

## Three Realms 1701

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

#### Chapter 1701: Hall of Meri

Jiang Chen perked up. He had joined the Eternal Sacred Land precisely to gain its support against Xiahou Zong. Given how limited his time was, it would be difficult for him to deal with Huang'er's issue on his own.

This was the perfect opportunity for him to negotiate a deal with the venerated forefather. But what was the right way to bring the issue up?

The forefather was the top of the command chain in the sacred land. Jiang Chen's relationship with Huang'er might be immensely important to the couple, but it might be wholly insignificant to the forefather.

Jiang Chen thought long and hard about what to say.

"We are generous to our disciples, young man. We're willing to support you in getting the House Yan girl. However, you have to show us your potential and prove that you're valuable enough for us to support you, even at the cost of making House Xiahou our enemy."

Ziju Min had said the same thing before, but what kind of a demonstration of talent would be considered enough? It was difficult to define the standards.

"Venerated Forefather, how will you determine my potential? What should this junior do for the sacred land's approval and wholehearted support?"

"We didn't have a set of standards before, but I can think of one for you now. Listen carefully."

"I'm all ears," Jiang Chen rushed out.

"First, cultivate by the Eternal River located within our grounds. In half a year, comprehend the heavenly law and acquire an empyrean decree.

"Second, everyone has to earn his keep here. You must make sufficient contribution to the sacred land by accumulating a hundred thousand points in a year.

"Once the first and second requirements are fulfilled, I'll evaluate you myself. If you pass, I'll take you in as my direct disciple. Although your status won't rival that of the three primes, you will be the equal of the upper elders. By then, the sacred land will naturally support you in anything."

The first two requirements were concrete, while the third was vague and subjective. How would he pass the venerated forefather's evaluation? What were the benchmarks?

Jiang Chen still had questions, but he didn't voice them. Knowing the requirements was enough for him. He was fine as long as the objectives were clear.

"Alright, my time is limited. Do your best, young man. Don't let your talents go to waste." The apparition disappeared.

Jiang Chen paused for a moment before smiling. "It's good to know the specific requirements," he murmured to himself. "So I'm to understand the heavenly law and gain an empyrean decree?"

That he was confident about. His understanding of the heavenly planes were ten times more than even the venerated forefather. His understanding of martial dao had been limited to theoretical application in his past life, but he was an extraordinarily quick learner. Half a year wasn't that long, but it was long enough.

Jiang Chen was roughly eighty percent sure he'd reach his goal. That the venerated forefather had specifically mentioned the Eternal River suggested that it was significant in some way. It would likely be beneficial to cultivate by the Eternal River.

As for the second requirement, he didn't know how much a hundred thousand contribution points was. He'd only just officially joined the faction after passing the Nine Winding Caves evaluation a couple days ago.

Ziju Min returned at this time.

"Has the venerated forefather left, Shao Yuan?" Ziju Min meekly stayed outside the residence.

"He has. Please come in, Elder Ziju."

Ziju Min walked in after receiving the confirmation.

"I have some questions, Elder Ziju. I'm glad you're back." Jiang Chen was a little lost and needed some information.

Ziju Min was curious about what the venerated forefather had said and responded without hesitation, "If you have any questions, come to me. I'll tell you everything I'm know and am allowed to tell you."

The pill sovereign now held the young man in the highest of regard. He knew he couldn't maintain the attitude that he'd done Shao Yuan a great favor. It was best for him to treat the young genius as an equal. Shao Yuan was meant for greatness and it was only a matter of time until he soared to great heights. It wouldn't hurt at all to befriend a genius.

Jiang Chen repeated the requirements he'd received.

Ziju Min gaped before he took a deep breath. "Grasping the heavenly law and obtaining an empyrean decree in half a year! That's much too short a period of time. Let me be frank, many are unable to ascend to empyrean realm for a hundred or a couple hundred years after reaching peak great emperor. Some are stuck for a lifetime.

"Half a year... that's very little time. You must be prepared for failure. Of course, there have been many geniuses since the dawn of time. Perhaps the odds are higher for you. Never say never when it comes to martial dao. You must work hard and do all you can. I believe that even if it takes a little longer for you to breakthrough, you'll still be considered qualified as long as the venerated forefather sees your potential. The six months mark is likely to be a simple motivator."

Jiang Chen smiled. "Perhaps. I do believe that I'll be able to grasp the heavenly law in half a year. I actually have more questions about the second requirement. How are the contribution points calculated?"

“There’s a complicated system in place. If you take on only simple missions, you won’t be able to accumulate a hundred thousand points even after ten years. To be honest, this isn’t an easy requirement to fulfill either. A year is too short.”

Ziju Min felt sorry for Jiang Chen. In his opinion, both requirements were too harsh. It was almost impossible for Jiang Chen to succeed. If he’d been faced with the same two requirements when young, he would’ve never been able to reach them.

Reach empyrean realm in half a year?

Acquire a hundred thousand contribution points in a year?

Nonetheless, the venerated forefather must have a reason for setting such targets for Shao Yuan. He was all-knowing. Perhaps he’d set the standards according to Shao Yuan’s potential.

What Ziju Min couldn’t do might not be impossible for Shao Yuan.

This set the pill sovereign’s mind at ease.

“I can take you to the Eternal River. As for the contribution points, the Hall of Merit can provide a detailed explanation. Doing regular missions won’t give you a hundred thousand points, but missions of larger scale or higher difficulty will award a hundred thousand points.

“Most of those missions have been there for decades, centuries, or even millennia. They are mostly for show. Not even the senior executives can complete them, let alone the youths in the sect.”

Jiang Chen nodded after a bemused pause. “I’ll first go to the Hall of Merit for some information. I have to make some preparations before going to the Eternal River.”

Ziju Min nodded. “Alright. Manage your time smartly.”

The Hall of Merit was an important division in the sacred land. Its power rivaled that of the pill dao division under Ziju Min’s governance. In some ways, it was even more important than the pill dao division.

It kept records of contributions made by every member of the sect, which was essential for the sacred land to operate normally.

Jiang Chen reached the hall with Ziju Min guiding the way. The elder in charge, Gu Yunjin, was one of the ten great elders and with Ziju Min. They weren’t good friends, but they were familiar enough with each other.

Both of them held power over an important division in the sacred land, and both might need help from the other at any time. Therefore, their relations were more or less harmonious.

“I was wondering why the magpies were chirping so early in the morning. Turns out it’s Daoist Ziju come to visit! Hahaha!” Gu Yunjin was one who could warm an atmosphere by himself. His charismatic demeanor drew others in. People like him were adept at dealing with others and socialization in general.

Ziju Min smiled. "I'm here with the venerated forefather's orders to teach Shao Yuan about the contribution points system. He's a recent addition to the sacred land. There are many rules he doesn't yet understand fully."

Gu Yunjin laughed heartily. "Young Shao Yuan is an exceptional genius that all of us are proud of. It's my honor to answer his questions. After fifty or a hundred years, maybe it's us old men who will be looking up to these young geniuses."

Ziju Min chuckled. "Don't flatter him too much, Daoist Gu."

"Haha, it's not flattery, no. It's my gut feeling and wishful thinking. The sacred land can develop only if the youths continue to grow and become the pillars of the sect." Gu Yunjin had a silver tongue and easily broke the ice between the three of them.

Jiang Chen did find Gu Yunjin too talkative, but he didn't dislike people like this. After all, even though Gu Yunjin was being a little dramatic, it was obvious that he meant well.

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#### **Chapter 1702: Mission Levels**

"Elder Gu, I haven't been in the Eternal Sacred Land for long, so please excuse my potential coarseness and ineptitude in advance. I would appreciate your guidance in many things, and I'm here to seek it today. I was wondering if you could teach me about the contribution points system?" Jiang Chen responded to the politeness shown with courtesy in kind.

"Hahaha, young man! I don't know what the others think, but I for one find your victory over the Nine Winding Caves respectably significant. We cultivators have no need to hide our prowess. This goes double for youngsters like you! If you have a hundred percent talent, why show only fifty or sixty of it? There's no need for that at all! Well done on the caves."

Gu Yunjin chuckled before continuing. "I suppose that's past us now. Let's talk about how the contribution points work. If the venerated forefather has orders to assist, what can I do but obey?"

In Eternal Sacred Land, the first prime was the supreme leader. Her orders were not to be defied. Meanwhile, the venerated forefather was the faction's psychological support and sole divine cultivator. His will was even more inviolate.

Gu Yunjin gave Jiang Chen plenty of face by going on a personal tour. With Ziju Min's accompaniment, the elder introduced the Hall of Merit's details to the young man.

The Hall of Merit was the place where every faction member's contribution was tallied, both income and expenditure. It set the standards thereof almost entirely by itself. Aside from the venerated forefather and the three primes, everyone else received a report of their contribution points at year-end.

Anyone who failed to meet his quota for three years in a row was at risk of demotion. For example, an upper elder may very well be demoted to a lower elder. Similarly, a personal disciple may be downgraded to a core one. Core disciples would be bumped down to normal disciples.

The contribution system prevented laziness by pushing everyone forward. No unproductive people could exist here.

Jiang Chen actually appreciated a system like this quite a bit. It guaranteed that the Eternal Sacred Land would always brim with vigor. Each person's contribution score would be display whether he had done poorly or well.

Moreover, demotion occurred only when the target was not reached for several years in a row. This mitigated the possibility that someone would be affected by an unlucky year in particular.

"In the lower area, the contribution scores vary between one and five hundred. In fact, they might go even lower than that. Normal disciples tend to dwell around here.

"This is the medium area, and you can see that most of the missions for this area are between five hundred and two thousand. There's a lot of variety in missions placed here."

"This is the upper area. Missions here are between two to ten thousand.

"Above the upper area is the elite area. The elite area has a baseline contribution of ten thousand and an upper bound of thirty.

"And above that... well, that's the crown area. Only the best of the best get to be here, between thirty to a hundred thousand.

"Past that many points is the sovereign area. If you reach this place, you'll be at the top of the Eternal Sacred Land. You'll be held in equal regard with the likes of Elder Ziju. Daoist Ziju, you don't mind that comparison, do you?"

Ziju Min smiled faintly. "As long as it's easy to understand, why would I mind?"

