

## Three Realms 1261

### Chapter 1261: Besieged on All Sides

“Vastsea! You’ll regret this!” A terrifying ray of blinding light burst out of Emperor Shura’s eyes. Fiery red beams abruptly floated over his body, turning him into a ball of flames shooting up into the sky. He’d summoned the Shura flames by igniting his bloodline!

The move wasn’t new to Jiang Chen. Emperor Shura had used it once during the final round of the Vassal Meeting.

“I’ll kill all of you! Die!” Emperor Shura’s battle intent grew more and more bloodthirsty as his bloodline powers burned.

Jiang Chen smiled blandly. “Hmph! Futile struggles by a trapped beast!”

He brought out an ancient talisman as he spoke. It was the Skyclearer Talisman that he’d taken from Imperial Prince Zhao during the fight with Demon Emperor Bloodmalva. It was an incredible talisman from the ancient ages. Even the demon emperor’s demonic miasma had been no match for its powers, let alone a mere sealing glyph. Sadly, modern talisman masters were no longer capable of creating talismans of this level.

Jiang Chen activated the talisman without hesitation.

The Skyclearer Talisman materialized as an ancient celestial god and instantly shattered the sealing glyph with an overwhelmingly formidable aura.

Jiang Chen was completely dumbfounded after witnessing this might.

Ah... I’ve put such a fine talisman to ridiculously petty use. He was filled with regret when he saw how powerful it was. He never would’ve imagined that it would be so useful. Fortunately, this talisman can be used thrice. I’ve wasted it once, so I’ll have to use it sparingly in the future.

Jiang Chen stowed the talisman back safely and activated the Ancient Crimson Formation Disk. A formation designed for trapping enemies instantly connected with the Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation. The mountain was completely wrapped in formations.

“Everyone, it’s time for you to display your skill!”

The three great emperor assassins that Emperor Pillzenith were rushing up the mountain to encircle Jiang Chen, but they found themselves trapped in a formation instead. When they looked up the mountain again, their target had drifted away.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh! Figures kept surging out from all directions around the mountain.

“Kill them!” Jiang Chen shouted.

Emperor Wellspring took the lead. The precious sword in his hand slashed forward a dazzling arc of radiance that roiled towards Emperor Shura.

Mo Wushuang didn’t hold back either as he deployed his arts and thundered towards Emperor Shura.

In terms of cultivation, Emperor Wellspring was possibly superior to Shura, and Peerless' was on par with Shura. Throwing in Vastsea into the mix made for a three against one situation. Shura burning his bloodline powers didn't help it one iota. He'd been gravely injured by Vastsea's blow, so his battle strength was a far cry from his usual peak form.

Emperor Wellspring was teaming up with Peerless on the mountain while the other nine wandering great emperors split into three groups, surrounding the three assassins and attacking furiously.

Given how the premises were enclosed by a formation that Jiang Chen was constantly monitoring and powering with the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, the would-be attackers were fish in a barrel. Their only function was to be beaten up. There was no escape to be had.

Although they had many trump cards to help them flee, they didn't have a chance to use them at all. Everyone was facing off with three opponents. There wasn't much a cultivation gap between fellow great emperors, so being disadvantaged in numbers meant that victory was impossible.

Besides, given the formation surrounding them, they'd have to leave the current area first before they could use any escape glyphs. As wondrous as their glyphs might be, they were useless when trapped in the formation.

Increasing surprise assaulted Shura as he battled on. He'd recognized the sword in Wellspring's hand. "Emperor Wellspring, I have no feud or conflict with you. Why do you force me so threateningly?"

Peerless however, shouted. "Shura, you upset the natural order of things and even the heavens despise you! What more do you have to say for yourself?"

"Pah! Mo Wushuang, I'd thought you were a man, but to think you're willing to be Sacred Peafowl Mountain's loyal dog! Is this all that a wandering heavyweight is good for?" Shura may be receiving a beating, but his mouth was working overtime.

Emperor Wellspring responded blandly. "Shura, I wouldn't make a move against you if we were outside Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The young lord has paid us to protect him on these grounds, so I'm afraid my actions will give offense. Just like young lord Zhen said, you wouldn't be faced with death if you didn't go looking for it."

Shura roared angrily as he'd been hit repeatedly as they conversed.

"Vastsea, you traitorous scum who sells out his own master! When have I ever mistreated you?? How dare you betray your master for personal gain? Do you think you can wash yourself clean if you throw yourself to this brat's mercy? Do you want me to reveal all the ugly things you've done?" Shura now turned his attention to Vastsea.

Emperor Vastsea's possessed an incredibly thick face and he retorted coldly. "Shura, there's no point in trying to drive a wedge between people now. I won't regret any decision I've made. This way is still better than yours to hell! I tried to convince you not to come back to Veluriyam Capital, that you shouldn't take the risk. But you decided to strike out on your own anyways and dragged me down without my consent. Did you ever ask if I wanted any of this?"

"Pfft, look at you finding excuses for being afraid of death!" Emperor Shura was incensed beyond believe.

“That’s right, I’m afraid of death. It’s been a long and arduous journey to reaching great emperor. Why should I accompany you when I know that only death awaits me?” Emperor Vastsea didn’t deny things at all.

“Shameless, shameless!” Shura bellowed, apoplectic. “I’m going to kill you, traitor, if that’s the last thing I do!”

A ghastly scream sounded in the distance. One of Emperor Pillzenith’s great emperors was just a hair weaker than the rest. He’d suffered a critical blow in his fight, which meant that the fight was soon to be decided. Scrapes and surface injuries wouldn’t determine the winds of battle, but fatal wounds could.

Repeated moves blasted into that great emperor as he shrieked and howled in agony. His body was tossed up like a sandbag and light from a sword flashed by behind him. It graced his neck, shooting a large head up into the sky. Blood spurted out in arrows, marking the fall of a great emperor.

None of the wandering great emperors were foolishly kind people. Since they’d decided to take action, they wouldn’t just stop at first blood.

After offing one opponent, nine of them circled the remaining two. The two fought with the desperation of a caged beast, but their mindsets had become fragile with the demise of their companion. They put their backs to each other and barely managed to defend their stance, but their situation was perilous.

Emperor Inferno charged ahead, sending a dominating dragon of fire churning towards the two. Emperor Reliance wasn’t to be outdone and notched an arrow onto her bow, Lifereaper. She too was ready to take their lives at any second.

“Daoist Inferno and Reliance, please hold!” The two broke down and begged for mercy when they saw that the two great emperors had readied their killing moves. The would-be assassins were in a disguise, so it was impossible to tell who they were from appearances.

Emperor Inferno blinked when he heard the cry and sniffed coldly. “How do the two of you know this great emperor?”

Lifereaper remained taut.

“Fellow daoists, we’re all wandering cultivators here, why seek our deaths?” The two ripped off their disguises to reveal their true faces.

“It’s you two?” Emperor Inferno started. He and Reliance actually did know the two.

“The Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai?” Emperor Reliance was startled as well.

“It’s us, it’s us.” The two begged piteously as they knew they were dead without a doubt if the fight continued. “Daoist Inferno and Reliance, we have the same roots, why torment each other like this? Why do wandering cultivators have to make life difficult for other wandering cultivators?”

Emperor Inferno hesitated. He was a straightforward man, but not someone who enjoyed killing for the sake of killing. If the two hadn’t revealed themselves or had they been sect experts, he would’ve given the kill order without another thought. But the two were actually wandering cultivator experts and they all knew each other.

Even though the Jiao brothers weren't as famed as he, they still ranked at the top. In the world of wandering cultivators, the top experts rarely tried to kill each other.

This was a slightly dicey situation now. Emperor Inferno's eyes flitted over to his counterpart, wondering what thoughts she had.

Emperor Reliance giggled. "Don't look at me. Ole Brother Hui's over there dealing with Shura. You're in charge here. We'll kill them if you say so and refrain if you say no."

The other great emperors with them didn't say anything, but the answer was clear in their eyes. They would listen to Emperor Inferno. He smiled wryly. "This is nuts. Jiao Yun, Jiao Feng, are you two mad? Why are you involved in Veluriyam Capital's internal conflict?"

The Jiao brothers complained ruefully. "Daoist Inferno, we're equally resigned. We're not interested in this conflict at all! But we owe some people some favors and they wanted us to come here to attack young lord Zhen. There's nothing we can do about it either."

"This complicates things. We have a business transaction with the young lord. If we let you go, we'll be violating the principles of the transaction." Emperor Inferno mused. "It's up to the young lord whether you live or die."

Sweat beaded the Jiao brothers' forehead. They were tremendously shocked that so many wandering cultivator heavyweights were willing to listen to the young lord's orders. What was going on here?

#### Chapter 1262: Jiang Chens Marvelous Move

In the wandering cultivator world, the Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai had a certain degree of prestige. They weren't as famous as the six titans, but they still wouldn't have come at Emperor Pillzenith's beck and call if he didn't have dirt on them. Moreover, the emperor had told them that the task wouldn't be difficult. They just had to listen to Emperor Shura's orders and kill Veluriyam Capital's young lord.

As long as they could pull that off, the debt they owed to Emperor Pillzenith would be cancelled out. That was why the Jiao brothers had agreed to help Pillfire City in the first place. The only reason, honestly.

They'd analyzed the situation before coming to Veluriyam, arriving at the conclusion that the job actually wasn't hard. After all, the young lord was only an emperor realm genius. So what if he had an expert like Mo Wushuang by his side? Could the five of them not deal with one measly young lord?

Therefore, the Jiao brothers hadn't expected anything life-threatening on the trip. Even if they couldn't kill young lord Zhen, they should've had no problem making a tactical retreat. They hadn't expected such a drastic change in the situation.

They couldn't even control their own lives anymore! This was truly an astonishing turn for the worse. From what Emperor Inferno was saying, if young lord Zhen didn't forgive them, it was a very real possibility that their peers would cut them down where they stood. After all, they were peers in name only. Each man fended for himself.

“Daoist Inferno, you’ll be the laughingstock of the wandering cultivator world if you kill us here. We are fellow wanderers. How can we squabble among ourselves? Wouldn’t such a thing be ridiculed by everyone?” The elder brother, Jiao Yun, protested loudly.

“That’s right. We’ve admitted defeat already. Daoist Inferno, Daoist Reliance, are you really going to stamp us out?” The younger brother, Jiao Feng, sounded just as resentful as his brother.

Jiang Chen had been observing the proceedings all this time, and snickered when he heard what the Jiao brothers were trying to pull. “The Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai, hmm? Your reputation precedes you. Are you a pair of death-fearing cowards?”

The brothers knew the speaker was young lord Zhen. Though they were inwardly furious, they didn’t dare to lash out. Their lives were in the young man’s grasp, after all.

Veluriyam Capital’s young lord didn’t wait for a response before continuing. “You call yourselves fellow wanderers. Are you saying that your opinion of the two emperors here has decreased after you’ve seen them help me?”

“Why don’t you think about what you were doing by coming here in the first place? Who sent you? Do you think it’s more honorable to attack Veluriyam Capital at his orders? What, is Emperor Inferno and the others not allowed to make a deal to assist my defense?”

