

Three Realms 1671

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

Chapter 1671: The Trinorary Sages' Puzzle

Everyone restored their original expectations for Yan Qingsang. He was just a two-bit character in House Yan after all! There was no need to pay him much attention.

After every question, Ziju Min secretly focused his attention in Yan Qingsang. When the young man failed to reply time and time again, he felt rather disappointed. He'd thought there was an opportunity to excavate a pill dao genius. Perhaps the youth really had just been lucky.

Xiahou Ying was very pleased at Yan Qingsang's now lackluster performance. House Yan trash is just trash after all. He lucked out on the previous answers, but he's wilted now. Yan Qingsang is just an ant, so I suppose it wasn't easy for him to even make the showing he did at the beginning. Glad he knows his place, hmph...

She had no desire to see Yan Qingsang perform with any degree of excellence.

They were now on the seventh question. Jiang Chen's strategy of playing dead hadn't changed. If Yan Qingsang was too showy in the competition and garnered unwanted attention, that would be a tremendously bad thing.

His friend needed some time out of the limelight to cool off. Some reverse acceleration was necessary. It was ultimately a disadvantage for Yan Qingsang to attract outside scrutiny.

Jiang Chen's silence for five questions in a row made the Yan genius anxious, but the young man was largely helpless about the affair.

There was no reaction for the eighth question either. Now that Jade Lake Sect had answered three questions correctly, they'd obtained thirty points, surpassing House Yan as current first place.

House Feng, House Beigong, and the Starlight Sect had managed to answer one question each. House Yan was second place with twenty points.

No one was particularly surprised at Jade Lake Sect taking the lead. The sect had deep pill dao foundations.

It seemed that Yan Qingsang had bumbled upon the right answer twice in a row, but he had nothing more to show after that. Finally, House Yan was behaving like everyone expected. Wasn't this more their real speed?

Yan Jinnan's clouded mood began to brighten once more. He gazed at Yan Qingsang mockingly.

"Looks like your luck's run out, Qingsang," he smiled. "I'm glad you didn't manage to scam me into putting stones out."

Yan Qingsang glared back with a roll of his eyes. "I can do whatever I want because I have money to. You're both useless and poor. What can you do other than making snide comments? Worthless!" He spared no courtesy whatsoever for Yan Jinnan.

Yan Zhenhuai furrowed his brow as well. "Be quiet, Jinnan. The house's reputation and name is at stake, and the only thing on your mind is making fun of others?"

Yan Jinnan played innocent. "I just think Yan Qingsang was being malicious from the start, Brother Zhenhuai. He intentionally wanted to drag us into it to scam our stones!"

"So? Did you put any in?" Yan Zhenhuai retorted icily.

Yan Jinnan had nothing to say to that.

"If not, then shut up and watch. Even if you don't want to cheer for the house, you shouldn't lose us face by behaving like this." Yan Zhenhuai was thoroughly disappointed by Yan Jinnan.

How could a person like that be counted among the house's geniuses? Internally, he struck Yan Jinnan's name from his list of family hopefuls.

"Enough. Everyone, please be quiet. Here is the ninth question. This is a question about spirit herb combinations. We will provide twenty-seven kinds of spirit herbs. You may combine any number of them as you like. If you can create three recipes, you may raise your hand to answer."

Images of twenty-seven spirit herbs appeared before the audience.

Jiang Chen swept his eyes across them. His brain computed all the possibilities at a rapid pace and quickly found what he was looking for. However, he turned to Yan Zhenhuai this time. "Brother Zhenhuai, raise your hand to answer. I'll answer it."

According to the rules, only two were allowed to raise their hands from each faction, but the actual answer could be given by anyone present.

Yan Zhenhuai blinked, but raised his hand without hesitation upon seeing Jiang Chen's serious manner.

Jiang Chen wanted to answer himself so as not to sell out Yan Qingsang. If Yan Qingsang were to answer this question, his performance would be too incredible to ignore. It was better that he take the flak for this one.

The speed with which Yan Zhenhuai raised his hand defied everyone else's expectations. The rest of the crowd was still knee-deep in serious research, attempting to come up with their first recipe. Were House Yan's members going to utterly defy expectations today?

Ziju Min glanced at Yan Zhenhuai with mild surprise. This genius hadn't gone to the ancient jade festival. Thus, there was no heritage to explain his potential skill. Had he solved this difficult question that quickly? If he'd relied on his own strength, then his pill dao talent was terrifying indeed.

Yan Zhenhuai smiled serenely under the collective gazes of the crowd. "I raised my hand, but Brother Shao Yuan here will be answering. Come, Brother Shao Yuan." He inclined his head ever so slightly at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen stood up with his own smile. "Master Ziju," he cupped a fist, "this question is a famous puzzle from the ancient times. Its name is the Trinonary Sages' Puzzle."

"Oh?" Ziju Min's eyes lit up. "How do you know this?"

The pill immortal was shaken up internally. To tell the truth, he hadn't heard of the name at all before. He had only seen fragments of its description in an ancient tome, specifically relating to someone else's thoughts on its study. The puzzle was an extremely difficult one, and Ziju Min had thought it impossible for anyone to come up with the answer.

He had put it forward largely to test the waters. And yet, this young man had blurted out the name of the puzzle straightaway.

"Can you give the three pill recipes the question asks for?" Ziju Min said.

"If three, they'd be the elementary ones. The Sumeru Pill, the Windgrace Pill, the Violet Fragrance Pill... these are quite easy to refine. Please review them, Senior Ziju."

Ziju Min drew a sharp breath. The three pills mentioned were only basic combinations in the Trinorary Sages' Puzzle?

In the fragments Ziju Min had read, only five combinations had been recorded. But the young man's tone made the actual number sound much greater than that!

The pill sovereign mused for a moment, then nodded slightly. "Your three recipes are correct. Where did you find out about this Sages' Puzzle, if I may ask?"

Jiang Chen smiled easily. "My ancestral heritage is somewhat related to pill dao. My family has researched the Trinorary Sages' Puzzle for generations. Just like its name, there are twenty-seven combinations in all!"

Ziju Min was paralyzed in shock. Twenty-seven combinations?

This... this was beyond his comprehension. As a pill immortal, he was one of the foremost authorities of pill dao in Myriad Abyss Island. He'd never heard of such a thing though. Twenty-seven spirit herbs could create twenty-seven pills? Was the puzzle truly this complex?

"Are your words true?" Ziju Min gazed at Jiang Chen.

"Absolutely." Jiang Chen smiled. "But we seem to be getting off-topic. Question nine only asked for three of those recipes."

He could clearly see Ziju Min's interest in the Puzzle. It was likely that the older man didn't know much about it. His reaction wouldn't be like this otherwise.

"Your answer is more than fine, my young friend. Another question outside the contest, though. Where does the Trinorary Sages' Puzzle come from?" Ziju Min persevered shamelessly.

"Legend has it that the puzzle was created by an ancient master over several centuries. Twenty-seven spirit herbs can be combined into twenty-seven different kinds of pills. Apparently, no one's broken that record since. If someone can come up with the twenty-eighth, he would surely leave his name in history."

In the heavenly planes, this puzzle was a rather famous one. If there were only rumors and fragments in Divine Abyss Continent, that meant the continent was a level far lower than the heavenly planes.

The other factions' geniuses were perplexed by Jiang Chen's eloquence. And where had this fellow come from? Since when did House Yan have someone like this? They'd never even heard of someone called Shao Yuan.

But his appearance and words marked him as someone extraordinary. His scholarship and manner distinguished him that much at least. Was this the rise of another difficult opponent?

Everyone came to the sudden realization that House Yan's score had risen once more. It was in first place along the Jade Lake Sect now, both factions having thirty points each.

It looked like they'd prematurely discounted House Yan with Yan Qingsang's silence. Though there still wasn't a peep out of Yan Qingsang, this Shao Yuan had come out of nowhere to earn another ten points. House Yan could very well end up in the top three.

The house probably wouldn't get first place – there was the Jade Lake Sect after all – but beating the other factions didn't seem particularly unlikely. Almost half of the questions were done. House Yan led ahead by a considerable margin.

Some factions hadn't earned any points at all yet.

Ziju Min considered Jiang Chen thoughtfully for quite a while before nodding lightly. "Thank you for sharing, little friend. If I may, I'd like to consult you about this afterwards."

The word 'consult' from Ziju Min astonished his collective audience. The other geniuses glanced sidelong at Jiang Chen, unable to process what they had just witnessed.

Xiahou Ying was one of the few who scrutinized Jiang Chen closely the most. Clearly, his display had piqued the girl's curiosity.

Jiang Chen curved his lips, then returned to his seat.

Yan Zhenhuai was very pleased about the increase in House Yan's points.

Yan Qingsang grinned excitedly as well. He wasn't at all upset by Jiang Chen's show of skill. He could guess easily enough that Brother Shao Yuan had done so to protect him.

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Chapter 1672: Fierce Contention

When Jiang Chen sat back down, he felt unified attention from several fronts concentrate on House Yan once more. The factions that hadn't thought much of the house were considering it with wary eyes a second time.

The Jade Lake Sect had proceeded at its own pace before, but its members were clearly troubled now. They glanced in House Yan's direction with some regularity from time to time.

Jiang Chen knew that lying low previously had earned him a brief reprieve. It wasn't going to be easy to fool their opponents any more. Now that House Yan had thirty points, the other factions would view it as a rival to surpass regardless of his efforts.

Still, it wasn't a worrying development. As long as they proceeded according to plan at a decent tempo, things would remain under control.

As the dark horse of the competition, House Yan unavoidably became the focus of attention. Without Jiang Chen's active participation, they had no advantage in the proceeding questions.

Because he wanted to contain their momentum, Yan Zhenhuai and Yan Qingsang were forced to poorly combat the pill geniuses by themselves. Whenever they had an inkling of what the answer could be, others had often already taken spoken it.

Sixteen questions came and went.

Jiang Chen acted only once more after the ninth. House Yan now stood at forty points. The Jade Lake Sect on the other hand, had reached fifty points in a valiant attempt at victory.

These two were the frontrunners in the competition. The third-highest total among the other factions had at most twenty points. It seemed quite difficult for anyone else to contest either leading party's position.

Only four questions remained. It was time for Jiang Chen to mount a counterattack in the eleventh hour.

Ziju Min was mildly surprised at House Yan's lackluster performance. He was a bit suspicious; given their ability before now, their score should've been much higher. Were they hiding their strength?

He himself was quickly scared by the thought flickering through his mind. Hadn't House Yan been synonymous with mediocrity a short while ago? Why did he think it was hiding its ability?

