

Three Realms 1811

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

Chapter 1811: The Domineering Vermilion Bird

Jiang Chen chuckled. "That doesn't matter now. You think the people you have left can do anything to us?"

He pointed at all the alliance cultivators lying on the ground, a waggish smile curling at the corner of his mouth.

Forefather Calmdew snickered. "I can summon a hundred thousand cultivators from the capital at any time. These couple thousand have only temporarily lost their strength. House Xiahou has plenty of antidote for the Soulless Powder... unless you're from House Xiahou yourselves!"

"Maybe we are. Have you considered that, hmm?" Jiang Chen replied with a half-smile.

The imperial forefather's face colored at this. He instinctively took a few steps away from Xiahou Zhen in order to keep his distance. If these people were from House Xiahou, there would be a lot of trouble.

"Enough with the slander, kid," Xiahou Zhen interrupted immediately. "When will you stop using our name to do violence?"

Using our name?

"Why try to hide it, venerated elder? In what way is House Xiahou inferior to the imperial family? Why should we be led by them? In my opinion, we should be the true rulers of the nation. We are the real pillars that hold it up!"

Jiang Chen spoke with an exaggerated swagger that was accompanied by a medallion that had once belonged to the late Xiahou Jing. "Venerated elder, Xiahou Jing reports for duty!"

Xiahou Jing?

Many of the younger members of House Xiahou blinked. Xiahou Jing was one of them who had disappeared a few years ago. There had been no news of him since. Most in the house didn't know where he'd gone. How was he here all of a sudden?

Why would a man who'd vanished for so long resurface here?

Disquieted, Xiahou Zhen glanced at Xiahou Jing's medallion. It was authentic; however, he remembered another contradicting detail.

"Absurd! You're not Xiahou Jing! His soul lamp broke many years ago! You're a fool to impersonate him!" the venerated elder declared furiously.

Jiang Chen was all silly grins in contrast. "Venerated elder, everything's already settled. Only a couple of stragglers remain – no one else can fight. Isn't this the chance for House Xiahou to take the nation for our own?"

"Silence! Shut up!"

Though House Xiahou wasn't happy about the imperial family's current prominence, that didn't mean the house wanted to break with it so soon. The two parties needed to be unified, at least, before the fall of the sacred land.

If the imperial family and House Xiahou parted ways, that would be tremendous news for the sacred land they were opposing. Even a second chance at life.

The bigger picture helped Xiahou Zhen hold back somewhat, unwilling to elicit more suspicions from the imperial family. Cupping a fist, he proclaimed loudly, "Friends! House Xiahou has always been aboveboard with our actions. I can guarantee that these people are not part of my house!"

"If not, why do they have your exclusive poison?" The quick thinkers among the crowd pointed out a glaring flaw.

"That... maybe they're the culprits responsible for killing Xiahou Jing. They stole his recipe for the Soulless Powder. Don't be fooled, friends!" Xiahou Zhen did his best to explain.

"Actions speak louder than words," someone near Forefather Calmdew remarked snidely. "You've said so much, but it wouldn't be nearly as convincing as if you took that Xiahou Jing's head."

Xiahou Zhen nodded. "Men of House Xiahou are not to be infringed upon!" he roared. "Warriors, come slay these bastards with me!"

He led the charge himself. As a venerated elder of House Xiahou, he was quite capable. His palms pushed two wheels of air outwards. They spun at incredible speed like inexorable grindstones into Jiang Chen's midst.

Jiang Chen laughed softly. "Kill him!" he cried.

Having received Jiang Chen's instruction, the Vermilion Bird loosed a sinister cackle. Xiahou Zhen felt his hairs stand on end. In the next moment, it transformed into a crimson ball, shooting at high velocity towards the enemy.

As one of the four sacred beasts, the Vermilion Bird was also significantly more powerful post-rebirth. Though it was only a demigod, it could fight toe to toe with any full-fledged one.

Xiahou Zhen was only peak empyrean realm, making him easy prey for the bird at best.

Faced with a blast of red in his direction, Xiahou Zhen sent two more wheels of air to intercept the Vermilion Bird. He was shocked by the potency of the incoming attack.

However, he was even more astonished by what came next. The red figure swatted aside the spinning air currents like flies with the most casual of motions.

It was as if Xiahou Zhen had gone easy on purpose.

But everyone realized that that wasn't the case. In the next moment. There was no House Xiahou conspiracy here. The figure in red next went for Xiahou Zhen with lightning speed.

It was as if the elder's body was frozen in time. In the next instant, a hand erupted through his chest.

A flash of red consumed Xiahou Zhen's body and soul into the Vermilion Bird's pocket dimension. There was a wave of fearful cries at his death.

"Venerated elder!"

"The venerated elder's dead. Run for it!"

The Vermilion Bird wasn't going to let them, though. It stretched out its wings, summoning a meteoric rain of fire down upon House Xiahou's cultivators.

Shrieks and howls of pain rang out incessantly. Then, blood and gore flew everywhere. House Xiahou's warriors was swept into a tornado of vengeance, their bodies and souls slowly ground to dust.

It didn't take long for the supernatural storm to subside.

Nothing remained of the victims who were caught within. It was as if the space they'd occupied had always been vacant.

The horrifying scene made silence to fall over its audience. Poisoned and healthy cultivators alike were shaken to their core.

The arrogant House Xiahou contingent – the House Xiahou that had dared butt heads with even the imperial family – had been totally decimated. The venerated elder and his men, all killed in action!

Forefather Calmdew grew somber. He motioned for his subordinates to retreat, clearly bewildered by this unexpected turn of events.

"Who are you lot, really?" the forefather's brows were knitted as he fixed a steady gaze upon the Vermilion Bird. There was a strange pressure emanating from the cultivator enshrouded in red mist, a mortal kind of fear.

The Vermilion Bird didn't reply. Instead, he considered Forefather Calmdew like a gourmand seizing up a delicious meal. Calmdew was much more powerful than Xiahou Zhen. In fact, he could handily beat three Xiahou Zhens.

The bird wasn't scared, though. It was a demigod that could hold its own against actual divine cultivators. Though Calmdew was also a demigod, he couldn't make the same claim regarding his combat ability.

To put it another way, three Forefather Calmdews wouldn't be a match for the Vermilion Bird.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "I didn't expect the imperial family to have a few experts of its own. But, your most foolish endeavor was opposing the sacred land in the first place. You'd best take this to heart: only the Eternal Sacred Land reigns supreme in Eternal Divine Nation. House Xiahou is just an usurper."

Forefather Calmdew was icy. "You're barely out of your cradle, kid. You dare speak of politics? Shame on you!"

"Soldiers at the rear, heed my orders. These four are enemy spies who've snuck into our midst. Gather together quickly to surround them. Don't allow them to escape!"

The forefather was in no hurry to act himself. He sent the cultivators assembled for the assault instead. Those at the back were a bit further away, and had originally been intended as backup.

Unfortunately, the three thousand experts who'd been taken down by the Soulless Powder in the front ranks hadn't awakened even now. Its potency was evident in this display.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Everyone, you're all smart people. If you're not scared of this Xiahou poison, feel free to come forth. These men will serve as your example."

"Don't listen to his lies. In the name of the imperial family, arrest these spies immediately. Kill them if they resist!"

"You? You want to kill us?" Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "What good is the imperial family, that it deserves the sacrifice of all these cultivators for your ambitions?"

"Friends, the foundation of this nation is the Eternal Sacred Land. The rule of the sacred land has been tradition since time immemorial. The nation has been stirred up into chaos for the sake of the imperial family's fleeting ambition. You are all brave men of this country. Are you willing to pour out your life and blood to sustain the imperial family's delusions of grandeur?" Jiang Chen began to pontificate.

"Are you really naïve enough to think that you'll be better off with the imperial family and House Xiahou in control? You see what's happening now. How many have died from the various factions? And how many from the imperial family or House Xiahou? You are merely cannon fodder. They're the ones gaining from all this. Can't you see through their paper-thin scheme?"

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Chapter 1812: The Situation Turns

Jiang Chen didn't expect to stir up a mutiny with just a few words, but at least he could plant the seeds of doubt in their minds, further driving a wedge between the imperial family and the other factions. Then, it was only a matter of time before the alliance fell apart.

Forefather Calmdew flew into rage. "Die, you devil-tongued brat!" He was going to take matters into his own hands!

"Halt!"

Suddenly, rays of light shone through the sacred land's great formation. Gap after gap opened up to allow its members egress. Thousands of cultivators swarmed out with as much aplomb as a dragon streaking forth into the ocean. They'd clearly come prepared.

The first batch of troops had collapsed due to the airborne poison. Leading the charge, the first prime shouted, "Take them all, alive!"

It'd be as easy as lifting a finger to kill all of them, since they couldn't even move, let alone resist. However, the first prime didn't intend to eliminate them at all.

Forefather Calmdew had originally been worried that the sacred land would holed up in the formation forever. But seeing such a large group of cultivators streaming out now didn't exactly please him. He turned as ashen as a dead man.

This was the worst time to face the sacred land army. Although he wasn't exactly on his own, it was a near thing. The army behind him might be able to match the sacred land's in number, but they'd lost their will to fight and couldn't rival the sacred land's elites at all.

Besides, the Soulless Powder was more intimidating to them than the imperial family. Forefather Calmdew had tried and failed to mobilize them. As a result, the sacred land was bound to gain the upper hand unless reinforcement came.

Forefather Calmdew knew when to cut his losses. He huffed when he realized that there was no hope.

"You might win this battle, sacred land, but don't celebrate just yet! There is no end to our numbers and no use resisting us. We'll do this another time!"

With that, he actually turned to leave!

"Leaving? And what do you take me for?" The Vermilion Bird wouldn't allow the human to flee. It tapped the air and turned two feathers into sharp blades, which expanded and slashed at the forefather's direction with a presence to shake the very earth.

