

Three Realms 2331

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

Chapter 2331: The Five Great Godkings

The scene fell deathly still.

Elder Xu's face turned ashen. Elder Ge stared in shock, mouth agape. Han Shuang's eyebrows shot up, satisfaction mingled with doubt in her eyes.

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the nephew and the uncle far outclassed Elders Ge and Xu.

Rather than kicking his opponent while he was down, Jiang Huan ambled back to his seat, grabbed another fruit, and took a bite, completely unfazed.

The pale but uninjured Elder Xu returned as well, his aged cheeks burning red. If only he could dig a hole to hide in!

But he still had some lucidity left to him. If his opponent hadn't shown mercy, he would probably still be down for the count.

"Many thanks for your leniency." He raised a cupped fist salute to Jiang Huan.

"Heh, no fuss no muss. It's just a friendly fight, I wasn't trying to take your life or anything," Jiang Huan responded pompously.

He was performing a role for all he was worth, so as to mask his original personality and not give up the beginning of a clue about his real identity.

While his normal self was no stranger to jests, he was far from a buffoon.

Han Shuang laughed heartily. "Great, Little Gou struck gold this time. He's found two gems for us. There's no reason we can't grab a spot now. Elders Zhen, you two are quite the secretive ones!"

"Not secretive. We're just staying lowkey." Jiang Huan chuckled.

Elder Ge demurred for a moment, but still inquired in the end, "Please assuage this one's curiosity. With your strength, you could easily have joined another sect. Why choose our Fiendstar?"

Jiang Huan rolled his eyes. "I like the sectmistress' gallant air. Happy?"

Han Shuang giggled. "Elder Zhen Senior speaks from the heart as always. The why doesn't matter. It's enough that we all have the same goal."

Jiang Chen nodded minutely. "Certainly. Not to mention, we might not have been valued as highly in a bigger faction. My uncle and I have our own pride. We'd rather not have to tolerate being bossed around."

Han Shuang beamed at this candid-sounding explanation. "That's right, big sects are all like White Drake. They won't treat you nearly as well as us. That little witch would've used you as a sex toy. She'd suck you dry, then tossed you out on the street like a broken husk of paper bag when she's done with you."

Jiang Chen smiled silently.

They'd passed the test with flying colors and truly joined Fiendstar. There were still three years to the competition. They could put this time to good use.

Han Shuang was the happiest of the lot. With the two new recruits, the sect's strength had grown in spades. At the very least, the audit was no longer an issue.

With a decent enough showing, they might truly finish in the top five.

Jiang Chen cultivated single-mindedly inside Fiendstar headquarters. As for Jiang Huan, he was bored out of his mind. He spent every day outside and returned only late at night, outwardly enjoying life's pleasures with wanton abandon. In reality, he was busy ferreting out information involving the Taiyuan Plane or Jiang Chen's father.

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Meanwhile, Godking Crimsonwaters was entertaining a few good friends inside his mansion. There were five in total. Apart from the tall and bulky master of the house, the four guests were all godkings in their own right!

Together, the five of them could shake the entirety of Taiyuan Plane. There were quite a few godkings left in the greater world, but none were truly close to the others. Few could pool their forces together and entrust their lives to a peer without qualms.

As the host, Godking Crimsonwaters brought out the best Crimsonwaters Cloud Liquor he could offer to toast his bosom companions.

"Heh, Brother Crimsonwaters, I never tire of your fine stuff," happily commented a godking as fat as Maitreya Buddha.

The other three guests also nodded in agreement, praising the drink to high heaven.

Godking Crimsonwaters sighed softly, "Gentlemen, you've finally found the time to accept my invitation for a chat. Of course I have to celebrate the occasion and bring out the good stuff for us to enjoy. You haven't yet made preparations for the godking convention, am I right?"

"Have you, Brother Crimsonwaters?" wondered the fat one.

"Not preparations per se, but the sects in my territory are gearing up for an upcoming contest. I can only take five factions with me to the convention, so I need to filter out the lot." Godking Crimsonwaters chuckled.

"It must be inconvenient with all the little sects on your world. My small fief doesn't have this problem," remarked the fat godking, seemingly unconcerned.

Another man clad in blue said, "To be honest, do we expect anything to come out of the convention?"

"Same old, I guess. First comes disputes, then someone picks a fight when they can't win the war of words. Then they overthrow the current celestial emperor and elect a new one, then rinse and repeat ad nauseum. Nothing new under the sun. I've seen enough of this circus for the past several hundred thousand years. At this rate, we'll soon deplete Taiyuan's fortunes."

This one sported upright features and a righteous air. Known as Godking Righteous, he specialized in the cultivation of virtue and integrity, which explained his looks.

“Hehe, Brother Righteous walks the straight and narrow as always,” the blue-clad godking exclaimed softly. “Sadly, people like you are far and few between. Instead, sinister folks abound on Taiyuan. They obviously harbor ulterior motives, yet all of them are cowards. Everyone wants to ascend to the imperial throne, but no one wants to put themselves at risk.”

“I don’t want the throne.” Godking Righteous shook his head. “One who isn’t fated for it is nothing but a crowned imposter waiting to be overthrown. Objectively, I don’t have this kind of destiny, so the thought has never crossed my mind. What about you all?”

The fat one grinned. “I’ve never dreamed of it either. I’d rather live a long life!”

Godking Crimsonwaters sighed softly. “Me neither. I’ve always thought that sovereigns without virtue are scourges for us all. Not only is it self-destructive, they also drag down the entire plane with them.”

The four others all nodded at this pearl of wisdom. Recent history was littered with such examples. Without the required karma and fortune, the throne was nothing but fool’s gold.

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Chapter 2332: Godkings Discussing Politics

“Brother Crimsonwaters, it might be a controversial opinion, but don’t you think the plane’s never been the same again after Celestial Emperor Taiyuan’s unseating?” suddenly offered the blue-clad godking, breaking the silence.

The fat godking chuckled. “Hehe, here I thought I was the only one who thought that way. Honestly, I rather miss Celestial Emperor Taiyuan right now.”

Righteous snorted coldly. “Was there anything wrong with him to begin with? I’ve supported him from start to finish. Sadly, his opposition was too strong back then. Everyone thought he’d transgressed against the supreme dao and brought down the heavenly cataclysm upon us. They all cried out for his deposition.

“Gossip is a terrible thing. With all the godkings united against him and those with a hidden agenda fanning the flames of discord, how could he have kept his crown? It’s unfortunate. Those people have ruined Taiyuan Plane’s future.”

Brimming with justice, he spoke with an incisive viewpoint.

The last godking, a skinny man who’d kept his mouth shut and his eyes closed thus far, suddenly opened his eyes wide. “This kind of talk is only permissible in private between us. I fear misfortune will visit us if others are to hear.”

