

Three Realms 1881

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

Chapter 1881: A Gentleman's Agreement

Mad Fiend cocked his head as he gazed at Jiang Chen, attempting to figure out what the young man's true intentions were.

Jiang Chen returned the look with a confident smile. If he had to use a real weapon, he could only resort to the True Spirit Post. For that however, he needed time to refine it, as well as an appropriate martial method.

Of course, he had no shortage of the latter. All kinds of texts and tomes on the matter filled his head, and it would be easy enough to find what he was looking for.

"Show me what you've got, kid."

Jiang Chen produced the True Spirit Post, rolling it around in the palm of his hand dashing. It grew to a length of eight feet within moments.

"Is... is that a brush?" Mad Fiend glanced at the young man oddly as he perused the strange design of the weapon.

The True Spirit Post was certainly not a run-of-the-mill sharp stick. It looked like it could be a polearm, but no blade was mounted on its 'pointed' end. Compared to a typical weapon of war, it looked more classic.

"This is the crowning treasure of the ancient Primosanct Sect, the True Spirit Post." Jiang Chen waved his brush around a little.

"Senior," he smiled, "give me twelve hours to refine this treasure and practice a martial method for it. We can duel with proper weapons afterwards. How about it?"

"Twelve hours? Are you sure??" It was Mad Fiend's turn to be surprised.

What could he do with twelve hours?

A martial method took three to five months of work at least. More commonly, more than a year of study was required to access the fundamentals. To understand the essence of anything without years of study was nearly impossible, and twelve hours was simply ludicrous.

Mad Fiend harrumphed. "You aren't looking for excuses for your defeat, are you, kid? You sure you can do anything in twelve hours?"

Mad Fiend found the very proposition comical. Had the young man gone mad himself? The time period was patently absurd.

Cultivation behind closed doors could take decades to centuries. Twelve hours was barely enough for a single session of meditation!

And yet, Jiang Chen's faint smile remained.

“I ask only for twelve hours. I can’t be disturbed in that time, however.” His tone was entirely even.

The old man didn’t know how to react to this. He finally settled on huffing. “Fine, I’ll do you one better and give you 120 hours instead. There’s plenty of time. I don’t mind giving you a few extra days. You won’t be able to say I didn’t give you any leniency after I win then!”

Evidently, Mad Fiend didn’t want to take a single offered inch. This surprised Jiang Chen a little. From this, he could see that the eccentric protector was just as honorable as the three before him... despite his unpredictable temperament.

A little more examination showed that this made perfect sense though. The first master of the Veluriyam Pagoda had been the leader of ancient humanity in the demon-sealing war. He must’ve chosen protectors who were upright and dependable individuals, in some sense of those words.

Jiang Chen made up his mind. He wouldn’t refuse the proffered 120 hours. The Six Palaces of Heritage would still be here waiting after he was done.

Mad Fiend followed through on his promise, giving Jiang Chen a perfectly quiet place that was isolated from outside disturbance. “This is the place. Remember, 120 hours!”

Jiang Chen chuckled, then waved. “Don’t worry. I’ll show you what I’m made of.”

“Sure, sure. I’ll be waiting.” Mad Fiend didn’t take that declaration too seriously.

Though the old man appeared crazy, he was still conscientious of his mission. He knew he was here to pick through and test the geniuses that came to this place. If a legendary genius did arrive, he wouldn’t unduly target the young person. His volatility itself was the most serious kind of trial for the intrepid challenger.

The first master of the Veluriyam Pagoda had told him to be as strict as he could. Only the most appropriate to inherit the palaces were to be allowed through.

Still, the eccentric old man didn’t have much hope for Jiang Chen. Yes, the young man was talented, but also far too reckless.

A hundred and twenty hours?!

What could he do with that? Refine a weapon and learn a martial method for melee combat? How was possible, unless he knew exactly how to do these things in the first place?

But that didn’t seem likely.

“Hmph. I hope this kid doesn’t let me down too much when I see him next. I won’t let him pass this fourth trial if he turns out to be another disappointment,” Mad Fiend muttered to himself in complaint. He was here for the specific duty of eliminating those who didn’t fit the bill.

In his opinion, Jiang Chen certainly fell into that category.

The challenger’s character, rather than talent, was the sticking point here. The crazy old man believed Jiang Chen to be crazy and boastful for originally suggesting twelve hours.

The young man had no idea what the curious protector of this place was thinking. He really did need the time to refine his brush and learn a method that would allow him to go toe-to-toe with Mad Fiend.

As the crowning jewel of the ancient Primosanct Sect, the True Spirit Post was considerably difficult to refine. Thankfully, he had a bevy of experience with valuable treasures just like it. Thus, the first part was easy and systematic.

As always, he needed only to infuse the pen with a bit of his own lifeblood, then channel his consciousness into it. Not hard at all.

His particularly robust consciousness gave him a natural advantage in this area. It was almost trivial to wipe away the remnants of the pen's previous owner. So it had been when Jiang Chen had refined the golden bell.

His success came after only a short while. Now, he could finally start understanding the pen's unique qualities.

In four more hours, he largely familiarized himself with the weapon.

"This True Spirit Post really can be used as a long spear. I must choose a martial method that makes sense for that."

That would take a little bit more thought.

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Chapter 1882: A Clash Between Dragons and Tigers

Jiang Chen's consciousness began to run at maximum capacity. He rifled through the contents of his mind in search of a good method.

"Hmm? This spear method is pretty good."

One rose to the top of his perception. Named the Searing Sundrake Spear, it was a technique that emphasized sweeping strikes and dominance over the battlefield.

Jiang Chen had studied it carefully in his previous life. The original master of the method had used it to sweep aside his competition on a material plane. Even in the heavenly planes, he had relied on it to make his name known far and wide.

The technique had been valuable enough for his father to place it in a great library in the heavenly planes. That alone showed what kind of power it held, and how extraordinary it was.

Most importantly, the spear technique's original master had also been a descendant of the dragons, with the bloodline to match it. That meant that it was extremely compatible with Jiang Chen's current status.

