

## Three Realms 1401

### Chapter 1401: Emperor Wellspring Vows Allegiance

Jiang Chen didn't coerce Wellspring into taking the gift. Its significance was clear. Accepting it would be swearing fealty to the young lord. There would be no room for regrets after all was said and done.

All that was left was for Wellspring to make a decision.

He knew full well that he'd be forever subservient to Jiang Chen if he accepted the olive branch. Like the untold contract between master and disciple, there would be no going back, even though he was technically the seasoned veteran while Jiang Chen was merely a young genius.

From henceforth, he'd have to admit that he was one of Jiang Chen's and brand himself as the young master's loyal deathsworn. A storm was brewing inside of him.

The empyrean realm... to think that this opportunity would fall into my lap after so many years! There won't be a second chance if I let go of this. But if I grasp it firmly, I have to swear fealty to Jiang Chen and irrevocably join Veluriyam.

Having lived for so long, what haven't I seen? Veluriyam's Peafowl and Pillfire's Pillzenith are both extremely eminent figures of the human domain, but neither of them surprise me as much as the young lord. He's able to bend the world to his will at such a young age. One day, he'll become a leader that's encountered only once every hundred thousand years. Is it really that humiliating to follow someone like that?

When his thoughts settled down, Emperor Wellspring realized that he did indeed have a very high opinion of the young lord. It was an admiration that he'd never sought to hide. The offer before him was simply too enticing to reject.

The empyrean realm is so elusive that many could spend a lifetime, or maybe even ten lifetimes, and not reach it. There won't be a second chance if I miss out on this. Emperor Peerless' cultivation has improved by leaps and bounds in just a few short years. He's even begun to surpass me in strength. Following the young lord will surely have its advantages.

The last bit of hesitation had begun to melt away. He'd finally arrived at a decision.

"Young lord Jiang Chen, the kunpeng bloodline of yours is impossible to resist." Emperor Wellspring sighed gently. "From today onwards, this bag of old bones is yours to command. Whatever you need, just issue an order and it'll be yours, even if it means climbing mountains of daggers and crossing oceans of flames."

Wellspring's oath implied that he'd accepted Jiang Chen's offer.

Jiang Chen cupped his fist together and smiled. "Congratulations Emperor Wellspring, most people spend a lifetime seeking but never encountering an empyrean opportunity. I have three drops of the kunpeng bloodline, two of which already have an owner: Emperor Peafowl and Emperor Peerless. You're the third."

"Ah?" Wellspring was a little dumbfounded. "Am I worthy of such an honor?"

He'd initially thought that there was plenty of the kungpeng and didn't expect Jiang Chen to only have three drops of it. Furthermore, the list of recipients of the bloodline shocked him greatly.

Emperor Peafowl was the lord of Veluriyam Capital. It was to be expected that he'd receive one.

Emperor Peerless had sworn allegiance to Jiang Chen many years ago and was like a brother to the young lord. He'd offered his unconditional support when the young lord needed it the most. Thus, it wasn't surprising that he'd receive a drop of the blood as well.

However, the third and last remaining drop was given to him. He couldn't understand why, but he was certain that he didn't rank third in Jiang Chen's heart. Why had the opportunity fallen to him?

Jiang Chen wasn't surprised by Wellspring's shocked expression. He smiled. "Old Brother Hui, you must be wondering why the third and final drop of the kungpeng bloodline was given to you."

Wellspring's face turned red and he burst into embarrassed laughter. Jiang Chen had seen through his mind with a glance.

"Young lord Jiang Chen is truly perceptive. Not even my thoughts can escape your eyes." He didn't deny his thoughts.

"There aren't many great emperors in Veluriyam that's compatible with the bloodline. Emperor Petalpluck is the next most suitable candidate in terms of strength, but he's not destined for it due to his nature. I think most highly of Emperor Coiling Dragon and Emperor Void, but their fortunes lie elsewhere. Neither are compatible with the bloodline for now." Jiang Chen answered meaningfully. "Another suitable candidate that remain are the Jiao brothers. Unfortunately, they are two. Giving the last remaining drop of blood to either of them might cause a huge rift between them and harm their relationship beyond repair."

Enlightened, only one question remained for Wellspring.

"Young lord, if that's the case, why don't you leave it for yourself?" He was suddenly embarrassed. "A gentleman doesn't take what others hold dear. Perhaps it's best that the young lord keeps the bloodline for himself."

Jiang Chen laughed easily. "I have my own ways to ascend to the empyrean realm. I have no need for the kungpeng bloodline." He had utter and indisputable confidence in himself.

If some other young genius had said that, Wellspring would surely think the person was dropped on his head as a child. However, he found it impossible to doubt anything that came out of Jiang Chen's mouth.

After witnessing the young lord's meteoric rise, who'd dare claim that the young lord wouldn't be able to ascend to the empyrean realm and bring forth a golden age to the human domain?

"I am grateful for any boons and repay them. Old Brother Hui, you gathered the wandering great emperors and gave me your staunch support back in the day. Other people might not know about this, but I'm not an ingrate who seeks to forget about a favor done or good deed performed. It was this precise moment that such thoughts began to surface.

“However, your staunch support wasn’t the factor that ultimately led to this decision. I see in you some similarities with Emperor Peafowl. You’re both magnanimous figures that possess great vision into the big picture.”

Emperor Wellspring was a little taken aback. To think that this was actually the reason for his fortune! Complicated emotions flooded his mind.

A gentleman would sacrifice his life for a true confidante. He was an accomplished great emperor who’d lived for many millennia. One was often uninvolved in worldly matters at his age, but certain issues could never be ignored. Wellspring suddenly felt that Jiang Chen could be a confidante in this matter!

“Old Brother Hui, just as you’ve mentioned, the human domain is in grave danger. Unfortunately, the majority of cultivators, including the heavyweights of the great sects, are ignoring this grave issue and continue to live out their lives in short-sighted manners.

“The human domain has a great need for wise figures and a greater need for principled fighters. To be frank, the human domain would be wiped out if the demonic cataclysm erupts tomorrow. Only crushing defeat awaits us.”

That was the unbridled truth. The human domain was too caught up in internal strife instead of consideration for the future of the race’s destiny. Humans were just whiling away the days given the lack of wise men. The human race was a pile of loose sand; a storm would rip everything apart.

Emperor Wellspring sympathized with the thought. “You’re absolutely right. Ever since the ancient cataclysm, the demon race has kept a low profile and barely stirred up any trouble. Because of that, humans have gradually forgotten about the threat they imposed. By the time disaster strikes, it’ll already be too late.”

“Indeed.”

Jiang Chen nodded and stood up gallantly, his eyes filled with valor. “Old Brother Hui, our faction is still lacking in strength, but we’ve gained a lot of support from our brethren over the years. I have great expectations for you, and I truly hope that you can lend us your strength.”

“My reply is still the same. This bag of old bones is yours to command. I will follow you even if it means climbing mountains of daggers and crossing seas of raging flames.”

“Old Brother Hui is truly a forthright person. Hopefully, I will have the backing of empyrean experts in the near future!” Jiang Chen had very high expectations for the recipients of the kungpeng bloodline.

The great titans of the wandering world such as Peerless and Wellspring were definitely extremely beneficial in the recruitment of other wanderers. Moreover, when they ascended to the empyrean realm, Jiang Chen would finally have pillars that he could rely on. They were of utmost importance in the next stage of his plan.

Pillfire was a thorn in his side, but Jiang Chen had never seen them as a threat. It would be overkill to consider them as such. Indeed, they were quite powerful, but they were destined to be overthrown by Veluriyam in the end.

Jiang Chen's greatest concern was the sealed demons. They were the biggest threat to humanity. Upon their emergence, the human domain would be dyed in a sea of red.

Jiang Chen and Wellspring were definitely on the same wavelength in this regard.

Their discussion spanned from the ancient demonic war all the way to the human domain's current predicament. After that, they moved onto humanity's current state of affairs, Pillzenith's ambitions, and the layout of the first rank sects in the Upper Eight Regions.

As a titan of the wandering world, Wellspring had a very thorough view of the human domain. In fact, his knowledge far exceeded that of Peerless and the Jiao brothers'. Jiang Chen suddenly felt that all three recipients of the kunpeng bloodline were the perfect candidates to receive it.

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

#### **Chapter 1402: Purple Smoke Sect of Phoenix Cry Lower Region**

The conversation with Wellspring enlightened Jiang Chen, deepening the latter's understanding of the human domain.

"A wise man's words are worth ten years of study. Old Brother Hui, I sincerely admire your knowledge and deep insights," the young lord praised wholeheartedly.

"What good is scholarship if I don't put it into practice? I can't compare to Emperor Peafowl. If everyone was willing to act for the greater good like him, would we need fear the demons? How would humanity not flourish?" Grief tinged Wellspring's voice.

Infighting and scheming between the various factions would only lead to disaster. Mankind's current strength was already dismal when compared to ancient times. Continued internal strife simply added insult to injury.

Jiang Chen comforted him. "Don't worry. Though there are signs of a demon resurgence, but we should be safe for a few decades still, from what I've seen. A few of them might stir up some trouble, but they won't be able make big waves."

He had travelled to the sealed lands and seen the situation for himself. Most of the demons were laying low, far from the restlessness surrounding an oncoming cataclysm. But of course, once they mobilized to that degree, then they would be on the cusp of launching an invasion.

Localized raids would continue to appear in the meantime, as proven by his clash against Emperor Bloodmalva in Great Scarlet, but he was optimistic no large-scale invasion would occur within thirty to fifty years.

