

Three Realms 2031

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

Chapter 2031: A Stubborn Black Tortoise

However, that wasn't near enough to change the Black Tortoise's mind.

"What? Are you trying to talk me into joining you?" The tortoise's tone was mocking. The notion was utterly ludicrous to it.

The Vermilion Bird grinned lazily. "What's so wrong about that? Given the circumstances, it only makes sense for the four sacred beasts to come together and achieve greatness."

"The four sacred beasts have never been on friendly terms since the ancient times," the tortoise denied lazily. "In fact, the dragons and tigers often fight to their deaths. I don't know what's making you three live in harmony. I can't imagine myself co-existing with all of you."

"We may not be able to, if not for our young master," admitted the Vermilion Bird. "He's our backbone and gives us a common goal, which is the basis of our friendly relationship."

The bird did want to convince the tortoise. Successful or not, it was doing its best.

The Black Tortoise was proving difficult to persuade. It was as stubborn as a donkey, unlikely to change his mind after it was made up. A few words wouldn't be enough.

"You may have a common interest, but I don't. I don't even share a common language with you. Don't bother trying to recruit me." The Black Tortoise yawned indifferently, its eyes flashing with a ferocious glint as they settled on Jiang Chen. "You were going to be my food, kid, but you managed to surprise me by resolving my gravity manipulation and soaring to the sky. Most human cultivators are cowards. It's rare to see a real talent like you. Those who have come before all ended up being my food. Hahaha!"

With an impassive expression, Jiang Chen said in the ancient beast language, "Given your age and cultivation, I should call you Senior Black Tortoise. However, you don't seem to deserve that respect, given the way you act."

"Ha, you're bold, kid. If not for this flat-feathered bird, this seat would've devoured you in a million different ways, even though you're up in the sky."

"You're being overly confident," Jiang Chen said coolly. He knew the tortoise was powerful, so much that it could rival the Vermilion Bird, but Jiang Chen himself was no longer easy prey. He wouldn't go down without a fight.

It was true that he couldn't defeat a sacred beast head on. Nonetheless, he had the means to protect himself. He was sure he'd have a fighting chance facing the tortoise.

The Black Tortoise smirked. "Oh? Do you want to try me?"

"I do." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "If you can't devour me like you have the other young geniuses. What will you do?"

The tortoise paused. "Oh? How do you know I have a devouring technique?"

It was a powerful heritage of the black tortoises. Normally, any being with a lesser cultivation wouldn't be able to escape from the devouring force once they were in range. Thus, Jiang Chen didn't doubt that the tortoise had indeed devoured some human cultivators.

However, that must have been a long time ago. Otherwise the ten sacred lands would've warned them about the danger of the tenth island, and the jade slip would give them some information about it.

Jiang Chen flashed a half-smile. "In addition to the devouring technique, I know you also have the Black Tortoise Festering Gas at your disposal, which is powerful as well."

A black tortoise had many natural talents. The devouring technique was one. The festering gas was another.

Back in the primordial times, the Black Tortoise was considered a judge of life, which made it a deity in charge of death. Death-related techniques were among the tortoise's heritage.

The festering gas was a powerful example.

The Black Tortoise had other tricks up its sleeves. As a sacred beast in control of the water element, its water techniques were also unrivaled.

This particular tortoise also knew how to manipulate gravity, adding to its arsenal of attacks.

Nevertheless, Jiang Chen believed he could at least keep himself alive, even if he couldn't defeat the tortoise.

The tortoise considered Jiang Chen with a doubtful expression and scoffed. "This damn bird must have told you about me."

The Vermilion Bird shook its head with a wry smile. "Your kind has always been paranoid. You're no exception. What a mistrustful coward you are. There's a reason the Black Tortoise traditionally ranks fourth among the sacred beasts."

The True Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and the Black Tortoise.

That was how the order went, but just as a general rule of thumb. The individuals had to be tangibly compared to determine which sacred beast was more powerful.

This tortoise was old, but it had an immature mind. It was easily provoked. The bird's words were very upsetting.

"Hmph, screw that bullshit ranking. Now that the three of you are here, come at me! We'll see if the ranking is accurate!"

The tortoise immediately added, "You have to fight me one by one, not as a group. Otherwise it won't be an honorable victory even if you do win."

It was no fool.

The Vermilion Bird smiled genteelly. "Protest all you want. It won't change the fact that the Black Tortoise has ranked fourth since the beginning of time. Young master Chen, let's not waste our time

persuading this stubborn tortoise. Perhaps it's meant to become a slave of foreign races. Let it stay here and count its days. Its peaceful life will soon come to an end."

The bird knew the tortoise well. Every word it uttered hit the tortoise where it was most tender.

Becoming a slave and living a shameful life in shackles was the tortoise's biggest fear, and the last thing it wanted to hear about.

"It's a real shame, young master," muttered the bird. "You've said you'd be able to refine a divine pill that gives us an unconditional boost to our cultivation. Alas, only the three of us will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labor."

The Black Tortoise's eyes flashed. It sneered, "Do you think I'll believe you, raggedy feathers? A divine pill? This kid is just an empyrean cultivator. If he can refine a divine pill, I can carry the Myriad Abyss on my back! You should think of better lies!"

The bird perked up. It knew it'd hooked the tortoise.

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Chapter 2032: The Black Tortoise's Challenge

It seemed to Jiang Chen that this Black Tortoise was a rather simple-minded spirit creature. It liked to pretend to be clever, but was easily manipulated.

Just now, the Vermilion Bird had successfully grabbed its attention with only a few words.

He had a very good chance of taming a beast such as this. Jiang Chen fell silent and awaited the Vermilion Bird's further efforts.

The Vermilion Bird laughed. "You've hidden in this patch of ocean for too long. Get with the times, old turtle! Before young master Chen's appearance, Divine Abyss didn't have that kind of pill for the emperor, great emperor, and empyrean realms either. But now, the entire continent knows his name! All in the world of pill dao recognize his unrivaled skill."

The Black Tortoise tilted its head. Its lantern-like eyes rolled around in their sockets, scrutinizing Jiang Chen with careful consideration.

It wouldn't relent verbally, however. "He's so young. Is there really no one his equal in the whole of Divine Abyss?"

Obviously, the tortoise was doubtful of the claim. Still, it found it odd that several other sacred beasts – proud as they were – were willing to be such loyal pets of a human youth.

There was something else to all of this.

Though the Black Tortoise was haughty, it knew full well that its race really was ranked last among the four sacred beasts. The three creatures here were every bit as pure-blooded. This was a rather confounding fact. How could a young human have won their proud hearts?

"I know you're still hesitant, fellow daoist. However, one thing is for sure: your days of cowering here will soon be over. Whether you like it or not, the ravages of war will sweep over you. The grasping claws of alien races will reach out for you soon."