"Haha, the explanation is indeed easy to understand." After seeing each area in person, Jiang Chen had a rudimentary understanding of their respective qualities.

Both the plan and the layout of the Hall of Merit were very well done. The hierarchy of value in contributions was more than clear. Jiang Chen stopped in the sovereign area.

"The missions posted here are all pretty terrifying, hmm?" He smiled. "Do people usually come by to request them?"

Gu Yunjin smiled as well. "Not many usually come, but it's not out of the question. We have a strict set of rules. Requesting a mission from the sovereign area requires you to have completed a mission from the crown area within this year."

"So, I can't just skip ahead to the sovereign missions?" Jiang Chen was a bit disappointed at hearing that.

"Not necessarily. Completing a crown mission first means that you are absolutely permitted to take on a sovereign mission. Moreover, even if you fail to complete it, you won't suffer any penalties. But if you request a sovereign mission right off the bat without having done that, you'll have to pay a price if you fail."

"What price?"

"A tenth of the points you would've earned from succeeding at the mission." Gu Yunjin smiled.

This rule helped avoid the sovereign area's missions from being swarmed. That would only spell disaster if it ever came to pass.

Without rules in place, the system wouldn't be much more than a joke. If everyone sought to complete sovereign missions that were too far above their sphere, what order would be left then?

Thus, the Sacred Land encouraged incremental challenge by waiving the penalty for failing.

Jiang Chen didn't have any time to climb up the mission ranks though. If he did that, who knew when he'd get a hundred thousand points?

Now that he knew the rules, he wasn't in a hurry to request any missions. His highest priority was still to break through to empyrean realm within half a year. This was also what he was currently most enthused about.

He could think about how to get contribution points later.

With that overview in mind, Jiang Chen felt that it wouldn't be too hard to get a hundred thousand points in a year. As long as he could finish one sovereign mission, that would be enough.

"Thank you for enlightening me in so much detail, Elder Gu. I'll be sure to revisit after a while." Jiang Chen made his farewell.

"You're welcome anytime." Gu Yunjin smiled back.

After the duo departed from the Hall of Merit, Ziju Min smiled in inquiry, "How was it? Are you confident?"

"Yes, I think so." Jiang Chen didn't want to show any weakness.

"Good, good. It's good for a young man to live with vigor," Ziju Min sighed, then clapped Jiang Chen's shoulder. "You should prepare over the next few days. When you're ready, I'll take you to the Eternal River."

After sending Ziju Min off, Jiang Chen looked about his residence carefully. His new home was very spacious and excellently designed. The senior who'd built it had clearly put a lot of his mastery into it.

He was well pleased with such living quarters. Now that it was his private residence, he needed to secure the premises a little. He began to set up formations around the perimeter.

From this day forth, this residence would be his base of operations. Therefore, Jiang Chen had an obligation to keep it tidy and accident-free. He didn't want his cultivation to be interrupted by any unwelcome guests.

A little setup rendered the residence a well-defended piece of property. Restrictions and formations were both in place to declare his ownership of it.

He rested two days, stabilizing his peak great emperor level in the process.

In truth, he had received tremendous benefit from his adventures in the Nine Winding Caves. Without it, he wouldn't be able to claim certain breakthrough in the next six months.

A few more days of living in the quarters only increased his satisfaction with his rooms. The plentiful spirit energy aside, it was also very quiet and peaceful – making it perfect for cultivation. In this way, Jiang Chen had been swiftly won over by his new residence.

With his cultivation level solidified and no new progress in sight, he decided to depart tomorrow to take in the heavenly dao on the banks of the Eternal River.

Time waited for no man. His heart became much more serene because of the decision.

“Daoist Shao Yuan, this is Gan Ning. I am a true disciple of the Eternal Sacred Land.”

A guest outside? This was his first. Jiang Chen had seen Gan Ning’s name in the documents detailing his fellow geniuses. This was one of the Five Great Gentlemen of the Eternal Sacred Land, a rather standout character among his peers here.

Jiang Chen couldn’t remain silent to the greeting outside. He hadn’t come here to make enemies. It was a good idea to remain on good terms with his neighbors, at least.

He disabled his restrictions and walked out. A handsome young man with rosy lips and ivory teeth awaited him. He was clad in a silk brocade robe, giving off the dashing air of a free spirit.

This was Gan Ning, one of the Five Great Gentlemen in the sacred land. He had chiseled features that were accentuated by his aquiline nose, which served to add some roguishness to his style.

“You must be Daoist Shao Yuan. Once again, my name is Gan Ning.”

“Sir Gan Ning of the Five Great Gentlemen? Excuse me for not coming to greet you sooner.” Jiang Chen smiled in polite acknowledgment.

“Haha, I live pretty close by. The news of a genius newcomer prompted me to visit.”

“Not at all,” Jiang Chen smiled. “I would’ve visited you instead, but alas I’m still familiarizing myself with my new surroundings. I didn’t dare impose in the interim.” His words were gracious and well-mannered.

Gan Ning nodded, apparently not taking Jiang Chen’s response too seriously. His brow unfurled as he smiled. “I’ve invited several of the young geniuses of the sacred land to tea at my residence today. They’ve all heard about you and are quite curious. They wanted me to come invite you. Perhaps we can go together?”

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

#### **Chapter 1703: Miss Xiahou**

Jiang Chen hadn’t forgotten Ziju Min’s admonishment and warning. He was in no hurry to answer Gan Ning’s invitation. Was this a standard social gathering or a veiled test between geniuses? Or, perhaps there were yet other reasons?

Typically, these invitations carried more malice than goodwill. More irritatingly, they were irrefusable even if a trap was obvious. If he did, he would be pinned down as an arrogant antisocial who didn’t play well with others. Or, a coward who didn’t dare attend even a simple tea party.

Because others had the power of criticism on their side, he was in a tough spot.

Jiang Chen smiled after a moment of consideration. "I'm new to the sacred land, so I have many things to ask of you. I just hope you won't think me too coarse."

"Hahaha, you're a straightforward man, Daoist Shao Yuan. Shall we go then?"

"After you." Jiang Chen gestured to indicate that Gan Nin should take the lead.

The young gentleman's personal presence meant that Jiang Chen had been shown full courtesy. If Gan Nin had sent a servant boy to call on him, he wouldn't necessarily have deigned to grace the visitor with a response.

Gan Nin's residence really wasn't far. A few miles of mountain road were all they needed to get there.

As one of the Five Great Gentlemen of the sacred land, Gan Nin was from a prominent background in addition to being talented. He was part of the direct line of one of the elders.

Once within the residence, Jiang Chen's eyebrows furrowed when he saw a particular person already there. It was none other than Xiahou Ying.

Her lips were slightly raised, her eyes half-smiling as they scrutinized him.

Why is she here? Jiang Chen was a bit surprised by her presence.

He swept his gaze around the room to find a group of several others already seated. Xiahou Ying seemed to be rather popular with them; their eyes wandered between examining Jiang Chen and currying favor with Xiahou Ying.

"Haha, this foolish brother has invited the man you're interested in, Miss Ying." Gan Nin smiled slightly, then turned back toward Jiang Chen. "Fellow daoist, Miss Ying mentioned your genius to us after a visit to Elder Ziju. Everyone wanted to invite you out of admiration for your skill. Please excuse the inconvenience."

Jiang Chen nodded very slightly, his expression impassive. The sight of Xiahou Ying had tipped him off to the unfriendly intentions behind this invitation to tea.

The star of the show smiled rather strangely at Jiang Chen as her pretty eyes probed him.

"Shao Yuan, Sir Shao. I didn't expect our separation after House Xiahou to end so shortly. You certainly put on more airs than the average person." Her tone was almost joking, yet carried a note of resentment in it. She glanced at Gan Ning. "If not for senior brother Gan Ning, it would've been very difficult to get you to come."

"A harsh judgment, Miss Xiahou," Jiang Chen smiled coolly.

"How is that harsh? I invited you several times in House Xiahou's name, but you annoyingly ignored me."

"Did you have anything you needed me for, Miss Xiahou?" Jiang Chen feigned ignorance.

"Hmph..." Xiahou Ying sounded a bit frustrated. "You're not a straightforward guy at all, Sir Shao. You know the answer to that already, and it's too late now. You're a genius of the sacred land – House Xiahou can't hope for your allegiance anymore."



“Haha, everyone seated here is a disciple of the sacred land. What say you, Miss Xiahou?” Jiang Chen’s impassionate voice hit a painful note for her.

“I am Elder Ziju’s disciple, but I’m not lucky enough to be part of the sacred land. No wonder you didn’t care for my invitations, Sir Shao... now you’ve latched onto a much bigger faction.”

Xiahou Ying was good at playing off emotions. Thankfully, everyone else already here was a disciple of the Eternal Sacred Land.

Jiang Chen was unmoved. He simply closed his eyes in scorn of her words.

Thump!

A violet-robed youth beside Xiahou Ying was displeased. He slammed the table. “Are you a man, Shao Yuan? Why are you so uncouth? Why are you giving Miss Ying such attitude?”

Jiang Chen didn’t know the identity or rank of the new speaker. From his conduct though, he was likely below Gan Ning at minimum. He didn’t bat an eyelash at the outburst, there was nothing interesting about small fry like these.

Xiahou Ying wasn’t a disciple of the sacred land, yet this youth was interceding on her behalf by shouting at him – despite the fact that he was an important disciple here.

To Jiang Chen, this kind of behavior was blandishment of the bluntest sort. But he wasn’t surprised by it. There was no lack of people who fawned upon women anywhere. The Eternal Sacred Land was no different.

His adversary was furious at Jiang Chen’s non-reaction. He felt that he was being humiliated.

“What’s with your attitude, Shao Yuan?” The unknown speaker’s ire rose. “Do you feel that I’m unqualified to ask you questions?”

Jiang Chen didn’t answer. Instead, he cupped a fist toward Gan Ning. “Daoist Gan Ning, is this the so-called tea party you told me about? I haven’t tasted any tea yet, but I do taste a rather acidic flavor.”

Gan Ning smiled slightly. “Junior brother Jing likes to be indignant on the behalf of others, Daoist Shao Yuan. He’s admired Miss Ying for a while now, so please excuse his rashness.”

