

Three Realms 821

Chapter 821: The Test Begins

Jiang Chen sat on his seat, his face entirely unperturbed. However, he had the impression Emperor Peafowl had thrown an encouraging glance this way when he said those words. What did His Majesty mean by that? Is he asking me to participate in the test together with those scions of the great clans?

Besides Jiang Chen, Ji San poked him and said via voice transmission, "Brother, I think Emperor Peafowl was looking at me just now. Did you notice anything?"

Jiang Chen was left speechless. This guy was truly narcissistic enough. However, Jiang Chen wasn't going to tell him the truth. Seeing his brother's face brimming with delight, Jiang Chen didn't have the heart to burst his bubble. After all, it would be too cruel for a man to suffer a blow in his professional life after suffering from sentimental woes no long ago.

"Ladies and gentlemen, now that the His Majesty has spoken, everyone has to treasure such a great opportunity." The various clan lords were also delighted. They looked at their own children and started discussing the development with them. Soon after, the youngsters all brimmed with excitement, eager to give it a go. The young people invited this time numbered eighteen, Jiang Chen included. All of them were first-rate geniuses from the various great clans.

"We naturally can't thank His Majesty enough for his blessings." The Coiling Dragon Clan's clan lord chuckled. "If I may be so bold, Pill Master Zhen here present is also a striking genius. I wonder if it would be possible for Your Majesty to include him in your test?"

With a hearty laugh, Emperor Peafowl said, "Since everyone here is a guest of mine, everyone will naturally be treated the same."

A pill king? The other young people from the various clans all looked at Jiang Chen in turn. They all revealed clear surprise. What is a pill genius like you sticking your nose in our business? His Majesty's test was certainly related to martial talent. As a pill genius, this simply isn't the stage for you to shine. By participating, wouldn't you be humiliating yourself? Those people's expressions weren't overly aggressive, but they still couldn't entirely conceal the rejection and the doubts in their eyes.

Jiang Chen hadn't been particularly keen, but the provocation he could see from these guy's eyes made him unhappy. He immediately cupped his fists in a salute. "Many thanks for Your Majesty's favors." His words clearly expressed his intent to participate. Emperor Peafowl laughed out loud. He silently sighed in relief for no reason at all when he saw Jiang Chen agree to participate. He had actually been a little worried. If others were to know Emperor Peafowl's frame of mind, they would likely un hinge their jaws in shock.

Seeing Jiang Chen really about to participate, the disciples from the other great clans suddenly were a little put out. Clearly, this pill king from a noble house receiving such an exalted treatment didn't sit well with them. After all, even the scions of noble houses weren't qualified to participate. As a guest pill king from an aristocratic house, why don't you consider your own status first? Even if His Majesty is magnanimous, you should still show some discretion and take the initiative to withdraw! Even if you want to take this opportunity to climb the social ladder, that's still too much lack of tact!

Some of the more narrow-minded were already plotting how to put him in his place when the opportunity arose. They could also let him know at the same time that even a pill genius couldn't careless stick his nose in the martial geniuses' territory.

"Are all of you ready?" Cloudsoar Monarch said. "If you're ready, then please come forward."

All the geniuses hurried forward in a rush to outdo the others and gathered near Cloudsoar Monarch. Jiang Chen reached the group in Ji San's wake at a leisurely pace. He saw some clan scions with undisguised mockery on their faces as soon as he reached the group, seemingly a little hostile to him. Jiang Chen was long accustomed to such meaningless posturing. He didn't feel like paying attention to them, and merely replied with a careless smile. For others, his attitude came across as conspicuous contempt. Miao Suo said with a cold smile, "Ole Third, are you becoming senile? You even cozy up to an aristocratic house's guest pill king now?"

The two of them were personal foes. It wasn't surprising for them to be at each other's throat.

A contemptuous smile was Ji San's only reply. "Fatso, do you think you're qualified enough to run your mouth in my presence?"

Miao Suo was about to speak when he noticed Cloudsoar Monarch's eyes on him. His bulky figure suddenly shook. His face ashen, he couldn't find the courage to say any nonsense any longer.

"Do you see the Peafowl Lotus Pond?" Cloudsoar Monarch pointed at the vast Peafowl Lotus Pond undulating with blue waves. It was so vast one couldn't seem from one end to the opposite shore in a single glance.

"Each of you will be given a lotus leaf. You have to reach the other shore of the pond with the help of this lotus leaf. The Thousand Peafowl Mural is there. What you have to do is to meditate on the Mural. His Majesty Peafowl has left opportunities therein. Whether you can obtain them will depend on your own luck. Of course, keep in mind that whether you can reach the Mural is an issue in itself. There are at least three trials involved."

Three trials? They could only reach the Peafowl Mural after surmounting the three trials. Only after visualizing the Mural would they have an opportunity to obtain a blessings left behind by Great Emperor Peafowl.

One had to admit that the difficulty was substantial. Jiang Chen didn't bat an eye. Standing inside the group of people, his eyes lightly closed, he seemed to be simply meditating without a care to the various reactions around him.

"Brother?" Ji San cautiously asked.

"Stay calm." Jiang Chen merely spoke two words.

A startled Ji San immediately seemed to realize something. He steadied his state of mind. Jiang Chen's two words had rang in his mind like a great bell. He realized he had been in a light-headed state of mind every since arriving on Peafowl Holy Mountain. Such a state of mind hadn't vanished even now. How was he going to face the contest in such a mood?

Some clan scions didn't pay any attention at Jiang Chen's appearance. They thought this Pill King Zhen really liked to put on a mysterious act. How far would a pill genius go in such a situation? It didn't matter how hard he played the part. Cloudsoar Monarch seemed very interested in Jiang Chen. His gaze revealed a bit of admiration when it swept past Jiang Chen. Even putting aside whatever talent he had in the dao of pills, this young man's self-possession was definitely out of the ordinary. Not every young man could stay calm by simply willing it.

In such a competitive atmosphere, a young man who could turn a blind eye to the provocative glances from the other competitors, a blind ear to all sorts of provocative words, was definitely a rare sight. After all, all young people were prone to anger. When it came to martial cultivation, all sorts of negative feelings were sources of internal demons.

Greed, envy, pride, anger... Those emotions in particular were great hindrances for martial cultivation. However, most of the time, most martial cultivators failed due to lack of control over their own emotions. To surmount the chains of the martial dao was easy, while vanquishing the demons in one's own heart was much more difficult. However, this Pill King Zhen made Cloudsoar Monarch feel that, though the youth's martial cultivation wasn't at a particularly high realm, he might not lose to anyone present when it came to spirit and consciousness.

With a broad wave from Cloudsoar Monarch, the blue ripples suddenly surged. Eighteen lotus leaves appeared out of nowhere and fell on the surface of the pond. "Ladies and gentlemen, these are the boats that will carry you to the other shore. Remember, don't think of it as a normal lake. In this place, your cultivation, your strength, your wits and wisdom, everything will be vividly reflected. No one can be certain to be the victor before laughing the last laugh." Cloudsoar Monarch ordered, "Be on your way."

"Brother, do your best!" Ji San leaped on a lotus leaf. With a nod, Jiang Chen also jumped onto a lotus leaf.

By the time Jiang Chen landed on the lotus leaf, he realized none of the other competitors were in sight anymore when he glanced around. What was left in their place was a vast expanse of white water. He surveyed the scene for a moment without any fear or worry, then called upon his internal energy and slowly pushed the lotus leaf forward without striving for excessive speed. Jiang Chen thought Cloudsoar Monarch's final words had been anything but casual. Especially when he said that "no one can be certain to be the victor before laughing the last laugh." There had obviously been a meaning hidden therein.

In other words, only the one to have the last laugh would be the victor. In that case, pursuing blind speed at the beginning might not be a good thing. Especially when they would run into three obstacles on the way, at the very least. Jiang Chen opened his God's Eyes and observed his surroundings. Although Cloudsoar Monarch hadn't mentioned whether there would be any element of danger, being careful couldn't hurt either way.

Something suddenly flashed in Jiang Chen's consciousness after a quarter-hour. He suddenly narrowed his eyes and looked in front of him. He saw many white streams of water forcibly partitioning the pond like blockades of steel, barring his way.

"Is that the first obstacle?" Jiang Chen slowed down and carefully studied it for a moment. He realized it was a dividing formation. *no ve.* **LB**-In

This formation wasn't too complicated. It purely used the properties of water to create layer upon layer of folding waves in order to blockade the space. If he couldn't break through this blockade, then he couldn't progress any further. Everything was that simple. Jiang Chen waved his hand without halting. Something appeared in it: it was the Moonshatter Awl he'd obtained from Cao Jin after he'd killed the latter. This item was simply custom-made for this obstacle. The Moonshatter Awl was none other than a formation-breaking artifact. Back then, Cao Jin had used this Awl and, together with several members of his sect using formation-breaking techniques, they'd broken the formation surrounding Mt. Rippling Mirage. One could see from that how ridiculous the Moonshatter Awl was.

Jiang Chen wasn't one of those inflexible men. He gripped the Awl and ruthlessly slashed with it. A moonlight-like beam of light shot at the layers of folding waves. After seven to eight successive slashes, the moonlight-like beams of light interlaced together and broke a small opening in the folded waves with a loud rumble. As soon the opening appeared, the internal structure of the formation suddenly crumbled and disintegrated, becoming countless sprays of water that scattered away entirely with a crash.

The water surged all of a sudden before recovering its calm a moment later. Jiang Chen didn't stop after seeing the first obstacle. He steered the lotus leaf and continued his journey forward. He'd passed this first obstacle more easily than anyone else.

"Now that I've dealt with the first obstacle, what's the next one going to be?" Jiang Chen wasn't excessively pleased or complacent despite surmounting the first obstacle. The first obstacle might not have been particularly difficult, but he'd have needed a long time and a lot of energy without the Moonshatter Awl.

"It seems like His Majesty is being serious this time?" Jiang Chen couldn't help but be a little more interested in this test. He might have many things already, but one never has too many good things.

Chapter 822: Passing Three Stages in a Row

Jiang Chen continued onwards and paid a bit of attention to his surroundings, but still didn't see any of the great clan disciples around him. "I suppose this entire Peafowl Lotus Pond is a big formation in itself, and is a formation that contains many little formations inside that isolates all participants."

Jiang Chen had done quite a bit of research into formations, so it was only natural that he managed to glimpse a little into Peafowl Lotus Pond's true nature. While moving forwards, he suddenly heard a rumble at the front. He looked to the horizon, and was surprised to find that the water surface to the front had actually parted to make a path through the center. The tides on two sides were at least several hundred feet tall, and they looked like two walls of water that had sealed up the passage. He could see countless whirlpools spinning circles at the center of the passage. Moreover, the water walls would sometimes fire rays of rainbow light that were obviously very powerful. Jiang Chen rubbed his nose. Am I supposed to pass through this passage to clear this stage?

He observed the passage for a moment and found that the whirlpools sat very close to each other. A simple misstep or a tiny loss of control might mean that he would be dragged into the whirlpools. These whirlpools were a kind of a test. The dense rays of rainbow light shooting out from the water walls were one as well. If he was accidentally clipped by one of the rainbow lights, then he might be swept away immediately by the whirlpools at the bottom.

Jiang Chen might not know the exact rules, but he was sure that being swept away by the whirlpools would mean failure. He had no intentions of leaving at such a sour note.

After observing the passage for a moment, he came to the conclusion that there wasn't a regular pattern behind these whirlpools. Still, he now knew that he should be able to deal with these whirlpools with relative confidence. The problem was that the rainbow light beams were even more irregular. Their speed was irregular, and a pattern was non-existent. The only thing he could do here was to dodge on instinct. Yes, the speed of these light beams were travelling faster than the eye could see. Therefore, he could only rely on his instincts as a cultivator.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen's instincts weren't weak. Hesitating no longer, Jiang Chen urged the lotus leaf and threw himself into the passage immediately. The second he entered the passage, he immediately sensed that the surrounding whirlpools were pressing against him constantly. Although Jiang Chen had avoided them carefully enough that he wasn't being pulled into them, the strength of the whirlpools still affected his path. Consequently, it also affected his movement speed.

