

Three Realms 1451

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

Chapter 1451: A Trade of Hostages

Jiang Chen hadn't expected this particular tactic from Emperor Pillzenith. It was patently ridiculous that the great emperor was threatening him with the second sectmaster of the Moon God Sect.

The young lord burst into exasperated laughter. "Are you telling me that you want to trade for your son with the Moon God Sect's second sectmaster, Pillzenith?"

"I'm only repaying you in spades, brat!" Pillfire's leader retorted coldly.

"Hahaha!" Jiang Chen roared with mirth. "You're truly shameless, Pillzenith. I thought the Moon God Sect was one of your more distant allies. Weren't you quite close for a time? Aren't you worried that your other allies will get cold feet from your actions?"

Jiang Chen looked meaningfully at the other sects flanking the emperor.

"There's no need for your provocation, Jiang Chen. Your destruction of the Boundary Stele and intention to cavort with alien races makes you a criminal to humanity itself! If you know what's good for you, surrender now and wash away Veluriyam's sins with your own blood to preserve the lives of your people. Otherwise, our armies will make your rivers run red wherever they go!"

The speaker was the head of the Empyrean River Palace, one of Pillfire's most loyal dogs. Jiang Chen wasn't surprised that he'd stepped up to protect his master.

Jiang Chen looked at the palace head with a half-smile. "The Empyrean River Palace is still considered a first rank sect, but you're willing to stoop to being Pillzenith's pet. But it's fine too if you like being a dog. We all make different choices in life. Your gravest mistake lies in your horrendous choice for a master. Do you think that Pillzenith will most assuredly triumph over Veluriyam Capital given your numbers?"

The Empyrean River palace head was supposed to be an important character in the Upper Eight Regions, given the stature of the faction he led. In Jiang Chen's eyes, however, the man wasn't worthy of any respect. Showing the palace head any courtesy would be doing himself a disservice.

The palace's head was red in the face with fury. Killing intent radiated from his eyes. Pillzenith waved a hand, signaling for the palace head to back off.

"Jiang Chen." Pillzenith remarked coolly. "You've always branded yourself a chivalrous boy. Don't think for a minute that I don't know the hidden dealings between Veluriyam and the Moon God Sect. This old woman is the master of your dear sister, Xu Qingxuan. She raised your sister from childhood, didn't she? She's like a second mother to your sister. If you're willing to let her die, then why can't I sacrifice my son for the sake of mankind?"

Though Jiang Chen held Pillzenith in great contempt, he had to admit the thickness of the other man's skin. Even the most ferocious of carnivores didn't eat its own children.

Pillzenith wasn't eating his own son outright, but he was using his son's life as part of a gamble. If Jiang Chen was incited to anger and refused to make the hostage swap, Pillzenith would be indirectly responsible for his son's death.

The young lord's first thought was to refuse Pillzenith's offer. As soon as he considered that, his sister's face rose unbidden to the top of his mind.

"If I simply leave my sister's master to die, our relationship will fracture for sure. Jiang Chen weighed things up. He would always have more chances to kill young master Tian Lin, but a crack in his relationship with his sister was generally irreparable.

"Never mind. The old woman has such a loathsome temper that I even wanted to kill her at one point, but she is sis' master at the end of the day. I'm sure Qingxuan thinks her of a second mother."

Jiang Chen could anger everyone in the world but his family. He could bear any shame on his family's behalf.

What was the life of a young master Tian Lin worth?

He was suddenly no longer fixated on killing the youth. Raising an eyebrow, he responded impassively, "I underestimated your shamelessness, Pillzenith. Very well, we can make the exchange if you so desire."

His Evil Golden Eye opened wide, glaring at the emperor. "You must swear however, that you haven't used any methods on the second sectmaster or left her with some hidden deficiency. Otherwise, I won't agree to the trade even if my sister blames me for the rest of her life."

Pillzenith was taken aback. He had done precisely that. Once the trade went through, he could use said methods to torture the second sectmaster so that she would wish for death for the rest of her life.

He was a villain through and through. It was just as well that Jiang Chen had his guard up against his enemy's poor morals. This demand destroyed Pillzenith's contemptible plans.

Jiang Chen wasn't in any hurry. "Your son can go back to you whenever you give me a second sectmaster that's perfectly healthy."

Suppressing his anger, Pillzenith called out, "Jiang Chen, you want me to swear an oath, but can you guarantee that you haven't done anything to my son?"

The paranoia was mutual. Pillzenith was as wary as Jiang Chen just as Jiang Chen was of him.

After some preparation, the great emperor was forced to remove his tricks from the second sectmaster. A conspiracy found out is no longer fit to be called one.

After about fifteen minutes, Pillzenith returned with the second sectmaster. "The second sectmaster here is perfectly healthy, Jiang Chen. I can swear an oath that she will not suffer any ill after effects from her captivity."

"You'd better think hard on whether you have anyone else from the Moon God Sect in your hands, hmm?" Jiang Chen replied.

Pillzenith harrumphed. "That's none of your business."

Jiang Chen was perfectly calm and unwavering. "I'm making the exchange, so it is my business. No matter how you pretend to not care, you clearly still want to rescue your son. Before he comes back to you, you should stay as honest and cooperative as possible."

He was using Pillzenith's care and hope to rescue his son against him.

Pillzenith harrumphed again. "I swear that I only have one hostage from the Moon God Sect. One is enough, anyway."

Truthfully, there had been quite a bit of pressure on Pillzenith for doing something so shameless. The Moon God Sect was a first rank sect that formerly had been on very good relations with Pillfire City. The despicable deed he'd been forced into doing just to fight Jiang Chen was exceedingly shameful.

That was why he had captured only the second sectmaster through covert operations rather than kidnapping her in broad daylight from the Moon God Sect.

As for the others, the great emperor didn't think that they would be worthy of being hostages in the first place. Only Xu Qingxuan's master had the weight to strongarm Jiang Chen into capitulating.

The great emperor was reasonably astute at reading people's hearts.

After a round of back-and-forth, both parties settled on strict and stringent terms to ensure that the exchange could go through uneventfully.

"The trade, then." Jiang Chen waved an arm to release young master Tian Lin.

The young man was ecstatic to regain his freedom. He rushed before Pillzenith. "Father, this brat has made me suffer a great deal. Please strike him down on my behalf!"

The second sectmaster was free as well. She swallowed her typical pride to return despondently to the side of Jiang Chen's forces, unsure of how to handle herself.

She was the second-in-command of a first rank sect and usually commanded significant respect in the world of martial dao. Her loss at Pillfire City's hands had been quite painful and depressing in light of that.

"Thanks for the help, Jiang Chen." The second sectmaster's thanks was extremely quiet.

Regardless of her stubborn nature, she knew that she would have met a grim fate without Jiang Chen's graciousness. A proud person could only think normally when her pride was shattered.

"You can thank Qingxuan," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "If you feel particularly grateful towards me, I would be happy if you could be a bit more lenient on my sister in the future. Alright, now that this little interlude is over, the curtain is about to be pulled back on a grander spectacle. If you are interested in watching, do stand back and enjoy the show."

"Stand back?" The second sectmaster gritted her teeth, her eyebrows upturned. "Pillzenith has gone too far. The Moon God Sect will not ignore his evil deeds. Today, I represent our sect in making a formal alliance with Veluriyam Capital against the malevolent Pillfire City!"

The second sectmaster had ever been single-track minded. She'd sung the multifarious praises of Pillfire City before, even hinting to Xu Qingxuan to make more contact with the city's Pill King Ji Lang. Her worship of absolute power at that time was evident.

The harsh lesson she'd been taught today had opened her eyes. The Pillfire City and Emperor Pillzenith she'd formerly respected were completely different from what she had expected. Their impressions had been utterly destroyed in her heart.

The Jiang Chen that she hadn't thought much of before on the other hand, had surprised her time and time again to the point of embarrassment. This was the young lord of Veluriyam Capital indeed!

Her reaction changed Jiang Chen's own opinion of what kind of person she was. The fact that she had such a one-track mind was endearing in her own way; perhaps she wasn't really that vicious after all.

However, he had no need of her intervention.

"Emperor Wellspring, please escort the second sectmaster to the back. I think she needs some rest." He didn't feel like explaining anything.

He asked Wellspring to just take her away. Only a top-level expert like Wellspring could calm a hysteric woman like the second sectmaster.

As expected, she caved under the emperor's gentle firmness and was compelled to retreat to the rear.

By this time, Pillzenith had completed an overview of his son as well. He had no concerns remaining.

"Jiang Chen!" The emperor's voice rumbled like thunder. "I'm putting aside my private grudges with you for now. The only reason my armies are here today is to punish you for the matter of the Boundary Stele! Your unauthorized attack against it has destroyed its protective boundary. Your betrayal of humanity in favor of alien races is unforgivable!"

"What next?" Jiang Chen smirked. "Are you going to get Emperors Cloudbillow, Castveil, and the rest to accuse me?"

Pillzenith blinked. What was he getting at? Was that kid's gall solid stone? Did he not know the meaning of fear?

Jiang Chen's nonchalant reaction displeased and surprised him.

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Chapter 1452: Unbounded Tide of Rats

Denial, refutation, or outright attack were within Pillzenith's expectations. But Jiang Chen being so casual about everything took the great emperor wholly off guard.

"It seems that you won't give up until you're at the end of your rope, Jiang Chen. I don't see the need to waste words given your admission. You have two choices today."

Jiang Chen maintained his half-smile. Pillzenith belaboring his performance was infinitely amusing to the young lord.

"One, your immediate surrender on the spot. I guarantee the innocents will be spared if you do so. And the alternative!" Cackling, Pillzenith swept his gaze across Veluriyam's other emperors. "The alternative is that the entirety of Veluriyam is buried with you."

"Take your pick." The emperor proclaimed the two outcomes with the finality of a haughty judge.

“Why waste time talking to him, Your Majesty Pillzenith? He’s the scum of humanity. He has no right to choose anything!”

“That’s right, we must crush him to pieces. To do otherwise is to disappoint our ancestors!” Pillfire’s dogs clamored in agreement.