The corner of Jiang Chen’s mouth curled, but he didn’t grace the statement with any affirmation.

He saw now that Gan Ning was likely in cahoots with the rest. He was merely being a bit more reticent, thanks to his position as one of the Five Great Gentlemen. This tea party really was a trap.

His mind cleared up once he realized this. He wanted to see what these guys had in store for him.

Still, wariness crept into his heart as well. He needed to watch out for Xiahou Ying’s schemes. He had always thought her to be a proud and unreasonable young miss, but it seemed that he’d underestimated her.

Xiahou Ying wasn’t as brainless as she appeared. A foolish young miss wouldn’t be able to incite these young geniuses to action on her behalf, no matter how beautiful she was.

This woman was surprisingly crafty.

Jiang Chen's uncaring stance gave off the impression of a bristling hedgehog. The youths who wanted to pick a fight with him didn't know where to start. They had invited him in order to do so, but his importance in the sect meant that they couldn't do many things too openly. If the executives were angered, the three primes especially, they wouldn't be able to deal with the consequences.

In truth, these geniuses were unsatisfied with Jiang Chen's current state of high favor. This young man before them had seemingly come out of nowhere and gained the favor of everyone for no reason.

Many found it difficult to accept the speed and momentum with which he'd risen. There were countless geniuses in the Eternal Sacred Land, and a lot believed themselves superior to this outsider in every aspect.

Most importantly, Jiang Chen's passage through all nine of the Winding Caves had daunted them to a certain extent.

They would unavoidably oppose and clash with someone who posed so much of a threat. They were understandably uneasy that positions which should've been theirs were no longer guaranteed.

This was the reason they attempted to find fault with Jiang Chen through a myriad of other channels.

It was a very strange sense of insecurity.

Gan Ning smiled when he noted the stifling atmosphere. "Daoist Shao Yuan," he said, "let me introduce these Sacred Land geniuses to you. We'll have plenty of opportunities to get together more in the future."

Jiang Chen tossed a thoughtful glance at Gan Ning. He wanted to know what the other young man's intentions truly were.

Gan Ning was nonchalant as he began a round of introductions, disappointing Jiang Chen when he heard who they were: aside from Gan Ning himself, none were among the Five Great Gentlemen.

At the same time, he was a bit relieved as well that not everyone in the sacred land was as shallow as this. If all Five Great Gentlemen had been so easily won over by Xiahou Ying, the geniuses of the sacred land would've disappointed him wholesale.

Jiang Chen's passivity after the introductions caused a slight frown to crease Gan Ning's forehead.

"Daoist Shao Yuan, I've gone to quite a bit of trouble to present these fine friends to you. Aren't you being unnecessarily aloof?" the young gentleman remarked with some annoyance.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "Daoist Gan Ning," he interjected suddenly. "Why don't you tell me just exactly what you want to do at this tea party? We all understand each other well enough. Excuse my bluntness, but I haven't gleaned anything from this gathering save for your collective hostility. Why waste your time and mine by dancing around like this?"

The hint of a smile played at the corner of his mouth. "I didn't expect Miss Xiahou to have such influence in the Eternal Sacred Land. My apologies for underrating you."

Saying this, he raised a cupped fist salute at Xiahou Ying. “Miss Xiahou, why did you seek Elder Ziju’s tutelage? To learn pill dao? Or to socialize with these Sacred Land geniuses? Honestly, I’m rather confused.”

Jiang Chen saw no reason to be courteous towards anyone from House Xiahou. Neither human nor animal from that house could be his friend, so there was no reason to be polite.

These words effectively tore away Xiahou Ying’s facade. Imperceptible killing intent flickered through the girl’s pretty eyes. It disappeared as quickly as it came. “No wonder you’ve given me the cold shoulder all this time,” she stomped and pouted. “You’re so biased towards me!”=

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

#### **Chapter 1704: Teaching You a Lesson**

If Jiang Chen hadn’t known Xiahou Ying’s true nature, he would’ve been easily deceived by her coquettish complaints and saw her as a innocent, spoiled noble girl. Now with more than enough advance warning about her, he naturally wasn’t going to fall for her tricks. He smiled faintly in response.

The youth dressed in violet, Jing Yi, had had enough. He shot to his feet and glared at Jiang Chen. “You sure are arrogant, Shao Yuan.”

“What do you mean?” Jiang Chen smiled indifferently.

“There are plenty of geniuses here who joined before you and have more experience,” Jing Yi raged. “Don’t you think it’s arrogant to act mysterious and mightier than all of us?”

Jiang Chen broke into an involuntary chuckle. “I was perfectly happy in my residence. You people invited me here and try to take me down a peg. Now I’m the arrogant one? I’m curious, are all the geniuses here as unreasonable as you are? Are they all in the habit of twisting facts?”

Xiahou Ying started up her act again and sobbed quietly. “It’s my fault. It’s all my fault. I shouldn’t have come. Don’t fight with Sir Shao, senior brother Jing. I’m to blame for everything. Don’t let an outsider like me damage your bond as fellow disciples.”

A woman’s tears were a lethal weapon on men.

Jing Yi leveled Jiang Chen with a frigid stare. “I don’t care how genius you are, Shao. From a man to another man, I demand you to apologize to Miss Ying.”

Jiang Chen snorted. “I don’t owe her an apology, do I?”

“You made her cry!” Jing Yi lashed out. “How dare you say you don’t owe her an apology? Are you a man or not?”

“By your logic, you must think of yourself as the most manly man, don’t you?” Jiang Chen was getting tired of this disciple.

“Are you going to apologize or not?” Jing Yi demanded in a steely voice.

Jiang Chen shrugged. “I don’t see why I should.”

Jing Yi's lips twisted into an angry sneer. "Fine. That's fine. It seems you aren't going to admit your mistake until you're staring death in the face. Don't blame me for not warning you."

"And what are you gonna do about it?" Disappointed, Jiang Chen looked at the other like he was looking at an idiot. If every genius here was as idiotic as Jing Yi was, then the sacred land was disappointing indeed.

He didn't know how talented Jing Yi was, but the genius was a damn fool to be easily manipulated by simple tricks. He lost all reason just because a woman had shed a few tears!

"What am I gonna do? I challenge you to a duel between two men. Dare you fight me, Shao Yuan?"

Jiang Chen's expression remained distant. "A duel?"

"That's right. The loser isn't allowed to complain to his master. What do you say? Dare you take me on?" Jing Yi shot him a taunting look.

Jiang Chen smiled, giving Jing Yi the once-over.

As a true disciple, Jing Yi had reached empyrean realm - mostly likely first level empyrean. He was considered above average in the sacred land, but not among the best. He must've assumed that it'd be as easy as crushing an ant for him to defeat a peak great emperor like Jiang Chen.

"The loser isn't allowed to go to his master?" Jiang Chen smiled, but the smile quickly gave way to a threatening scowl. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I am. Beg for mercy if you're afraid. There are many of our peers here today. I can give you a chance to admit your mistakes." Jing Yi humiliated Jiang Chen with abandon, or what he thought was humiliation.

"Your name is Jing Yi, right? I don't know how high up your master must be in the sacred land for you to turn out so undisciplined. Has your master taught you only cultivating and nothing about using your brain?"

Jiang Chen had no words to describe Jing Yi. The latter was far from the only man who'd ever acted recklessly for a woman, but it was unbecoming of a genius in the sacred land to act like such a crude fool.

Jing Yi's expression darkened. "Men fight with fists, not words, brat. Accept my challenge if you aren't a coward. Don't have everyone look down on you."

"I'm not interested in fighting for a woman I don't care about," Jiang Chen said coldly. "However, I don't mind teaching you a lesson since you insist on putting me down. Perhaps one day you'll come to realize how childish you are and be grateful." His gaze swept over everyone present.

"All of you here are on the same side, aren't you? Who else wants to fight me? Step forward and let's get this over with. You may have the time to waste, but I don't." He wasn't going to remain idle after knowing what these men wanted.

"I don't know what role you played in this, Daoist Gan Ning. You are among the Five Great Gentlemen, but you're a bit disappointing. I'm willing to give the other four the benefit of the doubt though. They must be ashamed to be lumped into a group with you." He rather felt contempt for Gan Ning.

This fellow wasn't any better than the others. He was the one who'd invited Jiang Chen to his home turf in the name of the Five Great Gentlemen, subjecting him to this farce.

Gan Ning appeared to be a mediator between them, but in truth, he had a hand or was even directly involved, in this attempt to intimidate Jiang Chen. He was just better at pretending.

His intentions didn't escape Jiang Chen's keen observation.

Jiang Chen's blunt criticism broke the calm mask Gan Ning put on. His self-control faltered and his face darkened. "I'm just a middleman, Daoist Shao Yuan. I have no intention of becoming involved in your conflict. If I back down after your false accusation, however, it'll seem like I'm afraid of you..."

"Enough with the yammering," Jiang Chen cut in impatiently. "This is your true nature. Why bother hiding it? Aren't you tired of doing so?" He had no intention of wasting his time listening to Gan Ning.

"Do you want to duel me first? Or come at me together? Or one after another?" Jiang Chen considered Gan Ning lazily. To be honest, he didn't consider anyone other than Gan Ning a threat. He could easily deal with the others all at once.

Gan Ning, on the other hand, was far superior to the others in mindset, ability, and all other aspects.

Even though Jiang Chen had many tricks up his sleeve, he wouldn't say he'd be the sure winner. Even if he did win, it wouldn't be an easy fight. He'd have to employ many of his techniques.

As one of the Five Great Gentleman, Gan Ning was among the most exceptional talents in the sacred land. He might be the worst of them, but that still put him in the top five. He was not to be underestimated.

However, Gan Ning took Jiang Chen's words as the worst insult possible. His expression turned cold. "You seem to have forgotten yourself after conquering the Nine Winding Caves, Shao Yuan. It's my job to beat some sense into you on behalf of the sacred land."

"Beat some sense into me?" Jiang Chen broke into laughter. "You wish! Take a look at the company you keep, Gan Ning. There's a reason for the other four avoid you, am I right?"

He was merely making a guess, but it hit Gan Ning in his most painful spot. He was the weakest among the five and the least respected. The other four seemed unwilling to be seen with him. They rarely invited him to any activities.