He knew that this stage wasn't easy, but he was a bold man with the skills to match. Although his speed was decreased by the whirlpools, he hadn't slowed down too much as he circled around them constantly. He knew very well that those rainbow lights would land him in great trouble if he were to fly too slowly. Therefore, he must control both speed and rhythm properly. He had to control it so that he would neither be hit by the rainbow lights or be swept away by the whirlpools at the bottom.

The passage was extremely long. Although Jiang Chen had been traveling for almost an hour already, he felt like that there was no end in sight. He looked a little surprised, "Why did this second stage suddenly become so much harder?"

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Everyone was seated around Emperor Peafowl, but no one was in the mood to taste the delicious wine atop the table right now. Their minds were on the Peafowl Lotus Pond. Unfortunately, no one could see what was happening inside.

Emperor Peafowl was the only one who was still wearing a calm and unfathomable smile. He had already received the Cloud Monarch's report when Jiang Chen passed through the first stage. As it turns out, the first person to pass through was actually Jiang Chen. Emperor Peafowl wasn't surprised in the least. He immediately notified the Cloud Monarch in secret to increase the difficulty of Jiang Chen's second stage by 50%. Under wraps, Jiang Chen had no idea that that his second stage was 1.5 times more difficult than other participants.

The rainbow light continued to fire wildly, and their speed and rate of fire was increasing continuously. Even Jiang Chen was starting to find the test strenuous. This stage was supposed to be testing a half-step emperor realm genius, but Jiang Chen was only at fifth level sage realm right now. Moreover, his test was fifty percent harder than others! Therefore, one could say that the difficulty of his test was almost the equivalent of an early stage emperor realm cultivator's test. It was no wonder that he was feeling stressed. Suddenly, an idea popped into his mind. He recalled an item.

Happy at the sudden flash of inspiration, he took out the Featherflight Mirror and used it at the same time the light rays were firing towards him. The moment Featherflight Mirror was used, the rainbow

lights' speed immediately decreased by half. Overjoyed, Jiang Chen immediately sped up and flew through the passage like hot knife through butter.

With the aid of Featherflight Mirror, Jiang Chen was able to pass through the remaining distance at relative ease. He broke through many obstacles again and again, and finally, there was a white flash that caused both water walls to collapse abruptly.

Rumble! As the water churned like a rumbling earthquake, Jiang Chen finally exited the second stage and arrived at a calm water region. He relaxed and put away the Featherflight Mirror. "This stage was seriously difficult. If I hadn't used the Featherflight Mirror, even I can't tell if I could've survived the last stretch. In fact, this last stretch in particular was really ridiculously difficult. Can those clan descendants really pass this stage?" *nove)lb*.In

Jiang Chen was doubtful of their chances. It wasn't that he was looking down on the others, but realistically speaking, even a half-step emperor realm cultivator like young master Ji San only had at best a thirty percent chance of making it through that stage. As for the rest, Jiang Chen couldn't see even a sliver of hope for them to make it through.

Jiang Chen continued forwards after passing through the second stage. "Your Majesty, Pill King Zhen is still the first person to make it through the second stage," The Cloud Monarch's voice resounded.

"Oh? Didn't you increase the difficulty of his stage?" Emperor Peafowl replied by message.

"I did, but he used some sort of unknown method later on and was able to travel even faster during the second half of the test." Not even the observing Cloud Monarch could see what was happening inside the formation. His responsibility was to supervise the test from outside the formation only. Therefore, even he had no idea exactly what method Jiang Chen used to speed through the second half of the test even faster than before.

After all, the second half of the test was even more difficult than the first half, not to mention that Jiang Chen's difficulty was intentionally increased by 50% compared to other participants. But he'd still been able to pass through the second stage first. Now this was a little unusual.

"This kid really is interesting," Emperor Peafowl thought for a moment and smiled, "Do refrain from upping the difficulty again during the third stage. It's true that geniuses must be tempered, but it isn't right to interfere too much either."

"Understood," the Cloud Monarch responded.

Jiang Chen very quickly ran into the third stage. In fact, there were no prior signs at all. Roars just started resounding from all across the water as water monsters charged out of the underground. These water monsters were actually all living creatures living beneath Peafowl Lotus Pond. Moreover, every one of these living beings looked incredibly sinister and brutal. Every one of them possessed the strength of a human sky sage realm cultivator, and the strong ones were actually possessed the strength of a human half-step emperor realm cultivator.

Jiang Chen actually counted a total of nine water beasts in the water. In addition, the position of these nine water monsters were so meticulously planned and logically arranged that one could even see a hint

of formation dao from it. Jiang Chen would be attacked no matter where he went he chose to enter the water. In fact, he might even be attacked en masse.

Do I have to use Featherflight Mirror again? While he might be capable enough to deal with these monsters in the norm, there was no telling what might happen beneath the water. Jiang Chen wasn't willing to waste time on them either. Plus, the test only requested that he pass through the stage, not take down all these monsters.

Jiang Chen was just about to use Featherflight Mirror when a yell suddenly resounded in his mind. "Idiot, what's there to be afraid of mere water monsters? Do you think that the dragon crystals I gave you are just for sure?"

The voice came suddenly, but Jiang Chen was overjoyed to hear it. The dragon crystals! It was the gift Long Xianxuan gave him after he made a breakthrough. They contained a tremendous amount of dragon aura in them. What was there to be afraid of mere water monsters if the dragon aura was deployed?

Jiang Chen was overjoyed, and he sent Long Xiaoxuan a message. "Brother Long, we can save the crystals. Why don't you unleash the aura yourself? It'll be stronger, and they'll get the hint and out of the way faster."

Long Xiaoxuan let out a quiet humph, but didn't answer. Jiang Chen knew the dragon very well. The fact that he hadn't declined meant that he agreed to the proposal. Jiang Chen immediately chuckled and urged the lotus leaf to speed up towards the front instead of slowing. It was at this moment Long Xiaoxuan abruptly unleashed his stunning dragon aura and focused it around Jiang Chen's body. A moment later, Jiang Chen's body was filled with the divine aura of a dragon race. He almost felt like an ancient divine dragon himself. The dragon race's aura was no trifling matter. It wasn't only used to intimidate enemies. A dragon's aura also contained an extremely powerful consciousness attack that greatly intimidated most living beings. Most importantly, all living beings that were touched by dragon's aura would be frightened out of their wits and have their souls crumble. However, these water monsters were all quite powerful. Although they were stunned by the dragon's might, they didn't perish immediately to the attack. Still, there was no hiding the fear and anxiety in their eyes in this one instant.

This one instant of hesitation was enough for Jiang Chen to slip through an opening. Even if he had passed through the stage, the leftover presence of dragon's aura still caused the nine water monsters to roar non-stop in a low tone above the water surface. There was reluctance and anger behind the roars, but fear was the most prominent emotion of them all. Even these water monsters couldn't control their instinctive fear towards the might of an ancient dragon. They could only watch Jiang Chen leave and do nothing about it. Contrary to his expectations of a difficult battle, Jiang Chen never thought that he would be able to go through this third stage like he was going for a walk.

"Brother Long, the dragon's race divine aura is truly impressive," Jiang Chen praised. Long Xiaoxuan humphed and mumbled something indiscernible, but Jiang Chen could absolutely sense that he was feeling pleased about himself. It was true that the dragon had helped him to pass through the third stage with ease, and in doing so stunned the wits out of the formation observer, the Cloud Monarch.

"Your... Your Majesty." The Cloud Monarch was starting to feel that his brain wasn't catching up to reality, "That... That Pill King Zhen has passed the third stage."

“What did you say?” Even Emperor Peafowl was more than a little shocked this time as well. Jiang Chen had just passed through the second stage, but now had gotten through the third stage too? Could it be that the third stage hadn’t activated for some reason?

Chapter 823: The Thousand Peafowl Mural

Even the Cloud Monarch was completely puzzled, to say nothing of Emperor Peafowl. The former was already amazed at how Jiang Chen had breezed through the previous two stages. These three stages had, after all, been personally arranged by His Majesty. None of them were remotely ordinary since their difficulty had been raised to match geniuses at half step emperor realm. It was virtually impossible for any normal person to trick their way through such a level of difficulty without sufficient strength. But this Pill King Zhen had actually passed through all three stages with relative ease!

He hadn’t even seen how Jiang Chen had passed the third stage. It appeared as if those aquatic monsters were very wary of Jiang Chen. Such a thing was practically unprecedented. Emperor Peafowl had personally used his abilities to suppress and capture these aquatic monsters. Not only were they extremely savage and ruthless, but they were also fearless even in the face of death. How could they be afraid of a human pill king? As such, the Cloud Monarch was also at a loss. He had no idea how to reply to Emperor Peafowl’s question.

“Continue observing that child. This emperor has finally found an interesting youth after three thousand years of service to Veluriyam Capital. Haha, what a rare occasion!” Emperor Peafowl was in great mood. He had previously predicted that Jiang Chen was that lucky figure from the Myriad Domain, but he hadn’t been entirely sure. His All-Seeing Eyes were not entirely clear, akin to seeing a flower blooming in fog. Moreover, most of the experts on his level were unwilling to believe him. But now, Emperor Peafowl was confident that his All-Seeing Eyes definitely had the ability to calculate fortune. The results of his deductions were being proven by Jiang Chen’s actions. At the very least, Jiang Chen’s every performance to date had far surpassed his peers, regardless of how far he would go in the future.

Amongst the geniuses of the Upper Eight Regions or even Veluriyam Capital, those who were able to reach such a stage were as rare as dragon horns and phoenix feathers, to speak nothing of those from the Myriad Domain. And, compared to Jiang Chen, these people had most likely started out with an overwhelming advantage in resources.

It was settled, Jiang Chen was the one he’d been looking for. Having lived several millennia, Emperor Peafowl’s attitude towards solving problems was far superior to the normal person, and few things warranted his excitement. But his heart was surging with waves of delight at the moment.

Seeing a faint smile on Emperor Peafowl’s countenance, the clan lords below merely felt that the emperor was in exceptionally good cheer today, but scarcely knew why he was so delighted. Nonetheless everyone was happy to know that the emperor had at least shaken off the pain of his disciple’s loss. This, in and of itself, was a cause for celebration. These clans had followed Emperor Peafowl for many years and were completely loyal to him. Deep down, they were unwilling to accept Emperor Peafowl being replaced by Emperor Shura.

But as of late, Emperor Peafowl had been living in relative seclusion and scarcely ever appeared in day-to-day administrative activities. He cared little about Emperor Shura’s gradual usurpation, and may even have tacitly allowed it. Such an attitude had created a fair amount of worry in his subordinate clans. At

this rate, Emperor Shura would replace Emperor Peafowl one day. At that time, Emperor Peafowl's old subordinates would surely be suppressed. How should they safeguard their future status in Veluriyam Capital?

Thus, these clan heads all hoped to see a more proactive and aggressive Emperor Peafowl. They'd all been worried that the emperor would be unable to recover from the setback of young master Fan's demise. Could it be that he'd been drained of all his grand aspirations? Everyone realized, after seeing the emperor smile so candidly, that His Majesty hadn't lost his determination. His smile was a symbol of his proactiveness. Invariably, these clans were also thinking, "With the emperor in such a good mood, could he be planning to select a new personal disciple?"

Great waves surged within their hearts at the thought. If any one of their scions would be fortunate enough to be designated as a personal disciple, they would be destined for a meteoric rise in status. Even more riches and honor would await, should one of theirs become the successor. Even the Coiling Dragon clan lord couldn't help but feel a great deal of expectation.

"The end of my destined life draws near. If I'm not fated to obtain the Pine Crane Pill, the Coiling Dragon Clan will surely fall into chaos after my passing. But if one of the Coiling Dragon Clan's younger generation is selected by the emperor as his personal disciple, the clan's position would once again become rock-solid and unshakeable... I wonder if any of our clan's scions possess such a destiny?" The clan lord mentally sifted through the several descendants of the clan and felt that, while each of them had their own merits, Ji San was still slightly ahead of the rest. At the very least, Ji San becoming acquainted with a rare genius like Jiang Chen went to show that his fortune was somewhat superior to his peers. I do hope my Coiling Dragon Clan's descendents can rise above the others and obtain the emperor's good graces.