Jiang Chen squinted at his enemies. He hadn’t yet erupted because he wanted to see the extent of their repulsiveness.

“Did you hear that, Jiang Chen?” Pillzenith snickered. “Do you still imagine you’ll be allowed to live after betraying the human race?”

“Are you done now?” Jiang Chen retorted with a faint smile.

Pillzenith had dealt with his young opponent multiple times before. He knew how difficult the youth was to contend with. That was why he had tried to dismantle Jiang Chen psychologically.

From the reactions he was getting though, it seemed that Jiang Chen had experienced minimal disturbance. The calmness of his response was a perfect illustration of that.

“So you want to flail to the bitter end, eh, Jiang Chen?” Pillzenith was greatly displeased. Wasn’t the great emperor already in a position to sentence the criminal before him? And yet, the convicted had no appreciation or awareness that his fate was being decided by another!

Jiang Chen glanced at Pillzenith ponderously.

“It must be tiring for you to dance around like this for this long, Pillzenith. You’ve certainly mounted a respectable effort in opposing me these years.

“I know that you came in high spirits, intent on consuming Veluriyam whole. You’ve thirsted for my genius pill recipes for a long time. Maybe you’ve discussed how to divide the spoils, hmm?

“And you.” Jiang Chen turned to the other factions’ leaders. “Your self-righteous declarations only reveal your deep-seated hypocrisy. Are you not tired by your pretenses?

“You envy me and yearn for my treasures. It’s normal to feel that, really, and I’d respect your honesty if you’d made your intent clear from the start. However, the fact that you put yourselves forward as the arbiters of justice for humanity is utterly revolting.”

Jiang Chen spoke with incredible speed, as quick as a series of popping firecrackers. Within a single breath, he insulted everyone once over.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m not insulting you. Before, I occasionally wanted to do so to inspire you to become better. Now, it seems that you don’t even deserve that. As leading factions of humanity, you don’t seem to care the slightest bit about the differences between good and evil. Any criticism I make fall only on deaf ears!”

Jiang Chen’s face darkened. “I don’t care why you came here today. I’m going to teach you a valuable lesson on some very personal terms. We’ll see who lives and who dies very shortly!”

As he finished his sentence, his consciousness passed a message to the king of the Goldbiter Rats.

Having received the command, the rat king passed it along to his descendants. The entire colony of rats swarmed out, causing the earth to roil for dozens of miles around.

Countless golden shadows shimmered, their glares as bright as the convergence of a dozen suns. The witnesses could barely open their eyes, so blinding was the radiance. Those with trypophobia felt their hairs stand on end and goosebumps rise everywhere on their skin.

After the past few years of reproductive time, the Goldbiter Rats had increased in numbers yet again. Furthermore, evidence of their evolution was very striking. Currently, the species was at least ten times its former strength.

Rats teemed everywhere the eye could see. No individual rat was particularly large, but the existence of so many of them side by side filled the space from their line of sight to the horizon. There seemed to be no gaps in their formation, with rats oftentimes stacking upon one another. This kind of density was nothing short of nightmarish!

Jiang Chen's gaze was cold and inhumane. He looked impassively at Pillzenith.

"Pillzenith, you've spent every day and night scheming against Veluriyam and me. However, I consider you nothing more than a clown, a pathetic failure of a man. You only know the joy of civil conflict. In my eyes, your ambitions are an absolute joke! Experience well how small you are before me!" He gave further instructions to the Goldbiter Rats to accelerate as he spoke.

A tremendous golden tide surging towards the northern alliance was the obliging result.

Everyone – Pillzenith included – could do little more than watch, their mouths agape.

There had been rumors about Veluriyam's young lord using a rat tide to besiege Great Scarlet Capital. At the time, Jiang Chen had kept a lid on the rats' momentum in order to make sure the innocents remained unscathed.

There was no need to do that here today. None of his enemies gathered here were innocent. The only thing left for Jiang Chen to do was teach these ignorant fools a painful lesson.

"Your Majesty, has... has Jiang Chen allied with a beast tribe?" Someone shuddered even as he offered this comment, his face pale.

"This doesn't look good, Daoist Pillzenith."

"What shall we do, Daoist?" Others could no longer remain calm.

The surging tide of golden rats that rapidly approached caused the weaker cultivators' very consciousnesses to shiver uncontrollably. Even Pillzenith, someone who had lived for several thousand years, felt his scalp tingle.

One Goldbiter Rat by itself was quite weak. Most cultivators here could easily crush a few dozen or hundred. When millions or billions of them came together however, the offensive momentum they brought forth was terrifyingly unrivaled. It was catastrophic, especially for the weak-minded among them.

The rats were imposing in their own way. When faced with this many living things at once, even an expert among experts would still be affected by their momentum. After all, these Goldbiter Rats weren't common animals. They were heirs of an ancient bloodline in their own way, and possessed their own kind of grandeur.

Distrust, fear, and other negative emotions began to unstopably spread through the northern coalition. Besides the very few staunch enemies of Jiang Chen or the best of experts, most were unsettled enough to want to retreat.

"Your Majesty, this rat tide is quite fearsome. Maybe we should steer clear for now. There's no way these rats know how to fly, so we..." One person offered some helpful advice.

Displeasure was plain on Pillzenith's face. He could see very well the delicacy of the situation. Still, was he going to give up his plans on the day of their fruition? Were these golden vermin going to ruin everything? He simply couldn't accept such a turnaround.

Jiang Chen's derision towards him had also built up a lot of pent-up anger to boot.

Pillzenith had experienced only success for several thousand years. Everyone everywhere gave him the respect he deserved. Who dared openly oppose him in the Upper Eight Regions – nay, the human domain in general?? No one!

That a young man so much his junior had the gall to do so... wasn't a junior like him supposed to show respect and humility to his elders?

Meanwhile, Jiang Chen's own allies were hypnotized by the display of force.

They were deeply impressed and thankful that they were on Jiang Chen's side rather than the reverse. The despair experienced by someone stuck in an inch of space in the midst of the boundless rat tide was unnerving just to imagine.

Great astonishment also radiated from the imperious eyes of the proud second sectmaster of the Moon God Sect. Her perception of the young lord had suddenly become much more complicated.

"Ah, it seems I've underestimated young lord Jiang Chen in the past as well. Qingxuan is lucky to have an older brother like him. Alas, I was too ignorant enough to perceive his value back then. If..." The second sectmaster didn't dare think on.

If Jiang Chen had brought these Goldbiter Rats to the Moon God Sect, would the sect have had the room to choose their response to him in the first place?

From this day forward, it was safe to say that the second sectmaster had no ground to stand on before Jiang Chen.

After all the things she had done and attitude she'd given, especially to Jiang Chen's mother Xu Meng... what had Jiang Chen done in return? He had repaid her with gratitude, and his willingness to redeem her using his enemy's son was illustration of that in spades.

Though Jiang Chen hadn't done it for her sake, obviously. It had been for his sister Qingxuan.

Still, the lengths he'd gone to nevertheless had an impact on the second sectmaster's opinion. She'd been taught a lesson of her own today: there is always another peak higher.

Presently, her eyes were filled with surprise as she beheld the endless tide of vermin. She felt nothing but shock at what she was watching. The sheer awe had almost made her forget about hating Pillzenith because she could tell that it was a very good question whether he would even survive the day!

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Chapter 1453: Despair Permeates

Han Qianzhan of the Great Yu Skysword Sect and Su Huanzhen of the Celestial Cicada Court had witnessed Jiang Chen's remarkable methods many times before. That still didn't lessen their awe at the magnificence before them.

They were veterans of the world, and it was precisely their experience that made them aware of how remarkable this sight was. It was astounding that the endless tide of rats was being controlled by young lord Jiang Chen!

The human domain had experienced bestial tides since ancient times. Historically, they'd been long and bloody affairs. However, such tides typically had their roots in the clashes between races – usually the breaking point of long built-up tensions. Other external factors could cause them from time to time as well.

Yet this tide of rats had clearly been started by Jiang Chen. This was the most surprising. Was the young lord truly capable of commanding so many beasts on his own?

This tide was completely different from the one seen in Great Scarlet. Not necessarily in size alone, but in the rats' bearing. The animals seemed tenfold fiercer than they had been previously.

The Goldbiter Rats were euphoric. Their eyes were red with killing intent and bloodlust. When every rat was in the same state, the resulting momentum was immensely fearsome and impactful.

It was akin to countless deathsworn charging at their target in a frenzy, a change of direction not even possible in their minds –

These rats were behaving very much the same way. This behavior alone was enough to crush some of the cultivators' spirits.

The tide of vermin pushed forward with unstoppable speed. They were already only a few hundred meters away. The golden torrent ate away more and more at the space before the creatures, filling their targets with depressed hopelessness.

The legs of a few of the weakest cultivators had already turned to jelly.

Rumble, rumble, rumble!

The rats in the very front turned into aureate arrows, plunging madly into the northern coalition's forces. When the Goldbiter Rats' bloodthirst was riled up, they could achieve a sufficiently bone-chilling level of mania.

One, two, three...

One by one, rats swarmed into the temporary line of defense set up by the northern coalition.

Coming from the largest of factions, none of these cultivators were inept. When they realized that confronting the tide of rats was unavoidable, they steeled themselves in order to weather the storm.

“All great emperors should rally the defenses! Don’t worry. What is there to worry about when I’m with you?” Pillzenith scolded his men when he saw his own camp start to panic. He clapped once as he did so, creating a stream of intangible, silver blades of air. They rolled about like flying carps.

In terms of cultivation, Pillzenith was definitely one of the best that the human domain could offer. His air blades rent all the Goldbiter Rats within thirty meters of himself to shreds of flesh.

“Wake up, you lot! These rats aren’t individually strong. They’re only relying on strength of numbers!” The emperor called out even as he mowed them down in swathes, attempting to raise his troops’ morale.

Just as he said, these rats were weak by themselves. Weak enough to not even a threat, in fact. When they were amassed however, these useless rats showed their true advantage. No matter how strong Pillzenith was, could he kill a hundred thousand rats? What about a million?