Whether intentionally or not, he was excluded from their circle.

It had always been a thorn in his side. Jiang Chen's words stabbed into his heart like needles, causing him intense discomfort. Unbounded hatred flared. It felt as if he'd been stripped naked under broad daylight, exposing his ugliest secrets.

“Stand down, junior brother Jing.” Gan Ning suddenly called off an eager Jing Yi and continued in a vicious tone. “Since this kid is so overly confident, I’ll show him that a latecomer should know better and respect his senior brothers.” He ground his teeth.

Jiang Chen smiled, unaffected by the threat. Although he was in Gan Ning’s residence, he didn’t consider himself in danger. He was calm and collected, as steady as Mt. Tai.

He didn’t for one second feel that these young men were a fatal threat to him. They were pathetic, spoiled geniuses who’d been completely manipulated by a woman.

He’d thought Gan Ning was mature enough, but it turned out he wasn’t that much better than Jing Yi and the others. His only strengths were his cultivation and talent, which were nothing to boast about in front of Jiang Chen.

“Come with me, Shao Yuan, if you have the balls to,” Gan Ning spoke coolly and walked straight outside.

Jing Yi glared at Jiang Chen. “There’s a sparring stage behind his residence. If you’re afraid, you can run off through the front door. I promise to turn a blind eye to that.”

A calculating glint flashed through Xiahou Ying’s eyes. She glanced at Jiang Chen. “If you’ve come to your senses, Sir Shao, I can ask senior brother Gan Ning to go easy on you.”

“Stop the act, Miss Ying,” Jiang Chen responded faintly. “You can fool only brainless men no matter how good an actress you are. You may be confident in your beauty, but in the eyes of real geniuses, you’re even less than the women selling themselves in brothels. Those women at least are upfront with what they’re doing. They just want money. But you? You’re playing with fire.”

To Jiang Chen, Xiahou Ying was indeed flirting with danger. She had befriended the geniuses here in order to exert House Xiahou’s influence on the sacred land. However, the house’s intentions couldn’t possibly have escaped the senior executives’ notice, given how obvious their methods were.

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

### **Chapter 1705: Open Hostility**

No one had expected Jiang Chen to be so brusque towards Xiahou Ying.

No matter how good of an actress she was, she wanted to openly throw down when Jiang Chen mocked her to her face. However, she’d been strictly trained otherwise and suppressed her anger instead. Her eyes reddened and tears welled up. Soon, she wept brokenly.

Jing Yi and his white-knighting comrades gnashed their teeth. They desperately wanted to duke it out with Jiang Chen right away.

The young man in question shrugged at the murderous looks being pointed in his direction.

Jiang Chen had already mentally written off the geniuses he’d met today. A genius of the sacred land who couldn’t resist a few crocodile tears from a woman was destined for failure.

Jing Yi was furious at being ignored. He caught up to Gan Ning at the very front in three strides, muttering at his ear. "Senior brother Gan..."

Jiang Chen knew that Jing Yi was tattling on him for the sole purpose of having Gan Ning shame him in the arena. The reason? For Xiahou Ying's sake, of course.

Turning, Gan Ning aimed a meaningful glance at Jiang Chen. A menacing look flashed across his eyes. Clearly, he was very unhappy with Jiang Chen's rude and coarse behavior. In his opinion, only an uncivilized barbarian would be so uncouth to Xiahou Ying.

As a genius of the sacred land, Gan Ning considered it necessary to be courteous to women in all things. That was true gentility. Someone who didn't know the basics to respecting women was a savage regardless of talent. Gan Ning looked down on people like that.

The group very quickly arrived at the arena.

Many came to the arena located in the genius' quarters to spar with each other. Usually, no one came here without information on pending battles. Therefore, the arena was currently very quiet and undisturbed.

If any battles took place, perhaps then people would come because of the commotion.

Gan Ning leapt onto the stage. He looked down at Jiang Chen, who'd yet to approach the arena.

"Your boorishness has angered your fellow peers, Shao Yuan. I wasn't going to raise a fuss over it, but your repeated verbal abuse cannot be tolerated. On behalf of the entire Eternal Sacred Land, I'm going to teach you a lesson about how to behave."

If he was going to start a fight, he wanted to take the moral high ground first. Gan Ning was clever enough to understand that he needed sufficient reason to fight Shao Yuan, given the latter's current favor with the executives.

If the executives found out that he was maliciously quashing a newcomer, that wouldn't be to his advantage. Even if they didn't intervene, he would make an undesirably bad impression in the three primes' eyes. Therefore, he needed to appear reasonable before he could roll up his sleeves.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Gan Ning, I had a shred of respect for you before, but even that doesn't seem necessary anymore.

"You are a genius of the the sacred land. If you'd said outright that you disliked me and wanted to fight it out, I'd see you as a sincere man who is true to himself. We can exchange blows, then laugh about it afterwards. But now... your face disgusts me.

"That's right, you heard me correctly. You disgust me." The young man had a tongue that was as sharp as any.

Gan Ning's expression darkened.

"Are you trying to oppose every other genius in the sacred land, brat?" Jing Yi squawked shrilly. "An outsider should know his place." He made another pass at clapping an egregious title on the young man he despised.

Jiang Chen roared with laughter. "You think you can represent all the geniuses here? The real geniuses wouldn't want to be lumped with someone as repulsive as you."

"You're good at talking. So what?" Jing Yi bristled with anger. "If you're so confident, get in the ring. Senior brother Gan Ning will teach you the lesson you need."

"Shao Yuan, didn't you pass the Nine Winding Caves? How come you're so scared to fight in the arena?" The other youths piped up noisily as well.

"Yeah, exactly. Is flapping your lips the only thing you know how to do?"

"If you're a real man, show us the skills you showed off in the Nine Winding Caves." These so-called geniuses wanted nothing more than anarchy. They showered Jiang Chen with provocation in order to spur him on.

Because of their inherent dislike of Jiang Chen, they wanted to take this opportunity to shame him. Their lines of reasoning were largely identical. Both first and second-rate geniuses in the sacred land were deeply xenophobic.

The fact an outside genius had made his way into the sacred land was annoying enough. That he enjoyed so much limelight only added insult to injury. Wasn't conquering the Nine Winding Caves a slap to every other genius here?

Under these conditions, the group had an oddly uniform goal. Every member wanted to take this opportunity to put down the outsider, to teach him a lesson about how deep the sacred land's waters were.

However, none of these geniuses necessarily had the strength for this, Jing Yi included. Though he clamored the loudest, he lacked the ability to back it up.

After all, a genius who had passed all nine of the Winding Caves in succession was sure to be no lightweight. Though he hadn't broken through to empyrean realm yet, Jing Yi wasn't entirely sure that he would emerge victorious.

But senior brother Gan Ning was different. Though he was the bottom-ranked among the Five, he was nevertheless fit to be mentioned with his more capable peers. Among the younger generation in the sacred land, his strength was remarkable. With his help, they would be able to beat this cocky outsider for sure.

Moreover, Xiahou Ying's visit had been at an extremely opportune time. Her intentional instigation of the conflict had roused the emotions of all the geniuses at the tea party. Under these conditions, they wanted nothing more than to skin Jiang Chen alive.

If not for the first prime's orders, they would definitely use a few underhanded methods to cripple this outsider. Right now, they couldn't do anything remotely so serious, but the executives wouldn't mind if they stirred up a little mischief now and then.

After all, no one's rise could be sheltered by the executives' protection. In fact, they enjoyed seeing competition between peers of the same generation. Without competition, how could there be growth?



If they could abrade Shao Yuan's fighting spirit through a series of skirmishes under the table, the executives wouldn't bat an eyelash at that. A genius who couldn't weather this little bit of danger wasn't fit to be called a genius in the first place.

Everyone's eyes were filled with an intense *schadenfreude*. The atmosphere of ridicule had only one goal: to force Jiang Chen into the arena.

A hot-blooded young man would be pushed into the ring immediately by the others' mocking eyes and the general mood. However, Jiang Chen wasn't so easily manipulated. In his eyes, this was a bunch of naïve children who'd enjoyed too much the protection of their seniors.

Though they really were martial dao geniuses, their immaturity made them – at least in Jiang Chen's opinion – inferior to even some of the human domain's best geniuses.

At least those geniuses weren't nearly so sheltered. They still had to experience the storm of the outside world. These other geniuses, Gan Ning aside, clearly hadn't had much trouble in their lives.

Perhaps they were too important in Eternal Divine Nation thanks to being the sacred land's geniuses. No matter where they went, they encountered little to no trouble. This meant that they lacked sufficient tempering from hardship.

"Shao Yuan, you can talk the talk, but you can't walk the walk. Do you not have the courage to go into the arena?" Jing Yu provoked after seeing Jiang Chen's smiling stillness.

"You had a pretty sharp tongue before, eh? How come you've gotten cold feet now that we're at the arena? You don't have to go up, but you have to kneel and apologize to senior brother Gan Ning and Miss Ying. Senior brother Jing Yi too."

"Yes, kneel and apologize. Maybe then we'll forgive you."

Even Xiahou Ying's eyes glittered with contentment. She was happy to see Jiang Chen lose and no longer needed to hide it. She'd wanted to conquer Shao Yuan before, to make him part of her admirers.

Alas, this youth had rejected all her advances. The repeated refusal of her overtures had upset her a great deal. She'd never been scorned so among the younger generation of Eternal Divine Nation before. Not just because of her own beauty, but because she was Xiahou Zong's sister as well.

After having been shamed several times by Jiang Chen, Xiahou Ying's curiosity in him had slowly morphed to hatred. The fact that he'd come from the lowly House Yan incensed her especially. How dare he defy her, a highborn miss of House Xiahou?

What right did anyone from House Yan have to look down upon anyone from House Xiahou?

Jiang Chen's gaze swept impassively across the group's faces. Suddenly, he grinned. "Apologize, was it?"

"Hmph, it's too late now!"

"You have to kowtow nine times to us! Maybe then we'll let you off."

Jiang Chen's smile was icy. "What I mean to say is, do you think yourselves worthy to receive my apology?" His voice chilled suddenly as well. "Come on then, all of you! I'm not interested in wasting time with the likes of you. You too, Xiahou Ying."