His dragon blood would serve to amplify the effects of the technique, allowing it to unleash energies tenfold that of someone without this quality. The technique itself was remarkable, but a dragon bloodline boosted its potency significantly.

Jiang Chen had only a hundred hours remaining. But he felt little stress about that fact. He had studied this martial technique many a time in his previous life.

Others might need time to study the finer points of a technique, but for him, it was easier than breathing. He had small issues here and there, but nothing actually tough to overcome.

Any small bottleneck was completely pushed through by his powerful consciousness, fueling an incredible comprehension. His grasp over the Searing Sundrake Spear deepened more and more.

Mad Fiend didn't think much of Jiang Chen's efforts, but kept his promise not to disturb the youth nevertheless.

In time, the hundred and twenty hours were finally up.

The old man chuckled as he faced down the young man walking out. "You're punctual, kid, but are you sure a hundred twenty hours were enough? If not, I can give you a couple extra days."

Jiang Chen grinned. "That's alright. I didn't actually need that much time, so I used the remaining time to meditate a little. Why would learning a martial technique need a hundred twenty hours?"

Mad Fiend became blue in the face. He had seen many braggarts before, but none with so much bluster as this young man. Learning a martial technique in less than five days?

"Hmph. You're young, but already an irresponsible talker. It looks like you're not the best candidate for inheriting the Six Palaces' heritage." Mad Fiend's expression darkened.

"Why do you say that?" Jiang Chen smiled coolly.

"Isn't it obvious? Your flippant attitude is enough to tell."

"Am I flippant?" the young man smiled wryly. "Can't you accept when someone's telling the truth, senior? Have you been bottled up so long that your heart has become smaller than a grain of sand?"

"You should know the limits of your sharp tongue, kid. Fine, fine, fine. Let's see what you've learned in these five days!"

Jiang Chen shook his forearms, conjuring a chain of strange runes that appeared upon the True Spirit Pen's surface like electricity. They glowed eerily in an unorthodox manner that was worthy of being wary of.

Mad Fiend eyed his opponent, putting away some of his prejudice for the fight ahead. Perhaps the young man before him wasn't so flippant after all. An expert knew his field well enough to recognize skill from others. This young man's very aura was noteworthy.

Mad Fiend was instantly fired up. He grinned toothily, brandishing his cane. "Are you ready now? Here I come!"

He raised his cane high overhead, then brought down a storm of radiance upon Jiang Chen.

The fourth protector was a madman indeed. He fought with a feverish fervor that imbued the strength of ten mountains into the swing.

Jiang Chen roared, his own blood heating up. His fighting spirit was roused by the power of his opponent's attack. The dragon blood in his veins roiled, creating a draconic resonance in the air.

His True Spirit Post darted forward like a bolt of piercing lightning, threatening to penetrate heaven and earth itself. His bloodline fueled the energies of his spear technique, producing a heat wave that burned with the brilliance of a hundred suns.

Clang!

The two legendary weapons collided against each other in the air, sending a number of terrifying shockwaves outwards.

The light of the cane and the draconic energies of the spear intermixed with each other in glorious spectacle. The sky became blindingly bright.

"Well fought. Again!"

Mad Fiend felt quite stimulated by the frontal clash. His desire to fight that'd been repressed since ancient times suddenly exploded.

He brought his cane forward for a reprise.

Jiang Chen respected the attack as much as he could. His True Spirit Pen flourished like a golden dragon, blocking and parrying the cane at every opportunity.

Sometimes, he found windows of counterattack. Every return thrust he made took perfect advantage of timing, interrupting Mad Fiend's offensive rhythm.

The young man knew that the Searing Sundrake Spear he'd studied so briefly couldn't possibly match Mad Fiend's fighting experience. However, the old man's cane and techniques were of a lower level. The Searing Sundrake Spear was truly one-of-a-kind in the material planes.

Thirty to fifty percent of its actual strength was sufficient to counter Mad Fiend's familiarity with his treasure and method.

Both combatants had their advantages and disadvantages. The fight was once again at a standstill.

Jiang Chen was unsurprised by this, but Mad Fiend was greatly taken aback.

His opponent had learned his technique practically overnight! Furthermore, this was a green kid he was dealing with. If the best he could manage was a tie, what was his age and experience good for?

The eccentric old man had some slight doubts about the impromptu nature of the study, but ceded the point in the end. When Jiang Chen had taken out the True Spirit Post for the first time, he really hadn't refined it yet.

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Chapter 1883: Equal in Contest of Strength

Since the True Spirit Post had never been refined before, Jiang Chen must have learned the spear method during the sixty hours he was given.

Mad Fiend had been derisive of Jiang Chen at first, even going so far as to not even want to look at the young man. However, the brief exchange made him realize that the challenger hadn't been joking. He had indeed spent the last few days refining the weapon and grasping the martial method.

The Searing Sundrake Spear was quite extraordinary. Mad Fiend's golden staff was known for its dominating and ruthless power; it struck with such ferocious momentum that the enemies were rendered helpless. However, Jiang Chen's spear came out on even ground in the head-on clash with Mad Fiend's staff, even gaining a slight edge over it. How could the old man not be shocked?

In the ancient times, he'd been well known for his melee fighting skills. Close-quarters combat was his favorite form of battle. He was thus nicknamed the Mad Melee Fighter. Now however, he wasn't able to fight with the same aplomb as he'd once had.

He brandished his golden staff like a furious temple door god. With a twist of his wrist, a shockwave of golden light radiated from the staff. His every hit was as heavy as a towering mountain.

To his surprise, Jiang Chen gave as good as he got. He wielded the True Spirit Post with the ease and impetus of a beast roaming through its natural territory. Every move he made was powerful, preventing Mad Fiend from gaining the upper hand.

The old man was shocked. At first, he had thought it was impossible for Jiang Chen to go head-to-head with him. He believed the young man had at most learned a few tricks and would start to falter after a few rounds.

Sadly, he was woefully mistaken.

Jiang Chen didn't seem like he'd run out of tricks to use, and he used the techniques with an ease that shouldn't be possible for someone who'd just learned them.

