

Three Realms 1371

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1371: Forced By The Circumstances

The Empyrean River Palace and Sublime Chord Temple immediately volunteered as well. Their fates were tied to Pillfire City's. There was no going back. Being proactive would only benefit them.

Six volunteers from the three factions immediately departed for the Moon God Sect.

Jiang Chen had naturally witnessed everything. Pillfire had lowered themselves to the point where no underhanded method was beneath them.

They sure are going all out against me. He fretted, no longer afford to sit around idly. *I mustn't let Qingxuan fall into their hands or the consequences will be unimaginable. I must stop them!* He wracked his mind for a solution.

Moments later, he came up with a plan. First, he'd have to depart the premises. There was no consequence for leaving the residence here as he'd fully refined it. No one could take it. Additionally, the palace had multiple exits and Emperor Pillzenith was only guarding one of them.

That bastard Pillzenith! How dare he set up camp in here? There's no way he'll leave until the other group returns. He won't know if I sneak out. That blithering idiot will think that I'm still inside!

After confirming that nobody was guarding the outside of the residence, Jiang Chen left the palace from a hidden exit. *Pillzenith, oh Pillzenith. Do take good care of my palace while I'm not around.* He jeered mockingly, but didn't let his guard down for even a second.

Jiang Chen pushed the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape to its very limits and reached maximum speed. However, keeping up with great emperors was still quite an enormous challenge. Fortunately, the group of six wasn't exactly rushing for time while he was going all out.

Time was money. Every second had to be fought for. He needed to reach the Moon God Sect before them or the consequences would be unimaginable.

Even though he was taking the shortest route, he'd still have to cut across Sublime Chord Temple and Pillfire territory before heading northwest towards the Moon God Sect. There would also be plenty of smaller territories and factions along the way. The distance he had to cover was quite daunting.

By rushing at top speed, he eventually caught up to the six great emperors and left them behind in the dust. When he arrived at Pillfire City, a bold thought suddenly emerged.

Since Pillzenith intends to threaten me with Qingxuan, why don't I give him a taste of his own medicine?

There was no going back after the bold thought took root. He was a doer, not a dreamer. Putting on a disguise, he entered Pillfire City and sat in the busiest tavern for four hours to gather intelligence.

Emperor Pillzenith had two sons and three daughters; one of his daughters had passed away when young. He'd welcomed one son in his youth and the other in recent decades. His youngest son was said to be extremely talented and the emperor's favorite child.

Emperor Pillzenith had always supported Pill King Ji Lang in pill dao, but he had even higher hopes for his youngest son in martial dao. The youngest son wasn't even fifty yet, a mere infant in the world of martial dao.

Since the great emperor drowned his youngest with love and placed such great hopes on him, it was a given that the latter had already entered emperor realm.

Only a few could ascend to the emperor realm between thirty to eighty years old. They were normally seen as the top notch geniuses in the Upper Eight Regions. Those who failed to ascend to the emperor realm before eighty years old were seen as second rate geniuses.

Moreover, Pillzenith had always been extremely protective of his youngest son. There was no conceivable way for Jiang Chen to kidnap him from the residence. Like his own young lord residence, their complex was likely surrounded by extremely powerful formations.

I must lure the snake out of its hole if I wish to capture it. The youngest son was apparently extremely close with the Temple of Cleansing Fire, a name familiar to Jiang Chen. He'd attended the temple's bounty arena before by disguising himself as Sir Shao.

It seemed that Emperor Pillzenith's youngest son had nicknamed himself as Sir Tian Lin and visited the temple every day. Jiang Chen couldn't be certain of the rumor's authenticity, but it was worth a gamble.

Whether I succeed or not, I can stay for only two days. Based on his speed, he deduced that he was at most two days ahead of the other group. There was a high chance the great emperors would catch up if he lingered any longer.

As expected, Sir Tian Lin really did visit the temple everyday like clockwork. Unfortunately, there were bodyguards constantly by his side. One was a great emperor, another a half-step great emperor, while the remaining two were peak ninth level emperor realm.

The four bodyguards stuck to their master like glue, leaving no opening at all. Jiang Chen wanted to trick them by impersonating Emperor Heartcloud, but with so many powerful experts by Sir Tian Lin's side, there was little chance that it would work. He could only watch helplessly as Sir Tian Lin and his guardians set foot into the temple.

No rush. There's always next time... Jiang Chen comforted himself. The temple was an open space with plenty of human traffic. Nobody could recognize a disguised him. Naturally, no one stopped him either.

After entering the temple, he noticed that Sir Tian Lin's bodyguards had taken positions in all four corners of the temple, keeping an alert eye on their surroundings. Protecting Emperor Pillzenith's son wasn't an easy job.

Jiang Chen kept his distance to avoid alerting them of his presence. Why has Sir Tian Lin come here? Why aren't his four bodyguards allowed inside?

He secretly summoned the Goldbiter Rat King. "Ole Gold, head over there and check what the young emperor realm cultivator is up to."

This was a task that only the Goldbiter Rat King could complete. The Temple of Cleansing Fire didn't have restrictions and formations everywhere like Emperor Pillzenith's residence, or else the four guards wouldn't have been on such high alert.

The Goldbiter Rat King was only gone momentarily.

"Young lord, there's a group of pill masters inside researching some kind of pill. The young emperor realm cultivator seems to be the overseer. A bunch of white-bearded men are listening to his orders. Based on their conversation, they might be studying the Pinecrane Pill."

"The Pinecrane Pill?" Jiang Chen was taken aback. He hadn't given out many Pinecrane Pills. Moreover, the recipients would never have handed it over to Pillfire City. However, there was one that made it out to the open market. The Sublime Chord Temple had gotten their hands on one during the Dragon and Tiger Meet auction.

As expected, the Sublime Chord Temple is just like the Empyrean River Palace, an utterly submissive follower of Pillfire City. Comprehension dawned on Jiang Chen.

The pill had fallen into Pillfire City's hands, but they were in for a big surprise if they think that it could be easily be replicated. If it was so easily copied, it wouldn't be that rare and precious.

Tsk Tsk. It seems Sir Tian Lin is quite the ambitious man! Does he really believe that he'll succeed? Jiang Chen sneered inwardly.

"Ole Gold. How people many are there inside? What's the social structure?"

"There are three old men, a group of pill servants and pageboys, as well as Sir Tian Lin. If I'm not mistaken, the old men should be pill emperors."

"Pill servants and pageboys too?" Jiang Chen's eyes shone. This was his chance!

The temple's hidden chamber was extremely large. It didn't just consist of a single room, but multiple like a residence.

"Old Gold. Lead the way. We'll make a move if an opportunity comes!" With the Goldbiter Rat King to lead the way, Jiang Chen didn't worry about exposing himself. At his current cultivation, he could suppress almost any earth movements.

After all, he possessed the Earth Bodhisattva Orb and very fine control over the earth. He could move undetected underground without worry, as though moving on flat land.

"Ole Gold, keep your eyes peeled. Inform me if a pill servant or pageboy leaves the premise."

The Goldbiter Rat King completely abided by Jiang Chen's orders.

"Young master Chen, a pill servant seems to be leaving. It's your chance!" The rat king informed roughly an hour later.

As the name suggested, a pill servant was in charge of menial tasks. The servant was dragging trash out of the secret chamber for disposal. Jiang Chen took this opportunity to strike.

Tentacle-like vines from the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice pierced out the ground, grabbed the servant's leg, and dragged him underground. He was subdued before he could even utter a sound.

The Goldbiter Rat King chuckled playfully. "Lord Chen, a successful start is an auspicious sign!"

Jiang Chen dragged the servant deeper underground and threw him down. "Spill the beans. Tell me everything you know!"

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Chapter 1372: Capturing Sir Tian Lin

A quarter-hour later, the pill servant had spilled everything Jiang Chen wanted to know.

Thump. The young lord knocked him unconscious and tossed him aside.

"Ole Gold, he's all yours."

With a mischievous chuckle, the Goldbiter Rat King pounced on the man.

"Wait, give me a second," Jiang Chen urged. "Let me borrow his identity and face first. Pill Seven. This poor sod has only this code name to call his own, how sad..."

He quickly completed his task. When he put on the servant's clothes, there was nothing to distinguish him from the man. After ensuring he'd attracted no suspicion, he calmly returned above ground, brushed off the mud from his clothes, and slowly made his way back inside.

He was greeted with mockery from an old man with a grizzled beard. "Pill Seven, what took you so long? You only had to dispose of some dregs."

Jiang Chen imitated Pill Seven's voice and tone. "This humble one mulled over the results of the Pinecrane Pill's decomposition. I became lost in my thoughts and forgot to come back in."

He left no hole in his explanation.

The old man waved impatiently. "This pill is a mystery for even pill emperors, so what's a pill servant like you going to achieve, even if you wrack your brain until it explodes? Stop wasting time and get back to work."

"Yes, of course," Jiang Chen said obsequiously.

A pill servant was restricted to lowly assistant work. Thanks to his expertise, he immersed himself seamlessly in the dull task. To think the great young lord of Veluriyam would be at the beck and call of a bunch of bastards!

A depressing thought to be sure, but he forgot all about it once he saw Tian Lin's focused state, the latter's eyebrows wrinkled in a frown. Here's my target. I just need to put up with it for a short while.

Stay calm, stay calm, he repeated and meticulously followed the three old pill emperors' orders. The simple chores were a piece of cake for him.

"Look at that. Pill Seven, what's happened to you?" one of the pill emperors quirked his eyebrows. The skill and deftness was a far cry from what the pill servant usually exhibited.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "We must make the Pinecrane Pill ours. I can't sleep when I think of its secrets still eluding our Pillfire City!"

His little speech actually exceeded the prerogatives of a servant, but everyone was in a good mood and no one minded him.

Preoccupied as Tian Lin had been by the Pinecrane Pills, he wouldn't have paid attention to pill servants, but the words he'd just overheard surprised him as well.

