

### Three Realms 1311

#### Chapter 1311: Continuous Argument

Shangguan Yanqing roared with laughter. “Everyone knows how easy name-calling is. If the sectmaster wishes me to die, I will go to my death without so much as a frown. However, you are completely mistaken if you think that killing me will give the sect a brighter future.

“My friends, I’m sure everyone knows the true identity of Veluriyam Capital’s young lord Zhen by now. Back when he was still in Myriad Domain, he crushed our plans for the sixteen kingdom alliance. He escaped notice simply because the issue was minor at best. When the Eternal Celestial Capital succeeded in their conspiracy to invade Myriad Domain, we were a bit slow on the uptake and therefore didn’t benefit nearly as much. Everyone thought that we lost out on a great deal, but in fact, we should be thankful for that stroke of fortune. Otherwise...”

“Otherwise what?” Esteemed Chen Lei sneered.

“Elder Chen Lei,” Shangguan Yanqing remarked coolly, “yYu shouldn’t use such a judgmental tone. Your loss and our decision here are separate matters. We will see the Eternal Celestial Capital’s fate very soon.”

Emperor Clearsky waved. “There’s no need to argue. Shangguan, go into a bit more detail.”

Shangguan Yanqing knew that the sectmaster wasn’t actually going to kill him. After all, he had received personal instructions before his journey to Veluriyam Capital.

“To put it more simply, sectmaster, one phrase is enough to sum it up. Discretion is the better part of valor.” The inspector cleanly summarized his stance.

“How so?” asked the emperor.

“It is better for us to have young lord Zhen as an ally rather than an enemy. In the latter case, it is possible that our ten thousand years of heritage will be destroyed overnight. The Ninesuns Sky Sect won’t necessarily benefit a great deal with him as a friend, but neither will it risk destruction!” Shangguan Yanqing’s words caused an uproar in the audience present.

Many thought he was exaggerating. Even if Veluriyam’s young lord was reasonably capable, he was still a young man at the end of the day. How could what the inspector was suggesting possibly come to pass?

Esteemed Wu Gong snickered incessantly. “Keep making things up, Shangguan Yanqing. I’d like to see how far you can go.”

“I’m sure most of you won’t take me seriously, my friends,” Shangguan Yanqing continued. “You’ve cloistered yourselves in the sect for far too long and lack understanding of the world outside. Or perhaps you’re not interested in learning of the outside landscape, caught up in your dreams that our clout as a first rank sect will overcome any problems. It’s the inspectors’ job to travel around and gather information. We can’t claim to have made any great contributions to the sect as a whole, but we do pride ourselves on knowledge about current events. Is there any disagreement about this?

“I bore witness to the Dragon and Tiger Meet from start to finish. If you had been there, you would’ve been even more shocked than I was. Young lord Zhen’s martial dao prowess surpasses anyone else of his

generation. However, his comprehensive pill dao knowledge and natural knack for leadership are even more terrifying than that. It's as if he was born to lead on a grand scale. No matter their alignment, the experts present were strung along at his rhythm.

"From the wandering cultivator world: Emperor Peerless, one of its six titans, is now one of the young lord's loyal followers. The Jiao brothers of Mt. Huai, known for their ferocity, have also become his retainers. Emperor Wellspring, another of the six titans who is loftier than even Emperor Peerless, has expressed his indirect support for the kid as well. I'm not exaggerating when I say that if Veluriyam Capital wages open war against the Ninesuns Sky Sect, young lord Zhen would be able to enlist the aid of Emperor Wellspring, Emperor Inferno, and Emperor Reliance at minimum. All of them are members of the six titans, I might add.

"We have deep pockets and an abundance of resources, but can we truly compare to Veluriyam Capital?

"The next part is what intimidates me the most. The young lord has the backing of an expert from the mythical Myriad Abyss Island! When that mysterious expert made his presence known at the Dragon and Tiger Meet, every great emperor expert cowered before him like children! They were as docile as lambs.

"Even if Myriad Abyss Island's expert doesn't participate in these affairs, young lord Zhen still possesses pills that defy the human domain's understanding. The Pinecrane Pill and the Emperor Supremacy Pill are both capable of buying a vast number of powerful experts for mercenary work. They would be satisfied with only a single pill of either type in return. What ability do we have to stand against the combined wrath of Veluriyam Capital and ten additional wandering cultivator great emperors, if I may ask?" Shangguan Yanqing posed a harsh question to everyone present.

Some of the complaining executives were already pale with terror. They could no longer sit still. The inspector's analysis made them realize that the youth they'd ignored for so long had become strong enough for the entire sect to look up to.

Disregarding everything else, who at the Ninesuns Sky Sect could resist a mysterious expert from Myriad Abyss Island? The threat of that alone was enough to strike fear into the hearts of all.

"Daoist Shangguan, is everything you've described about young lord Zhen true? Your words sound... a bit overblown." A few still held out in disbelief.

"Overblown? To tell you the truth, I haven't even gotten started. The real young lord Zhen is several times more incredible than what I've described. Pillfire City's Emperor Pillzenith is pretty capable man, isn't he? After he failed to benefit from the civil unrest within Veluriyam Capital, young lord Zhen scared him off in person at the Vassal Meeting.

"Emperor Shura, Veluriyam Capital's second-in-command, was cut down in secret after an attempted rebellion.

"The missing leader of Veluriyam Capital, Emperor Peafowl, is a commanding figure among the people. After his disappearance, many thought that the city would fall into chaos. It took only a few months for young lord Zhen to take full control, managing it so well that the city is bursting with new vigor rather than discord. Veluriyam Capital may not have as wide a sphere of influence as Pillfire City yet, but it has significantly greater potential."

Venerated Elder Chen Lei was furious. "Greater potential than Pillfire City? Pillfire City takes home more than eighty percent profit from the entire pill industry. Are you dreaming?"

"More than eighty percent? It wouldn't matter even if it was more than ninety." Shangguan Yanqing smirked nonchalantly. "As long as young lord Zhen lives, the pill industry will be turned upside down sooner or later. Pillfire City won't get to make the rules for much longer! Esteemed Chen Lei, your time behind closed doors has rendered you sluggish. You don't follow the trends in the outside world any more!"

The inspector's tone was very disrespectful. Hearing his disdain was almost enough for Chen Lei to cough up blood.

"He's just some immature kid who hasn't grown up yet," Esteemed Wu Gong rebuked. "It's hard to say if he'll even make it to great emperor. What does temporary fame matter in the long run? How could someone like Emperor Pillzenith allow him to enter into his full potential?"

"That's right. Pillfire City won't let him get his way so easily. You're heaping too much praise on that kid, Shangguan Yanqing. Did you take a bribe of some sort?" Esteemed Chen Lei followed up with further stigmatization.

"Pillfire City? The Pill-Martial Summit was clearly their response to Veluriyam Capital's Dragon and Tiger Meet. How did things end up for them? Only a few wandering great emperors attended the Pill-Martial Summit, compared to the twenty-odd who went to the Dragon and Tiger Meet. This was the first time, too! If Veluriyam Capital were to hold another one soon, I am sure there would be a much more significant gap." Shangguan Yanqing scoffed.

"Even great emperors feel the clutches of old age. Who wouldn't want a Pinecrane Pill? And the Emperor Supremacy Pill is perfect for those who want to break through too.

"Do you think they won't be able to make the rules, given these two pills? Pillfire City has a lot of history and knowledge, but young lord Zhen's pill dao methods have clearly surpassed the entire human domain. Pillfire City was strong before because of the lack of competition. But a veritable tiger has arrived upon the scene, and Pillfire's stores are rendered worthless."

Shangguan Yanqing smiled coolly. "That's as far as I'll go. It's up to you whether or not you believe me. Time will show the veracity of my words."

Emperor Clearsky smiled. "Shangguan, you've done good work by going to Veluriyam Capital. All that you've said today is valuable information for the sect. The Ninesuns Sky Sect has an ancient adage: when an opponent cannot be defeated, the best solution is to make them into an ally."

Emperor Clearsky's gaze was thoughtful. "We are a first rank sect. However, Veluriyam Capital has strength that surpasses any of our brethren. Even though Emperor Peafowl has disappeared suddenly, Veluriyam has strengthened rather than weakened. They are more united and more aggressive than ever before. Make no mistake about it: they're on a meteoric rise. From what I foresee, a clash between our sect and young lord Zhen can only result in a loss for either side. Because young lord Zhen has Myriad Abyss Island's backing, any bit of outside pressure from there will smash the Ninesuns Sky Sect utterly. From the sect's perspective, I'd like to ask all of you a single question: should we be friends or enemies with Veluriyam Capital? Feel free to speak your minds."

As the head of an entire sect, the emperor had to consider things more holistically.

"Sectmaster, are we supposed to forget about our grudge with that kid?"

"Indeed. When has the Ninesuns Sky Sect suffered such a indignity?!"

"Don't be like that, my friends. Grudges are relative. His killed ours and we've killed his. Technically, we're the instigators in all of this."

"You're right. We were the ones who first sent pursuers after him. Cao Jing died after striking out on his own. That's pretty typical for martial dao conflicts and it's hard to say who has the right of it."

"I agree with the sectmaster. It is impossible for us to fight Veluriyam Capital publicly! Their near-destruction of a first rank sect is not ancient history." Aside from the esteemed elders Chen Lei and Wu Gong, the others were diametrically opposed.

#### Chapter 1312: Obstruction In Front of the Mountain Gates

As soon as someone took a stand against the two esteemed elders, many started following suit.

"I think Daoist Shangguan's words are sensible. Inspectors who frequent the outside have a better understanding of the world at large than the rest of us. Young lord Zhen's exalted fame reached all the way to our dwellings, so there's no doubt he's a dragon amongst men. We can't challenge someone of his ilk."

"Indeed, I feel like Lord Zhen is a once in a generation figure destined to leave his imprint in human history. Are you saying we should volunteer to be stepping stones for his irresistible rise? Sheer idiocy!"

"It'd be unwise to become mortal enemies over our currently insignificant grudge."

"Sectmaster, rather than fighting an uphill battle, we should seize the occasion to mend our ties with Veluriyam Capital and earn some benefits!"

Shangguan Yanqing's persuasive words along with Emperor Clearsky's attitude convinced many among the upper ranks that their sect couldn't make enemies out of Veluriyam Capital.

Someone suddenly barged inside, interrupting the heated debate. "Sectmaster, there's a group outside of four seniors and a young man. They have an extraordinary look about them and possess unfathomable strength. They say they're from Veluriyam Capital, and they're asking the sectmaster to go and welcome them in person."

"What?" Everyone froze. Talk about the devil!

Shangguan Yanqing was delighted. "Sectmaster, could it be young lord Zhen here in person?"

Young lord Zhen?

Chen Lie and Wu Gong seethed with rage.

Emperor Clearsky murmured after a moment, "Chen Lie, Wu Gong, The sect comes before private quarrels. Whether it's him or not, you aren't to be swayed by your emotions. Everyone, come with me. Let us see if our guest is the famous young lord Zhen."

He walked out with great strides. Most of the upper ranks hurried closely behind. Chen Lie and Wu Gong looked at their peers' departing figures, then at each other. Their faces reflected their anger and helplessness.

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The sound of Emperor Clearsky's hearty laughter reached the mountain gates.

