

Three Realms 1801

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

Chapter 1801: The Divine Nation Boils Over

Ah Hong was clearly a feisty one. He grit his teeth and brandished his weapon, then made a mad charge at Jiang Chen. The difference in strength between his enemy and himself was completely ignored.

Harrumphing softly, Jiang Chen shot a ray from his Evil Golden Eye at the remaining cultivator. Ah Hong's body shook; he was restricted by an invisible force he couldn't struggle free from, regardless of what he did.

"You... you..." Ah Hong's tongue trembled. He glared angrily at Jiang Chen.

The young man had no desire to kill. Otherwise, Ah Hong would've become a golden statue in a hot second. What chance would he have had to speak?

"My magnanimity has a limit. I respect your authenticity and passion, Ah Hong. That's why I left you alive. Do you want to die? If so, I can fulfill that request." Jiang Chen also had another reason for leaving Ah Hong alive.

His Evil Golden Eye released its grip on the cultivator from the Starlight Sect. Ah Hong seemed to know the strength difference between Jiang Chen and himself. They were competing on completely different levels.

He deflated by sitting down in resignation. His tone was as equally hopeless as his demeanor. "Who are you, really? Did you really kill my companions?"

"Yes," Jiang Chen readily confirmed. "As for who we are, that's not for you to know."

"If you killed my companions, why not me as well?" Ah Hong sounded mildly self-destructive.

"I'm only keeping you alive because I think you're useful. You're man enough to not need to die. Are you really so submissive and servile to House Xiahou? To the imperial family?"

"You... what are you saying?" Ah Hong's eyes glared piercingly at Jiang Chen, his curiosity plain for all to see. Frankly, he was astounded. "Who are you, really?" he rasped.

"I'm not from House Xiahou or the imperial family."

"An expert from the sacred land then?" Ah Hong's tone became conflicted. "I suppose it was fitting my peers would die at your hand. So vengeance comes for me as well? Come on then, kill me. I won't resist."

His fighting spirit was obviously gone.

"That's easy enough. If you don't fear death though, why do you fear living on? Do you want to be released from this mortal coil? Don't you want to see what the future holds for Eternal Divine Nation?"

"How can the future possibly be different? You think you still have a chance to turn the tables? House Xiahou and the imperial family control most of the nation's important facilities. Over seventy percent of

factions have sworn their allegiance. I don't know what your position is in the sacred land, but it's best for you to leave now. If someone ends up paying attention to you, you won't have a chance to escape."

Ah Hong seemed apologetic to the sacred land to a certain degree. His altruistic reminder was evidence enough of that.

"Leave? Why would I leave?" Jiang Chen smiled coolly. "It took me quite a bit of effort to get here in the first place. I'm about to get into the capital!"

"Into the capital? You... you're not scared of dying?" Ah Hong gasped.

"Dying? The person capable of killing me in this world hasn't been born yet. Enough small talk: do you know why we've left only you alive?"

"You want to use our identities to sneak into the capital." Despite his candor, Ah Hong was no simpleton.

"Yes. So, will you cooperate?"

"Hmph. Aren't you worried that I'll call for help as soon as we enter the capital? You won't have a way out then." Ah Hong snorted.

"That's not your concern. We have our ways of making you submit, but we'd prefer if you willingly assisted us. We can see that you don't want to help House Xiahou's dirty deeds. The Starlight Sect doesn't stand to profit much from this insurrection, and in fact, it very well might be the next target after House Xiahou and the imperial family solidify their authority."

Ah Hong stayed quiet. He could see a hint of that already. There was nothing to deny about it.

"I'm not making it up, am I?" Jiang Chen chuckled. "The Eternal Sacred Land never bothered to strike at any of the first-rate factions in the nation, because all of you lack some way in strength and resources compared to it. The sacred land would never do something so unnecessary. House Xiahou and the imperial family? Not so much. They're not intrinsically much better than the rest of you. To prevent you from threatening their new position, they will inevitably cut you down to size. I'm sure you see that as well as I can."

"Hmm, so what? You should talk to the head of the Starlight Sect about it. I'm just a probational elder without much authority. You're wasting your time talking to me." Though Ah Hong agreed with the analysis, he didn't want to actually admit it.

"You can't change much in the grand scheme of things, but you can at least follow your own heart." Jiang Chen's searching eyes penetrated Ah Hong's consciousness, laying all in his heart bare.

Ah Hong hesitated a long while before muttering, "What do you want me to do?"

"Easy. Help us get into the capital and cover for us when needed. You can leave the rest up to us."

"That's it?" Ah Hong was incredulous.

"That's it." Jiang Chen nodded.

"After you get into the capital and disappear, what am I supposed to tell the sect head?"

"We all died," Jiang Chen supplied readily.

"If you die so suddenly like that, won't people figure out there's something fishy easily?"

"Here's your solution: we can join the war effort against the Eternal Sacred Land. On the battlefield, any of us could die at any time. There's not much for you to explain then."

"...that works," Ah Hong mused. "We'll probably be sent there after returning anyway."

"There you go, right?" Jiang Chen nodded again. "It's just that simple."

Ah Hong's eyes suddenly glinted with a keen light. "Was this your original plan?" he asked in a low voice. "You wanted to get into the battlefield to resolve the siege? I advise you not to bother. The barricade around the sacred land is watertight. You'd only be throwing your lives away."

"Oh, lives will be thrown away, alright," Jiang Chen snickered. "But not ours. You're in for a big surprise."

Ah Hong sank into silence for a time once more. His deliberation finished, he sighed. "Alright, I'll do it."

"I know you're not scared of dying. Still, for the sake of safety, I'm going to put a seal on your consciousness to oversee and control your actions."

Ah Hong was completely unperturbed about this. "If you weren't going to do that, I would think the worse of you for it," he harrumphed. "Maybe you're not committing suicide after all."

"I'm glad you think so," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I hope our cooperation works out for the both of us. If you can, feel free to rescue a few of your peers from the Starlight Sect. I won't mind. Just don't be too obvious about it."

Ah Hong sneered. "I don't have many friends in the sect. I don't know anyone worth saving. They want to enter the fray and risk their lives so they can win a share of honor and glory. They want to sell their lives to House Xiahou and the imperial family? Consider that transaction done. What can they complain about the expected outcome occurring? Do I look like I care about the other guys with me that you killed?"

This man was certainly a bit of an oddball.

Jiang Chen roared with laughter. "Sure, sure. Every man is the master of his own destiny. If that's really what you think, then you're more broad-minded than you know. If your cover really works out, then I'll owe you a big favor."

"Forget about that. Think about your own hide first, and work on those disguises. I'm not worried about being dragged into this, but you better actually execute your meticulous plan. It'd be idiotic if you were caught before anything happens."

"Heh, you can be sure that we will. Just tell me any habits or verbal tics your comrades had, as well as any other special traits I should know of. The relationships between three of them would be useful as well. And if the time comes that we need your mediation, do help us through any tricky situations."

"No problem."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Excuse this next bit, then. Relax your consciousness and don't resist. I'm about to make that seal. I'll remove it as soon as possible after all is said and done."

"Okay." Ah Hong wasn't particularly enthusiastic about it, but he was at least straightforward.

His astonishment was no less than Lu Che and the rest during the process of the seal implantation. He was just as shocked by the strength of Jiang Chen's consciousness.

His disbelief in their success was slightly shaken by what he'd witnessed.

The procedure itself was smooth enough. "There we are," Jiang Chen smiled after it was finished.

Long Xiaoxuan was swiftly sent out to spread the aforementioned rumors. Though the dragon liked to play it quiet and cool most of the time, gossip and misinformation was his forte.

He made up all kinds of fantastic allegations with a sincerity that gripped the hearts of his listeners. The hearsay spread fast like a plague through Grandeagle City.

The more stupid of the wandering cultivators were scared into flight overnight by the report of an extermination order. Moreover, they spread the falsehood on their outbound trips. Their logic was simple enough: the more people that knew about this, the less likely they themselves would be pursued.

This was risk mitigation at its finest.

Grandeagle City boiled over, as did all the metropolises surrounding it. Almost the entire Eternal Divine Nation knew about the siege in a single night.

The nation was up in arms; riots were everywhere. Loyalists everywhere gathered their men upon hearing the sacred land was under attack, ready to fly to its aid.

The divine nation was like a barrel of gunpowder that'd been set aflame. Smoke and chaos roiled over its demesne.

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Chapter 1802: Entering the Sacred Land

The news spread with astounding, crazy speed; first within Eternal Divine Nation, then quickly transcending the border and reaching everywhere in the Ten Divine Nations. The entire Myriad Abyss was caught in a storm. A bomb had been set off with the status quo.

Meanwhile, Jiang Chen snuck into the capital with Ah Hong's help. It went more smoothly than he'd expected. The Starlight member was very cooperative and gave them a lot of cover smuggling them in.

The capital was in a city-wide hysteria. The imperial family had become the official ruler, and factions from all parts of the nation had banded under the royal banner to form an anti-sacred land alliance.

In the beginning, there were only six first-tier factions within the alliance. It continued to expand and bring many second-tier factions into its fold.

The alliance was far from a tightly-knit group. Many had actually been forced to join. The Starlight Sect, for example, was now stuck between a rock and a hard place.

It was in an enormous dilemma. They hadn't anticipated the state they'd be in when they first joined. They'd simply wanted to topple the sacred land's rule and capitalize on the new political order.

But it and two other aristocratic families made up the bulk of the vanguard. The casualties they'd suffered were unimaginable. In the end, it was all about profit.

However, they hadn't gained anything so far and had suffered great losses instead.

The sect scrambled to find a solution. They wanted to pull out, but given the circumstances, the other factions would most likely cast stones at them if they did.

If they stayed in the alliance, however, given the rate at which they were losing members, this uprising would end up doing them far more harm than good...

The worst case scenario was that their power would be greatly diminished while they gained nothing, resulting in their fall from a first-tier faction to a second-tier one.

That'd be a harsh result, and one most likely to happen at the moment.