The other clan lords also had similar thoughts running through their minds, but not a whit was exposed on their faces. Nevertheless, Emperor Peafowl was, of course, quite aware of their minds. It was just that the scope of the emperor's vision had far surpassed these clan lords, and although their descendents were indeed not bad, none were up to Emperor Peafowl's selection standards. He could, perhaps, select one of them to nurture as a disciple. But they were all fell slightly short as a candidate for a legacy disciple. There were certain disciples who had sufficient talent, but were somewhat lacking in temperament, whereas some with excellent attitude just slightly lacking in terms of talent. There were also those adequate in both, but lacking in terms of fortune. Emperor Peafowl was different from the others in that he had opened the All-Seeing Eyes, albeit only slightly. As such, he attached much more importance to fortune than his peers could imagine.

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Jiang Chen didn't reduce his vigilance even after passing three stages. Who knew if there would be a fourth stage or not? He wasn't one to relax until he was at the end. This was a good habit he'd formed from the countless times he'd been hunted during this lifetime. But his path continued unhindered after three stages and after a quarter hour, he arrived at the shores of the boundless waters.

He first spotted it as indistinct reefs barely visible at the furthest end of this body of water.

"Oh? Could this be the other shore?" Jiang Chen's mind was shaken as he sped up. Only upon closer inspection did he realize that it wasn't a reef, but rather an enormous cliff rising above the ocean.

The tall cliff stretched dozens of kilometers high and its smooth walls were decorated with countless images of peafowls. Each of these vivid and lifelike depictions displayed upon the tall cliffs were of vastly contrasting demeanor and bearing. A single image of a peafowl would perhaps be nothing out of the ordinary, but it was indeed a magnificent sight to behold thousands at the same time. But Jiang Chen remained unmoved by this stately scene before him. He had experienced countless spectacles of greater grandiosity in his past. However, he was impressed by Emperor Peafowl's technique after seeing these realistic images.

"As expected of an expert who's sensed the heavenly laws. This Emperor Peafowl's techniques are indeed different from the normal titled great emperors." Although Jiang Chen hadn't reached the emperor realm himself, he had a rather keen grasp of how they differed in strength.

Gazing at these life-like peafowl images, some were gorgeously decorated, some detached and noble, some splendid and majestic, some solemn and dignified... The numerous peafowl illustrations each possessed their own characteristics and were quite the pleasing sight to the eyes.

"Perhaps Emperor Peafowl's fortune lies within this Thousand Peafowl Mural?" Jiang Chen felt curious. He noticed no two peafowls were the same, but it was quite difficult to point out the differences between them. Even with his eye arts and Boulder's Heart, Jiang Chen failed to see through its profundity at a glance.

"Emperor Peafowl is one of the most powerful great emperors in the Upper Eight Regions. Surely, he wouldn't fool someone with a mediocre stroke of fortune after employing such a grand spectacle—it's likely that the opportunity this time isn't small. Though I've a great number of protective treasures on me, most of them are best kept concealed. However, it'll be perfectly justifiable for me to use the fortune obtained from Emperor Peafowl in public. Any fortune related to the emperor is certain to act as a protective charm whether within Veluriyam Capital or without." At the thought of this, Jiang Chen began to inspect each peafowl diagram with all seriousness.

A few other great clan descendants also passed the third stage roughly after a quarter hour had passed.

"Heh heh, the tests should be nearing its end after passing the third stage. The border should be just ahead right? Great emperor fortunes, here I come!" Ji San rushed out, his face flushed with excitement.

The other outstanding clan descendants were more or less of the same thought. After passing the third test, none of them could bother with the miserable state of their injuries and were instead focused on rushing forward as quickly as they could, lest they get left behind. They all hoped to get the first claim after breaking out of the third stage so quickly. In the world of martial dao, every detail was worth competing over, regardless of whether they obtained the fortune or not. They were all afraid of falling second and rushed madly towards the other shore.

"Faster, I must be first to arrive!"

"Chances are greater for the ones who arrive earlier."

"With my powerful consciousness, I'll definitely be able to discover the emperor's fortune if I can arrive early to observe the mural."

"It'll be my greatest fortune if this leads to being selected as an inheriting disciple!" All of the clan scions were seized by a sense of urgency.

Chapter 824: Unexpected News

All those who could take the top among great clans were people of great ambitions. None of them was willing to admit they were second fiddle. This was especially true when they all decided to participate in the competition set up by Emperor Peafowl. Everyone wanted to show their best side, come out on top and suppress all other opponents. They all wanted to become unparalleled amongst all others. Therefore, it was impossible even for disciples within the same clan to concede their position to others.

For example, the Coiling Dragon Clan had fielded three participants. Young master Ji San, young master Liu Xiang and Ji Zhongtang, although they had differing personalities, were in direct competition against each other right now. They didn't give each other an easy time just because they came from the same clan. If even scions within the same clan acted this way to each other, one could imagine just how hostile the relationship between those of different clans were. However, when the disciples made their way one after another up to the tall cliff that housed the Thousand Peafowl Mural, they heard a devastating piece of news that nearly made them spit blood on the spot.

"You are too late. The opportunity left behind by the emperor has already been received by its destined person." The Cloud Monarch's indifferent words felt like a bucket of icy water drenching these scions from head to toe. They felt chilled all the way down to their very hearts.

"How is that possible?"

"Yeah, we showed up so early to the cliff. How could it possibly be claimed by someone else?"

"This isn't right, we're all reputable geniuses within our clans, and there are only so many of us. If we're all here, then who on earth is the person who claimed that opportunity?"

"Honored Cloud Monarch, it's not that we are sore losers, but at the very least, we would like to know why we lost. We all know who the geniuses of each clan are, and every reputable person is standing here right now. This means that no one has gotten that opportunity."

"Yeah, Cloud Monarch, there's no way that some unknown small fry had gotten ahead of us, right?"

"There's no way, unless... did the emperor's direct scions participate in the match as well?"

These scions of great clans were all completely confused. It was obvious that they couldn't accept this result calmly. *How could they call this a test? This is practically cheating!* They would've rioted already if this wasn't an exam set up by Emperor Peafowl himself.

Thankfully, Emperor Peafowl's dignity wouldn't be denied. Moreover, the Cloud Monarch was a senior at the level of their clan lords. In fact, he might be even higher placed than their clan lords. Therefore, they didn't dare act too brazenly despite harboring many doubts in their minds. But just because they didn't dare to start a riot didn't mean that they could accept this outcome with equanimity.

After all, this outcome was plainly preposterous to them. It was obvious that not a single one of the geniuses here had obtained the fortune. But the Cloud Monarch had informed all of them that they

were late. If this wasn't a lie, that what was? The only other possibility they could think of was that Emperor Peafowl's own geniuses had participated in the exam as well.

However, they hadn't heard that the emperor's scions would be participating in this exam. If they did, they wouldn't have been so optimistic and hopeful about their chances, and thus wouldn't experience such a rollercoaster of emotions. The Cloud Monarch didn't get angry despite facing these youngsters' accusations. Instead, he smiled faintly, "It is good that you all possess an inquisitive spirit. However, an emperor's opportunity is not child's play, so go back to your original positions and wait. You will know the answer eventually."

He didn't give them a clear answer, but there was no doubt that it was a declaration that his words were the undeniable truth. They could question all they wanted, but it wouldn't change no matter what. At this point, those scions who were slightly smarter than others understood that this outcome was an unchangeable fact already. Therefore, they gave up and went away with sighs of defeat. However, most of the genius scions still couldn't find it in themselves to accept this outcome. They continued to hang around the Thousand Peafowl Mural.

"Could this be a test the emperor has set up for us?"

"You're right! Maybe it's a test to see if our dao heart is firm!"

"That makes a lot of sense."

"Hehe, we were nearly fooled, weren't we? It may actually be a test after all." One had to admit that these great clan scions were quick to regain their calm from their previous fury and wonder if this was just another test. Their ability to adjust their emotions were definitely extraordinary.

However, the Cloud Monarch could do nothing but shake his head wryly. He himself knew that these youths would probably find his words hard to accept no matter what he said. To be honest, even he didn't feel like he could accept this outcome. It was an unsolvable puzzle. Just where on earth had this monstrous Pill King Zhen come from? Even if the Cloud Monarch were to overlook the fact that the pill king had cleanly passed through three stages in a row, the latter had still seen through and obtained the opportunity concealed by the emperor himself inside the Thousand Peafowl Mural in less than fifteen minutes' time.

Even the Cloud Monarch himself had to admit in shame that he couldn't match Pill King Zhen's speed. "It's no wonder why these youngsters couldn't accept this outcome. If I haven't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it either. I wouldn't have believed it no matter who told me."

Even now the Cloud Monarch was still stunned beyond belief at the rate in which Pill King Zhen had passed through the three stages and meditated on the Peafowl Mural. "Where on earth did the Coiling Dragon Clan find such a strange pill king? It's one thing to have godly pill dao talent, but now he seems to possess a martial dao talent that's just as outstanding. Could he be the heir the emperor has been searching for a thousand years?"

The Cloud Monarch was Emperor Peafowl's loyal supporter. If there was anyone who believed in Emperor Peafowl's so-called destiny theory in the entire world, they had to be the four great monarchs beneath him. Completely loyal to him, they would follow him unconditionally no matter what he said or did. Therefore, they were all very supportive of Emperor Peafowl's talk of destiny. The Cloud Monarch

was wondering right now if Pill King Zhen was the person of great destiny the emperor had been searching for.

Emperor Peafowl hadn't revealed Jiang Chen's identity to any of his subordinates due to his calculations of how sensitive it was. The Coiling Dragon clan lord and House Wei father and son already knew this from the beginning, so naturally they were an exception. Therefore, although The Cloud Monarch was shocked by Pill King Zhen's unparalleled talent, he still knew nothing about his true identity. Otherwise, if he knew that Pill King Zhen came from a poor lower region like the Myriad Domain, his shock about this youth would likely skyrocket beyond the limits of belief.

The Cloud Monarch felt amused as he watched the scions of great clan focusing all their attention on the Peafowl Mural. Even now, these youngsters weren't willing to accept reality. Since the opportunity had been taken away by the destined person, this Thousand Peafowl Mural would be fading pretty soon. As expected, someone started to shout a short time later.

"It can't be? Why is the Peafowl Mural fading?"

"Ugh, it disappeared. What's going on?"

"Are they intentionally keeping us from studying it or something?"

"Is this another test? Has the Peafowl Mural gone invisible?" All kinds of heated discussions started once more.

The Cloud Monarch spoke seriously, "The great emperor's opportunity has been taken by its destined person, so it is only natural that the Thousand Peafowl Mural would disappear. I am sure that all of you were prepared to lose when you chose to participate in this contest. If you will not admit defeat even now, it will only reflect badly on you."

When they saw the serious look on the Cloud Monarch's face, these geniuses finally realized that they really might have lost. This wasn't a test at all. This was reality. As a result, the atmosphere of the scene grew even stranger than before.

"Who on earth was it?"

"Did a nameless person seriously get ahead of us geniuses and take the opportunity for themselves?"

"Let's count off. How many people participated in the contest? Who else is missing?" These people began to interrogate the crowd one after another. It was obvious that even now they found it somewhat difficult to accept the reality of their loss. They all wanted to know exactly who had taken Emperor Peafowl's fortune.

Did one of the great clans hide such an unbelievable genius in their midst? Had they kept a profile so low all this time so they could reveal the genius at this exact occasion? That assumption just didn't sound all that believable. The only one who seemed to have figured out something was Ji San. Although he was smiling wryly at his defeat, his expression also looked somewhat joyful. It was obvious that he had his own guesses as to who the winner of the opportunity was.

"What are you laughing at, Ole Third?" Young master Liuxiang was confused by Ji San's smile.

“What do you think I’m laughing at?” The more Ji San thought about it, the more amused he felt. His expression also grew more and more cheerful. Young master Liu Xiang looked confused, “You’re not going to tell me that you’re the one who got the opportunity, are you?”

