

Three Realms 1621

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1621: Resolution

The lawkeepers were observant and knew how to resolve a conflict. In only a split second, Captain Qiu had made a decision, and the best decision given the known facts.

Even Jiang Chen was surprised by the captain's decisiveness. He'd thought that the captain would cause more troubles and further complicate the issue, but unexpectedly, the captain decisively cut through all the nonsense.

That gave Jiang Chen newfound respect for the Oriole Valley's operations, and the overall management of the Bluesmoke Isles.

He smiled. Given the resolution, he wouldn't needlessly drag on the argument since he was the one who'd benefitted. He cupped his hands at the captain. "I naturally respect Captain Qiu's final say. Your judgement is fair. Oriole Valley has left a good impression on me!"

With a faint smile, Captain Qiu calmly declared, "Oroile Valley is a place where logic and reasons reign supreme. In the Bluesmoke Isles, we also believe in prioritizing rationality."

Those were pretty, empty words. Jiang Chen took them with a grain of salt. Still, he was satisfied with the way the conflict had been resolved.

Shopkeeper Kang felt mildly insulted by the resolution, but he could accept the result. It was far from the worst thing that could've happened.

The worst case scenario would be if he'd been blamed for the two parties starting a fight in his shop. Now, only the five cultivators were unhappy, but they would blame the officers and the young man, not the shop.

The hook-nosed cultivator might be an unruly one, but even he didn't dare to stir up trouble before the lawkeepers. Glowering, he exclaimed, "Of course I trust Captain Qiu's judgement as well, but I'm curious... who is our friend here? We five admit defeat, but at least let us know who we've lost to." It seemed that the Northcrown Five were not yet satisfied.

Captain Qiu frowned, but didn't say anything. Instead, he looked at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen pulled his lips into a disdainful smile. "You five don't deserve to know who I am. Keep your eyes open next time. When it comes to mere wandering cultivators like you, there are many in the world you can't afford to offend."

With that, he pushed past the crowd and walked out of the shop.

He wouldn't dwell long on such a small conflict. He wouldn't be afraid even if the Northcrown Five decided to come after him. After all, none of them were empyrean experts.

Even if there had been a couple among the group, Jiang Chen still wouldn't fear them. It wouldn't be the first time he'd gone up against empyrean masters. There were quite a lot who'd died at his hands.

Hua Ming couldn't be more satisfied. He'd never been as proud as he was today. He followed Jiang Chen, noting that people were looking at him with baffled dread instead of the usual indifference and contempt.

He'd never experienced this kind of thrill before.

It took a while of following after Jiang Chen for him to muster the courage to catch up. "Now I'm impressed, brother. Your presence is strong enough to intimidate even the captain of the lawkeepers! Hahaha! I'm impressed, I'm more than impressed!"

Jiang Chen slowed down his pace and looked at Hua Ming with a lopsided smile. "You sure look happy. You're enjoying the feeling, aren't you?"

"Yes, yes I am," Hua Ming admitted without hesitation or pretense. "All my life, people have looked at me like I'm dirt, or pretended I didn't exist. I've never been this proud of myself!"

"Have you considered that you may not be able to survive in Oriole Valley from now on?" Jiang Chen couldn't help reminding the boy, whose head was now in the clouds.

"I'm not afraid! A man should set his eyes on the vast world. I, Hua Ming, don't want to stay in Oriole Valley for my entire life, and I won't!" The boy puffed his chest out. It was as if he had finally found his purpose after a lifetime of depression.

Jiang Chen looked at the proud young man. He didn't want to rain on Hua Ming's parade. Everyone started out reckless when they were young. Everyone had a dream in the beginning. One could not laugh at a boy for his ambition.

Hua Ming's eyes suddenly darted to the side. He asked Jiang Chen in an earnest tone, "Can you please wait for me for a moment, brother?"

"What for?"

Hua Ming pointed at the tailor shop next to them. "As your sidekick, I'm going to embarrass you if I wear dirty clothes like these, right? I'll go for a change of clothes and make myself presentable."

He seemed to have been struck by an epiphany and wanted to change the way he looked.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Since when did you become my sidekick?"

The boy suddenly thumped to his knees. "I don't have family or friends, brother. Even though I've always been considered inferior by others, I've never once knelt down to anyone. Today however, I've come to see you as the guiding light in my life. There's a voice telling me that you are my opportunity. If I'm to become somebody one day, I must stick close to you. I have nothing but a loyal heart. Please..."

Jiang Chen considered the boy's serious expression. A quiet sigh escaped his mouth. "Stand up. Go change your outfit and clean yourself up."

He casually handed him three thousand empyrean spirit stones. "Take these. We can talk if they're not enough."

Jiang Chen could tell that the boy had a quick mind. He did indeed need some loyal helpers during his time in Myriad Abyss Island. The boy had potential, so he was worth keeping around.

Hua Ming was delighted by Jiang Chen's generous offer, but took only five hundred spirit stones. He felt a little uneasy about even that. "I'll be quick, benefactor," he hurriedly said. "Just a moment."

Three thousand empyrean spirit stones were too great a fortune for him. He had acquired some money through his little tricks before, but had never been in possession of such a large amount. He was far too nervous to take the entire sum.

Even when he was nervous though, his mind worked fast. He'd changed the way he called Jiang Chen. Brother had become benefactor.

Jiang Chen stood idly by the street, his gaze wandering about. He spotted many people along the way who obviously knew what'd happened in the shop. They looked at him with mixed emotions. Some boldly kept their eyes on him while others snuck fearful glances at him.

Jiang Chen sighed inwardly.

The boy was more efficient than one would expect. After fifteen minutes, he came out in a different attire, surprising Jiang Chen with the sight.

Hua Ming had cleaned up nicely. With his face cleaned and his clothes changed, he turned out to be a handsome young boy. The clothes made the man like a horse depended on a saddle.

"Benefactor..." Hua Ming had never put on such fine clothes before, putting him ill at ease.

Chuckling, Jiang Chen patted Hua Ming on the shoulder. "Good, good. You're just a little too thin. How old are you?"

"Twelve," Hua Ming answered honestly.

From Hua Ming's shorter height, Jiang Chen had assumed that the boy was young. This was confirmed with knowledge of his age.

"You're twelve, but you have no basic training or understanding in martial dao?" This took Jiang Chen by surprise.

"I've been on the streets in Oriole Valley as long as I can remember. I have no parents and no family. There was no one to teach me about cultivation."

Hua Ming's tone was glum. What he wanted the most always was to learn martial dao. He knew that martial dao was the key if he wanted to set himself apart from others.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Come on then. It's a little late to start cultivating at the age of twelve, but you haven't missed much."

This was the honest truth. When he'd reincarnated in the Eastern Kingdom, he'd been fourteen or fifteen, and had had no basis in martial dao either.

At twelve, Hua Ming was younger than Jiang Chen had been when the young lord first started. Besides, this was Myriad Abyss Island. There was a solid foundation of martial dao here.

Hua Ming followed after Jing Chen, his heart filled with a mix of excitement, awe, and dread. He was worried that the benefactor would turn him out if he didn't perform well.

Just as he was on tenterhooks, he heard Jiang Chen ask, "Why do you insist on following me, Hua Ming? Is it because you think I'm from the Ten Divine Nations?"

"No!" Hua Ming blurted. "I've always thought that you're extraordinary. I'll have a bright future by your side. A brighter future than being nothing in Oriole Valley, at least."

"What if I'm not from the Ten Divine Nations?"

"No matter where you're from, Hua Ming will consider you my master until the end of my life without regret. If I ever betray my promise to you, let there be no room for me to survive in this world!" Hua Ming was young, but he was no fool. Quite the contrary, he was a clever one. No matter what fate awaited him, it would be better than wasting his time in Oriole Valley!

Jiang Chen smiled. "I'm not from the Ten Divine Nations. That I can tell you. Those from the Ten Divine Nations however, are no threat to me. This may be too vague an answer, but you'll come to understand what I mean in the future. Now, follow me. If you have the potential, I'll teach you according to your talent."

Hua Ming didn't care if Jiang Chen was from the Ten Divine Nations. He was a naive boy with a simplistic view of the world. If someone treated him with kindness, he would willingly give the person his heart in return. What Jiang Chen gave him was the thing a boy most desired - respect.

Hua Ming had received little such in his life. Yet Jiang Chen had never treated him like a little beggar. He'd paid money in return for information, and Jiang Chen didn't look at him with contempt. To a young boy, that was more valuable than any favor.

The two of them left the trading area and found accommodation in the biggest inn in Oriole Valley.

Hua Ming trailed after Jiang Chen. He couldn't help his excitement at seeing Jiang Chen splash out like money was nothing. He was curious just who exactly his benefactor was.

Can someone with such a strong presence be a nobody? Hua Ming told himself to be loyal to his benefactor and stop overthinking things.

After booking two premium rooms, Jiang Chen said to Hua Ming, "I'm going to Hell King Island in a few days. Do you want to stay in Oriole Valley for the time being, or come with me?"

"I'll follow you, benefactor!" Hua Ming responded resolutely.

"You told me that there's going to be a Bluesmoke Jade event and that people from the Ten Divine Nations are attending, right?"

"That's what the word on the street is. If you want to gather more information, might go to a more important city in these isles. Oriole Valley is a small border city."

Jiang Chen gave it some thought. He waved a hand in lieu of a response. If representatives from the Ten Divine Nations are coming, is there going to be someone from Eternal Divine Nation?

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Chapter 1622: Surprise, Gaining An Apprentice

At the end of the day, Ming Hua was still just a minor ruffian from Oriole Valley. He was quick-witted and well-informed, but core matters were still foreign to him.

Jiang Chen would have to travel to a bigger place in the Bluesmoke Isles to learn more. With his current abilities, traveling to the Ten Divine Nations wouldn't be much of an issue, but barging into House Yan and taking Huang'er away with him was a different matter entirely.

Thus, he felt it'd be wiser to carefully plan out the matter than hope for overnight success. The Eternal Divine Nation was participating in the coming event as well. It'd be a good opportunity to obtain more information. If the stars aligned, Huang'er might even be present!

He didn't need to take her away immediately. Seeing her and knowing about her current status would be enough to give him great comfort. But will Huang'er be interested in an event like this? Will her clan even let her venture into the outside world?

Uncertainties brimmed.

No matter. Let's take things one step at a time. There are more urgent matters to attend to, like helping Senior Vermillion with the rebirth cycle. It'll be a great help if the senior's born anew at peak power.

Jiang Chen hadn't fought by himself ever since setting foot in the world. He'd always made skillful use of what he'd been dealt and didn't feel there was anything wrong in doing that.