The sect head had been getting antsy lately. He'd sought out the emperor and Duke Xiaoyao to voice his complaints. Both men welcomed him with a smile and commended with faux politeness the Starlight Sect's dedication and contribution, urging the sect to focus on the big picture.

The sect head's words didn't have an impact at all.

There had been a lot of dissenting voices within the sect lately. Its members were tired of their losses, especially since some of the factions within the alliance had suffered almost no casualties, while the Starlight Sect had lost twenty to thirty percent of their elites. That was enough to undermine their foundation.

If things went on, they would no longer be a first-tier faction.

As a result, Ah Hong and his three companions were largely ignored. After Ah Hong volunteered to join the fight, the four of them were assigned to the front line. Their post was at one of the sacred land's exits, where many of its experts left through.

Ah Hong had done what Jiang Chen had asked him to do.

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "You've done well. I can tell that you still have a conscience. I'm afraid you'll have to stick with us for the time being. But don't worry, we'll make sure you get out safe after things settle."

"It's not my conscience," Ah Hong said responded impassively. "I just want to see what miracles you sacred land loyalists can create."

The four of them were in charge of an egress passage and its surrounding area. They'd be held responsible if even a fly escaped.

They also had to follow orders issued by a commander from the imperial family rather than be an independent group. The imperial family had the final say in the assault. Even House Xiahou was nominally supposed to listen to them.

The commander-in-chief was a forefather of the imperial family, and under him were three more in charge.

Jiang Chen and his companions were assigned to one of them, the emperor's uncle who happened to be an imperial prince. He held an important position in the family and oversaw all of military operations in the area. He was known as Imperial Prince Shang.

Every day, Jiang Chen and his friends reported to the imperial prince for a briefing on their achievements of the day. There was no denying that the besiegement had certainly been well organized.

On this day, Imperial Prince Shang summoned Jiang Chen and his companions.

"The four of you were assigned to this area a couple days ago. Why haven't you achieved anything since then? Is the Starlight Sect just humoring the imperial family?" Imperial Prince Shang made a serious accusation without preamble.

No one had passed through their jurisdiction over the past couple of days. Naturally they wouldn't have achieved anything. Besides, even if someone had passed through, Jiang Chen wasn't about to take them down.

He was staying put for the moment because he didn't have a good enough grasp on the situation. He needed some time to get the full picture of the operation.

He might not be able to make any game-changing moves such as freeing the venerated forefather, but there was a chance he could change the outcome of the assault since there was no divine cultivators stationed here.

Jiang Chen responded pitifully to Imperial Prince Shang's accusation. "Your Highness, we can't be blamed for being complacent. No one has set foot into this area. It's simply not where most of the action is! We can't fudge the number by killing innocent people, can we?"

He meant he wouldn't claim innocent people as those from the sacred land in order to get rewards.

Imperial Prince Shang scoffed, making his discontent with the Starlight Sect clear.

"I'll cut you some slack since you've just returned. If you keep this up, I can only send you to the very front where your lives will be on the line." The imperial prince reprimanded them in a harsh voice, an action he seemed to find joy in.

"Your Highness, the siege is getting close to its conclusion, isn't it? My brothers and I have been fighting outside the city. We returned to the capital because we wanted our chance to earn glory on the front lines. Will Your Highness give us the opportunity to?"

Imperial Prince Shang paused. His criticism hadn't been aimed at the four of them, but at the Starlight Sect as a whole. The sect had been growing complacent lately as a show of their dissatisfaction with the imperial family. These four were merely an easy target.

Never had he anticipated that they'd volunteer to fight on the front lines.

He cackled. "You volunteered! Your sect head has been whining about the great sacrifice your sect has made and the great casualties you've suffered because you're always in the fray of the battle. Are you truly going to volunteer yourselves?"

"Yes. My brothers and I are eager to achieve something. Please grant us our wish, Your Highness."

The imperial prince broke into laughter. "Oh, it's rare for the Starlight Sect to be this enthusiastic! Alright, I'll grant you your wish."

"Go. You're in charge of the sixteenth defense post from now on. Take this writ to the post and swap out the guards."

He wrote them a writ without hesitation. He couldn't be happier about the turn of events. The sixteenth defense post covered the most dangerous region. Experts from the sacred land often showed up there to attack the alliance. Many of their own experts had died there. The defense was held up by piles and piles of corpses.

That post was now synonymous with danger. Many factions and cultivators refused to even get close. The leaders had no choice but to force the job on some hapless folk.

Those stationed in the area had heavily bribed Imperial Prince Shang earlier today, asking him to put someone else in their place. He'd been agonizing over who he should pick, but then these fools had come knocking. He'd be idiotic not to take advantage of their offer.

He quickly finished writing the writ and stamped it with his official seal before handing it to Jiang Chen. "Go. If you are victorious in the sixteenth defense post, I'll reward you generously and recommend you to the emperor. You'll enjoy a lifetime of great fortune!"

"Thank you for your generosity, Your Highness," Jiang Chen said with great enthusiasm.

As beaming Jiang Chen left merrily, Imperial Prince Shang gazed at the departing young man mockingly. He snorted and silently called the young man a fool.

Jiang Chen made his way to the sixteenth defense post. Many senior executives from the sacred land had come to this area and countless intense battles had broke out, leaving the area a tattered living purgatory shrouded in the shadow of death and violence.

"Is this Elder Xun from House Beigong? Here's a written writ from the imperial prince. We'll be taking over this post. Let's finish the handoff."

Five cultivators remained in the area, three of whom had been seriously injured. They all perked up when they saw Jiang Chen. They couldn't be happier that they'd be relieved of their duty. Their eyes lit up with the joy of escaping death.

They exchanged their writ for defending the post. Elder Xun gave Jiang Chen careful consideration before his lips curved into a meaningful smile. "The Starlight Sect is indeed courageous. No wonder you're the vanguards of the assault. I wish you a great success in killing those villains from the sacred land and accomplishing great deeds for the new order!"

Elder Xun cackled and motioned at his men to leave.

Jiang Chen grabbed him with a shameless smile. "Don't be in such a rush, Elder Xun. We've relieved you of a big trouble, haven't we? I'm not asking for anything in return, but you wouldn't mind explaining the current situation to me, would you? My brothers and I just returned from outside and don't know a lot about the situation here."

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Chapter 1803: On Death's Door

Jiang Chen's words sounded completely reasonable.

Elder Xun suspected nothing awry. "The current situation isn't too optimistic. Though the sacred land has lost a lot of territory and suffered many casualties, its main force is still largely intact. Moreover, the defense of its great formation is difficult to break through. If we try to force our way through, we'll be trading a lot of men for just a little damage."

"So, our offensive is all talk and no action?" Jiang Chen ventured.

"Not quite. Our alliance's biggest advantage is our numbers. We're gaining in size every day, while the sacred land can't replenish its own ranks. We're completely fine for the long haul. The sacred land is slowly eating away at its stockpile of resources. Despite the resistance, it'll fall sooner or later."

When he got to this point, Elder Xun clapped Jiang Chen's shoulder. "Work hard, my friend. I know you want to earn riches and glory, and I guarantee this is a good place for that."

Jiang Chen nodded, then smiled simperingly. "One more thing, Elder Xun, if I may. Will headquarters look after us while we're defending here? If we're in danger, will we get help right away?"

Elder Xun couldn't help but laugh. "You're thinking too much, friend. There are over a hundred of these posts. How would we have nearly enough people to man them all if we were that meticulous with every single one?"

"So... if we die here, the people outside won't know?"

"If you fail to make contact for a long time, then we'll know you've died! Plus, you'll send out signals for help if you're in danger, won't you?" Elder Xun chortled. In his opinion, these Starlight guys clearly had brain damage. Was such an obvious question even necessary?

Jiang Chen sighed softly. "No one will know when we do fall here, then."

"Oh, we'll find out eventually. If you die, the enemy will obviously break through this area. That's evidence enough, isn't it?" Elder Xun thought less and less of Jiang Chen and company.

"Not necessarily. What if the opposition from the sacred land retreats after they're done killing? They won't do as we expect every time, would they?" Jiang Chen retorted.

"Stop worrying, friend. Are you worried no one will collect your corpse after you die? Rest easy on that front. There are patrols at dawn and dusk to see how all the areas are doing. Plus, the commander does a roll call and gives a speech every day for those who are responsible for an area. If you're not there for it, that's explanation enough in itself. Understood?"

Elder Xun shook his head as he said this. Clearly, these Starlight people were all just straight up idiots. How dare they hold the sixteenth post with their intelligence?

The elder wasn't up for further conversation with Jiang Chen. "Alright," he smiled coolly, "I've said all I have to say. I pass this position onto you. Good luck out there. Don't let the commander or our allies down."

Jiang Chen grinned. "Why're you in such a hurry, Elder Xun?"

"Why wouldn't I be? The guard has passed, hasn't it?" Elder Xun darkened. "I have to go inspect my new area. What, are you regretting it now? I'm telling you right now that once the guard is changed, nothing can reverse that action. There's no room for playing around in war."

The young man laughed heartily. "Regretting it? Hardly. I simply mean to correct you. You all died in battle in area sixteen, no? I'll report that to the imperial prince right away. House Beigong's experts, all dead in action! There were barely any bodies to find when we arrived."

Elder Xun and his companions all colored at this. "You're mad, kid!" they rebuked.

"The Starlight Sect's gone crazy."

"Did you hit your head on a door somewhere?" They were clearly angered. They'd awaited the change of the guard for quite a while, and had no patience whatsoever for idle chatter.

"Get outta my way," a burly man called out. "Don't think that this place belongs to you now. It only takes a hot minute for your old man here to teach you a lesson!"

Jiang Chen frowned. He hated when people called themselves his father.

"Old brother Zhu Que, this man dares call himself my old man. Doesn't that mean he thinks he's a generation above you? What do you say to that?"

The Vermilion Bird chuckled, then nodded. "This."

He raised his arm to produce a fiery chain in the center of his palm. It was composed of blue runes that glowed faintly without much furor.

The burly man snickered. "What? That's a candle women carry to the outhouse. You trying to scare me with that pathetic thing?"