The moment he said this, everyone’s gazes snapped to Ji San. Envy, jealousy, and even malice was clear in their eyes.

Ji San laughed but didn’t reply. But Miao Suo said loudly beside him, “No way! Ji San was only a few steps ahead of me. There’s no way he’s the one who got the opportunity!”

“Yeah, I almost arrived at the same time as Ji San. How would I not realize it if he’s the winner?”

Someone came out to ‘clear’ his name, and so the suspicion on Ji San was washed away. But Ji San’s smile only grew wider and wider. His odd reaction puzzled everyone on the scene.

“Ji San, don’t tell me that you’ve lost your mind because you can’t handle the loss?” Miao Suo sneered and taunted him. It was obvious that Miao Suo still thought of Ji San as a love rival.

“Ji San, you haven’t actually gone crazy with jealousy, have you?” Young master Liu Xiang rubbed his nose as he asked.

Ji San raised his eyebrows, “You’re the one who’s gone crazy. In fact, every one of you have. I’ve already figured out who is the winner is. I can’t believe that you’re all still completely clueless about it.”

“Who is it?” Everyone’s curiosity was piqued by his words.

Ji San smiled leisurely, “Like Buddha says, some things cannot be spoken of.”

Ji San waved his paper fan and walked away leisurely while purposely concealing the truth from everyone. He looked so happy it was almost as if he himself had gotten the opportunity.

Suddenly, Ji Zhongtang broke his long silence and exclaimed in surprise, “Could it be him?”

When he looked around, Ji Zhongtang didn’t find the figure he was looking for. In an instant, Ji Zhongtang turned to look at Ji San’s back with an extremely complicated look on his face. Young master Liu Xiang’s figure also started a little when a vague figure slowly surfaced in his mind thanks to Ji Zhongtang’s reminder. It was him?

Chapter 825: Pentecolor Divine Swords

Ji San’s intuition really was quite powerful. The second Jiang Chen’s name appeared in his thoughts, he immediately came to the conclusion that this opportunity must’ve been claimed by Jiang Chen. In truth, the answer he’d jumped to was in fact the reality of things.

When Ji San and the other geniuses returned to their seats, Jiang Chen was already seated next to Emperor Peafowl. There were countless gazes of jealousy, envy and hatred that flicked across Jiang Chen in that instant alone. It was obvious that these great clan scions was unable to accept this young man who had come out of nowhere to claim the great emperor’s opportunity for himself.

“Pill King Zhen?”

“How did a pill dao genius obtain an opportunity like this? Could his martial dao talents be higher than even us of the great clans?”

“Where on earth did this Pill King Zhen come from? Why have we heard nothing about him before?” It was obvious that everyone was having trouble accepting this kind of outcome.

Even the great clan lords themselves couldn’t quite wrap their heads around it, much less their disciples. They were all hoping that their own would emerge the victor, but they’d never thought that a young man of unknown origin would be the one who would ultimately claim this opportunity for himself. His identity was an even greater joke than this outcome. His true identity was that of a pill king, a guest pill king who hailed from a ninth rank aristocratic family!

If they were to judge by status alone, a guest pill king from a ninth rank aristocratic family shouldn’t even possess the qualifications to attend this battle. But it was this unqualified person who’d laughed at the finish line, and this result was an enormous slap to the face for all the great clans. Every other clan lord under Emperor Peafowl were immediately filled with disgust towards this Pill King Zhen, with the notable exception of the Coiling Dragon clan lord. It was obvious that they couldn’t find it in themselves to accept this outcome with a tranquil mind.

Surprisingly, the Coiling Dragon clan lord was the one who’d managed to be the most open minded, having lived through so many years of torment. The three young scions beneath the Coiling Dragon Clan were all peerless geniuses. That being said, the Coiling Dragon clan lord still thought them to be just a tad bit unqualified to succeed the mantle of Emperor Peafowl. It wasn’t that they were entirely unqualified. It was just that they didn’t stand head and shoulders above their peers. If they were forcefully raised to that level of power, they might end up shooting for the moon if their luck held. However, if their luck turned for the worse, then they might encounter a death worse than young master Fan’s.

Although Jiang Chen was the one who stood at that prominent spot right now, the Coiling Dragon clan lord didn’t see it as a bad thing. Rather than displeasure, he even felt an undercurrent of excitement. Even though he had been very courteous to Jiang Chen before, it had primarily been because he required Jiang Chen’s aid. But although he needed Jiang Chen’s help, even he was doubtful as to whether Jiang Chen could really procure the Pinecrane Pill for him.

Even though Jiang Chen had vividly described that extraordinary master of his to the point of creating the image of an otherworldly master in the clan lord’s mind, he wouldn’t be completely convinced until that senior was before his eyes. But the moment he saw Jiang Chen grabbing the emperor’s opportunity for himself in such a monstrous fashion, the final trace of doubt in the clan lord’s mind vanished completely.

How could the scion of a feudal vassal, born in a tiny, worldly kingdom of the Myriad Domain, reach such a level if he hadn’t landed on a massive opportunity during his youth? It just didn’t seem possible for a poor, desolate backwater like the Myriad Domain to ever produce a genius like Jiang Chen, no matter how he looked at it. If that was true, the only possible explanation behind Jiang Chen’s growth was the guidance of his elusive master. That was how the clan lord rationalized his conjectures and finally came to believe Jiang Chen’s words in full.

“Your Majesty, we are all very curious as to how this Pill King Zhen obtained this opportunity. Please grant us this favor and satisfy our curiosities.” The Spirit Branch Clan Lord took the lead to speak for the clan lords.

“It is truly surprising to see this Pill King Zhen beating all of our clan’s geniuses. We cannot help but be curious at this pill dao genius who possesses such wonderful martial dao talent as well.

“Your Majesty, may we know where this Pill King Zhen comes from?” Although the clan lords had not voiced it out loud, they were obviously harboring some ill will towards Jiang Chen. It was only natural that a fellow who had appeared out of nowhere, without any foundations to speak of, wouldn’t win everyone’s acknowledgement so easily.

Emperor Peafowl smiled calmly, “It is a moot point to ask a hero where they were born. However, I can give you all the answer of how he did it easily.”

As he spoke, Emperor Peafowl nodded at the Cloud Monarch. The latter opened his palm to reveal an image crystal. The image crystal, as its name implied, could record images. Although it didn’t capture every moment from within the formation, there were still records of Jiang Chen at certain critical regions. At the very least, the image crystal had caught the crucial moments when Jiang Chen had beaten the stages. However, the crystal wasn’t omnipotent, and the footage appeared blurred and unclear.

Everyone could see that Pill King Zhen had passed through the three stages like everyone else present. The difference, however, lay the ease in which Pill King Zhen had overcome all of them. In comparison, the great clan scions all encountered some measure of difficulty or trouble, even though they’d passed through the stages all the same. Almost no one had been able to overcome the obstacles as easily as Pill King Zhen. As for the Peafowl Mural, Jiang Chen had used only fifteen minutes to beat the test. If there was one thing Jiang Chen didn’t lack over the course of his two lives, it would be his insight.

Even if he hadn’t cultivated God’s Eye, Evil Golden Eye, Boulder’s Heart, and Psychic’s Head in this life, it was still impossible for anything within the mural to hide itself from Jiang Chen’s insight. His experience and insight were simply too vast. One might even say that his experience and insight exceeded that of Emperor Peafowl’s.

It was true that Emperor Peafowl’s formation was exquisitely made, and the Thousand Peafowl Mural was an extraordinary object. It was also true that the formation was intelligently laid out, and the opportunity very well hidden. One could say that the entire setup was almost perfect. But no matter how outstanding Emperor Peafowl’s setup was, his mind couldn’t exceed the limitation that was the Divine Abyss Continent.

Jiang Chen’s insight was solidly at the level of the divine planes. How could a mere Divine Abyss Continent contain someone like him? Therefore, he’d only needed to visualize for fifteen minutes before he spotted the opportunity hidden within the mural. However, the fortune he’d gained had truly been extraordinary.

It was a set of swords Emperor Peafowl had used to dominate the Divine Abyss Continent in his youth. The swords had five colors that matched the natural cycle of the five elements. This set of five swords was the set of weapons Emperor Peafowl had used to kill demons and monsters, dominating the world

in the process. There were almost no opponent of his that had survived to tell the tale of these five swords after facing them. After Emperor Peafowl had reached the apex, the Pentecolor Divine Swords started to appear less and less. Finally, he sealed away the five swords a thousand years ago and never used them since. More specifically, he sealed these five swords into a diagram of a peafowl, turning them into the tail feathers. On the surface, the tail feathers looked completely ordinary, perfect yet unassuming.

But Jiang Chen was still able to detect a bit of the five elements and a portion of the seal thanks to the God's Eye and Psychic's Head. The emperor's seal had been sublime, almost completely flawless. But for a singular genius like Jiang Chen, the flaws in an almost perfect seal like this was still magnified tens and hundreds of times. Perhaps the flaw looked like a wisp of smoke in Emperor Peafowl's eyes, but it was practically a smoke signal in Jiang Chen's eyes.

Although the clan lords felt absolutely depressed after watching the recording on the image crystal, the only thing they could do was turn around and scold their disciples. It was the only way they could make themselves feel better. But they knew in their hearts that it wasn't that their scions had performed badly, but that this Pill King Zhen was simply too monstrous.

Just how powerful must his consciousness be to be able to visualize that mural and find its flaw in just fifteen minutes? Even ninth rank emperor realm experts would be hard pressed to see through the devices that surrounded fortune bestowed by Emperor Peafowl. But this young lad of unknown origin really did seem to possess the insight to see through it. Even if they assumed that it was just luck, there was no changing the fact that he was the victor of this test.

Emperor Peafowl smiled, "Do you have any doubts remaining after watching the contents of this image crystal?"

"Your Majesty, this Pill King Zhen's mysterious origin is an enormous hidden threat. There is no harm in granting him a small opportunity, but the selection of your direct disciple is a whole other matter."

"He is absolutely right, your Majesty. There are plenty of forces who are eyeing Veluriyam Capital covetously. We cannot allow the enemy to infiltrate our ranks." If they couldn't suspect his results, then they could only attack his origin. This Pill King Zhen had been a character of mysterious origin ever since he entered Veluriyam Capital. This was the only point they could feasibly use to attack him.

Emperor Peafowl's tone was as calm as ever, "I have my own considerations with regards to his background."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord smiled, "Pill King Zhen's genius in pill dao is known to all, but who knew that his martial dao talents were just as outstanding? A genius among geniuses like him is exactly the kind of genius Sacred Peafowl Mountain needs right now. Your valuable insight is truly a fortune, Your Majesty. My Coiling Dragon Clan disciples admit defeat wholeheartedly."

"Yes, I'm utterly impressed!" Ji San echoed with a laugh. n).O**Vel**1n

Ji Zhongtang examined Jiang Chen closely several times before nodding his head thoughtfully. It was obvious that even Ji Zhongtang had nothing to complain about if he lost to such a great opponent. Considering that Emperor Peafowl had laid down the foundation, and the Coiling Dragon Clan had

offered their support as the number one clan, the rest of the clan lords were naturally no longer in a position to persist in their objections.

Emperor Peafowl couldn't help but inwardly praise the Coiling Dragon clan lord when he saw this show of support. The Coiling Dragon Clan Lord truly was deserving of his title as the number one clan lord in Veluriyam Capital. His horizon and generosity were leagues ahead of the other clan lords. He was about to speak when a beam of light suddenly cut through the air. It transformed into a sacred message glyph in Emperor Peafowl's palm. The message glyph was a long range consciousness transference divine glyph that was of a far greater grade than a normal message glyph. The information contained inside the glyph entered his consciousness in full with a single sweep of consciousness.

His expression darkened instantly. Everyone's heart skipped a beat involuntarily when they saw his expression change so drastically. There were very few things that could cause Emperor Peafowl to lose his genteel mask after so many years. This news, whatever it was, must be one of great weight.

