

Three Realms 1751

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

Chapter 1751: A Promise

However, Jiang Chen couldn't easily make a move at this point. He knew full well that he didn't know much about treasures like these. If he acted rashly, he would bring great disaster down on himself. Even he might be defenseless before an active light field.

The memories from his previous life weren't omnipotent. They paled before life-threatening danger.

The Astral White Tiger's eyes glowed with vigor. It seemed very confident and excited.

Jiang Chen's confidence was bolstered somewhat when he saw the ease of his companion. He knew that many things in the world had natural affinities and oppositions. This place might be extremely perilous for most, but Astral White Tigers favored such harrowing habitats. Understandable, because they embodied murder itself.

In the subterranean world, the Astral White Tiger leaped about with meticulous rhythm. Its increased tempo signified that it had gotten more and more into the swing of things.

Atop the tiger's back, Jiang Chen coolly observed his surroundings. Strangeness and bizarreness permeated everything he saw. He felt like he had entered into someone's body and was traveling among various organs, vessels, and veins.

"Cloud Camel Mountain's underground is quite unique." Jiang Chen had been under the earth in many places, relying on his Goldbiter Rats and Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire in the past. He didn't dare take this place lightly though.

Prismatic formations that threatened to take his life were everywhere. The air became more dark, damp, and sinister with each additional inch lower into the ground. The killing aura had intensified too, of course.

Jiang Chen felt like he was no longer in the world of the living. The mystifying colors all around him danced about like will-o'-the-wisps, eerie merely to behold.

The Astral White Tiger's steps began to slow.

"Young master Chen, do you see?" It messaged the young man.

Jiang Chen glanced in the direction the tiger was looking in. There was a long ribbon of light – no, a pillar or serpent – that coiled and pierced the length of east to west. Neither end was visible...

"Is this... a complete earthen vein?" Jiang Chen gasped.

"Yes," the Astral White Tiger nodded. "It doesn't look far, but it's hard to get there. It's way larger than we expect, so it seems closer than it is. I'm not sure if I can go there myself, young master Chen."

It tilted its head in an adoring gaze at the endless ribbon of light.

"You can't go, either?" Jiang Chen gasped a second time.

“Mhm. If I was empyrean realm, I could probably risk it.” The Astral White Tiger was still coming into the fullness of his strength. It was only a step away.

“How long will it take you to break through?” Jiang Chen asked.

“This place is great for my cultivation. Maybe only two weeks? That’s a bit short... three months at most.”

Jiang Chen pondered it for a moment. There were four months before the tournament of geniuses. He had enough time to wait for Little White.

However, if Little White was busy cultivating, his own safety would no longer be guaranteed. If the natural restrictions around here were activated, he would have little immediate recourse.

“How about you cultivate here, Little White, and I’ll wait for your good news?” he ventured.

The tiger engaged in some musing of its own. “Young master Chen,” it replied seriously, “I can’t take care of you while I’m here. I think you would be safer outside, since something might happen around here while I’m busy.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “Alright. I’ll pull back for now, and come back in half a month to check on you. If you’re done by then, we’ll meet outside. If not, I’ll wait for you. How does that sound?”

The earthen vein’s magnificence had shaken him to the core.

If he could, he wanted to dig it up entirely. He knew that endless stores of top-quality ore were hidden within. To grasp the vein was to obtain incalculable riches.

Jiang Chen wasn’t fixated on the wealth itself, but the valuable treasures were likely to be very useful in the future.

Though he hadn’t fought the demons personally, he knew their inherent strength. Demons had undying bodies that were difficult to destroy. Perhaps the minerals here would make keen weapons against them once excavated. But that was just a theoretical idea at the present.

Jiang Chen saw no reason to tell the tiger about his theory. Little White was still very young, and probably lacked the mental faculties to understand the details in his words. However, it was certain to comply with the requests of the person who’d cared for it since its cubhood.

Following the Astral White Tiger outside, Jiang Chen remarked, “we’ll rendezvous here later on. Don’t go anywhere unless we meet up, alright?”

“You should be careful, young master Chen. Don’t wander off anywhere!” Little White pretended to advise with a mature voice.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. “Be careful yourself. I know you’re at home here, but you need to keep on your toes. You’re supposed to be Brother Long’s contender.”

The tiger puffed out its chest, its eyes glittering. “Hmph, I’ll make that big dragon reel in surprise the next time I see him!”

Little White didn't care about much, but his competition with Long Xiaoxuan was an exception. It was an idea that had been implanted in him since birth, born out of the pride of all Astral White Tigers.

Because true dragons and Astral White Tigers were both sacred beasts, the quality of their bloodlines was largely the same. Therefore, tiger and dragon saw each other as fitting rivals.

Though Long Xiaoxuan was a bit older than Little White, he saw no reason to take things lightly. As the descendant of dragons, he had his own inherited memories: he knew that once Little White attained the ability to transform, he would be a force to be reckoned with in empyrean realm and beyond.

Though the Astral White Tiger bloodline was technically slightly inferior to the draconic one, the tigers' savagery in combat rendered the difference moot.

It had always been difficult to differentiate whether dragons or tigers were on top.

Dragons were a bit better when it came to reproduction, compared to the Astral White Tigers.

Though pure-blooded dragons were difficult to produce, dragons could also procreate with humans and other races, causing a plethora of inherited mutations in the descendant's bloodlines.

Astral White Tigers, on the other hand, were incredibly focused on the purity of their blood. They didn't care for the intermixing of their bloodline. Thus, far fewer instances had been passed down as a result.

When a group of dragons formed a brood in a plane, they typically propagated with reasonable speed. The Astral White Tigers, on the other hand, rarely exceeded a handful.

Compared to dragons, tigers were solitary animals.

Their unwillingness to share territory with rivals was their most prominent characteristic. No self-respecting Astral White Tiger would live in a group. This too, affected the strength of the tigrine race.

Despite this, their pride surpassed even dragons'.

Jiang Chen bid farewell to the vanishing figure of his furry friend for a moment with a soft sigh, then returned via the route he'd come.

Without the guidance of the Astral White Tiger, he could only move about on the ground. Now he understood why Cloud Camel Mountain was so difficult to develop.

Even the best surveyors and scholastic masters would be cut to fine ribbons if they recklessly ventured into the underground world.

Once the powerful fields of light beneath the earth resonated with each other, they could cover a huge area with their attacks. Mighty as empyrean cultivators might be, they had no chance of escaping alive.

Bodies of flesh and blood were unable to resist the kind of sharpness that the subterranean lights embodied. Unless a counteracting treasure was brought in, any cultivator without the immortal body granted in the divine realm would find himself hard-pressed to survive.

Jiang Chen decided to go back rather than stay longer.

His pass allowed him to breeze through the checkpoints unhindered. He arrived back at Yan Wanjun's residence in the early evening. As soon as he stepped over the threshold, he sniffed at the air.

His instincts as a pill dao master caused him to frown slightly.

"What is that smell?" Jiang Chen inhaled some more air, detecting a scent he hadn't encountered here before. It was far from conspicuous, but he was more sensitive than most.

Somewhat suspicious of this abnormality, Jiang Chen swept his eyes across the courtyard. The servants were minding their business as usual; nothing he could see seemed awry.

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Chapter 1752: Blackjade Coralplum

The servants stopped what they were doing to greet Jiang Chen. They had been told by their superiors that Jiang Chen was a surveying expert, here to canvass Cloud Camel Mountain. He had free access to the elder's manor. Someone like him naturally warranted their respect.

Once inside, Jiang Chen asked, "Is the elder here today?"

"Yes, he hasn't left the manor."

"Welcome back, sir."

Jiang Chen nodded and made his way to Yan Wanjun's residence. With the pass and the elder's explicit order, the servants let Jiang Chen enter without a word and nodded at him in a slightly fawning manner.

Jiang Chen observed them discreetly and relaxed a little when he noted nothing unusual about their expressions.

Unlike Yan Wanjun, he wasn't as optimistic that House Yan wouldn't target the elder. Yan Wanjun's actions must have angered the patriarch. No patriarch could stand having a venerated elder steal his thunder and disobey him in public.

The patriarch may have refrained from making a move against Yan Wanjun before to avoid disrupting the order of the family, to refrain from disappointing the others, but here in Cloud Camel Mountain, the patriarch could make House Feng his scapegoat. Not only would Yan Wanjun's death not disrupt the family, it'd drive the family forward and give them something to band together behind.

That was merely speculation for the time being, but Jiang Chen believed that they couldn't let their guard down.

Even if House Yan didn't make a move, House Xiahou wouldn't be able to resist retaliation. It was against their nature to take the public humiliation from Yan Wanjun without doing anything.

Jiang Chen had also hinted at the possibility before. With doubt in his mind, he entered Yan Wanjun's residence. The elder was in the garden tending to some herbs and seemed to be in a good mood.

He'd cultivated the herbs personally. It was evident that he'd put in a lot of care into the garden. He smiled as soon as he saw Jiang Chen. "You're back, young man."

“Elder Wanjun.” Jiang Chen nodded as he approached the elder, his nose twitching subconsciously and his gaze sweeping over the garden.

Yan Wanjun was puzzled by his unusual behavior. “What are you looking for, young man?”

Jiang Chen frowned slightly. “Did you plant all of these yourself, Elder Wanjun?”

“I did,” Yan Wanjun responded with a laugh. “But it’s probably undeserving of your attention.”