"I heard the trill of magpies early this morning and wondered what wonderful news we would receive. It turned out to be honored guests from Veluriyam Capital!" He cupped his fist and offered Jiang Chen a wide smile, approaching with large steps.

"Young lord, this is the Ninesuns sectmaster Emperor Clearsky. His cultivation is even higher than mine," Mo Wushuang sent to Jiang Chen.

With a smile, Jiang Chen stepped forward and offered a courteous greeting. "I've long since heard about Emperor Clearsky's might and prestige. Today, I see your reputation is well deserved. I'm Jiang Chen. I hope the sectmaster won't mind the sudden visit."

"And what words are these?" Emperor Clearsky held Jiang Chen's hands and smiled amiably, as if greeting a long lost friend. "We're greatly honored by your presence, young lord Jiang Chen. Please come in, come in!"

The four great emperors in Jiang Chen's party dogged the young lord's footsteps. Given the group's strength plus the young lord's own on the same level, they weren't that concerned with venturing deep into Ninesuns Sky Sect territory. There might not even be five great emperors to be found inside the whole of the Ninesuns Sky Sect. It'd take at least two or three first rank sects to equal a Veluriyam Capital. Hence Emperor Peerless and the others strode easily behind Jiang Chen, full of assurance.

Emperor Clearsky personally introduced the elders and inspectors to Jiang Chen. The latter smiled when it came to Shangguan Yanqing. "Inspector Shangguan is a splendid person. You must have reaped some gains at the Dragon and Tiger Meet. I haven't had time to congratulate you yet."

Shangguan Yanqing had noticed the young lord was calling himself "Jiang Chen" rather than "Zhen Shi". He too switched names without missing a beat. "Haha, it was all thanks to young lord Jiang Chen's good fortunes."

Jiang Chen in turn introduced the four great emperors to the Ninesuns Sky Sect. Seeing their deference to Jiang Chen, the amazed crowd wondered what kind of charisma the young lord exerted to tame these unruly great emperors.

Winding through several mountain paths, they were about to reach the main gate when two figures suddenly landed in front of them. The two were Chen Lie and Wu Gong. Both of them held a token. Full of anger, their expressions stern, they blocked the way forward.

Emperor Clearsky's face darkened, but Jiang Chen remained as collected as ever. His gaze flitted past the two of them, then landed on Emperor Clearsky. "Sectmaster, these two are?"

With a slight nod, Emperor Clearsky stepped forward and hectored, "Chen Lie, Wu Gong, do you not understand the rules of the sect? Do you fail to see the larger picture?"

Chen Lie lifted the token in his hand. "Sectmaster, this is the Esteemed Elder Token, a privilege granted to us by the sect. The rules of our sect say that two esteemed elders are enough to convene a sect meeting as long as they hold the tokens."

There was indeed a sect rule like this, but a sect head like Emperor Clearsky wouldn't be fazed by such trivialities. "Hmph, what command? Chen Lie, Wu Gong, my mind is made up. I've always indulged the both of you, but today, you better first weigh the consequences of opposing me!"

Shangguan Yanqing also shouted, "Esteemed elders, we can talk things out! It's no use waving about the token with only the two of you. Remember, there are four esteemed elders in the sect."

Chen Lie and Wu Gong looked at each other. They needed the four esteemed elders acting in concert to veto the sectmaster's decision.

Chen Lie's eyes fell on two men standing beside Emperor Clearsky. "Brother Ximen, Brother Lu, all of us rose to prominence together with the previous sectmaster's rule. We carry the sect's fate on our shoulders. Are you really going to allow this nonsense?"

He was calling out to the other two esteemed elders, Ximen He and Lu Yuan. Like Chen Lie and Wu Gong, these eminent elders had experienced two generations of leadership and did indeed have greater seniority than the sectmaster.

However, Ximen He shook his head without the slightest hesitation. "Daoist Chen, I don't see anything wrong with the sectmaster's decision. Our sect has always acted according to the circumstances. On the contrary, I would be worried if we were blinded by personal spite."

"That's right," Esteemed Lu Yuan echoed. "Daoist Chen, Daoist Wu, it's your prerogative to use the Esteemed Elder Token, but the sect comes above all. It would be unreasonable to continue with your petty grudges."

"That's right. Please stop, Esteemed Elders. You're challenging the sectmaster's authority. This is much too unbecoming!" The upper ranks of the sect also advised them.

Chen Lie and Wu Gong were livid. Blinded by personal enmity, they had been counting on the other two esteemed elders to stop Emperor Clearsky from mending ties with Veluriyam Capital. But their cohorts hadn't supported them at all!

His face expressionless, Emperor Clearsky suddenly lifted three fingers. "Three breaths. You have three breaths to consider the bigger picture and take a step back. If you do, then everything will be water under the bridge. We're still one family from the same sect. But if you don't..."

His face suddenly hardened and he started counting down. "Three."

"Two."

Emperor Clearsky was a domineering sectmaster with supreme strength. When he flared his aura and expressed his attitude, Chen Lie and Wu Gong received the impression that they couldn't withstand the incoming displeasure.

Wu Gong mumbled with a soft sigh, "Forget it, forget it. Maybe I'm old and confused. I'm dropping this matter here. This old man's dignity is in shambles, so I'm going into seclusion for a hundred years. I hope all of you will take good care of the sect."

Too ashamed to stay, he turned into a blur and disappeared in a stream of light.

Chen Lie glared at Jiang Chen, his eyes full of hostility. But he didn't dare persist now that he'd been isolated. He stomped a hateful foot on the ground and flew away.

Jiang Chen was puzzled. "Sectmaster, it seems these two elders came here because of me?"

The Ninesuns sect members looked a little embarrassed. Shangguan Yanqing responded with a wry smile, "Elder Chen Lie had a disciple named Cao Jin..."

Cao Jin? Jiang Chen had killed him back on Mt. Rippling Mirage. As he seemed to recall, that lowlife was one of the ten true disciples of the Ninesuns Sky Sect. No wonder.

"Sectmaster Clearsky, Cao Jin was the one who went to Myriad Domain and provoked me. But it's true I killed him, so if Elder Chen Lie wants to blame someone, he might as well look to me." Jiang Chen didn't care either way.

"Not at all, young lord. Our sect may keep grudge and gratitude in mind, but they're common occurrences in the world of cultivation. We also realize it wouldn't be a smart choice to be enemies with you." Emperor Clearsky was rather plain-spoken. "Not that I'm afraid, but I have to evaluate the circumstances when managing a sect. Young lord Jiang Chen heads a powerful faction. Rather than enemies, I'd like to be friends."

His forthrightness both surprised and caused Jiang Chen to be on the alert. Emperor Clearsky wasn't to be trifled with. Discretion as the better part of valor, making friends if he couldn't afford enmity. In other words, a friend like him might very well become an enemy at the drop of a hat if the situation were to change.

#### Chapter 1313: A Transaction

Emperor Clearsky is a highly competent leader. This was Jiang Chen's initial assessment. He naturally kept the thought to himself and remained unperturbed on the surface. His merry smile made him almost harmless.

"Young lord, Shangguan Yanqing has been singing your praises ever since he returned from Veluriyam Capital. Now that we've finally met, I can safely say that the rumors from the jianghu aren't exaggerated in the least. Please, come in and wash off the dust from your travels!" Emperor Clearsky was incredibly outspoken and forthright.

"I appreciate the sentiments, Sectmaster Clearsky, but I've travelled all the way here to discuss something important. Why don't we find a better place to discuss business instead?" Jiang Chen cut right through all of the civilities.

Emperor Clearsky was taken aback. He'd received many eminent figures from the Upper Eight Regions before and almost all of them were highly particular about welcoming ceremonies. He never would've thought that the young lord of Veluriyam Capital would pay so little attention to such things. But even

so, he still admired the young lord. He's already acquired an air of indifference about formalities at such a young age. He'll surely achieve great things one day.

Emperor Clearsky smiled. "Of course. I've always believed that the host should follow the guest's wishes. We should all look up to young lord Jiang for your indifference towards extraneous details. Come. I'll lead the way."

He made a sweeping gesture. "The rest of you may leave. Young lord Jiang and I will take a stroll in the rear mountains."

The crowd was dumbfounded.

Jiang Chen smiled blandly when the four great emperors tried to follow him. "You all can socialize with the Ninesuns Sky Sect's executives. I'll be taking a stroll with Emperor Clearsky."

"Young lord, you..." Emperor Vastsea seemed hesitant. It was only natural that he'd worry about his master's safety.

"That'll be all." Jiang Chen waved his hands nonchalantly.

"Hahaha! As expected of a young hero! I'm extremely fond of your fearlessness! Come, let us depart!!"

The dumbfounded crowd watched as Emperor Clearsky and Jiang Chen walked off side by side. An hour later, the two arrived at a pristine valley deep inside the mountains. The environment there was very tranquil. Taking a stroll in this place would lift anyone's spirits.

"Young lord Jiang, what do you think of this place?"

"Very good. The tranquility is almost otherworldly." Jiang Chen praised.

"Hehe. Young lord Jiang, look at this tree over here. It was merely a young seedling a decade ago, but it has since grown into a towering giant. The world is as unpredictable as it is mysterious. To think that the young boy from a faraway land a decade ago would become the holder of the Upper Eight Regions' fate and titan figure of the human domain!" Emperor Clearsky was flush with emotion.

Jiang Chen wasn't able to discern the emperor's thoughts just yet and smiled. "Emperor Clearsky, our past is long and eventful, but I've not here today to reminisce about such matters."

"Haha, that's very true! The past events seem so insignificant. It isn't wise for great factions like us to be held up with these little things. Esteemed Chen Lei and Wu Gong was a little too brash. Please don't take it to heart."

Jiang Chen smiled. "It's no surprise as I expected it before my arrival. Just as you've said, it's better to make friends than foes."

"Indeed." Emperor Clearsky nodded.

"Sectmaster Clearsky, since you're a straightforward person and I'm not the type who minces words, I'll cut straight to the point."

"Please do." Emperor Clearsky said solemnly.



"I've come to propose a transaction with you." Jiang Chen smiled enigmatically.

"A transaction?" Emperor Clearsky was confused. "Please do elaborate."

"Sectmaster Clearsky should know that the Eternal Celestial Capital and I are mortal enemies. You don't seem to be on friendly terms with them either. As neighbors, you've had countless clashes with them over the years. Would you agree that we have a common enemy?" Jiang Chen asked with a smile.

Emperor Clearsky pondered deeply and nodded. "Indeed, we're not exactly on the best of terms with the Eternal Celestial Capital and there's been some conflict between us, but I wouldn't call them a mortal enemy."

Jiang Chen laughed. "A true conqueror will never allow another to lie peacefully beside him. As neighboring factions, do you really expect me to believe that you've never thought about swallowing them whole?"

Emperor Clearsky laughed. "One should learn to separate ambition from reality. It's a thought constantly on our minds, but we simply don't have the ability to do so and can't afford to launch an assault on such a grand scale."

The sectmaster had quite a glib tongue and wasn't giving Jiang Chen an opening at all. The latter smiled and didn't seem too troubled by it. "Fine. It seems I'm the one thinking too much. I'd thought this would be a good chance for Veluriyam Capital and the Ninesuns Sky Sect to form a partnership."