During all the time he'd spent here, the six pill servants had always stayed within the strict confines of their helper role. It was his first time seeing one of them so proactive, so he smiled favorably at Pill Seven's corny declaration.

"Pill Seven was it? Very good! If all the pill servants in the Temple of Cleansing Fire were as proactive as you, how can the Temple not prosper? How could Pillfire ever falter?"

A little "embarrassed," Jiang Chen scratched his head and stammered, "Many thanks for the undeserved praise, young lord. I hope to contribute even more to Pillfire in the future."

The real Pill Seven wasn't as brazen, so he feigned a stutter.

Of course, Tian Lin wouldn't waste too much time on a servant. He simply asked, "You said earlier you didn't come in because you were lost in thought, correct?"

Jiang Chen smiled and rubbed his neck. "Something like that."

"Did anything come out of it? Was it related to the Pinecrane Pill?"

"It was. When handling the dregs, this humble one analyzed the residue's various smells and colors. I'm certain the Myriad Tempering Grass is one of the supplemental ingredients. There's also the Green Misty Jade, and the..."

He named four ingredients in one go, three of them true and one false. A lie almost true was the hardest to detect. Three out of four ingredients were genuine, lending an authenticity to his opinion.

The pill emperors grew grave. Jiang Chen had provided them with strong inspiration and clarified their thoughts. Perhaps they hadn't recognize the ingredients before, but now, they gasped in astonishment once they thought it over. How did Pill Seven suddenly come up with such understanding?

Jiang Chen instantly became the center of attention.

The old man with the grizzled beard asked solemnly, "Anything else, Pill Seven? Speak your freely, don't worry about being wrong." He clearly was the most passionate one about the Pinecrane Pill.

Jiang Chen knew the pill like the back of his hand. It was no trouble adding new details. Of course, he wasn't trying to show off, so he left a stutter in his voice to erase potential misgivings. He revealed only insignificant elements and also misled them with some mistakes here and there.

Tian Lin was amazed by "Pill Seven's" eloquence. The more the man spoke, the more credible he sounded.

“Pill Seven, you named so many supplemental ingredients. Can you guess the primary ones? The refinement method completely covers and makes it impossible to detect the ingredients’ characteristics.”

Jiang Chen smiled. “The Goldencrown Cloudcrane should be one of them. Jiang Chen’s been buying them for a while, and at a high price at that. It must be for the sake of the Pinecrane Pill. Sir Tian Lin, what do you think?”

Tian Lin fell into deep contemplation.

A gleam appeared in the three pill emperors’ eyes. The one with the grizzled beard in particular, leapt to his feet. “That’s right, why didn’t I think of that? Pinecrane Pill, Goldencrown Cloudcrane, both contain the word crane! They must be related.”

“Pill Seven, your guess is bold but also logical. Let’s take a look at the pill again and see if we can find traces of the Goldencrown Cloudcrane.”

Everyone offered their own views. Jiang Chen’s suggestion had undoubtedly opened a new door, lighting a way in the darkness and a new way of thinking. Thanks to his clues, they made great strides in their research.

Tian Lin’s admiration for “Pill Seven” grew even stronger. “Pill Seven, staying here seems like a waste of your talent. With your attainment in pill dao, you’re a match for many top rank pill kings. Are you interested in following me?”

He surprisingly wanted to poach the pill servant.

The bearded old man interjected hurriedly, “Sir Tian Lin, please don’t steal him away. Now’s a crucial time for our experiments. We’ve built a rapport with these pill servants. If you take him away, where would we find someone else suitable?”

“That’s right. And Pill Seven, don’t be too full of yourself. A cultivator of Pillfire should stay composed, whether faced with favor or misfortune.”

Sir Tian Lin’s enthusiasm grew as time went on, but there was a limit to how long he could stay. Two hours later, he readied himself to leave.

“Gentlemen, I leave the research to you. I’ll come back tomorrow,” he encouraged before departing. He was deeply gladdened by today’s progress.

“Pill Seven, come with me. I want to test you further.” He issued an invite to Jiang Chen in an expression of goodwill.

Jiang Chen beamed. He’d been fretting on how to create an opening. How very accommodating of the fellow! “Of course. I’ll send you off.”

Tian Lin smiled when they exited the pill room and arrived in the courtyard. “Pill Seven, if we can decipher the pill’s recipe, your contribution will be the greatest.”

Jiang Chen nodded curtly. What did he care?

Capturing Tian Lin without alerting the enemy was of critical importance. Once his target left the courtyard and reached the four guards waiting outside, the window of opportunity would be gone.

Now is the time! He suddenly triggered the Major Artifice Formation through the formation disk and sealed off the surrounding space.

The Bewitching Lotuses of Fire and Ice he'd prepared beforehand drilled up from the ground. Swish, swish, swish! They bound Tian Lin and dragged him underground.

Everything had happened in the blink of an eye, leaving no time for Tian Lin to react. Even when the poor man found himself trapped, he still didn't understand what had transpired.

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Chapter 1373: Deception

As Pillzenith's son and possessing excellent martial talent, Tian Lin had already reached initial emperor realm. Jiang Chen could have subdued him with a frontal attack, but easy capture would've been impossible.

He'd achieved a flawless victory instead by catching his opponent unawares. He further paralyzed his victim by sealing off acupoints.

Everything was silent in the courtyard. No one had noticed anything untoward. When he exited the yard still disguised as Pill Seven, Tian Lin's four guards immediately crowded him.

"Where's the young lord?" The one who spoke, a great emperor, frowned. It was past time for his master's return, so his absence was surprising.

Jiang Chen replied with utter deference, "Your young lord asked me to bring a message that you can go back. He's going into seclusion for a month as he's made great strides in his research. He plans on leading the charge in the final effort to unravel the Pinecrane Pill's secrets."

The guard's brows shot up in surprise. "A month? With His Majesty gone, there are many responsibilities awaiting the young lord. The city will descend into chaos if he goes missing."

"Sir Tian Lin said the city is stable enough. Nothing of importance will happen. Emperor Pillzenith should be on the verge of returning as well. In the meantime, Emperor Pillzenith's and Pill King Ji Lang's personal disciples can be called upon."

But the great emperor refused to leave. "Friend, please inform our young lord that as his protectors, we'll remain on guard as long as he stays here."

How surprising. These guards seem rather devoted.

Jiang Chen reacted instantly. "I admire your dedication to your duty. However, if you stay as the doormen, you'd be informing the whole world of Sir Tian Lin's location. Are you possibly worried about his safety here? In Pillfire, inside the Temple of Cleansing Fire?"

The great emperor stubbornly shook his head. "Friend, please tell the young lord that we only obey his personal orders."

They wouldn't listen to a messenger.

Jiang Chen sighed. "I will, but you'll have to bear his wrath if he flies into a rage."

"Don't worry, no responsibility will befall your... esteemed self." In truth, the great emperor was unwilling to waste too many words with the lowly Pill Seven. He was a great emperor! Who was Pill Seven? A mere pill servant, a base domestic.

Jiang Chen returned to the yard and quickly disguised himself as Tian Lin. He wore an annoyed expression and went back outside. "What now? When did my words become so cheap? I told you to go back, why aren't you listening?"

Jiang Chen's imitation of Tian Lin's manners was on point, fooling the four guards. The great emperor bowed and raised a cupped fist salute. "Young lord, His Majesty's entrusted your security to us. We dare not neglect our duty. Please forgive us."

"Hmph! This is the Temple of Cleansing Fire's forbidden area. I couldn't be any safer here. I commend your loyalty, but I have no need for watch dogs. This is a busy area, you'd attract too much attention. At most, find a secluded spot and secretly keep watch. You'll still be nearby in case of any suspicious activity."

After some consideration, the great emperor acquiesced to "Sir Tian Lin's" demand. To protect the young lord didn't mean to stay glued at the young man's side at all times. This was a safe area. It was enough to keep their eyes open.

"Very well, it shall be as you say. We'll hide and watch over you. If anything happens, please warn us immediately. We'll be at the ready." The great emperor chose to back down. He had little desire to oppose Sir Tian Lin.

Jiang Chen waved impatiently. "So it's decided. We're at a critical moment in our experiments, I have no time to waste with you." He turned and left immediately.

The four guards looked at each other helplessly. Although they had a duty to protect Tian Lin, they couldn't go against his will and earn his displeasure. What if he complained about them to Emperor Pillzenith?

"Let's find a spot each and keep our eyes peeled for anything remotely suspicious. The young lord must stay safe at all cost. Otherwise, all of us knows what awaits us once His Majesty returns!" Their zeal didn't come from any respect for Tian Lin. They simply feared Pillzenith.

Once the four guards left, Jiang Chen transformed back into Pill Seven and returned to the secret room. Everyone was still busy with their own affairs, entirely unaware of Tian Lin's misadventures.

The bearded pill emperor asked, "Pill Seven, did you send off Sir Tian Lin?"

"He said I'm to follow him back and run some errands for him for a while. And also..."

"What else did he say?" The old man frowned.

"He said we're at a critical juncture. Everyone should intensify their efforts and go into seclusion for a month to complete the research in one go."

A month of seclusion?

The bearded pill emperor sighed. "We might have a rough outline to follow, but that's still much too short for tangible results. Sir Tian Lin is too impatient. "

Jiang Chen nodded. "Sir Tian Lin knows that as well, but he hopes to have good news for Emperor Pillzenith when His Majesty returns."

"Since the young lord has spoken, we share spare no efforts. A month of seclusion is no big deal. Everyone, let's do our best and show him some results!" the bearded pill emperor encouraged.

He faced Jiang Chen again. "Pill Seven, you don't talk much usually. What's happened to you all of a sudden? Sir Tian Lin admires you so much he wants to bring you back? Kid, you're something else to find so much favor with the young lord. No matter, we won't detain you. Go, serve him properly and don't think of playing any tricks."