The Vermilion Bird took advantage of the Black Tortoise's psychological weakness to scare it into submission.

"Hmph. And do you have any way to deal with disaster when that day comes?" the tortoise retorted stubbornly.

"We don't necessarily have a solution just yet, but we're strong in our unity. Fellow daoist, imagine for a moment what kind of strength lies in the gathered might of all four sacred beasts! Even alien invaders wouldn't be able to do anything to us.

"Our bloodlines are among the very best in the heavenly planes. We are only in such a disadvantageous position because there are so few of us. If our progeny were numerous enough, would we be scared of a few paltry outworlders? We would become kings of this continent ourselves."

The Black Tortoise sank into thought.

It had to admit that the Vermilion Bird had a very good point. The four sacred beasts were paramount existences in the heavenly planes, but that didn't much matter when they were alone.

The tortoise's eyes rolled around for a few moments before it came up with an idea. "I won't believe any part of your boasting about this human youth just yet," it declared, "unless he can prove that he really is exceptional. Then, I'll consider it."

"What kind of proof would you like me to offer?" Jiang Chen smiled coolly.

He desired the Black Tortoise very much. Why would he be wasting his time here otherwise?

Time was short these days. The continent was on the verge of war. The Great Formation of Heavenly Soul Confinement needed him to reactivate it. Every moment was precious.

If he was just a moment late to anything, the ensuing chaos was virtually unmitigable.

"Easy enough. Let us spar with each other," the tortoise cackled.

The Vermilion Bird frowned. "Fellow daoist, we've both lived over two hundred thousand years. Young master Chen is only a human youth. Don't you think you're abusing your seniority a bit much?"

"What if I am? If he's as great as you make him out to be, he'll have the courage for that, at least." The Black Tortoise wouldn't budge.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Sure. Let's spar a bit, shall we?"

The tortoise nodded. "Don't worry. I won't kill you or anything. You don't look like you're much past a hundred, so you're pretty good by human standards. As long as you can block three of my attacks, you pass. How about it?"

Jiang Chen secretly found this rather amusing. Was this a popular pastime for cultivators to suggest?

But he found no reason to refuse.

“It shall be as you say. Three attacks, and no more.” His affirmation was smooth and agreeable.

The Vermilion Bird paled. “Young master Chen, the Black Tortoise is already a divine in its own right. The attacks of a god are far above those of a demigod. You shouldn’t force yourself to go beyond your limits.”

Jiang Chen knew well the truth of the advice. Heaven and earth trembled at a god’s blows.

However, he had to take the risk. Moreover, he felt the chain seal in his consciousness becoming more and more active. It could unlock at any moment. The mysterious force enshrined within gave him the confidence that it would come to his protection in key moments, as it had already done countless times in the past.

A voice in his mind cheered him onward, supporting him in his decision to bravely face the tortoise. In this moment, he could take on any god.

“Trust me, Old Brother Vermilion. This is an undeniable opportunity.” Jiang Chen looked at his feathered friend with clear eyes.

The Vermilion Bird knew it couldn’t talk him out of it. The Black Tortoise was too important for the youth.

Jiang Chen had once informed his friends that the confluence of the four sacred beasts would give rise to some sort of historic fortune.

In this moment, it saw an unrelenting firmness in the young man’s eyes.

“Be careful. If it seems impossible, quit early,” reminded the bird.

“Daoist Black,” it loudly proclaimed, “we are both sacred beasts. You have our admiration, and we hope that you will be a commensurate gentleman to honor our races’ good names.”

These words warned the tortoise that although sparring was fine, anything more than that was too far out of line. If a god used his full strength against a human empyrean cultivator, that would be utterly shameful behavior.

“Heh, don’t worry. I won’t kill him. Still, if he turns out to be a knockoff, don’t bother talking to me again.” The Black Tortoise was no fool. It wasn’t interested in risking a fight against the three other sacred beasts here.

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Chapter 2033: A Promise of Three Moves

Jiang Chen’s heart was as calm as water. He stood in midair, motioning for the Vermilion Bird and the others to back off slightly.

The Black Tortoise began to shrink rapidly, transforming amid the waves. Moments later, a brutish man wearing scaled armor appeared in front of them.

This was the tortoise's human form, tenacious and virile.

"I'm going to be fair, human. I'll fight you at this size." Though now humanoid in size, it had become even bolder and more intimidating.

Jiang Chen's expression remained calm. "Alright," he nodded. "Please go ahead."

As soon as he said this, he activated every ability at his disposal to its maximum. He needed to throw everything he could at the Black Tortoise.

The Earth Bodhisattva Orb was an earth attribute treasure of unparalleled value. It was a must when facing off against the tortoise.

The Bewitching Lotus of Ice and Fire and his magnetic mountain would be brought to bear as well.

Finally, the golden bell was Jiang Chen's main weapon of choice right now, both for offense and defense. It was extremely reliable.

Forefather Goldenbell had barely extracted a tenth of his old weapon's strength. In truth, this bell was a divine instrument of ancient origins. The runes upon its surface revealed a potent ancient restriction.

Since Jiang Chen had a superior understanding of them, he wielded the bell to much greater effect than the forefather had.

"Ready?" The Black Tortoise roared, then jabbed his fist forward suddenly.

There was nothing special about the strike at first glance, but the aura around it tore through the fabric of space.

Jiang Chen felt like he was surrounded by a thousand waves. Power surged at him in every direction, threatening to crush the pocket of space that contained him.

Undeterred, he reinforced his tempered body with as much magnetic energy as he could muster. The golden bell rang out incessantly, flaring up with a golden protective barrier all around him.

Amid this aureate shield, the countless tendrils of the Bewitching Lotus wove themselves into a latticed wall. This multilayered defense was incredibly sturdy.

Boom!

The force of the Black Tortoise's fist slammed against the golden bell's barrier.

The instrument keened harshly in response, flickering and dimming a few times.

It had been sorely tested by the impact just now, but had survived admirably. He had passed the first blow

"Well done, young master Chen!" the Vermilion Bird cheered from afar. "As expected of a genius chosen by heaven. Even an attack from a god can't harm you!"

Though this appeared to be simple congratulations, it was a mental tactic to interfere with the Black Tortoise's decision-making as well. The bird had far more confidence in Jiang Chen now.

Jiang Chen felt mildly inspired. He glanced back at the golden bell, which trembled still. He didn't have time to think much – he needed to act.

He focused his inner energies into the bell once more. The instrument needed some time to recover, but he couldn't afford that same period of recuperation. Even if he had to overtax the bell, he needed to stand firm.

"Not bad. To be able to withstand my punch like that... you have a bit of skill, kid. But, just like you said, I have a devouring ability. That will be my next move. It won't be as simple this time! Prepare yourself." The Black Tortoise feigned generosity.

