

Three Realms 1541

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

Chapter 1541: Subduing the King of Gunuo Village

Jiang Chen relaxed at this moment instead. He stepped forward with leisure and changed the subject. “King Gunuo, you make it sound like you four chieftains don’t have the highest authority in your tribe?”

“The highest authority naturally belongs to Forefather Embittered Bamboo. All four villages obey him because he’s the master of the Temple, the center of our faith. He can communicate with our gods.”

“Communicate with your gods? Do you really believe that?” Jiang Chen smiled lazily. “Tell me about his cultivation.”

King Gunuo felt a bit awkward. “I don’t know exactly, but his cultivation is above us four chieftains. Some even suspect he’s sixth level empyrean realm!”

“Oh?” The young lord quirked an eyebrow. Such a master would be an existence to be reckoned with.

Even in the heavenly planes, this strength would result in a decent status. Once at greater empyrean level, a man of common birth could be bestowed a noble title, albeit a lesser one. Was the forefather this strong?

Surprised, Jiang Chen asked again, “Then why hasn’t he arrived yet?”

“I heard he’s busy with a human powerhouse who’s gone to our domain to cause trouble. The man even threatened the Temple’s safety, so the forefather can’t afford to take it lightly. The Temple is our holiest of holies. Our entire tribe’s fortune would suffer if anything were to happen to it.”

Jiang Chen tried to organize his thoughts.

“Forefather Embittered Bamboo, a human powerhouse...” His eyes lit up. “To think a human secluded expert would finally assume their responsibilities! I wonder who it is?”

There was highly unexpected. He’d stopped counting on human empyrean masters ever since meeting Shu Wanqing. Yet, one of them had gone to Savage territory to delay Forefather Bamboo and paralyze the Savage army’s march.

People in Veluriyam had hazarded many guesses, yet it seemed they’d been far from the mark.

Looking at the Savage king wilt where he laid, Jiang Chen asked with an easy smile, “Do you think your tribe is truly strong enough to conquer us?”

The older man closed his eyes, his voice heavy. “The victor is king. What else is there to say? If not for our barren lands and lack of resources, you humans would have nothing on us! You have such vast territory, yet you waste it in petty squabbles among yourselves. What wastes of existence you are! Why do we hardworking Savages have to toil on barren wastelands while you lazy pigs wallow in these fertile soils?” His tone bristled with frustration and injustice.

Jiang Chen laughed despite of himself. "Each race is bestowed its own lot. You don't seem to recognize that. Such is destiny. Would your kin truly be so hard working without your difficult environment? With an easier life, are you certain your warriors wouldn't become indolent pleasure-seekers?"

It was the honest truth.

Who would willingly live an ascetic life? The Savages' nature had been shaped by the limits of their environment.

The king sighed softly. "No matter. Give me a clean death. I simply hope you will abide by your promise and spare my son."

Whether human or Savage, a son was always an object of constant worry.

Jiang Chen smiled. "I'm not the bloodthirsty sort and have little to gain by killing you. I can actually spare you. Do you want to listen to my offer?"

His survival instincts stirred, the king's eyes shot open. "What is it?"

"Have your village pledge allegiance to me. Not only will I spare you, I'll even make you the supreme ruler of your tribe and help your race flourish." He drew a perfect vision of the future for the older man to see.

Hesitation was writ large on the latter's face.

The proposal was certainly tempting. The Savages had little qualms about both attacking or surrendering to the humans. Integrity or honor wasn't high on their list of priorities. They were a pragmatic sort who'd always followed the profit. In this instance, survival.

After a moment of contemplation, King Gunuo looked at Jiang Chen with bright, piercing eyes. "Young lord, there's only one question. What about the forefather? How will you cope with such a powerful existence?"

Become the ruler of the tribe? As long as the forefather lived, such talk was a simple joke. A sixth level empyrean master was a thorny issue.

Jiang Chen didn't answer directly. Instead, he fired back another question with a subtle smile on his lips. "Isn't that your problem to solve?"

King Gunuo blinked. "What do you mean?"

"I'm merely offering you a chance to live. Are you going to rely on me for everything? Even if I'm looking for a puppet, I'd rather have a capable one, don't you think?" Jiang Chen responded lazily.

Since the king wanted to live and accomplish his ambitions, he should come up with a solution himself. Even if not, he ought to appear proactive at least. Otherwise, Jiang Chen might as well kill him right then and there

King Gunuo finally remember this wasn't a negotiation between equals, but a choice between life and death. He became lost in thought. How to deal with the forefather?

The issue was a great taboo he wouldn't even have dared to contemplate before. But other choice did he have now? Every man for himself, that was the rule of the martial dao world.

He seriously considered possible plans, before finally sighing. "Young lord, it's impossible to quell him with force. According to my understanding of Veluriyam, you don't have the power to either. But I might try the method you used against me."

He'd come to admire the young man's skills after unwittingly falling into his trap.

"Heh, that happens to be my idea as well. But you need to personally act as bait." Jiang Chen smiled.

The stratagem had been effective against King Gunuo. The same trick might not work against the forefather, but things might turn out differently with the king as a double agent. An inside enemy was the most poisonous kind.

Looking at the emptiness below his knee, the king lamented, "How can I go back in this shape?"

"If I could pierce your knee, so I can heal you as well. You just decide whether you're in or not," Jiang Chen responded uncaringly.

King Gunuo clenched his teeth. "I'm a dead man if I'm not, but I might have a chance if I am. Is that really choice?"

He'd made his decision. I'll do it!

Jiang Chen clapped with a chuckle, then glanced at the warriors behind the king. "What about your village? Can you guarantee they'll follow you?"

The king replied. "Please be at ease. Everyone I've brought is trustworthy! I've personally nurtured all these warriors!"

"Very well. Let's hear your oath then."

Realizing his impasse, the king clenched his teeth. "I, the king of Gunuo, hereby swears my surrender to young lord Jiang Chen. I will be wholeheartedly loyal. I will do whatever he tells me to do. May celestial thunder strike me dead if I lie!"

"And your son?" Jiang Chen turned his gaze to Gu Tianqing.

The latter had no choice but to follow suit. "I, Gu Tianqing, follow my father in surrendering to young lord Jiang Chen. May the heavens smite me if I renege on my oath."

Jiang Chen turned stern. "King Gunuo, not that I don't believe you, but each of your men has to swear the same oath, or I won't let them live."

"Don't worry, this I can promise you. Young lord, can you heal me now?" As a man who cared about his appearance, he didn't want to go about without half a leg.

There were many miracle cures in the world, but it would inappropriate for Jiang Chen to leave him hanging, so he started the treatment at once. He had many elixirs at his disposal that could restore a man's flesh and vitality. The king's wound was naturally no exception.

After a moment, the man's legs were roughly healed.

"Here's the antidote. Suit yourself." Jiang Chen handed it over to King Gunuo, releasing the latter's experts from the Nine Labyrinth Formation at the same time.

The king embraced this crushing defeat wholeheartedly.

"Young lord, not that I want to haggle, but I hope you can provide me with enough resources. I promise to be loyal unto death once I sit on my tribe's throne."

Resource shortage was the reason for the Savages' warlike nature. Plunder had been their only way of survival.

"Don't worry about that. Of those truly loyal to me, I've never treated any of them unfairly!" Jiang Chen promised with a generous wave of the hand, setting the older man's face alight with delight.

After detoxifying everyone, King Gunuo announced to his warriors, "Gentlemen, everyone is witness to today's events. Humans easily routed our entire army with a simple stratagem. Devouring mankind? That's nothing but a daydream! Our lands are barren and our numbers few. We're destined not to be the continent's main characters. But young lord Jiang Chen promised me that I'll become our tribe's sole ruler. Once I come into this supreme authority, you, my loyal companions, will also have your share. Just think of it! Are you willing to die in vain, or will you follow me on another glorious journey?"

His speech roused his warriors.

They had been ready to die for him to begin with, hence they immediately proclaimed, "We swear to follow the chieftain wherever he goes!"

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Chapter 1542: Accomplishing All With One Operation

His eyes as sharp as an eagle's, King Gunuo swept his consciousness through his warriors while Jiang Chen deployed the God's Eye and the Evil Golden Eye. With the young lord's keen and penetrating insight, he could see clear as day who was genuine through and through, and who had second thoughts.

Most warriors were fiercely loyal to King Gunuo, ready to follow him without so much as a blink or a thought. But there was a suspicious glint in the eyes of some. No matter how faint, it didn't escape Jiang Chen. His consciousness immediately locked onto these people.

"Since you're following me, you have to swear an oath," the Gunuo king remarked faintly. "Whether we succeed or fail, your lives and that of your families will be on the line. Everyone needs to be responsible for their own actions."

"Right, we need to swear!"

"What if some bastard betrays the chieftain?" They cooperated willingly, each swearing the oath each in turn.

King Gunuo looked at Jiang Chen, "Young lord, does that satisfy you?"

The young man responded with a mental transmission. "Those over there are suspicious. They will stab us in the back."

King Gunuo's heart sank. These happened to be the ones he wasn't especially certain of either. In fact, he'd planned on secretly dealing with them afterwards. So he responded, "Don't worry. I already had my eyes on them. I'll find an opportunity to remove them in the future."

"No need, I can do it."

With a series of finger motions, two Confounding Puppets floated down into the crowd like ghosts. None of the suspicious warriors were empyrean realm. Thus, they could mount very little resistance as the puppets tossed them out.

A frightened hush fell upon the Gunuo warriors.

"Don't worry, everyone. This young master is proficient in heart-reading. To me, their thoughts are clear as day. These fellows are wretches who'll betray you for no apparent reason. I'll dispose of them for you."

Of course, Jiang Chen couldn't truly read a man's heart.

Even so, his judgement was keen enough with the help of his eye arts. In any case, his words induced the desired deterrence. These fellows certainly harbored hidden thoughts.

"King Gunuo, I've done my part. Everything's in your hands now."

The latter nodded. "Right, let's meet again outside Veluriyam. Forefather Bamboo will be there and I'll find an opportunity to release the poison."

"Not bad, but don't be overeager. It'd be a disaster for your village if you exposed your intentions. That being said, your village will be an ally to the humans as long as you carry out this mission. There will no longer be the Embittered Savage Tribe in the future, only the Gunuo Village and the Gunuo Tribe. How does it sound?"

King Gunuo flushed with excitement. "Then I'll be relying on you, young lord."