Righteous smiled faintly. “What’s a little misfortune at this stage? There used to be a hundred and eight godkings back in the day, but only sixty are left nowadays. What will happen in another five hundred thousand years? Unless we find a way to redo the Taiyuan Plane’s fortunes, it’ll soon perish, and all of us with it.”

Godking Crimsonwaters was familiar with Righteous' temperament, so he dropped this topic with a wave of the hand and changed the subject.

"Rumor is that someone will propose we change our plane's appellation in the next conference. They want us to remove the word Taiyuan entirely and erase all traces of his rule."

The fat godking scowled. "Can... can I call this idea blasphemous?"

"You absolutely can!" Righteous' indignation boiled over. "The only reason our plane hasn't crumbled yet is because of the continued existence of its creation token. To alter the name would be to sever the ties between this world and it! We'd be deprived of the universe's blessing. Do they want to expedite our world's demise? Who is so deranged??"

Celestial Emperor Taiyuan had been pulled down from his post many moons ago and imprisoned in the Divine Prison of Eternity. But who was the chief instigator of the coup d'état? Who'd caused the upheaval? No one on Taiyuan had the answer.

The people had witnessed the endless musical chairs of celestial emperors succeeding each other in the past hundred thousand years. Not a single one had lasted for more than thirty thousand years before abdicating or perishing.

Clearly, none of those fakes could be the real mastermind. Perhaps the culprit was still hidden at large, waiting for his moment to this day, never exposing himself.

Why?

Because he or she didn't have the creation token. Without it, a godking had no real edge over his peers. Once his identity was exposed, he'd be targeted by many.

So, the secret plotter bided their time in the shadows until they could seize the token and rule legitimately. As the one ordained by the heavens, no godkings would be able to stop them even if they were so inclined.

It was Taiyuan's greatest mystery. The plane had become a right mess, but who was the real instigator, the most ambitious of them all? No one knew for certain. The most likely candidates had already tried their hand at ruling, and were ultimately overthrown.

Most people saw the current celestial emperor as another puppet, a temporary fill-in to be replaced in probably less than ten thousand years.

A real celestial emperor enjoyed a million years of blessing at the very least. Less than that would make them an object of derision.

The five godkings were plainly appalled by the idea of changing the world's name. That would be altering fortune itself!

The people would be deprived of what little fortunes the Taiyuan Plane had left. Facing outright destruction overnight wouldn't be out of the question by then, turning all of them into homeless vagrants.

That was no joking matter.

Without its remaining fortunes, without its creation token, without the supreme dao's acknowledgement, the fate of a plane would be extremely dire.

"It's only a rumor. It might not actually happen."

"I wouldn't be so sure. The situation's very delicate right now. Whatever we fear the most is always what actually happens." The fat godking's chubby cheeks quivered.

"No matter what, we have to oppose the name change, or we're all done for!" Righteous insisted resolutely.

Godking Crimsonwaters nodded. "I invited the four of you for that very reason. We're close friends and can make plans beforehand. We don't aspire to the throne, but still need to oppose those who seek to harm our world. This has to do with our very survival. We can't just lie down and wait for death."

"That's right, we need to draw a line in the sand," concurred the blue-robed godking.

The skinny godking murmured, "Of course we'll oppose this idea. My worry now is whether the secret mastermind will stake everything on a last desperate throw of the dice. Perhaps he thinks he can refine a brand new plane. Great for him if so, but if not, that arrogant lunatic will drag us into the pit of hell with him."

Certainly, it was the most alarming possibility.

Godking Crimsonwaters gloomily commented, "Regrettably, no one knows the identity of our nemesis. Everything would be easier if we did."

"You don't say. There's been noise in the past about releasing Celestial Emperor Taiyuan to re-enthroned him. But everyone who's suggested it ended up dying in mysterious circumstances. It's plain to see the chief criminal is as determined as ever to make the plane his. He's never let go of this ambition!" exclaimed the blue-robed godking.

Righteous mused, "Releasing the celestial emperor is an option we ought to seriously consider. Rather than to live with this strange, permanent fear, why not simply go back to a better time? Surely, an imprisonment this long is punishment enough for his past sins?"

"Hush! Brother Righteous, I pray you never mention this idea again. It's a matter of life and death. Take care never to utter these words outside these doors!" warned the blue-robed godking with extreme caution.

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Chapter 2333: Explosive News

Life on Crimsonwaters seemed rather peaceful. Shady dealings were a daily occurrence, but the lesser world was relatively stable as a whole, a sign that Godking Crimsonwaters' ability lived up to his reputation. At the very least, the situation in his lands hadn't devolved uncontrollably.

Jiang Chen remained in seclusion inside Fiendstar. Sectmistress Han Shuang sometimes stopped by and shared gossip, but contrary to his expectations, she acted with decorum when alone with him. Her behavior was a far cry from her rough and ready attitude in public, not to mention her wild and bold demeanor.

Her current personality was much more to his taste.

“Elder Zhen Junior, why do I feel like you should be called Elder Zhen Senior instead of your uncle? You’re clearly younger, yet you’re boring as dust. Do you know anything other than cultivation?”

Jiang Chen smiled lightly. “Shouldn’t you be gratified by my diligence? The more hardworking I am, the better the odds for Fiendstar in the competition to come.”

“Haha, you’re right. I should lecture your uncle instead. I haven’t seen him cultivate seriously even once since he’s joined!” Han Shuang laughed freely. “The red-light districts are more familiar with him than us. What a debauched fellow. It’s a miracle you haven’t been led astray with such a relative.”

Jiang Chen chuckled. The one to lead him astray hadn’t even been born yet. Moreover, Jiang Huang’s attitude was a simple masquerade. He’d brought many useful pieces of information as of late.

“Sectmistress Han, please don’t misunderstand him. He might be a freewheeling spirit, but he knows where his priorities lie. He simply enjoys life in his own way. As for me, cultivation is a form of pleasure.”

A little perplexed still, Han Shuang soberly looked him over, genuine appreciation shining in her eyes.

“Seeing you put your nose to the grindstone makes me feel like we’ll definitely achieve our goal at the lake!”

Sensing her eagerness, Jiang Chen nodded in agreement. “Of course we will. Isn’t that the reason why we joined? We also want to meet the celestial emperor.”

Han Shuang giggled. “Tell me about it. Why do folks like us cultivate for a lifetime? Isn’t it to build up our legacy? To bring glory to our sects and honor our ancestors? To make something of ourselves? Who on Crimsonwaters would dare look down on us after we earn an interview with His Majesty?”

Jiang Chen smiled softly at her naive thinking, but offered no comment. He naturally wouldn’t point out that the current emperor was a fake and wouldn’t last long.

