

## Three Realms 901

### Chapter 901: Annihilating the Purple Light Division

The head of Hidden Death flashed a ruthless smile. "We're only taking out some interest. Our biggest target is still that scoundrel, Jiang Chen. He killed a number of our members all those years ago, and now he has a worldwide bounty on his head. Maybe one day he'll flee back here. We should all keep our eyes peeled."

Eyes blazed everywhere in the peanut gallery. The very sound of Jiang Chen's name was enough to remind them of the associated princely sum promised by the Eternal Celestial Capital.

Elder Qiu spat hatefully as well, "That kid is Purple Sun Sect's mortal enemy! If we can catch him, we must take him to the Eternal Celestial Capital to receive our reward."

The Hidden Death head snickered in secret disdain. How idiotic. A reward from the Eternal Celestial Capital? Our Ninesuns Sky Sect has an internal bounty on that kid's head too, with the goods to match. Aside from the Ninesuns Sky Sect's higher-ups, however, not many people knew about it. From a grunt's perspective, the Eternal Celestial Capital was the issuer of Jiang Chen's bounty.

"We have to look into our recent mission to Skylareland Kingdom. We of the Hidden Death emphasize efficiency. It's been quite a few days since we've received word from them. Send some more people to check on them." The head was evidently somewhat dissatisfied with his underlings' abilities.

Suddenly, faint laughter echoed through the air. "No need. They're not coming back."

The voice was extremely out of place. There had been no indication of its source prior to its emanation. Everyone present jumped in their seats.

"Who? Who is it?!"

"What... where?!"

Some felt like they were hallucinating. Was one of them intentionally being negative? But the voice had come from thin air, not from someone within the seated audience. The head of Hidden Death focused his eyes and deployed his consciousness to his surroundings. His expression grew very serious. "From where do you come, friend? Don't you know that it's proper to notify us ahead of time?"

"Ahead of time, huh?" The strange voice popped up again, this time from a different corner. "How could I make sure that you wouldn't all run off somewhere if I did that?"

The constant changes to the voice's apparent position made it seem like there was someone invisible in the air who kept moving from place to place. They traveled instantaneously, and it seemed as if they didn't even exist. The head of Hidden Death was black with rage. "Who are you really? Why all this excessive mystery?"

"Ah, but I thought that was your sect's specialty." The voice reverberated throughout the grand hall, but nobody could pinpoint its exact location.

Even with his consciousness fully deployed, the division head didn't have a clue as to where the voice was coming from. The situation was terrifying. Ever since he had lucked out with his sworn brother, the

head of Hidden Death's strength had grown in great strides. He'd gradually accumulated a newfound loftiness. He felt that he could take on any cultivator in the sixteen kingdoms alliance. Even outside of it, they still had the Ninesuns Sky Sect to back them up. His organization had been on a roll for the last few years, which took him from behind the scenes into the limelight. Understandably, his nature had changed drastically with this shift. He now found it intolerable to be toyed with on his own turf like this and seethed with anger.

"Since you're playing such idle games with us, I assume you hold the Ninesuns Sky Sect in no regard whatsoever?" His higher-ups seemed to be the only thing still on the division head's mind. It certainly did a good job calming down the others. The chaos in the room subsided a little.

"The Ninesuns Sky Sect? Funny you should say that. I hear that several of their best disciples have been cut down one after another, and that they've lost face numerous times to boot. Is that the sect you're talking about?"

"How dare you!" Everyone else in the room jumped up at the insult.

"Such humiliating words to the great Sky Sect should be punished with death!"

"Division head, this person must die. We can't let him escape!"

"That's right! Such is the fate of anyone that dares insult the Sky Sect!"

The head of Hidden Death was a bit more clear-minded. He secretly fretted about the situation. Death? That was easy to say, but for whom would it be in the end? They couldn't even catch this person's shadow. "Calm down, everyone," collecting himself, he gave appropriate orders. "Get in formation and be ready for the enemy."

His subordinates moved in accordance to his command.

"Friend, you can decide for yourself whether you're our enemy or not. If you have a grudge with the Ninesuns Sky Sect, you should go to their headquarters instead. Why show off your power at one of their mere divisions?"

Though the tone of this statement was still somewhat hardened, it had softened considerably from before.

"Of course I'll go to headquarters. But just as I said, I came here to collect advance interest."

"What do you mean?" The head's face froze.

"Nothing in particular. I'm sending you to the world beyond." The voice was off-handed, almost casual, as if it were speaking ordinary words. However, the contents of his message made everyone's hearts leap.

"How arrogant!" The division head took out a smooth, shiny mirror. It shined with an awe-inspiring light that flooded the corners of the room.

The voice laughed serenely, "You don't need to go to such an extent. I'm over here." As soon as the words were spoken, two figures appeared in the middle of the hall. One male and one female, both

quite young. They stood with an odd listlessness, their faces impassive. For the division head, both faces were unfamiliar.

“Kill them both!” He let out a mad roar, heralding his subordinates’ charge.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. These clowns didn’t deserve to be killed by his lotus. He braced himself, and a magnetic force blasted in both directions. Immediately afterwards, his ginseng’s tentacles followed, spreading themselves every which way. The cultivators of the Purple Light Division weren’t nearly as strong as the wandering ones that had attacked Jiang Chen at Myriad Corpse Valley. Those guys had at least been in the origin realm, and some were even in the lower initial sage realm. But within this Purple Light Division, the only sage realm cultivator was the division head. The strongest people in the sect were a few weak origin realm cultivators, while the majority of the remaining cultivators were in the spirit realm.

Jiang Chen didn’t need to use any of his special methods, really. The core members of the division were crushed by the mint ginseng’s tentacles, exploding in clouds of blood and flesh.

“How can this be?” The absurdity of the scene clued the division head in to the fact that the end had come. Along with a few other wily elders, he tried to walk towards the door. Unfortunately, they didn’t get very far before they realized that they were stuck in a formation. There was no way out.

“Trying to leave?” Jiang Chen mocked.

The head of Hidden Death was white with sheer terror. The person before him was infinitely more fearsome than anyone else he’d ever seen. He couldn’t possibly hope to bridge the gap between their strengths.

“Sir, sir... we can talk about it, can’t we?” Even as a man of many experiences, the division head’s teeth chattered.

Jiang Chen scanned his surroundings. Only the five or six strongest remained. “I don’t think there’s much to talk about.” He said coolly.

The division head shivered. “Sir, are you not afraid of the Ninesuns Sky Sect’s vengeance? You can’t just go around destroying its divisions.”

“Do you have memory problems? I thought I said that I would go to the Ninesuns Sky Sect later.”

“If you have a score to settle with them, why take it out on us little ants?” The division head cried.

“Little ants?” Jiang Chen boomed with laughter. “Do you remember all the people you sent killers after? Or the number of people that Purple Sun slaughtered when they were in power?”

The few people that remained were all shocked by this announcement, including the division head.

“Who... who are you really?” Suddenly, the head realized, “You, you’re that Jiang...”

Jiang Chen smiled faintly again. Grabbing the division head’s neck with one hand, he stopped the man from speaking further. “Die.” With his other, he killed the rest of the remaining, stunned men with a palm strike. He continued gripping the division head’s life in his hand. “You’re clever, but you got in way over your head when you first tried to lay a finger on me.”

The division head's teeth clattered with fury. Everything about today had been too strange. They'd had so many years of smooth sailing, and they were about to do something big and climb even higher! But everything had come crashing down with this singular slap. The acute feeling of loss made him think it was a kind of nightmare instead. He was incredulous. But he didn't beg for his life. He knew that he was dead without a doubt, so became fearless instead.

"Jiang Chen, you animal. You dare come back?" He shouted loudly. "Don't be so full of yourself. The Sky Sect will tear you to shreds!"

"A pleasant thought. I doubt it'll come to fruition, though." Jiang Chen was perfectly relaxed. He smacked the division head into dust, then destroyed the entire hall with a few more. As for the underlings of the division, Jiang Chen didn't need to tend to them himself. The Goldbiter Rats finished the job in a much better fashion than he would have.

After an hour, there was nothing left alive in the entire Purple Light Division's headquarters. Jiang Chen's heart was as calm and as undisturbed as a pool of water. He had no pity for a faction like the Purple Light Division. No matter whether it was Hidden Death or leftovers from the Purple Sun Sect, they were a scourge to the sixteen kingdoms alliance. It was a crime to leave anyone here alive. There was no guilt in killing them.

News of the slaughter went out of the sixteen kingdoms alliance a few days later—the Ninesuns Sky Sect's Purple Light Division had been utterly wiped out a few days ago. Nothing was left alive on the mountain that served as its headquarters. Even the plant life and spirit vein had been destroyed. All of their foundations had been removed for good, and there was no possibility of rebuilding.

It took even longer for this news to reach the Ninesuns Sky Sect. The entire sect was aghast. Although the Purple Light Division had only been a very small division amongst countless of others, this sort of outright annihilation was a slap in the face to them. It was an enormous challenge and provocation. The sect immediately sent out numerous inspectors in droves to the Myriad Domain for a detailed investigation. However, all of this would only occur a month later.

## Chapter 902: The Generation Binding Curse, Resolved

The Ninesuns Sky Sect was both shocked and furious, but it wasn't like these series of events were all considered bad news to them. The sect had been trying to find a good excuse to invade the Myriad Domain for quite some time. Today, they finally had that justifiable excuse. The destruction of the Purple Light Division was a tiny blemish in the overall scheme of things—it didn't affect the Ninesuns Sky Sect's core strength at all.

Despite their initial anger, the senior executives of the Ninesuns Sky Sect were secretly bursting with joy when they sent out large groups of inspectors into the Myriad Domain. The current Myriad Domain was a mess that was being controlled by the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region. This outcome displeased the Sky Sect greatly. After all, they had made their own plans for the Myriad Domain a long time ago. Unfortunately for them, their schemes weren't as great as the Eternal Celestial Capital's. In the end, a large majority of the Myriad Domain had fallen into the Eternal Celestial Capital and Great Scarlet Mid Region's grasp. To say that the Ninesuns Sky Sect's share was small was an understatement. So how could the sect possibly be satisfied by this outcome?

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Setting aside the Myriad Domain that was about to be embroiled in chaos once more, Jiang Chen was currently more anxious about trying to cure Huang'er of the Generation Binding Curse, three thousand meters below the ground of a secluded area in Swordland Region. He had obtained the Requiem Wood, and only one piece of it was needed to cure the Generation Binding Curse. The Requiem Wood was the best item for purifying one's soul and nurturing one's mind. It was often used for such purposes, even in the heavenly planes.