"Haha! Young lord Jiang, our doors are always open to a partnership! But are you really planning to borrow our strength to wipe out the Eternal Celestial Capital?" Emperor Clearsky smiled. "This isn't something that should be joked about."

"It's only a matter of time before we go to war with the Eternal Celestial Capital. This will happen with or without your faction's participation. I only invited you because I wanted to share the glory and strengthen our relationship. Sadly, you don't seem to be interested."

Emperor Clearsky mused deeply. This wasn't a decision a leader should make half-heartedly. What if Jiang Chen was just testing him?

"Fine. Why don't we talk about something else instead?" Jiang Chen smiled. "I hear that you're an ancient refining sect known for a heritage in weapons forging, ancient forging formations, as well as a plethora of skilled refining masters?"

"Mm. We won't downplay our skill in this regard. If we claim to be second in the Upper Eight Regions, nobody would ever dare claim to be first!" Emperor Clearsky answered proudly.

"Can you forge flying swords?" Jiang Chen asked blandly.

"Naturally." The leader smiled. "That isn't a difficult task."

"But the flying swords that I want aren't ordinary. I want to infuse True Heavensfall Iron into the swords with impeccable craftsmanship." Jiang Chen smiled. "I'm afraid that would be impossible without an refining formation."

Emperor Clearsky was taken aback. "True Heavensfall Iron? Can that metal really be used to forge something as delicate as a flying sword?"

"Of course." Jiang Chen smiled.

Emperor Clearsky smiled wryly. "True Heavensfall iron is too difficult to refine. That task is too difficult even for someone like me, let alone infuse it into a flying sword."

"The True Heavensfall Iron in my possession is even more difficult to refine than its regular version. Thus, I'll need to borrow the aid of a refining formation."

An interested light glinted in Emperor Clearsky's eyes. "Young lord Jiang, a refining formation isn't exactly a small expenditure..." He hinted subtly.

"Mm. I know." Jiang Chen smiled. "An ancient sect of your heritage should possess a refining formation right? Can you lend it to me?"

"Lend it to you?" Emperor Clearsky was taken aback. "Are you going to do things yourself?"

"It'd be better if you could lend me a hand." Jiang Chen smiled. "Sectmaster Clearsky, allow me to cut straight to the point. I'll give you a Pinecrane Pill as a token of appreciation if you'd assist me in my endeavors."

A Pinecrane Pill? Emperor Clearsky's heart spasmed.

"Does the young lord still have a pill to spare?" His eyes glimmered with blazing heat. No cultivator could possibly resist the pill's allure.

"Not right now. But I'll give one to you within the decade." Jiang Chen smiled blandly.

"Haha! So you're making an offer with something you don't have!" Emperor Clearsky exclaimed half-jokingly. "Young lord, I heard that you also possess something called the Emperor Supremacy Pill?"

Jiang Chen shook his head. "It's either the Pinecrane Pill or nothing. The final decision is yours. I'll go somewhere else if you decline." He wasn't in the mood for haggling.

Emperor Clearsky pondered for a moment and snuck a few glances at Jiang Chen. They were on the same playing field; the young man wouldn't be easy to manipulate. The fact that he'd fearlessly headed alone to the rear mountain was testament to his audacity and fearlessness. This wasn't an action easily taken

The emperor pondered for a few more moments before he finally nodded. "I accept your proposal. A Pinecrane Pill must be paid within a decade and you mustn't go back on your word!"

"If it takes longer than ten years, I'll compensate you with a Pinecrane Pill as well as an Emperor Supremacy Pill."

"Are you certain?" Emperor Clearsky was elated.

"I swear to the gods above." Jiang Chen smiled blandly.

“Good!” Emperor Clearsky burst into a hearty laughter. “It’s certainly refreshing to discuss business with you! It’d be a sin to not befriend someone like you!”

“Please take some time to consider my other proposal as well. I’ll be launching an attack on Great Scarlet in a few days. The Eternal Celestial Capital will surely respond to their calls. If you tie them down, I’ll give you another Pinecrane Pill.”

Emperor Clearsky’s heart skipped a beat upon hearing Jiang Chen’s request. “Only tie them down? Not fight them to the death?”

“That’s correct. I only need you to hold them back and not let their men pass through.”

“The Eternal Celestial Capital will have to travel across our territory to reach Great Scarlet. Their paths will be long and arduous if they take the long way around. This I can help with.”

“A man’s word...” Jiang Chen smiled with a glance at the emperor.

“Cannot be taken back!” Emperor Clearsky laughed heartily. The two exchanged hand slaps to seal the deal. The sect head would never hastily agree to go to war with the Eternal Celestial Capital. He wouldn’t let his men be cannon fodder on Veluriyam Capital’s behalf. However, being just an obstacle was a lot more reasonable. They were the stronger faction after all.

#### Chapter 1314: Pointing Swords At Ones Homeland

The most valuable part in all of this was the Pinecrane Pill offered as payment. Emperor Clearsky was sorely tempted by the offer. He knew full well what a single pill was worth in the world. Because such pills couldn’t be mass produced, Jiang Chen didn’t have any on hand, a perfect illustration of how scarce the pill was.

The two of them discussed a few more details before descending the mountain.

Returning to the sect proper, Emperor Clearsky arranged for Jiang Chen and the four great emperors to stay at his personal residence. The honor he was according to Veluriyam’s retinue was unrivaled.

Everyone from the Ninesuns Sky Sect marveled at the attention their sectmaster was heaping upon young lord Jiang. They weren’t optimistic about Esteemed Elder Chen Lei and Wu Gong’s chances.

According to Emperor Clearsky, refining the flying swords required anywhere between a week to a fortnight. Jiang Chen demanded that the sectmaster be present in the entire process.

The great emperor had a mind to refuse, but the young man was quite persistent. Emperor Clearsky couldn’t do much more than acquiesce in the end. Besides, refining items wasn’t an art that could be stolen easily.

After twelve days, the doors to the Ninesuns Sky Sect’s forbidden area housing the refining formation opened. A tired Emperor Clearsky shambled out.

“You’ve really driven me to my limits, young lord Zhen,” he remarked. “However, I’m more surprised by your expertise in crafting weapons.”

“Haha, your praise is too high.” Jiang Chen was very pleased. Though it had been a lot of work to refine the items he had in mind, the rewards were more than commensurate. The flying swords were a total success!

Two hundred-odd kilograms of True Heavensfall Iron had been fused fully into eighty-one swords. The entire process had been perfect. The Ninesuns Sky Sect’s ancient refining formation was something to be thankful about. With human technique alone, even one of the best great emperors like Emperor Clearsky wouldn’t be able to accomplish such a feat.

The fact that Jiang Chen had offered him extremely helpful advice at crucial moments in the refinement process had been wholly unexpected. Emperor Clearsky had benefited from it a great deal, attaining breakthroughs in key moments required to finish the job.

“Not at all high, young lord Zhen. Many say that you are a man of superb talents. It was truly a serendipitous pleasure to see your skill in refining items. I deeply respect the breadth and depth of your knowledge.”

The emperor’s words were heartfelt. He was still shocked that a young genius had such incredible talent. Should the Ninesuns Sky Sect really make an enemy of someone like that? Merely thinking about it was enough to make his scalp tingle. He’d already decided that the prospect was out of the question without some kind of absolute guarantee.

Having received the results he wanted, Jiang Chen had no plans to stay further at the Ninesuns Sky Sect.

He notified the sect that he would be taking his leave the very next day. Emperor Clearsky knew that there was no chance of getting him to stay and personally escorted him to the base of the mountain.

“I won’t see you off too much further, young lord Jiang. Our doors are always open to you. Please feel free to come visit whenever you wish.”

“Of course, of course. Don’t forget our promise, Sectmaster Clearsky. I will make good on my word within ten years.” Smiling, Jiang Chen waved goodbye before drifting into the distance with the four monarchs.

Watching Jiang Chen disappear into the distance, Emperor Clearsky was silent for a long time. Finally, he sighed softly. “A genius like this in the human domain... the unchanging situation for the past several thousand years is finally about to shift!”

There was complexity in his tone. He raised his head to the heavens, taking in the roiling clouds; a mixture of feelings rushed to his head.

“The most terrifying thing about him is his universal mastery of every subject,” Shangguan Yanqing agreed. “There is nothing that he lacks expertise in. He’s a man who will define an entire age. It’s imprudent for the sect to maintain hostilities with someone like that.”

Emperor Clearsky nodded thoughtfully. “Go, invite Esteemed Elders Chen Lei and Wu Gong. I have something I’d like to discuss with them.”

Esteemed Chen Lei came as asked to Scorching Sun Hall, but Elder Wu Gong was noticeably absent.

“Esteemed Ximeng, Lu Yuan. Please go request Esteemed Wu Gong’s presence,” said Emperor Clearsky. “Tell him that unless he has sealed his doors on pain of death, he is to come out to see me immediately.”

The emperor’s unyielding approach was evident in his words. All of the sect’s executives braced themselves.

Esteemed Wu Gong failed to avoid a confrontation in the end. There wasn’t much else he could do other than open his doors.

“I am at fault, sectmaster. Please mete out my punishment.” As soon as he entered the room, the elder prostrated himself upon the ground.

Esteemed Chen Lei stood up suddenly. “Sectmaster, take revenge on me however you wish. I will not beg for mercy at any point.”

Emperor Clearsky looked at Chen Lei and Wu Gong coldly. “Both of you are pillars of the sect. I have a great deal of trust in both of you. I can understand your feelings for blocking the way down at the entrance, and you are within your rights to protest as such. I was angry at the time, but there is no reason for me to act upon any personal emotions. I called you here today to declare one thing only:

“Remember, from today forth, our sect shall treat Jiang Chen as a friend rather than an enemy. The entire sect must be unified in this outlook, and I’m giving the order as the sect head. If anyone causes any disruption to the harmony between us, he will be branded a traitor and criminal! Don’t blame me for not making this clear beforehand.”

Esteemed Chen Lei was electrified. He stood still for a long time, uncertain of what to say. He was dissatisfied with this outcome, but what could he do?

The sect head had made an extremely resolute assertion already. If he caused any further trouble, it would be tantamount to issuing a public challenge to the sect head’s authority. Even an esteemed elder would meet a miserable end if that happened.

Wu Gong was a smart man. He didn’t have an inextricable grudge with Jiang Chen. The only bad blood between them was the matter of Long Juxue, which had left his grandson without a cultivation vessel. Something like that could be significant or meaningless, depending on how one thought about it.

“Daoist Chen Lei,” the other two esteemed elders entreated, “Cao Jin was a genius, but he went to Myriad Domain announcing his status as a first rank sect’s personal disciple. That he died at Jiang Chen’s hands means that he had insufficient fortune. It’s always been the case that geniuses may die when they set out to prove themselves. Why do you hold onto your grudge like this? Jiang Chen’s rise is unstoppable, and it’s unwise for the Ninesuns Sky Sect to stand in his way. Why not seek out another genius and cultivate him instead? Cao Jin isn’t fundamentally unique.”

“That’s right. Cao Jin was only ranked ninth amongst the personal disciples. He was even weaker than Xiao Paohui. I think it’s better just to look for another genius. The gain far outweighs the loss.”

Everyone pleaded with the esteemed elder, giving him a way out of his stubborn position.

