

Three Realms 1601

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

Chapter 1601: The Situation Explodes

Three were missing from House Kuang, and one each from Xuan and Xue. The situation exploded. House Kuang's seniors especially couldn't sit still.

They could've accepted the loss of one genius. After all, no trial was a hundred percent safe. However, they'd lost all three! This was a complete wipeout. How could they accept such a travesty? This was tantamount to just straight up killing them.

These seniors couldn't imagine how they would relate the situation to their patriarch. And how would the elders react?

"Imperial Prince Huo, how come we're missing five people?" One of House Kuang's seniors interrogated the imperial prince rather brusquely.

The prince's palms were clammy with sweat. The five that hadn't come out yet were probably dead.

"Master Kuang Han, perhaps something is holding them up inside? Perhaps we should send an expedition to look for them?" He turned to the chief warden. "Old Ding, send in a group of your best subordinates in to search. Remember, you must at least find some clues as to their whereabouts. Search every corner if you have to!"

"Of course, sir. I will go myself." The chief warden hurriedly obeyed.

The chief knew how important this was. If the eight houses' geniuses had an unfortunate accident on Winterdraw, he wouldn't be able to absolve himself of the responsibility. He handpicked a thousand men to come with him. The large group entered the Blackwraith Mountains for a very detailed search.

Jiang Chen sat near House Xuan's people, completely quiet. He pretended that he was meditating; the outside world was nothing to him.

Thankfully, Xuan Rui was ordinarily rather antisocial. Thus, his behavior went unnoticed. House Xuan's other members didn't find it strange whatsoever.

Though House Kuang was down three people, the tabulation of the results continued. This pertained to a competition between the eight houses, after all.

The ranking was quickly decided. Disguised as Xuan Rui, Jiang Chen was fourth place. It was a standard rank for someone of his ability, one that no one could find fault with. If Kuang Rong hadn't died, perhaps he would've been fourth instead. An average performance, all in all – or so everyone else thought.

Everything was going according to plan. Jiang Chen hoped that the search would finish as quickly as possible. Then, he could leave Winterdraw.

As quickly as possible.

Even a single extra breath meant a sliver of additional danger. Who knew what could happen in the next moment?

There was another stretch between Winterdraw and the wider world. It was impossible to guarantee his identity would stay concealed in the airboat. Thus, he hoped to leave at the earliest opportunity. Less time wasted meant a smaller likelihood of trouble.

Though he appeared to be deep in thought, he was actually acutely observing his surroundings. He'd be able to pick up the slightest disturbance.

The search took half a day, but yielded no results.

The chief warden and his team extricated themselves from the mountains. The chief's expression was dark and gloomy.

"How did it go?" Imperial Prince Huo hurriedly strode up.

The chief shook his head helplessly. "There are no humans remaining inside. However, we found traces of the forbidden grounds in being broken open. There was evidence of heavy fighting after that, but nothing particularly useful to us."

House Kuang's seniors became terribly dour after hearing this. "What do you mean by that, Ding?" one called out. "Do you suspect that our geniuses are trespassing on your forbidden grounds?"

"Not at all, sir." The chief warden looked panicked. "I was only offering a hypothesis. Perhaps they wandered in there unawares."

"Ridiculous! Winterdraw isn't some remarkable place. Polylore has more than its fair share of sacred grounds to spare. Why would they be interested in your pathetic forbidden grounds? The eight houses' young geniuses are a disciplined bunch. Their competition is a hundred times more important than what you're proposing!"

The chief warden was speechless. What could he do against the roars of Polylore experts? Did he dare argue?

Imperial Prince Huo's lips trembled. "Master Kuang Han, please do calm down. Shall we wait a bit more? Maybe they saw something truly amazing and followed it?"

A guess like that was nothing more than self-comfort and a fiction.

Kuang Han shook his head. "Impossible!" His spittle spewed everywhere. "How many times do I have to repeat myself? Our house's scions are all very disciplined. There is nothing more important than our competition. They wouldn't have chased after something to hold up its conclusion!"

Imperial Prince Huo had no reply to that. No matter what he said, he would get yelled at. Was it really true? Had the eight houses' geniuses been taken down by Winterdraw's own?

The proceedings sank into a standstill.

It was then that someone near the imperial prince offered some counsel. "I have a suggestion, Your Highness."

"Speak your mind." Imperial Prince Huo waved.

“Perhaps we should count the Winterdraw contestant tokens? If we’ve collected them all, then that means whoever barged into the forbidden grounds is…” The advisor didn’t dare go on. He didn’t have the guts to insinuate that the eight houses’ scions had ventured deeper into the mountains.

The imperial prince’s eyes lit up. He glanced towards Kuang Han.

Kuang Han harrumphed before striding to the tabulation area.

Jiang Chen was depressed. He hated the advisor with every fiber of his being. Wasn’t counting so finely going to ruin things for him?

He had a lot of tokens on his person that he hadn’t handed in. They were spoils from the six he had killed. If he had handed all of them in, he would’ve been first place.

As expected, there was a large number of tokens missing.

“What’s the point of counting? The missing tokens are probably in the hands of the missing youths.”

Kuang Han glared at the imperial prince. “That was a stupid idea. Are all your subordinates this foolish?”

He felt that he had done something rather pointless. What was that supposed to accomplish?

“If we go inside again to check the corpses, we’ll be able to see exactly who’s missing,” the advisor added intrepidly.

It was a blunt and unwieldy idea, but its usefulness and practicality became more pronounced.

“Old Ding,” the imperial prince turned to the chief warden. “I need you to make another trip. Take the faction heads and their men and have them help you search for the missing ones. It will be more efficient this way!”

Jiang Chen cursed to himself at their conscientiousness. He wasn’t worried about giving anything away, but the delay was in itself dangerous.

The chief warden could hardly refuse at this juncture. He called up Sin City, Nefarious Vale, and Terminus Place as well as the second-rate factions.

“Friends, this is a matter of vital importance. I hope you give the search everything you have. Don’t let even a single clue escape you. I leave this important task in your hands.”

It was rare for the chief warden to adopt such a low posture. None of the factions dared refuse. The team that went inside this time was several thousand strong.

This made the search rather more efficient. Two hours later, all the corpses and remnants were brought out. After repeated verification, the chief warden came to a rather reasonable conclusion.

“Imperial Prince Huo, we’re missing two bodies,” the chief warden reported.

“Which two?” the imperial prince asked.

“They’re both from Sin City’s list. Jiang Huang and Su Hong. Both were elites.” The chief warden snuck a look at the city’s lord, Xie Wushang.

Xie Wushang was greatly displeased that he was being implicated so oddly. He hadn't known the reason for the selection in the first place. Was Sin City supposed to be responsible simply because two of its chosen geniuses' bodies were missing?

He couldn't take that lying down.

"Xie Wushang, come here. Tell me a little about those two." The imperial prince beckoned to him.

Sin City's lord felt deeply resigned, but complied in the end. "Su Hong is very famous in my city. According to the public, he is one of the best young geniuses on Winterdraw," he supplied truthfully. "As for Jiang Huang, I don't know his origins. Apparently, he entered the selection after only having come to Sin City for a couple of days. No one has anything substantial on him. The only information I know is that his pill dao is reportedly quite decent. His martial dao potential... limitless."

Imperial Prince Huo snuck a glance at Kuang Han with some struggle.

Kuang Han snorted. "What? What are you trying to express? You want to say that a young genius from Winterdraw can kill all three of House Kuang's geniuses? And House Xuan and House Xue's as well?"

"Not at all."

"Then what are you trying to imply, eh?" Kuang Han was losing control of his emotions.

Imperial Prince Huo had no idea what he wanted to hear. "What should we do now, Master Kuang Han?"

"Open up the second restriction and search inside." Kuang Han was absolutely certain.

The imperial prince swore silently. Hadn't he just said that his house's scions wouldn't venture into the forbidden grounds? So why did he want to look inside then?

That was completely contradictory.

Alas, he could only wonder about that to himself. He didn't dare express a shred of it.

"Master Kuang Han," he uttered with some difficulty. "If the second restriction is opened, I worry that Winterdraw's foundations will be shaken. I believe that your geniuses definitely did not venture inside."

"Who cares about Winterdraw's foundations? Can this place compare to the importance of the eight houses' geniuses?" A senior from House Xue piped up angrily.

"That's right, Imperial Prince Huo. We only came because of your invitation. Is this the kind of hospitality you should be showing, hmm?" Another senior from House Xuan expressed his displeasure.

The imperial prince felt cold sweat drip down his back.

At this moment, another from the eight houses interceded. "Oi, you three. Stop bothering Imperial Prince Huo. You know how trials are! Some are lucky enough to live, some are unlucky enough to die. I think it's high time to leave, now that our little competition has concluded."

"Quite so. Time is limited. Deal with your private affairs yourselves. Don't hold the rest of us up!"

The eight houses were indeed not a unified bunch. Some of the other houses were jumping out to sing a different tune.

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Chapter 1602: The Plan Falls Apart

Without a doubt, there was a complicated relationship between the eight great houses. Some even rejoiced at the bad luck that had befallen Houses Kuang, Xuan, and Xue. Why would they side with these three houses to make things difficult for Rejuvenation Isles?

Not to mention, the agreed-upon plan was to leave the island and return home as soon as the trial ended. Why would they delay the journey for the sake of rival houses?

Kuang Han shouted angrily, "Easy for you to say!"

"Heh, Kuang Han, should we waste our precious time for your private business? I don't remember your house commanding so much influence."

"How about this? Those willing can stay while the rest of us take our leave."

Sitting on the side, Jiang Chen secretly gave these fellows a big thumbs up. He naturally hoped to leave as fast as possible to avoid possible complications.

Kuang Han glanced at House Xue and Xuan. "What say you?"

A prominent member of House Xue answered, "We won't leave before we solve the matter of the disappearances."

"Likewise," an elder from House Xuan agreed firmly.

Jiang Chen felt helpless. If possible, he'd take charge of House Xuan and leave right this second. Sadly, as a mere junior, Xuan Rui didn't possess such authority. The young lord started regretting his choices.