Jiang Chen’s talent in pill dao surpassed even that of Master Shi Xun. Yan Wanjun would never question his expertise.

The youth’s gaze settled on one of the herbs. He considered it carefully with a thoughtful expression.

“Elder Wanjun, did you plant the Blackjade Coralplum yourself as well?”

Yan Wanjun chuckled. “You have keen eyes, young man. How did you know that I didn’t plant it?”

“Every spirit alchemist has their own signature method and style. The Coralplum clearly stands out from the other herbs. It’s not that difficult to tell.”

“You’re incredible,” praised Yan Wanjun. “How can you tell such nuanced differences? Personal signature? Is it really that obvious?”

He found it hard to believe. In his eyes, the Coralplum looked just like any of the herbs he’d planted. Could a master really tell the differences in a plant’s energy?

Instead of boasting about his ability, Jiang Chen considered the plant carefully with his brows furrowed before looking around the garden. After a good while, he asked quietly, “Elder Wanjun, may I ask you where the Coralplum comes from?”

Yan Wanjun hadn’t realized the gravity of the issue yet. He smiled. “Let me ask you a question, young man. How would you describe the style in which the herb was cultivated?”

“It’s difficult to describe in a few words,” Jiang Chen said faintly. “But it’s different from your method.”

The fact that the Coralplum was cultivated by someone much more skilled than Yan Wanjun was left unspoken. That wasn’t Jiang Chen’s focus, anyways.

Yan Wanjun laughed in delight. “You’ve finally made a mistake, young man!”

“How so?” Jiang Chen didn’t look even slightly surprised. He knew he couldn’t have made a mistake. That wasn’t in the realm of possibility.

Yan Wanjun smiled. “I don’t mean to offend you, but this plant wasn’t cultivated by man. It was found deep in the mountain this couple of days by a senior executive stationed here. He knows that I like planting herbs, so he gifted it to me this morning. This Coralplum is a premium specimen. I like it a lot.”

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. “Is Elder Wanjun saying that since the herb’s grown in nature, there isn’t a cultivation process to begin with?”

“That’s right.” Yan Wanjun sighed. “So you’re human after all, young man.”

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I didn't make the wrong observation. The problem is that you're too trusting, Elder Wanjun."

His expression turned grave as he looked at the Coralplum. "Is this really a gift from a senior executive here, Elder Wanjun?"

"It is." Yan Wanjun chuckled. "I don't lie."

"There's something I'm not sure if I should tell you," Jiang Chen said calmly.

"There's no need for formalities between us, young man." Yan Wanjun chuckled. "I already consider you family."

"Alright then." Jiang Chen nodded. "You are Huang'er and Qingsang's grandfather, Elder Wanjun. I'm not going to hide anything from you. If this is a gift from a senior executive, please have him arrested immediately, no matter who he is."

Yan Wanjun widened his eyes, his face ashen. "Why?"

"He's committed an atrocious crime," said Jiang Chen, his voice steady. "You're an honest man, Elder Wanjun. You don't realize how malicious this gift is."

"What do you mean?" Yan Wanjun was shocked. It was simply a plant. How malicious could it be?

"Whoever gave you this Coralplum has one goal: to take your life."

"That bad?!" Yan Wanjun couldn't believe his ears. "I may not be an expert in spirit herbs, but I'm not entirely uninformed. I can confidently say that the Blackjade Coralplum is harmless."

As a spirit herb hobbyist, he didn't know much about the Coralplum, but he at least knew if it was poisonous.

Jiang Chen sighed. "That's the clever part of the plan. Elder Wanjun, there must be someone of great intelligence behind this. The plot couldn't have been achieved by a mere senior executive in Cloud Camel Mountain."

"The plan?" Yan Wanjun asked with his mouth agape. "This is getting more and more confusing, young man. What plan are you talking about?"

"You aren't wrong about the Coralplum, Elder Wanjun. It's a high-level spirit herb that isn't poisonous itself. If it's raised separate from other herbs, it's an invaluable asset."

He had nothing against the plant itself.

"What are you referring to by 'plot' then?" Yan Wanjun was even more lost.

"Let me make a wild guess, Elder Wanjun. You must have been cultivating these herbs when you were in House Yan's headquarters, and you started many years ago. There are people who know what herbs you're cultivating, aren't there?"

"Who are you referring to?" Yan Wanjun felt as if Jiang Chen was leading him on a merry chase. He had no clue what was happening.

“I mean the other members of your family, or perhaps House Xiahou.”

“No one from House Xiahou cares about my hobby, but there are many people who know about in the family,” admitted Yan Wanjun.

“Does Yan Wanyou know?” suggested Jiang Chen.

“He knows I like cultivating herbs, but we’ve never been on friendly terms. He shouldn’t know what herbs I have.”

“What about the other senior executives? Who would know about the types of herbs you keep?”

“There aren’t many who know the details, but well, the patriarch does know. We talked about it every now and then.”

Jiang Chen’s expression turned grim. He muttered, “Patriarch... Patriarch Yan, is it?”

“Yes. What’s wrong with that?” Yan Wanjun was starting to get anxious upon seeing Jiang Chen’s serious reaction.

“Something’s wrong. Very wrong. I’m not sure if it was the patriarch who gifted you the Coralplum, but I can guarantee that someone did it on purpose. If I were you, Elder Wanjun, I’d have the gift-giver arrested right now.”

“Would you explain to me what’s going on, young man?” Yan Wanjun had thought that he’d finally found something the young man didn’t know, but he wasn’t so sure now after taking in Jiang Chen’s serious expression and words.

The young man was always careful with his words. Things must be as grave as he was saying.

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Chapter 1753: A Broken-Hearted Yan Wanjun

“Blackjade Coralplum by itself isn’t harmful, but it’s highly malleable, and there’s a recessive attribute to it. Does Elder Wanjun know that spirit alchemists often use the Coralplum to refine poisons?”

“Poison?” A stilted smile appeared on Yan Wanjun’s face. “Even if it’s an ingredient for poison, it’s not harmful as long as it’s not processed, is it?”

“That’s not entirely true,” Jiang Chen said faintly. “Its recessive attribute makes it the perfect catalyst to bring out other herbs’ toxicity, and the Coralplum can incorporate a great variety of herbs to create potent poisons. No processing is needed. Simply place the two herbs near each other, and their energy will mix in the air to produce strong poisonous substances.”

Realization struck Yan Wanjun, pulling out the rug from beneath him. A trace of shock flashed through his eyes. “Are... are you serious?”

“Absolutely. This Dream Inducing Grass must be one of your proud projects, isn’t it? The Blackjade Coralplum can combine with it and produce a great amount of poisonous gas, which even smells faintly fragrant rather than pungent. At midnight, the interaction will accelerate and produce even more gas.”

“That horrifying?” Yan Wanjun was close to being convinced. He knew Jiang Chen. The young man didn’t have a habit of lying. He must be quite confident in his speculation to voice such doubt.

Yan Wanjun’s face contorted into a scowl, the look in his eyes dark. “So they’re producing poisonous gas already?”

“It’s not yet midnight. The poison won’t be fatal for another day. Tomorrow, the poison will have spread through all your vital organs. Not even a god will be able to save you then.”

Yan Wanjun froze, shocked but also relieved. “Guards!” yelled the elder.

Several of his personal advisors and guards walked out of the shadow. “Yes, elder.”

“Bring Wang Jing of Cloud Camel Mountain to me. If he cooperates, let him come to me on his own. If he doesn’t, do everything you must to bring him here even if you have to kidnap him. Remember, I want him alive!”

Yan Wanjun hadn’t become a venerated elder without some tricks up his sleeves. He had a group of deathsworn at his command and quickly came up with a plan once he’d wrapped his head around what had happened.

“You must act quickly and decisively,” reminded Jiang Chen. “You also have to consider the possibility that the mastermind is still around to provide sanctuary to Wang Jing.”

“Should I deal with him personally?” boomed Yan Wanjun.

Jiang Chen shook his head. “Oh, that won’t be necessary.”

“Doesn’t this mean that the Blackjade Coralplum is only going to do me harm?” Yan Wanjun’s eyes blazed with fury, taking a step toward the plant. “I’ll destroy it!”

“No need, no need,” Jiang Chen hurried out. “You simply have to separate the two herbs by five hundred meters to stop the reaction. However, there are better alternatives. The best solution is to cultivate the Coralplum in isolation by setting up a formation around it, preventing its energy from mixing with that of the other herbs.”

Most people would take such measure when cultivating the Coralplum. Yan Wanjun just didn’t have a deep enough understanding in herbs to fully grasp the plant’s properties.

Instead, the elder was still trying to find excuses for his family. “Young man, can it be a misunderstanding that Wang Jing gifted the Coralplum to me? Or perhaps an unfortunate coincidence? Maybe he doesn’t know it can be poisonous himself.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “It’s not an unfortunate coincidence.”

“Why?” Yan Wanjun was reluctant to believe that someone from the family would want him dead.

Although the different factions within the family were sometimes at odds, things never escalate to murder. Once its members resorted to killing their own, what future could the clan have?

Yan Wanjun still cared about House Yan deeply. He didn’t want to believe that his fellow clan members would try to kill him.

"I wouldn't be so sure if Wang Jing had admitted that he planted the Coralplum, but he told you decisively that it was found in the wild. He was clearly lying. Man-made interference is evident on the Coralplum. Perhaps he thought it'd be easier to earn your trust by claiming the latter. That leads me to the conclusion that Wang Jing meant you harm from the very beginning."