Chen Lei sighed softly. "My friends, I have been a fool," the old man slumped. "Forget it all. Alas, Cao Jin didn't possess enough fortune. Who can truly be blamed for the ill-fated end of a personal disciple from a first rank sect, when his killer was only some unknown disciple from a fourth rank sect?"

.....

Jiang Chen didn't let down his guard on the way back. After a period of travel, he arrived back at Veluriyam Capital. He was met with great news upon his return.

"Young lord, several groups of wandering cultivators dropped by while you were gone. They had four Goldencrown Cloudcranes with them. They said that the news of your need for these spirit beasts has spread far and wide in the wandering cultivator world as of late. That entire sphere has been mobilized to your aid."

"Oh? Where are the Cloudcranes right now?" Jiang Chen hadn't expected there to be four of the Cloudcranes. It was a stroke of much-appreciated fortune.

"They're at Taiyuan Lodge right now."

"Let's go and see, then."

The four Goldencrown Cloudcranes had been delivered by four different groups of wandering cultivators.

Young master Ji San had spent a few dozen million all those years ago when buying one through auction. Jiang Chen didn't shortchange the wandering cultivators who bought him the necessity; each Cloudcrane was paid for with eighty million saint spirit stones. All the sellers left satisfied.

"Yanyu, take them to the young lord residence," Jiang Chen commanded.

The spirit beasts in question were mandatory in refining the Pinecrane Pill. It'd Jiang Chen's first time refining the pill back then, yet he'd been able to get a cauldron of nine. Four Cloudcranes meant four cauldrons of pills. Their arrival provided timely relief from an urgent need.

Now that he had the materials, the young lord was in no rush to refine the pills immediately. The Pinecrane Pills he owed didn't need to be paid out anytime soon.

"I shall refine the Pinecrane Pills after I return from Myriad Domain," the youth promised himself.

Back at the young lord residence, he declared that he was entering closed door cultivation once more for a while. He needed to familiarize himself with his new flying swords, as well as the corresponding Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation.

He wasn't going to master the sword formation overnight, and he had to practice it sometime. The eighty-one flying swords required great control and resilience over one's consciousness to maneuver. The art of deploying sword formations was very technical. One sword out of place would affect the overall power of the formation by a great deal.

Given the level of the formation, Jiang Chen was able to cultivate only a few of its rudiments at his current strength.

Unfurling the diagram for the sword formation, he began to peruse and comprehend it.

“The Heavenly Chalice Sword Formation is divided into seven levels: novice, minor achievement, skillful, perfection, great perfection, supreme, and legendary. Three times three equals nine, and thus nine flying swords are required for the novice level. Four times four equals sixteen, and sixteen are the swords needed for minor achievement. Twenty-five simultaneously controlled blades signifies skillful. Six times six, seven times seven, eight times eight, and nine times nine are the numbers marking perfection, great perfection, supreme, and legendary...”

It took three days for Jiang Chen to grasp a modicum of what the formation entailed. Another four days passed before he opened his doors once more, gathering his subordinates to his side.

“My friends, all of the preparations are complete. Today is the day we launch an attack on Great Scarlet Mid Region and retake Myriad Domain! Geng brothers.”

“We are here!”

“Take three thousand Peafowl Guard with you to the old site of Regal Pill Palace. Slay all who linger there!”

“Yes, young lord!” the Geng brothers accepted the instructions.

“The four monarchs. Each of you take a team to seal off the north, south, east and west cardinals of Myriad Domain. Entry is permitted, but not exit. Anyone who belongs to Great Scarlet Mid Region and the Eternal Celestial Capital will be executed on the spot. Those unrelated may be released pending their innocence.”

“Yes, young lord!”

#### Chapter 1315: Fear of Not Surviving a Single Day

“Emperor Coiling Dragon.” Jiang Chen looked at his old acquaintance with an easygoing smile. He hadn’t wanted to mobilize any of the great emperors of the capital, but Emperor Coiling Dragon was insistent on repaying the life-saving favor he owed.

The other great emperors also expressed their willingness to participate, but Jiang Chen politely declined them all. A single Great Scarlet Mid Region was nothing to worry about. It was hardly something that deserved so much attention, at any rate.

“Shall I lead the vanguard, young lord Jiang?” Emperor Coiling Dragon was ready for a fight.

“Haha, I only have one task for you. Can you lead eight vassals in surrounding Great Scarlet Mid Region? No one is to enter or leave.”

“That’s a piece of cake. What’s hard about that?” Emperor Coiling Dragon was a bit disappointed.

“Actually, I wanted to take down the Great Scarlet capital.”

“I’m going there myself,” Jiang Chen smiled. “Emperor Peerless, take a group of men to back Emperor Coiling Dragon up. In fact, please reinforce any team that needs it. That’s a bit of a tougher job than the rest, I know.”

“Oh, no, no trouble at all,” Mo Wushuang laughed.

“Emperor Vastsea.” Jiang Chen looked toward the other emperor he named. “Take your men to crush the three third rank sects in Great Scarlet. Can you do that?”

The strongest cultivators in a third rank sect were sixth or seventh level emperor realm at best. Though Emperor Vastsea had fallen in stature, his old subordinates were still as strong as before. There was no concern about any inability to meet Jiang Chen’s command.

“Heheh, I’ll get the job done. The crushing part though... do we kill them all, or...?” Emperor Vastsea asked.

“Execute anyone who resists!” Jiang Chen voiced only those four words.

“Alright, I’ll cut a path through them to start then. If the ones left aren’t happy with that, they can die with their compatriots. The ones who surrender will be left for your judgment, young lord.” Emperor Vastsea cackled viciously.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Jiao brothers, come with me to the Great Scarlet capital.”

“Yes, young lord.” The two brothers were tremendously excited. This was amazing news for them. The Great Scarlet capital sheltered the criminals fundamentally responsible for the attack on Myriad Domain. There was sure to be rivers of blood on this excursion. Lethal engagement was perhaps the brothers’ most enjoyable pastime, so they relished getting an opportunity to enjoy it.

“These are the preliminary orders. Make your preparations before we march. The only path before us is to victory! If there are any changes to our arrangements, I’ll give commands in the field.” With a wave of his hand, Jiang Chen finalized the battle plan.

“Young lord Jiang,” Palace Head Dan Chi asked from the side. “What of the dozen or so fourth rank sects in Great Scarlet?”

“Don’t worry. As long as Great Scarlet Mid Region is sealed off, they’ll be nothing more than a bunch of sitting ducks. When I deal with the imperial family in a savage takedown, I’ll visit them one by one. The Thunder Note Hall and Great Roc Sect are priority targets. These two sects were directly responsible for destroying Regal Pill Palace...”

“Please take us along, young lord Jiang!” Palace Head Dan Chi and Elder Yun Nie both volunteered.

“Haha, of course I’ll bring you along to such a momentous occasion. All of you shall come with me to eradicate the imperial family. How could I deny you the satisfaction of taking vengeance on our foes?”

.....

Though Great Scarlet appeared as peaceful as ever, recent undercurrents of activity began to surface. Information of all kinds about Veluriyam Capital had made its way into the ears of the imperial family as of late.

Although only the royal family was first to be privy to said information, it eventually propagated to the rest of the region via the wandering cultivators.



"Have you guys heard? The young lord of Veluriyam Capital is Jiang Chen from Myriad Domain's Regal Pill Palace! From all those years ago!"

"I've heard a lot of people say so. There's no way it's true though, right?"

"I heard that Emperor Coiling Dragon from Veluriyam Capital admitted it himself."

"That's not good at all. We did some pretty brutal things to Myriad Domain back then. If young lord Zhen really is Jiang Chen, he..."

"He'll take revenge on Great Scarlet for sure."

"Who cares? We wandering cultivators shouldn't care about conflicts between the big factions. We weren't the ones invading Myriad Domain. I doubt the young lord will bother us innocents."

"That's right. I hear young lord Zhen is a man of principle. There's no way that'll happen."

Similar conversations took place in Great Scarlet's every corner in great abundance.

Great Scarlet's emperor had been living incredibly uneasily in recent times. Sleep had been scarce for several nights in a row, and he was losing large handfuls of hair from his scalp. The spies that he'd sent out were feeding a lot of information back to him, each piece verifying the truth of the rumors more and more.

"Your Majesty, I've heard the spies' reports. Emperor Coiling Dragon did indeed confirm that Veluriyam Capital's young lord Zhen and the Regal Pill Palace's Jiang Chen are one and the same." The person speaking was the minister of chambers, Old Guo.

"Is there any news from those sent to the Eternal Celestial Capital?"

"Not yet, Your Majesty. We should hear from them soon though." Old Guo paused before continuing.

"Sire, I have a few words that I'm not sure I should say."

"Do so. You've followed me a long time as my most trusted confidant. What need is there for you to withhold your thoughts?" There was deep fatigue in the emperor's voice.

"I think that if the news proves true, even the Eternal Celestial Capital may not defend us. Therefore..."

"Therefore what?" The emperor's tone took a sharp turn.

"I think that Your Majesty should make contingency plans." Old Guo sighed. His own voice was lowered and his eyes became evasive.

Though he'd followed Great Scarlet's emperor a long time, he knew how explosive His Majesty was. If he didn't speak cautiously, even a confidante as him would suffer a tongue lashing.

"Contingency plans?" The emperor sounded bitter. "If young lord Zhen really is that Jiang Chen kid, what plans can we possibly make? How can Great Scarlet possibly defend against a lightning-fast strike from Veluriyam Capital?"

An officer of the imperial guard, Commander He, broke his silence. "Your Majesty, I think there's no cause for concern at all. So what if Jiang Chen is young lord Zhen? He spent barely any time at the Regal

Pill Palace in the first place. What feelings could he have for that sect? It's been so many years too, right? Wouldn't he have taken revenge far earlier than this if he were truly interested? One more thing, can he really command all the other great emperors' forces? He's only the young lord, after all. Veluriyam Capital is without Emperor Peafowl right now, so it's rather occupied with internal affairs. What reason would they have for attacking Great Scarlet? Wouldn't they attack the Eternal Celestial Capital first?"

"The Eternal Celestial Capital?" Old Guo smiled wryly. "Reports indicate that that sect was the only first rank sect absent from the Dragon and Tiger Meet. That's more than sufficient evidence."

"Evidence for what?" Commander He was not satisfied.

"Evidence that young lord Zhen is preparing to bare his fangs." Old Guo prostrated himself before the emperor and begged, "Your Majesty, we must take countermeasures as soon as possible. If we're too late, unmitigated disaster will strike."

The possibility of something as huge as Veluriyam Capital setting its sights on Great Scarlet... it was enough to make the old minister's head spin.

"Old Guo, you've been talking about plans and countermeasures. What do you think His Majesty should do exactly, huh? What kind of plan and countermeasure should we take to mitigate Veluriyam Capital's attack?"

"Are we supposed to just sit here and await our doom then?" Old Guo retorted angrily.

The statement pained Great Scarlet's emperor. He remembered his tremendous past ambitions. With a few simple commands, he'd zealously destroyed Myriad Domain in one fell swoop. How glorious and awe-inspiring he'd been back then!

Alas, a terrifying nightmare ensued after that greatness. A single disciple from the Regal Pill Palace wreaked havoc upon both Great Scarlet and the Eternal Celestial Capital's plans, forcing them to take loss after loss.