"Question seventeen is about the fire used to refine pills..." Ziju Min went on.

Jiang Chen blinked without hesitation. Yan Qingsang raised his hand instantly. Because it had been a while since he'd done so, everyone else blinked as well.

Whenever Yan Qingsang raised his hand like this, his answer generally carried a lot of certainty behind it. Certainty that Jiang Chen gave him, of course.

When he cleanly gave the correct answer once again, Ziju Min pondered him thoughtfully, then turned to Jiang Chen, then to Yan Zhenhuai. House Yan's youths were absolutely pretending to be out of their element. One of them had to be an expert in pill dao.

But which of the trio was it? Yan Zhenhuai was the most likely candidate, then the young man named Shao Yuan. Yan Qingsang was the least likely.

Of course, there was another possibility as well. If the ancient jade that Yan Qingsang had dug up in Bluesmoke was extremely valuable and contained a heritage beyond pill emperor, then...

Ziju Min didn't know the actual reason. However, he was sure that House Yan had hid its own strength. It was showing vestiges of its true ability only now.

Only three questions remained. House Yan and the Jade Lake Sect were tied at fifty points each.

Among the remaining factions, two were at twenty, three more at ten, and two hadn't gotten any points at all. First place wasn't the only position in jeopardy, third place looked rather uncertain too.

It was impossible for the other factions to catch up, and many were beginning to regret having participated in the first place. Some cursed House Yan for feigning incompetence.

That house had seemed rather reluctant about buying in with a hundred million in the beginning — it had seemed an exorbitant sum to them. But now, it seemed that House Yan's geniuses had intentionally taken that attitude. It'd been a front to mask their incredible ability.

Even the Jade Lake Sect's geniuses were having similar doubts. However, the sect had ever been proud of its pill dao skills. Even if they had any suspicions, they wouldn't raise them — out of contempt, if nothing else.

Besides, there was nothing in the rules about using a bit of trickery to conceal one's capabilities. A contest like this often saw the application of some strategy.

"The last three questions are before us. Please focus on what I'm about to say. They will determine your final ranking! Both first and third place are up in the air right now." Ziju Min reminded everyone.

He didn't really need to; his entire audience was aware of what was at stake. Everyone wanted to take home the last three questions — even a faction with zero points could get third place if it got all three right.

Though the prize was only a hundred million sky spirit stones, at least that meant there wouldn't be any loss of capital. Furthermore, it was honorable enough to take the bronze here.

As for first and second place, even the most optimistic of factions knew it was impossible numerically. It was a fight between House Yan and the Jade Lake Sect.

The sect was a rather odd one. Among the three sects, it had a perfect male-female ratio. Each male disciple it took in was always accompanied by a female one. Thus, it had the occasional moniker of 'Yin Yang Sect'.

Of course, that didn't mean its disciples were allowed to intermingle freely. In order to become dao partners, interested students had to pass rigorous trials from the sect as well as meet a number of criteria. Additionally, compatibility of all kinds had to be appropriate to garner the sect's approval.

Its standards were even stricter on any outsiders. It was almost impossible to become the dao partner of anyone from the Jade Lake Sect, whether male or female. It kept a very tight grip on all its disciples.

Therefore, the faction that attracted the most animosity in Eternal Divine Nation wasn't House Yan, but the Jade Lake Sect.

House Yan was disliked solely because it was weak. Such a thing was common to humans in general. One would not earn respect without strength. The Jade Lake Sect, on the other hand, was disliked because it was completely unreasonable.

Even though Xiahou Ying was full of reasons for hating House Yan, she nevertheless found herself at a bit of an impasse. How were the other factions doing so terribly?

Why were these two at the top of the chart? Why couldn't another power win the competition?

Among the factions in attendance today, she disliked House Yan the most; but she positively despised the Jade Lake Sect. She felt that it was far too arrogant. Only House Xiahou had the right to act like that! The sect didn't deserve anything.

Thus, she had good reason to be upset – at least in her own eyes.

The tense struggle for placement continued.

The sect was ready for a brawl. Its desire to take first was quite intense. Its so-called foremost genius, Pang Wei, warned Yan Zhenhuai with a veiled glare that he didn't want any competition for the accolade.

Yan Zhenhuai ignored the threat entirely. House Yan was inferior to the Jade Lake Sect to a certain degree, but that didn't mean he was going to give up in this kind of situation. It was a golden opportunity for the house to make its name known. There was no reason for him to be scared witless by the anemic attempt at intimidation.

He wasn't going to give up either the six hundred million prize for first place or cede the potential glory accorded to his house.

"Qingsang, Brother Shao Yuan, Jade Lake's Pang Wei warned us just now to try to curb our momentum. I think he and his buddies want us to concede. Don't mind him! Do whatever you need to win. I will personally take responsibility for anything that ensues."

Yan Qingsang was furious when he heard. "Are those bastards trying to keep us down too? House Yan isn't at the point of being a public enemy yet, right? They go too far!"

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "Calm down, Brother Yan," he advised Yan Qingsang. "The more they engage in this kind of behavior, the more fearful they are. This is an opportunity for us."

There wasn't much time for them to discuss, but Yan Zhenhuai's attitude set the tone for their ensuing actions. They were going to give it their fullest!

Now that Jiang Chen knew what the leading youth from House Yan thought, he had nothing to be worried about. He would secure a decisive victory for House Yan in the final three. House Yan needed the honor from this victory to solidify its status. If the house became socially precarious, he would find it hard to make his way in Eternal society as well.

Though he didn't particularly like the house, he had to be on House Yan's side for Huang'er's sake.

Question eighteen was another about pill recipes.

This time, an incomplete recipe was presented for perusal. Some supplemental spirit herbs were missing, and the geniuses were supposed to figure out exactly which ones.

This question was actually very difficult. If the answering person was unfamiliar with the recipe and attempted to come up with the answer on his own, it'd be almost as difficult as ascending to the skies.

But for Jiang Chen, any question that related to pill recipes was a freebie for him. He indicated that Yan Qingsang should raise his hand without hesitation.

The genius was becoming better and better at working with Jiang Chen. He complied incredibly quickly, but the Jade Lake Sect had matched his speed this time. Pang Wei had raised his hand almost simultaneously. Now this was a tricky dilemma.

The others looked on at the two vying factions with some interest. Because they had no chance at winning first place, they found it far more enjoyable to watch the show.

“Ying’er, these two factions raised their hands at the same time. Can you come up with an idea to decide who should answer?” As a senior, Ziju Min found it inconvenient to show any bias. He belonged to the Eternal Sacred Ground and had no inherent favoritism toward any of the factions. He didn’t want to make a decision that would anger either one.

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Chapter 1673: Challenging Authority

Xiahou Ying didn’t want to make the decision. She didn’t like either of the two. One she detested, the other she hated. Neither was her choice of a winner.

She shook her head after some hesitation. “You should be the one to decide, teacher.”

Seeing that she didn’t have an opinion, Ziju Min nodded after a pause. “If that’s the case, they’ll both write down their answers on paper. If both turn out to be correct, they’ll each get ten points. If either answers incorrectly, we’ll subtract ten points from the wrong one.”

Xiahou Ying considered the solution viable. She nodded. “As you say, teacher.”

Ziju Min smiled faintly and turned to Duan Zhiyuan, national advisor of Eternal Divine Nation.

“What do you think, Advisor Duan?”

Duan Zhiyuan was deferential to Ziju Min. He smiled. “Since it’s about pill dao, Brother Ziju should be the one in charge. I’m here merely as a guest. It’d be inappropriate for me to intervene.”

Ziju Min chuckled. “Advisor Duan is an important guest. Your opinions matter a great deal.”

“Haha, I’ll listen to Brother Ziju.” The advisor was pleased that Ziju Min respected his opinion and naturally wasn’t going to argue.

Having made the final judgement, Ziju Min gave them each an ink brush and sheet of paper. They were required to write down the correct answer as quickly as they could, putting in the right supplemental spirit herb to complete the recipe.

Jiang Chen took the brush and started writing immediately. He finished in no time.

Pang Wei was quick to write down his answer as well.

The two of them handed in their answers at almost the same time.

Ziju Min checked Pang Wei’s first. He gave it a quick glance and then read it carefully again before nodding slightly. His satisfaction was evident.

His expression and action made the sect geniuses brighten up visibly. They looked at their top genius with delight and congratulated him.

Pang Wei's lips quirked up into a confident smile. He was certain he had answered correctly. What he wanted to know was how the young man from House Yan had done.

If he gave the wrong answer, House Yan's score would forty points and the sect's at sixty. The gap thus widened, the Jade Lake Sect only needed to answer one of the two remaining questions correctly to secure their victory.

Pang Wei calmly looked at Ziju Min. He possessed the strong presence and unhurried confidence of a top genius. The closer it got to the end of the contest, the more resilient he became, and the more potential he was able to tap into.

Jiang Chen didn't pay any attention to this show of confidence. No matter how good the other was, he posed no threat.

Jiang Chen had never admitted defeat to anyone in pill dao. Not now, not ever. He was even more composed than Pang Wei was.

Or perhaps Pang Wei's calmness was partly an act, a front that a genius like him put up for the outside world. Whereas Jiang Chen's calmness came from the inside, from the bottom of his heart. A mere Jade Lake Sect wasn't enough to make him lose his composure.

Ziju Min put away Pang Wei's answer and picked up Jiang Chen's. He frowned when he unfolded the piece of paper. His reaction didn't escape anyone's eyes.

The sect members perked up. There was obviously something wrong with House Yan's answer.

Meanwhile, members of House Yan froze with panic. Yan Qingsang's nervousness was especially apparent.

Ziju Min read over the answer again, a bemused look flashing through his eyes. It seemed that he wasn't sure how he should judge the answer. In the end, he sighed and shook his head, putting down Jiang Chen's piece of paper.

His gaze swept through the crowd before he threw a regretful glance at House Yan.

"The Jade Lake Sect takes the eighteenth question. Ten points to them. House Yan's answer is wrong. According to the rules, they'll have ten points subtracted."

Raucous cheers broke out from the Jade Lake table.

At House Yan's table, everyone other than Yan Jinnan slumped in disappointment. Yan Zhenhuai and Yan Qingsang were especially affected. It was too much for them to take.

Jiang Chen seemed to have anticipated the result. His lips curved into an amused smile as he stood up and cupped his hands. "Master Ziju, may this humble one say something?"

Ziju Min looked over at him, a little surprised. "What do you have to say, young man? If you disagree with my judgement, you must present a convincing argument. Otherwise, it'll be against the rules."