Why did he have to erase all traces of the bodies after the kills?

Perhaps he should have left the corpses intact instead. These fellows might have given up after finding hard evidence of the deaths.

Unsympathetic to their peers' difficulties, the other houses told Prince Huo, "Prince Huo, we're fully satisfied with your hospitality. We're going to leave first. As to the other three houses, you can attend to them as you see fit."

The prince would've happily left with them, but he didn't dare offend the other three houses. How should he approach this dilemma?

In the end, he smiled affably. "Our guests' satisfaction is our honor. Only, some guests have met with trouble, so this little prince needs to stay behind. Why don't I have some of my close aides send you off?"

Black dots suddenly materialized in the distant sky. Soon, three airboats hovering overhead landed in their direction.

Sitting cross-legged on the ground, Jiang Chen's heart pounded fiercely. Uh oh. Taking advantage of the crowd's distraction, his figure vanished on the spot, disappearing with a few leaps and bounds before the boats landed.

The place was crowded with people from the Rejuvenation Isles and Winterdraw. Running away from the area was certainly not an option. He had no choice but to brace himself and return to the Blackwraith Mountains.

He sighed, rather depressed. He'd gone to great pains to plan his exit, but everything had been in vain. The airboats' hurried arrival was a bad omen if he'd ever seen one. He chose to trust his pressing intuition. No matter how extravagant his powers, being surrounded would spell his doom. It was wiser to live and fight another day.

A group of men burst out of the doors before the boats came to a full stop.

"Commander He?" Imperial Prince Huo gasped. The man was a palace commander of the Rejuvenation Isles royal guard, and each of his companions a palace expert.

"Prince Huo, has something happened here?" Commander He asked anxiously as soon as he came within hearing distance.

The prince's wry expression was all the answer he'd needed. "Is His Majesty also aware?"

The aggrieved commander replied, "Three Polylore aristocratic houses hectored us through a transmission formation. His Majesty is shocked. He's sent me to assist with the investigation. His orders are to catch the murderer no matter what their identity. We can't let them get away!"

"Murderer?" Prince Huo stiffened. The geniuses were merely presumed missing, their deaths yet to be confirmed. Had His Majesty received definite information?

Kuang Han rushed forward and stared at Captain He. "What did you say just now? Catch the murderer? Did House Kuang notify your emperor?"

Commander He nodded. This wasn't something he could conceal. "Indeed."

"What did they say?" Kuang Han barked viciously.

His manners were brusque, but now wasn't the time for a quarrel. The commander replied truthfully, "Five geniuses are dead. Their respective houses have confirmed their soul lamps have shattered."

"Aaahhhh!" An ear-splitting roar escaped Kuang Han's lips.

How could all three geniuses from his house have died?! He'd been holding onto the hope they'd entered the mountain's forbidden grounds by mistake, only to have his hopes cruelly dashed.

Dead. Such was the cold hard truth!

The issue now lay with the identities of whoever had gone inside the mountains' second level forbidden area. Could it be the two missing prey?

The atmosphere suddenly turned heavy.

An elder from House Xuan asked at this time, "Honorable commander, what did House Xuan say? Did they have any instructions?"

Commander He stammered, "The one from House Xuan seems to be called the Elder Zun. The dead Xuan Rui is his direct descendant, so you can imagine his anger..."

"Xuan Rui?" House Xuan's elder was puzzled. "The one missing is Xuan Fei, not Xuan Rui."

"Ah?" Commander He stared blankly. "But the transmission clearly stated Xuan Rui's soul lamp had broken."

"Impossible!" The elder's face sank. "Isn't Xuan Rui over there, hale and hearty?"

He looked over at Jiang Chen's previous spot and froze. Xuan Rui was nowhere to be seen. Surprised, he quickly looked in every direction but couldn't find a trace of the young man.

"Where is he?" He asked, his face darkening.

Jiang Chen's departure had gone unnoticed in the previous chaos.

A genius from another house suddenly offered, "I paid it no heed, but I seem to remember a figure flashing by this area moments ago."

The crowd fell into a strange silence. Xuan Rui had suddenly disappeared!

The one missing should have been Xuan Fei, but the broken soul lamp back home belonged to Xuan Rui. Even stranger, Xuan Rui had returned just fine and dandy a short while ago.

The situation was almost supernatural. Upon further thought, some cowardly fellows even shivered.

House Xuan's elder murmured, "What the... what's going on? Xuan Rui's soul lamp broke? Then who was that earlier? Xuan Fei? No, impossible."

"Lord Xuan Zan, could have someone be impersonating Xuan Rui?" One of Prince Huo's men suggested.

Xuan Zan froze. His chest suddenly felt heavy. There had been nothing wrong with Xuan Rui, at least on the surface, so there had been no reasons for careful scrutiny. Neither the young man's personality nor his attitude had been suspicious. Even his results in the training had been up to his normal standards.

That he could've been a fake simply hadn't crossed anyone's mind. However, it was a possibility they had no choice but to consider now.

The more he thought about it, the more his blood ran cold. Could it be... the Xuan Rui he'd seen earlier was a fake? If not, why had he vanished at this crucial juncture?

"A fake, it must have been a fake! He slipped away once he saw the boats because of a guilty conscience!" Someone from House Xuan shouted.

"If it's an imposter, what about Xuan Fei? Where's he gone off to? The house didn't mention his soul lamp."

They wouldn't know that Jiang Chen had killed Xuan Fei mere moments before the end of the trial. House Xuan had notified the Rejuvenation Isles right after Xuan Rui's death. Xuan Fei had still been alive then.

His death had come days later, and his house naturally couldn't have foretold his fate. It was aware of his death by now, but the news hadn't made its way over yet, so Winterdraw was naturally in the dark.

"Strange, very strange." Xuan Zan murmured. "How could a talent of Xuan Rui's caliber die out of the blue? Am I supposed to believe a local could have killed him...?"

Kuang Hand humphed. "His caliber? Are you implying Kuang Rong's weaker?"

Xuan Zan glanced coldly his way. "Keep the nonsense to yourself. What bloody use is it now? Our priority's to catch the murderer."

"My lords, if Xuan Rui's a fake, then the impostor must be related to the murderer, or be the culprit himself. There's no other explanation possible," Xue Yi interjected.

"What's his motive for passing himself off as Xuan Rui after killing him?" Xuan Zan was still perplexed.

Winterdraw's chief warden solved the riddle.

"My lords, if the two prey truly are the culprits, then they must have planned to use young master Xuan Rui's identity to leave the island!"

The three house seniors' face fell at the explanation. At a guess, their geniuses had been killed by the very prey they'd hunted. That the murderer was bold enough to disguise himself as his victim bespoke courage and skill astounding even by Polylore's standards.

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Chapter 1603: No Other Options

The other five houses had now changed their minds. Instead of leaving, they now wanted to stay and enjoy the show.

Of course, they weren't kind enough as to provide assistance.

Rejuvenation Isles couldn't ignore the combined wrath of three noble houses. Imperial Prince Huo, Commander He, as well as important figures from Winterdraw were all on site. The most apprehensive one right now was Sin City's lord, Xie Wushuang.

The three houses might have lost six geniuses between them, and contestants from his city were the most likely culprits.

"Xie Wushang, look at what you've done. Explain yourself to our noble guests!" The chief warden berated, keen to shirk his responsibilities and throw the hot potato to the city lord.

However, the latter retorted, his face a picture of innocence, "Lord Warden, your servant's devoted himself heart and soul to organize the selection at your behest. I'm confident my due diligence has been worthy of your trust."

He truly felt himself innocent. Your men never told me the selection was meant to provide Polylore with young geniuses to hunt.

If he'd known, he might have been more careful and refrained from sending candidates that were too strong. But on the contrary, the wardens had urged him repeatedly to raise the standards and select the cream of the crop.

How could he not be aggrieved to see the time and effort he'd spent come back to bite him? He was less than eager to become the scapegoat, to say the least.

Xuan Zan threw the chief warden a discontented glare. "Cut the damned chit chat. Focus on the murderer! He's the one we want!"

The chief warden hurried to respond, "Yes, of course! We'll hunt him down and dole out the punishment he deserves!"

Hiding their extreme disdain, Xie Wushang and the others nodded in concert. They were the ones who felt the most wronged. As Winterdraw locals, they were innately hostile to outsiders. They also weren't all that happy to see the geniuses they'd selected turned into prey.

The hunter killed by the prey? Your geniuses only have their own incompetence to blame. What are you lashing out for? How unsightly.

Seeing Xie Wushang's lack of enthusiasm, Kuang Han remarked with annoyance, "You're called Xie Wushang, correct? I hear you're the one who's selected the two suspects. Tell us, who's the more likely murderer out of the two?"

Xie Wushang didn't dare express his loathing for these men, so after some consideration, he replied respectfully, "In my opinion, it should be Jiang Huang. Su Hong's undeniably talented, but more so than Polylore's geniuses? I find it hard to believe. On the other hand, I can't see through Jiang Huang. His origins are mysterious as well..."

"Jiang Huang?" Kuang Han, Xuan Zan, and Xue Yi looked at each other and nodded.

"Prince Huo, since we're now sure we're dealing with a murderer, shouldn't you lift the mountains' restrictions so we can hunt him down?"

The prince wrung his hands. "My lords, the mountains are truly pivotal for the island. Harming their foundations will affect the entire island's well-being."

Kuang Han exploded. "Prince Huo, do you mean that our geniuses aren't worth the foundations of a trivial land of exile?"

"Indeed. Prince Huo, I've heard Winterdraw's an abandoned island meant to house the worst criminals. What do we care about its foundations?" Xuan Zan rebuked without holding back.

For an exalted prince of the royal house, to be so harshly contradicted was hard to endure. Still, he couldn't afford to offend these men. He threw an awkward glance at the chief warden.

The latter summoned his courage. "My lords, please leave hunting the murderer to us wardens. You don't have our familiarity with the mountains and might fall victim to lots of accidents. Rushing inside

headlong might be more detrimental than it's worth, while we can use the formations to tail him. We stand a better chance of catching him."