He was still young. It'd barely been twenty years since his reincarnation. Not many could get this far in such a short period of time; no one could reach the heavens in a single bound.

His rate of growth was already astonishing and in no way slower than that of any Myriad Abyss genius. He was anxious about growing stronger, but more often than not, speed begot failure. It was imperative that he borrow strength from others until he was strong enough.

"Hua Ming, come here. Let me test your martial dao potential." Jiang Chen beckoned Hua Ming over.

"Sure!" The boy's eyes gleamed. He'd never been tested before. Due to his beggarly appearance, people often just pinched their noses and avoided him. Who'd want to check his martial dao potential?

Jiang Chen's test didn't involve any instruments. All he did was take Huang Ming's pulse. "Calm your heart. Don't let your mind wander or circulate your qi."

Hua Ming followed the orders exactly.

Jiang Chen's consciousness gradually filtered into the boy's body and began analyzing it. A scant heartbeat later, the light of utter shock and disbelief shot forth from his eyes. Hua Ming didn't notice the reaction as his eyes were screwed tightly shut.

Jiang Chen found it hard to quantify his amazement. Hua Ming possessed an innate fire constitution, and one of high order at that! He was just as talented as Mu Gaoqi, who had an innate wood constitution of high order!

Even though fire constitutions were relatively common, Hua Ming's constitution was a tad different from the rest as a frighteningly powerful bloodline heritage was held within. Jiang Chen couldn't identify it just yet, but he was certain that it had nothing to do with the Vermillion Bird.

That's unfortunate. If he had the Vermillion bloodline instead, the senior will probably view him very favorably.

Even though he couldn't identify Hua Ming's bloodline yet, this discovery was enough to make him jump for joy. He'd encountered such a great treasure without even looking for one! Of all people he could've met on the street, he'd met someone with an innate fire constitution of high order!

Myriad Abyss Island was truly a luxurious place. Someone with such a fantastic constitution and bloodline had been wholly ignored in a small place like the Oriole Valley?

The Bluesmoke Isles are well governed, but they still have a long ways to go when it comes to discovering talent. Perhaps this is the difference between them and the Ten Divine Nations?

No matter the reason, this discovery was an immense stroke of good news for him. He released the boy's wrist. "Alright, you may open your eyes now, Hua Ming."

The boy obediently opened his eyes and look at Jiang Chen with anticipation. One could clearly see the restlessness in his eyes. This was potentially a life changing moment. How could he not be nervous?

"Hua Ming, you have a great foundation and potential. Your body has been cultivating on its own and is now on the verge of breaking through to the sage realm. Didn't you realize?"

Hua Ming shook his head. "Nope. All I know is that my body feels incredibly hot at noon everyday, like it's about to explode. Only at midnight do I feel most comfortable."

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. Noon was when yang energy was at its strongest, agitating the energy in Hua Ming's body. It was only natural that the boy would feel hot at noon as he didn't know how to circulate qi.

If he'd known the basics of cultivation, he'd likely be in emperor realm or even a great emperor by now. This was a promising talent worth spending some time on.

"Hua Ming, I have two paths for you to choose from. But before that, I need you to swear your allegiance."

"Benefactor, I swear that I'll always be loyal to you. If I ever stray from my path, may the heavens smite me and the earth reject me. May a million horses pull my body apart!" Hua Ming blurted out every oath he could think of.

Jiang Chen nodded and smiled gently. "You're young, but have been tempered by the ways of the world. This is both a boon and a bane. You're well-versed in how the world works, so you won't be deceived or cheated in the future. But because of that, you'll run the risk of having an impure dao heart. Of course, this is something that you can overcome with enough tempering and training."

Hua Ming nodded obediently and committed the words to memory, even though he didn't really understand what Jiang Chen was talking about. It sounded like gibberish now, but he could slowly comprehend it over the years to come.

“You have two choices. One, be my attendant. As long as you're by my side, you'll never worry about food, clothes, or money ever again. All you need to do is tend to my needs with utmost loyalty. Two, be my disciple. I'll guide you through your cultivation.”

There wasn't an iota of hesitation after Hua Ming heard his choices? “Honored master, your disciple wishes to learn from you and accepts your tutelage.”

Why would anyone with a sound mind choose to be a servant? Jiang Chen wasn't surprised by Hua Ming's choice. It was the better choice of the two.

“Then I shall accept you as my disciple. From now on, I will pass on training methods to you. However, I won't tell you my true name yet. Further observation and later deliberation is required.”

Hua Ming kneeled. “Master, please accept a kowtow from your disciple!”

He carefully went through the disciple's ritual, rigidly kowtowing nine times until Jiang Chen had lifted him up. He was so ecstatic that he couldn't stop rubbing his hands together. His encounter of Jiang Chen was like a dream.

“With your talents, you should've been a disciple of a great sect, but for some reason, your potential has gone unnoticed all these years. That's just as well, if you'd been taught by those amateurs, your future would probably be just as mediocre as theirs. Perhaps it was your destiny to be taught by me and possibly achieve greater things in life.”

Jiang Chen didn't paint too big of a picture, but he was still filled with confidence.

Even at Myriad Abyss, he didn't think there was anyone more worthy of taking in disciples than him. His cultivation level wasn't on par with the masters of the island, but any of his numerous disciples from his previous life could single-handedly wipe out the Ten Divine Nations.

“Hua Ming, you've come from a harsh world, filling your mind with schemes and ploys. To improve your mindset, let me impart to you Boulder's Heart, along with its three accompanying abilities, God's Eye, Zephyr's Ear, and Psychic's Head. These four abilities will heighten your senses and temper your foundations. Work hard to master these skills, or you'll be punished.”

“If I ever slack on master's teachings, I'll have no complaints even if you kill me with a palm strike!” Hua Ming agitated.

There was a reason why Jiang Chen had chosen Boulder Heart instead of something else. Hua Ming was a child from the secular world, and thus hadn't formed a dao heart. What he needed right now wasn't a method, but a tempering of his heart. Boulder's Heart was without doubt, the most suitable ability for the job.

Hua Ming's mentality had to be stabilized first before he could cultivate other techniques. Otherwise, if he found out that his innate talents were beyond that of many, he'd grow proud and conceited.

There were many such stories since the beginning of time. Jiang Chen didn't want to watch his handpicked seedling wasted like that. The next day, he left the tavern along with Hua Ming. Their next destination was the Bluesmoke Isle's eastern capital.

There was a total of four capitals on Bluesmoke Isles. The eastern capital was known as Miracle City. It was a very popular city in the isles. Because of its vicinity to Yellow Dragon Ridge, it was also the most developed and bustling city. It was also a convenient starting point to travel to Hell King Island.

Departing Oriole Valley led them to a bleak wilderness. Jiang Chen led the way, not going particularly quickly. Hua Ming however, kept glancing behind them, seemingly worried about something.

"Hua Ming, don't look backwards. Even if you're worried about something, don't show it on your face, understood? You need to practice the Boulder's Heart some more."

Hua Ming blinked, looking at his master with surprise. "Master, do you know that something's behind us?"

"The Northcrown Five, and maybe other helpers too." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Ah? They really didn't give up?"

"Since they didn't, they can be the Northcrown Dead." Jiang Chen's tone abruptly turned frosty.

The wandering cultivators didn't dare stir up trouble in Oriole Valley, but they were emboldened enough by the lawless wilderness outside the city that they wanted to regain their face.

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Chapter 1623: Slaughter

Hua Ming delighted at the dominance of his new master. My master is mighty alright!

Jiang Chen continued onwards, looking for a sufficiently secluded spot. If he was going to take action, he wanted to ensure the total obliteration of his pursuers without it being traced back to him.

The wilderness was a rather large place, and completely abandoned. Jiang Chen slowed his steps upon reaching a thicket. He landed after a moment of observation.

"After the fighting starts, stay near me," he informed Hua Ming. "Don't panic."

"Yes, master." Hua Ming was extremely excited. This was his first time participating in a fight. Though he had no combat ability to speak of, he was nevertheless brimming with enthusiasm.

Jiang Chen patted the boy on the shoulder. "Don't worry. Calm yourself. You'll see many more like these in the future."

A few casual motions were enough to set up a concealment formation. The duo disappeared within the thicket.

"Remember, don't speak or make a single sound. Stay absolutely still." Jiang Chen's voice echoed in Hua Ming's consciousness.

Another couple moments later, the Northcrown Five happened upon the scene. The five were led by the hook-nosed cultivator. All five members had equally strange outfits and looks, but their murderous intent was undeniable.

The hook-nosed cultivator was especially vicious. His eagle-like eyes scanned to and fro, clearly fixated on the clash they'd had earlier. There was no other reason to have pursued Jiang Chen here.

"Weren't we right behind him, boss? Where'd he go? Is he hiding in the forest?" a tall, fat cultivator asked.

"Look alive, brothers. That brat must know we're tailing him," the hook-nosed cultivator commanded. "Don't spread too far out. Back each other up."

"Boss..." a scholarly cultivator came up. "He seems pretty mysterious, right? What if he's actually important? What if... we just suck it up and let bygones be bygones? It's not like we lost very much..."

The scholarly cultivator was rather different from his four fellows.

"What're you implying, number two? Don't ruin our reputation by getting cold feet just before a fight!" the fat cultivator's brass voice boomed forth once more.

The scholarly cultivator ignored him, continuing with his advice. "Boss, even Captain Qiu treated the kid deferentially. He might really be related to the Ten Divine Nations. Our grudge with him was a public affair. If it turns out... well, we won't have anywhere to go in Myriad Abyss Island."

"You scared, number two?" the hook-nosed cultivator harrumphed.

"Ah, we're brothers. Why would I have been a brother all this time if I was scared? I'm just thinking of our futures." The scholarly cultivator made another pass.

"If you're not scared, then shut up! If you're scared, get out of here." The hook-nosed cultivator wouldn't be persuaded.

Disappointment flashed through the scholarly cultivator's eyes. He was none too pleased by the response he was receiving.

The others were set on following their leader. They hadn't yet realized the danger this incident could contain.

"Ah, forget it. We'll face whatever comes, together. We're brothers." The scholarly cultivator was completely resigned. His biggest wish was that his judgment was incorrect – that the kid wasn't from the Ten Divine Nations.

Secretly, he hoped that the young man had already disappeared. Ideally, they would never meet again. Perhaps that was the best bulwark against tragedy.