Chapter 826: Provocation from Pillfire City

The Peafowl Gathering was now concluded, and the participating clans were about to depart. However, the Coiling Dragon clan lord and Jiang Chen were given a new command - to stay. No one else had this honor, not even young master Ji San. All of the clan lords were bewildered by this turn of events. Since when had this Pill King Zhen become more important than them? Especially someone who'd popped up out of nowhere. That the Coiling Dragon clan lord was able to stay was at least somewhat understandable. He was the lord of the foremost clan, after all. This Pill King Zhen, on the other hand—even if he had obtained the emperor's grace, surely that wouldn't correspond with a rise in his position?

What was up with this sudden promotion? Did he now outrank them in importance? Though they didn't understand, they didn't dare defy His Majesty's orders nor resent him. Their time with Emperor Peafowl had taught them well of his tendencies. His Majesty's decisions always had a good motive behind them. There had to be a reason as to why His Majesty had sent them away while allowing Pill King Zhen to stay. They were also somewhat curious about the message in the glyph. Why had it caused Emperor Peafowl's face to darken? The people departed with a bellyful of questions, no different from the two who remained behind.

Emperor Peafowl looked meaningfully at Jiang Chen, his lips curving into a faint smile, "Pill King Zhen, more trouble has come to us."

Trouble? Jiang Chen did a double take. Is there really a need to tell me that? Am I supposed to solve all of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's problems for you? The Coiling Dragon clan lord was also very curious, but refrained from immediately voicing his questions given Emperor Peafowl's stance. Despite their uncertainty, the four monarchs present similarly stayed silent, choosing instead to cast strange glances at Jiang Chen. Evidently, they too wanted to know what was so unique about this Pill King Zhen. Why did His Majesty value the young man so much? What did that glyph have to do with him?

"Forgive my slowness, Your Majesty." Jiang Chen smiled wryly.

"It's news related to the Longevity Pill you presented. There's a rumor circulating in Pillfire City that the Longevity Pill actually belongs to them. They say that those of us from Veluriyam Capital have stolen

their concept. The rumor has spread like wildfire within their private circles, and though it hasn't been publicly declared yet, that day is not far off."

Pillfire City? Jiang Chen was no stranger to the name. It was where Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie had been sold to by slavers. He'd found out about the faction back when he'd interrogated the Myriad Puppets Pavilion's Shopkeeper Li about Mu Gaoqi's whereabouts.

If there was any faction in the Upper Eight Regions that Veluriyam Capital had scruples about, it would be Pillfire City. In terms of absolute martial strength, it was unlikely that Pillfire City surpassed Veluriyam. However, with respect to pills, Pillfire City undoubtedly held the upper hand.

Within the Upper Eight Regions and even within the entire human domain, Pillfire City amassed over seventy percent of the profits in the pill industry. As a leading force in the business, countless pill factions rallied beneath Pillfire City's banner. They had branch stores and regional headquarters in various cities and territories. Anywhere a pill faction existed, one could also find Pillfire City.

Yet, Veluriyam Capital was an exception to that rule. The capital's pill business was held entirely in its own hands, as was that of its surrounding territories. Besides Veluriyam Capital and its neighbors, the remaining lands had their respective pill industries essentially monopolized by Pillfire City and its associated factions. Insignificant locales and minor factions aside, of course, as Pillfire City had no interest in them. As for everywhere they did have interest in, it was virtually impossible to shake off their shadowy influence. In terms of pill-related influence, Pillfire City could exert far more of it than Veluriyam Capital.

In the human domain, Veluriyam Capital could at most claim ten or twenty percent of the market share and power. Pillfire City, on the other hand, could claim more than three times that on its worst day. The difference between them was quite marked. Although Veluriyam Capital had undertaken numerous efforts over the years, having trained many pill kings and genius pill masters, they had not been able to close the gap in face of Pillfire City's strong foundation. Thus, the faces of the Coiling Dragon clan lord and the four monarchs instantly darkened at the rival city's name.

"Pillfire City?" Cloudsoar Monarch furrowed his brow. "Can they not bear to see even the slightest sign of growth from us? Is suppressing any and all of our attempts their agenda?"

"Your Majesty, don't you think they're going too far? We can't let them bully us like this." Chronobalance Monarch's fiery temper had been roused.

Wildfox Monarch's eyes glittered with insight as he focused his gaze on Jiang Chen. "Pill King Zhen, you were the one to submit the Longevity Pill recipe. Did your teacher tell you how many factions in the world knew how to refine it?"

The others looked at Jiang Chen with curiosity as well. He was completely calm about the whole matter, his tone sanguine, "'The Longevity Pill is an exclusive recipe, and no one else in the human domain can possibly know how to refine it.' These words came directly from my master's mouth."

"Is your master that sure?"

"I don't know exactly how sure he was, but I know my teacher well. I don't think any pill expert in the human domain could even compete with him. Thus, I have complete faith in his wisdom." Jiang Chen

couldn't say that the Longevity Pill was a product of the heavenly planes, or that it was impossible for anyone from the Divine Abyss Continent to know how to refine it. But it didn't even require his toes for him to guess that the Eternal Celestial Capital had to be responsible for Pillfire City's sudden intervention. They knew that they could not beat Veluriyam Capital when the latter announced their copyright over the Longevity Pill. Having understood this, they'd changed tactics, turning instead to cooperation with Pillfire City.

Jiang Chen hadn't seen the exact proceedings, but he was almost certain that this was the truth of the matter. The raw sensibility of his logic was almost as good as seeing things first hand. There was little need to suspect that something else was at play.

The gathered crowd had mixed reactions at Jiang Chen's confidence. Neither Emperor Peafowl nor the Coiling Dragon clan lord questioned Jiang Chen's veracity. Cloudsoar Monarch wasn't particularly suspicious either. The other three monarchs, on the other hand, had varying degrees of doubt. Perhaps this Pill King Zhen was over-exaggerating a little. Maybe the Longevity Pill wasn't exclusive after all, and Pillfire City had seen the recipe for it from somewhere.

The skepticism in the monarchs' eyes did not go unnoticed, and Jiang Chen wasn't exactly pleased to see it. "The Longevity Pill's exclusivity is unambiguous," he began softly. "But if you seniors don't have the courage to compete with Pillfire City and are fine with giving it up, then I won't comment on the decision." Jiang Chen took a breath, his tone hardening. "However, what belongs to me cannot be taken away by force. Even if they can do so now, I will make them pay up one day with interest."

It wasn't an idle boast; he was entirely serious. He was sick and tired of the Longevity Pill being abused by others. The Eternal Celestial Capital, the Majestic Clan, and now Pillfire City... they all treated the Longevity Pill as a mere tool to stir up chaos in order to gain an advantage. How could he not be upset?

The three unsure monarchs were astonished by Jiang Chen's rigidity. There was even a hint of anger on their faces. No matter how much His Majesty appreciates you, shouldn't you still respect your seniors?

However, Jiang Chen had no intention of retracting his statement. He raised a cupped fist salute to Emperor Peafowl. "Your Majesty, the Longevity Pill was first taught by my master to the head of Regal Pill Palace in the Myriad Domain. When the sect fell, the recipe was snatched away by the Eternal Celestial Capital. The Longevity Pill that Pillfire City currently possesses is merely their unjust offering, created after Sacred Peafowl Mountain's announcement. There was no way the Eternal Celestial Capital had a chance against Veluriyam Capital, so they turned to Pillfire City for support instead. In the pill world, Pillfire City is accustomed to great gravitas. Their authority has remained unchallenged for a long time. It would be strange if they were not worried about Veluriyam Capital's claim to the Longevity Pill!"

His speech removed the anger from the monarchs' faces, replacing it with the shock of realization. They hadn't thought about that aspect. They were only concerned with their own misgivings about Pill King Zhen and hadn't considered Pillfire City's potential malice. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's acquisition of the Longevity Pill recipe was an opportunity for rapid growth and the realization of great ambition. As the current tyrant of the pill world, how could Pillfire City simply let a potential competitor rise unchecked? How could they allow their dominion to face such a severe threat?

Emperor Peafowl nodded admiringly. He had understood the rationale behind Jiang Chen's words all along, but he hadn't thought the youth would have a vision that greatly exceeded his station. Jiang Chen

had pierced through the smoke and mirrors of the situation and reached the core of the issue. The emperor had already previously found Jiang Chen's talent commendable, but this display of broad contextual awareness served to further elevate the youth in his mind. Smiling faintly, Emperor Peafowl probed further, "Then, Pill King Zhen, do you have any stratagems to counter this?"

Jiang Chen knew this question was a test and took some time to consider his answer. "Well, I have three stratagems – best, better, worse."

"Oh?" The emperor laughed in spite of himself. "I haven't even fleshed out one, but you have three already?"

"The worse stratagem is to fight it out with Pillfire City on a military level, using the logic of might makes right. In terms of strength, Pillfire City cannot edge out Veluriyam Capital so easily. However, in terms of influence in the pill world, they have the advantage, which might cause future complications. Therefore, this is the worst of the stratagems.

"The better stratagem is to ignore them entirely. They can produce their pills, and we can produce ours. Let us speak purely in terms of production volume - as long as we do not lose to them in terms of quality, they can complain all they like. In these matters, each side has their own version of the events that transpired, and it is difficult for observers to discern the truth. If Pillfire City really did own the Longevity Pill, where was it prior to now? Considering this, their claims don't really hold much factual basis."

Everyone nodded at Jiang Chen's analysis, including the three monarchs who had doubted him. The words he had spoken thus far were quite reasonable.

Chapter 827: Preemptive Strike

Emperor Peafowl smiled meaningfully, "And what is your best stratagem?"

The audience perked up their ears, their eyes fixated upon Jiang Chen. They waited for him to reveal his last plan.

"The best stratagem is to completely defeat them on a technical level. That way, they would have nothing to say over their loss. The biggest advantage of this is that it will shake up Pillfire City's hegemony over the pill world. Though circumstances won't immediately change, we can damage their foundation. From what I can see, Veluriyam Capital doesn't want to be crushed by Pillfire City to the point of asphyxiation when it comes to pills either, does it?" It had to be said that Jiang Chen's words were extremely motivational and persuasive. If it wasn't because Veluriyam Capital lacked the prowess to compete with Pillfire City, who at the capital was willing to see such a thing happen?

Indeed, Pillfire City's monopoly was against the interests of the entire human domain. After all, the current situation was oriented in a very anti-consumer fashion. That Pillfire City was able to control over seventy percent of pill-related profits was precisely because of their position of utter exploitation. Their pills were always measurably superior to other pills of the same level. Moreover, the city quashed any potential competitors to the degree that no one was able to put up a fight. Even a place as gargantuan as Veluriyam Capital could only protect the city itself and a few surrounding areas from Pillfire's market invasion. Pillfire City's products dominated everywhere else.

For Veluriyam Capital, its pill business provided a crucial source of income and was one of the capital's lifelines. However, this lifeline could never grow nearly to the degree that they wanted it to thanks to the existence of Pillfire City. Pillfire City had both the coercive might and the historical wealth to back its hardline stance.

Its ancient pill recipes, its systems for training pill kings, its various tomes on pill dao... Pillfire City's resources were three or four times those of Veluriyam Capital. This kind of gap wasn't something that time could reduce. In fact, the passage of time possibly only served to widen the distance between the two cities. Thus, for a long time now, the attitude of Veluriyam Capital towards Pillfire City was very mixed. There was recognition, of course, but antagonism and jealousy accompanied it as well. Of course, the Capital also did many things in an attempt to bridge this gap. Such action extended to even Emperor Peafowl himself. However, the result of their efforts only led to the maintenance of the gap, a sort of preventative measure. But truth be told, even that was a victory, considering the scope of the difference between them.

When Jiang Chen had submitted the Longevity Pill's recipe, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain felt the arrival of an opportunity, an entry point. If the production and distribution of the Longevity Pill proceeded smoothly throughout the human domain, it would be a significant turning point for their pill market. Veluriyam Capital's influence in the pill world would soar, and its market share with it.