For these pill emperors, Pill Seven was at most a perceptive helper. They didn't begrudge Sir Tian Lin for taking him away. Neither would they offer heartfelt wishes or sincere advice to a simple lackey.

Jiang Chen had now hoodwinked both sides. These fellows had been tricked into seclusion, while the four guards would wait for a month. He'd won time for himself.

The guards and the fellows in the Temple of Cleansing Fire would make no waves in the meantime. Even if they did, it would be a month later. That was more than enough for him.

He returned underground, tidying everything, then resurfaced and found a remote spot in the temple. Switching back to his original disguise, he strutted out of the temple with no one to the wiser.

He didn't tarry in Pillfire, and traveled until he reached uninhabited wildlands. There, he opened his storage ring and released Tian Lin. These rings usually couldn't store living creatures. Human cultivators in particular, couldn't survive for long inside.

However, a short stay for ten hours or so was usually no issue. One would need shelter like the Goldbiter Rats' Millionditch Stonenest for stays of longer duration. Moreover, the rats were tied to their nest. They would likewise face a quick demise inside a storage ring.

Tian Lin was still groggy from his capture, but when he recovered some clarity of thought, he immediately shouted, "Who are you? Do you know what you're doing? Are you aware you're challenging the whole of Pillfire City?"

Whether his victim could speak and how loud he could yell was all within Jiang Chen's grasp, so he remained unruffled. He cared little even if Tian Lin shouted himself hoarse.

He calmly roasted some game over the fire. A golden layer of oil coated the meat; an appetizing smell wafted through the air. Then he smiled leisurely. "Perhaps you think that Pillfire is the greatest power in the world and won't tolerate any provocation?"

"Nonsense! Pillfire is publicly recognized as number one in Upper Eight Regions. My father stands at the peak of the entire world. How dare you be so presumptuous? Aren't you afraid of the consequences? We can annihilate your family, your sect, and even your entire region!"

Although Tian Lin was using Pillfire's prestige to intimidate his captor, his courage was but a front. His heart palpitated with fear. The young man in front of him gave off the aura of an outlaw with nothing to lose, the sort that feared no one. Someone like him would hardly be frightened by fame or prestige.

Chapter 1374: Revisiting the Moon God Sect

Jiang Chen found the young man's overconfident attitude of 'you can't afford to offend me, nuh uh!' rather funny. Tian Lin had remarkable martial talent and was spoiled by Emperor Pillzenith a great deal, so he hadn't washed himself of his natural pampered aura.

People like him carried at least a little bit of the dandyism common to their status with them. Whenever they encountered trouble, they first resorted to using their fathers' names as the bogeyman. This was a sign of immaturity.

The unexplained sense of superiority and self-confidence was actually somewhat childish. After all, young master Tian Lin was currently a prisoner.

Why hasn't he realized his situation yet? Jiang Chen burst out in laughter. He cut a slice of the game in his hand and bit into it. The meat's savor filled his mouth.

"It looks like you still haven't realized what you're doing, kid!" spat the young master hatefully. "You won't be satisfied until you're staring at your doom in the face!"

Jiang Chen's laughter became louder. As he chuckled, he tapped his knife against the blue-green rock beside the fire-spit. The rhythm he drummed up was light and joyful.

"I don't understand, Sir Tian Lin. How much do you trust your father exactly? He must give you a whole lot of courage if you can mouth off like this while being someone else's prisoner."

The young lord stood up as he spoke, placing the knife in his hand to the young master's neck. His blade was still slick with grease from the meat.

"Even if your father is Emperor Pillzenith, a single cut should leave you dead on the spot, no? What does your father's importance have to do with your immediate fate? Say, would he cough up blood if he saw this happen in front of his eyes?"

The chilly steel of the knife put Tian Lin's head into a buzz. Cold sweat beaded upon his brow, bringing new clarity to his mind.

"Who... who are you, really? Do you have a grudge against Pillfire City?" Tian Lin was no hot-blooded fool, nor was he some kind of steadfast warrior. He was just a cultivator who'd attained emperor realm at a young age through both talent and a prominent birthright.

Because of this, he was puffed up in front of most people. This plus a previous lack of obstacles in his life made him inexperienced with adversity.

The instant before a knife had been at his neck, he'd subconsciously felt that nothing bad could ever possibly happen to him. It was grave misjudgment on his part.

“You don’t need to know who I am. I’m asking you just a single question: do you want to live or die?” Jiang Chen’s knife rubbed against the young master’s skin. If he applied just a little more force, he could cut the young man’s throat on the spot.

Young master Tian Lin proved Emperor Pillzenith’s son, after all. He finally knew terror, but oddly didn’t beg for mercy.

“You wouldn’t dare kill me!” More sweat dripped down his forehead.

“I... wouldn’t dare?” Jiang Chen found each new sentence out of his prisoner’s mouth even more entertaining. “Do you think I couldn’t kill you as easily as a dog right now?”

“You...” the young master was tremendously incensed upon hearing this – that was, before he realized once more that he was only a prisoner. If he lost control and said something too nasty, his captor could cleanly slice his airpipe in half in a fit of rage.

Jiang Chen tapped the flat of his knife upon young master Tian Lin’s face a few times. “In the eyes of you Pillfire people, you’re a real bigshot as the son of Emperor Pillfire,” he smirked mockingly. “In my eyes, though, you’re nothing more than a lamb to the slaughter. Just because I’m keeping you alive for now doesn’t mean that’s going to be true forever!”

He withdrew his knife in a swift motion, smiling to himself. Young master Tian Lin’s mute acupoint was sealed off once more; he had no interest in wasting more words on the youth.

He hadn’t wanted to target young master Tian Lin in the first place. If not for Emperor Pillzenith’s shamelessness in targeting Qingxuan, Jiang Chen wouldn’t have resorted to such equally underhanded tactics.

Stopping for a moment, he made a rudimentary disguise for the young master. The change in appearance altered Tian Lin’s presence completely. He wanted to avoid overt attention for the next while.

After doing all that, Jiang Chen wasted no time in departing. His detour into Pillfire City for young master Tian Lin had been quite easy, but it had still cost him an entire day of time.

The six great emperors were fast approaching and every minute from now on was very precious. Thankfully, the Moon God Sect’s headquarters wasn’t far from here.

Jiang Chen pushed himself to maximum speed, arriving in Moon God Sect territory within the day. It was his third time here, and his mood and mindset was different once more.

He didn’t announce his arrival to Third Master Jing this time, preferring instead to barge in directly. His trip was supposed to be discreet; he didn’t want to reveal his presence.

The senior sectmaster was a bit surprised upon receiving Jiang Chen’s message glyph. Why had the young lord returned so soon? However, she couldn’t afford to snub him. She received him in secretly immediately.

“You haven’t been gone long, young lord Jiang Chen. Do you have a purpose for revisiting us so soon?” The sect head was mildly uneasy.

"I came to deliver some news, senior sectmaster, a warning about Emperor Pillzenith," Jiang Chen cut straight to the chase. "He is moving against the Moon God Sect as we speak."

"What?" The senior sectmaster's expression froze. She shook her head instinctively. "Impossible! No matter how ambitious Emperor Pillzenith is, he wouldn't go against the rest of the world by publicly invading the Moon God Sect! We're a first rank sect. If he does so, the Upper Eight Regions will be thrown into chaos! He's the master of Pillfire City. He can't not know about that!"

"That's all history, senior sectmaster." Jiang Chen sighed softly. "Things are different now. Pillzenith is at his wit's end, and he's gone mad. If you do not believe my message, I must take Qingxuan away ahead of them."

"Young lord Jiang Chen," the senior sectmaster frowned, "Are you exaggerating things so that you can take Qingxuan away?"

"What, do you think I'm that kind of person?" Jiang Chen retorted with a sneer.

"Ah..." the senior sectmaster sighed softly. "Honestly, I'm still not sure what kind of person you are, young lord Jiang Chen."

"I'm not interested in wallowing in your indecision, senior sectmaster," Jiang Chen stood up suddenly with a cupped fist salute. "Pillzenith's men will arrive either today or tomorrow. They aren't coming solely for Qingxuan. They want to intimidate the Moon God Sect into supporting Pillfire City openly as well. If you don't agree, there may be a vicious slaughter."

The senior sectmaster drew a sharp breath. Jiang Chen's seriousness was infectious.

She sighed bitterly. "Relations between the Moon God Sect and Veluriyam Capital have finally angered Pillfire City, hmm?"

"You make it sound like Veluriyam Capital is to blame," snickered Jiang Chen. He'd lost interest in the conversation. Hardship was a trial by fire for character.

If the senior sectmaster was going to continue being a wallflower or linger or intensify her support for Pillfire City, Jiang Chen wasn't going to waste time talking further. He would take Xu Qingxuan away outright, whether the Moon God Sect let him or not.

The senior sectmaster knew that the fundamental problem between the Moon God Sect and Pillfire City wasn't the former's relations with Veluriyam Capital, but rather its lack of servile ingratiation toward the nearby northern superpower. The Empyrean River Palace's posture was far more ideal.

The Moon God Sect possessed ancient heritage and incalculable knowledge. It was less than willing to relegate itself as a subordinate faction to Pillfire. That was why its members resisted despite the burdens and tribulations in recent years due to Pillfire's chokehold. The faction hadn't sold itself out to become another's vassal.

Once that happened, the Moon God Sect would no longer be a pure sect faction. The heritage of its ancestors would be defiled.

"Excuse me, young lord Jiang Chen," the senior sectmaster sighed softly. "I don't mean to blame Veluriyam at all. There's nothing clandestine about our comings and goings. Pillfire has always wanted

us to be one of its henchmen, but we've maintained our own heritage instead. That's the root of our conflict. Emperor Pillzenith's conceited ambition is to blame!"

That was much more like it.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Let's not attribute cause right now, senior sectmaster. We should instead face our crisis head on. Pillfire's sent six great emperors, including experts from both the Empyrean River Palace and the Sublime Chord Temple. You should shore up your defenses now, otherwise..."

