

Three Realms 2021

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2021: Unstoppable Momentum

The grey wolf alpha was able to use its pack to its advantage. Jiang Chen's breakneck charge tipped it off to the fact that something was very wrong. It commanded its underlings to continually ram themselves against the human interloper, like a chain of a dozen or more meaty cannonballs.

Jiang Chen braced himself. The alpha was clearly feeling cornered to resort to desperate tactics. His speed gave him an incredible advantage over the wolves, allowing him to zigzag left and right rapidly to dodge all the wolves.

The alpha was astonished at the human's approach. It tried everything it could, but the human was not to be deterred.

With slight acceleration, Jiang Chen leapt onto the alpha's back.

The alpha roared, bristling and shaking in order to get rid of its undesirable rider. It tried to turn its head in order to turn its maw upon Jiang Chen.

Alas, none of these things actually had much effect.

Jiang Chen delivered a light smack against the wolf's forehead. The wolf alpha felt its head spin. In a daze, it was no longer able to mount an effective resistance.

The young man on its back plucked three hairs in order to complete his task, which his jade slip immediately reflected.

Stroking the hairs, Jiang Chen chuckled, then landed outside the valley in a bolt of lightning. He had been incredibly fast on the second island, to the degree that he himself was a bit embarrassed about it.

The other competing geniuses were still stuck in the first island's mists. Meanwhile, he neared the third.

Since copies of the jade slips lay with the judges, his progress was witnessed in real time. That a genius could pass through two islands so quickly was almost unheard of, but the slips' anonymity prevented the judges from knowing exactly who it was.

The judges traded confused looks. Some wondered whether the slip itself was having issues. This genius was doing a bit too well, wasn't he?

"Two islands in two hours? Which faction do they belong to?"

"I wonder who it is?"

Before the answer was revealed, several of the sacred lands hoped that they belonged to them.

The Eternal Sacred Land's first prime was no different. Her intuition told her that this high-performing genius was probably Jiang Chen.

She didn't have many expectations for the others. The Five Great Gentlemen were known to be quite mediocre. Sui Chen was middling at best, and the others were worse than him. It was unrealistic to think they'd do particularly well.

Right now, Eternal only had Jiang Chen to rely on.

"Haha, Daoist Qi, what are you thinking about? Are you perhaps wondering if this leading genius is Jiang Chen from your sacred land?" Someone intentionally posed this question in a loud voice.

The first prime didn't deny it. "According to what I know of him, perhaps he is."

"Impossible! I think it is Lu Mingye from the Flora Sacred Land."

"No, the poison consort seems more likely."

"Why can't it be our very own Hu Lei?"

"I have faith that the genius hails from Void."

Each speaker was more thick-skinned than the previous. None of them shied away from boasting about their own.

Ziju Min smiled coolly. "I guarantee that genius is Jiang Chen," he said with some certainty. "If you don't believe me, we can bet on it."

"What are we betting on?" a dissenter piped up.

"Anything you like," Ziju Min shot back instantly.

His confidence cowed the person who'd disagreed with him. He had stated that it wasn't Jiang Chen purely out of envy and dislike for the youth.

Ziju Min's conviction in light of that was tremendously damaging to the others' assurance, especially given that a strong performance from Jiang Chen was the most likely outcome.

Heated discussions grew among the judges and their audience about exactly who the mystery genius was. Many tried to use examples of their own's past exploits. However, the commentary from the peanut gallery was self-gratifying at best.

"Elder Ziju," transmitted the first prime, "are you really so sure it's Jiang Chen who's doing so well?"

"It has to be him," Ziju Min laughed. "Shouldn't you know him by now, First Prime? Who else could first place be? Jiang Chen was born to win anything he participates in."

Meanwhile, the genius of the hour broke through each trial with impossible speed.

The third, fourth, then fifth...

He completely indulged himself in the joy of success. True, there was a point of difficulty with every trial, but none posed a serious problem for him.

The first few trials especially were almost trivial. Jiang Chen's knowledge and experience surpassed all of his peers in every way. He utterly crushed the first five trials.

Not so for the other cultivators. Several who lacked sufficient talent or ability were eliminated quickly.

The unluckiest among them failed in the second trial, but there were several for the third, fourth, and fifth trials as well, and in increasing numbers.

While the other geniuses were busy with the first few, Jiang Chen was already past the sixth and onto the seventh. The seventh island was quite different from the ones before.

Built like a veritable maze, it was filled with misdirection and confusion. Anyone caught unawares would never be able to find the exit in the limitless labyrinth.

Jiang Chen was quite familiar with ensnaring formations like these, yet the seventh island was remarkable in that its formation incorporated the terrain.

Solving the puzzle was no problem though. After checking a few calculations in the sand, Jiang Chen found some clues as to its operation.

Once he had a place to start, the maze practically became his playground.

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Chapter 2022: Volcano Giants

After calculating where the gate of life was within the formation, Jiang Chen found the desired exit moments later.

Since experiencing the formation, he thoroughly respected the cultivator who'd set it up. If he hadn't been an expert in the field, he would've had a much harder time here.

"I think this seventh trial will eliminate a majority of the candidates. Most people will need quite a bit of luck to pass on through."

It wasn't a stretch for him to assume that Eternal's five gentlemen would all fail here. After all, there was a time limit of fourteen hours to navigate the maze. Not a lot of time to mess around with, honestly.

When Jiang Chen had just broken through the seventh trial, Lu Mingye was doing the same with the fifth. Excitement was apparent upon his face; he wanted to roar to release some of his pent-up energy.

He felt that he'd done everything as perfectly as his abilities would allow. No time had been wasted, as far as he knew. His perfect performance surely meant that Jiang Chen was far behind him!

"Hmph. I got to the sixth trial really fast. Jiang Chen must still be dawdling around the third or fourth!" Lu Mingye was absolutely convinced of his superiority. The fact that he had no evidence that this was the case didn't bother him.

Jiang Chen wasn't interested in whatever the other geniuses might be thinking. Having set foot on the eighth island, he was only three trials from completing the gauntlet.

In other words, he was at the hardest segment.

The mission here wasn't easy. Surprisingly, the eighth island was a volcanic one.