At the end of their squabbling, both factions had lost a good deal of men. More painfully, the leaders of Great Scarlet's fourth rank sects who'd pursued Jiang Chen alongside Gong Wuji were beheaded. Afterwards, their heads were delivered to him in an act of intimidation.

The emperor still couldn't forget the sight of it. Ten chests, each one filled to the brim with heads. Several hundred pairs of wide-open eyes stared at him from beyond. It was enough to terrify even a ruler like him.

"Don't listen to his lies, Your Majesty. I don't believe a kid from the Regal Pill Palace can control Veluriyam Capital. The rumors..."

"Shut up!" Great Scarlet's emperor rebuked. He glanced at the prostrate Old Guo. "Rise, Old Guo. Tell me what I should do at this point in time. Do you have any ideas?"

The old man hung his head in sadness. "If Great Scarlet really has become Veluriyam Capital's target, a clash between us would be like an egg striking a stone. In light of that, I don't have any particularly good ideas. There are a few bad ones, Your Majesty, that you might choose from."

“Speak.”

“First, submit to Veluriyam Capital. Apologize them in the most humble way possible and push all of the blame onto the Eternal Celestial Capital. This idea won’t necessarily guarantee the imperial family’s continued rule, but it will prevent a massive loss of life in Great Scarlet as a whole.”

The emperor’s expression darkened as soon as the proposal left the old man’s mouth. This was completely ridiculous! He was to kneel to Veluriyam Capital? And the Yan family wouldn’t be able to continue to rule regardless of that?

Could that really be considered an idea at all? What was the point of surrendering if he wasn’t emperor?

What would he even be doing it for? The people that lived in the region? It’d be a shame to give up what he had for them. He’d been on the throne for a long time and he cared only for his personal interests. The rest of Great Scarlet could crash and burn as long as his family’s possessions and status were intact.

If the Yan family couldn’t be preserved, he would rather the rest of the region follow them to the funeral pyre!

“What other ideas do you have?” The emperor’s tone was a bit remote.

“An alternative would be to join up with Pillfire City. We can seek their intervention and aid. Unfortunately, because they’re in the distant north, we can’t rely on them to deal with our present plight.”

“What else?” Great Scarlet’s emperor asked coldly.

“Aside from that, we can only disband the Great Scarlet Empire and other regional factions. We must scatter and take refuge in other regions, which means that Veluriyam Capital will miss us entirely. This...”

“Enough!” The emperor became visibly upset. “What terrible ideas are these? They’re either impractical or shameful. Don’t you have a more dignified idea, Old Guo?”

“I do.” Old Guo was emotionless himself by this point. “We can fight to the death. Let us lay down our lives for our nation. If you choose this, Your Majesty, I will willingly lead the charge.”

#### Chapter 1316: Routed Before The First Sword Drawn

A fight to the bitter end, that was the most lionhearted suggestion. The emperor almost coughed up blood. If they weren’t in dire straits, he might well have put this old servant to death.

“Your Majesty, please have faith in your old servant’s loyalty. If Your Majesty fears for the people, then pick the first choice. If your Majesty itches for a fight, then pick the second. If survival is the most pressing issue, then pick the third. If your Majesty wants to show his unyielding character, then a fight to the bitter end is the only path left.”

Old Guo knocked his forehead repeatedly on the floor, crying in sorrow. “I’ve served Your Majesty for many years now. These old bones fear no death, but I beg your Majesty to heed my advice. The way Jiang Chen handled the Eternal Celestial Capital is enough to show what kind of man he is. Your Majesty would be sorely misguided to think he’d drop this matter. It’s only a matter of sooner or later.”

The emperor knew that Old Guo was loyal and honest, unlike flatterers who only said what he wanted to hear. He couldn't hide from the sharp truth in Old Guo's logical words.

"Your Majesty, the Scarlet Parting Sect, Myriad Buddha Sect, and Sky Eagle Sect request an audience," an imperial guard reported.

The three great sects asking for a joint audience?

The emperor rejoiced. The three great sects were pillars of the empire alright! With all three tightly knit around the imperial house, they could at least steady the ship even if they couldn't beat back Veluriyam Capital.

And maybe, if young lord Zhen couldn't control the other great emperors, if Sacred Peafowl Mountain was the only force he could gather against Great Scarlet? Then who knew, they might even be able to withstand him! He suddenly glimpsed a ray of hope.

"Send them in, send them in already! Wait, this steadfast expression of loyalty in dire times deserves me welcoming them in person." The emperor was in high spirits.

Old Guo urged him, "Your Majesty, you're the exalted emperor. Welcoming them in person would breach every rule of propriety! Why not invite them in and see what they have to say?"

It'd been a momentary impulse. Now that he'd calmed down, the emperor nodded. "Old Guo, welcome them in my stead."

A moment later, Old Guo came back with the representatives of the three great sects in tow.

"Greetings to Your Majesty." The ones who came this time were impressively the leaders of all three sects. Given their status, they merely cupped their fists and offered a slight bow instead of kowtowing.

It was a simple action, but a sudden foreboding premonition constricted the emperor's chest. The three sect heads wore grave expressions, and their greetings had been perfunctory at best.

"Dearest subjects, you must have come together today because you've heard of the rumors and wanted to help shoulder the burden of these trying times?" the emperor welcomed with a smile.

The Scarlet Parting sect head spoke first. "Your Majesty, my sect deeply feels the dangers of our troubled times. After suffering great losses at Cloudshatter Mountain, our fortunes and very existence totters on the edge of collapse. Hence we plan to seal our gates and stay secluded from the world for a hundred years. I came by to notify Your Majesty of this."

"What? Seal the gates for a hundred years?" The emperor blanched. His heart sank as if a giant hammer had smashed his chest.

"Yes." The Scarlet Parting sect head remained imperturbable in the face of the emperor's dangerous stare.

"Your Majesty, my Sky Eagle Sect is in the same boat. We likewise suffered great harm from Cloudshatter Mountain. We will seal our gates for a hundred years to recover and won't meddle in worldly affairs."

“My Myriad Buddha Sect has always shunned secular matters. A measly sect like ours is powerless in the face of the winds of the world now blowing to and fro. Hence we plan on sealing our gates for two hundred years and ask nothing of the world.” Not to be outdone, the Myriad Budday Sect upped the ante to two hundred years.

The Great Scarlet Emperor almost spat out a mouthful blood. He’d thought the three sects were here to offer aid, not to quit. There were clear lines being drawn in the sand. In other words, they saw the writing on the wall and planned to abandon the imperial family.

“You planned this together, didn’t you? You didn’t have the courage to come alone, so all three of you came together to intimidate me?” The emperor’s words were coated with thick rancor.

“We wouldn’t dare. We are Your Majesty’s loyal subjects, how could we ever imagine intimidating your august person?” The Scarlet Parting sect head’s tone was neither servile nor arrogant.

“Indeed. Your Majesty, please don’t misunderstand.”

“Hmph! Loyal subjects?! Would loyal subjects abandon me in these dire straits? Is the bond between the imperial family and your three sects so weak it can’t withstand a few rumors?” The emperor erupted in anger. “Your sects consume the best food and goods in Great Scarlet, use the most precious resources, and enjoy the greatest status and treatment. Now you turn your back on the region when it needs you most? How can you even face the people of Great Scarlet? How can you face all those who worship you as pillars of our region? How can you face the imperial family’s regard?”

Old Guo secretly shook his head. Why was the emperor talking about the common people at a time like this?

The leader of the Scarlet Parting Sect offered a faint smile. “Your Majesty, it’s no use saying all this now. There’s only ever been just one that enjoyed the best resources of the region, and that would be Great Scarlet herself. Our three sects are thrown some leftovers at best. Moreover, we are mere sects. The worries of the common people are best left to Your Majesty to bear.”

“Indeed. Your Majesty, you speak of your high regard for our sects. Last time on Cloudshatter Mountain, our sects lost considerable manpower, but we heard all of it was an elaborate trap from the imperial family meant to humble and whittle us down. Your Majesty still hasn’t given us a clarification to this day.”

The emperor’s anger turned into rage at the mention of this matter. “Bullshit! My own younger brother died on Cloudshatter Mountain. A trap? How creative!”

“Fine, let’s talk about something else then. Back when we invaded Myriad Domain, Your Majesty had promised each of our sects a sky rank spirit herb. Did Your Majesty honor this commitment?”

This matter was another stain on the emperor’s name.

“Do you think I withheld them on purpose? We found no sky rank spirit herbs inside the Regal Pill Palace!” Or rather, the emperor had obtained some, but nearly not enough to share with each of the three sects.

“Heh, Your Majesty, whatever you say goes. We invaded Myriad Domain at great risk for our sects but didn’t obtain anything. Now you want us to shoulder the responsibility for what happened? That’s quite unfair!”

“Indeed. To gain no benefit but to share the troubles, the world doesn’t work this way. Our sects aren’t strong enough to withstand Veluriyam Capital’s wrath.”

The three sect heads pulled no punches after seeing the emperor drop all pretense of civility. They knew full well that this liege merely wanted to use them as cannon fodder while he kept his rule.

None of them were fools. They were glad they had nothing to do with that matter and since it was a good pretext to sever ties, they naturally did so without any hesitation. The best choice for them was to seal off the gates and hide.

It was none of their business whether Great Scarlet Mid Region had a new master. It might even be better for them. Neither the region nor the three sects had flourished under House Yan’s long rule. So they didn’t mind if a new master seized control. In fact, it might even be better for them in the long run!

The emperor’s chest ached dully while his eyes flashed murderously. However, he couldn’t take action since none of these three sect leaders were in any weaker than him. The three of them together could offer a good fight even in the core of his domain. If he ordered their deaths and one of them managed to escape, then the imperial family would’ve just signed the writ for their own doom.

Forcing down his fury, he heaved a soft sigh. “Sect Heads, my conscience is clear when it comes to the sky rank spirit herbs. But as an apology, I can take three of them from the national treasury as compensation.”

“No need.”

“Heh. We won’t participate in worldly disputes after sealing off our gates, so we won’t need sky rank spirit herbs either.”

“Indeed. I’m afraid we aren’t so blessed as to enjoy them.”

The three sect heads were of one mind. Anything they accepted from the Great Scarlet emperor at this time would be seeds for future trouble. They took their leaves.

Watching their retreating figures, Captain He’s eyes belched with fire. “Your Majesty, just say the word and I’ll bring a squadron to exterminate those rebels!”

The emperor waved it off limply. “Don’t be brash. The three sects have solid foundations. Our region can’t escape internal strife if we ever fell out with them.”

He would have no hesitation at all if it had been a single sect, but an uprising of the three pillars would be a tough obstacle for the imperial family to digest.

“Old Guo, summon the crown prince. I’ll task him with requesting help from Pillfire City. He can be a hostage prince there to express our determination to defect to them.”

The emperor had finally made up his mind. Offering his own son as hostage as guarantee of his sincerity was an exceedingly humiliating act of diplomacy. He would be at the complete mercy of others. From this, it was obvious to see that he was obviously grasping at straws.

The prince came very quickly and, when he heard the emperor's plan, responded without any hesitation. "Imperial father, your son is willing to help share your heavy burden. I will head to Pillfire and request their help."