Jiang Chen laughed. "Come at me. I'd like to witness this ability of yours for myself."

The tortoise's eyes glinted with a hint of respect. It was rare for a young human to have so much courage. Compared to the human cultivators he'd met before, this youth was completely different. Unlike them, he was no coward.

Moreover, he'd eaten one of the tortoise's straight punches. Yes, it hadn't been with the fullness of its strength, but sixty or seventy percent was still pretty good.

Yes, almost incredible, given that a young human had blocked it!

The devouring ability he was going to use next was his most adept ability. Of course, he wasn't going to use all of his strength this time either.

Seventy percent was enough. The tortoise was a god! If a god had to use his full power against an empyrean youth, that would be far too ignoble.

Though dragons possessed a similar ability, theirs differed from that of the Black Tortoises'.

The tortoises' devouring ability used incredible amounts of mass as the basis. In other words, it was a sort of gravitational phenomenon that the tortoise bloodline amplified.

Jiang Chen's scholastic pursuits in his previous life had prepared him well. He wasn't at all anxious.

"Fuuu..." The tortoise opened its mouth. Its humanoid body began to change, flickering between its original form and its current one.

Its mouth grew bigger and bigger all the while. Like an endless black hole, it gained in pressure until it threatened to swallow up heaven and earth. A fearsome ability, to be sure.

Jiang Chen gestured and made hand seals all the while. One, two, three...

He was drawing suspended runes in the air. He had enough faith in this skill learned from the Six Palaces to rely on it in the present conflict.

Jiang Chen was unsure whether his defenses alone could withstand the devouring ability.

If he cut space up into smaller pockets with suspended runes and laid out sheets upon sheets of fragmented dimension in front of him, he could avoid being swallowed up.

He brought the Nine Labyrinth Formation to bear as well, it being another treasure that could affect the layout of space.

The laws of space were what he precisely needed to rewrite to counter the incoming attack.

“Aouuuuuu...” The Black Tortoise’s roaring grew louder and louder, causing the very colors of existence itself to pale. The oceans frothed, the sky turned, and the stars seemed almost to be attracted to the ground.

Jiang Chen disregarded these sights. He carried on drawing as many suspended runes as possible, slicing space into ever smaller bits and pieces. This was the perfect disruption against the tortoise’s devouring ability.

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Chapter 2034: Another Blow

Once the devouring ability was fully deployed, the velocity of airflow sped up ten thousand times in an instant. Anything caught up in the rapid flow was consumed without exception.

The dimming of the heavenly radiances astonished the three sacred beasts watching from outside. They gained a newfound respect for the Black Tortoise’s capabilities.

“Old Brother Vermilion, is that Black Tortoise going at it for real?” Long Xiaoxuan was a bit unhappy. If he was a god, he wouldn’t be nearly so courteous.

Though he tended to be rough around the edges, he was the first one to meet Jiang Chen among the trio. He valued his relationship with the human youth deeply.

As such, he was filled with indignation on Jiang Chen’s behalf.

A solemn expression was present on the Vermilion Bird’s face. “Usually, an advanced empyrean cultivator would have no hope against a god. However, young master Chen may prove the exception to the rule. I am confident in him because he is who he is. For him, nothing is impossible!”

The bird’s confidence didn’t have much basis in foreseeable fact. Rather, it was born out of instinct and past anecdote.

Nevertheless, it was confident that the Black Tortoise wouldn’t dare land a lethal blow. As long as that was established, there wasn’t much else to worry about.

Even if the young master couldn’t take three attacks today, he would only have a bit of a harder time taming the tortoise. Given his talent and potential, he’d definitely be back sooner or later.

Long Xiaoxuan didn’t consider nearly so many things. “If that old bastard hurts young master Chen,” he huffed, “I absolutely won’t forgive him!”

The dragon wasn’t quite at the level of the Black Tortoise yet, but his words, spoken in vehemence, weren’t to be discounted as hot air. True dragons could make that claim with certainty and assurance.

“Don’t worry,” the Vermilion Bird comforted. “First, the Black Tortoise won’t dare hurt young master Chen. I’m sure of that.

“Second, I think the young master has his reasons for doing what he’s doing. Don’t forget, he’s a reincarnated god. He’s no stranger to what other gods are capable of.”

Long Xiaoxuan snorted. His eyes focused eagerly on the scene of the combat.

“Brother Long,” the Astral White Tiger piped up, “why give yourself an unnecessary headache? Shouldn’t you know young master Chen better by now? What’s ever stopped him from winning, huh?”

As the youngest of the bunch by a long shot, the tiger was definitely somewhat more simpleminded. Its impudence drew Long Xiaoxuan’s disdainful eye roll.

The Vermilion Bird smiled, but stayed quiet. It had high hopes for the Black Tortoise to join their ranks. If the four sacred beasts could be gathered together... what a sight that would be!

If Jiang Chen’s dreams could come true, that would be absolutely perfect.

“Look!” The Astral White Tiger pointed at the sky. The intense energies in the air were dying down, allowing the roiling storm clouds to clear. The sun’s illumination gradually filled the sphere once more.

A wide swathe of space had been torn asunder. There seemed to be absolutely nothing remaining in the destruction’s wake.

The Black Tortoise gasped for breath, its eyes filled with peculiarity. The air suddenly rumbled.

Shortly after, Jiang Chen emerged from a fissure in space, his forehead beaded over with sweat. Evidently, his series of extradimensional moves and manipulations had cost him a fair amount too.

The same was true with the Black Tortoise and its inner energy expenditures. The two opponents traded enduring looks. The tortoise was perplexed, even a little angry.

“I didn’t expect you to deal with my devouring ability like that, kid. You’re the smartest human I’ve ever seen.” The Black Tortoise finally spoke up. Though it sounded rather irritated, there was a note of preliminary approval as well.

Jiang Chen wiped away some of his sweat, then smiled. “If I’d been just a little slower, you would have drawn me in.”

“Hmph, that’s because I only used seventy percent of my strength. Do you think you can avoid me at my fullest?”

Jiang Chen laughed. Though he was a bit drained, he hadn’t pushed himself to his own limits either. Plus, his chain seal lay dormant still.

It had actively wanted to help him several times, but he managed to survive using his own strength alone.

“One more move,” Jiang Chen reminded.

“Heh. You’re sweating and panting for breath already. You think you can take one more?” the Black Tortoise poked at the human’s mental fortitude.

Jiang Chen chuckled. He was sweating profusely and pulling the stunt just now had exhausted him somewhat. However, pills had allowed him to recover eighty percent of his energy.

He had time yet to muster up a strong defense as his opponent gathered energy for the third attack.