They weren't the sharpest of all blades, but the killing intent and destructive power they contained were enough to take the forefather's breath away. His escape route was blocked.

He turned to escape the other way. He was determined to flee and had made up his mind to abandon his three principals.

There was a growing voice that told him that he had to run now, or his life would be in danger.

He thus spared no effort in forging a new path, but he couldn't lose the Vermilion Bird. Its feather blades chased him doggedly, like a curse to kill.

"How can this be? How??" Forefather Calmdew was frustrated for being obstructed every step of the way. He'd fought in many battles and had a world of experience, but never had he been so caught on the backfoot.

After he'd become a demigod, only divine cultivators could somewhat threaten him. The rest were riffraff to him.

"Can this unassuming fellow in the red fog be a divine cultivator?" The forefather's heart sank, a trace of trepidation sneaking up on him. It'd be terrifying if were true.

"That can't be! If he were a god, he'd easily destroy my mind by exerting his presence or even crushing me with a strand of his consciousness. I can feel a powerful bloodline in him, but not a human one. Is he a spirit of sorts?"

Forefather Calmdew was observant despite his fear. He nervously threw an escape talisman in the air, trying to escape.

However, before he could activate it, a flash of light streaked past his view. An arrow pinned the talisman to a pillar before him. The arrowhead made a crisp clink when it sank into the stone.

Forefather Calmdew turned to where the arrow came from and saw Jiang Chen holding a bow in his hand. Clearly, the young man had been the one to shoot. "You're not going anywhere, Forefather Calmdew!"

He chuckled and shot another arrow, aiming for the center of the forefather's forehead this time. Only Jiang Chen would dare attack Forefather Calmdew, as an intermediate empyrean cultivator.

The arrow was ferocious. Even the forefather didn't dare take it head on. He dodged the attack with minimal movement and dashed for the outskirts straightaway.

The Vermilion Bird cackled and soared through the skies. The red fog surrounding it expanded and turned into a sea of blazing flame.

Its shriek rang through the entire nation. It had expanded back into its beast form and obscured the sun with each wingbeat. Its wings had a savage beauty to it that captured the imagination, but at the same time they radiated an intense killing intent.

"Where are you going, Forefather Calmdew?" the bird asked mockingly. It easily overtook the forefather with a few flaps of its wings.

The forefather widened his eyes in shock and terror. This was a vermilion bird of the ancient divine beasts, and one that had reached its maturity! With it almost fully awakened, it far surpassed him in power.

"Dammit, I must run!"

Forefather Calmdew didn't dare stay for a moment longer. The Vermilion Bird's beast form was majestic and terrifying in equal measure. He wanted nothing but to escape from this nightmare and never return.

However, the bird was at its peak when it was in this form. Only a god would be able to rival it.

The Vermilion Bird easily stopped the forefather's attempts to flee. Its feathers morphed into sharp blades and fired fatal attacks at him.

It was clear that the bird wasn't going all out. Otherwise, the forefather would be dead already. It was using him as target practice.

The forefather scurried around pitifully, his hair unkempt. He couldn't escape the bird's grip.

Jiang Chen could tell what the bird was doing. He smirked. "Forefather Calmdew, as the second forefather of the imperial family, don't you feel ashamed for doing nothing but trying to flee? Where's your pride? Where's your dignity?"

The forefather swallowed down a mouthful of blood. He was having enough trouble defending himself from the bird and didn't have the effort to spare at all for arguing with Jiang Chen. Moreover, the sacred land's army was still at standby, ready to join the fight any moment.

Jiang Chen approached the first prime and whispered, "It's now or never, First Prime. You should send a team of elites to attack the vault with the spirit herbs and regain control over the area."

The first prime was highly pleased to see Jiang Chen. Ziju Min was even more thrilled and kept patting the young man's shoulder.

"Good lad! I know you wouldn't disappoint me." Life hadn't been easy for Ziju Min lately, what with all the criticism and rumors swirling around. However, Shao Yuan, who'd he personally brought to the sacred land, had become the key figure in turning the tide for them!

It was a known fact that Shao Yuan was a genius, but no one anticipated him to complete such a great feat. He'd played thousands of cultivators like fiddles and planted a time bomb between House Xiahou and the imperial family.

Although the sacred land was not yet victorious, they'd won this round of the match. At least the war was no longer one-sided. They'd been liberated from oppression and humiliation.

Once the sacred land recovered enough to strike back, nothing could stop their momentum until the alliance broke down.

The first prime gazed deeply at the Vermilion Bird, who was toying with Forefather Calmdew in the sky. "Shao Yuan, who is this spirit to you?"

"A companion," Jiang Chen responded simply.

"Good, good. You're indeed one of our geniuses. You even befriended a divine beast!" The first prime marveled. "Shao Yuan, this seat is wholeheartedly impressed today. The forefather was wise to have set his eye on you."

The bird was about done toying with Forefather Calmdew.

The first prime commanded without hesitation, "Lead a team of elites to the vault and take it back, number three. Failure is not an option!"

"Understood!" the third prime responded with great spirit. He took everyone he needed and moved out quickly.

"Brother Vermilion, don't go overboard with toying with your prey," Jiang Chen exclaimed as a reminder. "Restraint is key."

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Chapter 1813: The Alliance Panics

The Vermilion Bird listened to Jiang Chen's every order. It strengthened its aura and rained down even more relentless attacks on Forefather Calmdew.

The pressure on the forefather grew significantly. The bird's might could rival a god, and its attacks could shake heaven and earth. The forefather could barely keep himself upright in the face of its unrestrained assault.

An endless sea of fire enveloped him, broiling his body and tearing apart his soul. He knew he couldn't win this fight, but he didn't even have the chance to escape under the bird's suppression.

Finally, an agonized scream rang through the flames as the bird devoured him whole, leaving neither his body nor soul behind.

The alliance immediately fell apart. All of the rebels lost their will after witnessing the forefather's death.

Jiang Chen leaped into the air with his Holy Dragon Bow raised and declared, "Kneel and surrender, or die on your feet!"

The Vermilion Bird flapped its wings, sending waves of flame towards the army.

Thud, thud!

One by one, cultivators dropped down to their knees with their hands up in the air, submitting to the bird's awesome might. Its oppressive and absolute power had destroyed their will to fight.

Xiahou Zhen was dead. House Xiahou's troops had been eliminated. Now, even Forefather Calmdew had been slaughtered. Without a leader, the thought of resisting didn't cross their minds.

"Take them all!" ordered the first prime. She led her cohort of experts to the battlefield to clean up the mess.

Things had been turned around completely.

The main battlefield had been rid of all possible threats, leaving the other defense posts to be dealt with. Those fighting against the sacred land couldn't make much of a difference.

In less than an hour, the sacred land had reclaimed their territory.

News about Forefather Calmdew's death and the Xiahou troops' destruction spread to every part of the capital like the plague. Shock rippled through the city. No one had foreseen this conclusion of the assault.

Almost all alliance cultivators had become the sacred land's captives overnight. Although the alliance still stood, it was as good as destroyed.

The imperial family was stunned, as was House Xiahou, and the remaining members of the alliance! The already fractured group fell further apart.

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Within the inner court of the palace, the emperor, Duke Xiaoyao, and various figureheads from different factions held an emergency meeting to come up with a solution. The alliance might seem bigger in number, but the last battle had rendered their morale at a record low.

The emperor read through the intel brought back from the sacred land with a grave expression, his hands trembling slightly in his sleeves. Things had gone in an entirely unexpected direction.

They'd taken all factors into consideration, including the sacred land's total firepower. Almost everyone had been convinced that even if they couldn't conquer the sacred land, they'd at least be able to damage it to the point where it couldn't resist anymore.

Instead, all expectations had been subverted.

“How can this be? How??” muttered the emperor to himself. “Someone tell me what happened! Forefather Calmdew was a demigod. How could anyone from the sacred land kill him? This can’t be true!”

“Your Majesty, there’s a detailed description of the fight in the report. Forefather Calmdew was killed by a ferocious ancient beast. It was a vermilion bird of the Four Divine Beasts!”

“What? The Four Divine Beasts?” The emperor’s eyes twitched. “There haven’t ever been any descendents of the Four Divine Beasts in the nation. Where did this vermilion bird come from?”

“The information is accurate, Your Majesty. No one knows where the divine beast is from, but according to the witnesses, it’s related to one of the sacred land’s members.”

“Who?”

“Shao Yuan, the genius who killed Xiahou Zong in the sword competition.”

The brooding Duke Xiaoyao scowled and asked, “What did you say? The vermilion bird’s appearance is related to Shao Yuan?”

“That’s right.”

Duke Xiaoyao slammed his fist into the table. “That bastard again! He’s disrupted our plans more times than I care to count. How does he possibly deserve a divine spirit creature’s help?”

“Shao Yuan is a wild card. No one can say for sure how he got involved with the bird. Your Majesty, Duke Xiaoyao, our army has been eliminated and our elites fallen. The alliance is in great danger of breaking up. We must act now, or we’ll die a terrible death once the sacred land recovers!”

“Nonsense! The sacred land just got lucky and won this round. They can barely defend themselves, let alone launch a counterattack.”

“Don’t panic. The sacred land has suffered a great loss in the battle as well. They can’t afford to fight back for the time being!”

The emperor and Duke Xiaoyao were more in agreement now than they’d ever been. Originally, they’d been fighting for their own interests, and they sometimes clashed under the table. Losing to the sacred land had alleviated the tension between them. It was once again their biggest enemy.

“His Majesty, Duke Xiaoyao, the three primes are still able to fight and the sacred land has the vermilion bird on their side. They still retain their most elite forces. Perhaps it’s time we summon the two divine forefathers to protect the alliance.”