A scintillating ray shot out from the young man's Evil Golden Eye. It hurtled toward Xiahou Ying like the keenest of blades.

The girl yelped and shook with dizziness. She almost fell to the ground beneath the pressure of the powerful consciousness bearing down upon her. It felt like someone had stripped her into nude helplessness.

If not for her quick reflexes and the fact Jiang Chen hadn't wanted to kill her, she would be nothing more than a statue by now.

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

#### **Chapter 1706: A Contest of Speed and Space**

As Jiang Chen spoke, he deployed his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape to land on the stage like a bolt of lightning. Both hands crossed behind his back, he cut a striking figure in the ring. In this moment, his austere expression and imposing aura outshone Gan Ning.

Jiang Chen cast his gaze at his opponent. "Get all your 'brothers' up here. You aren't worthy to fight me by yourself."

Gan Ning was a genius who'd just reached third level empyrean realm. There was widespread acknowledgment of him as one of the Five Great Gentlemen of the sacred land. He wasn't the useless holder of an empty title.

Like all geniuses, he possessed pride born out of talent. He grinned angrily when he heard what Jiang Chen had to say.

"Did you not sleep last night, Shao Yuan? That'd explain your daydreams right now. You're just a great emperor. Do you believe that I can kill you ten times over with just one hand?"

Jiang Chen shook his head with a serene smile. "I don't."

Both of Gan Ning's eyes widened into disks. "Then I'll make you believe it!"

He shook his right hand lightly as he said this. In the next moment, his arm took on a bizarrely ethereal appearance; strange runes rippled all around the limb.

Jiang Chen snorted. His Evil Golden Eye flared with aureate light. Powerful consciousness projected from it, hurtling toward Gan Ning like a volley of arrows. He had a new rule for any fight he involved himself in. His rhythm was the only one allowed to exist.

No matter what methods or skills his opponent might have, he would follow his own strategy.

A bout between martial cultivators was a comparison of strength and foundations in the end. There must be something peculiar about Gan Ning's runic arm, but that didn't matter to Jiang Chen. He would crush his opponent by following his own tempo.

The Evil Golden Eye was at least ten times stronger than its initial strength. Supported by the potency of his chain seal, it delivered an attack on the consciousness that was comparable to one from a third or fourth level empyrean expert. Moreover, this was just a typical strike.

If Jiang Chen pushed his Evil Golden Eye to its maximum and powered it without regard to cost, it would exceed a peak attack from a fourth level empyrean expert. By now, this had become one of his most lethal techniques.

Focused on powering his own attack, Gan Ning could scarcely do more than raise his arm when the Evil Golden Eye's light reached him.

"Senior brother Gan Ning, be careful of his ocular attack!" Xiahou Ying suddenly uttered a reminder from the audience. She'd just suffered it and knew how powerful it was.

Gan Ning had originally wanted to ignore the attack altogether, but Xiahou Ying's reminder and a frisson of danger from his own consciousness changed his mind. In that instant, he moved to evade the ray. He leaned to the side, averting his eyes all the while.

Gan Ning's choice astounded his observers. They almost thought they were seeing things.

The haughty senior brother Gan Ning, who'd just broken through to third level empyrean realm, had lost the initiative in the first exchange?

Rather than meeting Shao Yuan's attack head on, the senior brother had chosen to dodge it. Was Gan Ning not dominant enough to keep Shao Yuan under control?

The kid was just peak great emperor – half-step empyrean at most. A half-step empyrean versus a third level empyrean should have been a fight with a foregone conclusion. The events that had just transpired made absolutely no sense.

Even Jing Yi was mildly disappointed. As Gan Ning's loyal lackey, he had thought his senior brother capable of trivially smashing the Shao Yuan kid into smithereens. His dreams of that were in pieces right now.

Gan Ning harrumphed, but was a lot more terrified than he let on. How could a single look be so astoundingly offensive? Is that an attack of the consciousness or a physical one?

He didn't understand what that attack had entailed, which scared him all the more. If it had been a physical attack, why had his consciousness quavered at its arrival?

If it were a mental attack, why did he feel like his physical body would be crippled upon contact?

Gan Ning didn't let his emotions get the better of him though. Sneering, he raised his arm once more in a return to his original intent. A swirl of ripples congregated at the tip of his right index finger, expanding outward in ring after ring.

"Enough of your arrogance, kid. Know your place! Enclosure of Rippling Water!"

The ripples seemed to create an extradimensional pocket in space that took over the arena. A vortex of warping force swept towards Jiang Chen.

Snorting softly, he darted out with his Kunpeng Meteoric Escape, easily eluding Gan Ning's attack range. He landed on the opposite side of the arena, his eyes moving once more to strike. An even more powerful ray blasted forth from his Evil Golden Eye, firing with increased speed.

Both his Meteoric Escape and Evil Golden Eye were blindingly fast.

Gan Ning reacted just in time. The flash of light tipped him off that his enclosure hadn't caught up with his enemy.

The most powerful thing about the Enclosure of Rippling Water was that someone caught within the vortex would be trapped within a pocket of extradimensional space, subject to his whims.

It was a very powerful spatial ability that he had obtained through tremendous fortune. It was part of his Water God's Arm, which had the power to call up storms.

Gan Ning was number one in the sacred land when it came to control over water. This was the reason why he had the right to be ranked among the Five Great Gentlemen.

Alas, that attribute had a major weakness as well: namely, speed. Water attribute abilities didn't specialize in speed. It made up for it with manipulation and potential.

Water was a miraculous element that could both go with and against the flow of things. As such, it could be molded into a myriad of astonishing abilities. Water could envelop all, contain all, pervade all, suffuse all. It was mysterious and extremely difficult to master.

If Gan Ning hadn't obtained the wondrous Water God's Arm through serendipity, he wouldn't have nearly the same notoriety among the younger generation. Fortune had made him the man he was today. But when faced with the Kunpeng Meteoric Escape, he felt himself struggling.

The Enclosure of Rippling Water was superb at ensnaring and suppressing an opponent within its bounds. And as a third level empyrean expert, Gan Ning wasn't exactly slow.

Alas, he had encountered a monster of speed. Jiang Chen's Kunpeng Meteoric Escape was among the best escape methods available. His Evil Golden Eye struck as quickly as light and thought would allow.

In both defense and offense, Jiang Chen was slightly faster than Gan Ning. Fighting under such circumstances was extremely irritating for the latter. Thankfully, Gan Ning's arm was potent in its own right.

He had been forced to evade the Evil Golden Eye's attack while unprepared, but his repeat performance was much more elegant and befitting of a gentleman. He stretched out his arm, producing a translucent barrier of water.

Wham!

The ray of golden light slammed into the watery veil, causing it to shatter in a flurry of splashes. However, the impact was enough to cancel out the assault as well.

Jiang Chen was surprised. The apparently ordinary water screen was astoundingly sturdy in its own right!

Looks like Gan Ning is pretty adept when it comes to water attribute abilities. His attack and defense are both excellent.

He was happy enough to admit the ability of his enemy. Still, Jiang Chen didn't think it possible for Gan Ning to actually win.

The prospect of a worthy opponent roused his enthusiasm in the fight. Pushing his speed to its maximum, Jiang Chen filled the sky with afterimages of himself.

A storm of light rained down, as if countless images of divinity were declaring judgment from the firmament. The arena was blindingly bright for a time.

Jiang Chen's acceleration contained both an offensive and defensive element. He knew well that Gan Ning's art was proficient at territorial combat. If he stayed in one spot for too long, the enclosure could catch up and subsume him rather easily.

Thus, his frenzied speed served the purpose of self-preservation as well. Of course, the best defense was a good offense, and Jiang Chen followed that principle to the best of his ability.

The battle waged on, each youth using his advantages in an attempt to gain an edge over the other. Jiang Chen relied on his speed, Gan Ning on taking over territory.

Gan Ning wanted to encroach upon as much space as he could to overpower Jiang Chen, and Jiang Chen wanted to move so quickly that Gan Ning couldn't keep up. Unfortunately, neither could decisively overwhelm the other.

The relative equality of the combatants awed everyone else watching. They couldn't accept what they were seeing. How could someone as strong as senior brother Gan Ning be kept at bay by some great emperor kid? What was going on here?

Jing Yi was frozen in place, disbelief plain upon his face. He finally understood why Shao Yuan had been so cocky. He had every right to be so.

If they really had all swarmed him, his terrifying speed would have rendered all actual assistance impossible.

For a moment, Jing Yi was grateful that senior brother Gan Ning was the one in the ring. If it were him, he would have lost long ago under Jiang Chen's harassment.

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

#### **Chapter 1707: Shocking the Sacred Land**

Jing Yi was feeling relieved from a bout of luck, while Xiahou Ying felt a mass of emotions.

Women could sometimes be such bizarre creatures. The more a man ignored her and cast her aside, the more curious she became. Put nicely, it was curiosity, but the truth was that women sometimes were just that masochistic.

Although she was furious with Shao Yuan, her curiosity had also been deeply piqued. She was frustrated and befuddled. Why is Shao Yuan so hostile to my house? Is he doing this to get my attention? Playing hard to get?

Such were the delusions filling her mind at the moment. She quite wanted to know what was motivating the young man. Why had he entered House Yan first, then the Eternal Sacred Land?

Why did he refuse her invitations and was so harsh to her?

He was indeed a martial dao genius to be able to hold his ground as a great emperor against Gan Ning, who was at third level empyrean realm.

Is Gan Ning trash, or is Shao Yuan too stunning?

She was very conflicted. On one hand, she wanted Gan Ning to win and teach Shao Yuan a ruthless lesson. Shao Yuan was already so strong as a great emperor. Wouldn't he become a formidable foe one day? Could he threaten her brother's place as the foremost genius?

On the other hand, she was very unwilling to admit defeat. Why couldn't this kind of genius become House Xiahou's? Why wasn't he affected by her beauty at all?

Her thoughts were hers alone.

Quite a number of people had started gathering around the arena. The intense raucous had caught the attention of a few geniuses nearby. There were only a couple at first. When the news spread through word-of-mouth, people swarmed to the fighting ring in droves.

The other four great gentlemen, however, didn't show up. Gan Ning was the only one present.

That didn't catch anyone's attention. All eyes were on the stage. It was a thrilling fight that captivated and excited every spectator.