Jiang Chen beckoned to Gu Tianqing. "You're King Gunuo's precious son, so you have to do your part as well. Eat this pill as a token of your sincerity. There won't be any problems in the short term. I'll give you the antidote once things are settled."

Truth be told, Gu Tianqing was far above Jiang Chen in cultivation.

But in the here and now, he acted with extreme deference. Though embarrassed, he didn't dare disobey. He walked up without hesitation and swallowed the pill in a smooth movement.

"Very good!" Jiang Chen clapped. "The Heavenly Dragon Sect lies ahead. I'll turn a blind eye to whatever you do there. But you'd better be more restrained once in Ninesuns Sky Sect territory. You can make a few token lootings, but don't act in earnest. The sect is currently Veluriyam's ally, I won't allow any presumptuousness."

"Yes, yes of course." King Gunuo's worries eased when he saw how the young lord valued his friends. An alliance with him might be a dangerous deal with the devil, and the young man was an unfathomable mystery; but he didn't look to be a backstabber.

Perhaps cooperating with him really was an opportunity for his village to soar to new heights.

Jiang Chen smiled mildly. "I wish you success. We'll meet again in Veluriyam."

King Gunuo acquiesced like a good sycophant, heaving a sigh of relief only after the young man's figure vanished in a blur of light. He flopped back on the limestone, completely dazed. He wanted to cry after today's bitter experience, but tears weren't forthcoming.

How had things ended up this way?

The outcome wasn't a disaster, but it wasn't one he'd have wished for.

"Chieftain, don't feel sad. We Savages have always gone where our interests lie. Since we can't defeat the humans, what does it matter if we have to lower our heads for now?" Gu Qi consoled.

King Gunuo heaved a drawn-out sigh. "Gu Qi, I don't want to betray the forefather, but... I have to think of our village. It will fall if I die here. Those left back home won't be able to resist the other three's greed."

Gu Qi nodded. "Chieftain, survival has always been our first priority. The other villages would certainly have made the same choice. It's our tribe's philosophy."

His eyes gentle yet apologetic, King Gunuo glanced at Gu Tianqing. "My son, I've let you down this time."

The latter hurried to reply, "Father, like Gu Qi said, it might not be a bad outcome for us. I've already suffered several losses at Jiang Chen's hands. This kid is as hard to fathom as the devil. As the humans say, fortune seems to favor him. He will be mankind's leader. With such a brilliant man at their helm, the humans will be united as never before, so the odds would've been stacked against us in any case."

"You mean, since we can't beat him, we might as well join him?"

"Exactly. If we'd been completely wiped out, the other villages would have swallowed our families and clansmen. They'd have made the men their war slaves and taken the women for their pleasure, leaving them no hope of a better tomorrow."

Such was the cruel life among the Savages.

The strong rose to the top. The weak was disregarded, or, if cast down from great heights like the Gunuo Village, were doomed to a bitter fate.

King Gunuo's face brimmed with resolve. "A great man has to be ruthless. We've never been at peace with the other villages. As to Forefather Bamboo, apart from setting us endless missions, what consideration has ever he shown us? We need only be loyal to our bloodline and our village's legacy. The temple is our tribe's supreme totem, but who's to say I can't become the temple's head shaman?"

Jiang Chen had roused his ambitions. He'd been moved by the future the young man painted. If he could seize the entire tribe, why would he fear becoming Jiang Chen's subordinate?

He would be far away in Savage territory in any case, Jiang Chen would be a distant emperor high up in the mountains, making him a nominal sovereign that the king wouldn't need to worry about.

Not to mention, they would be allies. He could gain many benefits from the young man, an important point for him. Why had the Savages gone to the trouble of invading the humans? Wasn't it for resources?

So why should he keep fighting when surrender worked just as well? Savage warriors were ferocious, but their numbers simply paled compared to the human race. Pitting resources or lives against them would be suicide. They could only rob and plunder like bandits.

"Alright, everyone, keep it to yourselves. If we're successful, every one of you here today will know riches beyond your wildest imagination! The Heavenly Dragon Sect is ahead of us, so let's loot our fill!" His intense gaze landed on the sect's lands.

The sect had chosen to oppose Jiang Chen, so the young lord would never shield them.

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Wellspring and the others were stupefied by the young lord's return. Why was he back so soon?

"Young lord, was the plan successful?" Wellspring couldn't resist asking.

Jiang Chen smiled mysteriously. "More than that. We might solve the Savage issue in one fell swoop."

"Oh?" The great emperors looked at each other in confusion.

Jiang Chen rarely hid the truth from those he trusted, so he roughly explained the situation.

Wellspring sighed with praise. "The young lord's strategies are endless. To be your enemy is truly a foolish move."

Peerless laughed. "I hope King Gunuo will be smart enough not to be found out by that Forefather Something."

Jiang Chen had no control over that particular outcome, He couldn't be blamed even in case of failure. His own side was strong enough to face the Savage army in any case.

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After handing over pursuit of the human to the experts staying behind and settling the rest of the tribe's affairs, Forefather Embittered Bamboo brought the Holy Beast with him to the human domain.

On this day, he arrived in the Moon God Sect and met the garrison stationed there.

"What? The four great villages left several days ago?" He frowned tightly. Why had they acted on their own without his express command?

Anger swelled in his chest.

“Forefather, the chieftains left us to report that they’ve left to surround Veluriyam in advance, but won’t fight without your esteemed presence to direct them.”

The words somewhat appeased the forefather’s ire.

“Hmph, what an impudent bunch.” Since he couldn’t delay any further, he rushed towards Veluriyam with the Holy Beast.

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Chapter 1543: Plans And Changes In Plans

Traveling at full speed, Forefather Bamboo finally caught up to Greenplume Village as the latter marched toward Pillfire. His arrival caused a flurry of trepidation, but that didn’t provoke displeasure. Instead, he asked King Greenplume, “Are you in contact with the other villages?”

King Greeplume shook his head nervously. “We agreed to keep in touch at first, but everyone went their own way and we haven’t really heard from them since.”

Forefather Bamboo’s expression changed drastically. “Aren’t you afraid of being ambushed by the humans? All of you are acting so rashly!”

King Greenplume had no excuses to offer. Though the forefather was keeping his temper in check, his displeasure was plain to see.

“Forget it, I don’t blame you. My delayed arrival has thrown a wrench in our battle plans. What a pity.” The forefather sighed. “I hope everyone will reach Veluriyam without a hitch.”

He wasn’t as confident as he sounded. Instead of feverishly looking for the other three forces, he chose to travel with Greenplume Village.

After Pillfire’s defeat, Wellspring had stayed behind to deal with the aftermath and handle the various great factions in the north. He’d already ordered men to haul away all the hoarded riches, sending most of it to Veluriyam.

Therefore, the Savages’ looting only resulted in slim pickings, leaving the invaders crestfallen.

The army then followed the road south, finally nearing Veluriyam’s territory on this day when King Greenplume suddenly received word from King Yuanqiang.

The message left him pale.

“Forefather, the Gunuo and Flowerback villages have arrived at our meeting location near the Veluriyam border, but they’re arguing and will probably end up fighting!”

“What?” The forefather shot up. The two villages were going to fight each other?!

He’d been holding back his temper to begin with. Killing their own at such a crucial juncture? How dare they! That was sheer suicide!

“We march! Make haste!” he ordered, his face dark.

At the forefather's urging, the army picked up the pace. They'd hadn't been too far away from rendezvous point, so they soon reached their destination.

Warriors from the two villages stood opposite each other, glaring at the other side like raging bulls. The tiniest spark could trigger a chaotic melee. King Yuanqiang was vigorously playing mediator.

"What's all this! What the hell are you doing? Is this how you act in my absence?" The anger Forefather Bamboo had repressed for so long finally erupted. These two villages would really give him a stroke.

To march on their own initiative was one thing, but to fight each other so close to Veluriyam? His arrival curbed most of the anger and posturing present.

"Forefather." King Gunuo and King Flowerback hurried to pay their respects, their men in tow. All of them looked uneasy and anxious.

The forefather fixed his stare at the two kings. "Look at the two of you! Why don't you go on and fight already! Do it! I'll be the referee. The winner gets to replace me. How about it, hmm?"

"You, Chieftain Flowerback. I hear the plan to split up came from you? You're something, aren't you! Now you're making plans and decisions in my place!"

"You also, Chieftain Gunuo, your village discovered the weakening of the human domain's Boundary Stele long ago, so why didn't you notify me? What were you trying to do? Hoard all of the riches for yourself?"

Everyone got their share of the dressing down. Neither king dared reply. They looked down and played dead, hoping the storm would pass.

"Let's hear it. Why were you arguing?" The forefather asked, deceptively mild.

"Forefather, I simply asked how their journey and looting went when I arrived. King Gunuo must have eaten gunpowder for dinner. For no good reason, he accused me of tricking him by giving him the most difficult route. He blames me for his village's grave losses." King Flowerback felt wronged.

King Gunuo retorted, "What? We drew the routes by lots. That's not what I said. As soon as we met up, King Flowerback jeered and taunted me. 'You seem to have lost many men. Your journey must not have gone well.' How can I tolerate this??"

Forefather Bamboo responded coolly, "So you almost traded blows because of this idiotic, petty trifle? Right on Veluriyam's doorstep? What if they've been monitoring you all along? I bet they'd die of laughter. We wouldn't even need to attack them."

The biting rebuke silenced the two men.

Fortunately, the forefather didn't continue the scolding. He took a deep breath. "Forget it. I'm also in the wrong this time, so let bygones be bygones. That you've successfully arrived is proof that we are still blessed. We're already at Veluriyam's doorstep. Do you have any plans?"

King Gunuo suggested, "Forefather, we were the first to arrive, so I've pitched a tent. Why don't we continue inside?"

The forefather glanced his way. King Gunuo's eyes sparkled with hopefulness.

"We might as well. Your itinerary was the most arduous one, wasn't it? It can't have been easy arriving first." He ordered, "Let's chat inside."

Naturally, no one protested. Everyone set off for that area of the encampment. The Gunuo tent was a spacious and luxurious affair. The feeling of being enveloped in luxury greeted them as soon as they stepped inside.

Forefather Bamboo tsked in praise. "King Gunuo, you know how to enjoy yourself."

"Forefather, if you find it to your taste, it's yours to rest in. I can set up another one elsewhere."

"No need. I'm not in the habit of snatching someone else's belongings." The forefather waved it off.