“Hah, I hope the current celestial emperor will stay on his throne for a while. Wouldn’t it be a waste of our efforts if he gets replaced as soon as we score an audience?” That was her greatest worry.

Jiang Chen chuckled leisurely. “That would indeed be a pity.”

“Sigh, the turnover of celestial emperors is a real downer. How can the ruler of a self-respecting plane be replaced so quickly? From what I hear, it’s not nearly the case in the other planes. Did our Taiyuan Plane fail to obtain the supreme dao’s blessing? Is that the origin of this volatility?”

Although seemingly thinking aloud, Han Shuang also sought an answer from Jiang Chen.

“Sectmistress, why are you so concerned about the affairs of our betters?” Jiang Chen asked with a chuckle.

“I’d rather not to. I don’t care who sits on the throne, but I’d welcome more stability and a strong ruler. I heard that the plane once knew millions of years of prosperity under the original Celestial Emperor Taiyuan. None of the following emperors lasted more than thirty thousand years. What a joke!”

She poked out her tongue. "Elder Zhen Junior, my words are a little disrespectful, so mum's the word. We don't want to bring harm to our sect, alright?"

"Haha, don't worry, I'm also a man of Fiendstar. My lips are sealed." Jiang Chen was only half joking.

"Alright, then I leave you to your cultivation." Han Shuang stood up.

The young lord suddenly spoke when she reached the door. "Sectmistress, just like you, I long for a strong celestial emperor."

Han Shuang grinned merrily, waved goodbye, and left without further ado.

Jiang Chen waited for her figure to disappear before murmuring, "The unrest's lasted for hundreds of millenia. Men now yearn for peace to return. Few want to see a Taiyuan Plane in the throes of discord."

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On this day, Jiang Huan came back and cast a defensive dome inside Jiang Chen's residence, isolating it from the outside world.

"Young lord, I have new reliable information," he announced eagerly.

"It must be quite exciting to make you so heated, Uncle Huan." Nothing short of a momentous development could make the older man so agitated.

"Several days ago, Godking Crimsonwaters invited several godkings to his residence. They stayed there for many days."

"Oh, and what of it? Isn't it normal for godkings to visit each other? Godking Crimsonwaters has a friendly reputation, I'm not surprised he has many acquaintances." The young lord didn't think much of it.

"As you say." Jiang Huan nodded. "But I hear he's not very satisfied by Taiyuan Plane's current state of affairs."

"That also goes without saying. Who'd be happy when there's no end in sight to chaotic times?"

"Hehe, you're right. Among his guests, there was a certain Godking Righteous, a very upright man. Apparently, he's always been His Majesty Taiyuan's firm supporter. Our secret mastermind's simply orchestrated the coup too masterfully for him to overturn. But, it gets better. Because of the worsening times, he sometimes openly pines for the past Taiyuan Plane.

"What does that mean? That your father is still influential after all this time! He still has supporters left. And at a guess, as the turmoil continues unabated, more godkings will yearn for the good old days and back his return."

Jiang Chen nodded, agreeing with the reasonable hypothesis. "Indeed, the greater their discontentment, the more opportunities for us. It'd be much more difficult to achieve our goals in times of peace."

"That's what I meant. So we absolutely need to take part in the godking convention. Everything hinges on you breaking through and refining the creation token before then."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Rest assured. At the current pace, I'm pretty confident I can become a godking within sixty years. I don't have access to the token yet so I can't make promises, but I'll do everything in my power!"

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Chapter 2334: Ready for the Audi

The plan was set. As for the specifics, he'd play it by ear, but having a clear direction was enough.

Three years thus elapsed slowly.

Jiang Huan left early in the morning everyday, and returned late at night with new information that deepened their grasp of the dangerous situation that Taiyuan Plane was in.

The rumor mill even bandied a possible name change for the plane at the next convention, shaking even Jiang Chen to the core. It took either a genius or a lunatic to come up with such a thought.

It'd be pure suicide, unless one had the strength to refine one's own plane. Without the support of its creation token, the plane would be struck from the list of heavenly planes and withdrawn by the heavenly dao. There was no coming back from this calamity.

The previous so-called shattering of the plane simply referred to the disruption of the political ecosystem and Celestial Emperor Taiyuan's fall from grace, while a name change connoted true devastation.

This really was no joking matter.

"We're dealing with a lunatic." Jiang Chen sighed with emotion. "If he can refine his own plane, why waste his time with Taiyuan?"

Jiang Huan said, "I'm dead certain he can't. His Majesty is the only one in Taiyuan with that kind of ability. Wouldn't it be more convenient and satisfying to create a plane from scratch? Why go down the shameful route of usurping someone else's? Moreover, our despicable culprit's waited for aeons, hiding in the shadows to this day without exposing himself. Countless celestial emperors have occupied the throne after the great shattering, yet he's still biding his time!"

"Uncle Huan, how do you know he's not one of those former emperors?"

"Heh, would they have willingly stepped down if so? Not to mention, some of them are already dead." Jiang Huan was now up to date on Taiyuan's history.

But Jiang Chen shook his head. "That's too simple an assumption. There's never too much deception in war. Perhaps he's more cunning than you think. He might have occupied the throne once, maybe to test the waters? He then abdicated when he realized he couldn't hold onto power for long. As for death, that's easy enough to fake. I've seen too many examples to count."

Jiang Huan grinned appreciatively at his junior. "Hehe, good! Exactly what you'd expect from His Majesty's son! Your brain works much faster than mine. It sounds plausible now that you mention it!"

“Yes, no matter who’s the chief instigator, he or she will have to come out of the woodwork soon. Our most pressing advantage is the increasing number of godkings nostalgic for my father’s rule as Taiyuan continues to degenerate. Time is on our side.”

“Exactly. By the time you suddenly appear, proclaim your identity, and occupy the throne with your creation token, no one will be able to stand in your way. Many peace-loving godkings will join your camp, weary as they are of the endless turmoil.”

“And then, I’ll free my father to solidify the greater picture!”

Celestial Emperor Taiyuan’s whereabouts were one of the facts Jiang Huan had learned. In fact, they were an open secret.

Based on the young lord’s analysis, the culprit had deliberately leaked the information. It was a honeypot to flush out the celestial emperor’s former henchmen.

Despite the celestial emperor’s capture, his creation token hadn’t been found. It was possible he’d entrusted it to a confidante, so the bait might be aimed at the item’s custodian.

Of course, this was merely conjecture.

Jiang Chen wasn’t a hundred percent certain, but given his familiarity with human nature, it likely wasn’t far from the truth.

“Hehe, so we need Taiyuan Plane to become even more chaotic, don’t we?” Jiang Huan grinned from ear to ear. “Maybe I should go on a trip after the competition ends. It’s already a lawless jungle out there, so I might as well add fuel to the fire, eh?”

