

Three Realms 1641

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

Chapter 1641: Lovers Finally Reunite

It wasn't the ancient jade festival nor the impending competition with the Ten Divine Nations' geniuses that he most looked forward to. It was Huang'er. He had done all this solely for her sake.

He was at the jade festival solely for a legitimate excuse to meet with her. He'd done a great deal for this chance.

For her part, Huang'er had also intuited he would be here. Though she hadn't originally planned to come, she had specially requested it.

"Honored guests, the area we are opening this time is unprecedentedly large. You are free to go anywhere within a ten-thousand-mile radius. Anything dug up will belong to you and you alone. The Bluesmoke Isles will not take a cut from it.

"Of course, there are many competitors in the ancient jade festival as well. Conflict is unavoidable, but I must remind all of you: any death or injuries sustained are your responsibility. Bluesmoke offers only this arena of activity and does not bear responsibility for what you do here. We can only request that you bow to reason and avoid any murderous clashes."

These words were meant for the guests, especially those from the Ten Divine Nations.

Everyone had heard about the happenings of Winterdraw. Though Bluesmoke had been able to invite these honored guests, it didn't wish for a repeat for what had taken place elsewhere. If something happened to a young genius from the Ten Divine Nations, they didn't want to be blamed.

Jiang Chen found this rather amusing. Still, wanting to absolve themselves of responsibility in the face of a previous example was reasonable enough. The Rejuvenation Isles had been unlucky indeed. The wrath of three Polylore aristocratic houses had completely turned them upside down and thrown them into mad chaos.

The bluntness of the warning was perhaps a bit painful, but necessary.

"Alright, I think we've said everything that needs to be said. All participants, please prepare yourselves. The staging area is about to open."

Several thousand of the genius participants came to the forefront.

Elders He and Quan drummed important reminders into the skulls of House Yan's contingent. They weren't to pay attention solely to digging up ores. Keeping an eye on Huang'er in case of an accident was equally important.

Neither Yan Jinnan nor Yan Qingsang could refuse this task. It was relevant to the house's well-being as well as their personal interests. If something happened to Huang'er, House Xiahou's anger would burn everyone equally in House Yan.

Therefore, they understood its importance as well as the elders did.

Alas, Huang'er was free to move about. Their cultivation was entirely inferior to hers. It was almost impossible to surveil her without being noticed themselves. Thankfully, the fact they had five on their side made it a bit easier.

The verification process at the entrance was very strict. Each participant had an exclusive jade token that Bluesmoke had handed out ahead of time. The great houses' tokens in particular were custom made and freely given. The wandering cultivators who'd paid to enter were even more strictly scrutinized.

Several thousand wandering cultivators paying a fee of two hundred thousand per person... the income from this alone amounted to almost a billion sky spirit stones!

The jade festival created prosperity as well as popularity for Bluesmoke.

After Jiang Chen's token was checked for authenticity, he was let through. He entered the area in Yellow Dragon Ridge that was open to them. Touted to be ten thousand miles in radius, it was a stupendously vast place.

Though there were several thousand participants, being thrown into such a sizable area was like so many waves in a bottomless ocean. No individual participant was easily visible.

Jiang Chen felt a weight lifted off his shoulders as soon as he came inside. Finally, he was no longer being watched by House Yan's eyes.

Because House Yan's participants were honored guests from the Ten Divine Nations, they had entered ahead of him. Huang'er had gone in an hour earlier.

But his and her heart were intertwined. Though they hadn't communicated with their consciousnesses due to fear of detection, he wasn't at all concerned about finding her.

Their thoughts had fallen into step with each other long ago. Huang'er had left a number of clues behind her path that were undetectable to others.

With Jiang Chen's skills, even the most imperceptible of traces were plain before him. He found it trivial to follow her trail. Two hours later, he knew that Huang'er was right up ahead. However, he was in no rush to see her yet.

It was impossible that House Yan was at ease about Huang'er's participation. It was likely that all the other young geniuses of her house were keeping tabs on her. If he brashly ventured forward now, he might run right into them.

Thus, he decided somewhere so he could change his appearance yet again. That way, even if Yan Qingsang ran into him, the 'Shao Yuan' identity would remain safe.

Nothing was too extensive or bothersome to ensure that he was reunited with Huang'er. If he could, he wanted nothing more than to head to House Yan directly and spirit her away. Alas, he didn't have enough strength for such a task yet.

He could only bide his time until he did.

The deal he'd struck with Yan Qingsang wasn't currently a priority. He had a month's time to contact the Yan genius. Now in a new disguise, he slowly pursued the trail anew.

Just as he'd expected, Yan Qingsang and Yan Jinnan were keeping a casual eye on Huang'er. She'd also noticed it herself.

She suddenly sped up near a valley, vanishing into a thicket of trees. The development took Yan Qingsang and Yan Jinnan aback, and both rapidly followed through.

But Huang'er was nowhere to be found in the patch she'd gone into.

As they were baffled about where she'd gone, a shadow appeared in the air behind them. Shocked, they swiftly whipped their heads around – to find Huang'er glaring at them from right behind.

"This is your last warning. Don't follow me. I'm not going to run away. I just want to be by myself for a bit. If you're going to try this again, I don't mind making sure you never leave this area." Huang'er's glacial attitude and harrowing tone shone through.

Yan Qingsang's lips quivered. He wanted to say something, but couldn't. He exhaled after a moment. "Never mind. I won't pry into your business, Huang'er, but I hope you won't forget about the burden on your shoulders."

Yan Jinnan had even less of a right to speak. He knew that no matter what he said, Huang'er would only get angrier.

"Scram!" Though Huang'er was normally a genteel person, she forced herself into a brusque expression. She and Jiang Chen had gone to all this trouble to create an opportunity for themselves. She didn't want to be interrupted by annoyances like these.

Indignation flared up from Yan Jinnan's eyes, but he didn't dare turn on her in the end. He stomped his feet, gnashed his teeth, and left.

Yan Qingsang sighed helplessly, then disappeared without another word after raising a cupped fist salute.

Huang'er silently watched them depart. She was a bit apologetic especially towards Yan Qingsang; she hadn't wanted to be so threatening towards him. He was usually quite pleasant to her.

An easy laugh echoed from the forest shortly after their disappearance. "You're really not very good at pretending to be mean. You're so polite even when you get angry!" The voice naturally belonged to Jiang Chen.

Huang'er's slender body shook, her expression blossoming into one of sincere joy. It was a beautiful sight to behold, the unfurling of spring flowers.

Jiang Chen appeared from the void. They exchanged a look and a smile, their palms pressing together almost unconsciously.

"Come, Huang'er. I'll take you to a more discreet place."

Huang'er smiled blissfully. No further words needed to be said. The duo disappeared swiftly like a bolt of lightning.

After two days, they finally found a reasonably secluded place. "Huang'er," Jiang Chen asked with curved lips. "do you remember how I removed your Generation Binding Curse for you back in the human domain?"

"Do you mean that we should go underground, Brother Chen?"

"Yes. There are too many prying eyes above the earth."

"I'll do whatever you want." Huang'er's heart had already melted. She would comply with any request her beloved made.

With the help of the Bewitching Lotus and the Goldbiter Rats, Jiang Chen quickly excavated a private chamber deep within the earth. He took off his disguise and assumed his original appearance. Their eyes locked, then their arms; they could no longer control themselves.

Taking Huang'er's perfect waist into his arms, Jiang Chen crooned. "I've been waiting every day and night for this moment. The heavens have taken pity on us and we meet again. I'm sorry that you have to suffer in the way that we're reuniting!"

"Brother Chen," Huang'er pressed a finger softly upon Jiang Chen's lips. "I won't let you say anything like that." She shook her head. "I've always known you would come to Myriad Abyss Island. No matter how you got here, I feel only contentment and bliss."

Gazing upon Huang'er's breathtakingly delicate face, Jiang Chen couldn't resist lowering his head to kiss her rosy lips.

The momentary contact stretched on longer and longer.

After what seemed like an eternity, the lovers finally broke free from their sweet embrace. Tears brimmed in Huang'er's eyes.

"Brother Chen, I'm so weak. I said I wouldn't cry, but..." Huang'er murmured. "I've thought about you every hour of every day for the last... how many years? I wanted you to come, but I was worried your cultivation wasn't there yet. You don't know how much I've fretted over this day..."

"I know, I know..." Jiang Chen was greatly moved as well. He tenderly wiped at the tears on Huang'er's face. "I've come to take you away, and will deal with all the resulting problems before I do so."

Huang'er gasped. "Have you dealt with the human domain's troubles, Brother Chen? The demons..."

"The demon race has at least fifty more years before a large-scale outbreak occurs. My goal is to conquer House Yan within the next ten to twenty years, and take you away with full pomp and circumstance."

This was what Huang'er liked most about Jiang Chen. Such boasting from any other man would be considered bluster, but he had the right to make this kind of sweeping statement.

“How did you come this time, Brother Chen?” After calming herself, Huang’er was curious about his itinerary.

Jiang Chen hid nothing from her. He related all his experiences along the way.

Huang’er sighed after she had heard all. “So Jiang Huang was you after all. That was my first instinct when Elder Shun mentioned that name, that you’d come to find me!”

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Chapter 1642: Endless Love

Huang’er listened with rapt attention. Her heart leapt to her throat when Jiang Chen relayed his experiences on Winterdraw Island. She felt both pride and heartache for her beloved. He had overcome so many difficulties and dangers to come to her. How would she not be moved?

“Oh right, Huang’er, didn’t you estimate that it’d take decades for you to reach half-step empyrean? What’s caused the dramatic growth in your cultivation after only a few years?” That was what Jiang Chen was most curious about.

“Brother Chen, after returning to my family, there wasn’t a day when I didn’t miss you greatly, so I threw myself into cultivation. For some reasons, I progressed at an unusual rate. Before I knew it, I had broken through great emperor and reached half-step empyrean.”

Jiang Chen mused, “Your parents must be of remarkable bloodlines, and they passed down the best heritage to you. That’s why you have an unparalleled natural talent in martial dao.”

Even he marveled at the speed in which she had improved.

“Your cultivation has grown quickly as well, Brother Chen. You were first level emperor realm when I left, and now you’re already great emperor.”

“Haha, how can I say I’ve improved quickly when there’s you?” Jiang Chen said teasingly.

Huang’er giggled. “Perhaps the breakthrough is to compensate for my lack of progress when I was in the human domain.”

During those years, she hadn’t improved much in martial dao, the main reason being the Generation Binding Curse hindering her cultivation.

They’d been apart for years. Naturally they had a lot to talk about.

Jiang Chen sighed and brought up a new topic in a conflicted tone, “There’s something we need to talk about, Huang’er.”

“Tell me, Brother Chen.” Her eyelashes fluttered when she noticed the heaviness in his voice. She looked up at him with eyes as tender as water.