Yan Wanjun sighed. "Even so, perhaps Wang Jing's simply overstated the value of the herb in order to butter me up."

"That's a possibility, which was why I asked if anyone else knew about your collection of spirit herbs. I believe that there must be someone who knows the Blackjade Coralplum can be combined with the Dream Inducing Grass, and that you have the latter in your possession. He cleverly used that knowledge against you. This was a sophisticated plan."

Yan Wanjun shook his head and sighed with great pain. "I still hope it's merely a coincidence."

That wasn't out of the realm of possibility, but the odds couldn't be higher than ten percent. Too many signs pointed to attempted murder.

Jiang Chen didn't push further. He'd made himself clear and was in no place to dictate what the elder should do. His job here was done. If Yan Wanjun decided to hold onto blind faith in his family and insisted on trusting them, that'd be up to him. Jiang Chen couldn't force him to change his mind.

Some of Yan Wanjun's men returned first with bad news that further dampened the elder's mood.

"Elder, Wang Jing has disappeared from the mountain. He has no family or friends here, so no one knows where he's gone off to."

"That can't be. He gave me the Coralplum this morning. How can he vanish in such a short amount of time?"

Things were getting more and more suspicious.

Jiang Chen didn't say anything and started setting up a formation around the plant instead. It was a valuable herb and shouldn't go to waste. He put a protective formation around the Dream Inducing Grass as well.

Now there was no danger of the two herbs' energies mixing. To be on the safe side, Jiang Chen had someone move the Coralplum further away.

Yan Wanjun looked at Jiang Chen with unfocused eyes, dejected. It was as if he'd spontaneously aged by many years.

More of the elder's men returned. "Elder, we've searched the neighboring area and found nothing. It's like Wang Jiang has disappeared into thin air."

"Has he fled to avoid punishment?" ventured one of the guards.

"Fled?" Yan Wanjun paused. "He attempted to kill me. There will be no escape for him!"

Ire contorted his face as he'd come to see things in an objective light. Jiang Chen was right. He'd been lying to himself. What good did it do for him to sacrifice for the greater good?

There was an internal schism in the family. Someone had attempted to take his life!

He was loyal to the house and would sacrifice himself to protect it, but that didn't mean he was willing to die a worthless death. He wouldn't accept being murdered for some unknown reason. He wanted his death to be worthwhile and just.

The worst way to go was at the hand of his peers. He'd done everything he could for the family; it's matters were his own personal affairs. And yet, they'd been counting down the hours until he died. Despair bloomed in his heart.

"Patriarch, Patriarch... why didn't you kill me during the meeting if that's what you wanted?" Yan Wanjun muttered, a little too loud for his words to be meant for only himself. "Making a move only after I came to Cloud Camel Mountain? Isn't that too inefficient?"

Jiang Chen could tell that the elder was devastated.

Once Yan Wanjun cleared the emotions clouding his judgement, he realized that if there truly was a mastermind trying to get him killed, the patriarch was the most likely culprit!

Aside from the patriarch, very few senior executives knew what herbs he kept. They were either distant from Yan Wanjun, or didn't care about spirit herbs enough to get to know his hobby. Besides, the patriarch had sufficient motive as well.

Another one of Yan Wanjun's guards came back covered in blood, his shoulder inflicted with a terrifying wound.

"Elder, we were looking for Wang Jing and ran into a stranger around his residence. The man ran away as soon as he saw us. We gave chase, but the bastard was stronger than we expected. He ambushed us and almost killed me. The others were after him still."

A stranger?

Jiang Chen was even more convinced of his speculation. He sighed. "Elder Wanjun, Wang Jing is likely dead!"

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Chapter 1754: A Decision

Just as Jiang Chen had thought, Wang Jing was found dead near his residence in a couple hours. Whoever murdered him hadn't had time to destroy his body yet.

The truth was very clear by now.

No matter how hard Yan Wanjun tried to stay positive, he couldn't deny the ugly facts that someone had set him up.

He stared at Wang Jing's body with a dark expression and called all his personal guards back. He was the target of this conspiracy, and the perpetrator was obviously highly skilled. His guards might not fare well against the culprit.

Noting the elder's dejection, Jiang Chen tried to comfort him. "Elder Wanjun, you have to stay strong."

Yan Wanjun scoffed. "I've devoted myself to the house my whole life, and this is what I end up with? Abandoned and crossed off after I have no more value?"

Jiang Chen didn't know what to say as he understood how Yan Wanjun felt. Anything that he could offer now would come across as nothing but empty platitudes.

Yan Wanjun couldn't contain his fury. "That's it. I will return to the house and demand an explanation!"

"You mustn't!" Jiang Chen blurted out.

"Why not? At my age, I should be appreciated for my hard work, if not for my contributions. I need to know why he did this to me!"

"You must stay calm, Elder Wanjun. You have every reason to want an answer, but if you return to the family headquarters now, you're bound to run into troubles along the way. You may not even reach your destination safely!"

Jiang Chen wasn't overstating the danger. If the patriarch had been behind the attempted murder, he would have a backup plan after the initial attempt failed. Troubles would follow the elder, which was the biggest threat Yan Wanjun would have to face.

An ambush was much more difficult to defend against than an open assault. If the patriarch was pulling the strings, it'd be risky for the elder to stay in Cloud Camel Mountain.

Yan Wanjun fumed. "What do you think I should do then? Be a sitting duck?"

Jiang Chen exhaled deeply. "It's a tricky situation. It would be better if House Xiahou had been behind the conspiracy. As it is, House Yan will continue to go after you."

Yan Wanjun scowled. Jiang Chen had a point. As long as he lived, the family wouldn't give up on eliminating him. Sooner or later, he'd slip up and they'd succeed. He hadn't become a venerated elder without an iron will, yet he was at a loss of what he should do here.

This was new territory. If he was facing an outside foe, he'd at least be safe in House Yan territory. Even the boldest enemies wouldn't chase him to home turf. With someone from the family attempting to kill him however, he didn't even fully know who wanted him dead. His closest friends might turn out to be his enemies, and constantly treading on thin ice would be the rule of thumb.

Yan Wanjun sighed after a long, bemused pause, disheartened and lost. "I didn't expect to become a downtrodden cur at this age. What should I do, young friend?"

Jiang Chen carefully responded, "If I were you, Elder Wanjun, I'd find a safe place to stay and lie low."

"Safe? Where can I go that'll be safe for me?"

"You can go anywhere if you're going to lay low until the storm passes. The real question is if Elder Wanjun will be able to give up your status and cut ties with everyone."

Yan Wanjun twisted his lips into a smile. "Just look at me. What status do I hold anymore? What ties do I have? I care only about Qingsang and Huang'er, and neither require my care now. Qingsang has the Eternal Sacred Land, and Huang'er has you."

Jiang Chen was in no place to get involved in the conflict between the senior executives of House Yan. He was but one person, and he hadn't gotten powerful enough to influence the house. He therefore didn't try to make the decisions for Yan Wanjun.

However, there was one thing that was for certain: Yan Wanjun must leave House Yan. He'd be facing countless assassination attempts otherwise. He might be able to survive one attempt, but any mistake would cost him his life.

"Brother Qingsang will be alright in the sacred land, Elder Wanjun. And I promise you that as long as I live, I'll protect Huang'er from any harm."

Yan Wanjun considered him for a long while before nodding. "I trust that you'll honor your word. For some reason, young man, I have an implicit trust in you. If House Yan may change for the better one day, it will be because of you."

"You're too kind, Elder Wanjun."

Yan Wanjun sighed deeply. "Maybe even the Eternal Sacred Land will be changed because of you."

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "That day will come, Elder Wanjun. Once House Xiahou is destroyed, everything will fall into place."

Yan Wanjun nodded. It was easier said than done to destroy House Xiahou, but the confident glint in the young man's eyes gave the elder hope.

"Alright, I've decided. I'll stay here for a little longer until Qingsang ascends to empyrean realm and you two return to the sacred land. Then I'll resign and leave."

Jiang Chen nodded. "You should stay on guard until then. I believe the perpetrator will strike again."

"If anyone attempts to kill me in my residence, they better be prepared to die!" Yan Wanjun declared confidently.

As a venerated elder, Yan Wanjun was close in status to the patriarch, and there wasn't a large gap between their cultivation.

Even if the patriarch came personally, he'd need some competent helpers. He wouldn't be able to kill Yan Wanjun in a one-on-one fight. That was why the patriarch had set him up with the Blackjade Coralplum. It was also proof that the house leader wasn't confident enough to attack elder head-on.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Elder Wanjun, there's a silver lining even if the assassination attempt is an inside job. The fact that the spirit herb was used means that they don't want to be exposed. Moreover, they might not have enough manpower to go after you."

With the whole clan behind him, the patriarch would be able to easily kill Yan Wanjun. However, he clearly didn't dare openly send people out to kill the elder.

For now, at least, the patriarch wasn't bold enough to do so. If news got out that House Yan went after one of their own venerated elders, the internal impact of the news would mark the end of the clan. No one would be willing to put forth any effort for the family anymore. House Yan would be undermining both its reputation and future.

Therefore, Yan Wanjun would be safe as long as he exited House Yan territory. There weren't that many killers House Yan could send in pursuit. In fact, there was no singular person in the family that could take on the elder.

