

Three Realms 1691

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

Chapter 1691: The Nine Winding Caves

Seconds passed into minutes as Yan Qingsang battled on within the fourth cave. He was already exhausted, but he wasn't going to give up now. He knew that he wouldn't have any strength remaining after this fight to challenge the fifth. This made the current opportunity all the more valuable.

He wanted to pass this trial, even if it cost him all he had.

Though he seemed a bit whimsical and off-key ordinarily, he was unimaginably stubborn when it came to certain things. Jiang Chen had discovered precisely this character trait. What reason was there for someone with such conviction not to find success?

Yan Qingsang suddenly recalled many things. His family, his grandfather, his unfortunate cousin, and the brother waiting for him outside...

His waning battle spirit roared to life once more.

"I can't fall here. Even if I die, I won't give up here!" An inner voice shrieked inside him. Maddeningly intense willpower burned.

Jiang Chen could sense ripples of this furious mentality. He was quite pleased by this turn of events, and had a very strong feeling that Yan Qingsang would pass the fourth cave.

The elders had already been very surprised to see Yan Qingsang pass the third trial. Evidently, they'd all felt it rather inconceivable.

From their point of view, it was impossible for the Yan genius to pass the third trial. Within that entire house, the only person who was supposed to have that ability was Yan Zhenhuai – and perhaps Yan Qinghuang as well.

They hadn't anticipated Yan Qingsang's success, and their shocked reaction showed it.

When he'd first entered the sacred land, many people hadn't spared him a single glance before pronouncing judgment about his future failure. It had only been a month since then. Had he really managed to forge himself anew?

Even Ziju Min was mildly astonished. He found the entire affair rather odd. He hadn't been particularly sure that Yan Qingsang would pass at the start, either. In fact, he had prepared himself for the eventuality that the young man would be kicked out.

Yan Qingsang's present display was a huge, but welcome, surprise. For one, it brought great honor to Ziju Min. Since the boy had originally come as Shao Yuan's accessory, no one had had any expectations for him.

Under these circumstances, his reasonably good results excited Ziju Min more. If the accessory was like this, how would the man of the hour fare? Surely even better than Yan Qingsang!

Boom!

A flash of light rose into the air above the fourth cave.

This pillar of radiance indicated that the challenger within had found success. In the next moment, the entire surrounding area was lit up by an incandescent array.

Yan Qingsang dragged himself out with tired steps. He lurched from side to side; blood and sweat caked on his skin. He looked dreadfully fatigued, but a cheerful grin hung on his lips.

Thud!

He fell to the ground after taking a few strides, causing a cloud of dust to rise from the impact.

"I did it!" He gasped breaths of noxious air, gulping in fresh wind to replace it.

Smiling, Jiang Chen lifted him up and placed him to the side. "Brother Yan, you're a real disciple of the Eternal Sacred Land now. The entire world will think more highly of you from now on!"

Yan Qingsang wanted to laugh, but had no strength to do so. It was all he could do to maintain the wide grin already plastered upon his face. There was untold joy in his expression.

Ziju Min chose this moment to come out as well. "Congratulations, Qingsang," he directed his words at the young man. "The Eternal Sacred Land formally welcomes your membership. You have done well, both on your own behalf and your house's. I believe that House Yan will be proud of you when they hear of this as well."

This was not praise, but fact.

Yan Qingsang's results were more than enough for House Yan to be proud of. Aside from Yan Zhenhuai and Yan Qinghuang, who in the younger generation could say they would definitely pass the sacred land's evaluation?

And yet, Yan Qingsang had done so. Just this was enough for him to hold his head high.

"Alright, Shao Yuan, it's your turn."

Ziju Min smiled faintly at Jiang Chen. "Your cultivation level seems to have increased as well. You're always full of surprises, young man. Even the people around you are infected by it. Yan Qingsang has changed a great deal in the past few days. Were you the catalyst for that?"

Jiang Chen shrugged. "Perhaps."

His gaze had already turned towards the Nine Winding Caves. His goal was to conquer the entire course, in order to put his potential on full display before the sacred land.

His body vanished from its original place.

The first cave was a rudimentary test, and Jiang Chen passed it trivially.

The second cave was an enhanced version of the first cave, with the difficulty somewhat adjusted upward. The attackers in this case were once again, puppets hidden in the darkness.

But Jiang Chen's senses were sharper than those of a mid empyrean expert's. It was impossible for any puppet to ambush him merely from cover of darkness. He passed the second trial as easily as the first.

The third trial was designed in the same vein. Aside from the puppets, many unknown organisms had joined the fray. The organisms in question weren't large, but moved extremely rapidly. It was more difficult to defend himself because of this.

Jiang Chen was both alert and quick enough to render the third trial frivolous as well. He passed without breaking a sweat.

Many elders in the Hall who wanted to have a good laugh at his expense were sorely disappointed. They were the same ones who'd observed him in secret when he had first entered. Because he was only at peak great emperor – not even half-step empyrean, they had largely written off his martial dao talent.

At least he would make a good spectacle to watch! Ziju Min would be embarrassed in the process too.

Or so they thought.

But it was a month later, and the joke they'd long anticipated hadn't materialized. Shao Yuan had almost offhandedly passed three trials in a row. It was as if someone was helping him cheat.

Some were exasperated at this. More, however, were shocked with amazement.

Passing three trials wasn't amazing in itself. Rather, that was quite an ordinary feat. But the way that Shao Yuan had passed through so easily was!

It looked like he hadn't even warmed up yet after three rounds. So far, he was having a nice stroll in the park. Many began to have higher hopes for the young man named Shao Yuan.

Jiang Chen quickly entered the fourth trial.

"From the way he's been going so far, I don't think the fourth will stop him either," someone remarked in restrained admiration.

"Not necessarily. Before him, Yan Qingsang had an easy time with the first three trials too. But the fourth trial exhausted him. Shao Yuan isn't even part of House Yan's bloodline, so how could he be stronger than Yan Qingsang?"

"Well, I think that's obvious. Aside from Yan Zhenhuai, who can compare to Shao Yuan from that house?"

"Don't get too excited, gentlemen. We'll see how our contender does soon enough."

Ziju Min remained completely quiet as he beheld Jiang Chen's performance. He had been a bit concerned about the young man's martial dao talent before, but his heart was completely calm now.

Jiang Chen did not disappoint. The fourth trial that'd exhausted Yan Qingsang wasn't even a burdensome challenge to him. None of the attacks could get through his defenses. Though it did take him a bit more energy than the previous ones, he had plenty of strength left to spare.

"Tsk tsk, this kid is starting to look interesting. Passing four trials means he's at least first-rate."

"Isn't that right? He's already at least as good as an elite disciple, but he has a lot of fuel left."

“Haha, the fifth cave isn’t going to be this easy. The earth attribute surroundings, the fivefold gravity, and the various subterranean creatures will be multiple problems for him to solve. It’s essentially impossible for him to pass the fifth trial. He’s just an outsider in the end.”

“Ah, he’ll have succeeded even if he doesn’t pass. He wasn’t born in the sacred land, after all. If he were, he could very likely try himself against the sixth or seventh trial.”

The Nine Winding Caves geometrically increased its difficulty with every additional trial.

Just because the fourth trial wasn’t particularly difficult didn’t mean the fifth would be the same.

Of course, Jiang Chen wasn’t accustomed to underestimating his obstacles. Since he’d planned to use his full strength to challenge the Nine Winding Caves, he would be cautious every step of the way rather than losing a crucial opportunity because of carelessness.

When he entered the fifth cave, the gravity restriction immediately bore down on him. No matter how he tried to move, the powerful force weighed down on his body and footsteps. Jiang Chen was quick enough to realize that he had entered a gravity-based domain.

“Heh heh, gravity at this level is somewhat intriguing. It’s not going to pose a problem for me, though!” Jiang Chen called upon his Earth Bodhisattva Orb.

The Orb had once been the crowning treasure of the foremost formation sect in ancient times, the Earth Bodhisattva Sect. It was one of the most valuable earth attribute treasures around.

The orb could neutralize gravity of this level with ease in an untraceable manner.

The treasure swiftly hummed to life, causing the gravity domain around him to disappear in a two-yard radius around it. Though gravity acted with terrifying efficiency outside these boundaries, the Earth Bodhisattva Orb had created a safe passage for him!

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Chapter 1692: Bringing Skill and Talent into Stunning Full Play

More importantly, the protection of the Earth Bodhisattva Orb caused the earth attribute creatures to tremble beneath the earth. None dared approach the intimidatingly radiant treasure.

Though Jiang Chen hadn’t unleashed its terrifying earth pulse yet, the orb’s natural power was enough to scare many organisms into submission. In this way, he passed through the gravitational cave with leisure.

In fact, he didn’t take much longer than he had in the fourth cave. In terms of ease, the fifth surpassed its predecessor.

Everyone was astonished when Jiang Chen emerged. The elders who’d expected him to fail were paralyzed with shock. Though there had been an emotional component in their prediction of his failure, they really hadn’t wanted him to pass the trial.

Even if he were to pass, he should've been exhausted by the ordeal. How could he still be so energetic and laid-back?

Reality had overturned their expectations. It was a bit hard for them to accept this.

"Good work, brother." After a brief period of recovery, Yan Qingsang had recovered enough of his vitality to cheer Jiang Chen on.

He too was impressed at the ease with which Jiang Chen had passed five trials. Before his brother had exposed his identity, Yan Qingsang had thought that he was only capable in pill dao and ancient jade. Only afterwards had the Yan genius begun to take an interest in his brother's martial dao talent as well, culminating in his current respect.

But what he'd just seen clued him into a new truth. This young man from the human domain had martial dao talent that far surpassed his own. Even someone as proud as Yan Qingsang had to defer to his incredible skill for teaching and altering the martial dao of others.

Maybe Huang'er's fate really will change through his efforts? A pleasant daydream popped into Yan Qingsang's head. He absolutely didn't mind if Jiang Chen could cut Xiahou Zong down. In fact, he would celebrate with every fiber of his soul.