"Watch your mouth! Prince Huo, Warden Ding, I hear nothing but excuses to keep us out. Am I to understand that you're colluding with the murderer?"

The prince paled. The three houses were close to losing their rationality. He had no choice but to squeeze out an apologetic smile. "My lords, Warden Ding isn't wrong. Trouble truly awaits at every turn if you're unfamiliar with the terrain. The wardens are locals and know every nook and cranny. It's a good idea to leave the chase to them. Why don't you rest nearby and await their good news..."

Kuang Han slammed a hand on the table. "Prince Huo, I don't want to hear this bullshit! Are you telling us to sit out something as important as the capture of our geniuses' murderer? We must participate in this! At most, let the wardens guide us if they know the terrain so well!"

"Correct. Prince Huo, refusing means you harbor ulterior motives!"

Since these fellows were impervious to reason, the prince resigned himself to the inevitable and kept his peace. He couldn't oppose them even if he wanted to, so he nodded immediately. "In that case, the chief warden will dispatch three different groups and provide the three houses with whatever assistance they can. The other wardens will conduct a separate search on their own. What do you think?"

The chief warden wanted nothing more than to refuse, but what choice did he have? He could also see that the three houses were on the verge of exploding.

"Alright, there's no time to lose. The murderer could have gotten far away while we're dilly-dallying here. Everyone assemble and get ready to enter the mountains!"

A storm was gathering, destroying the mountain slopes' usual tranquility

The other five houses weren't participating in the search. In no hurry to leave, they simply kicked back and enjoyed the ride.

"Tut tut, to think we'd find a talent in this place, great enough to wreak havoc upon three aristocratic houses. I'm now curious what kind of monsters these two men might be."

"Yeah. I heard one's called Jiang Huang. Apparently he's not a local?"

"Sounds like an interesting man. His strength must be frightening if he can kill the likes of Xuan Rui and Kuang Rong."

"Heh, House Ye could use a man like that."

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Although a little depressed to see his plan dead in the water, Jiang Chen soon regained his equanimity. It was no use crying over spilled milk. The noble houses would chase him down like mad dogs once they learned the truth. His sole preoccupation now was how to hide from them.

He traveled to the edge of the forbidden area.

The border of the sixteen-hundred-miles open area was jam-packed with formations and restrictions. All sorts of eerie runes and formation etchings filled the area as far as the eye could see.

Jiang Chen looked pensively at a certain gap.

“These traces are definitely man-made. I remember them talking earlier about signs of someone barging inside. Did Su Hong create a gap here and enter the second level?”

The nasty environment in the first level was of no challenge for Jiang Chen, but the same might not hold true for the second level. A place designated as forbidden grounds was to be reckoned with.

But time was pressing. There was nowhere to hide in the first level. He had to rush in and face the dangers head-on. Without further ado, he steeled his resolve and slipped inside despite the many layers of restrictions.

A crazy spatial countercurrent impeded his progress the moment he set foot inside.

Fortunately, his adaptability was second to none. Though difficult, he acclimated himself to the new environment and soon found himself increasingly less troubled by the spatial current.

He waded against the tide for a full two hours before finally leaving the border area.

Sure enough, danger lurked at every corner. Troubles cropped up every three steps, and disaster every five. Thankfully, his mighty consciousness allowed him to find his way out of every precarious situation.

What a terrifying place. I fear for Su Hong if he’s really come inside. Then again, the sky’s the limit for him if he can survive this time.

In the current situation, prevailing despite all odds would be proof of Su Hong’s potential.

All of a sudden, a venomous snake shot out of a tall tree, shooting at him as fast as lightning. Such occurrences were a common sight inside the forbidden area. He slashed with his blade without even looking that way.

Its head hacked off, the snake dropped on the ground. But even there, bone-chilling hisses emitted from a protruding tongue. These trivial interludes were of no threat to him.

The omnipresent formations, restrictions, and spatial currents near the edge of the forbidden grounds truly made his journey tenuous. Thankfully, he had more skill and experience dealing with them than most. He finally left them behind after an hour and entered the second level proper.

The land seemed all the more sinister and terrifying after being sealed off for so long. Chilliness oozed from the very air.

Though running for his life, he didn’t charge all over the place like a headless chicken. Instead, he progressed at his own rhythm, every measured step the result of meticulous scouting.

“I might’ve stirred up a hornet’s nest this time. The three houses might send their powerhouses. I can’t afford to be reckless, or I’ll be intercepted or even trapped.” Jiang Chen earnestly focused on his current predicament.

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Chapter 1604: A Fugitive's Flight

The large-scale manhunt reached the edge of the forbidden area not long after Jiang Chen passed through the restriction zone.

Inspecting the scene together with the three houses' upper echelons, Xuan Zan nodded after a moment. "Gentlemen, do you see what I'm seeing? There are clear traces of damage to the formations. This must be where the suspects went inside the second level. They can't be very far, especially the impostor. We must catch him at all costs!"

"That's right, our houses can't afford this sort of humiliation!"

"Warden Ding, are you going to lift the restrictions, or shall I do it by force?" Kuang Han glared coldly at the chief warden.

The latter threw a helpless glance at Prince Huo, waiting for his decision.

The crestfallen prince waved his hand. "Lift them then." He raised a cupped fist salute at the three houses. "Gentlemen, this junior has but one request. Please refrain from destroying the formations once inside. With our men as your guides, you'll certainly find the suspects if they're really inside."

"Hmph. Let's see how sincerely you guide us first. We reserve the right to act as we see fit if we can't catch our targets!"

Focused on their murderers, the noble houses paid little heed to his request. They might drop the matter if they caught the two, but they'd naturally make no promises in case they didn't.

The prince sighed. Even if he was unwilling, did he truly have a choice when furious eminent figures from Polylore were breathing down his neck?

His men slowly undid the restrictions.

The three houses divided their forces into nine different groups. The chief warden and the prince dispatched guides to each as they started the manhunt.

The deeper one went into the forbidden area, the closer one neared the core of the Blackwraith Mountains. Compared to the first level, the much greater surface area was an obstacle in the search.

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Utterly cautious after setting foot in the new area, Jiang Chen had retracted his aura as much as he could. A single mistake might allow the terrible pursuers on his heels to catch him, so he couldn't lower his guard even for a second.

"I wonder what kind of secret this place hides, for Winterdraw to attach so much importance to it."

His curiosity was piqued. There must be a reason for the island to repeatedly warn them not to stray into the second level. Now that he was inside, he'd personally experienced the sharp increase in the degree of risk.

He ran into many hazards on the way, but he could rely on the powerful sense for danger born of his formidable consciousness. More importantly, he could anticipate many pitfalls thanks to his vast experience.

“This place is dangerous, but not really life-threatening. I wonder why the wardens are so nervous?”

Half the threat came from the mountains themselves, and the other half man-made elements arranged by Winterdraw.

Noxious flora, poisonous insects and violent fauna, as well as all sorts of plants that could kill; for him, these posed little threat. The various formations, devices, or sudden traps were a greater menace.

Thankfully, he had enough knowledge to spare in these areas. Otherwise, he might truly have been brought down in a moment of carelessness.

“Strange. The wardens must really be wary of intruders. The place is armed to the teeth with all sorts of mechanisms.” Jiang Chen became increasingly curious. All of a sudden, his consciousness perceived a faint omen of danger. He looked back in spite of himself.

A blinding light illuminated the zone he’d traveled through not long ago.

“Hm? Have the restrictions at the entrance been lifted? Are the pursuers already inside?”

He shook. He knew he’d be hunted, but hadn’t thought he’d be placed so fast between the difficult terrain and the three great houses.

“If locals are leading the way, they’ll easily avoid all the pitfalls. They can proceed much faster than me since I have to stay alert at all time. Things will be hairy from now on,” he coolly analyzed. The situation was very unfavorable.

But at this crucial juncture, he had little time to lose on idle thoughts. He faced forward once again and pressed on deeper into the mountains.

“No matter. I must continue onward. I can’t look back even if I have to cross the entire mountain range. According to the map, I should reach the coast if I journey for a few dozen thousand miles. And then, I can make good my escape if I can cross the waters!

“That said, there are formidable barriers and formations near the coast. They’re no trifling matter, and there are roughly two thousand miles of dangerous seas to deal with afterward. Leaving will truly be an uphill battle.”

He could feel in his bones the challenges lying ahead. For a moment, he even considered using the spacetime seal to return to Veluriyam.

But there were no guarantees the seal could be used on Winterdraw. More importantly, after leaving the third Palace of Heritage, he’d been warned in no uncertain terms he couldn’t challenge the fourth palace before half-step empyrean realm.

Although each palace allowed for one chance of failure, Jiang Chen wasn’t keen to squander it so casually.

“The seal is a last resort. I’d have to start over again. Coming back to Myriad Abyss Island will probably be even harder by then, not to mention the time wasted.” He didn’t want to turn back now after making it this far.

The urgency of his situation brought to light even more of his talents. His formidable consciousness was fully put to use inside the forbidden area.

He perfectly avoided every mechanism and prohibition along the way. A single triggered trap might expose his whereabouts and alarm his pursuers, making life so much easier for them. Fortunately, he sidestepped every one of them and stayed under the radar.

Despite the many people hunting him down, they must have split into quite a few groups to cover the land in a wide-ranging human net.

This method was reliable, but also had its flaws. At the very least, they must have spread manpower thin, so they couldn’t form a perfect encirclement in the short term.

Being surrounded was his one and only worry. In a forsaken place like the Blackwraith Mountains, it was almost impossible for him to break out of a siege. After all, fearsome experts at sixth level empyrean realm were hot on his heels.

It wasn’t his first time contending with such existences, but he’d relied entirely on trickery to defeat the Embittered Savages’ Forefather Bamboo. He felt that his chances of victory in a straight confrontation were nil.

And apart from the spacetime seal, none of his trump cards would be of help. So he stayed as cautious as he’d ever been.

He found himself in unfamiliar territory. He was on enemy soil, none of his predicaments part of his plan. Circumstances had forced him to adapt time and again, firmly putting him on the backfoot.