However, the Requiem Wood that existed in the heavenly planes were much older and of higher quality than the ones in the Divine Abyss Continent. But of course, the Requiem Wood that he currently possessed was still enough to cure Huang'er's Generation Binding Curse. Although the treatment process wasn't particularly complicated, it would take a very long time to complete. According to Jiang Chen's calculations, it would take at least three to five months to cure Huang'er completely.

If the treatment really did take that long, then he might not be able to make it back for the Veluriyam Pagoda opening ceremony. With that being said, the first battle that would take place during the ceremony was the pill battle. Jiang Chen no longer had anything he wanted to attain from pill dao. Thus, the pill battles of the Veluriyam Pagoda didn't interest him all that much. After all, he was the absolute authority in Veluriyam Capital's pill dao scene. He was so great that even Sacred Peafowl Mountain had to rely on him to fight against Pillfire City. Considering how famous 'Pill King Zhen' was right now, there was no longer any need for him to prove his worth. In fact, he suspected that not even Emperor Peafowl himself was expecting him to participate in this particular battle.

The treatment process was very long, but Jiang Chen went through the entire process with extreme caution. He forbade himself from making even the slightest mistake. In reality, he had to bear a little bit of risk as well to do away with the Generation Binding Curse, as this curse was extremely potent. But he had his past life's experiences to guide him, and he was well-versed in the characteristics of the Generation Binding Curse. Therefore, the treatment process proceeded relatively smoothly.

After injecting the Requiem Wood's essence into Huang'er's consciousness, Jiang Chen used his own consciousness to force the Generation Binding Curse against the Requiem Wood's power. The curse was slowly but surely purified like silk being drawn from woven cocoons. This was a blood curse, and thus was extremely powerful. However, everything in this world has an accompanying weakness, and the Requiem Wood was the item that could counter and purify this particular curse. Three months later, when the final trace of the Generation Binding Curse was purified by the Requiem Wood, Jiang Chen finally let out a long sigh of relief.

"It is done." Jiang Chen's eyes were bloodshot and very tired. He had been working continuously for the past few months, and the task had been exhausting for him, even with his level of consciousness.

Conversely, Huang'er felt much better and more relaxed than ever before. The darkness that had constantly overshadowed her consciousness had finally disappeared entirely. As she basked in a new degree of comfort that only normal people had the privilege of enjoying, Huang'er felt her eyes turn misty despite her tranquil temperament. She hugged Jiang Chen tightly in her arms, wanting to never let go of him. Right now, the only thought running through her mind was that this man was her sky, her

earth, and her everything. She was deeply pained to see the extent that Jiang Chen had pushed himself for her sake.

“Brother Chen, knowing you is my life’s greatest happiness.” Huang’er murmured softly like she was in a dream. As she watched Jiang Chen sleeping soundly in her arms, she gently pressed a kiss onto his forehead with reddened cheeks. Her eyes were overflowing with infinite love. Huang’er was born with a tranquil disposition, and no young man had ever managed to leave a deep impression in her mind. But this man—she would give up even her life in order to protect him.

Jiang Chen’s spirit was fully replenished after he spent roughly four full days in recovery. Only now did he have the time to thoroughly inspect the rewards he’d procured. From the battle against Lu Shinan, he had obtained a big cauldron that would serve as a good piece of defense equipment. The eight statues that had formerly belonged to the Prince of Shangping were extraordinary as well. The only regret he had regarding this haul was that the formation disk was missing. Lu Shinan had a bit more good loot on him and a shocking amount of wealth. Naturally, they were all under Jiang Chen’s possession now.

Jiang Chen had also obtained a batch of sky rank spirit herbs from the Wood Demons. They were all genuine sky rank spirit herbs. He had obtained at least a dozen or so sky rank spirit herbs during this trip. Therefore, he currently possessed almost twenty sky rank spirit herbs. It was definitely a shocking amount of spirit herbs. Presently, only a handful of great emperors were wealthier than him. Of course, the greatest reward of this trip had been the improvement in his cultivation. Jiang Chen had already noticed that he was only a thin margin away from reaching the sixth level sage realm.

Taking advantage of this short gap, he shot through this boundary and completed his ascension smoothly. Jiang Chen wasn’t satisfied with just advancing a single level, however. After his ascent, he consumed a Sage Smile Pill and continued to cultivate. The Sage Smile Pill had been a gift by the Coiling Dragon clan lord, and it allowed a sage realm cultivator to unconditionally gain an entire cultivation level.

Jiang Chen hadn’t used it earlier because he had wanted to reserve it for this exact moment. In this way, he could ascend into the seventh level sage realm and immediately become a sky sage realm expert. Once he completed his ascension into the sky sage realm, his combat strength and cultivation would increase dramatically. Jiang Chen had used a total of three months to cure Huang’er of her Generation Binding Curse. He’d completed it ahead of schedule. However, it took him more than a month to ascend to the seventh level sage realm. When he reached the sky sage realm and felt an infinite amount of energy surging within his body, he felt truly great.

“I’ve finally reached the sky sage realm!” Jiang Chen’s eyes sparkled with joy. His cultivation had never stopped rising since the day he started cultivating, and now he had finally reached the sky sage realm. He was confident now that he could fight against an ordinary emperor realm expert even without his equipment. But Jiang Chen didn’t grow lax just because he had broken through. Making good use of the momentum from his ascension, he began practicing the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique. He had been preparing himself for this sword technique since a long time ago, and now his rapport with the Pentecolor Divine Swords was almost perfect. He truly possessed the necessary qualification to cultivate this sword technique. The technique had gone through countless evolutions from complexity to simplicity, and vice versa. It was full of variations.

Naturally, Jiang Chen couldn't master the sword technique in a single day. He had to start practicing from the most basic move. The Pentecolor Divine Swords had also been modified many times and possessed great power. Even a simple move could cause a large amount of destruction and upheaval.

The first move of the sword technique was called 'Worldshaker'. The Pentecolor Divine Swords contained the True Law of Five Thunders. When it was executed, it killed with the force of the move coupled with the might and sound of thunder. It took Jiang Chen half a month to finally comprehend the essence of this first move. Out of sudden interest, he executed the move and discovered that he had accidentally shorn an entire mountain peak in half.

"Congratulations, Brother Chen! This sword technique is absolutely extraordinary." Huang'er was no fool, and she too was astonished by the power behind the sword technique. Jiang Chen chuckled, "I still may not be a match for you if you were to fight me at full force, Huang'er."

Now that Huang'er was no longer restricted by the Generation Binding Curse, there was no longer any reason for her to refrain from fighting. She smiled beautifully, "If you were anyone else I wouldn't refute them, Brother Chen. But now I can't help but think that you're just being humble."

"I'm not being humble. Back at Regal Pill Palace, it only took you one move to scare Cao Jin into fleeing with his tail between his legs. It's a legendary story in Regal Pill Palace, you know?" Huang'er giggled, "I couldn't just do nothing while you weren't around. You would've lost face if I'd allowed him to behave atrociously in front of Regal Pill Palace's entrance, wouldn't you have?"

Jiang Chen laughed loudly and happily. He felt great to see a cheerful Huang'er who was no longer tormented by the Generation Binding Curse. One of his greatest worries had finally been completely assuaged.

"I wonder where Elder Shun is, though? Even if he did go back to Myriad Abyss Island, he should've returned already, shouldn't he have?" He sighed softly as he recalled Elder Shen.

Huang'er also looked a little concerned when Elder Shun was brought up. "Elder Shun is a stubborn man, and he cares for me greatly. I'm just afraid that he isn't willing to return without the Requiem Wood. Worse, I'm afraid that he may take dangerous risks to find it." "I hope he returns soon."

Huang'er nodded in agreement, "Speaking of which, that bounty should be invalid now, right? Let's find a suitable time to take down it down later. It'll be terrible if those who saw it decided to run to the desolate wildlands to seek out the Requiem Wood and lose their lives for a mere great emperor relic in the process."

"Huang'er was born kind-hearted, so she didn't want to see someone getting into trouble for her sake, especially since she was now freed from the Generation Binding Curse. Jiang Chen nodded, "Come. Everything is done. Let us head back to Veluriyam Capital."

The duo walked out from their hiding spot and returned to Tai-ah City. The city left quite a bad impression on Jiang Chen. He never forgot the fact that Tai-ah City had aided the villainous Gong Wuji in his attempt to hunt Jiang Chen down. Now that he had returned, Jiang Chen was wondering if he could find an opportunity to show them his 'appreciation'.

However, after the two made their way into the city, they heard that the Eternal Celestial Capital and Ninesuns Sky Sect had actually started fighting each other in the Myriad Domain. The Ninesuns Sky Sect claimed that the Eternal Celestial Capital had destroyed their Purple Light Division. However, the Eternal Celestial Capital said that the Ninesuns Sky Sect was making something out of nothing so that they could invade Myriad Domain. Neither sect gave ground, considering how they were competitors who shared many hostilities to begin with. As a result, escalating tempers eventually resulted in full-blown warfare breaking out within the Myriad Domain. The news sent a surge of pleasure into Jiang Chen's mind. It's a dogfight!

#### Chapter 903: Veluriyam Pagoda Gathering

Jiang Chen had only hatred for these two sects. He was perfectly content to see them at each other's throats. Sadly, he didn't have the leisure to see things through personally. It had been a long time since his departure from Veluriyam Capital. Though his trip had proceeded smoothly for the most part, he had spent several months restoring Huang'er back to full health. Afterwards, he had spent another few breaking through to the sky rank sage realm. All in all, it was a considerable number of days.

He would have missed the Veluriyam Pagoda's opening ceremony for sure. The festival centered around the Pagoda happened only once every sixty years. It was an excellent stage for rising stars at the capital to test their strength. The assembly properly began on the fifteenth day of the third month. From his calculations, it was already the fourth month. That meant the pagoda battles had already begun.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen's pill-related reputation in the city was already insurmountable. He didn't need the event to spread his fame. He wasn't missing out on much by skipping the sideshow. Because the Eternal Celestial Capital and Ninesuns Sky Sect were presently embroiled in a heated battle, Jiang Chen and Huang'er's return trip was fairly smooth.

Meanwhile, the pagoda battles were in full swing. The participants for this year's battles were far more numerous. Perhaps they had been inspired by the legend of a certain "Pill King Zhen", but geniuses from all over came to the pagoda battles, intent on using the battles as a stage for proving their worth and showcasing their skills. Their ambitions added a great deal of excitement to the proceedings. Because the divine Pill King Zhen wasn't participating, many talented pill geniuses wanted to take the crown, and in doing so, distinguish themselves as second-best.

The only loss was that Pill King Zhen, who had defeated Pillfire City, hadn't yet appeared at any of the Pagoda's events. In particular, many pill geniuses called for the famous pill king to be a referee over the proceedings. The cries for this demand were so great that the entire Veluriyam Capital was swept up in them. Though they were ignored initially, there was strength in numbers. The petition made its way into the ears of the seven titled great emperors.