However, Xiahou Zong was supposedly the foremost genius of Eternal Divine Nation. It wouldn't be easy to kill him in the first place.

Even so, a seed had been planted in Yan Qingsang's heart. At the very least, though it felt like most couldn't defeat Xiahou Zong – himself included – the same wasn't necessarily true for Jiang Chen.

Good luck, Jiang Chen. Yan Qingsang cheered for his friend from the bottom of his heart. If you can defeat Xiahou Zong and save Huang'er, I'll drink myself under the table at your wedding!

This was the first time he was seriously considering this possibility. He would be more than pleased if this were to pass.

Meanwhile, Jiang Chen had entered a trance-like state that completely ignored all outside interference. He dashed into the sixth cave in the blink of an eye.

The sixth cave was the cave of illusions. It brimmed with hallucinations, delusions, and other fantastical images. Someone that entered the cave wouldn't be privy to that information though. What their eyes and ears could sense seemed all too real.

As soon as Jiang Chen entered the sixth cave, he cast his consciousness all around him to examine his surroundings.

A limitless ocean was before him with no apparent end. Skeletons and debris was scattered about on the nearby coastline.

"Hmm? What is this place?" The Nine Winding Caves had sent him to a variety of locations, but an ocean was a first.

Suddenly, a voice boomed forth from the void.

“Lost one, nothing can get across this ocean. Look at what drifts upon it – all cultivators who have attempted to force their way past.” The voice was completely detached, uncaring about all things in the world. A closer glance revealed that it came from a man on the coast, a fishing rod in the waters. He was perfectly still, as if he had been sitting there for dozens of millennia.

Jiang Chen blinked. He glanced at the watery domain. A slight breeze picked up on the relatively calm waters, sending ripples across its surface. Corpses and bones were revealed by the movement of the waves, seemingly fated to spend eternity adrift.

“Lost one?” He blinked. “Are you talking about me?”

“Is there another human around here? Human, I will ask one question of you. You have studied martial dao all your life, but do you know what sacred place is on the other side of the ocean?”

“No idea.” Jiang Chen didn’t want to fall into another’s tempo. He resorted to disinterest to curb further conversation.

Pacing nearer to the coast, he began to observe every detail of this place with his consciousness. The ocean was rather misty and mysterious.

“Stop here, young man. The world of martial dao has no room for delusion. If you don’t even know what’s on the other side, how do you have the courage to venture on?”

“The limit of martial dao is in these waters. Turn back to safety.”

Jiang Chen burst out into laughter. “What gives you the pluck to say that this is the limit of martial dao?”

He didn’t particularly hate the voice, but the bold statements it was making seemed patently absurd. Suddenly, a flash of inspiration dawned. Maybe this was another kind of test!

He abruptly raised both arms, charging up a powerful attack which he hurled at the empty space in front of him.

“False phantasm, begone!” No matter what he perceived all around him, Jiang Chen’s goal was singular and clear. He didn’t want to be defeated by any of the caves.

Every detail within this sixth cave was designed to entrance. The environment almost had a natural ability to induce him into thinking a certain way. But Jiang Chen would have none of it.

Even if this sixth cave had a guardian, what right did he have to say that these waters represented the limit of martial dao?

He’d never heard of such a ridiculous thing. Therefore, he felt this had to be a deception. A closer sweep with his consciousness revealed no signatures of life whatsoever.

Abruptly, Jiang Chen realized that he’d been fooled.

His potent strike caused the space all around him to collapse into nothingness, the projected images and other sensory mirages disappearing into the ether.

Was that it?

As he walked out of the sixth cave, Jiang Chen was somewhat incredulous. He hadn't expected the sixth trial to be so civil and polite. It was all too unbelievable.

"The sixth cave was a realm of illusions. Nothing in there was real." Jiang Chen calmed down as soon as he came out. Careful consideration revealed the truth to him.

The name of the cave was the Illusory World. It had no offensive power whatsoever. All of its effects were involved in creating hallucination and apparition to guide people's thoughts.

Someone who didn't possess an iron will would be easily led astray, and lose himself in thought and in the cave. He wouldn't find the exit no matter what direction he went in then.

Jiang Chen had used his extremely keen perception and decisiveness to cleverly pass the sixth trial.

This piece of news spread through the sacred land like wildfire. Elders who hadn't come to the hall to watch the evaluation streamed out of their residences one by one, coming to the Nine Winding Caves to spectate the exciting proceedings.

The hubbub instantly increased near the caves.

That someone had passed the sixth cave was known to basically everybody by now. Someone who did so would be a personal disciple of a sacred land master. Even if Jiang Chen didn't continue on, he would receive that lofty standard of treatment.

But the young man was dissatisfied with his achievement. He felt that he could press on forward.

"What, is that kid still not satisfied? He wants to challenge the seventh too? Where does his courage come from? Doesn't he know that the difficulty will only shoot up again from here?"

"Haha, maybe he's overconfident? The seventh cave will endanger his life."

"Never mind. Young people have their own ambitions. Perhaps Shao Yuan is going for the fame!"

"Don't say that. This young man is still full of vigor despite passing six trials. His potential hasn't entirely manifested yet."

"He might very well surprise us yet again with the seventh cave."

"Yes, just like what he's done so far. I'm not sure I would be surprised if he did, really."

Beginning from the third cave, everyone had realized that the young man had extraordinary promise. As expected, he had passed through cave after cave with perfect cadence; and now, he was past the sixth!

The difficulty of the trials was common knowledge. The fifth and the sixth caves especially caused even the most powerful of geniuses to stumble if unprepared. But this outsider with an unassuming appearance had surpassed many who'd been born within the sacred land!

Passing six trials was already third place in terms of overall achievement. Many had managed to attain this result, of course, but few could claim to have done so in recent years. And yet, someone had crashed through all six of his trials today with incredible ease. This revelation shook the entire Eternal Sacred Land.

The three primes behind closed doors were stunned as well.

“He passed the cave of illusions? The young genius that Ziju Min recommended is rather remarkable.”

“A pillar of the sacred land, to be sure.” The will of the primes praised the pill sovereign’s find and character.

Ziju Min was exceptionally pleased to hear it. But he was more curious whether the young man could succeed in his challenge against the seventh cave too. He sincerely hoped that the young genius could work a miracle.

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Chapter 1693: Startling the Primes

Jiang Chen was remarkably determined to take on the seventh cave. Among the geniuses of the Eternal Sacred Land, the best performance in history was passing the eighth cave. Therefore, his goal was to progress through all the trials and conquer the Nine Winding Caves.

“What a man, what a man!” Yan Qingsang felt nothing but surprise and admiration. He finally understood where Jiang Chen’s confidence came from.

Most people would tremble at the mention of Xiahou Zong’s name, but there was no trace of nervousness or fear in his brother. Yan Qingsang had always believed that Xiahou Zong was unrivaled among the youths in the nation, and that he could never be surpassed.

But Jiang Chen refused to accept this fact.

Yan Qingsang had always attributed that to overconfidence and pride. How could Xiahou Zong possibly be beaten? However, it was more than apparent now that the confidence wasn’t unfounded.

The seventh cave.

Jiang Chen entered it without hesitation.

Waves after waves of a fiery ocean spanning the entire cave came into view. It was as if The Grand Supreme Elderly Lord in heaven had kicked over his pill cauldron, pouring down an endless stream of heat from a hole in the sky.

The wall of fire soared to hundreds of meters in height. The heat became smothering as he walked closer.

“The Cave of Tumultuous Fire?” Jiang Chen summoned the Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice as he mused. It was the best solution to this problem.

“Heh, this cave is a purgatory of fire. This challenge can end up being fatal. The kid has overestimated himself and is going to fail miserably.”

“What a shame for a genius like him to die in that cave.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic. He passed six challenges without much difficulty. Who knows? Maybe he’ll pass the seventh as well.”

“Tsk, if he can, we sure have hit the jackpot. He’s a genius in both pill and martial dao. How many people in the Eternal Sacred Land can claim to be a perfect combination of the two?”

“Is Shao Yuan going to surprise us all?” More and more elders had come to watch the evaluation.

Ziju Min had calmed down from his excitement. His back continuously straightened after witnessing Shao Yuan’s extraordinary performance. He’d been the one to bring Shao Yuan into the sacred land. His success would prove that Ziju Min’s decision was to the sacred land’s benefit.

Though Ziju Min had reason to be proud, he wasn’t. He only hoped that Shao Yuan could persevere and pass the Cave of Tumultuous Fire.

If he passed, his performance would be the second best in history. Over the past thousands of years, only a handful of people had passed the seventh cave. Every one of them had become pillars of the sacred land later in life.

Don’t let us down, Shao Yuan! Even the three primes wouldn’t be able to sit idle if Shao Yuan was successful.

In fact, his reputation and performance must’ve drawn the three primes’ curiosity already. If he could pass the eighth cave, even the venerated forefather might put in an appearance.

Such was his speculation. The last time someone had passed the eighth cave, the venerated forefather did come to the evaluation.

Therefore, Ziju Min had high hopes for Jiang Chen. Elders who were close to the pill sovereign hoped the young man would create a miracle as well.

In his extreme focus, Jiang Chen didn’t know that he’d attracted a crowd outside. He had to admit that this was quite a challenge. Even with the Lotus shielding him, he was having a hard time braving through the fire.

When the fire was about to reach him, however, he could feel that it seemed to be sentient and didn’t intend to kill him. It was as if the fire was afraid or reverent of something on him. It avoided him whenever it got close.

He was puzzled by the realization.

At first, he suspected that the seal on his consciousness to be responsible, but that didn’t seem likely. The seal only protected him against attacks on his consciousness, not this. So what was it?

No answer was forthcoming, but there must be something.

The Vermilion Bird suddenly came to mind.

“That must be it!” Jiang Chen was reminded that the Vermilion Bird had gifted him with a feather. In hour of need, he could refine the feather, and the bird would come to his aid as soon as it could, no matter how far away it was.