The hook-nosed cultivator grinned. "I know you love to fuss and worry, number two. Don't worry, so what about the Ten Divine Nations? If he's not a scion of a big house, nothing will happen to us. Would someone like that be alone? He'd have a couple retainers at least, right?"

This assumption was actually completely wrong. Many geniuses in the world of martial dao enjoyed going on journeys alone. However, the scholarly cultivator wasn't going to waste any more words. If he did, the boss would doubtless turn on him.

The group entered the thicket and began to search.

They suddenly felt the trees moving before them. The ground too, was shaking. The scenery rapidly shifted until they found themselves in a strange space. It seemed that exits were everywhere, and yet all of them were illusory.

"What is this?"

"The hell? What happened?" The Northcrown Five were collectively astonished.

"Don't panic!" the hook-nosed cultivator called out hastily. "Backs to each other. Beware of a sneak attack!" The boss was reasonably reliable in a sticky situation. He didn't lose his wits despite the surprise.

The fact that the five had been brothers for many years shone through. Their teamwork was impeccable. They gathered together almost instantaneously, backs to each other. Seriousness was written all over their faces.

"What happened, boss? Did we run into some sorta trap?"

"Shut up. Talk as little as possible," the hook-nosed cultivator demanded. "This has to be a formation. We'll work together and find the exit."

Only the scholarly cultivator remained silent. The foreboding premonition in his heart had blossomed into deep-seated worry. He was almost certain that all of this was part of that kid's plan. The kid had been waiting for them to walk right into his trap. They'd finally met someone they shouldn't have messed with.

"Boss..." the scholarly cultivator took a deep breath.

"You be quiet. It's too late to say anything now. We need to get out of here first." The hook-nosed cultivator had guessed something at this juncture too. But as the boss of the group, he wasn't going to admit his own faults.

"Heh, get out of here?" Faint laughter could be heard from the nothingness of space. "How naïve. Do you think I'll give you a chance to do that?" These words came from Jiang Chen, of course.

They were dreaming if they thought they were going to be able to leave his Nine Labyrinth Formation. Even an empyrean expert would have trouble doing that.

The formation had been a priceless treasure even in the ancient times. The human domain had been humanity's core back then. Myriad Abyss Island, nothing but wilderness!

Jiang Chen's voice made the blood drain from the Northcrown Five's faces. They were all white as a sheet. The hook-nosed cultivator glared at the air. "Show yourself, boy, if you dare! Don't play tricks like these."

“Tricks?” Jiang Chen laughed. “I have at least a hundred ways to kill you all, Northcrown Five. I merely picked one of the more interesting methods. Now, you can experience exactly how pathetic and insignificant you are before you die.”

His voice was cool. The group’s cultivation levels didn’t threaten him a single bit. He’d been pursued by three mid empyrean masters just a short while prior. What did he care about these clowns?

“Where are you from, kid? If you really have any skill, then fight it out with us fair and square!” The hook-nosed cultivator tried provocation.

“Ha, do you think yourself worthy of a fair fight?” Jiang Chen chuckled. “I’m surprised you’re so ignorant despite your age. No wonder you brought your brothers into this deathtrap. If you’d taken your brother’s advice earlier and left on your own, perhaps I would’ve let you live. But you hardened your heart and chose to ignore his warning, yes?”

The Northcrown Five traded regretful looks.

The others had rather different expressions now when they looked at the scholarly number two. They’d thought him chicken-hearted, but he turned out to be the most correct out of them all. The boss’s decision had indeed sent them to certain death.

The hook-nosed cultivator’s face changed color several times. He squinted viciously into the ether, as if he wanted to grab the invisible Jiang Chen right out of it. Alas, he was as helpless as a lamb within the Nine Labyrinth Formation. He could do little else other than await his inevitable slaughter.

“Brother Long, Little White. I leave these guys to you.” Jiang Chen didn’t care to strike these pathetic cretins down himself.

Long Xiaoxuan and Little White were in an important stage of their breakthrough to empyrean realm. Cultivators like these were wonderful prey for them. The dragon had a claw in the door of ascension already. Though the tiger had started a bit later, he was progressing incredibly well too.

It was trivial for the bloodline of the four sacred beasts to take down the Northcrown Five. The appearance of the dragon and the tiger scared the wandering cultivators witless.

The scholarly cultivator yelped. “Hold on, hold on! Sir, we’re willing to become your loyal servants! We only ask to live!”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “Isn’t it a bit late to beg now?”

“Sir...”

The young man was unmoved. “Brother Long, Little White,” he called with his consciousness. “You have fifteen minutes.”

He wasn’t the bloodthirsty or murderous type, but he wasn’t going to show mercy to these louts.

Wandering cultivators often bullied the weak and cowered before the strong. They were begging right now, but very well could launch another attack down the line. Any offensive action he took needed to be permanent. He didn’t want any future trouble.

The Northcrown Five put up barely any resistance against the fang and claw of the tiger and dragon duo. It took far less time than the beasts had been given, for them to consume their prey.

Jiang Chen put away his Nine Labyrinth Formation diagrams and allotted some additional time for his feisty companions to digest their food. “Come on, then,” he turned to Hua Ming.

The boy was completely flabbergasted. He couldn’t believe his eyes. A dragon, a true dragon from legends! And an Astral White Tiger! Weren’t these supposed to be mythical beasts, lost to stories and lore?

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Chapter 1624: Long Xiaoxuan Breaks Through to Emphyrean

“Master... was that... was that really a legendary true dragon?” Hua Ming’s mouth was dry. His brain was frying just trying to process all this information. He’d lived in Oriole Valley all his life and had never seen anything remotely grand. Seeing a dragon was an incredibly eye-opening experience.

“Yes,” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Hua Ming’s eyes opened wide. He was shaken down to his core. “I thought... true dragons were sacred creatures that only showed up... in stories?” he swallowed. “Will the dragon become a divine spirit one day?”

“Sure,” Jiang Chen agreed readily.

Thought was driven out of the boy’s mind. He was beginning to get the feeling why his master had said he didn’t care much about the Ten Divine Nations. If a true dragon served his master, what did that mean for the latter’s origins?

Is there something even greater than the Ten Divine Nations? Hua Ming felt his little mind overloaded with realization. He couldn’t say a single word for the longest time.

“That’s enough of that, I think. Wait here a bit. I think our draconic friend is about to break through, so he’ll need some time.”

Jiang Chen could see that Long Xiaoxuan’s cultivation couldn’t be held back any more. The dragon had sensed the law of heaven and was about to ascend to emphyrean realm.

This was a pretty desolate area. Though it was somewhat risky to break through here, it was far better than a crowded place like Oriole Valley.

Jiang Chen summoned the Goldbiter Rats, instructing them to set up defenses with a radius of three hundred miles. Any suspicious movements was to be reported on ahead of time.

A true dragon’s breakthrough to emphyrean realm would cause quite a commotion. Jiang Chen needed to make some preparations for it. Fortunately, Long Xiaoxuan didn’t need near as much time as a human would; the process was hardly as complicated. This was one of the advantages to the race.

There were no humans around for about four thousand miles. Thus, Long Xiaoxuan's breakthrough was reasonably smooth. Draconic aura blasted into the heavens in the last moments of the process, triggering natural phenomena. Thankfully, not many neighbors were disturbed.

When those further away arrived at the scene, Jiang Chen and his entourage had already long since disappeared.

The Astral White Tiger was stimulated by Long Xiaoxuan's breakthrough. Jiang Chen could detect an intensification of its fighting spirit. A healthy rivalry was to be encouraged. When dragon and tiger competed against each other for accomplishment, both would grow up more quickly to become his strongest helpers.

Admittedly, their bloodlines played an intrinsic part in their rampant growth. He and Long Xiaoxuan were cultivating at essentially the same speed. He was already cultivating extremely quickly, but Long Xiaoxuan had surpassed him into entering empyrean realm first, on merit of his bloodline alone.

"Ah, divine spirit creatures are all incredible monsters. Human geniuses really can't match them!" But Jiang Chen didn't think any less of himself. He knew the advantages and disadvantages of different races. There was no point in envying the divine beasts' natural talents.

Two hours or so after their departure, various local experts gathered at the spot of the disturbance. The extraordinary commotion that Long Xiaoxuan had caused was enough to draw out all the secluded experts around.

A true dragon's breakthrough was shocking indeed. The draconic aura hadn't yet entirely dissipated even after two hours.

"What kind of spirit creature caused this?"

"The change in heaven and earth prior was majestic. It didn't seem ordinary at all. Perhaps a sacred beast was breaking through here?"

"Why would one live in the wilderness?"

"Hard to say. Perhaps it was inspired by something it saw?"

"This aura is ancient. It's doubtless a primordial bloodline – possibly even a divine creature's!"

"Why do I feel like the aura is draconic? The Bluesmoke Isles has never had true dragons before, but we've had its descendants and wyverns. The aura here is similar, but stronger!"

"A true dragon? That couldn't possibly be the case. Since when has Bluesmoke had anything like that? Absolutely impossible!"

"Myriad Abyss Island has no stories about any dragons."

"That's where you're wrong. There have certainly been legends about true dragons in the history of Myriad Abyss."

"True dragons don't just pop up anywhere so easily, you know! One that appears signifies the dawn of a new, greater era!"

“The endless seas of Myriad Abyss Island must contain true dragons somewhere. Still, the development of a dragon takes a very long time. Who knows when they will appear?”

“Perhaps the seas has witnessed a new dragon’s birth? And it happened to pass by here?”

“The aura isn’t very strong for a true dragon. It must be a young one.” The experts discussed the possibilities among themselves.

When ‘young one’ was mentioned, everyone’s thoughts accelerated. A young dragon evoked the ambitions of every listener.

“A true dragon and a young one... a dragon that hasn’t reached adulthood yet. If someone manages to tame it, that would be such an enormous gain! A true dragon is worth far more than a single territory or collection of isles! At the peak of its strength, a true dragon can easily crush an entire nation! A single motion would be enough to cut down a swathe of empyrean experts...”

All of the experts found their faces contorting in strange ways.

“Friends, let’s not announce the news of this young dragon, hmm? We’ll keep this information to ourselves.”

“That’s right, we can’t. If we do, the Bluesmoke Isles won’t know another day of peace.”

All of the cultivators had their own ambitions. They didn’t want news about a dragon to get out. If stronger experts got wind of it, their plan to capture it would be done for.

“We have about forty of us here. Let us agree to swear a stern oath not to reveal this information to outsiders. The young dragon won’t have gotten very far. We’ll see who gets his hands on it through his own skill, eh?”

“Very good. It’s settled, then!”