Jiang Chen smiled lazily, his calm eyes fixed on Ziju Min. “Master Ziju, I do have some questions about your judgement. In my opinion, there isn’t a better recipe than the one I gave. I don’t understand why you’d choose a different answer over mine.”

Ziju Min was shocked. Everyone else in the room was equally stunned.

Had this young man from House Yan, who bore a different surname, lost his mind? No one in Eternal Divine Nation dared question Ziju Min’s judgement. In the realm of pill dao especially, he was considered the unequivocal authority. The young man’s boldness was both admirable and absurd.

Pang Wei huffed and said coolly, “Who are you? What role do you play in House Yan? You’re in no place to question Master Ziju!”

He was plainly offended by Jiang Chen’s reaction. He was just as confident in his answer and was naturally upset when it was suggested that his answer wasn’t the best one.

Jiang Chen gave him a faint smile. “I so happen to be qualified to question this answer. Why are you so angry? Do you have a guilty conscience?”

“A guilty conscience? Me?” Pang Wei laughed. “You’re insane. Is this how you try to make a name for yourself? Don’t you see how deplorable your methods are?”

Jiang Chen didn’t spare him a glance. This man didn’t deserve his attention. Instead, he turned to Ziju Min with a smile.

“You will be the final judge, Master Ziju, but allow me to say something. To make a Mirage Introspection Pill, the best spirit herb to complete the recipe is Silverstripe Grass. Greenhorn Grass and Illusory Spirit Grass rank lower. Those two are decent options as well, but not the best.” Jiang Chen explained eloquently, ignoring the odd looks cast his way and Ziju Min’s changing expressions.

Ziju Min had to recover from his shock before he took a deep breath and asked, “Can you explain why you consider Silverstripe Grass the best option?”

He felt as if the rug had been pulled out from beneath his feet. Pang Wei had answered with the Illusory Spirit Grass, which he himself considered the best option as well. It was also the one single correct answer the entire pill dao community on Myriad Abyss Island agreed on.

Were there really so many alternatives that worked even better? Why had no one on Myriad Abyss Island ever brought up the possibility?

He couldn’t determine if he should believe Jiang Chen.

“A theoretical debate means nothing. I’ll give you the facts. If Silverstripe Grass is used to refine a Mirage Introspection Pill, the success rate is guaranteed to exceed ninety percent, and the likelihood to produce a supreme rank pill is higher. As for Illusory Spirit Grass or Greenhorn Grass, the success rate is at most sixty percent, while the likelihood of producing a supreme rank pill is only ten percent. Master Ziju agrees with at least the last, correct?”

“You say that success rate using Silverstripe Grass is over ninety percent? How about the chance for a supreme rank pill?”

“Thirty to fifty percent. Provided that the pill refiners are at the same level, Silverstripe Grass is bound to get better results. There’s no doubt about that.”

“Are you certain?”

“A hundred percent,” Jiang Chen responded decisively.

Pang Wei scoffed. “You can lie all you want. The success rate won’t be higher just because you say so. You’re insulting Master Ziju and challenging the Eternal Sacred Land’s authority!”

Jiang Chen laughed derisively. “That’s a clumsy attempt at putting words in my mouth. Have you forgotten that the Jade Lake Sect is one of the biggest factions in Eternal Divine Nation, and that you’re the alleged top genius of your sect? Your pettiness disappoints me. I respect authority, but I respect the truth more.”

Respecting authority, but respecting the truth more.

Many were captivated and upon further reflection, felt that his words made a lot of sense.

After a while of deep thought, Ziju Min turned to Duan Zhiyuan. “This is a difficult dilemma, Advisor Duan. What do you think we should do?”

“You are the pill dao authority, Brother Ziju. We’ll do as you say.”

Ziju Min sighed. “If I make my judgement without basis, I’m afraid our two young talents will feel insulted and bitter. Experience is the best teacher. Let’s have them refine the pills here and now.”

The declaration flabbergasted the crowd. The two participants were going to refine the pill now? How exciting!

Since an agreement wasn’t forthcoming, they were now given the opportunity to prove themselves in practice.

Pang Wei was displeased. “Illusory Spirit Grass is accepted as the best option, Master Ziju. This man rejects conventional wisdom and questions authority. He’s leading the others astray. I believe there’s no need for us to waste time validating his theory. Not every disagreement is worth the time.”

He’d been announced the winner of this round. It’d be a slap to his face if the result was to be changed.

Besides, he didn’t think that there would be a better option than Illusory Spirit Grass. The convention had been established through generations of practice. It was the one true answer on Myriad Abyss Island. It was laughable that this young man dared say this wasn’t the best choice.

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Chapter 1674: A Contest of Practical Application

Pang Wei’s reaction irked Ziju Min. As the authority from the Eternal Sacred Land, he was the one who made the rules for the contest and was entitled to make judgement calls as he saw fit. As a young genius, Pang Wei should’ve listened instead of questioning him.

"Pill dao never stops advancing," he remarked noncommittally. "Truth is not a constant. If you can prove through practice that the Illusory Spirit Grass is the best choice, your victory will be unquestionable. That will also be in line with the purpose of the contest. You're the host and the star of the day, Ying'er. What do you say?"

Though Xiahou Ying didn't like either of the two factions, she was immensely put out with Pang Wei for his arrogance. That he'd dared to question Ziju Min's decision was especially upsetting.

Ziju Min was her master, the organizer of the pill dao contest and the rulemaker. How dare Pang Wei not understand the situation?

"You make the rules, teacher. You have the final say." She'd never intended to speak up for House Yan, and she wasn't. She just wanted to knock some sense into Pang Wei.

Pang Wei looked at her, then at Ziju Min's serious expression. The pill dao master didn't seem inclined to change his mind.

With a soft sigh, Pang Wei cupped his hands at Ziju Min. "My apologies for my loss of composure, Master Ziju. You're right. We'll get to the truth through practical application. I'll expose this man for the prancing clown he is!"

He didn't dare direct his frustration at Ziju Min. Instead, he shifted the focus of his ire to Jiang Chen. There wasn't much else he could do before the crowd's eyes. Killing intent exploded in his eyes. "You better behave yourself, brat. If I know that you've wasted our time on purpose, you'll get what you deserve."

Jiang Chen snorted silently. He'd gotten tired of rote threats like that.

Surprisingly, it was Yan Zhenhuai who scoffed back. "Who're you trying to intimidate, Pang Wei?"

As the top genius of House Yan, Yan Zhenhuai was obligated to protect the family's interest. Jiang Chen was fighting for the house's sake. It would be remiss of him if he didn't take a stand in support. Besides, he wasn't scared of Pang Wei.

The crowd grew excited to see the two geniuses go head to head. They watched with rapt attention, hoping the two of them would fight it out.

It was unrealistic to expect a fight to break out here. Once the two of them left the premises however, there was no telling what would happen.

Pang Wei sneered and threw Yan Zhenhuai a contemptuous glance. "Watch yourself, Yan Zhenhuai. You people from House Yan are welcome to come at me together. I'll take all of you on myself."

Jiang Chen intervened before Yan Zhenhuai could respond. "Arguing with petty men like him only brings us down to his level, Brother Zhenhuai. Let me teach him a lesson through pill dao."

It wasn't a harsh comeback, but it was enough to render Pang Wei speechless. He opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

Yan Qingsang broke into hearty peals of laughter. It was cathartic just to see Pang Wei's face turn beet red with anger.

Pang Wei leveled a frosty stare at Jiang Chen. He was already imagining how his opponent as a dead man.

That didn't faze his target at all. Jiang Chen shrugged. "Pang, are you too scared to take on the challenge?"

"Alright, enough with the quarrel," Ziju Min cut in. "All the ingredients have been prepared. You've been given the same materials except for the Illusory Spirit Grass and Silverstripe Grass. The cauldrons you're going to use are the same as well. You may check them yourselves."

Jiang Chen quickly checked his materials to make sure nothing had been compromised. The cauldron was especially important to examine. If the cauldron was faulty, it'd be impossible for him to win.

He sent out some tongues of fire to heat up the cauldron. Once he was sure it functioned normally, he put it down, waiting for Ziju Min to signal for the start.

The senior nodded. "Alright, you may start. Remember, you only have two hours, which is about the time it'll take for you to refine a cauldron of Mirage Introspection Pills."

Jiang Chen started without hesitation.

Heat the cauldron. Build the fire. Add in ingredients. For him, refining pill was as easy as eating and sleeping. Besides, this particular pill wasn't particularly difficult to make. He didn't use any special tricks. Instead, he did everything by the book.

Even with the same method, different people would produce different results.

Jiang Chen's way wasn't anything special, but he did everything with practiced ease. Even though he'd purposefully hidden his true ability, his performance caught Ziju Min's attention.

This young man has a solid foundation in pill dao. Not everyone at his age can possess such practiced skill.

He must've put in a great deal of effort to reach this level of sophistication.

Jiang Chen focused on nothing but the task at hand when he was refining pills. He ignored everyone's glances and worked step-by-step at his own pace.

Ziju Min shifted his focus between Jiang Chen and Pang Wei. Most of the time though, he was looking at Jiang Chen.

There were no surprises forthcoming from Pang Wei. Everyone on Myriad Abyss Island refined the same Mirage Introspection Pill with the same Illusory Spirit Grass and the same method.

The Silverstripe Grass was the only new factor of interest. What were the necessary steps? When should it be added? How should the temperature be controlled?

Every detail was crucial. It was often what determined if a pill would be refined successfully.

Jiang Chen didn't notice that Ziju Min was learning his techniques by observing him. This method was nothing special, thus he didn't care at all if someone stole the technique from him.

After about thirty minutes, Jiang Chen completed the preliminary combination of all the ingredients. Now it was time to refine the pills, the most important stage.

The quality of execution during this stage would determine the success rate. If everything was executed perfectly, the likelihood of producing supreme rank pills would be significantly higher as well.

He focused wholly on controlling the cauldron and the Mirage Introspection Pills within.

One... two... three... The pills were translucent and had an attractive glow to them like longan fruits. They lay inside the cauldron like embryos within a mother's body.

He cast his eye to the inside of the cauldron, feeling the pills settle into their shapes. His heart remained as calm as still water.

After three quarters of an hour, his cauldron started humming, a sure sign of success. He smiled in delight and gradually lowered the intensity of the fire, allowing the cauldron to cool down.

A dull rumble came from within. The fire extinguished in the next moment. The refining process had come to an end.

With the cauldron now quiet. He slapped the table lightly, making the lid of the cauldron leap into the air.