The Vermilion Bird was a divine beast from the ancient times. The feather contained its blood essence, which had an affinity with fire.

"It must be the feather. I wonder how Senior Vermilion and the others are doing in their cultivation?" Jiang Chen's heart settled once he figured out the cause of the unusual phenomenon.

The feather must have invoked an inherent friendliness to Jiang Chen. That was why the fierce fire hadn't devoured him.

Other people would be faced with great dangers in this cave. Many would choose to run away when an insurmountable challenge presented itself. But Jiang Chen never even thought about giving up.

After overcoming countless difficulties, he finally reached the fringes of the cave. He was one step away from exiting the seventh cave. He thought briefly of the rough trip, then walked out without another moment of hesitation.

Yan Qingsang jumped up and down in ecstasy to see his brother conquer the seventh cave.

"You're amazing, brother. You passed seven caves in a row! Hahaha! Even the most remarkable geniuses are no better than you are!" He could barely contain his excitement.

Jiang Chen, on the other hand, was unusually calm for someone who'd just come out from the Cave of Tumultuous Fire. Seven down. Two more to go. He could foresee that the last two caves were going to be grueling.

"Congratulation for passing seven caves, Shao Yuan. Even if you stop now, Eternal Sacred Land will give you the best treatment. Your performance ranks first over the past thousands of years." Ziju Min's elation was clear on his face. He didn't expect the young man to pass seven caves. What a pleasant surprise!

Rays of light split through thin air, tearing open a breach. Out came a wave of tremendous power from different sources.

"Your Excellencies, the primes!" Every member of the Hall of Elders bowed to the newcomers.

Three people walked out from the breach: the three primes of Eternal Sacred Land. Their possessed terrifying might.

Jiang Chen felt from them power greater than any he'd felt before ever since he came to this world. No other people he'd faced before could rival them.

The primes? Jiang Chen bowed to them in greeting. "Shao Yuan greets Your Excellencies."

One of them was a woman. She was of average height and build, but there was an intrinsic air of nobility to her that demanded deference. Her presence alone was enough to make others submit to her.

The other two lords were an old man and a middle-aged man. There was a mellow strength to both of them that marked them as seniors with incredible hidden strength.

I hear that the three primes are all at peak empyrean. It seems that the rumors are right.

Jiang Chen could feel their might. He was more relieved than surprised.

To be honest, reaching ninth level empyrean wasn't that much of an achievement in his past life. Many of those who'd served him at the time were in the divine realm. Empyrean realm experts weren't significant in any way.

His tens of thousands of years of experience in the heavenly plane was the reason why he could remain calm and collected in face of ninth level empyrean experts. It was far from the first time he'd met one.

Ziju Min was concerned by his reaction. He was surprised that the young man remained fearless even before the three primes. Did he really have the ability to back up his confidence?

"Haha, good on you, young man," commented the middle-aged woman. She was the grand leader of the three primes. "It seems that we have acquired another hidden gem. Your recommendation is a great contribution to the sacred land, Elder Ziju. It'll be accumulated to your points."

"Haha, it's my duty to work for the sacred land. If Your Excellencies can spare the time, please offer the young man some guidance. He won't disappoint the sacred land with his achievement in the future." Ziju Min knew better than anyone what a treasure Jiang Chen was.

The first prime nodded with a smile. "Of course. Any genius who's passed seven caves deserves to be treated with the utmost care."

Jiang Chen finally had the opportunity to talk. He asked quietly, "Excuse me, am I not allowed to keep going? Is the seventh cave the last I can take on among the nine caves?"

His words stunned everyone.

Was he not satisfied yet? He wanted to keep going? That hadn't happened for a thousand years. Shouldn't he quit while he was ahead?

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Chapter 1694: Agitating Hearts

The three primes conferred among themselves with their eyes. Surprise was reflected in each other. At first, they hadn't paid much attention to the genius that Ziju Min had dug up from the garden of another. Shao Yuan was supposed to be much more important pill dao-wise than martial dao.

But the Eternal Sacred Land was where even the most exceptional pill dao master was only as an accent to its main force. Experts in that area couldn't influence the faction's direction as a whole.

Now they realized that they'd overlooked the young man's potential. He was proficient in both martial and pill dao.

The Nine Winding Caves had a certain amount of difficulty, but it tested for talent even moreso; it was a cursory probe into young geniuses' untapped ability. Thus, crushing or overwhelming strength wasn't necessarily needed for success. Being talented in every area often conferred the superior advantage.

"Young man, the eighth cave is quite a bit more difficult and dangerous than the seventh. Are you sure you're going to challenge it?" The first prime looked at Jiang Chen with some interest, curious as to the source of the youth's intrepidity.

“Shao Yuan,” Ziju Min added his advice, “even if you don’t challenge the eighth cave right now, your performance has already earned you the highest level of treatment within the sacred land.”

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. “I seek not the best treatment in the sacred land, but to overcome my own psychological limits. I would regret it the rest of my life if I were to skip the eighth trial.”

Everyone understood what he meant by that.

In the world of martial dao, a cultivator’s heart was perpetually proud. Challenging the trial that others had stopped short at was a declaration of a certain attitude.

The three primes all smiled and nodded.

“Very good. The Eternal Sacred Land needs geniuses as confident as you. If you can pass the eighth cave, Shao Yuan, the sacred land will treat you as its top genius to raise. It will meet your every demand.” This was the promise given by the first prime. The other two inclined their heads in agreement.

Ziju Min was a bit excited, concerned, and expectant all at the same time. He knew the youth better than all the others. The young man wouldn’t act without being certain of his own success.

Since he’d made this decision, that meant he entertained at least a fifty to sixty percent likelihood of passing.

In actuality, Jiang Chen didn’t know what awaited him in the eighth cave. That was fine though. He based the eighth off of the difficulty he’d encountered in the seventh. He felt that someone with his talents and gear had a very good shot at withstanding the eighth trial. He would press on.

If the eighth trial was extremely difficult, then he may choose to give up challenging the ninth. That depended on what he saw in the near future.

The passage to the eighth cave thus opened, Jiang Chen entered without further ceremony.

He emerged into a staircase that marked a winding ascent. After a long while, he came to an empty plain.

Jiang Chen found this detail rather odd. He could see essentially everything in this expanse. There didn’t look to be any dangers, and even if there were, they wouldn’t threaten him in this wide-open place.

Still, he didn’t let his guard down. The more peaceful things appeared, the more lethal the threat beneath the surface. He was a veteran of a hundred battles. His instincts told him not to relax.

Stepping off the staircase, Jiang Chen noticed that there was a restriction against flight here. No matter how he powered his escape and flying methods, he couldn’t take off.

“So the eighth cave bans air travel then.” That was one characteristic of the trial out of the way. He needed to get to the exit on foot.

But there was no end to this vast expanse in sight. His God’s Eye failed to give him more information than his fleshly ones.

“This doesn’t make sense. The eighth cave didn’t look big from the outside. How could it contain such a huge space inside? Is this an illusion, or a formation?” Jiang Chen wasn’t too surprised though.

The world had a wide array of spectacularly wondrous things. Many formations could accomplish this kind of effect. A space that wasn't that large could be expanded using dimensional abilities as well.

Jiang Chen took smallish strides. As he did, azure light flashed overhead. A bolt of lightning smashed down upon his head. He saw it explode on his body, unleashing terrifying radiance.

In the next moment, a storm of powerful, strangely colored electric snakes began a mad dance in the air.

"A lightning domain?" Jiang Chen finally realized what kind of trial he was in.

More and more dark clouds gathered overhead, their grey, leaden puffs dampening out the firmament. Around the clouds were more of the electric serpents. They gyrated through the air, proliferating with frenzied speed.

Bolts of lightning tore through the sky to strike the person beneath, as if they could sense life itself.

As their primary target, Jiang Chen was hit with a constant barrage of blasts. Thankfully, he possessed a gold cicada bloodline that protected him from all poisons and lightning.

Any lightning attribute attack was thoroughly non-threatening to him. However, the pace with which he pushed forth wasn't a brisk one.

"I finally understand why they were so astonished that I would choose to challenge the eighth cave. Without my gold cicada bloodline, these incredibly dense electric serpents would hit me no matter how superb my agility is. A few glancing blows are alright, but a critical one would burn me to a crisp."

The prismatic snakes of lightning had more than sufficient power to destroy any lifeform they hit. Without his gold cicada bloodline to defend himself, Jiang Chen had no idea if he would've been able to dodge all of them.

The unavailability of flight was another factor. Jiang Chen had to finish the wilderness trek on foot. Even so, the impact of the electric snakes upon his body strained his tempered body almost to its limit.

Thankfully, the frantic attack didn't continue much longer. As he continued on at his sluggish pace, he finally arrived at a place where the lightning was more sparse.

The storm began to subside. It appeared that the worst of the electricity was behind him.

"Looks like the Nine Winding Caves rewards a well-rounded genius with a smattering of talents. Only then can one pass more and more trials. It doesn't seem easy to pass multiple of these with talents concentrated in a single area."

Having gotten to the eighth, Jiang Chen understood a bit more about the Nine Winding Caves. He felt that they'd practically been designed for him. He'd had a tremendous advantage with each so far.

He would've suffered a great deal on the eighth trial, especially without his gold cicada bloodline. It was non-trivial to fend off lightning attacks of this density.

When Jiang Chen reappeared triumphantly at the exit of the eighth cave, the three primes' eyes lit up with pleasure. The young man really had managed to pass! Also dubbed the Cave of Lightning, it

possessed so much snaking electricity that it was a natural lightning domain. The shocks it delivered were potent and advanced in level.

Many geniuses who attempted it brought items to instantly escape in case of failure. After all, none of them wanted the trial to cost their life in the process.

“Primes, elders, I’ve luckily completed my mission of passing the eighth trial.” Jiang Chen had no complicated feelings on the subject. In fact, he was in a very good mood.