His laughter stopped, cracked to a halt in the next moment. The bluish chain of fire had gusted into his vicinity in the blink of an eye. His pupils dilated violently as soon as it reached him.

In the next moment, it expanded all around him in a flash.

Then the strangest of sights occurred. The cultivator's flesh and blood were siphoned away in a fraction of a second; he spontaneously became a skeleton.

His arrogant expression hadn't the time to transform into shock and horror before disappearing entirely into nothingness. A bleached, off-white frame was all that remained.

The spectacle scared Elder Xun and company witless. What had just happened? A real live person had been turned into bone just by that chain's slightest touch? That was too terrifying to believe!

They'd all heard of powerful abilities before, but seeing such a domineering one was a definite first.

The man who'd just died had been quite capable defensively. Alas, the opponent's attack had torn his vaunted, steadfast defenses to shreds with no resistance whatsoever. The chain had burned him away as easily as a piece of paper or wood.

Elder Xun and his peers were paralyzed. Technically speaking, they were more numerous than Jiang Chen's group, but which of them could possibly live after being attacked by the Vermilion Bird's inner flame? Distractions aside, even a fully focused cultivator would've died instantly.

The Vermilion Bird was already a demigod!

A casual attack was enough to inflict enormous damage to the average empyrean cultivator.

"You... you..." Elder Xun was yellow in the face. He stuttered, his prior expression of mockery and confidence gone. Unfathomable fear replaced it.

"What about us?" Jiang Chen smiled. "Elder Xun, you're as good as dead. Why resist, right? Just kill yourselves to wrap things up nicely. What do you say?"

Elder Xun colored. "You're a spy, kid!" he cried out. "Are you from the sacred land?"

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Wrong. I simply couldn't stand your ugly mug, so I thought I'd take you out. It's nothing to do with the sacred land."

"You... ridiculous! I was perfectly polite..."

"Perfectly polite? How many times did you internally call me stupid? I can't read your mind, but I hardly need to when it's written all over your face. You didn't even bother to hide your emotions. Plus, your deaths will show off our superior skill in comparison. How would we prove our stellar contribution otherwise?"

Jiang Chen's logic nearly made Elder Xun cough up blood. "Since you're already at it, old brother Zhu Que, I'll leave these guys to you."

The Vermilion Bird licked his lips. "All of them?" he chortled.

"Don't leave a single one," Jiang Chen declared cruelly.

Elder Xun and his comrades were white with terror. The others began to beg. "Don't kill us! Don't kill us! We're innocent, we did nothing wrong... it's all because..."

The young man wasn't interested in hearing their empty excuses. "Go ahead, old brother."

The Vermilion Bird cackled once before propelling himself airborne with his toes.

"Run, everyone! We have to make it back to the patriarch and the imperial prince. Make this guy pay!" Elder Xun was infuriated.

However, the Vermilion Bird didn't give them the ghost of a chance. Three were caught within moments and consumed without reservation.

Only Elder Xun remained in futile defiance of his fate.

Unfortunately, he couldn't do much more than flop uselessly about. The Vermilion Bird was many times stronger than he, and a gout of flame destroyed the elder's defenses outright.

"Die!" The sacred bird pounced upon the old man, a huge talon slashing Elder Xun's head right open. Blood streamed out from the gash.

The elder's soul tried to escape, but the Vermilion Bird wouldn't let him. It picked the intangible thing out of the air and brought it to its beak.

Elder Xun had no time to express his despair before being swallowed whole.

Because the Vermilion Bird was on the verge of breaking through to divine realm, it was more than happy to make use of such wonderful sources of nutrition. In ancient times, such primitive methods were unnecessary thanks to the abundance of resources, but drastic times called for drastic measures.

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Chapter 1804: An Acquaintance Barges In

The change of the guard had given the Vermilion Bird an opportunity to feed. Elder Xun and his lackeys were eaten wholesale in less than fifteen minutes.

"Not bad, not bad," the bird remarked appreciatively.

"Old brother, there will be enough to eat for the both of you on the battlefield. I think you'll have a much better shot at comprehending the divine realm after all's said and done." Jiang Chen could tell that the Vermilion Bird quite liked the situation.

"I think you're right. I quite like things this way." The Vermilion Bird was exuberant.

Jiang Chen got back his documents very quickly, then destroyed the rest of the dead's effects. He did so in order to prove that the four of them hadn't made any contact with Elder Xun at all. Dead men told no tales, thankfully, so their claims weren't likely to be disputed.

The news was carried back very quickly.

Imperial Prince Shang was one of the first to hear. "What? Elder Xun and his men have all died? What about the Starlight who went to change them out? Are they dead, too?"

"No. They were the ones to notice the death of Elder Xun's men and brought back the news. Apparently, they're requesting reinforcements because of the danger."

The imperial prince was livid. "They'll defend it themselves or die trying. Reinforcements? Where am I supposed to get the men from? If I had that many men, what would I need them for?"

Area sixteen was not a high-risk zone that practically no one wanted to go to into. The likelihood of dying there was too high.

Since the beginning of the invasion, the mortality rate in that area had stayed at an incredible level. Thus, there were never enough men to defend it. No one with half a brain was willing to brave such a minefield.

The imperial prince considered people who were ignorant of the current state of affairs the only source of volunteers. These fresh cultivators who'd just come back from the outside, for example.

Asking for reinforcements now? Impossible!

"Send someone to reprimand and encourage them. They should fight with courage and make a good effort. Even if they can't kill many enemies, they must ensure the area is not lost. The grander battle must not be affected."

"Yes, Your Highness."

An emissary from the imperial prince came to Jiang Chen's area in no time at all. The emissary first applauded their bravery, then warned them of his master's requirements.

Jiang Chen agreed readily, of course.

This area was so far away and unwatched that the outside world knew practically nothing about it. He had easily dispatched Elder Xun and the rest without drawing any attention.

The emissary verbally employed both the carrot and the stick before departing.

Jiang Chen snickered after he did. "Imperial Prince Shang really does take us for fools."

"Heheh, shall I go kill him?" The Vermilion Bird licked his lips. He was raring for a fight. The brink of divinity caused its fighting spirit and initiative to rise a hundredfold.

"No rush. The imperial prince isn't a clever man. It would be worse to have a wiser replacement."

Jiang Chen wasn't in a hurry to act yet. He had his own ideas, but lacked sufficient control over the entire situation. Plus, an assassination had to be clean and swift. Any high-profile killing like this had to be decisive for a victory.

Small-scale exterminations, on the other hand, could be performed casually out of sight and without raising suspicion. He had gotten rid of Elder Xun and his men today because they'd been easy prey.

As they conversed, a neighboring area suddenly fired an emergency signal to call for help. The blue light meant that the alert level was correspondingly high.

"Area eighteen, yeah? The area right of us. According to the rules, those in neighboring areas have a duty to help each other."

Jiang Chen began to brood. This sudden development was outside of his expectation. However, he quickly calmed down and decided to observe instead.

If Imperial Prince Shang were to blame him, he could easily find enough excuse to deflect the accusations. Saying that there had been sacred land operatives nearby his own area was one good reason. He had stayed in order to hold the line.

Though Jiang Chen stayed put, trouble charged in his direction before long.

There was a message from afar. “Daoists in area sixteen, on your guard. Sacred land remnants have fled into your area. Beware, beware.”

It came from area seventeen. Evidently, all the cultivators on this battlefield were equally sly. They let a hot potato slip into Jiang Chen’s area rather than fend it off themselves.

A problem that no one wanted to face was a hard one to handle. Rather than get upset at the politics between areas, Jiang Chen laughed.

“If the alliance regularly engages in this kind of cloak-and-dagger behavior, it will fall apart sooner or later. There are no conflicts of interest as of yet, but when there are... its members will turn on each other.”

Suddenly, he felt a powerful presence approach at top speed.

“Everyone, prepare to keep him here. Don’t let him past us. There are many more areas beyond sixteen. How can he possibly escape from the rest of the encirclement?”

Ah Hong was very excited to watch Jiang Chen and his sacred beast friends rampage as they wished. All of a sudden, he began to feel that accompanying these guys in their work was much more enjoyable than what he’d done for the Starlight Sect before.

These guys killed almost unscrupulously. His own blood began to burn as he watched.

The person from the sacred land who had penetrated two defense areas was rather skilled. When Jiang Chen saw who it was, he almost jumped in surprise. It was none other than the man in charge of the Eternal Sacred Land’s Hall of Merit – Gu Yunjin!

Elder Gu wore a white robe today. His hair was a bit disheveled, which contributed to a rather ragged appearance. Clearly, it’d cost him somewhat to get through as many areas as he had.

Though he didn’t think much of area sixteen upon entering initially, he quickly realized that there was something different about it compared to the ones before.

“Hmph. I got past the two areas before this. I don’t believe there are literal walls of metal here to stop me!” Gu Yunjin’s own temper was riled up. He glared coldly at Jiang Chen’s quartet.

“You four are from the Starlight Sect? I don’t know how much the imperial family is paying you. I’ve killed so many expendables from your sect that I’ve lost count! And still, you pawns keep on coming. Do you not care about the losses you’re sustaining, the sacrifices you’re making? You’re throwing away your lives on the imperial family and House Xiahou’s behalf. Well, you better not cry when your sect is left bereft of men and resources. You’ll be gotten rid of soon after that.”

Clearly, Gu Yunjin was a man on a mission. His speech had been well-rehearsed and hit several critical notes.

The sacred land wanted to sow distrust and division in the ranks of its opponents. If the alliance dissolved itself out of fear, an opportunity to break out of the sacred land’s current predicament might very well arise.

In fact, the sacred land was in such a passive position because of a multitude of reasons. The suddenness of the betrayal had been one of them; the lack of exceling geniuses was another.

Most importantly, the coalition's compounded strength was simply superior to the sacred land's on a raw numbers level. Thus, dividing and conquering was a necessity.

Jiang Chen chuckled when Gu Yunjin finished his exhortation. "The Starlight Sect is certainly crying. You don't look like you're having a good time either though, Elder Gu."

"You know me?" Gu Yunjin blinked.