In the ancient times, not all of the many demon tribes were sealed. Some scattered clans had been imprisoned elsewhere in the human domain. However, surviving remnants might stir to activity and cause untold harm if left to their own devices. After all, rather than destructiveness, bloodline assimilation was the demons' most fearsome ability.

They weren't a fertile race, so the invasiveness of their blood was their greatest weapon. A single demon tribe could turn a sea of humans into obedient slaves, creating an army of puppets. They could do that to a thousand other species as well.

“Old Brother Hui, refine the kumpeng bloodline as fast as you can. With your excellent constitution, there will be ample opportunities for you to shine in the future.” Jiang Chen didn’t need the great emperor on the trip to Phoenix Cry. Bringing along Peerless and the Jiao brothers was enough.

The young lord now exercised utter caution before each trip. He didn’t feel at ease without inspecting the young lord residence’s Nine Sparks Petalstorm Formation one last time before setting out.

He’d worked on the formation whenever free, making it increasingly impregnable and more stable. Now, it would prove a challenging obstacle even if Pillzenith were to charge into Veluriyam with an army of great emperors.

His preparations complete, he finally left with Peerless and the Jiao brothers.

Relative to the entire human domain, Phoenix Cry Lower Region was a remote region. The Purple Smoke Sect was a great local faction, but insignificant when placed into the Upper Eight Regions.

Jiang Chen snuck inside the sect without fanfare. Pinpointing the forefather’s location, he landed outside the latter’s palace.

For him, the sect’s defensive formations might as well not exist. He immediately spotted the many flaws within, slipping inside the forbidden area without anyone’s notice.

The forefather was meditating when he suddenly sensed a slight fluctuation outside. In the next moment, a mysterious force broke through his residence’s defenses like a hot knife through butter.

“Who goes there?” He turned pale with alarm.

“Zi Tan, I trust you’ve been well.” Jiang Chen came into view, smiling in amusement at the forefather’s fright. In truth, it was deliberate intimidation.

The young lord hadn’t taken the forefather’s words at face value. He’d sprung a surprise visit to uncover any potential schemes, but he’d been too suspicious judging by the old man’s reaction.

“Y-young lord Jiang Chen?” Zi Tan froze at first, then beamed with understanding. “Young lord, you kept your promise to grace us with your presence!”

“Let’s drop the formalities.” Jiang Chen waved his hand. “Your sect seems rather quiet.”

The forefather sighed. “We’ve already dispatched our men. There’s a technique I haven’t mastered yet, so I stayed behind to meditate over it. I depart in no more than five days. All the great factions of Phoenix Cry have invited their backers this time. Young lord, thank the heavens we’re blessed with your assistance!” He flushed with excitement. “Everyone in the sect would be ecstatic if they knew!”

Jiang Chen interrupted bluntly with a wave of the hand. “Save your trump cards for Agarwood’s exploration, there’s no need to show off ahead of time.”

The forefather had forgotten himself out of happiness, but abruptly came back to his senses and nodded hurriedly. “Yes, yes, the young lord is wise.”

They might lose the initiative if he showed his hand too soon. Jiang Chen’s reputation was undisputed, but there was no shortage of mighty figures in this world.

“Tell me then, which factions are involved?” The young lord cut straight to the chase. He’d always been intrigued by secret realms, and the forefather’s depiction of the strange happenings in Agarwood’s secret realm had roused his interest. Undoubtedly, something was fishy there.

The forefather sighed. “Agarwood belongs in Phoenix Cry territory, so the secret realm should be our property by right. That’s what all the sects agreed so, but some secretly found outside backers in order to hoard all the benefits for themselves. In fact, all of the surrounding regions have been lured here. We’ve lost control of the situation.”

“Lost control?” Jiang Chen frowned.

The forefather nodded. “Indeed. In Agarwood, the foreign influences have sidelined the local factions and seized all authority...” His face darkened at the thought. Things had taken an unexpected turn for the region.

On the surface, the sects had agreed not to involve any outside helpers. But secretly, most had gone back on their words. However, their duplicity had produced unwelcome results. Their own backers had wrested away control and marginalized them.

There was an ironic justice to it, but the forefather couldn’t accept it. After all, Purple Smoke was also a sect of Phoenix Cry.

“Be specific. How many factions are there right now?” Jiang Chen had brought enough helpers, but to be forewarned was to be forearmed.

“The two great mid regions surrounding Phoenix Cry are both involved. More importantly, the Heavenly Dragon Sect and Ninesuns Sky Sect have also dispatched their heavyweights. I hear the Sublime Chord Temple, Eternal Celestial Capital, and Pillfire City plan to do the same as well.”

“What?” Jiang Chen was stumped for words. How had a trivial lower region attract so much attention? It was basically a backwater!

The former Myriad Domain might have been worse, that was due to Great Scarlet’s massacre centuries ago, while Phoenix Cry’s remoteness had sheltered it from outside danger. Its weakness came entirely from its lack of resources.

Yet, such a shabby place had attracted so many factions! Jiang Chen’s eyes gleamed with interest. “How did Agarwood become such a grand affair in a few months?”

The forefather hadn’t mentioned anything the last time he’d gone to Veluriyam, so it must have been a recent development.

Zi Tan sighed. “Everything happened less than half a year ago. Agarwood is now divided between the Heavenly Dragon Sect and the Ninesuns Sky Sect. The other mid region factions have to obey them. If not, these two first-rank sects will show no quarter!”

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

#### **Chapter 1403: Agarwood Valley**

“Young lord, must we do things this way?” Peerless asked, a little worried by the daring plan Jiang Chen had revealed moments ago.

The young man was grave. "I brought the three of you because I'd planned on taking control through brute force, but it's impossible with all the great sects in the valley now. We need to think of another way."

Peerless wasn't entirely reassured. "But who will protect you then?"

"No matter. Pillzenith brought so many great emperors to waylay me last time, but did that stop me? No one will be the wiser once I disguise myself as a member of the Purple Smoke Sect. Even if Pillzenith were to come, what could he possibly do?"

In the past, Jiang Chen had been somewhat intimidated by formidable characters like Pillzenith. But he'd mostly taken the latter's measure with their increasing interactions and was no longer as wary of his opponent. Of course, he wouldn't underestimate his enemy out of conceit, just that he no longer felt any fear.

Peerless opened his mouth, but Jiang Chen forestalled him with a smile. "Don't worry. If push comes to shove, I have many ways of protecting myself."

Peerless pondered a moment, then nodded. Hadn't the young lord always landed on his feet despite the many dangers and ruthless enemies he'd faced?

Despite their great strength, three great emperors couldn't take on so many first rank sects, to say nothing of Pillfire being involved as well. They might even become a hindrance if they exposed themselves.

Their martial styles weren't as varied as Jiang Chen's and wouldn't be as easy to disguise as their appearances.

In particular, how many pairs of great emperor brothers were there in the human domain? Their particular way of fighting also made the Jiao brothers easily recognizable. Perhaps it was indeed best not to show themselves, else they alert the enemy and ruin the young lord's plans.

Jiang Chen was the greatest thorn in Pillfire's side. For a chance to capture him, Pillzenith would disregard any distraction, including a chance to explore Agarwood Valley.

"Zi Tan, let this great emperor be blunt. You're the only one in the know. If mishap befalls the young lord because of you, you should be aware of the consequences." Peerless rarely used threats, but he needed to browbeat the forefather a tad this time.

Jiang Chen's status was extremely sensitive. It would be a catastrophe for all of mankind if the forefather secretly leaked his whereabouts to Pillfire.

The forefather nodded hurriedly. "Senior, I swear to the heavens I won't betray the young lord. May they condemn me to eternal damnation otherwise."

Peerless nodded impassively. "Do your best then."

Jiang Chen smiled. "Old Brother Mo, no need to worry. I've experienced greater storms than this. Nothing in Phoenix Cry can scare me."

It wasn't boasting, just pure confidence born not only from his strength, but also from his past life's experiences. His curiosity was piqued. Just what secrets did Agarwood hide to attract so many first rank sects?

Dressed up as a Purple Smoke disciple, he followed the forefather to the valley.

Phoenix Cry was located at the western border of the human domain, even farther west than the Heavenly Dragon Sect, while the valley itself lay at the western end of the region, not far from the Boundary Steles between mankind and the other races.

In ancient times, the major races had agreed upon an inviolable division of territory, thereby establishing the Boundary Steeles. It was the only barrier between the different races and prevented invasions both ways. To destroy its seals would be to shatter the peace between them. Despite its strength, mankind had been but one of the myriad races on the continent in ancient times.

The Divine Abyss Continent had been rife with conflict over resources and territory before the demon invasion finally put an end to it. Instead of pointing their spears at each other, the natives suddenly found a common enemy.

However, everyone had fought separately with next to no cooperation. To summarize, contradiction on the continent existed not only between the natives and the demons, but also between the different local races.

At this moment, many factions stood outside Agarwood Valley, each staying in their own areas, making for a lively scene.

More conspicuously, the Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Heavenly Dragon Sect controlled the valley's entrance. These two weren't any regular first rank sects, but among the strongest ones.

With his outstanding status, Long Baxiang was the most eye-catching on the Heavenly Dragon Sect's side. Judging from his arrogance, he seemed to have a firm grasp over the situation.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect had dispatched even more senior executives and occupied another side of the valley's mouth, looking just as overbearing.

Like two watchdogs, the two sects blocked the entrance.

Looking grave, the surrounding sects were afraid to protest out loud. Obviously, they lacked the courage to force their way in. Rather than benevolence, the two first-rank sects were known for their viciousness. They would kill anyone who dared challenge their authority.