However, while their plans were still in the cradle of infancy, they discovered that Pillfire City's targeted persecution had come. Without a doubt, the city's aim was to prevent Veluriyam Capital from executing designs. In this environment, Jiang Chen's best strategy was immediately attractive to all of his listeners. Past the initial rush of enthusiasm, however, a wave of wry smiles emerged around the room. Overcoming Pillfire City on a technical level was easier said than done.

If they were really this easy to defeat, how could they command so much of the market share in a market as hostile and competitive as the pill industry? Pillfire City's claim to fame was their overwhelming superiority in terms of technique. That was why they held over 70 percent of the profits. Pills made from forgotten recipes, pills that were rare and expensive and impossible to duplicate, countless pill dao techniques, and a rich pill tradition - the Pillfire City had all of these things. No other faction could remotely compare.

Although Pillfire City appeared to be only a city, just how many first ranked sects in the Upper Eight Regions were under its control was anybody's guess. It was a hot topic of discussion in private circles. There were only eight first rank sects in the human domain and less than five factions surpassing first rank sects in strength. Both Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City were examples of these mega-factions. However, though Veluriyam Capital had influence over many sects, one would not go so far as to say that it controlled them.

The Pillfire City was different in this regard. Their methodologies were more materialistic. They relied on their influence over pills to infiltrate the ranks of the various sects and thereby accomplish their goals. It could be said that in the human domain, Veluriyam Capital was an entity which no one wished to provoke, while Pillfire City was an entity which no one dared to provoke. In terms of threat and authority, Pillfire City slightly exceeded Veluriyam Capital.

The Chronobalance Monarch didn't like Jiang Chen's perceived boasting and spoke with a slightly dissatisfied tone, "Pill King Zhen, I don't know how strong your teacher is, but Pillfire City has dominated the pill industry's profits for many years. Their position has always been stable. You can't defeat them just by saying so."

The Coiling Dragon clan lord smiled wryly as well, "That's right, Pill King Zhen. Your suggestion sounds great, but unless you can convince your teacher to help us, I don't see how it can be done."

The clan lord was entirely focused on Jiang Chen's teacher. His opinion of the latter definitely approached that of outright worship. His thoughts were entirely on requests for Jiang Chen's teacher to leave seclusion so that he could refine a Pinecrane Pill.

The Wildfox Monarch chuckled, full of wisdom, "Only a sage above the mundane could be Pill King Zhen's teacher. I don't fancy our chances, even if we do extend an invitation."

From the circumstantial evidence shown in Jiang Chen's methods and talent, no one doubted the existence of his "teacher" any longer.

"A famous master breeds excellent disciples. Perhaps Pill King Zhen's teacher is a hermit who cares not for the world, but there must be some merit to his suggestion as well. Why don't we hear more about how Pill King Zhen intends to defeat Pillfire City on a technical level?" Emperor Peafowl suddenly declared.

With the direction of the conversation set, the others had no room to protest.

"I can't promise the same for all matters, but what's so difficult about defeating them on the matter of the Longevity Pill?" This was no mere display of arrogance. The Longevity Pill was originally Jiang Chen's recipe. It didn't matter how superb the pill kings from Pillfire City were - they had no chance of surpassing him with the recipe having originated from him. Moreover, this was only an ordinary mortal plane. Regardless of how strong his opponent was, they could not rival the pill dao saints of the heavenly planes in his previous life. Therefore, Jiang Chen's words were backed by sufficient confidence.

Emperor Peafowl raised an eyebrow, secretly pleased by Jiang Chen's earnestness. The youth hadn't refused to work or withdrawn, but rather faced the problem head-on. His temperament, at least, was something that the emperor was happy to see. "The Longevity Pill is an original creation of your teacher, Pill King Zhen. As your master's disciple, you are of course its lawful owner. Even if Pillfire City has the Longevity Pill's recipe, it is the unrighteous result of the Eternal Celestial Capital's robbery. Morally, they cannot compare to the Longevity Pill recipe that we rightfully obtained. If we can surpass them in technique, Veluriyam Capital will assume natural ownership of the pill."

The emperor spoke only words of encouragement, and looked with the same at the young man, "Pill King Zhen, how certain are you of the outcome?"

Jiang Chen thought for a moment. "Seventy to eighty percent." He refrained from making a full guarantee to avoid being perceived as a madman. Nominally, he was still a low-rank pill king.

"In all worldly things, one may strive for something with even a thirty percent chance of success. Seventy or eighty means that victory is nearly assured. Since Pillfire City bears only malice, why should we cower at the prospect of a fight? Gentlemen, what say you?" Emperor Peafowl's tone bore an

unquestionable air of solemnity. Though it was worded as a question, it was actually an announcement.

"We defer to your decision, Your Majesty."

"Pillfire City has pushed us too far. It is time for us to teach them a lesson! If we can crush them with the Longevity Pill, it will be a huge boost to Veluriyam Capital's influence in the pill world."

"Yes, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We can't miss it."

"Everyone is thinking only of chastising Pillfire City. What if we lose? How shall we conduct ourselves then?" It was Plumscore Monarch, the female monarch who had been silent thus far. Her tone was collected and cool. "If we fail, we will be branded as thieves of the Longevity Pill as a result. We will receive universal condemnation... not something desirable for Sacred Peafowl Mountain or Veluriyam Capital, I'm sure." Her figurative bucket of cold water was splashed at a timely point in the proceedings.

"It matters not whether we win or lose," Emperor Peafowl smiled. "What's important is the conflict between good and evil. The Longevity Pill belongs to Pill King Zhen, thus we represent justice. Even if we lose here, there is nothing to be ashamed of."

"That's right, winning or losing doesn't matter. We got the Longevity Pill through completely fair and equitable means. Even if we don't win, we can have the peace of mind to refine the Longevity Pill." At the end of the day, nobody was willing to simply abandon the Longevity Pill. Everyone knew that the pill meant a huge business opportunity, one that would propel Veluriyam Capital forward in the pill world.

Emperor Peafowl gave the final, decisive word. "It's decided then. We will send out notices immediately. From today onwards, the Longevity Pill is the exclusive secret of the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. No other factions are eligible to privately refine it, and those that do will be labeled as thieves. If anyone disagrees, they can come to an open competition within these next three months. If they win, they may refine at their leisure, but it remains theft otherwise."

Emperor Peafowl was full of boldness. Even though he faced an entity as big as Pillfire City, he wasn't ambiguous about his decisions. Moreover, the announcement was aggressive and on the offense. Rather than remaining passive, he had taken the initiative and made a preemptive strike.

Jiang Chen found the mindset very admirable. If Pillfire City was able to strike first and take the initiative, the Sacred Peafowl Mountain would only be able to reactively respond, thereby falling into their opponent's cadence. However, the voluntary announcement ignored any possible ploys from Pillfire City. They were essentially nullified. The Sacred Peafowl Mountain's announcement had priority.

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Chapter 828: Emperor Pillzenith

The Sacred Peafowl Mountain's declaration was duly circulated through its various channels, its great impact spreading to the furthest reaches of the domain within three days. The recently popular Longevity Pill once again became the focus of all the major powers' attention.

Pillfire City was no exception. They were caught completely unawares. They had been secretly planning a series of methods with which to fabricate a charge against the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They'd planned to accuse the latter of stealing the Longevity Pill recipe, thereby suppressing Veluriyam Capital's

prestige. Never did they expect that the Sacred Peafowl Mountain would deploy a preemptive strike. This effectively thwarted their still-forming plans.

Pillfire City and Veluriyam Capital had always been bitter rivals. Meanwhile, within Pillfire City, the lord of Pillfire City was receiving the pill dao representatives from the Eternal Celestial Capital. Emperor Pillzenith, was an expert not in the least bit inferior to Emperor Peafowl. The Eternal Celestial Capital representative this time was one of their first-rate pill kings — he'd lived well over a thousand years and was one of the Eternal Celestial Capital's best in terms of skill and experience—his name was Shi Yangshu. But even the Eternal Celestial Capital's most senior pill king had to observe a junior's etiquette before the Pillfire City lord. The Pillfire City lord was one of the most powerful experts in the Upper Eight Regions and in the last thousands of years hardly anyone had dared claim that they were stronger than Emperor Pillzenith.

"Your Majesty, it was rather unexpected that Veluriyam Capital would be so shameless. They not only destroyed our Eternal Celestial Capital's business, but they also plan to monopolize the Longevity Pill. Their ambition truly knows no bounds." The pill king's angry words contained some hidden intentions of instigation.

Emperor Pillzenith smiled indifferently. He'd naturally noticed Shi Yangshu's petty tricks. But the emperor remained the picture of calm, "Tell me again in detail about how your Eternal Celestial Capital obtained the Longevity Pill Recipe from the Myriad Domain. This emperor must determine from whence Veluriyam Capital's Longevity Pill recipe came, lest we fall into a passive state."

Shi Yangshu was given no chance to play tricks before Emperor Pillzenith and could only narrate the whole story regardless of how upset he was. Fortunately, such plundering was not rare in the martial world and Emperor Pillzenith only laughed ambiguously in response, "I hear that your Eternal Celestial Capital hasn't yet captured a certain remnant member of the Regal Pill Palace?" The emperor suddenly asked.

Shi Yangshu was somewhat startled but eventually nodded, "The survivors are quite cunning. However, given enough time, we'll definitely capture them in one go."

Emperor Pillzenith smiled with relative indifference and replied dispassionately, "I'm afraid the Eternal Celestial Capital won't ever have that chance."

"Your Majesty, what do you mean by this?" Shi Yangshu was somewhat astonished.

"It's obvious that the Regal Pill Palace survivors have joined Veluriyam Capital. More specifically, he's been recruited by Emperor Peafowl." Emperor Pillzenith's speculation, albeit not personally witnessed, was resolute and seemingly unquestionable. His every speech and action possessed a special charm, as if his words were the absolute truth. There was virtually no room for doubt.

The speechless Shi Yangshu swallowed hard with a rueful smile, "Could the survivor have actually escaped to Veluriyam Capital despite our encirclement and pursuit?"

This survivor in question was, of course, Jiang Chen. Emperor Pillzenith smiled unenthusiastically, "Is this the extent of your Eternal Celestial Capital's capability? You lot can't even clean up your own mess and refused to offer up the Longevity Pill before reaching the end of your tether. Do you know that it was your idiocy that allowed the situation to worsen to such a degree?!"

At this point, Emperor Pillzenith had taken on a rather harsh tone of voice. The emperor was speaking as if he was disciplining a child, but Shi Yangshu dared not retort and could only shake his head with a rueful smile. They wouldn't be in such a deteriorating situation if they'd given up the Longevity Pill recipe to Pillfire City much earlier.

The Eternal Celestial Capital had initially been afraid of being swallowed up by the colossal entity that was Pillfire City after offering up the recipe. They were apprehensive of testing the waters at Pillfire City's market and as such, they'd gone to Veluriyam Capital instead.

Never did they expect to fail so miserably at Veluriyam Capital. The Eternal Celestial Capital soon fell into a passive state under Emperor Peafowl's relentless assault and was forced to rely on Pillfire City. They had hoped to move their way up Pillfire City's ladder by relying on the massive profits the Longevity Pill brought them. Their wishful calculations were all well and good, but Emperor Peafowl's next move had also put Pillfire City at a disadvantage. n/-O**V**ELbIn

They'd lost the opportunity to speak out against the other party and now their argument was hardly justifiable. At this point it'd be too passive for them to make an appearance and announce that the Longevity Pill recipe was theirs when the other party had just declared ownership. The outside world would question why they hadn't announced it earlier and had instead waited until right after Emperor Peafowl's declaration if the recipe was indeed theirs. They would appear to be intentionally stirring up trouble.

This was also the most important reason why Pillfire City was in a passive position. But nonetheless, it'd be impractical to think they'd give up on such a profitable business. Furthermore, the force that had obtained the Longevity Pill Recipe was their archrival, Veluriyam Capital. Although Pillfire City would still be affected if any other power were to obtain the Longevity Pill, the effects would slowly but surely dissipate over time. They could employ various methods to mitigate the effects. But that wouldn't work on Veluriyam Capital.