Pills that resembled pieces of white jade flew out of the cauldron one by one. The refinement was a success!. Each translucent pill was shaped like a heart. They were endearing and appealing. The pills fell onto a jade plate like marbles, making a staccato of pleasant clinks.

Everyone turned towards the sound and counted the pills. Ziju Min widened his eyes slightly to see that thirteen pills had come from Jiang Chen's cauldron.

Every single pill was perfectly shaped and had a beautiful lustre. It was obvious that the pills were of supreme rank. Even the pickiest critics wouldn't be able to find any flaws. Everything about the pills was perfect.

Ziju Min was swayed. He glanced at Jiang Chen pointedly, his heart filled with shock. He was now ninety percent sure that Silverstripe Grass worked better than Illusory Spirit Grass. Even if he'd refined the pill himself, he could produce at most ten to twelve pills to a cauldron.

Jiang Chen produced thirteen at once! If he'd only exceeded expectation in quantity of the pills, there would be nothing to boast about. But the thirteen pills were all of supreme rank. That was a remarkable demonstration of his ability.

Pang Wei had proceeded to the end of the refining process as well. His cauldron was humming lowly. However, the sound coming from his cauldron was a clear enough indication that the result wasn't as good.

His pills were soon finished. There were nine of them, which wasn't bad. However, the pills he produced were clearly lesser than Jiang Chen's in all aspects including size and color.

Comparisons were odious. No one could say that Pang Wei hadn't done well, but he couldn't rival Jiang Chen in pill dao in any way.

The crowd watched in awe. The winner was obvious. The contrast between the pills was striking. Even the best of Pang Wei's nine pills couldn't rival the most flawed of Jiang Chen's.

Ziju Min didn't even have to announce the results. Everyone could see with their own eyes who was the winner.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1675: A Lock on the Championship

But, Ziju Min wasn't going to be so careless. He took pills from both and examined them over and over again before letting out a long sigh.

Pang Wei's failure wasn't solely his own, but Myriad Abyss Island's as a whole. The general understanding of the Mirage Introspection Pill had been flawed.

However, rather than disappointed, Ziju Min was very excited. That truth was found in experimentation was absolutely true.

"Haha, I didn't expect today's pill dao battle to yield such unexpected results. You've taught me a lesson, Shao Yuan. Who would've thought that the Mirage Introspection Pill would have such wondrous possibilities... so Illusory Spirit Grass wasn't the best choice for it all along, eh? You've done a great favor for the pill dao world at large. This is a deed of great merit."

"Not at all, Master Ziju," Jiang Chen smiled. "I don't deserve such high praise."

There was nothing else that needed to be said right now. The Pang Wei who'd been nothing short of ferocious moments ago was now drooping. All of his arrogant disdain had disappeared.

He had been shocked into submission by the unexpected results. Nothing here was proceeding according to his understanding.

It was at this time that Yan Zhenhuai suddenly clapped lightly with a laugh. "Brother Shao Yuan, you were absolutely right. Actions speak louder than words in an argument. You've certainly taught someone a lesson in pill dao, and I'm sure he'll be much more well-behaved from now on."

It was just as Yan Zhenhuai had said. Pang Wei was petrified in stupefaction. Saying anything more at this juncture would only leave opportunities for others to attack him by with He wanted to dive into a fissure in the ground.

"It seems that question eighteen must be rescored," Ziju Min judged. "However, Pang Wei's answer isn't strictly wrong. It's just that House Yan's surpasses his. The ten points will go to House Yan instead, but the Jade Lake Sect won't be deducted any points for the question."

Jiang Chen had no issue with this decision. In fact, he would have been fine if Ziju Min had given both parties ten points for the question. There were two more questions in which he had every confidence that he would defeat his opponent by.

Pang Wei froze at Ziju Min's declaration. His mouth moved a little, but nothing came out. He was too embarrassed to argue further. The Jade Lake Sect was collectively mildly upset and dissatisfied with this outcome. However, most of their enmity went towards House Yan.

Though House Yan wasn't in most of the other factions' good graces, it was difficult to comment about a question that it'd won with raw skill. Still, it was mildly strange that the house had gotten to this point in the first place. Since when had House Yan's pill dao improved by so much?

This incredible reversal excited everyone on House Yan's side. Yan Qingsang was especially animated: gesturing and waving wildly. Jiang Chen returned to his seat coolly, as if he'd done nothing at all of consequence. His composure slightly embarrassed Yan Qingsang.

With the last question, House Yan had surpassed the Jade Lake Sect in the rankings. It was at sixty points. The sect occupied second place, with fifty points. The other factions' point totals remained as they were.

Only two questions remained. The contest was heating up into the most intense stage. Things were even clearer now: if the Jade Lake Sect couldn't take the next question, but House Yan could, first place would be decided beforehand.

Thus, both parties solemnly prepared themselves for the problem to come. This would be the deciding point in the match.

The battle for third place was dampened by the tension for first. All eyes were gathered upon the two factions vying for the win. Ziju Min was a key focal point as well. He was the master of the questions, after all.

"Question nineteen is about spirit herb lore. This is an ancient question that I came across in my travels overseas. I've studied it for a long time and finally come upon some knowledge regarding it. Please listen well..."

Jiang Chen nodded to himself when he finished listening to the question. This question was indeed a remarkable one. It was rather esoteric and complex.

Ziju Min didn't elaborate as to the question's every detail. A small piece was sufficient for his purposes: the younger geniuses found it more than difficult enough.

This was a question about the cycle of five elements among spirit herbs. How should five spirit herbs be arranged to create a beneficial cycle so that all of them might grow faster with their peers' influence?

It asked about an ancient puzzle that Jiang Chen had studied in his previous life; the level of his research was several times deeper than the scope of Ziju Min's question. Thus, he had the answer already while the Jade Lake Sect was still confused about it. He smiled, motioning for Yan Qingsang to answer.

Yan Qingsang raised his hand with practiced ease.

The sect was uniformly demoralized by the gesture. Clearly they'd formed some kind of emotional reflex with Yan Qingsang raising his hand. Whenever he did so, bad news for them followed.

Jiang Chen stood up to answer the question once more without reservation.

The answer shocked Ziju Min once more. His question wasn't particularly intricate, but the young man named Shao Yuan provided an answer that was beyond its breadth. In fact, its wisdom gave him a few flashes of inspiration.

He'd finally realized that this young man was perhaps the real mastermind behind House Yan's preposterous performance.

When Ziju Min announced the results, the sect's geniuses were paralyzed into capitulation. They hung their heads like defeated roosters.

After question nineteen, House Yan had seventy points. The Jade Lake Sect had only fifty and had been forced into second place. Third place was undecided as of yet.

However, since both House Yan and the Jade Lake Sect had no need to answer the twentieth question. Ziju Min lowered its difficulty accordingly so that the other factions might have a chance to compete.

House Feng finished third in the end, bringing a close to the lengthy pill dao competition.

As the biggest dark horse, House Yan won first place in an almost incomprehensible display of prowess. Though the Jade Lake Sect had been favored to win, it could only look on as the honor was snatched from its fingers and given to another.

Ziju Min sighed. "I'm both pleased and worried about the results of this competition. I can see that many of the factions are lax about pill dao as a discipline. However, there were some pleasant surprises as well. The Jade Lake Sect has always been steadfast about its pursuit of pill dao, and House Yan has been an incredible find today. I haven't seen a show as amazing as this in a long time! Nor a young man as promising, truthfully."

Jiang Chen shook his head internally. He could see that Ziju Min was a sentimental man without much guile to him. But these words of his were simply too much... or perhaps he really did just want to praise House Yan's younger generation?

Given the current circumstances, the number of enemies House Yan made today was directly proportional to the gravity of Ziju Min's praise.

"Ying'er, would you like to say a few words?"

It was nominally Xiahou Ying's birthday party, so Ziju Min deferred to the star of the event.

"That's fine, teacher." Xiahou Ying was a bit upset. She hadn't wanted either House Yan or the Jade Lake Sect to win.

Ziju Min had no idea of her biases though. He announced the results after a slight smile.

The weight of six hundred million spirit stones was heavy in House Yan's hands. Yan Zhenhuai was more reserved about it, but Yan Qingsang made no attempt to hide his good cheer.

Yan Jinnan was green with envy. He found it hard to accept it even now. How come Yan Qingsang was suddenly hogging all the attention? The other youth who'd been slightly inferior to him in every respect had surpassed him in more ways than one. In fact, Yan Qingsang was several strides ahead now.

Psychologically speaking, Yan Jinnan couldn't accept this.

Now that the pill dao contest was over, initiative at the banquet returned to House Xiahou's hands.

As an observer, Jiang Chen watched as show after show was acted out in their honor. Every one of them had the same purpose: to heighten Xiahou Ying's existence. She was given plenty of opportunities to show off.

At the conclusion of the banquet, she had become quite familiar with the geniuses in attendance, thus accomplishing her initial purpose perfectly. She had little interest in the rest of House Yan's young people, but she was strangely courteous to Jiang Chen. She invited him several times to sit with her at the host's table.

Jiang Chen didn't fall for her tricks. He used his need to accompany his brother as an excuse to decline the numerous inquiries.

Xiahou Ying's attempts at socializing rarely failed, but her inability to draw forth the winner of the pill dao contest was an exception. This made her somewhat disgruntled.

What's the reason for his pride? I just wanted to test whether it was possible to steal him from House Yan. If he's so stubborn about it, he can stay there to choke and die!

Malice and disgruntlement filled her heart.

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

Chapter 1676: Master Ziju Min's Invitation

The rest of the banquet was a stage for all the best geniuses of the prominent factions. Most of them were also expert hands at socializing, and worked together to raise the atmosphere to new heights.

Abnormally, Jiang Chen lay low and observed from the side.

Yan Zhenhuai on the other hand, was reasonably well-known and accepted. Many geniuses were more willing to make his acquaintance. His talent was ranked highly among the younger generation in Eternal as a whole—regardless of his affiliation and house.

House Yan was declining, but Yan Zhenhuai was on the rise.

Yan Qingsang had no interest in putting himself in the middle of the activity. He was content to converse by Jiang Chen's side.

The banquet concluded amidst a bustling atmosphere. Jiang Chen and Yan Qingsang readied themselves to leave. If courtesy wasn't a consideration, the former would've left a time ago.

"Young friend, may I have a moment?" As he strode out of House Xiahou's gates, a voice called out behind him. Jiang Chen knew it was Ziju Min from the sound alone.