Jiang Chen's job was to get past the guardian of the island. The only exit off the island required taking a walk through the guardian's den. He had to get past the guardian by fair means or foul. Specifically, a volcano giant.

It was a creature that had formed from long term exposure to the land's essence all around it. Though it was of questionable intelligence, its birthright and homefield advantage granted it tremendous destructive power. Jiang Chen dared not underestimate it.

However, he immediately remembered that he had Vermilion Bird bloodline in his veins. Moreover, the bird itself was with him. Wasn't this volcanic island just as cozy for the sacred fowl as for the native guardian?

Jiang Chen summoned his feathered friend immediately. After he explained the situation, the Vermilion Bird burst out laughing.

"Young master Chen, volcano giants aren't too remarkable aside from their size. Their scorching flames may irritate you during a fight, but my bloodline will guard you against their attacks."

Jiang Chen was greatly relieved by the Vermilion Bird's aid.

He reached the volcano's core in only a moment or two. Magma spewed along the cavern's winding path, as if countless beasts were trapped below the blazing liquid.

Jiang Chen was entirely at ease. The roiling lava alone was a test of most cultivators' concentration and consciousnesses, but he was provided immunity to the heat thanks to his tempered body and sacred beast bloodline.

The exact location of the giant was much more interesting to him. Where is the exit?

He found out very shortly.

A resounding roar of fury echoed through the subterranean hollow. The stony walls began to shake.

Uooooh, uooooh!

Plumes of lava gushed out of the vents all around, shooting aggressively towards Jiang Chen. The young man smiled. A flash of gold called forth his tempered body, isolating the lava and rocks from flesh.

Still, though he wasn't hurt by the boiling temperatures of the molten rock, Jiang Chen was pushed into a corner by the sheer force of the flows.

The ground of the cave began to crumble and fissure. A huge creature was rearing its head!

Its unfurling body was a rough humanoid in shape, but it was at least several dozen times larger than a normal man.

Standing, it occupied almost all of the available room in the cave; in fact, the ceiling was forcibly heightened to accommodate its stature.

Perhaps the oddest part about the giant was its magmatic armor. It was clad in chunks of black basalt, joined together by veins of sluggish red. It swept its enormous arm horizontally toward Jiang Chen.

Within this cave, it was extremely difficult to dodge anywhere, given the extreme lack of space. Jiang Chen could only duck to avoid the attack just in time. He was hardly excited about the work ahead.

The volcano giant was the opposite of a pushover. Asking the Vermilion Bird for help was the only thing that could ensure him an instant victory.

However, he didn't want to rely on the bird's aid. Instead, he wanted to see how strong the giant was for himself.

Jiang Chen began to maneuver around and against the giant.

The volcano giant was absolutely enormous, which meant even its smallest movements packed an incredible punch.

For a time, the Eternal genius traded blows with the giant with great enthusiasm.

The methods of attack he typically e

mployed against more ordinary opponents would have a hard time scratching the giant at all. Therefore, he mainly used magnetic storms to hamper his enemy and suspended runes to restrict its movements. The Taiji Pisces Swords were his weapons of choice, since they were the strongest weapons he had available.

Though suspended runes were inferior to formations in some ways, their speed of deployment made them much more practical. Their power was not to be underestimated, and they caused the giant a considerable amount of annoyance.

The volcano giant could do little more than smash and pound. Sometimes, it mixed things up by trying to burn the human to a crisp.

Unfortunately, Jiang Chen's body was too tough to be injured via these methods.

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Chapter 2023: Scouring Astral Wind

Trading moves with the volcano giant was immensely pleasurable for Jiang Chen. The only downside was that the arena they fought in was far too beneficial for his enemy.

Without the plethora of methods and abilities at his disposal as well as the Vermilion Bird bloodline, Jiang Chen found it rather likely he would've suffered a minor defeat here.

The point of his fighting now was to train himself. At the end of the day, actually fighting the volcano giant was hardly a necessity.

A more intelligent approach was just as viable as brute force. His task was to clear the giant's den and find the exit on its far side. Any astute cultivator would recognize the semantics of the mission here.

In fact, brute force was probably the stupidest choice.

Jiang Chen had only chosen it because he wanted to borrow the giant's strength to test his own. Plus, it was a wonderful opportunity to gain practical combat experience.

After a while, he'd really gotten into the swing of fighting. A series of continual punches from the giant were blocked by conjuring suspended runes alone.

The volcano giant wasn't smart, but it had become aware that the human cultivator was the one who had the edge.

With a few more clashes, Jiang Chen picked up the giant's style and weaknesses. His enemy defended its waist and torso rather poorly.

He immediately took advantage of this, aiming every attack he launched toward that direction. As expected, the volcano giant became rather panicked in its attempt to guard itself.

Seizing this opportunity, Jiang Chen hurtled toward the middle of the giant's frame in a bolt of light.

The volcano giant scarcely had time to react with an instinctive grab. Failing to nab the pesky human, it tried to lumber after him in pursuit.

However, the young man was immeasurably faster than an ungainly giant at full throttle.

He found the eighth trial's exit not long after. When the light engulfed and left him, the scenery changed again.

"Was that it?" Jiang Chen found it hard to believe himself. Of course, the jade slip's confirmation answered his question.

"What the hell? With how hard that trial was, how many among the sixty can actually get past?" Though initially angry after his success, he calmed down quickly. It made sense; why shouldn't the final three trials be harder than the rest?

It certainly didn't make sense for them to be easy!

There was a wave of clamoring outside.

"Good heavens, he passed the eighth trial! How long did he even take? Whose genius could this possibly be?" Every witness felt his heart itch.

The second-place genius had only just entered the seventh trial, without any hint of being able to pass it. At the rate he was going, first place was going to pass all ten!

More than half of the geniuses had already been forced out. Not many geniuses had successfully made it to the sixth trial, and even fewer reached the seventh.

Only Jiang Chen was far ahead of the rest of the pack. His progress attracted the judges' collective eye.

A new wave of guesses erupted around his identity. By now, there was a noticeable bias toward Jiang Chen, but still a few supporters of Lu Mingye, the poison consort, or even other geniuses.

After all, he'd been first place in the previous round. The reputation he'd gained over the past few years had only added fuel to the fire.

The timer for the ninth trial had already begun.