Yan Wanjun mused carefully and concluded that Jiang Chen made a lot of sense. He ordered all his personal guards to be on high alert.

He'd been caught off guard. Now that he knew what the danger was, he wasn't going to be complacent. He'd be vigilant and tighten the defenses around his residence.

He wouldn't say that his abode was impervious to anything, but he wouldn't let even a fly trespass into his territory. He also reinforced the defenses around where Yan Qingsang was cultivating.

Jiang Chen had exercised caution as well. He'd agreed to meet Astral White Tiger in half a month, so he wasn't in a rush to head off.

Time passed without any incidents. Because of the earlier attempt, the level of alertness around Yan Wanjun's abode remained tight.

Half a month later, Jiang Chen returned to the meeting spot he and the tiger agreed upon. According to his estimations, the white tiger should be breaking through soon.

The Astral White Tiger was of a powerful bloodline, and his awakening was rapid. It hadn't been long since the tiger was a cub, but it was already close to empyrean realm. No human could fathom the potential held in its bloodline.

Even Jiang Chen, with great advantages in cultivation, couldn't rival the four divine beasts in their efficiency. Both Long Xiaoxuan and Astral White Tiger had progressed at incredulous speeds. Of course, he wasn't jealous of them as he was good friends with both.

When he arrived at the meeting spot, Little White was nowhere to be seen. He waited patiently at the designated spot.

Without his feline companion, Jiang Chen didn't dare venture further in. It wouldn't end well for him if he triggered the terrifying natural restrictions. He sat down in the shadows with his legs crossed, awaiting the tiger's emergence.

The sword competition is only a few months away. If I reach third level empyrean, I can further break through to fourth level with the Crowning Empyrean Pill. Then there's at least a ninety percent chance that I can defeat Xiahou Zong.

Jiang Chen was approaching second level empyrean, which he was confident in reaching before the competition. However, reaching third level would be a challenge.

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

Chapter 1755: Little White Breaks Through

With pressure came motivation. Whether he could pull third level empyrean realm off or not, Jiang Chen felt he had to try for it. In a place like Myriad Abyss, sometimes raw strength was the most convincing factor.

“My body and consciousness both far surpass cultivators of a similar level. Therefore, I can easily sustain the rigors of continuous breakthrough. What I do lack are necessary resources...”

Each step forward in empyrean required an astronomical amount of materiel. Jiang Chen had some handy, but not nearly enough for him to ascend through again and again.

Back in the Bluesmoke Isles, he’d gotten his hands on many pieces of ancient Bluesmoke Jade. He hadn’t managed to exploit all of their value yet. If he sold them all, he would receive more than enough resources in return for him to break through to mid empyrean realm.

Alas, he didn’t have enough time to meet his short-term need.

Jiang Chen had been rewarded for exemplary performance by the Eternal Sacred Ground as well, but not in the form of cultivation resources. Right now, he needed resources such as empyrean rank spirit stones and herbs, from which he could draw spirit energy directly. This would directly accelerate his cultivation.

Perhaps others were unable to brute force their cultivation like this, but it was the most appropriate and effective method given Jiang Chen’s resilience.

“If I have enough stuff to use, I have a decent chance of breaking through to third level empyrean realm. As long as that happens, the Crowning Empyrean Pill will allow me to push onwards to fourth level!”

Though he felt that he could hold his own as second or third level empyrean against Xiahou Zong, the other youth’s fame and reputation as the foremost genius of Eternal Divine Nation was worth additional attention. Reportedly, he was a reincarnated god as well.

As he mulled over his thoughts, something registered in his awareness. He turned to look behind him. A ripple appeared in midair, from which a striped beast erupted. It was none other than Little White.

The tiger’s figure had undergone drastic changes once more. An ancient sign flickered upon its forehead – the Astral Seal that denoted it as an Astral White Tiger. When the seal appeared upon a tiger’s forehead, that meant its heritage was fully awakened. It could summon forth the actual seal into being.

It also meant that the tiger had reached empyrean realm.

“So you broke through, Little White?” Jiang Chen was overjoyed.

“Hoho!” Little White was just as excited as his master. He rested a paw on the young man’s shoulder. “Young master Chen, I did it! I’m an empyrean divine beast from now on, hahahaha!”

The tiger brimmed with enthusiasm.

“Great! Wonderful. I knew I was right, Little White.” Jiang Chen was as happy about his companion’s breakthrough as the tiger itself.

He had collected three of the four sacred beasts’ bloodlines and was missing only a Black Tortoise. One would be blessed by heaven for gathering all four.

If he could obtain the allegiance of a Black Tortoise, he could borrow the strength of the sacred beasts to reforge his bloodline and ascend beyond the heavenly planes. The four sacred beasts would dominate whatever circumstance they were used in.

“Come, young master Chen. Let’s go back inside and see if there’s a chance we can take the earthen vein for ourselves!”

The awakening of the Astral White Tiger’s ancestral memories brought out with it a new savagery. Little White’s eyes glowed as it mentioned the earthen vein.

Jiang Chen was quite tempted by the proposition. He’d only had the chance to see the earthen vein from afar, but that had been enough for him to judge the vein as extraordinary. To take it for himself would be an amazing find.

In fact, Jiang Chen supposed that it contained more wealth than the entirety of House Yan.

Alas, the vein couldn’t be excavated by normal people. Only a divine cultivator had the tremendous ability to dig out the vein completely – or rather, had the potential to have that ability. Success was hardly guaranteed.

Nevertheless, Jiang Chen was eager to strike at the gold before him.

Sprawled upon Little White’s back, he noticed an obvious change in the figure of his furry friend. Aside from noticeable differences of its stripes, Little White had grown a pair of wings. Furthermore, the wings could apparently be materialized and dematerialized at will.

“I think your bloodline is very pure, Little White,” Jiang Chen praised. “Your wings belong to royal Astral White Tigers only.”

“My ancestral memories tell me that I’m descended from the noblest of nobles in the heavenly planes!”

“Very good, very good!” Jiang Chen smacked his lips.

His second foray into the subterranean realm was a lot more relaxed than his last. Little White had successfully come in before without reaching empyrean, and was several times more capable now that it had. It was even easier for the tiger to avoid the natural dangers around the place.

“Young master Chen, do you see? The blue lights are blue prism crystals, the red ones are red prism crystals...” Little White explained the color-coded crystals to Jiang Chen.

It had avoided them on instinct before, but empyrean realm and ancestral memories brought it slightly more substantial knowledge.

“The blue lights need to be hopped past for every three steps. Each hop spans three yards...” the tiger patiently explained. These were the Astral White Tigers’ trade secrets. Jiang Chen learned a lot from hearing his companion out.

These multicolored crystals were priceless treasures, more valuable than empyrean spirit stones.

“Young master Chen, these prism crystals can provide both spirit and attribute energy. For example, red ones are capable of burning as hot as some celestial flames. Green ones provide potent healing. Blue ones can freeze the air. And...

“Do you see those white ones?” the tiger asked with animation.

“I do. The white ones number the most here,” Jiang Chen observed.

“Yes! The earthen vein has mostly these white prism crystals. They have a metal attribute and can cut through anything forever. Everything in the sky and in the earth can be ripped to shreds. I have a close affinity with them. This place is heaven for me!”

Little White was overcharged with enthusiasm. Clearly, it was very satisfied with the environment. It almost wanted to live here permanently.

“Can you take the earthen vein with you, Little White?” Jiang Chen asked.

The tiger thought for a second, then responded honestly, “Right now, I definitely can’t. Still, I can absorb as much spirit energy as I want. Because I cultivate way faster here, I just might when my level gets to the right point!”

Little White lusted after the earthen vein as much as Jiang Chen did. It knew it would have no problem relying on it to carry him to godhood. The earthen vein was full of mysteries, treasures, and resources.

“Why don’t you keep cultivating here then, Little White? I’m in a hurry, but I can spare a decade or two for you to stay here. I only ask that you involve me when you decide to dig up the vein.”

“Of course, young master Chen!” the tiger responded earnestly. “I’m not that kind of greedy tiger. How would I have gotten such an amazing opportunity like this without you bringing me here?”

As an Astral White Tiger, Little White didn’t usually care for people. However, Jiang Chen had taken care of it since cubhood. He took care of all spirit beasts with especial care and respect to their habits, creating a natural rapport with them. His knowledge of ancient beast language gave him an additional advantage.

The tiger had relied on him implicitly since childhood. Even if Jiang Chen didn’t say anything, it wouldn’t have kept the vein to itself. It was used to sharing any goodie it got its paws on with its master.

“It might take some time before you can take the entire vein away, Little White. Would you be able to excavate some of these crystals strewn about?”

The full vein commanded an exorbitant price once wholly excavated. It was impossible to estimate its value. Even a batch of fragments would be very lucrative, and resources that Jiang Chen desperately needed right now.

These potent prism crystals would advance his cultivation by leaps and bounds. Moreover, they corresponded to the properties of nature. It would likely be quite beneficial for him to absorb their essences. He would have a great chance at breaking through to third level empyrean!

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1756: No Small Harves

Little White chuckled at Jiang Chen's words. "Young master Chen, I was afraid of touching these crystals before I reached empyrean realm. But now? I can handle a bit here and there, no problem. I'll need them to cultivate anyways! If you like 'em, I can get a few for you right now. What colors would you like?"

"All of them," Jiang Chen laughed. "As many as you can."