“That’s right. Only they can help maintain our upper hand.”

The factions within the alliance were panicking as well. Both Forefather Calmdew and Xiahou Zhen were out of the picture. The Vermilion Bird’s power was evident. No one in attendance would be able to rival it. Their only hope for defeating the bird were the gods.

Tension built up in the air.

“Hmph, the two forefathers are keeping the sacred land’s venerated forefather subdued. If they return, and the seal falters, we’ll essentially be letting a dragon back into the sea. Then we’re truly doomed!”

That was no exaggeration. As a divine realm cultivator, the venerated forefather could easily wipe the floor with the alliance once he was freed.

He was unequivocally the strongest in Eternal Divine Nation, a living model for everyone within the country. Even the imperial family and House Xiahou’s forefathers fell short before him. They wouldn’t necessarily be able to rival him even if they fought together. They’d only been able to subdue the venerated forefather through trickery.

They therefore had to keep a close eye on the seal to prevent the venerated forefather from escaping. Otherwise, he’d become a major threat to the imperial family and House Xiahou.

Therefore, the emperor and Duke Xiaoyao were the first to disagree with summoning the two forefathers back. That would only end very badly.

No matter how formidable a foe the sacred land was, they had to face the threat alone and not distract the two forefathers.

The success of the uprising was built upon the success of the two forefathers. If the sacred land’s forefather was let free, the uprising would be nothing but a pipe dream.

“His Majesty, I don’t want to diminish our morale, but what if that vermilion bird attacks us? Who among us would be able to fight it?”

“That’s right, Your Majesty! You claimed that victory was right within our grasp when you convinced us to join the alliance, and yet House Beigong has suffered great casualties and loss without any of the benefits you promised. If this goes on, we have no choice but to withdraw.”

Seeing that someone had cast the first stone, the head of the Starlight Sect spoke up. “If we’re talking about loss, our sect has suffered the most among all factions. Your Majesty, we’ve about depleted all our resources. If we are to keep fighting, isn’t it time for the imperial family and House Xiahou to deploy your elites?”

Duke Xiaoyao frowned. “What do you mean? Are you accusing us for not sending out our best? Xiahou Zhen was our venerated elder, and the group he led was composed of our elites. We’ve lost our people as well.”

“Ha, so what? You were the ones who started the whole thing. Naturally you should be the ones to lead the charge. The sacred land was only able to make a comeback because you’d been conserving your strength instead of giving the battle your all. What do you propose we do now?!”

“What do we do? The others can complain about the turn of events, but not the Starlight Sect. I hear that Shao Yuan was only able to infiltrate our army because one of your own colluded with him.”

“That’s right. We heard that as well.”

The sect head fumed. “So? Shao Yuan is powerful. He could’ve easily killed a few of our members and assume their identities. Do you expect me to just see through their disguises? Yes, he and his friends are

imposters, but they were in the battlefield for a long time. Why didn't their supervisor notice anything? If we're casting blame, it shouldn't all fall on the Starlight Sect."

The alliance was in engulfed chaos. Each faction had their own agenda. All the existing conflicts were brought to the table due to the loss. No one was willing to take a step back, and arguments escalated into a verbal brawl.

Seeing the mess the meeting had fallen into, the emperor slammed his hand on the table, hard. "Shut up! It's unbecoming of you to argue amongst yourselves!"

Everyone fell silent, but it was clear from their expressions that they were dissatisfied and frustrated.

"Gentlemen, there's no use for us to argue now. We're all on the same boat, and our interests are closely intertwined. Either the sacred land falls, or we do. This infighting isn't going to turn things around." The emperor spoke earnestly, trying to convince everyone.

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Chapter 1814: The Presence of a Sovereign

It was too late for the emperor to diffuse the situation. Words weren't enough to quell disgruntlement in a group once hearts had swayed.

"Your Majesty, these words are a bit too late now. If everyone had been truly united and selfless at the inception of the alliance, we wouldn't be here today. You started out having factions like us lead the charge. We bore the brunt of the battles, while you two played spectator and reaped all the benefits.

"It was as if the alliance was solely our responsibility and none of yours. And now what? You regret it now? It's too late! The sacred land has rebounded from their lowest point. You didn't work together with us to vanquish them when they were at their weakest. We've lost our window to defeat them!"

The head of the Starlight Sect couldn't contain his fury; anger had flooded his tone. His sect had suffered too heavy a sacrifice. They'd lost almost a third of their elites—an immense toll.

Factions in a similar position included House Beigong and House Feng. Both had started out as top-tier factions, but had suffered great casualties during the uprising.

In comparison, some had remained almost unaffected other than losing a few members in the final assault. It was only natural that the head of the Starlight Sect would be so frustrated.

Startled cries echoed from outside the palace. An extraordinary presence came from afar at amazing velocity, startling everyone.

"Heavens, is it coming for us already?!"

"Let's go take a look." The emperor took the lead, a group of personal guards forming a protective circle around him. Duke Xiaoyao propelled himself outside with a push against a chair. Figureheads from other factions rushed after them as well.

Tremendous might descended from above. Furiously red clouds covered the firmament, a divine beast resembling a ball of fire ensconced within. It flourished its powerful presence without restraint, seemingly ready to burn down the entire capital.

All cultivators within the city cowered and trembled under its might, their blood boiling as they struggled to stay conscious.

“It’s the Vermilion Bird! A divine beast!”

“Good heavens! Why is there an ancient, divine beast in Eternal Divine Nation?”

“Does the divine beast’s arrival means this isn’t the end for the Eternal Sacred Land? Is it true destiny for the sacred land to rule over the nation?”

“Maybe so! I knew it! It’s tradition for the sacred land is to govern the nation. They’re the rightful rulers that we put our trust in. Those ambitious cretins insisted on staging an uprising. Now, even an ancient divine beast has been disturbed. This is the will of heaven!”

“This is our doom. If the Vermilion Bird attacks, at least half of the cultivators in the city will die.”

“Definitely. The Vermilion Bird is a creature of fire. Its supreme true fire can reduce anything to ashes. It may even burn down the entire city in its fury!”

A man suddenly appeared out of thin air and landed on the bird’s back. He had a bow on his back, his expression calm and his eyes bright and penetrating, as if he could pierce through the heavenly law.

“Who’s that?”

“I think it’s Shao Yuan! Shao Yuan from the sacred land!”

“Gods, am I hallucinating? Is Shao Yuan sitting on the Vermilion Bird’s back? Is... he... is the bird his ride?”

“That can’t be! How can he be an ancient beast’s rider? He’s said to be a wandering cultivator, but does anyone actually buy that he started out as one?”

“Don’t be so certain. Perhaps Shao Yuan is a god incarnate more powerful than Xiahou Zong. Perhaps he knew the Vermilion Bird from his past life.”

“Makes sense. That explains it! But why would the sacred land decline with a genius like him? So it seems that the sacred land hasn’t yet reached the end of its fortunes.”

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Almost everyone within the city had their eyes on the bird and the young man, their gazes filled with a myriad of emotions - envy, fear, jealousy...

“Distinguished daoists of the capital, I am Shao Yuan of the sacred land, here to deliver a message on behalf of the first prime.” Jiang Chen’s strong voice rang through the city from above.

“Eternal Divine Nation has been ruled by the sacred land since the beginning of time. Under our reign, the nation ranks among the top in Myriad Abyss, and has been blessed with good fortune and been free of natural disasters. Now, a small group of men have started a terrible civil war for their own ambitions, leading to great suffering and countless deaths. This is divine punishment, but also the consequence of human sins.

“We cultivators train hard, but for what? For our own pursuit of martial dao, but also to protect our home and country! Isn’t it our goal to safeguard our homeland and loved ones? You haven’t been cultivating to fulfill a few men’s ambitions, have you?”

“How many corpses litter the path of their ambitions? How many have died needlessly? Have you thought about what will happen to your family after your death? Who will shed a tear for you before your grave?”

“Those ambitious men won’t cry a single drop for you!” Jiang Chen exclaimed with great passion. “And yet, you risk your life fighting for their cause. Is that fair?”

There wasn’t a swear or insult with his words, neither did he make any threats. And yet, they hit everyone where they were most tender. He was right. What exactly were they fighting tooth and nail for?

Had the sacred land not been a good leader?

The nation had been at peace under their rule. What purpose did the civil war serve? To fulfill the ambitions of the imperial family and House Xiahou?

Would the two factions do a better job than the sacred land? Given their behavior and track record, the answer was a vehement “no!”

The sacred land had at least given everyone a sense of security, which was more than the imperial family and House Xiahou could say.

“Nonsense! Someone kill that brat!” The emperor couldn’t stand listening to Jiang Chen stirring up the crowd. It was an open challenge to the imperial family’s authority!

“This subordinate volunteers!”

One of the imperial experts made his move. Two spears emerged in his hands with a twist of his arms and he stomped, propelling himself into the air to glide through the sky.

He was smart enough to recognize the power of the Vermilion Bird, and thus kept his distance to throw the spears at Jiang Chen at full force.

The spears streaked through the air like flashes of light, radiating killing intent. They were weapons of unparalleled might, only slightly short of the divine rank. One was of the yin element and the other, yang. When combined, their destructive power was absolutely astounding.

The spears’ power wasn’t at all diminished after leaving their wielder. The man was able to manipulate the spears like they were extensions of his arms.

The two spears morphed into dragon-like beasts before Jiang Chen and charged at him with their brandished claws.

The Vermilion Bird scoffed and spat two fireballs at the spears, as vibrantly red as the sun in the sky.

Caught by the fireballs, the two spear-beasts shrieked pitifully and spasmed as they scrambled to flee. However, the fireballs were faster and caught them, enveloping them in flames.

The two beasts shuddered and tumbled as pained, pitiful screeches rang through the sky.