"Alright, let's talk business. Everyone should already know why I'm late. That human is truly despicable."

"Forefather, did you end up capturing him?"

"I told those stationed behind not to let him escape. He was definitely trying to delay me, so how can I let him prevail?" This was still a touchy subject for the forefather.

"Back to the matter at hand. You four villages have arrived safe and sound. That's worth celebrating. Next, what's your plan? Let's hear it. We can go from there." He'd just arrived in the human domain and so wasn't familiar with the latest developments.

"Forefather, Veluriyam's the only faction that can stand up to us. It's smooth sailing as long as long as we defeat them."

"But the city's young lord is a remarkable figure. From what we've uncovered about his sudden rise, Jiang Chen is simply a miracle maker."

"Fortunately, the secluded empyrean masters all seem to dislike him, so they might not come to his rescue."

"What else? The more precise the better," the forefather asked. Even the smallest detail wouldn't escape his scrutiny.

The villages immediately relayed all the information at their disposal.

When Gunuo Village's turn came, King Gunuo reported with a wry smile, "My village fought against him at the northwestern border. The kid has strength and courage in spades. But ultimately, he's nothing more than a fledgling who hasn't reached empyrean realm yet, so his foundations aren't firm enough."

The forefather nodded. "True. A young man rising too fast will become the object of envy. Steady foundations? Easier said than done. Didn't you mention his bad relationship with the secluded human experts? What does that tell us? The human domain is in a transition period. The old leaders haven't passed the torch to the new ones yet. But Jiang Chen's become the leader, both de facto and in name."

"Forefather, the kid's subdued eight Stone Golems. Their fighting prowess is fearsome. I hear that many of our men have suffered at their hands."

“Oh right, he also has a dragon. That’s the truth, not a rumor. He also seems really close to a Vermillion Bird.”

The forefather’s glance swept through the gathered men. “No matter how strong he is, there’s nothing for us to fear when we have so many braves with us. Apart from the golem brothers, no one really stands out on his side!

“Alright, I’ll assign your tasks now. We need eight empyrean fighters to contend with the golems. Each village is to dispatch two empyrean elders to pin them down. Any questions? Remember, even if you can’t defeat them outright, you need to stall for time!”

“Forefather, are you planning to...?”

“I’ll personally subdue the kid.”

“My dear Holy Beast.” The old man stroked the ferocious beast at his side. “There’s a Vermillion Bird among our enemies, but I have you! Once the battle starts, you’re in charge of delaying Jiang Chen, understood?”

The spirit creature nodded obediently.

“Remember, this assault is our best opportunity and also mankind’s weakest hour. Our chance might vanish once they react,” he urged.

King Gunuo nodded as if in perfect agreement.

“Everyone has their own mission, so go and get ready. Remember, when you breach Sacred Peafowl Mountain, don’t ransack it without my express command. Understood?” he warned sternly.

“Don’t worry, forefather. We wouldn’t dare act on our own even if we conquer Sacred Peafowl Mountain. We’ll notify you first and wait for your word.”

The forefather laughed merrily. King Gunuo had become much more polite since the last time they’d met.

If only he knew how secretly delighted King Gunuo was at this moment. The tent was a dark trap laid with meticulous care. Soulless Powder permeated every corner!

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Chapter 1544: Time to Reap Rewards

“Have they entered the tent yet?” Jiang Chen leisurely waited for news atop Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Sure enough, the Goldbiter Rats soon informed him that Forefather Embittered Bamboo and the three chieftains had taken King Gunuo up on his invitation.

“Without a doubt, young lord Chen,” the rat king answered firmly.

Jiang Chen casually rose to his feet and barked with confident laughter. “Haha! They say that the best way to win a battle is through the use of strategy, resulting in a bloodless victory!”

He’d already assembled a large army that could go toe-to-toe against the Savages, but just because he could, didn’t mean he should. A war had to be avoided if possible as the Savages were ferocious and

deadly. With Veluriyam's current strength, the war would only end with huge losses on both sides. Victory would have to come at great cost.

That outcome was wholly undesirable as many of his close subordinates could lose their lives in the war. Even the thought of it pained him greatly.

"It's about time." Jiang Chen stated nonchalantly and summoned the golem brothers. "You will accompany me on the action, the rest of you stand ready for my orders!"

Inside King Gunuo's tent, the forefather's contracted spirit creature suddenly shifted restlessly and wouldn't stop growling. Bizarre fear and anxiety could be seen clearly in its eyes.

"Holy Beast, battle is on the horizon. Why are you throwing a tantrum?" The forefather rebuked.

Its fur on end, the beast alternated between growling fretfully and shrieking ferociously.

"What's wrong?" The forefather asked his contracted spirit creature. Moments later, his expression darkened. He examined his qi ocean and felt inexplicably weak. His current condition was night and day from his usual self. What was happening?

The forefather was completely taken aback. He suddenly rose his arms high to slice through the tent, as if his palms were two blades. The tent fell down on two sides, its occupants exposed to the world.

Almost all of the executives from all four tribes were gathered here. They were completely dumbfounded as they couldn't understand why the forefather had done such a thing.

"Forefather, what's wrong?" One of them asked with a perplexed expression.

The forefather glared at King Gunuo ferociously. "What treachery are you trying in your tent?"

At this point, the king had already retreated several feet away. A sinister smile materialized on the corners of his mouth. "Forefather, what do you mean? Why are you in a rage?"

The forefather yelled furiously. "You numbskulls! Have none of you realized that you've been poisoned?"

The color drained from everyone else's faces as they hastily checked their bodies. The results horrified them even further. None of them could muster any strength! Their qi ocean was empty!

"W-what's going on?" King Yuanqing was dumbfounded. Terror and angst could be heard in his voice. Clearly, the sudden turn of events had distressed him greatly.

King Flowerback glared at Gunuo, thoroughly enraged. "It must be you! The path from the Moon God Sect to the Heavenly Dragon Sect is riddled with danger! With two sects to plunder, you should've arrived last! But your tents were already up by the time I arrived! You must've been up to no good when you invited us to your tent!"

King Gunuo retorted mockingly. "You might eat a crock of shit, but there's no need to spew it from your mouth. Flowerback, we've had our differences in the past, but surely you don't need to slander me like this?"

The forefather glared at Gunuo coldly. "Why do you stay so far away if you've really done nothing wrong? Our movements have all been hindered by the poison, yet you're able to retreat effortlessly. Do you still wish to deny your involvement?"

Gunuo decided to tear down all pretences after the forefather had ousted him.

"That's right, it's all my doing! You've all been poisoned! You'll feel weak and powerless and you won't be able to muster any strength. Is this straightforward enough for you?"

A deathly hush fell over the crowd after he admitted his involvement. Pain, confusion, and despair were written over their faces.

Flowerback laughed ghastly. "Bastard! I always knew you were traitorous scum! Forefather, we should tear him into pieces while we still have strength and seize the antidote from him!"

Gunuo burst into laughter. "Antidote? Do you really believe that the antidote is in my hands? I had the same idea when I was in your shoes! The more you struggle, the faster the poison spreads! Hahaha!"

Reinforcements from the other three villages quickly arrived. The forefather shouted, "Stop! Stay away from here! The poison has yet to dissipate!"

The braves screeched to a halt.

"Surround the area! Don't let a single Gunuo bastard escape!" Flowerback commanded.

"Yes! Surround them and make them give up the antidote!" Yuanqing added.

Greenplume issued an order to his warriors as well. "Stop hesitating! You must surround the Gunuo traitors!"

The warriors of Gunuo Village had already gathered at their king's side, forming a squadron at one of the corners. The warriors from the other villages moved to surround them.

At this time, a crisp peal laughter echoed through the air.

"Tsk tsks. It's certainly lively here! How fortunate that I've made it in time." Jiang Chen had arrived with the Stone Golems.

Powerful experts from various factions had assembled and stationed themselves on Veluriyam's outskirts in preparation for war! Almost every single elite of the human domain had gathered at Veluriyam Capital. No matter how one looked at it, they held the advantage, both in terms of numbers and morale.

Jiang Chen slowly solidified, like a mirage taking shape. His image gradually sharpened as he made his way closer. It almost seemed like he'd materialized out of a primordial age.

He snapped his fingers once as he walked, causing the land in a ten-mile radius to tremble and shake. The sound of rumbling earth was bone-chilling.

Torrents of golden waves emerged from the ground, answering his call. It wasn't any kind of water, but an enormous army of Goldbiter Rats!

The tide of rats had appeared once again!

Their numbers spanned for as far as the eye could see, surrounding the area with their overwhelming presence. There was no end to their numbers.

“Forefather Embittered Bamboo?” Jiang Chen glanced at the forefather with the Evil Golden Eye. One could easily identify the latter due to being as skinny as a stick of bamboo, accompanied with an ill-fittingly large head.

The forefather glared daggers at Jiang Chen.

“You’re the young lord of Veluriyam, Jiang Chen?” Frustration filled his heart as he assessed the youth.

A young man was prancing around in front of him, yet there was nothing he could do. To a sixth level empyrean master, the humiliation was worse than death.

“That’s correct.” Jiang Chen smiled nonchalantly. “Embittered Savages, why do you covet our land when clearly your own territory is more than enough to suit your needs? Do you truly believe that the human race is beneath small and insignificant invaders like you?”

“How impudent!”

“How dare you speak such nonsense!”

“You despicable humans have no right to say that our tribe is small and insignificant!” The embittered Savages were extremely proud of their identities. They’d always naively believed that they were superior to the humans. This confidence seeped deep into their very bones.

Jiang Chen wasn’t in the mood for bickering. He flashed a bland grin. “Shout all you want. Your fate is already set in stone. You can mock and ridicule to your heart’s desire. That’s all you can do now.”

He taunted the Savages brazenly.

The forefather inched closer to Jiang Chen, a lethal strike kept in store. He’d yet to give up on the hope for a counterattack. Unfortunately for him, Jiang Chen had seen through his intentions.

The young lord smiled blandly. “Embittered Bamboo, you can save the effort. The more you move, the sooner you’ll die. Since I’ve appeared before you, I can guarantee that I have ways to deal with you. In fact, even if you hadn’t been poisoned, it’s unlikely that you’ll be able to harm me in any way.”

Such was Jiang Chen’s confidence.

The forefather’s anger dissipated after Jiang Chen hit the nail on the head. He sighed with despair. “I’ve run rampant through the world all my life, but to think that a human youth would cause me to eat a loss! Oh, the irony!”