"The one fighting with senior brother Gan Ning is the newcomer Shao Yuan, isn't he?"

"Yeah, he's too full of himself. He was arrogant enough to take on the Nine Winding Caves. Who knew he'd be so bold as to provoke senior brother Gan Ning?"

"He's new here, how did he do that?"

"Apparently he taunted the senior and insulted him!"

"Really? He's that crazy? That's an insult to every genius in the sacred land! I'm for senior brother Gan Ning giving him a good beating!"

"But I feel like there's more to the story. Shao Yuan doesn't seem like a troublemaker. Would he really provoke senior brother Gan Ning for no reason?"

"Who knows? It's a good show anyways." The audience chattered beneath the stage. They were thrilled by the fight and curious about how the conflict started.

It was difficult to figure out the reason from hearsay. Those who knew the truth were Gan Ning's close friends. Their words were obviously biased.

This wasn't where Shao Yuan lived. Rather, it was close to Gan Ning's residence. Would Shao Yuan come all the way here to start a fight with a senior brother? That didn't seem likely.

But Gan Ning was one of the Five Great Gentlemen. His high status meant everyone would rather play dumb than offend him. They would avoid offending him if possible. Even better was if they offended neither party and simply watched the drama play out as outsiders.

The geniuses were observant enough to come to the conclusion. It was a fight between the newcomer and one of the Five.

"Shao Yuan's conquered nine caves in a row. It's said that the three primes all have high opinions of him and treat him like a top tier genius. He does seem capable."

"Of course he's capable. How else was he able to complete all nine caves? He's the only one to do in all of history."

"He's able to go head to head with senior brother Gan Ning as a great emperor. That alone is admirable."

"That's not necessarily true. What if the senior brother hasn't gone all-out?"

"There's no guarantee that Shao Yuan has either. The only thing he's relying on right now is his speed."

"In the world of martial dao, anyone can be a formidable opponent as long as he's perfected a particular skill. Shao Yuan's able to bridge the gap between their cultivations with his amazing speed alone. I have to admit I admire him for that. He really is a genius."

"True. His speed is enough to compensate for his shortcomings. Even senior brother Gan Ning, adept at controlling space, isn't able to trap him. This kid isn't to be underestimated."

"Hehe, there's a limit to his speed. I believe that senior brother's going to be the winner. Maybe he's just waiting for an opening to defeat Shao Yuan once and for all."

"That's hard to say. Senior brother Gan Ning is strong, but Shao Yuan is far from incompetent. There's no telling who wins between speed and space manipulation."

"I'm for the senior brother."

"Of course. Shao Yuan joined only a while ago. He doesn't have a solid foundation yet. It feels a little like cheating for him to rely on his speed."

"That's not cheating. Speed is a part of martial dao. Different methods are equal in rank. Each has its own strength. How is that cheating?"

Both Gan Ning and Shao Yuan had their share of supporters. Most of those who supported the latter did so because they didn't like Gan Ning, rather than because they admired Shao Yuan.

The same was true of those who supported Gan Ning. They simply found Shao Yuan to have garnered too much attention as an outsider and wanted to knock him down a peg.

The fight caught the senior executives' attention in no time, Ziju Min and the three primes included. But they didn't intervene.

As many had postulated, the senior executives encouraged youths to spar or even engage in personal disputes. Healthy competition could accelerate progress.

If everyone was friends and had no motivation to compete with one another, after a while the youths would grow complacent and lose their drive. Fights like these were the perfect way to inspire the passion to cultivate.

“Shao Yuan keeps on surprising us, First Prime,” remarked the third prime. “He wasn’t allowed to fly in the Nine Winding Caves, so we never saw his speed. Now it seems that’s his strong suit.”

The first prime smiled leisurely and responded emphatically, “The young man is like an iceberg. He shows us only a hint every time we see him. We don’t know how many abilities he possesses.”

When Ziju Min had first introduced Shao Yuan to them, he’d said the young man was a rare talent in pill dao.

Then, people had realized that pill dao wasn’t Shao Yuan’s only strength. His talent in martial dao was just as high, which had been on display during the challenge of the Nine Winding Caves.

Now he was demonstrating his extraordinary speed in the duel. He was able to rival Gan Ning with speed while there existed a large gap between their cultivations. This meant he had reached the pinnacle of speed.

“The first prime is right. Shao Yuan is full of surprises.” The second prime echoed their sentiments. The three of them had seen countless geniuses during the long years they’d ruled over the sacred land. Every genius had their own strengths and characteristics, which were easy to spot and understand.

However, Shao Yuan was an enigma. No one knew what other miracles he was hiding. Would speed be the last surprise he had for them?

They didn’t think so.

The first prime sighed, keeping her mental eye on the fight. “People notice only his remarkable speed, but the strength of his consciousness shouldn’t be overlooked. He’s turned his consciousness into physical force and his attacks never decrease in power, which tells us his consciousness is as strong as Gan Ning’s. Otherwise he would’ve already been exhausted mentally and physically by now.”

The other two primes realized that she was right.

“I didn’t notice that before you mentioned it, First Prime. Shao Yuan hasn’t changed the way he attacks. He’s using only his speed and his eye art. Is he hiding his real power? Or is this combination something he’s best at?”

The first prime didn’t respond immediately. She wasn’t sure either.

“During the evaluation, I had a feeling that he wasn’t giving it his all in the fight with the serpent spirit. He can do more than that. I believe that he’s still pulling his punches even in the arena.”

“Why? Isn’t this the perfect opportunity for him to make a name for himself?” asked a baffled third prime. “If he defeat Gan Ning, he’ll gain a foothold in the sacred land.”



“This young man is different from what we expected,” said the first prime. “Maybe he isn’t able to defeat Gan Ning with other methods? Or maybe he simply doesn’t want to stand out too much after the evaluation. Or is he avoiding being put under the spotlight at all? Is he conserving strength for the sword competition next year? Perhaps he doesn’t think it’s the right time for him to show his cards.”

There were all sorts of possibilities. Nonetheless, the first prime had expressed clearly her appreciation for the young man. It was remarkable for someone his age to perform so well under the circumstances.

Suddenly recalling something, the first prime grew distracted.

### Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

#### **Chapter 1708: Mutual Appreciation**

The young geniuses watched with bated breath as the intense fight continued without an end in sight. Jiang Chen had demonstrated more than enough battle strength to captivate everyone’s attention.

All of the spectators were transfixed by the exciting battle.

In recent times, everyone in the sacred land had been talking about the young genius who’d conquered the Nine Winding Caves, but when all was said and done, they didn’t know for sure just how good Shao Yuan was.

The nine caves were for the entrance evaluation. Most undergoing it was of limited cultivation and mental fortitude. Therefore, the fact that Shao Yuan had passed all nine caves was surprising, but an unconvincing show of his competence.

A majority of them believed that Shao Yuan had been able to set the record because he joined the sacred land later in life. Most cave challengers were between age fifteen to thirty. Quite a few fell between thirty to sixty, but those were less common.

Naturally the crowd assumed that Shao Yuan must be older than most geniuses, and therefore higher in cultivation level. They didn’t know that he was actually quite young, and his cultivation history was half of that of many geniuses.

They didn’t know, and they didn’t want to know. Many were already upset about his performance during the evaluation; they didn’t have the slightest inclination of finding out more about him. As such, they came to the wrong conclusion.

They had believed that Shao Yuan would be deterred if he was to go head to head with someone his age. However, many of them were questioning their assumptions after witnessing the fight.

Had Shao Yuan really completed the Nine Winding Caves only because he was older?

“How old is Shao Yuan? He looks younger, rather than older than the senior brother.”

“Senior brother Gan Ning hasn’t reached forty yet, has he?”

“Hehe, none of the Five is over forty.”

In the world of martial dao, forty was the transition between childhood and adolescence.

“He’s younger than senior brother Gan Ning? Then he... can it be...” Some were beginning to question themselves.

“Isn’t Shao Yuan close to sixty? He set the record because of his age, right?”

“That’s one of the theories, but he doesn’t look sixty.”

“He looks at most thirty something. Hey, how old is Yan Qingsang? I think Shao Yuan’s supposed to be younger than him.”

“Yan Qingsang looks like he’s in the thirties at most?” Speculations about Jiang Chen’s age continued as confusion flourished.

Rumor had it that Shao Yuan wasn’t any better than people his age, that his more advanced age was the only thing giving him an edge. But seeing wasn’t believing. Shao Yuan didn’t look anywhere near sixty.

A sixty-year-old was still considered a youth in the martial dao world, but it was very different for someone to conquer the Nine Winding Caves at sixty, compared to thirty.

It was normal for a thirty-year-old cultivator to be below empyrean realm.

A sixty-year-old below empyrean realm wouldn’t be first-tier at all, at least in the sacred land. There were a few geniuses who were able to catch up later in life, but that wasn’t the norm.

“It’d be ridiculous for someone in his thirties to pass all nine caves!”

“I hear even the venerated forefather took notice. Maybe he really is in his thirties.”

“He is an extraordinary cultivator. Where did he come from? Apparently he was a wandering cultivator before he joined House Yan.”

“Him? A wandering cultivator? Since when were wandering cultivators this heaven-defying?”

“Isn’t it incredulous for a peak great emperor to go head on with a third level empyrean expert? Shao Yuan’s going to be famous after this!”

“Yes, he’s not to be underestimated. However, it’s clear that his foundation isn’t as solid as senior brother Gan Ning’s. His speed is the only reason why he can put up a fight. If senior brother Gan Ning’s a little faster, he’ll be able to defeat Shao Yuan.”

“Senior brother Gan Ning has the Water God’s Arm. He’s unparalleled in his mastery of the water element. Speed, however, is never the strong suit of cultivators specializing in water.”

“Right. He must be frustrated not being able to deal with a peak great emperor. It’s an insult to his reputation as one of the Five.”

“That being said, anyone can tell that he has the upper hand. Shao Yuan is just playing off his speed.”

“You can’t say that. I noticed that Shao Yuan’s only using his speed and his eye art, and not any other techniques. I hear that he showed amazing versatility during the evaluation. Why is he utilizing only a few techniques now? Maybe he’s hiding his real strength.”