Jiang Chen taunted the brothers with cold scorn. He could see that the Jiao brothers were trying to use the wandering cultivator community’s loyalty and justice as a tool. The brothers wanted to use something for the common good selfishly to save their own lives. However, they’d forgotten that Emperor Inferno and company were here to assist him with self-defense. There was no shame in that whatsoever anywhere.

Countless experts in the wandering cultivator world were hired for precisely such a task. This was a perfectly ordinary occurrence by any stretch of the imagination. But the Jiao brothers had been hired to mount an open assault on another faction. That was something entirely different. One was premeditated murder, the other was justified self-defense.

When judged, the former were naturally the unreasonable party. Therefore, Jiang Chen was obliged to jump out with criticism when he heard what the Jiao brothers were attempting to do.

Emperor Inferno nodded at Jiang Chen’s words. “Jiao Yun, Jiao Feng. You are wandering cultivator experts, and yet you attacked Veluriyam Capital on behalf of another. What right do you have to tell us what’s right and wrong?”

The Jiao brothers sweated in embarrassment. They had no ground to stand on when a more serious, logical approach was taken. Why would one bother to reason with dogs who had aggressively bitten them?

The brothers were both quite distressed. Jiao Yun was the first one to express contrition. “Never mind, then. I suppose there are worse ends than dying at the hands of one’s fellow wandering cultivators. Do your worst.”

Emperor Inferno gazed thoughtfully at Jiang Chen. "Young lord Zhen, the Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai aren't usually bastards. We fight for separate masters in this battle, but I must ask for mercy on their behalf."

The other great emperor participants were displeased by Emperor Inferno's intervention.

"Daoist Inferno, you couldn't possibly be pleading for their lives? If you do, then how will we get our Pinecrane Pills?"

"Isn't that right? Now's not the time for unnecessary compassion, Daoist Inferno."

"Daoist Inferno, I thought you were a decisive man. Are you going to give up now for such a trivial reason?" Even Emperor Reliance's eyes glittered. She was considering the merit of her peer's suggestion rather than accepting it outright.

The wandering cultivators present were all acting for the sake of their own Pinecrane Pill. They didn't bear much actual loyalty to young lord Zhen. Not killing the brothers of Mt. Huai was insufficient fulfillment of their promises. If they didn't use their full strength, then young lord Zhen had the right to renege. If he did, then today would've been a big waste of time.

That went against the reason they had agreed to come in the first place. Even a man as influential as Emperor Inferno couldn't make the decision in their stead. Unless... young lord Zhen also agreed to show the brothers mercy.

The Jiao brothers finally understood what was going on. The other great emperors' murderous gazes made their scalps sting. The others in attendance alone were enough to overwhelm them.

"Young lord Zhen..." Emperor Inferno wanted to keep trying.

"I know what you want to say, Emperor Inferno," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "They were only working for someone else, so there's no point shooting the messenger. But if I don't, will my Pinecrane Pill really be worth the effort you've expended so far? A deal can't be unequal."

The young lord's words made a lot of sense. There was no room for Emperor Inferno to criticize him. Even the emperor himself thought that it was unreasonable to expect Jiang Chen to pay for only what they'd done so far. No man could accept releasing a bunch of ruffians who had come to his doorstep. Emperor Inferno had no right to force Jiang Chen to do that.

"Ah, let's wait until Old Brother Hui finishes his fight and have him arbitrate." He deferred to await further input.

Jiang Chen presented a slight smile in the meantime. "The Jiao brothers, correct? I'd like to know what Emperor Pillzenith was able to give you to get two wandering cultivator seniors to fight for him willingly? Why did you risk your lives in coming here for?"

The youth was quite curious about this. If Emperor Pillzenith had extensive control over the wandering cultivator world, then he was a terrifying opponent indeed.

Jiao Yun sighed with exasperation. "There's no point relating the entire story. It would only bring us further shame. What can we do? We owe him a favor. Kill us if you wish, young lord Zhen. We are in your hands."

Though the Jiao brothers showed occasional trickery, they had a few shreds of dignity. They would never kneel and beg for their lives. However, what Jiang Chen had just heard was material proof that Emperor Pillzenith was involved.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly, his tone serious. "Jiao brothers, Emperor Pillzenith hired you for this job. Similarly, I hired Emperor Inferno and the others for one job only. If I don't kill you, I'll be at a loss. Therefore, I have a suggestion that nets us both a gain in the end. Whether you accept it is entirely up to you. Just like my deal with the other wandering cultivators, I don't wish to compel you either way."

The lifeline that the young lord had thrown astonished the brothers. Their heads perked up, their minds piqued.

Emperor Inferno blinked, glancing at Jiang Chen with bewilderment. Emperor Reliance, on the other hand, carried a sweet smile on her visage. Judging from her ponderous expression, she seemed to have guessed what was going to happen next.

"It's very simple. Veluriyam Capital has a lot of things that need to be done, and quickly. If you are willing to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, you'll not only live today, but also become esteemed guest elders of our faction."

Jiang Chen said this very matter-of-factly, but the content shocked every wandering cultivator present. Young lord Zhen was recruiting the Jiao brothers for Veluriyam Capital?

A strange scene, indeed. The other wandering great emperors were a bit dumbfounded. How had it come to this point so suddenly and unexpectedly? Hadn't they been fighting just moments earlier?

They were wandering cultivator experts helping Veluriyam Capital to rope in a few of their fellows. No matter how one looked at it, that kind of situation was exceedingly odd. But further consideration revealed that it made a lot more sense than one would expect.

Since the Jiao brothers' lives were in young lord Zhen's hands, wasn't it very appropriate that he would ask them to join up instead of killing them? The young man himself said that they desperately needed talent.

The proposition came as a surprise to the Jiao brothers as well.

"At the end of the day, it's your choice," Jiang Chen said coolly. "I never force anyone to do anything. The fruits of such labor are rarely sweet."

The brothers exchanged several meaningful looks, clearly communicating with each other. They'd been caught in a deathtrap. Either they died here and now or they joined up. There was no third choice.

Death ended all things.

Joining up would elevate them to becoming esteemed guest elders of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with that. Perhaps it was a bit embarrassing from a self dignity point of view since wandering cultivator experts generally prided themselves on their aloofness. They never fawned over authority, nor did they bow to the prominent.

They were sure to receive disdain from the wandering cultivator world if they suddenly attached themselves to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Even a giant like Mo Wushuang who'd done so to repay a kindness had endured a similar, albeit reduced, reaction.

Their reputation wasn't as strong as Mo Wushuang's, so there was no reason to expect any better. But what was a reputational hit compared to death itself?

Moreover, there was nothing to lose and everything to gain by joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Young lord Zhen's current ability and magnanimity showed that he was quite possibly capable of greater heights than Emperor Peafowl. It wasn't a bad choice when one thought about it.

If they had to enslave themselves to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, they would've never accepted that condition. But if they could exist on the same level as Mo Wushuang, that in itself was somewhat reputable. By this point, the Jiao brothers had made their choice.

#### Chapter 1263: Immense Shared Joy

Wandering cultivators had pride, for sure. The Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai had their own pride, but they were forced to relinquish their grasp on it when confronted with life and death. Moreover, young lord Zhen had given them an easy way out. They weren't obligated to be slaves, but esteemed guest elders instead. What more could they ask for?

Not surrendering at this point was completely foolish.

"We are willing to submit to your will, young lord Zhen."

"Is that what you really think?" There was no hint of joy on Jiang Chen's face yet. "I repeat: the choice is yours, but you must live up to it. Inconstancy or disloyalty will not be permitted at Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

The Jiao brothers were smart enough to understand that they were being pushed to make a declaration.

"We brothers swear to the heavens that we shall be part of Sacred Peafowl Mountain henceforth and perpetually stay loyal to it. Young lord Zhen's wish will be our command. If we break our word, let heaven and earth smite us!"

They would be idiotic not to take the offered way out. A declaration of loyalty was well within reason to demand. There was no reason for them to hesitate. The oath to the heavens instantly made them closer with the young lord and their new faction.

"Excellent. From today on, you two belong to Sacred Peafowl Mountain." Chuckling, Jiang Chen saluted Emperor Inferno with cupped fist. "You've kept to your promises well. Our deal stands. There is one spot of trouble that remains over there, though... what say you?"

Jiang Chen glanced coolly over in Emperor Shura's direction. Under the encirclement of Emperors Wellspring, Peerless, and Vastsea, the former second-best of Veluriyam Capital was becoming increasingly desperate. Instinct alone carried him onward.

The Jiao brothers cackled. "We're fresh inductees into Sacred Peafowl Mountain, young lord Zhen, so we haven't contributed much yet. I think it's we should show our sincerity. Daoist Inferno and the others can take a break. We'll take their places instead. Shura is at his wit's end, and his strength is almost out."



"Sounds reasonable," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "We'll have Emperors Inferno and Reliance back you up then. I'd like to ensure that he does not escape."

Though he knew clearly that Emperor Shura had been trapped, Jiang Chen wanted absolute surety. He could not afford to allow a vital threat to live another day. A destructive unknown like Emperor Shura had to be destroyed immediately. Left unchecked, it was a thorn in his side that continually pained him.

The Jiao brothers' participation only made the situation more lopsided. Emperor Shura still thought they were his helpers. He hadn't paid much attention to the fight nearby, and was therefore completely unaware of the brothers' change in allegiance.

"Good that you came, friends," he shouted energetically. "Let's put our strengths together and get out here. We'll come back another day!"

The Jiao brothers traded a look, snickering internally despite themselves. How had they followed such an idiot to Veluriyam Capital? Wordlessly, the duo raised their weapons on Emperor Shura.

The desperate emperor was completely unguarded against them. In fact, he'd had high hopes for their helping hand. There was no time for him to react to their unexpected assault. He was suddenly mired in the middle of five belligerent opponents.

Shrieking incessantly, he and his defenses began to weaken as more wounds appeared on his body.

Intent on impressing the young lord of their new faction, the Jiao brothers put a hundred and twenty percent into their efforts. Individually, a single brother was weaker than Emperor Peerless. In tandem, however, they were unquestionably mightier. Their fresh participation meant that Emperor Shura's only recourse was to take the incoming beating.

Thump! The attacks landed upon Emperor Shura's body simultaneously, disintegrating his Shura Rings of Life and Death completely. The seven violet rings dissipated into thin air.

Because the Rings were the emperor's most intimate defensive treasure, his body was laid bare to the five assailants after it was destroyed.

Another combined attack was enough to smash the spiteful emperor's last hopes into smithereens. The terrifying energy reduced the man to dust and ashes. The man who was once the number two great emperor of Veluriyam Capital was dead. What remained of him was scattered upon the wind, lost in the breeze at the foot of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Letting out a loud bark of laughter, Emperor Wellspring returned his blade to its sheath. "I've done as you asked, young lord Zhen. I can finally have some peace of mind for taking your Pinecrane Pill."

"That is so. Well done, and thank you for your hard work," smiled Jiang Chen.