The forefather’s tones were tinged with despair. Everything was out of his control.

Jiang Chen didn’t let his guard down just because of this. All he did was smile coldly at his foe.

“The winner reigns over the defeated. I have nothing else to say.” The forefather was surprisingly straightforward. “Name your terms. What must we do for you to let our innocent warriors go?”

“Innocent?” Jiang Chen roared into laughter. “Did they not kill or pillage? How are they innocent?”

“Embittered Bamboo, don’t take me for a fool! Right now, you’re in no position to talk terms, understood?” he warned solemnly.

The forefather was an eminent figure after all. He burned with impotent rage after the human’s lecture. But when he marshalled his strength to attack, he discovered to his great chagrin that he wasn’t confident he’d be able to hit his target.

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

Chapter 1545: Be My Servant

Forefather Bamboo forcibly suppressed his temper. “You have us in the bag. What do you want, Jiang Chen? Speak plainly.”

“I can show mercy... with a few conditions, of course,” Jiang Chen rolled his words out slowly.

“What conditions? State them.” A ray of hope flashed across the forefather’s heart.

“The first is very easy. You will be my servant, Forefather Bamboo.”

Like a bolt of lightning, Jiang Chen’s words crashed into those who heard them.

“Are you crazy?” the forefather blurted out.

Jiang Chen’s smile grew only wider. “So you’d rather die? Alright, that’s the end of our discussion then. I hadn’t planned for diplomacy from the start anyways.” His face darkened after dropping this.

The forefather had wanted to bargain with Jiang Chen, but the human’s lack of reception and contrarian demeanor revealed someone more experienced than even the forefather.

“Hold on!” The Savage’s heart sank when he saw Jiang Chen pull out his Holy Dragon Bow once more. The young man looked ready to strike at any moment.

Jiang Chen sneered. “I see no reason to delay the proceedings. You should be more aware of your status as the loser of the conflict! Do you think dilly-dallying here will somehow change the outcome?”

“Is there no more room for discussion?” Forefather Bamboo sounded forlorn.

“Sure. I’ll make an exception and tell you something extra. If you follow me, you may hope to break through to great empyrean realm in your lifetime. Otherwise, you’ll finish at mid empyrean at most.” His tone was even-handed, but the content of his words shook the forefather to his core.

“You? You can do that?”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “You can choose whether or not to believe me, but you have no other choice either way.”

Forefather Bamboo heaved a long sigh. “I’ll ask the others.”

“No need. I have no interest in the other three tribes. I will let King Gunuo decide their fates. If the king wants them to live, they may live. Otherwise, they will die when he says so.”

King Gunuo's eyes lit up when he heard this. Jiang Chen was giving him a lot of face. His choice had been worth it! The king had been worried about the possibility of the young man reneging, but that no longer appeared to be the case.

The three other villages' leaders colored one by one. "Forefather Bamboo," they pled, "we will surely die in King Gunuo's hands."

The forefather looked at Jiang Chen dismally. "Must it be like this?"

"I promised King Gunuo that I would place him in a position of leadership. I keep my promises, so you should appeal to King Gunuo instead."

King Flowerback suddenly stepped forward, his face blanching as he bowed deeply to King Gunuo. "King Gunuo, I was stupid before for arguing with you. Please, allow us to live and we will ensure your position as the ruler. The ancestral temple will be yours."

There had been enmity between Flowerback and Gunuo from before.

King Gunuo snickered. "I can let the others live, but you are too wily and cunning, King Flowerback. I can't keep you around!"

With this, he slammed his palm into King Flowerback's chest.

Because he was poisoned, Flowerback had only a tenth of his cultivation left. He was no match for the healthy King Gunuo. The palm hit him squarely where it landed.

Crack!

King Flowerback flew backwards like a broken kite. King Gunuo strode forward and stomped his foot on his fallen peer's face.

"If you hadn't suggested that we divide our forces, none of this would have happened! You pretend to be clever, but you're nothing more than a fool in the end!" Gunuo applied tremendous force on his leading foot.

King Flowerback's head burst open like a watermelon.

The other two village chieftains were white as ghosts at Gunuo's display of might.

King Yuanqiang squeezed out an ugly smile. "King Gunuo, I didn't make things worse when you were quarreling with King Flowerback. I mediated the best I could. You..."

King Gunuo nodded nonchalantly. "If you had openly supported me, I would treat you as a close friend now. Unfortunately, you only tried to reconcile us. I can let you and your tribe live, but you must pledge your loyalty to me as the emperor of the Embittered Savages. The ancestral temple and head shaman will both be mine."

"Of course, of course! You're so talented, King Gunuo. It's our tribe's greatest fortune for you to grasp the ancestral temple. I believe that you will do even better than Forefather Bamboo one day." King Yuanqiang sang Gunuo's praises.

To the side, King Greenplume let out a sigh of relief. “We have no grudge, King Gunuo, right? I see no reason for us to fight to the bitter end.”

“Same thing. Pledge your loyalty to me and you will live,” King Gunuo replied coolly.

“Not a problem.” King Greenplume was very straightforward. Savages were unfettered by courtesies and social mores. As a result, they tended to be a rather fairweather bunch. Surrender wasn’t an issue provided things looked hopeless enough.

There wasn’t much of a difference between Forefather Embittered Bamboo and King Gunuo at the ancestral temple’s helm. In fact, they were a bit closer to the latter due to past relations.

Looking with indifference at King Greenplume and Yuanqiang, Gunuo continued smoothly. “If you pledge your loyalties to me, you must listen to my every order.”

“Of course.” The two other kings nodded.

“Very good. Swear your oaths. Your entire village must swear with you: I will consider leaving even one man as out a gesture of insincerity.” Now that he had a lot more authority in his hands, King Gunuo was soaring with pleasure. He was on top of the world! The mere thought of it gave him a rush.

This was his highest point as King Gunuo. He was now the forefather of the ancestral temple, ruler of the Embittered Savages.

Jiang Chen saw little reason to participate. His delegation followed an implicit trust that King Gunuo would be able to perform his duties to the best of his ability. If that turned out not to be the case, he could intervene afterwards.

“I must admit, Jiang Chen... you humans aren’t very good at martial dao, but your plotting and stratagems are admirable in their own right. Without internal conflict in the Embittered Savages, Veluriyam Capital wouldn’t have won nearly so easily.” Clearly, Forefather Bamboo wasn’t quite persuaded of his defeat.

Jiang Chen was quite dismissive of this conclusion. “War is deceit,” he smiled serenely. “The Embittered Savages have existed for countless years since the ancient times. How come you haven’t learned even that much?”

The forefather could only sigh in response. The logic was simple: the winner had the privilege of writing history.

“Embittered Bamboo, you must accept my brand upon your consciousness as my servant. Only then can I ensure your continued subservience.” Jiang Chen cut to the chase.

The forefather had no other choice. He knew that accepting said brand meant that Jiang Chen would have the power to decide his life and death in the span of a thought. If the young lord wanted to exterminate him, a small movement of the consciousness would destroy him utterly.

In the world of martial dao, these brands were very popular in their use to control others.

A powerful consciousness entered Forefather Bamboo’s mind. The brand was intensely personal, like a large protruding nail.

The forefather shivered; he sensed a powerful will taking root in his own.

“Such a powerful consciousness!” He could feel how vast Jiang Chen’s own was through the link in his consciousness ocean. It was actually quite shocking.

Jiang Chen was only half-step great emperor, but his consciousness ocean was like an infinite sea, surging with untapped potential.

Forefather Bamboo resigned himself to his fate. This restriction upon him meant that he had no recourse to turn the tables any more. It was doubtful that Jiang Chen’s consciousness would miss any disrespectful or dangerous thoughts, regardless of how fleeting they were.

“Sacred Beast, you’ve been dragged into this as well.” Forefather Bamboo caressed the spirit creature rather lovingly. “I found it as a cub on a hunt,” he introduced. “I didn’t expect it to grow up so well. Young lord Jiang Chen, will you let it come with me?”

“Feel free.” Jiang Chen wasn’t much worried.

The forefather himself had been defeated; there wasn’t much to be concerned about with a single spirit creature.

On the other hand, it seemed King Gunuo had nearly finished his organizational efforts.

“Young lord, everything is almost done. Aside from a scant few from Flowerback Village, the others have all sworn absolute loyalty to me.” King Gunuo was very excited – though not too much so, given that Jiang Chen had been the fundamental reason for his multiple successes.

“You have a good eye for the bigger picture,” Jiang Chen smiled. “It’s good for you to lead the Embittered Savages. It was wise to have helped you into your position of leadership.”

“All you, young lord,” King Gunuo replied humbly. “And the power of the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud too, of course.”

“Alright. I leave the rest to you. You have half a month to get every Savage alive out of the human domain. Any that remain will be put to the sword!”

“Yes, I guarantee it!” A fortnight was more than enough time.

“Remember to work hard. You will be paid according to your efforts, rest assured.” Jiang Chen wasn’t going to openly declare their covert relationship. Instead, he pricked King Gunuo with both insinuation and reward.

Forefather Bamboo glanced at the king from the side. “I forgot to congratulate you, King Gunuo,” he declared emotionlessly.

King Gunuo was a bit embarrassed. “Embittered Bamboo,” he harrumphed, “you shouldn’t feel wronged by this conclusion. What did you do as leader of the ancestral temple? Aside from flinging out tyrannical orders, what else did you do for your people? If you had been just a tiny bit wiser, do you think I would be here today?”

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1546: Emperor Jiang Chen

Jiang Chen smiled faintly at the bickering between new and old leadership. “Embittered Bamboo, haven’t you been the master of the ancestral temple for a long time? It isn’t necessarily bad to give up your seat to someone new like the virile King Gunuo. Plus, maybe he’ll do better than you did.” Naturally, he was only being polite.

Forefather Bamboo sighed dejectedly. “Never mind. There’s not much I can’t get over at this point. But was what you said earlier true?”

The young lord’s tantalizing words weighed heavily on his mind.

“What, that I can help you get through mid empyrean to great empyrean?” Jiang Chen retorted with a half-smile.

“Yes. If you can really do that, then it’s not a bad thing for me to lay down my mantle of the ancestral temple’s leadership. King Gunuo, you should feel lucky. If I didn’t willingly transfer my scepter into your hands, heaven may very well punish your attempt at forcefully offering sacrifice.”