The audience couldn't reach a consensus. Some supported Gan Ning. Others found different ways to praise Jiang Chen.

"Nonetheless, Shao Yuan's going to shoot to fame after the fight. His speed's amazing for a great emperor. If he can reach empyrean realm, he'll join the rank of the Five. Maybe it'll be the Six Great Gentlemen then."

"Tsk, tsk. Shao Yuan's getting famous overnight. He's made the right bet."

"Hmph, those who get famous overnight often let their hubris get the better of them. Who knows how long his success will last?"

As the debate offstage grew heated, the fight onstage grew intense as well. Gan Ning had perfectly mastered his weapon. His techniques were awe-inspiring and eye-opening.

Jiang Chen made use of nothing but his speed in the fight, but was also impressed with Gan Ning's ability.

Gan Ning is a bit of a bastard, but he's the real deal. He deserves his spot among the Five. I'd need to use the Confounding Puppets and Nine Labyrinth Formation in order to defeat him, but I'd like to keep those hidden for now.

He didn't want to show his hand just yet. This was just a personal fight of no importance. He could tell that Gan Ning hadn't gone all out either. His opponent was certainly hiding some trump cards.

Though Gan Ning wasn't level-headed enough, Jiang Chen didn't think any ultimate moves would make an appearance in the fight. Gan Ning couldn't be that much of a weak fool.

The sword competition next year and the competition for all geniuses in the Ten Divine Nations three years later were when geniuses would truly make a name for themselves. It'd be wise to keep his real power hidden until then.

At the beginning, Gan Ning had intended to teach Shao Yuan a lesson on Xiahou Ying's behalf; to curry favor with her, even.

As the fight wore on however, he realized that his opponent wasn't the easy prey he'd imagined. His mindset was challenged and tempered throughout the process. Towards the end, he became an entirely different person mentally. The fight was no longer a petty conflict, but a learning experience for his martial dao and mind.

Epiphany dawned on him once he calmed down. He noticed what he'd once been blind to, and resolved the emotional knots in his mind.

His heart sank when he saw the schadenfreude flashing through Xiahou Ying's eyes every now and then. She'd been tricking them, using their jealousy of Shao Yuan to stir up trouble.

He thought back to what Shao Yuan said. Why were the other four unwilling to associate with him? Why did he receive so little respect even as one of the top geniuses?

He'd resented the others before, but now saw that he was to blame. No one had ever pointed out the problem, while newcomer Shao Yuan had beat him over the head with it.

Throughout the course of the fight, they slowly reached a mutual understanding. The duel morphed into a friendly exchange. Eventually, Gan Ning sighed. "People said that you tricked your way through the Nine Winding Caves, but now I know you're the real deal."

They ended the fight and landed on each side of the stage as if agreed upon beforehand.

Jiang Chen had been observing Gan Ning all along and noted the changes in attitude. From the genius' tone, it was clear that he'd resolved some of his issues and arrived at some realizations.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Senior brother Gan Ning's technique in the water element is flawless. I greatly admire you for that."

The audience couldn't quite recover their jaws when they heard the conversation.

What was going on?

Hadn't the two of them fought like they wanted nothing more than to knock out the other? Why were they showing their appreciation and showering each other with praise now?

Had they formed a friendship through the exchange of blows?

Jing Yi couldn't be more shocked. He'd witnessed the start of their conflict. Why would senior brother Gan Ning be so polite to someone who'd insulted him?

That wasn't the senior brother he knew! Besides, Shao Yuan had been so rude to Miss Ying. Why would senior brother Gan Ning forgive him so easily?

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

#### **Chapter 1709: Not Worthy Of Challenging**

"What the hell? That's it?"

"There's no winner yet! Keep going!"

"Heh, neither of them can defeat the other, so there's no need to keep fighting. It may look like a tie, but in reality, Gan Ning's the loser."

"That's right. As one of the Five, he'll be mocked for not being able to defeat someone who just joined the sacred land."

"That's unfair. Shao Yuan passed the evaluation by setting a new record. He's been labelled as a top tier genius and is being raised as such."

"So what? Shao Yuan's only at peak great emperor while Gan Ning's third level empyrean. There's a great gap between their cultivations. That you have to admit."

"Oh, easy for you to say. If you're so great, go fight Shao Yuan yourself! Senior brother Gan Ning's able to alternate between attacking and defending with ease due to his Water God's Arm. Anyone weaker would've lost in no time to Shao Yuan's ridiculous speed."

The crowd held different opinions, but all of them had to admit the fight had been a very thrilling fight between young geniuses, if not the most thrilling.

Moreover, the fight was especially newsworthy, a clash between two masters of their fields. Even though it'd ended in a tie, the fight itself had been full of amazing and memorable moments.

"Senior brother Gan Ning," Jiang Yi called out as he approached the stage, eyes shooting daggers at Jiang Chen on the other side. "That guy cheated! You didn't give it your all, senior brother. Otherwise, he wouldn't still be standing upright with that smug face of his."

Gan Ning's expression was calm. "Alright, that's enough. Everyone should go back to their business."

Jiang Yi didn't want to let it go, but he didn't dare disobey Gan Ning. He'd always listened to the senior brother's every word.

"It's a shame that Miss Ying isn't avenged," he muttered. "That brat got lucky."

Gan Ning threw him a cool glance, but didn't say a word.

Xiahou Ying wore a pitiful expression like she'd been horribly victimized. Jing Yi's anger burned hotter seeing her face. He wanted nothing more than to fight Shao Yuan himself. However, he knew the extent of his own abilities. He could see from the earlier fight that he wouldn't be able to get back at Shao Yuan for the humiliation.

Other than senior brother Gan Ning, none of them could rival Shao Yuan. They wouldn't be avenging their honor in a duel, they'd be asking for humiliation.

"It's all my fault, senior brother Gan Ning. I've made things difficult for you." Xiahou Ying was clever enough to stir up trouble without a trace.

"Don't say that, Miss Ying," Jing Yi said angrily. "Shao Yuan's arrogant and rude! You're not to blame here! Besides, you're also the victim of his mockery. What an utterly crude man!"

"I can deal with a bit of insult," she said quietly. "I'm just worried that senior brother Gan Ning's reputation will be damaged because of me. Shao Yuan's proven himself in the fight. People are going to target the senior brother from now on. He's become Shao Yuan's stepping stone."

Gan Ning smiled faintly. "It's common for fellow disciples to spar, Miss Ying. That's the only way to identify our weaknesses and improve together. The general public's comments should be taken with a grain of salt. Real geniuses won't care about unfounded insults."

He wasn't going to let Xiahou Ying manipulate him anymore.

She looked blankly at Gan Ning after the response.

"Senior brother Gan Ning is quite magnanimous," Jing Yi bit out. "That guy should be grateful to you if he has even a lick of shame left in him."

Gan Ning smiled and glanced at him. "Please see Miss Ying off for me if you have the time. I made some discoveries during the fight. I'm returning to my residence for closed door cultivation." Like water, his dashing form slowly rippled away from sight.

Jing Yi gaped at where Gan Ning had been. He hadn't expected his senior to leave without keeping Miss Ying as a guest or even walking her out. He looked at her a little helplessly. "Miss Ying, senior brother Gan Ning must be in a sour mood. Let me show you around this time."

Xiahou Ying was likewise surprised by Gan Ning's sudden change of attitude. She considered Gan Ning a figure of importance, but Jing Yi a mere sidekick. He didn't deserve much consideration.

She'd been polite to his previous fawning only as part of her act. Her calm evaporated after Gan Ning gave her the cold shoulder, painting Jing Yi in a much more annoying light.

"There's no need," she responded coolly. "I've already visited my teacher. I should get going too."

Jing Yi wasn't shrewd enough to comprehend the sudden change in attitude. He looked at her helplessly, eyes following her as she walked away. He wanted to keep her, but didn't know what to say. Frustration weighted heavily in his chest, making him irritable.

He glanced at the stage that Shao Yuan just so happened to be stepping down from. Jing Yi glared at him with a venomous glare.

Jiang Chen shook his head slightly in response to Jing Yi's scowl. There was no need to waste time on a fool. He walked past Jing Yi, ignoring the latter's furious gaze like he didn't exist. The half smile tugging at Jiang Chen's lips brimmed with derision.

It was an immense blow on Jing Yi's pride, but there was nothing he could do other than grind his teeth with hatred.

Jiang Chen calmly walked away from the arena and returned to his residence, paying no attention to bystanders' comments. He'd fought Gan Ning with only his speed and eye arts, and had refrained from utilizing the Confounding Puppets or other tricks in the end.

The fight boosted his martial dao considerably, giving him new inspiration. His eye techniques, especially, had been greatly polished.

He was intercepted by Yan Qingsang before reaching his residence. The Yan genius looked much more excited than he was.

"Brother, I hear that you had a duel with one of the Five, Gan Ning?" Yan Qingsang was devastated that he'd missed the fight.

He'd been cultivating, oblivious to the world. The fight had already ended when he rushed to the arena after the news reached him. He felt that he'd missed so much.

"What happened? Who won?" Yan Qingsang's eyes glinted with curiosity.

Jiang Chen was exasperated by the passion for gossip. "It was a tie."

They walked into Jiang Chen's residence as they talked. Yan Qingsang paused when he saw the formations all around the abode. He clucked his tongue. "Did you set up the formations yourself? Or were they already here?"

"I set them up."

“What?” Yan Qingsang widened his eyes. “You know formations as well? What don’t you know, brother?”

Jiang Chen chuckled. “I know a little more than you think.”

Yan Qingsang was rendered speechless. He muttered, “I hear that Gan Ning is a third level empyrean expert. How were you able to tie with him?”

“Is it really so surprising?” Jiang Chen shrugged. “Gan Ning didn’t use his full strength. He was pulling his punches.”

Yan Qingsang rolled his eyes. “I don’t believe that. I hear that Gan Ning challenged you because you mocked him. Is that right?”

“That’s about it. I mocked him for a reason though, and I even went easy on him.”

Yan Qingsang looked doubtful. “If that’s the case, why didn’t he give the fight his all?”

Jiang Chen shook his head. “If he did, he’d truly be hopeless.”

“How so?”