Given their air of menace, they seemed on the prowl for resistance to trample. Bluntly put, they wanted to make an example out of someone.

Sadly, no hapless fool had volunteered, denying them an opportunity to let loose. Purple Smoke's men had arrived at the scene and were huddled in a corner together with the Spirit Crow Lodge and several other local sects.

Compared to the first rank and second rank sects, Phoenix Cry's factions were but specks of dust.



By the time the forefather arrived, his sect members were full of grievances. Several tried to complain, but the old man cut them short with his hand. "Be quiet."

His sect had no right to speak in the current situation, to say nothing of grumbling and protesting. Doing so in public would be stupid and perhaps fatal for the sect, so he simply ordered them to shut up. A trivial character like him was powerless to change the situation.

Great emperors spearheaded the first rank sects and many second rank sects from mid regions could count on experts that were half step great emperor realm. In comparison, he was only at ninth level emperor realm.

Might makes right. Without force, words were useless at best, and potentially harmful.

Jiang Chen observed the situation without batting an eye.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Heavenly Dragon Sect had blocked the entrance, clearly intent on presiding over the exploration.

The overbearing Long Baxiang proudly declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, Agarwood is close to the Boundary Steles. Since it concerns the fate of mankind, our Heavenly Dragon Sect will assume command!"

His attitude caused a stir of dissatisfaction. True enough, the valley was close to the border, but it was also on Phoenix Cry territory.

*You're on someone else's land, but unilaterally take charge without consulting the locals? Anger simmered at his high-handed approach.*

"He who disagrees may step forward." Long Baxiang cackled, acting as the master of the place, rather than a guest.

One of the Ninesuns leaders snorted. "Long Baxiang, don't get ahead of yourself. We're sharing command together."

Long Baxiang chuckled. "It's all the same."

Like him, the Ninesuns man was a well-known figure from a first rank sect. If the gloves came off, a frontal clash could prove a challenge, so he had to put up with the Ninesuns Sky Sect, no matter how unwilling he was.

"Emperor Dragontyrant, you first rank sects are strong, but doesn't this area belong to Phoenix Cry? Shouldn't you ask our opinion first?" The obviously disguised voice had suddenly appeared out of thin air. It was impossible to detect its origin.

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

#### **Chapter 1404: Great Powers Converge**

"Who was that? Who has a problem with this? Step forward!" Long Baxiang snickered even as his expression darkened, his tone full of disdain. "Feigning anonymity within the crowd is far from heroic."

His manner was intimidatingly imposing and his harsh gaze swept past the factions outside the valley. Heavyweights shivered wherever his eyes lingered. No one dared speak up against a shameless tyrant like him. They couldn't even make eye contact.

His mouth contorted in a half-smile, half-snarl, Long Baxiang looked at Phoenix Cry's own factions.

The native factions had been sidelined for quite a while. The imperial family, the Purple Smoke Sect, the Spirit Crow Lodge and all the rest had hid themselves in a corner

"Someone said just now that this land belongs to Phoenix Cry Lower Region. Apparently, I should be seeking your opinion. I'm not an unreasonable man, so..." Long Baxiang cackled. "Well? Do any of you have opinions about us taking over this place?"

His behavior elicited the communal hatred of everyone from Phoenix Cry. Everyone wanted nothing more than to slap him across his face. This was absolutely repugnant. He was clearly committing outright robbery, yet hypocritically asked what they thought.

Phoenix Cry's imperial representative became blue in the face. He had no outlet to express how upset he was.

"Nothing, eh? So you're all fine with this then!" Long Baxiang chuckled, self-satisfied graciousness coloring his tone. "I'm not an unprincipled guy. Since this is Phoenix Cry territory, you can send a few people inside when the secret realm opens."

"I've seen a lot of rude people, but your degree of shamelessness is a first." A voice suddenly echoed in thin air.

Long Baxiang darkened, his eyes glaring in the direction of the sound.

"Tsk tsk, it looks like Pillfire's dogs have arrived." His words and gaze were both frigid as they pierced into the distance. His senses were sharp enough to know that Pillfire and its subordinate factions had arrived.

As he had expected, a horde from outside the valley swooped towards them. In the lead was Pillfire's representative, Emperor Cloudbillow. Aside from Pillfire's own men, there were people from the Eternal Celestial Capital, the Emyrean River Palace, and the Sublime Chord Temple.

The atmosphere became grave with the appearance of these new arrivals.

Pillfire's attendance alongside three more factions made their intent rather clear. Still, that Emperor Pillzenith wasn't personally leading the group was quite surprising.

It should've been Pillzenith at the head if Pillfire was determined to get their hands on what they wanted no matter what. Though Emperor Cloudbillow was prominent within the city, he wasn't intimidating enough to overcome Long Baxiang by himself.

Jiang Chen remained impassive and calm despite the sudden changes he was witnessing.

Pillzenith comes wherever there's profit to be made. Why's he turned over a new leaf this time? I thought he would have come in the flesh to seal the deal. The man's absence defied his understanding of the emperor's behavior.

However, the Pillfire group and the company of the Heavenly Dragon tyrants was reason enough for anticipation. There was the very real potential of a dogfight between these two factions.

Jiang Chen cared for neither Pillfire City nor the Heavenly Dragon Sect. The latter had also participated in the ambush on Eternal Celestial Capital territory.

Long Baxiang was none too happy about these uninvited guests. He'd heard rumors that Pillfire City was potentially going to intervene, but the haste with which they had come was astonishing.

"Long Baxiang, don't you think it's inappropriate for you to act so brazenly in other people's lands?" Emperor Cloudbillow flashed a mocking half-smile at the Heavenly Dragon Sect's representative.

Long Baxiang scanned his surroundings for a few moments to ensure that no one else was coming. He didn't care about the rest as long as Pillzenith wasn't here. Sneering, he uttered a scathing retort. "Others may have the right to call me out for my tyranny, but Pillfire City? Don't make me laugh."

"Hmph. Don't compare Pillfire to the likes of the Heavenly Dragon Sect. You're not worthy!" Emperor Cloudbillow was extremely displeased.

"What, did I hit the nail on the head?" sniggered Long Baxiang.

Emperor Cloudbillow returned a black look. "Long Baxiang, the Heavenly Dragon Sect will not be allowed to rampage freely with Pillfire on the scene!"

"That's right! The world of martial dao has its rules. There's no reason for the Heavenly Dragon Sect to cause such a disturbance in the territory of another. Anyone would disagree with such behavior."

"If you want run amok, go back to your sect and throw your weight around there!"

"You certainly talk a nice talk," scoffed Long Baxiang. "As if we're somehow in your territory instead! You're not standing up for anybody but yourself. Out with it! What ambition does Pillfire have this time?"

The Heavenly Dragon Sect wasn't the most brazen faction in the human domain. That honor belonged to Pillfire City. It was used to having its way everywhere, at any time.

"Hmph, Pillfire is the leading faction of humanity. This place is too close to the territory of the Boundary Steles. You can't be allowed to roam freely here."

Emperor Cloudbillow spoke with a supremely righteous tone, just like how Long Baxiang had done so before. He too, claimed that he was here on the behalf of the human race's fortunes and the Boundary Steles' safety.

Long Baxiang roared with laughter. "What you said sounds oddly familiar. When did Pillfire City become the embodiment of justice? That doesn't seem like your style at all."

"Enough with the insults, Long Baxiang! We've always seen the fate of humanity as our highest priority. Nothing that our city has done has ever gone against this principle."

"Oh? Is that so? Was conspiring with Emperor Shura to plot against Veluriyam's Emperor Peafowl for the sake of humanity too?" Long Baxiang snorted even as he fired back.

Uproar rippled through the crowd.

The factions present didn't trust the newcomers much. Emperor Cloudbillow's tone had been far too pretentious to the point of hypocrisy. Pillfire wasn't the kind of faction that promoted any kind of altruism either. The drastic shift to its newfound principles felt gratingly strange to most onlookers.

Was there going to be a fight between these two?

Just like Jiang Chen, many of the cultivators present looked on expectantly. They desperately wanted the two factions to engage in a fierce melee first.

"Long Baxiang, Pillfire has no interest in Veluriyam's affairs. Emperor Peafowl's disappearance has absolutely nothing to do with us. Do you think that we can't deal with your sect? Is that the reason for your baseless defamation?" Emperor Cloudbillow was furious.

"Tsk tsk, if Emperor Pillzenith had said that, I'd actually show some well-deserved fear. What do you amount to, Cloudbillow? You're not fit to make any kind of threat against me." Long Baxiang wasn't going to leave Emperor Cloudbillow's dignity intact. "Who under the heavens doesn't know about what happened to Emperor Peafowl? You think that people won't know what you did if you bury your head in the sand? There's a very good reason why Veluriyam's young lord Jiang Chen is mortal enemies with your city."

"Long Baxiang, you're a great emperor. Do you think that this idle gossip means anything?" a cultivator from the Empyrean River Palace snapped back. "The Heavenly Dragon Sect should know what's good for it and turn back. If we make a public break, the damage won't be as simple as losing face."

This was a naked threat.

Long Baxiang chortled. "The insignificant Empyrean River Palace was only able to become a first rank sect thanks to your daddy Pillfire. Is an ant attempting to threaten the Heavenly Dragon Sect?"

"So, you're not planning to take a step back eh, Long Baxiang?" Emperor Cloudbillow's voice deepened to a growl.

"We were here first," Long Baxiang declared icily. "Phoenix Cry neighbors our own. We're obligated to protect this place. Cloudbillow, get out with your lapdogs right now if you don't want a fight."