“During my trials in the Eternal Spirit Mountain, I was set up and accidentally consumed an aphrodisiac. A woman saved me while I was under the influence, but I never knew who she was. It wasn’t until later that I learned she was Master Ye Chonglou’s disciple, Dan Fei, whom I met when I was in Skylareel

Kingdom. After she sacrificed her chastity to save me, she went missing. It was much later that I found out Lady Dan'er, whom Emperor Peafowl had taken under his wing, was Dan Fei. She gave birth to my daughter..."

The thought of hiding the affair from Huang'er had never crossed Jiang Chen's mind. That said, he worried that she would be crushed by the knowledge.

After a brief pause, Huang'er chuckled. "Are there any other affairs you haven't told me about, Brother Chen?"

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Just that one. I've wronged you, Huang'er, but if I didn't accept that responsibility, that would be a bigger betrayal to Dan Fei and Nian'er."

"Nian'er?" she muttered. "Jiang Nian'er? That's a pretty name. Brother Chen, were you worried that I'd be jealous?"

He shook his head with a stilted smile.

She rested both her hands on his shoulders and met his gaze with adoring eyes. "There are countless men in the world, Brother Chen. Why do I love only you? You're responsible, knowledgeable, and magnanimous. There are a lot of things I greatly admire you for. Of course I won't be the only one to fall for an extraordinary man like you. Dan Fei and the Ling sisters from Regal Pill Palace are all deeply in love with you as well. Doesn't Sister Gouyu harbor romantic feelings for you too?"

Huang'er was remarkably intelligent. She had been with Jiang Chen long enough to know how popular he was among women.

She knew all about Ling Bi'er's and Ling Hui'er's feelings. She'd even seen Ling Hui'er taking Jiang Chen's hand and place it on her chest. She was very smart to not point these things out and just let them take through their natural courses. Even if Jiang Chen ended up falling for them, she wouldn't judge him for that.

Most women's love was obsessively possessive. They wanted an extraordinary man to be theirs and theirs alone. Sometimes, it was too much to ask for.

Huang'er wasn't a regular woman. Her love was purer and more selfless. It was beyond the self-serving love of the mortals. That was why she didn't hold a grudge against Dan Fei; it was against her nature to be selfish.

Besides, Dan Fei had given away her innocence to Jiang Chen, but she left him afterwards instead of clinging to him. Huang'er respected her for that.

"Don't feel guilty, Brother Chen. If not for you, I would've lost my purpose in life like a wilted flower. You gave me the opportunity to start anew. You bring color to my life. I hope that there are more people at your side caring for and loving you."

She was overwhelmed by her love for him. She put her face to his chest, revelling in the heat of his masculinity. This was what happiness felt like. Nothing else mattered to her.

Jiang Chen put his arms around her and caressed her beautiful hair. "How high is Xiahou Zong's cultivation, Huang'er?" he asked gently.

She trembled at the mention of Xiahou Zong. The man had caused her a lifetime of nightmares.

“Don’t worry, Huang’er. That name will soon disappear from Myriad Abyss Island. I’ll end this nightmare he put you in with my own hands.”

Huang’er started. “Are you going to challenge Xiahou Zong, Brother Chen?”

“I don’t need to challenge him to eliminate him,” he responded in a dark tone. “I’m not stupid. I won’t attack House Xiahou head on before I attain the power to dominate them.”

“Your martial dao potential is higher than his, Brother Chen. If all other factors were equal, he wouldn’t be able to rival you in power. But he was born into the Xiaohou family, spoon-fed with the best resources and care. That’s why his cultivation is...”

“Don’t worry about hurting my feelings, Huang’er. Be honest with me. I have to gain a comprehensive understanding of House Xiahou.”

That made Huang’er wonder. “I’ve never spoken about Xiaohou Zong, Brother Chen. Did Yan Qingsang tell you about him?”

“Your cousin?” Jiang Chen smiled wryly. “He couldn’t be more opposed to me getting close to you. He’s unusually stubborn, that guy. He shoots me down everytime I brought you up. That guy sure is persistent.”

“Then how did you know about Xiahou Zong?” Huang’er was curious.

“I heard people talk about him after coming to Myriad Abyss Island. What’s more, his brother Xiahou Jing went to the human domain with his followers and caused a lot of damage. I wiped him out.”

“What? Did you say you wiped him out?”

Jiang Chen paused. “What’s wrong?”

“Xiaohou Zhing was one of the three great geniuses of his family. He ranked a little higher than Xiahou Xi, their representative to the festival this time. Though Xiahou Jing was a level below Xiahou Zong, he seemed unwilling to accept Xiahou Zong’s status in the family.”

“That’s right. His unwillingness to accept things was what prompted him to travel to the human domain in the first place. He and his followers established the Order of Wind and Cloud, leaving chaos in their wake. They almost left the human domain in shambles.”

Huang’er was shocked. “Did you kill him, Brother Chen?”

“I did. We would never have been able to come to a truce. I’ll finish what I started and kill every member of House Xiahou I encounter. If they fail to acknowledge their mistakes, I’ll erase the entire family from the Divine Abyss Continent one day.”

He meant what he said. As long as Xiahou Zong lived, Jiang Chen was destined to have a bitter feud with House Xiahou.

Huang’er knew he was doing it all for her.

“Xiahou Zong is one of the most remarkable geniuses among the younger generation in the Ten Divine Nations. I hear that he’s breaking through mid empyrean realm during his closed door cultivation.”

“Oh?” Jiang Chen’s eyes lit up. His curiosity was piqued. If Xiahou Zong had only been first level or second level empyrean, the genius wouldn’t have really been a threat. But Xiahou Zong had broken through mid empyrean at such a young age. Now that was surprising!

“Interesting.” Jiang Chen smiled lazily. “He actually is good enough to be my opponent.”

Huang’er was much more at ease upon seeing the relaxed expression on Jiang Chen’s face. He hadn’t lost his calm after knowing Xiahou Zong’s cultivation.

She knew her lover could triumph over people of higher realms, but she wanted him to be more cautious and take fewer risks on Myriad Abyss Island.

“He may not succeed in breaking through mid empyrean, Brother Chen. You, on the other hand, will certainly be able to reach empyrean in a couple years. The cultivation gap between you and him will become increasingly smaller. I believe that once you’re in the same realm, you’ll easily win a fight against him.”

“Haha, that’s only the first step. My ultimate goal is to destroy House Xiahou in order to eliminate any future threats and to rescue your parents.”

Warmth bloomed in Huang’er’s heart.

Jiang Chen had never forgotten about her parents. A man’s love for a woman could be seen in not only his care for her, but also his attentiveness to everything she cared about.

Huang’er’s biggest weakness was her parents.

If he could rescue her parents from the Boundless Prison, there would be nothing tying her to House Yan. She’d only returned because she didn’t want her parents to suffer for her deeds. They had suffered enough already, she didn’t want to add to their burden.

“Alright, Huang’er. Xiahou Zong’s cultivation is progressing quickly. I can’t fall behind. I’ll be cultivating in here the next few days.”

Huang’er looked owishly at him. “Didn’t you make a promise to Yan Qingsang, Brother Chen?”

“Haha, I have. But we have a month. I only need seven or eight days to locate the ores.”

“Do you really have the means to detect ancient jade, Brother Chen?”

“Yes. Otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to gain Yan Qingsang’s unconditional trust. After the festival, I’ll find a way to earn enough trust so that he takes me back to House Yan. I’m willing to work for House Yan to stay by your side.”

“Brother Chen...” Huang’er was deeply moved. She knew Jiang Chen was a proud man. It was against his nature to be ordered around by her family.

“I can’t rest unless I’m by your side, Huang’er. What’s more, if one day House Xiahou suddenly comes to take you away, I’ll be able to break you out. Even if I have to turn Eternal Divine Nation upside down, I will never let you become Xiahou Zong’s cultivation vessel.” Jiang Chen was quite determined.

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Chapter 1643: Encounter on a Narrow Path

Though they were underground in a cramped space, that was no issue at all for the pair of lovebirds. Just being together was a happy luxury.

They knew that their current circumstances made such companionship rare. After the month was up, they would go back to the way they were before. Because of this, they considered the time they spent together nothing short of priceless.

Jiang Chen spent twenty-four days underground with Huang’er. He didn’t slack on his cultivation during this time and so his strength saw a noticeable increase despite the short timeframe.

After realizing Jiang Chen’s change, Huang’er attained a new understanding of his martial dao capabilities. He was truly an extraordinary individual. Perhaps he really would trample Xiahou Zong underfoot – the entirety of House Xiahou, in fact.

Brother Chen hadn’t fully perfected his strength yet. In the Ten Divine Nations, someone like him wasn’t worthy of being mentioned. But his martial potential hid a tremendous energy that could upturn all of Myriad Abyss.

Huang’er firmly believed that this wasn’t a delusion.

Brother Chen was very likely right. He didn’t belong to this world, but was a reincarnated god from another who’d awakened his memories. How could Divine Abyss birth such an incredible man otherwise?

“It’s already been twenty-four days, Brother Chen. The event ends in another six. If you don’t leave soon, Yan Qingsang will get pretty upset.” Huang’er didn’t want to separate from Jiang Chen, but she knew they would really delay more pressing matters if they kept staying below ground.

“It’s been twenty-four days already?” Jiang Chen sighed. “It feels like it hasn’t been more than a dozen days.”

Reason overcame desire in the end.

The lovers returned aboveground. After making a promise with Huang’er to meet again, Jiang Chen went to work in Yellow Dragon Ridge. His excellent mood increased his efficiency by leaps and bounds.

The seal in his consciousness was especially perceptive of jade from the ancient and primordial eras. This allowed him to have double the results with half the effort.

Though Jiang Chen didn’t have much interest in ancient jade personally – he still hadn’t refined the raw piece he had bought back in Oriole Valley – his seal seemed much more active in the pursuit of it.

This caused him to refocus on its potential importance. It seemed he had underestimated the attractiveness of the jade. The seal was a weathervane for him.

When it reacted violently to something, that thing invariably ended up being extremely useful and important. When it remained calm for a long time, that meant nothing remarkable was probably going on.

He couldn't say why, but he was entirely sure of the seal's effectiveness in delivering early warnings.

The chain seal had most likely been left behind by his father, the Celestial Emperor. He hadn't yet found a precise answer as to why though. Because of this, he considered any activity from the seal as his father's guidance. He trusted it implicitly.

Thanks to the seal's directions, Jiang Chen's efforts were outrageously effective despite the shortness of six days. He was quicker than he would've been even with a physical map.

Anywhere that elicited a reaction from a seal was a place that he ventured to. He was able to find something almost every hour. Sometimes, he would make a discovery as quickly as every fifteen or thirty minutes.

All in all, he brought home a haul of nearly three hundred ores. He could guarantee the existence of ancient jade within every single one.

Jiang Chen didn't care for near-imposters. He only went for ore that he was sure of. Just these pieces wouldn't do, though. Out of convenience and to round out the story, he dug up waste jade amounting in the tens of thousands.