There was no end to the teeming tide. More rats welled up as soon as their predecessors were cut down, resulting in an unbroken line once more within seconds. No matter how much Pillzenith prevailed, he couldn’t make a dent in the Goldbiter Rats’ numbers, much less stem their advance altogether.

The normally arrogant great emperor was in a panic now.

He’d seen bestial tides before, but one of this size was the first. More importantly, there were no signs of it stopping anytime soon.

The more he killed, the crazier the replacements were. The Goldbiter Rats were completely fearless in their reckless charge.

“Damn it, is there no end to this rat tide? When is this going to be over?” Someone couldn’t help complain.

“We were too rash! Are we going to die here?”

“I said this before already. If Veluriyam wants to parade about, then let them. The southern part of the Upper Eight Regions needs a ruler of some sort. They...” He’d yet to finish when Pillzenith’s figure suddenly alighted near him, the great emperor’s palm pressing down on the man with great imperial force.

The man didn’t even have a chance to scream before being reduced to dust.

Everyone else looked at each other askance when they saw this. Why was Pillzenith killing so mercilessly on the basis of a stray comment?

“Daoist Pillzenith, what... what do you mean by this?!” It was an expert from the Heavenly Dragon Sect who’d just died. The sect’s executives were instantly put out at the loss of one of their own.

“Hmph, he was confessing his own evil by speaking ill of us and well of our enemies. How will the army remain steadfast if he’s not killed?” The emperor had a good explanation for what he did, or so he thought.

He glared coldly at the rest, proclaiming loudly. “Stand your ground, everyone. The rat tide is vicious, but we great emperors will see you through. Anyone who creates any more fear, uncertainty, and doubt will personally be given a ticket to the afterlife by me.”

Emperor Pillzenith knew that now was not the time to ease up. Once the army lost their will to fight, catastrophic loss was sure to follow. When defeatism was in full swing, his personal skills would no longer matter.

Therefore, he preferred to commit murder at this stage rather than risk his troops’ morale.

His swift response was effective to a degree. The encroaching uncertainty was wiped completely clean.

“Kill, kill all of these animals!” One of the cultivators screeched.

“Yes, we must kill them all! Restore a bright future to humanity!” The cultivators clamored one after another to pump themselves up.

Jiang Chen was completely relaxed. He was enjoying the despicable state being revealed when the northern coalition struggled. It was a superb feeling indeed!

Pillzenith’s powerlessness and anxiety, coupled with the infighting, had helped Jiang Chen finally complete a picture of the man.

The emperor was ambitious, but also utterly useless.

The threat of death was an effective morale boost in the short term though. The continual approach of the rat tide meant that the battle raged on. Because the northern coalition’s defenses were still relatively intact, loss of life was mostly restricted to the rats.

Each charge meant the death of tens of thousands of the critters. However, that was nothing when one considered the race as a whole. The situation never seemed to change despite the theoretically diminishing number of rats.

In fact, the Goldbiter Rats became fiercer by the minute. Any gap in the tide was filled up almost instantly on instinct.

“Your Majesty, there’s no end to this rat tide. I think we need to plan a route of retreat. I spot more powerful rats at the end of the tide, readying themselves to charge!”

“Your Majesty, we should flee to fight another day.”

The speakers had learned proper behavior this time. They messaged Pillzenith privately rather than publicly shout about it. In this way, they were able to express their attitude without affecting the others and creating a panic.

Pillzenith was bothered and disconcerted. He hadn’t expected men from his own faction to want to abandon ship, even if it was only mentally speaking at present.

“Ole Gold, what’s up? Are you still warming up after all this time?” Jiang Chen frowned when he saw what was happening. The Goldbiter Rat offensive didn’t seem ferocious enough.

“Heh heh, don’t be in such a rush, young master Chen! These dolts have killed at least a hundred thousand of my children, but that was an only initial investment. I’ll make them pay it back now, with interest!” Cackling, the Goldbiter Rat King suddenly stood up. Its large, auric body howled into the heavens with incredible energy.

The howl called its children to mount a full-on offense according to its will. When the other rats received the command, they piled forth with increased ferocity. Their bloodlust was amplified multiple times over!

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh...

Goldbiter Rats rammed themselves into the line of defense one after another. No fear of death could be seen in the attack. Their lack of raw power was made up in blood sacrifice.

The rats were typically a cowardly race. Trading blood for blood was extremely uncommon for them. Yet in this moment, no rat recoiled from its orders.

Having received their liege’s secret order, the rat king’s word was life and law. The only thing they had to do was obey!

Emboldened once more, the Goldbiter Rats attacked the northern coalition’s defenses with renewed vigor.

The great emperors manning the defenses were quite remarkable. They refrained from crumbling in the face of adversity and struggled against inevitability. But even so, the defense teetered on the brink of disintegration from the repeated impacts. It was going to do so any minute now.

At this point, the battle wasn’t something a few great emperors alone could easily decide. Moreover, a natural fear of death had kicked in for most of the participants here.

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Chapter 1454: The Defensive Line’s Collapse

The sea of Goldbiter Rats spread as far as the eye could see. They perhaps numbered in the billions, compared to the tens of thousands of men in the northern alliance.

It hardly seemed fair. Whether in number or momentum, the gulf between both sides was overwhelming. If not for great emperors barely stabilizing the defensive perimeter, the northern alliance would have collapsed already.

But even so, they were backs against the wall, tottering on the brink of defeat. There was little suspense to what would happen if the rats could open a single gap in their ranks. Carnage would ensue, pure and simple.

Each warrior was an elite who’d experienced life and death on the battlefield. It was readily apparent the dire straits they were in. The northern alliance boasted of a considerable elite force, but they were entirely overshadowed and drowned by the endless waves of Goldbiter Rats.

True, the great emperors couldn't be underestimated. They flattened any rats within their range into a bloody mess. But those were paltry losses for the endless ocean of beasts. Attempting to kill them all would be futile.

As soon as a group died, another batch was ready to replace it. And further behind, even more rats awaited their turn, eager to enter the fray.

Like a deluge battering a creaky dam, the endless siege inexorably found an opening.

"Ah!" A cultivator shouted in anguish. As a slight weakness appeared in his defensive range, rats instantly swarmed the space, pouncing on him and gnawing until only bones were left.

This tiny gap soon became an enormous hole in the defensive system as more and more rats poured inside.

Two, three...

Physically and mentally exhausted, cultivators fell one after another, becoming rat food. Their miserable shrieks filled the air.

The smell of blood made the Goldbiter Rats even more frenetic. As if demented, the ones in the back surged forward like the flood crashing through broken dikes, gaining space bite after bite, swallowing any creature in their paths.

In the blink of an eye, they submerged several hundred cultivators as they pummelled the immediate defensive circle, then spread out to tear the defensive system to shreds.

Someone shouted at the top of his lungs, "We can't hold it any longer. Run for your lives!"

As if possessed, the majority of cultivators turned tail, melting into escape rays shooting into the air. The fastest among them barely reached the safety of the sky, but the rest suffered a much grimmer fate.

Propelling into the air like cannonballs, countless rats pounced on them, bringing them back down to earth. And then, only horror awaited them as teeth rent their flesh.

"Everyone, run together!"

"It's our only chance! We're dead meat otherwise!"

The so-called northern alliance wasn't a true, solid alliance. Rather, it was a simple mob unified by common interest. This impossible alliance crumbled under the threat of oncoming death. In fact, it'd only held on for so long thanks to wariness of Pillzenith and his show of strength when subduing those lacking resolve.

But when facing the rats' onslaught, the fear he inspired could no longer stop the disintegration of the defensive line. The once coordinated ranks had broken down into small isolated pockets.

Pillzenith couldn't attend to every area, but even if he could, he would be powerless to stop them from fleeing. It was human instinct to run from death.

More and more cultivators took to the skies.

Some Goldbiter Rats were particularly strong and could fly as well. Those who could charged back and forth in the air, forming multiple front lines to prevent the cultivators from fleeing. Only, most rats weren't at that level. Their concentration in the air was much lower than on land.

Hence, even as many were forced down, a few fortunate ones managed to slip away, deserting the battlefield without a glance back as soon as they left the combat zone.

On Veluriyam's side, Emperor Coiling Dragon brimmed with eagerness as he spectated from afar. "Young lord, quite a few fish have slipped through our net. It's time for Veluriyam's force to shine."

The number of escapees wasn't high, but it wasn't negligible, making him a little anxious. He would have charged ahead in his impatience to catch them all, but Jiang Chen shook his head with a small smile.

"Don't worry, it doesn't matter. We have bigger fish to fry. You can't slaughter all tens of thousands of them. It's fine if we leave some small fry a way out."

No cultivator involved in this battle could be called ordinary, but the escapees weren't his goal. There was no need to kill every last of them.

"Big Stone, wait for now. Only act when you see our real targets preparing to flee. Don't let any of them get away. Remember, I'm testing your ability in this battle. Understood?" he commanded.

"Relax, Savior. We brothers won't forget our mission." Big Stone seemed very excited, his lively eyes staring ahead at the battle.

Jiang Chen had already ordered them to keep track of the northern alliance's great emperors. They could let anyone else go if they pleased, but not a single big fish was allowed to leave.

That was an unequivocal order!

Leading Pillfire's warriors, Pillzenith exerted his full power as he killed the rats in an effort to resist the endless waves. Thanks to their bravery, Pillfire's blood-soaked men hadn't suffered grave casualties yet. However, the enemy had sliced through the northern alliance, splitting the various factions like a cake, destroying their coordination and making each pocket fight for themselves.

"Your Majesty, there's no end to the rats. Our losses will be too severe if we keep fighting. Why don't we..." a great emperor from Pillfire stammered.

Despite his frustration, Pillzenith hadn't been blinded by anger. No matter his power, the endless sea of rats was beyond what his personal strength could handle.

"Leave?" He seriously considered this issue for the first time.

But how could he be willing? Waste an entire year of painstaking planning? He had gone through many hoops to gather these troops. If he were to fail, Pillfire would lose its prestige and its credibility. Would anyone still have faith in him after a defeat?