“That fight was nothing but a petty argument. There’s a sword competition next year and a grand competition three years later. As long as he hasn’t given up on all his ambitions, he won’t use up all his tricks.”

Realization dawned on Yan Qingsang. He nodded earnestly. “Right, right! How did I not think of that?”

Jiang Chen smiled. “That’s normal. You don’t have much expectations for the sword competition, do you?”

Yan Qingsang smiled awkwardly. “That’s right. I don’t expect much for it. My goal is more long term. I know I have a later start than the others and that I won’t be able to catch up anytime soon. But I’m young. There’s still a long way for me to go. He who laughs last, laughs best. I’m not going to focus on fighting for glory in the present.”

It was obvious that Yan Qingsang had become a more clear-headed individual.

Jiang Chen sighed. “You’re not going to focus on the present, while I must seize every moment every day.”

Yan Qingsang cackled. “Level with me. Did you try your best in that fight?”

Jiang Chen shook his head and responded with a simple “no.”

Yan Qingsang’s eyes lit up. “Neither of you did your best, which means that you are strong enough to go head to head with a third level empyrean expert. Once you ascend to empyrean realm, you may be able to challenge Xiahou Zong!”

He was very excited. What he currently looked forward the most was for Jiang Chen to defeat Xiahou Zong and take Huang’er back. He’d be over the moon then.

“You’re wrong,” said Jiang Chen.

“I’m wrong?” Yan Qingsang looked at him, baffled. “What am I wrong about?”

“I never intended to challenge Xiahou Zong,” Jiang Chen said in a frigid tone. “He’s not worthy of challenging. I will crush him and trample his corpse. In my eyes, he’s nothing more than a cockroach that’s a little harder to kill.”

### Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

#### **Chapter 1710: Comprehending Dao and Breaking Through to Emyrean Realm**

Jiang Chen’s bearing and poise was what Yan Qingsang admired most. Many of his words, if spoken from the mouth of another, would be absurd. But his brother seemed astonishingly credible when he made such sweeping statements.

Yan Qingsang chuckled. “Brother, do you know? Your dominance is what I appreciate the most. I really can’t wait for the day when you stomp that guy underfoot and more, and turn his pride as number one genius into the joke of the capital. I’d laugh myself awake in my dreams if that day comes, and I’ll happily drink myself under the table with my new brother-in-law.”

He’d been a bit upset as to why Jiang Chen had initially approached him. But now, he didn’t mind at all. In fact, he found it rather more exciting. There was finally a genius in Eternal Divine Nation’s younger generation uncowed by Xiahou Zong!

Up to now, many people had been dissatisfied with Xiahou Zong partially out of envy. But Jiang Chen’s disdain for the man was very genuine. There was more than enough evidence to corroborate his attitude.

The young man in question didn’t have the time to waste on chatting with Yan Qingsang, though. “Brother Yan, keep cultivating according to the plans I made for you. I’m going to visit Elder Ziju shortly. He’s going to take me to the banks of Eternal River to comprehend heavenly dao.”

“You... you’re going to break through to empyrean realm?” Yan Qingsang was shocked.

“This day was going to come eventually. The earlier the better, I say.”

“Ah, I’d only get angry if I tried to compare myself to you.” Yan Qingsang let out a long sigh. “But don’t worry, I’ll catch up soon.”

Ziju Min had watched the fight between Jiang Chen and Gan Ning, though he hadn’t come to find his protégé immediately after. He only descended upon Jiang Chen’s residence once the young man had sent off his friend.

Jiang Chen knew of the elder’s arrival, and came out himself to receive the older man.

“Well done,” Ziju Min smiled. “Your battle with Gan Ning has improved your reputation. If you manage the breakthrough at the Eternal River, your illustrious name will spread through the sacred land like wildfire. No one will doubt your prominence after this.”

Jiang Chen’s eyes were filled with spirit. “Please lead the way, Elder Ziju.”



The Eternal River was to the south of the sacred land. A waterway coursed through the land's manifold peaks, widening from the source into a broadly running course. It was variously beautiful throughout the four seasons.

The river wasn't a sight that just anyone could view.

Only those who wished to comprehend the heavenly dao could request time at its shores. All others were barred from entrance. In the Eternal Sacred Land, the waters of the river were sacred. Express permission from the administration was required to approach.

Jiang Chen had permission from the venerated forefather, the highest authority in the Sacred Land. Naturally there was no problem for him in this department.

"I can only take you this far, Shao Yuan. The forbidden ground ahead nearer to the river is land that even I cannot easily encroach upon." Ziju Min stayed his steps after accompanying him to the boundary.

Jiang Chen proceeded beyond without hesitation.

The Eternal River wound through the mountains, sometimes calm, sometimes roaring. Different sections of the river could appear quite distinct from each other, depending on location and time of day.

He followed the waters opposite to their flow, taking in the aura of this natural wonder all the while. He didn't let a single detail escape him. There had to be a very good reason for the venerated forefather to want him here at the Eternal River.

This place must be exceedingly appropriate for that purpose. As for exactly how that was the case, he needed to find that out on his own. Half a year wasn't a long time, but it wasn't short either. He was sure to reap considerable benefit by giving it his all.

Sometimes, he stood upon the bank and took in the sight of the roaring waters. Time seemed to take on much the same characteristic, streaming away before his eyes. It evoked the ancient saying that time was like an inexorable river, passing on in one relentless direction.

At other times, he hovered above the surface of the river itself. The towering, grey sentinels all around him contained a smattering of scenery. They were a microcosm of life's adventures, in which peace was intermixed with strife, and valleys with crests. For a traveler, life was ever changing.

At times, he opened his eyes to take in birdsong.

At times, he turned to see the blooming and wilting of flowers.

At times, he snapped awake to find snowflakes drifting all around.

At times, he raised his head to register the roiling clouds.

Wondrous marvels suffused his perception and consciousness, filling his heart with awe.

He seemed to have already understood them in his previous life, but some truths were revealed only in the here and now. Suddenly, Jiang Chen felt the lines between his two lives blur. Had there ever been any difference between his last life and his present one?

Which was reality, and which was the one he'd reached through dreams?

Jiang Chen thought he had an answer, but perhaps there wasn't just one.

"Heaven and earth, nature and creation, my own heart..." Images and thoughts flickered through Jiang Chen's heart. Some belonged to his previous life, others belonged to this one, and still others were a jumble of sights and sounds, memory and fantasy.

A font of inspiration engulfed him, born out of a resonance with nature itself. All notion and conception between heaven and earth flocked to him with tremendous enthusiasm. They came as excited guests, knocking on his door.

The heavenly dao – heavenly order – was present everywhere in the world at this moment.

He saw it in the grass and trees, the mountains and rivers, the sun and clouds, and his very own self. When all embodied the dao, all held a fragment of the whole truth.

The dao was everywhere and anywhere. All about him and within him, permeating and saturating his senses, fusing together into a harmoniously concentrated whole.

All was one, one was all.

Both all and one were part of the dao.

In this moment, Jiang Chen finally counted himself as part of the rest of creation. He sensed the dao within himself and understood that he was related to the greater whole.

All this was amazingly natural.

The heavenly dao had generously opened its door to Jiang Chen, accepting him as its own.

"Heaven and earth birthed me. My father and mother engendered me. Creation and growth nurtured me. What I've lost and gained are both contained in the world. What have I truly lost then, and gained?"

As Jiang Chen comprehended more of the heavenly dao, it acted upon his body, molding him into a more perfect being. The essence of nature coalesced together into an empyrean decree, leaving a deep mark upon his consciousness in a flash of light.

My empyrean decree has formed. Jiang Chen's thoughts fluttered. He knew that the heavenly dao had recognized him. Now, he needed to refine and build it up further to foster its growth.

Tears streamed out of his eyes.

He was grateful to heaven and earth for giving him life, opportunity, and everything he'd come to possess.

He was grateful to nature for creating all that he could see, hear, taste, and love.

He was grateful to the flora, fauna, mountains and rivers, clouds and existence itself. Through them, he learned of the joys and sorrows of all.

In the end, he was grateful for all of his experiences and that he could detach himself from them, ascending into a higher kind of existence.

Empyrean realm!

He had escaped mortality and set foot upon the path to heaven. This was a fresh beginning.

In the world of martial dao, empyrean realm was the real starting point, the point in which one could begin exploration of the heavenly planes.

The entire process of breaking through and forming a decree had spanned only about a month. This incredible grasp of comprehension set a new record in the Eternal Sacred Land.

Other than himself, it was likely that no one would understand why he'd been able to do so. Jiang Chen's memories from his previous life had been instrumental in it all. Without them, without his knowledge that had crowned the heavenly planes, without his millions of years of experience and existence –

He wouldn't have the glory of this moment.

He wasn't bogged down by self-satisfaction. Rather, he hungered for further advancement. After breaking through, he ravenously consolidated his empyrean decree.

Another three months passed before Jiang Chen let out a sigh of relief. After extensive refinement, his decree had finally stabilized.

Now, he was a full-fledged first level empyrean expert. Both the strength of his cultivation and consciousness far surpassed those on the same level. He was supremely confident in this fact.

After stabilizing his level, he needed to strengthen his martial methods, equipment, and other various techniques as well.

Thankfully, he had two months left of his half-year. It gave him plenty of room for anything he desired. He could clearly feel the difference between his old and new selves. The way he sensed and perceived the world was radically different.

Alas, I'm on a mission here in Myriad Abyss. If I were back in the human domain, I would be able to enter the fourth of the Six Palaces of Heritage. Jiang Chen was fixated upon the six palaces still.

They were the crowning treasure of the Veluriyam Pagoda, an all-encompassing heritage that the ancient leaders of humanity had left behind. The most powerful of ancient heritages necessarily resided within.

Even though Myriad Abyss's Ten Divine Nations were strong in their own right, the pagoda's heritage didn't pale in comparison to anything that could be found here. In fact, Jiang Chen considered it likely to solidly surpass any competition.

After all, the human domain had been the core of Divine Abyss Continent in ancient times. The prosperity of humanity back then meant that its leading cultivators represented the peak of achievement as well. What they'd left behind was sure to be something hotly anticipated.

Though Jiang Chen was eager, this wasn't the best time to return. He decided to wait a bit more. Huang'er and the exploration of the Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement were his top priorities.