"You're one of the great elders of the sacred land. How would anyone not?" Jiang Chen smiled a little. "Hallmaster Gu, don't you think we have some shared destiny with each other since you've barged into my area?"

Gu Yunjin spat angrily. "Bull. I am a true loyalist of the sacred land. How could I have anything to do with you? Enough with the swagger, kid. I'm going to send you to hell."

Jiang Chen chortled. "No need for all the murderous thunder, Hallmaster Gu. How have you been since our last meeting in the Hall of Merit?"

"What?" Gu Yunjin gazed at Jiang Chen with widened eyes.

"Hallmaster Gu, is my pill slave Shi Xuan still with the sacred land?" Jiang Chen asked once more.

"Who... who are you?" Gu Yunjin was shocked. He looked at Jiang Chen incredulously, confusion plain on his face.

"It's me," Jiang Chen nodded slightly. "Shao Yuan. Hallmaster Gu, chaos has spread outside. What're your plans on this outing?"

Gu Yunjin remained somewhat skeptical still. "What proof do you have?" He repeatedly sized Jiang Chen up and down.

There was nothing else for it; Jiang Chen brought out a few tokens as proof of his identity. A more in-depth description of their meetings in the Hall of Merit finally eliminated Gu Yunjin's doubt.

"So, you really are Shao Yuan! Fantastic! You haven't died or run off?" Gu Yunjin was overjoyed. "There are two versions of your whereabouts in the sacred land: one says you died in battle, the other says you fled very early on. Which is it?"

"Neither," Jiang Chen shook his head. "I took a trip just before the rebellion began and have been busy carving a path back. I just killed the guys in area sixteen moments ago."

"You killed House Beigong's Elder Xun and his men?" Gu Yunjin's amazement intensified.

"Yes."

"Good, good!" Gu Yunjin praised. "Good kid! I certainly wouldn't have expected you to sneak into our enemy's ranks! Haha, well done indeed! I'm sure the primes and Daoist Ziju will be happy to hear the news!"

“Was there anything specifically you came out to do, Hallmaster Gu?”

“On the first prime’s orders, I’m supposed to slip out and distribute tactical information and misinformation to break apart the rebel alliance. A call to action needs to be sent out as well to the factions still loyal to us, so they can defend the sacred land!”

“I’ve done both of those things. The news should’ve spread to every corner of the sacred land by now. As for the rebel alliance, cracks have already appeared in its armor!”

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

Chapter 1805: Jiang Chen’s Plans

Gu Yunjin was thrilled by the surprising news. Hope rekindled in his heart and drove away his deep despair.

Nevertheless, he kept a level head and worried, “Shao Yuan, you’re more admirable than many senior members of the sacred land for going to such lengths to help us, even though you’re just a recent addition.

“Elder Ziju’s trust in you isn’t misplaced, and the same is true of the venerated forefather and the three primes. What a shame you weren’t given enough time to grow when this uprising broke out. Given another couple centuries, I’m sure the sacred land would be able to rise again with your help.”

Jiang Chen could tell that there must be trouble brewing within the faction. However, he didn’t poke for more information. It was impossible for everyone to remain loyal to the sacred land in the face of such a crisis. There was bound to be people abandoning or fleeing the sacred land, or even defecting to the enemy.

“Everyone has their own ambitions, Hallmaster Gu. There will always be traitors and cowards. The fact that the sacred land holds strong against the alliance’s planned assault proves its foundations to be solid. How are the venerated forefather, the three primes, and Elder Ziju?”

“The first and third primes and Elder Ziju are fine, but the second prime was seriously hurt by a group of experts and is out of the fight. The injury isn’t fatal, but it may have a lasting effect if he doesn’t get treated in time. He may never recover his cultivation level.”

The second prime?

The man’s face surfaced in Jiang Chen’s mind.

“What happened?”

“When the first wave of attack came, it was the second prime who led our defenses. No one foresaw that the alliance would put together a team of masters specifically to target him. The prime is skilled, but he was caught off guard and ended up seriously injured. His condition is treatable, but the best alchemists in the sacred land have either been killed or trapped.

“To make things worse, we’ve lost control over the area where we store spirit herbs, which prevents us from getting the herbs we need to treat him. As a result, the second prime’s condition continues to worsen.” Gu Yunjin sighed. “We’ve made several attempts to steal the herbs from the vault, but we haven’t succeeded.”

Jiang Chen straightened up. "Where is the vault?"

Gu Yunjin's eyes lit up as he looked at Jiang Chen. A bold idea came to mind.

The sacred land members were holed up within the sacred land's great formation. It was difficult for them to access the heavily-guarded vault. That said, the vault was protected by a complicated defensive formation. Although the imperial family had taken over the area, they hadn't found a way to break through the formation and enter the vault.

"The vault isn't far from here, but it's under the imperial family's tight control. It's difficult to get close."

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "Do you have a map of the sacred land? May I have a copy?"

"I do have one." Gu Yunjin's eyes lit up as he took out a map, pointing at specific locations. "We're here. Our great formation covers this area. The spirit herbs are kept here. Oh, and I've marked the alliance's defense posts on the map according to the intel we've gathered. It may not be exact, but it should be of help."

The information was crucial to Jiang Chen. He'd just returned to the sacred land and knew nothing about the layout of the alliance's defense. That was why he'd asked Elder Xun for information. Imperial Prince Shang would never tell him anything.

"This is exactly what I need. Hallmaster Gu, how many people are stationed at the vault, and how many of them will pose a real threat?"

"That's hard to say. It's difficult for us to even get into the area. There should be at least a couple dozens guarding the vault, the most powerful of which is at eighth level empyrean, I think."

An eighth level empyrean expert was a first tier expert within the capital. After all, there were only a number of ninth level empyrean experts, and even fewer demigods. And one could count on one hand the number of divine realm cultivators.

The fact that there were eighth level empyrean experts stationed near the vault testified to its importance.

"Eighth level empyrean? How many?" asked Jiang Chen.

"I don't know for sure. Shao Yuan, you shouldn't risk your life for the spirit herbs. The sacred land needs you and what you can be. You're our future."

Personally, Gu Yunjin didn't want the young man to take the risk. In his opinion, Shao Yuan was their hope. It'd be unwise to risk their future for their present.

Jiang Chen nodded. "I won't push myself. Oh, and I hear the venerated forefather has been trapped by two divine experts somewhere and won't be able to escape for two thousand years. Is that true?"

Gu Yunjin sighed. "It is. If the venerated forefather hadn't been ambushed, he could've easily eliminated all our enemies and the alliance wouldn't be a threat at all."

The venerated forefather was the reason why the sacred land had gotten careless. They'd thought the imperial family and House Xiahou wouldn't be able to cause that big a trouble.

Jiang Chen sighed softly. "In that case, our top priority is to break out the venerated forefather and solve the crisis the sacred land is facing."

"That's true, but it's easier said than done. Even if the three primes all escape the containment, they won't necessarily be able to free the venerated forefather. Both the imperial family and House Xiahou's forefathers are gods.

"The three primes are unlikely to rival them even if all three of them work together, let alone when the second prime is injured. This is our darkest hour, which is why geniuses like you have to be patient, Shao Yuan. Live to fight another day!" Gu Yunjin earnestly advised Jiang Chen not to put himself in danger.

Jiang Chen thought for a moment before responding seriously, "Hallmaster Gu, it's dangerous for you to be here. You should first return to the great formation. We'll keep in touch. If I get some information or come up with a plan, I'll let you know immediately. I'll need you to work with me from the inside."

Gu Yunjin pursed his lips. "What are you planning, Shao Yuan? Don't risk yourself."

"Don't worry, I'm not going to start a fight I can't win," Jiang Chen declared with great conviction. "If I do make a move, it'll be to cripple our enemy or break the alliance down."

Gu Yunjin could tell the young man had made up his mind. He sighed softly. "If that's the case, I'll bring the news back to the sacred land first. I'm sure everyone will be thrilled."

"Yes, you should move quickly. This isn't a place for you to stay."

Jiang Chen wasn't going to keep Gu Yunjin. The defense posts around the area were populated by enemy forces. It was dangerous for the hallmaster to even stay and talk for a minute.

"Take care." With that, Gu Yunjin disappeared.

Jiang Chen waited for a moment before shouting in the direction opposite to where Gu Yunjin had left in, "Freeze, bastard!"

Those defending the neighboring areas had clearly been lax on purpose due to their unwillingness to risk their people. That was why Gu Yunjin had ended up in Jiang Chen's jurisdiction.

They were disappointed that Jiang Chen didn't catch the hallmaster, but they weren't going to point fingers. None of them were in any place to criticize Jiang Chen when they were all holding back for selfish reasons.

Their meaningful expressions imparted to Jiang Chen that the alliance was slowly falling apart as each faction's death toll accumulated, which was good news.

With each defense post thinking of their own safety, it was truly difficult for them to catch Gu Yunjin. The hallmaster safely returned to the sacred land's formation in no time. His comrades were surprised to see him so soon.

"Old Gu, is the offense really so tight that even you can't break out?"

"So even you failed. Those traitors certainly haven't spared any effort."

"What's going on outside? Tell us."

Gu Yunjin ignored them and headed straight inside, at the same time calling out, "Where's the first prime? I have important information for her."

The first prime quickly strode out when she heard his voice, followed by the third prime and Ziju Min.

"Hallmaster Gu, did you fail to break out?" the first prime asked dejectedly.

"First Prime, I had some success in the beginning, but do you know what happened when I reached the sixteenth defense post?"

"Did they deploy a great number of guards there again?" The first prime knew the area was of great strategic importance. The alliance had sacrificed many lives to guard it.

"No, I met someone," the hallmaster relayed in an excited voice. "I ran into Shao Yuan. He hasn't run away. He left the sacred land earlier for personal matters and has snuck back!"

"What? Shao Yuan?" Ziju Min was the first to react. "He's back?"

"That's right. He and his companions have assumed the identity of Starlight elders and haven't been exposed. Imperial Prince Shang entrusted them with the responsibility to defend area sixteen. It seems that he's planning something big."