Jiang Chen immediately caught his drift.

He wondered whether Jiang Huan’s strength wasn’t higher than he’d originally thought. I’m at the ninth level myself, so he might be a godking? Or a half step godking at least.

That kind of strength was enough to create some waves and leave a trail of destruction in his wake.

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On this day, Sectmistress Han summoned the sect’s four elders once again.

“Gentleman, I’ve already sent in our application. Tomorrow’s the day they’ll audit our strength, so I hope all of you will be in attendance.”

They nodded in turn as her beautiful eyes swept across each of them. As to Jiang Huan, he rubbed his nose. “What a shame, looks like I can’t go out to play tomorrow.”

“Who’ll supervise the audit?”

“Naturally the godking’s men. Godking Crimsonwaters is in charge of the competition, so he’s the final arbiter.”

Jiang Chen nodded.

Early next day, Han Shuang brought the four of them to the strength audit's venue. On the way, she constantly encouraged them. "Elders, today's a big day. You need to be at your best so we leave a good impression on the godking mansion. That might cause them to arrange a favorable schedule for us down the road."

Expert at socializing, she was highly skilled at deducing people's emotions.

The godking mansion was a vast structure. In fact, it resembled a sect. The participating sects all arrived early, ready to demonstrate their strength.

Han Shuang saw many acquaintances and received cordial greetings wherever she went. This was one of the advantages of a female sectmistress. In comparison, male-led factions usually bared their fangs at each other, as if playing a game of chicken.

Jiang Chen followed behind Han Shuang, his face serene.

All of a sudden, a malevolent pair of eyes landed on him. Unsurprisingly, it was White Drake's little witch. Scowling, she growled.

"Brat, don't let me meet you in the competition, or you'll get what's coming to you." It was a threat, pure and simple, but Jiang Chen shrugged it off and paid her no heed. He thought little of White Drake itself, to say nothing of one little girl.

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Chapter 2335: Passing The Audi

As it turned out, the unqualified factions were immediately excluded from the competition. Though stringent, the rules were applied equitably to everyone. As a result, the rejected candidates, though crestfallen, took their leave without crying foul.

After all, the godking's officials showed no special favoritism to anybody. They simply followed their orders to the letter.

It was almost Fiendstar's turn when a bald fellow from another faction wolf-whistled at Han Shuang.

"Mistress Han, are you sure you're in the right place? Do you have the requisite advanced gods? If not, you can add my name to the list. Provided you and me become one happy family, of course!"

The man's tone was obscene, and his laughter even more depraved as he harassed her with innuendoes.

Han Shuang's eyebrows shot up. "Zhao, are you trying to take liberties with those looks of yours? Didn't they castrate you after you molested a woman a few years ago? Why are you running your mouth off when you don't have what it takes?"

The bald fellow reddened as he swore, "Piss off, that's bullshit! Why don't we find a quiet spot so I can show you?"

"That I'll decline. Someone will chop off that toy of yours sooner or later."

“Hehe, Mistress Han, I’d let you do it if you’re into that sort of thing, but I’m afraid your scrawny arms aren’t up to scratch.” The fellow’s abuse continued unabated until a solemn-looking elderly official suddenly hectored, “Old Zhao the Seventh, keep quiet or I’ll kick you out! Don’t test my patience.”

Insufferably smug just a moment ago, the baldy didn’t dare make a peep after the official rebuff. He obediently tucked his tail between his legs, returned to his zone, and made himself scarce.

“Lowlife.” There was no other way for Jiang Chen to qualify this kind of wretch.

“Fiendstar Sect, you’re next.”

Her eyes shining, Han Shuang pronounced loud and clear, “Fiendstar is ready for the inspection. We’re at your service, my lords.”

Rather than a long-winded speech, her short declaration befitted the occasion. Her four elders in tow, she walked to the designated area.

Inside, some of the mansion’s core elders sized up her group.

One of them asked with a smile, “Sectmistress Han, I see two new faces. Are they rising stars from your sect?”

“Hehe, not exactly. They just tend to keep a low profile and rarely make waves. This one is Elder Zhen Huan, and this one Elder Zhen Shi. They’re uncle and nephew.” She turned to the two newest elders. “Elders, these honorable gentlemen are notable figures of the godking mansion. It’s a rare occasion to meet them in person, so you should make their acquaintances.”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “Greetings to you all, my lords.”

Jiang Huan’s cooperation came a little more grudgingly. These fellows didn’t hold a candle to his light, but he had to act the part today.

The mansion experts didn’t mind either way, seemingly not paying them much heed.

One of them smiled at Han Shuang. “Sectmistress, Lord Crimsonwaters is adamant we stay impartial. So just in case, please don’t fault us.”

Han Shuang smiled brightly. “Don’t worry, I fully echo his approach. Equal opportunity for all, I say. You have my whole-hearted support.”

The mansion experts froze. Was her cordial attitude meant to soften them so they’d loosen the rules?

Her response came as a surprise. Were the two unfamiliar elders enough to help them meet the requirements?

All would be well if so. They’d be pleased to see Fiendstar pass the inspection fairly and truly.

The procedure itself was simple. Each examinee had to infuse his divine power into a crystal wall that would shine with a number of lights equal to their cultivation level in the divine realm.

Seven lights would indicate the seventh level, the pass mark for the inspection.

First to step up to the plate, Han Shuang easily succeeded.

It took a little more effort for Elder Ge and Elder Xu, but they ultimately did their part as well. After all, both were honest to goodness seventh level gods.

Jiang Chen smiled when his turn came up. As he circulated his divine power, one light appeared on the wall, followed by a second. He slowly but inexorably reached seven lights, and in less time than Elders Xu and Ge to boot.

What did that imply?

The officials showed some surprise. They couldn't help steal a few glances his way, curious about this newcomer.

"Sectmistress Han, your sect is going places, it seems."

Han Shuang smiled back, feeling a weight off her shoulders. "Your praise is too high, elders. We passed by merely the skin of our teeth."

Jiang Huan effortlessly kept his side of the bargain as well, causing seven lights to shine just like his nephew and ushering Fiendstar across the finish line.

"Congratulations, Sectmistress Han. Your sect has qualified. The difficulty was higher than normal this time around, so not everyone was as lucky as you." One of the officials chuckled as he offered his congratulations.

Han Shuang beamed with joy. She took advantage of the situation to ask, "My lord, how many factions have qualified thus far?"

She obviously had to fish for information while the officials were still in the mood.

"There's harm in telling you. Out of the five spots, three will certainly go to the strongest factions. The other two are a toss-up between five or six sects. If you can defeat two of them, you're almost guaranteed to become one of the winners. But every qualified faction has met our standards. None of them are pushovers."

It was more or less as she'd surmised. But despite the challenges, they'd come too far to give up at this stage.