Emperor Peafowl had to step in to placate them. Pill King Zhen was out traveling and hadn't yet returned. But since everyone so eagerly expected the young prodigy, the emperor would do everything in his power to locate the pill king so that he could take part in the rest of the festivities. Jiang Chen had promised he would return for the Veluriyam Pagoda's opening, and the emperor's trust in him was firm and unshakable. As long as there weren't any extenuating circumstances, he would return.

For this year's ceremony, Emperor Peafowl seemed to be keeping a lower profile in general. He delegated much of the duties to the other titled great emperors and didn't show himself too often. This



change caused a subtle shift in the winds that blew through the city. Was the emperor too old? This was the first thought that crossed many people's minds. Or was it because he was overly saddened by the passing of his disciple, young lord Fan? Did he no longer have any faith in the city's heritage? More crucially, was this Emperor Shura's time to take the stage?

Though there was no announcement, no official version of events, every sign pointed towards the latter's distinct possibility. The clans under Emperor Shura took the opportunity to rear their heads once more. The repercussion from the Majestic Clan's fall from grace had seemingly disappeared. Compared to them, the clans beneath Emperor Peafowl's command were completely inconspicuous. Though the Coiling Dragon Clan lord had appeared at the ceremony and its related festivities, a rumor spread across the city that he was nearing the end of his natural lifespan. He would undergo cultivation dissipation in the next one or two years, maybe even within the next few months. The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was at the end of his rope.

Because of the low profile that both Emperor Peafowl and his foremost clan had taken, a curious atmosphere loomed over this year's ceremony. Within the Coiling Dragon Clan's halls, the clan lord was forlorn. Young master Ji San stood to his side, brow similarly furrowed. Neither man was particularly cheery.

"Ole Third, is there news of Pill King Zhen?" The Coiling Dragon Clan lord sighed quietly.

"Not presently." Ji San's reply was unhappy.

The clan lord picked up a list of names, reading it over again and again. "The top hundred for both the noble youths and wandering cultivators are out. The scions under His Majesty Peafowl's banner only have twenty-three spots in the top hundred, almost a historic low. Emperor Shura, on the other hand, has twenty. They're neck to neck with each other, and competition is tough."

Clearly, he wasn't pleased at the fact that there was a competition in the first place. Ji San shared in his plight. "If not for the fall of the Majestic Clan, I'd estimate that the numbers between the two emperors would be equal right now."

"Yes. That's why there's a sense of unease here in Veluriyam. The prevailing opinion is that Emperor Peafowl wants to abdicate the throne to Emperor Shura. There are more absurd rumors stating that His Majesty is too old and can no longer effectively compete with Emperor Shura any more." There was a tangible sense of helplessness from the Coiling Dragon Clan lord's words.

"Ridiculous. These people are ridiculous! Emperor Peafowl has ruled over Veluriyam for millennia. How can he lose to Emperor Shura?" Ji San was a diehard fan of the emperor. He wouldn't even entertain the thought. The situation was somewhat tempestuous, though. Even the factions that Emperor Peafowl was closest to didn't know what His Majesty was thinking.

"Clan Lord, is His Majesty setting a trap?" Ji San couldn't help but ask.

The clan lord laughed dryly. After some consideration, he shook his head. "I've been thinking about that, too. His Majesty's thoughts are difficult for the rest of us mortals to comprehend. But it is true that His Majesty's management of both Sacred Peafowl Mountain and Veluriyam Capital has loosened in recent years. Almost as if it were intentional."

“Why? Has His Majesty finally seen through it all and cast off the shackles of power and ambition?” Ji San had no idea how it could be.

“His Majesty is insightful and wise. I have no doubt that he has his reasons.” The clan lord shook his head, bemused. “Perhaps he really does have a different plan in mind that we can’t see. In my perspective, Emperor Shura has the talent and skills to shoulder the duties of the city, but his fortune and morals are still somewhat lacking. There’s something missing as to the way he carries himself, at least compared to Emperor Peafowl.”

“The way... he carries himself?” Ji San was perplexed.

“That’s right, though that might be a little insubstantial,” the clan lord explained. “Let’s look at it from a different perspective. Because Emperor Peafowl is in charge, we can ignore the threat of first-rank sects and loom above them. That’s why we can evenly oppose even an entity as large as Pillfire City. In the hands of Emperor Shura, I’m not sure if we’d be able to do the same. That’s the difference.”

The comparison clarified things for Ji San immediately. He scratched his head, bothered by the possibility. “I really don’t want that to happen. His Majesty seemed to take a strong interest in that sworn brother of mine, but the guy’s disappeared at such a crucial time. It makes me worry about things.” Young master Ji San really was worried. He wanted Ji San to become Emperor Peafowl’s personal disciple from the bottom of his heart. He even wanted Jiang Chen to replace young lord Fan if possible, and become the most-admired heir of the emperor. That was conducive to the Coiling Dragon Clan’s development as well. But Jiang Chen wasn’t here when he needed the fellow!

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was just as concerned as Ji San. Unlike the latter, he was anxious about his mortality. Though Jiang Chen’s healing was good for the next two or three years, that would pass in the blink of an eye. He didn’t want to collapse at such an important and complicated juncture. If he did, the entire clan would definitely immediately follow suit.

“Clan Lord, I hear that His Majesty has promised to find my sworn brother. Surely there’ll be no problem if that’s the case?”

“That depends on where he went. If it’s far away, even His Majesty would have a hard time finding him.” The clan lord shook his head. “More importantly, I hope that nothing bad has happened to him.”

The whole conversation bothered Ji San. He decided to change the topic by asking a question that suddenly came into his mind. “How’re the top hundred wandering cultivators this time around?”

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord was cheered up by the question, his eyes sparkling. “There are quite a few very talented cultivators this year. One mysterious person in particular has an absolute advantage over the rest, and shows incredible promise. I’d say he can even go toe-to-toe with noble youths.”

“Oh, is that so? What an impressive guy. And you say he’s a wandering cultivator?” Ji San was very surprised. “Could it be my brother pulling a new trick over our heads?”

The clan lord smiled wryly. “That idea popped into my head as well, but the truth is that that’s probably not the case. The guy is talented, but he uses drastically different methods compared to Pill King Zhen. His talent is remarkable, but they’re still not quite the same caliber of genius. Still, it’s amazing to see someone like that in Veluriyam.”

“Then shouldn’t we contact him ahead of time?” Ji San’s eyes lit up.

The Coiling Dragon Clan lord coughed. “I don’t think we could get him to join us. The seven emperors have their pick before we get our turn, and they have a lot more to offer. The first ten on the wandering cultivator list generally all get snatched up by the emperors. We can only think about the eleventh onwards.”

“Then, does Emperor Peafowl have any inclination to extend an offer?” Ji San hurried to ask.

“Apparently not. Emperor Peafowl hasn’t sent any messengers inquiring about him. We don’t have any information from the actual person in question, either. From the current state of things, though, Emperor Shura’s contact with him has been the most frequent. Many people speculate that he’ll join them in the end.”

This was bad news for anyone under Emperor Peafowl’s wing. The top-ranked wandering cultivator typically picked the strongest faction to join. If the person who took first place in the pagoda battles was taken by Emperor Shura, it sent out a bad signal—namely, for the top geniuses, Emperor Shura was now more attractive than Emperor Peafowl.

#### Chapter 904: Emperor Peafowls Successor Candidates

Lin Yanyu was feeling as pleased as punch lately, but he was nagged by a tiny bit of worry. Thankfully, it was the happy kind. Half a year ago, after leaving the desolate wildlands, he had heeded ‘Daoist Huang’s’ suggestion and traveled to Veluriyam Capital. He had heard that the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering that was held every sixty years was about to start, and that even wandering cultivators had the qualification to participate in the event and potentially advance their status.

This news invigorated Lin Yanyu greatly. He was a stray dog in Pillfire City, and Veluriyam Capital was Pillfire City’s sworn enemy. If he could earn his place in Veluriyam Capital, he might be able to take revenge for his family someday. If he allowed this chance to slip by, he couldn’t see a sliver of hope of taking revenge, even if he were to live for another few thousand years. Therefore, he had registered to participate in the Veluriyam Pagoda Meeting almost without thinking. He would be participating in the pill battles as a wandering cultivator.

Lin Yanyu was very confident in his own pill dao talent. However, he was aware that there was a legend who was even greater than him in Veluriyam Capital—Pill King Zhen. Pill King Zhen was Lin Yanyu’s idol. This was especially true after he’d heard that Pill King Zhen had defeated that insufferably arrogant Pill King Ji Lang in the clash for the Longevity Pill. After all, Pill King Ji Lang was an old enemy of Lin Yanyu’s father. Lin Yanyu had always thought that the true mastermind behind the Lin Family’s destruction was that particular pill king.

That was why Lin Yanyu quite admired the man who defeated Pill King Ji Lang. While ‘Daoist Huang’s’ suggestion was one of the reasons why he came to Veluriyam Capital, his wish to meet the world famous Pill King Zhen was also a factor. However, he couldn’t find any news about Pill King Zhen no matter how he tried to ask around. When the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was about to begin, and after countless pill dao geniuses had requested specifically for Pill King Zhen to be the judge of the pill battles, Lin Yanyu finally learned that the famous Pill King Zhen had been absent from Veluriyam Capital for quite some time already. This news disappointed him a little.

Still, he progressed triumphantly in the pill battles and was placed first amongst the top hundred wandering cultivators. Plenty of forces within Veluriyam Capital sought out Lin Yanyu in an attempt to recruit him after the rankings were released. Out of all the powers, the most proactive faction of them was, without a doubt, Emperor Shura's faction. However, Lin Yanyu still hadn't made up his mind even now. Although Veluriyam Capital's state of affairs wasn't very clear to him, he knew that the strongest great emperor in Veluriyam Capital was Emperor Peafowl. Moreover, the famous Pill King Zhen was closer to Emperor Peafowl. Therefore, Lin Yanyu didn't make any hasty decisions, despite facing much enticement.

However, the top hundred names were about to be immediately declared. After that, the semi-finals would ensue to decide the top thirty-six cultivators who would enter the pill pagoda of Veluriyam Pagoda. The pill pagoda contained every pill dao inheritance that ever existed in Veluriyam Pagoda. It was a secret vault of pill dao. Here, there would be many opportunities.

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Inside Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

"Your Majesty, the top hundred names of the pill battles have already been finalized. What will be your plan after this? I shall execute it straight away," Cloudsoar Monarch asked.

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly, "I have no plans for now, I'm afraid. What would be your plan of action, Cloudsoar?"

Cloudsoar Monarch was slightly caught off guard by the counter question. He smiled wryly, "The internal situation of Veluriyam Capital right now is somewhat awkward, Your Majesty. Everyone thinks that you are planning to abdicate soon. May I know if this is true, Your Majesty?"