Is he a genius handpicked by the heaven? It's only been a few days. How is it possible for him to reach such heights with his martial method?

Mad Fiend could barely believe his eyes. However, nothing excited him more than a formidable foe.

His attacks grew more and more ferocious as he shouted and growled. Jiang Chen fought back in kind, his spear unstoppable.

No matter how much harder Mad Fiend fought, Jiang Chen always held his ground, his presence strong even in comparison to the old man's.

If there had been any witnesses, they wouldn't have been able to tear their eyes away from the stunning fight.. Normally, expert cultivators fought with skills. The more powerful they were, the more exciting the fight.

Straightforward blow for blow combat was considered less impressive, but it was most representative of one's ability, including their understanding of martial dao, mastery of martial methods, control over the fight, and sensitivity to the key to victory.

What made Jiang Chen a genius was his ability to learn quickly. Where others might stumble or get stuck, he breezed through with ease.

A day passed. Then two, then three...

Three days into the epic fight, Mad Fiend was still vigorous and showed no signs of exhaustion.

He'd thought the young man would run out of stamina after a day or two, and that he'd win automatically, but Jiang Chen surprised him again.

The young man didn't seem at all tired, either.

"What a strange fellow he is." Mad Fiend fumed. Plenty of young geniuses had entered the Six Palaces of Heritage since the ancient times. Some had been able to reach the fourth palace, and Mad Fiend had challenged every one of them to a close-quarters duel.

After all, one often found themselves fighting at close distance with demons in the ancient war. When surrounded by an army of demons, melee fighting skills were imperative for survival.

"Your staff is powerful, senior, but you must be able to tell as well that it's impossible for you to defeat me. On the other hand, if I train my spear method for three to five more months, I'll absolutely be able to beat you. Do you agree?"

Jiang Chen spoke up since Mad Fiend didn't seem intend to give up. He didn't want to waste his time here. Neither side was going to win anytime soon.

"Beat me?" Mad Fiend cracked a ferocious grin. "Then let's fight for another three to five months and see if you get better."

The old man was crazy. Jiang Chen didn't have the time to waste on this fight. Moreover, repeated practice of moves wasn't enough to improve one's martial method. It was also important to explore and meditate on the method.

"If that's what you want, I won't hold back anymore, senior."

It was true that Jiang Chen wouldn't be able to defeat Mad Fiend anytime soon with only his spear, but he also had the Holy Dragon Bow and the golden bell.

The bell especially had been difficult enough for the old man to deal with on its own. Paired with Jiang Chen's spear method, the two became greater than their sum.

"Hey! Didn't we agree on fighting with only our weapons? Why did you use the damn bell again? Damn you!" Mad Fiend cried out in protest. He wanted to have a grand fight for a few more months.

"You're no fun, kid. Entertainment like you doesn't come by often. Can't you let me have a good fight?"

Jiang Chen chuckled. "I'll gladly fight you for months or even years if things were different, but I can't afford to waste too much time in the Six Palaces under the circumstances."

"You don't have the time? Can it be that the demons have risen again?" Mad Fiend darted his eyes around, his expression turning icy. The mention of demons triggered a shift in his emotions.

“The seal on the demons is deteriorating, and the protections laid down in the ancient times will fall apart soon. Any surviving demons will then rise again. What’s worse, the human race has no means to resist them. They’ll be unstoppable.”

Mad Fiend unconsciously slowed down his attacks in response.

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Chapter 1884: A Swift Change in Attitude

Jiang Chen also sensed the change in Mad Fiend’s mood. Something had prompted the protector to slow down and even reel in his aggression.

Jiang Chen was quite surprised. He didn’t expect Mad Fiend to react so strongly to news about the demons.

Mad Fiend swept his staff horizontally across and lay down on the ground, exhaling deeply. “Fine, fine. No more fighting.”

Jiang Chen had never intended to fight to either party’s limits. He couldn’t be happier that Mad Fiend had decided to end the fight. There weren’t any rules stipulating that a challenger had to defeat the defender.

Besides, Mad Fiend had suppressed his power to Jiang Chen’s level in the fight. It wouldn’t be a real victory even if Jiang Chen won.

Jiang Chen withdrew the True Spirit Post with his usual faint smile, humble, but dignified. His bearing defined that he was bound for greatness.

Mad Fiend considered the young man carefully, the fighting intent in his eyes fading visibly.

“Demons, demons...” Mad Fiend’s lips twitched as he muttered the word. His head suddenly snapped up. Amazing brilliance burst from his eyes as he stared at Jiang Chen. “Among the geniuses I’ve met, young man, you’re the one most likely to gain the pagoda’s ultimate heritage. I’ve never let any challengers pass without winning, but today, I’ll make an exception for you.”

Surprised, Jiang Chen blurted out, “Why?”

“What’s momentary gratification compared to the war against demons? I can tell that you have a bright future ahead of you, and you’re very likely to be the one the pagoda is waiting for. You’ve passed through the first three palaces. For the fourth, you’re likely to pass as well if you’re allowed to use every trick you possess.”

Jiang Chen looked owlshly at the old man. He didn’t expect the sudden change of attitude.

“My wife and little sister were both killed by demons,” Mad Fiend muttered in a melancholy tone. “The sooner you gain the pagoda’s heritage, young man, the sooner we regain our freedom. There’s nothing more I want than to join the crusade against demons.”

It was personal for him.

Realization dawned on Jiang Chen. He nodded. "The demons haven't broken through the seal yet, senior, and there hasn't been a large scale invasion. Also, the human domain isn't strong enough to fight demons at the moment. It's better to avoid a head-on clash."

"Avoid a clash? Do you think demons will retreat just because you want them to?" Mad Fiend scowled and snapped, "I thought you were a hot-blooded young man. Are you getting scared already before a fight breaks out?"

Jiang Chen smiled ruefully. "I've fought demons more than once - a demon emperor many years ago, then a celestial demon lord. They are formidable enemies, but they aren't unbeatable. The problem is the human domain is so much weaker than you can imagine. Empyrean cultivators emerge only once in a blue moon."