The three primes traded looks, then collectively exhaled. Their eyes were filled with curiosity, but they were also sincerely pleased. After all these years, another genius who passed the eighth trial had appeared!

Ziju Min was positively glowing. Jiang Chen’s excellent performance made him and Yan Qingsang the happiest of all. The latter was a brother to the young man, so it was understandable that he would be overjoyed. The pill sovereign, on the other hand, pressed back some of his enthusiasm.

“Quick, notify the venerated forefather. We have finally obtained another genius who managed to pass the eighth cave!”

“What an amazing surprise beyond all our wildest dreams. Elder Ziju, your recommendation was more than invaluable.”

“Heheh, I only did what I should have. Truthfully, no one expected Shao Yuan to be so talented and capable – not even I.”

At the start, everyone had been betting on whether he would pass the third cave. Now, even those interested in making trouble had nothing to say. Jiang Chen had delivered a resounding slap to their faces.

“Daoist Ziju, congratulations!”

“Daoist Ziju, you must treat us to a feast today! You’ve achieved a deed of great merit.”

By now, Ziju Min had calmed down from his momentary elation. He looked at Jiang Chen seriously.

“Shao Yuan, you’ve passed the eighth cave now. I must let you know in advance that historically, the highest record in the sacred land is what you’ve just accomplished. No one has ever been able to make it through the ninth. It’s more difficult than all of the caves before it combined!

“Whether you are going to challenge it or not is entirely up to your heart. Being able to get this far means that you are a genius with an iron will. You should do as your heart tells you in order to strengthen yourself further.”

Such was Ziju Min’s advice for Jiang Chen. He considered the eighth cave to be a perfect score already. To go further beyond might bring blemish to that record.

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

Chapter 1695: Pursuit of the Utmos

What his heart told him?

Jiang Chen smiled. His heart had never changed. He wanted to challenge all nine of the caves. If the ninth cave was far more difficult than he could imagine or bear, he would forfeit voluntarily.

If there was a chance he could succeed though, he would instantly take it. Currently, he needed most to make his reputation.

Passing the eighth cave would create a rush about him in the sacred land. It sounded good enough, but he wanted a longer-lasting moniker. If he could conquer the ninth cave, he would be the first genius in the Eternal Sacred Land to ever do so.

All men were ambitious; Jiang Chen was no different.

Right now, he needed to make his name known in the entire sacred land.

Jiang Chen hadn't forgotten about Ziju Min's earlier advice. If he could exhibit enough talent for the sacred land to want to keep him regardless of cost, it would offer undivided support in his bid to wed Huang'er.

In other words, he wanted the Eternal Sacred Land to be fine with offending House Xiahou on his behalf. That would mean the success of this entire endeavor.

In theory, House Xiahou didn't dare disobey the Eternal Sacred Land's decrees.

However, the sacred land typically also had its own principles. Perhaps they could use rules and circumspect methods to limit and quash other factions, but they definitely refrained from openly declaring war on any single faction.

Fighting with cloak and dagger was drastically different from an open brawl in the streets.

These thoughts caused him to draw a sharp breath, then enunciate aloud. "Honorable seniors, I have decided to attempt the ninth cave."

Ziju Min was entirely unsurprised. He sighed softly. "I knew you wouldn't stop here. If that's your decision, then give it your all. If you can break through the ninth cave, your name will be written down in the Eternal Sacred Land's history – you'll leave a deep flourish here!"

The three primes smiled and nodded as well. They found the young man more and more interesting. They admired his ability and daring a great deal; he hadn't even reached empyrean realm yet!

"Tsk, ts. Where did this Shao Yuan come from, this monster of a man? He passed the eighth trial, and now he's going for the ninth? Has... has this happened before?"

"There was once another. Will Shao Yuan follow in his footsteps, or will he break the record by succeeding in the ninth? Why do I hope that he will do the latter?"

"Daoist Ziju has found a treasure beyond compare this time for the sacred land. His martial dao talent is absolutely brilliant, and he is skilled in pill dao as well. Heavens, wouldn't all the young female cultivators all go crazy for him?" Everyone roared with laughter at that.

Jiang Chen moved with a steadfast step towards the ninth cave. The area containing it was grander and larger than any previous cave's.

Here I will either achieve lasting fame or need to bide my time. I'm giving it everything I've got!

Heroism flared in Jiang Chen's heart. As the final cave in the Nine Winding Caves, the ninth was surely a showstopper. He was prepared for whatever difficult task it threw at him.

As soon as he entered, a teleportation formation transported him into the cave's core.

A light hurtled toward him immediately upon landing. He evaded to the side just in time. A large, razor-sharp air blade had swept right into him. If he hadn't dodged, it would have cut him clean in half.

The air blade didn't relent in its forcefulness, cutting into two stone pillars to the side.

There was a resounding crash as the pillars collapsed into ruin.

Without a moment's reprieve, Jiang Chen was assailed from every direction by a hail of arrows. They seemed to lock down every conceivable avenue of escape. Even the best escape method didn't have enough room to slip away.

"How can this be?" Jiang Chen was shocked.

However, his consciousness spun rapidly on the spot. As soon as he realized he couldn't handle the volley on his own, he conjured his magnetic golden mountain.

It displaced the surrounding air with an explosive boom. A powerful magnetic field instantly altered the course of the onslaught of missiles.

Jiang Chen hadn't hoped for the golden mountain to absorb all the arrows. Its magnetic force was very attractive indeed, but that wasn't always enough to draw away especially powerful attacks.

But altering the courses of these arrows wasn't particularly difficult. As long as their trajectories were diverted, Jiang Chen's agility made a chance at life infinitely larger. His scrambling reaction had allowed him to survive in the end.

From this, it could be seen that his combat reflexes were extremely good. If Yan Qingsang were here, he would've fallen prey to the attacks. Because he'd been assaulted successively, Jiang Chen didn't dare let down his guard.

"The ninth cave should have a combination of challenges. It doesn't need to limit itself to a specific style," he speculated.

Because of the smattering of odd attacks, Jiang Chen didn't put away his magnetic golden mountain. He floated it above his palm, looking like he was holding an aureate tower.

The magnetic golden mountain gleamed with scintillating light. It evoked a rather magnificent appearance just by staying still.

A few more steps forward, Jiang Chen suddenly stumbled. The earth below him was caving in on itself.

Dirt transformed into sand, dwindling into emptiness below.

"Quicksand?" Jiang Chen marveled at what he was seeing. If he was within a vortex of quicksand, he'd be in big trouble.

Flight was forbidden here. He could only move on foot. If there was quicksand restricting his movements as well, that would be quite frightening. Dangerous quicksand could reap lives with ease.

The yellowish ground all around had turned into a sandy desert. Jiang Chen wanted to complain loudly. He wasn't worried about the desert, but the quicksand didn't look natural at all. There had to be someone – or something – controlling it.

Jiang Chen was on thin ice even though he was relying on his powers of prediction. Thankfully, his consciousness was fine enough that he could pick up the smallest of oddities. The sands threatened him heavily, but he wasn't yet mired in them.

He walked a while before suddenly turning around. His footsteps in the yellow sand had disappeared.

The sand itself was an ochre carpet that was being rapidly pulled away. Within moments, it was gone. A scarier abyss of a swamp had replaced it.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1696: An Arduous Challenge

The ninth cave was an ever-changing hellscape invoking the worst fears of the human heart. The endless desert abruptly transitioned into a bottomless swamp, which strange creatures lurked within, ready to strike at anytime.

Jiang Chen was treading on thin ice. He knew that one wrong move could lead to an unimaginable catastrophe. Fortunately, the seal in his consciousness grew more active the greater the danger he faced, helping him to instantly detect any threats.

His versatility once again gave him an edge. He was trapped several times, but the vines of the Lotus got him out of trouble time and time again.

The swamp posed a serious threat, but the Lotus' endless vines were tough enough to endure the harsh environment. He ended up using the vines to form a bridge, making it a lot easier for him to cross the hostile landscape.

He got to the other side without difficulty. Creatures from the bottom of the swamp ambushed him every once in a while, but he killed every one of them with ease. The swamp could not trap him. He pushed onwards.

Soon, he'd left the swamp and entered a grassland that spanned only a few miles. Ahead of it was an area of scattered stones. Rocks of unusual shapes stood before him, forming a jungle of stones.

As he contemplated what to do, the ground beneath his feet trembled. The stones hurtled into the sky like they'd grown wings and rained down on him like cannonballs. The danger here wasn't the physical impact of the stones, but their power to create an inescapable vacuum.

Countless rocks fell from the sky like meteorites, forming a bizarre space that sealed off all escape routes, preventing him from running in any direction.

Jiang Chen activated the Earth Bodhisattva Orb, forming a safe zone to stop the rocks from hitting him.

“Damn. The ninth cave is indeed perilous and full of death traps.” He broke into sweat from the unrelenting dangers. There had been a lot of close-calls.

“Someone less versatile is bound to fail terribly in this cave.” He kept his guard up, unable to see an end to the rocky area. Countless stones shot through the air. He was able to keep them from getting close, but his way forward was blocked as the stones landed all around him.

Jiang Chen’s scalp tingled numbly as he stared at the dense rain of flying rocks. Had ten thousand mountains collapsed simultaneously? Why would there be so many rocks otherwise?

The rain of stones grew more intense. The barrier formed by Earth Bodhisattva Orb prevented anything from getting within a couple meters of radius from him, but there was seriously no end to the rain of stones.

The stones piled up, encircling the space around him. In less than fifteen minutes, a mountain spanning dozens of miles had formed, trapping him underneath. Jiang Chen didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. The flying stones weren’t an attack! They were a powerful formation meant to trap him.

The formation took the shape of a mountain in its final stage, keeping any living beings beneath it from escaping.

Despite his realization, it was a bit too late. The newly formed mountain shouldn’t be that difficult to break, but he couldn’t destroy a mountain of such scale through his own fists alone.

More importantly, the stone mountain was a formation that fortified itself. That power was the most difficult thing to destroy.