"Many thanks, elders. Our sect will do our utmost to bring honor to Crimsonwaters and the godking." She displayed just enough deference to stroke the ego of the godking's men.

If they weren't bound hand and foot by the rules, they wouldn't have minded giving Fiendstar a little help. Unfortunately, their liege had brooked no leeway. Any semblance of special treatment would be punished by death.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony, Sectmistress Han. Strength alone will decide the final outcome. Lord Crimsonwaters will be glad to witness your success if your sect's powerful enough."

"Anyway, our day's not done yet, so you and your men should go, Sectmistress. The competition proper starts tomorrow. Don't be late."

An excited Han Shuang nodded. "Of course. We'll be there early, you can count on us. When it comes to determination and drive, we won't lose to anyone!"

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Chapter 2336: Heavenly Crimson Lake

Passing the audit lifted an enormous weight off Han Shuang's shoulders.

Thrilled and briskly motivated, she clearly cared a great deal about gaining a spot at the Heavenly Crimson Lake.

Early next morning, she took her team to the competition grounds at the lake.

Those from the godking's mansion had already set up the stage and made their preparations.

Upon his return to the Heavenly Crimson Lake, Jiang Chen looked emotionally at the vast body of water. In his past life, he'd come here with his father and marveled at a majestic creation by the heavenly forces. Who would've thought that he would return here as a different man after several hundred thousand years?

"What are you looking at, Elder Zhen Junior?" Han Shaung came up to him with an amiable smile.

"The forces of creation are extraordinary, and their craft masterful." Jiang Chen answered with a question of his own, "Don't you feel anything, Sectmistress Han?"

Han Shuang chuckled. "I've been here many times and had my moments of wonder. You should wait until we win a spot and establish our foundations here. You'll be free to stare at the lake then all day, every day."

Jiang Chen jerked his head. "Let's go."

A total of twelve factions were participating in the competition, three of which, however, were in a completely different league. The White Drake Sect was almost guaranteed a spot.

Each was assigned to their own area and everyone had brought their best elites. The place buzzed with energy.

Atop the stage emerged the organizers from the godking's mansion.

Surrounded by his attendants, Godking Crimsonwaters walked out in all his glory. His tall and strong build made him stand out and leave an unforgettable impression.

"All hail our lord godking. May you live as long as the world, and the realm be forever prosperous!"

A smile cracked through the godking's serious expression. "You are all pillars of the Crimsonwaters Minor, fellow daoists. There's no need for such formalities. There's only one rule for this competition - fairness!"

"To that end, the five spots will be split into two parts. The top three will be selected from factions that self-nominate. Those who aim to fight for the top three spots may put yourself forward first. If you fail, however, you can't fight for the fourth and fifth spots." Godking Crimsonwaters announced the rules.

The design of the competition was to ensure that the most powerful three factions would win the first three spots, which befitted the interest of the minor world and the expectations of the godking's party.

Of course, it was also a form of protection for the other factions to some degree. If every faction might be pitted against one another, those who were matched with the top three would suffer unduly. There would be almost no chance for them to win.

The rules protected both the top three factions and the lesser factions. The lesser factions were free to challenge the top three if they were so inclined. If not, they would fight for the bottom two spots.

It was a rather humane way to set things up.

"Those who'd like to fight for the top three spots, put your names forward."

Han Shuang didn't even lift her head. She wasn't interested in getting involved, and she had no reason to. The top three factions, including the White Drake Sect, weren't opponents the Fiendstar Sect could rival.

She would be courting death by challenging them.

One faction, however, nominated itself in addition to the top three factions, warranting everyone's respect.

"Tsk, since when did the Sunblaze Sect get so brave? Challenging the big three? Are they good enough for that?"

"They aren't the reckless sorts. Have they encountered something and improved themselves greatly?"

The Sunblaze Sect was one of the top factions on the minor world, but never numbered as one of the top three. At most, they'd ranked fifth among all factions. Recently, however, the sect had kept a low profile. No one knew for sure where they stood at the moment.

Therefore, the sect's decision to nominate themselves was surprising, but also exciting.

They must have the confidence to back themselves up. Otherwise, who would take such a reckless gamble? It was important to win a spot in the competition. If they weren't confident in their ability, they could have fought for fourth or fifth instead!

"What a ballsy move." Han Shuang gave the faction a mental thumbs-up and muttered, "I envy them for their confidence. When will the Fiendstar Sect be able to fight for the top three spots? That would be a glorious sight!"

She clearly envied the Sunblaze Sect for its moment of glory.

Jiang Chen chuckled. "You can give it a try too, Sectmistress Han."

"No, I don't think I will. I don't want to trip and fall by taking too big a step." Han Shuang cackled. "Let us take steady steps and aim for the last two spots."

Jiang Chen nodded without a word instead of volunteering his help. He didn't want to stand out when a godking was present.

Such glory meant nothing.

Due to the Sunblaze Sect's unexpected move, there were four sects fighting for the top three spots, while the remaining eight would fight for the last two.

"Haha, the dark horse of a challenger has made it easier for us to organize the competition. There are eight factions fighting for the remaining two spots. We'll pair you up and hold two rounds of matches to select the two factions. That should work, shouldn't it?"

Godking Crimsonwaters smiled slightly.

"The godking has wisely made the most reasonable arrangement."

In other words, merely two consecutive wins would guarantee a spot.

Comprehending the rules, Han Shuang boosted her group's morale with a talk. "This is a great opportunity for the Fiendstar Sect. We only have to beat two factions to gain a spot. We've got to do it! That will be the start of our ascension to greatness."

The other factions motivated their members as well.

Every one of them had passed the audit before participating. No one was weaker than the others. In fact, the Fiendstar Sect was considered the weakest contestant, nothing more than to spectate than to fight.

The seven other factions were all hoping to face Fiendstar in the competition. It was the least renowned faction - perfect for the first round.

Han Shuang knew full well what the others were thinking, but she didn't take it personally.

One had to win respect with real strength. Anger was unproductive. No one in the martial dao world cared about feelings. The only thing that mattered was power. The fist was law!

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

Chapter 2337: The Competition Begins

"The tournament for the last two spots will take place first. As for the first three spots, each sect will duke it out with another one. Two winners will confirm their spots after the first round, while the two losers will fight again for the last one."

After announcing the rules, the officials proceeded with the draw.

As the sect's representative, Han Shuang quickly saw Fiendstar's name come up, as well as the identity of their first opponent. As luck would have it, it was the sect of the bald fellow who'd previously insulted her.

Not one of the absolutely strongest factions, it was nevertheless far more famous than Fiendstar and easily ranked in Crimsonwaters' top seven.

"Heh, Sectmistress Han, we have such a shared destiny." Old Zhao the Seventh licked his lips and leered lasciviously.