"What? So few?"

"Less than you'd expect. There may have been more divine cultivators in the ancient times than there are empyrean cultivators now."

Mad Fiend slumped dejectedly.

If what Jiang Chen said was true, the human domain was indeed too weak to fight the demonic army. It might not even survive a small scale assault.

There were a few experts in the Veluriyam Pagoda, but there was a limit to what they could achieve on their own. There was no hope unless they could become as powerful as the leading figures from the ancient times.

However, things were different now. They had to rely on the younger generation.

"Since the demons are so powerful and the human domain so weak, why haven't you sought sanctuary elsewhere instead of staying here?"

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "It's easy for me to just leave, but I'm too involved in the human domain to do that. Every little thing I do will impact the human race."

"Is that the only reason you stayed?" Mad Fiend asked disappointedly.

"On a broader level, I of course want to defend my homeland. Demons are known as pests in the heavenly planes. They wreak havoc wherever they go. It is the duty of every race and every individual to fight them."

"Good, that's what I want to hear. You must be the human domain's finest and a leading figure now. Do you have any plans to deter the demonic army?" Mad Fiend gave Jiang Chen a onceover.

"There's only one viable plan: avoiding the first wave of attack when the demons do invade. The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement is the only way to stop them from entering."

"Hasn't the formation already been activated before?" asked Mad Fiend.

“It has, but it’s a large-scale formation. We can activate it again with the right approach, the problem is the great amount of resources required. That’s not something the human domain can afford at the moment.” This indeed had been Jiang Chen’s biggest concern.

Mad Fiend mused. “The formation was set up and activated by three formation masters and three major factions in the ancient times. Of course, the weakened human domain won’t be able to activate it now.”

“I’ve learned how to reactivate the formation, but there’s the problem with a lack of resources. If that’s solved, I’m eighty percent sure I’ll succeed!”

“Resources!” Mad Fiend muttered, “There must be a great deal of resources to be gained from the pagoda’s heritage. The master of the Veluriyam Pagoda was one of the leaders of the human race. He was a man of great foresight with great attention to the details. He must’ve planned for the future. I’m sure you’ll receive a good amount of resources once you pass all six palaces and gain the pagoda’s ultimate heritage. It may not be enough, but it’ll cover a large portion of what you need.”

He knew a formation of that scale must require an unimaginable amount of resources.

“I’m letting you pass now. You’ll be able to defeat me sooner or later anyway. Every palace you pass yields you a gift. The fourth palace is no exception. You said before you didn’t have a good weapon. I’ll give you a pair.”

With a twist of his wrist, two blinding rays of light shot out of his hand.

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Chapter 1885: Taiji Pisces Swords

The twin blades looked like two flying fish in motion, only slightly longer. Their shapes were exotic and beautiful in their own way.

“What do you think?” Mad Fiend grinned at Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen looked at the swords, his breath catching as he felt their unique energy. They were at least demigod level weapons, or even divine ones.

“These swords would rank among the top ten weapons even in the ancient times. They’re called the Taiji Pisces Swords.”

The Taiji Pisces Swords?

Jiang Chen stared at the uniquely-shaped blades, his heart pounding. He could tell the swords’ value with a single glance.

These were a pair of yin and yang swords, one masculine and one feminine. The spirit energy of nature had forged them into powerful divine weapons that could influence the rule of yin and yang.

Such weapons were very powerful, and since they had been created by nature, they came with the heavenly law’s blessings, flawless in all aspects.

Jiang Chen would be lying if he claimed to be unmoved.

“Young man, I hope the next time I challenge you to a duel, you’ll fight me with the Taiji Pisces Swords.”

With a shake of his arms, Mad Fiend sent the blades of yin and yang to Jiang Chen. Blinding light radiated from the swords, emitting the powerful energy of heaven and earth. Jiang Chen could feel something old, something from the primordial age.

The swords must have an illustrious and storied history.

He could barely contain his excitement. His hot gaze fixed on his new weapons.

The swords resonated lowly, shining with an extraordinary sheen as they crossed before Jiang Chen, rather than falling into his hands.

Jiang Chen paused and glanced at Mad Fiend. Understanding dawned in the next second. This was a test to see if he was good enough to tame the swords.

Having understood, Jiang Chen wasn’t worried. He didn’t mind proving himself to Mad Fiend and showcasing his techniques.

He was second to none in his wealth of knowledge and mastery of various skills. He was capable of taming powerful weapons in more ways than one. However, it’d require a delicate approach to tame the Taiji Pisces Swords. Weapons born of nature were sentient and often proud.

To tame them, he had to first understand the weapons’ attributes and characteristics - their personality and temper.

With his powerful consciousness, Jiang Chen was able to gain insight with a bit of observation. In terms of weapons grade, these were absolutely top class.

He transmitted his intention to communicate to the swords. Contrary to usual methods, his delicate control over his consciousness allowed him to talk to the swords as he would with humans.

Once he’d gotten to know them a bit better, he deployed arts to manipulate them.

He made repeated hand seals to reel them in. The proud spirits still hung in the air, but they slowly drew close to the human.

“Oh?” Mad Fiend was surprised by how easily Jiang Chen had won the swords over.

He’d thought it’d take a long time and some unique technique for Jiang Chen to wield the swords, but to his surprise, the boy had succeeded after just a few moves.

Once again, all of his preconceived notions had been proven wrong when the swords slowly drifted into Jiang Chen’s hands.

“You’re something else, kid,” Mad Fiend said with a delighted smile. “No one at your age has been ever able to tame the swords as easily as you have. What’s your secret?”

He couldn’t be more curious about the young man, who had done the impossible again and again. Anything seemed possible when it came to the young man.

Jiang Chen smiled. "I'm fortunate to know a thing or two about manipulating weapons. The Taiji Pisces Swords should've posed a great challenge, but they seem fated to fall in my hands. I was able to quickly refine them in my own way."

"You've refined them already?" Mad Fiend muttered. "True geniuses are often young, but even in the ancient times, there wasn't anyone quite like you. No one could surprise me to such a degree and gain control over the divine swords in such a short amount of time."