“You’re not at peak form either after using that ability. It’s not like you can bring your full strength to bear. Am I wrong?” the young man smiled coolly.

The Black Tortoise harrumphed. “Even so, I have more than enough energy left to beat you.”

“You said that two attacks ago. I’m still here, aren’t I?” Jiang Chen shrugged easily.

The Vermilion Bird was secretly anxious on Jiang Chen’s behalf. It thought the young human’s strategy of provoking the tortoise unwise.

All sacred beasts possessed a certain amount of pride, and aggravating the Black Tortoise so would only enrage it. The tortoise had only used seventy percent of its strength before, but that may well become a hundred now.

That eventuality would be quite troublesome for Jiang Chen to deal with. Messaging the youth to warn him of this, the bird received only a confident nod in response.

He had his own ideas. Yes, offending the Black Tortoise would rile it up, but winning over this tortoise necessitated eating an attack at its full strength regardless. The psychological shock that delivered would be much stronger.

He wanted to fully tame the tortoise in a decisive win.

Moreover, he guessed that this Black Tortoise would resort to its ace-in-the-hole: the Black Tortoise Festering Gas. Jiang Chen knew the properties of this gas well. He was confident in his ability to remain relatively unscathed.

Ahem. In case you never read the translator thoughts... you really should. Contests, giveaways, and behind the scenes.

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Chapter 2035: Black Tortoise Festering Gas

As the Vermilion Bird and Jiang Chen expected, the Black Tortoise threw reservation out of the window after being provoked by Jiang Chen’s attitude.

If this human is truly that powerful, we’ll see if he can take my last move. If he can’t, he’s in no position to patronize me!

Fury planted the seed of malice in the tortoise’s heart.

A ferocious glint flashed through its eyes as it cackled. “If you can take my last attack, young man, I’ll do whatever you say. If not, you only have yourself to blame for being overly confident.”

Jiang Chen smiled slightly. "Do you mean that?"

"Of course!" exclaimed the tortoise.

Jiang Chen had been just waiting for it to say this. "What do you have to back up your word?"

"Why would I need that? The Black Tortoise is a superior, noble bloodline. Would one of us lie to you!?" Offended, the tortoise flew into a rage. It glared at the Vermilion Bird. "You've heard my words. I won't pull back for my next attack. Don't blame me if he can't take it. If he can, I'll join you and follow his orders. Whatever you command will be my wish."

"What if you go back on your word?" the bird demanded coolly.

"If I do, may the heavens smite me with divine catastrophe and scatter me to the four corners of the world." The Black Tortoise didn't leave itself any wiggle room.

Jiang Chen was delighted. The simple-minded tortoise had fallen right into his trap.

"Good, you do live up to the honor of your bloodline. I admire your decisiveness." Jiang Chen cupped his hands. "Please, go on."

"Hmph, knock it off. Flattery will get you nowhere. I won't go easy on you. This strike will be at my full power. Do whatever you need to survive!"

The tortoise was very matter-of-fact. It was obvious it really wasn't going to pull its punches.

Jiang Chen smiled lazily. "I know your most powerful trick is the Black Tortoise Festering Gas, but that's the one thing I'm not afraid of. You better not pick that as your last move."

He continued to poke at the tortoise.

The tortoise had many techniques, the festering gas being the most powerful one, but that was what Jiang Chen wanted it to use.

He had a good idea about how he was going to counter the gas. If the tortoise chose any other techniques, he wasn't sure if he'd be able to hold out.

According to his understanding of the tortoise, it'd be contrarian and opt for the festering gas if he told it not to. If he'd told the tortoise to use the gas, well then it wouldn't!

A battle in martial dao was often so much more than that. It was also a battle of wits. The opponent's personality and state of mind must be considered. With the tortoise, one had to exploit its contrarian nature.

The Black Tortoise cackled derisively. "Stop trying to trick me into not using the festering gas. You're just scared. Not even the divine beasts can necessarily withstand it. You, a human, dare say that it won't work on you? We'll see if it does!"

As Jiang Chen had expected, the tortoise had made up its mind to use the festering gas.

Jiang Chen masked his delight and adopted a serious look. "Oh, then you'll lose for certain. Don't try to talk your way out of it!"

That was very intentional in order to provoke the tortoise.

It huffed angrily. "Dream all you want. Me, lose? If you can take my last attack, I'll join you and even serve you as your servant."

Jiang Chen pulled a long face. "Must things be this way?"

"Stop putting up a front, kid. It's too late. Know your doom!"

The tortoise shook itself. Green smoke rose into the air and formed a circle, as if pores had opened up all over his body and his scales had unfurled.

"Black Tortoise Festering Gas. Master of life and death. Overlord of souls." the tortoise intoned, then shouted, "I'll take you to hell and show you the gates of death, kid!"

The tortoise vanished into thin air.

The circular smoke expanded suddenly and, in the blink of an eye, flew past the void to reach Jiang Chen.

It dispersed into streams of silver smoke, writhing and rolling like silver koi leaping upstream.

Streams of light shot into Jiang Chen's consciousness without warning, each of which contained festering gas and could destroy a cultivator's consciousness on its own. A swarm would do even more damage.

Fortunately, a good majority of the light was bounced away by Jiang Chen's tempered body and magnetic energy. However, some of the more resistant streams blew past his defense and hit him.

More than thirty strands of gas entered Jiang Chen's consciousness. The tortoise appeared in front of Jiang Chen with a shift of its body.

It looked highly satisfied. "You have a decent defense, kid, but the festering gas has entered your consciousness. You'll be my puppet next. I'll show you what hell looks like!"

Jiang Chen looked at peace, his eyes closed as if in meditation. His body was as rigid as a statue. He seemed to have gone catatonic.

"Young master Chen!" exclaimed the Vermilion Bird.

Long Xiaoxuan's form flickered and he rushed toward Jiang Chen, but the bird stopped him.

"Wait, the young master hasn't lost yet," reminded the bird.

The Black Tortoise laughed out loud. "Yes, that's true. However, do you think his consciousness can resist my festering gas? Hahaha, only in your dreams! This isn't something an empyrean cultivator can resist. Even a few strands will be enough to devour his consciousness and make him my puppet."

The tortoise smirked and taunted the bird. "We have an agreement. Don't even think about breaking it. He lost! He'll be a slave under my command!"

The tortoise couldn't contain its excitement. It'd failed to take Jiang Chen down with the two previous moves, which compelled it to take the young man seriously. This was why it was so pleased to have defeated the young man.

The Vermilion Bird frowned and focused on Jiang Chen. It couldn't tell if the gas had worked on him. His lack of motion seemed to suggest that it had worked, but upon closer observation, he seemed to be fine.

The bird was silent. It wanted to get a closer look before coming to a conclusion.