These pieces of raw jade had no ancient jade within; they were just a smokescreen.

No single other contestant would match his profit, Jiang Chen surmised. Not even a ten-man team necessarily could.

For anyone else, excavating ore was gambling on luck. His process was positively cheating.

Only on the last day did he resume Shao Yuan's disguise. He found the highly distressed Yan Qingsang at their promised place.

"Man, were you hiding from me all this time?" Yan Qingsang's eyes were red with panic.

"Hey, don't discredit me like that. I was only doing you a favor. If I were together with you for the past month, what would they think? Even if you win, they'd only claim that you cheated."

Yan Qingsang blinked, then grinned in concession. "I suppose you make a certain amount of sense. How'd you do, then?"

"Pretty well, as it turns out. I have about three hundred ores that definitely contain ancient jade. I picked up some extra trash as well, of course, just to avoid alarming everyone else."

Yan Qingsang was speechless. Everything had been arranged for him; what else was there to say?

Jiang Chen gave most of the ore to Yan Qingsang and kept only a small fraction. "You take the raw ore for now, Brother Yan. Remember, we said we'd split it down the middle later. I want my pickings first, then you can have the rest, alright?"

Yan Qingsang agreed readily. "No problem. I'm getting it for basically free anyway. Oh, I dug up some ore as well... I wonder how I did with my own?"

"We'll see once we're out," Jiang Chen smiled.

Yan Qingsang nodded. "Sure thing. We should split up again though. Otherwise they'll say I cheated, yeah? Hahaha."

He made to do so as he said this, then remembered something important. "Brother Shao Yuan." He tilted his head with the question. "Have you seen Huang'er during this time?"

"Why are you asking me?" Jiang Chen retorted angrily. "I thought you didn't want me to get close to your cousin? And anyways, I wouldn't know how to look for her even if I wanted to."

Yan Qingsang chuckled. "Alright, alright. I have my reasons for not wanting you near her. My cousin is far above her peers in the Ten Divine Nations when it comes to beauty, talent, and all else. There are countless men who admire her beneath the heavens, but none dare express their emotions for her. Your heritage provides you some modicum of skill, but you don't think yourself superior to the divine nations' great houses, do you?"

Jiang Chen guessed from what he was hearing that Yan Qingsang really did mean well. The noble scion didn't want his brother to get in trouble if Jiang Chen got too close to her.

"One day, I'll make all the great houses in the Ten Divine Nations look up to me!" he huffed. These big words were naturally said for Yan Qingsang's benefit.

Yan Qingsang roared with laughter. "That's the spirit! I look forward to it. Alright, time's almost up. Let's get out of here."

Jiang Chen chuckled, but didn't move from his spot. His ears twitched, his expression turning frosty. "Come on out."

"What?" Yan Qingsang blinked.

Jiang Chen didn't respond to his friend. Instead, he pointed a cold look at the nearby forest. "What fool is hiding so secretively over there?"

There was a sinister cackle from within the trees, following by the appearance of a newcomer.

Yan Qingsang colored when he saw who it was. What a small world; it was none other than House Xiahou's Xiahou Xi, the one whom Yan Jinnan had curried favor with back at the Jade Revel Lodge. He was ranked top five among the geniuses of his house.

"You?" Yan Qingsang was a bit pale. He was anxious about the run-in since his cultivation lacked somewhat compared to his enemy's. "Brother Shao Yuan, take the goods and go on ahead." He tossed a storage ring at Jiang Chen. "I'll hold him up."

Jiang Chen laughed as he took the ring, then casually threw it back. “No, you go on ahead.”

Yan Qingsang was stunned. “Brother Shao Yuan, this isn’t related to you. This is a private matter between Houses Yan and Xiahou.”

This statement gained Jiang Chen’s respect. Most scions of these great houses wouldn’t push away the involvement of others in their problems.

He smiled faintly, then glared about with his Evil Golden Eye. He found no prying eyes within several dozen miles.

“Damn it, Yan Qingsang, stop f*cking wasting time,” he called out. “I told you to go on ahead!”

Yan Qingsang was no fool. It suddenly struck him that Brother Shao Yuan had noticed Xiahou Xi before him. Is this wandering cultivator stronger than me in martial dao? This both shocked and embarrassed him.

Xiahou Xi chose this moment to bark out a malicious cackle. “Yan Qingsang, was it? I remember you. You seemed to have quite a temper that day at the Jade Revel Lodge! It seems that heaven has put you into my hands. Do you think you can leave today?”

“Oh, and you over there. I don’t know where you’re from, but you must be trash too if you’re mixing with House Yan. Don’t bother looking around. I’ve been following Yan Qingsang for quite a while, and I made sure there’s no one around. No one’s coming to save you. What other useless member of House Yan is going to stop me even if he sees me kill you? Yan Jinnan? I think he’d rather have you dead, hahaha!”

Yan Qingsang was blue in the face. He knew that Xiahou Xi spoke the truth. Even if there had been someone around, no one would interfere in House Xiahou’s business. Moreover, others from House Yan wouldn’t necessarily assist him if he were attacked here.

Jiang Chen chuckled abruptly “You were right about one thing. No one is around, for dozens of miles in fact.”

“Oh?” Xiahou Xi’s eyes narrowed into slits.

“Have you thought about this, Xiahou Xi? If you died here, no one would know.” There was steel in Jiang Chen’s serene declaration.

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Chapter 1644: From Arrogance to Humility, Cutting a Contemptuous Figure

Xiahou Xi, die here?

The young man in question was slightly surprised, but Yan Qingsang was positively stupefied. Were his ears working right?

Get rid of Xiahou Xi, in this isolated place?

The idea stimulated his imagination and made his blood boil. His anger made his thoughts take an evil turn. Still, although it was an invigorating prospect to think about... but was it truly possible?

Yan Qingsang mulled it over. If Brother Shao Yuan were stronger than him – if he was roughly equal to Xiahou Xi – then he might just tip the scales enough in favor of their victory.

It was a small chance, in theory. Perhaps too small to gamble on. His fury receded at these second thoughts. If there wasn't a good chance of pulling it off, the risk wasn't worth it.

If Xiahou Xi didn't die here, there would inevitably be another round of verbal sparring outside. House Xiahou's current dominant position would lead to a renewed attack on House Yan. Though Yan Qingsang was often a straight-shooter, he didn't want to add any more troubles to his house than he'd already done so.

"Don't be too impulsive, Brother Shao Yuan. It's better for us to live to fight another day. If we band together, he won't be able to do anything to us." Yan Qingsang calmed down after he'd gotten a clear read on the situation.

"Leave what you have, Yan Qingsang," Xiahou Xi declared coldly. "Then kneel and kowtow to me three times. I'll let you go then. Your servant's life is mine, though."

"Don't you go too far, Xiahou Xi!" Yan Qingsang snapped back indignantly. "We are two, and you are one. What do you intend to do? Do you want to face us both?"

"Trash like you? I could take on ten of you." Xiahou Xi was astoundingly arrogant. He felt a natural sense of superiority over anyone from House Yan.

"Are you going or not, Yan Qingsang? I'm asking you for the last time." Jiang Chen glanced remotely at the young man beside him.

Yan Qingsang shivered as the gaze made contact with him. "Brother Shao Yuan..."

"Stop wasting time. You're only dragging me down by staying. Get out of here, alright? You saw nothing nor met anyone out of the ordinary today. Do you understand?" Jiang Chen's tone was meaningful.

Intimidated by his friend's steely look, Yan Qingsang instinctively nodded. "Okay, I'll pull back first. Don't hold on for too long."

"Go as far as you can. Remember, if you don't want to make any trouble for yourself, you haven't seen anything. Nothing at all!" Jiang Chen instructed once more.

Yan Qingsang had a sudden realization of something and silently vanished in retreat.

Jiang Chen's Evil Golden Eye locked onto Xiahou Xi, forcing him to cautiously remain still until Yan Qingsang's departure. Only then did he retract some of the pressure of his ocular skill.

Xiahou Xi harrumphed, then cackled. "I didn't expect House Yan to have a slave like you. I underestimated you, huh?"

Jiang Chen ignored the banter. He stood perfectly still in casual disregard of his opponent. He was waiting for Yan Qingsang's presence to disappear completely from the vicinity. Once it did, he opened his eyes once more.

"Xiahou Xi, hmm? I wonder what your relationship to Xiahou Zong is?"

"Hmph. Xiahou Zong is the best genius of our house. Who do you think you are to say his name like this?" Xiahou Xi reacted as if his tail had been stepped on. He was annoyed and flustered.

"Best genius? I'll make that so-called genius's head into my chamber pot one day. That's right, there's another Xiahou Jing from your house. Do you know him?"

"Brother Jing? You know him?" Xiahou Xi darkened, then snickered. "Don't bother with name-dropping. House Xiahou has countless geniuses. Do you think you'll be able to escape your doom today just because you can name two of them? Impossible!"

Jiang Chen laughed joyfully. "I thought Xiahou Jing was trash enough, but I've misjudged him. Compared him, you are far more of a piece of trash. He's definitely the smarter of the two."

Xiahou Xi bristled with fury. "You want to get the better of me with words, kid? I understand — you're so near death already. Alright, I'll do you the favor of sending you to your doom."

"Actually, I'm doing you the favor. I'll send you to a happy little reunion with Xiahou Jing."

"What do you mean? Have you met Brother Jing?" Xiahou Xi became more uncertain with each passing moment.

"Sure I have. I killed him while I was at it." Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "Oh yes, he had two dogs of a servant with him too. Elders Mo and Peng, correct?"

Xiahou Xi had repeatedly told himself to calm down, but he couldn't after hearing this tidbit.

"Who are you, really? Why do you know these things?" His discomfort was becoming unbearable.

"Me? I'm a gravedigger for your entire house. Xiahou Jing's was the first I dug, and you'll be the second. Many more will come after. The entirety of House Xiahou will be sent to the underworld one day. You can all be together then."

Having said all this, Jiang Chen suddenly clapped both hands together, producing a burst of strange light from the air. Nine strange images floated within empty space, producing a series of interlaced pocket demiplanes.

He'd brought his Nine Labyrinth Formation to life.

"What's this?" Xiahou Xi blinked.

"Haha, tell me how you'd like to die, Xiahou Xi." Jiang Chen's voice echoed by his ear.

The young man's expression changed drastically, turning his head all around him. Alas, there was nothing to be found save for these odd-looking pictures in every direction. They seemed infinite and endless without exit, extending in every direction to create new domains of space.

“A formation?” As a genius of a great house, Xiahou Xi instantly realized the gist of what he was encountering. “What a petty trick!”

He refused to give in. Murder flashed across his eyes. The wave of a hand conjured a weapon into his fingers. He used it to cut into the image right in front of him.

Snick!

The image was ripped right in half by the attack. A mocking smile appeared at the corner of Xiahou Xi’s mouth. He was pleased with his success. “What a joke a cheap prank like that is...”