Emperor Wellspring waved a hand. "Now that I have the Pinecrane Pill, please excuse me. I'll pass on the Dragon and Tiger Meet."

Today's events were evidently more awkward than the senior emperor would've liked. Out of so many great emperors here, he was the only one to have gotten a Pinecrane Pill ahead of time. The others were still waiting in line. Making his exit would help restore some of his personal dignity.

Jiang Chen laughed. "Senior Hui, today's happenings were only a small prelude to what is to come. There are many more causes for excitement down the line. Why are you leaving so soon? What a pity if you do."

Mo Wushuang chuckled as well. "Old Brother Hui, don't blame me for not reminding you later: young lord Zhen has prepared an excellent program for the Meet. If you miss out, you'll regret it for the rest of your life. Don't you want to hear the mysterious expert from Myriad Abyss Island lecture?"

When he heard that, Emperor Wellspring couldn't lift another foot. "Young lord Zhen," he coughed bashfully, "you're definitely an expert at tantalizing others."

Jiang Chen flashed a winning smile. He knew from those words that the senior emperor was no longer leaving. Emperor Wellspring was a heavyweight in the wandering cultivator world. The Dragon and Tiger Meet would be much less grand without his presence. There was no way the young man was simply going to let him go.

As for the others, they wouldn't leave now even if he tried to dismiss them. They hadn't gotten their Pinecrane Pills yet; in what world would they be willing to leave?

Saluting with cupped fist, he addressed them once more. "After the Dragon and Tiger Meet, I'll refine the pills as soon as I get my hands on the materials. I guarantee there will be no trickery involved."

"Hehe, we'll wait patiently for the good news." Emperor Reliance giggled.

"Of course. I won't let any of you down. Right, one more thing. Please keep today a secret. After all, Emperor Pillzenith had something to do with this. I wouldn't want you to antagonize Pillfire City over factional affairs."

These words improved the wandering cultivators' impression of him. Veluriyam's young lord wasn't attempting to blackmail them into joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain. That was something they absolutely did not want to happen.

They had helped for the sake of the Pinecrane Pill, not for a long-lasting relationship with Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Similarly, they had no intention of making an enemy out of Pillfire City. The enmity between the two mega-factions was theirs and theirs alone. No wandering cultivator wanted to get himself caught up in the chaos.

"Please inform the other great emperors that came today as well. Let's not let any wind of this out, eh?" Jiang Chen continued.

"No need to worry, young lord Zhen," Emperor Wellspring stated smoothly. "We are more than capable enough of shouldering any consequences from our own decisions. Besides, is Pillfire City stronger than all of us here put together?"

"That's right. If Emperor Pillzenith knows what's good for him, then he'll know that we had nothing to do with what happened today. If he diverts his anger upon us regardless... well, we have ways of dealing with him."

“That’s right. We are in the right on this matter and need not consider Pillfire City’s stance. If we had been hired by you for an attack, then we would be the ones at fault. But defending you outside of your home is no problem whatsoever.”

“Plus, we had no idea this had anything to do with them beforehand anyway.”

“Heh heh, even if we did? Are we wandering cultivators scared of Pillfire City? It’s fine if there’s no trouble, but even if there were... we wouldn’t just take it lying down.”

No expert in the wandering cultivator world could be considered meek. Their actions had been preceded by the willingness to take responsibility. What was a little risk compared to the payoff of a Pinecrane Pill?

Their upbeat attitudes took the words out of Jiang Chen’s mouth. He amiably escorted the wandering cultivators down the mountain with a wide smile.

A little after all of them were sent off, Emperors Void and Coiling Dragon arrived. Clearly, they had sensed the great battle occurring at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Emperors Petalpluck, Mountaincrush, and Skysplitter swiftly followed.

“Vastsea, why are you here?” Emperor Coiling Dragon’s keen eye spotted the other emperor from afar. He pounced on the man furiously. “Do you feel no shame at showing up here? Do you think we won’t kill you for real?”

Emperor Vastsea felt quite awkward. Emperor Coiling Dragon was the man he was most afraid of, and not of the man’s martial prowess, but his acerbic tongue.

Jiang Chen put a stop to his friend’s impulsive with a wave.

“Calm down, everyone. Please hear me out. A little while ago, Emperor Vastsea decided to return to the light. He has done Veluriyam Capital a great service.”

“What?” Emperor Coiling Dragon thought he’d misheard.

Mo Wushuang stood forward to resolve the situation as well. “It happened just now. Emperor Shura, in cahoots with Pillfire City, snuck into Sacred Peafowl Mountain to assassinate young lord Zhen. Emperor Vastsea turned at a critical moment to inflict a serious wound upon Emperor Shura, allowing us the opportunity to decimate our traitorous foe once and for all!”

“Huh?” Emperor Coiling Dragon—no, all of the freshly-arrived emperors—froze in place. Emperor Vastsea had turned... to inflict a serious wound on Emperor Shura? Why did that sound so very strange?

Wasn’t he one of Shura’s loyal followers?

“There is nothing to suspect, gentlemen. Emperor Shura pushed even his most intimate confidants away from him through his reckless behavior. Emperor Vastsea turned back to the light because he wanted to avoid certain death. That’s not a bad thing for our city as a whole. I would like to request your charity in this matter. We all make mistakes, some graver than others.” Jiang Chen attempted to help the former turncoat out of his bind.

“Hold on!” Emperor Void suddenly intensified his gaze. “Vastsea, there’s only one thing I’d like to ask you. Did you participate in Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance?”

#### Chapter 1264: Hearts Together

Emperor Void was a very scrupulous and thorough man, in contrast to the more impulsive Emperor Coiling Dragon. The morality of the issue was the first thing that came to the former’s mind. As expected, the crowd’s collective gaze turned extremely solemn after the question was asked.

Emperor Vastsea had already sworn a vow of innocence to the Goldbiter Rat King, but he understood young lord Zhen’s pardon alone wasn’t enough if he wanted to return to Veluriyam Capital. He needed everyone’s forgiveness and support.

“Everyone, you might think that I’m just trying to avoid responsibility no matter what I say. Yes, I used to be on Emperor Shura’s side, and yes, I did possess a fair share of complaints towards Emperor Peafowl, but I swear Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance has nothing to do with me! Emperor Shura single handedly planned all of it! May the heavens smite me if I lie!” He pointed up at the heavens as he swore a solemn vow.

Emperor Coiling Dragon’s expression turned ugly. “And were you the ones who spread rumors about Emperor Peafowl’s death in order to usurp the throne?”

Emperor Vastsea nodded, clearly ashen with guilt. Indeed, he was the mastermind behind the rumors and he’d once been extremely happy about Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance. However, he quickly realized that Emperor Shura had picked a fight that couldn’t be won. Regret and dejection flooded in then. The crowd’s hostility wouldn’t be easy to diffuse, but he had no other choice. He’d have to bear the shame and burden until he could finally earn acceptance again.

“Vastsea, since you’re not directly responsible for Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance, we’ll give you a chance to earn back our trust, however difficult that may be. It’s up to you to cherish this opportunity. For now, cough up everything you know about Emperor Peafowl’s disappearance. Don’t exaggerate or hide anything.”

The crowd nodded in agreement with Jiang Chen’s words. Having been pardoned, Emperor Vastsea bobbed his head up and down rapidly and spilled the beans. “Here’s what I know...”

Emperor Coiling Dragon flew into a rage. “That bastard Shura! Emperor Peafowl gave him so much guidance during his formative years. Instead of paying it back, he conspired with the enemy to harm his benefactor?! What an insatiable ingrate!”

Emperor Void sighed. “It’s fortunate that Veluriyam didn’t fall into the hands of a villain like him. Our legacy and traditions from the ancient times would’ve been ruined in an instant.”

Emperor Petalpluck and Mountaincrush exchanged glances, their eyes filled with relief. They’d supported Emperor Shura calling the Vassal Meeting and had actually been leaning towards supporting him.

They shuddered at that thought. If young lord Zhen hadn’t immensely exceeded expectations and won the thirteen round competition, Veluriyam would’ve fallen into Emperor Shura’s hands. To think that

Pillfire City was supporting Emperor Shura all along! Veluriyam Capital had nearly fallen to Pillfire City by proxy. They would've been condemned through the ages if they'd allowed that to happen.

"Pillfire City!" Emperor Coiling Dragon gnashed his teeth. "They've gone too far! Shura is already dead, but we can't put matters to rest yet! The true mastermind is Pillfire City and Emperor Pillzenith! Shura is merely their hound!"

"Yes. While we don't know if Emperor Peafowl is still alive or not, we'll make them pay in blood!" The crowd boiled with fury. There'd been no proof of the legitimacy of the rumors before this. People had been a little worried, but not overly so. After realizing the truth, it was only natural that they'd fly into a rage.

Veluriyam Capital had always been on equal footing with Pillfire City. But to think that Emperor Pillzenith would have such a voracious appetite. He'd made a move against Emperor Peafowl and attempted to gain control of Veluriyam Capital!

The powerful Veluriyam titans weren't going to take this lying down. Even the normally aloof emperor, Petalpluck, was ruffled by what had transpired. "Young lord Zhen, I'm ashamed. I was blind and thoughtless for letting that bastard fool me! If it wasn't for your insistence and gallantry, we would've been sold to the enemy and we would be none the wiser! From tonight onwards, the Petalpluck faction vows unyielding support to the young lord!"

"The Mountaincrush faction agrees. We offer unyielding fealty to young lord Zhen if anything major occurs again in Veluriyam Capital! Anything the young lord says, we will follow!"

"We support young lord Zhen!" The crowd also declared their position.

Emperor Vastsea's face was beet red. "Young lord Zhen, as a sinner, I have no right to swear fealty to you, but may the heavens smite me if I do anything to let Veluriyam Capital down in the future! My children and their descendants shall forever be slaves, never to be liberated again!"

Emperor Vastsea had prostrated himself greatly. The crowd's hatred of him slowly diminished with this humble display. He was a great emperor after all. Killing him would be momentarily fleeting, but he was more useful to the capital alive. Young lord Zhen definitely had his reasons for keeping him alive.

"Vastsea, it's good to see that you realize your own position. The Vastsea Retreat shall be returned to you, and you may keep your title. However, you will be last in the rankings. I don't like pretty words. I only want to see action. If you truly are repentant, prove it and show your worth with tangible action." Jiang Chen didn't deal too big of a punishment.

"Yes, definitely! I'll show my sincerity through my actions! If I ever let everyone down, feel free to spit in my face!" Emperor Vastsea was elated.

Emperor Void and Coiling Dragon began to understand Jiang Chen's actions as they calmed down. Because Sacred Peafowl Mountain's foundation hadn't solidified yet, letting Emperor Vastsea off the hook would mean gaining another diehard loyalist. He would shed tears of gratitude as long as he was capable of the slightest thought.

“Alright, now let me introduce two more of our fellow comrades.” Jiang Chen pointed at the Jiao brothers with a faint smile. “These are great emperor experts of the wandering world, the Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai. I’m sure everyone has heard of them?”

The Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai?

Two of the greatest figures in the wandering world!

“Are they the same Jiao brothers that took the Upper Eight Regions by the storm and upended many a great faction back in the day, Jiao Yun and Jiao Feng?”

The Jiao brothers were elated that these great emperors had heard of their name. Even though wandering great emperors were by no means weaker than ones in a sect, they couldn’t help but feel a little self-conscious and unconfident when faced with all these faction members.

“Precisely.” Jiang Chen laughed. “The two brothers and Sacred Peafowl Mountain have become friends after a fight. They’ve officially sworn to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain as an esteemed guest elder, never to betray us.”

The Jiao brothers naturally wouldn’t go back on their words after swearing such a solemn vow.

“Greetings, fellow great emperors.”

“I’ve long heard that Sacred Peafowl Mountain is filled with great talents and an immense gathering of great emperors. It seems that the rumors do not lie.” The two brothers were very sociable. It only took them a short while to become well-acquainted with the circle, their speed of familiarity quite surprising Jiang Chen.

Emperor Void and Coiling Dragon were equally impressed with the young lord. They’d actually harbored doubts about the decision to host a wandering cultivator gathering, but somehow the young lord had recruited the two brothers before the Meet had officially started. And they also seemed incredibly loyal and fearfully respectful?

What kind of magic does young lord Zhen have? The Jiao brothers are famous savages of the four regions to the north east! How did the young lord earn their unfaltering loyalty? Emperor Petalpluck simply couldn’t understand. However, having more great emperors in Veluriyam Capital would never be a bad thing.

Emperor Mountaincrush and Skysplitter were equally as bewildered. But seeing that even a great titan of the wandering world like Emperor Peerless had decided to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, it wasn’t all that incomprehensible to see the Jiao brothers do the same.

Emperor Shura’s death was kept a temporary secret as Jiang Chen didn’t want to raise any unnecessary commotion.

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Inside the young lord residence, the night had grown old but Jiang Chen was still awake. He was writing scribbling something beneath the candlelight. He mused deeply as he recalled the afternoon’s battle. After some long moments, he finally unearthed a martial technique from his memories and wrote it down.

Come dawn, he looked for Emperor Peerless and asked him to bring the Jiao brothers with him to the back mountains.

The two brothers were still adjusting to life in a faction. They've always lived in complete freedom so it was a little difficult to adapt to rules and customs. However, they understood that this was no longer something they could change. The brothers were incredibly anxious as Emperor Peerless led the way.

Why had the young lord summoned them? They were worried that Jiang Chen would send them on an impossible mission, such as assassinating Emperor Pillzenith.

Jiang Chen stood atop the mountain and greeted the oncoming group. The Jiao brothers dared not be rude and immediately made return greetings. "This subordinate greets the young lord."

Jiang Chen made a sweeping gesture. "You needn't be overly formal. Both of you are esteemed guest elders and needn't bother with those useless formalities with your great status. I haven't summoned you here to have you bow to me. Relax. What's done is done, let us leave the past behind. I'll not cause you unneeded trouble nor will I force unfair treatment upon you."

The Jiao brothers were ashamed. They'd been read like an open book. It felt like someone had torn away their clothes in broad daylight.

Emperor Peerless smiled. "I don't know how sincere you were when you joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but I can honestly say that fortune is favoring you you."

The two brothers nodded agreeingly, but it was obvious that their thoughts differed from their actions. They'd only joined Sacred Peafowl Mountain because the circumstances necessitated it. To say that fortune had favored them was a little difficult to believe.

#### Chapter 1265: True Submission With Good Grace

The experiences from Jiang Chen's past life meant that he had an excellent eye for people. The Jiao brothers' lukewarm attitudes gave away their lack of agreement with Mo Wushuang's words. The young man was perfectly fine with this. He knew that wandering great emperors tended to be wild and untamed. The Jiao brothers had only joined up with Sacred Peafowl Mountain out of necessity.

They needed to be more substantially convinced of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's greatness, of his own competence and skill as young lord. Only then would he truly win their allegiance.

Tapping a finger against a nearby pine branch, Jiang Chen looked at the Jiao brothers with casual nonchalance. "Gentlemen, when you fought three to nine, your companion died in that battle. Did you consider that if you were just a tiny bit stronger, perhaps you would've easily escaped from those numbers?"

The Jiao brothers blinked, unsure why young lord Zhen was suddenly saying something like this.

Jiang Chen ignored their reaction, carrying on with a question. "Old Brother Mo, do you think things would've been different if, say, either Emperor Everviolet or Sabledeep had taken their place instead?"

Mo Wushuang pondered a moment before responding. "Hard to say. Emperors Everviolet and Sabledeep are some of the best of the best. If they were set on making a break for it, they'd have a small chance even if they fighting against nine others."

"A small chance." Jiang Chen nodded. "You're right. The world of martial dao can be a cruel place. A small difference in strength can mean the difference between life and death. If Emperor Shura had been a bit stronger, he could've escaped even with both you and Emperor Wellspring on his tail. It's a matter of cultivation level in the end."

Emperor Peerless deeply agreed with this statement. "That's correct," he nodded. "A hair's breadth can turn out to be a world of difference."

Jiang Chen concurred. "I saw what went on during that fight pretty closely. From that, I think I've noticed a few issues you may want to address."

"Issues?" The Jiao brothers blinked in unison.

"Yes, issues with both of your comprehension of martial dao." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "You two have cultivated a martial technique designed to be used in tandem with each other. However, cultivation-related reasons have led to your inability to perfectly harmonize your strikes. This has affected your battle strength when fighting together, yes?"

The brothers were bewildered. They couldn't believe what they'd just heard. Did young lord Zhen have eyes that sharp? They did have a martial technique designed to be used in unison, but certain problems meant that they couldn't hone it to the peak of its potential. Because of this, they couldn't unleash maximum power in practical situations.

If the technique could be cultivated to its highest mastery, their offensive and defensive strengths would be amplified by a great deal. They could've fought their collective ways out then. This secret between the two of them was entirely unknown to the outside world.

Yet, Jiang Chen had pointed it out at a glance. The duo looked at the young man with doubt and distress.

"Young lord Zhen, if you'll excuse me saying this," Jiao Yun couldn't help but protest. "We're pretty ordinary among our peers, but we are still great emperors at the end of the day. You're definitely a martial dao genius, but you're also very young. Were you really able to understand everything you saw in that battle?"

Jiao Feng provided tacit agreement through inclining his head. The brothers had fought countless experts, but none of their opponents had ever been able to see the crux of their problem. The possibility that young lord Zhen surpassed all of their former foes was incredible. Or was it just a lucky guess?

As if he knew what they were thinking, Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "That fight back there looked hectic, but there was nothing complicated about it. I saw and understood all of it. You had three chances to escape, but you were always one step short in the end. Once, you were forced back by Emperor Inferno. Another time, intimidated by Emperor Reliance's arrows. And the last time, hemmed in by Ye Jianlei's powerful sword aura. You had a sixty-to-seventy percent chance at getting away in the final case, but you were too scared of losing. I can sympathize. Losing often means instant death, after all, but that's what stopped you."

Boom. The Jiao brothers felt their minds reel in disbelief. The youth's acumen was too piercing to take in. It was as the young lord before them had said. They did, indeed, have three chances to escape, all three of which they let slip away.



Ye Jianlei's sword aura had presented the best window of opportunity. Unfortunately, they hadn't managed to grasp it at all, instead being forced into a dead end. Jiang Chen's pointing out of the fight's intricacies shook the Jiao brothers to the core. They finally realized that Sacred Peafowl Mountain's current young lord was much more astute than they'd given him credit for.

He really had understood their fight earlier. He could recount and analyze every little step. It was impossible to do that without extraordinary perceptiveness. For the Jiao brothers, this only added another layer of awe to the young lord's person. They were beginning to comprehend why he had become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord despite his inexperience. Veluriyam Capital's young lord, even! He seemed to have real talent.

Such keenness of sight from a young genius alone was quite marvellous.

There was nothing easy about reading a brawl between great emperors. One-on-one duels were a lot more apparent in their flows. Which party was weaker, which party was stronger, where the dangers and flaws appeared, et cetera... all of this and more was reasonably transparent to an adroit observer.

In a brawl, it was very difficult to keep a single pair of eyes trained on so many people and details. But young lord Zhen had pulled it off with tremendous aplomb. Slowly, very slowly, the Jiao brothers let go of their pride. They were forced to admit that young lord Zhen's martial dao knowledge was expansive beyond compare.

In truth, Mo Wushuang was as surprised as they were. He'd been occupied with Emperor Shura at the time and had missed the fight. Still, the Jiao brothers' expressions told him that young lord Zhen more than likely had a point. Their reactions wouldn't have been so exaggerated otherwise.

However, Jiang Chen went on as if he hadn't noticed anything out of the ordinary. "If your tandem technique had been just a bit stronger in that battle, you would have certainly been able to break through Ye Jianlei's defense and flee. Well, have a sixtyish percent chance at least."

With a flourish of his sleeve, he sent a few pieces of paper airborne. They fluttered down to the Jiao brothers. The brothers took them almost reflexively. A single glance was enough to blanch their faces.

The papers delineated each and every crucial moment in their fight in excruciating detail. The descriptions were vivid and straightforward. Moreover, one of the sheets showed them what would've happened if their technique had functioned at its theoretical full power instead. The conjecture that Jiang Chen had written was watertight.

The brothers were positively incredulous by the final sheet, their bodies trembling in trepidation. Their expressions transitioned from shock to joy, then admiration and gratitude. Gratefulness flashed in the brothers' eyes. "Did you pull an all-nighter for this, young lord Zhen?"

"I had a bit of time last night. A few idle thoughts about what had taken place during the day, if you will."

The brothers looked at each other, blatant admiration brimming in their eyes. "Idle thoughts... just a few idle thoughts, eh. But you've seen right through what we couldn't in many, many decades. Are you teaching us through these words, young lord?" Jiao Yun murmured.

Jiang Chen's expression was mild. "You're great emperors. I'm only first level emperor realm. You can hardly call that 'teaching'. Even a wise man sometimes makes mistakes, just as a fool sometimes blunders upon wisdom. A mere flash of inspiration, I assure you."

The Jiao brothers were quiet a long while. Suddenly, they took a simultaneous kneel. "Young lord Zhen, we were fools not to recognize Mt. Tai. News of your genius have spread far and wide, and we were idiotic not to believe them. There is often a kernel of truth buried in rumor, and in your case, I think it encompasses the entire grain."

"You've fully won our respect this time."

"Please excuse our earlier rudeness, young lord Zhen. We shudder to think of the extent we misrepresented you. Everyone knows that your pill dao genius is unrivaled, but we can see now that your genius extends to your martial dao as well. Having so much understanding of martial dao at such a young age... that's absolutely astounding."

Like most wandering cultivators, the Jiao brothers had plenty of pride and dignity. Even though the situation at the time had compelled them to join Sacred Peafowl Mountain, they hadn't really wholeheartedly submitted to its authority. But that was no longer true now.