"Sure thing. Leave it to me!" Little White pranced about in its excitement. Each jump was accompanied by a swipe of its expert claw. Prismatic crystals were continually dug out from the rocky ground.

Without Little White's correct methods of excavation, an unwary miner would be cut to shreds by the light, as the crystals contained natural restrictions. The tiger, on the other hand, was an obvious professional.

In about two hours, several dozen crystals were between Little White's paws. The crystals scattered in their immediate surroundings had all been dredged up.

"Without opening up that earthen vein, it's pretty hard to get more crystals. I think the area around here is already pretty dense!" Little White gave all of the crystals to Jiang Chen. "Here, young master Chen. These crystals are really valuable. Don't give them away, you hear?"

Jiang Chen grinned. "Of course not. I need all of them myself."

The crystals came at a time of burning need. Jiang Chen's desperate thirst for empyrean cultivation resources was slightly assuaged now that he had these.

Man and tiger stood near an underground spring. The spring's waters glittered with sinister light; its chilling cold could be felt even from the shore.

"Young master Chen, this underground spring nurtures the surrounding environment. Past it is a direct connection to the earthen vein, but I don't dare go in yet." Little White refrained from recklessness.

"Do you still sense danger?"

The tiger nodded. "Now that I'm an empyrean cultivator, I have no problems just passing by, but it's still nearly impossible for me to get my claws into the vein. I want to wait here for a better opportunity and to protect it. This earthen vein belongs to us! I won't let anyone else lay a finger on it! It would be wasted in their hands, anyways."

Little White was quite confident that House Yan wouldn't be able to really utilize the vein. Furthermore, the earthen vein was a gift of nature that had simply happened to materialize in Cloud Camel Mountain.

The mountain belonged to House Yan, but the same didn't necessarily apply to the world beneath it.

Jiang Chen likewise had no intention of yielding the vein to another. He had seen firsthand what House Yan was currently like. Yan Wanjun had all but lost his influence within the house, and Yan Qingsang was more clearly down as a disciple of the Eternal Sacred Land. As for Huang'er, she had never felt any particular belonging to her house in the first place.

There was no need for him to consider House Yan anymore. A year ago, he might have spared them some thought, but now...

He would be a fool not to take advantage of anything of theirs that he could!

“Are you sure you want to stay here and watch over the earthen vein, Little White?” Jiang Chen gazed seriously at his tigrine friend.

“Yes, I am. You aren’t going to say no, are you?” Little White blinked, returning the look with fearful concern.

“Of course not. Your presence here relieves my worries. Still, you should be careful. If someone overwhelmingly powerful comes for it, don’t recklessly try to stop him.”

“Heheh, don’t worry about it. I won’t come out so easily. Normal people who wander in will die to the restrictions from the crystals. Any non-divine cultivator who intrudes without understanding the rules will be toast!”

Little White had an inborn advantage when it came to navigating this patch of underground.

Human cultivators – Jiang Chen included – were helpless in the crystalline world before them. If Little White hadn’t taught his master these things, the young man would’ve had his hands tied like the rest. Other human cultivators would be ground to dust upon trespassing.

Jiang Chen wasn’t going to stay here any longer. This was a good place for Little White to cultivate, but not for himself. It was time to abscond with the crystals in tow. Little White couldn’t do much to the earthen vein right now, anyways.

Leaving the tiger here for cultivation and protection were more than enough.

“I won’t be able to watch your performance at the tournament of geniuses, young master Chen. So don’t let me down! Beat up that stupid Xiahou Zong!” the tiger encouraged.

“Xiahou Zong is an insignificant and irrelevant threat. I hope that next time we meet, Little White, you’ll be able to surprise me with your cultivation.”

“Haha, you too, young master Chen!” The tiger flashed a swaggering grin, very much at ease.

After Little White’s lesson on the subject, Jiang Chen could leave the place by himself. He carefully followed the tiger’s instructions to slowly hop back up to the world above ground.

The method taught him was entirely correct and effective. Jiang Chen wasn’t attacked even once on the way, and the course of his trip was quite trivial.

He found this rather remarkable. His scholarship was already excellent, but he knew very little about this underground world regardless. He wouldn’t have been able to explore this place without Little White, much less prance around so freely like he was doing so now.

After poking his head back into sunlight, Jiang Chen found a dark place in which to hide himself. He departed two hours later when he was sure nothing was out of the ordinary. Risking his trail being

discovered by others was to risk the underground becoming public knowledge. Thankfully, it seemed that no one had crept in behind him.

He returned to Yan Wanjun's residence to find the old man in high spirits.

"Qingsang has reached empyrean realm, my young friend. He's stabilizing his level right now. He'll be right out within three to five days!" Yan Wanjun was filled with enthusiasm that belied his age. It was clear that his grandson had always been his top priority.

He was happier for Yan Qingsang's breakthrough than he had been for his own, all those years ago. His grandson had finally firmly set foot on the right track!

Jiang Chen was overjoyed to hear the news as well. "Good. I knew all along that Brother Yan's talent was just as good as anyone's. He simply hadn't quieted down to cultivate in the past! Or, perhaps I should say he hadn't found a path that was his own before?"

"Quite so! You are his benefactor, young friend. I am eternally grateful for all of your assistance."

After three days, Yan Qingsang finally emerged from closed doors, his cultivation perfected. The now-empyrean cultivator brimmed with vitality: he had taken on an entirely different aura.

"Good job, kid. Well done." Yan Wanjun rarely praised Yan Qingsang to his face, but he was quite excited to see his grandson an empyrean cultivator before him.

"I think I lived up to your expectations, grandfather." Yan Qingsang clearly didn't know that there'd recently been an attempt on Yan Wanjun's life. There was no unease in his expression to suggest it.

Jiang Chen refrained from mentioning such a killjoy topic. "Congratulations, Brother Yan," he laughed as he approached.

Yan Qingsang embraced him with a bearhug. "You deserve half the praise for my breakthrough, good brother! Now I have to follow through on that drinking promise at your wedding! I am your brother-in-law, after all."

Breaking through to empyrean realm was a big day for any young man, and Yan Qingsang was no different. The ascension placed him solidly above everyone else in House Yan. Only Yan Zhenhuai remained above him.

After the celebration, Yan Wanjun knew it was time to break the bad news. "Qingsang," he sighed softly, "there's something you should know about sooner or later..." He related to his grandson what had transpired prior.

Yan Qingsang was furious. "Was this the patriarch's idea?! What... what a vicious man! He was going to order your death, grandpa, after all your contributions over the years? Hasn't our family done and sacrificed enough for the house already?"

Frustration and anguish was written all over the young man's face.

"That's enough of the useless talk, Qingsang. You're an adult now, and should think like a man. What's happened is in the past, and no amount of complaining will change it. We must find a constructive way

out of this. When you two return to the Eternal Sacred Land, I will dismiss my subordinates and depart from Cloud Camel Mountain to travel the world. The house's affairs are no longer mine."

"Travel the world? Where are you going, grandpa?" Yan Qingsang gasped.

"Wherever my footsteps take me. I can't say quite yet where I'll end up. Qingsang, you're the person I worry most about. You lack restraint and conservatism by nature. If you learn those virtues one day, I'll have nothing to hold me back."

Not every youth could stay calm in the heat of the moment in order to make unerring decisions.

Yan Qingsang's eyes reddened. "Don't worry, grandpa. I've learned a lot in the Eternal Sacred Land already. I used to be young and impulsive, but that's in the past. From now on, I will surpass Yan Zhenhuai and shine as a pearl of the Eternal Sacred Land. Aside from Brother Shao Yuan, I won't let anyone outdo me!" He delivered this speech with undeniable conviction.

"Good. I can put away my concerns after hearing that. If you can surpass Zhenhuai one day, House Yan will regret what they've done!" Yan Wanjun was now quite bitter when speaking of House Yan.

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

Chapter 1757: The Capital Seethes With Excitement

Though Yan Qingsang was loath to leave, the two young men departed Cloud Camel Mountain the very next day. Not long after that, Yan Wanjun temporarily dismissed his subordinates and left a letter in his residence before disappearing as well.

It wasn't until several days later that the rest of House Yan discovered his withdrawal. The letter was delivered to the local elder in charge, Elder Liang, as soon as it was found.

The elder paled after perusing the letter's contents. Venerated elder Yan Wanjun had left Cloud Camel Mountain; from what the letter indicated, he seemed to be separating from House Yan as well, at least for the short term. The reason given was quite nebulous, which Elder Liang couldn't make heads or tails of.

The letter was quickly sent back to House Yan's headquarters. The patriarch smashed his fist into the tea table as soon as he read the missive, instantly disintegrating the expensive furniture.

"Yan Wanjun, Yan Wanjun! You belong to House Yan, whether dead or alive! Do you think your crimes will be washed away with the ink in this letter? You fled in shameful fear. Do you know how disastrous this will be for the house?!"

The patriarch was incensed. He had engineered the plot via the Blackjade Coralplum, after learning of the spirit herb's properties from some reference book. He knew of Yan Wanjun's Dream Inducing Grass beforehand, and how the mixture of the two herbs' gases would create a lethal poison.

If his machinations had succeeded, Yan Wanjun would've died under unknown circumstances.

Alas, they had come to naught in the end. The patriarch was astonished when the news he received was quite different from what he expected. He didn't understand how Yan Wanjun had found out about the Blackjade Coralplum's characteristics.