"Just six great emperors against us" The senior sectmaster huffed. "They underestimate our heritage!" There was a tinge of pride in her voice. "I'm truly thankful for your message, young lord Jiang Chen. There's no need for concern. Six great emperors aren't enough to even shake the foundations of our sect."

The Moon God Sect had a rich and extensive history. Its stores were well-stocked with countless failsafes. The senior sectmaster's confidence was living proof of this.

"If the Moon God Sect can protect itself, that would be best. Still, my only purpose for coming here is to take Qingxuan away. As her brother, I can't risk any harm coming to her."

"Impossible!" The senior sectmaster shook her head. "Even if I were to agree, the senior sectmaster won't. Are you planning to change the terms of our prior agreement, young lord Jiang Chen?"

"I'm not changing any terms whatsoever. I merely want to ensure my sister's safety. I can take a step back, senior sectmaster. Even if Qingxuan isn't allowed to come with me, you should still send her out on an excursion. That way, you'll have more than enough excuse to stuff Pillfire's mouth when they come. How do you intend to answer them if Qingxuan stays?" Jiang Chen's suggestion was actually quite good.

If Xu Qingxuan wasn't actually at the sect, Pillfire's men would have no effect regardless of their ferocity.

"Never mind," the senior sectmaster sighed wistfully. "I'll go talk to Number Two. She loves Qingxuan a great deal. If what you say is true, I'm sure she'll agree."

Just as she said, the second sectmaster cursed loudly as soon as she heard the news. When she was done releasing her anger, she attributed partial blame to Jiang Chen. Deep down, she felt that he was the culprit behind it all.

Chapter 1375: Departure

However, the second sectmaster had to accept reality after she was done with her rant. Against six incoming great emperors, the Moon God Sect would suffer a painful loss even if it won with a territorial advantage.

If Xu Qingxuan wasn't here, the opposing party was much less likely to descend into actual fighting.

"What do you think, Number Two?" Because Xu Qingxuan was a disciple of the Blues, the senior sectmaster had to hear her second-in-command's input.

The second sectmaster was rather annoyed. "Pillfire City has abandoned all semblance of basic shame. They've thoroughly broken with us in the public eye. What can we do? Do we face them head on,

staking all that the Moon God Sect has in the process? Ai, that Jiang Chen kid is a bit irksome, but his advice is correct. Qingxuan would do well to sidestep their inquisition.”

The Moon God Sect wasn’t qualified to stand directly against Pillfire City. Whether out of fear or apprehension, they could not and would not take on the larger faction in an all-out war.

“I’m not strong enough to protect you, Qingxuan. Thankfully, your brother is proving to be somewhat useful today. But I still bear no goodwill towards him. Without him, Pillfire City wouldn’t have targeted you in the first place.” The second sectmaster was still stuck on the perception that Jiang Chen was the source of all of Xu Qingxuan’s troubles.

“It’s my fault, master. Don’t blame my brother. Pillfire City’s ambition towards the Moon God Sect has never changed. Even without the issue of my brother, they would find fault with us eventually.”

Though Xu Qingxuan liked being contrarian with Jiang Chen, that was merely girlish impishness showing through. Deep down, she was very proud of her brother. Thus, she couldn’t resist defending him from her master’s criticism.

Ordinarily, the second sectmaster would have rebuked or chided Xu Qingxuan. In this moment of parting, she couldn’t do much but sigh in helplessness.

“I know that you don’t like listening to my disapproval of him because you’re family. When your mother was around, you were the same way with her. Never mind, never mind... blood is thicker than water. I’m sure he’ll take good care of you. I don’t like to admit it, but only Veluriyam Capital can protect you from Pillfire City in all of the human domain.”

The second sectmaster was sharp-tongued, not stupid. She knew that truth as much as anyone else did.

“Master, I...” Xu Qingxuan hadn’t heard such considerate words from her master before. The memories she’d made while studying with her master welled up to the fore of her mind. Her master, though frigid and almost cruel in front of outsiders, loved her dearly. Despite her routine strictness and occasional harshness of language, she had given her all to cultivate this disciple of hers.

Xu Qingxuan wanted to cry upon remembering her master’s grace. Her eyes reddened.

“Alright, that’s enough moping. We’re cultivators of martial dao and we should act like it. What are tears good for? You don’t have much more time. Make a few light preparations, then be off at once.” The second sectmaster urged, frowning.

Xu Qingxuan felt razors scrape against her heart. “I don’t want to abandon the sect by leaving alone, master. I don’t want to leave you.”

“Fool! What am I supposed to do if you stay? Give you up? Or fight to the death for you? You tell me!” The second sectmaster berated furiously. “What disciple of the sect will trust us if we do the former? If we fight to the death, how will the Moon God Sect survive beneath the combined might of Pillfire City, the Empyrean River Palace, and the Sublime Chord Temple?”

She spoke purely from a pragmatic point of view. The incumbent situation of Xu Qingxuan staying was far worse than her leaving.

The girl at the center of the affair clutched her face, weeping softly into her fingers. Guilt shot through her heart. She felt that she'd dragged down both her master and her sect.

"What are you still standing around for? Do you want me to die of exasperation?" The second sectmaster huffed. "Have you forgotten everything I've taught you? Why can't you be more decisive or resolute in times of trouble? How will your childishness survive in the cruel competition in the world of martial dao?"

Xu Qingxuan knew that her master really was dismissing her. She was sad, but kowtowed anyway. "Master, I'll be off straight away. I'll be a disciple of the Moon God Sect and your disciple no matter where I go, master. That will never change as long as I live."

The second sectmaster's heart was warmed by the words, but she remained expressionless and dismissive. Her body language was as if she was swatting away a fly.

Xu Qingxuan knew her master's personality well. Bowing several times more to the second sectmaster, she turned and walked gradually away.

The second sectmaster felt an emptiness in her heart as Xu Qingxuan's figure disappeared into the distance. There was a hollowness she could feel throughout her entire person. Her mood took a significant turn for the worse. She had raised Xu Qingxuan ever since the girl was little. Her favorite disciple carried many of her hopes and dreams.

Xu Qingxuan had never let her down. Among the Moon God Sect's holy maidens, she was essentially the unquestioned first place student. But now, she had to let her prized pupil leave into the world. The pain she felt was understandable.

"I appreciate your understanding. It's not necessarily a bad thing for Qingxuan to travel outside. Treat it as a learning experience for her," the senior sectmaster counseled.

"Excuse me, senior sectmaster. My behavior has been a little embarrassing." The second sectmaster was still melancholic; the tone of her sighs reflected how she felt.

Jiang Chen was overjoyed to receive the second sectmaster's agreement. He looked carefully at Xu Qingxuan's reddened eyes. "Qingxuan, I know you care about every moment of your time at the Moon God Sect. You've done more than enough for the second sectmaster and your sect."

Xu Qingxuan stopped weeping, but her eyes were still red. "Master and the sect have supported me for so long, but I'm leaving at a time like this, wuwuwu..."

"Taking a step back may reveal a bigger picture. You leaving is a good thing for both you and the Moon God Sect. There's a saying that a short departure today is the backdrop for a better meeting tomorrow, yes?"

Jiang Chen consoled his sister calmly.

Xu Qingxuan's eyes flared. Tears glittered on her long eyelashes. "Who said that? What a wonderful phrase."

Jiang Chen laughed wryly. How could he possibly remember who'd said that? He had heard it sometime in his previous life.

“Alright, Qingxuan, we don’t have much more time. The six great emperors should be almost here. We have to leave before they come, otherwise we’ll risk bumping into them.”

An empty-handed Jiang Chen wasn’t going to wait here to have a fight with those six. The Moon God Sect didn’t want to publicly break with Pillfire City just yet, either.

Xu Qingxuan was unwilling to leave, but circumstances were forcing her hand. She cleaned up her emotions and belongings. She’d left the Moon God Sect before now, but she hadn’t gone far. She didn’t know where she was going to go on this trip of hers just yet.

Veluriyam Capital? Perhaps that was her best destination.

At least the void left by her relationship with her master could be filled by another there. Familial love, for example; her parents were there, and her brother was also the city’s young lord.

After some basic touching up of their appearances, Jiang Chen and Xu Qingxuan set off for the city.

A day after they left the Moon God Sect’s headquarters, he suddenly pulled Xu Qingxuan to a shaded place off the roadside. “They’re here,” he whispered.

Six great emperors charged with lightning speed into the Moon God Sect’s territory. They barged about with complete lack of decorum, as if they were in their own backyard. They didn’t care for anyone in their path.

Jiang Chen and Xu Qingxuan suppressed their cultivation and consciousnesses. When the six great emperors’ own swept across them, they found only two ‘utterly ordinary’ cultivators.

Because the six great emperors had come under clandestine instructions, no one was supposed to know why they had come. Therefore, they weren’t at all worried about missing their prey.

Because of this, they hadn’t paid close attention on their journey to any anomalies. Passing by Jiang Chen and Xu Qingxuan, they took them for a pair of normal cultivators in Tilted Moon Region, thinking nothing further.

There had been countless cultivators like them scattered along the road. They had seen similar people countless times, and sensed no distinction.

The presence of six great emperors at the same time was extremely terrifying. The entire Tilted Moon Region sank into indescribable terror as soon as the six great emperors entered its boundaries.

“Are those the six bastards, stinky brother?” Xu Qingxuan glared in the direction of the six emperors in flight, her eyes wide with trepidation.

“Those guys, yes. Some of them are from Pillfire City and some from the Sublime Chord Temple and the Empyrean River Palace.”

“Are they all here for me?” Though she knew the answer already, the girl couldn’t resist asking. Her residual feelings of guilt refused to be shaken off.

“I suppose that’s half true. However, Emperor Pillzenith also wants to take this opportunity to intimidate the Moon God Sect. At the end of the day, he wants your sect’s unconditional submission.”