As soon as he entered the ninth island, Jiang Chen felt a surge of killing intent everywhere. The island was Lifeless by name, signifying that death awaited all who entered.

Understandably, the trial was more threatening than the volcano giant. Jiang Chen focused a hundred and twenty percent of his attention on sensing the environment around him.

The trees and branches turned to weapons and blades as he walked by, striking at him from every direction. The attack would've put any unwary cultivator at a disadvantage.

After barely guarding against the weapons, Jiang Chen felt the earth below his feet tremble. The dirt under his soles suddenly turned to quicksand, consuming him with alarming rapidity.

Jiang Chen felt a weight upon his heart. He knew this was what the ninth trial involved; there was danger with every step he took. Only an unbroken concentration could provide him with a small chance to triumph.

The quicksand didn't hamper him much. He jumped, then glided, breaking free from the engulfing influence of the quicksand.

He knew that softened ground alone didn't pose much of a threat to most cultivators. It was the combination of a number of somewhat dangerous details that made the environment fraught with risk.

It was impossible to know where the next challenge would come from next, since deadly threats could be found around every turn.

Suddenly, a gust of strange wind rushed at him. Jiang Chen's consciousness shifted; the flurry of air put his heart on alert.

He veered to the side as swiftly as he could to avoid being pulled in. The gust blew past him in a whoosh, slicing everything caught in its path cleanly in two. Some things were entirely diced to smithereens.

If Jiang Chen had been seized by the strange wind, he would've had a very bad time of it.

"This is... Scouring Astral Wind!" Jiang Chen recognized the phenomenon. This type of astral wind typically came about as a result of special terrain.

Any flesh swept in it would be scoured away completely, leaving only the bone beneath. Quick reflexes were required to avoid the wind. A predictive eye was the only way to live past an encounter with it.

Agility was just as important, since one's body had to match the speed of his mind.

Jiang Chen had discovered the onslaught of the wind because of his keen consciousness. Otherwise, even the strongest cultivators could be caught unawares by it.

The young man approached the trial with as much focus as he could muster.

If I'm having such a hard time, the others would need a special treasure of some sort to protect their lives. Otherwise, they'll surely die in this trial!

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Chapter 2024: Shocking the Executives

Jiang Chen was no stranger to the Scouring Astral Wind. He knew it as a devastating storm from his past life. The most dangerous place to be was the eye of the storm. On the fringes, one could survive as long as they moved as fast as the wind.

Jiang Chen considered the storm before him. It was powerful, but not as powerful as it could be. This astral wind was still in its infancy.

It was enough to threaten average empyrean cultivators, but not advanced empyrean cultivators with above average agility and consciousness.

Very few of the young contestants had reached advanced empyrean. Seventh-level empyrean was the highest bar. Therefore, even the best among the young geniuses might not be able to weather the storm.

Jiang Chen was in no hurry. He concentrated on observing the the astral wind. There wasn't a clear pattern to its ebbs and flows, but there were some general rules one could deduce.

"The Scouring Astral Wind emerges depending on terrain and geological features. To avoid the wind, one must study the terrain first and identify a pattern."

Thanks to his deep understanding of the astral wind, he knew what to do after spending some time observing it. His form flickered when his mind was made up. "Time to go. Scouring Astral Wind at this level is no threat to me!"

As the thought struck him, another gust of wind swept toward him. He shot to his right like lightning to dodge it. He then whipped to the left in a flash.

He leapt and zigzagged his way through the storm. The astral winds came at him relentlessly from all corners, but he foresaw them all and evaded in the nick of time.

He fell into a rhythm. With easy grace, he made his way to the other side. No matter how the storm changed in frequency and pattern, he remained untouched.

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Senior executives of the ten sacred lands had gathered together outside the Sandplain Island. Most of the sixty candidates had been eliminated. Only less than ten were still persevering.

Eternal's Five Great Gentlemen had all been kicked from the game. Both Wu You and Gan Ning were now merely spectators.

To the sacred land's delight, Jiang Chen was still on one of the islands, which meant he'd be at least among the top ten.

"Someone's entered the ninth forbidden island already. Who the hell is it?? The others are still on the seventh island... Ah, two of them just entered the eighth. But this mysterious genius has entered the ninth and is still going strong!"

“It must be Jiang Chen from Eternal!”

“My guess is Poison Consort Shi Qinglu!”

“Why can’t it be senior brother Lu Mingye?”

“Don’t forget about the golden hairpins Holy Girl Si Tong and Yu Ling. They’re among the top geniuses as well.”

“Hmph, none of them can compare to Jiang Chen. I hear he’s a god incarnate. He’s destined for greatness.”

“Tsk, suck up to Eternal all you want! Jiang Chen isn’t even a Myriad Abyss native. Apparently, he’s from the human domain. We all know how much that domain is lagging behind.”

“I don’t want to waste time arguing with you. Throw down with a bet if you have the balls to!”

“Why not? I’m not scared of you!”

The young disciples were crude and straightforward when they spoke. They each had a favored candidate they thought would win the competition.

In general though, most of them were neutral. Objectively speaking, many believed Jiang Chen was most likely the one who had reached the ninth island.

He’d dominated the first part of the competition, and there were quite a lot of rumors about him to begin with.

His reputation exceeded that of any other youth. The more reasonable minds believed he shouldn’t be considered a simple young genius. Even when compared to the senior executives in the sacred lands, Jiang Chen could hold his own against many of them.

He’d been progressing at a ridiculous speed.

Eternal’s first prime was sure that Jiang Chen must be the leading candidate, but she couldn’t help but be a little concerned.

What if it wasn’t Jiang Chen?

She tried her best to tamp down her excitement and joy, putting up a calm and collected front. It’d be embarrassing if she got excited too early and ended up being proven wrong.

On the other hand, Ziju Min had never once entertained the possibility that Jiang Chen would lose to another youth.

“Wu You, Gan Ning, who do you think the contestant on the ninth island is?” he asked with a smile.

Without blinking, Gan Ning responded, “Senior brother Jiang Chen, of course.”

Wu You chuckled. “It has to be senior brother Jiang Chen. We’ve spent quite some time with. We know his strength and techniques better than most people here. We know very well that no other young geniuses have the right to rival him. He’s standing above us all, and the gap is great.”