He hadn’t finished gloating before his voice ground to a halt. What he saw behind it terrified him.

It was another identical image, though the aura it exuded was even more mysterious and impenetrable.

This was absurd!

Xiahou Xi was in a complete panic. He finally felt that he’d met a fearsome opponent – someone who had the ability to threaten his life. Roaring multiple times in succession, he delivered a flurry thundering strikes against the Nine Labyrinth Formation’s images.

Jiang Chen snickered to himself when he saw Xiahou Xi’s rage. This was one of the dumbest ways to counteract the formation. Even Xiahou Jing hadn’t been this foolish. Xiahou Xi was definitely inferior to his kinsman.

There wasn’t much fun in tormenting such a weakling.

“You disappoint me, Xiahou Xi. I thought you’d be able to make a solid pass at solving this, like Xiahou Jing did. You got my hopes up for nothing.”

Xiahou Xi howled resentfully. “You’re just a slave of House Yan, kid. How dare you mouth off like that about House Xiahou’s geniuses? Aren’t you worried that you’ll cause trouble for your masters?”

“House Yan? The hell does that house have to do with me? I’d be happy to see you two houses fight to the death, really.” Jiang Chen had little goodwill toward Huang’er’s house. A house that gave away its geniuses to another to be cultivation vessels wasn’t worth his respect.

Xiahou Xi was flabbergasted. What did this man mean by what he’d just said? Was he not a servant of House Yan, after all? He’d hit a brick wall this time, truly.

“If you’re not related to House Yan, friend, then you are no enemy of mine. This is a misunderstanding!”

“Not at all. I killed Xiahou Jing, you know,” Jiang Chen smirked playfully.

“He has nothing to do with me. House Xiahou isn’t without its own internal conflicts.” Xiahou Xi tried his best to slither his way out of the situation. He had no other way to deal with his current dilemma.

The guy before him had more than enough ability to kill him on the spot. It was better for him to survive over anything else.

Jiang Chen shook his head. Xiahou Xi was conducting himself in a rather ugly manner. It looked like deep down, the Ten Divine Nations’ geniuses weren’t much different from the rest.

Cowardly, fearful of death, absolutely base and vile.

“Are you begging? Do you plan to to kneel before me and kowtow, hmm?” Jiang Chen scoffed.

Xiahou Xi was thoroughly discomfited. He tried his best to remind himself to stay calm and not run headfirst into his opponent. If he did, he would be cut down where he stood.

“Friend,” he offered a simpering smile. “I always pay my debts. If you let me live today, I will pay back tenfold.”

“No need.” Jiang Chen’s expression darkened. “I have one principle only in my dealings with House Xiahou.”

“What is it?”

“Death with no exceptions.” Having said this, Jiang Chen raised his Holy Dragon Bow and sent an arrow hurtling into the formation. Outside of it, he could not guarantee his accuracy, but the formation worked in perfect tandem with the Holy Dragon Bow’s power. Even Shu Wanqing, back in the human domain, had fallen prey to the combination.

Moreover, Jiang Chen was very different from his old self back in his campaign against the Order of Wind and Cloud. He was much stronger now.

‘Death without exception’ – the enunciation of these words chilled Xiahou Xi to the bone. He knew he was done for. A ray of light from within the void was accompanied by a reaping arrow in flight. The missile flew towards his face.

Xiahou Xi ducked hurriedly.

Alas, his attempt was stymied by the contracting images all around him. Within moments, they had boxed him into a tiny space. He was like a scurrying mouse trapped in a cage. The room left for him to maneuver grew increasingly tiny.

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

Chapter 1645: Falling and Consequences

Someone ensnared by the Nine Labyrinth Formation would find it extremely difficult to escape. With Jiang Chen’s current level of control, it was capable of trapping experts up to third level empyrean realm.

Xiahou Xi was only a half-step empyrean genius. Cultivation-wise, he was barely stronger than his peak great emperor peers like Yan Qingsang and Yan Jinnan.

What did Jiang Chen have to fear from an enemy like this? He’d already seen many empyrean experts in his travels. Furthermore, he had defeated them several times back in the human domain.

A genius like Xiahou Xi wasn’t worthy of standing before Jiang Chen.

The former’s fate was sealed when the formation started contracting. Though he could avoid one or two arrows, he couldn’t avoid a steady stream of them.

Having no time to even shriek, Xiahou Xi was hit by an arrow in a flash of light. In the next moment, he burst like a bubble into nothingness. Only a storage ring remained, clinking to the floor of the Labyrinth's simulated ground.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, and was about to pick the ring up when he remembered something. He cautiously conjured a formation to wrap around the ring, then closed his palm around it.

Suddenly, his consciousness detected someone closing in on a several dozen mile radius of the area. Without hesitation, Jiang Chen put away the Nine Labyrinth Formation and dashed away in a flash of lightning.

Though the battle had been fierce while it lasted, nothing was left of Xiahou Xi's body save for some dust. Anyone who approached the place was able only to sense that a fight had taken place; not much else was obvious.

This was the last day of the month-long festival. No one could spare time or energy for worrying about someone else. The unknown interlopers looked around, found no clues, and promptly left.

Jiang Chen tossed Xiahou Xi's storage ring to the side. He decided to throw it away.

If Xiahou Xi was inferior to Xiahou Jing, the possessions in his storage ring wouldn't be much either. Taking it with him would just create a future threat for himself. Murder was enough. Robbery didn't seem particularly attractive today.

Jiang Chen reached the exit four hours later. He accepted his inspection with coolness and poise, exiting as if nothing had happened after handing over his jade token. Outside the valley, he saw Yan Qingsang waiting for him. Jiang Chen ignored him for now.

The young man of House Yan was no fool. Jiang Chen's behavior tipped him off to refrain from a greeting. After Jiang Chen joined House Yan's team, the rest of House Yan's members exited as well.

Huang'er was among the ones who appeared at the valley entrance.

Elders He and Quan breathed a collective sigh of relief. They were worried about Huang'er most of all. If something were to happen to her, none of the elders would be able to bear the consequences. Her safety was extremely reassuring.

"How did you do in there, Huang'er?" Elder He asked hypocritically.

"Alright. Nothing special," Huang'er replied coolly.

No one in House Yan was stupid enough to ask Huang'er to show her. "Participation is the most important part," they chorused.

Huang'er glanced at Yan Qingsang. "Brother Qingsang, how about you? You have a wager to win, I understand."

"Very well, I guarantee it!" Yan Qingsang chuckled. "The thirty million is as good as mine!"

Yan Jinnan snickered. "Don't get too ahead of yourself. I did quite well too!"

"Your 'quite well' is powerless before my winnings. Thanks for the ten million, chump!"

Elders He and Quan ignored such petty bickering.

Those inside had almost entirely filtered out already. House Xiahou was all accounted for, save one.

“Where’s Xiahou Xi?” an elder of the house asked the other house geniuses. “Why hasn’t he come out yet?”

“I saw Brother Xi inside. I think he headed for the exit earlier than I did. Has he not come out yet? I thought he already did.”

“What, Brother Xi hasn’t come out yet? How is that possible?”

The Xiahou elder’s face darkened. “Are you sure Xiahou Xi went on ahead of you?”

“Yes, I talked to him when we bumped into each other. He said he had done quite well and was heading outside. Has he been delayed by something?”

“Time isn’t up yet. Fifteen minutes still remain. I assume he’ll be out at the last minute.”

“Possibly. Perhaps Brother Xi wants to make a grand entrance by being the last one to exit?”

House Xiahou’s geniuses were optimistic as a whole. Clearly, they didn’t think it possible for anyone here to threaten their kinsman. There was nothing to suggest that to be the case, anyways.

Plus, the atmosphere had been quite amicable at this competition. There hadn’t been any significant fighting, except bouts by and against wandering cultivators.

The Ten Divine Nations hadn’t fought against each other. There had been a kind of mutual understanding that this event was for profit only. Where could Xiahou Xi possibly be, given this?

As more time went on past closing, he was nowhere to be found. House Xiahou’s elders looked worse and worse.

“Alright. Time’s up. Yellow Dragon Ridge’s jade mines are to be closed!” an organizer from Bluesmoke shouted.

“Hold on!” Someone from House Xiahou could no longer remain calm. “House Xiahou has a young genius who hasn’t come out yet.”

The organizer was a bit surprised. He glanced at the house’s group to verify that it was indeed the case.

“Elder Geng, has Brother Xiahou not come out yet?”

“No,” the named elder’s tone had turned a bit hard.

Bluesmoke’s organizers found the situation rather tricky. They had warned everyone before of the possibility of death. Any liability for casualties wasn’t their responsibility. But what’d they feared had really come to pass. If something had happened to Xiahou Xi, his house wasn’t an easy faction to deal with.

If it had happened to a faction like House Yan, that would have been much better. In the Eternal Divine Nation, House Xiahou was sailing in favorable winds; it was the foremost house, second only to the imperial family. Geniuses from a house as important as that were universally spoiled and valued.

Thankfully, their prior warning made it unlikely to be blamed even by the likes of House Xiahou.

“We’ll wait a bit more, then. Elder Geng, how long would you like?” the organizer was very courteous to House Xiahou’s elder.

“Thirty minutes should be enough. Xiahou Xi is a punctual boy. Something important must’ve delayed him.” Elder Geng was embarrassed to extend it any longer. After all, the organizers needed time to clean up after the month-long dig.

Thirty minutes overtime was plenty.

Alas, there was no shadow of the youth even after that time. The elder was thoroughly defeated. He’d never thought something would happen to Xiahou Xi in a place like this.

There was no doubt about it. Though the house had not yet sent news that his soul lamp had shattered, Elder Geng was almost certain that Xiahou Xi was dead.

“You lot, are you sure Xiahou Xi headed outside earlier than you did?” He queried the young geniuses of his house once more.

“Oh, yes, definitely.”

“Brother Xi had a very good harvest and he looked like he was in a good mood. But I did remember him mentioning a person he wanted to keep an eye on.”

“Who?” Elder Geng asked curiously.

“He didn’t say. Someone he didn’t like, I think. Perhaps a former opponent.”

Many of the participants wanted to leave with their winnings, right now. They didn’t want to stay in a place where the party was over. Everyone else began to head out.

“Wait just a moment!” Elder Geng suddenly went ahead of them. “Fellow daoists,” he cupped a fist to the Ten Divine Nations’ other factions. “Please, may I have your attention.”

“What is it?” there was some displeasure at House Xiahou’s elder blocking the way.

“I have something I’d like to say. House Xiahou has lost a young genius. We suspect that he has been ambushed on his way out. I kindly request that you do us the favor of helping us find the criminal. I suspect he is targeting the Ten Divine Nations as a whole, and is flaunting his actions at us!”

The last sentence had entirely been made up. He wanted to provoke them to action, nothing more. If they found a common enemy with him, they would surely assist to the best of their abilities.

But Elder Geng had evidently overestimated himself. The factions of the other divine nations didn’t care.