Xu Qingxuan gritted her teeth. "In his dreams! The Moon God Sect has an incredibly long history. We'd rather perish than become his subordinates!"

The young lord's sister respected her sect's heritage a great deal. Every first rank sect began brainwashing their geniuses from a very young age about the importance of their own heritage.

Xu Qingxuan had evidently been a victim of this. She saw her sect's own heritage as sacrosanct.

"Don't worry," Jiang Chen chuckled. "The Moon God Sect is a first rank sect, after all. It should be able to deal with these six no problem. Come, I have someone to show you. Perhaps you'll let off some steam after seeing him. If not, you can beat him up to get it out of your system, too."

"Who?" Xu Qingxuan blinked.

"You'll see very soon." Jiang Chen set off once more, his sister in tow.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1376: A Month-Long Deadlock

Before he'd visited the Moon God Sect, Jiang Chen had told the Goldbiter Rat King to hide Tian Lin underground, somewhere deserted. This was where he was taking his sister.

Xu Qingxuan observed the surroundings, mildly surprised by the absence of human activity within a hundred miles. "Stinky brother, cultivators would never deign to come to a place with such scarce spirit energy. Who are we meeting?"

"Hehe, you'll know soon."

When the young lord's consciousness contacted the rat king, the latter immediately drilled out of the ground. "Young lord, it seems everything went without a hitch."

Xu Qingxuan had traveled the world and seen her share of strange monsters, hence she wasn't shocked by the sight of a golden rat as tall as an older child.

"This big rat can dig underground. How interesting! Stinky brother, is that your contracted beast?" Like a little child, she instantly forgot her previous sadness.

The rat king naturally understood human language after following Jiang Chen for so long. He bared his teeth at the girl, making her giggle.

"Stinky brother, is it trying to scare me?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Qingxuan, don't tease Ole Gold. He's usually even-tempered, but you don't want him angry."

The girl tilted her head. Her eyes sparkled with curiosity. "Is it really that powerful?"

The rat scrunched his face, as if in protest.

Jiang Chen mediated, "Ole Gold, don't mind her. She's my younger sister.

"Qingxuan, Ole Gold is the Goldbiter Rats' leader. When his countless descendants swarm out of their nest, they can destroy entire countries. You tell me if he's powerful or not!"

Despite slight surprise, his sister still looked half-skeptical.

"Never mind that. First, let's take a look at our Tian Lin." Jiang Chen smiled lazily.

"Tian Lin?" The young girl shook. "What did you just say? Tian Lin? W-Where?"

"Ole Gold, bring him here."

With an odd squeak, the giant rat scurried underground, coming back with the prisoner.

Tian Lin lay paralyzed like a feeble dog, his eyes vacant. Like the living dead, he showed no reaction to external stimulus. Even his consciousness had been sealed.

"Qingxuan, do you know him?" Jiang Chen asked, smiling.

"Of course I do, he... he's Emperor Pillzenith's younger son."

"Correct. To think that Pillzenith has such a young son!"

Qingxuan stared, flabbergasted. "Stinky brother, where did you find him?"

"In Pillfire, of course. This guy never leaves his lair, so I went through fire and water to smuggle him out." Jiang Chen smiled. "Let's see if Pillzenith still throws his weight around now! The old thing wanted to kidnap you, so I had no choice but to strike first."

The shameless Pillzenith had wanted to use Jiang Chen's sister against him, so despite a distaste for such methods, the young man had paid him back in his own coin.

Xu Qingxuan stood speechless. Despite her brother's casual tone, she knew capturing Tian Lin alive in Pillfire was next to impossible. The task required great skill and courage.

She'd always had the urge to challenge her brother, but now, she couldn't deny the gulf between them.

"Stinky brother, this man is a hot potato," she said after some consideration.

"Hehe, I'm not afraid of burns, or else I wouldn't have captured him. That reminds me. You go back first to our parents in Veluriyam."

"What about you? You're not coming?" The young girl blinked in surprise.

Jiang Chen smiled leisurely. "Pillzenith is waiting for me. How can I disappoint him?"

"Waiting for you?" She found herself speechless. Her brother really did seem to be on another level.

Qingxuan's horizon and competitiveness were limited to young geniuses of the region. However, despite his age, her brother already stood at the pinnacle of the Upper Eight Regions.

She took pride in her own talent. Yet, even if she loathed Pillzenith, such a personage was a senior, a future goal to chase. But her brother was facing him as an equal, even cornering him, creating endless trouble that left the great emperor helpless.

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Somewhere in the Eternal Celestial Capital.

Pillzenith and his group were still keeping watch in the palace half a month later.

Shouldn't we have gotten news from the Moon God Sect already? Pillzenith remained calm, but his men's morale declined by the day.

They'd tried every method possible to force Jiang Chen out. Yet they hadn't even spotted the young lord's shadow. Were they being paranoid? Perhaps the kid wasn't inside at all? Or perhaps he'd already snuck away.

"Your Majesty, shouldn't Emperor Cloudsurge have captured Xu Qingxuan by now?" Tallpeak asked.

Pillzenith snorted. "It might not be so easy if the Moon God Sect persists with its foolishness and mounts a last ditch resistance."

A first rank sect with homeground advantage was a tall order even for six great emperors.

"There's been no sign of Jiang Chen for so long. Is the kid really inside?" Tallpeak sighed. He too had lost some confidence.

"This must be a dirty trick of his!" Pillzenith snorted. "This palace is definitely his. No matter. Once Xu Qingxuan falls into our hands, let's see if he can continue holing up!"

The girl was now his last hope.

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Jiang Chen sent off his sister back to Veluriyam via a detour through Great Yu Skysword Sect territory. As for himself, he returned to the Eternal Celestial Capital and slipped back inside his palace. With a trump card like Tian Lin, there was little pressure on him.

It's been a long time, but Pillzenith's bunch's still here. Well they're certainly quite dedicated. However, they didn't look very focused. Pillzenith was as resolute as before, but the rest seemed impatient, including those from the Heavenly Dragon Sect.

Jiang Chen didn't show himself. There was no need to, now that he had ace up his sleeves. He could simply wait until Pillzenith got wind of his son's disappearance.

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An entire month flew by.

On this morning, Pillzenith suddenly stood up, a little fretful as he had a bad premonition. He murmured, "It's been a month, why aren't they back yet?"

This was outside his expectations. A month should have been more than enough to bring back Xu Qingxuan.

Yet, there had been no news.

"Your Majesty, we can't continue sitting back like this," someone urged.

"Hehe, Your Majesty, I admire your patience, but the Heavenly Dragon Sect can't keep wasting time here." The discontented Long Baxiang requested to leave.

"I've already told you, Long Baxiang. This emperor will be fine without your sect. You may leave if you wish, but it will void our agreement," Pillzenith responded coldly.

"Hehe, there's wiggle room in any agreement! I don't mind waiting if the kid's really here. But who can say for certain he is? What if he's already made his getaway?" Long Baxiang advised, "Instead, we should gather our forces and mount a direct attack on Veluriyam. That's more like it!"

His daring and fearless idea appealed to many people's violent sides. They hadn't spotted Jiang Chen for an entire month and needed an outlet through which to vent their frustrations.

The holy emperor's eyes also twinkled with excitement. "Your Majesty, the suggestion isn't without some merit. Why waste our energy in complicated schemes? Why make life so difficult for ourselves? Let's make a beeline for Veluriyam!"

Attack Veluriyam? Pillzenith had already considered the option, but the city was some distance away.

One wrong step could trigger a century-long war and forever alter the situation in the human domain. Such a decision involved countless unseen ramifications. No matter how ambitious he was, it necessitated careful consideration.

Chapter 1377: A Crazy Proposal

An invasion on a grand scale? Certainly, Pillzenith could blow off some steam if he ordered one. Alas, he was Pillfire's master and had to consider other aspects

A word from him could spark a no-hold-barrels clash between the two strongest factions of the human domain, creating an enormous maelstrom engulfing the entire domain. He wasn't worried about the fortunes of humanity, but rather, that he might become public enemy number one. All the factions might find common cause and take up arms against him.

After the perverse Jiang Chen's rise, the young man had taken a series of measures and won the favor of many parties, stealing much of Pillfire's thunder. If war broke out, many wandering cultivators might lean toward Veluriyam.

Wandering cultivators weren't the greatest of threats, but it'd be a disaster if their entire community stood against Pillfire. For one thing, they were the city's biggest customers rather than the various great factions. The city's business and cash flow depended on them.

Long Baxiang's suggestion was tempting, but Pillzenith remained collected. Perhaps the Heavenly Dragon Sect wanted to goad both sides into a deadly confrontation, then profit when both suffered heavy wounds.

Long Baxiang smiled strangely at his silence. "Your Majesty, I'm quite disappointed with you. Everyone lauds your grand resolve and ambition, but the reputation of a hero of our times seems undeserved."

Tallpeak humphed. "Do you think we're afraid? You're too naive if you're trying to scheme against us and profit from the conflict. Do you think no one sees through your plan?"

Long Baxiang chuckled eerily. "No matter how you put it, your Pillfire still lacks charisma!"

Pillzenith snorted. "Long Baxiang, I should conquer your sect first before attacking Veluriyam. That would actually be the best choice, to prevent you from stabbing us in the back."

He was pulling no punches either. If Pillfire wanted to attack the Heavenly Dragon Sect, few could stop them.

Hence, Long Baxiang was actually still wary of, and loath to fall out with Pillzenith. He laughed immediately. "Your Majesty, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Our blade is pointed at Veluriyam too. How could we stab our allies?"

Something abruptly registered on Pillzenith's consciousness. "Someone's coming."

Indeed, Emperor Cloudsurge and the other five had returned. Battered, each of them were riddled with injuries. Two among them sported particularly heavy wounds and looked very dispirited.