He tried several times to break out, but to no avail. Raw power alone wasn’t enough. He considered digging downwards, but the formation prevented him from doing so as well. The ground was made solid and unbreakable.

All other attempts failed miserably. He didn’t know whether he should laugh or cry.

“I’ve had an unstoppable streak of success, but now I’m trapped under the mountain. Though I’m in no danger of dying, I can’t stop here!”

He refused to accept defeat. He was here to conquer the cave. He wouldn’t be able to forgive himself if he failed.

According to the rules of the ninth cave, if he didn’t escape in one day, he would fail his challenge.

There was still plenty of time, but if he didn’t break out, it wouldn’t make a difference if he had a dozen or hundred days more. Even an empyrean expert would be helpless in his place.

“Is it impossible to pass this cave?” Jiang Chen’s head was clear despite his frustration. He tried his best to calm down.

An idea struck him.

Ah! The Goldbiter Rats! He grinned widely. How could he have forgotten about the army of rats?

Known for their ability to consume anything and everything, there was no fortress the Goldbiter Rats couldn't topple. The stone mountain may be sturdy, but it wasn't tough enough to stop the Rats.

Besides, he had a terrifyingly great number of them at his disposal.

He summoned Goldbiter Rat King immediately. "I'm trapped within a stone mountain, Ole Gold, and the mountain is reinforced by a formation. I can't break out on my own. Can you eat away the mountain from within?"

The Rat King cackled. "That's what we're best at, young master Chen. You should have summoned me earlier. Come out, my children."

At its order, an army of Goldbiter Rats flooded out of the Millionditch Stonenest and swarmed in all directions. They devoured everything in their way.

Jiang Chen marveled at their ability.

In less than half an hour, the army of Goldbiter Rats had created a long tunnel. Jiang Chen observed for a while. He could tell that the rats were close to digging through the stone mountain completely.

"That's enough, Ole Gold. Call your children back. I don't want them exposed."

As long as the rats stayed within the mountain, they would remain hidden. However, if they dug through the mountain and got out, the ones observing outside the cave would be able to see them.

Jiang Chen decided to break through the last bit on his own. He was confident that he'd be able to handle that much. He used his fingers as cutting tools and cut through the stone piece by piece. After less than fifteen minutes, a ray of sunlight shone through a crack he'd made.

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While Jiang Chen was trapped within the stone mountain, the three primes and the elders watched the changes in the cave with rapt attention.

"The ninth cave is unpredictable. It's unlikely Shao Yuan will succeed."

"It's good for young people to be brave and ambitious. His experience inside will improve his mental fortitude."

"First Prime, can you see what's happening in the cave with your mind's eye?" an elder asked, turning to the leader of the primes.

She smiled. "He's overcome many areas, including the quicksand and the swamp, but he's now trapped in the stone mountain. It seems that he's having trouble breaking out."

Ziju Min's face fell at this news. He knew how difficult a challenge the mountain of falling rocks posed.

If Shao Yuan had gotten around the mountain, he stood a decent chance of passing the area. But once trapped, he was in big trouble. He'd have to overcome not only the stones, but also the fortifying formation.

It'd take even a mid rank empyrean expert hours to escape the mountain, let alone a young man at peak great emperor.

"He's so close to escaping the cave. What a shame for him to fail with only a few more challenges ahead. Nonetheless, his performance is already remarkable."

"Indeed. Elder Ziju has done the sacred land a great service. First Prime, the mountain isn't going to cause any permanent damage to Shao Yuan, is it?"

"Right. We don't want anything to happen to a genius like him."

The prime smiled faintly. "Don't worry too much. Most areas in the Nine Winding Caves offer protection to the challengers. Only a few places are fatal. There are life-threatening dangers in the stone mountain, but I think Shao Yuan will be able to deal with them."

Ziju Min sighed in relief. It didn't matter if Shao Yuan failed the ninth cave. All was well as long as he survived. He'd set a great enough record already.

"Is there a chance for Shao Yuan to escape the mountain?" asked one of the elders.

The prime shook her head. "We don't know yet." Suddenly, she blinked as a sharp light shot out her eyes. She looked forward incredulously. "This young man is full of surprises."

"What's happened?" The others turned to her, surprised by her change of tone.

The prime took a deep breath. "He forged a path through the mountain and has escaped!"

"What? He's broken through the mountain? Isn't it strengthened by a formation? How can a peak great emperor destroy the fortifying formation?" All eyes widened in shock.

The prime shook her head with a wry smile, her eyes sparkling with astonishment and bemusement. A flash of imperceptible delight streaked across her face.

They were witnessing the rise of a genius.

She'd come to fully recognize what a genius Ziju Min had brought to the Eternal Sacred Land. No matter where this genius came from, no matter who he had been, as long as he wasn't a spy from one of their enemy factions, they must spare no effort in supporting him.

Jiang Chen broke through the mountain and took a breath of fresh air. Excitement swelled in his heart. He leapt out of the mountain and rushed away. He didn't want to be trapped again.

He kept his guard up even after leaving the formation. The cave was filled with dangers and he couldn't afford to be careless. Fatal threats lurked around every corner. He might not be as lucky next time.

Not long after, he found himself entering a dense forest area filled with lush vegetation.

All around him were ancient plants. The grass was at knee level, and the trees soared up to the sky. There were also various species of strange vines.

The seal in Jiang Chen's consciousness became active as soon as he stepped into the forest, which meant that dangers laid in wait. He deployed the Pentecolor Divine Swords to cut a swathe through the grass.

The trees were clearly visible, while the grass could be home to many dangerous beings. No one knew what dangers lurked within the overgrown grass. Plus, there was his seal also acting up again.

Suddenly, a strange wind swept over the turf. All the grass and crawling vines in his view transformed into snakes of different colors. There was nothing but multi-colored snakes within his sight.

Their combined hissing sent a chill down one's spine.

Even a regular person would be alright with the sight of a couple snakes, but being surrounded by so many was a different story. The density alone could make one's hair stand on end.

Jiang Chen's lips twitched as he snickered. "How dare you little snake spirits stand in my way?"

He fearlessly raised the Pentecolor Divine Swords and shouted, "The first sword, shaking heaven and earth..."

"The second sword, moving existence itself..."

"The third sword, separating yin and yang..."

"The fourth sword, claiming dominion over the world..."

"The fifth sword, gathering the five elements and forming thunder itself. Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, slewing the heavens themselves!"

He'd used the Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique. The torrent was unstoppable. It was the perfect technique to use in a group battle.

The endless slashes left nothing intact within the area of effect. Every last one of the snake spirits was rendered into small pieces by the blades, splattering flesh and blood everywhere.

Jiang Chen braved the rain of gore. He paused, his nose twitching. A foul smell assaulted his sense. Suddenly, the tree before him exploded.

The land behind the tree fractured. An enormous snake spirit of terrifying size shot out of the ground and straightened its body.

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

Chapter 1697: The Tone From The Top

The eyeballs of the gigantic serpent spirit were bigger than a lantern. Its horrifyingly bloodshot eyes shone with murderous intent.

Jiang Chen remained calm in the face of the evil spirit blocking his way. It wasn't the first time he faced down a giant monster. He wasn't afraid in the slightest.

The serpent suddenly opened its mouth wide.

Huff!

A whiff of filthy breath shot viciously towards him, the pungent smell repulsive enough to make one wish for the mercy of death.

He instinctively knew that it was highly poisonous. However, no poison in the world could harm him thanks to his Golden Cicada bloodline. With a simple wave of his sleeve, he diverted the gust of air.

It dispersed and rotated around him in continuous circles.

He shot a ray of light from his Evil Golden Eye at the enormous serpent's lantern-like pupils, splitting the air like keen swords.

The spirit hadn't taken the human's attack seriously at first, but it realized how powerful the attack was when the sharp golden light drew close. It tilted its head, narrowly preventing the light from taking its eyes.

The two rays of light cut into the center of its forehead instead.

Splurt.

Blood spurted violently out of the two cuts.

His Evil Golden Eye could attack not only the consciousness, but also apply physical force. It alone was powerful enough. With the seal on his consciousness strengthening it, its effects were boosted greatly.

The secret methods benefitted the most from the seal: the Evil Golden Eye, God's Eye, Ear of the Zephyr, Psychic's Head, and Boulder's Heart. Any having to do with the consciousness were also greatly enhanced.

The injury enraged the serpent. It threw back its head with a screech, its eyes violently bloodshot and killing intent surging.

Its enormous body scurried to and fro with its mouth opened wide. A blood red ribbon looped around Jiang Chen like a rope of flesh, who calmly inflicted a series of slashes with the Supernova Point.

The tongue was surprisingly tough. Even the powerful Supernova Point was unable to slice through it, leaving only a shallow cut in its wake. And, the cut instantly healed with the serpent's saliva.

Jiang Chen was dumbfounded by the bizarre scene. The serpent's tongue was even tougher than the stone mountain!

Although the Supernova Point wasn't his strongest martial method, it could inflict considerable damage to a single enemy. Even an empyrean expert wouldn't dare take the point head-on.

The serpent's tongue was even tougher than its skin?? He'd managed to puncture its forehead, but the Supernova Point had only left a glancing blow on its tongue. He finally understood why the ninth cave was so intimidating, and why no geniuses had managed to pass it.

Even without the giant serpent spirit, the series of dangers he'd encountered so far were more than what most people could deal with. The serpent and its descendents were all venomous, and the entire area was covered in poison.

If he hadn't been of the golden cicada bloodline, he would've long since been knocked out by the poisonous fumes. He wouldn't even be able to fight.

The serpent's tongue whipped at him with great velocity, an agile band. Fortunately he was adept at movement.

By distracting the serpent with the Pentecolor Divine Swords, he was able to stand his ground against it, albeit with some difficulty. The serpent continuously breathed out foul odor as it attacked with its tongue.

Its poisonous breath was obviously its greatest strength, and it happened to be the one thing Jiang Chen was immune to. He knew if he could hack through the serpent, he'd be close to exiting the cave.