"Your Majesty, it'll really be too late if we don't retreat now."

"Your Majesty..."

Pillfire clenched his teeth. Still blowing away rats left and right, he ordered decisively. “We leave! You go first, I’ll cover you!”

No one could accuse him of cowardice. He knew that without him at the helm, Pillfire’s defenses would crumble in no time. Bringing up the rear implied some risk, but he was confident in his own ability.

Blade in hand, he cut into the air, shouting, “Break, Aurora Slash!”

Countless blades of energy spun in all directions in a dazzling aurora, submerging all of the surrounding rats in white cyclones and eviscerating them, creating a window of opportunity for Pillfire’s troops.

“Go!” Using the sole opportunity their lord could create for them, they turned into streaks of light fleeing into the sky.

But all of a sudden, a fearsome power appeared from the void, crushing them with the weight of a mountain. Their bodies no longer obeying them, they bounced back to the ground.

“What?”

“What the hell was that?” They wailed like ghosts, their eyes filled with disbelief at the failed attempt.

Pillzenith also froze. He’d used a powerful move to block all of the Goldbiter Rats in the vicinity and give his men every opportunity to survive. Why hadn’t any of them escaped?

From his vantage point, they’d fallen back on their own accord, leaving him flabbergasted at the strange scene. He stared at the sky and spotted thick clouds rolling above his head. Powerful creatures seemed hidden inside, blocking the way out.

Who is it? As far as he knew, there shouldn’t be such powerful creatures in Veluriyam.

“Pillzenith, you also have two choices today.”

This time, Pillfire’s master thoroughly froze as Jiang Chen’s voice pierced his ears. The last time, he’d sentenced the young man like a judge in full control of the situation. But the roles were now reversed, and the young lord had thrown his own words right back into his face!

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

Chapter 1455: Let Fists Talk First

“Pillzenith, what was it you said before? One should take responsibility for his actions?” Jiang Chen’s indifferent voice echoed from thin air, shaking the crowd’s souls.

He whistled softly. As if under a sudden petrification spell, the Goldbiter Rats ceased all movement and stayed obediently in place.

The young lord looked at Pillzenith with a faint smile. “I can’t be bothered wasting time with you either. I’ll give you a choice. Surrender here and now, or else everyone here will be buried to pay for your ambitions.”

He’d almost mirrored Pillzenith’s previous words.

The latter's face shifted between green and purple. As he looked at the young man smiling cheerfully not far away, an intense desire to kill flashed in his eyes, as well as anger, dismay, dejection, a hint of helplessness, frustration, and irrepressible envy.

How could he accept such a young brat looking down on him and talking to him like an authority passing judgment?

But there was nothing he could do.

Jiang Chen's cold eyes swept across everyone present.

"Someone please tell me, should I order you be put down or should I give you a chance to live?" He didn't bother hiding the naked derision in his voice. These fellows had hooted at him, eager to skin him alive, but none now dared look in his eyes.

"How unsightly. What would our human forebearers think if they could see you now? You bully the virtuous, yet cower in front of strength. What are you, if not the scum of humanity?" He continued to fling their words back in their faces.

Under his forceful stare, everyone looked down, afraid they might be misunderstood if they met his gaze. Even Pillzenith stood petrified, still shocked by the rat tide.

"I told you I'd teach you a lesson. Now, who will live and who will die? Let's see what the heavens have in store for you. Remember, it's not your first time offending me or plotting against Veluriyam. Every action comes with its price!"

Judgment? He'd show them true judgment!

The crowd kept its peace, shivering in fear. No one had the gall to retort. Their hearts had trembled when Jiang Chen had mentioned prices to pay. Would they be sentenced to death?

Pillzenith finally came back to his senses. He roared, "Little bastard, aren't you acting high and mighty for someone relying on stinky mice!?"

"True, you're great at underhanded tricks! But do you think you can destroy the whole of humanity with just these mice?"

"Jiang Chen, you've colluded with alien races and betrayed mankind. And now, you use beasts against your fellow humans. I was right, you ARE scum!"

The northern alliance blanched in shock. Quite a few almost blew their top off. Was Emperor Pillzenith courting death? Even if he was, why did he have to drag them down with him?

But the young lord merely smiled leisurely, showing no anger. "Pillfire's truly unrivaled when it comes to dirtying someone's name. Betray mankind?" His tone suddenly turned frosty. "Pillzenith, what gives you the right to say that?"

His stone-cold eyes moved to Cloudbillow beside Pillzenith. He continued, tone sharp as a sword, "Tell me, what kind of man is this Cloudbillow of yours?"

Pillzenith blinked. "What do you mean?"

Jiang Chen laughed out loud. "What do I mean? He publicly surrendered to an ancient celestial demon lord in Agarwood Valley! As well as the Empyrean River Palace's vice head, Eternal Celestial Capital's Emperor Castveil, and that bullshit Sublime Chord master... Too bad you didn't see these proud Upper Eight elites fawning over the demon."

Pillzenith shook in anger. "Jiang Chen, stop your nonsense!"

"Nonsense?" Jiang Chen snickered with contempt. "Your Pillfire isn't worth the effort. Do you think your so-called Cloudbillow is the same man you once knew? What about the Agarwood returnees? Do you all think they're still the same?"

Despite his indifferent tone, everyone's skin prickled with horror. What did he mean? Not the same? The northern alliance couldn't make heads or tails of his words.

"You slander me and say that I collude with other races or destroyed the Boundary Stele? Correct, it's been broken, but that was the Southern Celestial Tribe's doing. Hmph, if not for me, their empyrean powerhouses would be here by now, invading our territory. The demon lord would be raining destruction on you all. If not for me, those demon slaves would be luring you all into the demons' trap. Idiots, are you so blind you can't recognize the impostors standing right next to you? Have you got so little to do that you spend your days scheming against me?"

Jiang Chen hadn't explained any of it before because no one would have believed him. He had to resort to a show of strength first. Only a total thrashing could make them more receptive.

Indeed, humans were this despicable. Previously, they had had no interest whatsoever and didn't believe anything he had to say. But now, no one dared utter a word, afraid they'd disturb him.

"Impostors? What do you mean?" someone quietly queried.

Some people glanced at the Agarwood returnees, intense doubt in their eyes.

"What does that mean? Have we been fooled?"

"Surrendered to a celestial demon lord? Did these people really become demon slaves? Have they come back to be moles?"

"It can't be! That would be too frightening!"

"Hmph, what do you know?" Most people remained skeptical. After all, it was difficult to blindly take the young lord's words at face value.

Cloudbillow shouted, "Little bastard, kill us if you must! Why use these contemptible means to turn us against each other? You should be disgusted with yourself!"

Jiang Chen's indifferent gaze latched onto the man. "Tsk ts, you impostor, where does your confidence come from? Who are you anyways? I'm genuinely curious. You're even craftier than the celestial demons!"

The northern alliance's men looked at each other. What now?

Didn't he say they'd submitted to the demons? How'd they become even smarter than demons all of a sudden? He made no sense at all.

Cloudbillow calmly said, "Jiang Chen, spare yourself the effort. Sowing dissension doesn't become you!"

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. "Sowing dissension? Do I need to? I could massacre you all with a finger snap. I just want to know who's the mastermind behind all this. I personally killed all of you demon minions, so who's resurrected you?"

Rather than true resurrection, he meant borrowing these men's names as a cheap trick.

Killed? The shocked cultivators took a deep breath. Was he implying all the top elites sent to Agarwood Valley were died?

And not only so, they'd also surrendered to a demon lord, only to be killed by Jiang Chen?

For some reason, many had become more clear-headed after Jiang Chen's lecture and were now more willing to believe him. They became pensive. *Has the young lord truly been wrongly accused?*

The thought flashed in some minds.

Cloudbillow cupped his fist at Pillzenith. "Daoist Pillzenith, the brat's gone insane. Please don't let his sinister nonsense poison your heart! He needs to be put to death for his malicious intentions!"

"That's right. What surrendering to a demon lord? What kind of claptrap is that?! There's no demon in Agarwood to begin with!"

"Jiang Chen, how about we go to Agarwood Valley and see who's right?"

"There is no demon lord. Why are you lying? What's your hidden agenda?"

These impostors were the picture of righteous indignation. If he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, they might have fooled even him. But he'd personally led the golems to kill them all. How could he be mistaken?

He chuckled calmly. "True or false, it's of no importance to me. The way I see it, whether you're real or fake, you were dead the moment you surrendered to the demon. You impostors want to sully my reputation and disrupt the human domain? If I'm not mistaken, you're not human descendants either. Whatever you are, I'll expose your true nature today!"

He beckoned with his hand. A scarlet, sky-blotting cloud suddenly appeared over their heads, casting vast shadows upon them.

"Senior Vermillion, please grace us with your presence!"

Instead of the ancient beast language, he'd used human language, but it wasn't simply an intimidation tactic.

Thanks to the wood spirit spring, the ancient bird had recovered some lifeforce. It was no longer in immediate danger. Even at twenty to thirty percent of its full strength, the ancient bird was a legendary existence compared to the current human domain.

That blazing body exuded an immense aura that took one's breath away! Hearts raced the moment the divine bird appeared.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1456: To Be Deserted By One's Followers

"Senior Vermillion, your keen eyes must have witnessed which fellows surrendered to the demon lord in the secret realm. Any familiar face you see today is an imposter. Please use your powers and expose their true nature!" Jiang Chen called out, still using the human language.

The Vermillion Bird glided in the sky, leaving a fiery trail in its wake. It was a celestial furnace that could rain down fire and scorch the entire world if it ever so fancied.

At least, such was the primal fear the ancient creature struck into the heart of the crowd. They could only look up to its unattainable level. Under this kind of fundamental oppression, even Pillzenith succumbed to a sliver of imperceptible panic.

A Vermillion Bird!

An ancient Vermillion Bird!

His mind went blank. Fear and anger assailed his heart. How could the scion of a mundane noble of the trivial sixteen kingdoms alliance be this lucky? Did every good thing in the world have his name written on it? Did he have to hoard all advantages beneath heaven?