Since the older man was his senior, Jiang Chen paused with a sincere smile. "Master Ziju, were you calling for me?"

"Haha, there's no need for so much pleasantries. I still have quite a few questions regarding the pill dao contest earlier. Will you do me the honor of giving me a bit of your time?"

Jiang Chen traded a glance with Yan Qingsang. His friend pushed him a little. "Go, Brother Shao Yuan. Master Ziju is a well-respected master. If you can receive a bit of his wisdom, or better yet, become his disciple, you'll have a wonderful future ahead of you."

He was only half-joking. If Jiang Chen and Ziju Min forged a strong relationship, House Yan would benefit as well. At the very least, it would receive Ziju Min's help to a certain extent. If conflict arose in the future, asking for assistance from the Eternal Sacred Land was an option.

Ziju Min understood the ramifications of his words much as Yan Qingsang did. He maintained a silent smile until the other youth disappeared. "After you, my young friend."

"No, no, please go ahead," Jiang Chen responded with equal courtesy.

They turned a corner to find an opulent carriage, drawn by four magnificent spirit beasts, parked in an open area.

"Come on in." Ziju Min stepped to the side to let Jiang Chen in first.

A single command sent the carriage airborne. The vehicle soared high into the clouds, vanishing from sight in the blink of an eye.

Not long after it did, several young geniuses pondered the shadow of the departed carriage. "It looks like Master Ziju Min has invited House Yan's young foreign-surname genius."

"Is it his lucky day?? A personal invitation from the senior can only mean promising prospects." The ones discussing it were filled with envy.

Clearly, they were quite desirous of Ziju Min's overture. The pill immortal was a giant in Eternal Sacred Land, at least in the pill dao department. He had a lot of authority everywhere in Eternal Divine Nation.

The young man must have been truly incredible for the senior to see value in him, going so far as to personally take him away!

"I guess it makes sense. That guy was the entire reason House Yan won six hundred million sky spirit stones and first place in the pill dao contest, right?"

"What I want to know is where he comes from. Have any of you heard about him before?"

"How could we have? I think Yan Qingsang brought him back from the Bluesmoke Isles."

"Yan Qingsang is too dumb to have brought someone back like him. That can't be right!"

"Hard to say. Myriad Abyss Island has its fair share of mysteries. You get used to it after a while."

"Heheh, I've always felt that the newcomer is too enigmatic to be at home in House Yan. Maybe he's only using the house as a springboard. Now that a pill dao master from the Eternal Sacred Land has taken an interest in him, he won't possibly stay with House Yan in its current downturn. He's going to fly elsewhere!" Although there were multiple voices in this conversation, the main theme was the deep envy they felt for Jiang Chen's current treatment.

Within the beast carriage, Jiang Chen was perfectly quiet. He answered every question Ziju Min voiced with impeccable accuracy. However, he said not a word beyond what was required.

He wasn't pretending to be deep and mysterious, but because he knew it was dangerous to speak too much. Being unfamiliar with Ziju Min, he didn't know the man's personality or habits.

It was easy to make a misstep by being unnecessarily eloquent.

Rather than bringing Jiang Chen to Eternal Sacred Land, Ziju Min brought him back to his personal residence.

"Do you know why I took you here rather than the sacred land, young Shao Yuan?"

"Perhaps you don't want me to go there, senior."

"Haha, It's not that. Eternal Sacred Land has very strict conditions surrounding it. Once you enter, it's difficult to come back out."

"Is it really that extreme?" Jiang Chen smiled.

"Well, rather than extreme... the sacred land doesn't easily allow outsiders. Anyone who enters either becomes an heir or a servant. It's almost impossible to leave without any consequences."

Jiang Chen understood the gist of what the senior was getting at. The Eternal Sacred Land's objective for doing this was likely to maintain its mystique.

"Alright, back to more important things. Friend, does the Trinonary Sages' Puzzle really have twenty-seven combinations? If so, how many have you learned?"

Ziju Min was an avid scholar, deeply in love with pill dao as a whole. He was intensely curious about anything he took an interest in. This was the main reason he had invited only Jiang Chen in the first place.

"Did you ask me to come here solely for the puzzle, senior?" Jiang Chen cracked a wry smile.

"Haha, please don't misunderstand, young friend. I simply wanted to make a few inquiries in the pursuit of knowledge. If it's inconvenient for you, I won't push you about it."

"Oh, it's not related to convenience or anything. I just didn't expect you to be so... inquisitive, Master Ziju. May I ask the reason why?"

"I've always been fascinated with studying these ancient puzzles. Alas, my available sources of information on them are few and far between. Sometimes, I have no opportunities to do so at all. If you share what you know with me, I will owe you a tremendous favor."

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "I don't see why not."

Taking a minute to sort out his thoughts, he dictated, "All twenty-seven combinations of the Trinonary Sages' Puzzle have been passed down through my ancestors. I know them all, but I feel that it's just a distraction, for entertainment only. I don't see any special meaning in it."

"What? You know all twenty-seven?" Ziju Min was exhilarated. He had thought the young man capable of seven, eight, or perhaps a dozen or more. That all twenty-seven combinations were available were shocking indeed.

Without further ado, Jiang Chen put his head down and wrote with the brush and paper near him. It didn't take long for him to scrawl out every combination. "Master Ziju." He handed the older man the paper. "All twenty-seven are here. I owe my heritage for giving me such esoteric knowledge, of course."

"No need to be humble, my friend. I have only the deepest respect for your pill dao knowledge. Your description of the Trinary Sages' Puzzle proves it all the more. You were also quite familiar with the five elements' spirit herb riddle, I recall."

Jiang Chen sighed. "I happened to have learned about it in the past, that's all."

His modesty only made Ziju Min appreciate him all the more.

"Young man, there's no need to hold yourself back like this before me. Genius is the only thing I esteem, no matter where you're from or what background you have. Your pill dao ability and foundational skills you displayed while refining pills mark you as superior to every other youth in Eternal Divine Nation. This isn't empty flattery at all. I've been an empyrean rank pill sovereign for countless years, always observing and seeking out juniors with potential for success. I must say once again that though Eternal has its fair share of competent martial dao talent, it's sorely lacking in the pill dao department."

Ziju Min looked rather sad when he discussed the present circumstances. His dissatisfaction with Eternal Divine Nation's current pill dao state was obvious.

However, this had nothing to do with Jiang Chen.

"I don't have a propensity for poaching people, young man. Still, I have very high hopes for your future in pill dao. If you feel yourself bored by House Yan one day, with no room for further improvement, you can come find me. I may not be the absolute authority in Eternal Sacred Land, but my words are reasonably hefty. I can carve out a spot for you anytime."

This a formal invitation from Ziju Min.

"All is currently well enough at House Yan, Master Ziju. I don't have any plans to leave right now. However, pill dao has never had walls or divides. If there is anything you need from me at all, Master Ziju, please contact me at your leisure. I will do whatever you ask, as long as it is within my power."

Of course Jiang Chen knew what status Ziju Min possessed in the sacred land. But he was deeply aware that once he entered it, he would have to leave House Yan and Huang'er behind. He would very likely be excommunicated.

Naturally, that was undesirable. He'd only been apart from Huang'er for several hours, but his concern for her was already mounting with painful speed. Going into the Eternal Sacred Land was a prospect too horrifying to imagine. He didn't want to be forced to remain for a few years, only to find upon exiting that something had happened to Huang'er in the interim. What would he do then?

No matter how attractive it was to others, Jiang Chen was completely unmoved. He had come to Myriad Abyss and Eternal Divine Nation not to climb the societal ladder here or to enrich himself, but to rescue his beloved!

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

Chapter 1677: Marriage Refusal, Another Breakthrough

The entirety of House Yan was shocked that Ziju Min had taken Jiang Chen away. After a summary of the birthday banquet, both the patriarch and the elders came to understand the depths of the young man's true potential.

It wasn't easy to stand out in that kind of pill dao contest. And yet, the unfathomable, talented young man had left with Ziju Min.

"What were you doing, Zhenhuai? Why didn't you pay more attention to him and stop him from going?" The patriarch was rather regretful.

"I was mingling with other guests in the House Xiahou manor, patriarch. I only knew afterwards that sage younger brother Shao Yuan had been taken away."

"Why didn't you stop him, Yan Qingsang?" The venerated elder Yan Wanjun growled with a scowl, glaring at his grandson.

Yan Qingsang pouted as he had his own reasons. "What's wrong with all of you? Isn't it a good thing for Brother Shao Yuan to win Master Ziju's approval? I thought about it and felt this would be the best outcome. Through Brother Shao Yuan, we'll be able to get on Master Ziju's good side, or even closer to the Eternal Sacred Land."

His words did make some sense to the others, but Elder Yan Wanyou thought otherwise. He sneered mockingly.

"Qingsang means well, but how long has it been since this Shao Yuan has joined House Yan? He doesn't have a deep connection to the family. If the Eternal Sacred Land makes him an offer, will he be able to say no? How will he possibly turn them down? After all, the sacred land is a much more attractive option than us."

"You don't know him, Elder Wanyou," Yan Qingsang denied. "If Brother Shao Yuan wanted to find a powerful benefactor, he has plenty of opportunities to do so in the Bluesmoke Isles. He has his own set of principles. He won't leave House Yan for mere material gain."

Yan Wanyou cackled. "The Eternal Sacred Land can offer him more than just a little material gain."

Their conversation was interrupted when someone announced, "Patriarch, elders... Sir Shao Yuan has returned!"

Shao Yuan had returned?

Yan Qingsang immediately rushed outside. He had come to explicitly trust everything about Shao Yuan. His brother was his guiding light.

There'd never been a moment's doubt that Shao Yuan would abandon House Yan just because Ziju Min made him an offer. Though Yan Qingsang wasn't a shrewd character, he was unusually stubborn in his judgement of Shao Yuan.

And the truth had proven him correct.

"Shao Yuan greets the patriarch and elders."

The patriarch laughed heartily. "Well done Shao Yuan. House Yan is lucky to have a pill dao genius like you. You grace us with your presence."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "The patriarch is too kind. Much credit should go to Brother Zhenhuai and Brother Qingsang."

The patriarch chuckled. "Yan Zhenhuai should be praised for his sense of duty and Yan Qingsang for his generosity. However, I asked around and have found that you were the one who contributed the most in the pill dao contest. They should both be commended, but you deserve most of the credit."

The patriarch was obviously trying to get on Jiang Chen's good side. He was putting himself on a lower level and Jiang Chen on a pedestal.

Jiang Chen naturally could read between the lines and smiled back. "I can't in good conscience boast about my achievement as it's nothing to write home about. I'm satisfied as long as I didn't make troubles for the house."