Naturally, everyone in Sacred Peafowl Mountain was very concerned with this question. If Emperor Peafowl truly planned to abdicate the throne to Emperor Shura, then his strange inactivity as of late would make a lot of sense. But if the emperor truly planned to abdicate, he should have informed his subordinates beforehand and given them some time to prepare themselves mentally, shouldn't he have?

Emperor Peafowl didn't say anything, however. In fact, he hadn't revealed even the slightest hint of his plans. His silence caused the situation to become even more awkward than before. Although everyone had all sorts of guesses, no one could tell what the emperor was thinking for sure. As Emperor Peafowl's most trusted aide, Cloudsoar Monarch had never stopped trying to figure out his emperor's true intentions. But he'd failed, and now he could no longer stop himself from asking.

"Abdicate?" Emperor Peafowl sighed softly. His gaze on Cloudsoar Monarch suddenly turned meaningful, "Did you know that I sensed the heavenly dao a thousand years ago?"

His answer was like a clap of summer thunder. It rang so loudly in Cloudsoar Monarch's ears that he was stunned for a very, very long time. "Your Majesty... did you just say that you've sensed the heavenly dao?"

Emperor Peafowl sighed softly, "There is no point in hiding it any longer. I've tried to suppress this feeling for a thousand years, but the heavenly dao is unavoidable once you sense it the first time.

Emperor Shura is full of ambition, but unfortunately he never had the courage to rise to power and confront me for the throne. Sadly, I can only wait for him to come to a decision, but even to this day, he still lacks the courage and the strength to make that move.” Emperor Peafowl spoke as if he wasn’t included in the story he was currently narrating. In fact, he sounded a little despondent. “Everyone thinks that I am getting old, and that Emperor Shura will replace me one day. However, no one has realized that I am hoping that he can replace me as soon as possible.”

Cloudsoar Monarch was speechless. This revelation was just too surprising to him. He never realized that Emperor Peafowl had reached a height so great that no one could understand him. Now, it would appear that the outside world’s so-called worries were completely unnecessary.

Emperor Peafowl had sensed the heavenly dao and wanted to abdicate the throne since a long time ago. This was because a great emperor who had sensed the heavenly dao was the equivalent of a half-step empyrean cultivator. If he truly wished to hold onto his authority, then no one could have replaced him. There was only one reason why he would abdicate his throne, and that was because Emperor Peafowl had transcended to a level where worldly power no longer meant anything to him. His horizons had long since surpassed everything in Veluriyam Capital. Compared to Emperor Peafowl, they were as pitiful and amusing as frogs at the bottom of a well.

Cloudsoar Monarch was absorbed in emotions of pride and sadness for a while. He was proud because the emperor he’d pledged allegiance to was so capable that he’d actually sensed the heavenly dao. But he was also sad because the emperor would eventually heed the call of the heavenly dao and leave Veluriyam Capital one day. If that day were to come, where would Veluriyam Capital go, and what would be its fate in the future? Would the glory that Sacred Peafowl Mountain had maintained for such a long time be lost forever after his absence? And would they really have to allow Emperor Shura’s faction to take control of Veluriyam Capital?

“You don’t need to worry about this, Cloudsoar. For a thousand years I was troubled by this predicament, but the answer finally came to me in recent years. The fog that once enshrouded Veluriyam Capital’s future is slowly clearing, and it has enlightened me to a whole new path.”

Cloudsoar Monarch trembled and looked at Emperor Peafowl in shock, “Have you made up your mind already, Your Majesty?”

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly, “Not until recently, but yes, I have something in mind. Emperor Shura has proven himself to simply be a good agitator, but not the courageous ruler this power truly needs. Therefore, he can only be my second choice.”

“Second choice?” Cloudsoar Monarch frowned visibly, “Who is the first choice then?” He didn’t know why, but Cloudsoar Monarch suddenly recalled the deceased young lord Fan. His heart ached at the loss.

“Who do you think is most suitable, Cloudsoar?” Emperor Peafowl suddenly asked meaningfully.

“Alas...” Cloudsoar Monarch sighed softly, “The late young lord Fan may be the most suitable candidate. Unfortunately, his passing remains somewhat unclear even to this day.”

Cloudsoar Monarch had always thought that young lord Fan’s unexpected demise was most likely caused by Emperor Shura’s faction. However, Emperor Peafowl had forbade them from discussing or

making wild guesses about his demise. That was why Cloudsoar Monarch had never spoken of it in public.

But Emperor Peafowl suddenly laughed and shook his head, “Oh, Cloudsoar. Even you were fooled by him, weren’t you?”

“What do you mean?” Cloudsoar Monarch was caught off guard.

“As matters stand, I can now tell you the truth. I killed young lord Fan with my own hands.” Emperor Peafowl said calmly.

“What?” Cloudsoar Monarch’s head buzzed with shock. He stared blankly at Emperor Peafowl in utter disbelief.

“A demon bloodline is a justifiable cause for execution. I had been waiting to see if any one of you could discover his bloodline. I was planning to choose that person as Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s successor. Unfortunately, not one of you managed to discover the truth.”

“The demon race?” Cloudsoar Monarch’s expression changed yet again. These surprising series of revelations were starting to overwhelm him. He worked hard to swallow a few times until he finally calmed himself down, his belly full of regrets. He’d never realized that the great emperor had been testing them. Unfortunately, none of the peak emperor cultivators had passed the test. However, another question immediately appeared in Cloudsoar Monarch’s mind. If Emperor Shura was only Emperor Peafowl’s second choice, then who was his first choice? Cloudsoar Monarch’s mind was once again filled with doubt.

“Your Majesty, your servant is truly slow-witted. No matter how much I mull it over, I can’t figure out who could possibly be your first choice. Just who is your best candidate?” Naturally, the only person in Veluriyam Capital who was more suited to rule than Emperor Shura was Emperor Peafowl himself. But Emperor Peafowl had already made it clear that he planned to abdicate. So who could possibly be the future master of Veluriyam Capital?

“This person has risen to attention for some time already. Are you truly this slow, Cloudsoar?” Emperor Peafowl sighed.

The answer abruptly flashed through his mind, and Cloudsoar Monarch couldn’t stop himself from exclaiming, “Pill King Zhen? Do you mean Pill King Zhen?”

“You’ve finally guessed it.”

“But where does Pill King Zhen’s martial dao talent stand? It hasn’t been verified yet, has it?” Cloudsoar Monarch couldn’t describe how shocked he was at present. He didn’t doubt Pill King Zhen’s pill dao talent in the slightest, but even at best Pill King Zhen had only displayed tremendous potential during a previous exam. True geniuses could only be identified through competition. Therefore, whether or not Pill King Zhen possessed a superior martial dao talent and strength that surpassed all other young geniuses was still pending a reality check. In addition, Pill King Zhen was much too young. If Emperor Peafowl’s plan was to groom him as a young lord, then the possibility wasn’t completely out of the question. But succeeding Emperor Peafowl’s throne? Wasn’t that a little too early? Could he even grow up to become a suitable ruler without at least three to five hundred years of time?

## Chapter 905: The Return of Pill King Zhen

Cloudsoar Monarch had quite a few doubts. There was something he could rely on, however, and that was that Emperor Peafowl's judgments about people had never been wrong. He had no doubt about the continued truth of this fact. Pill King Zhen? Still, the choice left the monarch feeling a little helpless. He admired the young pill king, sure, but he had never imagined that His Majesty would secretly decide on the youth as his heir!

"Your Majesty, isn't Pill King Zhen only a sage realm cultivator right now? Given his level of cultivation, it'll take at least a hundred more years for him to reach the emperor realm. To become someone at Your Majesty's strength... that would take several hundred more. If you feel the call of the heavens, how many more years can you keep him safe?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled faintly. "A decade or a century, perhaps? I cannot be sure myself regarding such matters. However, I'll wager that when Pill King Zhen reappears, he'll be in the sky rank sage realm for sure. For him, the emperor realm can be attained within the next twenty years. And perhaps, he'll become as strong as me in just a hundred."

"What? A hundred years to become as strong as a titled great emperor?" Cloudsoar Monarch was baffled at the emperor's statement. From sage realm to great emperor realm in only a century? Was there even historical precedent for that, anywhere on the Divine Abyss Continent? Cloudsoar had never been as skeptical about His Majesty's insights as he was now. There had to be some exaggeration in his statement, right? His Majesty was being just a bit too optimistic?

Emperor Peafowl appeared to have no plans of elaborating on his reasoning, however. He smiled again. "Cloudsoar, there is no need to speak of the matter any further. We shall see all in due time."

The monarch could only nod. "Then, Your Majesty, let's talk about something else... the top-ranked wandering cultivator in the Pill Pagoda Battles is a pill genius. Is there anything about his background..."

"Veluriyam has a specific set of ways for discerning his background. I'll pay attention to it personally. Enemy factions' interference in the city's affairs is forbidden. Thank you for the concern. You may rest easy."

"What, hmm..." Cloudsoar was silent for a moment, then interjected in spite of himself. "Your Majesty, why not ask him to join us? Sacred Peafowl Mountain should have enough of a reputation now to be considered one of the sacred pill lands of the world."

Emperor Peafowl chuckled. "I'm sure he's talented, but can he compare to Pill King Zhen?"

"Of course he can't, Your Majesty, but I think a genius like this is still fairly rare. No other faction in Veluriyam is worthy of someone like that, no?" Cloudsoar was dead set on protecting Sacred Peafowl Mountain's paramount position.

"Cloudsoar, calm yourself." Emperor Peafowl gave the man an ambiguous smile. "If he is truly wise, then he will make his decisions accordingly. If he is short-sighted and foolish, then it will only prove that his genius is wasted."

There was a lot of hidden meaning behind the comment, and the monarch had to think long and hard about it. At its core, though, he knew that His Majesty did not wish for them to recruit the wandering

cultivator genius. Resigned, Cloudsoar asked another question. “Your Majesty, do you know when Pill King Zhen will return from his travels?”

“According to my calculations, he’ll be back within the month. We cannot speak in absolutes, however. Nothing is perpetually smooth in the world.”

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Jiang Chen and Huang'er's journey out of the Swordland Region encountered no setbacks. In only a day or so, they reached Myriad Peoples City, on Veluriyam Capital's border. Jiang Chen discovered many forces taking orders from the Eternal Celestial Capital on the outskirts of the city. But he now had extremely clever ways of disguising himself—ways that were virtually undetectable by anyone from the Eternal Celestial Capital.

Thus, he and Huang'er both passed through the encirclement without much actual danger, returning to Veluriyam's holdings succinctly. They found that the entire countryside was filled with a fervent atmosphere. Anywhere they went, people were talking about the Veluriyam Pagoda events. Many rumors and tales made the rounds here, each more fantastical than the last.