Dragons and Vermillion Birds were divine beasts from the ancient era. These divine creatures were thought to be extinct, yet Jiang Chen had both of them at his side.

Pillzenith seethed with envy.

As for the other powerhouses, the bird's formidable presence filled them with fear and regret. Enlightenment beat them over the head. They finally understood why the young lord had seemed so unafraid.

The terrifying tide of rats was one thing, but an ancient Vermillion Bird was simply an existence beyond their comprehension!

Judging by its aura, it was at least empyrean realm, an existence far beyond great emperors. Without a doubt, it could easily kill great swathes of them in the blink of an eye if it cared to. In fact, perhaps none of them could make it out alive.

With such a hidden card, what was there for Jiang Chen to worry about?

Alas!

Even the factions most loyal to Pillfire were full of remorse.

"To think that a single bad decision would cause our downfall! We shouldn't have opposed Veluriyam. We shouldn't have listened to Pillzenith!"

"Why did we have to stick our noses in a power struggle way beyond us? Isn't that pure suicide? Sigh, I just hope the situation can still be salvaged."

“Damn Pillzenith, damn Pillfire, everything’s their fault!”

“Jiang Chen is truly a tiger grown with wings. He’s too strong now to be stopped. By opposing him, we’ll become his stepping stones. How foolish this was!”

The same heartfelt regrets resonated deeply in all of the powerhouses. How they wished they hadn’t succumbed to Pillfire’s carrot and stick! They should’ve kept to their own business.

Now, their very lives were in jeopardy because of Pillzenith’s ambitions. Had everything been worth it? Even a child could answer that. The more they thought about it, the more resentful they became.

Combining the God’s Eye with the Evil Golden Eye, Jiang Chen could read their inner thoughts like an open book. He smiled expressionlessly.

“I ought to kill you ten times over for your conduct and misdeeds. I wouldn’t feel the slightest bit of guilt if I did so. However, the heavens treasure life and humanity can’t afford never-ending infighting. So, after some contemplation, I’ve decided to give you a chance. I repeat, this is your last chance!” he warned sternly.

“Another chance?” The crowd perked up.

“Wonderful! Young lord Jiang Chen is truly not the heinous villain that Emperor Pillzenith’s depicted!”

“But will he really give us one last chance?” Some found it hard to believe.

Pillzenith shouted, “Don’t fall for his lies! The brat wants to drive a wedge between us so he can destroy us one by one! Trusting him will only bring ruin!”

The anxious lord of Pillfire had to stop his rival from inciting the people to desert him. The alliance already rested on flimsy foundations. If they were swayed by Jiang Chen, they would lose their last bit of fighting spirit.

Pillfire would become isolated on all sides. How could he afford that in the current circumstances?

He wouldn’t have been afraid if not for the Vermillion Bird. Even if he couldn’t reverse the situation, he was confident that he and his elites were powerful enough to escape.

But everything had flown out of the window the moment the ancient bird had appeared.

Just how strong was it? That was difficult to gauge, even for him. The beast didn’t look in its best condition, but even so, it wasn’t something that Pillzenith could take on!

He’d been reluctant to retreat, wondering if he should continue fighting. But now, he only had one thing on his mind: flee!

Jiang Chen looked at him with a supercilious smile. “Pillzenith, even at death’s door, it seems you still want to drag everyone down with you.”

His eyes landed on the various factions’ leaders. “You can help him, or you can mend your ways. It doesn’t matter to me, but you’ll have to bear the consequences of your decision. You’ve been warned.

“Now, those faithful to Pillzenith to the bitter end, stand to the right. Those with a change of heart, move to the left! Remember, there’s no middle ground. If you don’t move, you’ll be considered Pillfire’s staunch follower!

“You have ten breaths to decide starting from now!”

The crowd stared, dumbstruck, especially those who still hoping for a miracle. Some weak-willed fellows immediately ran to the left, clearly fed up with Pillfire. *Why should we pay for Pillzenith’s ambitions with our deaths?*

Things would be different if the man had some mettle. Everyone could have shared some profits together and gone home happy. However, the great emperor only had ambition going for him. Time and again, he’d come off the worse for wear against young lord Zhen, retreating with his tail between his legs.

It seemed he’d enraged the young lord enough this time that Veluriyam was determined to settle things once and for all.

As to who was stronger and who was weaker, didn’t the results speak for themselves? These cultivators had little love for Pillfire to begin with. Now they only wished to draw a clear line between the city and themselves as swiftly as possible!

The first one led to the second, then a third...

Pillzenith watched as familiar faces normally filled with deference and flattery leave his side without any hesitation.

In less than ten breaths, three-quarters of the crowd stood to the left, with quite a few Emphyrean River and Sublime Chord cultivators among them.

The Emphyrean River Palace’s master still stood in front of Pillzenith, but his inner struggle was plain on his face for all to see. Despite his vast experience, he couldn’t help but be cowed by the Vermillion Bird’s overpowering aura. He’d finally started having second thoughts. What had he gained with following Pillfire so staunchly all these years?

He looked at the opposite side. The Great Yu Skysword Sect and Celestial Cicada Court stood by relaxed and carefree, idly watching them.

These first rank sects were just like his own faction, so why were they on such a vastly different trajectory?

“Daoist Pillzenith...” he finally spoke, his tone pained.

“What? Are you planning to betray me as well?” Pillzenith asked indifferently.

“N-no. But where there’s life, there’s hope. With these circumstances, why don’t you...”

“Enough!” Pillzenith interrupted furiously with displeasure. “That brat must’ve given you something good for you to waggle your tongue like this to try to persuade me!”

That stopped the palace master in his tracks. He was Pillzenith's confidant. How could Jiang Chen possibly give him anything? *He's simply taking out his helplessness and frustration on his own people.*

The palace master smiled ruefully. Without a word, he raised a cupped fist salute. Then, despite his shame, he walked to the left without a backwards glance. He could see as clearly as anyone how utterly routed they had been, so he had to make a choice.

For Pillfire, Empyrean River Palace's abandonment was the last nail in the coffin.

Pillzenith laughed arrogantly despite his anger. "What a bunch of cowards! Buck up, all of you! Even if the entire world abandons us, what does this great emperor have to fear?"

With a grab of the hand, a purple talisman suddenly appeared in front of him.

"This is bad, he wants to get away!" Skysword Sect's Han Qianzhan immediately saw through Pillzenith's intentions.

Sure enough, the talisman immediately glowed with a divine purple light that enveloped all of Pillfire's powerhouses. With an incantation, the radius covered by the purple light steadily increased.

"Be careful, Jiang Chen. This is an ancient talisman. The old man is trying to slip away," the Vermillion Bird warned.

Given the divine creature's condition, the young lord hadn't planned on making it fight. He merely needed its deterrence effect.

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

Chapter 1457: Struggles of a Cornered Beast, Crippling With One Palm Strike

"It's your time to shine, Big Stone!" Jiang Chen was alert in his own right after receiving the warning from the Vermilion Bird. The ancient talisman Pillzenith was quickly activating likely held untold power. Perhaps it was a treasure with a remarkable heritage.

The violet light flared into the firmament, carrying with it a crowd of Pillfire cultivators on an escape through the horizon. It left behind it a lavender streak of an afterimage.

"Well met!" The eight stone golem brothers had waited in the clouds for a long time.

When the violet light hurtled into the sky, it was met by Big Stone's giant hand. A giant palm was formed with incredible energy, slamming ferociously down on the fleeing cultivators.

Boom!

The light scattered instantly, and many cultivators that it had carried were flattened into pancakes. A few of the stronger great emperors spread out in time with terrified screams.

But there was no way Jiang Chen was letting them escape.

"Don't miss a single one, Big Stone!" He gave the order to the eldest stone golem.

"No worries, Savior." Howling at the air, Big Stone pounced at Pillzenith.

The emperor was extremely fast even though one of his hands was occupied with his son. In the instant the violet light was destroyed, he found another gap of space and blitzed towards it.

His other hand produced a second talisman, an ancient one designed for retreating like the last. His body was transformed into a sharp arrow designed to pierce through spatial restrictions.

Even this high in the air, the stone golem brothers had locked down the space entirely. To any intrepid travelers, this defense was harder than stone or metal wall.

No matter how much Pillzenith tried to penetrate the defenses, he couldn't break through them.

The emperor was scared out of his wits. He'd never thought that all of his trump cards would fail to bring him out of this mess. Right now, he was a homeless stray rather than a leader of a prominent faction.

His embarrassing behavior was completely taken in by the other factions down below. Their men and leaders all quavered at what was happening. They'd never thought it possible for the imperious Pillzenith to one day be so flustered and helpless.

However, they were also thankful that they had come around at the last second. It was certainly much better than the alternative of supporting Pillzenith all the way.

"Do you know what this is called, Pillzenith?" Jiang Chen's voice was infinitely harsh to Pillzenith's ears.

"This is called 'bolting the door to beat the dog'." Jiang Chen laughed easily. "You're an old dog that's plagued the human domain for far too long. If you're allowed to live for much longer, you'll drag the rest of us into the abyss with you."

Pillzenith presently didn't even have the heart to utter a witty retort. The only thing on his mind was escaping with his life intact.

Unfortunately, the position the eight golem brothers had taken wasn't something he could possibly break through. No matter how hard he tried, he was met with an impassable brick wall.

Jiang Chen's eyes didn't rest on Pillzenith. He was more attentive to the others who'd formerly been his cohorts.

"You've made the wise decision in the end, so I'll spare you from death. However, this doesn't mean I've forgiven your transgressions. You have a chance to redeem yourselves by arresting anyone who went to Agarwood Valley. I can clearly tell you that they are imposters, one and all, with only the most malicious of intents in infiltrating us!"

He hadn't forgotten about this matter. In fact, he held the imposter problem in much higher regard than Pillzenith's offensive.

No matter what the leader of Pillfire did, he was restricted to a set of relatively predictable maneuvers. There was nothing creative he could pull off.

These unknown imposters, on the other hand, were concerning due to their mystery. Who was the mastermind behind them? What faction did they belong to? This was Jiang Chen's foremost concern.