Han Shuang was a little disgruntled to run into such a thorny opponent right off the bat.

What the Golden Glyph Sect lacked in raw strength, it often obtained unexpected victories thanks to its ingenious use of glyphs and talismans.

She would've preferred a lesser foe, if possible.

"Gentlemen, a tough fight awaits us, but it doesn't mean our chances are nil. We only need three wins out of five, so those of you confident in the odds, please raise your hands."

Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan looked at each other before slowly doing so.

Scowling, Elder Ge and Elder Xu rebuked, "Gentlemen, now's not the time for showboating. There's a spot at stake, so don't overestimate your strength."

Jiang Chen chuckled. "And how would you know that we are, elders? What are you, mind readers?"

His retort struck the two old men speechless.

"Hmph! Sectmistress, you better carefully consider all of the variables before deciding on our overall strategy. Don't let certain foolhardy people ruin it all." Elder Xu snorted lightly.

"Cut it out," replied an annoyed Han Shuang. "Strategy? What's the use if we're eliminated from the get go? Truth be told, I would've been more relieved to see you two step forward as well. Since you don't have the guts for it, why are you trying to hold back others?"

Han Shuang didn't think Jiang Chen and his uncle were guaranteed to win, but their aplomb was far more preferable to the two elders' cowardice.

Elder Xu and Elder Ge fumed. "If that's your stance, then so be it. Just don't hold us responsible when our sect's eliminated."

"If we fail, it won't be because we took a risk, but because of lack of strength." Jiang Chen calmly countered. "All their tricks are powerless if you're powerful enough in the ring. Sectmistress, what about you? Are you up for it? Me and my uncle are ready to brawl."

Han Shuan smiled at him, secretly happy with his confidence. "Of course I am. I'm the sectmistress, so I have to lead by example! Ah, woe is me! I'll do whatever it takes, so you guys just do your part."

Jiang Chen smiled. "Great, the Golden Glyph Sect will be a piece of cake in that case."

Elder Xu and Elder Ge scowled ferociously. They hadn't intended to shirk their duties. They had the same desire to win, yet they hadn't raised their hands. They simply didn't feel strong enough to confront their opponent.

So they found themselves torn between two opposites. They'd be glad to see the two pretentious fellows suffer, but they also hoped to see them prevail.

"Alright, the arenas are ready. The chosen representatives may come forward to authenticate their identities," one of the main judges announced.

"Let's go." Han Shuang concluded curtly. No further words were necessary.

The authentication was to prevent any instance of impersonation. Today's combatants were required to have attended the audit the previous day, or they'd declared cheaters and their eligibility revoked.

It was an important step, but fraud rarely occurred at this stage.

Once confirmation was completed, the doors opened to five tunnels leading to the arenas. Both sides would soon clash against each other in five duels.

As for the fighting order, it was entirely up to the luck of the draw.

As it happened, Jiang Chen's name was the first one drawn. His opponent, an esteemed elder almost as strong as the Golden Glyph Sect's sectmaster, was known as his sect's number two.

Jiang Chen observed the man. He should be around the eighth level.

He waved at Han Shuang. "I await your good news, Sectmistress."

Han Shuang's smile vanished when she saw who he was supposed to face. Weaker opposition would have secured a victory both for him and his uncle, propelling them to the next round once she gave it her all.

But the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.

Could someone as young as Elder Zhen Junior handle a warrior as seasoned as the Golden Glyph Sect's number two?

One after the other, the others drew their own opponents and entered their respective stages.

"Alright, since everyone has taken their places, I will go over the rules one last time. Avoid fighting to the death as much as possible. You have to cease attacking as soon as the opponent throws in the towel. Otherwise, you'll be penalized and declared the loser instead."

The rules were less complex or restrictive than they might initially appear.

Jiang Chen stood in the middle of the arena, his heart entirely serene. He'd already grasped his opponent's strength. Peak seventh level, close to the eighth level, but not quite there yet.

Perhaps the Golden Glyph elder possessed a mighty art that could tap into his potential and temporarily elevate his fighting capabilities to the eighth level.

Even so, the young lord was a ninth level god chasing after the godking realm. Few at the same level were his match, so he had little to fear from someone with lower cultivation.

The Golden Glyph Sect's esteemed elder stared at him with cold, haughty contempt. "This seat wonders where Mistress Han dug up you misfits. Let me warn you, you should know your place and admit defeat right now. Otherwise, while my wondrous skills won't kill you outright, but you'll wish they had."

It was a naked threat, pure and simple.

This fellow obviously thought very little of Jiang Chen, but the young lord was accustomed to this kind of conceit. His youth made him easy to belittle.

Hence, he smiled indifferently. “Yap yap yap. Is that the only thing they teach in your sect? How are you going to clean up the situation when you lose even your pants later?”

The older man roared with laughter. “Interesting. I won’t waste my breath then. I’ll just smack you until you cry uncle. Don’t break on me too soon now, boy!”

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 2338: The Momentum of the Dark Horse

The fellow didn't look like he was joking. Runes were already welling out of his body, a myriad of golden tadpoles hovering all around him.

“Tremble at my power!”

His runes rushed forward as he said this, hurtling towards Jiang Chen in a stream of distorting, devastating force.

The runes were capable of bending the fabric of space itself, which affected an opponent’s ability to react to them.

The man’s skill with runes was quite remarkable. Even Old Pill Rune back on Divine Abyss was a far cry from this venerated elder of the Golden Glyph Sect.

However, Jiang Chen wasn't the same man as he’d been on Myriad Abyss.

At ninth level divine realm, he possessed a consciousness that rivaled a godking’s. A seventh level god was no threat to him. His biggest problem was how to hide as much of his real strength as possible. He couldn't let Godking Crimsonwater perceive how strong he was.

Ordinarily, he could kill this elder ten times over with a single slap.

Jiang Chen called upon his tempered body, then raised up his magnetic golden mountain in hand. This treasure was relatively unknown in the Taiyuan Plane, so there was no problem with him using it here.

The mountain’s magnetic storms roiled all around, countering the spatial distortion that the runes administered.

Golden Glyph’s elder was astonished at the toughness of his opponent, and Jiang Chen wasn’t exactly going to give him time to rest. He pushed his mountain to new depths in order to unleash a magnetic tempest that would crush his opponent against the wall.

In martial dao, having the upper hand mattered a lot.

When Jiang Chen had the upper hand, his opponent was prevented from using most of his abilities. In using the magnetic golden mountain to achieve this, that would fool observers into thinking that he relied on the power of his treasures rather than his personal cultivation.

This was his strategy to remain undetected.

The unfortunate Golden Glyph elder had no idea that his defeat was a foregone conclusion.

Even the magnetic golden mountain wasn't something he could resist.