Sui Chen felt as if he'd been stabbed in the heart. His face turned dark and rigid. He didn't agree with Wu You's unbridled praises.

Wei Yong had lost all respect for Sui Chen. He echoed Wu You's sentiment. "Very few can impress Holy Girl Si Tong and Yao Guang. Senior brother Jiang Chen is the only one in the younger generation who's achieved that feat."

That was a jab at Sui Chen, who had tried to strike up a conversation with the holy girls and ended up captured.

Jiang Chen, on the contrary, not only convinced the holy girls to release Sui Chen, but also won their approval. The two men were night and day.

Their debate was interrupted by an excited exclamation. "Look! Someone's passed the ninth island and entered the tenth!"

That bomb rippled through the crowd and caught everyone's attention. The crowd erupted into chatter.

The senior executives of the ten sacred lands had considered it impossible to complete the ninth mission. That was their designated endpoint.

However, someone had proved them wrong!

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Chapter 2025: Legends of the Tenth Forbidden Island

Something incredible had just happened. Someone really had passed the ninth trial!

All of the executives shot to their feet in the same instant, amazement writ plain in their eyes. They were thoroughly astounded by what they'd seen.

"Who could that possibly be? What a prodigious genius!" The same thought flickered through everyone's minds. The unknown young person's exploits were worthy of uniform admiration.

Whoever this was had far exceeded all expectations. None of the executives seated here had been capable of such a thing in their own youths, not even one!

The genius who'd passed the ninth trial had demonstrated talent superior to every high-ranking member of the sacred lands here.

"Congratulations in advance, Daoist Qi. The future of the Eternal Sacred Land is bright indeed. We're all very envious!" Someone remarked merrily to Eternal's first prime.

The prime was uncharacteristically humble. "We don't know whose genius it is yet," she replied hurriedly. "It might not be someone from Eternal."

"Haha, I have no doubt it is young Jiang Chen. We all know what the other geniuses are capable of. None of them could possibly hope to do this."

"You're right. Even the best disciples of the sacred lands have defined limits. We all have a good estimate of what they're capable of. Jiang Chen is the only exception – because he's popped up so quickly, we don't know him fully yet."

"Many congratulations, Daoist Qi. An excellent young man like him is hard to find. However, I do hear he is a native of the human domain rather than Eternal proper. I'm a little worried whether his loyalties will remain with Myriad Abyss?"

The first prime didn't take the compliments with much seriousness. They were merely words of courtesy.

It was impossible to know the motives of the speakers behind them. The most pleasant of commendations could very well hide a consuming jealousy and burning desire for Eternal to fail. She remained firmly down to earth.

"My friends, you think too much. There are still almost ten geniuses left, and any one of them could've just passed the ninth trial. Jiang Chen is only one of them. I see you know his origins by now, but I know him well enough to perceive his strong sense of responsibility. He's hardly going to be limited to the human domain alone. It's too small to contain his greatness in any case. He will represent the entirety of Divine Abyss one day – yes, the entire plane!"

Her grandiose prediction was also a warning against the attempted provocations she'd just heard.

Of course, there were others with a different opinion when it came to exactly who was doing so well.

"At the end of the day, Jiang Chen is just a genius from the human domain. His talent is surely limited. In my opinion, Myriad Abyss has plenty of good geniuses of our own. Any of them could have had a breakthrough past their own limits. Isn't this kind of competition precisely the stage for that?"

"Exactly so. I think that Flora's Lu Mingye and Shi Qinglu are both wonderful talents."

"Our arguing right now isn't of much use. The answer is almost out. Shall we keep our eyes peeled and await the truth? Regardless of the genius's identity, they are a blessing to Myriad Abyss."

"Indeed. The ten sacred lands' alliance is as good as fact. I'm sure this super genius will win a considerable deal of support for his faction."

"Quite so. A genius like this will be a superb leader one day."

The first prime was secretly overjoyed. Still, a bit of concern lingered. Yes, the person who'd just reached the tenth trial was very probably Jiang Chen, but what if it wasn't? It would be a tremendous blow for Eternal. If prevailing public opinion was overturned, the whiplash would be painful in its own way.

"I hope you pull through, Jiang Chen," the first prime prayed.

The discussion continued. "Don't the ten restricted islands around Sandplain all have ancient heritages?" Someone asked. "The last few are especially mysterious. Does anyone know what the tenth contains?"

"Apparently, the tenth trial is absolutely off limits. Friends, have any of you entered it before?"

"Historically speaking, I don't think anyone's come out from it."

"What??" The first prime felt a sharp pain in her heart. The historic annals did seem to mention such a thing.

Because no one had gotten close to entering the tenth in the last dozen thousand years, this fact had fallen out of memory.

The sudden mention of it reminded the first prime that this was indeed the case. The tenth restricted island was also nicknamed by some to be 'the Island of Death'.

Only the best of the best had ever been eligible to enter it, but none had ever returned.

Her expression suddenly became very grave. Ziju Min's smile froze over as well.

He wasn't privy to the same kind of information the first prime was. "First prime," he couldn't resist transmitting, "is what they say really true?"

The first prime wanted to slap her own face. Why had she forgotten such a vital piece of information? She should have informed Jiang Chen of this well ahead of time!

If one didn't set foot on the suspended bridge into the tenth island, there wouldn't be any problems.

However, entrance into the tenth island proper meant that escape was impossible. Someone had compared the passage as the very same bridge as one that led to the netherworld.

The tenth island itself was painted as the physical manifestation of the world of the dead.

This was a significant exaggeration, of course, but the reasoning behind it was understandable. No survivors had ever been recorded so far, over hundreds of millennia of history.

The first prime's expression caused Ziju Min to pale. So the rumors were true, then.

He started to panic. Jiang Chen was a genius, but even the greatest of geniuses wasn't guaranteed protection. Could Jiang Chen become the sole exception to the rule by making it out of the tenth island alive?

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Chapter 2026: The Mystery is Resolved

Young people were naturally daring and unconventional. Wu You and Gan Ning took it much better than Ziju Min. They weren't particularly interested in what history had to say, choosing instead to trust their own gut.

"Elder Ziju, historical records are meant to be broken. Hasn't senior brother Jiang Chen done that countless times? He's accomplished the impossible every single time." Wu You mentioned Jiang Chen's name with immense confidence.