If the mastermind couldn't be found, a hidden threat would remain. More importantly, he suspected that Emperor Peerless and the Jiao brothers had fallen into this mysterious faction's hands. He had no desire to see any harm come to those three.

The imposters collectively paled when they heard what Jiang Chen had said, turning into streaks of light that also attempted to flee.

This reaction instantly revealed their status as fakes. The sect members finally realized that Jiang Chen hadn't made anything up. He was speaking only the truth.

"Stop them!"

"Quick, quick, stop them from getting away!" There was mass anarchy due to the fakes' sudden escape attempts.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen's arrangements beforehand meant that none had a real chance of actually getting away.

Countless Goldbiter Rats surrounded them on the ground, and the stone golem brothers' wall locked down the airspace.

Despite transforming into beams of light, the imposters failed at getting anywhere, largely because they kept on slamming into walls of resistance. Eventually, they all ricocheted back to where they started from.

Their former fellows and current pursuers arrived just in time to encircle all of them.

When the imposters saw they had no possibility of escaping alive, they traded resolute looks, then muttered a few words. In the next moment –

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Their bodies exploded without any prior warning. The resulting bloody debris and energy scattered outwards.

They had chosen to self-destruct, every single one of them!

This sent absolutely every witness into shock. The cultivators who were closest died on the spot, hit by the aftershocks of the detonations.

The ones who remained were extremely terrified, backing off in unison. They remained fearful as their eyes passed over all the gore littering the ground, their hearts pounding with dread.

Jiang Chen was as utterly astonished as the rest.

What kind of faction was this? Why were the imposters so organized that they uniformly chose suicide after failing to escape? A cultivator choosing to detonate himself was one of the cruelest things to do to oneself.

Without an especially cold heart, who could be callous enough to harm oneself to such a degree?

Jiang Chen's pleasure from having completely quashed the northern coalition evaporated because of this new turn of events. He didn't particularly value the lives of the dead, but the trail was cold now that they were gone. How was he supposed to find Emperor Peerless and the Jiao brothers now?

Above the clouds, Pillzenith fought like a cornered beast. The other Pillfire executives were either captured or dead, and none was left to mount any resistance. The emperor was still struggling alone like a madman, his hair messy and unkempt.

"Big Stone, send him to hell." Jiang Chen wasn't interested in showing unnecessary mercy. People like Pillzenith didn't deserve it in the first place, and shouldn't be given that hope.

His ilk created disaster wherever they roamed. Therefore, he couldn't allow Pillzenith to leave alive.

Chortling, Big Stone leaped down from the clouds with a giant thud.

A descending jump from someone as enormous as him had immense visual impact. The stone golem looked like a powerful god among mortals.

Big Stone strode up, the steps of his thick, burly legs long enough to almost circumvent the limitations of space. He wasn't particularly brisk, but the sheer distance between each footfall was astounding.

Within a single inhale and exhale, he was already at Pillzenith's side. A divine art exerted the weight of the world on the emperor's chest, instantly slowing the target down. A colossal palm shot through the clouds directly down, gripping the great emperor within its clutches.

Pillzenith was scared witless. He wanted to struggle, but he no longer had control over his body. He was being held in place by a huge clamp.

With a casual slam from Big Stone, a tremendous force passed through Pillzenith's skin to shatter his qi ocean. All of his veins and meridians were completely destroyed!

The attack hadn't taken Pillzenith's life, but it had taken the basis that he lived by.

For Big Stone, anyone who lost against him was treated the exact same way, regardless of their status.

He tossed the body of Pillfire's leader before Jiang Chen. "Savior, he's useless now. You tell me what to do with him."

Big Stone may be naïve, but he had some cunning of his own. He knew enough to let Jiang Chen decide his enemy's final fate.

Jiang Chen looked at the struggling emperor, his heart devoid of compassion. In fact, he despised the man to the bitter end.

"You'll meet an ignoble end of your own, Jiang Chen. I won't let you off even as a ghost!" Pillzenith knew that his death was assured so resorted to wanton cursing.

"I considered you as low as dirt when you were alive. Do you think I'll be scared of you after you die?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Your actions in this life means that even if you reincarnate, you'll become an animal. Want to get revenge on me? Do ten lifetimes worth of punishment first!"

The formerly arrogant Pillzenith flopped on the ground like a dead dog. He rather looked like he was kneeling out of respect to Jiang Chen.

Pillfire's erstwhile allies were dumbfounded. In their eyes, Pillzenith had once been someone second to none in the world. But that invincible emperor was virtually insignificant before Jiang Chen. This vast difference between expectation and reality was a bit hard to accept for most.

"Is Emperor Pillzenith's era over just like this?"

"It seems that Pillfire's blooming ambitions were an absolute joke."

"From now on, the human domain belongs to Veluriyam Capital alone!"

"This is better in the end. When north and south war against each other, humanity is the biggest loser. A decisive conclusion may be for the best!"

If Jiang Chen had relied on threats and coercion before, his excessive display of force finally clarified to these people why the young lord had treated Pillfire's incursion so casually. He had the absolute strength necessary to back him up!

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

Chapter 1458: The Curtains Fall

The battle on the borders of Bluesky Nation was destined to go down as a pivotal event in human history.

When Emperor Pillzenith had formed his northern coalition, almost every cultivator in the human domain was pessimistic about Veluriyam's prospects. The faction seemed certain to be crushed under the barrage from their neighbors in the north.

However, both process and conclusion were nothing short of astonishing.

Pillzenith had been crippled like a dead dog, then eaten to the bone by countless Goldbiter Rats. Though his veins and meridians had been destroyed, his life essence hadn't dissipated. Therefore, he was superb nutrition for the rats.

The rapid skeletonization of the once-proud great emperor inspired shocked awe in his former followers. Pillzenith's fall was like a monument in their hearts being demolished. They hadn't at all expected the near-invincible great emperor to be so easily crushed by Veluriyam's young lord. This was a real, measurable gap!

Pillzenith had conspired time and time again to topple Jiang Chen. This time however, he'd clearly gone too far. The young man had returned the favor by utterly smashing both the emperor and his faction in a lightning stroke.

This made everyone come to a shocking realization that Veluriyam had never feared Pillfire even from the start. Instead, young lord Jiang Chen had never even seen Pillfire as a long-term rival of any kind. In his eyes, Pillzenith was little more than a dancing clown!

Pillfire City's men were all dead, but Jiang Chen didn't call for his Goldbiter Rats to retreat yet. They swarmed around the defectors.

Jiang Chen didn't believe for one second that ethics had to do with their defection. They had only caved due to their collective fear of death.

"The eight first rank sects of the Upper Eight Regions are supposed to be its pillars. Look at what you've done instead! Day in and day out, all you manage is trickery and deceit of each other. You do the common people a great disservice simply by existing!

"I'm letting you go today with your lives, but it's not because of your innocence. Spend some more effort in thinking about what you should do in the future." Pausing, Jiang Chen tossed a frigid gaze towards the Eternal Celestial Capital. Its holy emperor shivered when he detected the young man's eyes. "Luo Jue, I can absolve the other sects of their responsibility as they were strong-armed into it by Pillfire. The Eternal Celestial Capital however, cannot be forgiven!"

The sect had made its way onto Jiang Chen's hit list a long time ago.

"Young lord Jiang Chen!" Luo Jue spat resentfully, "are you turning on me after tricking me into surrendering?"

"There's no need to defend yourself," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I'm not interested in hearing your excuses. Whether you resist or not, your fate won't change."

Panic flashed across the sect head's face. "Jiang Chen," he called out, "if you're willing to forgive these other Pillfire loyalists, why can't you show some mercy to us as well? Yes, we were responsible for Myriad Domain all those years ago. Still, hasn't survival of the fittest been the unspoken law of the human domain since time immemorial? What difference is there between us and the Ninesuns Sky Sect? Why do you solely target us, young lord Jiang Chen?"

He hadn't given up on weaseling his way out of his fate.

"Survival of the fittest?" Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "Is that how you understand it? Very well then, since I am now more fit to survive than you, that means you should die because I say so. Right?"

He was using Luo Jue's own argument against him. Because of this, the lord of the Eternal Celestial Capital had no response. Yes, why couldn't survival of the fittest apply here, too?

The sect head wanted to say more, but Jiang Chen wasn't interested in giving him the chance. "Big Stone, take him out!"

The young man was set on clearing away all of his enemies. Both the Eternal Celestial Capital and its holy emperor lacked a great deal when compared to Pillfire City. There had been nothing that the latter had been do, which made the former's case all the more hopeless.

The holy emperor wanted to make a last stand, but he could barely move a finger before the eight golem brothers subjected him to the same fate as Emperor Pillzenith.

The layout of the Upper Eight Regions were henceforth completely altered. The Eternal Celestial Capital was struck from the list of the eight first rank sects.

In the clash between two superpowers, Veluriyam was the final victor. Pillfire was forced into decline, marking the end of an era.

For Veluriyam, the victory had been nothing short of total. It was a golden opportunity for the faction's development. Coupled with the many advantages it already possessed, it felt like it was on top of the whole world.

Jiang Chen however, was quite unhappy.

The imposters sent by the mysterious faction had committed suicide before his very eyes. He hadn't been able to question a single one of them, despite his extremely strong desire to do so.

Jiang Chen was unafraid of Pillfire or any other first rank faction within the Upper Eight Regions. After extended exposure to them, he knew them like the back of his hand.

All their cards and resources were an open book. Even when the situation for Veluriyam had been at its worst, Jiang Chen had never been particularly pressed. The mysterious faction, though... its ability to create so many imposters within such a short span of time made him wary.

He ignored the fearful looks from the others after eradicating the cultivators from the Eternal Celestial Capital.

The Heavenly Dragon Sect, the Sublime Chord Temple, and the Empyrean River Palace – none of the three sects had a mortal grudge with Jiang Chen. There was no reason for the young man to cut them down.

"If I followed my emotions, gentlemen, I would find killing all of you to sit perfectly well with me. After all, you acted as Pillfire City's hunting dogs on its incursion into Veluriyam territory."