The magnetic storms quickly intensified into a great cyclone, a torrential sea that trapped the Golden Glyph elder within.

There was no chance for him to fight back; he was completely stuck.

The venerated elder from the Golden Glyph Sect wanted to viciously curse out loud.

“What the hell is this? Is this kid even human? What treasure does he have? Why is he able to create a spatial storm?”

A profusion of questions filled his mind, but no one answered them. Moreover, he noticed that he was utterly hemmed in.

Boom!

The magnetic winds came to a roaring head. The Golden Glyph elder’s body was picked up like a leaf and tossed out of the arena.

Thump!

The Golden Glyph elder felt a splitting pain in his rear as he was dropped onto hard ground.

“First victory for the Fiendstar Sect!” Someone reported the results immediately.

Locked in a fierce battle, Han Shuang was immediately bolstered when she heard the good news.

A moment later, there was a similar report. “Second victory for the Fiendstar Sect!”

What amazing momentum!

Han Shuang didn’t need to look to know that the winners weren’t Elders Ge and Xu. No, it had to be the two Elder Zhens.

Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan had won with minimal effort, but they’d also both been obligated to pretend that they had tried very hard. This kind of performance art was draining in itself.

Nevertheless, their victories shocked the audience.

When had the Fiendstar Sect become so strong? The twelve factions participating in the competition had universally believed it to be last place.

What a reversal of expectations! Many disappointed not to have drawn them were strangely relieved. Wouldn’t they have been crushed in the first round due to their underestimation?

There were a number of sects who were definitely weaker than the Golden Glyph Sect.

If Golden Glyph had lost so badly, could they do any better?

Han Shuang fought increasingly harder due to the encouragement from the Jiangs. Regardless of how the Golden Glyph elder moved against her, she kept him tightly under control until his eventual loss. Her victory was decided very shortly after Elders Ge and Xu were defeated.

Therefore, they had won three out of the five bouts.

Golden Glyph was eliminated; Fiendstar would advance!

Was this the appearance of a new dark horse? Everyone else found the development nearly miraculous. Even amongst Crimsonwater's officials, many of the elders and advisors exchanged amazed whispers.

The godking himself peered with interest in Han Shuang's direction. Jiang Huan and Jiang Chen's successes garnered his curiosity.

"Where did little Han Shuang find that pair of capable helpers?" he asked his subordinates.

"According to her, sire, they've always belonged to the Fiendstar Sect. They're simply introverts and usually keep to themselves."

"Is that so?" The godking wasn't so convinced. The two men didn't seem trivially explicable, but he could hardly investigate further into the secrets of a subordinate sect.

Instead, he kept the thought in mind for later.

The other sects began to compete against each other.

Han Shuang was quite excited. She exchanged high-fives with Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan in celebration.

"Nicely done, Sectmistress Han!" Jiang Chen smiled in welcome.

His impression of her hadn't been too great before. What he had seen moments earlier changed his mind about her.

Han Shuang wasn't just a curse-spewing shrew, that was merely how she survived in the world. She could fight as hard as anybody, and deserved the leadership position much more than Elders Ge and Xu.

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

Chapter 2339: Round Two

The three other bouts ended shortly. The factions who won entered the second round alongside Fiendstar. The winners of this round would receive qualification.

"Shall we continue our streak as the unexpected dark horse?" Han Shuang's spirits were very high.

Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan's performances had given her a hefty boost of confidence. She almost believed that their victories were inevitable, and she was the only one who needed to win. It would be nice if the Elders Ge and Xu could win as well, but they didn't actually matter.

Lots were drawn for the second round's matchups.

None of the winners from the first round were easy contenders. Among the three potential opponents, two were assuredly stronger than Golden Glyph.

The last one was approximately on equal footing. It would be a difficult fight no matter their assignment. Fortune blessed Fiendstar this time: they drew the comparatively weaker of the three.

"Heh, Sectmistress Han. Fiendstar's defied expectations up to now, but isn't this about as far as you'll go? The Thousand Battle Sect is composed of only veterans. If our warriors were to accidentally strike

with too much force... wouldn't that be bad for our relations?" The enemy quickly started the attempt to browbeat Fiendstar into submission.

"Are you saying you intend to surrender?" Han Shuang smiled serenely.

The Thousand Battle sect head's expression darkened. "Don't play stupid, sectmistress. I am kindly advising you to surrender. When the fighting starts, your safety cannot be guaranteed."

Han Shuang maintained her smile. "Oh? Are you sure that yours is?"

Jiang Chen gave the woman a thumbs-up. She was a bold one!

"Enough banter. Get in the arena!" The godking's subordinates weren't interested in hearing pointless posturing. It was better to let fists decide who was right.

Once again, three wins were needed among five battles.

Han Shuang was first in the randomized lineup. Luckily, she matched up against one of Thousand Battle's normal elders, perhaps third or fourth among their five.

She tossed a look at Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan that said, I can handle this guy, so the rest is up to you.

Jiang Chen returned it with a confident smile.

Jiang Huan rubbed his nose, then snorted at the sky in a gesture of utter disdain. It was an act put on especially for Godking Crimsonwater. He didn't want the ruler to pay him too much attention.

The Jiangs' opponents were drawn in time as well.

Jiang Chen was fortunate to find himself matched up against someone of also middling strength.

Jiang Huan's opponent, on the other hand, was the Thousand Battle sect head. He was a little vexed. Not about how to defeat his opponent, but how to avoid suspicion while doing it.

Jiang Chen walked easily onstage, leaving his 'uncle' alone with his problem. His adversary had waited quite a while for him already.

The man who was to be his opponent was clearly an expert who had fought in countless battles. The killing aura that lingered upon him marked him as a diehard survivor of great bloodshed.

But then, so what?

If one's aura alone was potent enough to kill, there would be no need for them to get into the ring in the first place.

The expert's eyes fixed on Jiang Chen with great venom. "My blade has drunk the blood of at least ten thousand men, kid. You will be number ten thousand and one."

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "Is it customary among fools to threaten their opponents before fighting? I suppose your threat is better phrased than that old man from Golden Glyph. Are you sure you're stronger than he is, though?"

He cared not for an enemy's empty words.

His objective was the same as in the last round. He needed to figure out how to defeat his opponent in a way that kept his true strength hidden.

Anemic intimidation that sufficed only to scare children concerned him not at all..

The man's eyes turned cold. He trembled a moment before releasing countless images that roved in every direction.

Several thousand copies of him stood before Jiang Chen now. Thousands of arms and thousands of sabers filled the air.

Jiang Chen seemed to be ensnared in a vortex of blades in an instant.

The target of the attack feigned a serious reaction. An impetuous attack like this was far too obvious under the scrutiny of his Evil Golden Eye.