“You think too much, Elder Geng. I felt the festival went quite well and the atmosphere was very good. Our youngsters told us there was barely any fighting. Maybe he’s had an accident – not like that’s uncommon in the world of martial dao, eh? Why mind it so much, Elder Geng?”

“Definitely. Bluesmoke emphasized that there was a certain amount of risk, didn’t it? We were reminded not to engage in life-threatening clashes.”

“We’re all busy, Daoist Geng. Why waste our time and energy?”

House Xiahou was only important in the Eternal Divine Nation. The other divine nations’ factions didn’t need to give it any face.

Elder Geng was rather depressed by the lack of a reaction. He’d thought too highly of House Xiahou’s influence. Outside of the Eternal Divine Nation, the prevailing factions were largely ambivalent.

Of course, there were some that intentionally displayed their benevolence. “That’s easy enough. What if we ask everyone to take out their storage rings and examine them? The criminal must have Xiahou Xi’s ring, no?”

This wasn’t a very good suggestion, but Elder Geng was enticed anyway. However, it was almost impossible to get all of the young geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations to comply.

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

Chapter 1646: A Bet Won and A Future Planned

“Apologies, Elder Geng. We have no obligation to do as you say.”

“Agreed. We already asked around ourselves. No one in our family has crossed paths with Xiahou Xi.”

“Doaist Geng, most of the houses from Sunrise Divine Nation had no contact with him either. A few did see him hours ago, but he was secretive and appeared to be avoiding others.”

“Let it go, Doaist Geng. It’s an event of thousands of people. A few accidents were bound to happen.”

The loss hadn’t happened to them, naturally they weren’t taking it seriously. Death wasn’t a problem as long as it happened to other people. That was how the martial dao world had always been.

Casualties in other factions were none of their concerns. They would sooner mock House Xiahou for their misfortune than worry for them.

After all, the Ten Divine Nations weren’t a united front. Conflicts and rivalry between them meant that the web of relationships was a delicate one. Many within the Ten Divine Nations considered Xiahou Xi’s death nothing more than an interesting turn of events. That was why the three houses of Polylore Divine Nation had been mocked for their failure on Winterdraw Island.

A young man walked out from the crowd as the tension in the air grew palpable. He meekly approached Elder Geng.

“Senior Geng, I saw this storage ring when I was leaving. I picked it up because I didn’t know who it belonged to. I thought it was just a lucky find. Perhaps the ring...”

“Give it to me,” Elder Geng rushed out. If the lost ring did belong to Xiahou Xi, something bad must’ve happened. The odds that the genius had survived were slim.

The young man was a scion from a small faction. He nervously presented the storage ring. Elder Geng’s face fell as soon as he set his eyes on it. The design of the ring was unique to House Xiahou. He took it for a close consideration. It was Xiahou Xi’s.

Elder Geng flew into rage, his expression dark. "Who was it? Who killed him?! Admit your crime now! Coward, you coward! What kind of person would be scared to take his victim's possessions after killing him? Show yourself and let me look at you with my own eyes!" Elder Geng had forgotten himself in his fury.

Yan Qingsang couldn't be more shocked. He hadn't exited for long, had he? He'd felt guilty for leaving Brother Shao Yuan to face Xiahou Xi on his own. The deed had weighed heavily on his conscience. He'd been pleasantly surprised to see Jiang Chen make it out alive.

Now, the feeling gave way to ecstasy and shock. He moved closer to Jiang Chen and transmitted, "Did you do it?"

Jiang Chen played dumb. "Huh? What do you mean?"

Yan Qingsang paused. A crooked smile pulled at his lips when he realized what Jiang Chen was playing at. He was still stunned, but didn't push. He schooled his expression into indifference and turned his attention elsewhere.

Deep within his heart, he couldn't be more satisfied. Xiahou Xi was overweeningly arrogant. Yan Qingsang would be lying if he claimed not to hate the rival genius, and in fact would be the first to applaud if the fellow died.

He wanted to poke fun at Yan Jinnan. "Is this the man you've been fawning over? He was killed with no one the wiser!"

Given the circumstances, he stayed silent.

Elder Geng was furious, but there was nothing he could do. He had no leads, no information, no evidence. Any of the contestants could be the killer.

And, the killer was cunning. He'd made the decision to discard Xiahou Xi's ring instead. Whoever picked it up could serve as his red herring.

Elder Geng peered at the youth who'd turned in the ring. No matter how he looked, this young man couldn't have been capable of killing Xiahou Xi. He scowled at the young man. "What's your name?"

"This lowly man is Yanqing."

"Alright, I've heard you. You may go now." Elder Geng pocketed the ring. He had no intention of giving a reward for the information.

The youth gave up on being rewarded and scrambled away. He was rather worried that Elder Geng would turn on him if he overstayed his welcome.

Xiahou Xi's death caused a significant ripple, but not as big as the incident on Winterdraw Island. There was only one victim, and the Bluesmoke Isles had forewarned the participants.

Members of House Yan were curious, but they kept up a polite front. They didn't dare to provoke House Xiaohou at time like this. Elder He and Elder Quan led the group of scions away.

Yan Qingsang grabbed Jiang Chen. "Follow me, Brother Shao Yuan."

It was Jiang Chen's goal to get close to House Yan to begin with. He went along. "Stop dragging me around. I'll go with you."

Yan Qingsang snickered and gave Yan Jinnan a taunting look. "How about we check our finds now?"

"Why not?"

Jiang Chen messaged him hurriedly, "Let him take out his ores first. Don't let them see everything you've got. You only have to win."

He'd discovered close to three hundred pieces of ancient raw jadeite. According to his estimation, anything more than twenty was enough to win the bet. Yan Jinnan and the others had no talent in detecting ancient jade. It would take a miracle for them to win.

House Yan soon found their way to an ore processing shop.

Yan Qingsang won with only fifteen pieces of ancient jade. Despite the large amount of ore Yan Jinnan had discovered, most were of no value. He did acquire about a dozen ores containing ancient jade, but the quality was mediocre at best. The other two performed even worse.

As for Yan Qingsang, he presented fifteen ores containing ancient jade. He was the clear winner among the four of them. The thirty million stones were his.

Yan Jinnan and the other two cursed and swore, but they didn't dare to go back on their words. House Yan's family law was no joke.

One could lose, but one had to lose with dignity.

Elder He and Elder Quan were surprised by Yan Qingsang's finds. They exchanged a puzzled look. Once they were back at the manor, the two old men summoned Yan Qingsang.

"You've done well in the jade festival, Qingsang," greeted Elder He. "Congratulations on your remarkable performance and winning the thirty million stones."

"Hehe, what Brother Shao Yuan taught me about recognizing ancient jade is useful. They had to admit their defeat. Elder He, Shao Yuan's a wandering cultivator from a humble background. He's always wanted to gain a foothold in the jianghu. With his talents and familial heritage, he's bound to make a name for himself. Perhaps he can be of help to House Yan. What do you think?"

Elder He was surprised. "Do you mean you didn't win out of luck, but with the methods he taught you?"

"Not out of luck!" Yan Qingsang was honest with them. Luck might be useful in the short-term, but no one could rely on luck alone for a lifetime.

"Alright. What do you think, Elder Quan?" The truth spoke the loudest. Elder He was growing curious about this friend of Yan Qingsang's.

"If the wanderer didn't befriend Qingsang with ulterior motives, I believe that he can be of use to us," opined Elder Quan. "With what he is capable of, any other families would gladly bring him into their fold."

"What did you plan to do originally, Qingsang?" Elder He asked curiously.

“I wanted to invite him to join my side. After seeing what he’s capable of, I believe it’ll be a great loss to House Yan if we don’t keep him around.”

The two elders shared a look and waved a hand at him. “You may go, Qingsang. This isn’t a trivial matter. We’ll have to discuss it first.”

The two were shrewd foxes who’d lived for a long time. They wouldn’t make a decision lightly.

Once Yan Qingsang was out of earshot, Elder He sighed. “Yan Qingsang’s a strange one in the family. He’s at odds with the other geniuses, but close to a non-related wandering cultivator. I suspect that he’s gained even more than what he showed us.”

“Forget it, the house didn’t require them to turn in their finds,” Elder Quan spoke up. “Let him have the jade. If he has an encounter that helps him stand out from the geniuses, it’s a good thing for the family. To be honest, even though there are several geniuses with better talent in cultivation than Qingsang, none of them can compare to him in backbone, magnanimity, and grit.”

Elder He paused. “You think so as well?”

Elder Quan nodded. “I do. We may as well turn a blind eye to some of his actions. But who exactly is this Shao Yuan?”

“How about we question the young man and remind him to stay in line?” suggested Elder He.

“We can question him, but not interrogate him.” Elder Quan was cautious. “Young men like him were prideful. If he finds our attitudes hostile, it can do more harm than good.”

Elder He contemplated deeply. In the end, he nodded. “You’re right. It’ll be good if someone like him is on our side.”

Jiang Chen was called into the room not long after. He hid a smile. Yan Qingsang must’ve expressed his intention to recruit Jiang Chen and asked permission from the two elders.

They must’ve summoned him to test the waters. Jiang Chen sharpened his focus.

“It’s Brother Shao Yuan, isn’t it? I hear from Yan Qingsang that your secret method greatly helped him in searching for ancient jade. It’s a marvel that you’ve inherited such a remarkable talent. This old man is impressed.”

These were empty pleasantries. Jiang Chen nodded and smiled in response, but he didn’t say anything.

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Chapter 1647: The Princess Looks for a Consort

After a rather roundabout circuit of conversation, Elder He came to the crucial question with a chuckle. “Brother Shao Yuan, it’s a shame that you’re a mere wandering cultivator with your talent. Since you and Qingsang get along so fabulously, we would like to invite you to join House Yan. It will be beneficial to your development if you do.”

They had finally come to the most important topic.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Honorable elders, I've always admired the Ten Divine Nations. My cultivation simply hasn't offered me a good advancement opportunity until now. Therefore, I am thankful for your courteous invitation. May I ask though, what role would I be joining the house in?"

"I have no interest to do so as a servant of any kind, but I might consider it as a guest expert or advisor." These words actually a way of advancing in the form of retreat.

The two elders exchanged a look. Despite his honest and simple appearance, this young man was difficult to fool. They had indeed wanted to mislead and dupe him into becoming a servant for House Yan, but the young man's clear mind had enabled him to maintain a bottom line and his own goals in the face of a faction of the Ten Divine Nations.

"Haha, as long as you show off your talents after you join, we have more than enough room for an extra honored guest!"

The Ten Divine Nations' factions didn't easily invite others to be their guests. Only those with special expertise in certain fields had that luxury and right.

"Ah, if I'm given that position, then I am perfectly happy to affiliate myself under House Yan's wing." Jiang Chen offered a little underhanded praise.

Suddenly, there was loud arguing from outside.