"What exactly do you mean?" The first prime asked with a frown.

"He didn't go into details. He simply asked me to tell you he'd always stand by the sacred land and he'd help turn the tide for us!"

"Tsk, what a bold statement from an intermediate empyrean cultivator. In my opinion, he's likely to have defected to the imperial family during his unannounced absence. Perhaps he's now the enemy's spy!"

"Agreed. House Yan has defected to the imperial family as well. It's unlikely that Shao Yuan will remain loyal to the sacred land. Don't let him deceive you."

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

Chapter 1806: Contention in the Sacred Land

It was evident that Shao Yuan had become a controversial figure for the senior executives of the sacred land. He'd gone missing when the faction fell into chaos, which gave those who'd been jealous of him the perfect opportunity to attack. His absence had further fueled the criticism against him and gave rise to many baseless accusations.

Some called him a deserter who bent whichever the wind blew. Others claimed he'd been planted by the alliance to create friction within the sacred land.

The three primes didn't acknowledge their theories, while Ziju Min took a firm stand to defend the young man. As of late, he'd had many arguments centered around the genius.

Derision and criticism had been levied at him, but he continued to support Jiang Chen without wavering. He firmly believed that someone as loyal and committed as Shao Yuan had no reason to betray the

sacred land. The senior executives who suspected him knew nothing about his character, and were only against him out of envy over the young man eclipsing their disciples.

Ziju Min raised an eyebrow in response to the accusations. "You guys won't stop until you've pushed Shao Yuan into the arms of the alliance, will you?"

"Tsk tsk, Elder Ziju, Shao Yuan isn't your son. Why do you care about him so much? Aren't you worried that you've also been deceived by him? What are you gonna do then?"

"That's right. You're an honest man, Elder Ziju, but the kid is cunning. Wouldn't it be ironic if he's been lying to you all along?"

Ziju Min flushed purple with anger. "Nonsense! Why would Shao Yuan lie to me? What does he stand to gain?"

"If he is the imperial family's pawn, he may be lying to you to gain our trust."

"So what?" retorted Ziju Min. "If he's a liar, why would he leave us? Wouldn't it be better for him to stay in the sacred land to stir up trouble?"

"Ha, maybe he fled because he realized he was going to get exposed."

"You're reaching now. You're just jealous of Shao Yuan for making your disciples look bad. Do you need to put on such a disgusting act? Shao Yuan has proven to all of us how much of a genius he is. You'd have to be blind to not see it."

"If Shao Yuan truly is the imperial family's pawn, then they're the most generous opponents to give us the Taiyi Skymender Pill and the Crowning Empyrean Pill. And would they let Shao Yuan kill Xiahou Zong?"

The senior executives themselves knew full well that Shao Yuan couldn't be a spy. If he was, there was no reason for him to kill Xiahou Zong. He would've lost on purpose and continued to stay in the sacred land.

Besides, the imperial family wouldn't be able to manipulate someone who could kill Xiahou Zong.

They were just attacking Shao Yuan out of spite.

The first prime frowned. "Enough. You've spouted plenty conspiracy theories about Shao Yuan lately. Watch how you present yourselves. It's rare for the sacred land to gain a genius at his level. Do you really want to destroy him?"

The senior executives fell silent for fear of offending the first prime.

"Hallmaster Gu, please continue."

Gu Yunjin nodded. "I'd be the first to deny the possibility that Shao Yuan is the imperial family's pawn. Although he's a recent addition to our ranks, he's surpassed many elders in terms of contribution made. Moreover, there's an air of righteousness to him. He's not a dishonest man."

"Yes, Shao Yuan is no doubt a genius worthy of our trust." The first prime spoke up, putting Shao Yuan in a positive light. "Since he already has a plan, this seat believes he knows what he's doing. There's

nothing we can do at the moment other than wait patiently. We'll send out some of our elites every once in a while to keep in contact with him. Oh, and don't let any information about Shao Yuan leave this room. If anyone does, I won't go easy on them."

All that remained here were devoted members of the sacred land. They might disagree sometimes, but they'd never betray the sacred land. Still, the first prime warned them just in case.

"First Prime, Shao Yuan also mentioned that the factions within the alliance are clearly at odds with each other. Perhaps we'll soon be able to make our comeback."

"Both House Xiahou and the imperial family are selfish. It only makes sense that the alliance is unstable." The first prime scoffed. "Without mutual gains as glue, the alliance would've collapsed long ago. As long as we persist long enough, we'll see the alliance fall apart one day."

She did indeed have an eye for strategy.

The next few days were uneventful for Jiang Chen as he stayed within his defense post, but the vault of spirit herbs was always on his mind. If the imperial family could find a way to break in, they'd take everything for themselves, which would be a great loss for the sacred land.

"Can't let those bastards get what they want so easily," Jiang Chen grumbled.

There was some good news as well. He could feel the atmosphere within the alliance growing tense lately. A brief investigation yielded something interesting.

At the fringes of the nation, many sacred land's supporters were up in arms and had declared war against the evil alliance, stating their conviction to defend the rightful ruler. Those factions had gained quite the traction around the nation.

Presently, many members of the alliance had grown weary due to the great losses they'd suffered in battles. They also had troubles with deployment because of lack of manpower.

The sacred land's supporters put an even greater pressure on the alliance. The imperial family and House Xiahou had no choice but to take matters into their hands.

However, there were too many sides to fight on. Not even the imperial family and House Xiahou combined would be enough. They tried to mobilize the other first tier factions, but aside from the particularly devoted ones, the ones that'd taken the brunt of the initial charge refused to keep putting a majority of their people into the fight. They'd recognized their mistakes and turned cautious.

As a result, the resistance against the alliance grew stronger and stronger instead of weakening. If the resistance was allowed to form a united front, more and more factions would join, and turning the tide would be a possibility.

That was the alliance's biggest fear. They had to come up with a solution.

Jiang Chen wasn't allowed to join the high-level meetings, of course. Only the likes of sect heads and venerated elders from major factions could partake in the sessions. Still, he was able to collect some information.

It was said that the alliance was under great pressure. As a result, the imperial family and House Xiahou had decided to gather all the forces from the major factions and organize a final assault against the sacred land's great formation. This time, the two at the head would send out their elites to lead the charge, rather than letting the other factions to march to their deaths like they had before.

That way, the others had no choice but to play their part despite their reluctance.

They'd been passive because they nursed a grudge against the imperial family and House Xiahou for using others while preserving their own strength.

Now that both had joined the battle by sending out their elites, the other factions had no qualms about following them into the fight. The resulting casualties would be a lot lower for them as followers.

The above information was confidential. Jiang Chen paid a great price to acquire it and was overwhelmed with a myriad of emotions. The alliance is getting impatient. They organize this assault to end the sacred land once and for all.

If the alliance was truly united without diverging agendas, they'd have the power to dominate the sacred land.

"They'll make the move seven days later, on the night of waning moon." Jiang Chen sent a message when the opportunity presented itself. The sacred land was shocked. The imperial family and House Xiahou had decided to end them with no regard for human life!

That was what the sacred land least wanted. They had very limited manpower. Every death hurt. The alliance, on the contrary, had an endless supply of cultivators and could easily replenish their forces.

"We must cut our losses, First Prime," someone suggested. "If we can't defend the great formation, we should break out of their siege. Then we'll have the freedom to do anything!"

"Shut it!" The first prime raged. "Without the formation, we'll be spread thin and isolated, making it easy for our enemies to eliminate us one by one. If anyone dares talk about abandoning the formation, this seat will take that an attempt to mislead us all and deal with them swiftly!"

This was where the sacred land's foundation was. Only cowards would choose to abandon their roots. Breaking out would be nothing but an attempt to flee!

If the sacred land was conquered, they'd all be doomed even if they were lucky enough to survive.

Everyone fell silent in face of the first prime's thunderous fury. The man who suggested for them to break out was visibly panicking.

"Please quell your anger, First Prime. It's wise of us to stand our ground and defend the formation, but we can also find a way to reinforce the formation and improve our coordination in battles. If everyone fights together smoothly, we'll be able to entrust our backs to our comrades and become that much stronger!"

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

Chapter 1807: The Day of the Final Assault

Ziju Min made an unexpected offer. "First Prime, I request to meet up with Shao Yuan. I'm interested in what his plans are, and whether he has more news regarding the outside world."

The first prime was quite pleased with the elder's initiative. "I trust your abilities implicitly, Elder Ziju," she nodded. "Still, make sure to take care out there. We will wait for your successful return."

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In area sixteen, Jiang Chen was frantically preparing for the coordinated attack. He was roused, rather than restless after hearing the news. He had the feeling that this was a grand opportunity.

If he could make use of it, this might very well be the turning point in the entire war.

"Young master Chen, why did you refine so much Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud? Can you be..." The Vermilion Bird looked thoughtful.

"Heh, you'll find out in due time." A crooked grin hung at the corner of Jiang Chen's mouth.

In addition to refining the powder, the young man spent each day studying the sacred land's map and layout. He wanted to consider every detail.

The assault on the great formation depended on how much area it covered. An idea of how big the attack force might be was conducive to finding a solution.

On one of these days, Ziju Min came to area sixteen.

Jiang Chen was overjoyed to see the older man. "How did you get here, Elder Ziju?"

"Haha, you really are alright, Shao Yuan. Well done, really well done!" The elder was even more excited than the youth. "I came out to ask about what you've seen and heard. Is there a plan you're putting into action? We're more than happy to assist you in whatever capacity needed."

"Hehe, I'm planning to strike a vicious blow against the alliance. I want the cracks in it to expand so quickly that it shatters in the next moment. Right, Elder Ziju – please ask the first prime after you return to ready a group of experts for an opportunistic strike. You'll get a chance to vent your pent-up anger on our enemies."

"What does your plan entail?" Ziju Min asked with some excitement.

"Simple. I'll poison them with Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud," Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Isn't that House Xiahou's poison? It's rather well known here in Myriad Abyss. I doubt they'll lack a solution to it," the older man commented worriedly.

"This powder has been improved with my secret sauce," Jiang Chen laughed. "An antidote to the original won't do much to help. In fact, it will only make the victim worse off."