Jiang Chen raised his Holy Dragon Bow and shot at the cultivator, who hastily dodged the vicious attack.

However, numerous vermilion feathers followed up the feathers and loomed in his eyes. The cultivator's pupils dilated violently as they pierced through his body.

Boom!

His existence was wiped out by the terrifying might.

Jiang Chen summoned the arrow back with a quick grasp and stored his bow on his back.

"Who wants to try next?" he threatened, expanding his Evil Golden Eye to its fullest and covering the land with his consciousness. That, on top of the Vermilion Bird's unrelenting presence, put him in a dominating position over everyone.

Lower level cultivators ducked their heads, too terrified to meet Jiang Chen's gaze. They weren't at a level to resist his eye art and aura.

Silence spread through the city. It was so quiet one could hear a pin drop.

"Your Majesty, is that the best your experts can do?" Jiang Chen smiled lazily. "The imperial family was only able to gain your status because of the sacred land's support. And yet you forget gratitude and repaid kindness with malice. Your days on the throne are numbered."

The emperor raged. "Crook! How dare you insult the imperial family?! Whoever kills this man will be rewarded handsomely with your own lands and faction!"

The imperial experts exchanged glances, but none volunteered.

They weren't afraid of Jiang Chen, but rather of the Vermilion Bird he was riding. The bird was so terrifyingly powerful that they didn't stand a chance against it. They'd be marching to their deaths even if they attacked together.

Forefather Calmdew had been powerful, but he'd died at the bird's hand as well.

The emperor flushed purple with anger at seeing how timid his men were. He hadn't expected the tide to turn so suddenly, putting them in such a dire situation. They'd been on track for victory just yesterday!

Jiang Chen smiled slightly as the emperor's air of superiority evaporated. "Most members of the alliance were tricked into joining by the imperial family and House Xiahou. According to the first prime's order, all factions will be pardoned for your crimes if you leave the alliance right now. If you insist on staying on the wrong side of history, we won't stop until we eliminate all of you."

The heads of each member faction were visibly conflicted.

They all recognized this as the sacred land's ploy to break the alliance, but no matter how obvious it was, they didn't have much of a choice other than walk straight into such a trap.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1815: The Alliance Crumbles

The first tempted was the head of the Starlight Sect. He had previously thought he was on a path of no return, but Jiang Chen's words changed his mind.

The imperial family and House Xiahou had failed to demonstrate complete superiority over the sacred land. Did the Starlight Sect really have to follow these losers to their demise?

It was almost as if Jiang Chen could see what the sect leader was thinking. "Sect Head," he smiled serenely, "Ah Hong from your sect was key to my infiltration. He's been displeased about the imperial family and House Xiahou's rebellion all along. He also told me of his peers being oppressed in the alliance.

"I can pardon the Starlight Sect's past offenses on the sacred land's behalf. As long as you and yours leave the alliance and cease aiding the forces of evil, the sacred land guarantees your safety. If you are willing to assist the sacred land in quelling this rebellion, you will be rewarded handsomely! Whether you are friend or foe is entirely up to you."

The Starlight Sect head tangibly felt the gazes around him turn strange. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. How could he not know that this solicitation was also a burning of his bridges?

The undertone of the young man's speech was that the Starlight Sect had been displeased for quite a while. Even if he didn't cut ties now, would the others continue to accept him?

There was no other choice for the sect. There was no other choice for him.

Men who became sect leaders were generally decisive. The head of the Starlight Sect grit his teeth, nodding. "The Starlight Sect is out! Sir Shao Yuan, please inform the first prime that though we have committed many grave misdeeds, we have also repented of our sins. We are henceforth an ally of the sacred land, willing to do whatever needed to redeem ourselves!"

There was a great outcry at this statement. Duke Xiaoyao was furious. "The Starlight Sect was a traitor from the start! Friends, how can we let these backstabbers live?"

"Yes, we can't let them leave so easily!" a supporter of House Xiahou chimed in.

However, many other factions were eerily quiet. They didn't partake in the clamor. Because the situation was still murky, everyone kept self-preservation at the top of their minds. Even if they didn't leave the alliance directly, they wanted to quietly observe any changes.

"House Beigong, House Feng, you're cannon fodder in this alliance as well. The first prime promises equal treatment with the Starlight Sect. As long as you renounce your past affiliation, you too will be granted clemency despite your conduct. Moreover, you are fully aware of what the sacred land can bring to bear. Today, I bring a warning, next time will be an army. You won't have the opportunity to escape the slaughter then!"

Even without the example of the Starlight Sect, these two houses were already quite dissatisfied at the heavy losses they'd been forced to sustain by the alliance. Jiang Chen's proposition was extremely attractive in light of that.

House Beigong's patriarch couldn't help but ask. "Sir Shao Yuan, do you represent the first prime?"

"I have been delegated that authority, yes," Jiang Chen replied coolly.

"Alright. If that's the case, House Beigong is out of the alliance as well. We head to the sacred land's aid! We've been thinking about it over the past few days ourselves. Perhaps the sacred land's rule is what's best for this nation. The other factions only have ambition without the ability to match!"

House Beigong took a parting shot at the imperial family and House Xiahou on their way out.

The departure of three first-rate factions caused the hearts of the others to waver as well. Clearly, the anti-sacred-land alliance had been drastically weakened.

The Jade Lake Sect head mused for a few moments before sighing. "Apologies, Your Majesty. After serious consideration, we believe this rebellion to be extremely odd and out of place. The Jade Lake Sect is out!"

That sect was on reasonably good terms with the imperial family, but had decided to leave regardless. The factions that remained became even more panicked. Among the three great sects, two had withdrawn. Of the seven houses, two as well.

Jiang Chen's eyes settled impassionedly on the House Yan patriarch.

"Patriarch Yan, it seems you're planning to follow House Xiahou to the bitter end. Is that correct?"

House Yan's patriarch shivered. He looked with mixed feelings at the young man aloft. The youth had been a genius of House Yan only a few years ago, but was now pointing fingers and issuing commands above them.

"Never mind, never mind," the Yan patriarch murmured. "I've made so many mistakes in the past, but I won't falter here. I'm out! House Yan is out!"

House Yan wasn't a particularly important member of the alliance in the first place, but it did serve as a first-rate representative as one of the seven great houses.

Now, five of the first-rate factions were solidly detached from the alliance.

Among the aristocracy, two hadn't rebelled in the first place. They maintained a neutral stance even now. Only two houses and the Cloudwave Sect remained with the rebels.

The Cloudwave Sect was a die-hard loyalist of House Xiahou. It wouldn't possibly betray its master. Nevertheless, its members began to fret about the disintegrating alliance.

"Cowards, one and all! Faithless curs!" Duke Xiaoyao was furious. "The alliance has two divine realm experts. We have full control of the situation. You are foolish, absolutely foolish, to leave now!"

"Everyone," the emperor called out as well, "I don't blame you for being temporarily tricked by this kid. As long as you take back your words now, I promise you won't be charged for them. Will the sacred land protect you in the future? When the two divines slay the sacred land's venerated forefather and return, what good will your numbers do? Do you dare stand against the gods?"

These words were rather intimidating to listen to.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Are you still making your final struggles, old man? The venerated forefather isn't someone that two initial divine cultivators can take down. They used underhanded methods to trap him in the first place, didn't they?"

"When the forefather recovers, he will have no problem breaking free. Perhaps your two divines won't even live to return. Moreover, this ancient Vermilion Bird beneath me is a god as well. So what if you have two divines? The venerated forefather and the Vermilion Bird are more than a match for them."

The young man's words were far more convincing than the emperor's. The leaders who had quit the rebellion readily agreed after some thought.

The forefathers of House Xiahou and the imperial family were strong, but they were definitely considerably weaker than the sacred land's venerated forefather. Adding on the Vermilion Bird, it was obvious which side would win.

"Sir Shao Yuan, we are willing to bow before the sacred land. We will not have another change of heart. If we betray the sacred land, let heaven and earth destroy us!" The leaders were wise enough to understand that their previous momentary hesitation might've led to Shao Yuan to think less of them for it. They swore oaths of loyalty immediately.

Jiang Chen laughed. "You are all important leaders of this nation, and will surely play an important part in maintaining its future. The nation needs you to run smoothly. The Eternal Sacred Land has no intentions to pursue everyone to the bitter end. If everyone else is dead, then what? The nation will be drastically weakened. What good would a sacred land by itself be? Therefore, don't worry. The sacred land's promise of a full pardon is genuine!"

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief at that. Jiang Chen's words strengthened their resolve.

"How long are you going to wallow in your idiotic stubbornness?" the Starlight Sect head loudly proclaimed. "Do you think the imperial family will let you grow as you are? What about House Xiahou? Wouldn't you threaten their positions then? I've thought it through already. We are the tools that will be discarded in time. The imperial family and House Xiahou want us to be exhausted as cannon fodder. They can seize power while we are weak, and then we will be powerless against anything they do!"

Loyalists aside, most of the first-rate factions had decided to exit the alliance. However, many second-rate factions hesitated about whether they wanted to stay.

They hadn't left yet only because they had their own ambitions. Once the first-rate factions were weakened, they intended to rise up as replacements. Every member of this coalition was here for selfish reasons.

"I know what you're thinking. You want to see the first-rate factions sacrifice everything they have in the fight against the sacred land. Then, you can rush in. It's a good idea, and some of you might even succeed. But don't forget: House Xiahou and the imperial family aren't charities. Do you think yourselves more capable of scheming than they?"

The Starlight Sect head channeled his frustrations into incitement.

“That’s enough from me. You see the sacred land’s strength and resourcefulness. Once this ancient Vermilion Bird strikes, the imperial family and House Xiahou’s experts can possibly escape. But what about you? How likely do you fancy yourselves getting out intact?”