How can this be? Informants had told him that Yan Wanjun had been quite pleased when the Coralplum was first delivered. Furthermore, it had been transplanted near the Dream Inducing Grass. Who would've expected things to end in failure after such a successful beginning?

Even if the plot had failed, the patriarch had been hopeful that Yan Wanjun wouldn't discover anything – especially not the identity of the perpetrator. The rest of the letter however, utterly dashed his hopes.

What others didn't understand was crystal clear to the patriarch's eyes. Yan Wanjun was well aware about the lethality of the Blackjade Coralplum and the patriarch's culpability in the affair.

He hadn't pointed it out in order to preserve internal peace.

But the patriarch was hardly going to be grateful at this juncture. In fact, he was filled with resentment for the venerated elder.

"Yan Wanjun, Yan Wanjun. Do you think you can just leave after causing so much trouble for the house? Do you understand how grave the price will be for your stubbornness and stupidity?"

The patriarch gritted his teeth, his eyes glittering with savage light.

Xiahou Zhen had threatened that many from the patriarch's own branch would be killed in Yan Wanjun's stead. The man whom he'd leaned on was a thing of the past. When his closest relatives were threatened, did Yan Wanjun's life matter nearly as much?

Man was a selfish animal, and the Yan patriarch was no exception. Thus, Yan Wanjun's vanishment made his heart sink like a stone. He could almost see Xiahou Zhen's slaughter in front of him.

"Are you trying to ruin the rest of the house by leaving, Yan Wanjun?"

The venerated elder in question was tens of thousands of miles out by now. He couldn't possibly hear the patriarch's angry roars.

His graceful exit made waves in the entire house.

Many venerated elders announced their desire for the patriarch to publicly strip away Yan Wanjun's position as venerated elder. Moreover, they requested that the patriarch issue a joint bounty to hunt down Yan Wanjun in all of Myriad Abyss. The House's elite would be sent out at the same time, of course.

These suggestions were reasonable enough in isolation, but it was very difficult to actually carry any of them out.

Announcements were easy to make, but more would become curious about the reason behind the departure. Why would Yan Wanjun choose this time to take off? He could've avoided Cloud Camel Mountain altogether in favor of outright retirement after the Skymender Festival.

Why would he choose to leave at this point rather than back then? What did the letter contain, exactly?

All kinds of conjecture filled House Yan's halls, filling the listeners' hearts with uncertainty and dread. Most felt that there was something fishy about all this.

Rumors quickly spread through the capital about the real reason behind Yan Wanjun's exile. The Yan patriarch had wanted to kill the elder! The venerated elder had escaped out of despair and fear, leaving behind only a letter to express his thoughts.

Furthermore, the rumor went into excruciating detail about every aspect of the plot, even the bit relating to the Blackjade Coralplum. It was as if the person who spread it had been there.

This rumor quickly boiled over, filling the house and the capital with its vapors. House Yan became the capital's laughingstock overnight thanks to the rumor's ubiquity.

Some said that House Yan was destroying its own foundations and reputation, others remarked that Yan Wanjun was a coward, and yet others said that Yan Wanjun's retirement was wise. There was plenty of debate on the subject.

Jiang Chen was naturally the orchestrator of the circulating rumor. He had spread it after spicing it up. Afterwards, he hid himself inside the sacred land's secret realm in intense cultivation. He went back to the Eternal River to refine himself once more.

Once his request was approved, he wholeheartedly poured himself into the act of cultivation.

The prism crystals he'd dredged up from beneath the underground world allowed him to take to cultivation like a duck to water. There were five colors among the crystals, corresponding to the five elements.

Each crystal was the size of a cat's eye. Even so, a stone as small as that contained terrifying power. A normal empyrean cultivator would have had a hard time absorbing it all, but Jiang Chen had the right method to refine the spirit energy within, as well as the attribute. It was easy for him to absorb the prism crystals that aligned with the five elements.

Cultivation was a wondrous thing. If someone only cultivated one or two elements, his speed of advancement wouldn't be particularly swift. This highlighted the importance of the foundations he had laid down between the true qi and spirit realms. He had all five elements to bolster him.

This was a cultivation method that proved difficult and strenuous at first, but advantageous later on. Jiang Chen also had the tempered body and will to sustain the amount of stress placed on him as a result of his accelerated training.

When he absorbed the prism crystals, there was a world of five elements within him that simulated the truth of martial dao. The crystals were far more potent than Jiang Chen had ever expected.

The spirit energy within them seemed almost infinite. Each cat's eye held more than an ocean of spirit energy within. Jiang Chen received tremendous benefit from these miniature storehouses.

The third day after his return, he broke through second level empyrean with no sign of stopping. He made pass after frenzied pass at third level.

“I have two and a half months. I can definitely make it to third level empyrean!” Jiang Chen encouraged himself silently. His goal was to hit third level in under two months, then rely on the Crowning Empyrean Pill to reach fourth level.

If he could put that into perfect action, he would astound the crowd and the entire nation. After all, he had shown up in Eternal Divine Nation as a mere great emperor cultivator.

It had been only two years since then. Getting to fourth level empyrean from great emperor in that short a timespan was the stuff of legends – certainly enough to break Xiahou Zong’s prior record. It would dim the halo around the other genius.

Each dig at Xiahou Zong’s illusion of invincibility brought Jiang Chen closer to an overwhelming victory over his mortal enemy at the tournament of geniuses.

If he could topple Xiahou Zong from his mythical throne, Jiang Chen would forever be in the right when it came to Huang’er. Even Xiahou Zong himself wouldn’t humiliate himself in making another pass.

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House Xiahou had heard about Yan Wanjun’s exit from House Yan as well. The whole house was completely enraged. If the old man who had shamed them simply left, how would the house regain its reputation?

And how were they supposed to get their hands on Yan Qinghuang without the actual person or hostages to threaten her?

There was heated discussion inside House Xiahou. Some executives proposed a straightforward approach of disciplining House Yan.

“Damn it! Is the House Yan patriarch slacking off, or is he actually useless? Yan Wanjun is just a venerated elder. How can a patriarch be powerless when it comes to a venerated elder? With trash like him as patriarch, no wonder House Yan is in decline!”

“Who knows? Maybe they were in cahoots from the start. I don’t believe for a moment that the Yan patriarch would be so subservient as to help us get rid of Yan Wanjun.”

“Not necessarily. The Yan patriarch is hardly a noble person. He would definitely rather sacrifice Yan Wanjun over his own blood relatives.”

“Either way, we have to do something to teach them a lesson! We can’t let House Yan fool us this time. They’ll remember only a price paid for in blood!”

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

Chapter 1758: Duke Xiaoyao

Xiahou Zhen felt rather embarrassed. He’d gone to threaten House Yan in person. As a venerated elder of House Xiahou, he had always felt a natural superiority when it came to the other house. Thus, he had thought the Yan patriarch would carry out his orders unerringly.

But Yan Wanjun had disappeared!

I was deceived by House Yan's patriarch. His demands had not been met, which was more than enough reason to be angry.

"Calm down, everyone. I was responsible for this matter all along. Since House Yan's patriarch has decided to be rebellious, I will clean up my mess." It was Xiahou Zhen's principle to be a responsible man.

"There's not much point in killing a few from House Yan now, venerated elder," Xiahou Zong remarked coolly.

"What do you mean, not much point? We must drill the consequences of disrespecting House Xiahou into those Yan numbskulls."

"Do you think it fruitless to act against House Yan currently, Zong'er?"

"Right now, House Yan is like a lamb to the slaughter. It's not going to run away whether we kill it now or later. If we mete out punishment upon House Yan now, we only push it further towards the Eternal Sacred Land. Though it won't affect the house's plans in the grand scheme of things, it will introduce some unnecessary uncertainty."

The house's plans!

Everyone cooled off when they heard that.

Xiahou Zhen sank into thought. Though he was a venerated elder, he was willing to listen to Xiahou Zong's opinion. In fact, he didn't have much of a choice in the matter.

"Young master Zong is right. The house is in mid-expansion and should prioritize intimidation rather than pulverization. If we crush House Yan utterly, it won't hesitate to turn to the Eternal Sacred Land!"

"That's true. We aren't scared of House Yan, but we have better things to do. Why should we give ourselves busywork? I think it is better to apply both the carrot and the stick. That'll keep them at a reasonable distance from both us and the sacred land."

Everyone nodded in consensus at that suggestion.

Xiahou Zhen inclined his head. "So I should pay attention to how I approach it then. I can kill one or two as a show of House Xiahou's attitude, which should be more than enough."

"Just as it should be. If we don't do anything at all, House Yan will think us weak instead!"

Everyone nodded once more.

"Young master Zong," someone piped up, "Shao Yuan from the Eternal Sacred Land is really quite full of himself. Do you think he's brave enough to face you in the tournament of geniuses?"

"I don't know." Xiahou Zong shook his head coolly. "I certainly hope so. I don't want to be disappointed yet again. It's been so many years, yet no worthy opponent in Eternal Divine Nation has risen to meet me. Shao Yuan is capable at pill dao, but I'm not so sure about his martial dao."

“I hear his martial dao talent is pretty good too.”

“Pretty good?” Xiahou Zong smiled faintly. “It’ll be a shame if that’s all he has to offer.”

There were countless cultivators with ‘pretty good’ martial dao talent in Eternal Divine Nation. Such people were far beneath his attention.