"You... you improved the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud? That's incredible. Wherever did you get its recipe?"

"I've killed plenty of people from House Xiahou, haven't I?" Jiang Chen smiled. "I have my ways. Don't worry, I can vouch for its veracity."

Ziju Min didn't press on. He discussed the details some more with Jiang Chen, gaining confidence the more information he gleaned.

"Here's a batch of antidote for this version of the powder, Elder Ziju. If you're planning to send out a force while the poison is airborne, its members must take this beforehand. The Soulless Powder is a vicious poison."

Ziju Min took the medicine seriously. "Alright. I will give it to the first prime personally, and let her decide what to do."

"Sure," Jiang Chen nodded. "How is the second prime?"

"Not great. If he's not given the necessary medical attention, his condition will only worsen. Ah... the sacred land has never seen such an ordeal before," Ziju Min remarked sadly.

"Don't worry. As long as my plan is successful, the alliance will be all but broken. It'll be our chance to stage a counterattack in tandem with the loyalists outside. I daresay the rebellion will be quashed before long."

"But Shao Yuan, even if your plan succeeds, we can't crush the rebels unless the venerated forefather breaks free of the seal. The imperial family and House Xiahou both have divine cultivators."

"Haha, it's impossible for their divine experts to participate in the coming battle. The most they can do is intimidate a bit. They need to stand guard over the venerated forefather, and thus have no energy to spare. In the case they do foolishly divert their attentions over here, the forefather will be given an opportunity in turn."

"You're quite right." Ziju Min became pensive.

After seeing the senior off, Jiang Chen continued with his refinement of the poison.

The worsening situation meant that there was a roll call two or three times a day. It didn't take long for Imperial Prince Shang to interrupt his work. There was nothing for it. He had to go.

"Greetings to the imperial prince," he greeted with feigned respect.

"You lot are having a good time, eh? A real easy life of it. Before you, area sixteen was one of the hotbeds of fighting. After you went there, there hasn't been a single fight. Don't tell me you've been intentionally avoiding any enemies?"

Jiang Chen vehemently denied wrongdoing. "Your Highness, why are you so unfair? We dream of doing big things every day, but the sacred land is scared and won't come out. We can't do anything about that! We can't charge into the great formation, can we? I'd like to, but I'm not good enough to break it open."

His tone was even-handed despite the imperial prince's admonishment.

Imperial Prince Shang harrumphed. He found it strange why area sixteen had suddenly quieted down as well. However, there had been a trend of decreased activities from the sacred land in general as of late. It seemed that total defense was the new strategy that'd been settled on.

Seeing the imperial prince in thought, Jiang Chen ventured, "Your Highness, I hear that the sacred land is defending the great formation rather than coming out anymore. If that's the case, we'll just keep this siege up for a decade to run 'em out of stuff."

"A decade? Who would possibly have the time for that?" The imperial prince was thoroughly displeased. The proposition was utter nonsense.

Jiang Chen pretended to be upset. "They're not coming out themselves though. My brothers and I want to lead the charge to win some glory for ourselves, but it's hard."

"You? You want to lead the charge?" The imperial prince's eyes darted about in their sockets.

"Yes, Your Highness. Send us anywhere there's a battle," Jiang Chen put on a forthright expression.

"You want to fight, do you?" the imperial prince asked again.

"I do, I really do!" Jiang Chen's answer was loud and clear.

"Alright. I'll give you a chance for then. If you can accomplish something here, you'll win ten times the usual credit."

"Really?" 'Greed' flashed through Jiang Chen's eyes.

"Of course. Do I sound like I'm joking?" Imperial Prince Shang snorted.

"Tell me, Your Highness. What chance is it?" Jiang Chen probed hurriedly.

"We're planning to organize an offensive that we need a lot of men for. We're looking for warriors unafraid of sacrificing their lives. Are you sure you want to join?"

"Yes, yes, we want to join! How would we not for a chance like this? But don't forget your promise, Your Highness. What prize will we win if we achieve something?"

"Much more will be yours! There will be quite a bit of pillaging to be done after the great formation opens up. The brave warriors at the forefront will have first choice for it. How about it?"

Jiang Chen's eyes lit up. "It's a promise then!" he roared with laughter.

"A promise!" Imperial Prince Shang chuckled as well, but he had only disdain for the idiots he was speaking to. These empty promises meant absolutely nothing. People who didn't realize they were cannon fodder wouldn't possibly survive the offensive.

Jiang Chen could guess what the imperial prince was thinking from his smile. Though he was none too pleased about it, he put on an eager demeanor. He needed to grasp this chance to participate. How else could he pull off his grand sabotage?

Ideas swirled around in Jiang Chen's head. The imperial prince enjoyed petty tricks. Having spoken to him several times, Jiang Chen largely knew what he was planning.

"Alright, you go back first. Make sure you're ready to go in the next two days. Wait for my orders. No mistakes, you hear?"

"Yes, Your Highness." Jiang Chen responded fervently. "I'm at your service."

Coming out of the imperial prince's pavilion, the young man was quite happy with his performance. He was one step closer to his goal. Next came to the setup.

That wouldn't be an easy thing to accomplish. If he was discovered in the process, all his preparation and effort would be for naught.

But he had no room for second-guessing now. The string was taut, and the arrow had to be loosed.

More and more Soulless Powder was refined, enough to incapacitate more than ten thousand. Jiang Chen supposed that no more than two would actually participate in the offensive. Even so, such numbers were astonishing in themselves.

After all, only empyrean experts were eligible for the attack. Over half of the factions' strength was now invested into this battle. If something bad happened to these two thousand men, the alliance would crumble without trying.

It was finally the day of the offensive. Early in the morning, Jiang Chen received notice to abandon his defense area and go to a predesignated meeting place.

"Now that we're here, Ah Hong, you can leave. We believe you won't cause any problems and won't stop you from leaving for safety," Jiang Chen declared somberly. "You should know that we'll be in serious danger if my plan fails."

Ah Hong was completely impassionate. "I've nowhere to return to. Plus, I trust you. Finding out you were Shao Yuan helped quite a bit, actually. Eternal Divine Nation has barely had any heroes in recent years, and I guess you're one of them. Xiahou Zong used to be one as well, but his death was too pathetic, so he's off the list. If there's anyone worth trusting for me, you're in the top three."

"You sure? You're staying?" Jiang Chen intoned in a low voice.

"I'll live and die alongside your company," Ah Hong stated bluntly.

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

Chapter 1808: Forefather Calmdew

Ah Hong had been won over by Jiang Chen's tremendous charisma over the days. He'd gone from cold observation, to astonishment, then a slow integration. Now, he was fully impressed with the young man's performance.

From start to finish, he felt pride at being more than an eyewitness. Perhaps following this Shao Yuan would lead to a much more exciting life than before.

Ah Hong had no intention of betraying the Starlight Sect, but he could see how much trouble the faction was currently in. It couldn't guarantee its own safety. He only hoped he could preserve some of the sect's heritage and hope through a different method.

"I have a presumptuous request, Sir Shao."

"What, pray tell?" Jiang Chen smiled.

"If... if your plan succeeds, and the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud takes everyone out, could you... spare those from the Starlight Sect...?" Ah Hong's voice became rather quiet as his sentence went on.

Jiang Chen laughed. "That's not a problem. After this plan pans out, I estimate that the Starlight Sect will be the first to defect to the sacred land. The conflict may not end just yet, but such an immediate outcome is unavoidable."

"Huh? How so?" Ah Hong inquired with some surprise.

"Simple. We'll be exposed in the process. When the imperial family and House Xiahou find out, they won't hesitate to strike at the Starlight Sect. Even if your sect protests its innocence, they'll force you to mount a desperate attack against the sacred land.

"If the sect slacks off even a little in that effort, it will be made an example of to the others. Morale has been very low among the rebel alliance, and most have been dragging their heels. If I were the imperial family and House Xiahou, I would jump at the chance."

Ah Hong thought about it for a few moments. It made too much sense to ignore.

"So, does this mean you're agreed to my request, Sir Shao?"

"Yes. Don't worry, you have my word I will not kill those from the Starlight Sect." Jiang Chen's answer was very straightforward.

"Alright. After all's said and done, I will try to convince the sect head by giving him your analysis. Maybe..."

"I don't mean to look down on you, Ah Hong, but you're not nearly important enough to convince your head. If you went, you'd only have the opposite effect." Jiang Chen smiled. "I'll deal with it myself. I'll make sure the situation is favorable for you and yours."

As they conversed, a message echoed in the distance. "Area sixteen, prepare to gather."

The young man chuckled. "Come on, then."

All of the men on defense duty assembled at the designated location. A great number of well-equipped elites had been added to their number, ready to launch a frenzied assault on the sacred land's great formation.

Obviously, the rebels' failure to gain anything of relevance for the past period had driven them to restlessness.

Jiang Chen lay low among the teeming crowd. Since he had requested to 'lead the charge', the imperial prince had put him on the very front lines.

Imperial Prince Shang and two other administrators congregated near a gray-haired old man. Their expressions towards him were ones of utmost awe and respect.

The young man remembered that another venerated forefather from the imperial family was supposed to be the commander for the raid. A demigod who was quite near the threshold.

Can he be this gray-haired man? His suspicions were quickly proven.

Imperial Prince Shang stepped forward unceremoniously. "All of you, quiet down. Forefather Calmdew has something to say."

Forefather Calmdew?

Jiang Chen glanced surreptitiously again at the demigod forefather. This was no ordinary man. His will was focused inward, utterly impenetrable to the casual observer.

"This Forefather Calmdew is a tough nut to crack, young master Chen," the Vermilion Bird reminded discreetly.

"Haha, can you handle him?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Let's put it this way: he's very unlucky to have met me," the bird chuckled.

The Vermilion Bird's boast wasn't empty. Even before its rite of rebirth, it had been able to duel human demigods in ancient times with a reasonable win rate. Back then, demigods were uniformly stronger than they were now.