The festering gas was indeed difficult to fend off. Jiang Chen's defense had been impeccable, but the gas was unstoppable!

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Chapter 2036: The Black Tortoise Concedes

The Black Tortoise swept its triumphant way toward Jiang Chen with a victor's smile on its face. It looked at Jiang Chen like it was appraising at its masterpiece.

"Tsk, it's impressive for a human cultivator to reach your height," the tortoise muttered to itself. "But you still fell short in the end! Haha, you were just a bit shy of being good enough."

Jiang Chen's eyes suddenly shot open, shooting forth a stunning, crystal-like light, interrupting the tortoise's self-satisfied spiel.

"Oh? I think it's you who falls short." The human's lips curved into a lazy smile.

What?!

The tortoise came to a halt, staring at Jiang Chen incredulously, its pupils shaking like it'd seen a ghost.

The Vermilion Bird's heart settled back into its chest. Even the usually serious Long Xiaoxuan flashed an involuntary grin.

"That big guy is an idiot," grumbled the White Tiger. "Did it honestly believe it can defeat young master Chen? Whoever can do that hasn't even been born yet."

The tiger was either making the statement in hindsight, or out of its blind admiration for Jiang Chen.

"You... you're fine?" The tortoise couldn't believe its eyes.

"Do I look like I'm not?" There was a touch of friendly teasing in Jiang Chen's tone. He was obviously not hurt at all.

The festering gas that'd entered his consciousness had faded like a breeze. It didn't even cause a ripple on his ocean of consciousness.

"But... that's the Black Tortoise Festering Gas," stammered the tortoise, dumbfounded. It didn't look like a sacred beast at this moment.

"I know," Jiang Chen said with feigned seriousness. "Didn't I tell you I know how to deal with the gas, so you better not use it? Why didn't you believe me? Where's your trust in another human being?"

"You!" The tortoise almost spat out a mouthful of blood, the metallic taste lingering in its throat.

Trust in another human being? The tortoise was a divine beast, not human. Besides, it was only natural for opposing parties to plot against each other. Why would there be any trust between them?

However, Jiang Chen was looking at it with an innocent face, as if the Black Tortoise was the one that had made a mistake - a grave mistake.

The tortoise felt his perception of the world, developed over the past two hundred thousand years, shattering. His festering gas was unbeatable. The tortoise could easily take out cultivators at its level with the gas, and even when faced with an opponent above its level, it had a good chance of winning.

However, a young, empyrean cultivator proved to be the exception.

Why?? The tortoise was still confused. It knew its technique. The festering gas wasn't something an empyrean cultivator could take.

There must be something it was missing, but that seemed to be the least of its concerns now.

The tortoise looked at Jiang Chen dumbly, trying to figure out the human's secret. Jiang Chen smiled and cleared his throat. "Oh, what was the oath you've made?"

The tortoise paled and shot him a glare. "Stop boasting! I admit my loss. I'm at your service from now on. However, you have to tell me what tricks you've used. How did you nullify my festering gas?"

Curiosity would continue to nag at it if it didn't get an answer. The gas was its trump card. The tortoise be devastated if it was so worthless.

Jiang Chen didn't want to knock the tortoise down. He smiled and extended both hands with his palms up.

"There's nothing special, really. I happen to have a powerful consciousness that protects me against such attacks. If you'd used a physical attack, I might've been in trouble. However, a mental attack is exactly what I fear the least. I could fend off the festering gas because I understand it, and my consciousness is powerful."

The seal chain was like the sun in the sky, while an attack on his consciousness a blast of cold air. Cold air evaporated immediately beneath the blazing heat.

Therefore, the festering gas couldn't destroy Jiang Chen's consciousness, despite its incredible strength.

The Black Tortoise gaped. The explanation did make sense, but how could an empyrean cultivator have such powerful consciousness?

"Are... are you really an empyrean cultivator? You aren't a god pretending to be much weaker than you are, are you?" The tortoise was beginning to question the basic tenets of life.

The Vermilion Bird guffawed. "I told you, Daoist Black Tortoise, that young master Chen is no regular young genius. It's your fault for treating him like one. You have no one else to blame for underestimating your opponent and making the wrong decision."

The tortoise shook its head dejectedly. "I knew it. You targeted me. Of course I would fall for your tricks."

"What tricks?" the bird retorted. "You were the one who boasted prematurely. You thought you were going to win, didn't you?"

"Fine, I lost." The Black Tortoise had given up. "But I have to make something clear first. I'll join you, but you can't humiliate me or make me a slave."

"Of course we won't do that," snapped the bird. "Do we look like slaves to you?"

"I'm just worried you'll bully the new guy," the tortoise complained pitifully.

"Haha, with the Black Tortoise with us, we have a perfect team." Jiang Chen laughed heartily. "Don't worry. We're all brothers and partners. We're comrades who weather thick and thin together. No one bullies anyone else."

The Black Tortoise considered Jiang Chen and clucked its tongue. "You're different from other humans. Alright, I know you've been telling the truth. I can't just hide here and pretend nothing bad is happening. I'm not stupid. I know the continent will soon face a disaster. I know about the offworld invaders as well. I simply didn't want to face it and didn't know how to face it."

That was the truth, and nothing but the truth.

The tortoise was merely one sacred beast. It had no allies, no comrades it could trust. It couldn't possibly take on the invaders on its own, ancient sacred beast or not.

His new circumstances weren't necessarily a bad thing, since he would have powerful allies by its side.

As long as it wouldn't be enslaved and it wasn't fighting on its own, what reason was there to be unhappy?

They were all of sacred beast bloodlines, after all. They respected each other. The tortoise believed the other three spirits weren't going to ostracize it.

More importantly, they had said the human cultivator knew how to refine divine level pills. That piqued the tortoise's interest.

After careful deliberation, it believed it was a good thing for it to join the group.

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

Chapter 2037: The Reactions of All Those Awaiting

Meanwhile, on the outer-rim of Sandplain Island, time was counting down. It was down to the final thirty minutes. Still, there was no sign of Jiang Chen's return.

Like a stone thrown into the ocean, he seemed to be irrevocably lost.

Among the senior executives of the ten sacred lands, some gleefully celebrated the tragedy, some sighed inwardly, and some felt genuinely sorry for the Eternal Sacred Land.

If Jiang Chen died on the tenth forbidden island, it'd be a senseless waste. No one had ever expected that to happen. The organizers would shoulder the blame.

The first prime's expression was dark, her face tight.

Suddenly, beings of great power emerged from thin air. They came at great speed and landed on the island in an instant. The divine forefathers of the ten sacred lands arrived.

They'd been supervising the offworld battlefield and had made time to come talk about the alliance. It was clear that the grand competition should've ended, according to their estimations.