Emperor Cloudbillow burst out in laughter. "Long Baxiang, do you not know what kind of situation you are in? Are you forcing Pillfire to open fire against the Heavenly Dragon Sect?"

Long Baxiang didn't reply. Instead, he looked toward the Ninesuns Sky Sect. "What say you, my friends? We arrived first, but Pillfire wants to pull the rug out from under us. Will you agree to something as absurd as that?"

He was no fool. He knew how to read and use his circumstances to his advantage. Though Emperor Pillzenith wasn't here, Emperor Cloudbillow was no ordinary cultivator either. Plus, Pillfire had three more sects on their side. In terms of absolute strength, Pillfire had an overwhelming advantage over the Heavenly Dragon Sect.

However, an alliance between the Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Heavenly Dragon Sect could stand a chance.

Long Baxiang would never agree to giving up profit at hand to Pillfire City. That viewpoint was likely to elicit agreement from the Ninesuns Sky Sect.

“Emperor Cloudbillow,” remarked one of Ninesuns’ executives, “if you came to solve problems, then you should come up with a solution acceptable to everybody. If you’re here to take the reins, then why waste words? Let’s cut to the chase and fight then.”

Mass silence fell over everyone present.

Were the human domain’s strongest factions going to clash against one another? Wouldn’t humanity’s already mediocre conditions worsen considerably then?

Emperor Cloudbillow glared at the Ninesuns Sky Sect, frowning. “Is the Ninesuns Sky Sect also intent on opposing Pillfire?”

“Hmph, just because we don’t want to raise a fuss doesn’t mean we’re scared. Like I said, come up with a good solution if you want to solve... this. If you want to push us out? We’ll fight you to the death!” The Ninesuns Sky Sect’s attitude was clear and defiant, uncompromising to the bitter end.

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

#### **Chapter 1405: Fragrance in the Nigh**

t

Emperor Cloudbillow was rather surprised. They’d hypothesized about what would happen before coming here.

By their estimates, the Heavenly Dragon Sect was sure to staunchly oppose them. That sect would have to be taught a lesson before it retreated. The Ninesuns Sky Sect should have been wiser – or so it was thought.

It seemed now that though the Ninesuns Sky Sect was a bit more polite about it, their stance was extremely firm. They would not be denied entrance into the secret realm.

Emperor Cloudbillow pondered for a few moments. Afterwards, he nodded as if he’d found an answer.

“Pillfire has always acted in a fair and equitable manner to ensure benefit for all. Since Agarwood Valley touches upon the matter of the Boundary Steles, the proper thing would’ve been for all factions to sit down and discuss first. What good is fighting and worsening things for?”

The shift in his attitude was a shocking inversion. There was a real feeling of him caring about the wider world.

Stern consideration flickered across Jiang Chen’s heart when he heard such a disgusting performance. Pillfire had learned how to put on an act! They were beginning to hide their ambitions in public.

It seems that Pillfire City seeks to change as well. Jiang Chen braced himself. A changed Pillfire was perhaps a far more formidable opponent.

There was nothing to fear about one that rampaged according to its own wishes. A strategic and thick-skinned one, specializing in plots and conspiracies, was much more dangerous.

Since the last time he'd seen them, it would seem that Pillfire had begun to switch up its tactics. It no longer used brute force to accomplish everything.

Is the city changing because it's lost so many times to me?

As the foremost faction in pill dao, Pillfire had always given off a haughty, imperious impression. Because of this, few cultivators had any positive feelings towards them. Veluriyam's rise further ground Pillfire's reputation into the dust.

However, Pillfire still had a great many resources to rely on. If it could reflect on its problems and adjust accordingly, it would be much thornier to deal with.

"Pillzenith, that old coot... he's as wily as a fox." Cursing to himself, Jiang Chen continued watching Cloudbillow's performance.

"Phoenix Cry Lower Region is the rightful owner of Agarwood Valley. No matter what we do or what decision we come to, we shouldn't ignore the owner, hmm?"

"Moreover, most are here today because of the Boundary Steles. The human race would be negatively affected if they were to break. Thus, we have a common point of consideration. Let us peacefully discuss the details and come to a consensus in compromise."

Jiang Chen's eyes widened at what the emperor was saying.

Since when had Pillfire City become so noble? Worried about Boundary Steles and the fate of the human race?

It was most ludicrous thing he'd ever heard of!

"Long Baxiang, I know that Phoenix Cry is very close to the Heavenly Dragon Sect. As a veritable native, you should value this land as if it were your own."

"Hmph, what a waste of air," Long Baxiang retorted coldly. "My response is the same as before. The Heavenly Dragon Sect arrived first and we have no intention of being shoved out."

His attitude was staunch.

Rumors of this secret realm had spread far and wide recently. Everyone thought that there was a treasure within Agarwood Valley.

The bit about the Boundary Steles and the fate of humanity had been utter bullshit. These people had never been that great in their entire lives!

"It's fine if the Heavenly Dragon Sect doesn't want to leave. However, we must follow some rules for this expedition. We must maintain principles of fairness and law. Neither Pillfire nor the Heavenly Dragon Sect should break these principles – nor anyone else, after entering."

Emperor Cloudbillow was offering Long Baxiang an easy way out, and the latter knew it as much as anyone else.

Long Baxiang didn't think that Pillfire was afraid, per se; but that it had more important ambitions and therefore didn't want to expend energy here. He took the offered truce. "That sounds more reasonable. As long as the rules are fair, the Heavenly Dragon Sect is happy to play by them."

The fact that these large factions were dividing up the profits so brazenly left a bad taste in the mouths of those of Phoenix Cry and its neighbors.

"There's a reason why this secret realm has attracted so many people. I suggest that we first..." Emperor Cloudbillow had clearly prepared a speech beforehand. His words made perfect sense, and he was almost sincere enough to fool Jiang Chen.

It was a solid plan.

With Pillfire's typical way of doing things, ownership would be declared instantly, disallowing everyone else from entering. Selfishness had always been the city's most familiar forte.

This time however, they didn't behave like a bunch of petty tyrants. Instead, their plan was built on communal cooperation. This alerted Jiang Chen to potential danger.

None of this was the style of a Pillfire of yesteryear.

Since Phoenix Cry was the nominal owner of the land, it received a reasonable share in the number of allowed entrants. The other factions present also received a few accordingly.

"Friends, there would be complete chaos if everyone goes in at once. That's why quotas have been imposed on each faction. Now that that's been settled, there should be no further concerns, correct?"

Emperor Cloudbillow's attempt at burnishing his reputation was obvious. And indeed, there was a wave of cheers at what he had said.

"Pillfire City is quite fair! The Heavenly Dragon Sect is the real tyrant here!"

"That's right. A faction like Pillfire doesn't use their clout against the weak, yet the Heavenly Dragon Sect has no problem doing just that. I hadn't thought much of Pillfire before, but the difference after a quick comparison is palpable."

"There are many rumors of Pillfire's selfishness and despotism. Emperor Cloudbillow's behavior directly contradicts this! He's neither of those things."

"As expected of one of the leading factions in the human domain!"

Those that had received permission to enter had been indirectly bought out with the favor.

They'd forgotten that Pillfire didn't have the right to divide up entrance spots in the first place. It had overshadowed the real owner, Phoenix Cry, in order to do so. The only difference between it and the Heavenly Dragon Sect was that it had paid lip service to everyone else.

The Heavenly Dragon Sect on the other hand, had wanted exclusivity!

He's buying reputation so self-righteously. What's laughable is that Phoenix Cry is being manipulated left and right, its own will ignored entirely. Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

It wasn't a bad thing for him to be ignored along with the rest. Given his disguise and pseudonym, it was better and safer to conceal himself.

The division of entrants was rather generous. Out of apparent respect for Phoenix Cry's native factions, they were offered more than sufficient spots.

Because the Purple Smoke Sect was one of the largest factions in the region, it received a commensurate amount of opportunities.

Pillfire's representative had crushed the Heavenly Dragon Sect in influence, sorting out any disorder in the process. Every faction here was excited for the secret realm to open.

"What do we do about our lack of spots, young lord?" messaged Emperor Peerless.

"No worries, you can wait outside," replied Jiang Chen. "I'll be fine. I'll keep an eye out for you if there's any particularly amazing heritage or treasure. Pay attention to any changes from the outside."

Jiang Chen was wholly unconcerned about a team led by the likes of Emperor Cloudbillow. Any group without Pillzenith was a piece of cake to deal with.

No one objected to the current draft of the plan and the gunpowder in the air dissipated greatly.

"My friends, you must carefully consider who you're sending into the secret realm. It's not a good choice to brashly go inside if one is weak. Brawls often break out for the sake of profit and treasure. Prepare yourselves for the potential bloodshed and casualties that may come very soon."

These words were a follow-up in order to steal people's hearts.

Jiang Chen didn't pay much mind to it. Instead, he sat in a corner to observe any further developments that took place. He had made an almost certain judgment about the nature of this expedition.

Pillfire's participation in this means that there must be some conspiracy afoot. He couldn't see exactly what that was yet, so there wasn't much of a need to think about it. He would just deal with things as they arose. He sat down cross-legged to await the opening of the secret realm.

When night came, he sniffed at the air slightly. There was a strange smell wafting in the wind. Jiang Chen had the vague sensation that he'd once smelled it before, but couldn't recall where.

"Does Agarwood Valley emit a fragrance every night?" There was something very peculiar about this.

Even if a valley were filled with specimens of exotic flora, the smell should linger into the day. There had been absolutely nothing to smell during the daytime, so the nighttime scent was rather unexpected.

"Where have I smelled this scent before?" Jiang Chen tried very hard to dig up any memories he had of it.

The other cultivators noticed the intensifying fragrance in due time.