"Exactly. Records are meant to be broken. No matter how scary the tenth island is, it's just a trial in the end. The senior brother has passed the eighth and ninth without problems, so the tenth should be a piece of cake too. I have a feeling that he'll come out of the trial completely successful!"

The two youths' assurance was infectious. Ziju Min couldn't help but begin to agree. Yes, if young people could trust each other so implicitly, why couldn't he? Wasn't he a venerated elder?

"First Prime, Wu You and Gan Ning make good points. Doing the impossible has become Jiang Chen's signature. He has infinite potential to do whatever he sets his mind to!"

The look in the first prime's eyes became conflicted. Her tone was filled with regret and self-blame. "It might be different this time. I was careless..."

The other sacred lands' executives saw Eternal's first prime grimace. They realized that the topic was likely a painful one for her.

Some fell silent, but others added insult to injury. "I hear that the tenth island is as good as hell on earth. There's only death to be found there. I wonder if that's true? After all, no one's even been to that island in the last ten thousand years. Perhaps this genius will serve as the touchstone to this rumor?"

"If the rumors are true, it would be a great shame. No matter which faction the genius is from, Myriad Abyss Island aches at their loss."

"Indeed. To lose a genius capable of passing through the ninth trial is a real tragedy."

The first prime felt her anxiety intensify. She wouldn't be able to answer to the venerated forefather if Jiang Chen died here. She didn't know how angry he'd be once he arrived.

Two more geniuses were eliminated from the trials at this time. They had failed at the eighth island.

The hours wasted away as more and more made their respective exits. Only four remained now.

Two were from the Flora Sacred Land. Lu Mingye, and Shi Qinglu. One was Sunrise's Holy Girl Si Tong. Of course, the last was Eternal's Jiang Chen.

These were generally considered the strongest of their generation. Jiang Chen was easily the most popular. The prevailing opinion began to turn to him being the one who'd entered the tenth island.

The air became increasingly tense. The sacred lands whose geniuses were eliminated were a little upset, but also thankful. At least their geniuses had come back alive!

Two hours later, one more was ejected. It was Lu Mingye this time!

Tired, harried, and with frustration plain on his face, Lu Mingye's first action was to ask the judges whether he was the last to exit.

When he heard that three more yet remained, he felt a heavy blow upon his chest. He was furious that he had been forced out due to a lapse in focus.

The truth was much worse than he'd hoped. Three geniuses had proven to be superior to him!

Their names only brought further shadows to his face. As he expected, it was the opponents he was most wary of. However, Shi Qinglu and Si Tong had done far worse in the first round than him.

If these two were eliminated by the eighth trial as well, their final scores for this segment wouldn't be too far apart. Their rewards might be different, but he would be in the overall lead still.

But that Jiang Chen...

Lu Mingye gnashed his teeth at the thought of the Eternal genius. How could that kid still be inside? What gave him the right to walk all over Lu Mingye??

He absolutely couldn't stand it. Jealousy consumed his soul like a viper.

However, he quickly heard that one of the geniuses had entered the tenth restricted island. At first, his head spun in a daze, but the circulating rumor that no other genius in history had come out alive relieved him.

Lu Mingye almost wanted to throw his head back and crow. Heaven was smiling upon him!

He knew better than anyone that the only genius capable of reaching the tenth island had to be Jiang Chen.

It couldn't be Si Tong or Shi Qinglu, because their strengths were comparable to his.

The difference between Jiang Chen and himself was large enough to despair over. He was immensely grateful that such a dreadful truth existed in the first place.

Schadenfreude filled his heart. "Good, good! I hope he never comes back out. He deserves to die for being so far above everyone else. He doesn't know when to keep a low profile. Heaven itself is against him! I'd like to see him struggle now!"

Lu Mingye hadn't actually lost at Jiang Chen's hands, but deep down, he hated the Eternal genius far more than Shi Qinglu did.

Shi Qinglu respected Jiang Chen to a certain degree after her loss.

Though Lu Mingye hadn't fought with Jiang Chen, he had been scared into hiding from the other. This was a perpetual black mark upon his record.

The only way he could ignore it would be if Jiang Chen died here.

After six hours passed, Si Tong and Shi Qinglu re-emerged as well. They were unable to pass through the Scouring Astral Wind, and thus eliminated.

Now, everything was clear. Jiang Chen was the only one who remained within.

It was just as everyone had guessed earlier. He really was the genius at the forefront! His incredible genius was the envy of all. Perhaps heaven envied him as well?

The first prime was ghastly pale. She was a little panicked now.

"Since no one has come out from the tenth island in history, this round is over, right?" someone spoke up.

"Yes, it's over. Let's tally the results. Sigh!"

The first prime immediately found an outlet for her anger. "Who said it's over? Nothing is over before the time limit is up!"

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2027: The Tenth Forbidden Island

The first prime was fully incensed. She knew that Jiang Chen had to be the one on the tenth island right now and how much trouble he was in.

However, the allotted time was far from being up yet. It was tremendously insulting to the Eternal Sacred Land to tally results right now, and she wasn't going to stand for it.

In truth, the person who'd made the suggestion had only done so to provoke her.

Though it was nearly consensus that Jiang Chen wouldn't be able to come back out, they still had to follow the rules. On the off chance that he did happen to return, they would be in a very awkward spot without doing so.

Thus, keeping up appearances was fully necessary, regardless of the unbroken curse upon the tenth island.

The factions on good terms with Eternal came over to comfort the first prime.

Puresmoke of the Martial Sacred Land offered her own perspective. "Daoist Qi, I perceive that Jiang Chen is favored by fortune. There are no omens of ill in his visage. We can take the rumor and history into consideration, but it's not all conclusive. A genius like Jiang Chen is surely different from all the others. I'm certain he will evade every danger."

The Martial Sacred Land was indebted to Jiang Chen, and Puresmoke herself rather admired the youth. If he hadn't settled down with Huang'er long ago, she would've tried to get him and her disciple Yu Ling together.

The first prime struggled to smile. "I hope you're right, my friend. If he gets out of this one, nothing can stump him."

"The best geniuses always endure hardships that the mundane are exempt from. They are honed and strengthened through every trial, until they finally attain the pinnacle of achievement."