That was easier said than done, however.

Jiang Chen observed the serpent's behavior and the surrounding landscapes as he fought. He could've made quick work of the serpent by summoning the Confounding Puppets, or at least hold down the serpent long enough for him to pass through safely.

However, there must be many watching him outside the Nine Winding Caves. He didn't want to show all the cards he had. That was why he had such a difficult time fighting the serpent.

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The first prime kept her eyes on everything happening in the cave. She closely watched Jiang Chen's fight with the serpent.

"What's happening, First Prime? Has Shao Yuan entered the serpent tribe's territory?"

"Oh, he won't be able to defeat the serpent spirit."

"He should be proud of himself for escaping the stone mountain alone. Throughout history, none of the cultivators entering the ninth cave were able to pass that region. Shao Yuan's record is already unparalleled, right"

"That's right. I hope the young man will bring us the ultimate miracle."

The first prime looked ahead deeply. "The young man seems helpless against the serpent spirit, but the serpent seems incapable of taking him out either."

"What? The serpent can't take him out? Isn't the serpent's poisonous gas very powerful? Is its army of descendents unable to deal with him either?"

"That can't be. The whole region is the death zone. It's covered in snake venom. No one can pass through the area. Has the serpent gone easy on him and not attacked with the poisonous miasma?"

The elders didn't have their mind's eye open and couldn't see what was happening in the cave.

"Haha, the serpent has attacked him with poisonous air many times, but the young man has a mysterious method of defense that protects him against poison."

The elders were dumbfounded. It wasn't rare for a cultivator to know anti-poison methods, but most of them only worked for a short period of time. Their effects would wear off after prolonged exposure to poisonous gas.

"Elder Ziju, what do you think is the method that protects Shao Yuan from poisons for so long?" The first prime was very curious. Methods against poison were something all cultivators cared about. Even someone at her level wouldn't say she was invincible against all poisons.

There was a great variety of poisons in the world. The same poison could have drastically different effects in different hands.

A poison that didn't work on an empyrean expert when used by a great emperor, could threaten the former in the hands of another empyrean expert.

At the same time, even the most powerful cultivator wouldn't claim to be immune to all poisons; none in the Eternal Sacred Land at least. The same was true for Ziju Min, recognized as the figurehead in pill dao.

Thus, Ziju Min didn't immediately respond. He thought for a good moment. "There are many ways to defend against poisons - pills, magical items, or antidotes. Each method has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, it's almost impossible to be immune to all poisons. It's said that there was a bloodline in the ancient times that granted immunity. However, there's never been such a case on Myriad Abyss Island."

"A bloodline that grants immunity to all poisons? Is there a human bloodline like that?"

"Bloodlines of the human race are complicated. Our bloodline is flexible and able to incorporate many others of the ancient times as our own. If a human bloodline has been mixed with that of an ancient race, the power may awaken after some generations."

The first prime smiled. "Is Shao Yuan's immunity from his blood, a pill, or some treasure?"

Ziju Min didn't have an answer.

The first prime didn't push. "Why do I have a feeling that this isn't Shao Yuan's full power?" she commented suddenly. "He seems to be pulling his punches even as he fights the serpent. The young man is more extraordinary than we imagine."

Her comments surprised the others and they exchanged looks.

"Why would a talented young man like him have remain unnoticed before?" someone spoke up. "It seems suspicious."

"I agree. Shao Yuan's history is an odd one. He appeared on the Bluesmoke Isles as a nobody and latched onto House Yan. He then came to us after a short period of time. I feel like there's someone pulling the strings behind the scenes." The ones who spoke were Ziju Min's rivals.

They were insinuating that Shao Yuan's backstory was suspicious, and that he might have joined the Eternal Sacred Land with a hidden agenda.

Ziju Min looked at them, but surprisingly didn't say anything.

The first prime smiled. "Don't overreact. If Shao Yuan has joined us with ulterior motives, he won't succeed. As long as he isn't a spy from our enemy factions, we must devote everything we have to support him. His potential is unrivaled. Besides, I don't know what faction would be generous enough to send a genius like him out as a spy."

Factions hostile to one another did plant spies, but the spies were always of mediocre talent.

If a spy was too remarkable, it'd be a great loss for the faction once the spy was exposed. In addition, talented people attracted too much attention. It'd be difficult for a spy like that to do his job.

Regular disciples who were unremarkable in every which way were the ones most suitable for going undercover.

Ziju Min bowed slightly to the prime lord and promised with heretofore unseen conviction, "This subordinate can't guarantee that the young man has no personal agenda, but I can promise that he is no spy."

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

Chapter 1698: Tactics of Exhaustion

Ziju Min had observed Jiang Chen a long while and had put a lot of thought into each of his interactions with the youth. At their first encounter, the young man really had been uninterested in the invitation. That rejection had absolutely not been for the sake of a later acceptance.

The pill had lived for more than enough time to be able to glean that trivial amount of information.

If the young man had planned to join the Eternal Sacred Land all along, he could've done so at the first invitation. There would've been no need to initially refuse.

The pill sovereign had only pulled off the second invitation by using the friction between the young man and House Yan. Thus, he was certain that the young man would do no harm to the sacred land.

Someone snickered. "Elder Ziju, your guarantee is entirely personal. I don't find it very convincing."

Ziju Min smiled coolly. "What do you think we should do? Exile him? Dismiss him from the sacred land?"

"Not necessarily, but we should be wary of him. It's never bad to understand all of the specifics."

"That's what some of House Yan's executives thought. And what came of it?" Ziju Min sneered.

"House Yan isn't remotely worthy of comparison to us," the dissenting elder retorted.

"The reasoning is sound. I can't believe any faction in the Ten Divine Nations would be blind enough to give away a genius like him."

Ziju Min was frigid. "Though I suppose the possibility of brain damage can't be discounted."

The first prime didn't take a side in the argument. Instead, she smiled serenely. "That's enough on that subject. We will see in time whether Shao Yuan has any ulterior motives."

“He has a goal of his own,” Ziju Min declared. “He’s mentioned it to me, in fact. I told him that the sacred land will not support him before he displays absolutely dominant talent and capability.”

“Oh? What goal does he have?” the first prime inquired with interest. Goals were fine to have. Goals unknown to others were much more concerning.

Ziju Min sighed softly. “First Prime, I’d be happy to discuss it at length with you later.”

The first prime nodded after a moment of consideration. “Acceptable. Everyone knows of Shao Yuan’s surpassing talent by now. I’d like to issue a formal warning that all debate regarding him should cease. If there really is a problem with him, I will deal with it personally. If not, all of this noise is pointless. House Yan lost this young man because of envy from a bunch of fools, but this is the Eternal Sacred Land. I don’t enjoy the company of fools. Have I made myself clear?”

The elders who had been arguing a moment earlier were shakingly silent. They could hear the admonishment in the first prime’s tone.

A slight slap to the face was to teach them to behave. No obstructionist behavior would be tolerated.

“Alright, that’s that then. Let’s keep our eyes peeled to see if our newest genius can’t work a miracle. Will he break the Nine Winding Caves’ record?”

Jiang Chen was embroiled in a bitter struggle. Under the precondition that he couldn’t use his Confounding Puppets, he found it difficult to deal with the situation using his other, more standard, techniques. However, he took pleasure in the difficulty.

This was the best time to hone his own combat ability. The more he strived, the more he sharpened his battle senses. He rather liked this kind of training; it would increase his overall skill a great deal.

It was difficult to look for chances to do so; he had come upon this opportunity by happenstance.

Jiang Chen’s all-roundedness really shone through here. If the ninth cave hadn’t forbidden flight, he felt that he could use speed alone to penetrate the creature’s defense.

Unfortunately, the cave’s restrictions were too severe.

He could only rely on his own agility and various methods to navigate around the serpent. His advantage lay in his mobility, his toolbox of abilities, and his limitless supply of pills.

The serpent was colossal in size, and would fatigue itself as the fight waged on. More importantly, it needed a lot of food to replenish its energy. Because it couldn’t refine pills, it lacked the portable supply of energy that was available to Jiang Chen.

This was the only opening he could make use of at the moment. Therefore, Jiang Chen went to painstaking lengths to force the snake to drain its own energy. His goal was clear: even if he couldn’t harm the serpent, he wanted to leech it of stamina until it could no longer move.

Jiang Chen utilized his strategy in a very adept manner. The serpent was excessively large and couldn’t command all its extremities with particular dexterity.

Its tremendous mass gave it a crushing advantage in battle, as well as destructive momentum. However, the associated negative side effects were not to be discounted. It used up a lot of energy very quickly and had a hard time replenishing it.

This was why many towering races had declined from the primordial to the ancient, and from the ancient to the present. A large body meant a lot of inconveniences.

Though humans were naturally weak and mediocre in terms of bloodline, their ability to reproduce was extremely potent. Additionally, their bloodline could accommodate that of many others, and they were rather small in size.

These details didn't immediately appear advantageous in a single generation, but the passage of time showed their vital importance in a race's propagation. A race with such qualities was very resilient.

This serpentine spirit was undoubtedly a descendant of ancient creatures. Evidently though, a creature like it was no longer the ruling race in these lands. It wouldn't be placed in a trial area otherwise.

Because it was kept in a trial cave, that might mean its existence was under the Eternal Sacred Land's control and permission. More bluntly, it was a puppet of the sacred land – albeit of a different nature.

The first prime appreciated Jiang Chen's clever use of strategy. In the world of martial dao, a young genius wasn't considered amazingly gifted if all he had to show was talent alone.

Countless youths with exceptional potential existed among the first-rate factions of Myriad Abyss Island. Aside from remarkable talent, a cunning intellect and a calm mind were decisive factors that distinguished a genius from his peers – and many other personal qualities besides.

The first prime was very satisfied with this young man in particular in these areas. A genius who could strictly carry out a strategy in a bind must have a sharp mind.

"How are things in there, First Prime?" someone asked.