In particular, Jiang Chen heard one rumor the most often—that Emperor Peafowl was old and weak, and was likely abdicating to Emperor Shura. He found the notion plainly ridiculous. Though Emperor Peafowl had already lived a few millennia, and he was a titled emperor that had touched the dao of heaven. It wasn't a stretch to call him a half-step empyrean cultivator. How could such a man be old and weak?

Rather than being naturally spread by the commoners, this type of rumor was more likely to have been intentionally sown as seeds of discord. Jiang Chen didn't need any brainpower to guess that Emperor Shura had been behind this. If not the emperor himself, then his crazed henchmen. This kind of gossipy rumor was very compelling, because it satisfied the public's desire for entertainment. Rumors aside, though, most still doubted whether Emperor Shura could lead Veluriyam towards continued prosperity, just as Emperor Peafowl had done. There wasn't much evidence from the former emperor's part thus far to prove that he was capable of such a thing.

Having heard all the news flying around, Jiang Chen stepped into the city gates of Veluriyam. He gazed at the Veluriyam Pagoda, with its cloud-piercing peak; the structure radiated an eye-dazzling brilliance, as if it was made entirely of its eponymous gemstone. He knew that the light came from the tower's opening. Now that he was on his home turf, relatively speaking, Jiang Chen had no further need for disguise. He revealed Pill King Zhen's countenance, which caused the gate guardsmen to clamor with great excitement, even from a considerably distance away.

“Pill King Zhen?”

“It's really him. Pill King Zhen is back!”

“Pill King Zhen has returned!”

The news spread from the gates like wildfire, setting the entire Veluriyam Capital ablaze. So, too, did it reach the scene of the Veluriyam Pagoda's proceedings. The activities of the gathering were still taking place, and the second round of the Pill Pagoda Battles was about to begin. The top hundred pill geniuses were about to enter into a new trial of challenges.



When the people present heard of Pill King Zhen's return, the reaction was uproarious. Each and every one of the pill geniuses clamored for the pill king to come referee for them. Clearly, having their idol watch them compete was a big motivational factor. The people at Sacred Peafowl Mountain were invigorated by the news of Pill King Zhen's return as well.

"I shall go receive him," Cloudsoar Monarch said.

"I as well," the Coiling Dragon clan lord recommended.

"I'll come with, too." A large amount of Emperor Peafowl's retainers actively put themselves forward. The words that Cloudsoar Monarch had received from the emperor had evidently spread amongst those high-ranking enough to hear the news.

Though it hadn't yet spread publicly, the four monarchs and several of the great clans both had their guesses. Jiang Chen hadn't expected such an intimate reception from so many important people upon his return. He became a little embarrassed in the heat of the moment.

"Thank you, everyone. I haven't done anything deserving of such an honor, and so you have my sincerest gratitude." Faced with so many greats from Sacred Peafowl Mountain, Jiang Chen's attitude was mainly one of surprise.

Cloudsoar Monarch laughed, "Pill King Zhen, you don't know how popular you are now. The Veluriyam Pagoda's pill battles are filled with geniuses that all want you to be one of their judges. If you stay away any longer, I think they'll riot."

Though it was an exaggerated claim, there was a grain of truth to it. The Coiling Dragon clan lord laughed as well. "Pill King Zhen, I can vouch for the monarch's words. You're the most popular man in Veluriyam's pill scene. It would be a shame if you hadn't been able to come to the Pill Pagoda Battles, so it's very fortunate that you came back at the time that you did."

Though Ji San, standing behind the clan lord, didn't have much authority to talk, his eyes were lit up as well. He looked at Jiang Chen with eager eyes and made a multitude of faces, clearly in a cheerful mood.

Jiang Chen individually saluted everyone with a cupped-fist salute before walking towards Ji San and patting his shoulder. "Brother Ji, I have some good news of my own for you. I came across an acorn from an Invisible Chameleon Cloudpine during this trip abroad, purely by chance."

"What?!" Young master Ji San's body shook at that last sentence, as if touched by electricity. He was frozen in place for a long while. The Coiling Dragon clan lord in front of him had heard as well, exhibiting a similar reaction. A cocktail blend of emotions surged into his heart, and his skin tingled. He was so giddy that he could barely walk.

How could he not remember that the acorn was one of the main materials for the Pinecrane Pill? He had the Goldencrown Cloudcrane already, but they had looked for the Pine to no avail. It was a major concern for the entire Coiling Dragon Clan. This exciting news came as a sudden shock. Did Pill King Zhen really just happen upon an acorn from the requisite Cloudpine by chance? That meant that both main materials for the Cloudcrane Pill were present, right? Only the pill itself needed to be refined. Even someone as advanced in years as the Coiling Dragon clan lord was overjoyed by the situation. It was a

kind of happiness that only one escaping certain death could experience—an indescribable sense of mirth.

“Don’t get overexcited. We’ll talk about it at length later.” Jiang Chen didn’t want to explain the details at present.

Ji San took a deep breath to calm himself. “Brother, I owe you one yet again.”

“There’s no need for that. What else are brothers for?” Jiang Chen returned an easy smile.

The return of Pill King Zhen was an explosive piece of news. The Pill Pagoda Battles’ atmosphere only became more heated.

Standing at the forefront of the hundred wandering cultivators, Lin Yanyu saw Pill King Zhen arrive in the midst of a throng of people. His eyes were fixated upon Jiang Chen, looking him up and down.

“Is this Pill King Zhen? He looks very young. Tsk, he might even be younger than I am... the arrogant Pill King Ji Lang was defeated by someone like this? No way... wait a second, how come he seems so familiar?” A strange feeling came over Lin Yanyu. Pill King Zhen looked unfamiliar superficially, but something about him was oddly reminiscent of someone he knew. Suddenly, he noticed the young pill king’s gaze was resting on him. The pill king nodded and smiled at him! Lin Yanyu was astounded, his body shaking.

“He knows me? Did Pill King Zhen hear of my name already?” He didn’t know how to react to this surprising turn of events. The next moment was even more surprising, though.

“Daoist Lin, you really did come faithfully to Veluriyam Capital after the wildlands.” He knew the voice all too well. Lin Yanyu gaped at Jiang Chen. Something was stuck in his throat, and he didn’t know what to say.

#### Chapter 906: Popularity Through the Roof

It’s Daoist Huang! Are Pill King Zhen and Daoist Huang the same person? A lightning bolt snaked across Lin Yanyu’s mind, connecting a series of unrelated thoughts. All the clues fit together now.

“Yes, yes, of course Daoist Huang is Pill King Zhen. That’s why he told me to come to Veluriyam Capital. He finds my talent remarkable. He wants to help me!” Lin Yanyu was overjoyed. “When he heard about my troubles with Pillfire City, and how my father was Pill King Ji Lang’s mortal enemy, he must’ve taken pity on me. I would only have a chance to take revenge on Pillfire if I came to Veluriyam—that must’ve been his logic!”

He was a bright young man, and instantly knew what Pill King Zhen expected of him. “Still, what an unexpected revelation. Daoist Huang—no, Pill King Zhen—must have acted as an overbearing asshole to deceive the others!” A storm of sensations passed through Lin Yanyu’s heart.

Seeing Jiang Chen’s arrival, Emperor Peafowl sidled towards him with a faint smile. “My young friend, how have you been recently?”

Jiang Chen bowed. “I’m pleased to be able to keep my promise and come back in time. Still, I must have already missed some exciting moments.”

"It's not too late to have returned now. Look, all these pill geniuses are looking for your approval. Shouldn't you return the favor somehow?"

Jiang Chen smiled and didn't ignore the request. He went in front, his eyes brushing past all two hundred of the pill geniuses' faces. A hundred of them were youngsters from the noble houses and aristocratic families in Veluriyam. A hundred more were wandering cultivators from all over the realm. On a holistic level, the noble youths naturally had an edge. From an individual perspective though, Jiang Chen noticed Lin Yanyu's excellence. In intuition especially, he had a commanding lead over everyone else. It was just a first impression, though.

"Everyone, I am honored to be held in such a high regard in your hearts. The Veluriyam Pagoda gathering happens only once every sixty years. You have already distinguished yourselves from amongst the wider competition, proving your remarkable talents. No matter the results of this second round, you are already all winners. Having said this, the top three of this round will receive a pill-related opportunity from me personally. You'll have a certain degree of choice when that time comes, but I can't promise anything concrete. However, one thing is for certain—I guarantee that the quality of the opportunity will more than live up to the champions that arise here."

Not many people gave promises that were taken seriously by most. Only the likes of Emperor Peafowl, or his great emperor peers, had the appropriate status and honor. But ever since the battle over the Longevity Pill, the name 'Pill King Zhen' seemed to carry an infinite amount of charisma with it. Everyone was willing to put their faith in it. The crowd cheered with jubilation at the announcement. However, there was instant follow-up. "That's unfair! How come only the first three get it?"

"That's right, Pill King Zhen. They have enough nice things as the top three. Giving them further opportunities is just icing on the cake. Why not give us some much-needed help instead?"

"Yeah, we're not asking for much here. We only want Pill King Zhen to give a few more of his famous public lessons. Just like when Taiyuan Tower first opened!"

"It was three days last time, but you should make it seven to match the occasion of this gathering!"

"Seven isn't enough! I think ten is better."

Many voices echoed here and there beneath the podium. Most of them were wandering cultivators, but there were some noble youths who joined the cries as well, mostly from Emperor Peafowl's side. There were a few whose families were subordinate to other emperors, so they were demure. Nevertheless, sheer anticipation was plain in their eyes. Though Pill King Zhen was intrinsically Emperor Peafowl's man, no one found that particularly disconcerting, a select few of Emperor Shura scions aside. On the contrary, there was a great deal of respect for the pill king because he had defeated Pillfire's Ji Lang. In light of that, the feelings they had weren't unreasonable.

Off to the side, the Wei father and son grew increasingly passionate. The young man that had once been their guest pill king was currently one of the most popular people in Veluriyam. Who at House Wei wasn't proud of that? Who didn't feel like they basked in shared honor?

The old Jiang Chen wouldn't have been willing to spend ten days wasting time teaching, but his trip to the wildlands had changed his mind on many things. He wasn't just interested in keeping out of things and focusing primarily on self-preservation any longer. The demon race was on the move, and many

human cultivators were dead as a result. Jiang Chen couldn't just stand by and let things play out. Emperor Peafowl's decision to stay the call of the heavens, just for the sake of keeping watch over the human race, was made all the more admirable because of it.

Jiang Chen hadn't been a particularly selfish man in his previous life. He had chosen to protect himself during this one out of necessity alone. But he was still a hot-blooded youth, and his father, the Celestial Emperor's responsibility was ingrained into his very bones. Thus, he came to a decision. If they wanted to hear from him, then he would teach!