King Gunuo felt cold sweat trickle down his back.

Was the forefather’s direct support and transfer of scepter really necessary? He had taken the position by force of arms, hadn’t he? What an embarrassing prospect. But it was as Jiang Chen had said. The loser had to yield to the winner.

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The expected gruesome war with the Embittered Savages didn’t end up breaking out after all. With the cooperation of Jiang Chen on the outside and King Gunuo on the inside, the problem of the invaders was resolved once and for all.

Now that King Gunuo had authority, he would surely execute a batch of Flowerback dissidents once he returned to the Savages’ homeland. Following that, he would need to establish his newfound status as the head of the Embittered Savages.

Under the restriction of Jiang Chen’s consciousness, Forefather Bamboo couldn’t even think about betrayal ever again.

Jiang Chen sorely lacked talent. Killing the old man would have been too much of a waste! Hence the spark of inspiration for turning the forefather into his servant. He’d only casually slipped the prospect into the conversation and had thought for sure that Forefather Bamboo would be too dignified to surrender.

Things had gone more or less the way he had expected. The forefather hadn’t been particularly pliant at first, but he came around eventually. Jiang Chen wasn’t going to keep him inside the young lord residence, of course.

Instead, he acquired a separate residence within Veluriyam Capital for the old man. This was both house arrest and an arrangement. The presence of a cultivator as strong as Forefather Bamboo mitigated potential troublemakers in the form of secluded human experts.

The forefather saw nothing to complain about. He knew well that he was Jiang Chen's prisoner and servant now. The past had little to do with him. With Jiang Chen's support, King Gunuo would no doubt keep a tight grip on the Embittered Savages.

In this way, Veluriyam's young lord resolved the Savage invaders in an unexpectedly smooth and efficient way.

But Jiang Chen didn't relax because of it. The human domain had many Boundary Steles. The northwestern wastes had possessed just a single one. Out of the others, the only one that he'd repaired was the one near the Southern Celestial Tribe. How well would those repairs hold? He wasn't so sure.

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During his meditations one day, Jiang Chen suddenly had an idea.

"The situation in the human domain isn't stable, but at least there's a reasonable path forward. Things here aren't too bad yet. Even if another Boundary Stele realm breaks, there won't be mass hysteria like before."

He could feel the human domain grow through the many trials it was weathering. Those of the large sects had left Veluriyam Capital to return homes in droves. Good news was popping up all over.

Peerless and Wellspring both harmonized with the heavenly dao, entering empyrean realm and refining their own decrees. Veluriyam had suddenly gained two native empyrean experts.

Not long after, the Jiao brothers refined the empyrean decrees they'd been given. They became empyrean experts as well.

At the same time, Coiling Dragon successfully refined an empyrean relic, reaching peak great emperor. He had only a little bit to go before empyrean realm. Though it was early days yet for actually getting there, the news nevertheless invigorated and excited the whole of Veluriyam Capital.

Aside from the human cultivators, Long Xiaoxuan and Little White achieved great progress in their own rights. They were truly showing the nobility of the ancient sacred beast bloodline. Long Xiaoxuan had cultivated even more quickly than Jiang Chen had – he'd reached great emperor quite a while back.

The Astral White Tiger had grown far past its cub stage as well. It was almost great emperor!

The tiger and dragon seemed to be competing against each other in their cultivation. Neither was satisfied with letting the other take a commanding lead. However, the tiger had a comparatively slower start, which meant it was at a disadvantage compared to Long Xiaoxuan.

Jiang Chen was pleased with the progress that those around him were making. The human domain was reaching a blowout stage in terms of progress.

He made several selections from the library of martial dao tomes in Shu Wanqing's storage ring, handing them out to the various sects. Jiang Chen wasn't stingy towards particularly the second and third rank sects, as a reward to his stauncher loyalists in the past conflict.

He could foresee that in ten or twenty years, many more factions rivaling first rank sects would crop up in the human domain. These martial dao tomes would ensure that. Existing first rank sects would either grow stronger or be edged out by their competition. This vitality would be a delight to witness.

After the Jiao brothers broke through to empyrean realm, Jiang Chen gave them an important task.

“Jiao Yun, Jiao Feng, I met a demon emperor named Bloodmalva back in Cloudshatter Range of Great Scarlet Mid Region. He hadn’t recovered to peak condition at the time, but the great emperors I saw there weren’t a match at all for him. I only barely managed to escape from his clutches; the demon emperor went elsewhere. You brothers should go investigate where he is now. If that threat isn’t nipped in the bud, I am worried he may cause far more chaos at some future stage.”

From beginning to end, Jiang Chen saw the demon race as his primary concern. He wouldn’t relent against a single demon, especially an opponent as obviously fearsome as Bloodmalva.

After delegating the job to the brothers, he planned on closing his doors in cultivation once more. His goal was clear this time: he needed to break through to great emperor. He had waited for this moment for far too long.

He remembered Huang’er’s exhortation for him not to go to Myriad Abyss Island before he reached great emperor. He couldn’t possibly save her before that point!

From her tone at the time, the island held a great deal of danger for someone who wasn’t even a great emperor.

“I must break through as soon as I can!” Jiang Chen’s resolve was set in stone. He had never been in as much of a hurry to ascend to great emperor realm as he was now. Everything in the human domain was getting back on the right track.

“I’ve worked for humanity and the public good for many years now. It’s time for me to be a bit more selfish... for Huang’er’s sake as well as my own.” He could only imagine what kind of suffering Huang’er had to be going through with each passing day.

Doing so filled him with initiative. For Jiang Chen, breaking through to great emperor wasn’t a challenge at all. His fortune, intuition, and foundations all converged to ensure that.

After nine months, he successfully opened his doors as a great emperor.

This time, he’d arrived at a new level of martial cultivation as well. There was plenty to write home about with regards to how he’d benefited. The young lord could finally style himself Emperor Jiang Chen!

Every step he climbed was a redemption of the yin constitution of his previous life. Every stride filled him with excitement. Everything about him saw a massive boost after breaking through.

The Nine Labyrinth Formation’s dimensional mysteries were a bit clearer to him now. The number of Confounding Puppets he could control increased to four. The ability to command four puppets simultaneously in battle gave him an almost insurmountable advantage.

Aside from these, Jiang Chen had worked on his Holy Dragon Bow the most. He'd meditated on it each day to take in the primordial aura the bow exuded. The quality of the bow was remarkable indeed; this treasure was quite a coup! Of course, his other equipment and methods saw large improvements too.

He came out just in time to hear that the Jiao brothers' pursuit of Demon Emperor Bloodmalva had succeeded. The demon emperor hadn't expected two empyrean experts to be on his tail and had been firmly suppressed by them.

After being wounded in the battle in the Cloudshatter Range, the demon emperor found his recovery delayed even more. Despite this and the fact that the Jiao brothers were empyrean experts, the battle had still been quite fierce.

Thankfully, the Jiao brothers were significantly stronger than a demon great emperor. It had cost them a little to kill Bloodmalva, but success meant the removal of an enormous thorn in the young lord's side.

What made Jiang Chen rather upset though, was that the icy old man who'd brought a shouting match to Sacred Peafowl Mountain had seemingly disappeared. There was no actualization to the threats he had made.

Jiang Chen had laid down a plot for any secluded experts to appear, but the frigid old man had apparently smelled something fishy about things here. He had been nowhere to be found since then. This absence was more concerning than his potential presence.

"Spread this piece of news far and wide," Jiang Chen commanded. "Tell the human domain that I am inviting all secluded experts for tea at Sacred Peafowl Mountain in Veluriyam Capital. The more the merrier. I have many gifts for them!"

By doing so, he intended to take the initiative. Perhaps this was a better strategy in dealing with these hermit experts.

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

Chapter 1547: Social Circles of the Secluded Experts

There were quite a few empyrean experts still living in the human domain, but only seven or eight was in touch with each other. The now-dead Shu Wanqing had been a part of this network.

In fact, the old man's death had caused a wave of heated debate in the small circle. Some expressed their indignation and declared that Jiang Chen should be harshly punished. Others didn't care at all since the matter wasn't personally relevant to them. A few were extreme enough to announce they were going to slaughter the entirety of Veluriyam Capital, in a display of empyrean power.

However, none of them carried out their threats in the end.

The ones calling for heavy-handed tactics fell silent after repeatedly discovering exactly how tough of a nut Jiang Chen was.

The glacial old man who had descended upon Veluriyam was among their ranks. Finding only failure at the city, he'd rounded up several other experts to seek revenge. Some made excuses as to their busyness, others stated their lack of interest, and still others plainly ignored him.

After finally finding two others with similar interests, the dastardly trio had agreed to find a good opportunity to quash Veluriyam.

But receiving news that Veluriyam had defeated the Embittered Savages and taken its Forefather Embittered Bamboo as a servant left the three experts wide-eyed and clueless.

Their delusions of troublemaking disappeared in the blink of an eye. Any attempt at opposing Jiang Chen was tantamount to suicide. And now, he'd sent out the news that he was inviting the human domain's empyrean experts for tea and conversation!

The invitation alone wouldn't necessarily have persuaded them. Though they were forced to admit Jiang Chen was a character in his own right, they didn't want to seem too approachable by agreeing to attend so easily.

However, the prospect of gifts caused them to waver. The quality of the presents was a bit doubtful, since the recipients in question were empyrean experts, but there was an indescribable element of attractiveness given all the miracles Jiang Chen had pulled off so far. It seemed that nothing was impossible with Veluriyam's young lord.

He'd brought forth the Longevity and Pinecrane Pills when he was still a sage realm cultivator. Who could guarantee that the young cultivator, now a great emperor, didn't have other wonderful surprises up his sleeve?

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In the human domain, Craneseat Mountain wasn't a well-known locale. Normal cultivators didn't even know where this mountain was, nor were they able to find its entrance.

For the social circle of the secluded experts though, this was a sacred place worthy of their admiration and respect. A real expert of humanity resided here – Old Man Cranecry.

No one knew exactly how old Cranecry was, but the secluded experts in the human domain had all heard legends of him in their youths. When they became empyrean experts in their own right, still he was there.

Craneseat Mountain was where this enigmatic old man lived.

At the foot of the mountain, paths comprehensible only to empyrean cultivators began to shift. Numerous experts followed the trail of the paths into the heart of the mountain.

Before a stone tablet, a green-robed man was looking around, seeking a road upward.