He traveled for two days without a second of rest, his mind stretched taut by the constant tension.

The flight took its toll. Though everything had gone perfectly thus far, and he refrained from exposing his position or losing ground to his pursuers, he hadn’t had a moment of respite. He never felt safe or free from the manhunt.

His energy was running low after fleeing for two days and nights straight.

“I can’t go on like this. I need to get some rest.” He very much wanted to hasten his journey, but reason prevailed in the end.

Even a few hours of meditation would be a huge boon to alleviate his excessive fatigue and help him to recover. Despite his decision, he didn’t dare stop immediately. He arranged some Goldbiter Rats on the wayside as scouts and sentries.

His preparations done, he found a secluded spot and began meditating. Every second mattered. He needed to regenerate his reserves in order to face the even greater difficulties lying ahead.

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The nine groups of pursuers sometimes traveled together and sometimes went their own ways. Like finding a needle in a haystack, the search had yet to yield results after a few days.

On the verge of exploding, the three houses' leaders once again convened a meeting, their faces so glowering that Prince Huo and Warden Ding were a little afraid to look at them in the eye.

"We haven't so much as spotted the murderer's shadow after so many days, to say nothing of catching him. Warden Ding, your wardens are the ones leading the way, so how do you explain this?" asked an exasperated Kuang Han.

Chief Warden Ding coughed in embarrassment. After a few days of large-scale manhunt, he'd begun to wonder whether a murderer truly existed.

It was possible the geniuses had killed each other, while Jiang Huang and Su Hong were entirely innocent. But it was a mere fleeting guess born from frustration. How would he ever dare voice it?

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

Chapter 1605: A Difference in Opinions, Breaking Away

"Imperial Prince Huo, Warden Ding. I don't see any sincerity from your guides. Don't blame us for not giving you face from now on!" Kuang Han's expression was completely black.

The chief warden was astonished. "What are you planning, Master Kuang Han?"

"From now on, we three houses are taking control of this place. We will set the route and plan the pursuit. If you would like to follow us, feel free. If not, you can leave now," Kuang Han announced.

"That seems a little ill-advised, Sir Kuang Han," Imperial Prince Huo's face changed color. "The deeper you go, the more restrictions there are. If you don't know the territory, you'll end up going slower..."

The imperial prince's words made a certain amount of sense.

"Honored sirs, the imperial prince is telling the truth. Without us to guide you through the Blackwraith Mountains, you will go even more slowly than we are now," Warden Ding advised.

Xuan Zan snickered. "You think we can't live without your help? Absurd! You are mere frogs at the bottom of a well. Do you take us for your local factions? Our methods are far beyond your comprehension!" His tone was downright rude.

As figures of authority in their own right, the imperial prince and the chief warden were unhappy to hear such words. They would've turned on him instantly had he not been from Polylore.

"Please, do reconsider," Imperial Prince Huo forced out meekly.

"Enough." Kuang Han waved a hand. "It's so decided."

Warden Ding had had quite enough of these upper crust Polylore natives. As the chief warden of Winterdraw, he was an important man in the whole of the Rejuvenation Isles. The three houses were strong, but the seniors who'd come weren't necessarily stronger than him. At most, they were comparable in skill.

Because of the difference in status, the chief warden had bit back all complaints. But he was having a hard time keeping things down any more. His expression darkened, his own tone completely turning from a respectful one.

“As the chief warden of Winterdraw, I cannot defy the will of you Polylore nobles,” he declared coolly. “I do have a word of warning, however.”

Kuang Han sneered. “What? Are you trying to stop us by force?”

“As the aristocracy of a divine nation, you have the ability to treat the Rejuvenation Isles as you wish,” the chief warden replied. “Even if I wanted to stop you, I would not be able to given the circumstances. This is quite separate from that.”

“Out with it then.” Kuang Han became detached as well.

“If you truly want to have things your way and decide on your own path, then Winterdraw is no longer responsible for whatever else happens in the Blackwraith Mountains. Whether you find the culprit or get into another accident – that is none of our concern.” Warden Ding took a hard stance.

“Tsk tsk, it sounds like you think we three houses won’t be able to handle these mountains, hmm?” Xuan Zan curled his lip.

“I don’t mean to belittle you,” Warden Ding responded with a cupped fist salute. “Still, the Blackwraith Mountains have been a dangerous place since ancient times. This place is foundational to the existence of Winterdraw itself. As a place of ancient heritage, its dangers are inestimable. I am sure of one thing though. Even you three houses cannot guarantee that each and every one of you will remain unscathed.”

The chief warden was in a difficult position. He couldn’t be too viciously certain about the statement, but he had to make himself clear. If they wanted to venture in without regard, any subsequent deaths shouldn’t be blamed on Winterdraw.

In actuality, he had borne displeasure for the three houses ever since their geniuses had gone missing. Their lack of decorum annoyed him. If they came to test themselves on Winterdraw, shouldn’t they have been ready to suffer some losses?

What kind of aristocratic house was it that blamed mishaps of its own upon another?

Were they not responsible enough to shoulder the burden of potentially dying? Why had they come to test themselves in the first place then?

The three houses’ current behavior was absolutely tyrannical in his eyes, with no reason whatsoever for their high-handedness.

Imperial Prince Huo hurriedly interceded. “My friends, Old Ding is the chief warden of Winterdraw Island. He feels a great deal for this place and knows what the Blackwraith Mountains signify. He wanted to protect the heritage here, nothing else. Plus, the mountains really are rather dangerous. He only means well.”

Kuang Han snickered. “Imperial Prince Huo, it doesn’t matter what you think. No matter what you say, our wish to hunt down the criminals is set in stone. As for the pointless air that Warden Ding has farted,

don't concern yourselves with our well-being. We will take responsibility for what happens from here on out. Pay attention to your own affairs."

"That's right. Follow us if you'd like. If not, get out of here." Xuan Zan didn't want to waste any more time.

Imperial Prince Huo's lips quavered; he sighed helplessly.

Warden Ding tossed the prince a thoughtful glance. "Well then." He raised a cupped fist salute. "We will not bother you with our presences any longer."

The chief warden knew that they would only be abandoned by the three obstinate houses if they tagged along. Thus it was better not to go at all.

"We're going!" Kuang Han waved without looking at the imperial prince and the chief warden. He and his team departed. Xuan Zan and Xue Yi zoomed after him along with the elite of their own houses.

Warden Ding's expression was chilling as he glared at their backs. A fire burned in his heart. He desperately wanted to give the order to kill all of them, if it were possible.

Winterdraw Island and the Rejuvenation Isles had the power to do it.

The three houses had many experts, but they were few in number. Winterdraw and the Isles on the other hand, had all of their best men here.

Commander He sighed. "Warden Ding, you're too hard-headed. You'll only end up insulting these three factions in the end."

"You saw their attitudes," the chief warden retorted with evident displeasure. "They don't think much of us at all. What's the point of us sucking up to them? Will they somehow show us any kindness in return?"

Imperial Prince Huo waved a hand. "That's enough complaining. Our invitation to the eight houses was supposed to have been a good thing, but now, I can't really tell..." Tragedy colored his voice.

"Warden Ding, is there really insurmountable terror within the Blackwraith Mountains?" Commander He questioned worriedly.

"I don't really know myself. It's been quite a while since I became chief warden, but I haven't been everywhere in these mountains yet. There have always been historical records. This is the most dangerous of the five forbidden grounds we have here on Winterdraw, and certainly the most mysterious. Moreover, any trespassers into the deep of the mountain can reportedly only expect death."

"Isn't that going to be very bad?" Commander He became extremely anxious. "The death of a few geniuses has already driven three houses into a panic. If something further happens to them... wouldn't they turn the Rejuvenation Isles upside down?"

"No worries." Warden Ding shook his head. "I've mitigated that risk already." He raised his arm to show off something in hand. It was a recording crystal.

“Our journey here, my warning just now... both have been recorded within the crystal. The three houses can’t blame us in the future, even if they want to.”

Warden Ding handed the crystal to Imperial Prince Huo. “Your Highness, please keep it for future need. Perhaps it mightful be useful at some point.”

The imperial prince was overjoyed. “Good. Well done, Warden Ding! If some accident happens to them, it is their stubbornness that’s to blame, not the Rejuvenation Isles.”

Commander He’s ugly expression was alleviated somewhat. The recording crystal was helpful proof. The three houses couldn’t be downright irrational or unreasonable.

The other five houses had been quite satisfied with Rejuvenation’s reception of them. Any hostility from these three stragglers would need to be dealt with as things came up.

“We leave!” The imperial prince finally came to a decision to not mess around with the three houses.

“Fall back,” Warden Ding gave the signal. He and his men withdrew outside.

“Warden Ding,” Commander He ran up to him. “If one crosses the Blackwraith Mountains, where will one end up?”

The chief warden halted his step. “Why do you ask that, Commander He?”

“Heh, I was just worried. If those two contestants really did pass through the Blackwraith Mountains, won’t they have escaped?”

“Impossible!” Chief Warden Ding shook his head. “The Blackwraith Mountains cannot be traversed so easily. Your concern is misplaced, Commander He.”

“We must prepare for the worst. If those two really were responsible for killing the houses’ scions, they are extraordinary talents indeed. Think about it: you’re intimately familiar with this place, Warden Ding, yet you found no trace of them after several days of careful searching. What does this prove? They are anything but predictable. What if they succeed?”

Imperial Prince Huo stopped in his tracks as well. “I suppose we must defend against that possibility.”

“You’re overthinking things, Your Highness, Commander He. Barely anyone has gone from one side of the Blackwraith Mountains to the other since ancient times. Plus, there is reportedly a terrifyingly powerful ancient restriction at the mountains’ heart. The core of an ancient formation lies there. Anything living can’t even approach, much less pass through.”

“How about this.” Imperial Prince Huo thought for a moment. “We’ll send a group of elites each to search the mountain exit on the other side. An ambush will be prepared there for them. If they don’t pull it off, we’ll have wasted only a few man-hours. If they do, we can cut them down on the spot to prevent them from endangering the formation on the edge of the island. We can’t let them escape!”