“Of course. There hasn’t been a single genius who can go toe-to-toe with young master Zong in martial dao in Eternal Divine Nation. I’m not sure there will ever be one, either. We never towered above the competition like you in our youths, so we don’t understand your loneliness very well, haha.”

Even House Xiahou’s elders needed to praise Xiahou Zong from time to time. His loftiness of position within the house was thus evident.

Suddenly, the voices of the meeting ground to a halt. A figure had appeared in the collective view of the attendees. It was so insubstantial that it appeared to have blown in by the wind.

“Patriarch!” There was instant silence upon the scene.

The patriarch of House Xiahou held penultimate authority within the house. Aside from the venerated forefather, he had the most power. His name was Xiahou Xiaoyao, also known as Duke Xiaoyao.

He was one of the strongest men within Eternal Divine Nation, claiming superiority over all but some of the most venerated forefathers. Even the first prime of the Eternal Sacred Land couldn’t claim she was absolutely stronger than him.

His hair swept up on his head and secured with a small hair crown, Duke Xiaoyao cut a lean, graceful figure. Starry mystery radiated from his eyes.

“Greetings to the patriarch.” Everyone bowed.

Xiahou Zong bowed in deference before Duke Xiaoyao as well. This act, in spite of his customary arrogance, showed the clout that the duke had within the house.

The venerated forefather barely inquired after the house’s affairs, which made Duke Xiaoyao the actual ruler of the house. He had power over its members’ lives, as well as the course that the house was to take.

“Sit down, everyone.” The duke waved a hand, in apparent high spirits. He radiated an aura of authority that commanded automatic respect from others. His eyes rested upon Xiahou Zong first and foremost. “Well done, Zong’er,” he commended. “Your strength within House Xiahou redoubles our might.”

This was high praise indeed.

Xiahou Zong was almost humble before the patriarch. “But you are the source of the house’s strength, patriarch, the final, perfect touch to the details.”

Everyone roared with laughter at the adroit rejoinder. What innovative flattery!

“Everyone, I visited the forefather before I came here. He has given a precise date. Our plan is to be put into motion after the sword competition. Together, you form the backbone of our house. We must all be daring and selfless in this action. Anyone who negatively affects the plan with self-interest will be

branded a criminal. The house's future prominence rests upon this plan. If we succeed, we stand to gain untold riches in every respect. If we fail, we might..."

The duke trailed off, but his meaning was clear enough.

"Are the other factions' attitudes clear, Patriarch?" asked venerated elder Xiahou Zhen.

"We're sure about most of them. Some wish to stay neutral, and the majority of the remainder has allied itself with us. The support the sacred land receives will be extremely limited," Duke Xiaoyao remarked confidently.

"Is the Eternal Sacred Land really so badly off now?" asked another.

"Hmph. It has consumed more than half of the nation's resources all this time, yet all it's done with that is twiddle its thumbs. What has the sacred land done for our nation? What geniuses have come out of it over the years? Despite its wealth, it's barely stronger than our house. Is a sacred land like this worth supporting?"

The duke's analysis was pointedly cynical.

"The sacred land has shown signs of decline for several centuries now. We always thought it was loftily untouchable before, but it doesn't look so intimidating now that we're up close. It's lost its former feeling of overbearing dominance! What need have we to fear it any longer?"

"It's time for history to lower the curtains on a dying faction. No political layout lasts forever. A change in the Ten Divine Nations by the wheel of history is past due. Regardless of all else, House Xiahou must take ample advantage of this opportunity. We will set the world on fire!"

Every House Xiahou member in attendance felt their blood run hot.

Duke Xiaoyao smiled, then turned back to Xiahou Zong. "Zong'er, our plan begins with the sword competition. Your job is to crush every genius in your way – including those from the sacred land. Ah, I hear they have a new genius called Shao Yuan?"

"Yes, but he doesn't amount to much more than a clown. His comedy show won't last much longer." Xiahou Zong was furious at any mention of the other youth.

The disrespect to him was one thing, but Shao Yuan had dared publicly propose to Yan Qinghuang! This seriously infringed upon his bottom line.

How could someone as proud and ruthless as Xiahou Zong ignore such blatant provocation and insult?

"I hear that kid is more than a little bit unorthodox. Don't underestimate him, Zong'er. Winning against Flora Divine Nation's Shi Xuan is no ordinary feat. Yes, he hasn't shown his martial dao talent yet, and I think he will prove inferior to you in the end. But still, you mustn't take him lightly. In the arena, you and he are mortal enemies. If you can kill him in one blow, do not use two flourishes."

Duke Xiaoyao was a practical man. He cared only about results rather than the process. The best route to victory was the most efficient one.

Xiahou Zong cupped a fist toward his senior. "Don't worry, Patriarch. He's made me angry already. I won't give him the shadow of a chance to leave the arena."

Everyone knew the overwhelming lead Xiahou Zong carried compared to the rest of his generation. They were impressed and pleased with the decisiveness of his claim.

"Good. Our young master Zong is ambitious!"

"Let the glory of House Xiahou begin with your victory, young master Zong!"

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

Chapter 1759: Countdown to the Sword Competition

The Eternal River ebbed and flowed in a rhythmic manner. Jiang Chen took note of the slightest changes as he cultivated. His mind became more agile and his insight more keen.

Day after day, he absorbed the prism crystals as well as the early rays of sun, morning dew, the air at the riverbank, the energy of the flora, and the smell of the earth... Every existence in the world seemed to be offering energy to him generously, giving what was needed for cultivation.

His body was also undergoing transformation every day. Both his physical strength and fortitude of consciousness were greatly improved.

An empyrean cultivator cultivated through absorbing the energy of heaven and earth. The faster he cultivated and the greater his progress, the more dramatic the natural phenomenon he'd trigger.

Fortunately, the Eternal River was quiet and isolated like a secret realm. People outside knew nothing of what was going on inside, while those inside were oblivious to the outside.

The sword competition was a few months away.

Jiang Chen made amazing progress every day; his efficiency was out of the world, and yet he wasn't satisfied.

"I've reached a bottleneck in second level empyrean. If I break through and reach the next level, I'll be able to take the Crowning Empyrean Pill."

In truth, Jiang Chen would easily make the breakthrough if he took the pill now, but that wasn't his final goal. He only wanted to use the pill to push himself to fourth level empyrean.

"There's still time. I can do it." Jiang Chen quietly absorbed the energy within the crystals and refined their attributes for his own. Even the Five Great Gentlemen would at most be able to absorb only a handful, while Jiang Chen had absorbed more than twenty.

Most would have to be insane to attempt what he did. A lesser cultivator would've already died from overconsumption. Jiang Chen, on the other hand, had room for more.

It wasn't impossible for him to step beyond the threshold of second level. As long as he kept absorbing energy, he'd eventually be able to ascend. That was the moment he was aiming for.

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Meanwhile, talks about the upcoming sword competition flourished everywhere in Eternal Divine Nation. There wouldn't be a record-breaking number of geniuses, and the talents featured weren't the most remarkable, but there was a fascinating story to follow for this year's event.

The stars of the story were none other than Shao Yuan from the sacred land and Xiahou Zong from House Xiahou. There was even a female lead - Yan Qinghuang from House Yan.

The general consensus was that Xiahou Zong would undoubtedly dominate the competition, followed closely by top geniuses from the most powerful factions, including the Five Great Gentlemen from the Eternal Sacred Land. There would be no surprises.

However, Shao Yuan's proposal to Yan Qinghuang at the Skymender Festival threw a twist into things and made it all the more interesting.

Gossip about Shao Yuan and Xiahou Zong's tussle over a woman spread like wildfire.

On one hand, many were convinced that Xiahou Zong's dominance over the young geniuses couldn't be challenged. On the other, some believed that Shao Yuan had a chance at disrupting the current pecking order.

Although the majority weren't betting on Shao Yuan winning, they admired him for his courage and ambition. Quite a lot were even hoping that the young man could create a miracle.

Not even Jiang Chen knew that he'd gained a group of devoted supporters within the nation. They saw him as a hero for defeating Shi Xuan and restoring the reputation of both the sacred land and Eternal Divine Nation. He was a true man for bringing glory to the nation.

Xiahou Zong was a great genius, but he'd earned his fame through battling his compatriots. His glory had been gained at the cost of his peers. Many were more inclined to support Jiang Chen.

The three primes were also under great pressure lately. A few days ago, Duke Xiaoyao, the patriarch of House Xiahou, visited the Eternal Sacred Land and demanded Yan Qinghuang.

The three primes refused vehemently, insisting that the sacred land would protect Yan Qinghuang as long as she stayed within their territory. But if she left on her own accord, the sacred land wouldn't intervene.

However, they refused to retract Shao Yuan's proposal.

The conversation ended on bad terms. The three primes simply refused to comply with the request. If they surrendered the girl to House Xiahou, it would be the sacred land subjected to no end of mockery.

"First Prime, it was long decided that Yan Qinghuang would be Xiahou Zong's cultivation vessel," the duke declared calmly. "It defies both reason and propriety for you to encourage Shao Yuan to propose to her."

"Your words are unfair, Duke Xiaoyao. We've only heard about this deal and have seen no concrete evidence backing your claims. The youths will determine their own fate. It's wonderful that Shao Yuan has fallen for Yan Qinghuang. Why don't you let them have their happy ending?"

The duke was silent for a moment. "Happy ending?" he growled. "Who will support our happy ending then?"