“That’s the way it should be. Anyone who leaks the information will be hunted down by the rest of us!” These experts swore oaths, then indulged in their daydreams.

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Jiang Chen was already several thousand miles by now, headed for Miracle City. There were more than a hundred thousand miles between here and there, so the trek wasn’t easy.

Now that Long Xiaoxuan had hidden himself, there wasn’t a trace of his draconic presence whatsoever. The delusional cultivators back there would have no luck whatsoever trying to catch their mark.

Jiang Chen didn’t rush along. Whenever he encountered a reasonably sizable city, he went inside to experience the local culture and gather information.

There was something he didn’t know how to react to though. Every city he passed by had a rather conspicuous wanted poster issued by Polylore. It was just as Hua Ming had said: the bounty had been increased. Ten million had doubled to twenty.

Jiang Chen found it rather funny, honestly. The more Polylore increased the bounty and raised a bigger fuss, the more stinging their self-inflicted shame was. What if the culprits were never caught? Were they going to infinitely increase the bounty then?

He was a bit worried on Su Hong's behalf though. He wasn't worried about being hunted, but he couldn't say the same for the other youth.

Jiang Chen had never shown his true face in Winterdraw. No one was going to draw a connection between the bounty and himself. As long as he never assumed the identity he had used back there, Polylore would never get their hands on him – unless he revealed himself voluntarily.

Hua Ming found the bounty quite amazing. "Master, just how strong are these two? Polylore has put a lot of stones for their heads, you know? Do you think you can catch them, master? You're so strong 'n all..."

"I'm not interested," Jiang Chen laughed. "Twenty million sky spirit stones isn't worth my time."

He looked like a complete outsider as he said this. In fact, he almost believed himself that the persons wanted by the bounty didn't include him.

Hua Ming thought for a moment, then agreed. His master was far too loaded to be attracted by just twenty million sky spirit stones. The boy had already been taught Boulder's Heart. If he couldn't stay cool in the face of just twenty million, his master might think lowly of him...

Polylore Divine Nation's bounty request had spread throughout the millions of miles that composed of the whole of Myriad Abyss Island in only a few months.

Information and rumor about it was everywhere in the Ten Divine Nations. The gaffe that Polylore had committed couldn't be kept back any more. All ten nations knew what had happened in Winterdraw now.

Polylore Divine Nation suffered a twofold failure. In particular, the three houses became the butt of everyone else's jokes.

Winterdraw Island and the Rejuvenation Isles were a terrible backdrop to the humiliation. Rumor had it that the three houses returned to vent their fury upon the Rejuvenation Isles. Its imperial family struggled a great deal to offer compensation and abate the onslaught against them.

Winterdraw Island had become practically pointless. All its exiles and prisoners had fled, aside from the old, infirm, and ill.

Though most proceeded to die in the surrounding seas as fish food, its ignoble exit from history was an undeniable fact. The island had lost all the formations and restrictions around it. There was no value in a place like that any more.

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The Eternal Divine Nation resided on a certain mysterious and grand continent in the midst of an endless sea. The landmass was at least ten times as large as the Bluesmoke Isles. In fact, it was one of the largest in Myriad Abyss Island. It contained countless great sects and houses. Of course, an even stronger imperial authority reigned above all of those.

Once a first-rate house here, House Yan was experiencing a recent decline for a mixture of reasons. Many of their peers had surpassed them. Right now, Huang'er resided deep within House Yan's manor.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1625: Huang'er's Shock

Huang'er appeared to be treated as the eldest young miss of the house still. No one in the entire house dared disrespect her. However, she also felt a deep-seated helplessness. She knew full well that no one in the clan actually cared much about her. They just didn't want to press her, out of concern that she might commit suicide due to depression.

She was cooped up and kept out of the way; a future cultivation vessel delivery to House Xiahou. This was a promise the house had committed to many years ago, and a mark of shame upon the family.

Alas, the passage of time had dampened the indignance of the latter. But as a token in the exchange, Huang'er herself hadn't been forgotten. Everyone knew the importance of keeping her intact. House Yan couldn't suffer House Xiahou's indignant rage otherwise.

She was clever enough to understand all the details, but wise enough to know she couldn't turn the tables yet. Instead of causing trouble, she bided her time closely.

If there were any miracles left in the world to hope for, she believed that only Jiang Chen would be able to bring them. She could lose faith in the rest of the world, bar him.

She firmly believed that the man she loved would descend upon Myriad Abyss Island one day and save her from this nightmare, shocking the entire realm in the process. What she had to do was to wait patiently until then.

To this end, she kept her solitude and focused on her own cultivation. She dismissed the servants and maids given to her. She took care of her own needs and chores. Aside from Elder Shun, she had no companionship.

Unfortunately, the elder was also significantly worse for wear compared to how he'd been a long time ago. For violating the taboo of taking Huang'er away from Myriad Abyss, he'd been imprisoned as punishment. Only after her return and alternating between threats and coaxes had he been released. His cultivation was restricted to less than thirty percent of what it'd been.

This ensured that he wouldn't be able to help Huang'er in any more misadventures. It was also out of consideration for her emotional needs that he was released. He would've been left to rot in jail, otherwise.

Meanwhile, Huang'er's parents were utterly despised by House Xiahou. House Yan had no authority to make decisions on that front. Thus, she refrained from making any demands about them.

On yet another day, Huang'er sat outside her room to play her zither. The two pieces she played were almost a daily ritual for her.

The Sacred Deliverance Mantra and the Ethereal Soothing Melody assuaged her grief, if only a little. Jiang Chen had taught her both, and they'd been extremely effective in suppressing her Generation Binding Curse a long time ago.

At the same time, the pieces marked the initial stages of her attraction to him. She'd never expected a martial cultivator to be able to perform such elegantly fine and moving music. Jiang Chen himself was still in the dark about the key part the music had played.

Huang'er plucked the songs over and over, the nostalgic notes taking her back to the time in the human domain, at her love's side. She couldn't restrain her emotions. Melancholy, affection, sorrow, anticipation, disquiet, and all kinds of other feelings were stirred together in a melting pot.

"Ah, Huang'er. You're thinking of that kid again?" Elder Shun's aged voice sounded outside the hall. His vigorous footsteps could be heard as he approached the girl. Though he had only thirty percent of his cultivation remaining, his mind wasn't any less diminished for it. There was a strength that supported him – giving him the single-minded resolution to protect Huang'er. His faculties were perhaps even sharper than before.

Huang'er pressed her fingers down to mute the strings of her instrument when she heard the elder's footsteps. She adjusted her emotions, doing all that she could to calm herself. She knew how much Elder Shun worried about her, and wanted to keep his concern to a minimum.

"You're here, Elder Shun," she murmured quietly.

"Yes, I went out to gather some information. Just like you, I hope that foolish boy comes soon." The old man knew about the oath between the two. "Unfortunately, there's nothing as usual." Elder Shun shook his head with disappointment. "He hasn't gotten a new paramour, has he? Maybe he's too scared of Myriad Abyss to come?"

"No, no," Huang'er defended hastily. "Brother Chen isn't that kind of guy."

"Oh, I know he's not," laughed Elder Shun. "But it's not an easy task to get from the human domain to here."

The girl nodded, then sank into silence. It took a long while for her to speak again. "Elder Shun, have you heard anything about your disciple?"

"Not him, either," sighed the old man. "When I noticed the family was on my tail, I set him up for success elsewhere. I wonder if he's found his footing after all these years?"

The disciple they were talking about was Chu Xinghan. Elder Shun had brought him from the sixteen kingdom alliance here all those years ago.

Under the old man's tutelage, Chu Xinghan had advanced rapidly in cultivation. He'd already reached emperor realm when they'd been forced apart from each other. It's almost guaranteed that he's a great emperor by now.

After all, the elder had spent many resources on him; some of which even Jiang Chen hadn't benefitted from. It was the first time that the elder had taught someone so seriously. The old man had high hopes for the youth.

It was a pity that their time together had been so brief. Ever since Elder Shun had been captured by the family again, there'd been no communication with Chu Xinghan since.

The old master couldn't exactly leave the Eternal Divine Nation in his current circumstance. The house wouldn't let him do so. Thus, it was virtually impossible for him to get any information on Chu Xinghan.

"You know, Chu Xinghan and Jiang Chen carry themselves with the spirit of the ancients despite being from the human domain. Many Myriad Abyss geniuses can't compare to them in this respect. Perhaps it's true that the cultivators that came here were largely cowards and deserters from the ancient demon-sealing war. Their descendants have lacked certain qualities ever since..."

There was self-deprecation and frustration in his voice. Elder Shun's experiences had left him disappointed in his own house and in Eternal Divine Nation. In fact, this carried over to the entirety of Myriad Abyss, to a certain extent.

"There are remarkable geniuses in Myriad Abyss too, but Brother Chen is unique." Huang'er didn't think there existed another genius beneath the heavens who could rival her beloved.

"Ah, that's right. On the topic of Jiang Chen... I heard some news about an interesting character recently." Elder Shun whacked his head. "Look at my memory. I wanted to tell you about it, but I almost ended up forgetting."

"What is it?" Huang'er's eyes glittered at the mention of Jiang Chen.

"Polylore Divine Nation has become the laughingstock of all. Its eight houses journeyed to the Rejuvenation Isles so that their young geniuses could undergo a trial on an isolated island. They were supposed to be hunting the local geniuses, but that ended up backfiring. Two of the hunted reportedly became hunters and killed six young geniuses across three houses."

Huang'er's slender brow furrowed slightly. "Polylore Divine Nation's eight houses? Their geniuses rival House Yan's, no? How come..."

"Heh, they're probably stronger than House Yan's. But things really are just that strange. Six geniuses from three houses have mysteriously died, and it seems that their killer was the same person. There are reportedly two possible culprits: one is called Su Hong, a Winterdraw native, and the other one is named Jiang Huang. Winterdraw still hasn't figured out who he actually is or where he came from. This mysterious man apparently appeared out of thin air, then vanished overnight!"

Huang'er trembled violently. "Elder Shun, what did you say? What's his name again?"

"Jiang Huang." Elder Shun was unsurprised by the girl's reaction. "Huang'er, Jiang Huang is the more suspicious of the duo. Su Hong is being gradually eliminated as the likely assassin. The pursuit is much hotter on the former. I hear Polylore is planning to increase the bounty once more."

"Jiang Huang? Jiang Huang?" Huang'er's brilliant eyes glittered with exciting color. She was usually serene, but could no longer maintain her composure after hearing this particular bit of news.

Elder Shun's revelation had inexplicably hit a nerve. She became restless and giddy. The name was too much of a coincidence for her to mark it off as being oversensitive.