Veluriyam Capital was a tough bone which even Pillfire City couldn't chew on. The other party definitely wouldn't play according to their rules. Neither robbery nor deceit would work on Veluriyam Capital. They had always strived to surpass Pillfire City and would never give in. Neither soft nor hard tactics were viable. The only remaining method was to challenge the Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Didn't the Sacred Peafowl Mountain announce that anyone in doubt could challenge them within three months? If their Longevity Pill could triumph over the Sacred Peafowl Mountain's, they could still turn the situation around and claim the rights. History was written by the victors, and ergo legitimacy would belong to the victor!

While playing with the jade cup in his hand, Emperor Pillzenith suddenly laughed, "Holy King Shi, I've received your message. You may go."

"Go?" Shi Yangshu was dazed, "Your Majesty, I came on the clan head's orders to discuss, with all sincerity, our cooperation with Pillfire City."

"Cooperation?" Emperor Pillzenith laughed indifferently, "What are you offering for this negotiation?"

"The Longevity Pill of course." Shi Yangshu was puzzled.

“The Longevity Pill?” If I remember correctly, the recipe to it is in the hands of Veluriyam Capital. What does it have to do with your Eternal Celestial Capital?” Emperor Pillzenith’s tone was disinterested.

Shi Yangshu’s expression suddenly changed, “Your Majesty, you... are you trying to exclude us?”

“Exclude?” Emperor Pillzenith laughed in a leisurely manner, “Your Eternal Celestial Capital was never included in the first place. If you’re dissatisfied, you can challenge the Sacred Peafowl Mountain and win back the rights to the Longevity Pill. At that time you’ll naturally have the right to negotiate with this emperor. But for now...”

Emperor Pillzenith smiled meaningfully. Why should Pillfire City carry the Eternal Celestial Capital along if they had to throw their cap in and fight it out with Veluriyam Capital?

Shi Yangshu’s heart sank and stammered, “Your Majesty, that’s completely unreasonable. How would you contend with Veluriyam Capital if not for us offering you the recipe? Our Eternal Celestial Capital...”

Emperor Pillzenith’s expression became solemn, “Pill recipe? Do you think our Pillfire City doesn’t have the means to obtain it?”

This time, Shi Yangshu had realized that Emperor Pillzenith was looking to renege on his words. He was going to exclude them with a flat denial. “Your Majesty, you shouldn’t be so tyrannical.”

Emperor Pillzenith replied apathetically, “Is your Eternal Celestial Capital not clear about this emperor’s principles?”

Shi Yangshu was left speechless. How could he dare express the flames of fury burning in his heart? Emperor Pillzenith could turn him to ash with a single slap should he reveal the slightest hint of disrespect.

“Since that’s the case, things have truly gone beyond my control. I shall take my leave immediately, report this back to our sect head, and await his decision.” Shi Yangshu was indeed upset inside but he knew he could hardly redeem anything with his meager ability. But the Eternal Celestial Capital, being a first rank sect, still had a bottom line. Although Pillfire City was indeed very powerful, the Eternal Celestial Capital might not take this lying down.

Seeing Shi Yangshu leave with fury, the corners of Emperor Pillzenith lips curved into a cold smile. The smile was very meaningful, as if he was plotting something. After a while, Emperor Pillzenith eyes turned pensively towards the south where Veluriyam Capital was located, “Emperor Peafowl, I wonder where you get the confidence to make such a declaration. It’s as if you’re openly challenging our Pillfire City’s foundation. Since that is the case, allow us to give you a lasting lesson and show you just how limited your outlook is!”

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The whole of the Upper Eight Regions was abuzz following Veluriyam Capital’s declaration.

Three days later, Pillfire City finally made their next move. They announced that the Longevity Pill was originally their product and that it’d been somehow plagiarized by Veluriyam Capital. However, an empty speech made for a hardly convincing argument. As such, Pillfire City’s representative would arrive at Veluriyam Capital in one month’s time to compete against their pill king on the subject of the

Longevity Pill to prove their claim. This forceful announcement immediately exacerbated the conflicting views.

With this, the two giants of the Upper Eight Regions, one of the north and the other of the south, would suddenly come face to face without prior warning. And the focus of their collision was surprisingly the Longevity Pill which had been causing quite the clamor recently.

Everyone knew that whoever obtained the rights to the Longevity Pill would be on a path to tremendous wealth. Everyone was clear about the Longevity Pill's market potential and value, but nobody had expected this Longevity Pill to cause Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City to clash head on with little room for error. Suddenly, the entire Upper Eight Regions was full of anticipation.

Chapter 829: The Preparations of a No Preparation Period

A month wasn't too long of a period of time, and Pillfire City's power and influence was undeniable. The contest hadn't even begun, but news had already spread throughout the lands. Only, most of the factions in the human territories unconditionally favored Pillfire City. After all, Pillfire City had been the hegemon of pill dao in the human territories for over three thousand years.

Veluriyam Capital was doing fine, but when it came to pills, it had merely shown a little development in the last thousand years. It was still far from posing a tangible threat to Pillfire City. Never mind the wild speculations running afire throughout the world at large, there were many questions even inside Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Even the four great monarchs were baffled by Great Emperor Peafowl's decision this time. Why did His Majesty trust Pill King Zhen so much?

If one put their respective pill traditions and heritages side by side, it was an almost impossible task for Sacred Peafowl Mountain to go against Pillfire City. Anyone with a little brains knew that Pillfire City was an existence one couldn't provoke when it came to pills. However, Great Emperor Peafowl had gone so far as to pin all his hopes on an outsider. Granted, this outsider had exhibited a pill talent formidable enough to shock everyone in the capital, but was talent truly enough to shake Pillfire City's impregnable, millenia-long position at the top? Even the Cloudsoar Monarch couldn't be certain.

The four great monarchs had tactfully broached the subject with Great Emperor Peafowl several times, but received only a silent smile in reply. The Chronobalance Emperor was the most outspoken of them. "Your Majesty, Pill King Zhen might have outstanding talent, but in your loyal servant's opinion, we will be in deep trouble if he turns out to be an agent sent by Pillfire City. His origin is far too unclear at the moment."

He wasn't the only one with such thoughts. The other monarchs were also baffled at this seemingly obvious oversight. Even the Cloudsoar Monarch, the one most loyal to the great emperor, was somewhat uncertain. After all, to challenge Pillfire City to a pill contest was to publicize their conflict. Even though it was evident that a fight between Pillfire City and Veluyiram Capital had always been inevitable, it was hard not to be surprised by the suddenness of this contest. However, Emperor Peafowl seemed to be set on his course this time, his resolve seemingly unshakable. No amount of persuasion, be it tactful or blunt, could make him waver. Even many of the other great emperors in the Capital had come to Sacred Peafowl Mountain and tried to subtly remind Emperor Peafowl that going head to head with Pillfire City would have far-reaching consequences. Was it truly a necessity?

Emperor Peafowl had but one answer for them—we fight! His resolve was as firm as iron. When everyone saw his determination, they all understood it was impossible for anyone to change his mind.

As for the one involved, Jiang Chen went into closed door cultivation after returning to his residence, turning a deaf ear to the quarrels outside. He knew that the one Pillfire City would send would definitely not be an ordinary figure, since they were adamant about obtaining the Longevity Pill. Only, Jiang Chen had never been afraid of anyone when it came to pills, and he was certain there was no one on the Divine Abyss Continent capable enough to cause him fear. In particular, Jiang Chen didn't even take Pillfire City seriously when it came to the Longevity Pill. He could even send a pill emperor running with his tail between his legs, never mind pill kings.

The various rumor mills in the Capital were running at full steam. Countless versions of "Pill King Zhen"'s past history came to the fore. Some people said that this Pill King Zhen had once received the teachings of an immortal and had already gone beyond the realm of pill kings thanks to his talent.

Some others said this Pill King Zhen was an agent of a hostile power dispatched to the Capital to disrupt the local situation.

Of course, there also those who said that Pill King Zhen was merely a charlatan. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's trust in Pill King Zhen would cost them dearly. There were all sorts of rumors flying through the air. The one about being an undercover agent in particular, under the guise of great insight, took a life of its own. What was surprising was that Great Emperor Peafowl didn't adopt any measure to stop these wagging tongues.

All kinds of rumors came and went in the Capital. At Great Emperor Peafowl's urging, the Coiling Dragon clan lord and House Wei didn't make any comment, to say nothing of taking any action. It was as though they weren't concerned in the least about the upcoming confrontation. They only had to do what they ought to do. They didn't have any apprehension on the eve of battle.

As for Jiang Chen, he'd gone straight into seclusion for just one goal, to break through to sixth level sage realm. With the two Sage Smile Pills from before, he now had the possibility to break into sky sage realm in one fell swoop. As long as he broke through to the sixth level, one of those pills could instantly help him break through to the seventh level.

Such motivation filled Jiang Chen with renewed vigor. His cultivation progressed in leaps and bounds with the help of countless Heroic Sage Pills. Supplemented by the refining and absorption of the dragon crystals, Jiang Chen made steady steps on the road to the sixth level, each day nearing closer to his goal.

"I haven't yet seen a great emperor's disciple, but the scions at the great clan level are on the whole comparable to a first rank sect's core disciples. I need more strength to establish myself in the Capital. As long as I can reach the sky sage realm, then I can thrash any peak ninth-level cultivators or half-step emperor realm cultivators that comes my way."

To fight against cultivators of higher levels was child's play for Jiang Chen nowadays. However, after obtaining the information about Myriad Abyss Island, Jiang Chen was much more driven to increase his cultivation. He knew that the Upper Eight Regions wasn't the summit of the Divine Abyss Continent, and weren't even the peak of martial cultivation on the continent.

Remembering Huang'er's background, recalling he was still without news of his father in the Upper Eight Domains, how the rebuilding of the ruined Regal Pill Palace was still a faraway thought, how he still didn't know whether his father in his former life was dead or alive... Jiang Chen felt a heart-rending pain each time he thought of any of these, forcing him ever onward. He didn't dare slack off even in his dreams.

Time flew by, day by day. Jiang Chen finally came out of closed door cultivation three days before the pill battle. In the end, he hadn't broken through to sixth level during this seclusion, but he'd still laid down firm foundations in preparation for his breakthrough. "Pillfire City." After organizing his thoughts, Jiang Chen reviewed the information he had about Pillfire City. "Greed and shamelessness. A faction can't become grand with these tags attached to it. I wonder which Pillfire house has gotten its hands on Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie?"

Jiang Chen was in fact still quite worried. He could see how shameless Pillfire City was. They had been so brazen about snatching the Longevity Pill by force, even though it clearly didn't belong to them. Judging by this alone, they were definitely not easy to deal with. He would of course not judge a faction with simple criteria such as "good or bad." However, regardless of morality, it was out of the question for them to occupy his own things. Such was Jiang Chen's temperament. If he was willing to offer something, then he wouldn't bat an eye no matter how precious a gift it was. If it wasn't a gift given willingly, but snatched by force, then Jiang Chen would never allow it even for the cheapest trifle.

To tell the truth, the Longevity Pill was a mere small fragment among Jiang Chen's countless memories. There were countless more precious pill recipes stored in his mind. Only, the theft of this pill recipe touched upon the principles Jiang Chen lived by. Even the strongest pill faction in the Upper Eight Regions couldn't just take it from him. He would never agree to someone claiming his possession by shady means.

No one from Sacred Peafowl Mountain had come to disturb him while he'd cultivated behind close doors. However, Ji San made his way over as soon as he exited, as the Coiling Dragon clan lord's representative.

"Brother, the clan lord said that the mood in the entire Capital is strange now that the pill battle is near at hand. He thinks that you should go to His Majesty now to boost their morale." Ji San was actually fully confident in Jiang Chen. "I told him those people were short-sighted. They simply don't know your talent and abilities. Pillfire City? If you ask me, they aren't even fit to polish your shoes!" Ji San's words were as blind as they could get. Their only goal was to enhance his good brother's morale.

Jiang Chen actually listened with a calm smile. "Brother Ji, your words actually hit it on the head. I wouldn't let Pillfire City polish my shoes even if they wished to."