Leading at the front, Emperor Cloudsurge exhibited no lethal injuries, but his abject expression betrayed his failure.

"Cloudsurge, what's happened? Where's Xu Qingxuan?" Restless, Pillzenith looked left and right, but couldn't see the girl.

Cloudsurge sighed with shame. "Your Majesty, please forgive our incompetence. We've betrayed your trust. When we reached the Moon God Sect, it was already ready for battle. They'd even activated their formidable territorial defense formation. We thought they wouldn't dare defy your authority, but they seemed determined to break all ties with us. They treated us like enemies as soon as we arrived."

"What of Xu Qingxuan?" Pillzenith's face darkened. Rather than excuses, he only cared about her.

Cloudsurge stammered, "Your Majesty, she wasn't in the sect. It seemed they'd seen through our plans and had long been prepared."

"What do you mean, not in the sect? Did you investigate?!" Pillzenith shouted.

"We did. They let us inside to prove their innocence. We searched but found no trace of her.

"Since persuasion didn't work, we threatened them. But instead of caving in, these harridans became more and more excited. We even ended up fighting.

"Their formation is extraordinary. With an inheritance like the Moon God Precious Tree at the core, it creates a perfect defense. We attacked without cease for ten whole days, but we made no headway. So... So we decided to report back to Your Majesty."

What a bunch of trash! Pillzenith fumed. He wished he could swear at them, but most of them were from Pillfire.

Admonishing his own men in front of outsiders would be unwise. He restrained himself and murmured, "Perhaps I've looked down on the Moon God Sect? Should I have sent more men? Do I need to go there in person?"

They did all they could. Seeing the six great emperors' exhaustion, he couldn't rebuke them too harshly. Without Xu Qingxuan, he had no way of forcing out Jiang Chen.

Long Baxiang cackled sinisterly. "Look, isn't my way the most straightforward? Why should we care about the girl? Let's just attack Veluriyam. Just like when the Eternal Celestial Capital invaded Myriad Domain, we'll burn them to the ground and exterminate their experts to the last."

Inside the palace, Jiang Chen eavesdropped on their every word. He frowned at Long Baxiang's malicious proposal and silently added the Heavenly Dragon Sect to his blacklist

"He's nursing such a deep grudge because I refused to hand over a true dragon? I have to watch out for his sect in the future." He was gaining a new understanding of the vindictiveness of these sect giants.

"Your Majesty, my Eternal Celestial City is firmly in favor of an attack. Didn't Veluriyam invade Great Scarlet? With a little propaganda, they'll become every cultivator's enemy." That was the holy emperor of the Eternal Celestial Capital

"Your Majesty, if we don't act now, no one will be able to oppose Jiang Chen once he grows into his own. His word will be law in the human domain and will be the greatest blow for all of us."

"Your Majesty, the kid's killed Big Horn and Old Ma. We have a perfect reason for our actions."

"Indeed. He can buy favor, but his foundation is shallow. Once things become rocky, who will truly stick their necks out for him?"

"That's right. Your Majesty, we should proceed with this plan."

Everyone urged Pillzenith for an invasion, even Pillfire's own. The long wait had been a depressing one. For great emperors, every day was precious. Whether they caught Jiang Chen or not, to waste time was to waste their life force. No one wanted to persist with a pointless task.

"Tallpeak, what do you think?" Pillzenith asked after some deliberation.

Tallpeak hesitated. "Pretext and motive are no issue. However, there are three unanswered questions."

"Which three?"

"First, how deep is the kid's relation with Myriad Abyss Island? If they're only casual acquaintances, the island naturally won't fly to his rescue. Second, how deep are Veluriyam's foundations? How certain are we of victory? It would be a joke if our entire force fails to conquer them. Finally, do the wandering cultivator titans have a vested interest in the kid? It'd be troublesome if they take his side. If by any chance public opinion tilts in his favor, all the wandering cultivators in the human domain could band together against us."

Words flowed from Tallpeak's tongue, each striking at the core of the issue, echoing Pillzenith's deepest concerns.

They could use revenge or justice as a reason to invade. The problem was whether Veluriyam could call upon Myriad Abyss Island. Also, how many trump cards was the kid hiding?

In fact, he was deeply wary of Jiang Chen after seeing the kid's seemingly inexhaustible bag of tricks. If his invasion failed, his own men could end up dead or captured.

What was the right choice?

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1378: Dividing The Spoils

Pillzenith wasn't an irresolute man. On the contrary, once he made a decision, he followed it through to the end. He simply needed to consider every possible angle. Once he mobilized his troops, it would be too late to change his mind.

He thought for a long while. A vicious glint flashed through his eyes as he raised his eyebrows and scanned the crowd.

"Gentlemen, I've never been afraid of decisions, however difficult they are. Only, how staunchly will you stand by me? Do you plan on fishing in troubled waters, or do you genuinely desire an alliance against a common enemy?"

This was the most pressing issue.

The latter would be for the best. A sincere alliance born out of common interest made for the most solid of relations. On the flip side, he could do without a coalition that merely wanted to sit by and watch both sides crash and burn.

If they proceeded just along their current path, it'd be a case of all sides rejoicing if they won, but him being the scapegoat in the event of failure. The other factions could easily withdraw whenever they pleased.

Veluriyam's destruction would be an earthshattering event never seen in millennia. No one could predict the course of events. Were they brave and resolute enough to persist until the end? He needed to ascertain their trustworthiness.

The Empyrean River Palace's head stepped forward first. "Your Majesty, we're naturally like-minded in our determination to put to death the brutish Jiang Chen, uphold righteousness, and restore peace and clarity to the human domain!"

His flattery had somehow transformed Jiang Chen into mankind's enemy, while they were the embodiment of justice.

"My Sublime Chord Temple will follow Your Majesty through thick and thin." This sect expressed their intentions as well.

"My sect's enmity with that kid is as deep as the sea." The Eternal Celestial Capital sighed after a moment. "There's no reason for us not to stand by Your Majesty. Count us in."

The Empyrean River Palace and the Sublime Chord Temple were Pillfire's loyal sycophants. Put bluntly, without Pillfire's backing, they wouldn't have maintained their position as one of the eight first rank sects in Upper Eight Regions. They might've been replaced long ago. Therefore, they would never waver in their support.

The Eternal Celestial Capital's relation with Pillfire was shallower, but a common enemy ensured the firmness of their partnership. With their addition, three out of the present four factions had expressed their stance.

Only the Heavenly Dragon Sect was left. Their presence here was due to nothing else but Pillzenith's promise of a true dragon. In other words, they were the weakest link. It would be a predicament if that link were to break.

The war would only have a single outcome: one side falling, or even exterminated.

"Long Baxiang, you were the loudest earlier. Why are you silent now that you have to take a side?" Tallpeak coldly mocked.

Long Baxian laughed. "What do you want me to say?"

"Does your sect pledge to do its utmost against Veluriyam?"

"That depends on the benefits." Long Baxiang smiled leisurely.

"Hmph, how greedy!"

"Right back at you. They say a ruler doesn't neglect his soldiers' welfare. Do you want to rope us in without giving us benefits? What a cute little fantasy!"

Pillzenith waved Tallpeak silent and gazed at Long Baxiang with indifference. "You'll naturally have your share as long as you don't betray us."

"Oh? Your Majesty, does that mean you've decided?" Long Baxiang's lips curved in a supercilious smile.

"What kind of benefits will buy your diligence? I'm listening."

If the Heavenly Dragon Sect and three other first rank sects fully supported Pillfire, there'd be no suspense left about the outcome they went all out against a Veluriyam without Emperor Peafowl. Pillzenith was confident he'd destroy Jiang Chen in the blink of an eye.

"The true dragon is ours. No one else is to touch it. We also want all of the kid's pill recipes." Long Baxiang made incredulous demands. Of course, Pillfire wouldn't agree to this daylight robbery, but it was common sense to start negotiations with sky-high proposals.

Pillfire's great emperors shouted at this display of impudence.

"Long Baxiang, did I hear that right? Why don't you ask for all of Veluriyam's treasures while you're at it?!"

"This is pure extortion. Have you no shame?!"

"Your Majesty, do we truly need them? Such shameless people are never reliable."

Long Baxian remained unflappable and didn't lose his lazy smile.

Frowning, Pillzenith fixed him with a cold stare. "Your sect can't afford such avarice. Ask for something more reasonable."

Long Baxiang laughed. "Hehe, is greed reserved only for Pillfire? Fine, I'll make some concessions. The true dragon, plus one recipe: either the Emperor Supremacy Pill or the Pinecrane Pill. Also, if the kid has that kind of supreme pills stowed away, we must be given one first. If there's more than enough to go around, we'll discuss again how to split them..."

Pillzenith frowned with displeasure at the lowered, yet still shocking conditions. "A true dragon is worth as much as the Pinecrane Pill's recipe. You're asking for the lion's share."

"That's my sect's bottom line." Long Baxiang leered. "If it's not feasible, we'll take our leave. Who knows, maybe we'll befried Veluriyam and get some benefits from Jiang Chen, just like the Great Yu Skysword Sect and the others."

This was blatantly a thinly veiled threat. I'll withdraw if you refuse, and I'll even notify your enemy.

Killing intent flashed through Pillfire's heart. At this very moment, he was truly tempted to kill Long Baxiang. However, he ultimately resisted the urge. No matter how shameless, the man was a prominent figure of the Heavenly Dragon Sect.

He wasn't the sect head, but his influence was outstanding nonetheless. His death would turn a top first rank sect into an enemy. Of course, Pillzenith wasn't afraid of them, but dealing with them would weaken Pillfire.

"Long Baxiang, I'd heard of your sect's shamelessness, but you still managed to surprise me. Here you are, plotting to kill Jiang Chen. Do you think you can still mend fences with Veluriyam?" He sneered.

The great emperor cackled in answer. "But we haven't killed him. Moreover..."