The others muttered half-hearted assent. They could neither agree nor disagree.

"However, I'm not exactly the bloody, murderous type. The human domain can't tolerate further struggle and strife. Emperor Pillzenith has seen me as his biggest threat for a long time now. I was supposedly some kind of challenge to his personal authority. He was a complete and utter fool! Danger has long brewed over the human domain, the kind that you cannot hope to understand.

"Demons and aliens outside the Boundary Steles are prowling for weaknesses in our ranks. It's absurd that as the nominal leader of the human race, Pillfire never thought about how to handle a potential invasion. Instead, it focused solely on opposing me. Is that appropriate behavior for a real leader? He could have led you from rags to riches, but it's far more likely he would have led you into a bottomless abyss!

"But never mind that." Jiang Chen waved a hand. "Take care of yourselves. The demons will invade sooner or later. If you're still only interested in civil unrest and petty politics, you will be the first to perish when the demons arrive!"

These people were humiliated by Jiang Chen's criticisms. However, they were overjoyed to hear that the young lord had granted them permission to leave. It rather felt like they'd been granted amnesty.

The tide of Goldbiter Rats finally receded.

Under relayed orders from the rat king, his children began to retreat. In about fifteen minutes' time, all of the rats had vanished from the scene, as if they had never been here in the first place.

The uneasy sects immediately asked leave from the young lord.

Jiang Chen reacted with nonchalant coolness. He had given these people clemency, but that didn't mean he liked them one bit. He simply had no desire to gain the reputation of a brutal tyrant.

Moreover, these sects were sure to have nightmares upon hearing his name after today's loss. It was extremely unlikely they would oppose him ever again.

On the very off chance they did make a return visit, Jiang Chen had no qualms about wiping them out.

The disgraceful departure of the three former Pillfire allies elicited an exclamation from Han Qianzhan. "That first rank sects in the Upper Eight Regions would stoop so low... Miserable! Absolutely miserable. Am I supposed to think them the Great Yu Skysword Sect's peers?"

"Daoist Han," Su Huanzhen giggled. "I don't think you should think of it that way. At the end of the day, they're still strong enough to be considered first rank sects. If they're willing to recognize the error of their ways, their potential effect on the Upper Eight Regions shouldn't be underestimated."

The Moon God Sect's second sectmaster was strangely silent. Her expression was a mixture of uncertainty and shock.

"Congratulations, young lord Jiang Chen." Her tone was as conflicted as her look.

"What is there to congratulate me for?" Jiang Chen sighed softly. "There was no joy in that battle. What good is there if I kill a group of my fellow humans? I only hope that all of the human sects and factions can coexist peacefully from now on."

Emperor Wellspring sighed as well. "The toppling of Pillfire may indeed prove to be an opportunity for the Upper Eight Regions. In the north especially, Pillfire has had a monopoly over every pill-related channel and resource. Because of this, the other first rank sects will be revitalized now that the cloud looming over them is gone. There will be changes for sure, possibly even radical ones."

The emperor's viewpoint was sharp and incisive. He instantly saw the effect of Pillfire's destruction on the world. The biggest change was that Pillfire's monopolized profits would now be divided among its sufficiently powerful neighbors. A lot of money was going to change hands.

Jiang Chen became ponderous at the proffered opinion.

"Young lord, I think that Veluriyam must take over what Pillfire has left behind. Otherwise, there may be severe infighting arising from the power vacuum, perhaps on an unaffordable scale. Moreover, Veluriyam must command both the south and the north if it wishes to rule over the entirety of the human domain!" Emperor Wellspring's suggestion was equally thought-provoking.

Just as he had said, Pillfire's void could only be filled by Veluriyam. The amount of profit on the table could elicit the bloodlust of the staunchest pacifist. How could a warring human domain stand against a demonic invasion?

Jiang Chen completely agreed with the great emperor's analysis.

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

Chapter 1459: An Impossible Decision Between Dan'er and Huang'er

Jiang Chen was both swift and efficient. With imposing momentum, he brought a group of subordinates with him to Pillfire City that very day.

Pillzenith had brought as much as ninety percent of Pillfire's best on his sortie against Veluriyam. The remaining ten had been left behind to hold down the fort.

When these glorified sentries heard of what'd happened in Veluriyam territory, none of them had the courage left to resist. They fled the city before Jiang Chen's arrival, taking vast amounts of the city's wealth with them.

When Jiang Chen arrived at Pillfire and announced he was taking over, not a single figure of importance was to be found. Its commoners teemed with unrest and uncertainty.

After taking control of the city, he was quick to push out a series of procedures aimed to eliminate Pillfire's original principles.

At first, the residents of the city and its surrounding powers were a bit worried about Veluriyam's takeover. Many of the smaller factions, clans, and vassals also shared this sentiment. They were concerned about the possibility that Jiang Chen would take revenge by looting and sacking Pillfire and its wealth.

However, Jiang Chen's edicts won them over after a while. Pillfire under his rule was no worse off than it had been in the past. In fact, it was improved in some ways.

The city was very stable under the young lord's rule. Moreover, many of the harsh taxes, tariffs, and mandatory bribes were eliminated. His policies were both righteous and honest, a reflection of the youth's personal nature.

After three months, the entirety of Pillfire had completely forgotten about Pillzenith. They preferred the way things currently were. There was no exploitation, no pressure, no dictatorial actions...

Jiang Chen was well aware of the strategy his administration had to take. If he resorted to brute force rather than diplomacy, he would have been resisted at every turn. It was easy enough to oppress a territory's existing factions, but extremely difficult to brainwash a people.

And yet, he had done precisely that through exerting his unique charisma and methodology, spreading his own ideology throughout the city. Without realizing it, Pillfire became a much more law-abiding place.

Of course, Jiang Chen had listened to Wellspring's advice about calling up some of the wandering cultivator experts and quartering them within the city as well.

"Your Majesty, the great emperors among wandering cultivators are no less talented than the leading experts of the largest factions. The only thing the former lacks is the vast quantity of resources available at the latter's disposal. If you lack in people and are willing to give them some opportunities, they may surprise you in the end." Wellspring's eye for strategy was perpetually superb.

He always saw things from a distance. It was better to gather the scattered wandering cultivators into a loose faction rather than have them remain completely separate like a pile of sand.

When a wandering cultivator was merely a grain of loose sand, he had the most to lose. He had no advantage against any sect cultivator because he had no backing of his own. Oftentimes, he had to swallow his pride despite abuse and hardship.

If the wandering cultivators, especially great emperors, could be gathered together, it would be a big help against the demonic invasion.

After considering it for a moment, Jiang Chen nodded. "Old Brother Hui, your perception and level headedness is second to none among your wandering brethren."

"Haha, you think too highly of me, young lord. I think about these things all the time. Even a fool like me can have his moments of brilliance, you know!" Wellspring was very humble.

"No need to sell yourself short, Old Brother Hui. There are many advantages to gathering up the wandering great emperors. It's not as simple as bringing together just any bunch of experts. Because wandering cultivators often travel around, they'll be the first target for any reawakened demons.

"Plus, if a sense of collective honor could be cultivated by gathering the wandering cultivators together, it would be very helpful to the anti-demon effort in the future. Strength and cooperation in numbers is quite potent, no?

"Finally, you are very much respected in the wandering cultivator world. If you oversee this matter, it will be as good as done. Therefore, I'm leaving all the details of this initiative up to you." Jiang Chen had no love for power and authority. Quite the opposite in fact: he was perfectly willing to give it up to anyone he saw fit.

Wellspring was the kind of person that had the morals and character to back up his outstanding ability. There was nothing wrong with placing utmost trust in him.

After giving full control of Pillfire's affairs to Wellspring, Jiang Chen journeyed back to Veluriyam. This was where his roots were. There was no reason for him to linger in Pillfire territory.

The familiar sight of his family and friends lightened his mood a great deal.

Though his battle against Pillfire had proved to be trivial, Jiang Chen was very much depressed. No matter how good the results of a civil war were, that was no cause for happiness.

"Stinky brother, my master has already gone back to the Moon God Sect. She said that she's too embarrassed to face you, and asked... asked me to apologize on her behalf." Xu Qingxuan was quite excited to see Jiang Chen again.

Still, talking about her master was a little awkward. Her master didn't have a pristine track record when it came to her family.

Jiang Chen didn't mind. "Nothing to worry about," he shrugged. "She's your master at the end of the day. I couldn't very well just let her die in front of my eyes."

Xu Qingxuan's eyes reddened. "Thanks, stinky brother," she murmured after a while.

The girl typically enjoyed butting heads with her brother, but that didn't mean she had anything against him. She admired and worshiped him a great deal, in fact!

In the past, she would sometimes consider her brother's superiority over her a product of blind luck. But after experiencing recent events, Xu Qingxuan finally understood that her brother wasn't merely lucky. He was also superbly charismatic. That was why so many were impressed with him despite his youth.

Who else would have cared for the Moon God Sect's second sectmaster in that situation? She hadn't exactly been his friend. To say that they'd been on poor terms was putting it lightly.

Ordinary people would have enjoyed a moment of schadenfreude.

Jiang Chen had done something quite different. He had made the hostage exchange, indirectly teaching his sister a lesson in the process.

After Veluriyam finally saw the return of its young lord, many covert operatives were immediately sent out to investigate.

Jiang Chen paid a great deal of attention to Emperor Peerless and the Jiao brothers' potential whereabouts. In fact, he wanted to go out and search himself.

That night, Dan Fei wrapped her arms lightly around Jiang Chen's waist. She rested her face on Jiang Chen's back, her voice tender. "Brother Chen, I hear that you're closing your doors to cultivate again?"

Jiang Chen nodded. "Dan'er, I've let you suffer all these years. We cultivators toil our lives away on travel and cultivation. Though we live much longer than mortals, we spend little time with our loved ones and family."

Dan Fei sighed delicately. "Sometimes, I wonder if we would have had better lives as a normal couple. And yet, wouldn't life be too mundane for us that way? A normal woman only has ten years of youth... I think cultivation is better in the end."