Now that its rite was complete, the Vermilion Bird was just half a step away from the divine realm. It was on the threshold of becoming a full-fledged god. Because of this, it had an advantage in battle against most initial divine realm cultivators. Its sacred beast blood ensured that this was so.

"Let us prepare on two fronts then. If the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud is ineffective against the strongest experts, then you should swiftly and decisively annihilate this so-called imperial forefather. How does that sound?"

"Leave it to me!" The Vermilion Bird was itching for a fight.

"How about me?" Long Xiaoxuan piped up.

"You can do what you like, Brother Dragon." Jiang Chen had no task for the dragon, but he wasn't worried about his friend's safety, either. Long Xiaoxuan was formidable in his own right.

"Little brother Dragon," the Vermilion Bird said, "I think you should hold back for now. It's shocking enough for one of the four sacred beasts to appear. If two did instead, young master Chen would be troubled to no end in the future. The time isn't ripe yet for that."

The words were heartwarming for Jiang Chen.

As expected of mankind's old friend, the Vermilion Bird impressed him with its consideration.

Forefather Calmdew began his speech.

"Everyone, the divine nation has already been turned upside down. The imperial family's takeover is set in stone. You are participating in one of the most key battles in our campaign. If you survive it, you will enjoy untold riches and glory for the rest of your life. If you do not, the nation will erect monuments and shrines to your name, granting you eternal fame.

"Warriors, are you prepared to win this battle!"

"We are!" From the thunderous reply, morale seemed quite high.

Hidden amid the crowd, Jiang Chen pretended that he was as enthusiastic as his neighbors. He was just chanting empty words to avoid suspicion

“I don’t like to waste words. As the representative of the imperial family, I guarantee that our most distinguished warriors from this first charge will be awarded with land and the ability to begin their own factions upon victory! The imperial family will forever appreciate your service.”

Almost every cultivator wanted land or a sect of his own.

It felt good to be a king among one’s people, regardless of how small the latter group ended up being.

“Roar! Long live the emperor. We are willing to lay down our lives for the imperial family!”

The forefather’s material promises were a tale as old as time. However, that didn’t make them any less effective.

“Very good. Each man should prepare himself. The regional principals will hand out your tasks shortly. Do your job well and keep the formation unbroken.” Having said this, he handed the floor to the three principals. Imperial Prince Shang was one of them.

He evidently had the concrete battle plan already, and gathered the cultivators under his jurisdiction to give them the details of their work.

“You, you... you’re in charge of this area near the great formation. It’s not the most active, but a lot of rank and file to take note of. The sacred land’s experts seem to prefer taking this route.

“You lot, go to this area...”

“Your team should provide backup here. If the men in front of you fail at their task, rectify their error...”
The imperial prince’s delegations took place at a rapid-fire pace.

Jiang Chen’s group was up in no time at all. Imperial Prince Shang was clearly worried that the young man would go back on his word; “I’ve arranged a wonderful job for you,” he said hurriedly. “The area you’ll be responsible for isn’t the hottest, but it’s just as important as area sixteen was. Good luck, and don’t let us down.”

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. The imperial prince was the furthest from worrying about someone ‘letting him down’. He simply lacked manpower that was willing to serve as shock troops.

Nevertheless, Jiang Chen put on the most simpering smile he could manage. “Thank you, Your Highness. We will give it all we’ve got.”

Imperial Prince Shang waved, clearly not expecting much out of these four men. They were cannon fodder – what else could they do?

He didn’t have time to chat with the walking dead. As soon as the briefing was done, he hurried away to instruct the others. This suited Jiang Chen’s purposes perfectly.

He hated being watched when he was up to no good.

Since the army was two to three thousand strong, the area the poison needed to cover was correspondingly immense. It would be nearly impossible for Jiang Chen to spread the powder by himself.

Thankfully, he had the Goldbiter Rats to help him out. He had prepared such huge quantities of the Soulless Powder as a safety. His design was to have the rats make trouble from the underground.

The Goldbiter Rats moved through the earth like ghosts. Even if their movements were detected, the proximity of the great formation meant that they'd be attributed to that instead.

Jiang Chen sneakily called up the king of the Goldbiter Rats. "Old Gold, this job is a bit riskier than usual."

"Don't worry, young master Chen. The Goldbiter Rats always get it done!"

"Take care yourselves. The Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud is very potent. Try not to accidentally sniff too much of it in," Jiang Chen noted.

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Chapter 1809: A Strange Situation

With the Millionditch Stonenest as cover, the Goldbiter Rats didn't have to go aboveground in large numbers to deploy the poison, preventing them from being discovered.

Everyone was in high spirits, their attention focused on the principals as they took in their orders and pep talk.

The imperial family had really gone all-out this time. The first wave of attackers was promised a great deal of rewards, which greatly incentivized many of them. At the same time the rewards were a statement that the sacred land was no more. The imperial family was the ruler of the nation, and the only one that could bring fortune to everyone.

The pep talk didn't last long, but it was enough to motivate the vanguard. They were pumped and ready to strike.

"The time is now! The sun is setting on the sacred land. This assault will destroy the last of its fort. We will be the heroes that change the course of the history and be forever remembered by generations to come!"

"Kill!"

The commander-in-chief's order prompted the first group of designated attackers to raise their weapons of choice and flourish their most extraordinary moves to attack every weak point of the great formation.

The formation was incredibly sturdy. The constant barrage of attacks left only small cracks, which weren't enough to destabilize it. This illustrated that even after all this time, the alliance still hadn't struck a fatal blow on the sacred land.

Although a large swathes of territory had been conquered, the sacred land's core regions and leading figures remained strong. It was a demonstration of the alliance's failure. They fought with abandon as they intended to end the sacred land once and for all.

The large-scale assault applied great pressure on the formation. Fortunately, the sacred land had been informed beforehand, giving them ample time to reinforce it. As a result, the formation managed to hold strong against the intense attack.

But this wasn't the alliance's only move.

While the first wave attacked the sacred land, the second group was deployed. Instead of joining the fight, they hurled insults at the enemy.

"There's nothing sacred about this bunch of cowards!"

"What a shame for the nation to be ruled by these weaklings all this time!"

"Cowards! Come out and fight us!"

Fighters were often crude, but these men were especially obscene. It was curious where the alliance had found them. The name-calling may not be enough to provoke the sacred land into fighting back, but it was an immense blow on their pride.

If they refused to take a stand even when faced with verbal abuse from such base, crude characters, it would undermine their reputation greatly.

There were currently a myriad of different voices within the sacred land. Some argued they should charge out and knock the alliance down a peg. Others argued they should stay and defend the sacred land at this critical juncture and not let humiliation get to them.

Jiang Chen's defense post was a hotspot for battles. He put on a front and made it seem as if he was devoting everything into attacking, but in reality he didn't so much as harm the sacred land. His actions went unnoticed in the chaos.

He cared more about the Goldbiter Rats' progress. If they could spread the Soulless Powder to every part of the battlefield, he was confident that he'd be able to turn the tide.

The damage that a force of three thousand could inflict was no joke. Under the alliance's relentless attack, the formation cracked in many parts, compromising its defenses. Many sacred land's cultivators were visible to the attackers for the first time and left vulnerable.

Increasing numbers of fights broke out.

The great formation could be likened to a bamboo shoot. There were many layers to it, each with a good number of experts defending the pillars of the formation. Each time a layer was peeled off, an inevitable fight broke out.

Jiang Chen was highly anxious. He knew the sacred land couldn't afford a prolonged fight. If the great formation continued to remain under attack, it'd be weakened considerably even if it wasn't broken.

If the imperial family and House Xiahou organized a couple more salvos like these, the formation would be in danger of breaking down. Then the alliance would charge into the sacred land and kill off most of its experts with sheer numbers.

Even if a few managed to escape, where could they possibly run to given the circumstances?

“Nicely done, warriors! Forefather Calmdew is pleased with your progress. Keep up the good work!”

Imperial Prince Shang called out loud motivation to the cultivators at the front lines, while he continued to deploy forces to join the fight. Every time someone died, he replaced them with new substitutions.

The alliance’s number gave them an edge. Ten deaths would be a heavy toll on the sacred land, while a hundred didn’t mean much to the alliance.

Imperial Prince Shang frowned and turned to Jiang Chen, his expression darkening when he did so. He motioned for his personal guards to follow him as he strode over to Jiang Chen.

“Are you bastards trying to trick me? Look at what others have done, then look at yourselves! You’re slacking off on purpose!!” The imperial prince couldn’t contain his anger. He felt cheated.

“Guards! Arrest these men and have them executed! Put their heads on display for all to see!” The imperial prince had been looking for a punching bag. These men had practically fallen into his lap.

Jiang Chen exclaimed defensively, “Your Highness, this is... this is a misunderstanding!”

“Misunderstanding? How so?” Imperial Prince Shang widened his eyes with a serious expression. “Do you think I’m a fool? You clearly haven’t been doing your job!”

Jiang Chen took a step closer to the prince and whispered, “Your Highness, this subordinate feels something fishy in the air.”

“In what way?” the imperial prince huffed.

“Something’s wrong.” Jiang Chen put on a grave expression. “There seems to be a conspiracy brewing. I can smell a strange presence in the air.”

“Presence? What presence?” The imperial prince’s nose twitched. He smelled nothing. He turned to ask his guards, “Do you smell anything?”

The guards shook their heads cluelessly and denied smelling anything.

Jiang Chen shrugged. “Perhaps I’m being overly sensitive, but you must be careful, Your Highness. This subordinate has wandered the jianghu for years. The experience has honed my instincts. Something is going to happen today. Your Highness must be on your guard.”

The imperial prince’s first reaction was to suspect the young man, but his earnest expression made the prince question his assumptions.

Their conversation was interrupted by a commotion from the outer circle. One after another, a large group of people exclaimed and screamed.

Jiang Chen perked up, delighted that the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud was finally in effect. He slapped the back of his own head. “Shoot, I’m getting lightheaded. Your Highness, there must be poison in the air. I’m losing my strength!”

The imperial prince’s face fell as he yelled, “What happened? You there, go check.”

The guards nodded. As soon as they took a step though, their legs went weak and they stumbled, almost collapsing to the ground.