Jiang Chen suddenly found the Starlight Sect head much more pleasing to the eye. He was a good deliverer of speeches.

“Ah, forget it. We’re out, too.”

“House Shangguan withdraws!”

“As does the White Tiger Mountain!”

“We’re all out of here!”

Second-rate factions were far more numerous than their first-rate brethren. Almost thirty of them announced their departures in the blink of an eye.

The emperor was as pale as a ghost. What he was seeing was a stinging blow to his ego.

What had been a superbly advantageous position had crumbled over a matter of minutes. He still couldn’t understand. How? Why??

Had it just been Shao Yuan who’d single-handedly turned the tide in Eternal Divine Nation?

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

Chapter 1816: When the Tree Falls, The Monkeys Will Scatter

It was said that a prominent figure’s departure from a group would cause a chain reaction. The imperial family and House Xiao had never felt the truth to the saying more keenly than they did so now.

The emperor and Duke Xiaoyao exchanged a silent look, their hearts bleeding as the major factions pulled out from the alliance. Everything seemed so surreal and detached from reality. How could things have taken such a wild, sudden turn?

Where had the Vermilion Bird come from?

Why had the assaulting army so suddenly collapse from the Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud?

Duke Xiaoyao believed that the house had taken effective measures to keep the poison’s recipe confidential. Only their core members and geniuses knew of it. How had the sacred land gotten ahold of the recipe?

Perhaps they’d never find the answers to those questions.

Once the tide turned, the sacred land’s credibility surpassed that of the imperial family’s. Factions of all scale and wandering cultivators around the capital opted to support the sacred land, putting the blame on the imperial family and House Xiahou.

Public opinions gradually converged. It became clear to everyone that the nation at large had become more chaotic as the war dragged on.

Countless innocent people had been killed in crossfire. The nation's order had been falling apart as well. Cases of fatal robberies grew exponentially.

All signs pointed to the fact that they'd been better served under the sacred land's rule. Back then, there had been little in the way of pleasant surprises, but at least the world hadn't been as nightmarish as it was now.

People had been living under daily terror since the uprising. They were helpless and directionless. The disparity was telling. Only now did they reminisce what was good about the sacred land and how they'd taken things for granted.

"Your Majesty, we must come up with a solution. Things can't end like this. All our hard work will have been for nothing." Duke Xiaoyao spoke gravely.

Only a quarter of the original members remained in the alliance, half of which were loyal supporters of the imperial family and House Xiahou. The other half were still weighing their options. They only remained because they had an ingrained fear of the two leading factions.

Jiang Chen wasn't going to waste his time trying to persuade them. He knew they were either too stubborn or too devoted, and could only be defeated, not persuaded.

The alliance had been able to suppress the sacred land for so long not because of the imperial family and House Xiahou's superior power, but the momentum they'd gained.

Previously, the alliance's domineering appearance had given them an edge. Their momentum allowed them to keep the sacred land at bay and attract more and more members.

Now, the tide had been turned and the alliance was falling apart. They were as good as doomed both in terms of their power and the impetus driving them forward.

Therefore, Jiang Chen didn't intend to waste his breath. His frigid gaze swept through the crowd beneath him. "It seems you've decided to stay on the sinking ship that is House Xiahou and the imperial family. Don't blame the sacred land for being merciless then. Since you refuse to budge, the sacred land will not show you mercy."

His words were effective. A few more factions hesitantly left the alliance. The emperor's eyes blazed with fury, but there was nothing he could do.

"Your Majesty, things aren't looking good for us," transmitted Duke Xiaoyao. "The sacred land was able to turn things around solely because of Shao Yuan and the Vermilion Bird. If we can eliminate the pair, we still stand a chance of coming out on top."

"Eliminate them? How?" The emperor was more eager to kill Jiang Chen than Duke Xiaoyao was. It was deeply regrettable that such a remarkable genius didn't belong to the imperial family!

If he'd been theirs, the alliance would have gained a clear upper hand or even conquered the sacred land already.

"We have to do it ourselves. We must gather all elites from both our factions and launch a counterattack with the help of the palace's great formation." Duke Xiaoyao continued, "It seems that

the Vermilion Bird's strength is still at a demigod's level, which is our only chance to defeat it. If it becomes a real god, it'll be so powerful we may not even survive a fight with it, let alone rival it."

"It's common knowledge that even as a demigod, a descendant of the four divine beasts can rival a divine cultivator," the emperor sighed. He couldn't help but wonder if it was fate that the sacred land would rise again.

"At least we still stand a chance against it, Your Majesty. If we let the bird continue to grow and ascend to divinity, it'll become an unstoppable force. No matter how slim our odds are, we have to give it a try. Otherwise, we'll have no choice but to call the two divine realm seniors back."

If they did that, the sacred land's venerated forefather would be set free. So that wasn't an option. They had to depend on themselves to forge a way out.

But before they could reach a conclusion, Jiang Chen was already poised to victoriously report back to the sacred land.

"Your Majesty, Duke Xiaoyao, the two of you are the sinners who brought disaster upon the nation. I'd even venture to call you sinners. You've committed too many atrocities to be redeemed. Better be prepared for the sword of justice to claim your lives!

"The rest of you, listen up! We'll be merciful to you, but if you insist on helping these two tyrants, we won't hesitate to execute you as well."

He tried to sway the alliance further even with his parting words. The imperial family might be a unified whole, but survival was every cultivator's priority. There would be those willing to stick with the alliance when faced with great danger even at the risk of their lives, but not everyone.

Jiang Chen's words were the straw that broke the camel's back. Soon, the palace fell into complete chaos.

The good news that Jiang Chen had torn the alliance apart with the first prime's order reached the sacred land. Morale was high and a strong sense of relief permeated the air.

They weren't afraid, but they were sick of the killings.

The relationship between the major factions of the divine nation was complicated. Take the sacred land as an example, many of its members had been recruited from the other major factions. They might be loyal to the sacred land, but they couldn't completely abandon their familial bond.

After all, blood still spoke loudly in the end.

If there was a way to peacefully resolve the war, they'd chose that over fighting, anyway.

The imperial family and House Xiahou panicked when they realized the alliance was about to disband, while the sacred land was thrilled.

The three primes made a collective statement to the entire nation, declaring the imperial family and House Xiahou as the culprits of the uprising. The rest of the factions could be pardoned as long as they took action to atone for their crimes, and they would be rewarded accordingly.

At the same time, the sacred land called for the factions to put aside their biases so that this conflict could be ended for the greater good.

Lastly, the sacred land declared that it was going to launch a comprehensive counterattack against the alliance. All factions seeking atonement must declare war against the imperial family and House Xiahou.

It was merely a demonstration of loyalty. Both the imperial family and House Xiahou had been considerably crippled. The deaths of Forefather Calmdew and Xiahou Zhen had taken a heavy toll on them, and the two divine realm forefathers couldn't come to their aid.

Although they still had a few devoted supporters left, they were clearly at a disadvantage. It was no exaggeration to call them helpless and weak.

After the sacred land made the statement, factions that supported them rejoiced. Meanwhile, some former members of the alliance changed their tune and declared the imperial family and House Xiahou persona non grata.

The situation was reversed completely in only a few days.

"First Prime, the imperial family and House Xiahou are at their weakest. It's time for us to strike them down. Otherwise, things may change after their divine realm forefathers return. As long as we take out the emperor and Duke Xiaoyao, the two factions will lose their direction."

"That's right. For the imperial family, especially, their experts are bound to flee after the emperor dies. On the other hand, House Xiahou won't go down without a fight due to their heritage. Our biggest problem at the moment is the latter rather than the former."

"House Xiahou may be difficult to eliminate, but once Duke Xiaoyao is killed, none of the others will be much of a threat."

"Please give the order, First Prime!"

"Hear, hear! Please give the order now!"

The first prime was thoughtful. "Since you're all so driven, this seat isn't going to rain on your parade. Besides, it's wise to eliminate our enemies once and for all before they can regroup. Get ready, everyone. I'll lead the charge tomorrow morning against the two treacherous factions!"

"Exterminate the traitors!"

"Crush House Xiahou and the imperial family!"

"All hail the mighty and everlasting sacred land!"

The cultivators were in high spirits. They'd been suppressed for so long. Finally, it was their chance to strike back. They'd pay the alliance back double for the humiliation and torment inflicted on them!

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

Chapter 1817: The Imperial Family Destroys, House Xiahou Remains Stubborn

Now that the spirit herb vault was back in the sacred land's grasp, the second prime's wounds were quickly treated. After hearing the decisive turn that Jiang Chen had effected, the recuperating prime

discarded any lingering suspicions he might have harbored. Now, more than ever, he realized the true extent of the young man's capabilities.

Under the command of the sacred land, the other factions pointed their spears against the rebels after a brief respite.

In only a few days, the counter-insurgent army swept through the capital and surrounded it. Though the imperial family had a few true believers left, many of their past adherents turned against them because of the way things were heading. Only the most rabid of supporters still resisted.

Because of this, the imperial family's resistance was largely pointless. The palace fell in less than half a day.

The emperor struggled vainly with the protection of a few of his most loyal men, but he managed to do nothing of consequence. He planned to sneak out of the capital in disguise, but the city was completely surrounded. Moreover, too many pairs of eyes were on him.

Before he could even attempt an escape, he was reported on and captured by the sacred land's experts.

The imprisonment of the emperor was the heaviest blow yet to the anti-sacred-land alliance. The factions that had wanted to fight tooth and nail no longer had any spirit to do so. Even the emperor had been captured, so was anything they did of any consequence?

One of the two major factions in the rebel alliance was broken. Only House Xiahou remained, which commanded far greater forces than the imperial family. After all, its gradual development over so many years had made it capable of threatening the sacred land somewhat. There had to be something to back that up.