Another man appeared nearby, dressed in red. His chest was half-bared, the hairs upon it dense like boar bristles. Similarly thick hair decorated both of his cheeks, giving the man a wild, fierce look.

"Ole Zhu? You're here too?" The green-robed man greeted the one in red.

The red-robed man chuckled. "Brother Liu, you came earlier than I."

"I wonder if Old Crane is here at Craneseat Mountain at all?" the green-robed man wondered.

“Old Crane doesn’t leave home, so I’m sure he’s here. What did you come see him for, Brother Liu?” the red-robed man inquired out of curiosity.

“Ah, I just wanted Old Crane’s opinion. Veluriyam’s invitation for tea... I want to see what Old Crane thinks of it.”

“Same here,” the red-robed man chuckled. “Come, let’s go up first. I think there’ll be quite a few people here. If Old Crane doesn’t give the word, the rest of us won’t exactly take the initiative either.”

“Isn’t that right. I remember Xi Yanbing’s antics at Veluriyam... didn’t Old Crane criticize him for it?”

“Haha, I wouldn’t go so far as ‘criticize’. A small warning at best. Old Crane isn’t that strict.” As the two men conversed, they flew up side by side.

Upon Craneseat Mountain was a bare stone dais next to a simple building. An old man sat upon it, entertaining himself with a zither. Countless white cranes had gathered nearby, an audience to his music. The atmosphere was very harmonious and serene.

The old man abruptly pressed down both hands upon the strings of his instrument. “It seems that my idle pleasure is going to be interrupted,” he sighed softly. “Leave me be for a while, my children.”

The white cranes cried in unison, seemingly understanding what the old man had said. They departed the platform on elegant wingbeats.

“Haha, I heard your zither from halfway up the mountain, Old Crane. What, you won’t let us two hear your music? We’re a bit too uncivilized for your tastes, eh?” It was the red-robed man who had said this. His name was Zhu Yun, a secluded empyrean expert.

The green-robed man behind him was Liu Yuan, also an empyrean expert.

Old Crane’s wise eyes pondered the two men as they approached. “Zhu Yun, you don’t have a single graceful bone in your body,” he smiled faintly. “Why would you want to listen to my zither?”

Zhu Yun scratched his bristles of hair. “I’m a crude man, Old Crane,” he chuckled, “but I still feel like I get quite a bit out of hearing you play.”

“Your music calms the soul,” Liu Yuan chimed in. “It soothes and clears the heart.”

The old man smiled gently. “There’s no need to flatter me so. Sit down, now that you’re here. I live in the wilderness, so I don’t have much to offer my guests. If you are content with these fruits, have a few.”

A few interesting-looking wild fruits were scattered about on the stone table before the old man.

“Haha, how can we go wrong with anything you offer, Old Crane?” Both men unceremoniously took the fruit.

As they conversed, more appeared from the foot of the mountain.

“Eh? Brother Zhu, Brother Liu, you’re here too?” The newcomers were apparently surprised to find the two men present here.

Many had come today – five, to be precise. They had come in two groups of two and three.

Among the trio was the glacial old man named Xi Yanbing. He was the expert who'd gone to make trouble and yell at the foot of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. His cultivation and position was reasonably elevated above several of his peers. Still, he showed more than sufficient respect to Old Crane.

"Greetings, Old Crane." Every visitor stepped forward to salute and greet their oldest and most prestigious fellow.

"All of you are my guests," Old Crane chuckled. "There's no need for so much courtesy. Please, take a seat."

The old man bore a pleasant and kind demeanor.

"Something must've happened in the human domain. Otherwise, you wouldn't all be here, hmm? As far as coincidences go, this doesn't seem like one." A question was delivered with the same telltale placidity and ease.

A thin man near Xi Yanbing started to whine. "Old Crane, that Veluriyam kid doesn't know how big the world is. He announced his invitation to us empyrean experts so carelessly. What kind of 'martial dao tea party' is he intending on holding? What makes a mortal cultivator bold enough to put on airs like this? Are we secluded experts supposed to grace him with our presence just because he says so?"

He clearly represented Xi Yanbing's opinion.

After receiving a tongue-lashing from Old Crane last time, the man himself did not find it too prudent to display his open hostility.

Old Crane was silent. His disinterested gaze swept across everyone's face. "Jiang Chen is hosting a martial dao tea party for all of us. Is there something inappropriate with his invitation? Does it deserve all of you coming here to ask me about it?"

"Old Crane, that kid is insincere. If he were sincere about it, we might have considered. But he hasn't given us a calling card of any kind or an invitation. In fact, he hasn't come to invite us at all. Is he commanding us to go with his announcement? Who does he think he is, to call on us secluded experts like this?" The thin, wiry man was clearly indignant.

Old Crane smiled patiently. "He would need to know where you lived to give you those things. Secluded experts are separate from the world, how was he supposed to invite you? That's unworthy topic of criticism. However, it's up to you whether to go or not. I won't interfere."

"Huh? Old Crane, we came to hear your opinion."

"That's right. Old Crane, that kid styles himself the leader of the human domain. He thinks nothing of you at all."

Old Crane's face darkened. "That's enough!" He could see their malicious intent. They were attempting to aggravate him and give him a bad impression of Jiang Chen.

A man of his age could see through such things quite easily.

Old Crane had no strong opinions about Veluriyam's current leader either way. In the same regard, he was uninterested in being swayed or brainwashed by others.

The old man's harsh rebuke caused the speaker in question to pull back his head, cowering to the side.

Before him, Xi Yanbing offered a placating smile. "Please do not be angry, Old Crane. Sage Brother Tu got a bit ahead of himself."

"I have my own way of judging people and things," Old Crane stated coolly. "You don't need to try to pass on your emotions to me. My eyes will not be clouded."

"Yes, sir." The old man's decisiveness was met with a wave of nods.

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

Chapter 1548: Old Crane's Ideas

"Liu Yuan, you speak." Old Crane named another cultivator. From his understanding of these men's personalities, he trusted this one much more than the last speaker.

Liu Yuan was none other than the earliest arrival to Craneseat Mountain, the cultivator in green robes.

"Old Crane, after Jiang Chen's victory over the Embittered Savages, his right to rule is unquestioned in the various domains. I assume he's achieved some sort of breakthrough a few days ago and is riding that high to extend the tea invitation. Apparently, there will be amazing gifts at the martial dao tea party."

"Amazing gifts?" Old Crane smiled faintly. "He's just a mortal boy, is he not? He isn't empyrean realm yet. What gifts can he give that would amaze us?" This question was based in doubt rather than ridicule.

"We thought it odd, too. That's why we came to you, Old Crane."

The old man cracked a wry smile. "But there's no need for that, is there? If you want to go, feel free to go. What if he really does have something amazing?"

To the side, Zhu Yun blinked. "Are you going too, sir?" he looked expectantly at the wise old man. "We'll only have enough momentum to overshadow Veluriyam if you come with us."

"Why would we need to overshadow them?" Old Crane blinked in surprise.

Zhu Yun tugged at his messy hair. He didn't know why; he'd said it without thinking.

"We don't need to overshadow him if you don't think so, Old Crane." He laughed blithely.

Old Crane ignored the mildly silly man. Instead, he glanced toward Xi Yanbing. "I remember you went to Veluriyam last time, Ole Brother Xi. We had a conversation about it. Do you really think that we should take a hostile stance towards Veluriyam?"

Xi Yanbing hadn't expected Old Crane to direct the conversation towards him.

Unable to find the right words, he stammered, "M-maybe, he's a bit too overbearing. He'll threaten us one day, r-right? Even if not directly, then bring us indirect disaster at some point."

The excuse he made was reasonable enough, given the short notice he'd had to come up with it. His two companions nodded instinctively in agreement.

The others were impassive.

Old Crane's attitude gave them the impression that he wasn't particularly against Jiang Chen or Veluriyam Capital. Because of this, it was a better idea to withhold their opinions.

Old Crane was perfectly calm when he heard Xi Yanbing's reply. "You cannot condemn someone because of possibility alone," he smiled smoothly. "Plus, I think he's quite far from being overbearing."

Old Crane looked toward the others. "Do you think Jiang Chen is arrogant or overbearing?"

Liu Yuan thought for a moment, then intoned in a deep voice. "I've paid some special attention to Jiang Chen. There are many topics and rumors about him, but haughty dominance isn't one of them. I think he's a quite responsible young man."

The thin man behind Xi Yanbing grew anxious. "But he's making enemies everywhere. The Embittered Savages today, the Southern Celestials tomorrow, and who knows what the day after? He might even draw the demons here one day. Is the human domain ever going to have peace again?"

Liu Yuan grinned indifferently. "These words of yours are biased. The Embittered Savages came of their own volition when the Boundary Stele broke. Jiang Chen didn't invite them in. Quite the opposite in fact: he went to cut them off as soon as they entered the human domain. The Southern Celestials moreover, has even less to do with Jiang Chen. He was the one who drove them off. I don't know about demons, so I can't comment on that, but he did send two subordinates out recently to kill off a demon emperor. This is something that's actually happened. The evidence I can see shows that he's a responsible man."

Despite his reserved appearance, Liu Yuan didn't shy away from speaking up against greater numbers. He made his comments justly and fairly.

"Daoist Liu," the thin man harrumphed, "I assume you're going to go fawn over him at his martial dao tea party? Aren't you an empyrean expert? You're lowering yourself below your status!"

"I haven't decided whether I'm going or not. That's why I'm here to ask Old Crane." Liu Yuan didn't want to argue with the thin man. Instead, he turned to Old Man Cranecry. "Old Crane, this is all that I know about him. My opinion of Jiang Chen is my own."

Old Crane nodded. "Did you all come here to listen to what my thoughts were? You want to know whether I'm going or not, hmm?"

His audience didn't nod, but their non-disclosure was tacit agreement.

"Well, Old Crane? Are you going?" After a while, Liu Yuan broke the silence with curiosity.

"I am." Old Crane's answer was clear-cut.

"Huh?" Zhu Yun yelped exaggeratedly out of surprise. He had thought it impossible that Old Crane would go anywhere.

"I suppose we can chat about it if you want to know why." Old Crane's tone was even. "I'm much older than any one of you – double that of some, in fact. As you'd expect, I've seen a few more people and things in my time."

"But just like you, the time I spent in the human domain was stifling. To be here in the first place, we've all witnessed countless so-called geniuses.