All of the senior executives came forward to make their bows.

Members of the Eternal Sacred Land lowered their heads dejectedly when faced with their forefather. He frowned. "What's the matter? Has the competition ended?"

The first prime fell silent, shamefaced.

The forefather's gaze swept over them. Everyone was there except for Jiang Chen. His heart sinking, he demanded, "Where is Jiang Chen?"

Blood drained from the first prime's face as she averted her eyes. This was all because of her carelessness.

"What's going on?!" snapped the forefather angrily. Jiang Chen was Eternal's most precious member now. Anyone could die, but not Jiang Chen!

Ziju Min was depressed as well, but seeing that the first prime was too intimidated to talk, he spoke up instead. "Jiang Chen entered the tenth island and hasn't returned since."

"The tenth island?" The forefather digested the new information. His eyebrows jumped up. "What?? Did none of you warn him??"

The forefather knew what that meant. His heart seized up as he couldn't quickly recover from the bad news.

On his way here, he'd been pondering how he should fight for the leadership role of the alliance, only to be bludgeoned by this terrible news as soon as he arrived!

Jiang Chen had indeed performed the best in the grand competition, which was exactly why he'd entered the tenth island.

Was this... fate?

The forefather glared coldly at the first prime, infuriated. He wanted nothing more than to kill her right then and there. He managed to restrain himself only because they were in public.

"If Jiang Chen doesn't return," he said in a low voice, "You have no need to return to the sacred land either."

Some forefathers came to console him. Others came to enjoy the show.

"Fellow daoist, the grand competition has come to an end," someone spoke up. "Why don't we calculate the scores and determine the ranking?"

"Has time run out yet?" the forefather retorted coolly.

"Haha, there's only roughly thirty minutes left. There's no reason for us to stay and wait it out. Why waste our time when it's clear what has happened?"

That was the forefather of the Flora Sacred Land. Flora was absolutely delighted by the turn of events.

Jiang Chen, the thorn in their side, had fallen, and members of Eternal were fighting among themselves for the loss. Heavens had paved the path for Flora's ambitions!

"The competition doesn't end until time runs out," insisted the forefather. "How can you not know about the rules as a forefather? What the hell have you been doing with your mangy excuse for a life?"

"Haha, you're in denial," retorted Flora's forefather. "Everyone knows how it's going to end. Do you honestly think there will be a miracle?"

"A miracle?" The forefather felt a sliver of hope. Wasn't that what Jiang Chen specialized in?

If there were any miracles to be found, Jiang Chen would be the miracle maker.

"The competition doesn't end when there's still time," Eternal's forefather said frigidly. "You can't change the rules no matter what you say."

"Alright, I'll wait. We'll see what you're gonna say once the time runs out," scoffed Flora's forefather. He was obviously enjoying this and didn't even try to hide his delight.

The onlookers shook their heads. What had happened to Eternal was tragic, and Flora's reaction crossed a line. This was when Eternal was suffering the most. They should keep their shauenfraude to themselves. It was unbecoming of them to add insult to injury.

In general, they much preferred Eternal. Jiang Chen was a decent young man. More importantly, they wanted his pills.

If he'd died, those amazing pills of his would be lost to history. That would be a great shame!

Silence stretched as time trickled away. Everyone was waiting for the end to come. Some had been hopeful at the beginning, but as time went by, their hopes died down.

Even those who expected most from Jiang Chen began to waver. Would he really return?

Prime Puresmoke frowned, while Holy Girl Yu Ling looked visibly upset.

Holy Girl Si Tong was bewildered. Jiang Chen seemed to be blessed with good fortune. Why would he meet with an untimely demise in the competition?

Holy Girl Yao Guang gazed into the distance deeply, her expression unreadable. However, it was clear from their eyes that they were unhappy, and they felt sorry for Jiang Chen's circumstances.

By contrast, a majority of Flora's members were celebrating like it was the new year. Lu Mingye, especially, seemed like he'd won the grand competition already.

If Jiang Chen didn't return, he stood a good chance of winning first place with his total score. He could barely contain his excitement.

Once the time was up, he would be the champion of the competition.

The fact that he couldn't defeat Jiang Chen himself made his performance seem less impressive, but Jiang Chen was lost. The slight smudge on his record didn't matter.

Shi Qinglu's expression was impassive. She didn't seem happy, neither did she seem sad. Seeing Lu Mingye's premature excitement, however, she showed obvious contempt.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2038: Jiang Chen Returns

Time was almost up.

Everyone fixated on the hourglass. There was less than ten minutes before the end. It seemed impossible for a miracle to occur at this juncture. Many were already beckoning to their own disciples to tally the results.

"Get ready, everyone. It's almost time to score!" someone from Flora called out.

Lu Mingye boomed with laughter. "Heaven doesn't favor the unlucky. We young geniuses shouldn't be too arrogant!"

Most frowned upon hearing these words. Their speaker could claim the dubious honor of being arrogant, much more than the one he was attacking.

Jiang Chen was extremely capable, but he'd never seemed pretentious. If it existed, no casual bystander had ever seen that side of him.

Of course, no one was going to say anything right now. At the moment, the Flora Sacred Land was clearly beloved by fortune. There was no reason to get on its bad side.

Currently, Flora had a very good chance at leading a potential alliance. If it did take that role, it would be even more unwise to provoke it.

"Prepare your results, everyone. When the sand finishes, we will begin recording to determine the winner of the competition," the first prime of Flora loudly proclaimed.

As soon as his voice fell, a response echoed through the air. "The winner hasn't even arrived. What're you planning to do without me, hmm?"

Jiang Chen!

Whether the audience recognized it or not, that singular name came to mind.

Eternal's despairing expressions were magically lifted with eagerness and vitality.

"I knew senior brother Jiang Chen would return!" Gan Ning wildly waved clenched fists in the air. He grit his teeth and glared at Flora to vent pent-up frustration.

"Haha, some people flaunt their conceit far too early. You came back in the nick of time, senior brother! Your presence is a thoroughly gratifying blow to their dignity." Wu You was positively thrilled. He looked only at Lu Mingye as he said this, without a hint of evasiveness.

Lu Mingye was stunned. The blood left his face entirely. His eyes glared daggers of hatred into space, searching for where exactly Jiang Chen was coming from.

The young man darted into existence like a streak of lightning. He landed in front of everyone in the span of a single breath. There was still a tiny bit of sand left in the hourglass that held on to dear life, almost like the grains were waiting for his triumphant return.

"Senior brother Jiang Chen!"

"Senior brother, you're finally back. You didn't know this, but some people were wishing you ill, so that you'd never come out!"

"Well done, Jiang Chen, well done!" Ziju Min rushed forward with exuberance, patting the young man on the shoulder a few times in reassurance.