These words made have been said in jest, but they still were Jiang Chent's real thoughts. In his former life, there had been so many empyrean powerhouses eager to polish Jiang Chen's shoes they were impossible to count. Even divine powerhouses had been a dime a dozen. However, one could count on one's hand the number of people Jiang Chen had taken a fancy to.

Jiang Chen wasn't as exalted now as he had been in his former life, but he still had the memories of his past life, so his sights were likewise set high. With Pillfire City's manner of doing things, Jiang Chen felt true contempt for them.

Ji San's smile was awkward when he heard Jiang Chen's boasting. "Brother, you actually should pay a visit to His Majesty. After all, His Majesty is putting his faith in you this time. You should go and ease his worries!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "If I am to guess, this doesn't come from His Majesty himself."

"How did you know?" Ji San blinked. True enough, he'd come this time to persuade Jiang Chen at the clan lord's behest. In the Coiling Dragon clan lord's opinion, no one was optimistic about the upcoming confrontation, and so it brought an enormous pressure down on them. No matter the outcome, the clan lord felt that Jiang Chen ought to report to his Majesty and at least talk about the duel.

However, Jiang Chen and Emperor Peafowl had a faint, unspoken mutual understanding. Jiang Chen guessed that the Longevity Pill was only a small part of the reason why Emperor Peafowl backed him in the pill duel against Pillfire City. The greater reason was that Emperor Peafowl wanted to borrow this opportunity to test Jiang Chen, and test the reliability of his All-Seeing Eyes. After the long talk with Emperor Peafowl that day, Jiang Chen in fact understood him now better than many others.

For one seated in Emperor Peafowl's position, one pill recipe or one business opportunity weren't enough to make him move heaven and earth. Rather than saying the Emperor didn't mind shouldering the fallout of going against Pillfire City for the sake of the Longevity Pill, it would be better to say he was doing it to test Jiang Chen, to make the youth prove his talents.

Ahoy, any VRMMORPG fans in the audience? May I introduce you to "The MC is Kickass" and the cover that was commissioned for it? In a world where everyone makes themselves as beautiful and handsome as possible online.. our poor MC is assigned the IGN of "Nutjob" and the honor of being the ugliest on the server. Poor Nutjob, even NPCs cringe and refrain from giving out the best jobs to our MC...

There was no reason for Jiang Chen to deny Emperor Peafowl's intentions. Personally speaking, Jiang Chen was very impressed by Emperor Peafowl's behavior and amiability thus far. Moreover, this battle was no longer merely a conflict between Veluriyam Capital and Pillfire City. It was directly related to his personal future and fate. Therefore, the thought of retreat didn't cross Jiang Chen's mind even once.

The Longevity Pill was his!

If Jiang Chen hadn't given the pill willingly to Pillfire City, then there was no way they would get to keep it. They had to first ask for permission from Jiang Chen if they wished to use it!

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That day, Jiang Chen met Emperor Peafowl once more inside the Sacred Peafowl Mountain secret realm. Although the highly anticipated battle was going to happen in less than three days' time, not a shred of pre-battle jitters could be seen on Emperor Peafowl's face. At his level, it seemed as though nothing could cause huge emotional turmoil in Emperor Peafowl. Even a matter such as this, a battle so important that it would influence the future trend and fate of Veluriyam Capital's influence in pill dao for the next thousands of years wasn't enough.

"Jiang Chen, you and I may be the only two people in the entirety of Veluriyam Capital right now who are completely unaffected by this battle." Emperor Peafowl cast Jiang Chen a rather meaningful glance before smiling.

"Aren't you worried about this battle at all, Your Majesty?" Jiang Chen blinked and asked with a smile.

"Why should I be worried?" Emperor Peafowl countered.

Jiang Chen rubbed his nose, "Aren't you afraid that I would lose this battle and negatively affect Sacred Peafowl Mountain's fate?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled freely, "I can see the flow of destiny, so why on earth would I be afraid of the effects of destiny? My eye art tells me that Sacred Peafowl Mountain will only climb to greater heights. I can almost see no possibility of you losing this battle."

"Are you that confident in my abilities, Your Majesty?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"You're even more confident in yourself than I am, aren't you?" It was as Emperor Peafowl said. Jiang Chen truly was completely unaffected by this battle.

It wasn't that he was confident in his chances of victory. The thought that he would lose simply never crossed his mind. "Oh right, I heard that Pillfire City's team has already crossed the borders, Your Majesty?"

"Yes, they have already arrived in Veluriyam Capital. Emperor Pillzenith and I have already met."

"Oh?" Jiang Chen remarked, "It must have been very interesting, not? Sparks must have flown everywhere when the two greatest emperors encountered each other."

Emperor Peafowl laughed, "What sparks? It is true that we fight each other on the surface, but drawing daggers in private is a whole other matter altogether. Great emperors wouldn't butt heads against each other easily unless their very life was at stake, young friend."

Jiang Chen smiled but said nothing in reply.

Emperor Peafowl actually took the initiative to ask Jiang Chen with bright eyes, “Do you plan to publicize your identity after this battle, young friend?”

Jiang Chen didn’t think that Emperor Peafowl would ask this. A moment later, he ultimately shook his head, “My father and my sect mates are still out there somewhere. I’m afraid that publicizing my identity would put them in danger.”

It was true that it was somewhat dangerous for Jiang Chen to publicize his identity with his current status in Veluriyam Capital, but if he managed to beat Pillfire City, then not even the Eternal Celestial Capital would dare act brazenly before him. But still, he didn’t wish to publicize his identity. They might not be able to threaten him in Veluriyam Capital, but they could attack those who were close to him in secret.

He could imagine that his father, Jiang Feng or his Regal Pill Palace sect mates would definitely come running after hearing his name. He had no doubt that it would also give enemy forces the chance to attack them. Jiang Chen would rather investigate in secret than openly publicize his identity. If his actions enabled his enemies to threaten his loved ones, he was sure that he would come to regret this decision his entire life.

“Come to me whenever you feel like publicizing it. I will give you the greatest protection possible in Veluriyam Capital. I guarantee that not even the Eternal Celestial Capital will dare raise a hand against you.” Emperor Peafowl made his standpoint very clear.

Jiang Chen was touched. No matter what happened next, there was no denying that Emperor Peafowl was treating him with great kindness. “I won’t forget your kindness, Your Majesty. I will definitely win the Longevity Pill for Sacred Peafowl Mountain and send Pillfire City back with their tail between their legs,” Jiang Chen also expressed his determination.

Emperor Peafowl laughed loudly, “Haha, that’s a sight I’ll look forward to! Emperor Pillzenith completely looks down on Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s pill kings completely, and it is true that they are inferior to those of his Pillfire City. That being said, I have a feeling that the all-encompassing Emperor Pillzenith will be met with a loss at Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s hands this time around, shattering their invincible legend in the pill industry. My expectation grows just thinking about it.”

“The Longevity Pill is mine. If I haven’t given them the pill willingly, then they shouldn’t dream of keeping it to themselves. I would not have the face to meet my master if I lose.”

“Alas, your master must be an expert of unimaginable heights. I can’t believe that he could nurture a genius like you in just ten years time. I’ve dominated Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, and I have seen as many geniuses as there are fish in rivers. But I have never seen a more skilled young man than you. If it isn’t for your master, I might actually consider keeping you in Veluriyam Capital by force, young friend.” Emperor Peafowl might be using a joking tone, but who knew if that had seriously crossed his mind ?

When Jiang Chen had triggered that shocking worldly phenomenon back at Precious Tree Sect, Emperor Peafowl had seen it all with his ability to observe the threads of destiny. It had come as a great shock to the emperor. Even he hadn’t triggered such a ridiculous worldly phenomenon the day he broke through

to become a great emperor. Now that he had seen Jiang Chen with his own eyes, the flow of destiny circulating around the youth was to a degree he had never seen in his whole life. It would be stranger yet if Emperor Peafowl wasn't tempted to bring a genius like this into his camp.

He had forcefully suppressed his ability to perceive the heaven's dao and stayed in Veluriyam Capital because he was waiting for a successor of great talent and destiny to succeed him. In his opinion, Jiang Chen was the best choice he'd ever seen. That was why he had never given up trying to take Jiang Chen as his disciple these past few days.

Although Jiang Chen found Emperor Peafowl a lot to his liking, he still found it somewhat difficult to accept the emperor as his master. After all, he couldn't just forget his past memories, and in his past memories, the only person worthy to become his master was his father, and no one else. Be it Ye Chonglou or Palace Head Dan Chi, Jiang Chen had thought both of them as his friends and seniors despite their age difference. He had never given them the salute of a disciple.

In terms of seniority in this lifetime, he deserved to be called a junior considering his age and status. However, a master and disciple relationship was a lot more serious. Naturally, Jiang Chen didn't wish to take a secular world's expert as his master. After all, there literally didn't exist anyone in the entire Divine Abyss Continent who could guide him along the path of martial dao.

He had no doubt that Emperor Peafowl was tens and hundreds of times stronger than him right now. At the very least, there was zero harm in accepting Emperor Peafowl as his master at the moment. Moreover, the emperor could pass down many things regarding actual combat. But still, Jiang Chen couldn't overcome that final hurdle in his heart. He couldn't help but feel a little something keeping him from accepting Emperor Peafowl as his master.

Thankfully, he had this fake 'master' to use as his shield. Therefore, turning down Emperor Peafowl's offer was less awkward than it could've been. After all, his fake 'master' sounded a lot more mysterious and powerful than even Emperor Peafowl. Experts attached great value to their inheritances, so naturally they couldn't forcefully take in another master's student. It would be a breach of the rules of martial dao.

"I am very grateful, Your Majesty. It's just that my master once told me that the ten years of skill he imparted to me is enough for me to use for an entire lifetime. He forbade me from accepting another expert's offer to teach me, or it would constitute a breach of the rules."

Emperor Peafowl waved his hands gently and smiled, "That is exactly right. Do not worry, young friend. Even if your master is just an origin realm expert, I would not force you to take me as your master." He wasn't that narrow minded considering his position as the heavyweight of an entire faction. However, Emperor Peafowl immediately smiled again, "That being said, I do have an idea."

"Please speak, Young Majesty." ~~no ve-lB~~(In

"You and I are like old friends, even though we met not long ago. Perhaps a master disciple relationship does not yet exist between us, but that doesn't mean I can't pass down my inheritance to you."

"What do you mean, Your Majesty?" Jiang Chen was surprised.

“You and I are the only ones here, so I shan’t speak in circles, young friend. I had three direct disciples, and two are left after one was killed by my own hands. Both of them are preeminent geniuses of their time. However, they still lack a quality that would enable them to carry certain responsibilities on their shoulders; a quality that only you currently possess. It is not yet time to pass on the torch of Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s fate.”

“You can always wait a little longer, right?” Jiang Chen smiled.

“I’m afraid that isn’t possible for much longer. I can miss the heavenly law’s the first and second summons, but I absolutely cannot miss the third time. If I do, I am afraid that the law would smite me.” Emperor Peafowl sighed softly, “In the next ten years, I must either obey the heavenly law and refine the empyrean decree, or perish and enter the cycle of reincarnation.”

Ten years? Jiang Chen looked shocked when he heard this, “Your time is that short?”

“Ten years is just an estimate, but that is more or less the right time. That’s why I’m so curious: What kind of method did you use to stop the Coiling Dragon clan lord from losing his cultivation?” There was no need to tell this to others, but Emperor Peafowl’s insight was so great that it obviously couldn’t be hidden from him. Therefore, Jiang Chen had no choice but to tell the truth.

“This is something your master taught you?” Emperor Peafowl let out a soft sigh. He was filled with respect and admiration after he finished listening to the story. Jiang Chen nodded.

“Then the Pinecrane Pill truly exists?” Emperor Peafowl suddenly asked.

Jiang Chen nodded, “It definitely exists.”

Emperor Peafowl’s pupils contracted a little when he heard this. He continued, “Did your master teach you the method to refine the Pinecrane Pill?”

Jiang Chen couldn’t lie in front of Emperor Peafowl, so he had no choice but to nod in acknowledgment.

“So you mean that if the ingredients are present you could try refining the Pinecrane Pill too?” Emperor Peafowl’s eyes shone brightly.