"Could there be poison of some kind? The fragrance is too strong!" shouted someone.

"Strange, very strange. There was nothing during the day. Why is it so fragrant during the night?"

"There's something off about it. Given it's sudden appearance, there must be more behind this smell."



“Isn’t this place called Agarwood Valley? Agarwood is known for its fragrance. Maybe the plants here only release fragrance at night?”

There were guesses of every variety.

Jiang Chen’s own thoughts whirred furiously as well. He instinctively knew that there was something completely wrong about the scent.

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

#### **Chapter 1406: The Strange Agarwood Valley**

Beneath the silent night sky, the fragrance quickly carpeted the valley in an eerie atmosphere, startling all those present. Cultivators tended to be more alert than most. Their hackles rising, their thoughts immediately drifted to poison. Is someone behind this?

Poison wasn’t a major art in the world of cultivation, but it was one very difficult to defend against. As recorded in the annals of history, it’d humbled and even killed many towering figures. Hence, many despised this unpredictable art, and also feared it nonetheless.

It was also Jiang Chen’s first guess.

As a pill master renowned throughout the planes, he’d studied them thoroughly in his past life. He understood them far better than anyone else. The lethal ones, the most secretive ways of applying them, the antidotes...

His brain contained an encyclopedia of toxins.

Of course, he feared no poisons thanks to the Golden Cicada blood. But hidden further away, Emperor Peerless and the Jiao brothers weren’t immune, so he stayed alert and immediately analyzed the scent.

Surprisingly, it had none of a poison’s virulence. Is the smell noxious at all?

He frowned. The scent had appeared so suddenly that he’d been certain it was dangerous, but it seemed his first hunch had been mistaken. Is it simple coincidence? Perhaps it comes from a rare plant inside the valley?

The elites at the scene seemed to have realized as well that the fragrance was benign.

“Everyone, it’s harmless. Perhaps it’s even a clue?”

“Indeed, no need to panic.” Outside the valley, the restless crowd slowly settled back down.

Jiang Chen observed the great sects from a secret spot, looking pensive. Is someone trying to drive away the competition? That would make things even more interesting.

However, this was mere idle conjecture. The prominent sect figures were all wary and vigilant. None of them appeared suspect.

Jiang Chen’s suspicions slowly vanished, but the scent still puzzled him. No matter how harmless, there had to be a reason behind it. He couldn’t lower his guard.

The night was fated to be a tense one.

No one dared breathe too loud, as if a apocalyptic demon god was waiting inside the endless darkness, ready to pounce and swallow them whole. When the sun rose again in the east, the smell suddenly vanished without a trace.

Even Jiang Chen was shaken by this development.

“Is it afraid of sunlight?” Countless possibilities whirled in his mind. However, the arrival of the sun didn’t bring with it an entrance to the secret realm.

According to Phoenix Cry’s locals, the secret realm would create a passageway of its own volition once it opened. Yet none had appeared in spite of the long wait. It would seem the time wasn’t ripe yet.

The day slowly passed amidst the tense atmosphere. The fragrance reappeared when night fell, even denser than before.

“The f\*ck, it’s here again. It’s even worse tonight. Is it trying to ruin our noses?”

“I know, right? For the first time, I finally realize a strong fragrance can be a huge torture.”

The dialogue exposed the crowd’s inner feelings. They knew full well that it was innocuous, but they couldn’t help being afraid of its mysterious origins.

Night turned into day again, then back into night.

Ever punctual, the scent reappeared night after night. By the seventh night, quite a few cultivators had chosen to leave the valley. The physical assault on their nostrils was one thing, but many couldn’t endure the ever-present pressure and dread of the unknown.

Jiang Chen was as calm as ever. It might not be a bad thing if it truly was a poison. He’d kept a watchful eye on the other cultivators during the last few days while he studied the scent.

The crowd had thinned by now and those remaining were clustered tightly together. Many of the former swarm of wandering cultivators had fled.

Those who remained mostly belonged to the great sects and had made themselves immune to the fragrance. For example, many had chosen to seal off all of their senses. But it left them vulnerable, empty bodies without a soul. That was an unacceptable solution for the young lord.

When twilight descended again, a disturbance suddenly ran through the crowd. “Look! Look inside the valley!”

A strange scene unfolded in front of their eyes.

A scarlet mist rose in the depths of Agarwood Valley. Seen from afar, the valley seemed to be roiling with a fiery blaze. One couldn’t help being suffocated by its mystique.

“What’s the matter?” Jiang Chen frowned. He could sense the eerie aura emanating from within.

Those present held their breath, unsettled.

Bewildered, they suddenly saw a red, blinding light flash at the mouth of the valley. Like a sharp blade, it cleaved a path inside. As the light dimmed, an enormous entrance came into view.

“It’s open! We can finally enter!”

“Is that the passageway to the rumored secret realm?”

“Fortune favors the brave. Let’s go!” Without the slightest hesitation, the great sects scrambled inside.

Jiang Chen followed them, but once past the valley’s mouth, he felt an enormous heat radiating from its depths, as if rejecting them. However, it couldn’t stop the sects’ fevered charge.

Mixed with the crowd, Jiang Chen was very taken aback. With his formidable consciousness, the heat posed no threat to him, but he vaguely sensed a colossal power hiding within, one that didn’t welcome their presence.

However, it wasn’t the only entity he could perceive. Another one seemed to be luring them inside, as if summoning them.

Jiang Chen puzzled over the baffling duality.

Was it a mirage? But his instincts had always proved keen. It was worth trusting them, no matter how strange the situation.

“Perhaps there are truly two opposing forces inside? One rejects us, while the other wants even more of us to enter?” He stayed his course, despite his many conjectures. At this stage, how could he give up exploring Agarwood’s many mysteries?

As the crowd went deeper in the valley, the intense, burning light seemed to approach him. The temperature climbed continuously until the very air seemed to be burning.

“Zi Tan, did Phoenix Cry explore this secret realm before? Did the same phenomena appear when it opened?” he transmitted.

“Well... It’s impossible to answer. None of those we’ve sent ever made it back alive...” The forefather’s voice quavered, betraying his fear of the dangers awaiting in the secret realm.

The air had been a gentle warmth at first, but now blazed like a bonfire. Even a bonfire burned gently at first before suddenly flaring. Agarwood was giving off a similar feeling. The previously tolerable temperature had now become smothering.

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

#### **Chapter 1407: The Mysterious Light Pillars**

Nothing but flames came into view when Jiang Chen fully expanded his God’s Eye. The heat was rising so rapidly that it felt like the surrounding air had spontaneously combust.

The weaker cultivators began to crumble beneath the heat. Sweat trickled unceasingly down from their foreheads.

“Damn! Is there a huge lake of lava underneath Agarwood Valley?” Someone amongst the crowd complained.

“Master, the heat is unbearable!”

“It’s so hot! I feel like I’m going to explode!”

“This place is clearly hell! How can anyone mistake it for a secret realm?” The crowd complained endlessly.

Jiang Chen was standing amongst the crowd. He noticed that the weaker cultivators had already begun to lose heart.

The Purple Smoke Sect’s forefather was also sneaking glances at Jiang Chen from the corner of his eyes, observing if he should advance or retreat. A crack had likely emerged in the forefather’s dao heart.

“Zi Tan, stop looking at me. If you want to advance, then stop trembling in your boots. If retreating is your answer, then you should make haste.” Jiang Chen warned through his consciousness. “Hesitation is deadly in places like these. Those who wish to advance yet also retreat die the quickest.”

People who hesitated during dangerous situations did often die the quickest because they couldn’t focus on dealing with the danger itself. The more one was afraid of something, the more likely one’s fear would approach.

The entrance was now shrouded by an impenetrable fog. They could no longer discern the direction of whence they came from.

Out of nowhere, pillars of light suddenly shot far into the clouds. They looked like rainbows originating from the deepest parts of the valley. The bedazzling glow was extremely mesmerizing.

“One, two, three... seven pillars in total!”

There were tiny shimmering fragments of gold, silver, purple, and green inside the pillars...

Sparks and motes of light flew, the cascading radiance like a suddenly opened chest filled of treasures and jewels.

“What is that?”

“Tsk tsk. Look at how mesmerizing it is! A priceless treasure must be emerging!”

“Listen! What’s that sound?”

“Ah! I hear it too!”

A majestic and sonorous melody could be heard in the distance. Its grandeur was comparable to waves crashing onto the beach, a flock of cranes crooning in the skies, and the cosmic hymns of countless gods.

The crowd was completely enthralled by it.

Jiang Chen however, remained as nonchalant as ever as his consciousness was far stronger than the average cultivator. In fact, no great emperor could even hope to compete.

The dignified melody continued to reverberate in the air. Peculiarly enough, there was a strange rhythm within that could influence one’s mood.

Such powerful strength of consciousness! Alarm filled Jiang Chen. Like a savage beast facing attack, the chain seal in his consciousness suddenly took on a defensive stance.

Every time this happened, it meant that the situation was awfully amiss.

*Is the melody actually a trap for the consciousness?* Jiang Chen stared suspiciously at the glowing pillars.

In the eyes of those present, one could clearly glimpse the undertones of obsession hidden behind the confusion. Their faces were flushed red and the melody had brought their minds to a state of extreme stimulation.

A chill ran down Jiang Chen's spine. Cultivators would only enter that state during the extremest of extremes, whether good and bad. For example, cultivators could enter a state of wild euphoria when on the edge of a breakthrough. Inspired by a new realm in martial dao, that state would then become an extremely potent motivator.

However, this was clearly not the case here.

The other was during extreme danger, such as when their minds were being taken over or influenced in some way.