.....

Jiang Chen had no idea that the outside world was abuzz over his progress. He didn't know he was supposed to be dead. In fact, he was positively clueless as to what he was supposed to do here.

The jade slip didn't assign him a task for the tenth trial. Was there not one?

"This is strange. Is my job to just last the allotted time and survive?" he pondered.

As soon as he arrived, he felt a marked difference between this tenth island and all nine of the ones before.

Jiang Chen noticed no sense of danger here. There was an odd peacefulness and calm. The sparse plant life barely managed to hide much of anything.

The island itself didn't look very big either. It was enshrouded in a faint sea mist, but that was nothing harmful.

"What mystery does this island hold?" Jiang Chen couldn't understand. His consciousness detected no signs of life whatsoever all around him.

The occasional buzzing of insects aside, not a peep could be heard.

"Is this island unsuitable to life? From the looks of the sparse trees and grass, I guess that might be the case."

Perplexed, Jiang Chen began to explore a bit more. The barren earth contained potent spirit energy, which didn't quite match with the facts. There was a lot to think about.

He stayed put and slowly climbed the slope he stood upon. The incline was very gentle.

His conclusion was no different at the top. Nothing around here concealed a shred of danger.

Had the organizers chosen the wrong place? Was this not the place for the tenth trial? Perhaps he'd headed to the wrong place?

This seemed pretty unlikely. There were only ten islands on Sandplain's shores. The sacred lands wouldn't get this much wrong!

Jiang Chen paced around, but made no new discoveries.

Sighing softly, he gazed into the distance. There was nothing to see save the waves.

The sky was perfectly clear and halcyon, as calm a sheet of azure as the sea beneath it.

How could this place be the place of the tenth trial?

"Ah, well. I might as well walk around a bit. Whether this is the tenth island or not, I can at least scope out my surroundings."

Jiang Chen didn't press too hard. He supposed that the other geniuses would have a very hard time even getting here. The ninth and eighth island's trials were extremely difficult for the other geniuses of the sacred lands.

There was no question that he would place squarely first in the competition. He ranked at the top for both rounds. Thus, he was in no hurry at all.

The island wasn't big. It took less than thirty minutes to walk around its perimeter. Unfortunately, it turned out to be thirty minutes of wasted time.

The only thing Jiang Chen had confirmed was the nonexistence of life here. There was nothing more threatening than a few bugs and frogs.

They were such mundane pests that they couldn't even hurt ordinary people, much less an advanced empyrean cultivator like him.

"What's up with this place?" His mind full of questions, Jiang Chen sat down flat upon the ground.

As soon as he did, he felt his consciousness tingle. There was a tiny bit of trembling in the ground. ...had his senses deceived him?

No – there it was again! The ground had sunk for a brief moment.

Jiang Chen tried to tune into that sensation, but there was no more. He furrowed his brow; something was wrong.

His consciousness was sharp enough not to hallucinate. What he'd felt had been real.

How could an island shake though? An underground pulse, or a localized earthquake perhaps?

It really didn't feel like it. There would be more activity if that was the case.

But Jiang Chen felt no aftershocks whatsoever.

"I guess I really am hallucinating?" the young man ventured uncertainly.

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

Chapter 2028: A Stunning Discovery

The sudden tremor beneath him alerted him. The island wasn't what it seemed. There was something more than met the eye. He simply hadn't identified what it was yet.

The fact that he'd failed to find anything after careful inspection made him even more wary.

Whatever the island's secret was, it was well hidden. Otherwise, he would've found something.

After sitting down for a while, Jiang Chen got to his feet. Before he could take a step, he felt a slight tremor again.

This time, it was even fainter. Since he was on his feet, it was almost impossible to detect. If he hadn't been primed to notice it because he'd felt the tremor when sitting down, he would've been completely oblivious.

"Was there such a tremor before, but I simply failed to notice it because I was on my feet?"

At that thought, he expanded his consciousness and looked for any minute changes in the area.

Eventually, the tremor happened again. Then again after the same interval.

Jiang Chen's heart sank. "This is very strange. The tremors follow a regular pattern, and they seem to be coming from beneath the ground. Unlike a sudden, dramatic quake, the tremors are steady and rhythmic."

They were like heartbeats, but much slower than a human heart. About three to four hundred times slower compared to a human cultivator's heart, in fact.

With that in mind, Jiang Chen surveyed the area even more carefully.

A long time later, his face clouded over. He'd found a pattern. There was a tremor beneath his feet every four hundred beats of his heart. No more, no less.

"Is there something underground?" Jiang Chen's curiosity was piqued. The tremors were absolutely worth investigating.

He scouted around. The tremors were fainter on the outer rim of the island. The closer he was to the center, the stronger the tremors, but still faint enough that he had to pay close attention to feel them.

He couldn't glean any clues no matter where he looked. He manifested a pair of wings and soared to the sky. He wanted to look down at the island from a birdeye's view and find out its secret.

However, his heart sank as he took flight.

An invisible force was pulling him back down. He couldn't soar into the sky as he wished.

He could leave the ground, but the height he could reach was very limited, and the energy expended was tremendous.

What the...

Jiang Chen was very taken aback. Gravity here was much stronger than normal, about hundreds of times stronger. He'd been moving horizontally and therefore hadn't noticed, but it was obvious when he tried to move vertically.

"Is gravity that's hundreds of times stronger than usual the secret of the island?" Jiang Chen was surprised, but didn't panick.

He activated the Earth Bodhisattva Orb and tapped into the earth energy within himself, changing his gravity to match the island's.

As the most powerful treasure of the ancient formation sect, the priceless Earth Bodhisattva Orb resonated with the island as soon as it activated. It began to absorb the great gravity forces of the island.

The ground beneath him seemed to sink spontaneously. Then, something unfathomable happened. The island shook! Not just vertically, but horizontally as well!

Jiang Chen could see with his own eyes that the island brought up tall waves as it moved, like a whale cutting through water. Its speed grew increasingly faster.

"What the hell, the island is moving?!" He'd seen many strange things in his life, but still this surprised him.

There had never been an island that could move. Could this island be a formation? Or the basis of a formation?

However, he hadn't sensed anything required for a formation, so that was unlikely. As a formation master, he was confident in his judgement.