The others silently approved of him for being humble. The young man was indeed remarkable. It'd be House Yan's loss if they failed to keep a talented youth like him.

"Patriarch, doesn't Elder Wanyou have a granddaughter called Qingzhi?" Folks started offering ideas. "She's one of the most remarkable girls in the house with both brains and beauty. And Shao Yuan is at his peak, an addition from outside the family that we value greatly. It'll be killing two birds with one stone for us if we arrange a marriage between the two of them. He'll truly be part of the family then."

Yan Wanyou frowned. What did this have to do with him? But he stopped himself before arguing against the proposal. Why should he argue against it?

No matter how he saw it, Shao Yuan wasn't any worse than the geniuses of the house. Other than Yan Zhenhuai, no other youths in the family was his match. He would indeed make the perfect son-in-law.

Yan Wanjun's line of the family had been able to recruit Shao Yuan only because Yan Qingsang had been the first to make his acquaintance. Yan Wanyou didn't believe that the two of them were really as close as brothers.

Even if they were, the bond between dao partners was bound to be stronger. Yan Qingzhi was a most talented and beautiful girl, but it was unlikely for her to marry any of the top geniuses. Meanwhile, there were signs showing that Shao Yuan would one day become an extraordinary man. Thus, Yan Wanyou was experiencing a spontaneous change of heart.

He'd instinctively disliked and rejected Shao Yuan only because the young man had been brought into the family by Yan Wanjun's descendent. But there was no point in rejecting Shao Yuan now. Why not change his perspective and marry off his granddaughter to the boy?

"Patriarch, Qingzhi is a fine girl who is considerate and talented. She and Shao Yuan would make a good couple. I won't intervene in this matter. May the patriarch make the decision."

Yan Wanyou wanted the marriage to happen, but his pride didn't allow him to make such an open declaration. He wanted to push the patriarch into arranging the marriage with this vague sort of statement.

"No, that won't do!" Yan Qingsang declared suddenly. "Yan Qingzhi can't marry to him. It'll be unfair to her."

"What do you mean?"

"He says he had a dao partner. Right, Brother Shao Yuan?" This was just a random excuse as Yan Qingsang simply didn't want Jiang Chen to marry Yan Qingzhi.

Jiang Chen smiled and bowed slightly. "In response to the seniors, I am indeed already married and have a child. Please forgive me for not being able to accept the offer."

The refusal to him volunteering his granddaughter offended Yan Wanyou. He could tell from the boy's attitude that Shao Yuan didn't want the marriage to begin with.

"Since Shao Yuan's already married, we'll give up on the idea." The patriarch was highly observant and could read Shao Yuan's lack of enthusiasm. Since he wanted Jiang Chen's loyalty, naturally he would cater to the youth more.

Yan Qingsang laughed when he returned to his residence. "Old man Yan Wanyou was fixated on you marrying his granddaughter. Wasn't I smart for finding an excuse for you?"

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "I hear that Yan Qingzhi is talented and beautiful. Isn't it my loss to not marry her?"

"Haha, you shouldn't listen to rumors. Let me tell you, Qingzhi's at most one fifth as beautiful as Huang'er, and she isn't even one tenth as elegant. That's something many younger members of the family often talk about in private."

Huang'er?

Jiang Chen wasn't in the mood to chat with Yan Qingsang anymore and decided to enter closed door cultivation. He'd wanted to break through to peak great emperor as soon as possible and aim for empyrean realm.

"I'll cultivate behind closed doors for a few days, Brother Qingsang. Please don't interrupt me unless there's an emergency." He shut himself in to cultivate and refine an Emperor Supremacy Pill.

Now that he had enough free time, he decided to refine the pill first. It'd greatly help him in progressing through great emperor. The most important thing about refining an Emperor Supremacy Pill was acquiring a Heavencloud Ganoderma. He happened to have one, and of high rank at that.

The next few days were both productive and relaxing, but at times slightly boring. Eternal Divine Nation was a lot richer in resources and spirit energy compared to the human domain.

He successfully refined a cauldron of Emperor Supremacy Pills, and his cultivation slowly advanced from advanced great emperor, making peak great emperor possible.

He knew that he would ascend to a higher level one day, but he wanted that day to come as soon as possible.

Roughly a month later, inspiration struck and the key to his breakthrough suddenly came to him. Understanding of the profound laws of nature dawned on him, pushing him from advanced great emperor to peak great emperor.

He discovered that he'd successfully broken through when he came back to his senses. He was now one step away from half-step empyrean. Perhaps an Emperor Supremacy Pill would be enough to push him over that threshold?

But haste made for waste. Pills such as an Emperor Supremacy Pill could only be consumed once. Taking it a second time wouldn't have that much of an effect.

He was in high spirits when he exited his cultivation, but immediately noticed that something was wrong with House Yan. The atmosphere was turbulent and frigid.

"Has something happened in the house lately, Qingsang?"

Yan Qingsang smiled wryly. "The Jade Lake Sect is still holding a grudge over what happened in the pill dao contest. They've sent many messages for a rematch and refuse to let it go."

"What about House Yan? Has the family agreed?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"Of course not. We can't compare with the sect in terms of pill dao. The family doesn't want a rematch at all. It's bound to end in humiliation. Besides, you're the one who's most talented in pill dao, and you've been in closed door cultivation."

Someone interrupted their conversation with a message.

"Young masters, the patriarch has issued an emergency summons. Please attend at once."

"Do you know what it's for?" asked Yan Qingsang.

"I don't know. The patriarch only said that anyone receiving the order should go to the main hall as quickly as possible."

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1678: Three Great Matters

Almost every executive was present in the house gathering hall. House Yan's young geniuses were in attendance as well.

Yan Qingsang grabbed a chair to sit down with. As someone with reasonable importance in the house now, Jiang Chen too had a seat to himself.

Taking a casual glance at the patriarch, he found some worry to be present between the man's brows. Had House Yan encountered a large stumbling block?

Jiang Chen was perturbed. He didn't care about anything that happened to House Yan, save for Xiahou Zong opening his doors. He absolutely couldn't accept any attempt to take away Huang'er.

As long as that wasn't the case, he had ways of dealing with everything else.

“Since everyone’s here, I’ll cut to the chase. I felt that everyone should know about several of the emergencies that the family is facing.

“Firstly, our land near Cloud Camel Mountain, the part that borders on House Feng territory, has seen numerous supernatural manifestations. House Feng has sent a large group of their elites to encroach on our territory. There’s no need to dodge the issue: our strength has waned since our venerated forefather has departed. It goes without saying what difficult straits we’re in.

However – we’ve never suffered the shame of being invaded before. House Feng’s troops seem intent on occupying our territory as soon as it’s convenient. We’re facing the serious problem of needing to protect our holdings.

“We are all hot-blooded men and there’s no reason we should yield even an inch, no matter how much of our own blood is poured out in the process. Otherwise, we won’t be able to face our ancestors after we die!

“Cloud Camel Mountain’s issue must be swiftly dealt with, but that’s only the first. Second is the Jade Lake Sect. They’ve been provoking us as of late. Because they failed to take first place in the pill dao contest, they now hold a grudge against us.

“In fact, they’ve been causing trouble in the capital for quite a while now, attempting to rile others up about it. Recently, they’ve gathered together a group of pill dao experts to attempt the overturn the Mirage Introspection Pill judgement.

“Thirdly, House Xiahou has made another demand. According to them, Xiahou Zong will exit closed door cultivation within three years. They demand that we promise nothing happens to Yan Qinghuang during this time. Furthermore, Shao Yuan is to be delivered to House Xiahou. Apparently, they admire his talent...”

Jiang Chen didn’t care about issues one and two. Number three though, concerned both Huang’er and himself. He frowned slightly.

House Xiahou wants me? Did they take an interest in me after what I did at that birthday banquet?

He didn’t know precisely how to react to that. He’d come to Eternal Divine Nation to rescue Huang’er from peril as well as destroy House Xiahou. It was patently absurd to hear that they wanted him.

“Alright. All three matters are quite important by themselves. Let’s discuss them one by one.” The patriarch waved a hand, indicating that the others were free to talk.

“There’s nothing to talk about for Cloud Camel Mountain, patriarch. We must station forces there as well. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. We can’t show weakness despite our shortage of resources. We may lose, but we can’t be intimidated.”

“That’s right. Since when did House Feng dare bare its fangs in front of us? When our venerated forefather was still alive, it was only worthy of kneeling down before us.”

“Give the order, patriarch. We are willing to go to Cloud Camel Mountain and take the battle to House Feng.”

“Yes, patriarch. We absolutely can’t relent! Perhaps we can make our name known again through this clash with House Feng. Let’s tell the rest of the world that we haven’t fallen that far at all!”

Almost every House Yan descendent held the same opinion with regards to Cloud Camel Mountain. The world of martial dao emphasized fighting and bravery, after all. To back off rather than fighting intimidation head-on would only get oneself laughed at and dismissed.

Moreover, House Feng wasn’t one of the strongest factions. House Yan knew that resistance was futile against the likes of House Xiahou, and would concede accordingly in light of that. But if it couldn’t stand up to House Feng – a faction formerly inferior to House Yan – then everyone would really be out for blood.

The events of the recent past showed that House Yan was being targeted by other factions all over. Upon return from the Bluesmoke Isles, its airboat had been intercepted by the Starlight Sect. And now, House Feng was churning up a storm in Cloud Camel Mountain.

On top of that, the Jade Lake Sect was trying to pick a fight with House Yan because of the earlier pill dao battle. Even though it had been the losing party, it was utterly sore at its defeat. That was also because House Yan was weak. Would the sect dare to do the same if House Yan were as strong as House Xiahou?

Not necessarily.

Aside from these three factions, House Yan’s biggest problem hadn’t been just resting either. House Xiahou had added clan favorite Shao Yuan to its list of demanded people.

“Patriarch, that sect goes too far. They were the ones who lost, but now they’re resorting to all these underhanded tactics to get even. If they can’t take the loss, they should be forthright about it. Why all this nonsense?”

“It’s a gross overreach on their part.”

“We can’t blame all of it on them. In the pill dao battle, we caused them to lose face. It’s understandable that they’d bear a grudge because of it.”

“Absurd! What’re you talking about? Nobody with half a brain backs off from a challenge. Are we supposed to sandbag even though we have a good chance to win?”

“Exactly. Our victory was fair and square. We did nothing underhanded. Why aren’t we allowed to win?”

“Let them do their worst. We’re not scared of them even if they appeal to the Eternal Sacred Land!”