The emperor was elated at having a worthy son. He immediately ordered Old Guo to make the preparations and send off the prince in secret.

"My son, if Pillfire accepts our request, I'll find a way to bring you back sooner or later. If they don't, then stay there and don't come back. You'll at least be able to carry on the family name," the emperor exhorted him.

#### Chapter 1317: The Nirvana Sect Contributes

Following that, the emperor made many preparations, summoned some important scions of the imperial family, and detailed the perilous situation to them.

"Each of you is an elite child of House Yan. Great Scarlet is on the verge of collapse, so our bloodline's future falls upon your shoulders. You shall leave Great Scarlet and go incognito. You may return in a few decades if it's safe. If we end up destroyed, then this enmity will be yours to carry. Never forget your mission. There's hope as long as you're alive. Are there any cowards in our House Yan?"

"None!"

"We obey all of your orders, Your Majesty!"

"Why would the great men of House Yan cower in front of an upstart?" Most of these juniors bubbled with the vigor and hubris of youth. They rejected Jiang Chen from the very bottom of their hearts. Even now, they couldn't associate a country bumpkin from the sixteen kingdoms alliance with the earthshaking young lord Zhen.

"Your Majesty, can the intelligence be faulty? How could a nobody from Myriad Domain suddenly become the young lord of Veluriyam Capital in a mere decade?"

"Maybe it's just hearsay?"

"I think so too..."

"Silence!" The emperor's shout rumbled like the clap of thunder.

These young men stared at the emperor in fright, their mouth sewn shut. Only a few of the younger ones looked a little rebellious.

"Is there no one with brains amongst the scions of House Yan? If these really are your thoughts, I wonder whether if the clan's bloodline is safe with you, if any of you can be given the great task of revitalizing the house!?"

“You say Jiang Chen isn’t young lord Zhen? Then why was the Eternal Celestial Capital the only first rank sect to be absent from the Dragon and Tiger Meet? How do you explain that? Why didn’t we hear a single word from them after sending so many emissaries?”

“Make use of your brains, use your eyes! The Eternal Celestial Capital is using us as scapegoat!”

“You might become stray dogs from a destroyed nation tomorrow or in a few months. How can you be so blind?”

The emperor waved his hand, his face purple with rage after his furious roars. “Elder Guo, you’re in charge of escorting them out of Great Scarlet. I’ve already done all I could for you. Whether you die or strive and prosper, our ancestors are watching from above!”

Covered in cold sweat, the imperial descendants finally realized the severity of their predicament.

Elder Guo’s face was expressionless. “Young masters, please keep in mind His Majesty’s sincere efforts. Now let’s not tarry, time is pressing. This old servant will arrange for your departure.”

After the crown prince, he now needed to send off these imperial descendants. He took this matter to heart because he knew that Great Scarlet faced certain ruin if assistance from Pillfire City couldn’t reach them in time.

Jiang Chen’s troops had already reached Swordfield Mid Region in secret with the help of the Nirvana Sect, one of the three great local powers.

The True Heavensfall Iron transaction had induced the sect to be dead set on following Veluriyam Capital. They’d received a secret missive from the capital and been fully prepared for this operation.

Swordfield Mid Region wasn’t far from Great Scarlet. The Nirvana Sect was found in the region’s southwest and was the local faction closest to Great Scarlet.

“Young lord, Sectmaster Wei Lang is here,” Jiao Yun reported.

Wei Lang beamed from ear to ear when he spotted Jiang Chen. “Wei Lang is here to pay respect to young lord Jiang Chen. I broke through to eighth level emperor realm thanks to the pill bestowed by the young lord, so I have to repay this debt of gratitude.”

Jiang Chen sized him up before smiling. “Sectmaster Wei, you were too anxious. Wouldn’t it have been better to save it for ninth level emperor realm?”

“Hehe, I couldn’t wait. I simply couldn’t wait when I thought about this pill’s miraculous effect!” Wei Lang blushed.

Jiang Chen could understand the temptation of the Emperor Ascension Pill, a pill that could allow any emperor realm cultivator to gain one level.

“Oh well, with your foundation, it shouldn’t be too difficult to break through to the ninth level once opportunity knocks. As for great emperor realm, that’ll depend on your fortunes.”



The clever Wei Lang immediately picked up on the undercurrents behind those words. He kneeled, his eyes glinting. "I merely hope to follow the young lord. Once the young lord stands at the peak of mankind, any good luck you are willing to impart will be a great blessing of mine."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly at the glib tongue, but didn't reject the sectmaster. He was in need of loyal men. If Wei Lang was sincerely devoted to his cause, the young lord wouldn't mind helping the sectmaster again in the future.

"Sectmaster Wei, I'm certain you'll be met with good fortune as long you work hard. This is always a possibility in the world of martial dao. Oh right, where's Elder Luo?"

Wei Lang's eyes shone as he took a step forward. "Young lord Jiang, I sent him on an errand. He might be back soon if everything goes well."

"Oh?" There was a subtle tone in Wei Lang's words that surprised Jiang Chen.

"Hehe, if everything goes well, I might have a small gift for you, young lord." Wei Lang played up the suspense.

Jiang Chen was about to respond when he heard Elder Luo's loud and excited voice coming from outside. "The young lord is already here? Haha, I'm not late, am I?"

Luo Tianshu strode in quickly, dragging a tightly bound man with him. The captive's acupuncture points were sealed.

"Luo Tianshu here to pay his respects to young lord Jiang," he greeted.

"Elder Luo, what is this?" Jiang Chen was puzzled by the bound man.

"Young lord Jiang, earlier today, we heard that an important figure was going to sneak into our Swordfield Mid Region. Since he had to pass through our sect's territory, the sectmaster sent me on patrol. And as luck would have it, here he is."

Luo Tianshu grinned and threw the man down. "Young lord Jiang, there's quite a story to why he's came here. He apparently has the momentous task of going to Pillfire to be a hostage prince and informing them of Great Scarlet's willingness to submit."

"Hm?" Jiang Chen's eyes glinted with a peculiar light. "Someone from the Great Scarlet Empire?"

"Not only that, but apparently the crown prince." Luo Tianshu poked his captive with a shoe to unseal the acupuncture points.

The man regained consciousness with a groan, but froze in shock when the first thing he saw was unfamiliar faces, some young, some old. "W-who are all of you?"

Luo Tianshu teased, "Heh, who do you think I am?"

The man shouted, "Senior, I'm wandering cultivator of no consequence, why did you capture me? I beg for your magnanimity, please release me!"

"Hahaha, the crown prince of the Great Scarlet Empire is a nameless wandering cultivator? You certainly learn something new everyday!" Luo Tianshu cupped his hands and saluted Jiang Chen. "Young lord

Jiang, I've already verified the kid's identity. There's no doubt he's the crown prince. There are imperial identity tokens inside his storage ring, as well as all sorts of imperial treasures."

Jiang Chen failed to hold back his laughter. "So not only he was on a mission to request for help, he was never meant to go back?"

The man in question was staring at Jiang Chen as if he'd seen a ghost after hearing the title 'young lord Jiang'. The merest mention seemed to electrocute him.

"Jiao Yun, pry out his secrets," Jiang Chen ordered with a wave of the hand.

Jiao Yun grabbed the man with a sinister leer and dragged him to the back with an eerie laugh.

Shrieks and wails rose from the back not long after, each louder than the last, before finally settling into quiet sobs like the whimpers of a dying dog.

Jiao Yun reported back, "Young lord, he's the genuine crown prince from the Great Scarlet imperial family. He was on a mission to ask Pillfire City for help in resisting us while he stayed there as hostage!"

Jiang Chen's face was chilly. "They couldn't latch onto the Eternal Celestial City, so now they're trying with Pillfire City? Great Scarlet Mid Region is certainly full of schemes." He smiled at Wei Lang. "Sectmaster Wei, I will remember your sect's contribution."

"No, no! Young lord Jiang is a distinguished patron of our sect. How would I dare claim any credit for something so trivial?" Both Wei Lang and Luo Tianshu knew better than to put on airs.

Jiang Chen waved it off. "Don't be modest, merit is merit. I don't need your sect to participate in the war against Great Scarlet. Just remember, if escapees come to your domain, don't let a single soul slip away. Can you do that?"

"It shall be done!" Wei Lang and Luo Tianshu pledged.

"The Great Scarlet Emperor is cunning enough not to put all his eggs in the same basket. This prince tried to slip away to Pillfire City, which means other princes are also on the loose. Great Scarlet is already searching for a fallback plan. Sectmaster Wei, have your sect intensify the patrols. Make sure no one suspicious gets away!"

"Understood," Wei Lan obeyed.

"Go tell Emperor Vastsea to depart tonight and seal off Great Scarlet. I want every exit locked down tight!" Jiang Chen ordered.

Emperor Vastsea had brought almost his entire faction with him for this campaign. He rushed to Great Scarlet as soon he received word. Tension descended on the border between the Nirvana Sect and Great Scarlet Mid Region, heralding storms to come.

Chapter 1318: House Yans Forefather

"Cloudsoar, you four monarchs are to set out tonight and rush to Myriad Domain at first light. Block all exits and stop any Great Scarlet survivors from escaping in that direction."

The four monarchs sprang into action.

The Geng brothers didn't even stop at the Nirvana Sect on their march to Myriad Domain. Everything was now in place.

"Palace Head Dan Chi, the time has come. Tomorrow's dawn will mark the demise of Great Scarlet and the resurgence of the Regal Pill Palace." Jiang Chen gazed in Great Scarlet's direction, his gaze foreboding.

That night, a bizarre fear worked its way into the peaceful darkness of Great Scarlet. Sleep eluded the Great Scarlet emperor that night. He couldn't stop his eyelid from twitching, and there was an indescribable feeling stirring in his chest.

At first, he'd felt some relief after sending away the crown prince and the other elite imperial descendents. But for some reason, his mood became as dark as the night outside when dusk fell.

When the first morning rays emerged from the east, he sat up and glanced at copper mirror facing the bed. A withered figure stared back. An august emperor like him now looked like a crooked old man, his temples white as snow.

"Is that me?" He rubbed his eyes in disbelief. How had he suddenly become so old?

Rage suddenly bubbled in his chest as he examined his reflection. He lifted the copper mirror vengefully and smashed it on the floor.

Footsteps immediately sounded from outside, a patter that was infused with a sliver of panic. The emperor recognized Old Guo from the gait. In charge of the emperor's security and everyday life, Old Guo was a strict man, meticulous about his steadiness and orderliness. But now, he could hear panic in the man's stride, giving rise to an ominous omen.

"Your Majesty, are you awake?" Old Guo's voice filtered through the door.

"One moment." Despite his anger, the emperor wasn't willing to let his subjects see his current sorry figure. He smoothed his robes and changed into court dress before stepping out.

Old Guo didn't have the courage to look the emperor in the eye, so he prostrated himself at the foot of the stairs. "Your Majesty, of the imperial descendents we secretly sent away, three came back last night."

"What?! Came back? Why?" The emperor's rage boiled even hotter.

"Your majesty, please listen to your old servant. They didn't come back of their own volition, they had no other choice. All passages in Great Scarlet leading to other territories have been blockaded."

"What?" Blockaded? The Great Scarlet Emperor's body froze, as if struck by thunder. He stood still and silent a long moment, his mind blank from shock.