A few thin sheets of paper outlined the key to their life's cultivation. Furthermore, it clarified complexities which had formerly perplexed them.

"We've always thought our technique was perfect, young lord Zhen. We didn't realize that the manuscript we were cultivating from was incomplete."

"If it wasn't incomplete, your unified technique would be many times more potent, no?" Jiang Chen smiled patiently. He had read virtually every book in the heavenly planes. In his eyes, the strongest techniques of the mortal planes were absolute simplicity. The barest amount of simulation was enough to find and fill in their flaws.

But what was easy for him was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the Jiao brothers. It opened a brand-new door on their path of cultivation. Henceforth, they entered new, much broadened horizons. How could this not utterly satisfy the brothers?

## Chapter 1266: The Meet Begins

Emperor Peerless was amazed that Jiang Chen was able to subdue the rowdy Jiao brothers with a few simple strokes. He'd witnessed many marvelous facets of the young man already, but every passing moment near the youth showed that he'd still only seen the tip of the iceberg. The young genius seemed to be a natural, inexhaustible goldmine. There was endless treasure to be found within him.

"What do you think, friends? Did I deceive you earlier?" A smiling Mo Wushuang looked toward the Jiao brothers.

Both brothers were ashamed. They cupped their fists. "Brother Mo, we are the ones who couldn't tell wheat from chaff. We thought you were exaggerating, but we were the frogs in the bottom of the well all along. There's nothing more to say. We submit wholly and utterly."

“You know, I have the same kind of pride that you do,” laughed Mo Wushuang. “However, I’ve never regretted joining Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I’ve only experienced satisfaction and delight since then. I’ve walked this world thousands of years, never believing that there could be a peerless genius anywhere... that is, until I met young lord Zhen. There are some geniuses in the world that others aren’t meant to reach.”

Truly, the young lord was a genius.

Here was an emperor realm young genius who could instruct great emperor experts on martial dao! That was jaw-dropping enough to shock the entire world. But young lord Zhen had done precisely that.

No matter how big of an ego the Jiao brothers had originally, they couldn’t maintain it in the face of this truth. As the saying went, no matter how good one was, there was always someone better.

Today, they’d had seen the saying in action. Granted, their pride was understandable given their status as great emperors. They’d reached a pinnacle of martial dao, a level unattainable by the vast majority of mankind.

There were as many cultivators in the world as stars in the heavens. Out of that, only a handful was ever visible. Only a handful ever rose to the top. Each and every one who’d managed the feat had done so by wading through innumerable dead. There might not be a single great emperor out of a hundred million!

The Jiao brothers had always had a high level of self-esteem. They didn’t especially respect even the biggest factions’ head honchos. What was special about those high and mighty guys? They’d just been lucky enough to be born into their circumstances. Their strength and status was backed by their organization’s resources.

Wandering cultivators were completely different. They had to fight tooth and nail for each inch of cultivation. Because of the hard work required, they were unable to fully let go their pride. Jiang Chen’s singular move had easily destroyed all of their self-pride.

The young lord waved a hand. “All three of you will be strong pillars for Sacred Peafowl Mountain in the future. Please make yourselves comfortable. I have other matters I must attend to. Please excuse me.”

Having done all he’d wanted to do, he departed without another word. The point of the exercise had been to display intimidating prowess. He wanted to quash the Jiao brothers’ pride in order to integrate them more fully into Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Otherwise, they would pose a problem down the line for the faction as a whole. The others wouldn’t accept a pair of arrogant men into the fold, regardless of their strength or expertise.

After the young man left for good, Jiao Yun let out a sigh. “Brother Mo, who is young lord Zhen’s master? His martial dao knowledge is terrifying.”

“Yes. I know he was an impartial observer, but that fight took place at astounding speed. I’m surprised he managed to grasp as many key points as he did. Even Emperor Peafowl might not have been able to fix the flaws with our martial technique.”

Truthfully, it wasn’t a possibility but a certainty. There was no way Emperor Peafowl would’ve been able to pull the same thing off. Jiang Chen’s martial dao knowledge was peerless in the heavenly planes. Such ability wasn’t something great emperors living in mortal planes could comprehend.

Mo Wushuang chuckled. "Like I said earlier, you're seeing only the tip of his proverbial iceberg."

"What, this is just the tip?"

Emperor Peerless smiled coolly. "What, do you think the young lord is limited to just this?"

The Jiao brothers were at a loss for words. After thinking about it a bit more, they came to the realization that young lord Zhen was far more unfathomable than they'd given him credit for. He had no end to his ability. What among his recent accomplishments could be classified as 'simple'?

For the Vassal Meeting, he had defeated a very prepared Emperor Shura from an unfavorable position.

For the wandering cultivator meeting, he'd pulled out one ace after another, overwhelming the competing Pillfire City with insurmountable advantage – and crushing the other city's face in the process.

At Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he had finagled an impressively large lineup of wandering cultivator emperors to aid him. Killing Emperor Shura had been a painless endeavor, one that'd earned him the brothers' allegiance as well.

And now, he had absentmindedly filled in each and every little problem with the brothers' martial technique. They finally had a chance for a breakthrough!

Any of these things would've made even a great emperor the focus of the human domain's attention. Young lord Zhen was less than thirty by all reports, yet had accomplished all of the above. What other name was there for him other than 'monster'? Or perhaps 'miracle'?

"Brother Mo. Is young lord Zhen... really related to Myriad Abyss Island?" Jiao Yun couldn't help but ask.

"Yes." Mo Wushuang's answer was clear-cut. "However, Myriad Abyss Island has many secrets. I myself am not privy to some information about it, despite my closeness with the young lord. We are all wandering cultivators, so I have a piece of valuable advice for you. Follow young lord Zhen loyally and you'll have a bright future ahead of you. Otherwise, I doubt we'll have much more room to grow. We're already great emperors as wandering cultivators, after all."

The last part of his statement rang true. It was quite unlikely for wandering cultivators to rise much higher than great emperor. The first reason for it was that they lacked the resources available to someone that hailed from a large sect. It was one of the most incontrovertible facts about their existence.

Great emperors of sects always had various routes open to them thanks to their sect's resources. Wandering cultivator great emperors didn't have that luxury, and almost always had a much harder time finding suitable materials and resources.

The Jiao brothers sank into deep contemplation. They no longer questioned the veracity of Mo Wushuang's declaration. They couldn't tell yet exactly how bright of a future they would have under young lord Zhen, but the martial technique improvements they'd just received were enough to double their unified attacking power.

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After various tasks came to their inevitable conclusions, the Dragon and Tiger Meet's preparations were finally complete.

The weather of this particular day was sunny and fair. The large square beneath the Veluriyam Pagoda was the staging ground for the event. Honored guests from sects and factions all over were arrayed in areas reserved for them. The wandering cultivators themselves were scattered all over the square, with a large number overflowing into the streets.

At least a million had come for the festivities. Under countless expectant eyes, the much-anticipated Dragon and Tiger Meet finally began. The other great emperors of the city clustered around him, Jiang Chen made a striking entrance into the event.

Special seating was arranged for all emperors and great emperors in attendance, demonstrating the city's respect for wandering cultivator experts. Wandering cultivators below emperor realm weren't allowed to simply pack themselves in either. Every area was subjected to strict supervision and control, ensuring that no crowding and chaos occurred anywhere. The Peafowl Guard was assigned on patrol to remove any troublemakers.

Jiang Chen stood atop a lofty place, backed up by a troupe of great emperors. The group made for an impressive tableau.

"Greetings, everyone. When we first decided we would convene the Dragon and Tiger Meet, every faction in the human domain thought we would fail. They thought that we wouldn't have the clout after our recent issues to draw in enough people. Your presences here has proven how ludicrous they are."

The young lord's rich voice carried into the wind. He had imbued his words with a bit of dragon's roar technique, sending them into the audience's collective ears.

"Some of you came here for the Pinecrane Pill. Some for our pill dao academy. Some for the sake of my own humble self. Some, for 'Myriad Abyss Island'. And of course, some came purely to spectate. No matter your reason for being here, I'd like to emphasize that anyone interested in making trouble should put that away. I'm saying this up front: those who don't will be branded enemies of our city. We will spare no quarter."

Jiang Chen's tone and warning were both extremely stern.

"The Pinecrane Pill, the pill dao academy, the mysterious expert from Myriad Abyss Island: all of those and more will be here. However, the Meet will be far more exciting than that. If the Pinecrane Pill is simply shown off and auctioned, how will our guests be satisfied? How will the uniqueness of the Dragon and Tiger Meet be revealed? Veluriyam Capital has many more things to offer from its coffers than that. Many events will take place at the Meet, and many of you will benefit from each one of them."

His gathering of his audience's hearts proved reasonably effective. The wandering cultivator giants weren't displeased by the speech, but the ordinary ones felt warmth in the cockles of their hearts.

Whether young lord Zhen could fully carry out his promises or not, at least his attitude was there. The low-level wandering cultivators hadn't come for nothing.

"I've never been one for empty words. Allow me to announce the first event. Dubbed 'The Perceptive Eye', it's related to treasure identification. In this round, any treasure that anyone can't identify may be presented. We will be responsible for giving you the knowledge you need to make use of them. You won't be disappointed! There's plenty of gold in the sand we're about to sift through."

Treasure identification?

Mentioning it was enough to instantly pique many people's interests. Every martial cultivator had an innate curiosity and desire for treasure. That was precisely what Jiang Chen was banking on.

Chapter 1267: Sincere Invitation to Heavyweights

"Of course, we will not reveal the treasures' owners for the sake of secrecy and protection. There is no need to associate a treasure shown here with someone's name, lest there be problems down the line. I swear on my internal demons that nothing will be revealed. If anyone is still concerned with their personal safety, they can also submit the treasure to us for immediate auction or transaction afterward."

This was a necessary measure. If a low-level cultivator had the misfortune to own some high-rank treasure, he was basically a three-year-old openly carrying gold in the street. There was no guarantee he'd keep his life, much less treasure.

This 'Perceptive Eye' segment didn't sound very entertaining at first. Jiang Chen had actually spent a lot of effort coming up with the idea. If he could find one or two particularly valuable items in this segment, he would build up plenty of hype.

His purpose wasn't actually to dig up anything obscure, but to promote the legitimacy of the Dragon and Tiger Meet brand. Only then would Veluriyam Capital become attractive to wandering cultivators over the longer term.

Compared to Pillfire City, Veluriyam Capital didn't lack in just pill dao prowess. They also had insufficient draw for the public. Their largest festival was the Veluriyam Pagoda Meeting, but that was something only the city's various vassals were eligible to attend. For wandering cultivators, Veluriyam Capital wasn't much more than a passing topic of conversation.

Jiang Chen had designed multiple segments ahead of time to make the Dragon and Tiger Meet more attractive. Only then would it bring in crowd after crowd on a consistent basis. Only then would wandering cultivators have a habit of coming to the city.

When every wandering cultivator in the world developed that habit, Veluriyam Capital would be as good as the Upper Eight Regions' hub of activity. Wherever that hub was, so would the human domain's core be as well.