Though it had suffered painful losses in several of the prior conflicts, House Xiahou's core had remained intact. It still possessed formidable forces with which to fight.

The sacred land wasn't going to repeat the mistake of the rebel alliance. It knew the value of uprooting weeds. Moreover, it wasn't going to attempt to selfishly exhaust its opponent using cannon fodder. Instead, the venerated forefather led the charge.

Jiang Chen and the Vermilion Bird were part of the main force as well.

He had little interest in fighting the imperial family, but greatly enjoyed wiping out House Xiahou. His past enmity with the house meant that he would be satisfied only with its extermination. If he didn't, it would seek revenge sooner or later.

Nipping an undeveloped problem in the bud was the best solution.

House Xiahou had the Cloudwave Sect and another first-rate house as its staunch supporters, thus it possessed the robust combat strength of three first-rate factions. The collected company was a good match for the Eternal Sacred Land.

However, other factions had joined the sacred land in quelling the rebellion.

Because of their past misdeeds, the former rebel factions wanted to contribute meritoriously. Their previous hostility to House Xiahou only added fuel to the fire. Thus, they displayed an incredibly intense desire to fight. House Xiahou was put under a lot of pressure.

Its bases of operations were eradicated one by one. The Cloudwave Sect and the other supporting house were forced to withdraw to House Xiahou's main headquarters. Though not as impregnable as the sacred land, it was nevertheless a well-reinforced fortress. Terrain and formations combined made it difficult to attack.

However, more and more men and experts gathered outside it as time passed – so much so that the sacred land and its allies now outnumbered House Xiahou three to one.

Face to face on the field of battle, House Xiahou wouldn't be able to last more than a few moments.

Alas, the security of its headquarters allowed it to gasp for a few more breaths.

No man within House Xiahou's headquarters was in a good mood. This was a far cry from what they'd felt a short while ago. Before this, they had been at a clear advantage in their encirclement of the sacred land. As such, they'd been completely at ease.

Now they were the ones surrounded and disadvantaged. There seemed to be no way out from their predicament, and whether or not they could keep up their futile struggle was yet to be seen.

The scariest thing was that the pendulum was swinging the other way. When fate had been on their side, the rebel alliance had been ragtag and loose at best due to disagreements over profits. Therefore, it had never been able to effect its full strength.

The sacred land's counterattack was different. Since all the factions had been ruled by the sacred land originally, they possessed a natural fear for it.

Furthermore, the sacred land led by example, placing itself on the very front lines. That lent its words more credibility. It was thus able to concentrate its allies' forces much more capably than the rebel alliance had.

"Your Grace, I don't think we can keep defending this fortress. As sturdy as it might be, our soldiers' morale will suffer. Not everyone can keep their fighting spirit roused in these trying times. If pessimism fills our ranks, they might just turn on us by letting in the sacred land's army. We can't just ignore that possibility."

The Cloudwave Sect head was the speaker here. He regretted his involvement with House Xiahou as much as anybody. What had he gotten out of the deal? He'd lost his home and heritage, and was now hemmed into House Xiahou's final holding.

What had he gone to so much trouble for?

The Cloudwave sect leader was somewhat hesitant still. He had heard of the sacred land's declaration that only the imperial family and House Xiahou were found culpable. Their accomplices had a chance of atoning through service.

Thus, he had the discreet notion of stabbing House Xiahou in the back.

The choice between life and death was extremely difficult, but it had to be made nevertheless.

The Cloudwave Sect and House Xiahou were on incredibly close terms. He was loathe to contemplate betraying House Xiahou just yet.

Honestly, the sect head was in great turmoil. He wanted to hear whether House Xiahou had any plans for self-preservation.

If House Xiahou had any bit of hope left, he would be willing to follow it wherever it headed. It was less likely that the Cloudwave Sect would be forgiven if he were to plead with the sacred land now. More importantly, would it even be trusted given its closeness with House Xiahou? Would it be accepted without issue?

All of these were unknowns.

Duke Xiaoyao gazed thoughtfully at the Cloudwave Sect head. "Brother Yun, what do you think? Speak your mind. We should gather our wits and pool our resources to get through this ordeal."

As he said this, he glanced toward the patriarch of the other house under his command. "Ole Brother Tian, that goes for you too. I'm willing to listen to and try out any piece of good advice."

House Tian's patriarch sighed. "I hear that the imperial family has fallen. The only thing that'll get us out of this bind is if the two divine forefathers return."

The Cloudwave Sect head nodded in agreement. "Yes, that is the only way we can turn the tables. Our strength alone will not suffice."

Duke Xiaoyao let out a long sigh. After witnessing the Vermilion Bird's overbearing strength, he knew their methods were limited. Moreover, there remained the three primes to contend with. The first prime, for example, was at least as strong as he.

Duke Xiaoyao was a powerful expert, but he couldn't guarantee a win against the leader of the sacred land.

As if that wasn't bad enough, he felt virtually powerless before the Vermilion Bird. At least he could maneuver around the first prime as he liked!

In fact, the heads of all three factions added together wouldn't necessarily be able to defeat the divine spirit creature.

The bird was of the lineage of one of the Four Divine Beasts, and had come into the fullness of its own strength. Perhaps only House Xiahou's divine forefather would be able to overcome such an existence.

They were too mortal to want to attempt the incredible feat.

"Your Grace, there shouldn't be a problem if the two forefathers leave the sacred land momentarily, should there? As long as they quickly crush the sacred land's counterattack, that Vermilion Bird, and the three primes, we will be in a favorable position once more. Threatened with death, those traitors will betray the sacred land again. If you're not happy with that, you can kill a few of them. The Starlight Sect, for example..."

The Starlight Sect had publicly renounced all affiliation with House Xiahou. Making an example of a faction like that was ideal.

Duke Xiaoyao furrowed his brow. He knew that the two divine forefathers could reverse the situation. But wouldn't they be here already if they had the freedom to do so?

The fact that they hadn't returned meant that the sacred land's venerated forefather was significantly harder to seal away than they had previously thought. It was possible the two forefathers themselves were in trouble.

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

Chapter 1818: Two Great Forefathers

Duke Xiaoyao was in a bind.

Without the two divine forefathers, could House Xiahou's fortress really hold? Despite his customary arrogance, the duke wasn't be optimistic about his chances.

"You must make a decision, Your Grace," the Tian patriarch urged.

The Cloudwave Sect head nodded as well. "Please do. We need to tell the two forefathers about what happened here, at least. They don't even know about any of it, right?"

"Yes, the matter is too important to ignore. The two forefathers must be informed immediately. What decision they make with the information is up to them," the Tian patriarch affirmed.

Evidently, the two men didn't believe that House Xiahou could effect much change on its own – only the two divine experts could do that.

Duke Xiaoyao guessed at what his two supporters were thinking. If he refused their suggestion, even these two would waver. The situation was too dire to allow for much else.

After musing a few moments, he nodded. "Alright, I will send a message to the two forefathers. Perhaps they have a plan to preserve the war."

"That would be ideal," said the Cloudwave Sect head.

"The sooner the better. Why not do so right now? We're surrounded, so we need to use a secret method, but..."

Duke Xiaoyao smiled coolly. He had the secret method: a communication formation. That was nothing special here on Myriad Abyss. Using a formation to contact an individual rather than a location was somewhat more difficult, but it was no problem at all for House Xiahou.

"Come with me, gentlemen."

The duke brought the two other leaders near a formation that belonged to his house. It was very well hidden on the house's territory. He activated it by pouring in his consciousness, reaching out for House Xiahou's forefather gradually.

House Xiahou's forefather was somewhat stronger than the imperial family's, and the main force behind the sealing of the sacred land's venerated forefather. The other was merely his assistant.

In no time at all, the formation flared to life and established a link.

In some region elsewhere in Myriad Abyss, the forefather of House Xiahou was channeling all his energy into perfecting a sealing formation.

He and the imperial family's forefather had taken turns constructing this seal for the past while. Within was the sacred land's venerated forefather, as well as several empyrean realm elders.

The formation had been specially set up by the Xiahou forefather as an ambush for the sacred land's venerated forefather.

He had observed the sacred land forefather's activities secretly for centuries, taking almost that long to figure out a pattern. He'd chosen a route that the sacred land forefather always took to create and execute a successful trap.

Alas, he couldn't kill the forefather outright. Instead, the sealing formation had to be gradually reinforced in order to keep the sacred land forefather inside. The sacred land forefather's strength would be drained over a long period, while they could refuel and swap out each other to rest anytime. The only thing they sacrificed was some extra time.

Even so, the two forefathers found it quite stressful to maintain the seal. The sacred land's venerated forefather was far too strong. There had already been several instances of the seal nearly failing to hold against his breakout attempts.

They'd barely managed to keep the forefather inside the formation, but at considerable cost to themselves. Their prisoner could escape at any time – a result they simply could not sustain.

Once he did, they would no longer be able to stand against him. In fact, it was quite likely they would be hunted down themselves.

In a fair fight, the two forefathers added together was no match for the sacred land's forefather. If the latter didn't have such an overwhelming advantage in personal strength, he wouldn't have taken the anti-sacred-land alliance so lightly in the first place.

"Daoist Xiahou, the old man from the sacred land is rather tenacious. He won't yield after all the time we've exerted him. He's an obstinate, stinking antique." The divine forefather of the imperial family sighed to remark.

"Hmph, some struggling in the face of death is understandable. If you were able to kill him easily, would you feel at ease?" the Xiahou forefather harrumphed.

"Quite so. If they killed him easily, I would suspect he was a fake."

"Exactly," nodded the Xiahou forefather.

"I wonder how things are in the capital? Strange. In the past, the imperial family and House Xiahou would message us about their progress. How come they've been totally silent over the past few days? I don't know why, but I feel somewhat uneasy."