What happened next was even stranger.

The ground beneath his feet cracked, the dry earth fracturing. What little vegetation there was crumbled and slid into the ocean.

The terrain continued to change, revealing a greyish-green surface. Irregular, intersecting lines split the surface into varying shapes. There were pentagons and hexagons. The surface looked unbelievably strange.

Jiang Chen considered it for a while. Suddenly, his eyes lit up in disbelief. The strange surface reminded him of something.

He pushed the orb to its full power and absorbed the terrifying force of gravity. His body grew lighter and lighter, and he rose higher and higher above ground.

He looked down from above. His heart pounded. Now he understood!

It was like a turtle's shell.

The shape and patterns of the island resembled a turtle's shell, and the island moved in the water like it was swimming.

Even someone with as much experience as him was shocked. The sea turtle was so enormous that people had assumed it was an island!

The tremors Jiang Chen had felt must be the turtle's heartbeats. Giant turtles had their own unique heritage. They could slow down their heartbeats infinitely, even to a few beats per day.

He sucked in a breath. If this was a turtle, it must be one that had lived for a very long time.

He'd been wandering about on a turtle's body for a long time without noticing. If the turtle had attacked, he would've been in great danger!

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2029: The Sacred Beast Black Tortoise

Jiang Chen was surprised, but still calm. He looked down at the quickly moving sea turtle from above. The turtle would surely make a move after being alerted.

Normally, creatures like turtles weren't aggressive, but turtles that had pursued martial dao were different.

Jiang Chen kept his guard up. He didn't want to count on the creature's good mood to keep himself safe. He had to be prepared. His instincts told him that the turtle was not to be underestimated.

Jiang Chen summoned the Vermilion Bird, Long Xiaoxuan, and Little White. He felt more confident with the three of them by his side.

"Haha, young lord Chen, what is this place?" As a divine entity, the Vermilion Bird was immediately alerted to the strangeness of the area.

Jiang Chen described what had happened. The Vermilion Bird nodded. After surveying the surroundings, its expression changed. It cast its sharp eyes at the giant turtle below. It then looked at Long Xiaoxuan and the White Tiger meaningfully.

"Have you noticed anything, Brother Long?" the bird asked pointedly.

Long Xiaoxuan frowned. "My bloodline seems to be boiling with emotion. There's something about the turtle's bloodline that causes a reaction in mine."

The tiger was surprised as well. "I have a similar feeling. Something about the turtle isn't right."

They looked at the bird.

"This isn't a simple turtle!" Abruptly, the bird shouted, "Watch out, it's going to attack!"

Their conversation was cut short. A tail resembling a steel whip shot out from the creature's rear end, the surface sectioned like it was armored. The thick tail whipped toward Jiang Chen and the others, almost collapsing space itself.

From the ocean rising to the sky, the ferocity of the attack didn't diminish one iota.

With lightning reflexes, the Vermilion Bird extended its wings, obscuring the sun and shielding Jiang Chen and the other sacred beasts. It flashed to the side, dodging the powerful tail.

The hit left ghastly scars in the air. Jiang Chen and the others tensed, shocked by the demonstration of power.

Regular turtles had very short tails. Very few could use it to attack. To Jiang Chen's knowledge, there weren't any such turtles with this level of offensive power.

"Can it be..." Long Xiaoxuan blurted out in realization, "the sacred beast Black Tortoise?"

The dragon's memory heritage surfaced suddenly. The epiphany led him to the right speculation.

The Black Tortoise!

Jiang Chen's surprise was clear on his face, as was a hint of delight. He hadn't expected to run into the Black Tortoise here!

"Are you sure, Brother Long?" Jiang Chen took a deep breath and verified in a low voice.

Long Xiaoxuan peered at the Vermilion Bird. "What do you think, Old Brother Vermilion?"

The bird smiled wryly. "It is indeed the Black Tortoise. The bloodline can't be faked. The fact that our blood resonates with the turtle's is strong enough proof. Such a depth of resonance isn't possible without all four sacred beasts being present."

Long Xiaoxuan nodded. "You're right. Look, the turtle is sneaking a peek at us!"

Jiang Chen looked down. The creature's head had been hidden in its shell, but it now reared its head proudly.

The Black Tortoise had a head that resembled a common turtle's, but was actually a hybrid of a turtle and snake. Therefore, the Black Tortoise had a long, smooth neck, powerful and unbreakable like it'd been cast from metal.

It raised its head tall and proud, as if it was showing off to Jiang Chen and the others. However, there was a hint of confusion in its eyes. Its bloodline was resonating as well, a feeling that was completely foreign to it.

Jiang Chen confirmed that the beast was the Black Tortoise after taking a good look. Its appearance and power all match his knowledge of the sacred beast.

He could barely contain his excitement. He'd roamed through the world looking for the Black Tortoise, and now had stumbled upon it by chance!

Not too long ago, he'd been talking to the Vermilion Bird about the sheer power the four sacred beasts would create when gathered together. He'd been wondering how he was going to find the Black Tortoise.

The bird had said that the tortoise was present on the Myriad Abyss Island, but no one knew if the ancient rumors still held true. It had been more than two hundred thousand years since then. Things would've changed substantially.

That was why Jiang Chen hadn't been that hopeful despite his eagerness to find the Black Tortoise. Luck played too big a part in this. He didn't expect to run into the last sacred beast today!

"How is it that the tenth forbidden island is actually the Black Tortoise! Doesn't anyone from the ten sacred lands know about this?"

He believed the ten sacred lands must be in the dark about this. Otherwise, they wouldn't have risked offending the sacred beast.

The Black Tortoise was drastically different from regular turtles. It might not be as quick to fight as the White Tiger, but it also despised having its territory disturbed.

Sandplain Island was very close to the tortoise's territory.

"Brother Vermilion, how strong is the Black Tortoise?" Jiang Chen transmitted.

"It's on my level," the bird said seriously. "And this is its territory. It won't be easy to deal with it here."

The bird added in assurance, "However, it's the four of us against one of it. The odds aren't in its favor. Don't worry."

Jiang Chen wasn't worried. In fact, he was excited.

How was he going to win the Black Tortoise over? The sacred beast wouldn't be easy to convince.