This incarnation of the Meet gathered not only wandering cultivator greats, but attendees from various sects and geographical factions as well. The world-famous first rank sects of the Upper Eight Regions were most prominent among the invitees.

The Upper Eight Regions had a sect corresponding to each region. Aside from Eternal Celestial Capital, the others were all honored guests. The first rank sects had all sent big-shot representatives to the

Meet. As prominent members of their sects, they all had a degree of foresight and vision. Some immediately realized Jiang Chen's goal after hearing the plan. Those who did drew in sharp breaths.

"Young lord Zhen is both youthful and ambitious. Either Veluriyam Capital will be destroyed in his hands, or it will rise to truly great heights!"

"A man so young is able to carry out such great feats. Young lord Zhen must have a powerful backer. How could he be capable of so much otherwise?" Some harbored a very real suspicion that Myriad Abyss Island was secretly backing the capital.

Veluriyam's own Emperor Petalpluck was just as astounded as the rest. "Young lord Zhen's presence and ambition has surpassed even the young Emperor Peafowl's. Is Veluriyam Capital headed towards great prosperity?"

Jiang Chen knew that his audience needed time to digest what he'd said. He paused a moment before smiling and continuing.

"We have so many friends with us today. There are heavyweights from the various sects, regional moguls and greats, and wandering cultivator titans. As the host, it would be remiss for me to be the only man in the spotlight. I would like to invite a few honorable and upstanding seniors in the cultivation community to participate in this segment with me. We hold transparency in our proceedings as one of our paramount values. Any worries that I am doing this for private gain may be dismissed."

The speech was generous and straightforward. The wandering cultivators were won over immediately, offering up thunderous applause to the youth. However, though the wandering cultivators were pleased at Jiang Chen's announcement, they were also a little concerned deep down.

They didn't suspect young lord Zhen's vision or ability, but any selfishness on the young man's part could lead to purposeful downplaying of their valuable treasures. If other giants were thrown into the mix, there was that much more guarantee to the fairness of the proceedings.

As Jiang Chen had guessed, the wandering cultivator world had its fair share of successful treasure hunters, too. They didn't necessarily know what all of their spoils were all the time; but many of them didn't dare go to larger factions to identify their goods, lest they lose both life and prize.

The opportunity they were being offered today was very rare indeed. A great part of the wandering cultivators were severely tempted by the offer.

"There are many esteemed characters here from all over the Upper Eight Regions. I wonder if any of them might grace us with their assistance?" Jiang Chen's eyes swept over the giants' faces, a smile hanging upon his own.

Participation in such an event was good for the judges' reputations as well. The youth's gaze enticed some interested to come forward, but they held their tongue out of momentary restraint.

Amongst the wandering cultivator experts, Emperor Wellspring was the first to laugh. "Count me in. I respect you a lot, young lord Zhen. Will you have me join you?"

The great emperor was the first to volunteer. His words were even-handed and smart, giving full respect to the host.

Jiang Chen was quite pleased. "You're one of the six titans in the wandering cultivator world, Emperor Wellspring," he chuckled. "I'm sure our wandering cultivator friends will rest easier with you around."

Many of the wandering cultivators in the audience nodded in agreement. Emperor Wellspring was definitely in the top three among the six titans, perhaps even second or first place.

If he were to judge in this event, the participants would have a hefty guarantee. Very often, wandering cultivators tended to trust each other more than outsiders. It contented many that Emperor Wellspring would represent their interests by partaking in the event as a judge.

"Haha, young lord Zhen, the Great Yu Skysword Sect and Sacred Peafowl Mountain are old friends. May I have a seat by your side?" Han Qianzhan of the Great Yu Skysword Sect was the one to speak up second. In terms of martial prowess, the Skysword Sect was among the eight first rank sects' betters. As the sect head, Han Qianzhan's presence was relatively unopposed.

"Excuse my lack of courtesy, young lord Zhen. Can I have a spot as well?" The Celestial Cicada Court's head, Su Huanzhen, followed closely behind.

"Of course, of course. Both of you are among the most prominent people in the Upper Eight Regions. You're more than sufficiently qualified, and I would be glad to have you." Jiang Chen cheerfully granted their requests.

He looked toward the other first rank sect representatives as well. The only leaders from among the first rank sects here were the Han brothers and Su Huanzhen. The other representatives were mostly third-ranked personnel, or even fourth- or fifth-ranked ones. They lacked both in strength and importance to all three of the current judges. Therefore, most felt doubtful at their chances for a request.

Veluriyam's young lord smiled. "I hear that the Sublime Chord Temple has a method called the Warrior Buddha's Eye. It can see through a great many things in the cosmos, heavenly truths and mortal matters. An ability like that would be a tremendous asset in identifying treasure. Is there an expert from the Temple who would like to participate?"

He was openly courting the Sublime Chord Temple.

The Sublime Chord Temple was one of the first rank sects in the Upper Eight Regions. They cultivated through the Buddhist dao of sentience and existence. Its representative today was one of its high-ranking masters, one Master Dong Ye. Incanting a Buddhist mantra, the master smiled. "How can I turn down such a kind offer, young lord Zhen?"

He was certainly self-aware. He'd accepted the invitation with no ceremony whatsoever.

Jiang Chen flashed a smile in return. "Is there anyone else willing to participate?"

The Moon God Sect lacked anyone with much ability on the subject. Its third-ranking sectmaster had no plans to participate.

The Empyrean River Palace had very close ties to Pillfire City. Their retinue had only come to participate for the sake of saving face. It was actually a question whether they'd come to spy or gather information. Its main representative was only an elder, definitely not on the level of the other sects' representatives.



There was no reason for the man to volunteer. Being refused would result in a massive loss of face. In any case, it would be a joke if a lowly elder volunteered when many other important people did not.

Because the Ninesuns Sky Sect had made peace with Jiang Chen only recently, their main objective here was already mostly accomplished. They hadn't prepared enough for the rest of the Meet, and didn't quite dare to participate in light of that.

The Heavenly Dragon Sect was the only one left.

The sect was a rather mysterious one. It declared itself the heirs of an ancient dragon heritage. In terms of strength, it was the strongest among its peers... or tied for it, at least. However, as haughty as the sect was, its representatives didn't seem particularly interested in adjudicating the proceedings. No one else came forward to volunteer.

Jiang Chen didn't push for anything. "With four giants beside me," he laughed, "I'm sure everyone will have much more faith in the proceedings to come.

"I'll repeat what I said: treasure identification is entirely voluntary. If anyone is doubtful about Veluriyam Capital's honor, I am not going to force their hand. On the other hand, everyone who trusts us is welcome to come forward."

He waved a hand. "A moment of consideration, if you'd like. Any willing participants can sign up over there. Emperor Peerless and the Jiao brothers will oversee the registration. No risk of having your treasure swapped for someone else's, guaranteed." Jiang Chen had thought out every step.

Mo Wushuang and the Jiao brothers oversaw registration because they were wandering cultivators, and thus more easily won the trust of their fellows. This alleviated suspicions to a degree, permitting increased participation from the audience.

There were many wandering cultivators attending the Meet, but few of them had noteworthy treasures. However, Jiang Chen was certain that true treasures did exist. If he could dig some out, the impression of the segment would be much improved.

#### Chapter 1268: Treasure Identification Begins

The enthusiasm of the wandering cultivators present was slowly roused. The number of registrants climbed steadily, passion running so high that the registration time had to be lengthened from one hour to two.

The heavyweights sitting in the honored guest area inwardly marveled at young lord Zhen when they noted how eager the wandering cultivators were. They had to admit that the young lord had the ability to turn stone into gold. One had to know that that it was very difficult to interact with the world of wandering cultivators. It was exceedingly difficult to get them to wholeheartedly participate in anything.

Yet young lord Zhen had done it.

This treasure identification segment wasn't a particularly stunning part, but the young lord had managed to inject new life into trite entertainment. He'd coaxed the wandering cultivators to let go of the doubts in their minds and join in with full enthusiasm.

There were still some wandering cultivators who wanted to sign up after two hours were up, but time was up.

"Everyone, I'm immensely touched by your support," Jiang Chen announced. "But we're bound by the rules and have already increased the time limit. I can only apologize to those who didn't register in time. However, the doors of Veluriyam Capital are forever open to you!"

Those who didn't put their name down in time were awash with regret. Why hadn't they made their move earlier? If they hadn't dragged their feet, they would've made it in time!

The count of offered treasures was swiftly tallied. There were more than 3,600 items in total!

This number was quite shocking. It would seem that the young lord had underestimated everyone's enthusiasm in the end. He'd originally anticipated selecting one or two items for a few hundred or a thousand. But with these numbers, it was much more likely for real treasure to appear in this segment. Jiang Chen looked forward to the proceedings with great anticipation.

"Everyone, the treasures have been gathered. I must reemphasize that 'The Perceptive Eye' will be conducted with utmost impartiality. There will be no exaggeration or purposeful markdowns. We will accurately reflect the true worth of these treasures.

"Of course, it wouldn't be realistic to thoroughly evaluate each item here. We'll be grouping them into five grades. First grade is the highest and will have twenty items at most. Second grade will be capped at a hundred, third grade at two hundred, and I'll have to offer my apologies again to the fourth and fifth grade items."

There was definitely treasure to be found in the wandering cultivator world, but it wasn't possible that everyone possessed it. Even though it seemed that more than three thousand had been collected this time, what could truly be hailed as treasure was undoubtedly a few small number. Maybe only one in a thousand would be worthy of that title.

"Would the four of you like to say anything?" Jiang Chen turned the floor over to the four heavyweights.

Emperor Wellspring smiled faintly. "Then allow me.

"Everyone, I'm sure everyone's heard of young lord Zhen's reputation over the past couple of days. I'm Jing Zhonghui and am honored to be raised as one of the six titans in the wandering cultivator world. I just want to tell you that since I'm participating in this segment, I will be the very definition of fairness. I'll do my best for all of you so that your treasures are excavated and appraised with their true worth. With my knowledge of young lord Zhen, I have firm trust in his abilities and character. I'm sure he can help all of your treasures shine with their rightful value!"

Emperor Wellspring's popularity in the wandering cultivator world was immense, even greater than Emperor Peerless'. His words instantly won him a standing ovation.

"I'm the sect head of the Great Yu Skysword Sect and am old friends with the young lord. I don't represent anyone today, just my sect. I will conduct this segment fairly and transparently, intermixed with no personal desires at all. May the heavens and people abandon me if I let any selfish motives color my actions!" Han Qianzhan knew that this was supposed to be a show of support for the young lord and that he couldn't eclipse his host. Therefore, he kept his words short and sweet.

Su Huanzhen also piped in. "I admire only two in Veluriyam Capital: Emperor Peafowl and young lord Zhen. I admire Emperor Peafowl's character and breadth of mind while young lord Zhen's character and fathomless knowledge draws me. Therefore, I trust him hosting this event and am very willing to participate."

"This humble monk is Dong Ye of the Sublime Chord Temple. In the name of Buddha, I will be fair and objective with no pursuit of personal gain at all."