"Oh?" The Xiahou forefather blinked. "You're restless as well?"

“Are you the same way, Daoist Xiahou?” the imperial forefather was shocked.

The Xiahou forefather’s expression became conflicted. “Perhaps we’ve stayed here for too long, wrapped in anxiety. Didn’t they say they would launch a penultimate assault on the sacred land a few days ago? The alliance has more than enough strength to succeed on that front. Even if they suffer some minor setbacks at first, they’ll tear down the sacred land’s defenses sooner or later by piling on the pressure.”

“I hope so. If they succeed, there should be news of it soon enough, yes?” The imperial forefather hoped for a lucky turn of events still.

Suddenly, something registered on the Xiahou forefather’s consciousness. He opened his palm to materialize a message glyph.

The forefather’s brows unfurled when he noticed the energy upon it. “Look, fresh news. The sacred land’s down, then? There’s no more cause for concern.”

The imperial forefather was overjoyed. “Very good, very good! We didn’t work in vain. As long as we can exhaust the sacred land’s forefather to death, our plan will be fulfilled to great perfection.”

“Yes. Let’s see what they have to say in the message. I’m curious as to the details of the battles.” The Xiahou forefather activated the message glyph and began to read. His face froze as soon as his eyes passed over the characters.

“Dear forefathers, the alliance is divided, the sacred land mounts a counterattack, House Xiahou is in danger? Imperial family fallen, only Cloudwave and House Tian left, defending House Xiahou’s headquarters...”

Duke Xiaoyao was the author of the description within. The Xiahou forefather was utterly bewildered.

Hadn’t they organized a large-scale attack just a few days ago? Didn’t they have the advantage? How come the tide had turned in the blink of an eye?

“Shao Yuan? A vermilion bird? House Xiahou’s Soulless Powder of Wind and Cloud was used on the day of the attack to take out a huge number of cultivators? The bird slew Xiahou Zhen and Forefather Calmdew on the spot?”

The divine forefathers almost suspected that the news they held was false.

“Could the message be fabricated by an enemy, Daoist Xiahou?”

“Impossible! This message glyph is connected to House Xiahou’s communication formation. Without our secret method, it is impossible to send the message in the first place,” the Xiahou forefather replied with certainty.

“That’s odd, then.” The imperial family’s forefather paled. “The imperial family has been eradicated? Even ole brother Calmdew is dead? How... how can this be?”

“The vermilion bird is an ancient sacred beast. Since when did Eternal Divine Nation have one of those?” House Xiahou’s forefather couldn’t quite accept the news he’d received either. He was totally perplexed.

“No, I have to go back. I can’t stay much longer here, Daoist Xiahou. No wonder I was disquieted the past two days!” The imperial family’s forefather panicked.

If the imperial family was wiped out, what would his efforts here mean? Even if he could take out the sacred land’s venerated forefather, he would be utterly alone in the world.

“Foolish! In returning, you are walking right into a trap! It’s extremely likely that they’re lying in wait for you right now.” House Xiahou’s forefather didn’t want to lose his comrade, as profit-driven as their relationship was.

Right now, he couldn’t afford to lose the help. If he did, he would absolutely be unable to maintain the seal. If the sacred land forefather made another counterattack, wouldn’t that cost him everything?

Once the venerated forefather was freed, they would be sent right back to the drawing board. Their rebellion would also end in complete failure. The only thing that awaited afterwards was the judgment of fate.

“You won’t make it in time even if you return now, fellow daoist. Why not stay here and slay the venerated forefather? We can turn the tide again then!” the Xiahou forefather advised patiently.

“Hmph, what good would it do me to remain here if the imperial bloodline is terminated? What’s the point of killing him then? I’d be an old man without any attachments to the world. Daoist Xiahou, your house is mean indeed. Why did no one rush to the imperial family’s aid when it was attacked? A brood of vipers, the lot of you! The imperial family has been thoroughly tricked this time!”

The Xiahou forefather fumed. “What’s the point of saying these stupid words now? Your decision will only please your enemies! Shall you embrace cowardice after the sacred land ends your bloodline? If you leave now, you’ll accomplish nothing on either end. What good would it do you to leave?”

The imperial forefather was not receptive to such reasoning. “If I stay, only House Xiahou stands to benefit,” he glared at the Xiahou forefather coldly. “If House Xiahou didn’t help in the imperial family’s hour of need, then you shouldn’t blame me for being callous. House Xiahou can figure out another solution!”

After saying this, he leaped into the air and flew away.

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

Chapter 1819: The Vermilion Bird Flourishes Its Migh

Forefather Xiahou couldn’t believe that the imperial forefather would just leave like that.

“Wait, fellow daoist!” His attempt to stop the imperial forefather was met with resounding silence. The man didn’t even turn around.

Forefather Xiahou’s heart sank. Without the other forefather’s help, it was next to impossible for him to maintain the sealing formation on his own. If the sacred land’s forefather escaped, the Xiahou forefather would be the first to fall victim. The sacred land’s forefather was much more powerful than he was.

He was beside himself with anger, but there was nothing he could do. Staring at the formation, he agonized over his options. Should he retreat, or stay to hang doggedly on??

He'd already been anxious when receiving Duke Xiaoyao's message. He also wasn't sure what was happening inside the formation now. Had the forefather been tormented within an inch of his life? Had he died? There was no way to tell.

If he left and gave the forefather a chance to recover, the latter would break free, and all their hard work would've been for nothing.

But if he stayed trying to maintain the formation on his own, he might exhaust himself. More importantly, House Xiahou was in great danger. If he didn't go to their rescue quickly, they'd fall under prolonged siege as well.

He was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Forefather Xiahou came to a decision after some deliberation. "I won't last long on my own here. If the forefather rises again, I'll only get myself killed. I might as well hurry back to the family and strike down the sacred land to resolve our crisis. Once things settle down, I'll recruit the help of divine cultivators from other nations."

He knew it wouldn't do much good for him to stay here if the forefather could escape. He spent some time reinforcing the formation before making his way to the capital without a glance backwards.

He burned with anxiety. The threat against House Xiahou intensified by the minute. He couldn't say for sure how long his clan could prevail under the sacred land's attack.

Not long after the Xiahou forefather departed, the sacred land's forefather frail form inside the formation wavered as he expanded his consciousness. The two divine cultivators had left the formation!

What an absolutely delightful and unexpected turn of events!

During the time in which he was trapped, his subordinate elders had been tormented and killed by the formation, leaving only him still standing. He had a feeling that he'd be met with the same fate after three to five months.

Unexpectedly, his captors had left his goal. As a result, the pressure on him ceased to increase.

"What's going on? They wouldn't have left without a reason. Has something changed about the situation in the sacred land?"

In order to preserve his strength, the forefather had turned a blind eye to the happenings outside, which was also why it took him some time to notice the two forefathers' departure.

"Is this a ploy, perhaps?" He considered the possibility, but dismissed it after some consideration.

It didn't make sense for them to trick him, not at this stage. As long as they continued to broil him through the formation, he'd deplete his strength sooner or later. His instinct as an expert told him something must've gone wrong for them to take off at such a critical juncture.

He'd made up his mind. No matter what they were trying to do, he had to seize the opportunity to recover his strength and break through the formation as soon as possible!

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Meanwhile, the three primes and the heads of each faction were gathered before House Xiahou's home base.

The first prime gazed at the fort and declared gravely, "House Xiahou makes for a formidable foe, but their fort isn't impenetrable. Their defense can't keep us out forever. Let us work together on our respective tasks and break through their defenses as quickly as possible!"

"Break in, break in!"

Morale was high and everyone was eager. The Vermilion Bird soared into the sky first, leaving a sea of fire in its wake, vibrant and tremendous.

Whoosh! True fire came out of its beak on the exhale, raining rain of flames on House Xiahou's fort.

A din of screams and wails rang out from within. Even the stone walls and structures burned. A brief contact with the fire was enough to reduce cultivators into ash.

The Vermilion Bird was as strong as a god after all. It could easily slaughter everyone with its full power. It was capable of greater destruction than anyone from the sacred land.

The first prime was both intimidated and relieved as she witnessed the bird's might.

"It's fortunate that the bird is Shao Yuan's friend, and therefore on our side. Otherwise we would've been defeated by the alliance," she sighed inwardly. The divine beast was the key to turning things around.

She hadn't been there when the bird killed Xiahou Zhen and Forefather Calmdew. Now, with her own two eyes, she saw how powerful the bird was and how integral it was to their victory.

The bird's fire blotted out the sky above the fort, surrounding House Xiahou's home base and raining down an ocean of flames upon them.

"What's wrong? What's the commotion about?" A surprised Duke Xiaoyao looked upwards and spotted the vermilion bird's demonstration of its prowess.

"The Vermilion Bird's struck again! We've underestimated that feathered bastard's lust for blood!"

Duke Xiaoyao knew how powerful the bird was, but it still surprised him that it was able to break into their fortified stronghold. Although the walls had kept most of the fire out, even the slightest crack was enough to let the flames through.

"Your Grace, that feathered bird is a great threat! We must find a way to stop it, or people will panic under its relentless attack!"

"Your Grace, we mustn't take the hit without doing anything!"

Duke Xiaoyao huffed. "So? Do you expect people at my level to risk our lives fighting the bird?"

Perseverance seemed to be their only option if even their fort couldn't stop the sacred land.

"If any of you have a solution, feel free to speak up. You'll be rewarded as long as your proposal is sound." This was a difficult time. He knew rewards were the only way to motivate people.

“This subordinate has an idea, Your Grace, but I’m not sure if it’ll work.”

“Go on.” Duke Xiaoyao glanced at him. It was one of their elders who wasn’t particularly valued within the family.