Jiang Chen chuckled. "You aren't going to take them back, are you, senior?"

"Of course not." Mad Fiend waved his hand in denial. "Alright, time's a-wastin'. Go ahead to the fifth palace. You're good enough to take that challenge, and you stand a good chance of passing."

Jiang Chen didn't expect to be let off the hook so easily in this palace. He gladly accepted the swords and cupped his hands at the old man. "The swords will be of great help to me, senior. When I use them to slay enemies, I'll remember your kindness."

Mad Fiend laughed heartily. "You're welcome. I'll take you slaughtering demons as thanks enough. Besides, once you pass all six palaces, everything will be yours anyway, and we old ones will be under your command."

That, Jiang Chen did know.

"Alright, the portal is ready for activation. If you still need time, you may cultivate in this palace. If you don't, I'll send you to the next once now!"

Jiang Chen nodded after a pause. "Please send me to the next palace now. Things are constantly changing. The earlier I get this over with, the better the chance we'll win the war."

Demons might not invade in large numbers just yet, but it was better to be prepared.

What would be waiting for him in the fifth palace?

Jiang Chen opened his eyes once he'd been teleported.

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Chapter 1886: Suspended Runes

During the leap between the fourth and fifth palaces, Jiang Chen couldn't help but dwell on Mad Fiend. The old man who had seemed incomprehensible initially seemed much more reasonable now.

The protector had been in the Six Palaces of Heritage from the ancient era to the present. In the process, he had been deprived of his freedom and had to bear the pain of losing his wife and younger sister.

One or two days of this would've been bearable, but it had been over a hundred thousand years. It'd be hard for anyone to last that long unchanged.

For a time, Jiang Chen was filled with great sympathy.

What Mad Fiend had gone through reminded him of his father, the Celestial Emperor. I wonder how father is doing now?

If a heavenly cataclysm had really been unleashed, even someone as great as a celestial emperor wasn't guaranteed to remain safe. Where might his father be now?

No pain was as harsh as separation from one's loved ones.

The continual increases in his cultivation and the introduction of higher and higher tiers of information fueled his curiosity about what had happened in his previous life.

"I must attain godhood. When I do, I will be able to solve the mystery of the chain seal in my consciousness. I will be able to see what clues father has left me." Jiang Chen quite looked forward to it.

He arrived at the fifth palace in no time at all. As soon as he entered, he felt like he was in a different world.

The fifth palace was a sequestered space, strangely cut off from the outside world. There was nothing here: no buildings, life, or any distinguishing features. The very air was stagnant.

It was as if this world was perfectly still.

"Hmm? What's this?" Jiang Chen looked all around him. There was nothing but emptiness and stillness, with seemingly no connection to the true and material.

This place was more silent than death itself.

Jiang Chen swept his eyes and consciousness across the expanse, taking in the oddity of the quietness here.

"Is this really the fifth palace?" He began to doubt where he was. He simply couldn't understand what he was witnessing. "No. Even in the void, complete stillness is impossible. This has to be an illusion! It has to be!"

Jiang Chen kept reinforcing this notion to himself.

Clang!

A majestic and somber bell suddenly rang by his ear.

In the next moment, the world before him underwent a drastic change. Stranger sights appeared in front, beneath, behind, and all around him. Countless runes drifted bizarrely through the air like wraiths.

Jiang Chen opened his eyes, then braced himself. The leaping runes reminded him of something.

"Suspended runes?" he remarked with some astonishment.

In the world of martial dao, there was a particular kind of ability that didn't require materials or use a medium to etch runes in thin air. A runic formation could be built using nothing but empty air as the basis.

It wasn't a proper formation, since it lacked a foundation and other trappings of one. But it was just as potent and diverse as a real formation. In fact, it was more mysterious in some ways.

As an experienced man, Jiang Chen had an inkling of what the glowing tadpoles swimming in midair meant.

Thankfully, he had some basic knowledge about them. If he stood still, he would probably be able to avoid triggering the runes' effects. If he tried to rashly move about, the opposite would happen.

As such, he stayed as still as he could while examining the environment around him. No set of runes was absolutely flawless. Just like formations, they were hardly indestructible.

To find the chinks in their defenses however, required a sharp eye and a capable hand. A complex suite of skills and abilities.

In other words, Jiang Chen possessed all of the necessary qualities for success. Though his strength hadn't yet been perfected, his experience could guarantee calm and poise before the suspended runes.

A challenger who was ignorant of what he saw would likely approach and investigate. Once he did, he would be mired in a great deal of trouble by triggering the runes' effects.

Jiang Chen gave the runes a once-over with his consciousness. They weren't particularly offensive. In fact, they seemed to dance with a strict purpose.

It was a safe assumption that they were present here as a test, rather than a lethal trap.

Even so, he didn't dare move lightly. The Veluriyam Pagoda's six palaces were to test anyone who ventured in.

If he was trapped, he would be admitting defeat. That was an obvious kink to passing all of the palaces. He decided to sit and wait for now.

Carefully scrutinizing the landscape around him, he found several patterns in the runes' operation.

As long as he had the requisite clues, he was confident he could break through the blockade and enter the true fifth palace to greet its master. If he couldn't even get through this much, he would be looked down upon.

Jiang Chen drew on as much of his previous life's memories as possible. Details and snippets about suspended runes flashed before his eyes. His mind whirred with an urgency that stirred it into thought.

"These suspended runes clearly have some sort of a pattern. They're following a diagram of some sort. Sadly, I'm inside of it, which means I can't make heads or tails of it. If I could see a broader picture, perhaps I would have a few more clues."

Jiang Chen seriously considered this, scattering his consciousness into every corner as he did so. He wanted to observe the runes from as many perspectives as possible.

His method paid off immediately. The multiple points of view he received were very telling, and the spectacle he witnessed became more and more amazing as time went on.

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

Chapter 1887: Continuing Eccentricities

The countless angles he took, near and far, changed the outline of the runic pattern each time. Moreover, the pattern itself seemed to be shifting. That was interesting.

“The mysteries imbued in these runes are more varied than I expected.”