Jiang Chen could tell that it was the latter. He raised his guard even further as he had a feeling that Agarwood Valley was a lot more dangerous than any secret realm he'd ever entered.

The Maze Realm Autumn Hunt in Skylareland Kingdom, the Hidden Dragon Trials of the sixteen alliance kingdom, Regal Pill Palace's Mt. Rippling Mirage, and the Paramount Realm were only a few examples of secret realms he'd been to, each realm more extraordinary than the one before.

However, he'd never been to any that was quite as mysterious as this one. He made great efforts to calm down and block out the music. Fortunately, the chain seal had been an insulator to prevent the sound from advancing beyond mere irritation.

Right now, he was a genius disciple from the Purple Smoke Sect. Even if he did realize something, it would be most inappropriate for him to make any outlandish moves. Doing so would be like painting a target on his head.

He glanced at the heavyweights of the great factions. They seemed to be observing something. Due to the peculiarities of the situation, it'd be most inappropriate to charge in blindly.

"Hmm? Do you feel it? The temperature has dropped a little."

"You're right! It's no longer as hot as before!"

"Haha! Did the light pillars suppress the heat?"

The surrounding temperature had indeed dropped a little. Even the crimson red of the air dimmed slightly, seemingly countered by the seven glowing pillars.

Yet, the towering pillars continued to be as eye-catching and mesmerizing as ever, standing out with resolution and creating vortexes of incandescent beauty. They were like lighthouses, guiding the cultivators to the right path.

The temperature was still far from normal, but it was now within acceptable range for these cultivators.

“Doaist Cloudbillow, shall we proceed?” A Pillfire cultivator glanced at Emperor Cloudbillow enthusiastically.

Cloudbillow responded by turning towards the others. “What does everyone else think?”

“I agree that we should proceed!”

“Yes! There must be a heavenly secret behind these light pillars. For all we know, it might be an ancient realm that could change the course of the human domain!”

“Indeed! Just look at the majestic grandeur of these pillars! An extraordinary ancient realm must be hidden behind them! The human domain’s heritage is growing weaker with each passing generation, there’s no reason for us to hesitate in front of this fortuitous encounter!”

“Wealth can only be obtained with risk! Let’s proceed!”

The crowd were surprisingly unanimous in their decision. They’d been thoroughly tantalized by the glowing pillars. None of them would go back at this point for the world.

Most great emperors had a fair number of experience exploring secret realms. But even the most experienced among them had never seen one as vast and impressive as this.

The pillars seemed to connect the sky and earth, a bridge that extended into the void. The towering sight paired with the enthralling melody coalesced into a singular notion -- forward, forward!

There was no place to go but forward!

Emperor Cloudbillow nodded. “Very well. Let us proceed forward then.”

Pillfire led the way, while the Empyrean River Palace, Sublime Chord Temple, and Eternal Celestial Capital followed. They’d completely submitted to the faction.

However, the Ninesuns Sky Sect and Heavenly Dragon Sect didn’t follow Cloudbillow. They had their own plans. The two first rank sects seemed to have formed a pact. If Pillfire tried to oppress either of them, they might act together.

There were over a dozen second and third rank sects from the surrounding areas, but they were merely a pile of loose sand due to the lack of leadership. They were fated to be sidelined, never to stand beneath the spotlight.

The crowd continued onwards. Jiang Chen blended seamlessly with Phoenix Cry’s party.

The deeper they penetrated, the louder and clearer the melody became. Suddenly, they seemed to have stepped into an ancient god’s realm. The world was composed of pure, multi-colored lazurite glass. The seven colors of the rainbow were now center stage.

*Hmm?* Jiang Chen was taken aback. Why had the scenery abruptly changed?

The sea of fire and plumes of smoke were almost completely gone, replaced by a land that teemed with treasure. Benevolent clouds parted, allowing auspicious and peaceful light to filter down.

The leading party came to a complete halt again. The sudden change took them completely off guard.

“Tsk tsk. What is this place? Why does it feel like I’ve left the mortal realm and entered the world of gods?”

“Was this how beautiful our Divine Abyss Continent was in the ancient era?”

“This is so exciting! To think that a treasure trove is actually located in the most remote of areas. Quite ironic, if you think about it.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. There were no upper or lower regions in the ancient era. For all we know, this might have been humanity’s holy land in the past!”

“Mm. Makes sense. That could very well be right. The human domain was filled with powerful experts during the cataclysm. Just about any place could potentially be a holy land by today’s standards.”

“One can definitely find heaven-defying treasures and heritage in a place like this!”

Like an echo chamber, the crowd had nothing but praise for the valley. Fanaticism colored their eyes and they wanted nothing more than to dive right in and loot the secret realm.

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

#### **Chapter 1408: A Secret Realm Fading In and Out of Sigh**

Jiang Chen observed impassively from the back of the crowd. He wasn’t deluded by the display of luxury before him. Any kind of scenery could be forged by the strongest experts. Sometimes, all it took was a single formation, a small trick, or art.

In the world of martial dao, what one saw with physical eyes was never necessarily the truth. Especially given the present circumstances, what he was seeing was extra likely to be fabricated.

If this place really was an oasis, why hadn’t anyone from Phoenix Cry’s expeditions returned alive?

That was utterly illogical!

Though he could only see peaceful harmony before him, Jiang Chen felt an unnameable irritation. The chain seal in his consciousness was on high alert.

With each increase in his own strength and consciousness, the seal in his consciousness became dearer and more familiar to him. It was no longer mysterious and impenetrable. This seal likely held the secret to his rebirth and reincarnation; he just didn’t have the ability to unseal its riddles yet.

The seal had unquestionably protected him at crucial times and warned him of impending danger without fail.

Currently, the chain seal was clearly much warier than it usually was. It was irrelevant that Jiang Chen couldn’t read its entire meaning; he understood the hint that this place hid a plethora of evils under its serene surface.

Above the seven pillars of light, waterfalls of radiance began to pour down. The radiance shimmered with iridescence, glassy and crystalline in their splendor.

Eye-catching ripples flickered across the screens of light, and many images with them. Scenes of the divines and demons, of arms and weaponry, of ancient beasts, exotic flora, celestial palaces and starry seas...

The images were as beautiful as they were transient. The interplay of light and shadow shocked every observing cultivator, their mouths agape in an attempt to take more of it in.

Aside from Jiang Chen, everyone's heart was captivated by what they had seen before them. They collectively shivered in anticipation. Ambition snaked into them like fast-moving vines. They were champing at the bit to enter the secret realm and see what ancient mysteries it held.

"Look, look, what's that inside?!" someone screamed suddenly.

Everyone's gazes hurriedly focused inside. Within the veil of light was a gargantuan palace complex, glowing with aureate brilliance. The seven giant pillars of light originated from the palace like seven defending stars, shooting into the heavens.

"This must be a sacred place of the ancients!"

"We're rich! A secret realm like this appears only once every ten thousand years."

"Tsk tsk, look at how glorious that palace is. It must have been the best of the best even back then."

"There has to be ancient heritages and treasure within!"

More and more glimpsed the palace that was peeking through the veil. Like the tip of an iceberg, it gave plenty of room for imagination as to what was beneath the surface.

Emperor Cloudbillow didn't wait for the others to ask his opinion. "Let's all go and see," he called out.

Pillfire's men were quick, but the Heavenly Dragon Sect and the Ninesuns Sky Sect were just a step behind them.

All the biggest factions rushed forward. The remaining ones piled after them, attempting to secure a reasonably advantageous vantage point for themselves. They couldn't compete with Pillfire City and the first rank sects, but mutual competition was still possible.

"Come, let's go see as well," transmitted Jiang Chen to the Purple Smoke Sect's forefather.

Having been warned by the young lord earlier, the forefather didn't dare make any fast moves. He nodded only after receiving the instructions. "After them, everyone!"

Jiang Chen and Phoenix Cry's team were able to catch up rather quickly because of a spatial restriction in their way. Like a heavenly denunciation, it lay in the explorers' path and separated them from their beloved treasure.

Emperor Cloudbillow looked coldly upon the restriction before him.

It was a river-like obstacle, save that the water within was replaced with surging lava. The earth itself seemed to be boiling, and geysers of magma rose up several hundred meters from time to time with incredible momentum.



This restriction seemed to be the final blockade before entering the secret realm proper.

Truthfully, it look very terrifying. The gushing lava and boiling magma appeared hot enough to melt the entire world around them. The fearsome aura they exuded was plenty intimidating.

Standing before the restriction, even Emperor Cloudbillow and his great emperor fellows were awed by the waves of heat smashing into their faces.

“Are we supposed to fly past it?” Someone piped up, looking doubtfully at Emperor Cloudbillow.

“Don’t be hasty,” replied the great emperor in a deep voice. “Let’s wait and see.”

No cultivator who entered this secret realm was ordinary. Sage realm was the lowest level among the entrants, so flight was of no issue. The restriction was clearly not something that one could simply fly over, however.

“Daoist Cloudbillow, this restriction looks quite extraordinary. I don’t fancy our chances if we simply fly over. Shall we send someone to scout it out first?”

This was tantamount to ordering someone to commit suicide. Because Pillfire’s expedition team was filled with elites, it wasn’t appropriate to send any of them.

Emperor Cloudbillow frowned slightly, muttering a few sentences to a great emperor near him. Said great emperor inclined his head a little, a strange smile curving his lips. He suddenly walked out from the front of the group into its rear.

“Friends, there’s a restriction up ahead,” he smiled faintly to the factions following. “There’s something odd about it. Is any one of you willing to scout ahead for us?”