Pillzenith cut him short. "The true dragon is yours, the Emperor Ascension Pill's recipe is yours. Forget about the rest."

Long Baxiang shook his head with a chuckle. "Hehe, that won't do. We want the Pinecrane Pill and the Emperor Supremacy Pill as well"

"If we find more than five of them, I'll assign one to your sect. That's my last offer. Don't test my patience." Pillzenith had already made consecutive concessions because the Heavenly Dragon Sect was the most powerful out of the four sects. He could use their strength against Veluriyam.

However, he would settle his accounts with them once the war was over. He'd make them spit out everything they'd eaten.

Long Baxian remained unperturbed. "One last thing. After conquering Veluriyam, Pillfire can't doublecross us for any reason. We'd rather not give up what we just earned, and then some."

As a crafty old fox, of course he'd think of this possibility.

Did he see through me? Pillzenith quavered inwardly, but his face betrayed none of his surprise. "How devious. My goal's Jiang Chen, not your sect. Don't be paranoid."

"Haha, the world is full of danger. A man can't be too prudent." Long Baxiang sniggered. He obviously didn't trust Pillzenith at all.

All of a sudden, a derisive laugh interrupted their haggling.

"Each of you is an old monster who's lived for thousands of years. Daydreaming in broad daylight doesn't become you." Filled with taunting mockery, the voice naturally belonged to Jiang Chen.

He'd been eavesdropping while these old fellows shamelessly boasted about invading his city and haggled over the loot. How could he sit still?

The crowd froze. Pillzenith in particular, turned murderous.

"Kid, you were really hiding here!" he swore ferociously. "You've killed two of my great emperors. This debt can only be repaid by bathing Veluriyam in blood!"

"Hahaha, why stop at two? What about the fellow who came in before?" Jiang Chen laughed lazily.

Without exception, everyone froze.

Chapter 1379: Jiang Chen Slaps Faces

Jiang Chen's intrusion in the midst of their spoils discussion was a bucket of icy water doused on their heads.

According to him, Big Horn and Old Ma had both fallen at his hand. Moreover, Emperor Heartcloud was also dead. Most of those present had come to those conclusions already, but Emperor Heartcloud's death nevertheless created a sliver of caution. So, Jiang Chen did have the ability to easily kill great emperors!

And yet he was so young! Was it really wise to become a mortal enemy of a genius such as him?

"Pillzenith, you say that I killed Pillfire's great emperors. Why don't you talk about your collusion with Shura against Emperor Peafowl? Why don't you talk about how those emperors' presence in Myriad Domain made them necessary targets? Why don't you understand that your ambush was what led to Emperor Heartcloud's death?" Jiang Chen spoke at a slow but rhythmic pace.

His body flickered, then reappeared only a hundred or so yards away from the great emperors. Alas, it was difficult to make him out across that short distance. His form was indistinguishable, almost as if he wasn't entirely there. Was it really possible to reach him? He almost seemed a world away.

Emperor Pillzenith was on the brink of exploding. "You rascal!" he huffed, "the feud between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City is irreconcilable, no matter how sharp your tongue is!"

"That's what I wanted to say," sneered Jiang Chen.

"What are you going on about, you scoundrel? You're faced with countless great emperors here! Pillfire City has allied itself with four first rank sects of the Upper Eight Regions in a coalition against Veluriyam. When our army arrives, Veluriyam will be reduced to smithereens. Let's see how stuck-up you are then!" One of the great emperors behind Emperor Pillzenith crowed.

Jiang Chen was perfectly serene. "I've always been 'stuck-up', as you put it. What's Pillfire going to do about it? You don't need to make everything sound so grand, Pillzenith. If Pillfire wants my Pinecrane Pill and Emperor Supremacy Pill, you should just say so. Why hide your desires? Is your hypocrisy growing at the same rate as your age?"

"Bull!" Emperor Pillzenith snorted. "Veluriyam treasures those pills. Do you think that the entire world does the same?"

“What, you’re not interested in the Pinecrane Pill?” Jiang Chen laughed.

“Not one bit,” Emperor Pillzenith retorted proudly. “Veluriyam Capital won’t catch up to Pillfire City in pill dao even in another three thousand years. You think that one or two miracle pills will close the vast gulf of difference between us? In your dreams!”

“Tsk tsk, Pillzenith, you’re so very shameless in your old age.” Jiang Chen couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Those who don’t know better would actually believe you. But I wonder how the Pinecrane Pill that the Sublime Chord Temple won ended up in Pillfire hands?”

Emperor Pillzenith’s heart tensed. This was a secret between only Pillfire City and the Sublime Chord Temple. How did the kid know about it?

The great emperor had used every available effort against the Sublime Chord Temple in order to obtain the pill, including a few veiled threats. The Temple had practically been forced to give it up.

Of course, Emperor Pillzenith hadn’t gone overboard in the matter. He returned the same number of spirit stones as the Sublime Chord Temple had spent in the auction rather than forcing it to take a painful loss.

But still, the Temple was none too happy about the turn of events. After all, they had offended the Heavenly Dragon Sect during the auction for the sake of the pill.

Because of the underhanded way in which he’d procured the pill, Emperor Pillzenith was extremely surprised that Jiang Chen was able to point out his possession of it. The Sublime Chord Temple’s great emperor was just as astonished.

The ruler of Pillfire turned his eyes to the Temple’s expert. Clearly, he suspected that his sect was responsible for leaking the info.

The Temple’s expert tasted bitterness in his mouth. “Your Majesty Pillzenith,” he messaged hurriedly, “my Sublime Chord Temple definitely kept the secret!”

Emperor Pillzenith felt doubtful. “You’re making things up, kid,” he harrumphed. “I couldn’t care less about a mere Pinecrane Pill.” He was stubborn to the bitter end.

“What about the Pinecrane Pill that the Temple of Cleansing Fire’s pill emperors are studying? Where’d that come from then, hmm?” Jiang Chen’s tone became exaggerated. He clucked his tongue in mock disapproval.

What? Emperor Pillzenith was stunned. That the pill emperors from the Temple of Cleansing Fire were researching the Pinecrane Pill was a well-kept internal secret.

Aside from Emperor Pillzenith, very few of the city’s great emperors knew about it. The emperor had especially put his youngest son in charge to give the boy some credentials and momentum, preparing for the day that he might inherit his father’s position.

Originally, Emperor Pillzenith’s pill dao heir was Pill King Ji Lang. Martial dao went to his young son, young master Tian Lin.

But Pill King Ji Lang's perfect performance pre-Jiang Chen had turned into loss after loss after meeting the young man. He'd disappointed the great emperor's expectations time and again. Therefore, Emperor Pillzenith decided to pin his hopes for both pill and martial dao upon young master Tian Lin.

The Pinecrane Pill's research was the first step for his young son on his path to the throne. The revelation of the clandestine subject was like having one's secret found out by a huge crowd.

"Surely you won't deny this, will you, Pillzenith?" Jiang Chen smiled coolly.

Emperor Pillzenith was in a bad spot. He was both scared and astonished, and above all, completely confused. How did Jiang Chen know something so well-guarded? Did the Temple of Cleansing Fire have a traitor in its halls?

Everyone saw that Emperor Pillzenith was at a loss for words. Was the kid right this time? Was Emperor Pillzenith researching the Pinecrane Pill behind everyone's backs?

"No need to waste words on the brat, Your Majesty. The more we talk, the deeper we fall into his trap. We just need to attack Veluriyam Capital as planned," advised Emperor Tallpeak.

Emperor Pillzenith inclined his head slightly, struggling to choke down his fury. "I have no interest in wasting words on you, petty thief!" He raised an eyebrow. "When my conquering force arrives, Veluriyam Capital will be utterly crushed. Let's see you escape from my grasp then!"

He was content to admit defeat in a war of words. That didn't mean he had given up!

Jiang Chen roared with laughter when he heard the threat.

"I'd like to know when you're setting off, Pillzenith." Jiang Chen's grinning expression showed that he was unafraid of the great emperor's coercion.

Emperor Pillzenith sneered. "You think your fake calm will make me change my mind, kid? All four of these first rank sects here hate Veluriyam Capital to the bone. Your city has incited mass outrage against it across the human domain. You shall become dust under this natural course!"

"That's right, you crook. You'll pay for your crimes as Veluriyam's young lord, Jiang Chen!" The lord of the Eternal Celestial Capital screamed.

Jiang Chen tossed him a dispassionate glance. "You're right, crimes must be paid for. Payment will be collected from the Eternal Celestial Capital soon enough."

As the head of a sect, the emperor of the Capital was disturbed by the frigidity of Jiang Chen's words. He felt an irritating tug on his heartstrings. Swiftly, he turned his thoughts to the fact that there was no reason Pillfire and the four first rank sects couldn't take down Veluriyam.

"Young lord Jiang Chen," Long Baxiang cackled. "I remember when I asked you for your true dragon the easy way. You wouldn't give it up for your life, eh? Well, that'll show you not to snub me. The Heavenly Dragon Sect won't give Veluriyam an inch, either!"

"If you're stupid enough to plot alongside a tiger like Pillzenith, I'm too lazy to encourage your repentance. Forget about the true dragon. The Heavenly Dragon Sect will never get its grubby hands on

it. If your sect is so set on opposing me, perhaps it's time for a re-shuffling of the eight first rank sects in the human domain. I guarantee the Heavenly Dragon Sect will disappear, at any rate!"

"Hmph. Ignorant child! You sure talk big." Long Baxiang was incensed. "I'd like to see whether Veluriyam or the Heavenly Dragon Sect disappears first."

"Don't you see, brat?" Emperor Pillzenith stated icily. "This is the will of the people. When the army gets here, both you and Veluriyam will be history!"

Jiang Chen roared with laughter. "I see, I see. Let me know when you decide to depart, eh? I'll give you a human sacrifice as a present."

"Hmm?" Emperor Pillzenith furrowed his brow, uncertain of what Jiang Chen meant.