"Rather well. This young man is a lot more resilient than we thought he would be. More exceptionally, his thoughts are crystal clear. Someone who can keep their cool in a heated moment is hard to find. The fact that he's executing a strategy even now... he really stands out from the crowd." The first prime didn't hold back any praise.

"First Prime, he... he's executing a strategy?"

"Yes, he's attempting to tire out his opponent. The serpent is very large, and each motion requires a lot of energy. He's trying everything he can to get it to move around and speed up its exhaustion. On the other hand, he's using pills to restore his own energy. If the serpent can't deal with him shortly, perhaps the young man can get past."

"Tire out his opponent?"

"Exactly so." The first prime nodded.

Ziju Min's eyes lit up. Relying on the serpent's fatigue was the best strategy right now. The serpent was assuredly stronger than him in terms of pure offense and defense.

Taking advantage of the energy discrepancy between the two combatants was a perfect solution. As long as there was the tiniest of openings thanks to the snake's fatigue, Jiang Chen could take advantage of it.

Many of the Hall of Elders nodded to themselves. The young man was indeed remarkable. Stratagems were not uncommon, but it was much harder for a young genius to come up with the best one in so short a time. That was a much rarer quality.

Just as the first prime had said, Jiang Chen was putting the maximum amount of effort into exhausting his enemy. He aimed his attacks specifically at the serpent's most vulnerable areas, forcing it to dodge. He also occasionally provoked it into attacking him recklessly.

As long as the serpent moved without rest, it would expend energy at an exponential rate. And as long as he didn't actually enter melee range with the serpent, Jiang Chen was unafraid of its attacks. The scariest missile range attack of the serpent was its poison mist, completely ineffectual against him.

After four hours spent in frenzied brawl, the serpent's presence began to weaken. It was having a hard time keeping up the intense assault. This was Jiang Chen's chance!

He nocked two arrows upon his Holy Dragon Bow.

"Eat this, you brute!" Jiang Chen hadn't used it earlier because he'd been waiting for this moment. His Holy Dragon Bow could inflict the maximum amount of damage among everything in his arsenal. Thus, Jiang Chen wanted to use it only when the serpent hesitated.

His target was the beast's eyes.

His Evil Golden Eye had failed to destroy the serpent's eyes despite being deployed several times. It was time to break out a more potent weapon.

The fully drawn bow unleashed a powerful ancient aura.

Jiang Chen concentrated the strength from his entire body into a single point. He prepared himself to fire the most powerful set of twin arrows in his entire life. His heart was as clear as calm water. His consciousness rested upon the two arrows.

Only the weapon was in his heart.

The serpent shrieked, feeling a tinge of oddness and unease. Its gargantuan body slithered to and fro, attempting to land a lethal strike upon Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen's own body was light as a swallow, his eyes perpetually trained on his target without hesitation. He was narrowing the focus onto the serpent's eyes.

As long as he managed to hit its eyes, it would be blinded. Without its eyes, its senses would be severely deadened. The opportunity created by the pain would be the chance he could dart past!

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

Chapter 1699: A Perfect Score

However, it was far from easy to hit the pupils of the snake.

Timing was of the essence, as well as the utilization of every other environmental and circumstantial factor. Jiang Chen's mind was clear. The chain seal in his consciousness was especially active, allowing his senses to maintain peak keenness.

"The chance will be fleeting. I have to make this opportunity happen myself."

In the span of a single thought, he made a hand seal and conjured countless vines from the Lotus from beneath the earth. They surged towards the serpent with alarming alacrity.

The Lotus' potency lay not just in its dual attribute offense, but its vines' terrifying ability to entangle as well.

One or two weren't particularly effective at doing so, but hundreds to thousands of them combined in force were spectacular to behold.

Moreover, the Lotus was gradually improving itself alongside its master. It was drastically different in form from when Jiang Chen had first obtained it. Each vine was filled with vigor and tenacity.

The serpent was completely unprepared for the vines' onslaught, and reacted by lashing out in berserk madness. Its body contorted to break through the organic bindings.

Jiang Chen knew that the serpent was strong enough to shake off the vines in no time at all. Thus, he levelled the Evil Golden Eye without hesitation. Fearsome aureate light shot toward his bestial opponent with terrifying killing intent.

The golden rays were almost too bright to behold, more brilliant than the glare of the midday sun. The serpent couldn't quite keep its eyes open at the radiance.

"Now is the time!" Or so Jiang Chen's instincts told him.

He drew back both arrows on his bow to form a full moon.

Whoosh!

The ear-piercing sound of missiles tearing through air could be heard. The arrows soared forth, golden trails following behind them.

A flash of light marked their disappearance entirely. In the next moment, the serpent spirit howled with hysterical pain. Its clumsy physique writhed madly about, tail sweeping the air like a giant whip. Huge trees were smashed cleanly in half by its frenzied motions.

Yard-deep gashes were created upon the ground as well, their jagged edges painfully fresh.

The serpent continued its blood-crazed shrieks. Its eyes had been pierced straight through, and blood gushed out of them incessantly. Jiang Chen was exceedingly pleased.

"Go!" The thought flickered across his mind.

He was extraordinarily fleet of foot. A few quick hops were all he needed to get out of the serpent's zone of control and bound far further into the distance.

Jiang Chen took a deep breath, then turned back to look at the agitated snake. A few pangs of relief were still running through him.

If his gambit hadn't succeeded back there, he knew that he would need to use the Confounding Puppets. He really hadn't wanted to use them. In fact, he considered it better for him to forfeit the trial rather than do so.

Thankfully, he'd managed to pull off a spectacular feat here.

His success wasn't as simple as having forced his way past. His strategy and daring had both been proven as well. Without either of those traits, he wouldn't have prevailed in the ordeal.

Having gotten past the serpent, Jiang Chen didn't let down his guard still. Presumably, the ninth cave's trials were done, or nearly so. However, whether it really was the last test or not was still up in the air.

Thankfully, the appearance of an exit shortly thereafter smoothed his worries.

"Congratulations, contestant. You have passed all nine trials of the Nine Winding Caves." The echoing voice sounded heavenly to Jiang Chen's ears.

He took the portal offered to him.

Suddenly, he heard thunderous applause all about him. The three primes as well as all the congregated elders of the Hall offered him a deafening ovation. Surprise and recognition were plain in their collective eyes.

Ziju Min came forward without regard for his status. "Congratulations, Shao Yuan. I am proud of you and your achievement here, as are we all here at the Eternal Sacred Land. Come and greet the three primes. They have come personally to cheer you on. This is a first in our history, as far as I know."

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. He had seen the three primes before and was uncowed by a repeat visit.

"Your gracious support is immensely appreciated, great primes." He saluted.

"I was wrong about you, young man." The first prime sounded quite happy. Her gaze held nothing but appreciation. "I didn't expect a young man to finally pass all nine of the Winding Caves. You are the first, and I hope this is the precedent for generations to come."

"I'm sure that'll be the case," Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Yan Qingsang ran over as well, enthusiasm plain on his face. He grabbed Jiang Chen's shoulders. "Well done, brother!"

Many of the elders from the Hall came forward to offer their felicitations as well.

"Good job, young man!"

"Keep at it! We need more geniuses like you."

"Don't be too satisfied with your current achievement. We wouldn't want your wonderful talent to go to waste now!"

The encouragement of these seniors were largely courtesy, but Jiang Chen nevertheless responded with notable politeness. His respectful attitude pleased every elder he interacted with.

Many young geniuses were proud to some degree. This young man possessed a calmness and modesty that weren't characteristic of his peers. Though he had attained an unheard of feat, he remained rather down to earth.

"Shao Yuan, I have reported your performance to the venerated forefather as well. Perhaps he will host an audience for you in the near future," the first prime remarked seriously to the young man.

"The venerated forefather?" Jiang Chen knew about the hierarchy here, but this senior of a forefather felt rather distant to him. Apparently, the venerated forefather had attained true divinity, which made him a pinnacle among all in Myriad Abyss.

Divine cultivators were the backbone of society in the heavenly planes.

Thus, he was mildly expectant upon hearing about the venerated forefather. He wanted to know just how strong the strongest experts in Myriad Abyss were exactly. He was also curious whether there was much of a difference between gods here and the ones of the heavenly planes.

Jiang Chen's silence prompted some admonishment from Ziju Min. "Shao Yuan, the venerated forefather is a divine being who watches over the Eternal Sacred Land. He is our totem and protector. He has almost divorced himself from worldly affairs, so it's an immeasurable honor for him to want to meet you."

He was worried that Jiang Chen would feel a callous indifference because of ignorance.

A smile appeared on the young genius' face. "I found it hard to believe that I'd be blessed with an audience with the venerated forefather. I needed a moment to recover my wits."

Everyone roared with laughter.

The first prime smiled. "Well then, I hereby announce that from this day forth, Shao Yuan is considered a personal disciple of the highest rank. He is to receive the best treatment of his generation. If the venerated forefather will not take him as his disciple, I will teach him myself."

This was a valuable promise. The first prime was the ruler of the Eternal Sacred Land in fact as well as name.

Though the venerated forefather held unrivaled prestige, he didn't mind the particulars of the sacred land or interfere in its operations. Therefore, the one who held authority in day-to-day affairs was the first prime.

The venerated forefather was more akin to a pillar of support and figurehead for the faction.

The rest looked at Jiang Chen with envious admiration. This young man had distinguished himself in a single move!

However, their recollections of how they did in their youth diluted that emotion. They couldn't complain given his excellence in comparison. After all, he had performed marvellously – to a degree that it was impossible to refuse him.

“Yan Qingsang, you passed four trials. You’ve risen to the rank of an elite disciple, but your discovery of Shao Yuan elevates you to the treatment of a core one.”

Though he was an elite disciple in name, he was considered a core disciple in all other respects.

Core disciples were only one rank below personal disciples within the Eternal Sacred Land, but the latter group was a very small and exclusive category. Therefore, it was a tremendous honor for Yan Qingsang to receive this kind of treatment.