'Jiang Huang' was precisely 'Jiang Chen' and 'Huang'er' put together.

Can it be Brother Chen? Has he come? Her heart quavered. A thousand thoughts welled up in her mind, demolishing her customary restraint. The anticipation for her beloved overcame her inhibitions. Was this a coincidence, or was Brother Chen trying to hint at something?

"Elder Shun, the Rejuvenation Isles is only a second or third-rate faction, yes? Winterdraw is an island in its domain? Do you think a native from there is strong enough to kill geniuses from three great houses?"

"That's why it's so odd. Huang'er, do you think..." Elder Shun didn't want to go on. He was concerned Huang'er might grasp at impossibilities, only to be met with disappointment.

"Whether or not that's the case, Elder Shun, I want to go investigate." Huang'er was uncommonly resolute.

"How's that possible? The entire house is courteous toward you, but that's based on your firm captivity here. There's no way anyone else will agree to you going on a trip!"

"If they don't, I'll kill myself!" Huang'er's clear eyes held a hitherto unseen stubbornness.

"That..." Elder Shun pondered. "Actually, the house has received an invitation recently. The Bluesmoke Isles is holding some sort of jade festival to which the Ten Divine Nations' geniuses are cordially invited to..."

"I'm going." Huang'er suddenly rose to her feet.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1626: Miracle City

"What? She wants to leave the residence? Impossible!" The house elders' gut reaction was to oppose Huang'er's idea.

What kind of colossal joke was this? They'd gone to the trouble of sending Elder Xi to bring her back from the human domain. And while they were very thankful that a completely healthy Huang'er had returned, she was now held under virtual house arrest for the sole purpose of fulfilling their oath to House Xiahou. The grudge could finally be resolved without further loss then.

This was a shared thought of almost every member of the clan. Everyone knew that nothing more could be allowed to happen to Huang'er. If anything did, they would fail their delivery.

If House Xiahou got another excuse to stir up any more trouble, there was no way it would hesitate at forcing House Yan into complete submission.

Everyone's nerves were taut. Everyone was worried something unexpected would happen again.

"I think we've treated the girl far too nicely after bringing her home."

"Why not seal her away and take away her will? Let's see her make unreasonable requests then!"

"Sure, that sounds like a good idea." Some of the house elders were taking a draconian stance. Indeed, forcibly restraining Huang'er would take away her impetus to do anything at all.

The more rational elders however, opposed. "That's inappropriate. If we restrain her, her condition would take a significant hit over the long term. If we give House Xiahou a half-dead cultivation cauldron, how will we explain ourselves then?"

"Yes, the girl has an unyielding spirit. If she self-detonates once we remove the restrictions, we'll have failed House Xiahou completely. I think we need to take a softer approach. Humoring her fancies is much more effective in making her more pliable."

The house elders were split in terms of opinion, but most agreed on the necessity of eschewing force. House Yan couldn't suffer the potential consequences of any accidents thereof.

"This is what I think: why not let her go to the Bluesmoke Isles for some time off? We can simply send a few extra experts to protect her in the open and a few more to observe her in secret. No matter what, we can't let her escape our grasp. Keep close tabs on her."

"Mm. If we send a large enough group of experts, she won't be able to do anything with her current level of strength. Certainly, it won't be possible for her to escape!"

"So what's the consensus then? Let her go?"

"I don't see much choice in the matter. If she acts up and threatens us with suicide, we'll have a much harder time dealing with her. Her days are numbered. We'd be done for if she loses all hope and commits suicide. Why not go with what she says for now? We can avoid any extreme mood swings, at least."

"Well, it's decided then. Send a couple of extra experts with her."

House Yan finally reached agreement about how to respond to Huang'er's request. Four elders and eight middle-aged experts would take a few of the house's youngsters to the Bluesmoke Isles for some air and experience.

Two of the elders were tasked with covertly following the group. Their mission was to not let Huang'er out of sight, either to cause trouble or escape.

As for Elder Shun, though he'd kept his life, he'd lost his status as an elder of the house. He didn't have the right to attend the meeting.

The house's decision made its way around very quickly.

"Good news, Huang'er. The house has agreed. They're going to take a group of young geniuses out for some experience. You're one of them!" Elder Shun quickly passed on the news to Huang'er.

She'd been quite hung up over the decision and had decided to dangle her death over the house's head if it didn't agree. Though she found the prospect absurd, her mind wasn't to be changed.

She hadn't expected them to agree so readily!

This was a rather serendipitous surprise. "Can you come with us, Elder Shun?"

"I'm a traitor," Elder Shun smiled wryly. "Why would they let me go? They'd be worried about me whisking you off. My name's not on the list, but don't worry, Huang'er. It's a good thing for me to stay

here instead. If I came with you, I will only cramp your plans. They'd be unnecessarily suspicious, and would keep a closer eye on you than you want."

Huang'er was wise enough to understand what the old man wanted to convey. "You've done so much for me over all these years, Elder Shun. I hope I'll have a chance to repay you someday."

"Silly girl, I watched you grow up. I'm a decrepit old man. Even if I die at some point, I will do so reasonably satisfied. But you're different. You're still young. Remember, never give up hope until the twelfth hour. Remember that well!" Elder Shun gazed at Huang'er lovingly.

"Yes, I know. I definitely won't give up. I truly believe that Brother Chen will come to Myriad Abyss Island. Maybe he's already here!"

Elder Shun smiled, but said nothing. He didn't want to rain on her parade. Instead, he offered silent prayers and blessings that her dream would come true.

"Ah, one more thing. Huang'er, the decision to let you go was definitely preceded by a great deal of debate. They will watch you extremely closely. Don't give any clues that you're up to something, that will only make things harder. Whether Jiang Huang is Jiang Chen or not, you can't try to get information about him. Listen, rather than speak. Do you understand?"

The elderly was much more experienced. Though Elder Shun was no longer a house elder, he knew the hearts of his former peers. His advice had a great deal of thought and reason behind it.

Huang'er sank into reflection. It was only roughly four months before the jade festival. If the house were going to prepare ahead of time, they would embark in two more months. She decided to take the time in the interim to sort out her thoughts.

She didn't know the reason for it, but she had a hunch that Jiang Huang being pursued by Polylore's three houses was closely associated with Jiang Chen.

Perhaps they were even one and the same.

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All the way out in the Bluesmoke Isles, Jiang Chen had finally reached the eastern part of the territory after a long trek. Miracle City's grandeur and mystique were revealed before him.

Aside from cultivating himself, he had also tried to foster Hua Ming's growth. In the month or so they'd been together, he had solidified the boy's martial dao foundations.

The process had also introduced composure into Hua Ming's nature. The youthful shallowness that had characterized the boy was being gradually stripped away. Cultivation of the Boulder's Heart had changed the boy's mentality a great deal.

Now that he'd become more familiar with his master, Hua Ming relied and respected Jiang Chen even more so. He was grateful from the bottom of his heart. He could feel his master's sincerity in cultivating his skills. The almost paternal warmth touched the orphan waif deeply.

He swore to himself that he would cultivate with the utmost seriousness all his life. He would sacrifice everything to repay his master, if possible.

Upon the duo's entrance into the magnificent city, Hua Ming was astonished. "Master, is this Miracle City?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "I suppose so." Though he felt the city to be reasonably bustling and luxurious, he'd seen places a hundred times busier in his previous life.

"Ah, master, I always thought Oriole Valley was a pretty big place. I thought I knew a lot, but it looks like I was just a frog at the bottom of a well." Hua Ming took account of his own flaws. He had grown up just a little and become capable of self-reflection.

"It's fine to be a frog that lives at the bottom of a well, as long as you're brave enough to hop out. The world is a big place, and you'll gain more experience by traveling it far and wide."

"Yes, master." Hua Ming held only the utmost admiration for Jiang Chen. The more time he spent with his new master, the more he was in awe of his master's fathomless depths.

Just like the last city, Miracle City also had the bounty issued by Polylore Divine Nation. However, the size of the city meant that it attracted much less attention. Miracle City's hottest topic had always been ancient jade.

The Bluesmoke Isles were known in Myriad Abyss for their jade. Miracle City was a famous metropolis of the stuff. Thus, it was no surprise at all that ancient jade would be the perennial talk of the town.

Jiang Chen and Hua Ming walked in the city's streets, taking in all the jade-related stores around them. This industry alone occupied the efforts of more than half the businesses in the city.

"I've always heard that miracles happen every day in Miracle City. Looks like we're in the right place, master." Ever the youngster, Hua Ming enjoyed the urban tumult a great deal.

Miracle City's affluence and its inhabitants' fervor outshone Oriole Valley like the sun against a candle. In fact, Hua Ming felt that the latter seemed to be children playing house.

The unlikely pair found an inn to check in.

The city's accommodations were uniformly exorbitant, but Jiang Chen didn't seem to care much about it. He picked the best inn and rooms regardless. Hua Ming clucked his tongue when he saw his master's extravagance.

"Hua Ming, I'm going to have you stay here for a while. I'll be back anywhere between one to three months. Don't relax or laze around, keep cultivating every day. Aside from that, go out and gather what information you can. I want as much as you can find out about the jade festival, and you'll do well to catch wind of anything related to the Ten Divine Nations." Jiang Chen gave a series of instructions.

Miracle City was closer to Hell King Island than Oriole Valley had been. Jiang Chen didn't want to waste any more time. There were about four months before the jade festival, so he saw no reason not to help the Vermilion Bird conduct its rebirth ritual on Hell King Island.

Hua Ming nodded when he noted his master's seriousness. No doubt this was a test for him. "I will make you proud, master!"

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1627: The Vermilion Bird's Peak Strength

Jiang Chen stayed in Miracle City for just one night. He checked out the next day, leaving Hua Ming with enough spirit stones and means to survive before discreetly skipping town.

He also bought a map of the neighboring seas and marked the location of Hell King Island. Miracle City was the closest major city, but there was still close to two hundred thousand miles between the two.

The journey was a dangerous one, especially when one reached the radius a few thousand miles around the island. That was no man's land. Most cultivators avoided going through the area.

"Young master Chen, this spirit must thank you for all you've done for me. If I can complete my rebirth, I promise to pay you back with all of my strength."

The Vermilion Bird greatly valued its oaths and the bonds he shared with others. Otherwise, it wouldn't have stuck to its guarding duty for so many years, just because of a promise to the Primosanct Sect.

"We've been through hell and back together, Senior Vermilion. Don't be a stranger. I believe that the collaboration between us two make a perfect storm. It benefits both of us."