"Your Majesty... The Veluriyam army is already here." Pained words came from Old Guo. "Your Majesty, please change quickly. The lockdown isn't completely secure yet, so this servant will break through the siege with the might of the empire and escort Your Majesty to safety."

“Safety?” The emperor burst into sudden laughter. “Old Guo, do you think I can still flee at this stage? The eyes of my forefathers are on me. Leave? Even if I die, I would be too ashamed to face them in the afterlife.”

“Your Majesty, while there’s life, there’s still hope,” Old Guo implored, his forehead smashing the floor in repeated kowtows.

“Say no more. I’m not afraid of death. House Yan lives on as long as a single one of them can make it out. Is there any news from the crown prince?”

“None... He was the first to leave. Surely he reached safety before they sealed us off?” Old Guo’s tone was hesitant.

“That brat Jiang Chen can’t see the future, so how would he know I sent away the crown prince in advance? He’s absolutely fine. There’s still hope for us as long as my son reaches Pillfire City.” The emperor clung to this ray of hope.

“Your Majesty, it’d be a good thing if the crown prince made it out safely. But Your Majesty is the bedrock of the empire. Even if they turn Great Scarlet upside down, we can mount a comeback one day as long as Your Majesty is with us,” Old Guo implored.

“My mind is set. Go summon the scions who came back. I need to carefully interrogate them.” The emperor was still worried.

Three returnees were quickly summoned.

“What happened to the three of you? Tell me everything.” The emperor frowned.

“Your Majesty, all the ways leading out of Great Scarlet have been blocked, especially the one leading to Swordfield Mid Region. There’s a massive army camping there. If not for our quick wits, we would be prisoners by now.” All three of them still harbored lingering fears.

“Does that mean none of the others managed to escape?” The emperor’s mind was thrown into chaos.

“Escape would’ve been very difficult.”

“Your Majesty, you have to find a way. How about inviting House Yan’s forefather out of seclusion?”

“Your Majesty, only the forefather can save us from Veluriyam Capital’s enormous invasion.”

The emperor snorted. “The forefather is in seclusion. No one’s seen his shadow in a few centuries, do you think that’s so easily done?”

Great Scarlet Mid Region did indeed have an forefather around five thousand years old. He was the last remaining forefather of the imperial family.

Old Guo suggested, “Your Majesty, in these times of peril, perhaps only the imperial forefather can save us.

“We can also command the three great sects and the dozen fourth rank sects. We’re all in the same boat, so working together is the only chance to safeguard our foundations.”

Now that the enemy was at the gate, they had no choice but to fight.

The emperor nodded after momentary thought. "Old Guo, make all the necessary preparations. I'll personally visit the imperial family's forbidden area. We have no choice but to interrupt his cultivation. I can only hope it won't disturb him."

Any faction as strong as Great Scarlet Mid Region was bound to have a couple reclusive elders.

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Somewhere in front of a quiet secret realm, the Great Scarlet emperor used a secret technique unique to his family and attempted contact with the imperial forefather.

A moment later, a message glyph shot out of the secret realm.

"Kid, you've never disrupted my cultivation in the centuries since you ascended the throne. Why do you take this liberty today? Come inside."

The emperor was overjoyed by the response. At least the forefather still lived, and the lack of anger in his voice eased the emperor's trepidation.

"This junior greets the forefather." In the whole of Great Scarlet Mid Region, the forefather was the only one the emperor had to kneel to.

"No need for ceremony, you may rise." A faint voice came from the depth of a secluded forest. "The imperial family has its own rules. I've already left secular affairs behind. You wouldn't come here if not for an utter disaster. So tell me, is Great Scarlet Mid Region in peril?"

Despite the passage of time coloring his throat, the forefather's voice contained a cold grandeur that cowed the emperor.

"Forefather, your junior is incompetent. The survival of Great Scarlet Mid Region is hanging by a thread!" the emperor wailed. He knew he had to be honest. Any petty trick would be exposed in front of the forefather.

"What happened? Did you offend someone? Or maybe a first rank sect?" The forefather remained calm. "Why are you beating around the bush? Even a first rank sect would have to give me some face. They wouldn't act that easily against us."

The forefather's tone was indifferent, but confidence pervaded his words.

"Forefather, this time... it's not a first rank sect."

"Then why are you worried? Don't tell me that a second rank can threaten us?" The forefather was even more baffled.

"Forefather, it's... It's Veluriyam Capital." The emperor clenched his teeth and squeezed out the truth.

"Y-you offended Emperor Peafowl?" The forefather gasped. "Where did you find the gall to provoke someone like Emperor Peafowl?"

"No no, I wouldn't do that no matter how stupid I am. It's a disciple of his."

"His disciple? What is going on? Tell me everything." The forefather had trouble sitting still.

Some first rank sects might actually give him some face, but a colossus like Veluriyam Capital was an entirely kettle of fish. Would they care about someone like him? Especially a monster like Emperor Peafowl who could destroy Great Scarlet on a whim all by himself.

The emperor obediently narrated everything from beginning to end, but the forefather swore at him before he could finish. "Bastard, idiot! Are you a moron?"

"Those bastards from Eternal Celestial Capital are a complete bunch of trash as well! They caused the dispute, but now they want to use us as a scapegoat instead of owning up to their actions?" The forefather flew into a rage, but felt a deep helplessness inside. "This won't be easy to handle. You went too far in destroying his sect, heritage, occupying his territory, and slaughtering his people. These were grave, grave sins!"

"Forefather, it was my mistake." The emperor stayed very humble.

"Hmph, I've heard enough." The forefather's face hardened. "There's no use crying over spilt milk. Veluriyam Capital's young lord sounds powerful. However Emperor Peafowl is no longer there and Emperor Shura is dead. With them out of the picture, the others aren't much of a threat. I'll stay in the shadows and find an opportunity to ambush them. If I can seize that kid and force them to retreat, we'll be able to make further plans after that."

The forefather knew a frontal confrontation was destined to fail. He could only resort to trickery and catch Jiang Chen unawares.

#### Chapter 1319: The Terrifying Rat Flood

The morning sunlight was gentle and enchanting in Great Scarlet Mid Region, but it was tinted with the redness of blood. The arrival of Jiang Chen's mighty army trapped everyone inside the territory like ducks in a barrel.

"Ole Gold, I've raised you for so long, now it's time for your clan to get to work." Jiang Chen summoned the Goldbiter Rat King.

With an uncanny, bloodthirsty smile, the rat king responded, "Young lord, just sit back and watch the show."

"Don't be in such a rush," Jiang Chen admonished. "Take your clan and surround the capital. Anyone who enters or leaves is to be viewed as wanting to go down with the imperial family."

"Young lord, can't we just kill everyone?" The rat king was slightly disappointed. He had hundreds of millions of descendants. It would be quite a feast if they made it into the capital. In fact, they were already champing at the bit to do so.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "Your only mission is to seal off the city unless I say otherwise. Of course, kill anyone who resists!"

His words dampened the rat king's hopes. Reality seemed a bit off from expectations.

“Ole Gold, don’t be impatient. You’ll have your killing. I’m only worried about indiscriminate slaughter of common people.”

Although Jiang Chen had come for revenge, it was directed to those in power and not civilians. Cultivators were a bloody breed, but even so, killing innocents was a sin against the heavens. This was a principle that Great Scarlet Mid Region had also mostly observed when it’d invaded Myriad Domain.

“Hehe, be at ease, young lord. Mortals taste really bland. We only eat cultivators.” The rat king chuckled merrily.

“Be off!” Jiang Chen ordered with a wave of the hand.

“Yes, young lord!” In high spirits, the delighted rat king prodded the Millionditch Stonenest. The Goldbiter Rats poured out of it in a torrent.

They used to number more than three hundred million strong, but as the mighty preyed on the weak, only a hundred million or so were left. But those left were far more powerful than before, especially the rat king and a few handpicked elites.

Of course, individual strength wasn’t the most terrifying thing about them. With their numbers, no obstacle could stand in their path.

Several dozen miles away from the capital, Goldbiter Rats surged towards the city walls from every direction. An ominous carpet of rats writhed in a radius around the capital. Just a glance at the dark, squirming flood was enough to scare someone out of their wits.

The Jiao brothers looked at each other, their astonished eyes hiding a hint of fear. They’d been lucky when Emperor Pillzenith hoodwinked them into attacking Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They might have ended up as rat food even without the offense from the wandering great emperors.

But for the Peafowl Guard and other subordinates that Jiang Chen had brought on the campaign, their scalps tinged with numbness at the sight. Even if they knew the rats were on their side, their blood still ran cold at this chilling spectacle.

As the core area of the empire, Great Scarlet’s capital was tightly guarded at all times. In the currently tense atmosphere, defenses at the city’s four gates had been further strengthened.

At the southern gate, a guard captain asked his vice-captain, “What the hell, do you hear something?”

The vice-captain listened carefully and then nodded. “I think so. It sounds like rumbling drums? Are we under attack?”

“Drums? Impossible! Do you think we’re in a battlefield?”

“What is it then?” The vice-captain froze. “It’s coming closer and closer. It sounds like an earthquake. What’s going on?”

They could feel the ground shaking under their feet now. The vibrations weren’t big, but the tremors were particularly intense. It felt as if the earth had ruptured somewhere far away and the fissures were creeping closer and closer.

“Go check it out!” The captain shouted with a frown. “Brothers of the third city battalion, listen carefully! We’re entering emergency mode!”

“Hurry, tell the brothers at the inner gates to be prepared!”

The captain shot forward while issuing commands. As the leader of the third battalion, he had to take the lead and scout the situation.

After a few leaps, he landed on an elevated spot and gazed into the distance. He almost lost his footing when his eyes focused on the source of the tremors. He stiffened as if struck by lightning. He stared incredulously at the... something surging and roiling from the distance. He couldn’t distinguish what it was yet, but it was surely some sort of monster that was coursing their way like a river crashing through a broken dam.

At this rate, it would reach the city gates within a quarter hour.

“What!? Is that a beast tide?” The captain regained some lucidity after momentary stupefaction. He locked his eyes forward, afraid to move forward. “Wait, something’s not right. We’ve never weathered a beast tide even with all the mountains in the area. A tide would also have to pass through many places before reaching the capital, so we should’ve received ample advance warning.”

As it rumbled closer, he finally managed to discern the nature of the torrent.

It was indeed beasts.

They didn’t look very big, the largest ones were human-sized at most while the smallest ones were the size of a foot. Each of the monsters had a tail and sharp teeth. Their fur was as smooth as a mirror. Their advance wasn’t fast, but... there was so many of them that a glance at their density was enough to kill someone with a phobia of dense crowds!

There were simply too many of them! A single look prompted shudders of horror.

“Rats! It’s rats! How can that be? I’ve never heard of a rat tide ever happening in Great Scarlet. Is it a sign of great changes afoot? Are more and more strange things going to happen?” The captain didn’t linger any longer and sprinted back. “Hurry, have someone inform the higher-ups. There’s a rat tide incoming, it’ll wash over us within a quarter hour!”

“Rat tide? Captain, could you be mistaken?”

“Stop the bullshit and just go!” The captain roared like a rampaging lion. “Call anyone you can, put in a request for the highest level of alert. This rat tide will swallow the capital whole if we don’t stop it!”