Inspiration flooded him. He had a good idea of what was up now. The shapes the pattern made gave meaning to the array of the runes. For example, swords signified killing. Dragons and tigers, excitement and power.

He analyzed everything he saw.

“A tree? What does its abundance mean?” Jiang Chen found the newest image odd. That couldn’t be a sign for danger.

The pattern shifted once more. A green plain, with all kinds of spirit herbs growing from it.

“The creator of these suspended runes is a tasteful individual. Drawing such beautiful images with them... that’s hardly common.”

He beheld the pretty pictures with a mixture of astonishment and enjoyment.

“Hmm? Is that a bird? A pigeon perhaps, or a dove? If it’s a dove, that’s a sign of peace and safety, no? Maybe I should try something with it.” Now that Jiang Chen had a plan, he became even more calm.

He patiently watched for further changes to the pattern, new images born out of the chaos.

After a long while, the dove appeared once more.

“Now!”

He decisively took the opportunity to fire himself into that patch of space, backed by the incredible speed of the Kungpeng Meteoric Escape.

Whoosh!

He crossed the expanse of the void in a single instant, before the dove could change to something else. He was finally free from the area of suspended runes.

Before he could land, the runes burned away like a shower of meteors. They blazed with radiance before disappearing into nothingness. There was peace all around him once more, as quiet as things had been before.

The suspended runes’ restriction was entirely gone.

“So I guessed right?” Jiang Chen wasn’t particularly pleased about his success. Things were exactly as they should’ve been.

And yet, the tacit sameness of the empty space all around him made his scalp tingle.

“Surely the protector of this fifth palace is a true master of dimensional abilities. That he’s created such a space here... perhaps he’s greater than all of his predecessors.”

The Six Palaces of Heritage were sure to become more difficult as he went further in. As their purpose was to select an heir however, an opportunity would be left for the challenger.

He saw no reason to be discouraged. Even the most minute of clues could be found.

Above all, he was supremely confident in himself. If the Veluriyam Pagoda was to fall to anyone, it would be him.

Jiang Chen didn't believe there had been any young geniuses capable of surpassing him in the previous hundred thousand years, nor would there be any after.

Calming his heart once more, he sat down cross-legged within the serenity of space. He was waiting for that slim window to arise. The quiet wouldn't last forever.

The fifth palace would have a sign of some sort to guide him.

Rather than stumble about like a headless fly, it was better to remain in place to meditate and observe. He would find the lone path of escape that much faster then.

In no time at all, he heard the somber sound of an ancient bell ring. This toll was even dignified and austere than the last.

Jiang Chen braced himself.

The last time the bell had rung, suspended runes had appeared immediately. There was sure to be more this time as well.

The runes he expected didn't appear.

Instead, he felt the space all around him heat up. Without warning, the landscape became a brilliant red, as if countless embers had flared simultaneously to life.

In the next moment, the entire place was engulfed in a sea of flame.

The fire consumed all with a grand majesty, transforming from radiance into a scorching inferno before long.

How could this be?

Where had the fire come from? Or the heat before it, for that matter?

Jiang Chen was shocked. The place he was in was so big! How could it simply catch on fire like that? Was there something he hadn't noticed?

He quickly got his answer.

The blaze illuminated all with its light. His field of view broadened; he could see the boundaries of this place! There were actual walls here. Eight gates demarcated the enclosing walls, taking the eight bagua positions. They were bizarrely astounding to behold.

In other words, he was in a very large room rather than a boundless expanse of space.

In fact, all this looked more and more like a huge pill cauldron. He'd taken the place of a small piece of refining material, small enough to be totally negligible.

This was a terrifying thought!

His first stop in the fifth palace to be inside a pill cauldron had been the last of his expectations. He could predict a great many things, but he'd never experienced anything like this before.

A real live human being transported into a cauldron? And caught up in the process of refinement?

The young man was completely taken aback. This had entirely turned his assumptions about the fifth palace upside down!

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

Chapter 1888: The World of the Bagua Pill Cauldron

In the world of martial dao, there were abilities that could hide something very large within something small. Dimensional abilities were wondrous indeed, and many experts skilled in them could pull off remarkable feats like this.

Jiang Chen had witnessed the usage of these dimensional abilities before – even on Divine Abyss. This time though, he was impressed as well as surprised.

He hadn't the foggiest inkling that he would be placed in this situation.

"There have always been powerful cultivators who could hide the world within their sleeves, or the skies in their wine jugs. Since this is a cauldron for refining pills, its owner must be an expert on that subject." Jiang Chen was perfectly at ease.

He welcomed a protector who was capable with pills. He was absolutely confident in his own ability in that area. As long as he could meet the fifth palace's master in person, he had a very good chance of passing through.

There was nothing he was better at in the world than pill dao.

Right now, he didn't have the luxury to think about such things. What did this cauldron he was inside of mean?

So far into the six palaces, the personality of the palace protectors had always factored into the tests. The actions of this protector in particular seemed extremely cool.

No normal person could create such an expansive void within a pill cauldron. Dimensional abilities of this strength were rare!

In addition, specific treasure-refining methods were practically required. How could such a miraculous creation have come about otherwise?

Jiang Chen was no stranger to the eight bagua positions.

However, departing the cauldron required more than recognizing what the gates were. The eight trigrams were a science unto themselves, and it wasn't easy at all to grasp all their intricacies.

The air began to heat up more and more.

Jiang Chen really was a pill material in the cauldron, but he was far from discouraged. He was a real live person at the end of the day.

The young man had seen blood sacrifices being required in the refinement process, but he had never done something so inhumane himself. It was too morally reprehensible to consider.

The same would be true of this protector. The motive of the cauldron wasn't to refine him, but to test his skill.

Qian, kun, zhen, xun, kan, li, gen, dui. These were the eight trigrams.

They corresponded to eight facets of nature: heaven, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountain, and marsh respectively.

Jiang Chen opened up his consciousness to observe any changes in the gates.