It was as powerful as the Vermilion Bird. Jiang Chen had only been able to move the bird's heart with kindness because he'd run into it when it was at its lowest point.

The Black Tortoise was obviously full of life and far from desperate. He wouldn't be able to win its approval in the same way.

"Let me talk to it first, young master," said the Vermilion Bird.

"Alright," Jiang Chen responded. Neither he, Long Xiaoxuan, or Little White was powerful enough to talk to the Black Tortoise on equal footing.

If the tortoise was a prideful one, it might ignore them completely. The Vermilion Bird was at least equal to it in power, making the tortoise more likely to talk to the bird.

"Try the diplomatic approach first, Brother Vermilion," said Jiang Chen. "Try not to offend it and maintain peace if possible."

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2030: The Vermilion Bird's Silver Tongue

Having known Jiang Chen for years, the Vermilion Bird had come to understand the human. It knew he very much wanted to recruit the Black Tortoise.

It would be a difficult task, but the bird had to try. Jiang Chen had painted the picture of what the four sacred beasts would be capable of in concert, which the bird very much wished to come to fruition as well.

If possible, it'd like to achieve something great.

There was nothing greater than manipulating the heavenly law and refining the five elements to create a heavenly plane. If they succeeded, they'd be the rulers of the heavenly plane. Even if Jiang Chen was the Celestial Emperor, the four of them would be the emperor's most powerful followers.

The prospect was a hundred times better than wandering the world like they would otherwise. No matter how exciting the Divine Abyss Continent was, it was no match for a heavenly plane.

"May I have a word, fellow daoist?" tried the Vermilion Bird.

"Hmph, who are you lot? What are the four sacred beasts doing with a human? This is a dishonor to your bloodlines!"

The Black Tortoise was an obvious hothead. It didn't sugarcoat its words and pulled no punches, even when faced with an equally-powerful sacred beast.

The Vermilion Bird was too shrewd to be provoked. It smiled indifferently. "The bloodlines of the four sacred beasts are superior, but not so superior that we cannot interact with humans. Based on my heritage, even the sacred beasts sometimes serve and follow a human master. Only on a plane ruled by spirit creatures would the four sacred beasts be considered the unequivocal supreme leaders. This is a world led by human lords. Are we to stay out of it?"

"Hmph, you sure have a lot of excuses for your voluntary fall from grace," the Black Tortoise retorted derisively. It didn't want to waste its time arguing.

"Why must you think in absolutes?" the bird responded with a smile. "What can you do in this barren sea of a home even with your great might and plethora of techniques? You're burying your head in the sand and trying to convince yourself otherwise! Truth be told, you're just playing dead!"

The tortoise flew into a rage. "How dare you say that?!"

The bird shrugged. "Why don't you visit the bustling areas in Myriad Abyss if that's not the case? But no, you're afraid! Afraid of human cultivators!"

The tortoise was both furious and mortified, like its worst secret had been exposed,

"That's still better than being a human's slave! I'm living the good life on my own. You're making a joke out of yourself and your bloodline!"

The Vermilion Bird remained smiling, unperturbed. "You might be able to say that if I was the only one making the decision, but both a True Dragon and the Astral White Tiger follow my young master as well. Can you honestly say that we all lack your foresight? It's Black Tortoises that fancy themselves too good for the real world! You've been cut off from reality after holing up here with little interaction with the outside world."

Naturally, the Black Tortoise wasn't going to admit that.

It scoffed. "As long as I'm free and happy, what does the outside world have to do with me? Since the ancient times, there have been human cultivators who have trespassed into my territory. All of those foolish humans mistook my back as an island and became my food!"

It grinned. "You didn't see how they reacted before they died. You wouldn't feel any affection for humans then."

Since Jiang Chen understood the ancient beast language, it was clear to him that the tortoise was a jaded cynic, especially when it came to humanity.

"No offense, fellow daoist, but you're quite naive for a being with more than two hundred thousand years of experience. A long life expectancy is the Black Tortoise race's strength. You being two hundred thousand years old is equivalent to several thousands in human years. Still, you're as ignorant as a child."

"Tsk tsk, are you honestly telling me to behave in my territory?" the Black Tortoise snapped, making it clear that it wouldn't hesitate to attack if further provoked.

"There are black sheep among every race. You only see the bad apples and the weaklings among the humans, not the heroes of their kind. I am quite right to call you ignorant."

The bird scoffed.

Enraged, the Black Tortoise glared at the bird with murderous eyes.

The bird wasn't intimidated. With a smile, it asked, "If you think so little of human cultivators, why give them such a wide berth? What you call freedom is nothing but cowardice in my eyes. You're deluding yourself and frittering your life away."

The bird minced no words. Every part of its riposte cut deep.

"Bullshit! Who do you think you are? Who gives you the right to judge me?!" The Black Tortoise was again consumed by its prejudices. Its eyes blazed with red battle lust.

"Fine, if you don't want me to point out your faults, I'll stop. It's just a shame for a sacred beast to hide out in the middle of nowhere and waste your potential. This won't help when outside foes invade our world. They'll drag you out from the sea and make you their slave. That day will arrive soon enough."

"Outside foes?" The Black Tortoise paused. The defiance in its eyes lessened somewhat. "Do you mean demons?"

"The demons are just one of our concerns. The plane's coordinates have been exposed. It's only a matter of time before offworld races invade. Our sacred bloodlines will make us their prime targets. With your Black Tortoise bloodline, fellow daoist, you'll surely be their proudest possession after you're enslaved."

That hit the tortoise hard. Its eyes widened as it fixed a stare at the bird, trying to determine if the bird was telling the truth.

The bird might have been a little hyperbolic, but it hadn't said a single false word.

The Black Tortoise spat. "Ha, if one day I become their slave, do you think you'll be spared the same fate?"

"We may not, but at least we'll fight for ourselves and the world. We won't hide in the ocean like you've been doing, too intimidated to even interact with people. In terms of dishonoring our bloodlines, we're no match for you."

The tortoise was cynical, not shameless. It opened its mouth to defend itself, but couldn't find the words.

"Fellow daoist, this young man saved my life. I joined him to repay the debt, and I trust him. Along with my True Dragon and White Tiger companions, we all trust him and will go through heaven and hell with him."