The first prime smiled faintly. "Let the youths resolve their own conflict. Tongues will wag if we old folk intervene too much. Our youths will also be mocked for crying to their parents like a little child."

She was essentially calling Xiahou Zong weak and incompetent.

A frown creased The duke's forehead. "First Prime, you're being unreasonable. First come, first serve. The Eternal Sacred Land takes more than half of all the resources in the nation--that we've accepted. You shouldn't be pushing for more. You're interfering with House Xiahou business. We can't possibly tolerate that, can we?"

"That's an overstatement. This is simply a matter of the heart between the young. Your words make me wonder if you have no confidence in Xiahou Zong. Do you think he's going to lose in the sword competition? If he truly is as powerful as he purports to be, no one will be able to take Yan Qinghuang from him. If she ends up becoming Shao Yuan's partner, Xiahou Zong has no one to blame but himself for not being strong enough."

The duke flew into rage, his lips twisted into a leer. "Xiahou Zong isn't strong enough? First Prime, I don't know why you're so confident in Shao Yuan, but he's going to die in a battle with Xiahou Zong unless he flees like a coward. Don't blame Xiahou Zong for not showing mercy then!"

"If Shao Yuan is incompetent enough to be killed by Xiahou Zong, then that's his fate."

"Good, good!" The duke laughed. "I look forward to seeing Shao Yuan's blood and guts splattered all over the stage."

"Duke Xiahou sure is confident," the first prime said coolly.

"Haha, I'm not exaggerating when I say that not even the Five Great Gentlemen can defeat Xiahou Zong, let alone Shao Yuan. In Xiahou Zong's own words, he can fight the five gentlemen at the same time and still come out on top."

It was typical of Xiahou Zong to make such a bold statement. Only someone insane would say so without the strength to back himself up, but he was likely the only one qualified to make such a bold statement.

The first prime knew The duke was likely right, but she wasn't going to admit defeat even in conversation. "This seat has asked Shao Yuan if he can defeat Xiahou Zong. Do you know what he said?"

The duke scoffed. "What?"

"Simply, Xiahou Zong is merely a stepping stone in his pursuit of martial dao. He can easily kick the stone away. A little interlude isn't going to change his path to success."

Jiang Chen had said something to the effect. Only, the tone and choice of words had been changed a little.

The duke could barely contain his rage. Shao Yuan was truly overly arrogant! "It seems that we can't come to an agreement about Yan Qinghuang, First Prime."

“Let the fight do the talking,” the first prime responded in a steady voice.

“As you wish!” The duke shot to his feet. “When Xiahou Zong destroys Shao Yuan, don’t blame House Xiahou for being ruthless and then complain about losing a pill dao genius!”

The first prime gave as good as she got. “I hope House Xiahou won’t fall into despair if Xiahou Zong lies dead on the ground.”

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1760: Participation Slots

The crystals Jiang Chen had collected from the underground greatly facilitated his cultivation. He’d reached peak second level empyrean and was one step away from breaking through.

“Just one more step... I can do it!”

He only had a month left, but he was as convinced as ever that he’d be able to overcome the challenge.

Cultivation was different for empyrean cultivators. Before that, cultivation was about tapping into the potential within oneself. After that, it was about combining one’s strength with the power of heaven and earth, incorporating the heavenly law.

Jiang Chen had a deep enough understanding of the heavenly law, and he had the necessary physical strength. What he needed and lacked the most now was time.

He was essentially trying to finish three years worth of food in three months. He was talented and adept enough to do it, but it wasn’t the natural course of cultivation.

One after another, crystals disappeared from Jiang Chen’s hands. Spirit energy spread throughout his meridians, his organs, and even his pores. He struck a perfect equilibrium with heaven and earth. Cultivation was the construction of a bridge between his body and the nature, enabling the exchange of energy.

“I’m getting close. Ever closer now...” He was ascending a tall mountain, trying to reach its peak. Third level empyrean was almost within his reach.

Suddenly, a ball of warmth burst within him, spreading to every part of his body. It felt as if all his pores had opened up as countless hot streams exploded within. Like a ray of light splitting through the darkness, a weight lifted from his chest.

Third level empyrean!

Jiang Chen couldn’t suppress his joy. He’d worked so hard for so long and paid a great price to reach his goal. It’d ended up taking it less time than he’d anticipated.

Despite his high spirits, he didn’t have time to waste on celebrating. He refocused his mind once more. He’d just broken through and needed to stabilize his cultivation base.

Nonetheless, he hadn’t reached his final goal yet. Next came the Crowning Empyrean Pill to push himself to the next level before the sword competition.

Since his ascension to empyrean realm, his edge in cultivating had become more and more apparent. He had more experience with the empyrean realm thanks to his past life, and thus he possessed more knowledge and insights about the realm.

He felt this realm was the true threshold of his journey. Before his ascension to empyrean, he'd been merely laying down the foundation.

He spent a few days stabilizing his base and then selected the finest Crowning Empyrean Pill without hesitation.

"There are many experts in the heavenly planes who used the Crowning Empyrean Pill to achieve an unconditional breakthrough. I have great shared fortune with the pill. It won't disappoint me!"

The higher the cultivation, the rarer the pills for a free level and the lower the success rate. Pills for sage and emperor realm almost never failed to their users. The pills were also easier to refine and less likely to be a failure.

The Crowning Empyrean Pill could still help empyrean cultivators ascend a level, but the success rate wasn't as high.

Of course, Jiang Chen didn't think he'd made a mistake. He'd refined the pill himself. He knew the properties of the pill and how he should use it.

He placed the pill on his palm, his eyes filled with complex emotions.

He'd never expected to one day take the pill himself. In his past life, he'd refined countless pills of unparalleled quality, but never taken any of the cultivation ones himself. That was an enormous tragedy and humiliation to befall the top pill dao master.

"Father, you're protecting me from the heavenly plane, aren't you?" Without hesitation, he swallowed the pill.

A pill of empyrean rank was not to be underestimated. Powerful energy rushed through every part of his body at once. If he hadn't been strong enough physically, his body would have collapsed under the impact.

In reality, his body was much stronger than other cultivators at his level, and his consciousness likewise. He therefore, was able to maintain control over himself in face of the pill's impact.

The pill came into full effect.

He had about twenty days left. There wasn't much time for him to push for the next level.

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As the sword competition drew ever closer, the entire Eternal Divine Nation bubbled up with excitement. All factions above third tier were allocated a certain number of entry spots, which were determined by the faction's status.

Factions like the Eternal Sacred Land was given ten spots, the most among the factions.

The other first tier factions varied. The powerful House Xiahou received given eight, while the weaker House Yan was given only three.

The second tier factions each had two spots, while the third tier factions each had one.

The number of spots was very limited, which meant that a great portion of the participants would be real geniuses.

All factions were now agonizing over who should represent them, especially the bigger factions. They had too many geniuses and thus many conflicting interests to consider when coming up with a list.

The sword competition was being hosted by the imperial family of Eternal Divine Nation. Members of the imperial family had all cultivated in the sacred land, but that didn't mean the two parties completely got along.

The imperial family naturally wanted to gain full control over the nation, unchallenged by any. Although most of their elites had been cultivated by the sacred land, as the official ruler of the nation, they wanted more autonomy and less restrictions.

It made the imperial family's job difficult as the sacred land all too often involved themselves in political affairs. Therefore, the two commonly held differences in opinion.

The two parties were mutually dependent, but there also existed conflicting interests to a certain degree. The conflict was mostly confined only because of the sacred land's dominant power. The sword competition was the perfect opportunity for the imperial family to demonstrate their authority.

Even the sacred land had to comply with the rules of the competition and follow the imperial family's instructions. In addition, the sacred land was restricted by the number of participants allowed.

They had great difficulty settling on ten people.

The Five Great Gentlemen were undoubtedly going to participate. Jiang Chen also needed a spot because of his feud with Xiahou Zong. Six spots were taken, leaving only four openings.

The fight for the remaining spots was intense. The sacred land was still more powerful than many other factions, even if they weren't how they used to be. Their foundations made sure of it.

In Myriad Abyss, there was a clear line of division between the top geniuses and the rest - empyrean realm.

Only those who'd ascended to empyrean could be considered first tier geniuses. The others, including those at half-step empyrean, were considered second tier and below. They could attend the competition, but they would only serve as a backdrop while the others shone.

But for the Eternal Sacred Land, it could gather ten empyrean geniuses without too much difficulty.

These days, Yan Qingsang had been frantically looking for support to gain a spot in the competition. He couldn't represent House Yan after his grandfather's departure. If he wanted to attend the competition, he had to take one of the sacred land's spots.

There were only four left. He wasn't sure if he could stand out from the great number of geniuses.

Yan Qingsang wanted to talk to Jiang Chen about it, but his friend hadn't ended closed door cultivation. He'd have to find another way. And so, he turned to Ziju Min for advice.

Ziju Min was surprised to see Yan Qingsang. "You've made impressive progress, Yan Qingsang. You've ascended to empyrean realm as well!"

"That's what I'm here for, Elder Ziju. Is it really so difficult to become one of the participants for the sword competition?"

Ziju Min paused. "You want to attend?"

Yan Qingsang nodded earnestly. "I want to very much so. I've lost the opportunity to prove myself to House Yan. I'd like to prove myself to the sacred land. Please trust me, Elder Ziju, and help me with this..."