"Yan He, Yan Quan, come out here this instant!" The thunderous voice came from House Xiahou's Elder Geng. His attempt to cause a ruckus back at Yellow Dragon Ridge had been unsuccessful.

"What's he doing here?" The elders exchanged a wary look. Though they were elders of House Yan, they nevertheless possessed a reflexive fear of House Xiahou.

"Let's go out and see."

They couldn't exactly avoid Xiahou Geng now that they'd been named. He was at their doorstep!

"Why are you so angry, Brother Geng? Come, have a seat." Elder He ignored the old man's dangerous expression, returning only a smile.

"I'm not interested in your fake civility," Elder Geng replied darkly. "Call out your house's Yan Qingsang."

"What has Qingsang done?" Elder He couldn't resist asking.

"Hmph! I suspect that he's the culprit responsible for ambushing Xiahou Xi. My investigation has told me that Yan Qingsang's made a lot of money off of his excavations. I wonder, did he get all that jade by himself?"

Xiahou Geng's information gathering was admittedly quite capable. It wasn't easy to find out so much detail in so short an amount of time.

Elders Quan traded a look with Elder He. "Brother Geng," he smiled wryly, "how could Qingsang's strength possibly threaten Xiahou Xi? I think you've listened to too much hearsay."

"Ridiculous. We asked many people in our investigation. They told us that Yan Qingsang appeared near the place where Xiahou Xi disappeared."

This logic was almost irrational in its rashness. Was a passerby really classifiable as the culprit?

Yan Qingsang was quickly summoned and informed of the accusation. “Honored elders,” he protested, “you think far too highly of me. My cultivation is far too insufficient to ambush Xiahou Xi. Would I really be Yan Qingsang if I could beat him?”

He was indeed considerably weaker than the late cultivator.

“Hmph. Why were you nearby then?” Xiahou Geng probed icily.

“Where do you mean by ‘nearby’, Elder Geng? I’ve been to many places over the past month. I never stay in a particular spot for very long, and I exited early to boot. I don’t think the time matches very well, right? I haven’t seen him.” Yan Qingsang’s denial was clear, logical, and evidence-based.

Even Xiahou Geng found it difficult to rebut the youth. Though the old man was displeased, he had no proof with which to take further action. His interrogation thus complete, he stormed out in a huff.

House Yan could do nothing about Xiahou Geng’s overbearing behavior. Elders He and Quan were both quite frustrated. They’d been called out by name, but couldn’t do much more than sulk.

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The jade festival was over, but the fervor in Miracle City surrounding ancient jade didn't dissipate.

Every jade store in the city was bustling with activity. Every now and then, there was the explosive news of yet another discovery of ancient jade – sometimes of supreme rank.

Talk of so-and-so finding another primordial heritage was the fastest type to propagate.

The entire city had lost itself to this crazed atmosphere. Auctions and sales happened all over the place. Even House Yan’s contingent couldn't avoid being affected by the fervor. They joined in the activity several times.

Certainly, there’d been a small group of lucky winners in the ancient jade festival who’d received amazing heritages. Many were admiring and jealous of their fortune. Some of these heritages were so potent and valuable that not even the Ten Divine Nations’ geniuses had anything like them.

“Big news, big news! Have you heard? The princess of the Bluesmoke Isles is looking for a prince consort. The imperial family promises that if a Ten Divine Nations young genius manages to win her heart, he will be presented with a piece of ancient jade of the best possible quality. It will contain a primordial heritage that’s difficult to come across in ten thousand years.”

Miracle City was thrown into an even greater frenzy after the news.

The marriage of a princess was an important event. That it was taking place after the ancient jade festival made it even more so. The exciting news fermented in the hearts of many of the young scions. They could no longer sit still.

At House Yan’s residence, Yan Qingsang was a bit eager himself. “Brother Shao Yuan, do you think I’m a good match for Bluesmoke’s princess?”

“Sure, and it would be to Bluesmoke’s advantage rather than yours. But I trust that many of the geniuses who are here think the same as you. They might not be interested in the princess much, but they definitely lust after ancient jade. The princess seems more like an accessory in this case.” Jiang Chen’s words rang true.

“What are you saying? Do you think I’m the type of guy to sell out my love for profit? But if the princess looks like a toad, then I think I’ll have to pass.”

“Why don’t you go see what she looks like? What if she’s as pretty as a fairy, her face worth nations and cities?”

“Haha, I’m a bit worried about that. I’m so handsome that I’m afraid she may fall in love with me at first sight. Wouldn’t I be at a disadvantage then?” Yan Qingsang was mildly narcissistic.

Jiang Chen was at an instant loss for words.

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In the inner court of Miracle City’s palace, several representatives of the imperial family were anxiously preparing something. They wanted to take advantage of the golden opportunity offered by the jade festival to maximize Bluesmoke’s reach.

The occasion of a princess picking her consort was momentous enough. Thus, every detail had to be readied to perfection.

A pale eunuch came out from deeper in.

“Imperial Prince, the princess has refused to eat for several days. She seems very resistant to our matchmaking.”

“Haha, Eunuch Jia, you should know the princess’s temperament after serving her all these years. But you’ve served the imperial family for even longer, yes? Which are you more loyal to, the imperial family or the princess?” a middle-aged imperial representative asked with a smile.

The eunuch colored immediately. “The imperial family, of course! My loyalty to the princess is the same, is it not? Considering that she belongs to the imperial family...”

“Haha, the princess... I hope she knows what’s good for her. My royal brother has raised her to her current prominence, but that won’t last if she doesn’t cooperate.”

“She’s not actually part of the imperial bloodline. She doesn’t share our heart and vision,” another imperial relative remarked. “Alas, I wonder what His Majesty is thinking. This princess is as cold as ice. She pretty much ignores anybody. If she wasn’t so pretty, even a dog wouldn’t want to touch her.”

“That’s enough. She was given her status by His Majesty himself. His Majesty has very high hopes for her. She is beautiful and talented. A bit icy, but the large factions’ scions adore that kind of trait, no?”

“Haha, I suppose that’s true. I hear many of those young geniuses are strangely masochistic. They have no interest in easily affectionate girls, and chase after the hard-to-get, frosty ones instead.”

“So our princess should prove quite attractive, then!”

“As long as she goes with the program, of course.”

None of the imperial family members seemed to respect the princess terribly much. In fact, they didn't seem to value her at all in their discussion.

If the princess wasn't of the imperial bloodline, did that mean she had been found somewhere?

Within the courtyard of the imperial palace, the Bluesmoke Isles' princess stood at her windowsill in snow-white robes. She gazed into the distance, her eyes quiet and bleak. It was as if she was entirely separate from the world.

There was an occasional flash of sadness in her muted look, as if some past sorrow racked her remote heart from time to time.

It's been so many years, and I'm in this far-off land. I wonder if those back home are alright? Did he escape that calamity? The princess had a lot on her mind. Though her body was within the palace, her heart drifted several million miles off.

Even though she was nominally a member of the imperial family, she'd never felt a sense of belonging in all her years here. She missed her homeland, and all the familiar faces that drifted in her memories.

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

Chapter 1648: A Martial Competition for a Hand in Marriage

House Yan's contingent had planned on returning to the Eternal Divine Nation right after the jade festival. However, its younger generation was champing at the bit to participate in the princess consort selection. The rewards were quite handsome.

The elders conferred among themselves before coming to a decision. Because nothing untoward had happened during the jade festival, another few days wasn't going to hurt. Why not let the youngsters enjoy themselves in the coming festivities?

If one of them managed to take the princess home with him, so much the better. After all, none of the geniuses who'd come to the jade festival were top talents in the house, apart from Huang'er.

They weren't really eligible to intermarry with the other great houses. If a marriage could be arranged with a second-rate faction like Bluesmoke, the union would offer a psychological and material advantage. Whyever not?

The Bluesmoke Isles played up the atmosphere as much as possible. The process of picking the bridegroom was one of the most disappointingly common – via a martial tournament.

However, such a crude way also tended to draw the most attention.

The requirement to participate was exactly the same as the ancient jade festival. A young genius in the same age range, with the same qualifications. In fact, anyone who'd participated in that festival didn't need to re-register to enter. Those that hadn't needed only to pass a cursory inspection.

The young geniuses were well and truly riled up.

Rumor and gossip about Bluesmoke's princess began to circulate. All of them uniformly described her as ravishingly beautiful. Because of this, interest in her grew even more intense.

Jiang Chen felt Yan Qingsang's palpable enthusiasm over the past few days. He seemed dead set on achieving his goal of winning the princess.

"Brother Shao Yuan, can you be honest with me? How likely do you think I'll come out on top for this tournament?" the young man asked for what seemed like the eighteenth time.

"I say Brother Yan, you talk too much. If you want to know the answer to that, why not make a real attempt? Haven't you seen all the geniuses who've come from the Ten Divine Nations? If you don't know which of them will be your fellow competitors, going to see them for yourself is the best course of action."

"Ah..." Yan Qingsang sighed softly. "Several dozen factions have come from the Ten Divine Nations. About that many of their young geniuses are definitely stronger than me. If I were as strong as you, brother..."

His eyes suddenly lit up at this. He opened his door and peered about, then closed it and returned secretively. "About that Xiahou Xi..." he intoned in a low voice.

Jiang Chen furrowed his brow. "I told you, I didn't see him."

"Haha, you were hiding your true strength all this time, eh?" Yan Qingsang punched Jiang Chen's shoulder playfully with a chuckle. "Still, I'm quite satisfied whenever I remember that arrogant prick is dead."

He'd been bullied quite a bit by Xiahou Xi. It was immensely gratifying to dwell upon the latter's ignoble death. The occurrence had taught Yan Qingsang a bit more about his new friend as well.

He'd thought Brother Shao Yuan was simply a knowledgeable scholar of ancient jade. He'd never given much consideration to his brother's martial prowess. Now he knew that Shao Yuan was superior to him in this aspect as well.

Yan Qingsang had firmly believed that he needed to build true rapport with the young man and bring him into the family fold. Brother Shao Yuan would be a big help in many aspects of his life and future. If his friend made a name for himself someday, Yan Qingsang would share in that honor.

The young man from House Yan sighed, then made an unexpected remark. "Brother, I know you're somewhat interested in my cousin, but it really is impossible between you two. I hear that Bluesmoke's princess is dazzling and elegant, comparable in her beauty to the Ten Divine Nations' sixteen golden hairpins. If I can't make it, maybe you'll have a better chance! Aside from a select few guys like Ye Zhou from Polylore, it's a cinch for you to beat pretty much everyone here!"

A man that could kill Xiahou Xi was sure to be leaps and bounds stronger than his victim. The conjecture above was reasonable in light of that.

Jiang Chen rolled his eyes. "Brother Yan, please don't play the matchmaker for me. I have other things I'm occupied with. Don't drag me into this, alright?"