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

Chapter 1606: Tracking With A Secret Ar

After breaking with Imperial Prince Huo and Warden Ding, the three houses began to take a more aggressive route. They no longer avoided formations and traps, destroying any that stood in their way.

It increased the speed of their advance by a considerable amount, but carried the risk of notifying those that they pursued.

“My fellow daoists Xuan Zan and Xue Yi. Please hear me out.” After two hours, Kuang Han began to think that their current method was too blunt. He extended a request for communication to the other two houses.

They gathered together once more.

“What do you think about all this, Daoist Kuang Han?” Xue Yi asked.

“I’ve been thinking about Warden Ding’s words. His attitude wasn’t good, but he had a point. This place just might be a forbidden place from an ancient heritage. Given our numbers, we’ll suffer a loss we can’t afford to if we just charge in blindly.”

The eight houses were visiting the Rejuvenation Isles with only elites, which meant they hadn’t brought too many along. Each house had brought maybe several dozen people, which included seniors, young geniuses, and their personal guards.

Altogether, they numbered a hundred and a bit. They lacked the ability to perform a carpeted search of the Blackwraith Mountains and couldn’t possibly cover the entire area.

They had been able to employ that kind of method before because of the combined presence of men from the Rejuvenation Isles, Winterdraw, and Winterdraw’s various factions. This had afforded the mixed group a significant numbers advantage compared to their task.

Now that they had massively reduced manpower, it was unrealistic to do the same as what they had done before.

“You’re right, fellow daoist. We don’t have nearly as many men as we would like. Plus, those two scoundrels are wily indeed. They haven’t left any traces of their passing.”

“That’s right. I’m beginning to wonder myself: did we make an error in judgment somewhere? Maybe there’s no murderer in the first place?”

Kuang Han frowned. “Impossible! There must be a culprit.”

Xuan Zan nodded as well. “The one pretending to be Xuan Rui certainly killed him. Someone saw him disappear into the Blackwraith Mountains. He can’t possibly have vanished into thin air!”

Xue Yi inclined his head in concession. “Alright. What do you think we should do now, fellow daoists?”

“We can’t allow selfishness to get the better of us. We need to put some real skills on the table,” Kuang Han declared coldly. “I have a secret method for pursuit. It costs a great deal of mental effort, but it captures all traces of consciousnesses within a thousand miles. I can’t keep it up for long, so I need your help.”

“Oh?” Xuan Zan became interested. “How so?”

"I can keep up the secret method as long as you channel your mental energy to me. If we collectively put power into it, we can use it for as long as we need. As long as we lock on to our opponent, we can take down a mere great emperor upstart. So what if he can rival an empyrean expert? Can he survive an onslaught from all of us combined?"

Their most pressing concern wasn't killing their opponent, but finding him in the first place.

Once that was done, killing a young great emperor was no harder than wringing the neck of a chicken. Alas, they hadn't been able to find him at all over the past few days.

Xuan Zan and Xue Yi traded a look. Evidently, they'd been ruminating over the same issue. After a few moments, they seemed to come to the same decision and both nodded.

"Daoist Kuang Han, we will do as you say. Are you sure your secret method is reliable?"

"If it wasn't, do you think I would waste my time and consciousness on it?" Kuang Han retorted icily.

The two other men agreed after brief consideration.

"Then, please do. We will assist you. Perhaps we'll instantly find where that kid is, eh?"

"Yes, yes. We must trouble you then, Daoist Kuang Han."

Kuang Han was the most angry one out of the three. All three geniuses of his house had perished, forcing his hand on the matter. He sat down cross-legged, beginning the initiation of his secret method.

A violet haze rose from his body. Ripples of the same color radiated outward from his head.

"We depart!" Kuang Han suddenly stood up. The secret method didn't prevent him from moving.

"Let us clear the way and protect Daoist Kuang Han!" Xue Yi and Xuan Zan made a show of their support by taking the initiative.

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Jiang Chen was sitting cross-legged as well. Four hours had passed in the blink of an eye, and in a rather peaceful and undisturbed way too.

In fact, the lack of disturbance had been rather astonishing.

After four hours, he opened his eyes once more. The rest period had allowed him to recover roughly eighty percent of the strength that had been lost through two days of grueling expenditure.

"I haven't exactly gone fast over the last few days, but the Blackwraith Mountains span tens of thousands of miles. I should be halfway by now at least, no?" Jiang Chen guessed that he must be nearing the mountains' heart.

Calling his Goldbiter Rats back to his side, he prepared to set off again.

It was at this time that his consciousness felt something odd in the air. An indistinct wave formed by another's consciousness was radiating in his direction. He didn't have time to retract his own before he made contact with it.

There was a slight exchange midair; he felt an indescribable pressure on his chest.

“Not good, a consciousness sweep!” Jiang Chen instantly realized that something was awry. He retracted his consciousness without another word, leaving in the same breath. If the sweep was this close, his pursuers couldn’t be far.

“They’re so quick!” Mildly upset, Jiang Chen didn’t pause for a single moment underfoot. He sped up as much as he could, hurtling deeper into the Blackwraith Mountains.

Even if eighteen layers of hell awaited him within, he could do little else but press on. He certainly couldn’t turn back. His pursuers weren’t going to give up easily now that they’d chased him all the way here. Death alone awaited him if he retreated.

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“Got one!” Kuang Han was overjoyed. He hadn’t expected a response in only an hour. “He’s six or seven hundred miles out. He’s a pretty quick runner. Why’s he so far ahead of us?”

It wasn’t a relevant amount of distance in the outside world, but the Blackwraith Mountains had different rules. Here, each mile was as difficult as five to seven.

“Did you really find him, Daoist Kuang Han?” Xuan Zan was exuberant as well. “One or two?”

“Just one for the moment!” Kuang Han replied in a low voice. “He’s in this direction. Make no mistake about it. Hurry up, everyone! After him!”

“Daoist Kuang Han, why not have us three go first? Let the men behind us catch up,” Xuan Zan proposed. They were the three houses’ leaders on this trip and thus the strongest among their expedition. They had a bigger advantage in the chase.

“That’s right,” Xue Yi assented. “We should go on ahead and cut that kid off. We can’t let him escape our control again!”

Kuang Han thought about this for a moment before nodding. “Alright, it’s so decided. Everyone else, follow as quickly as you can. We three will serve as the hunt’s vanguard.”

Finding their mark was a large boost to their motivation and fighting spirit. They wanted to catch up to their target right this very moment. All three were mid empyrean experts. Once they had a clear target, they moved at drastically different speeds from the large group behind them.

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Though Jiang Chen was accelerating as well, he could clearly sense the threat behind him rapidly approaching. Moreover, his life was clearly in danger. He pushed himself to his absolute limit.

Thankfully, his speed and consciousness rivaled an empyrean expert’s. This allowed him to maintain a reasonable gap that wasn’t reduced too quickly. Nevertheless, the danger behind him also approached inexorably.

“Why are my pursuers coming so quickly?” Jiang Chen was quite bothered. “Did they send their elites ahead alone?”

Remembering the clash of consciousnesses made him uneasy. Someone who could send his consciousness out so far had to be a terrifyingly strong empyrean expert. It was very likely that the same man had come for him.

Jiang Chen didn't think it possible for him to fight toe to toe with an expert like that. Perhaps he could have outmaneuvered a the other one on one, but he would only choose to run from two. If there were three, his hopes were slim even for escape.

"I can't let them close too quickly. Otherwise, I'll be done for." Jiang Chen hadn't encountered a situation as risky as this since he'd first entered the world of martial dao. He felt the blade at his neck closer than ever.

The pressure his pursuers exerted on him from several hundred miles out was a crushing mountain that hung over his head. The mere sight of it was enough to bring a man to his knees.

"Stop struggling, kid! You can't get away!" A tyrannical voice echoed forth from the air. It came upon the consciousness, attacking Jiang Chen's own like a flood wave.

He was well-protected from such intrusions by his chain seal, but the presence of the voice in the first place meant that his enemies were near.

"I'd like to see the person who dared kill Polylore's geniuses. You think the Blackwraith Mountains will hide you from us?" The voice carried overwhelming authority, filling heaven and earth with power. It appeared the secret method's master wanted to use it to defeat him preemptively.

Though Jiang Chen felt a heaviness on his chest, his feet were totally unaffected. He wasn't bored enough to argue with his pursuers. Instead, he charged ever forward.

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Chapter 1607: Using the Concealing Talisman

Kuang Han harassed Jiang Chen ceaselessly with his secret method. He could sense that they were closing in on their prey. Even though it wouldn't cause any physical harm, it was imperative that he instill terror in the target.

"Fellow daoists, I can say with utmost certainty that he's the murderer," Kuang Han stated while giving chase.

"Why do you say so?"

"What makes you so certain, Daoist Kuang?"

"Simple. That brat wasn't affected at all by the pressure of my consciousness and continues to run without slowing down. Have you ever seen a genius of this caliber in the great emperor realm?"

The two other daoists fell into deep contemplation with the countered question.

"That's true. How can that brat be immune to your mental assault? Not even Xuan Rui or Kuang Rong can withstand our combined attacks, even from several hundred miles away."

"I can't believe there's such a formidable monster on Winterdraw Island. Is it possible that he isn't even part of the trial, but an empyrean master that slipped in somehow?" Xue Yi's imagination ran wild.

The theory was a slight shock to Kuang Han and Xuan Zan. No wonder so many geniuses had died to that person. Their deaths wouldn't be unwarranted if met with this kind of opponent.

"No matter! Even if he has limitless talent, he's going to die today!" Kuang Han yelled resolutely. If this had been some other incident, perhaps he might spare the genius and take them as a henchman. Unfortunately, a blood debt could only be paid with more blood; there was no room for compromise.

His life on the line, Jiang Chen had no choice but to push himself to the absolute limit. However, that still wasn't enough to shake off his pursuers. In fact, they inched closer with each passing second.

Damn it! If this continues, it won't be long until I'm surrounded. Must I really activate the spacetime seal and return to the human domain?

He felt extremely indignant. If he returned to the human domain, all of his hard work during this past period would go down the drain.