A human sacrifice? As a present?

Jiang Chen smiled with some indifference at the perplexed emperor. "Didn't you send people to the Moon God Sect to try to capture the holy maiden Xu Qingxuan?"

Emperor Pillzenith's eyes widened. That kid knew about that too? Then he remembered that they'd decided it within the residence. It was quite reasonable for the brat to have overheard it given the location.

"Hmph, she can't run forever. One day, I'll capture your entire family and cut their flesh off strip by strip. They'll taste all of the tortures known to mankind. Your collective destination is the grave. Hahaha!" The emperor spat all of this out through gritted teeth. He had been provoked to utter irascibility by his young nemesis.

His state of displeasure amused Jiang Chen to no end.

"Excellent, Pillzenith, excellent. I was wondering how I should get rid of the guy. You gave me some great ideas." Saying so, Jiang Chen hoisted young master Tian Lin in his hand and smiled superciliously. "Shall I torture him right now by cutting his flesh off strip by strip? Or shall I pick another day? The day your army departs perhaps, as a superb sacrifice?"

A closer look rendered Emperor Pillzenith on the verge of collapse. The person Jiang Chen had in his hand was his dearest son!

Young master Tian Lin hung lifelessly in Jiang Chen's hand like a ragged robe. The great emperor was about to cough up blood.

Chapter 1380: Pillfire City Submits

Emperor Pillzenith couldn't possibly have imagined such a dramatic reversal of circumstance. Shouldn't his son be in Pillfire City right now, protected by countless experts? Why had he inexplicably appeared here instead, in that dastardly Jiang Chen's hands no less?

Am I hallucinating? Or perhaps Jiang Chen had found an innocent doppelganger, and dressed him up in the same likeness of his son? However, a closer glance revealed that it was quite likely to be Tian Lin in the flesh rather than a fake.

Emperor Pillzenith's head spun. His ambitious couldn't prevent him from panicking. The tables had turned several times over, and he couldn't accept reality just yet. The other great emperors from Pillfire were just as flabbergasted as him.

Why was young master Tian Lin in Jiang Chen's hands?

He had seen his father off personally upon their departure from the city. Every Pillfire emperor had witnessed this in person. Had that kid captured young master Tian Lin en route after leaving the Moon God Sect, when he was passing by Pillfire City?

What a preposterous thought!

If Jiang Chen had taken the detour to Pillfire City, why hadn't any news come from there? That was assuming of course, that he had the ability to capture the young man in the first place. The timing made no sense.

It had been a long time since their ambush of Jiang Chen. The people they'd sent to the Moon God Sect to cut off Xu Qingxuan had returned by now. Why hadn't there been any messengers from Pillfire City if something really had happened?

Though Pillzenith had been a cocksure rooster a moment earlier, Jiang Chen's critical act deflated him like a balloon. His throat gurgled, unable to accept what he was seeing. The emperor's mind was utterly blank. How had Jiang Chen captured his son?

The time didn't match up at all!

Can it be... Suddenly, Emperor Pillzenith's brain whirled. A terrifying thought flashed across his mind. Did the kid leave the residence midway? Can it be that he visited Pillfire City and warned the Moon God Sect as well?

A look of horror flickered across the emperor's face.

If that was the case, the kid was a real force to be reckoned with. Emperor Pillzenith was filled with regret. Why had he plotted so brazenly within the residence? Why hadn't he avoided giving away information instead?

It didn't matter what he was thinking at this moment. He could do very little to help the situation. Emperor Pillzenith's heart burned with a reckless fire whenever his eyes passed over his collapsed son.

It was difficult for him to open his mouth after the harshness of his prior words.

Was he supposed to beg? The emperor wouldn't do so if someone killed him.

Take a hardline stance to the end? If he did that, Jiang Chen really could slice young master Tian Lin to bits. Emperor Pillzenith was out of ideas and desperate.

Emperor Tallpeak felt rather guilty. After all, he had suggested that Xu Qingxuan be captured. The fact that young master Tian Lin was in Jiang Chen's hands meant that the young lord had a hand upon his liege's vitals.

Would Emperor Pillzenith take his anger out on the strategist? Emperor Tallpeak couldn't imagine what would happen. Is it really a good idea to oppose this kid?

Did Pillfire City really have to fight Jiang Chen to the death?

Emperor Pillzenith was ashen-faced. He didn't dare to spew forth a single threat out of all the ones he was thinking. Any unnecessary provocation meant that the hot-blooded Jiang Chen could kill young master Tian Lin right away.

He glanced at Emperor Tallpeak through his peripheral vision. The gesture tipped Tallpeak off to the fact that Emperor Pillzenith was interested in conceding.

It wasn't any permanent or honest sort of concession, but one driven by the circumstances. Young master Tian Lin's death at Jiang Chen's hands would be unmitigated disaster.

Having received the hint from Emperor Pillzenith, Tallpeak called out loudly, "Jiang Chen, the only hostilities that exist are between Pillfire and Veluriyam. Getting innocents involved goes against the common principles of morality and righteousness, no?"

Morality and righteousness?

Jiang Chen burst out laughing. "I've seen a lot of shameless people, but you're definitely the cream of the crop! You're the one that suggested to Pillzenith to capture Xu Qingxuan, correct? What? Is Pillfire City the only party allowed to use such underhanded techniques? A counterattack on similar terms is somehow forbidden?"

Tallpeak's face colored with embarrassment and uncertainty. He had no good response to the accusation. He knew that nothing he said would be particularly useful.

"Alright, Jiang Chen! Your intellect has triumphed this day. Pillfire City admits defeat! Why not forgive and forget? Tell me, what do we need to do for you to release young master Tian Lin?"

He didn't want to use any abrasive words. Any provocation against Jiang Chen meant that young master Tian Lin's death was possible. If things came to that, he would be despised by Emperor Pillzenith for life.

The experts from the other sects were depressed just the same. If Emperor Pillzenith's son was in enemy hands, that was a chokehold over the city's pulse. How were they supposed to fight Jiang Chen or Veluriyam Capital?

The attack on Veluriyam Capital was probably dropped, unless Emperor Pillzenith was willing to sacrifice his son as preamble. Alas, everyone present knew that young master Tian Lin was Emperor Pillzenith's most favored son. Furthermore, the emperor also had superbly high hopes for him.

Even the Heavenly Dragon Sect's Long Baxiang didn't dare mouth off. He knew very well how much Pillzenith treasured this son of his. If the Heavenly Dragon Sect was responsible for the youth's death, Pillfire would instantly likely turn on the sect over its feud with Veluriyam.

Though the lord of the Eternal Celestial Capital deeply wished to kill Jiang Chen on the spot, the circumstances before him told him that that was already unrealistic.

The Empyrean River Palace and the Sublime Chord Temple were allies of Pillfire City to begin with. It was completely understandable for them not to mess with Emperor Pillzenith's son considering his status and their own.

The atmosphere became rather odd.

That almost thirty great emperors had been made fools of by a single youth depressed all Pillfire's emperors a good deal. None of them was satisfied with the current state of affairs.

Jiang Chen smirked. "Let him go? You think that I'm just going to let my hard-earned prey go? Just like that? Would you let someone from Veluriyam go just like that?"

Jiang Chen's rhetoric stopped all possible retort. If they were in his shoes, they would take full advantage of a captured Xu Qingxuan to blackmail Jiang Chen to no end. There was no way they would've let her go. Simply threatening Jiang Chen was use enough. The reverse of that – Xu Qingxuan missing, young master Tian Lin stuck in Jiang Chen's hands – evoked a sense of absurdity in all of the experts from Pillfire.

Even the traditionally clever Tallpeak, master of a hundred stratagems, didn't know what to say. What could he even do in this spot? Was it possible to force his opponent to back off by swearing vengeance and escalating?

He couldn't actually do nothing, though.

"You have the upper hand, Jiang Chen," sighed Tallpeak. "You can be as proud as you like. You should know very well, though, that although young master Tian Lin is a good card to play, much of his value is determined by how you use him. If you do so poorly, a battle to the death between the two giants isn't necessarily to your benefit."

"To the death?" Jiang Chen laughed. "Wasn't that what you were planning on? I'm fulfilling your wishes, aren't I?"

This was a resounding slap to both emperors. The verbal blow stung their faces, and both men wanted to find a deep fissure to dive into.

"Jiang Chen, we're not at that point yet. You should know that if Pillfire and Veluriyam do fight to the death, it's extremely likely that your city will be utterly destroyed. Do you really want that to happen? If you release young master Tian Lin, we can discuss an alternative."

Tallpeak was trying to win Jiang Chen over through reasoning. He wanted the youth to go with what he perceived as the flow.

Jiang Chen didn't believe a word of it. "Get your facts straight, old man. Firstly, Veluriyam isn't scared of Pillfire one bit. Your patchwork army is held together only by mutual profit. You have no unifying principle behind your forces. An alliance like that is more fragile than glass. Secondly, Pillfire was the instigator of this family-kidnapping scheme. I'm only returning the favor, as I rightly should! Lastly, you should right your attitude if you want an alternative. Do I look like I care?"

In truth, Jiang Chen had no interest whatsoever in any alternative save for war. Still, his own reason told him that full-on conflict with Pillfire immediately was far less advantageous for Veluriyam.

Though Pillfire City was a group of mongrels, it and the four first rank sects presented a surprisingly potent combination. Jiang Chen wasn't scared, but the rest of Veluriyam wouldn't necessarily agree.

Now was not a good time for war. However, his grasp over young master Tian Lin meant that he had the initiative.

Tallpeak sighed. "Pillfire City's attitude is right here. We ask only for young master Tian Lin's safety. Pillfire City can forgive all your prior offenses, given that."

Forgive all prior offenses?

Jiang Chen snickered internally. He and Pillfire wanted drastically different things. Emperor Pillzenith's conspiracy behind Emperor Peafowl's disappearance wasn't going to be forgotten that easily.