The images and the real man's movements were as disparate as raindrops between falling petals, easily discernible.

The expert was internally quite satisfied with his opponent's reaction. He thought that his ability had managed to fool the youth.

Fall! He shouted wordlessly, his blade slicing toward Jiang Chen.

Unfortunately, a golden light erupted as soon as he neared the young man. Wave after circular wave of terrifying rippling power sucked his weapon in.

What was this?

The man grew aghast. He had plenty of combat experience and considered his speed top-notch. And yet, his wraithlike strike had been accurately captured!

Why hadn't his prided swiftness worked? Had his misdirection failed after all?

Or... was this actually a coincidence?

Definitely a coincidence! his wishful thinking told him.

Alas, his naivete only worsened his condition. The dispersing ripples nearly disarmed him through its engulfing strength. His weapon was firmly glued.

"Out with you!"

Both weapon and man were pulled free from the myriad copies that surrounded him.

In the next instant, every false image disappeared.

The man felt an understanding pulse through his heart. He moved to get up, but Jiang Chen's foot was already upon his back. A mountainous weight nearly shattered his entire body.

"Haha, too bad. Your illusion isn't good enough against my ocular skill," the young man declared seriously.

His victim began to bawl in pain. The man panted with such agony that his tongue lolled out of his mouth. If Jiang Chen's foot pressed down any harder, he would be dead.

"Fine. If you don't want to be here, you can leave." Jiang Chen kicked the man off the arena like a ball.

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

Chapter 2340: Obtaining a Position

"Victory for the Fiendstar Sect!"

"Second victory for the Fiendstar Sect!"

"Third victory for the Fiendstar Sect!"

The three reports sounded nearly simultaneously. Jiang Chen noticed right after his that someone had already won before him.

The third victory came immediately after.

The first was won by Sectmistress Han Shuang. She walked out of the ring gracefully, a look of joy very much apparent upon her face. Her eyes were slightly reddened.

Evidently, she'd heard the reports and realized that Fiendstar had pulled through once again. Moreover, this round's victory meant that they were now entitled to a spot!

"We... won?" she ventured uncertainly to the two new elders.

Jiang Chen nodded with a faint smile, while Jiang Huan flashed her a cocky, sidelong look.

Elders Ge and Xu ended up losing again – no surprise there. Thankfully, that didn't matter. Fiendstar had won against Thousand Battle with almost trivial ease.

The godking's men were astonished once more.

Godking Crimsonwater glanced at Fiendstar thoughtfully. "Interesting. Those three are very interesting indeed. It's not just the two elders. I'm beginning to see little Han Shuang in a new light as well."

"Hasn't she always been like that?" asked one of his elders.

"Always like that? Haha, perhaps. Don't you think that she was also concealing her strength, though? If she's only seventh level divine realm, why has she barely won against every opponent she's fought despite their differing strengths?"

No one had a good explanation for that.

Yes, seventh level divine realm was no guarantee of victory in this competitive arena. Even eighth level wasn't necessarily assurance enough.

"When you put it like that, Your Majesty, that is a bit odd. Han Shuang is so young too. Why was she betrothed to Fiendstar's late sect head in the first place? And why did he die prior to their actual marriage? Is there more to the matter than meets the eye?"

Someone began to wax imaginative.

Crimsonwater chuckled. "That's inconsequential at best, the sect's private business. As long as they don't overstep their boundaries too much, we have no need to intervene."

His word set the nature of the affair in stone.

"This competition, then?" inquired another.

"It's their victory, of course. Their strength more than warrants it. Are you saying they cheated?"

"Hahaha, of course not! It is as you say, sire."

Thus, Fiendstar's run as a dark horse was sealed, and its fruits of victory secured. A remarkable and completely unexpected result!

The Jade Buddha Sect was the other winner.

When Han Shuang stepped forward to receive a Crimsonwater Token, her face was visibly flushed with emotion.

Only four sects competed for the top three, which made things a lot easier.

The process was no less dramatic, though. Especially notable was Sunblaze's victory over one of the top three, stealing its spot in the process!

The losing party was named the Jadearmor Sect. Formerly third place in the ranking, it lost its position entirely after the defeat.

The five sects who received an entitlement to the Heavenly Crimson Lake were as follows:

The White Drake Sect, the Cosmos Sect, the Sunblaze Sect, the Jade Buddha Sect, and the Fiendstar Sect.

Han Shuang didn't care at all that Fiendstar was last among the five. She wanted the renown and benefits first and foremost.

As the governing authority, Godking Crimsonwater congratulated them all. He informed them of the demarcated territory they were permitted to use and build upon.

"I must offer my sincere felicitations to all five of you. At the next godking conference, you will have the right to accompany me as my followers to visit the celestial emperor. You should value this unique and glorious opportunity."

The five sects were overjoyed. The Fiendstar Sect was the happiest of all, since it was the first time it had made it to Heavenly Crimson's lakeside. It was natural for its people to be more delighted than the rest.

Of course, Han Shuang and the Jiangs' excitement was mostly counterfeit. Elders Ge and Xu, on the other hand, displayed authentic emotion. They had fought rather poorly in both rounds, yes, but it was fine after all! Fiendstar had won the day and a position. Winning and losing were a natural part of one's life.

Others would only look upon them with envy now, rather than mention their names with scorn.

Next came a banquet from the godking's residence. The five winning sects were invited, as was everyone who had lost. The latter was a kindly and thoughtful gesture, despite the fact that the losers wouldn't feel great about attending.

The godking found time to speak to Han Shuang and the Jiangs during the banquet, though the words exchanged didn't go beyond courtesy.

Everything seemed entirely natural. Han Shuang remained quite animated after the meal.

"It's alright, Sectmistress Han. Elders Ge and Xu have gone home. There's no one else here," Jiang Chen reminded gently. The sect head's behavior was getting a bit too theatrical.

Han Shuang blinked, then smiled with some embarrassment. "What do you mean? Shouldn't I be happy that we won? And why do the two of you look unhappy, huh? I want to know why that is."

Jiang Chen answered with aplomb. "We joined Fiendstar for the sake of winning. Losing was not an option, and winning, entirely expected."

"Hmph. Entirely expected? Do you not have ulterior motives for joining us?" Han Shuang solemnly scrutinized Jiang Chen and Jiang Huan.

Jiang Chen remained impassive. "No. My uncle and I would like to cultivate around Heavenly Crimson Lake. It's fame and an audience with the celestial emperor that we're after."

"Heheh, alright." Han Shuang waved a hand breezily. "That's not important. Our first goal aligns, right? We got the spot we wanted."

In a show of strangely lucid reason, she abandoned her initial probe.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly. "Yes. We worked toward our common goal with concerted effort. Now that it's accomplished... what are you going to do next, Sectmistress Han?"