"That's why people at our height intrinsically look down upon mortal geniuses. They're not like us when they were young. There's no way they'll break through to empyrean realm, not ever. Something like that, right?" Old Crane's gaze was serene, but strangely piercing as well.

The old man was exactly right. Jiang Chen's achievements in the ordinary part of the world hadn't particularly impressed the empyrean experts. They didn't consider it a given that Jiang Chen would be able to reach empyrean realm in his entire life. How could he possibly surpass them?

"When a young man shows the potential to catch up to us, we might feel discontent in our hearts. We might see it as a challenge to our position and authority. I think that Shu Wanqing's trip to Veluriyam Capital was partially motivated by this." Old Crane sounded almost detached. "Unfortunately, he underestimated the young man's potential... and his strength and decisiveness."

Sobriety entered the old man's voice. "Actually, I would've called you all here even if you hadn't come. It's good that you gathered of your own volition. There are some things I must discuss with you."

Each man braced himself. It was the first time they saw Old Crane being so serious in both expression and tone.

"First, I must make my positions clear. I applaud his actions. Nay, more than that; I admire him for being so capable. My reason? It's very simple, really. I wouldn't have been able to do some of the things he's done at my current age, much less at his'. Frankly, his charisma and ability are shocking for the times we live in. His constant victories in the face of mounting challenge means that he has both great potential and rapid growth.

"You will never be able to quash a young man like this." Old Crane turned oddly harsh. He tossed a fluid glance at Xi Yanbing. "When a genius like him is born, it often means that the human domain is about to be thrown into a new era of chaos. He's a genius created by fate itself!

"Some of you say that he's the reason the Savages and Southern Celestials came. And you say he could lead the demons here. To that I say, you've gotten cause and effect backwards!

"Be honest with yourselves. Did Jiang Chen really attract the Embittered Savages and the Southern Celestials? Can he possibly be the sole cause of the demon race's eventual invasion? None of you experienced their dominance in that bygone era. Jiang Chen? Can one young man usher in an entire ancient race?"

The thin man's face reddened. His baseless accusations were revealed for what they were.

"Remember, hard times create heroes. Not the other way around. Make sure not to get mixed up. You will only find trouble for yourself otherwise. Disregarding the future, what can you do to Jiang Chen right now?" Old Crane's words were grating, but true.

The current Jiang Chen wasn't someone they could take on. Perhaps only Old Crane himself could. But now the young lord had used some method or other to take in the forefather of the Savages as his servant.

Hypothetically, it would be hard for Old Crane to strike at Jiang Chen if he had to go through the Savage forefather.

"I think that's enough talk from me. Distill what you'd like from it. I am going to this martial dao tea party for two reasons. One, to meet Jiang Chen in person. Two, to apologize personally. The human race is in great danger, but we elders have left much of the burden to a young man like him."

Old Crane had announced that he would retreat from the world countless years ago. Mortal interests were no longer his own. This was the biggest reason he'd turned a blind eye to the outside world.

However, his observations informed him that the human race was at a very dangerous juncture. It would be hard for him to pursue self-preservation alone. It was time for him to reappear in the world.

Liu Yuan readily concurred. "I'll go as well."

Zhu Yun chuckled. "If you're going, Old Crane, I'll go to spice things up as well. That Jiang Chen kid has a few tricks up his sleeve, eh? I've never seen a youngster do nearly as many things as him."

The other two secluded experts nodded as well. "If that's the case, we'll both accompany you, Old Crane."

Only Xi Yanbing's trio was left.

Xi Yanbing coughed out a laugh. "Old Crane, I just can't get past my previous tiff with Jiang Chen. I guarantee I won't try to make an enemy of him in the future, but I should probably not go to this tea party of his."

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

Chapter 1549: Convening

Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Veluriyam Capital.

Jiang Chen delegated the responsibility of the martial dao tea party to Jingzhong Hui. Emperor Wellspring was called emperor no more. The city had taken to calling him Elder Hui, or sometimes Elder Jing.

In the same way, Emperor Peerless had become Elder Mo.

After breaking through to great emperor, Jiang Chen assigned the bulk of menial work to his subordinates. His focus was on personal cultivation. He had plans that once the human domain settled down a bit, he would make a trip to Myriad Abyss Island.

It'd been several years since Huang'er's departure. It would be a lie to say that Jiang Chen wasn't worried about her. Xiahou Jing's nature was evidence that his entire house was a brood of vipers. If Huang'er really did become Xiahou Zong's cultivation vessel, she would surely meet with a miserable end.

"Young lord, we've received a calling card." Xue Tong came in with the card in question.

Jiang Chen took and perused it with a frown. "Old Man Cranecry? Who's that? Old Brother Hui, have you heard of someone by that name?"

Wellspring's entire body shook. He bounced up from his chair, his eyes wide with surprise. "Did you say Old Man Cranecry, young lord?"

"Yes? Do you know him?"

Wellspring looked incredulous. "I don't know him, but I've heard of him! Your calling card is from Old Man Cranecry?"

"Yes. He said he wanted to come chat with me during the tea party. He was very courteous." Jiang Chen handed the card to his lieutenant.

Wellspring took it and read it himself. Residual shock was visible on his face. "I didn't expect Old Man Cranecry to still be alive."

"Why do you say that?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"I've heard stories of him ever since my youth. He was a legend of his generation. There were many tales passed down about his exploits. When I was young, my master used to tell them to me as inspiration." Wellspring grew wistful as he recounted his past.

"He's a man out of history. That means he should be very strong, no?" Jiang Chen played with the card in his hands. "I'm surprised he's so polite in his communications."

His understanding of the secluded experts so far had given him the impression that they were a uniformly proud and aloof bunch. He wasn't used to Old Man Cranecry's civility.

But Jiang Chen was the kind of person that reciprocated any kindness he received ten times over. He wasn't likely to be hostile to someone polite. Those who wished to attend the martial dao tea party were considered guests.

He found no reason to refuse them outside the gates. "Old Brother Hui," he smiled, "it sounds like you used to idolize him. Come with me to receive this honored guest."

"I would wish for nothing more!" Wellspring was overjoyed.

At the foot of Sacred Peafowl Mountain stood an old man in cream-colored robes. It was none other than Old Man Cranecry. He had an ethereal aura, someone almost separate from the world; perhaps because he had departed from it for so long.

There were a few others following him: four of the secluded experts who'd visited Craneseat Mountain. Everyone aside from Xi Yanbing's trio had come.

"You must be Old Man Cranecry, sir. This kid is Jiang Chen, please forgive my tardiness in receiving you!" Jiang Chen greeted them with passion.

Cranecry considered Jiang Chen with undisguised interest. "Young lord Jiang Chen, I often hear your name despite my hermit lifestyle. Heroes often become so at a young age. Very good, very very good. I heard you were holding a tea party for the secluded empyrean masters. Though I've long since washed my hands of mortal affairs, I was drawn here by your remarkability."

"I humbly thank you for your graciousness, sir." Jiang Chen had a rather good first impression of Old Man Cranecry. The visitor wasn't throwing his weight around simply because he was an empyrean cultivator.

The old man's eyes were placid and serene, and his words had the same nature. Jiang Chen found no fault in anything. Thus, he desired to show the same amount of exceeding courtesy. He enthusiastically brought the secluded experts up the mountain.

The young man's attitude contented Old Cranecry and his companions. They had heard from specific sources that Jiang Chen was young and proud, but that seemed completely inaccurate in person.

There was no youthful brashness in this particular youth. Quite the opposite: he treated them with decorum and respect in a practiced hand. In some aspects, he might have been even more mature than they were.

"My friends, the tea party begins tomorrow. Please rest in a few of the side residences for today. Do you know if there will be more guests coming?" Jiang Chen was unsure of exactly how many hermits there were.

"I can't answer you clearly," Old Man Cranecry laughed. "By my estimates, there should be more secluded experts than just us few. Some won't come because of various reasons, but we shall see tomorrow as to the remainder."

Jiang Chen nodded. "I'll keep my eyes open."

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain looks quite impressive," Cranecry smiled. "I can see you've spent quite a bit of effort on this place."

"Sacred Peafowl Mountain is the foundation of Veluriyam Capital, and Veluriyam is the foundation of the human domain. This place is extremely important, so I found that to be a necessity."

"Hmm, quite so. Young man, it has been difficult for you to build up what you have so far. I came in part to express my apologies."

"Oh? Why do you say that, Old Crane?"

"Logically speaking, the human domain's issues should've been my unshirkable responsibility. Alas, I announced to the world I would retreat from it roughly eight thousand years ago. My life was to be spent among the beauties of nature, unto my old age." Old Cranecry's words bore the tone of one who had seen much of life.

It was a tough thing for someone who'd gone into voluntary seclusion eight millennia ago to enter the world once more. The human heart was liable to be changed by its surroundings; seclusion often dampened one's optimism.

"Were you planning on coming back into the world at large, Old Crane?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"Haha, you're quite perceptive, young man," the old man chuckled. "The winds are changing and you're shouldering all of the additional responsibility. I can't let my old bones rest while I know that's happening. But don't worry, I won't be jealous of a young man like you even if I do come back. I don't

need meaningless things like titles of leadership. Actually, I came to tell you that you've been doing very well. Please continue your good work. I will be on your side from now on."

Well! The old man was quite direct.

Jiang Chen was rather embarrassed by the display. "Not at all, Old Crane. You are far too kind. If you were to take up that mantle, I would be completely happy to listen to your orders."

There was no pretense in the young man's declaration. He wasn't some kind of omni-directional busybody. He had carried Veluriyam's weight so far entirely because of his promise to Emperor Peafowl.

If Old Man Cranecry were willing to come out of retirement and lead the human race, Jiang Chen would be perfectly happy to cede the position and initiative.

"That wouldn't be appropriate," the old man replied quickly. "You're a young genius destined to shine while I'm a wilted flower of yesteryear. To overshadow your radiance and let your genius go unused would be positively criminal."

Cranecry's attitude surprised Jiang Chen. His understanding of the secluded experts was that they were a conceited, presumptuous bunch. And yet, this old man was the picture of affability.

"Those words are too harsh, Old Crane. The seniors around you are all empyrean experts as well. Given your reputation and history, it's a no-brainer for you to take my place."

Cranecry turned solemn. "Not at all! I am older than you, yes, and I'm stronger than you currently, but I can see the momentum in things and events. If I had to pick someone who could change the fate of the human domain's future, I would definitely not pick myself. You, young lord Jiang Chen, have the momentum of the world behind you."