"Back in the heavenly planes, there was a verse about them, wasn't there? It went like this: Three lines Qian, six segments Kun. Upward vessel Zhen, reverse bowl Gen. Empty heart Li, full center Kan. Flawed top Dui, broken base Xun."

The verse helped remind him of what the trigrams actually looked like.

"That's right! Three lines Qian means that Qian is the trigram with three solid lines. All three barriers prevent exit. On the other hand, six segments Kun means that there's an empty space right in the middle of all three lines. Passage through is possible! The remaining six trigrams all have similar obstacles, and none are as free as Kun. I believe I've found the way out!"

Sometimes the simplest logic was also the most sensible.

Jiang Chen immediately hurtled out from his resting place.

"Time waits for no one. I have to trust my intuition and judgment. This is my way out!" he said with considerable decisiveness.

Whoosh!

He reached the threshold of the Kun gate in a mere moment.

A blinding white consumed his body. In the next moment, it was all he could see. Within this radiance, he could once more hear the movement of the air in the outside world.

Joy crept into his heart.

The empty space he had been in before had been totally calm and undisturbed. Since this was no longer the case meant he was back in the real world.

This knowledge relieved him.

When the light disappeared, he finally stood upon solid ground once more. Luxurious tiles, to be precise, splendiferous and magnificent in their hue.

Jiang Chen was astounded by the extravagance. He was within a great palace filled to the brim with opulence. Each plank and brick, pillar and shingle was decorated with utmost lavishness and severity.

Most importantly, countless statues of gods were arrayed all around. Their eminent figures dominated the space.

Jiang Chen was agape with shock. He hadn't expected such a divergence from the program. What had happened to the emptiness he had been in before? What was up with the huge, gleaming palace?

"Well done, young man. You passed two tests in a row, hmm? I had thought youths with such keen eyesight and insight were extinct. You've certainly kept me waiting for a very long time." A resonant voice intoned, amiable and serene. It sounded very much like an elder's voice, bringing tranquility to the heart of whomever heard it.

"Greetings, senior of the fifth palace. My name is Jiang Chen," the young man humbly introduced himself.

"Jiang Chen?" The voice paused a moment, then gave way to laughter. "Your name doesn't matter. What matters is my appreciation for your talent."

Jiang Chen breathed out a sigh of relief. But he didn't completely let down his guard. He saw it as a necessary precaution to be wary of anyone and everyone.

"I count myself lucky to win your favor, senior."

"No need to be so modest, young man. Tell me, how did you get all the way to the fifth palace? Do you know anything about this place?"

"Not at all, sir," Jiang Chen shook his head. "No one before this has given me any hints. As for myself, I didn't get here all the way in one go. I reached this place slowly, step by step! I do have to say though, that the test I went through was definitely one-of-a-kind." He didn't mind performing a bit of flattery.

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

Chapter 1889: Old Pill Rune

Hearty laughter rang through the air, but Jiang Chen couldn't detect any physical body concealed in the vicinity, no matter how hard he tried with his consciousness.

He couldn't be more surprised. The protector of the fifth palace was powerful indeed. Very few could get close to Jiang Chen without him detecting them.

"Alright, kid, stop looking around. I'm not going to challenge you in person. In fact, you've already passed half of my trials. So far, you haven't made any missteps. Now I'm going to test if you're my kind of person. Why don't you tell me how you made your way to the fifth palace?"

Without missing a beat, Jiang Chen explained with a smile, "I've overcome challenges and dangers to reach this point..."

He briefly described his experience going from the first palace to the fourth. It got him thinking. Did the protectors of the palaces, who'd been put here by the master who built and ruled over the pagoda, know nothing about the other protectors? Had they not been sharing information?

That seemed like a distinct possibility.

However, Jiang Chen remembered that back in the first palace, Honored Master P'eng had told him in advance that one of the protectors was a senior from the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect.

Thus, he was already mentally prepared.

The fifth protector smiled in response to Jiang Chen's words. "Good. You're easy to like. No wonder you've been doing so well.

"Since the last four protectors all showed you some level of appreciation, you must be worthy to some degree. Nonetheless, this seat has my own set of criteria. I'm not going to let you pass unconditionally or take a liking to you just because they do. You have to win me over with your talent in order to pass and receive the reward. I'm going to see for myself if you deserve the heritage of the six palaces and the Veluriyam Pagoda. If you don't meet my standards, I won't hesitate to kick you out." He was a resolute one.

Jiang Chen nodded with a smile. "Understood. How does the senior plan to test me?"

"Tell me, what are your talents?"

Jiang Chen erred on the side of caution this time and thought before responding, "I'm somewhat of a jack of all trades. I've dabbled in various fields."

"Are you saying you're an all-around genius?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "You've used glyphs and pills, senior. I happen to know a thing or two of pill dao. That's one of my stronger suits."

He kept his tone exceedingly humble since he speculated that the fifth protector wasn't a fan of braggarts.

"You're adept in pill dao?" The owner of the voice was pleasantly surprised.

"I am. If the senior is going to test me in pill dao, I'll have a chance to prove myself and honor what I've learned so far." Jiang Chen spoke matter-of-factly.

"Then pill dao it is?" the voice asked with a smile and muttered, "I'm Old Pill Rune, young man. Since you've picked pill dao as your challenge, you better do your best. If you disappoint me, it'll be harder for you to pass."

Old Pill Rune? That was what the fifth protector called himself?

Since he'd dared give himself the title, he must be a great master in the two fields.

After a bemused pause, Jiang Chen put on a confident smile. "Then let's get started, senior. I have faith in my level of pill dao."

"Good, very good," said Old Pill Rune. "There are many fundamental skills in pill dao. First, a keen observation, without which you'll achieve nothing."

Jiang Chen nodded in agreement, like they were holding a face to face conversation. "A keen observation is the foundation to a pill expert's success. Pill dao isn't the right path for people without a basic level of sensitivity."

"Good, at least your beliefs are the right ones, kid," the old man praised. "What else do you think is crucial to pill dao?"

The question was broad. It was more about a general understanding in pill dao than about the specifics.