Vermilion Bird guffawed. "Well said! Heroes are rare among the human cultivators, but they've never gone extinct. You, Jiang Chen, are the great hero of this generation and one that rivals the heroes of ancient times."

Jiang Chen was in grand spirits. "Hahaha! This junior will put aside my humility for once and accept your compliments!"

He perched on the back of Vermilion Bird as they flew over the ocean, engaging in pleasant conversation. The tranquility and peace relaxed him.

In the human domain, he had a lot of baggage to bear. There were many things to consider whenever he acted. Now that he was here at Myriad Abyss Island on his own, Huang'er was his only concern. He could stay true to himself and do whatever he wanted to do. Gone were the constant reservations that wrapped around him.

It felt good. Liberating.

He was as free as fish leaping over a vast ocean, a bird soaring through the boundless sky. He would remain fearless even if the skies caved and the earth fractured. Moreover, he could feel his cultivation progress accelerating after arriving on Myriad Abyss Island.

The density of spirit energy on the island far surpassed that of the human domain. It was the perfect cultivation environment.

He'd broken through to mid emperor realm in the last battle. After months of diligent cultivation and improving his state of mind, inspiration flowered, pushing him into a stage of rapid growth. He was one step away from reaching advanced emperor realm. After that, he would aim for great emperor, then peak great emperor.

Once he refined an Emperor Supremacy Pill, Jiang Chen felt that he could reach peak great emperor within a year. Then came the most significant turning point in his pursuit of martial dao: empyrean realm would be within reach.

Reaching this level meant grasping the laws of heaven. It meant being acknowledged and recognized by the heavens and earth. His martial dao would enter an entirely new stage, an entirely separate height of existence. He would have the right to peek at the heavenly planes.

Even the strongest great emperors could only be considered cultivators of the mortal world. They were, at most, the best of the mortals. Reaching empyrean realm was a stamp of approval from the heavenly dao itself.

Jiang Chen felt an immense surge of anticipation. There was a whole new world and future excitements waiting for him.

“Young master Chen,” Vermilion Bird called out, derailing Jiang Chen’s train of thoughts. “This spirit lived in Sacred Peafowl Mountain for some time. I heard the others say that you were mentored by a mysterious master when you were young. Is this master of yours from Myriad Abyss Island?”

“What do you think?” Jiang Chen asked wryly.

Vermilion Bird huffed out a self-deprecating laugh. “I used to think so, but now, I’m not so sure.”

“Oh? What do you mean?”

“You’re already at Myriad Abyss. If you had such a teacher, he’d have left you with some way to contact him. After all this time however, I haven’t seen you contact anyone. Even if you did have a master before, he can’t be from here. Am I right?” Vermilion Bird was very observant.

Jiang Chen was a little embarrassed for concealing the truth. He sighed. “As you’ve said, senior, I have no mysterious mentor on Myriad Abyss Island. That is simply a white lie I tell.”

“Ah, as I expected.” Vermilion Bird sighed. “That’s strange. How can someone from a mortal kingdom know so much? Where is your knowledge from? I have this feeling that you didn’t grow up in Myriad Domain at all. I don’t even think that you belong to this world...”

Jiang Chen was quite shocked. The Vermilion Bird sure had sharp instincts.

He was quiet for a long while before responding. “Senior, after I was caned on the king’s orders in the Eastern Kingdom, I seemed to have gone to hell and come back. When I regained consciousness, something had awakened in my brain. I suddenly had a lot more knowledge.”

“Young master Chen, can it be that you’re a god incarnate?!” exclaimed the bird.

“What do you mean by that?” Jiang Chen played ignorant. The senior was very close to the truth.

“It meant that you may have been a god in your past life. For some reason, you needed to reincarnate and start anew. Such beings slowly recover their past memories after awakening. They’re often genius with unimaginable potential. In the beginning, they seem just like any of the others. Once their abilities present themselves, these people continue to grow until they become legends.”

The Vermilion Bird grew more and more excited as he spoke. "That must be it, young master Chen! You haven't recovered all your memories yet. Once you've fully awakened and know who you were in your past life, you'll understand everything. You're the reincarnation of a god! Hahaha! Young master Chen, I can't believe it!"

Vermilion Bird was completely convinced. It couldn't be swayed otherwise.

"Thank you for the auspicious words, senior. If I really am the reincarnation of a god, it'll be a good thing for both of us."

"Of course, it'll be a good thing, a great thing!" The divine creature sighed. "Do you know, young master Chen, that very few human cultivators could enter the divine realm even in the ancient times? There were a few demigods, but the ones who could acquired full divinity were extremely, extremely rare... I'll say that there might be gods on Myriad Abyss Island, but not more than a handful."

Jiang Chen agreed with him. He didn't think there would be a large number of gods on Myriad Abyss either. The Divine Abyss Continent belonged to a regular plane. It wasn't even a minor heavenly minor plane, much less a full-blown one.

A material plane couldn't accommodate that many gods.

Every plane had its own rules. Once a large enough group of gods came into existence, the plane would automatically be promoted to a minor heavenly plane. Or else, the gods would be called into a higher plane by the rules. Their presence otherwise would cause the plane to expand or even collapse.

"Senior, how high did your cultivation rank in the ancient times?" Jiang Chen had always been curious about this. Now he had the opportunity to ask, he couldn't resist bringing it up.

"As a descendent of a divine spirit creature, I was among the strongest beings in the ancient times. Nevertheless, there were others who were stronger. My battle strength rivaled that of a demigod. But my cultivation base was ninth level empyrean realm."

The Vermilion Bird and Jiang Chen didn't have to hide anything from each other.

"Ninth level empyrean realm is a great achievement. Perhaps after completing rebirth, you'll comprehend divinity and break through to become a demigod!"

Being a demigod placed one between ninth level empyrean realm and the divine realm. It made one a half step away from becoming a full god. It was more difficult to cross that threshold than compared to other realms.

Almost no peak empyrean experts could reach this halfway point, let alone cross it and ascend to divinity. Out of ten thousand ninth level peak empyrean masters, perhaps five would reach the half-step point. However, there might be none who could enter the divine realm.

It was difficult to reach demigod status, and next to impossible to enter the divine realm.

A demigod cultivator could easily deal with 3-5 ninth level empyrean masters. They could even easily slaughter peak empyrean masters. There had been very few gods even in the ancient times, making the status of a demigod a wondrous achievement.

The Vermilion Bird was remarkably powerful for being able to rival a demigod. Even on Myriad Abyss Island, it would encounter very few opponents. It could do whatever it wanted unless a god came after it.

Of course, that would require Vermilion Bird to recover its peak condition after rebirth. It was hardly the ancient times now. There was no guarantee that it would be able to recover anywhere near its full strength, and even more of an unknown if it could surpass that. Even Jiang Chen wasn't sure about that.

Vermilion Bird smiled. "If my rebirth is a success, then I'm confident I'll be able to recover my peak form again. That won't happen overnight, however. It'll take time for my strength to come back to me. It may take five to ten years, or even more than a hundred years. Nonetheless, as long as I am successfully reborn, I'll be able to instantly crush anyone under great empyrean realm."

That pleased Jiang Chen. "Your rebirth won't fail, senior. Your luck has turned for the better. I believe that it'll be a great success."

"Haha, thanks for your auspicious words." Vermilion Bird shared Jiang Chen's confidence.

Its only concern had been to find the right location for rebirth. Now that a good location was within reach, success was guaranteed!

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

Chapter 1628: Wild Creature Beneath the Waters

On this day, Jiang Chen and the Vermilion Bird finally crossed the patch of peaceful seas that bordered the waters around Hell King Island.

"Senior, judging from the landscape, we're getting close. Perhaps we've already in the death zone." Jiang Chen was hit with a looming sense of danger as soon as they crossed that invisible border. There was a tangible feeling that they'd entered a completely different domain.

The Vermilion Bird snorted disdainfully. "Worry not. As long as I'm here, nothing will dare show their face."

It had the bloodline of a sacred beast's bloodline, after all; there was an inherent air of dominion to it. They were drawing close to Hell King Island. Even if great dangers lay await, the Vermilion Bird wouldn't let anyone interfere with its rebirth.

Nonetheless, the turbulence was growing noticeably stronger. Even the Vermilion Bird had to slow down considerably to handle it.

"Stay put, young master Chen. I'm going to transform and shield you with my wings. You don't have to move a finger no matter what happens." It was a loyal friend and quite grateful to Jiang Chen for accompanying it to Hell King Island. It wouldn't let anything to happen to him.

The Vermilion Bird's body transformed subtly. Its feathers all lifted slightly, with the ones on its back standing upright, forming a protective circle around Jiang Chen. All of its feathers gleamed noticeably brighter and became more vibrant. Its trajectory and movement through the air made it seem like a ball of flames.

No matter how aggressive the turbulence became, the Vermilion Bird had its own way of moving along the current to avoid disturbance. Its speed took a hit, but the direction of its movement didn't change.

Tall waves kicked up by the spatial currents threatened the sky. Gales screamed and seas frothed. A lesser cultivator would've been overwhelmed and chewed up by the endless turbulence, never to be seen again.

But for the Vermilion Bird, it was barely a threat.

"We're close," said Jiang Chen. He could feel the island getting closer before he even saw it.

The air around them became noticeably hotter and thinner. The sheer high temperatures was burning everything around them.

Boom!

A sudden steep wave churned up from beneath them. A horde of ferocious sea monsters reared their heads and lunged at the Vermilion Bird. They were the masters of the sea in this region; their first reaction to devour any and all trespassers.

"Hmph, courting death!" Though the Vermilion Bird was at the low point of its life cycle, the wood spring at Sacred Peafowl Mountain had healed and alleviated much of its ailments. Besides, it had only refrained from fighting because it wanted to conserve energy.

Now, the place for its rebirth was at hand. It didn't care if it was at a natural disadvantage in this fight. In its current condition, it could afford to drain some of its energy.

The Vermilion Bird was still a remarkably fierce fighter when it wanted to fight. A flap of its razor-sharp wings created a honed wave of piercing fire, leaving a scar in the air as it hit the sea monsters below.

They were cleaved in half and burned to charcoal by the frightening fire energy.

Plop! Plop!

One after another, the monsters fell back into the sea. However, there were many more. The fallen ones were quickly replenished by a new wave from the bottom of the ocean.

Still, the Vermilion Bird was powerful. It made quick work of the monsters with its wings every time new ones emerged.

The attackers grew cautious once they saw how powerful the Vermilion Bird was. Instead of rushing to their deaths, they lurked underwater and tailed the bird doggedly, waiting for an opening for a swift, lethal attempt.