Relative consensus was reached on the matter of the sect. The latter really was stepping grossly out of bounds.

Jiang Chen smiled slightly before continuing. “No matter how many pill dao masters they invite, they won’t be able to overturn my results regarding the Mirage Introspection Pill. The superiority of Silverstripe Grass in the refinement is the absolute truth, and there’s no room for negotiation in fact. Even if the Jade Lake Sect’s strongest pill dao expert were pitted against me, I can easily defeat his Illusory Spirit Grass with my Silverstripe Grass.”

There was an undertone of unparalleled confidence to his lines.

The patriarch found this to be tremendously praiseworthy.

“Very good. Your determination fills us with the same. So, the Jade Lake Sect wants to cause a ruckus, does it? It wants a group of pill dao masters to invalidate the truth? Are you bold enough to take it to the end with them?”

“Any time. They can decide the time and place.”

Jiang Chen didn’t much care for the so-called seniors from the Jade Lake Sect. He didn’t know how competent they were, but he had seen Ziju Min, a master of the Eternal Sacred Ground.

It was impossible for the Jade Lake Sect’s experts to surpass Ziju Min, since the sacred land occupied a loftier position than the sect.

And taking a step back, even if they were, what then? Jiang Chen had never been afraid of anyone in pill dao before.

His certainty was met with a fair bit of doubt.

“It’s good that Shao Yuan believes in himself, patriarch, but excessive confidence isn’t necessarily a good thing. In the pill dao battle, he faced only Pang Wei and peers from the younger generation. Pang Wei is a martial genius, but has clearly not perfected his pill dao. Against a master from the Jade Lake Sect, the situation may change.”

“That is definitely something to be concerned about, patriarch. The smallest likelihood of failure is nevertheless worthy of consideration.”

House Yan’s patriarch pondered this for a few moments. “One shouldn’t use those that one doesn’t trust, and one should trust those one uses. Given the events at the pill dao battle and Master Ziju’s judgment, I am inclined to trust Shao Yuan.”

As the leader of an entire house, the patriarch didn’t lack for charisma. Decisiveness was needed in a time like this, rather than pointless hesitation. There were a smattering of opinions on almost every topic. Without strong decision-making skills, it was impossible to steer a great house.

“As for Cloud Camel Mountain, I’ve decided that two venerated elders should be stationed there. Venerated Elders Wanjun and Wanzhong, you are both well-respected within the house. Our expedition to Cloud Camel should be spearheaded by people such as you. Will you lend us our strength?”

Yan Wanjun and Yan Wanzhong traded a glance. “We can’t shirk our responsibility in this time of need. We are at your command!”

House Yan marshalled its forces in preparation for a confrontation at Cloud Camel Mountain. Though an all-out war wasn’t guaranteed with House Feng, the posturing made the house’s hardline stance evident.

Jiang Chen wasn’t going to interfere with the decision. In fact, he agreed that it was probably better to be a bit more forceful in this situation.

This was Eternal Divine Nation. There was often friction between large factions, but actual full-blown war to the death was unlikely. How could the house face a real large-scale battle if it couldn't handle a few skirmishes?

Thus, Jiang Chen found House Yan's behavior here reasonably admirable.

"Alright. Now that issues one and two are decided, let us discuss the third. This problem affects our house holistically." The House Yan patriarch gazed at Jiang Chen thoughtfully. "House Xiahou wants us to give up Shao Yuan. He's the one that the Jade Lake Sect has a grudge against too. Cloud Camel Mountain's excavation will likely need him in the future as well. So, what are your opinions on House Xiahou's unreasonable request?"

If Jiang Chen were to be delivered to House Xiahou, the first two issues would be entirely resolved.

"Feel free to voice your thoughts."

Yan Wanjun was the first to speak. "Patriarch, House Xiahou has been too full of itself lately. Its appetite is insatiable. If we are coerced into compliance this first time as well, they'll just come back for thirds and fourths. House Yan can't become their docile prey or blood bank, or they'll consume us whole before long!" His attitude was very resolute.

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

Chapter 1679: Jiang Chen's Ire

Yan Wanjun had suffered the most at the hands of House Xiahou. His youngest son had been forced into suffering for all eternity in the Boundless Prison. His most talented granddaughter had been cursed since young. Though the Generation Binding Curse had been lifted, her fate was still decided.

And now, House Xiahou had its sights set on Shao Yuan, someone his grandson had plainly benefited greatly from becoming brothers with.

If that happened, Yan Wanjun knew that Yan Qingsang would lose another strong companion that the boy could depend on. Age and experience had made him observant. He could see that his grandson had improved immensely in all areas ever since Shao Yuan came into his life.

One took on the color of their company. Even the most ill-tempered man would improve after being with someone well-rounded. Shao Yuan was clearly someone who could make Yan Qingsang better.

The only one Yan Wanjun could pin any hope on was his grandson. If Yan Qingsang's path to success was blocked, he would really have nothing then. He didn't know what crazed things he would do, nor did he know if he'd still have the motivation to keep fighting for the house.

No one could fight with complete lack of motivation. If everyone he loved and cared about was destroyed, why would he keep fighting?

That was why Yan Wanjun was determined to keep Shao Yuan.

Yan Wanchong sighed. "Patriarch, if Shao Yuan is this important to House Yan, we mustn't give in to House Xiahou's request. Otherwise, we'll end up becoming their blood bank and they'll suck the life out of us whenever they want. We'll become nothing but an empty carcass one day."

“That’s not true,” said Yan Wanyou. “Shao Yuan may be an extraordinary man, but he doesn’t bear our surname. It’s doesn’t seem wise for us to offend House Xiahou for him.”

He’d been appreciative of Jiang Chen when he wanted to marry off his granddaughter. Rejection had turned that appreciation into irritation instead.

He wanted to kick this eyesore of a youth out of House Yan. It was the norm for them to submit to House Xiahou. It wasn’t that big of a deal to embarrass themselves again. He’d also be able to strike a blow at his old enemy Yan Wanjun. It seemed like a fair trade.

Yan Wanyou’s points were persuasive to many others.

Elders who supported him started speaking up. “He’s right, patriarch. Shao Yuan’s talented, but he’s not talented enough to call for our unconditional support. Think about it. If we gift Shao Yuan to House Xiahou, our conflict with the Jade Lake Sect will be resolved as well. The sect has a problem with Shao Yuan, not House Yan.”

“Additionally, the Cloud Camel Mountain has troubled even the most prestigious experts. Shao Yuan may be knowledgeable about ancient jade, but he’s not necessarily knowledgeable in land development.”

Yan Wanjun had had enough. “Do all of you hear what bullshit you’re spouting? What do you mean Shao Yuan is the one the sect has a problem with? Their anger is aimed at House Yan for taking the first place in the contest! Do you really think they’re targeting Shao Yuan? I bet they’d be ecstatic if we give him to them!”

The Jade Lake Sect was irritated by the very fact that the first place had fallen in another faction’s hand. They didn’t have anything against Shao Yuan himself. And in fact, they’d happily accept a young man with such remarkable talent in pill dao.

Only a fool would think the sect was targeting Shao Yuan instead of House Yan.

“Elder Wanjun, we understand you want to protect Shao Yuan because he’s Qingsang’s sworn brother, but you must put the family’s interests first.”

Now this was a severe crime of disregarding House Yan’s interest.

Yan Wanjun flew into rage and growled, “What do you mean I don’t care about the house’s interests? If I didn’t, would I be leading an army to Cloud Camel Mountain? Would I have sacrificed my own granddaughter? Would I have allowed my son be thrown into the Boundless Prison? All of you run your mouths with no skin off your back, what the hell have you done for the family?

“My grandson is all I have left. I won’t pull my punches if anyone wants to hurt him. The worst case scenario is that I go down too in the end. Try me!

“It was my grandson who made the family proud in the ancient jade festival, and it was my grandson who pushed the house into participating in the pill dao contest. Which of these matters that brought honor to the family have we not participated in? All of you have glib tongues when spewing nonsense, but where are you when the family needs you? I didn’t want to embarrass anyone today, but whose grandchildren was it that put the family to shame during the birthday banquet in House Xiahou?”

Yan Wanjun's temper had been thoroughly riled up. He'd sacrificed so much all these years for the family's interests, but who among the family had shown genuine gratitude to his family branch?

No one!

Thus, it was understandable that he was so furious.

The patriarch's expression sank. "I won't stop anyone from expressing their opinions, but if it's said that Elder Wanjun is selfish, then I'd be the first to disagree. Everyone knows that the elder has sacrificed the most for the family over the years."

Many others nodded with these words."

"That's right. Elder Wanjun has sacrificed so much. You all shouldn't have made such flippant comments."

"House Yan didn't do anything wrong with the pill dao contest. Should we not fight for our own interests? Should we avoid taking the first place just because we don't want to offend others? Even if we take second, there'll be many other factions we offend. Should we take third place then? Or even aim for the bottom? House Yan is a great faction. If we're afraid of everything, we can't achieve anything. We might as well do nothing!"

A fierce debate broke out.

"Settle down," said the patriarch. "House Yan must decide on what to do with Shao Yuan. I believe that we need new blood. There's no reason for us to give a genius like him away. Besides, House Xiahou doesn't have leverage against us in this regard. There's no need for us to be too submissive."

"The patriarch is right. If we do whatever House Xiahou tells us to do, how are we going to continue developing?"

"Agreed. We accepted their unreasonable request only because we did something wrong. House Yan's in the right now. We don't have to listen to them."

"Besides, House Xiahou is clearly trying to destroy House Yan. Why should we let them?"

"How about we have a vote?"

"I agree. Many of the senior executives are here. We'll vote. Majority rules."

Jiang Chen stood up with a half smile and raised a cupped fist salute at the patriarch. "May I have a few words?"

"Of course. It's about your future, Shao Yuan. Your opinions are very important."

Jiang Chen smiled leisurely, completely at ease.

"Patriarch, elders, clan leaders, I must emphasize that I only came to House Yan because it felt that I was old friends with Brother Yan Qingsang. I'm not a stray dog that you brought home to order around as you would.

“In addition, please remember, I’m Shao Yuan. I’m a living person, not an item or a product you can give to anyone you want.

“My feet are my own. If the house doesn’t welcome me, I can leave immediately and disappear from your collective sight. We can forget about anything that’s happened between us.

“Lastly, Myriad Abyss Island is vast. There are many factions in the Ten Divine Nations. I know my abilities. It’s not that difficult for me to find a place to be. You don’t have to debate where you should send me to. Remember, I’m not a House Yan servant.” He shrugged. “That’s all. You may continue with your discussion. Once you come to a conclusion, I’ll make my own decision.”