However, Jiang Chen went against the old man's expectations and responded with a smile, "The devil's in the details for pill dao. A keen observation being one of them, but there are many other crucial factors. For example, a fine control over fire and heat, a good memory, and more importantly, a strong will. When all is said and done, the heart determines a pill expert's success. An iron will makes the cultivator unbeatable."

Old Pill Rune made a sound of surprise. He hadn't expected Jiang Chen's answer.

"So you do know pill dao. The different paths share some commonalities since they're from the same source. A strong will is crucial to cultivators of all kinds." He sighed. "You're on the right track. Now I'd like to test your understanding of the specifics."

"Please do," Jiang Chen said respectfully.

"Alright, here's a pill recipe for you to judge."

A translucent screen emerged in the air and spots of light transformed into text. It was a visually beautiful sight.

Jiang Chen marveled at the spectacle, but didn't get distracted from the writing on the screen.

It was a pill recipe analysis.

"What do you think, young man?" asked the old man. "I'll give you fifteen minutes to formulate your thoughts. Does that work?"

Jiang Chen made an assenting sound and read the recipe carefully in lieu of a verbal response. He smiled once he'd browsed through the text. He recognized the recipe. It was an empyrean level one - the Goldenhorn Moonmender Pill, used for mending injury.

Jiang Chen went through the recipe from beginning to end four times. "The pill is a fine one, but the recipe falls short. One won't be successful following this recipe. Even if pills are successfully refined, the end products will be too flawed to be useful."

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Chapter 1890: Giving Pointers, The Might of Pill Dao

Jiang Chen hadn't sugarcoated his words at all. He knew his actions were risky. What if Old Pill Rune flew into a rage?

Nevertheless, his mentor from his past life had instilled a certain belief since day one: pill dao was about seeking and respecting the truth. Never lie to anyone under any circumstances. Stay true to the facts.

Jiang Chen had held himself to that principle since his first day of pill dao. No matter how important or authoritative the person he faced was, he never broke the principle.

Therefore, he never once considered lying to the protector despite the risks.

Old Pill Rune was silent for a long while before he sighed and asked in a quiet voice, "You're bold to voice your true thoughts, young man, but there's more than one reason why someone would be so blunt. Some follow their heart and spill their true feelings. Others speak their mind to gain a strategic advantage. Which are you?"

"I've learned not to twist the truth since the day I started learning pill dao," Jiang Chen said seriously. "Facts are facts, and mistakes are mistakes."

"So you do think the recipe is flawed?"

"It is. Very much so!" Jiang Chen's tone was direct and without pretense.

"Explain." Old Pill Rune decided to give the young man the benefit of the doubt since he sounded so confident.

"First, the proportion of ingredients. Too much of the main ingredient is used. The magical thing about the pill is the way different ingredients complement one another. When the portion of the main ingredient is too large, it'll undermine the others and their complementary effects. This is the first flaw.

"The second critical mistake is the refining method. The pill has to be refined with low heat, not medium, and definitely not high heat.

"Then there are more trivial details. For example, the order of adding the ingredients makes a difference. Although the order recorded here is mostly correct, there are some mistakes. The little things combined can have a significant impact on the quality of the end products."

Jiang Chen laid down his points clearly and without difficulty. He exuded confidence and a commanding presence. Old Pill Rune hung on his every word, transfixed for a good while.

"Where did you learn all that, young Jiang Chen?" the old man asked once he'd finally broke out of his trance. "Was your pill dao master good enough to teach you that?"

He had been an expert in pill dao since the ancient times. That recipe was something that had stumped him personally. He'd thrown it out as a test and hadn't expected Jiang Chen to actually give an answer.

To his surprise, the challenger's answer was detailed and comprehensive, covering both important and trivial problems. Some of the points made even gave the old man some new ideas.

Old Pill Rune was caught off guard, and his level of approval for Jiang Chen rose significantly. He'd started to accept the young man.

"I've learned many things from different fields, a lot of which weren't taught by a master," Jiang Chen responded suggestively. "Knowledge seems to emerge out of nowhere in my head. It dawns on me when I wake up or even in my dreams."

He knew the old man was smart enough to connect the dots.

As expected, Old Pill Rune blurted out in a conflicted tone, "Are... are you a god incarnate? Are you sure you gained knowledge in your sleep, young Jiang Chen?"

"I'm sure," Jiang Chen said with deliberate nonchalance. "It's happened many times."

"I knew it, I knew it! You are indeed a god incarnate!" the old man exclaimed excitedly. "Do you know what that means?"

Jiang Chen nodded. "I've heard the phrase thrown around. Some other people suspect me of having the memory of a god as well. However, my recollection is messy. I don't remember much about my past life. Shouldn't I remember if I'm a reincarnated god?"

"Most have their memories of their past lives erased by the wheel of reincarnation. Only a few particularly powerful and willful cultivators retain some memories. There are also the rare exceptions who manage to keep a significant part of their recollection, who then become talented cultivators in their new life."

Jiang Chen pretended to be in deep thought.

"If your memory fully awakens one day, young Jiang Chen, you'll be on track to greatness. You'll not only become the heir of the Veluriyam Pagoda, but may even surpass the former master of the pagoda."

He wasn't merely trying to comfort Jiang Chen. Being a god incarnate would truly give the young man a great edge in every aspect. He had even higher hopes for the young man and brought up a series of questions about pill dao that he'd been having trouble solving.

Jiang Chen answered every single one of them.

That won the old man over entirely. He'd now had a complete change of mind and his caution melted away. He even wanted Jiang Chen to stay a little longer, given that he had the opportunity to pick the brain of a pill dao genius.

Jiang Chen could understand. The old man had been on his own since the ancient times. He must have devoted his whole life to exploring everything about pill dao. He offered all he could to the protector, not holding anything back and explaining everything he knew about every issue.

Their exchange in pill dao lasted for three days and three nights. Still, the old man wasn't satiated.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen didn't have anything important to do at the moment since he wasn't strong enough to take on the sixth palace, which would require him to reach advanced empyrean or even peak empyrean.

He settled for having an intellectual conversation with Old Pill Rune until the old man himself started feeling embarrassed for taking up his time.