“Your Grace, Shao Yuan is an emotional man who has fought hard for a woman. He wouldn’t have considered us his enemies if not for Yan Qinghuang.”

“So what?” Duke Xiaoyao asked in a low voice.

“Why don’t we exploit that weakness of his and try to appease him with a marriage? Xiahou Zong’s sister Xiahou Ying is both beautiful and talented. Wouldn’t she be a good candidate?”

Duke Xiaoyao’s expression clouded. “Xiahou Ying? Do you think she’ll cooperate after Shao Yuan killed her brother?”

The elder sighed. “Her opinions are insignificant when the entire family is at stake.”

“Even if Xiahou Ying is willing, Shao Yuan may not be. I hear that she made an offer to Shao Yuan before, but he never accepted it. He was clearly hostile to her then. This is unlikely to work.” Duke Xiaoyao shook his head. He didn’t think that was a good idea.

“Your Grace, we won’t know until we try. The family is in great danger. We can’t afford to waste any time. This subordinate volunteers to seek Shao Yuan out and try to convince him. As long as Shao Yuan gives us some leeway by telling the Vermilion Bird to hold back, we’ll be able to survive!”

Duke Xiaoyao considered the elder carefully and asked seriously, “Your enthusiasm is appreciated, but are you sure you can sway Shao Yuan?”

“This subordinate will do my best,” promised the elder with confidence.

Duke Xiaoyao mused in silence. The plan was unlikely to work, but if it did, it’d be great news for the clan. They’d get some breathing space as long as the bird held back even by a little.

Without the bird’s help, it’d take a long time for the sacred land to break into House Xiahou’s fort.

“There’s no reason to hesitate, Your Grace. Shao Yuan started out as a wandering cultivator and he hasn’t been in the sacred land for long. I don’t believe that he is truly devoted to them. At the end of the day, material gain is all that matters. As long as we give him enough incentives, he will talk to us.

“Even if the negotiation fails, it won’t do us any harm to drive a wedge between him and the sacred land.” The elder made some convincing arguments.

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

Chapter 1820: Tempting With Benefits

Duke Xiaoyao didn’t hesitate for too long before he nodded. “Alright, I leave the negotiation with Shao Yuan in your hands. Xiahou Ying won’t be a problem. You’re authorized to give away some of the clan’s treasure at your discretion. House Xiahou will do our best to satisfy his needs!”

He didn’t have much of a choice. If he could get Shao Yuan to spare them by sacrificing some of their own interests, he wouldn’t hesitate to do so.

His bone-deep hatred for the genius made him want to devour the man's flesh and blood, but right now, he had to think with his head rather than his heart.

As one of the top factions in Eternal Divine Nation, House Xiahou had an amazing horde of resources and treasure. They could afford to give some of it away.

The elder visibly brightened once Duke Xiaoyao approved of his plan. "Don't worry, Your Grace. This subordinate won't disappoint you. I'll be back with good news."

"If you accomplish this task, we'll make sure to reward you when the time comes," promised Duke Xiaoyao.

The elder went off with his orders and located Jiang Chen in no time. The Vermilion Bird was taking some time to recuperate after a round of attacks, which had left House Xiahou's fortress severely damaged. The fort still stood, but its integrity had been compromised.

"Young master Chen, House Xiahou is the real deal. Even with my relentless and powerful attacks, I've failed to destroy the outer walls of the fort. I've only damaged them. All of us have to work together to break through their defenses."

The Vermilion Bird didn't have a habit of complimenting others. Thus, it meant its praises to House Xiahou.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "The fact that House Xiahou managed to stage an uprising and almost succeed proves their foundation to be solid."

"True. However, they're still somewhat lacking in the way they hold themselves, when compared to the sacred land."

At this moment, something triggered Jiang Chen's consciousness. He spotted a person sneaking past layers of defenses and entering his area.

"Brother Vermilion, would you please get that man for me?"

In a flash, the bird caught the man and brought him before Jiang Chen.

"I am here on the duke's orders to seek you out, Sir Shao Yuan."

"The duke? You meant Duke Xiaoyao?" Jiang Chen was surprised. What was there for the Xiahou patriarch to talk to him about?

"Please hear me out, Sir Shao Yuan. Our patriarch greatly admires your talent and cultivation. He told me that he'd like to offer you Xiahou Ying and some wealth as part of a deal with you."

"What deal?" Jiang Chen asked with a half-smile.

"As long as you can get Senior Vermilion to pull away from the battle and thus spare House Xiahou, our patriarch will willingly offer you our clan's treasure."

"Tsk, since when was House Xiahou so generous?"

“It’s not a matter of generosity. The duke simply recognizes it’s time to cut our losses. He knows that once House Xiahou falls, all of our possessions will become the sacred land’s anyway. They’re better served as leverage for us to cut a deal with you.”

Jiang Chen smiled and didn’t immediately respond.

The elder continued at a deliberate pace, “Sir Shao Yuan, you weren’t born and raised in the sacred land. I’m sure someone as talented as you won’t covet its heritage. Besides, do you really think the sacred land will fully trust an outsider like one of their own? Will they really be willing to pass the torch to you one day?”

“We all have to think for ourselves. You’ve made great contributions to the sacred land, but what have they done for you in return?”

The elder had a silver tongue. He was able to identify the key points and make all the right arguments. If Jiang Chen was a regular genius, he would’ve entertained some possibilities, if not been outright tempted.

But he was no ordinary man. Not only wasn’t he tempted at all, the offer was a colossal joke to him. The look in his eyes was amused as he gazed back at the elder.

“I’ve disrupted many of your plans already,” Jiang Chen smirked. “Doesn’t Duke Xiaoyao hold a grudge?”

“There is no permanent enemy in the world, just a permanent pursuit of profit. House Xiahou is the only faction that can pose a threat to the sacred land within this nation, Sir Shao Yuan. If we fall, leaving the sacred land the authoritarian ruler, they are bound to change. Are you sure you will always be the young genius they value the most? Are you sure you’ll receive the best resources?”

“No permanent enemy, huh? It seems House Xiahou is going to make me a very generous offer.”

“Yes, we are. Whatever you wish for, we’ll give it to you.”

“Is that so?” Jiang Chen smiled. “What if I want Duke Xiaoyao’s head?”

The elder’s smile dropped and his pupils contracted violently. “Why must you be this stubborn, Sir Shao Yuan?”

“Why do you think?” Jiang Chen asked in lieu of a response.

“You’ve done everything possible and improbable for the sacred land. Isn’t it time for you to be a little selfish? Are you willing to let all of House Xiahou’s treasures become the sacred land’s property after you conquer us for them? Don’t you want to earn a little something for yourself?”

“Ha, I’ll fight for what I want on my own. Go back and tell Duke Xiaoyao that neither coercion nor bribery work on me.”

“Sir Shao Yuan...”

Jiang Chen’s expression darkened. “Enough! I’ll spare you this time. Get out of here and tell Duke Xiaoyao that House Xiahou may keep your possessions for now. I’ll go get them myself later. There’s no need for him to offer them as gifts.”

A peaceful resolution was impossible between Jiang Chen and House Xiahou. He'd never show mercy to this clan.

Noting his determination, the elder sighed and went away empty-handed.

Not long after that, a messenger from the sacred land came knocking. The elder from House Xiahou had come discreetly, but he hadn't escaped the sacred land's attention.

"Sir Shao Yuan, the first prime has summoned you to discuss an important matter."

Jiang Chen snorted. He knew he had to eliminate any suspicion within the sacred land at a time like this. He nodded. "Let's go."

As he expected, the first prime had been informed of the Xiahou elder's visit. She was surprised to see Jiang Chen bring it up of his own accord.

"House Xiahou is making its desperate, final struggles," she sighed. "I didn't expect them to play such a trick and try to drive a wedge between us. This seat trusts you with my whole heart, Shao Yuan. You wouldn't have joined us back then if you were willing to make peace with House Xiahou. I didn't summon you to question you, but to protect you."

"Protect me?" Jiang Chen was puzzled.

"You've been on a dramatic rise lately and you're now our poster boy. Enemies see you as their biggest obstacle. The elder visited you in secret seemingly to strike a deal with you, which is in itself an attempt to fracture us. They may have known beforehand that they wouldn't be able to buy you, but they can use the opportunity to undermine your reputation and make us suspect you. Once the doubt drives us apart, House Xiahou will have a fighting chance."

Jiang Chen considered her explanation.

"Don't worry, First Prime. I won't be swayed even if all of House Xiahou's treasure is put before me. There will be no peace between me and House Xiahou."

The first prime breathed out in relief at Jiang Chen's resolute promise. She'd said she didn't doubt him, but deep inside her heart, she was still a little worried.

The young man was on track to greatness, but he'd only joined the sacred land not too long ago. What if he was tempted by House Xiahou's offer?

Fortunately, he was more strong-willed than she'd expected. In that case, it'd be unreasonable of her to be too stingy with her rewards.

"Shao Yuan, once we break into the fort, you and the Vermilion Bird will be considered the top contributors," she promised. "You may have first pick from the House Xiahou vaults. What do you think?"

No reassurance or promises spoke louder than material rewards. Jiang Chen's eyes lit up. He knew what the first prime meant.

"I accept your generosity with great respect." He trusted the first prime to honor her promise.

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The elder returned to House Xiahou, dejected. Duke Xiaoyao could tell that negotiations must have failed.

“Your Grace, Shao Yuan is as stubborn as a mule. He wasn’t willing to listen at all. My apologies for my incompetence!”

Duke Xiaoyao huffed. “Forget it. I’d look down on him if he was able to bought so easily.”

“Your Grace, Shao Yuan clearly resents us deeply. He won’t stop until he eliminates us.”

“No need for the reminder,” Duke Xiaoyao responded irately. “You’re dismissed.”