The judges' declaration further put the wandering cultivators' minds at ease. They were wholly looking forward to the identification now.

Of course, many knew that their items would be hard pressed to be a first grade treasure. Being a second grade treasure would be fantastic enough.

"Let us begin." Jiang Chen announced with a smile.

The first to do in this segment was to weed out the fifth grade items. These weren't treasures. While it was overdoing it to say they were just to make up numbers, they weren't worth much at all.

The five randomly swept the items with their consciousness and picked out two thousand items. All of them made a complete sweep in the end to ensure nothing was overlooked.

They were in agreement. These two thousand could be eliminated. The concurrence of all five meant that there was no possible room for error.

Next were the fourth grade treasures. Another thousand items were quickly selected from the remaining. These were just a bit higher than the fifth grade items and worth just a little more, but it was still a stretch to label these as treasures.

After sifting through for fourth and fifth grade treasures, there were less than two hundred items remaining. Out of these, either the item was noticeably higher quality than the others, hadn't been fully identified, or the judges disagreed on how to categorize them.

Surprises abounded in the world. Not even these heavyweights could identify every piece of treasure. But even if they couldn't, they could still vaguely sense through their consciousness if the item in question was valuable.

And yes, there was still no absolutes in the world. Some exotic treasures appeared ordinarily common and was quite ambiguous to the consciousness. It was very difficult to pin a definition on them.

The unexperienced might ignore them, but those in the know would discover their value.

"Young lord Zhen, to think that there are quite a few treasures in the world of wandering cultivators." Han Qianzhan smiled as he cast his eye over the remaining.

"Haha, we'll have to ask Emperor Wellspring about this. He's a heavyweight in their world." Jiang Chen smiled.

Emperor Wellspring laughed heartily. "The treasures in our world pale in comparison to yours."

Jiang Chen nodded with a faint smile. "That's true, but what amazes me is that there are actually a few good things in here. There's actually some surprises as well."

"Oh?" The group's interest was piqued. They'd gone over the remaining 200 items multiple times. Although there were a few good items, wasn't it over the top to use the word 'amazement'?

It would seem that young lord Zhen is still a young man after all. He exaggerates a bit too much with his words.

Jiang Chen however, ignored everyone's thoughts about him. "Let's sort the items into the remaining three grades. I think there's around 150 third grade items."

"Give or take." Su Huanzhen nodded in agreement.

"What about second grade, young lord Zhen?" Master Dong Ye smiled politely at Jiang Chen, seeming to want to test the young man.

"If we look at it in terms of spirit herbs, second grade is the equivalent of earth rank and first grade equal to sky rank spirit herbs. There's about fifty second grade treasures."

"But that leaves around twenty for first grade." This took everyone by surprise. Young lord Zhen had said himself that there wouldn't be more than twenty for the first grade treasures. But now he seemed to be refuting his own words?

Jiang Chen offered a bland smile. "There's definitely twenty of them, but what's most delightful is that there's more than one treasure that exceeds first grade."

"Oh?" Master Dong Ye's eyes lit up. With his Warrior Buddha's Eye, he was confident that none of the others present had appraisal skill that was better than his. They might be stronger than his sect in terms of martial dao, but he was firmly certain that he outstripped them in their current arena.

Young lord Zhen however, was a slight enigma. The young man wasn't so easily seen through. He really did seem unfathomable.

"Young lord Zhen, there are indeed a lot of first grade treasures, but it's difficult to say for certain if there are any higher than first grade." Han Qianzhan couldn't resist a word of caution.

"What do you think, Emperor Wellspring?" Su Huanzhen decided to ask the wandering great emperor, who responded with a chuckle.

"My appraisal skills are probably the lowest out of all of us here. All of you are immensely talented. I'm just tagging along. Let's look to young lord Zhen to ease our confusion. I trust him."

Having received the Pinecrane Pill from Jiang Chen, the wandering cultivator still felt that he owed the young lord somehow. Though he'd helped in the fight against Emperor Shura, the late great emperor had already been a dead man under the circumstances. There was no way he would've escaped even if Emperor Wellspring hadn't made a move. Thus, the wandering great emperor supported Jiang Chen immensely.

"Let's choose the third grade treasures first." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

This grade of treasure didn't cause much controversy. Though they were higher rank than the fourth and fifth rank treasures, it wasn't to the point where they couldn't be identified.

150 items were labelled as third grade, ushering in the selection of second grade treasures. Things were slightly more difficult here, but still didn't pose much of a difficulty to these heavyweights. They had their eyes on the first grade treasures.

#### Chapter 1269: Three Supreme Rank Treasures

There was very little dispute when it came to the second grade treasures as well. The group had very keen eyes. Selecting those wasn't much of a challenge. Everyone's selections consistently matched each other.

Treasures that were disputed or beyond their knowledge were left untouched and unclassified. However, that still made for fifty-two second grade treasures when the results were out, more than what they'd initially expected.

The group didn't pay it too much heed as second grade treasures weren't particularly noteworthy. They were most concerned that there was twenty-four treasures left! This was much beyond their initial estimations!

The original count was that there'd be twenty first grade treasures at most, but a full twenty-four? How were they supposed to classify these items?

Some of these treasures were completely foreign to them. Even a knowledgeable old hand like Emperor Wellspring didn't dare casually comment on these items. Han Qianzhan and Su Huanzhen were also a lot less experienced than Master Dong Ye. Therefore, perhaps it was up to young lord Zhen and the master to identify these items.

"Master Dong, do you see anything worthy of note? Why don't we pick a few and classify them as supreme rank?"

Master Dong Ye pondered solemnly. "Treasures worthy of note? Young lord Zhen, this monk is truly unenlightened. What are the characteristics of said supreme rank treasures?" The master thought that Jiang Chen was testing him. He cautiously threw the hot potato back to the young lord.

Jiang Chen smiled. "There are three items which I believe are worthy of being classified as supreme rank. The rest shall remain as first grade treasures. What does everyone think?"

"Young lord Zhen, are you classifying the three as supreme rank because of their extraordinary quality, or because you were forced to do so as the number of items has exceeded your estimations?" Emperor Wellspring quickly interjected.

Jiang Chen smiled. "The former of course. I wouldn't hesitate to classify five as supreme rank either if there were five that made the grade."

Master Dong Ye was taken aback. "Is the young lord really certain that three items here are superior to the others?"

The master remained unconvinced. Even though a monk shouldn't be overly competitive, he was still a cultivator at heart. It was only normal that he'd feel some semblance of competitiveness.

Moreover, he'd always been proud of his keen eye for quality items. He didn't think it was wrong to classify the twenty-four items as first grade treasures. There were also indeed one or two items of even more superior quality, but he remained unconvinced that there were three supreme rank items among the lot. He felt that young lord Zhen was putting on airs to make himself seem superior.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Let me select the treasures first and give you all a detailed explanation. My words alone wouldn't hold any weight. We must all agree upon the classifications."

He immediately identified the three treasures after speaking.

One of the treasures was a jade token. There were ancient symbols carved onto the slip, and looked impossible to comprehend.

Nobody was able to sort it, but one could easily tell that it was no ordinary item. During the sorting, nobody had dared to issue a grade as they didn't understand it. They were worried that they'd be misclassifying it.

The jade token had made it all the way to the end for this very reason. Nobody brought it up as they didn't want to reveal their ignorance. They'd rather wait for someone else to bring it up. The crowd was taken aback when Jiang Chen selected the jade token and wondered why. Did the young lord really know it?

The other treasure that Jiang Chen selected was a spirit herb. Su Huanzhen frowned at his decision. Master Dong Ye smirked a little as well. It was evident that he didn't think very highly of it.

Emperor Wellspring couldn't help but worry for Jiang Chen. He knew nothing about the herb, but Su Huanzhen and the master's expression clearly indicated that they did. Moreover, they weren't particularly impressed by that decision. Jiang Chen couldn't care less about their opinions. He proceeded to identify the third treasure.

It was a very quaint and unadorned talisman. Master Dong Ye nodded faintly as he finally agreed with one of Jiang Chen's choices. He'd noticed the extraordinariness of the talisman, but he chose not to come to conclusions as he was unsure of its origin. His hunch was confirmed when the young lord picked it out.

"Young lord Zhen, will you be ranking these treasures as well?" the master asked in a calm and collected manner.

"Haha. In my humble opinion, the jade token should be ranked first, the talisman second, and the herb third. Of course, it's only a shallow conjecture of mine. Feel free to voice your opinions if you disagree. That's why I've invited all of you here. I welcome your advice as I'm still young and inexperienced."

Jiang Chen mouthed humble words, but he'd actually noticed Master Dong Ye's disapproving glances. He knew that the monk was skeptical.

Emperor Wellspring laughed. "Well, count me out then. I know nothing about these items. I sense an ancient aura emanating from the talisman, but I know nothing about its use. I can only wait for an analysis from the experts."

Su Huanzhen didn't say anything. She recognized the herb, but it was impossible that she'd question Jiang Chen's choice because of her relationship with Veluriyam Capital.

Han Qianzhan was the same as Emperor Wellspring. He could tell that those three items are very extraordinary, but he couldn't pinpoint why.

Master Dong Ye didn't remain reserved. "Young lord Zhen, I agree with the talisman, but I don't understand why you've selected the jade token and the spirit herb. Since this is an open discussion, we shouldn't be lenient and accept your decision unquestioningly, or this exercise would lose its purpose."

The followers of Buddhism were sometimes very stubborn. They were often very single-minded and inflexible, but Jiang Chen didn't mind. In fact, he admired such people.

"Master Dong Ye, perhaps you recognize this spirit herb?"

"If I'm not mistaken, it should be a Heavencloud Ganoderma. I've come across this sky grade spirit herb before. But as the young lord has mentioned, only sky grade treasures can be classified as first grade, and since the fungi is a sky grade spirit herb, shouldn't it be classified accordingly? Does it really deserve a supreme classification?"

Jiang Chen nodded without dispute and pointed at the token. "Master, what is your opinion on the jade token then?"

He'd ranked the jade token at the very top. To him, it was clearly something very remarkable.

Master Dong Ye was very straightforward. "I don't recognize the characters on the jade token. If the young lord wishes to classify it as supreme rank, you have to tell us its origin. Or else, we'd be hard pressed to believe that it's actually the best item among everything else."

Emperor Wellspring laughed. "The others might not know the young lord very well, but I can confidently say that he's a flawless decision maker. He must have his reasons for selecting the jade token. Young lord Zhen, you needn't keep us on tenterhooks any longer. We were told that your knowledge is from Myriad Abyss Island, and that you're much more knowledgeable than us. Surely you can clear up our confusion?"

"Hahaha! Agreed! Young lord Zhen, stop keeping us in suspense! I'm about to die from curiosity!" Han Qianzhan belly-laughed.

Jiang Chen nodded. "I recognize the characters on the jade token. It's actually an ancient scripture of an extraordinary martial technique. After some evaluation, I feel that the scripture is very immaculate and so is the ancient martial technique. Its potential is comparable, if not better than the ultimate treasures from the great sects of the Upper Eight Regions."