Moreover, he might not end up on this island again if he tried to come back. Who knew exactly how the teleportation array worked? He didn't want to use the spacetime seal until absolutely necessary.

At this rate, they'll close the distance to a hundred miles within a day. My every move and action will be difficult to escape their eyes then.

A good counterplan was needed, and quick.

Suddenly, an inexplicably powerful force emerged directly in front of him. He had no choice but to slow down his footsteps and move cautiously. He glanced ahead with the God's Eye. An eerie, dark, and impenetrable forest was ahead of him; one could just make out an ancient and mysterious building deep inside.

A field of formations and traps was laid outside of the forest, stretching far beyond what the eye could see, blocking his path.

"What in the world is this place?" Jiang Chen was completely taken aback. The path in front was blocked while his pursuers were quickly encroaching from behind. It felt like he'd been pushed into a dead end.

Does this mean I have no choice but to use the spacetime seal? He smiled helplessly at the mysterious formation field in front of him.

"Haha! Brat, why have you stopped running?" The pursuers at the back had also sensed the formations blocking the path ahead and Jiang Chen's predicament.

"Ran out of places to run, have you? Time to meet your maker!"

"How dare you kill our geniuses?! You've got some balls alright!"

Like rolling thunder, an endless stream of dignified voices exploded around Jiang Chen's head and entered his consciousness. The three empyrean masters clearly wanted to destroy him through the sheer force of their combined consciousness.

The person in question could sense that they were getting closer. Four hundred miles... three hundred miles... two hundred miles... they'd covered those distances in merely a few breath's time. However, Jiang Chen quickly regained his composure.

He stared deeply into the formation field with the God's Eye in an attempt to uncover a weak spot. Every formation had a weak spot that was overlooked in some way or manner.

Impenetrable formations did exist, but this was very unlikely to be one in front of him. He could sense that this formation was likely from a very distant era. Though it was incredibly powerful, he still felt he had a chance. However, finding its weak spot in a short period of time was no easy feat.

If he failed to find its weak spot and rushed in headlong, he'd be attacked by the restrictions and ground to dust even if he was made of metal. He couldn't afford to be so brash. He focused his attention and began to observe it.

However, this wasn't something that could be completed in such a short amount of time. The empyrean masters had already reached the two hundred mile mark.

Without delay, he took out a talisman that he'd obtained from Shu Wanqing's storage ring, the empyrean concealing talisman. It was one of the most valuable talismans in his possession. Upon activation, it allowed the user to vanish into the void without a trace and unable to be sensed by the eye, nose, consciousness, or any of the other senses. One would meld completely with the air.

Without any hesitation, he activated the talisman and applied its effects onto himself. After a bright flash, Jiang Chen's body rippled away from sight. His figure became blurrier and blurrier until he vanished altogether.

The three empyrean masters arrived in just a few breaths.

"Where is he?" Xuan Zan immediately asked upon landing.

Xue Yi cackled sinisterly and started to search around. "Brat, do you really think that hiding will of any use? The place is only so big. Let's see where you can run off to!"

Kuang Han's eyes glinted. His target had disappeared right beneath his eyes. This greatly perplexed him. There seemed to be no movement within the formation either. Did the brat scamper his way into the formation? Doubts filled his mind.

"Fellow daoists, let's split up and see if you can find any trace of the brat." He'd become the de facto leader between the three, while the other two had taken a slightly more supportive role. Without so much as a murmur, they split up and began their search.

Hiding within the void, Jiang Chen was just three hundred meters away from the empyrean masters. To minimize his presence, he stood under a nearby tree without moving a single muscle and observed the formation with complete focus.

Focusing one's thoughts during such circumstance was an incredibly difficult feat. However, it was during such times when Jiang Chen's Boulder's Heart showed its strength. Even though the three were moving within his line of sight, his heart remained as immovable as ever.

The formation field is extremely complicated. It's an amalgamation of many smaller formations stacked on top of each other, from deep to shallow, and from simple to complex. It's fortunate that I didn't rush in headlong. If I were attacked by it, I wouldn't be able to escape even with the spacetime seal.

Jiang Chen silently heaved a breath of relief. After a moment's observation, he began to gather some leads.

To infiltrate the formation, I'll have to master every single minute detail. It's clear that time has taken a toll on the formation as it's integrity has begun to falter. This is a very favorable situation. I wonder what opportunities can be found inside?

However, he didn't have the time to think about such things. Right now, all he could think about was escaping from his pursuers by entering the formation.

"You must be kidding me! The brat disappeared!?"

"Did he enter the formation without a care of the consequences?"

"Impossible. There isn't any movement within the formation."

The three were completely caught off guard. The fact that their prey had vanished into thin air only made them more frustrated.

"Daoist Kuang Han, what should we do?"

Kuang Han muttered, "This is extremely suspicious. Let's take a closer look and see if there are any weak spots in the formation where the brat might've slipped into." He couldn't think of any other reasonable explanations.

The three had no choice but to observe the formation meticulously. There were a few weak spots here and there, but no sign of any holes or movement. Their fruitless search went on for almost an hour.

"Can the brat really have escaped?" Xuan Zan gnashed his teeth.

"Even if he can fly or tunnel into the ground, there's no way he can escape from my field of consciousness. His mind ripples suddenly vanished into thin air. I can only think of two possibilities.

"First possibility is that he's entered the formation. Perhaps he's extremely familiar with formations. This explains why he could navigate his way through the mountains and arrived at this place with pinpoint accuracy. Second possibility is that he's used some kind of secret method to conceal himself from our consciousness. If it's the second one, he's probably still nearby." Kuang Han growled deeply.

Xue Yi suddenly interrupted. "I recall that there's a concealing talisman that allows the user to hide his presence.

"A concealing talisman?" Yu Kuang had an epiphany. "Daoist Xue Yi might be right. If the brat has concealed himself, we won't be able to locate him with our consciousness. However, he won't be able to use to run away either because the talisman will immediately lose its effect. Since he has to run on foot, it's unlikely that he's made it very far. We can't to see him with our eyes, but he can't escape from our range either. We'll sense it if he uses any arts."

“Does that mean that he might still be in the vicinity?” Xuan Zan suddenly asked.

“Yes. Since there are two possibilities, let’s try to rule out the second one first.” Kuang Han answered coldly.

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Chapter 1608: The Enormous Stone Formation

Xuan Zan blinked. “How do we smoke him out?”

Xue Yi was just as confused and looked at Kuang Han.

Kuang Han harrumphed. “A concealing talisman can hide his position in the air, but it doesn’t allow him to simply disappear. He’ll be revealed if we unleash an omnidirectional attack on this patch of space!”

Xuan Zan and Xue Yi were both overjoyed. The idea didn’t sound complicated, but they hadn’t thought of it in their haste.

“We’ll go with that,” Xuan Zan smiled cruelly. “We’ll each be in charge of a subdivision.”

“No rush,” Kuang Han replied coolly. “Our men are about to arrive. Have them lock down a hundred miles of space. I estimate it’s impossible for him to flee past a hundred miles if he can’t fly or otherwise transport himself!”

“Heh, allow me to demonstrate.” Xue Yi suddenly cackled. “House Xue has a method that is perhaps especially suited for this purpose.”

Kuang Han’s eyes lit up. “Are you speaking of the Demonhowl Zither?” he inquired happily.

“Exactly.” Xue Yi’s smile was so very odd. He pulled out a zither with a strange aura from thin air. Various sinister designs were engraved upon it, and its strings glowed with an eerie light that reminded one of hell.

“Fellow daoists, you should be able to resist this with your skills, no?” he asked, still grinning.

“We’ll be fine. Use it to your heart’s content. We’re in the open and our enemy is concealed. As long as your Demonhowl Zither causes him to make the smallest of movements, he’ll have nowhere to hide!”

“Quite right. Do as you like.”

Xue Yi nodded. “I’ll get to it then.”

He suspended the demonic zither in the air, placed both hands upon it, and began to play it. The first note from the instrument was like throwing open the gates of hell. Infinitely shrill howls of beasts and ghosts came from within.

Jiang Chen wasn’t even five hundred meters from the trio. The demonic song resounded in his ears. However, he had nothing but smiles for their adopted method.

Not a bad plan, but their reaction was quite slow. If they had done this upon first getting here, perhaps they would’ve succeeded. Now that I’m beginning to find clues about how this set of formations operates, who can possibly touch me?

Thinking this, he turned into a bolt of lightning that blasted into the sky.

Spatial ripples caused powerful air currents to kick up. Jiang Chen raised a hand casually to direct them, dispersing large doses of the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud all over the place.

“He’s finally come out. After him!” Kuang Han reacted the quickest. As soon as Jiang Chen moved, he sensed the movement of the air currents. He pounced with the quickness of an eagle.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh!

Three figures collapsed onto the revealed direction almost simultaneously. The air roiled. Fallen leaves and dust gathered up into an enormous wave, blasting toward the trio’s direction.

“Hmph. How dare a great emperor ant dare act like this?” Kuang Han didn’t consider a young genius of such trifling achievement worth much at all. In his point of view, the culprit would be as good as dead if he revealed himself.

However, he felt a flickering premonition of danger when the air blast neared. Pushing outward with both hands, he created a more powerful one to counteract the onslaught.

Boom!

The collision of two forces obliterated all plant matter present. The terrain itself was leveled.

“Hold on!” Kuang Han waved to stop the two others from approaching. His eyes glittered with a keen light. “He is a devious one, alright. There’s a poisonous powder in the air.”

“What? Poisonous powder?” The other two colored at the revelation. They warily stopped breathing, closing up their pores as well.

“Hmm. The powder is tasteless and odorless. I have a feeling that it’s very powerful besides that. I would estimate it to have been instrumental in the kid’s killing of Kuang Rong and the others.” Kuang Han affixed his eyes upon the formation as he spoke. “He’s a decisive one for sure. I didn’t expect him to charge right into the formation, nor to use this poison powder as a diversion for his escape.”

“Hmph. Does he think we won’t be able to do anything to him once he goes into that formation?” Xuan Zan was furious. A repeated lack of success was evidently quite frustrating for him.