Although skeptical, the soldiers didn’t dare waste any time after their captain’s urgent yell. They snapped to solemn attention. The vice-captain volunteered. “I’ll warn our brothers in the other battalions. Captain, our gates are tall and sturdy, they can withstand anything as long as it’s not those people from Veluriyam Capital.”

“Cut the crap! Sturdy gates and thick walls won’t be enough. Hurry up or nothing will be left alive in the city in three days!”

Seeing the seriousness of the situation, the vice-captain immediately made for the other gates.



“Rat tide coming! Rat tide coming! Cultivators, be ready for battle! Any civilian who can help, please do so. If you can’t, go back home and stay there! This isn’t an exercise! I repeat, this isn’t an exercise! Rat tide alert! Rat tide alert...” The vice-captain hollered warnings as he ran.

Those on the busy streets looked at him like they were looking at an idiot. However, many became worried when they saw his appalled face. Someone suddenly yelled. “Everyone be quiet. I think I hear something!”

“Ah, is it just me or is the ground shaking?”

“I can hear it, it’s like an avalanche. Is it really a rat tide?”

“Oh no, a rat tide is coming!”

Fear and panic were the most infectious of diseases. In seemingly a few breaths’ time, they spread throughout every nook and cranny of the capital, leaving chaos in their wake.

The vice-captain had finished relaying the news up the chain of command. Step by step, the information reached higher and higher in the upper echelons of the capital.

“Grave news, Your Majesty. A rat tide has been spotted at the the southern gate.”

“Bad news, Your Majesty, the northern gate has also noted a rat tide.”

“Rat tides incoming at the eastern and western gates as well. We’re completely surrounded, there’s simply too many of them. They’ll reach us in five minutes!” A torrent of bad news filled the emperor’s ears within the palace.

The immensely irritated ruler suddenly shot to his feet and smashed his teacup. “Rat tide? How can a rat tide materialize out of nowhere?”

Understanding flashed through Old Guo’s eyes. He ventured, “Your Majesty, there’s never been a rat tide in Great Scarlet history. It must be Veluriyam Capital... They’re already here.”

Before the emperor could reply, a menacing voice boomed in the air above the capital.

“Attend, people of the Great Scarlet capital! A debt must be repaid, a grievance must be avenged. This young lord has come today to settle a score with the Great Scarlet emperor. Innocents will not be harmed. You’ll be safe as long as you stay home. But if you choose to side with the tyrant, I will turn this place into a ghost city with a snap of the finger!”

Chapter 1320: First Blood With the Crown Prince

The voice belonged to Jiang Chen, of course. Using the dragon roar art, his voice was a clap of thunder and bolt of lightning, heralding the dignity of a god descending amongst mortals, the presence of a sovereign who ruled over life and death.

He wasn’t boasting in the slightest. A single command from him could drown the capital in an ocean of blood and a pile of corpses as tall as a mountain. He could have every single living soul put to the sword.

Jiao Yun added at the end of Jiang Chen's declaration, "The young lord of Veluriyam is benevolent, but he holds your lives in the palm of his hand. If you give aid to the tyrant, your capital will suffer the same fate as Myriad Domain's six great sects!"

Though the commoners had been largely ignored when Great Scarlet invaded Myriad Domain, almost all of the higher level cultivators were slaughtered. Those lucky enough to live were sold as slaves. Most of the six great sects were massacred to the last, with only a few being enslaved. The remaining fifth and sixth rank sects didn't escape grim fates either. Great Scarlet had even killed many wandering cultivators in their bloodlust, uprooting sects and factions entirely while leaving the completely mundane kingdoms alone.

"Palace Head, please say a few words." Jiang Chen had brought the survivors from the Regal Pill Palace with him on this campaign.

Palace Head Dan Chi nodded. "Emperor of Great Scarlet, if you're a man, atone for your crimes and don't drag your people down with you! You were happy to be the Eternal Celestial Capital's dog for the sake of your ambitions. You repeatedly invaded Myriad Domain, ending up destroying my sect and murdering my disciples. Today is the day when the remnants of Myriad Domain strike back!"

Roaring his words into the sky above the capital eased some of Dan Chi's depression, though they couldn't erase all of the suffering he'd gone through during these years.

And after that declaration...

The world of cultivators had its own rules, the most primitive of rules. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!

The blood that Myriad Domain once shed, Great Scarlet had to repay tenfold!

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Almost all of the elites of the imperial family and important ministers were gathered within the imperial palace.

"My dear subjects, the enemy is at our door, so don't hesitate to volunteer any plans. If we survive this, each of you will have a share of the empire's lands." The emperor started making promises he wouldn't honor.

Apart from some military officials, the rest of the ashen scholars and advisors were so scared they had trouble remaining on their feet. How would any of them have any stratagems?

"Your Majesty, fighting to the bitter end is the only choice left. I'm willing to personally lead eight thousand men of the Valiant Tigers and charge out. We've trained our troops for so long for an occasion like this!"

This was Captain He of the imperial guards. At seventh level emperor realm, his cultivation ranked amongst the top ten in the Great Scarlet Empire. On top of that, his personally trained imperial guards were adept in military tactics, especially frontal assaults. This was one of the reasons for Captain He's hard-line stance.

Some military officials agreed with him. “Your Majesty, I’m willing to lead a group of deathsworn and fight with Captain He. How many men has Veluriyam Capital brought? A few thousand at most. Our city is home to at least two million cultivators. Emperor realm experts number more than a thousand, to say nothing of the sage realm ones. Don’t tell me they won’t be intimidated when they see this kind of army charging at them!”

“Your Majesty, this is everything we shouldn’t do!” Someone immediately refuted the idea. “Veluriyam’s young lord comes fully prepared. The palace’s defense formations are the only reason why he hasn’t ordered an assault yet. He wants us to lose our composure and rush outside. But if we do so, we’ll lose our main force and there’ll be no one left to defend the palace.”

“Indeed. Your Majesty, our advantage lies with the defense formations. Why should we go out looking for a death match? We don’t need to hold on for too long, just until reinforcements arrive.”

“Reinforcements? From where?” Captain He shouted angrily. “The weak are fodder in this world. Who would dare send reinforcements against Veluriyam’s army?”

“Your Majesty, the Eternal Celestial Capital is the sole reason for the enmity between us and Myriad Domain. Given our close relationship with the Eternal Celestial Capital, how can they not intervene when we’re facing annihilation?”

“Yes, Your Majesty, how can they not send help? Are they simply going to wash their hands of this matter?”

“Also, Great Scarlet has the three great sects, a dozen fourth rank sects, and countless powerhouses. Your Majesty should give immediate orders for them to aid the capital. Great Scarlet lives as long as the capital stands. If the capital falls, so does the entire region.”

“I agree. Why have we sheltered them for millennia? It’s precisely so they will bring some effort to bear at crucial moments. The empire is under attack, so now it’s time for them to risk everything for the empire!”

“Your Majesty, we can defuse the crisis if everyone acts together!” The officials weren’t yet aware of the three sects’ desertion and so created a rowdy atmosphere throwing out a variety of suggestions.

The emperor was livid. Nothing much could be gleaned about these people during peaceful times, but they exposed their true colors in times of real danger. The empire had raised a group of trash!

Jiang Chen’s voice sounded again above the capital.

“Emperor of Great Scarlet, the heavens are delivering retribution for your sins. You were so mighty and glorious when you invaded Myriad Domain, so why do you only know to turtle in your palace now? Do you think I won’t be able to do anything to you if you remain inside?”

“Men, bring them in.”

With a mischievous laugh, the Jiao brothers waved their hands to bring forward eight imperial scions in chains. None of them had slipped through the net. They’d either fled back or been captured at the border.

"Your Majesty, please save us, save us!" These imperial descendants wailed as soon their acupuncture points were unsealed.

Only the crown prince remained proud and staunch. His body covered in bruises, his expression dark, he wordlessly watched the princes make disgraces of themselves. Grief welled up in his heart when he saw how worthless these imperial sons were in moments of life and death. These were scions that the imperial family was depending on!

"Heh, Your Highness, you look quite the tough character." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

The crown prince arched his neck proudly. "Jiang Chen, cease your arrogance! If only the Eternal Celestial Capital hadn't let a dog like you slink away, you wouldn't be barking here today!"

Jiao Yun sent a slap right to the face. "Still running your mouth when you're at death's door?"

A mouthful of blood mixed with broken teeth seeped out from the corners of the crown prince's lips, lending him a hideous appearance.

Jiang Chen glanced at the prince with contempt. "Stop acting like you're the one with a death feud. Whether you beg or continue putting up a front, Great Scarlet needs to pay for what was done to Myriad Domain, and pay with her own blood and lives. As the crown prince, you bear the sins of your entire empire. Who knows, maybe you were among those leading the invasion. You've absolutely committed your share of crimes. Today, you'll be the first sacrifice!"

"Who wants to be the executioner?" Jiang Chen glanced at the Regal Pill Palace's survivors. The Great Scarlet Empire was laden with crimes. Her crown prince had surely committed many as well.

"I will!" Palace Head Dan Chi offered.

The crown prince flicked a glance at Dan Chi. "Are you that survivor from the Regal Pill Palace, the one who hid like a coward during all these years, the so-called palace head?"

Dan Chi felt no anger at the crown prince's haughtiness. He merely fixed the captive with a cold stare. "Who I am matters not. Even if I were a peasant of Myriad Domain, you're ordained to die beneath my blade today!" Dan Chi drew his weapon without further ado.

"Emperor of Great Scarlet, I'll use the blood of your crown prince as the first sacrifice to Myriad Domain's departed!" Dan Chi declared with magnificent confidence.

The crown prince? The emperor blinked, then suddenly shook as the words registered.

The crown prince was the most important piece of his contingency plan. Has he also failed? The emperor could no longer sit still after this enormous blow. "I'm going out!"

Old Guo immediately knelt in front of the emperor. "Your Majesty, you can't, it's too dangerous!"

The emperor seethed with rage. "My son is in enemy hands, I'm going to save him!"

"Your Majesty, you can't! You can't go out no matter what!" Old Guo kowtowed repeatedly. "They want you to leave the palace. Your Majesty, you're the backbone to us all. We can't be certain the one outside is the crown prince, and even if he is, how can he compare to Your Majesty?"

“Don’t stop me! No one is to stop me!” The emperor made to walk around Old Guo, but the latter clung to his liege’s right leg, imploring, “Your Majesty, please think of the empire, please think of your subjects!”

A miserable shriek came from the sky. “Ah!”

Something snapped in the emperor’s mind. How would he not recognize the voice of his own son?

“The crown prince! Where’s the crown prince? Give me my son back!” Fueled by anger, he kicked away Old Guo, ready to charge out of the palace.

A thump sounded from outside the hall.

Something had landed — a headless corpse belonging to the crown prince.

Another item fell from the sky.

“Emperor of Great Scarlet, how many sects did you destroy and how many families did you ruin when you invaded Myriad Domain? Did you ever think of their pain? Today, this young lord will teach you a slow lesson in what pain feels like!”

The second item was the crown prince’s bloody head. The eyes remained wide-open with disbelief even in death, filled with fear and anguish. Looking into those lifeless eyes, the emperor’s vision blurred. Blood suddenly sprayed out from his mouth.