“Don’t say that I didn’t tell you about this, there’s a lot of benefits to being a scout. Anyone that manages to pass the restriction can keep any treasure he gets his hands on. That’s a promise you can trust us to deliver on. Pillfire guarantees that scouts’ rights shall not be infringed upon.”

Because Pillfire City’s men were too valuable, none of them was viable as a scout. However, there were always fearless people amongst the other cultivators present. Sometimes, one had to acquire riches through danger.

Pillfire had everything all planned out.

Sadly, those who’d entered the secret realm were no fools. Pillfire had led the way all this time, and yet they were loath to send one of their own to scout. There was something fishy about this.

All several hundred of the lagging cultivators presented difficult expressions. None of them was willing to volunteer.

It was easy enough to guess that the mortality rate of scouting approached a hundred percent. Treasure was enticing, but not enough to throw away all caution to the wind. If one couldn’t guarantee one’s own safety, what was the point of taking everything and dying right after?

The treasure would then fall to another anyways.

The Pillfire great emperor waited quite a while, but no one stepped forward from the crowd in the rear. This incensed him somewhat.

“It seems that none of you deems the chance to scout as valuable. What use do we have for you pieces of trash, then? Are we supposed to let you take a share of the treasure inside for free?”

The great emperor’s tone became increasingly frigid. “I’m giving you one more chance. If you don’t take it, then go back to where you came from. Cowards aren’t fit to possess the riches of this secret realm!”

Among the crowd, Jiang Chen found Pillfire’s behavior pretty amusing. It was fine to let others risk their lives, but only they were allowed to take the first share of the treasure.

Cowards? It wasn’t bravery, but foolhardiness to run to certain death.

The scene was complete crickets. No one stepped up because no one wanted to die. Even the slowest of men saw that Pillfire was picking out hapless fodder to be sacrificed.

The lack of volunteers after a prolonged wait displeased Emperor Cloudbillow. He transmitted a few words to the great emperor he’d sent.

The emperor’s expression also darkened. “Alright,” he nodded, “if you don’t think that kind of opportunity is valuable, then you don’t know what’s good for you. From this moment forward, Pillfire is claiming this valley. We represent the Upper Eight Regions, the pinnacle of the human domain. Unless you are from a faction there, you must depart immediately. Otherwise, we will do it for you.”

This was an ultimatum. They had to either send people in or leave!

It was also brutal and straightforward.

There were perhaps a hundred factions that had entered Agarwood Valley. Each faction had a decently sized team, which meant that the entire entourage was extremely large. Pillfire City’s original intent wasn’t to let them have a share of the treasure either. They were supposed to have been the perfect cannon fodder in a time of need.

Alas, none of those let in had such self realization. This upset the Upper Eight Regions’ factions greatly.

“The way ahead is not obvious, honored great emperors,” a representative from a second rank sect said humbly. “Anyone that ventures in now does so to their deaths. In theory, we second-rate factions should present a token of our sincerity, but no one is willing to actively sacrifice themselves. I think we don’t need to go in all at once. A few chosen to do so should be enough.”

“Hmph. You don’t have even one right now, much less a few.” The Pillfire emperor smoldered with anger.

“We can choose right now. Anyone that is chosen mustn’t shirk their duty.”

“How are we supposed to pick? There’s no way of doing that that’s fair! I think we should draw lots.”

These second-rate factions were beginning to acquiesce. The giant factions from the Upper Eight Regions could very easily clear out the room despite their disadvantage in numbers.

There were too many first rank sects here today, plus something as gargantuan as Pillfire City. Too many great emperors existed on the other side. This was the fundamental reason for the second-rate factions' lack of resistance.

### Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

#### **Chapter 1409: Cannon Fodder to the Fore**

Amidst the crowd, Jiang Chen snickered as he watched Pillfire's performance. It was changing its tune very quickly.

Before now, there'd been a focus on an honorable and respectable attitude. When profit was in sight however, it instantly reverted back to its old ways, dispensing with all pretense. The essence of its conduct was self-gain through any means necessary.

There was no reason for the Heavenly Dragon Sect and the Ninesuns Sky Sect to oppose this motion. They watched Pillfire's performance with smiles on their faces, their tacit support evident.

The first rank sects had brought their own teams of elites. Losing any one member would be a tremendous blow. There was also no reason for them to actively scout ahead, given the risks.

Large sects always preferred others sacrificing themselves and dying on the sects' behalf. There was plenty of cannon fodder to go around here, no?

How could those second-rate factions want a cut of the prize without paying something for that privilege?

The pressure on the inferior factions mounted. They could only begin discussions among themselves on what course of action to take. They knew that if they didn't take stock of the situation, they would be pushed out for sure. The secret realm and its treasure would be barred to them forever.

"Everyone, it's not the time to debate about fairness. The greatest fairness in the world of martial dao is survival of the fittest. The heavenly dao is just. You're provided according to what your strength deserves. We either send out a few scouts right now, or we're thrown out from the secret realm. What do we do?"

"What the hell can we do? At the end of the day, they're stronger than us. If we expend enough men to sort out the way ahead, we'll still be called upon if there are future problems ahead. We'll probably all be dead before we see any treasure!"

"That's right. We were the ones here first. Why do we have to go to our deaths?"

"Shut up!" One of the second rank sect's giants criticized angrily. "There's no point wasting words here. If you have the balls for it, why not seek justice for everyone by arguing with the Upper Eight factions?"

Please. Argue with the Upper Eight factions? That wasn't any less suicidal than simply scouting ahead. Pillfire quite obviously had the initiative.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect and the Heavenly Dragon Sect didn't seem to want to offer opposition at this juncture. That meant those who obeyed lived, and the rest perished. The logic was as simple as that; survival of the fittest was a universal law.

The second rank sects immediately began to plot how they could foist scouting duty onto even weaker factions.

Aside from the Upper Eight's leading factions, there were second, third, even fourth rank sects as well. The Purple Smoke Sect and the Spirit Crow Lodge were very good examples.

However, the remaining factions exploded with fury when the second rank sects expressed their intent.

They were unquestionably fearful of the Upper Eight's largest factions, yes. But since when could second rank sects throw their weight around, huh? What right did they have to attempt shirking their issues and fob them off onto slightly weaker factions?

There weren't many second rank sects present. Third and fourth rank sects composed the majority.

"It's normal for the Upper Eight Regions to give orders as the leaders of the human domain. What gives you the authority or the right to send us to our deaths?"

"That's right! We might as well not go in at all then. How come second rank sects are allowed to lord it over us too?"

"Exactly. Our chances of getting anything are very low. Why should we be cannon fodder for them?"

"Cut the blabber. Let's fight it out. You think all of us added together can't beat a few second rank sects?"

"Yeah, let's get 'em!"

Chaos brewed in the proceedings. When the weaker factions found out that the second rank sects were planning to force them to scout out of self-preservation, they erupted in rage.

No one could do anything about how powerful the Upper Eight factions were. These second rank sects were all from the neighboring regions though. They didn't belong to the Upper Eight Regions. Why were they expecting any special treatment?

"We can draw lots, but the second rank sects shouldn't have any special treatment!"

"That's right! The second rank sects don't lead the Upper Eight Regions. They don't qualify for preferential treatment!"

Only twenty percent of those assembled belonged to the second rank sects. The remaining eighty were from lower factions. Third rank sects like the Purple Smoke Sect, for example. These factions weren't to be underestimated. Most importantly, their numbers advantage meant that they weren't going to just eat the loss.

Jiang Chen watched impassively as the situation begin to spiral out of control. No matter how they chose, it was highly doubtful that they'd end up picking him. Not that he minded scouting ahead, regardless.

A valid concern for others wasn't necessarily the case for him. The restriction looked terrifying, but it was also flawed. Did the flaw exist originally, though? Or had it appeared with the passage of time?

Though Jiang Chen didn't fear scouting at all, he couldn't exactly volunteer himself either. Being overly eager would only attract unwanted attention.

He didn't want to reveal his identity so early. Drawing attention would also play into the opposite of that.

Amidst a chorus of protests, the Upper Eight Regions began to speak once more. They ordered the second rank sects to wise up and avoid privileging themselves; they had no such right given current company.

The second rank sects were displeased by these orders, but there was nothing they could do. It was finally decided that three people would be chosen by lot.

That was a minuscule portion of the total population present. Therefore, there was no significant resistance to this proposition. Everyone in the world of martial dao was confident in their own fortunes. One would have to be tremendously unlucky to be picked as one out of so many peers.

Regardless of how low the probability was, there were three picked in the end. The unlucky louts were pulled out after the lots were drawn. None were from Phoenix Cry Lower Region.

The trio wanted to renege immediately after being picked, but the watchful eyes of the great emperors from the Upper Eight Regions crushed their thoughts of resistance.

If they showed any dissension, those great emperors would kill them in one sweep!

They were dead either way.

Death was absolutely certain if they tried to go back on the results.

If they scouted ahead and were lucky enough to pass the restriction, whatever treasure they got in the secret realm was theirs to keep. It was quite reasonable for a successful scout to have first pick of the spoils.

"Listen up, you three. As long as you pass the restriction, any treasure you obtain within will remain yours. We can guarantee your rightful ownership to a point. However, any particularly special treasure – the kind that can alter the fate of humanity – should probably not be touched. Your ability and fortunes are insufficient to control treasures like that. They'll simply bring misfortune instead."

There was nothing for any of the three people to say. They could only nod to show that they understood what they had to do. It was just scouting ahead, right?

Their life and future prosperity was on the line!

Better to actively push into the danger of the abyss than be pushed by another. Survival seemed bleak now, but...