The Vermilion Bird scoffed. "How dare you weaklings come after me? Take a look at yourself!"

When all was said and done, it was still a divine beast from the ancient times. Each of the sea monsters might be equivalent to a peak great emperor, but the bird was mightier still.

The monsters continuously emerged from the waters only to face a quick death. There was too big a gap between them and the Vermilion Bird. It wasn't something that numbers alone could overcome.

“Senior, there must be a king among the sea monsters. Judging from how dangerous this area is, the king here has to be a powerful one. We mustn’t let our guard down.”

The Vermilion Bird nodded. “That’s what I think as well. Don’t worry. Even if there is a sea monster king, I’m not afraid of it.”

“Should I ask Brother Long to come help?” asked Jiang Chen.

“No need,” responded Vermilion Bird. “Long Xiaoxuan has just reached empyrean realm. If there’s an empyrean beast here, the dragon will have trouble dealing with it. I can do this on my own.”

Jiang Chen smiled in response to the Vermilion Bird’s confidence. “Then I have your back.”

“Much appreciated, young master Chen.” Vermilion Bird didn’t dare underestimate Jiang Chen now. This was someone who could kill an empyrean master! With the human’s backup, the Vermilion Bird would be able to better deal with any unexpected dangers.

Jiang Chen stayed on the Vermilion Bird’s back with his consciousness expanded to its fullest. The seal on his mind was unusually active. That told Jiang Chen something big was coming.

“Look ahead, Senior Vermilion. The area covered in thick smoke and the red glow filling the sky must be where Hell King Island is.” Jiang Chen glanced forward to where the sea itself seemed to be burning.

The Vermilion Bird looked at the area the way a wandering son looked at his hometown upon his return. A current of emotions rose in its heart. They’d finally reached it. It could feel the immense fire energy from afar before they’d even set foot on the island.

“Here it is, young master Chen. This is the sacred place I’ll complete my rebirth at.” The Vermilion Bird sped forward, disregarding any potential threats from the ocean below.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, kept an eye on any minute changes in the area.

A sea monster would cause a disturbance in the water as it surfaced. From high above, Jiang Chen kept his consciousness focused on the ocean. He would be able to detect any major changes in the environment.

With Jiang Chen’s help, the Vermilion Bird was able to focus on rushing towards their destination. Hell King Island was right ahead of them.

From a distance, the island looked like a ball of fire, dyeing the ocean and the air red. In fact, there really seemed to be flames in the air. The water below Jiang Chen seemed to have been affected as well, bubbling gently like it was boiling.

“Look out, senior! There’s a powerful beast lurking somewhere.”

The Vermilion Bird suddenly gave a long whistle. In the ancient language of the beasts, it declared its warning. “Beings of this area, do not provoke me! Otherwise, I will not hesitate to kill all of you. My authority as an ancient divine beast is not to be challenged by wild spirits such as you.”

Whoosh!

Several hundred meters ahead of them, something like an iron chain whipped up abruptly, bringing up a wave tall enough to reach the sky.

Up and up, the wave shot up to several hundred meters in height, forming a boundless water screen before them. It continued to rise against the law of gravity, leading the water to rush upwards.

Hundreds of meters, over three thousand meters, six thousand meters, nine thousand meters...

The Vermilion Bird hovered in the air, glaring fixedly at the magnificent water screen. It continued to screech its warning whistle.

Jiang Chen communicated mentally, "Senior, this must be an ancient wild spirit. It's probably been here for many years. I can see from a distance how enormous it is. It's probably a large fish-related spirit. Its length exceeds nine hundred meters, and it's still growing larger."

His God's Eye looked past the water screen and saw the large spirit responsible for it cavorting within. It had an intimidating aura, obviously no easy foe.

The Vermilion Bird scoffed. "If I were at my peak, I'd be able to kill this little spirit in an instant. It wouldn't have the chance to strut before me."

Jiang Chen firmly believed that that was no exaggeration. The Vermilion Bird had been as powerful as a demigod in the ancient times, which was miles ahead of this large sea spirit, despite how big and powerful it was.

He took out his Holy Dragon Bow and stayed on high alert. Regular physical attacks weren't enough to kill a large spirit like this. One had to strike its weak point to inflict a fatal wound. Otherwise, the attacks would be as effective as a scratch.

Thus, Jiang Chen planned to identify the spirit's weak points during the battle. A large spirit such as this must have a weakness. If he could hit it with Holy Dragon Bow, it would be seriously injured, if not killed outright.

That would relieve some of the burden for the Vermilion Bird and finish this fight as quickly as possible. They were in an unfamiliar territory. The longer the fight lasted, the bigger the risk. Who knew if there would emerge an even more dangerous wild spirit as they fought?

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

Chapter 1629: Fleeing in Disarray

Jiang Chen was completely silent, as if he'd entered into a trance. He suddenly leapt up from the Vermilion Bird's back. "Senior Vermilion," he messaged, "let's attack in tandem."

"No need," the bird retorted proudly. "I'll take on this monster myself."

An ancient, divine fowl bore itself with dignity that befit its bloodline and status. Though it wasn't at peak strength, it didn't see the monster in the deep as an opponent on the same level.

With a ringing cry, it expanded in the wind. Its body instantly became more than ten times its previous size, and a wing-flap sent rows of crimson energy surging outwards.

The bird's wings oscillated like two giant blades. The fiery aura they exuded created arcs that sliced the very fabric of space itself. Energy crashed into the watery veil that stood in their path.

Boom!

The red aura disappeared into the water veil with lightning speed. In the next moment, a scar was torn upon it.

Boom!

The veil crumpled without a second thought.

Its concealment stripped away, the fierce beast's true form was brought into daylight. With the vastness of the ocean, its colossal body stood like a large coral reef. It raised its gargantuan head and opened a ravenous maw to unleash a resounding roar. Earth and water trembled for miles around.

Though the monster's body was huge, it was also exceedingly swift when traveling on the ocean currents. Its tail had been swishing in the previous moment, and in the next, its jaw surged towards the Vermilion Bird with an electrifying motion.

"Ridiculous!" The Vermilion Bird wasn't intimidated by such a crude attack. It dodged, unleashing fiery blades from its wings once more. The attack headed right for the inside of the beast's mouth.

The monster tilted its head downward. A strange light appeared upon its forehead, producing a defense from seemingly nowhere. The fiery blades broke upon the makeshift shield, producing a dull thud.

It'd managed to block the Vermilion Bird's attack outright with a strange ripple around its forehead! There was no wound to speak of.

This surprised the bird a little. Though it wasn't in its final form, it'd still been confident that it could kill the monster easily. What'd just happened defied expectations. There seemed to be a strange defense on the beast's forehead that enabled it to block an attack of much higher level.

Jiang Chen was also astonished. In his opinion, the Vermilion Bird's attacks weren't easily weathered even by mid empyrean experts.

"Senior Vermilion, perhaps you should make use of mobility rather than a frontal assault. There's something off about the beast's forehead. Try elsewhere."

The human transmitted a reminder, but the Vermilion Bird knew what to do even without it. If it were in peak condition, that strange defense would still be no obstacle. However, now was a time when technique was superior to viciousness.

Naturally, the Vermilion Bird was both quicker and more dexterous than the monster. In spite of the watery beast's endless roiling of interfering waves into the sky, the bird was barely affected.

After several rounds of back-and-forth, the monster sustained several hits. Unfortunately, it was too bulky and thick-skinned to have been seriously injured. For the time being, its life was completely unthreatened.

Furthermore, the monster was a devious one. When it noticed its titanic body was the target of attack, it became more devious by hiding itself beneath the waves. Only its head and neck were visible now; the rest was concealed by the briny deep.

“We can leave first, Senior Vermilion,” Jiang Chen pointed out. “There’s no need to drag out a fight now – why not come back and take care of this beast later?”

“If we do, it will definitely make trouble for us when we are upon Hell King Island,” the Vermilion Bird replied. “Monsters are always thus. They must be either tamed or slain, or they won’t stop their harassment and hostility.”

Jiang Chen agreed with the bird’s point of view and stopped trying to persuade it otherwise.

For a while, the Vermilion Bird and the huge monster were locked in a stalemate.

Intrinsically, the bird was stronger than the beast. Alas, the latter had the advantage of being on homeground, which afforded many advantages. Moreover, the beast was a tough nut to crack. It could ensure its life by using the seas to its full advantage, poking out occasionally to discharge a powerful strike.

The bird’s attacks from high in the air were accurate enough, but non-lethal at best. If it wanted those attacks to become lethal, it needed to close the range – ergo, swoop closer to the water.

But doing so also increased risk to itself. Flying so low made counterattacks from the beast significantly more possible and threatening. If the beast could drag the bird beneath the waters, even a creature like the Vermilion Bird would suffer a great deal. Death wasn’t out of the question.

The Vermilion Bird wasn’t used to the sea and at an obvious disadvantage.

Jiang Chen sat high in the air to watch the combat. He could feel the bird’s fury. It was greatly displeased that an existence far below it was holding it up like this. This was the height of disrespect!

“I suppose the monster can’t be underestimated,” he sighed to himself. “It’s managed to go even with Senior Vermilion by relying on its environment!”

Jiang Chen was observing the fight, but hardly relaxed. Instead, he paid close attention to every detail in an effort to seek out a vulnerability. He believed that one surely existed.

He finally picked up a few clues after half an hour. Each time the monster made a pass at the Vermilion Bird, it raised its head to face the bird squarely. Each time the bird repositioned, the monster followed closely behind in the water to maintain the same facing.

Though it couldn’t necessarily keep up with the bird’s speed all the time, it would contort itself to raise its forehead to its foe. Whenever its head was held up, it made sure the back of its neck was well-protected. In fact, it seemed positively fearful of showing that part. This was a rather startling discovery.

Summoning Long Xiaoxuan, Jiang Chen gave him some instructions. “Brother Long, when this monster goes at it with Senior Vermilion again, sneak up and give it the old one-two. Remember, safety first.”

“Dragons belong to the sea,” Long Xiaoxuan harrumphed. “That’s our territory. Why should I be scared of such a pathetic creature?”

The more his heritage memories awakened, the more Long Xiaoxuan's regal aura intensified. He held himself with the bearing appropriate for an ancient sacred beast.

"Let's do it." Jiang Chen drew his Holy Dragon Bow, then vanished in mid air.

Long Xiaoxuan manifested his true form, projecting a roar into the air. As he did, all the oceans around him stilled. Even the monster's eyes shied away instinctively, its instincts taking over its mind for a moment.