All eyes focused on him without exception. They were uniformly curious as to how he'd survived the tenth island. Was the curse upon it mere hearsay?

Color returned to the first prime's bleak visage as she let out a sigh of relief. Jiang Chen was safe and sound. She felt more guilty than anyone, especially after what the venerated forefather had said to her.

When she teetered on the brink of hopelessness, Jiang Chen reappeared against every expectation!

The Flora forefather swore under his breath. The recurrence of Eternal's genius threw a wrench into all of his plans. He had thought heaven on Flora's side, but that turned out not to be the case after all.

Eternal's first prime smiled. "Alright. The competition is finally over. Our waiting wasn't in vain. Reality has taught us that we cannot make conclusions until the last minute. We can tally the scores now, yes?"

But was there a point to scoring now?

Jiang Chen was obviously in first place. He had passed all ten trial islands of the second segment. Moreover, he had returned safely from the dreaded tenth island. What doubt could there be as to the veracity of his victory?

Even the Flora Sacred Land, with all motivation to be as picky as possible, had no rebuttal to the solidity of his claim.

"Young Jiang Chen," the Flora forefather snidely probed, "the tenth island has always been one of no return. Did you make any discoveries in your journey there?"

“Oh, nothing significant. That island was very strange, but I managed to sink it completely. Sandplain will only have nine restricted islands from now on.” Jiang Chen flashed a radiant grin.

Everyone was blindsided by his response.

What incredible dominance! It seemed too incredible to believe, but the way he declared it so outrageously left no room for doubt.

The Flora forefather chuckled. “A young hero indeed. You sank the tenth island? Its reputation is undeserved, is it?”

“I think the rumors surrounding it are far too overblown,” Jiang Chen feigned. “Maybe all the supposed danger was entirely made up. I walked around a bit, but didn’t find anything too nasty. I didn’t like being fooled, so, well... I sank it in the spur of the moment.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t going to let a hint leak about the Black Tortoise. Thus, his smokescreen was reasonably effective.

There wasn’t much more room to ask any questions. He didn’t exactly have a responsibility to answer them in more detail, regardless.

Eternal’s venerated forefather came over. “What?” he called out, “the competition of geniuses isn’t your responsibility, is it? Do you think you’re trying a criminal? Remember, Jiang Chen, you are one of the future pillars of our world. Not just anybody has the right to ask you questions.”

Jiang Chen laughed. “Yes, my bad.”

The Flora forefather said nothing, but his expression was very dark.

After the scores were tallied, there was no question as to the winner. Jiang Chen was in first place by a long shot. Though Lu Mingye had obtained second place, that was no better than last. His boasting earlier had completely toppled any impact his current results would have.

In fact, it was probably worse for him now than if he had actually been last place.

The competition of geniuses was finally over. The best geniuses had generally ranked near the top. Without considering the anomaly of Jiang Chen, the tournament had indeed witnessed a substantial struggle.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2039: Jiang Chen’s Counter-Strike

Some were astonished by Jiang Chen’s reappearance, but most were quite pleased. His Crowning Empyrean Pills were still yet to be sold, after all.

According to the prior agreement, the Eternal genius was to auction them after the conclusion of the competition. However, he felt it was best to wait until after the formation of the alliance.

To do so right now would strain relations between Eternal and at least some of the sacred lands. This would be highly disadvantageous. Prime Gao, of the Flora Sacred Land, knew this as well.

“Young Jiang Chen,” he breathed out through a skin-deep smile. “You are blessed to have survived a near-death experience. We all know how exceptional of a genius you are now, and a veritable guru of pill dao to boot. I imagine that all of Myriad Abyss and the ten sacred lands will bow down to you someday. The auction of the Crowning Empyrean Pills we talked about earlier... we can do that now, yes?”

Though every sentence seemed to praise Jiang Chen, their intention was uniformly to draw enmity and trouble for him.

If the auction was conducted now, those who didn’t benefit would likely end up opposing Eternal and supporting Flora. Therefore, it was in the Flora primes’ best interests to have the auction commence immediately.

“Daoist Gao, that is entirely the Eternal Sacred Land’s decision. We thank you for your extraneous concern,” interjected Eternal’s first prime. She needed to earn back the forefather’s trust after that last debacle.

“Haha, we all have ears here. We heard what he said before. You were the ones who promised to auction the Crowning Empyrean Pills after the competition, weren’t you? Surely you weren’t toying with our feelings?” Prime Gao was an expert at inciting negativity from the crowd.

All eyes rested on Jiang Chen.

“Young friend Jiang Chen, please don’t keep back the Crowning Empyrean Pills any longer. These treasures are meant to be shared. Why disappoint us so? The ten sacred lands should stand united. We have plenty of future opportunities to cooperate.”

“Exactly. There’s not much point hoarding your pills.”

“Eternal wants to use these pills to strike it rich, eh?”

When others came out of the woodworks to light a fire under Eternal’s feet, the atmosphere became a little tense.

Eternal’s first prime darkened. Flora is at it again!

Jiang Chen was entirely at ease. He raised his hands a little, then pushed downward. “There’s no need to argue, my friends. Please, hear me out.”

The crowd instantly became calm.

He cleared his throat before continuing. “I know you are all discerning and wise individuals here. Why then, should we act or speak foolishly? There’s no need to judge what kind of person I am from the few words of another. Daoist Gao is clever as well. Think closely as to what he intends by his words just now.

“To put it nicely, he’s rabble-rousing. To put it bluntly, he is using your emotions for his own ends.”

Villains such as these didn’t need to be shown any face.

“There’s no reason I would bring the Crowning Empyrean Pills if not to auction them. I guarantee I will do my best to ensure every sacred land gets at least one. Of course, because Flora has singled me and

the Eternal Sacred Land out numerous times, I am heavily considering excluding them. Anyone who follows in their footsteps will receive similar treatment.

"I would rather keep the pills unsold than have them fall into ill-meaning hands. I need to make a profit, but I have my principles. I have ever been a forthright and conscientious man. If you want to buy a Crowning Empyrean Pill from me, I ask you to wait until more important matters are dealt with. Moreover, I swear that I will refine these pills for any sacred land that doesn't manage to get hold of one today, charging only a nominal twenty percent fee. If the cauldron contains ten pills, I ask only two. Is that satisfactory?"

Jiang Chen's quick reaction rebuffed all of Prime Gao's trickery, smacking down the latter's reputation in the process.

His audience was impressed. The young man had just demonstrated remarkable skill at verbal fencing in parrying and riposting with one fluid motion.

The ones who'd been riled up instantly calmed down. It was obvious after a little thought that Flora was taking advantage of them.

Many specifically noted to themselves to be wary of the Flora Sacred Land in the near future because of this.