The better one knew Jiang Chen, the more one understood this fact.

"I don't deserve your excessive praise, Old Crane," Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Do you have any opinions about humanity's current predicament?"

Old Man Cranecry was grim. "Humanity has three hidden problems. One, the demons; two, Myriad Abyss Island; and three, the aliens outside the Boundary Steles. The last is the least threatening of these. Since the ancient times, humanity has always had the greatest numbers and been the strongest among its neighbors.

"Myriad Abyss Island... well, it's very far away. Unless its experts return to the human domain en masse, we can overcome some of the other associated issues.

"But the demons... I'm sure you know that this is an unavoidable tragedy. It's a continuation of ancient events." Cranecry sighed. "I hear that you've fought a few demons already?"

"I've had multiple skirmishes with the demon race. However, I've only fought against disorganized troops left to their own devices. The most threatening demons remain in the desolate wildlands, where they are sealed away. I'd give them another few decades before they regain freedom."

This drew Old Crane's concern. Despite his age, he hadn't experienced the ancient demon-sealing war. As such, he had little idea of what demons were truly able to accomplish.

"You've fought many demons before. If war breaks out with the demons, what do you think current humanity's chance at victory would be?"

"Almost nonexistent," Jiang Chen replied without thinking. "Unless a significant amount of opportunities or changes arise."

Old Crane was taken aback. "Almost nonexistent?"

"Almost none." Jiang Chen knew the answer was cruel, but he didn't seek to hide the truth. "In ancient times, it cost humanity an incredible amount of manpower and resources to defeat demonkind and seal their leaders away. Though the demons won't recover their ancient combat prowess straight away, we humans have weakened a great deal since then as well. We're likely to be worse off, actually."

Honestly, his biggest worry was also the demon race.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1550: The Martial Dao Tea Party

In the guest quarters, Jiang Chen made his farewells and bid his men to take good care of his distinguished guests.

Old Crane was in a solemn mood. He felt quite distressed and rather guilty after conversing with Jiang Chen. ^[1]_{SEP}

Off to the side, Zhu Yun was huffing indignantly. "Jiang Chen is too young after all. He doesn't understand how to converse in polite society. He glorifies the demons and disparages his fellow humans!" ^[1]_{SEP}

Old Crane knew that Zhu Yun was quick to jump to conclusions and didn't have any bad intentions. He shifted his glance to Liu Yuan instead. "Liu Yuan, what do you think?" The person in question was in deep thought. This was an issue that needed to be considered seriously. ^[1]_{SEP}

"Old Crane, Jiang Chen's words are harsh, but I do agree with him. The human race has weakened greatly after the ancient war. Most of our ancient heritage was either taken to Myriad Abyss Island or has vanished completely. As it currently stands, our current foundations and strength aren't even a tenth of our ancestors'. If the demons recover up to thirty percent of their full strength, we won't be able to put up much of a resistance." Liu Yuan was already being rather tactful. ^[1]_{SEP}

Old Crane sighed. "At first I thought that Jiang Chen was overstating the severity as well, but after careful consideration, I believe his words to be true. The Embittered Savages and Southern Celestials might not be anything to be afraid of, but the start of the demon invasion will plunge us into the depths of hell." ^[1]_{SEP}

A depressed atmosphere clung to the crowd after these words. ^[1]_{SEP}

They were empyrean masters. Worldly matters no longer concerned them, nor did humanity's plight, but the demons were a threat that not even they could avoid. Once the demons came back to life, even the experts would be drawn into the conflict. In fact, they would likely be the first to bear the brunt of disaster. ^[1]_{SEP}

A grinning Liu Yuan wasn't as sombre as the others. "Old He, even though Jiang Chen is extremely wary of the demons, it's likely that he has some kind of plan in store. During our conversation, he mentioned something about a great change of fate. Perhaps things might not be as grim as we think."

Old Crane's eyebrow twitched. "Where do you think this change of fate lies?"

"I can't tell for the moment, but perhaps Veluriyam and Jiang Chen is one of the possibilities. I once heard that an ancient leader of humanity built Veluriyam Capital, and that the Pagoda is his trademark masterpiece."

Old Crane mused deeply. "That is indeed a saying, but it's never been verified. And in fact, every age since the ancient times brings with it some empyrean masters who try to spy on the Pagoda's secrets. But no one's ever succeeded. Either they realize they need to back off, or they just don't make it out."

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Several more secluded masters filtered in during the rest of the day. It wasn't a given that all empyrean masters had dealings with each other. Those who arrived after the initial group were even more mysterious and low profile. Some of them surprised even Old Crane — he hadn't figured that they'd still be alive.

After exchanging pleasantries, all retired for the night in the guest quarters that Jiang Chen assigned to them.

It was without a doubt that they weren't here for just the tea party. They also wanted to take in what kind of person this famous young lord was. Would this miracle-maker actually bring forth some valuable benefits this time?

The sun shone brightly the next day, overlooking very pleasant weather. Jiang Chen rose early and went to look in on his guests after washing up and composing himself. Nothing was overlooked in the care of his guests.

The martial dao tea ceremony was held in a clearing on the mountain to the rear of the young lord residence. It was a prime location outfitted with high altitude, excellent and unobstructed visibility, and an excellent view.

The empyrean visitors who'd travelled quite a distance to be here filtered into the clearing. There were nine in total — a figure smaller than what Jiang Chen had anticipated, but not too great a disappointment overall.

At the start of the tea party, the young lord announced with a smile, "Everyone, we have all manner of drinks in sufficient quantities today, be it tea or alcohol. Sacred Peafowl Mountain is only a humble place, so please do excuse us if our offerings are inadequate."

The tea and spirits that Jiang Chen had prepared today were likely to be novelties to even the empyrean masters — particularly the spirits.

Back in the mundane kingdoms, his random 'Nine Magnificence Dew Wine' concoction had been enough to conquer Skylare Kingdom. For today's tea party, he'd painstakingly prepared real, heavenly-plane level drinks.

“Everyone, the green pot in front of you is filled with Drunken Immortal, while the red pot holds Shennong [A mythical Chinese deity and sage ruler of ancient China] Liquor. I’ve taken meticulous care with both. Please, try some.” Jiang Chen poured a cup for himself as he spoke.

Their interest piqued, everyone present poured a cup of each. They were all empyrean masters, so they could naturally discern good from bad after they’d been so bold as to answer the invitation. A quick scan was sufficient to tell them that all was well with the drinks.

Interest gripped Old Crane and he drained a cup of Drunken Immortal. Its mellow sweetness instantly imparted good spirits and a light mind. He blurted out compliments, “Fantastic wine. It suits the name alright! This is wine that can put down even the gods and immortals. What a beauty, haha!”

Seeing Old Crane partake further drove the reservations out of people’s minds. Besides, one of the shared interests between these secluded experts was a love of drinking.

Each chose Drunken Immortal or Shennong Liquor as they would, and almost all set down their cups with unanimous appreciation. “This really is fine alcohol!”

“Young lord Jiang Chen, you brewed this yourself? It’s really something! Hahaha, looks like I have to come visit often in the future!”

Zhu Yun loved drinking. Jiang Chen was much more pleasing to his eye after two cups; any previous prejudices were nowhere to be found.

How could a brewer of such lovely alcohol possibly be bad? Such was Zhu Yun’s logic.

The others burst out laughing. Jiang Chen joined in as well. “Please have as much as you’d like if the refreshments are to your taste. Like I mentioned, we have more than enough for everyone today.”

Zhu Yun’s eyes gleamed. “Really? Then I’m going to solemnly indulge myself!”

There was another roar of laughter at his words. Atmospheres were always most easily warmed when drinking. After a few cups of alcohol, people warmed up to each other and relations were closer.

“Young lord Jiang Chen, I’ve heard your name often in the past years. Old fogeys like us rarely inquire about mundane matters, but I must raise my thumb in approval and admiration to what you’ve done lately. You’re definitely something! It’s the human domain’s fortune to have someone like you.”

The speaker was a short and stout elder. He had an enormous, red nose that lent him quite some character.

Talk was cheap and compliments free. The others chimed in as well. Having drunk the young lord’s alcohol, Jiang Chen was much more agreeable in their eyes.

“Young lord Jiang Chen, the battle with the Embittered Savages cemented your position as the leader of humanity. Though us old fellows don’t seem to have accomplished anything, we too must admit that you’re a qualified leader of the human domain. You have such abilities at your age and such a sense of responsibility. It really puts the rest of us to shame.”

“Truly, therefore, our attendance at today’s tea party is also a sign of respect.”

Pretty words abounded, but Jiang Chen didn't forget himself amidst the mass flattery.

He smiled faintly, raised his cup and took a sip. "I took the risk of being forward in holding this tea party. I wanted to see where the limits of the human domain are and just how many empyrean experts humanity possesses. Please forgive me if I've offended anyone with my brash actions.

"My second intention is to make use of the tea party to express a few sentiments to the various seniors present. She Wanqing's death wasn't the result of pointed provocation on my end. He brought it down on himself, and I absolutely mean no disrespect to my empyrean seniors. He was too depraved and sunk to the depths of colluding with robbers from Myriad Abyss Island! Under those circumstances, I wouldn't have let him off even if I knew him personally!"

Jiang Chen's attitude was quite resolute when it came to this matter.

"Perhaps there will be those who think I'm too overbearing, that I'm being disrespectful to my seniors. I want to re-emphasize that I mean no offense. At the same time, I want to stress that even if the seniors here decide to withdraw from the world and refrain from sharing the burdens of mankind, please keep to a bottomline of morals. Don't aid and abet tyrants, or collude with alien invaders."

The young lord's words were a bit heavy, but he delivered them quite openly. The others could tell from the clean look in his eyes that he had no ulterior motives.

"The third intention behind the tea party is that I wanted to make use of this opportunity to get to know all of the seniors present. I really don't want to spend my time and effort on civil strife, and want even less for internal troubles to create misunderstandings! This kid feels that although the danger for humanity has been temporarily defused, the human domain lies in shambles with a thousand boils and a hundred holes. It can't take much more. Thus, whatever we all may do, please remember that we are all humans at the end of the day.

"And finally, when I sent out the invitation, I mentioned that there would be some benefits to attending."

Jiang Chen was showing an adept hand at how to operate in social situations. He'd had the serious talking to first, then pivoted to benefits at the end. In this way, any ruffled feathers or uneasiness would be smoothed over to a certain degree.