"I've heard your demands, and I am pleased to answer. After the Pill Pagoda Battles are over, I will personally set up a stage here and speak for ten days. I only have one thing to ask in return—please, spread the message far and wide. The more that show up for my lessons, the merrier."

The crowd cheered at Jiang Chen's promise.

"Oh, definitely! Only a fool wouldn't come to Pill King Zhen's lessons."

"That's right, even if my legs are broken, I'll crawl here if it's the last thing I do!"

"I can already see it—with everyone here, all the homes will be empty!"

"I for one will do my part. I'll bear a personal grudge against anyone that decides not to come!" The wandering cultivators were mostly simple men. They lacked the guile that the noble scions often possessed and had a tendency to say whatever came to their minds. They especially had nothing to hide from Pill King Zhen. He was a beacon and a goal for them, an example of how a wandering cultivator could rise up into eminence.

Before he'd come to Veluriyam, Pill King Zhen was a virtually unknown name. But now, his name was respected throughout the sphere. Who in the world had their fame spread faster than he had? Pill King Zhen had accomplished more in a year or two than most would throughout their entire lives. Defeating Pill King Ji Lang, defeating Pillfire City's indomitable myth...

No one had been able to do that for thousands of years. Pill King Zhen was a perfect exception to the rule. There was much rejoicing from Sacred Peafowl Mountain at the crowd's fervor. Strictly speaking, Jiang Chen could be counted amongst their numbers. This was even truer for Cloudsoar Monarch, who knew that Emperor Peafowl had decided on Pill King Zhen as his successor. He'd had some initial misgivings about it, but closer observation of the pill king revealed the emperor's wisdom.

For any regular person, having this many fervent fans would put them on cloud nine. Yet, Pill King Zhen was different. His face always carried a soft, calm smile, as if all of the adoration he'd been given was nothing to him. Such composure despite his youthfulness already greatly distinguished him from the rest. Most importantly, Cloudsoar Monarch discovered that His Majesty's prediction had been surprisingly accurate. Pill King Zhen emitted the aura of a sky sage realm cultivator! It was quite the convincing piece of evidence.

At the earlier trial on Sacred Peafowl Mountain, the monarch recalled that Pill King Zhen's martial prowess had only reached earth sage realm. It hadn't taken him long to move from the earth to sky realm. No wonder Emperor Peafowl considered him in a special light. Cloudsoar Monarch couldn't find anything to criticize even when comparing him to young lord Fan. Demon bloodline aside, the young

lord had been quite popular due to him having carefully nurtured his reputation. Compared to Pill King Zhen's reputation, however, his popularity was still somewhat lacking.

Their pill dao talents were even further apart. Pill King Zhen could defeat the eternal legend of Pillfire City—there was no conceivable way that young lord Fan's could have compared. The only thing that they rivaled each other in was martial talent. Young lord Fan had been quite a bit stronger than even the current Pill King Zhen. But in a real fight, perhaps the pill king would still have the lead. He had a certain reticence that masked his true strength. The talent Pill King Zhen had exhibited during Emperor Peafowl's three trials, for example, had never before been seen, even from the deceased young lord. The flashiness and intensity with which Pill King Zhen had passed all three trials were remarkable even now.

Still, anyone from Sacred Peafowl Mountain was of course happy to see Pill King Zhen's continued popularity. Naturally, this meant that there were some who were unhappy as well. Especially out of the seven judges for the Pill Pagoda Battles, a couple were certainly less than willing to witness this sight. After all, they were the real judges here, the main parts of the Pill Pagoda Battles.

The enormous amount of acclaim that Jiang Chen received made their faces flush with embarrassment. Each great emperor had a judge chosen from amongst their followers, which meant that there were seven judges for seven titled great emperors. Emperor Peafowl's judge was the best pill king beneath his banner. As a material witness to Jiang Chen's numerous miraculous feats, he had no objections to the lad. Several of the others hadn't seen that key battle with their own eyes, though, and weren't entirely satisfied with Jiang Chen's current level of fame.

None of the competitors had ever been so excited and grateful to the referees before, yet now they had chosen such a young pill king to be the target of their adoration. How could the older pill kings retain any shred of respect for themselves? As a result, two of the referees, because of the intense unhappiness that had arisen in their hearts from these series of events, wanted to stir things up and were planning to make trouble for this Pill King Zhen. However, Jiang Chen was still in the dark about all of this.

#### Chapter 907: Malicious Provocation

Due to strong demand, Jiang Chen had no choice but to join the judges. Now, there were eight judges instead of just seven. Thankfully, the slight increase in the number of judges wouldn't affect the contest. In fact, Jiang Chen's participation was exactly what everyone had been hoping for. It gave these pill dao geniuses the opportunity to display their talent before Pill King Zhen.

The moment Jiang Chen got close, he immediately sensed two or three concealed, unfriendly gazes snaking across his body. However, he paid them no heed and sat amongst the judges with a leisurely smile on his face. Beside him, Sacred Peafowl Mountain's first-rate Pill King Yi gave Jiang Chen a friendly smile and messaged, "Pill King Zhen, you should've been the judge of this festival instead of me, but because you didn't return sooner, I had no choice but to take your place and pad the numbers. However, although I'm aware of your skill, the rest of the judges here may challenge your authority. You must be careful, Pill King Zhen."

Jiang Chen was slightly startled by this initial reminder, but he quickly came to an understanding. The human heart was dangerous, and jealousy was one of its original sins.

Although he hadn't wanted to put himself in the limelight, there were certain things in the world that one couldn't avoid. He was the one who had chosen to sit down in the judge's seat, so he feared neither the jealousy nor the hostility of others that might result from it. When a person disliked someone, they could always think up a reason to attack them. Not once in his life had he thought to please people like this, so he chose to ignore them instead. If they really were foolish enough to provoke him, he had all kinds of ways to humiliate them up his sleeve.

Jiang Chen had participated in many pill battles in the past, but this was the first time he'd taken the role of a judge in this lifetime. Therefore, he was a little uncomfortable being in the judge's seat. When Jiang Chen looked through the rules for the first time, he quickly understood how the system worked. After researching it for a couple more times, he fully grasped the rules.

"Let us begin." Jiang Chen nodded towards the other judges. Pill King Yi was Sacred Peafowl Mountain's representative, so naturally, out of everyone present, he had the right to speak first. Upon seeing Jiang Chen's nod towards him, he immediately started.

"Alright, all participants, please pay attention to my words. I hereby announce that the semi-finals of the Pill Pagoda Battles start now. Everyone will be on the same starting line regardless of your status as a noble or wandering cultivator. We will choose the top thirty-six people out of the two hundred present to enter the Veluriyam Pagoda. All battles shall happen under our fair supervision, and we guarantee that there is no chance for either bribery or fraud to happen beneath our watch. If any one of you is planning to cheat in this contest, I can tell you to eliminate that thought right now. If you are caught, you will be exiled from Veluriyam Capital forever!"

Pill King Yi swept a dignified glance across all participants before he continued his speech with a serious look. "Finally, I would like to remind you all about one thing. To all those who have attended this contest with the ulterior motive of discovering the Veluriyam Pagoda's secrets, I would advise you to erase that thought as well. Veluriyam Capital has caught countless spies since ancient times, and every one of them shared the exact same fate—death!"

Pill battles had many formats, but the basis of them were all the same. The semi-finals of the Pill Pagoda Battles were split into three segments. The first segment was a test of basics. The second segment was a test of theory. The third segment was a test of pill refinement. The test of basics evaluated a participant's foundational skills. These were very important to a pill dao genius. It was an incredibly wide subject, and the test of basics would evaluate even a participant's natural talent.

After all, talent was the first of many unavoidable obstacles one must face in either pill dao or martial dao. Nothing could be achieved without it. For example, in his past life Jiang Chen didn't have the talent to cultivate because he had been born with a yin constitution. Not even his father, the almighty Celestial Emperor who could reverse even the sun and moon, could change this.

Without talent, everything else was utterly irrelevant. The two hundred pill dao geniuses quickly started and finished the test of basics. Although the test of basics had plenty of components to go through, they were structured so orderly that Jiang Chen didn't need to work too hard to earn his 'pay' as judge. All he needed to do was to go through the motions. There was nothing special about this test of basics and the results quickly came out.

As it turned out, thirty out of the top thirty-six were all noble youths. Only six of them were wandering cultivators. It was made immediately clear that the noble-born had an overall advantage over the humble-born. However, when the test of basics came to an end, the name on the number one spot of the leaderboard surprised a lot of people. The spot didn't belong to a noble, but rather, to a wandering cultivator.

Even Jiang Chen had to gasp in admiration when he looked through Lin Yanyu's test results. Foundation wise, Lin Yanyu's skill was even better than Mu Gaoqi's. In terms of raw talent alone, Lin Yanyu might be a tad inferior because Mu Gaoqi possessed an innate wood constitution of high order. However, Lin Yanyu came from a family with an illustrious history, and every one of his foundational skills, excluding talent, was more solid than Mu Gaoqi's.

Mu Gaoqi might be ranked amongst the top five if he were to participate in this test, but he would never be able to claim the number one spot. It wasn't that he was incapable, but that Regal Pill Palace hadn't been able to fully tap into Mu Gaoqi's abilities before disaster had hit. If Mu Gaoqi had been given thirty years of time to temper his skills in Pillfire City before he participated in this contest, then Lin Yanyu might not hold any advantage over him.

A hundred years after that, Lin Yanyu might even lose to Mu Gaoqi. But as of now, Lin Yanyu was without a doubt the best pill dao cultivator of the bunch. Even Jiang Chen was speechless. Pillfire City does not shame its title as the greatest power in pill dao. To think that the youth of a random family in Pillfire City would possess such extraordinary talent! Thank heavens Pillfire City doesn't know how to cherish their talents because they're flooded with them, or there would have been no way for Veluriyam Capital to obtain someone as amazing as Lin Yanyu at all.

Lin Yanyu proved just how far below Veluriyam Capital was to Pillfire City in terms of pill dao. It definitely wasn't a gap that could be closed in just three to five years' time. Although Jiang Chen admired Lin Yanyu a great deal, he didn't overtly show his emotion. This was because he knew that some of these judges were hostile towards him. If he were to show unusual admiration towards Lin Yanyu's performance, these judges might be tempted to show hostility towards Lin Yanyu too. He would be dragging Lin Yanyu into his own mess. The first segment ended, and Lin Yanyu currently placed first amongst all the participants. This result caused a discussion to break out among the judges too.

"Just who is this wandering cultivator? How is he so talented? Why did a genius like him come to our Veluriyam Capital?"

"We should investigate his background a bit. He can't be a spy from our enemies, can he?"