He rose gracefully and walked outside.

He’d had enough of the boring conversation. He wouldn’t have stayed in a declining faction like House Yan at all if not for Huang’er. Moreover, many members of House Yan were foolishly arrogant and unreasonable.

He left dashing without looking back.

The patriarch sighed and glanced helplessly at Yan Wanjun.

Yan Wanjun responded woodenly, “He’s right. There are some of us who must’ve suffered blows to the head. Do you honestly think that you can just send Shao Yuan where you will, like a servant? Someone with a unique skill set like him will be able to find patrons anywhere. What’s more, I’d like to remind the floor that Shao Yuan’s talent lies not only in pill dao. His martial dao rivals that of Yan Zhenhuai. You simply haven’t noticed it yet!”

That created an uproar. Better than Yan Zhenhuai? Was Shao Yuan truly that talented in martial dao?

The patriarch started. “Are you serious, Elder Wanjun?”

“I swear on my character that his talent in martial dao rivals that of Yan Zhenhuai, and he’ll one day shock all those present with his achievements.” Yan Wanjun’s tones were heavy and his expression disinterested. “Alright, I’m tired. I’m going back to rest. I’m setting out for Cloud Camel Mountain tomorrow. The worst that can happen is for me to die there. It’ll be a death worthy of the ancestors’ approval!”

He stood up and left, his old form seeming rather melancholy.

Many of the elders felt a surge of sorrow. Even someone so loyal as Yan Wanjun was now in such lonely straits. Was there any hope left for the family?

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

Chapter 1680: Ziju Min Comes to Visi

“Alright,” the patriarch sighed. “Vote if you will on the matter of Shao Yuan. When you’re done, I’m sure he’ll be already gone. According to my sources, Master Ziju Min of the Eternal Sacred Land had Shao Yuan over his private residence after the contest. He extended an invitation at the time, but was politely refused.”

“What? Shao Yuan refused the sacred land’s invitation?” Yan Wanzhong gasped in astonishment.

“He absolutely did. But, apparently Master Ziju promised him that the door is always open whenever he wishes it.”

Hiss! Everyone drew a sharp breath.

Here they were, discussing whether they should keep Shao Yuan, but the young man already had a better potential home. He hadn’t gone solely due to emotional attachments. If the family really wanted to push Shao Yuan away, he still wouldn’t be forced to go to House Xiahou at all!

“Yan Wanyou, perhaps this is the result you want?” Yan Wanzhong glanced at the named elder meaningfully, breaking into a faint smile.

Yan Wanyou was indeed stunned for a moment. “That’s just a rumor,” he hastily blurted out. “Patriarch, if the kid’s loyalties aren’t with House Yan, we’re not going to be able to keep him anyway. Maybe he considered us a springboard into a higher power from the start.”

“Oh?” The patriarch remarked coolly, “There are many other factions in the nation more suitable for being a springboard, no?”

Yan Wanyou maintained his stubbornness. “Well, he might feel that we’re the most appropriate for it, since we’re currently weak.”

This explanation was indefensible even by those who supported the elder.

“If that’s the case, patriarch, we need to make every effort to keep Shao Yuan.”

“Yes. If he really is as superb in both pill and martial dao as Elder Wanjun says, and also extremely skilled at identifying ancient jade, he will achieve greatness at some point in the future for sure. We have no reason at all to abandon him.”

“Heaven has given us this opportunity. If we let it slip through our hands, then we deserve whatever back luck befalls us from here on out.”

Many of the house’s elders were voicing their opinions. They’d finally realized that they couldn’t afford to give up Shao Yuan. If House Yan made any moves to dismiss him, he would head to a new place straightaway.

Their most important job now had nothing to do with sending him away, but figuring out how to keep him in mind as well as body.

“What a shame that he has a dao partner already. I have a little niece who’s rather pretty and talented. There’s no reason why we can’t give her to him.”

“Haha, my concubine has a charming daughter as well. She’s thirteen this year. I wonder if young Shao Yuan would be interested in her?”

The patriarch had no patience for the foolishness he was hearing. “Enough with the arbitrary suggestions. Shao Yuan isn’t the lecherous sort. If he were, he would have gone to the Jade Lake Sect already. They have no shortage of beauties.”

Yan Qingsang abruptly stood up. "I know something," he remarked offhandedly. "Shao Yuan seems to admire my cousin, Yan Qinghuang. Or more accurately, her zither skills." He shook his head with a sigh, then left.

Yan Qinghuang?

Everyone was taken aback. "Yan Qingsang!" someone shouted. "Stop messing around! We can give anyone else to Shao Yuan, but how can we give Yan Qinghuang to him?"

"Yes, don't you try to destroy the family!"

"Isn't that right? He and Yan Qinghuang are both grandchildren of Elder Wanjun. Just like he said, she's his cousin. He's obviously aiming for personal gain in this matter!"

The patriarch found the turmoil irritating. "All of you, quiet down." He waved a hand. "Yan Qingsang was just making a statement. He didn't say that we should betroth Huang'er to Shao Yuan. Huang'er... ah!"

The head of the house knew as well as anyone that Yan Qinghuang was no less talented than the prestigious Yan Zhenhuai.

If not for the trouble with Xiahou Zong, Yan Qinghuang would be one of the house's flagship geniuses. Her charisma and grace would win the hearts of an entire generation of Eternal Divine Nation's geniuses in worship of her.

Alas, fate was a fickle mistress. This girl had been cursed since birth. It was many years later now, but no end to it was in sight.

In truth, the patriarch was somewhat apologetic towards her. This was why Yan Qinghuang hadn't been punished after coming back from the human domain.

Amid this meeting, a message came from outside the hall.

"Patriarch!"

"Patriarch, Master Ziju Min and a few of his fellows are here to visit."

Master Ziju Min?

The expressions on those present changed drastically. Speak of the devil! Had Ziju Min come to ask for Shao Yuan?

"Show him in as quickly as you can," the patriarch commanded, then changed his mind and stood up. "I will go receive him personally. Venerated Elders, come with me."

Ziju Min came from such an important place that better treatment was a matter of fact.

The elders stood up one after another. None of them dared flaunt their importance. This was Master Ziju, a heavyweight of the sacred land!

The pill sovereign was still dressed in his scholarly attire. His demeanor was serene and humble, with a bearing belonging to a real immortal. His tone was the furthest one could imagine from being overbearing.

"Patriarch of House Yan, I hope you don't mind my sudden intrusion."

"Haha, we are honored by your visit, Master Ziju. Please, come on in." The patriarch roared with laughter, seemingly very pleased. The two men exchanged niceties before going inside together.

Behind Ziju Min were several of his peers. Once they were settled in and under a roof, the pill sovereign introduced them one by one. They were all pill dao giants, famous within the nation. Of course, none were as prominent as Ziju Min himself. He was the leading man today.

After tea was served, Ziju Min smiled. "Patriarch Yan, I'll get straight to the point. I have something to discuss with you today."

"I'm all ears, Master Ziju." The patriarch was the image of courtesy, though he put his guard up internally. Was the pill master really here to fish for talent?

The others of the house were mildly perturbed. They had spoken about Shao Yuan earlier as if whether he stayed or went was insignificant. But Ziju Min's arrival had changed their perception of the young man. It was as if someone was here to rob them of their treasure.

"I'm sure you've guessed already, patriarch. I'm here for my young friend Shao Yuan. Recently, the Jade Lake Sect has tried to gather together many pill experts to overturn my conclusion about the Mirage Introspection Pill. I'm very displeased about that. Any arguments in the world of pill dao should be decided by truth alone. Ill-advised persistence otherwise is utterly pointless in that regard. Thus, I've been thinking about solving this little issue for you."

"Oh?" The patriarch's eyes lit up. "If that's the case, House Yan must thank you for upholding justice, Master Ziju."

"Upholding the truth of pill dao is a basic moral principle that all pill masters of integrity must maintain. However, I do have a presumptuous request."

"What is it?" House Yan's patriarch felt his heart sink.

"I hear that my young friend Shao Yuan is in a mildly awkward position at House Yan. He is neither unimportant nor important enough. Some have a few doubts about his status and veracity. They think he may be a source of trouble for your house. So, I would like for you to try and persuade Shao Yuan to perhaps join the Eternal Sacred Land. We will owe you a favor if you succeed."

Ziju Min truly placed a tremendous amount of importance on Jiang Chen. He was still contriving to recruit the young genius beneath his own wing. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry that House Yan was so ludicrous that it didn't value the incredible piece of jade in their possession.

Alas, Shao Yuan was a bit impulsive himself. He had refused Ziju Min's invitation because he didn't want to leave, for some reason.

This was the reason the pill sovereign had come to House Yan today. He wanted the patriarch to help him persuade the youth. If necessary, he would very much like House Yan to make Shao Yuan feel unwanted.

Perhaps then the genius would think about leaving out of anger and frustration.

The patriarch cracked a wry smile. "Master Ziju, Shao Yuan is a talented youth under House Yan's banner. We've already decided to invest a lot of resources into him. You are witness to the fact that our house hasn't had many geniuses in recent years. Shao Yuan... ah, it's hard to part with him."

Rather than decline outright, the patriarch resorted to bemoaning his circumstances. He couldn't throw around a tough act in front of Ziju Min.

Ziju Min smiled slightly. "House Yan is a faction within Eternal Divine Nation. As long as the sacred land and the imperial family acknowledges your status, no one will be able to shake your position."

House Yan's patriarch felt his heart skip a beat. He was a smart man and Ziju Min's intent was obvious. The apparently consolatory words also held a note of warning.

If they were clever enough to dismiss Shao Yuan and let him join the Eternal Sacred Land, then there would be a favor owed as well as future support. If not, then the sacred land would take a drastically different stance.

House Yan's head was in a tough spot. If he refused the Eternal Sacred Land, a tiny bit of prejudice shown in return would be more than enough to cause the house much suffering.

This was quite a severe dilemma.

Ziju Min was quite relaxed. He sipped at the tea provided by the host, his expression completely calm and composed. He didn't look like he was here to force House Yan's hand at all.

The patriarch sighed softly. "Master Ziju, this is a very important matter in many respects. Let me, let us, think about it a bit more. House Yan would be more than happy to build a strong relationship with the Eternal Sacred Land. We would greatly appreciate your acknowledgement."

He didn't dare refuse. He was saddened to realize the reality that he was unlikely to be able to keep Shao Yuan much longer.