His original goal had been to remain in the sacred land as a regular disciple. He’d never dreamed to be treated as a core one.

Yan Qingsang was extremely excited. He was completely satisfied with Jiang Chen’s elevation to the highest rank of disciples. He knew that he had come this far largely to his friend’s help.

“Elder Ziju, I don’t think Shao Yuan’s pill dao evaluation is necessary any more? A pill dao genius that even the Jade Lake Sect has conceded to is plenty impressive.” The first prime smiled. “I will waive the requirement on his behalf.”

The first prime no longer saw the pill dao evaluation as particularly important. Even if the young man didn’t have an ounce of pill dao talent, what did that matter? His astoundingly terrific martial dao potential was enough cause for celebration.

“Of course you can waive it, First Prime,” Ziju Min smiled back.

As the ruler and administrator of the Eternal Sacred Land, the first prime had sufficient power to make that call.

“Take good care of these young men and don’t let any abuse happen to them. From now on, Shao Yuan is considered the foremost genius in the Eternal Sacred Land. You are all seniors and should thus tend to and teach your juniors.”

This was once again a cautionary statement from the first prime to those interested in making trouble for Shao Yuan. If they did so, they would be making trouble for themselves and the sacred land.

The few elders that had been opposed to Jiang Chen had only done so because of their lukewarm relationship with Ziju Min. Now that his plumage was filled out and he was under the protection of the first prime, not to mention the venerated forefather – who would be blind enough to obstruct him given these circumstances? Doing so would be tantamount to suicide.

To put it bluntly, some elders were entirely unnecessary to the sacred land, but geniuses of this caliber made a huge difference.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1700: The Venerated Forefather

Jiang Chen’s remarkable performance in the Eternal Sacred Land sent a great ripple through the calm Eternal Divine Nation. No one expected that the young man House Yan had brought back from the

Bluesmoke Isles would be this talented. He'd broken the sacred land's record for the Nine Winding Caves!

House Yan was collectively shocked when they received the news. Incidentally, they became the laughingstock of the great factions in the nation once again. Almost everyone, including the patriarch, regretted their behavior greatly. Yan Wanyou and others who were antagonistic to Yan Wanjun were the few exceptions.

The only thing maintaining their last shred of dignity was Yan Qingsang. A young man from House Yan had somehow managed to pass the sacred land's evaluation and became one of its official geniuses! He offered the house some comfort in its awkward state.

For his remarkable performance, Jiang Chen was given the best abode located in the best area of the sacred land. Only the true disciples could reside here.

As a core disciple, the treatment Yan Qingsang received was one level down. His abode was a tier lower than Jiang Chen's, both in the structure itself and its location.

Ziju Min personally led Jiang Chen to his new residence.

"Thank you for everything, Elder Ziju. It's been quite a bit of trouble for you this time" Jiang Chen was very grateful for the pill sovereign's help.

Ziju Min chuckled. "I was the one who prompted you to join the sacred land. I must finish what I started. Besides, you're my greatest achievement during my time here."

Jiang Chen smiled in response to the compliments.

"To be honest, I don't entirely approve of your decision to take on the ninth cave, Shao Yuan. The Eternal Sacred Land is fair, but there are some hidden rules. The tallest tree is the first to be bent by a wind. You've only just arrived. I worry that your dramatic ascension in status will make your life difficult."

"Oh?" Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "Is Elder Ziju worried that someone in the faction will target me?"

"They're unlikely to harm you, but young people are impulsive. It's difficult to predict if the other geniuses will welcome you with open arms after your achievement. My guess is they'll be hostile towards you."

Jiang Chen wasn't surprised. Only mediocre talents garnered no jealousy.

"I'm ready for that, Elder Ziju, and I'm not afraid. I didn't join the sacred land to compete with or defeat others. Petty arguments won't trouble me. You don't have to worry. I know what I'm doing."

Ziju Min was slightly surprised. He'd thought the young man had lost his ability to think carefully in the heat of the moment. It seemed that Shao Yuan had considered the consequences of his actions. He did indeed have quite a strong character.

He didn't conceal himself even when knowing full well what troubles may follow.

"I'm curious, Shao Yuan. Are you really so eager to prove yourself just to gain our support in your fight for Yan Qinghuang?"

It was said that even heroes couldn't help but fall for beautiful women, but he still found it difficult to believe.

"That's right," admitted Jiang Chen.

"That's the only reason?" Ziju Min pushed.

"The only reason."

Ziju Min considered him carefully. The young man's expression seemed genuine. He sighed. "Shao Yuan, when you were in the ninth cave, many of the senior executives from the Hall of Elders questioned your background. They worried that you might be a spy from our enemy factions. Do you know how the first prime responded?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "I don't know, and I don't care to know."

Ziju Min paused. "Why?"

"Because I wasn't sent here by any faction," Jiang Chen said calmly. "No one can order me around."

Ziju Min was silent for a long moment.

"I introduced you to the sacred land because of your remarkable talent in pill dao," he finally responded. "You're the kind of pill dao genius that rarely appears even once in ten thousand years, but it turns out the same is true of your martial dao talent."

"My observations tell me that you possesses unparalleled talent and potential, Shao Yuan. There's very little that I can teach you. As someone who's walked the path however, I want to remind you to not take your talent and potential for granted. Don't do anything that'll sabotage your own future. As long as you're loyal to the sacred land, we'll help you become renowned and feared throughout the lands. We can give you more than any other faction can. This is where you can develop your talent to the fullest. Do you understand?"

Jiang Chen knew what he was getting at. "I understand your concerns, Elder Ziju, but I can swear that I didn't join the sacred land on anyone's order. My one and only goal is to save Yan Qinghuang. If I lie, may the heavens and earth destroy me."

He didn't like making oaths, but it was the most effective way to earn trust in the world of martial dao. He didn't want any troubles. It was better for him to take himself into the clear and reassure everyone of his intentions, lest the senior executives doubt him and hinder his progress.

Ziju Min was overjoyed. "Wonderful. I am at ease. I believe the venerated forefather and the three primes will all appreciate you greatly."

"I will treasure this opportunity," Jiang Chen said humbly.

“Good. With their approval, you can afford to be a little reckless. I mentioned that the other geniuses might be hostile to you, but that’s not that serious a problem. Be yourself and make no compromises. In the world of martial dao, you don’t make friends through compromises, but with power and force.”

The weak were prey for the strong. Being polite without ever being assertive marked one as a weakling that anyone could bully. It was necessary to be aggressive when the situation called for it.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen’s consciousness reacted. His expression changed slightly. Ziju Min noticed something at the same time. He tensed and whispered, “It’s the venerated forefather, Shao Yuan. He’s come to visit!”

The venerated forefather?

The only cultivator who’d reached godhood in all of the sacred land. The famed divine spirit.

Jiang Chen’s heart pounded. He could feel a stupendous power ripped through the air without warning. It was near his residence.

Ziju Min dropped down to his knees. “This subordinate Ziju Min greets the venerated forefather. All hail the venerated forefather for your eternal existence.”

Seeing that Jiang Chen was still on his feet, Ziju Min glanced around and nervously dragged the boy down, telling him to kneel in respect.

Jiang Chen resignedly got on one knee. “Junior Shao Yuan greets the venerated forefather.”

The air rippled with a great will, but neither Ziju Min and Jiang Chen saw where the venerated forefather was. Suddenly, a vortex of air swept over one of the rocky walls of the residence. A vague, shifting projection appeared.

“You’ve done well, Ziju Min,” the shadow figure boomed in an authoritative voice. “You are to be commended for bringing us a genius.”

Ziju Min was bowled over. He blurted out, “That is this subordinate’s duty. I dare not claim any credit. I’m honored to receive a compliment from the venerated forefather.”

It was clear from his reverent tone just how much he respected the forefather.

“My true form is in closed door cultivation still,” the forefather remarked faintly. “This is an apparition from a piece of my consciousness. Leave us for the moment. I’d like to talk to the young man in private.”

Ziju Min nodded hurriedly. “Yes, yes, of course. This subordinate will leave you alone at once.” He shot Jiang Chen a pointed look. “The venerated forefather has materialized before you, Shao Yuan. Be sure to show proper respect and not to be rude.”

He was worried that Jiang Chen might offend the venerated forefather in youthful recklessness.

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. “Worry not, Elder Ziju. I know the gravity of the situation.”

Only then did Ziju Min walk gingerly away from the residence. He couldn’t have held the venerated forefather in a higher regard and didn’t dare listen in on the conversation inside. Instead, he put a great distance between him and the entrance for fear of going against the forefather’s will and angering him.

A knee still on the ground, Jiang Chen looked at the shimmering projection on the wall. "The venerated forefather has formed an apparition with your consciousness. I am truly in awe witnessing your immense power."

There was a lick of truth to his praise.

It was the first time he came face to face with a divine cultivator in this world. Although it was only a piece of the forefather's consciousness, forming a projection was precisely attainable by only those who'd attained godhood. Not even a peak empyrean expert would be able to do the same.

"You're the first person to finish all nine challenges of the Nine Winding Caves in our history, young man. I noticed you despite being in closed door cultivation. Your conversation with Ziju Min has piqued my curiosity."

"The venerated forefather is all knowing. Nothing escapes your attention." Jiang Chen flattered.

"It's not necessarily a good thing to be able to keep secrets from me. Quite the opposite, in fact. How surprising it is that the most remarkable genius in Eternal Sacred Land history has joined us for a dao partner!"

Jiang Chen didn't deny it. "I've embarrassed myself before the venerated forefather."

"Geniuses join the sacred land for a great variety of reasons. Yours is one of a kind. Nevertheless, it doesn't matter why you joined us. What's important is if you're telling the truth."

"This junior wouldn't dare lie."

"For most people, the problem you face is a difficult one. The feud between House Yan and House Xiahou has spanned many generations. Most will hesitate to get involved. However, the Eternal Sacred Land is an exception!" The venerated forefather's tone was casual, like he was talking about something trivial.