“Come, come,” Yan Qingsang cackled. “I hear they’re officially starting the competition today. Only small fry will be fighting in the beginning, but maybe we’ll see an expert or two as well. Let’s go watch from the sidelines first. There’s a month in this tournament. More skillful cultivators like us should make an entrance later on!”

The place set for the competition was Miracle City’s arena. All twelve stages were opened to the public.

Starting from this day forth, anyone who won ten matches in a row in an arena had the right to present himself to the princess – as stated by the Bluesmoke government. If anyone could remain undefeated after a month, he would be among the suitors available for the princess’s personal selection.

If only one did, he would become the bridegroom by default. If many did, either the princess or an elimination match would remove the extra candidates.

The rules were far from well-defined.

But Jiang Chen saw through the ruse. These arrangements were safeguards against the possibility that the emerging winner wasn’t from the Ten Divine Nations. Bluesmoke’s plans would be all for naught then.

Bluesmoke was clearly planning to use the so-called martial tournament to marry its princess into the Ten Divine Nations, which would increase its own social status.

Jiang Chen was sharp enough to notice Bluesmoke’s noteworthy ambition. It was understandable. Any faction or nation naturally wanted to become stronger. In the world of martial dao, anyone who was satisfied with the status quo was in a dangerous situation.

Only through continuous advancement could increase one’s likelihood of survival.

Jiang Chen was affected by the sight of the hardworking rabble in the various stages. They charged in with an ardor that put their anxious misgivings on full display.

Bluesmoke wants to connect with the Ten Divine Nations, and these wandering cultivators and smaller factions want to latch onto Bluesmoke in turn. Such is life in the world of martial dao.

He had little interest in observing bouts at such a low level of expertise. In fact, he found the exchanged blows positively boring. When he tried to stand up and leave though, he felt Yan Qingsang tug on his arm.

“Don’t go yet. We haven’t even seen the princess. Why’re you in such a hurry?”

“You wanted to see the princess, not me,” Jiang Chen huffed.

“I want you to accompany me though.” Yan Qingsang sounded giddy. Jiang Chen didn’t know how to respond to his friend; the young man right here and the stubborn youth back at the Jade Revel Lodge were barely the same person. Everyone had a side to them that most of the world didn’t know.

Jiang Chen didn’t refuse Yan Qingsang’s request. He knew that if he wanted to get closer to House Yan, Yan Qingsang would be a big part of that plan. Thus, he was inclined to be accommodating in many things.

Yan Qingsang's enthusiasm ran so high that he wasn't quite sated even after an entire day.

Does he really want to be in love that badly?

When they returned to House Yan's residence, Huang'er was taking a walk near the entrance. She came to a stop when she saw the two youths arriving home, looking at Yan Qingsang with a half-smile. "I hear you went to win the princess' hand in marriage, cousin. How did you do today?"

Yan Qingsang took shameless pride in the time he'd spent today. "I did go to the arena, but I didn't participate. Experts like us need to wait a bit in reserve, you know."

"Us? Plural?" Huang'er glanced at Jiang Chen, her smile widening a little.

Jiang Chen shrugged. "Don't listen to his lies, Miss Huang'er. He's positively besotted with this entire thing and just happened to drag me along for it."

"No, Brother Shao Yuan. You shouldn't slander me!" Yan Qingsang protested. "I'm hardly besotted. And hey, stop pretending to be a gentleman in front of my cousin. Let's go inside already." The young man was fiercely vigilant when it came to Huang'er.

Jiang Chen laughed, but said nothing more. Inside House Yan's temporary residence, he and Huang'er treated each other as guest and host. It was impossible to detect anything more between them.

He knew clearly that Huang'er was being secretly watched.

When Yan Qingsang called on Jiang Chen to accompany him to the arena the next day, he was met with a vehement refusal.

Yan Qingsang headed there himself. Jiang Chen meanwhile, returned to the inn where Hua Ming was. His student had been very obedient indeed. He had focused single-mindedly on cultivation. The boy was overjoyed to see his master once more.

"You must've gotten a lot at the ancient jade festival, master!"

"I suppose I did, and I found a partner from the Eternal Divine Nation. I gave half my winnings to him. Still, half of a fortune is rather sizable in its own right."

"Eternal Divine Nation? Which faction?" Hua Ming asked curiously.

"House Yan," Jiang Chen stated offhandedly.

"Why House Yan? I hear House Xiahou is the strongest faction in Eternal Divine Nation," Hua Ming blurted out.

"Haha, yes. House Xiahou is the strongest right now. It certainly won't be in the near future," Jiang Chen smiled. "Hua Ming, we must stay here a bit longer. Perhaps we'll go to the Eternal Divine Nation after that. Prepare yourself for that eventuality."

"Huh? Eternal Divine Nation?" Hua Ming's eyes lit up. "That's wonderful. My biggest dream is to someday go to the Ten Divine Nations and see the most marvelous sights in Myriad Abyss for myself."

Jiang Chen knew that in Hua Ming's understanding, the Ten Divine Nations were tantamount to the sacred lands of Myriad Abyss Island. He wasn't in a rush to change his student's preconceptions about the world.

Such things needed personal experience and exploration over time. It was extremely difficult to forcibly alter a worldview in a convincing way.

After making sure Hua Ming was fine and settled down, Jiang Chen promised to meet up with his disciple in another few days. He gave the boy a few martial dao pointers before going back to House Yan's residence.

For the next while, Jiang Chen would occasionally accompany Yan Qingsang to the arena to watch the fights. Most of the time though, he remained at House Yan's temporary residence to cultivate his own martial dao.

He had planned to refine a cauldron of Emperor Supremacy Pills, but no opportunity or good environment to do so had presented itself to him. The superb specimens of Heavencloud Ganoderma he'd obtained back in Oriole Valley were ripe for conversion.

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

Chapter 1649: The Identity of the Princess

Jiang Chen devoted himself to cultivating every day. His discipline impressed the elders in House Yan, who'd been observing him in secret. They approved of the young man more and more.

At first, they worried that he might've approached Yan Qingsang with ulterior motives. Now, it seemed clear that he was merely a diligent wandering cultivator trying to gain the support of a large faction. He worked on improving himself and his cultivation with a single-minded focus that even many scions from aristocratic families didn't possess.

Jiang Chen knew Elder He and Elder Quan were secretly watching him, but he pretended to not know and took no actions to change that.

In a hidden room in the manor, Elder He sighed. "Look at him, Elder Quan, then look at the youths in our family. There's a stark contrast with how they treat their cultivation. Our youths have grown complacent. They lacked the urgency, vigilance, and hunger of the wandering cultivators. This young man has great potential."

Elder Quan echoed his sentiment, "Compared to Shao Yuan, Yan Qingsang's too headstrong, Yan Jinnan too frivolous, and the others too meek. If you ask me, only a handful of geniuses in the family, like Zhenhuai, can rival him. Elder He, we should really recruit him and have him be of use to House Yan. Otherwise someone as talented as he will easily find his way to success by turning to the other aristocratic families. We'll lose this diamond in the rough then."

"We should give it more thought. I'm worried that he's approached us with an unknown agenda."

"What can it be?" asked Elder Quan. "To get close to Huang'er?"

"I can't say for sure. It's merely a feeling. But perhaps my instinct is wrong this time. He doesn't seem like a lascivious man. He's aware of Huang'er, but not obsessed with her. Not even the tournament for the princess' hand has piqued his interest. Besides, many people on Myriad Abyss Island know about Huang'er. Someone as smart as Shao Yuan couldn't be an exception. It's unlikely for him to foolishly covet her at the risk of making enemies out of House Yan and House Xiahou."

"Elder He is right. It defies logic for Huang'er to be his ultimate goal. There are sixteen beauties in the Ten Divine Nations. Even if he wants to attach himself to a stronger faction, he wouldn't pick the unattainable Huang'er."

Elder He laughed. "Perhaps we're really being overly sensitive."

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Within the palace of Miracle City, members of the royal family gathered.

"Tell the princess to come here, Jia-gonggong."

"This servant has already done so. She'll be here soon."

A young imperial descendant scoffed. "Who does she think she is? Go get her again!"

"Understood." Jia-gonggong returned after a moment with a young woman in tow. Snow-white fabric covered her tall and slim frame. Her arrival brought with her a cool brilliance that lit up the room.

The royals swallowed hard in face of her grace. They had to admit that the princess was strikingly elegant and beautiful. She was not of the royal blood and therefore, the royals didn't bother to hide their predatory gazes when they considered her.

Without a word, the princess took her seat, her delicate eyebrows knitted together. She ignored those assembled like they didn't exist.

An older imperial prince cleared his throat. "Princess Bi, the tournament has started. Many have requested for you to put in a showing. They would like an opportunity to admire your beauty and grace."

"I'm not interested," she responded with steel in her voice. "There are many princesses in the royal family. Pick anyone else to make an appearance."

"You were handpicked by His Majesty, Princess Bi. Only your unparalleled beauty can conquer the geniuses and make them fall for you. This is an imperial order for the good of the royal family and the Bluesmoke Isles. Besides, isn't it a good thing for you to find a good husband?"

The princess stayed as frigid as the cold moon and said nothing, but her rejection was clearly expressed.

"You're making it difficult for us, Your Highness. Don't forget that the royal family has raised you and provided the necessities of life over the past couple of years, as well as resources for cultivation. Now that the royal family requires your assistance, how can you refuse to help?"

"I will always remember everything that His Majesty's given me. If he wishes to take my life, I will not resist in the slightest. However, not even he can force me to do anything against my will."

The princess would not be swayed.

“You...” The royals were rendered speechless. They were helpless against someone who refused to listen to any reason.

“Princess Bi, why are you so against the idea? There must be a reason. Men and women should be married after a certain age. You may have great potential in cultivation, but you can’t say that the geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations are all beneath you, can you? Countless women in Myriad Abyss can only dream about being married to someone from the Ten Divine Nations.”

“Please tell His Majesty that he’s free to take my life if he wishes, but I’ll never surrender myself to a forced marriage.” The princess rose and walked off further into the palace without looking back.

“Halt!” snapped the imperial prince. “Princess Bi, the royal family has never wronged you. Since you refuse to listen to reason and gentle words, don’t blame us for resorting to a more forceful approach!”

She didn’t even pause. The threats didn’t register at all as she disappeared from everyone’s view.

“This servant will try to convince her, masters...” Jia-gonggong was frantic with panic. He too thought that the princess had been too stubborn this time.

Marriage was written in the cards for a woman. There was nothing bad about the tournament. Even a princess of the Bluesmoke Isles shouldn’t find it a humiliating end in being married off to the Ten Divine Nations.

Jia-gonggong was too scared to face the royals’ fury. He hurriedly followed the princess into her room.

“Your Highness, you’re dooming yourself in disobeying the royal clan.” Jia-gonggong’s tone was anxious. He’d grown to care about the princess after serving her for many years.

“Are you going to force me to get married as well, Jia-gonggong?” she asked coolly. There was a trace of helplessness in her frosty eyes.