Cultivation extended lives and preserved youthfulness, sometimes indefinitely. Dan Fei cared quite a lot about her looks. She had been like that ever since her time at Skylaurel Kingdom.

"Yes, female cultivators definitely retain their youth," Jiang Chen laughed. "Dan'er, you look just like the day we met back in Skylaurel. Well, you do seem much more mature."

Dan Fei blushed. "I was a bit too childish back then. My girlishness must have been pretty silly."

Jiang Chen felt only warmth when he recalled the events of yesteryear. Alas, memories of Huang'er resurfaced even as he did so. The girl who had endured the best and worst of times with him, the girl whom he'd sworn an oath to.

How bitter would she be if she knew that he had another girl, and a daughter with her to boot?

He couldn't help but feel guilty. It wasn't his fault. That trial years ago had been an unexpectedly alluring misunderstanding.

Jiang Chen was remorseful to Dan Fei as well. After all, he'd completely forgotten about his one-time affair after the fact. This had led to many years of anguish for her as well. He couldn't give up either emotional attachment.

Having been with Jiang Chen for so long, Dan Fei was close enough to his heart to gain a tacit understanding of his thoughts.

“Brother Chen, are you... remembering little sister Huang’er?” Dan Fei was a bit older in terms of age.

Jiang Chen sighed softly. “You must have heard from Gouyu about Huang’er, Dan’er. I will never forget her, nor can I let her down. Whenever I think of her long days and nights of misery on Myriad Abyss Island, my heart burns in yearning and anxiety. That’s why I have to cultivate more. I need to go there as soon as possible to save her!”

After experiencing the world’s ups and downs, Dan Fei knew that most things were imperfect in some way. A genius like Jiang Chen was idolized by countless young girls who would stop at nothing to offer themselves to him...

It was already exceptional for Jiang Chen to not have any other attachments aside from Huang’er. Many other youthful talents could only be described as stylish dandies, womanizers everywhere they went.

There was no right for Dan Fei to complain about Huang’er in light of that.

One, Huang’er and Jiang Chen had unbreakable bonds. The strength of their relationship was one that Dan Fei could not boast the same of.

Two, Jiang Chen had started a relationship with Huang’er before he had formally been with Dan Fei.

Most critically, Huang’er was seen as the mistress of the young lord residence. Everyone admired her, and Dan Fei saw no reason to upset the others who lived here through her jealousy.

When she considered this, Dan Fei sighed once more. “Brother Chen, I know about your relationship with Huang’er. Someone like you is beloved by innumerable other girls. I’m happy enough just to have a child with you, and little sister Huang’er deserves the same happiness. I almost wouldn’t be able to live without you. I’m sure she’s the same way. Where would she get the courage to go through each day otherwise? I couldn’t possibly be selfish enough to stop you from going.”

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

Chapter 1460: Vermilion Bird Essence

This time, Jiang Chen was determined to stay in seclusion until he attained sixth level emperor realm. He was at already peak fourth level, so he needed two successive breakthroughs.

Anyone else might have found it a great challenge, but for him, ascension within emperor realm posed little difficulty. He’d gained many things in Agarwood Valley, including a deeper understanding of martial dao that would help him reach his objective.

He might even be able to rush all the way to seventh level in one session. In actuality, reaching seventh level within five years was the goal he’d set for himself.

According to Venerated Skysoarer, Jiang Chen needed to be at advanced emperor realm for the highest chance of success in the third of the Six Palaces of Heritage. The lowest threshold for that was seventh level emperor realm. And given their close relationship, Venerated Skysoarer wouldn’t scare him for no good cause.

He really had no time to lose.

He needed absolute power to protect those dearest to him. He'd understood this cold hard truth when Elder Xi had taken away his beloved Huang'er. The trip to Agarwood had reinforced this notion even further.

After such rude awakenings, he now longed for strength as he never had before.

But first, he went looking for the Vermillion Bird in the rear mountain of the young lord residence. The divine beast had become fond of the place. Not only because it was Jiang Chen's territory, but because of the wood spirit spring.

Bathing every day in the spring had helped it recover quite some lifeforce. Although the spring couldn't fundamentally reverse its predicament, the waters could at least noticeably prevent further deterioration in the short-term. Such improvement was the best insurance for the ancient bird.

"Senior, I might spend a long while behind closed doors this time. A year at least, but it might be five years or more."

"You do you, why tell me? Or do you want to chase me away?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Of course not. You're welcome here as long as you want. With an divine senior holding down the fort, what else could I ask for?"

The longer the bird interacted with the young man, the fonder it was of him.

"Kid, you don't need me for that. And don't you have the golem brothers? Get to the point, what do you really want?" Seeing the human prevaricating, it knew he must have something else to say.

Jiang Chen grinned. "Hehe, I can't hide anything from the mighty senior. In fact, I came to ask you for a few drops of blood."

This, for an ancient divine creature, was the most taboo of subjects. Of course, they had enough blood to spare. They would hardly feel the loss of a hundred drops, to say nothing of a couple.

However, their blood was as important to them as their very lives. They would fight to the death to protect it. Unless they offered it on their own, very few would gift it away. After all, some risk was involved in the process.

Indeed, the divine bird turned stony. "You want my blood essence?"

"Senior, I'm cultivating a formidable art that can shape the essence of ancient flames into the form of a Vermillion Bird. Unfortunately, it can imitate the shape but not the soul. After careful study, the reason seems to be my lack of a genuine Vermillion Bird bloodline. Otherwise, it might well be ten times stronger."

Jiang Chen looked at the divine bird with sincerity, his expression tranquil and candid, free of nefarious ambitions. The bird stared back for a long while before sighing. "Jiang Chen, even in ancient times, no human expert's ever dared ask me that. You're the first one."

“Senior, let’s pretend I didn’t say anything if I was out of line. I have many other ways to deal with my enemies anyways.”

He longed to enhance his technique, but it wasn’t in his nature to compel someone else. He would naturally drop it if the bird wasn’t willing.

“Ah well...” the ancient bird sighed. “Why do I have to be so fond of you? Why did you have to help me at every turn? I guess I’ll indulge you this once. But remember, bloodlines are very important for us. The longer we live, the more we cherish it. Another divine creature might have killed you for this insolence.”

Jiang Chen was well aware of this fact, but he simply nodded docilely. “Many thanks for your guidance, senior. I’ll be more careful next time.”

Long Xiaoxuan and Little White were also ancient beasts, one a true dragon and the other an astral white tiger. But the dragon willingly gave his blood whenever Jiang Chen asked. As for the white tiger, he’d raised it since young. It was essentially his contracted beast, so it never refused him anything.

Hence, he’d overlooked this issue.

It wasn’t until the Vermillion Bird’s reminder had he realized how impetuous his request had been. Fortunately, even if reluctant, the ancient bird hadn’t been miserly enough to refuse.

It gave him three drops of blood in the end, quantifying sorrowfully, “My strength has plummeted because my life is near its end, so the blood has lost much of its potency. How about I give you some more once I fully recover?”

Jiang Chen beamed with happiness. “I can’t thank you enough, senior. That reminds me, please make the residence your home. Once I become great emperor, we’ll go to Myriad Abyss Island together. Perhaps you’ll find a suitable place there to break free of the shackles of life and be reborn anew.”

The Vermillion Bird perked up, remaining silent for a long while before exclaiming, “I’ll wait for you to reach great emperor realm then. Hurry the hell up!”

That was a simple jest. It was already pleased enough with the wooden spirit spring and life in the young lord residence was easy. In fact, it wouldn’t abandon the spring’s safety even if Jiang Chen were to chase it away.

The young lord then went to find the eight golems. He’d reserved an area behind the mountain for their rest, cultivation, or other activities.

They’d revived not too long ago, their bodies and souls previously separated for aeons. Compared to their prime, they were still far too weak. Now, they too could cultivate single-mindedly in the residence.

Big Stone thumped his chest when Jiang Chen mentioned seclusion. “Don’t worry. Us brothers will defend this place with our lives, even if some lame demons come invading.”

The young lord smiled. The golem had understood him before he’d said anything.

Golems were purportedly slow and simple, but Big Stone seemed to have absorbed human culture quite fast and now understood the way of the world.

His next stop was the residential area, or more precisely, Madame Yun. He felt guilty over Peerless' disappearance. He had to pay a call at least, and perhaps provide whatever solace he could. It wouldn't do to cause her continued worry by just remaining silent.

Indeed, surprised by his visit, she couldn't hide her inner worries.

"Sister-in-law, I'm to blame for Old Brother Mo's disappearance. But I promise I won't idly sit by.

I've already sent out many men to investigate. His business is Veluriyam's business. And with his vast powers, he'll surely stay out of harm's way. So don't be too worried."

Madame Yun was a proper and empathetic lady. She was indeed sick with worry, but she knew Jiang Chen wasn't at fault.

"Little brother, the heavens help the worthy. Just as you've said, I'm sure Brother Mo is safe and sound somewhere. He must be detained for some reason, but he'll come back one day." She had great faith in her dao partner.

Jiang Chen was slightly relieved by her steady mood.

Indeed, after obtaining the kungpeng blood, Peerless had the potential to break through to empyrean realm. With his ability, he'd surely be safe no matter who was plotting in the shadows.

With everything finally sorted, Jiang Chen entered Guo Ran's palace, formally starting his seclusion. His first priority was to refine the Vermillion Bird's blood essence. Even near the end of its life, an ancient divine creature's blood wasn't for show.

As long as he could fuse it with the Vermillion Bird image, the power of his technique would soar.

"Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermillion Bird, and Black Tortoise. I'm only missing the Black Tortoise bloodline. If I can obtain it one day... With all four, I can master all five elements and fathom the heavenly dao. That would be the opportunity of more than a single lifetime!"

Although the trip to Agarwood Valley had been fraught with danger, he'd reaped enormous gains. The Vermillion Bird's blood, in particular, was a heaven-sent.

His long-term goal was to reach the heavenly planes and plumb their depths. Why had the planes shattered? Gathering the blood of all four great ancient creatures might allow him to make the impossible possible, bringing him one step closer to the root of his past life's mystery!