Jiang Chen didn't say anything despite being within earshot. However, just because he stayed quiet didn't mean that the others couldn't force him to break his silence. The old ninth-rank pill king under Emperor Shura wore a wide grin. "Pill King Zhen! You're a reputable man, and I would like to hear of your opinion on this subject. Do you think that this wandering cultivator who seems to have appeared out of nowhere could be an enemy spy?"

His question was extremely provocative. On the surface he was talking about the wandering cultivator Lin Yanyu, but in reality the term implicated Jiang Chen too. After all, Pill King Zhen had also appeared out of nowhere just like Lin Yanyu. Another judge smiled when he heard this, "If I remember correctly,

Pill King Zhen is a wandering cultivator too, isn't he? Brother Bu, aren't you implying that Pill King Zhen is an enemy spy too?"

This pill king under Emperor Shura's wing was called Pill King Bu. With a smile that didn't reach his eye, he responded, "Pill King Zhen, I am not trying to attack you. Please don't take this the wrong way."

Jiang Chen smiled indifferently and countered with a look of astonishment, "Were you talking to me just now? I thought you were talking to yourself."

Provoke me, will you? Then I will treat your words like how I treat farts. Jiang Chen's casual deflection of the attack was like a smear of mud on Pill King Bu's face. It made the pill king feel extremely embarrassed. That other judge cackled again, "Brother Bu, wouldn't you agree that the saying that the young replaces the old is definitely true? To think that someone of your achievements would be ignored so thoroughly by a junior. What a saddening sight this is!"

This judge had been fanning flames and sowing dissension between Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu since the beginning. The pill king's face turned chilly as he shot Jiang Chen a cold look, "You sure know how to be deaf and mute, Pill King Zhen!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Do you really think that I should respond to everything you say?"

"Tsk ts, you think you're something hmm! You truly are the pill dao genius who shattered the invincible legend of Pillfire City. I guess we old folks are no longer worthy of your attention, are we, Pill King Zhen?"

Jiang Chen smiled and answered in a deadpan voice, "Let me correct you there for a second—I have no idea who you are to begin with, so it's not 'no longer' but 'never been, and never will be'."

This person had been continuously trying to create drama, and Jiang Chen never gave face to people like this. Therefore, his response was to slap him painfully in the face with all the rudeness he could muster. He turned completely red after this mockery. It was at this moment that Pill King Yi shot a glare at the three of them and scolded softly, "Men, you may insult each other all you want after we leave this place, but for now please stop embarrassing yourselves in front of a crowd."

Once done, Pill King Yi stood up again and announced to the participants beneath the stage, "Everyone, the second segment of the battle is the test of theory. We have eight judges here, and every one of us will be issuing a question. You must answer each question with careful exposition so that we may study and enjoy the full depth of your pill dao."

The test of theory was a test of knowledge, foundation, and true ability. Originally, the participants only needed to answer seven questions in total, but Jiang Chen's participation meant that they had to answer one more question. Therefore, more time was also added to the clock. Once Pill King Yi had made his declaration, he told the other judges, "Please begin making your questions now, fellow judges."

The questions were made up on the spot and restricted to a certain spectrum of subject matter so that no one could cheat during the test. To Jiang Chen, drafting a question was as easy as pie, but he didn't work half-heartedly. He carefully formulated the question in his head before he finally wrote it down. He would strive his utmost in anything that he did. The question needed to be reasonably focused so that



the gap between a first-rate genius and an average genius could be clearly distinguished. Otherwise, he would only be wasting his efforts if he were to draft a general question that had no distinction at all.

Jiang Chen finished composing his question only after fifteen minutes had passed. By now, the rest of the judges were done composing their questions too. In fact, Pill King Bu was shooting Jiang Chen a provocative glance. "Pill King Zhen, I wasn't there to witness your glory with my own eyes when you took down Pill King Ji Lang. However, I dare say that even you might not necessarily be able to solve the question I've composed."

Jiang Chen smiled coolly and remained indifferent. However, Pill King Bu wasn't going to let matters slide just like that. He continued, "If the participants are allowed to vote for the one question they think is of the highest quality, I'm sure that they will choose the question that I composed."

Pill King Yi smiled faintly in response, "I see that you are very confident, Ole Bu."

Pill King Bu smiled proudly, "I am confident. I have been famous for a few hundred years, and no one-hit wonders who aim solely for fame is going to beat me!"

One-hit wonders, aim solely for fame. Everything he said was directed at Jiang Chen.

#### Chapter 908: Making Another Bet

Jiang Chen wasn't originally planning on bickering with these people over pride. He found it better to ignore their goading entirely. Still, even a sculpture had a few rough edges. This Pill King Bu constantly pushed at his boundaries, acting like they were sworn enemies. Jiang Chen glanced coldly at the pill king, silently sneering. If you want to put your face right in front of me, then don't blame for for taking a few swings at it.

"Pill King Bu, is it? I don't know where your confidence comes from. I'll put it simply. If you have an issue with me, then be a man and cut to the chase. Did you want to challenge me? Then speak up. Stop trying to take pot shots at me. We're both men, I assume. There's no need to be so cowardly about everything. Acting like some shrieking harlot... you might be shameless, but I'm not." Jiang Chen's statements didn't quite cut to the bone, but the comparison he made was still insulting.

Pill King Bu had been compared to a common wench, with none of the flair that was characteristic of a pill king. The mental image the comparison conjured up was enough to make some of the neutral judges snicker. No one was blind here. Everyone could see the lack of style in Pill King Bu's actions, and the jealousy contained therein. A long-established pill king was intentionally making things unnecessarily difficult for a rising star. This kind of behavior was completely unjustifiable.

Pill King Bu's face became as red as a pig's liver. "You're good at talking," he harrumphed. "But have you got the skills to match? Shall we make a bet on the questions?"

"How so?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"We'll let the candidates choose which question they like the best, and which gives them the most inspiration. Are you up for it?"

Jiang Chen looked at his surroundings, then suddenly smiled. "What if neither of our problems are picked? Wouldn't that be a rather shameful display?"

Pill King Bu sneered. "If neither of us is chosen, then that means neither of us is the best pill king in Veluriyam. I will accept that result."

Jiang Chen couldn't help but laugh. "So you admit that you're causing trouble on purpose, then? You're just jealous then. But okay, that's fine. What do you have to bet on this?"

"What I have? Winning or losing is enough. Stakes are extraneous." Pill King Bu was perplexed.

Jiang Chen shook his head. "What's the point of a bet without stakes? Am I supposed to entertain your arbitrary request out of duty or charity?" His voice was full of rampant disregard for the old pill king, almost as if he was already being charitable enough by simply speaking to the man. Pill King Bu found the feeling greatly insulting.

"What do you have in mind?" The pill king bristled with anger.

"What do you have that's worth anything?" Jiang Chen sneered.

Pill King Bu had never been looked down upon like this in his entire life. He took a deep breath. "Then let's do it like this. The loser has to leave Veluriyam forever, and cannot return for the rest of their days. What do you think?"

That was quite the vicious bet. Jiang Chen smiled placidly, however, clearly not thinking much of it. "Is that really a worthy stake? I thought you were already going to sneak out yourself when you lost. Surely your skin isn't thick enough to stay after the shame."

Pill King Bu had reached the point of coughing up blood. He's expecting me to lose before we've even begun? He glared at Jiang Chen. "Then why don't you give a better suggestion?"

Jiang Chen tapped two fingers against his forehead in thought. "Well, let's make the bet a bit more interesting. The loser has to ask the winner to become his master and follow the winner's orders for the rest of his life."

The raised stakes caused alarm to surface in all the other judges. Such a bet had irrevocable consequences. Any normal person would pale at hearing such a suggestion. It was shocking even for someone as arrogant and proud as Pill King Bu. His eyes bulged and he found it harder to breathe. His gaze fixated on Jiang Chen. He couldn't just instantly accept such a deal, especially in the heat of the moment.

Once the bet was made, the loser would lose their entire life and freedom. For a pill king who had a thousand plus years of fame to become the disciple of a youngster... it was a fate worse than death. Entering eternal servitude was too much for an old man's face to bear. Jiang Chen didn't really want the old pill king to become his disciple anyways. He'd merely noticed how puffed up the other pill king was and wanted to strike at his ego. Only in that way could he suppress the pill king's fierceness. If he really wanted to find students, he could easily find ones that were ten times stronger than this Pill King Bu. After all, his pill dao level was considered top-notch, even during his previous life in the heavenly planes. The current skills he displayed were only the tip of the iceberg. Pill King Bu's hesitation showed his weakness before the bet had even begun.

Jiang Chen laughed casually, "Pill King Bu, I'm not going to force you to make the bet if you're too scared. But please, don't pretend like you're number one next time. I don't care if that's what you really think, but don't act in such a manner in front of me. I can't say I enjoy seeing that kind of thing."

Pill King Bu grit his teeth, and his gaze became firm. "Who says that I'm too scared to make the bet? I'll hold you to your promise. I hope you'll stay true to your words when you lose."

"We'll make a heavenly oath, naturally," Jiang Chen returned with a serene smile. "I assume we're not playing around, right?"

A heavenly oath to seal the deal? Even more shock was elicited from the judges at this new turn of events. This Pill King Zhen wasn't really just mouthing off. Was he convinced that he'd win because he had some kind of hidden plan? The bystanders weren't too concerned with the gravity of the consequences, and they looked on encouragingly at Pill King Bu. Their collective expectant gazes, tinged with a hint of interrogative intent, backed the pill king into a corner.

"A heavenly oath is perfectly fine. I'm no coward." Pill King Bu had enough trust in the potency of his question to proceed.

Turning to Sacred Peafowl Mountain's Pill King Yi, Jiang Chen chuckled. "Pill King Yi, how about you and everyone else here bear witness?"

The other judges all nodded in willing agreement. Neither party had a way out of it now. Both Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu made their respective oaths. News of the bet spread quickly to the seven titled great emperors. Emperor Peafowl shook his head when he heard of its absurdity. That kid is setting up a trap yet again.

On the other side, Emperor Shura could only frown. Why is someone as mature as Pill King Bu still so impulsive? His loss would throw a serious wrench into my plans. Emperor Shura had every confidence in Pill King Bu, but Pill King Zhen's existence in Veluriyam had reached an almost mythical height. His meteoric ascension had given rise to a feverish atmosphere in turn. Truthfully speaking, the emperor thought that Pill King Bu had a pretty good chance, even if he were to be pitted against Pill King Yi. But against this mysterious Pill King Zhen... he had a few more doubts about the matter. It wasn't because of bias, but rather, a kind of expert's instinct. The emperor was thusly very unhappy about the bet. He wanted to call it off, but he knew that if he did so now, it would become even more of a joke.