“This servant would never! But the emperor put great emphasis on this tournament for your hand. If the princess refuses to cooperate, this servant shudders to think what they’ll do to you. The emperor’s fond of you, Your Highness, but this marriage was part of his plan. If you disobey his will, not even the combined force of everyone on Bluesmoke Isles will be able to save you.”

“I know.” She sighed, sounding a little lost. “I can only repay the emperor’s favor with my life.”

“You mustn’t, Your Highness,” Jia-gonggong rushed out. “There’s hope as long as you live. Even if you’re unwilling to give your hand to the winner of the tournament, why don’t you put in an appearance? There are a lot of geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations participating. Even if you have no interest in marriage now, maybe you’ll find someone you like after meeting them. You can always find excuses to turn the marriage down when no one strikes your fancy. I believe that the geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations won’t force a marriage against your will. They are all ferociously proud. They won’t shamelessly chase after you if you don’t like them.”

The princess looked at him with a frown. “If I spoil the marriage, what will His Majesty do to me?”

“This servant doesn’t know. If you don’t make an appearance though, the consequences may be too terrible to endure.” The eunuch sighed. “The emperor has invested a lot of effort into cultivating you. Perhaps he’ll arrange another marriage should this one fail. If the tournament ends with no success, maybe you can travel around the Ten Divine Nations to gain some worldly experience. Perhaps you’ll happen upon a husband you like? This servant doesn’t know the source of Your Highness’ resistance, but this cannot continue on.”

“I understand, Jia-gonggong. You are dismissed. Tell them I’ll consider making an appearance in a few days, but I’ll make my own decision in finding a husband. No one can force me into that.”

Jia-gonggong was delighted by the compromise. “Understood. This servant will convey as such to the imperial princes.”

Once the eunuch left, a trace of concern resurfaced in the princess’ beautiful eyes.

If Jiang Chen had present, he would’ve been greatly taken aback to see the princess. She was none other than Ling Bi’er, who’d gone missing for many years.

She’d wandered the world since her escape from Regal Pill Palace. The heritage she’d gained in the Paramount Realm boosted her strength significantly.

While being chased by enemies, she’d happened upon a mysterious ancient formation. She accidentally activated it and, before she realized what was happening, she was transported to Myriad Abyss Island.

Her destination wasn’t Winterdraw Island like Jiang Chen’s, but a different region.

Unfortunately, she was dropped into the midst of a battle. In the heat of the moment, it was the emperor of the Bluesmoke Isles who’d saved her.

When he realized the remarkable potential she possessed, he put forth a great deal of effort into furthering her accomplishments. Her cultivation progressed by leaps and bounds over the past few years.

Of course, the emperor had his agenda. He saw her unique grace as an opportunity. He wanted to arrange a marriage between Ling Bi’er and a scion from the Ten Divine Nations in order to foster a closer relationship between Bluesmoke and the divine nations.

In other words, she was merely one of the emperor’s pawns.

Though she was talented and clever, she had been too young to understand the minutiae of politics. When she’d realized it, she was already trapped in the cage of the emperor’s making.

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

Chapter 1650: It’s Her?!

Over the years in the Bluesmoke Isles, Ling Bi’er had improved rapidly in martial dao, thanks to an admittedly large amount of resources from the royal family. She was never completely at ease, but she was grateful to the emperor.

Even after she found out about the emperor's true intentions, she couldn't find it in herself to hate him. After all, she'd been saved by the royal family and had gained a lot from them. She wasn't the ungrateful sort who would bite the hand that fed her.

Even though she was vehemently against the tournament for her hand, she didn't resent the royal family as a result. She was a clever woman. She put her mind to finding solution once she'd calmed down.

What Jia-gonggong said made a lot of sense. It wouldn't do her any good to disobey the royal family and embarrass them now. She had to cooperate with them to some extent during the tournament.

Should the winner be a cultivator from the Ten Divine Nations, as long she refused to accede on pain of death, it wasn't in the divine nations' nature to force her into marriage. Even if it did come to that, she would sooner die than concede.

Ling Bi'er had made up her mind.

She would take things one step at a time and cross the bridge when she came to it. There was no changing the fact that she was trapped. What she should do was to wait for an opportunity rather than lose herself in anger.

She'd grown resilient after the destruction of her sect and being on the run without a place to call home. There was still a pillar of faith supporting her throughout the trials of life. It prevented her from losing all hope and just giving up.

That faith came from her connection to the faraway human domain, to the Myriad Domain, and to the Regal Pill Palace. It was her bond with her father, her sister, and of course, her junior brother, whose smile and voice remained vivid in her memory even after ten years.

The junior brother who'd gone through hell with her in the Paramount Realm, the one who'd saved her father many years ago.

Years had passed. Had the tragedy befalling the Regal Pill Palace come to an end? Were those she cared about alive and well? She didn't have a clue, and there was nothing she wanted more than to find answers.

With the resources from the Bluesmoke Isles, her martial dao progressed at amazing speed and she reached initial great emperor.

She might not stand out among the youths on Myriad Abyss Island, but she'd started cultivating later than those geniuses. She'd broken through from sage realm to great emperor in only a few years, which was nothing short of a miracle.

Even though she was far from peerless in the human domain, she looked forward to the day she reached peak great emperor or even half-step empyrean. Nothing would stop her from returning to the human domain then.

She wanted revenge, but what she wanted more was to find those she cared about.

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Yan Qingsang came to Jiang Chen in high spirits. "You can't achieve your goals overnight, brother. Stop cultivating for a day and fight in the tournament with me."

"You've finally decided to participate?"

"Of course. It's been more than twenty day and I'll be too late if I don't partake now. I hear that two hundred or so have already won ten matches in a row."

"Can I refuse?" Jiang Chen smiled wryly.

"You can't," Yan Qingsang responded without hesitation. "You've got to come with me."

Jiang Chen sighed inwardly. The choice was out of his hand. He was getting a little bored after many days of cultivating, anyways. This could be a break to let off some steam.

Besides, Yan Qingsang had been babbling about the mysterious princess of Bluesmoke Isles every day. It was getting on his nerves.

The princess was finally going to make an appearance. Even Jiang Chen was somewhat curious about how beautiful she must be, to willfully refuse to make an appearance until so many days into the event.

As soon as he walked out of the door, a chipper voice sounded from behind him. "I hear that you're going to fight in the tournament today, cousin Qingsang. May I join in the fun?"

Huang'er's voice gave Jiang Chen pause. Yan Qingsang chuckled, but both gaped in unison when they turned around.

Huang'er was dressed in men's clothes! The vigor of her expression completed the look of a handsome man. The only problem was her face. She still looked a little too beautiful as a man.

"What? Can't I go?" She beamed merrily at Yan Qingsang.

"Uh, Huang'er, are you gonna fight as well? Why are you dressed like this?"

She gave him a lazy smile. "If I join the fight, you'll never stand a chance of winning."

Yan Qingsang shrugged. "I'm fine as long as the elders agree to let you go. Come on." He threw Jiang Chen a glance, silently telling him to leave Huang'er alone.

Jiang Chen was exasperated by Yan Qingsang's guarded reaction, but didn't comment on it. He knew there were still several people watching Huang'er's every move. It would be unwise for him to say anything.

The three of them arrived at the arena. Jiang Chen noticed that there were several new rules. Participants who hadn't fought before needed to earn ten consecutive wins in the preliminary contest, after which they could enter the intermediary stage.

Only then were they considered worthy of the princess' consideration.

For geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations like Yan Qingsang, it wasn't difficult to earn ten consecutive wins. After only a few hours, he'd won five matches in a row.

At that moment, the tournament was put on hold. The crowd surrounding the arena increased considerably. The Bluesmoke's royal family walked out on an elevated platform. A middle-aged imperial prince pressed his palms down, silently indicating for the crowd to quiet and let him speak.

The chatter died down.

"Is the princess coming out?" Most of them were here for her. After days of petitioning and waiting on their part, was the princess finally going to put in an appearance?

Anticipation was clear on their faces.

Yan Qingsang jumped off the stage and stood by Jiang Chen, winking at his brother. "The princess is coming."

"Alright, I know you've been looking forward to this moment." Jiang Chen shrugged nonchalantly. He'd only come to keep Yan Qingsang company. He wasn't interested in the princess at all.

Surprisingly, it was Huang'er who seemed to anticipate the development more. She had an amused smile on her face and her arms crossed before her chest.

Yan Qingsang glanced at her and asked curiously, "Why do you look more excited than me?"

He was puzzled as Huang'er had always been sullenly unhappy. It usually looked like nothing in the world interested her. Why had the princess piqued her interest so?

In fact, Huang'er had significantly lightened up after the jade festival. She seemed like a completely different person; Yan Qingsang couldn't figure out what could have caused her change.

Perhaps getting some fresh air at the festival had brightened her mood. That was his only guess.

The imperial prince announced, "Thank you all for your enthusiastic participation, honored guests. The tournament allows us to see how remarkable the young geniuses of Myriad Abyss are. Your passion surprises and delights us in the Bluesmoke Isles. I know you've been looking forward to the day that our princess finally agrees to make an appearance. She's coming to cheer on all of the young geniuses!"

A thunderous cheer erupted beneath the stage.

"All hail the princess!"

"Your Highness! We want to see the princess!" The level of excitement went off the charts. After all, everyone was here to fight for her.

Days had passed without even a glimpse of her. Speculations were exchanged and passed around in her absence. The mysterious princess was finally here!

Their riled-up curiosity was finally going to be sated. The contestants couldn't be more excited.

"Let us welcome the beautiful and irresistible Princess Bi!" The imperial prince declared in a dramatic tone, making a flourish with his arm.

"Ohhh!" The crowd was exploded with enthusiasm, bodies tensed with anticipation.

Guided by imperial prince's outstretched arm, a number of uniformly and finely dressed maids took the stage first. Every one of the maids was stunning, captivating the crowd's attention.

If even the maids were this beautiful, how striking must the princess be? Even Yan Qingsang stared at the stage, his neck craning and eyes unblinking.

A thin layer of smoke rose from behind the elevated stage, covering the floor with a silver glow, soft and elegant like moonlight. A woman dressed in white slowly sashayed onto the stage, bringing with her the fragrance of an osmanthus tree.

Her dress was whiter than snow, wrapping around her body like a blossoming orchid. She held herself like a plum blossom flowering proudly in winter...

Everyone sucked in a breath, hearts contracting violently. They couldn't peel their eyes away from the princess. More than ninety percent of the people present felt inferior at the sight of her.

Jiang Chen's eyes widened. A peal of lightning struck him when he got a good look at her face.

It's her! His head spun and almost stopped functioning. He didn't expect the princess to be senior sister Ling Bi'er! He'd been worried about her all these years.

When the Regal Pill Palace fell, she'd escaped and disappeared without a trace. Even after the sect was rebuilt and the news of its reconstruction got out, she never showed up again. Sometimes, even Jiang Chen wondered if she'd passed away, but now...