Eternal's forefather found it quite remarkable. Even he couldn't think of a solution that was much better than what Jiang Chen had done here. As expected of a genius who was skilled in every field!

The ten sacred lands seemed largely accepting of this compromise. Moreover, they were quite excited. Usually, the best pill masters took half of the cauldron as the fee for refining pills. Some particularly harsh ones took even more.

For Jiang Chen to take only a fifth was beyond kind. His incredible skill meant that his services were being rendered nearly free of charge.

Everyone nodded in acceptance of his terms.

"A straightforward settlement, young friend Jiang Chen. Impressive."

"Impressive indeed. You deserve the attention you have, and more."

"I've always said that young friend Jiang Chen has more heart and magnanimity than any of his generation. He would do well even compared against us old-timers."

"Quite so. He's the only one ever to return from the tenth island, no? I've always disagreed with the fact that he's been deemed chosen by heaven, but reality has proven me otherwise."

"Young friend Jiang Chen, I daresay you're the only candidate for the man at the forefront of Myriad Abyss in the future. Other geniuses are good, but you're the best."

"Or they might catch up after a very long time. Still, you're far ahead of them right now!"

Flattery overwhelmed the young man. Some were sincere, but others were hot air.

Jiang Chen wasn't the type to let any of it get to his head. "Thank you for the undeserved compliments, seniors," he smiled. "Let us get down to more formal business."

"He's right. Back to the main topic at hand. Aren't we here to form an alliance?" Prime Puresmoke took the initiative.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2040: Floral Sacred Land's Attitude

The Martial Sacred Land had always been Eternal's stalwart ally. Since Jiang Chen had saved it singlehandedly so recently, it had a natural duty to reciprocate that today. Where Eternal itself was indisposed to take the lead, Martial filled in as necessary.

Others were very happy to chime in.

"Yes. With how bad things are, the ten sacred lands need to band together. Otherwise, the future of the offworld battlefield will be bleak indeed."

"We need to discard our differences and oppose the alien menace. If we expend any more resources on internal squabbling, Myriad Abyss will be spent sooner or later. If that happens, we will all be equally vulnerable. You know the consequences as much as I."

"No eggs can stay intact under an overturned nest. I support the alliance."

"I too support the alliance! We must gather up all of our strength in order to turn the tables on the battlefield."

Multiple sacred lands offered their agreement.

It was hugely beneficial to ally with one another. Ten sticks were easily broken individually, but virtually indestructible once secured to one another.

The ten sacred lands were weak because of their dispersion. Occasionally, two or three of them would band together, but an alliance would have all ten concentrate their combined forces.

Even the Flora Sacred Land had wanted an alliance before, mainly because they wanted to lead it.

Right now though, that faction was strangely silent. It was rather worried that the formerly secure position would fall by the wayside.

The plethora of methods it had prepared to hamper Eternal had unfortunately not paid off. Lu Mingye and Shi Qinglu had both failed to produce the effects Flora hoped for.

Jiang Chen's decision to challenge the tenth island had been a golden opportunity that had also failed to pay any dividends in the end.

There was no longer any hope of accomplishing their original objective. It didn't seem very likely that it would become the leader of the alliance. Under these circumstances, its members began to hesitate whether to form an alliance at all.

It would be a net negative to forgo forming an alliance, but it would have a bad time if Eternal was to become the leader as well.

Its attitude didn't much matter in the grand scheme of things though. Most sacred lands supported the alliance, including Flora's closest allies, Polylore and Void.

The three sacred lands had been inseparable before, and the seat of leadership had seemed almost guaranteed if only two or three more sacred lands could be swayed to their side.

Now... well, they were still close, but cracks had appeared in their relationship.

The parties Flora had scoped out to influence were actively avoiding it, clearly suspicious of its ethics and intentions.

In the competition, Lu Mingye's performance had been a far cry from Jiang Chen's in every way. They were on totally different levels.

In terms of assets, Flora didn't have much of an edge over Eternal. Because of Jiang Chen's allegiance, the latter had a large collection of excellent pill recipes to choose from, which was an undeniable advantage.

In contrast, Flora couldn't promise many substantial benefits – certainly nothing so hefty as the Crowning Emyrean Pill. Thus, it turned out to be in a rather poor position.

"Daoist Gao, wasn't Flora in complete agreement with the alliance earlier? Why are you quiet now?" someone inquired with a smile.

Flora wanted to feign ignorance, but continuing that strategy would only be detrimental at this juncture.

"Haha, I'm glad we're trying to form an alliance. Myriad Abyss needs an institution such as this. However, there's a lot of work involved in figuring out the details. I think we must discuss at length exactly how to do that.

"Why not take some time to reflect and confer? When that's done, the alliance will naturally come together. If we hastily rush into things right now, we'll still think of ourselves as separate. What's the point of all form and no function?"

Prime Gao was both imaginative and eloquent. It wasn't easy for him to make up such a long list of frivolous reasons on the spot.

"I do not agree, Daoist Gao. The ten sacred lands are separated by vast distances. It is very difficult to gather all of us together under one roof. Plus, we're in rather dire straits right now. Do you think we would even be here otherwise?"

"The alliance needs to be decided as soon as possible. Who cares about the details? We can work them out very quickly right now. I believe that all of us are factions with our unique convictions and heritages. We all understand what it means to act for the greater good. At the end of the day, things aren't as complicated as you make them sound."

"I concur. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Delaying will only lead to our individual defeats. An alliance would be too late then."

“Daoist Gao, I don’t understand you. Just a moment ago, you were more anxious than anybody to form an alliance. What’s with your inconstancy?”

The Flora prime’s conflicting performance was very aggravating.

Prime Gao coughed. “You misunderstand me. Flora has supported the alliance from the very beginning, but we must find an appropriate leader. I think that is a rather difficult task.”

It came down to the mantle of leadership in the end, a fact that everyone implicitly understood.

“If we were to elect Flora as the leader, I’m sure you would readily agree, yes?” someone joked.

Prime Gao chuckled, then followed up without missing a beat. “If all of the friends here have faith in Flora, we will do the best job we can.”

“Hah, I knew you would say that. However, consideration has revealed that Flora isn’t the best leader at this time.”

“The Flora Sacred Land isn’t bad, but some of the finer points we’ve noticed during this competition are disappointing.”

Since all the sacred lands were equal, the other executives weren’t worried about being blunt. There was little need to hide their opinions.

Prime Gao looked mildly disturbed. The crowd’s directness was frustrating.

Thankfully, Flora had its own allies. Prime Zhao of the Polylore Sacred Land stepped in. “The Flora Sacred Land has always commanded respect among the ten for its prestige and wealth. Its coffers and libraries are fuller than any other’s. We must pick the most outstanding among us, shouldn’t we? Why shouldn’t Flora lead?”