It hastily raised its head to scan the surroundings, fear clear in the beady orbs.

Though Long Xiaoxuan was only initial emperor realm, his presence and might nevertheless held natural sway over organisms that lived in water. The dragon extended a claw into the air, bringing a lightning-infused blow down on the beast's head.

The beast shrank its head when it saw the true dragon. It didn't dare eat the attack at all, instead sinking beneath the waves. Long Xiaoxuan's talons were unsatisfied with stopping here, and he followed into the water.

The leviathan was in a full blown panic now. It swam at top speed into the nearby waters. Clearly, it was overtaken with dread. Vermilion Birds and true dragons were both ancient beasts of the most terrifying variety. Though it had never fought against a true dragon in its life, it had the basic instinct as an ocean-dweller that dragons were indomitable kings of the sea. They were impossible to beat.

Thus, Long Xiaoxuan succeeded where the powerful Vermilion Bird had failed.

Jiang Chen didn't know how best to react to this absurd turn of events. His fingers remained upon the Holy Dragon Bow. He'd wanted to find an opportunity to strike at back of the monster's neck and possibly search for openings. He hadn't expected it to run so decisively and certainly!

When the Vermilion Bird flew over, Jiang Chen was a bit apologetic. "Excuse me, Senior Vermilion. I took some initiative there. Hell King Island is right before us, so I didn't think we needed to waste any more time. Because we are over open seas, we were fighting in its domain. The island will become yours, senior. If it dares disturb you, you can easily crush it."

He was somewhat worried that the Vermilion Bird would be displeased. Some flattery was the least he could do.

The bird laughed helplessly. "What, you thought I would blame you? I know full well where you're coming from. So true dragons do a much better job of scaring monsters off, eh? I suppose my race is a bit less intimidating and well-known."

"True dragons have always reigned supreme over the ocean," Jiang Chen smiled. "Denizens of the deep instinctively fear them. I don't think it's a racial thing."

The bird sighed, but said nothing more on the subject. Instead, it turned to Hell King Island in the distance. "Come, let's go."

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Chapter 1630: Rebirth From Flames, the Vermilion Bird is Reborn

Without the monster's interference, Jiang Chen and company arrived at Hell King Island very quickly. Even the reefs around the island burned a dull red. There was fire everywhere upon the landmass.

The strangest thing was that plant life seemed to thrive here. In fact, there was plenty of floral coverage. Most of them had a fire attribute to them; it was the purity of the veins of fire energy that enabled them to prosper.

"Brother Long, stay in the outer seas. The inner part of Hell King Island is like a furnace. Can you stand guard for us against that monster's return?"

Long Xiaoxuan thought for a moment, then nodded. "Sure. I don't think that thing'll be coming back any time soon though."

Jiang Chen tended to agree. Big fish weren't known for their intelligence, but a healthy fear of death was characteristic of almost every living thing.

"Senior Vermilion, I will patrol the skies to prevent you from being disturbed by outside forces. As for any issues deeper into the island, you'll have to deal with those yourself."

"Alright. Young master Chen, Xiaoxuan, thank you for the hard work. If my rebirth is completed, I will owe you both a big favor!" After making this promise, the bird shot into the inner part of the island like a fiery comet. From the sight alone, it looked like a fireball thrown into a fiery pit.

With Jiang Chen and Long Xiaoxuan around, no disturbance from the outside was likely to get through.

The Astral White Tiger hadn't broken through to empyrean realm yet, and it lacked the protection afforded by Jiang Chen's Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire. It couldn't move about in Hell King Island, which was why it remained unsummoned.

Days flowed into weeks.

Each day Jiang Chen spent in protecting the Vermilion Bird wasn't done so in vain. He cultivated all the while, using the surrounding ocean to polish himself.

One day, as he fought amid the waves, inspiration struck him once more. He successfully broke through to advanced emperor realm.

He'd only thought himself to be only a step away before. The majesty of the endless waves and the power of nature had allowed him to leap over threshold almost effortlessly.

After breaking through, he felt another marked increase in his strength. In great emperor realm, every additional level led to a noticeable direct increase of power.

"Advance great emperor, peak great emperor, half-step empyrean..."

Jiang Chen vowed to himself that he would get to peak great emperor as quickly as possible. Once he was close enough, he would use the Emperor Supremacy Pill to reach half-step empyrean.

At that point, empyrean realm wouldn't be far away.

In the water, Long Xiaoxuan found himself indescribably at home. It was as if a king had returned to his throne. Though he'd just broken through to empyrean realm, he was filled yet again with inspiration. The awakening of ancestral memories increased his level by one more.

"Young master Chen, it seems that coming to Myriad Abyss was the right call." The dragon's words were heartfelt. There was nothing better than for true dragons to find inspiration in than an enormous ocean.

"Brother Long, take as much time as you like to solidify and develop your cultivation. In fact, you can even stay in these waters for a while. Do be careful though."

"I'll think about it." Long Xiaoxuan was accustomed to being a bit contrarian, but deep down, he did care very much about the human. The dragon had relied on the young man since the day they'd met.

He was maturing more and more now, but childhood friends were always the closest bonds. Furthermore, he had little experience living by himself. He found it hard to accept being alone.

"Brother Long, dragons have lived in oceans since time immemorial. We are partners, brothers, and comrades. Don't change what you want to do based on my potential opinion. If you want to stay here, I'm right behind you." Jiang Chen was thoroughly sincere as well. He'd helped Long Xiaoxuan grow because he'd wanted to borrow the dragon's strength, but leaving him there was both a trial and preparation for the future.

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Three months passed by in the blink of an eye.

One day, as Jiang Chen patrolled the air, he suddenly felt an enormous disturbance in the volcano and fire energy on Hell King Island.

As he wondered what had happened, an earth-shaking tremor passed through the entire area. In the next moment, an explosion appeared in the middle of the island. The Vermilion Bird's body rose out from the fire-pit like a rising ball of flame, catching the eye of all observers. The crimson rays it exuded were almost blinding.

It had forged itself anew in fire!

It soared into the heavens with an excited cry, trailing long embers behind it. Each cycle of rebirth meant an entirely new life for a Vermilion Bird.

A single completion signified the beginning of a new lifecycle; it didn't need to worry about its lifespan for a long time from now on. Furthermore, it would gradually recover its former strength after the rite, back to its former peak. It needed only time and the right environment. After that, it would perhaps be given the opportunity to attain new peaks.

Jiang Chen was just as pleased for the bird as the bird itself. Everything had been a great success!

After waiting an eternity, the Vermilion Bird had finally reached a new chapter in its life. It had been reborn into a new cycle and received a new lifespan.

"Congratulations, Senior Vermilion!" Jiang Chen sent his felicitations to the fiery bird.

The Vermilion Bird screeched proudly into the air to its heart's content, venting all at once all of the repressed negativity it had bottled up over the years.

"I'm very grateful for your help, young master Chen!" Passionate light flared from its glittering orbs. It was truly thankful from the bottom of its heart.

Without the young man's help, it wouldn't have been able to come to Myriad Abyss Island. There was nowhere in the human domain as perfect for rebirth as this.

A good location for the process of rebirth was essential for success. The likelihood of succeeding would've been almost nonexistent regardless, and its life permanently extinguished then.

"It was your own good fortune, Senior Vermilion. I only helped you along. As long as your destiny dictates it, no one in the world will be able to destroy you!" Jiang Chen comforted the bird.

"Part of my good fortune was meeting you. Where would I find my fortune otherwise?" The Vermilion Bird's feelings ran high.

Long Xiaoxuan also rose out of the water and took up a coiled position in the sky, looking furtively at the sacred fowl that was countless years his senior.

"Congratulations, big fiery bird. You're very strong, but I'll catch up to you one day soon." The dragon was as swaggering as ever.

The Vermilion Bird was in too good of a mood to care. "Xiaoxuan, your bloodline is so strong that it's only a matter of time before you catch up to me. It seems that you've benefited quite a bit as well from our trip to Myriad Abyss as well. Your cultivation has seen some breakthroughs."

Long Xiaoxuan nodded coolly. He harbored some respect for the Vermilion Bird, so he wasn't too aloof despite his ego.

"Senior Vermilion," Jiang Chen intruded. "I have something to talk to you about. Will you give me some direction?" He talked about Long Xiaoxuan and the latter's new discoveries in these seas.

"Xiaoxuan is a true dragon," the Vermilion Bird mused, "and true dragons are at home in the ocean. It's not a bad choice to cultivate further in these seas."

"That's what I'm thinking too." Jiang Chen nodded.

"But Myriad Abyss Island has oceans everywhere. Long Xiaoxuan can cultivate anywhere."

"I suppose so, but there aren't many living beings here. Even the creatures that live in the water clearly avoid these parts. It's a good place for undisturbed cultivation. In other places, the human cultivators passing by alone would be hard to defend against."

Jiang Chen knew how much humans thirsted after true dragons. If powerful cultivators knew that a true dragon had appeared, they would show themselves in an attempt to tame it for sure. He didn't want that to happen.

"You're right. These seas are a rare patch of tranquility. You know, the seas surrounding Winterdraw were pretty good too," the Vermilion Bird remarked thoughtfully. "Why don't you leave Xiaoxuan for a while to train? You can meet up again when he grows stronger."

"That's what I'm thinking too. However, Brother Long is an innocent dragon, and doesn't guard himself zealously enough against human malice. I'm worried that a human expert who chances by this place..."

The bird's expression grew serious. "Your worries aren't misplaced. How about this? I may be reborn, but I want to stay here for awhile longer to fortify my cultivation. Xiaoxuan can stay in these waters and we'll look after each other. But you..."

Jiang Chen's eyes lit up. "Very good. It's settled then. Senior Vermilion will look after you. No one will dare touch either of you if you combine forces."

"No. What will you do if both of us leave?" Long Xiaoxuan objected.

"Me? Don't worry about me. I can survive on my own. I won't be able to keep you two company for a while though. I need to take a trip back to the Bluesmoke Isles."

The jade festival was about to begin. Jiang Chen wanted to return to gather some more information. He hadn't forgotten what he'd come to Myriad Abyss for.

"Will you be fine by yourself, young master Chen?" The Vermilion Bird gazed at Jiang Chen.

"No problem. Let's split up for now so that we may meet again in better straits next time. I trust that we'll all be pleasantly surprised on that day!" Saying this, he roared with laughter. "Alright. Now that you've completed the rite of rebirth, Senior Vermilion, I no longer have any more concerns. Brother Long, you can stay here to cultivate and take care of each other. I'm going back to the Bluesmoke Isles immediately."