“No rush. This formation is very complicated. Even if he goes in, it’ll take more than a while for him to get out.” Kuang Han calmed down instead. He’d realized that even though they were mid empyrean realm masters, they couldn’t underestimate an opponent like this.

Perhaps the youth couldn’t present a life-threatening danger to them, but it no longer seemed impossible for him to escape with his life intact. Thus, calmness at this critical juncture was absolutely crucial.

“After the poison in the air subsides, we’ll head into the formation.” The addition of something to fear made Kuang Han rather more guarded.

“We have abilities to disperse the poison powder, no?” Xuan Zan said.

“The poison powder outside is easy enough to get rid of, but that kid was pretty slippery. He put down a lot of the same stuff just inside the formation’s entrance too. If our arts try to disperse it, it’ll trigger the restrictions into attacking us.”

Dispersing the poison wasn’t hard, but if that activated the traps hidden in the formation and caused its restrictions to fire full force against them, that would be quite troublesome. Despite their status as mid-empyrean experts, they didn’t want to become the targets.

After entering the formation proper, Jiang Chen was able to proceed onward step by step by utilizing what he had learned during observation.

The formation was truly intricately constructed. Each link was tightly connected to the next through almost an almost mystical connection, allowing all the links to create a harmonious whole.

Though the array of formations had loosened somewhat, it still wasn’t nearly safe enough to simply barge in. Jiang Chen navigated it much like an acrobat on a tightrope. Caution was required, lest he trigger the restrictions and be attacked himself.

He couldn’t go as quickly as possible despite pursuers outside. Instead, he had to apply the utmost circumspection.

His current position allowed a closer look at the formation’s intricacies. The knowledge from his past life ensured that he wouldn’t make any mistakes. He passed through several multi-layered gates to get closer and closer to the formation’s core.

The closer he drew to it, the more extraordinary he found the formation to be.

“There’s no way this place was ordinary in the past. None of the formations I’ve seen before have had this kind of scale. The only one I can think of is the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement.”

Jiang Chen had learned many formations from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect, but none had rivaled this in size. This was no longer a singular formation, but a perfectly arranged array of them.

Thankfully, he was a master of formations and could always find the weakest points in the individual formations that made up the larger whole. Moreover, he could find the best passages through the connecting points between the formations. This allowed him to travel along time and time again without actual danger.

“This is my eighth jump from formation to formation. How many formations are there in here? What secret does the core hold?”

Jiang Chen had almost forgotten that he was being pursued. He was entirely devoted to traveling between the formations. Each jump held terrifyingly great danger.

Any little indiscretion would lead to a slow, abrasive death in the pockets of space between the formations; much like what happened to substances between two grindstones.

“Oof, that’s another jump.” Jiang Chen completed his ninth jump. God’s Eye looking onward, he saw an ancient complex of buildings not far off.

These buildings didn’t look residential in nature. Rather, they looked altar-like and ritualistic.

The seemingly haphazard arrangements held an indelible order to them. Ancient stones stretched out in every which direction to create an ancient formation. Various primordial glyphs were engraved upon them.

Jiang Chen halted several hundred meters out from the giant stones. He had a feeling that the structure formed by these giant stones contained a great secret. The raging air around them proved this formation's status as the entire formation's core.

"Am I finally here?" He took a deep breath, taking in the stony constructions around him. His heart was filled with questions. Even he could not immediately spot any clues as to the formation's nature.

He noticed only that there was hidden principle in every apparently mislaid stone. As for what that principle was, he couldn't say.

In this moment, he forgot about the pursuers behind him. He had no other choice. The boulders that blocked his way weren't something to rashly venture into. Without understanding it fully, he didn't dare brave them.

Jiang Chen's intuition told him so. He had a strong hunch that if he charged in without thinking, he would be disintegrated on the spot. Thankfully, the three mid empyrean experts behind him had not caught up yet. He had more than enough time to observe the stony formation.

The formation of boulders was different from any that he had seen before. This wasn't a sealing formation, nor was it defensive or offensive.

The only thing he could glean so far was that it contained boundless energy and a forbidding aura. It would certainly not hesitate to unleash potent offensive energies on an unwitting trespasser!

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

Chapter 1609: The Door in the Void

Jiang Chen focused all his knowledge and faculties on observation. He was perpetually struck with a feeling that he didn't quite understand the whole.

"What's this formation doing here?" He was wracking his brains trying to figure out its purpose. "If this were a sealing formation, wouldn't it have the characteristics of one? But it doesn't. If it was an offensive formation, why would it be located in the depths of the mountains? And what would it be defending if it's a defensive one?"

Jiang Chen's brain brimmed with various thoughts and hypotheses. Sadly, none of them satisfied him. His mind whirred into action. "A formation is made for a singular purpose. Those Winterdraw people care a lot about the forbidden grounds, which means this formation must be even more important than I thought. But what is it used for?"

He couldn't understand. The formation was virtually impenetrable. This was the first time he'd experienced this; the memories from his past life had been more than sufficient to clarify everything up until now.

“Must I use the spacetime seal to return to the Six Palaces of Heritage?” He gazed at the boulder formation in a depressed daze. The troubles he’d experienced after coming to Winterdraw flashed through his head. Had it all been for naught?

Jiang Chen would not resign himself to it. His calculations put him most of the way through the Blackwraith Mountains. If he could pass through this area and head onwards, he had a good chance of getting through the entirety of the mountains altogether. He would be on the boundary of Winterdraw then!

That would give him a good shot at escape.

Suddenly, a rather specific image made its way into his head. During one of his days in Sin City’s library, he had studied Winterdraw’s map. A spark of inspiration lit in his heart. It hovered before him, tantalizingly within reach. His heart beat faster, and he projected the God’s Eye toward the formation once more.

The formation was laid out with a great variety of depths and heights. The more he looked at it, the more it became familiar to him. It overlapped with the map he had reviewed back in Sin City!

“Can it be? This formation is based on a map of Winterdraw?” Jiang Chen was astonished and began to scrutinize it more closely.

The secret hidden in plain sight almost made him shout with excitement. The stony formation was a model map of Winterdraw Island itself!

“What’s the point of having a formation structured in the same way as the island’s geography?” Jiang Chen wanted the truth.

“Can it be...” A daring thought appeared in his mind, heating his blood. “Can it be that the formation controls the entirety of the island? And all the formations on it too?”

This possibility was rather exhilarating. The more he considered it, the more likely he found it to be. All the details were pointing to this conclusion.

Jiang Chen had seen this kind of formation before. He would’ve remembered if he’d searched his memory a little more.

There were many powerful formations in ancient times that could exert their control over a large region, resulting in a colossal area of effect. The core of any such formation was generally very well hidden.

The core of a formation was its eye, a place where all the formation’s levers could be tweaked. If the core failed, so did the rest. This stony formation was at the heart of the Blackwraith Mountains. Furthermore, it was touted as forbidden grounds – no entrance was allowed from anybody. What did that signify?

Winterdraw didn’t want this place to be revealed to anybody’s eye.

“It must be like that.” Jiang Chen was all fired up. His heart pounded as he perused the formation of boulders again. “If I can destroy this formation, wouldn’t all the restrictions over Winterdraw lose their effect? It will no longer have the ability to hold back its prisoners from escaping. The millions and tens of millions here... all of them would be able to escape!”

A maddening impulse drove at his heart.

“When Winterdraw’s experts discover that the restrictions on its borders have lost their strength, it will be a great help to my own flight. I would be merely one among countless others.”

Winterdraw didn’t have nearly enough men to pursue all the prisoners – or defeat them at all, in fact.

The island’s authority had been established under the precondition that no one could leave of their own volition. Because of this, no one dared oppose the chief warden and his men.

Once someone did, he could easily be held culpable for his crimes as he wouldn’t be able to disappear somewhere else. Thus, Winterdraw inspired awe through its restrictions alone. Who cared about the chief warden if the restrictions were gone?

The crazy idea ate at Jiang Chen’s heart, fermenting itself into irresistible action. He began to consider whether it was possible. Now that he knew the mystery behind the boulders, it was possible for him to try to figure out a way to demolish them. Where was he to start?

He carefully considered what he could see from the outside. He needed to find a flaw or loophole of some sort within the formation. Without it, breaking in was virtually impossible.

In fact, he could very well prompt a backlash from the formation. Given the level of the formation, such an attack would disintegrate ten Jiang Chens on the spot. He didn’t have the luxury of being hasty.

I must think and plan everything through before I do anything.

But now that he knew the entire thing was based off a map of Winterdraw, he found some clues as to where to begin. Exactly which places were more or less dangerous to dive into, for example.

“Although this formation was set up long ago, it’s continued to run ever since then. There must be something supporting its foundations.”

Formations didn’t run on nothing. They uniformly required energy – either from spirit stones, a treasure of some sort, or simply drawing it from heaven and earth.

Jiang Chen began to go through the possibilities one by one. He could rule out the last instantly. There was no gathering of natural energies here.

A supply of spirit stones was impossible to maintain for such a long time. They would be inevitably used up and expended. Although the formation was positively ancient, it didn’t appear to be decaying. Thus, Jiang Chen could eliminate that one too.

The last of the possibilities, and the most likely, was that the formation drew its power from a potent treasure.

Jiang Chen remembered the Earth Bodhisattva Orb he had obtained. In ancient times, the Earth Bodhisattva Sect had been able to rely on the orb to claim the title of foremost formation sect. Even the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had been considered slightly inferior. The overpowering strength of the orb had been its entire basis.

“Could this place hold a treasure like the Earth Bodhisattva Orb?” According to his estimations, that seemed like the most likely conclusion.

Jiang Chen tried inching closer to the formation.

He began a painstaking search. As long as he could find where this treasure was located and figure out how to get it out, the formation would crumble by itself. The formation was partly dimensional in nature. If a bumbling fool ventured in, certain death obviously awaited him.

Jiang Chen however, was gradually able to detect the formation’s underlying principles. He became braver and more inspired as he did so, grasping more and more of its mysteries. It took a while, but he was able to move inward without triggering the restrictions.