The Upper Eight Regions were quite generous. Pillfire City's Emperor Cloudbillow gave out several pills to each of the three men. In particular, the heat avoidance pills were some of the best that the city could refine.

The three scouts didn't expect Pillfire's Emperor Cloudbillow to be so friendly. Not only was he encouraging them, but also giving them pills for protection?

"No matter which of you passes through the restriction, anyone that manages to return will receive a handsome gift from me. I can even consider taking you under Pillfire City's wing."

What?

Pillfire City's wing?

All three scouts felt their hearts jump. They were at one of the lowest points in their lives, a moment that made them utterly weak and desperate.

They had been designated cannon fodder because of the weakness of their own sects. This was the original sin of any faction that couldn't claim significance.

Emperor Cloudbillow's promise of admission into Pillfire was painfully desirable for people in their position.

"Go on. I won't go back on my word. As long as you give all the treasures you get to me, I guarantee you will become my confidantes."

This ignited the fighting spirits of the three scouts.

"Let's go!"

Exchanging looks, the trio transformed into three streaks of moving light, shooting towards the heavens and the opposite side.

All three men felt their scalps tingle at the sight of the boiling, bubbling matter beneath them. Their first thought was to fly as high as possible to maximize their distance from the danger. Only that could alleviate some of their fear.

Alas, flying high didn't mean that they would escape or surpass the restriction. The restriction itself had terrifying offensive strength that was ready to spring forth at any moment. The lava wasn't the only risk factor.

One of the three attempted to shoot past the restriction without hesitation.

Unfortunately for him, a chain of embers dozens of yards long swept up the interloper like a fiery dragon. Not losing much of its momentum, it swooped downward, disappearing into the bubbling magma.

In the next moment, a shrill shriek pierced through from the lava.

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

#### **Chapter 1410: A Domineering Long Baxiang**

The scream instantly affected the other two. Fearful of the fiery dragon forming in the air, both men descended slightly. Their descent brought the lava underneath closer; close enough to hear the boiling and popping of the lava below. Countless geysers spurted high enough to touch the tips of their nose.

The parched air formed crests of hot air that could melt the world, suffocating the scouts with blazing heat. They could almost see the moisture in their bodies evaporate before their eyes.

The two of them felt that the restriction would be a bit weaker lower down. Their perturbed minds were relieved a little bit by this.

At this time, something floated out from the lava beneath into their field of view.

A skeleton, to be exact, one that had been a living, breathing person only a few breaths ago. His flesh had been consumed by the lava!

Terror pulsed through the two survivors' hearts. They wanted only to accelerate on through as quickly as possible.

Alas, the restriction was a muddy morass. The more one sunk in, the harder it was to move. The two men slowed down the deeper they went in. Finally, they were so sluggish that they could barely move another inch.

Seeing the burden with which the two scouts walked, everyone became thoughtful. It looked like they each bore the weight of a mountain on their backs, so great was the pressure.

"Daoist Cloudbillow, the restriction really does look like the trapping, hindering kind. It doesn't seem like they'll make it."

Neither scout had particularly advanced cultivation. One was sage realm, the other half-step emperor. Their strength didn't help them very much in the middle of the restriction and they didn't look like they were going to get free any time soon.

Observing the restriction in secret, Jiang Chen muttered inwardly to himself. The restriction has some spatial properties, huh. It won't attack through material means alone... there's a dimensional component as well. Those two guys are both blind and inflexible. Not a good combination, if they want to pass through...

Even as that thought flickered through his mind, the sage realm cultivator suddenly shrieked. He was already sweating buckets and appeared to have little energy left. Immediately after the shriek, he spasmed as if electrified, then froze like trapped by an invisible force.

His body plummeted downward, taken by something intangible. It was submerged in the boiling lava with a splash.

There was another shriek. Within moments, another skeleton floated to the top.

The death of the second scout made the last cultivator very nervous. He saw that his compatriot hadn't been attacked by the restriction at all. Instead, he'd lost his balance after using up all of his energy and then fell to his death.

The last man standing was half-step emperor realm, which meant that he was considerably stronger than the other two.

From Jiang Chen's point of view however, he didn't have much longer to live. He gave the last guy about fifteen minutes before he broke.

Just as the young lord surmised, the man was a trapped beast in the spatial restriction. Fifteen minutes hadn't yet elapsed when he fell into the terrifying lava after expending all his energy. A third skeleton soon appeared in the crimson flow.

Color drained from everyone's when they saw what'd happened to the scouts.

This was the result of exploring ahead!

Even the half-step emperor had met a cruel end. More than half of those present were lower than emperor realm. None of them were so fearless as to want to scout any more.

Emperor Cloudbillow furrowed his brow at this. The three scouts' attempt had revealed little about the restriction. The pills he'd given them were utterly wasted.

The emperor glared at the omnipotent restriction until he was blue in the face. He didn't quite know what to do. Would great emperors do better than those three foiled cultivators? In theory, a great emperor would do a lot better. Still, he had no guarantee whatsoever of that hypothesis.

Because of how ineffectual the scouting sortie had been, exactly how much strength the restriction held was completely unknown.

Without that information, Emperor Cloudbillow wasn't going to risk himself.

"Send more to scout, higher level this time!" he transmitted.

The second-rate factions exploded at hearing that they had to send more. Hadn't three people just died?

"No way, hells no! No matter how many we send, they'll just all die. Why should we? Shouldn't it be the Upper Eight Regions' turn?"

"That's right, we've lost three already. It should be the Upper Eight Regions' turn to risk their hides."

"Quite so. If the Upper Eight Regions are the leaders of the human domain, shouldn't they take the lead at a time like this? If not, what kind of leaders would they be?"

The clamor of the crowd revealed their heated emotions. No one wanted to scout on ahead any more. The way the three scouts had died was just too depressing.

The restriction was entirely uncooperative. The number of lives that went in didn't seem to matter. Such a fearsome restriction was impossible to pass!

A wave of anguish rippled through the crowd. After the three tragic deaths that had taken place right in front of their eyes, most of the observers had suffered significant trauma. No matter how much profit they were promised, no one was interested in scouting ahead. Who was willing to go to their certain doom?

The situation was at a standstill. Emperor Cloudbillow was thick-skinned, but intimidation and threats weren't necessarily useful at this point any more. If he pushed too hard, the second-rate factions could very well riot. Even if he didn't, it wasn't like the Upper Eight Regions could stop them from leaving straight up.



Jiang Chen pretended not to see any of the changes in public perception. His thoughtful eyes were focused on the restriction alone, mulling over it.

The restriction has obvious powerful spatial properties. It uses the restrictive power of space and the intersection of time to grind to death any cultivator that ventures into it. The lava isn't the killing mechanism, but rather the pulverizing force within.

Though the restriction's mysteries were hidden from an outsider like him, Jiang Chen was able to come to a few educated conclusions after some observation.

Though Pillfire City hadn't yet raged at the overexcited crowd below, Heavenly Dragon Sect's Long Baxiang was not so patient. He rushed into the crowd, grabbing two random emperor realm cultivators.

Without another word, he flew towards the restriction.

The two emperor realm experts were white in the face. "Senior, mercy! Senior... we don't hold any grudge with you..."

Long Baxiang was mostly expressionless, save for the slight sneer at the corner of his mouth. "Begging me is pointless. You should beg for the heavens to give you mercy... or yourself maybe, for luck."

Saying this, he shook both arms, pushing the two emperors into the range of the restriction.

The two men thus unwillingly entered it.

As emperor realm cultivators, both quickly tossed their hatred aside after being thrown in. Only a fleeting moment of panic and despair preceded a careful search for a way out. They were already in trouble. Now wasn't the time to be upset at Long Baxiang. They needed to make it out alive first!

There was no retreat after entering. The only way out was forward.

The two cultivators were quite a bit stronger than the previous three scouts; and yet, the restriction was still quite formidable and limiting. However, they dealt with it in a much more methodical way. They didn't brute force it, instead attempting to find some sort of order.

"These two have learned from the mistakes of the three before them. They're going with the flow rather than struggling. However, it's impossible to pass by exerting so little effort without finding the truth of the restriction. You can't get to your destination by drifting along a river! This is a swamp. As long as you don't actively try to leave, you'll just mire yourself in deeper and deeper. It's only a matter of time..."

That was Jiang Chen's judgment.

"Daoist Cloudbillow, what do you think of these two?" One of the great emperors of the Emyrean River Palace blurted out.

Cloudbillow frowned at the restriction above. The two emperors were like snails crawling sluggishly along. He didn't particularly approve of this passive approach to exploration.

At a time like this however, maybe it was the best they could hope for.

Long Baxiang stood at the very front, his eyes fixated on the two scouts. He'd hurled them in after grabbing them randomly from the crowd. He wanted to know very much if they could actually pass the restriction.

Nobody was realistically optimistic about their chances. The two were performing much better than the three before them, but they were obviously struggling very hard.

Even if they could minimize energy expenditure, the restriction would eat away at their stores of strength sooner or later. They needed to either break through the restriction or end up just like their predecessors.

The two emperor realm cultivators were having an absolutely difficult time. No matter how much they labored, they felt their bodies becoming more leaden by the second. Every step they took forward was harder and harder.

They were still wrestling with their predicament, but had realized in their heart of hearts that their fate was likely no different from the previous three. They were on the brink of despair, ready to crumble at any minute.

They were at the end of their rope.

Time passed minute by minute. The two emperors slowed down more and more. Everyone's hearts sank into their stomachs.

The restriction wasn't planning on letting anyone through. If an emperor realm cultivator couldn't do much, could a great emperor really do drastically better? No one was sure of the answer to that question.