"What?"

"It's comparable to a sect's ultimate treasure?" Han Qianzhan and Su Huanzhen could barely contain their shock. Emperor Wellspring's jaw nearly fell off.

This information was too shocking as the human domain was sorely lacking in powerful cultivation techniques, even more so for wandering cultivators. Martial dao treasures had mostly been monopolized by the great sects. Wandering cultivators often had to make do with items much inferior.

“Young lord Zhen, y-you’re pulling our legs, right?” Emperor Wellspring could barely contain his excitement.

“I’ve already given my word that I wouldn’t lie during the treasure appraisal.” Jiang Chen answered with a faint smile.

Master Dong Ye doubted Jiang Chen’s words in spite of himself. Perhaps young lord Zhen isn’t mouthing empty words, but there’s still a possibility that he’s mistaken. Maybe his observation is actually false?

Jiang Chen nodded with a smile. “Yes, that may be true. However, I’m willing to bear the price of my mistakes. If the bearer of the foremost supreme treasure wants to part with it in the end, I’ll buy it from his hands with a price that’s more than adequate for a treasure of this caliber.”

The crowd was taken aback.

“Since we’ve vowed to have an open and fair discussion, we should discuss matters related to the jade token at a later time.” Su Huanzhen suddenly interjected.

“That’s also fine. We should discuss disagreements openly to prevent further misunderstandings down the road.” Jiang Chen answered straightforwardly.

Master Dong Ye wasn’t convinced, but he still nodded without saying much else. His gaze suddenly fell upon the Heavencloud Ganoderma. He’d sooner die than classify this herb as supreme rank. He knew that it was a sky rank herb as he’d encountered it before, but there was no way it was worthy of such a high mention!

#### Chapter 1270: The Heavencloud Ganoderma

Master Dong Ye was a stubborn man who spoke whatever was on his mind.

“Young lord Zhen, I can’t identify that jade token, so I have no room to argue with you on that matter. However, I really think that the Heavencloud Ganoderma is unfit to be classified as supreme rank. It’s only a high-quality sky rank herb. You’ve already classified multiple sky rank herbs as top rank, no? Why is the Heavencloud Ganoderma above its peers?”

The Ganoderma was indeed a sky rank herb. Su Huanzhen also knew that because she recognized it. Neither Han Qianzhan nor Emperor Wellspring could contend on Jiang Chen’s behalf. It would be unfair to give that herb preferential treatment. What purpose did young lord Zhen have for doing so in the first place, though? Did he have something else in mind?

Jiang Chen was immensely relaxed. He examined the Ganoderma over with a patient eye, sighing. “This Heavencloud Ganoderma should be between a thousand to a thousand two hundred years old. It’s been picked a bit early, alas. A three-thousand-year specimen would be five to ten times more valuable.”

“Haha, some of the other sky rank herbs are a thousand five hundred years old or more. If the Ganoderma isn’t even a thousand two hundred, why do you prize it so highly, young lord Zhen?” Master Dong Ye was still perplexed.

“If the Ganoderma’s medicinal effects were evaluated alone, it would indeed be a mere sky rank herb.” Jiang Chen laughed. “Perhaps you don’t know of one of its more unique properties, Master Dong Ye?”



The master was stunned, then shook his head instinctively. He was good at identifying treasures, but he didn't know about the unique properties of spirit herbs. He wasn't willing to cede the point just yet though. "Please, go ahead."

Smiling, Jiang Chen continued. "The pill dao world contains tremendous variety. You are all amongst Divine Abyss Continent's best experts. I'm sure you're no stranger to pills such as the Origin Doubling Pill and the Sage Smile Pill?"

Master Dong Ye was impassive. "The Origin Doubling Pill is a pill for origin realm cultivators. The Sage Smile Pill is a bit better, but it's designed for sage realm experts, yes? There's nothing particularly remarkable about that. Plus, the main material for the Sage Smile Pill is the Celestial Grass. I heard that you managed to get your hands on a large batch of the Grass, so you must have plenty of the pills now as well. What does that have to do with the Heavencloud Ganoderma, though?"

The others were just as bewildered as he was.

Jiang Chen grinned. "That's right, there's no relation between the Ganoderma and the Sage Smile Pill. But we have the Origin Doubling Pill and Sage Smile Pill for origin and sage realm respectively. What about emperor realm? Can't we have a similar pill that unconditionally helps a cultivator increase a level in the emperor realm?"

Emperor realm? Mass bafflement rippled through the crowd. The only pills that were known to do that were the Sage Smile Pill and the Origin Doubling Pill.

Furthermore, the former was difficult to find. One of its main materials, Celestial Grass, was itself a sky rank spirit herb. Because it could be refined into the Sage Smile Pill, it was both scarce and valuable.

Back then, a single specimen from Liu Zhen was enough to cause a frenzied auction. Jiang Chen only knew later that there was a sizable clump of the herb later on; Liu Zhen and his father Jiang Feng had discovered it together.

The Celestial Grass had allowed Jiang Chen to refine a ton of Sage Smile Pills, which proved very useful in substantially increasing Sacred Peafowl Mountain's strength.

"Young lord Zhen... can the Heavencloud Ganoderma be used to refine a pill that unconditionally increases the level of an emperor realm cultivator?" Emperor Wellspring was as surprised as everyone else.

Every level in the world of martial dao was stupendously difficult. Especially in emperor realm, a fast rate of progress was considered ten to twenty years, while a slow one, anywhere from one to several centuries.

If one could gain a level unconditionally, there would be tremendous savings in both time and energy. Additionally, if pills of this nature had nonexistent side effects, that destined it to be a hot commodity.

Unfortunately, the highest realm that one could advance unconditionally with a pill in was sage realm. That was public knowledge. Nobody had heard of emperor realm cultivators being able to do the same.

Han Qianzhan was overjoyed. "Young lord Zhen, does this world really have a pill that does that for emperor realm experts?"

"Of course," Jiang Chen smiled. "There are many marvels in the world of martial dao. It's not too far fetched a concept, is it, To have a pill that unconditionally enhances an emperor realm cultivator once as well?"

Everyone was shocked. 'Not too far fetched a concept'? No one present had any experience with anything remotely similar! Did a pill like that really exist within the human domain?

"Pillfire City has let word out that they have a recipe for this kind of pill," Master Dong Ye mused.

"As for whether they really do or not, they didn't admit to much either way. Still, some think it to be rather plausible."

"Pillfire City likes to tantalize others. That's certainly something in their form to do," Jiang Chen chuckled. "However, the Heavencloud Ganoderma has nothing to do with that kind of pill."

Nothing to do with that kind of pill?

Why would he mention all this if it was irrelevant?

There was dejected expressions all around. The crowd thought that they'd just heard an explosive piece of pill dao hearsay. Was there nothing of the sort after all?

"If the Heavencloud Ganoderma can't be refined into a pill that enhances emperor realm experts, what value does it hold?" Master Dong Ye doggedly stuck to his previous point of contention.

"The Heavencloud Ganoderma can't be refined into that kind of pill. In fact, it would be a waste to. The pill it belongs to is designed for great emperor experts. It will raise the level of someone like that by one."

Raise the level of a great emperor? The gathered crowd could scarcely believe what it was hearing. Great emperor experts weren't divided into nine levels. Was young lord Zhen dreaming?

A helpless smile played at the corner of Master Dong Ye's mouth. He shook his head, displeased by Jiang Chen's long-winded sophistry. But as an ascetic, he wasn't exactly in a position to break out in curses.

Jiang Chen was relatively bland with his gaze. "Great emperors aren't separated into nine levels, but they have their own stages, correct?"

"That's so." Emperor Wellspring nodded. "We have these unwritten stages: half-step great emperor, initial emperor, mid great emperor realm, advanced great emperor, supreme great emperor, and peak great emperor."

"Sounds like six in total." Jiang Chen smiled once more. "Emperor Wellspring, you should be supreme great emperor, yes? Close to peak great emperor? How long did you take to get from initial to mid great emperor, may I ask?"

The emperor pondered the question a moment. "If I recall correctly, a hundred eighty years in total."

"Excuse the intrusion, Sect Head Han. What about you?" Jiang Chen turned to the other man.

"I'm embarrassed to say I took about two hundred years too. With the benefit of the sect's various resources, to boot." Han Qianzhan was amused by the question. His current cultivation level was about the same as Emperor Wellspring's – between supreme and peak great emperor.

"Hehe, you're both real geniuses. It took me two hundred fifty years to take that step," lamented Su Huanzhen.

Master Dong Ye was genuinely a bit flustered. "Truly, all of you are the strongest of the strong. I only recently became mid great emperor realm. It took me almost four hundred years to get here."

This reflected upon the martial dao talents of everyone present. Master Dong Ye wasn't a great emperor expert fit to be the head of a sect. As such, there was some expectation for his cultivation talent to be lesser to everyone else's.

"There is a kind of pill," smiled Jiang Chen, "that allows an initial great emperor to advance to mid great emperor within three years. The chance of success? Over ninety percent. Would you consider that a free level in its own right, hmm?"

Though the youth had spoken his words very smoothly, they were still a thunderclap near his captive audience's ears. An initial great emperor, ascend mid great emperor within three years? Wasn't that... too... far-fetched?

"I'm not dreaming, am I, young lord Zhen?" Emperor Wellspring chuckled. "I haven't even heard of such a pill, much less seen one in person."

"Neither have I." Han Qianzhan shook his head in agreement.

"Are you sure it exists at all, young lord Zhen?" Su Huanzhen was taken aback a little as well.

"Before the Longevity Pill, no one believed that such a pill could exist at all. Before the Pinecrane Pill, no one believed that a pill could extend the lives of emperors or great emperors. Both existed, but had to be dug up from the past. In ancient times, pills like those and more certainly existed in the human domain... which, incidentally, proves that the pill I mentioned is true!"

Jiang Chen's tone was one of absolute certainty. His listeners found it hard to doubt him. The Pinecrane Pill alone was already a painful challenge to everyone's worldviews. There was nothing they could rebut him with if he used that as a talking point.

Much of Master Dong Ye's dissatisfaction dissipated. He was still doubtful, but he knew that he had no expertise to speak of regarding pills before Veluriyam's young lord.

Emperor Wellspring sharply inhaled. "Young lord Zhen, what is the pill called? Can you tell us its name, if it exists?"

"Emperor Supremacy Pill. Its name comes from the idea that the pill can help a great emperor to rise supreme above his current level."

"Emperor Supremacy Pill! An excellent name." Emperor Wellspring slapped his thigh. "I wouldn't believe these words if they came from anyone else. However, I have no choice but to believe when it comes to you!"

Han Qianzhan grinned. "I believe him as well. Young lord Zhen, do you understand how to refine the Emperor Supremacy Pill?"

"A bit of it, I suppose." Jiang Chen saw no reason to be humble.

A bit? Curiosity tugged on the audience's heartstrings. If the young lord was saying that, that likely meant he knew how to refine it very well. Rife speculation ran through the crowd and eyes darted to and fro with complexity.