“Very good. Just as I thought, this is a dimensional formation. There are many pieces of profound mysteries within, all of them relating to Winterdraw’s secret. The formation is the reason why Winterdraw exists. I doubt that it was a prison island long ago. Instead, it seems to have been some sort of fort.”

He could make no final judgments on the island’s antiquated purpose without further archaeological research. He didn’t need to know much else though. The boulder formation absolutely served as the control point of the entire island.

“I have to find the formation’s core. There will indubitably be an amazing treasure there, the one that sustains this entire structure.” Jiang Chen had no room to turn back now.

Destroying this formation and consequently the island as a whole was part of his plan. He needed to disable all the restrictions anywhere they may be.

His consciousness inspected the formation very carefully, not allowing a single detail to escape him. His footsteps halted, eyes were affixed on a place that they’d just passed over. The stones were arrayed in a particularly impressive way here, and they seemed to almost be giving off a signal.

In fact, the corner looked rather gate-like, though empty space appeared to occupy both sides.

Jiang Chen sank into deep thought.

In the next moment, he heard a voice in his consciousness that urged him to pass through the boulder gate. Without another word, Jiang Chen leaped through the door in a flash of lightning.

Whoosh!

A burst of white light was the only manifestation of his journey elsewhere.

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

Chapter 1610: The Ultimate Secret of Winterdraw Island

The dimensional gate appeared to be rather ordinary. But as a traveler within, Jiang Chen felt an unbidden sense of wonder. He found himself landing in a completely separate patch of space.

The place looked like a residence, though a rather empty one. A lone obelisk stood in the most eye-catching place, a slate wall not far behind it.

Jiang Chen stood before the obelisk, which slowly began to glow with a faint light. The light scattered in a sedate manner, making the surface of the obelisk as smooth as a mirror.

In the next moment, a figure flickered into existence upon it.

“O ye of future generations... if you have come before this obelisk, you share a fated destiny with me. I am Pei Xing, a veteran and survivor of the ancient demon-sealing war. I came to Myriad Abyss Island, but did not wish to commingle with those cowards. I stumbled upon this deserted island and made a home for myself here...”

Jiang Chen was slack-jawed at the discovery of this information.

Just as he thought, Winterdraw had its own origin story. However, it wasn't a run-of-the-mill story. The first master of Winterdraw had, in fact, been a cultivator who'd participated in the ancient demon-sealing war! Senior Pei Xing had been unwilling to live alongside the deserters of the war he'd fought so hard in. That was why he'd created a home for himself on the then-wild island.

This was how Winterdraw Island had come into being.

“My life's knowledge is split thus: seventy percent in formations, thirty percent in the martial arts. I was one of the three masters responsible for the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement. I worked alongside two masters from the Earth Bodhisattva Sect and the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect...”

Jiang Chen was even more bewildered. He hadn't expected such illustrious history from Winterdraw's ancient master. One of the three masters behind the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement! He'd borne a third of the responsibility for the construction and planning of the formation.

The other two in the same role had been representatives from the two most famous ancient formation sects. Pei Xing on the other hand, appeared independent. Someone who'd been on the same level as two of the greatest formation sects was more than worthy of Jiang Chen's respect.

“No wonder there were formations strewn about everywhere on the way here. Restrictions upon restrictions, each linked to the next. They were pretty hard to keep up with! But considering their creator, it makes sense.” Jiang Chen breathed out in admiration when he realized the truth.

“I poured my heart and soul into refining this obelisk. It protects the land's fortunes and feng shui. All of Winterdraw's formations are beholden to it. Whoever obtains this obelisk... obtains the island.”

Following this, images flickered upon the obelisk's surface that showed how to refine and utilize to control the island's restrictions. Only excitement remained in Jiang Chen's heart.

“Just when I thought I'd come to a dead end, a new path reveals itself before me.” He wanted to crow with laughter. “I can't believe Senior Pei Xing's Winterdraw Island would hold a secret like this!”

It was clear that no one before him had trespassed. No one had understood the formations or entered the dimensional gate. Which meant of course, that no one before now had seen the obelisk.

Jiang Chen was the first man lucky enough to enter this place after Pei Xing's creation of the obelisk. The young lord seemed to always have had an affinity with formations.

He'd received the Ancient Crimson formation heritage, including everything within its forbidden grounds.

Though he hadn't found the site of the Earth Bodhisattva Sect, he'd obtained its crowning treasure.

And now, he had gotten his hands on Senior Pei Xing's heritage.

Jiang Chen memorized the steps required to refine the obelisk. Finally, the figure upon the obelisk sighed. "I was too heavily injured in the ancient demon-sealing war. It's hopeless for me to attain any breakthroughs to greater heights. Alas and alack! I've nothing to leave behind, besides this Obelisk of Containment. Aside from that, there is an airboat I used to use. All that I've learned in my life is contained in that vessel. After you pull the obelisk up out of the earth, the floor will crumble below you. You may find that vehicle beneath."

How fortuitous! Senior Pei Xing had left him an airboat as well. This was invaluable considering his present circumstances. Jiang Chen was exuberant. He realized that he could finally break free of his shackles and escape from Winterdraw.

It was at this moment that the surface of the obelisk emitted another bright light. The image on it turned to the world outside. The three mid empyrean experts had reached the stony formation's outskirts via following his trail. Kuang Han was in the lead.

"Those three wily bastards! They're hounding me far too closely! I must've left traces of my consciousness and energy as I made my jumps. How would they've understood these formations' mysteries so easily otherwise?"

Jiang Chen didn't believe it possible. So what if these three men were mid empyrean realm? He had plenty of reason to disdain their formation skills. He solidly maintained that the trio had followed him inside rather than using their own skills.

This was a bit regrettable, but there was nothing to be done. He'd been nearly perfect, but he hadn't been able to avoid leaving no traces whatsoever during his jumps through the formations. Unless he surpassed those three in strength, it was difficult for him to remain untraceable with so little time.

Thankfully, they were very conservative about the way they were proceeding. They walked to and fro outside the formation of stones without barging in.

"This formation is very odd. What think you, Daoist Kuang Han?"

The other two now saw Kuang Han as the de facto leader of the expedition.

The man who had been asked the question glowered. "That kid is the odd one. Every time we think he's out of options, he manages to escape from our clutches yet again."

"Is he using his concealing talisman again?" asked Xue Yi.

"Perhaps." Kuang Han gritted his teeth. "But where could he possibly hide in this small a space?"

"Shall I try him again with my Demonhowl Zither?"

“No. This place is too strange. If your song triggers the formation here, we’ll be in a great deal of trouble. It’s better not to risk anything at the core of all these formations. This may be an opportunity of sorts for us! I didn’t expect a place as insignificant as Winterdraw to hide so great a secret as this.” Kuang Han paced slowly around the stones, scrutinizing their details.

Xue Yi backed off uncertainly at Kuang Han’s opposition.

Within the residence, Jiang Chen began to refine the Obelisk of Containment as quickly as possible according to Senior Pei Xing’s instructions.

Refining the obelisk meant taking it away from the core of the formations. Once it was removed, all of the formations on Winterdraw would lose their effects.

“The three of them are already outside. When I refine the obelisk, the dimensional formation that places me here will fail as well. Perhaps I may directly come face to face with them for a moment. But according to the senior’s instructions, the space here will collapse upon itself when that occurs. I will be dropped underground into the airboat called Starfate. I hope the senior hasn’t deceived me...” Jiang Chen had no other choice.

Thankfully, Pei Xing hadn’t placed any particularly difficult problem in the process. As a master of formations himself, Jiang Chen had a superb advantage. This allowed him to be quite efficient in the refinement of the treasure.

In no time at all, he was eighty percent done. His attention was occasionally split in order to monitor any changes in the circumstances outside. He had to guard against the trio entering the same gate that he had entered. That would put them right here.

Outside, Kuang Han and company searched all about, but to no avail. However, Kuang Han did begin to find a few clues that led him into the boulder formation. The peculiarly constructed gate was suspended in midair before them.

“This is where the trail ends.” Kuang Han gazed at the cryptic passage above him, lost in thought.

“Can this be an actual doorway that leads to somewhere?” Xuan Zan guessed.

“It must be a dimensional gate, but it’s hard to say whether we’ll find safety or disaster beyond.” Xue Yi had an opinion as well.

Kuang Han glanced at his companions. “We don’t have another way forward, you two. Either we enter or we return. What do you think we should do?”

“If we return now, won’t everything have been for nothing?” Xuan Zan didn’t sound accepting of that option. “We’ll have wasted our time. Even Winterdraw’s fools will laugh at us. I won’t suffer that indignity!”

Xue Yi gnashed his teeth as well. “Daoist Xuan Zan is correct. We three houses will lose all our face if we go back now!”

Kuang Han chuckled. “Then, you mean to...?”

“We’re going in!” Xuan Zan was absolutely certain. “If not you, then I will go alone! Although if there’s anything good inside, it’ll be mine as well.”

“What an absurd notion. I’m going too.” Xue Yi volunteered.

“If we’re of the same mind,” Kuang Han sighed, “then we shall embark together. Whether blessing or curse, we’ll shoulder it together!”

“Alright!” The trio nodded, exchanging a mutual look of understanding, then readied to charge into the dimensional gate.

It was at this moment that the fabric of space before them shivered violently. In the next moment, all of the boulders suddenly crumbled. It was as if the plane that had supported them had also been demolished.

The astounding tumult shook both heaven and earth. Apocalypse seemed to descend. Everywhere the eye could see, countless lights soared away from the formations. Rocks toppled left and right. All order seemed to disappear in that moment.

“What’s happening?”

Even men as experienced as mid empyrean experts were left agape at this incredible sight. For a few moments, they completely forgot about their decision. They leaned on each other in a triangular formation for the sake of self-defence.

Boulders toppled all around them, smashing into the earth before their feet. The men were buried in the ruins. Thankfully, the three were too skillful to be fundamentally hurt despite being buried. They used their methods to escape.

The area above was now empty. Aside from a spreading destruction, where was there a shadow of anything?