Imperial Prince Shang panicked. Upon checking himself, he realized that his body was sore and heavy as well. He couldn't muster any strength.

"Shit!" His chest tightened and his face contorted.

The cultivators around them had noticed their condition and cried out as well.

Forefather Calmdew raised an eyebrow, surprised. With a few bounds and leaps, he brought the three principals to his side and growled, "What's going on?"

His cultivation had reached the point that the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud had no effect on him. The other two principles looked to be in a good enough condition as well. They were affected, but they could still move. Meanwhile, Imperial Prince Shang was weaker in cultivation and could barely move his legs.

"Forefather, we've been poisoned," the imperial prince exclaimed, his face contorted in anger. "My limbs are weak and losing strength. Someone's ambushed us!"

"Poison?" Surprised, the forefather gazed at his surrounding with frigid eyes and expanded his consciousness to search through the area.

"Who was it? Show yourself!"

The forefather exerted his tremendous might without restraint. The cultivators around him cowered under the power of a demigod, tasting blood in their throat.

Who'd poisoned them? The cultivators exchanged a glance, befuddled. Their confusion was clear in their expressions.

"Forefather, the poison is a familiar one. It seems to be House Xiahou's Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud. All the symptoms match."

"The Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud?" Forefather Calmdew's face darkened as he shot his cold gaze to House Xiahou's camp.

House Xiahou was currently stationed in the northern part with venerated elder Xiahou Zhen as their leader. They looked unharmed and didn't seem to be poisoned at all.

That was deliberate on Jiang Chen's part. He'd ordered the Goldbiter Rats to forgo the area when spreading the powder.

"Xiahou Zhen, explain to me what's going on," the forefather demanded coolly.

Xiahou Zhen was befuddled. "What do you mean, Forefather Calmdew? Do you think House Xiahou will poison our allies?"

Xiahou Zhen's tone was irate. He didn't like the imperial family's condescending attitude.

The house staged the uprising because they didn't want the Eternal Sacred Land to lord over them. If the imperial family was going to oppress them after the uprising, then what was all this for?

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Chapter 1810: Locking Onto Enemy Intelligence

House Xiahou was equally displeased about the imperial family's forcefulness. It had its own ambitions: to replace the Eternal Sacred Land, not to help the imperial family grasp absolute power.

Even if the imperial family were allowed to rule on the surface, the house's profits and initiatives had to be guaranteed behind the curtain.

But the actions of the former made that seem rather unlikely. The imperial family was attempting to steal authority for its own, as well as diminish House Xiahou's contributions. And now, they were actively picking a fight! Naturally, Xiahou Zhen was quite upset. Correspondingly, he dispensed with courtesy in his tone.

Forefather Calmdew became more wary of Xiahou Zhen when he heard the latter's rudeness. "These people's symptoms indicate that they've been poisoned with the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud," he said coolly. "You should know that better than me, Xiahou Zhen."

"Hmph! What are you trying to say, Forefather Calmdew? There's a saying that the huntsman puts away his bow when there are no birds left to hunt. However, we're far from being at that point yet! Are you already kicking us off the bridge?"

Forefather Calmdew was furious. "Cease your nonsense, Xiahou Zhen. Take a look for yourself! Are these not the signs the Soulless Powder would have?"

The forefather was intensely irritated that Xiahou Zhen had the gall to deny something so obvious.

Xiahou Zhen snorted softly, but a touch of doubt tinged his expression. He became much graver after probing several cultivators in succession.

"I'm not making baseless accusations, am I? My deduction was completely correct," Calmdew pressed.

House Xiahou's forefather knitted his brow. Suddenly, he turned back towards his house. "Is it one of you who has caused this trouble?" he intoned slowly. "Step forward now and repent, and this may yet be resolved peacefully."

Xiahou Zhen was unable to deny wrongdoing. Still, he'd truly been ignorant about all this, hence the question. He assumed that someone had done something foolish out of a grudge against the imperial family.

However, his sweeping eyes found only surprise on the faces of his kinsman. They cast dubious glances at their neighbors, but there was no hint of guilty panic in their own.

"I will count to five. If the culprit stands forward, I promise I will only punish him. If he does not and is found later, his entire branch will suffer." Xiahou Zhen's sinister voice sent chills down everyone's spine.

However, no one ended up coming forth.

“Forefather Calmdew, this matter has nothing to do with House Xiahou. Plus, we’ve been in this area all along. The huge area of the poison’s influence means that the person responsible would’ve had to walk around. However, no one would’ve dared leave without my orders – or used poison without my notice, for that matter.

“Additionally, taking down so many cultivators isn’t a job for one man. The amount of Soulless Powder used must have been immense. No warrior from House Xiahou present here did such a deed. If you can prove me wrong, I will sentence him myself!” Xiahou Zhen tone was categorically certain.

On one hand, he firmly believed what he had said. On the other, he was sure that the poison that had taken down the rebel army was indeed House Xiahou’s exclusive Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud.

It was difficult to wash themselves of the shit that had been smeared on them.

“Forefather Calmdew, House Xiahou’s intentions to cooperate with the imperial family are sincere. We would preserve the greater good in this crucial moment, even if we were stupid beyond words to make this move. Why would we do something so unwise? There must be some trick in this. Perhaps someone with ulterior motives is trying to break apart the imperial family and House Xiahou.” Xiahou Zhen tried his best to convince the imperial family’s forefather.

“Your words aren’t proof enough! You say House Xiahou didn’t do this, Xiahou Zhen. Well, then, produce the antidote.”

Xiahou Zhen waved a hand without hesitation. “Take out your antidotes for the Soulless Powder, everyone. Keep one portion for yourself and contribute the rest. No selfishness!”

House Xiahou’s warriors were reasonably loyal and responsive. The antidote was swiftly presented.

Forefather Calmdew grew hesitant because of their readiness. Was the culprit someone else after all? Was someone hiding in the shadows, trying to stir up conflict between House Xiahou and the imperial family?

“You lot, you’re not poisoned. Take some of the antidote to guard yourself against the airborne powder, then give out the antidote to the others.”

The large swathes of warriors collapsed on the ground concerned Calmdew somewhat.

The front ranks of the gathered army had almost entirely succumbed. Those in the reserves were relatively further away, but didn’t dare approach at this time. All the elites were concentrated in the first group, making for weaker reserves in backup.

The antidote was gradually distributed to those affected.

“Our antidote is very effective,” Xiahou Zhen stated coolly. “It should less than an hour for them to recover much of their strength.”

His words served to remind Forefather Calmdew: House Xiahou shouldn’t be blamed before the truth revealed itself.

Time passed moment by moment.

Most of an hour passed, but those who had taken the antidote were unchanged in their paralysis. In fact, they had become even weaker.

Forefather Calmdew became even more enraged.

“When will you stop with your tricks, Xiahou Zhen? I believed you when you said House Xiahou didn’t do it, but your antidote is completely useless. House Xiahou really does plan on opposing the alliance, then?” Calmdew’s tone was filled with hostility.

Xiahou Zhen was utterly confused. He held the antidote in his hands, stunned by its lack of effect. Suddenly, his eyes widened. “There must be a spy in our midst. Warriors of House Xiahou, listen up! House Xiahou will not suffer this deception. Look alive and seek out this spy!”

Having said this, Xiahou Zhen cupped a fist toward Forefather Calmdew. “Forefather, you would only please our enemies if you target us now. We haven’t done anything wrong, and this disaster is not our doing. Whether you believe me or not, that’s the honest truth!”

Calmdew’s expression was dark. He had half a mind to believe it. Regardless of House Xiahou’s ambitions, it wouldn’t conduct such blatant sabotage. Was there really a spy here, just like Xiahou Zhen had said?

A spy...

Calmdew opened his consciousness to look for someone fitting that description.

Xiahou Zhen did the same, house warriors in tow.

The forefather swept his gaze in Jiang Chen’s direction quite suddenly. He paused upon the young man and his comrades, suspicion plain upon his face.

“You there don’t look like you’re poisoned! Why is this? What faction are you from?”

The forefather’s attention meant that the jig was just about up. Jiang Chen was a bit disappointed he hadn’t managed to provoke House Xiahou and the imperial family into direct conflict.

“Out with it! Well, what faction are you from?” The other two principals came up to shout the same.

It was time for battle to be engaged. The enemies’ suspicions were already roused. He chuckled and flashed a wide grin. “So you see what we’re doing, then?”

“You’re the one that poisoned us?” Xiahou Zhen was incensed.

“They’re from the Starlight Sect!” Someone pointed out instantly.

“The Starlight Sect?” Forefather Calmdew glanced all around. Many from the Starlight Sect had also been afflicted. How could they be from the Starlight Sect? Had these four been bought out by the Eternal Sacred Land?

But, even if they had, where had they gotten House Xiahou’s Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud? Moreover, how had they spread the poison so effectively?

“Are you the culprits?” The forefather looked Jiang Chen up and down. His tone grew chilly; a fearsome power radiated from his consciousness directly towards the young man.

Men on the level of Forefather Calmdew were crafty. He wanted to strike pre-emptively to catch Jiang Chen unprepared, and take out his opponent before the latter realized it.

He didn’t expect his demigod level of consciousness to vanish without a trace after entering his target’s mental ocean!

Sweat trickled down the forefather’s back. His expression was incredulous. How could this be?

Forefather Calmdew knew his strength well. Even Xiahou Zong would have been severely injured by an invasive attack from his consciousness. In fact, such a blow would have potentially been lethal.

And yet, his sudden strike seemed to have veered off the mark – or missed entirely. It was very strange indeed.

Jiang Chen knew that his chain seal had saved him yet again. He became all the more astonished for it. The chain seal was practically invincible against mental attacks. It had essentially absorbed what would have been a crippling attack.

Since when was there such a capable expert in the Starlight Sect? Furthermore, he looks rather young.

Everything about this oozed oddity.

The forefather found no reason to panic. He trained an icy gaze on the suspicious youth. “You are certainly not from the Starlight Sect. No one from that sect would dare do something like this. Show your true face!”