All eight questions were given out to the two hundred participating pill masters. The time given for the theory-based examination was quite long—four hours in total. The eight judges who drafted up the questions were unquestionably the cream of Veluriyam's crop. They stood at the pinnacle of their craft. Each question had its own unique way of being thought-provoking, and the pill masters who took the test felt a tangible benefit to their comprehension of pill dao. One of the questions, though, was at a cut above the rest.

If the other seven were around the level of a top-ranked pill king, then this additional question had definitely entered a new realm, surpassing a pill king's limits. The question bestowed a sense of enlightenment upon many of the. The deeper they probed into its depths, the more insight they received. Almost every contestant made the same choice—they answered the other seven questions first, and then proceeded to focus their full efforts on the final one at the end.

Although the other seven questions were quite beneficial for their studies, they only applied to specific categories of knowledge. Compared to these questions, the last question was like a stroke of genius that expanded their horizons and brought them into a brand new world. It improved every aspect of their pill-related skills. Like a treasure trove, the deeper they dug, the greater the rewards yielded.

Typically, a certain portion of the papers would be handed in early during theory examinations. But this time, all two hundred of the participants were still embroiled in the test even after their allotted time had been used up. Many didn't even notice that time had run out, and there was collective displeasure at the interruption. Regret was only natural when certain key reflections were cut off mid-thought.

Each judge's question had its own corresponding identifier. Jiang Chen's was number 8, because he had shown up late. Each participant had eight scrolls, each with a different identifier. The scrolls with the same identifier were gathered up and given to the judge who had come up with the question. That judge would then mark the scrolls one by one. Only when all of the scrolls were tallied up would a participant receive their final theory mark.

Because every judge had two hundred scrolls, it took a while for all of them to be scored. Still, it was quite easy to distinguish the quality of responses. The names on the scrolls given to Jiang Chen were obscured, having been sealed away via special methods to avoid any form of cheating.

Of course, judging pill battles was a sacred tradition, and cheating attempts were rare in the first place. From Jiang Chen's reading of the scrolls, most of the participants had spared no effort in drafting up their answers. There was sufficiently deep analyses on almost everyone's part. Despite this, however, barely anyone had an answer that shone through. There were a few glimmers here and there, but nothing particularly astounded him.

Only three or four out of the two hundred satisfied Jiang Chen's standards. Of those, two were somewhat superior, and Jiang Chen gave those especially high marks. He assigned scores to the other scrolls accordingly as well. The judges finished their marking processes at around the same time. All of the scrolls were sorted once more, this time by the examinee's name, in order to tally up the contestants' scores.

Suddenly, Pill King Yi piped up, "Everyone, please. We have a small additional request to make of you."

All of the contestants paused at this, looking at the pill king who had made the announcement. They didn't know what he wanted to say.

#### Chapter 909: Utter Defeat

As looks of curiosity focused on him, Pill King Yi could only smile. "We have a little... disagreement... internally with the judges. So, we'd like you all to rank the exam questions. Your exam consisted of eight questions. We'd like you to pick the one question you thought had the greatest beneficial effect for you. Please write it down, and we'll tally up the results."

There was some commotion from the test-takers. Finding the situation quite amusing, many of them broke out in laughter. The request left them in high spirits. There was a lot of pressure on them because of the judging process. Now, they were given the chance to decide something about the judges. No one would simply let such an enjoyable opportunity slip by! Everyone hastened to write down their answer.

In truth, many contestants already had an internal answer to the question, even though they hadn't expected this additional bonus round.

Most wrote without much thought. The entire crowd finished their judgments in only a brief amount of time. Pill King Yi noticed this as well, and found it a little bizarre. "What, you're done already? You don't want to consider things a bit more?"

At the judges' table, Pill King Bu was clutching the sides of his chair with both hands with an intensity almost strong enough to break both armrests. His expression was conflicted and his gaze fierce, focusing on the contestants below. He was very interested in the final answer. Whose question would these participants pick? Why had it been selected so quickly and thoughtlessly? He didn't know why, but Pill King Bu felt an unreasonable sense of panic arise in his heart when he saw everyone's lack of hesitation. The answers had been given instantaneously. Though he felt his question could surpass everyone else's, he still had some degree of self-awareness. No matter how good his answer was, it couldn't have an absolute advantage... not enough to make everyone decide in such synchronized unison, at any rate. He had a bad feeling about this. His eyelids started twitching.

Suddenly, one of the participants below decided to cry out, "All of the questions this time were well-written, but there's no question about which one is the best."

"I agree! One of them in particular touched me in a powerful way. I have to pick that one." A single interjection turned into a sea of discussion.

The judges looked at each other helplessly at their table. Apparently, the decision process was very easy, and there was one question with significant public approval? An almost overwhelming edge, one could say? None of the judges considered their own question worthy of possessing such a characteristic.

Pill King Yi collected the two hundred slips very quickly, and returned to the other judges. Since Jiang Chen and Pill King Bu were the betting parties, they had no right to view the slips. The other six judges began the counting process. The results were simply stupefying. The judges' expressions looked uniformly odd after reading only a dozen or so of the answers. In particular, Pill King Yi's expression had the hint of a barely-suppressed smile within, like it was about to burst out at any given moment. All of them stared Pill King Bu up and down, their looks peculiar.

As the tallying continued, the judges' gazes intensified. By the completion of the counting, they were simply baffled. It was as if an arduous task had just been finished. Each of them leaned back in their chairs, their foreheads beaded with cold sweat.

How incomprehensible.

All of the slips had voted for the same question! Not a single one was different.

Each of them selected question 8—the question Pill King Zhen had written. It was a total consensus. Even Pill King Yi hadn't expected such a conclusion. He had thought that Pill King Zhen was more likely to win, but not in such a devastating way. It was a complete and total annihilation!

Despite Pill King Bu's impudence, he had not received a single vote. All of them had voted for Pill King Zhen instead. Even Emperor Shura's scions hadn't picked another answer. Perhaps they disregarded matters of standing in this subject, choosing to view it in terms of skill level alone.

Pill King Yi's barely-contained mirth chilled Pill King Bu to the bone. Even a fool would know, considering the other judges' expressions as well, that the result of the tally was likely extremely disadvantageous for him. He didn't know exactly how bad yet, though. He looked at Pill King Zhen out of the corner of his eye. The kid was collected as always, almost as if he wasn't one of the betting parties. His confidence remained perpetually unshaken. Jiang Chen's aplomb painfully pierced Pill King Bu's ego.

"It's unfortunate for me to have to say this, but... Pill King Bu, you've lost." Pill King Yi wasn't too cruel about it. His announcement was matter-of-factly stated.

Pill King Bu's heart skipped a beat, and all blood drained from his face. He stuttered. "No... no way... how could I have lost? Did you get something wrong somewhere?"

"There's no mistake." Sighing softly, Pill King Yi shook his head. Maybe that was possible with only a few people, but all two hundred slips were identical. How could there be an error?

Pill King Bu was still struggling with reality. "I don't believe it. I want to see the slips!" He exclaimed loudly.

Pill King Yi laughed mirthlessly, "Pill King Bu, you definitely don't want to do that. You'll be even sadder if you do."

"Bullshit! How do I know you're not just messing with me if I don't get to see the votes?" The judges' table had a soundproof barrier around it. The contestants could see the commotion, but they didn't know what they were discussing. Still, there seemed to be some kind of an argument.

Pill King Yi furrowed his brow at his colleague's attitude. He was saving Pill King Bu from further embarrassment by not elaborating on the details of his loss. How could Pill King Bu not know what was good for him? Calling him 'bullshit' was just rude. He suspected that everyone else was fudging the votes just to mess with him?"

"If you want to see the votes, then go right ahead." Pill King Yi's expression grew cold. "I only hope that you don't have nightmares that plague you for the rest of your life!"

There was no way the other pill king could take his advice now. Pill King Bu desperately wanted to see a difference somewhere. All two hundred of the slips were laid out in front of Pill King Bu. He looked through them one by one, his facial muscles spasming every time he read past a slip. Similarly, his face grew more and more colorless with each answer he read. He was already on the verge of collapse after going through forty or fifty slips. His hands and lips shook, as if he'd seen a ghost in broad daylight.

Past a hundred, he no longer had the courage to continue. He sank into his chair, his expression suddenly decrepit. Despair oozed out of his eyes. After a long while, the old pill king sat up again. He looked at Jiang Chen, his face ashen. "I admit defeat. I only have one request remaining. Let me see the question you wrote. What kind of question was it, that everyone picked yours over mine?"

"Feel free." Jiang Chen smiled easily.

Opening up the scroll, Pill King Bu read it for only a brief moment before his face underwent a series of different expressions. There was surprise, astonishment, and finally—utter helplessness.

"I... truly, I have totally lost." Placing the scroll weakly down, he walked in front of Jiang Chen. "Pill King Zhen, I'm just a frog in a well. You are my master from this day forth, and I will heed your every order."

There wasn't much unwillingness in his tone. Only deep resignation and failure. No one had defeated him so soundly before. There was no room at all for debate. The aftermath of this localized storm was quickly passed on to the seven great emperors, who could only shake their heads one by one.

"You've lost another key general, eh?" Emperor Void said jokingly, sixth among the seven emperors.

Emperor Shura was sullen. "Just a small bout. Battles over pills can only be considered an appetizer. Not worthy of much mention, really."

None of the other emperors wanted to respond. Shura's displeasure was plain as day. Emperor Peafowl was the first to break the silence, "Both pill dao and martial dao fall under the demesne of the heavenly dao," he smiled. "Your bias remains, Brother Shura."

Emperor Shura frowned a little, "Do you hold pill dao in such high regard, Brother Peafowl?"

Emperor Peafowl returned an unrestrained smile, "Since time immemorial, countless geniuses have made their way into the world through pill dao. It's not my opinion alone, you know. It's the truth."

Determined to pick a fight, Emperor Shura considered the pill geniuses before him thoroughly. "Then, if I may... Is there any among these pill geniuses who has the potential to become a great emperor?" He asked suddenly.

The question was somewhat tricky to answer, but Emperor Peafowl was unaffected. The emperor nodded instantly in response, "Yes. For example, Pill King Zhen's future accomplishments will not be any lesser to mine."

The other emperors gasped in surprise at his words.

"Brother Peafowl, don't you think that you're drawing conclusions far too early?" The fourth-ranked emperor, Vastsea, couldn't help but interrupt. He was like a brother to Emperor Shura. The two of them moved as one.

The resolution in Emperor Peafowl's eyes did not dim. He didn't turn directly to Emperor Azuresea, showing only a lighthearted smile. "Not at all. Perhaps my judgment could even be called somewhat late."

Emperor Shura became very serious. "You must have high hopes for this Pill King Zhen then, Brother Peafowl. Perhaps losing young lord Fan and gaining Pill King Zhen is a blessing in disguise, hmm?"

"Quite so. Sacred Peafowl Mountain finally has a worthy successor with a genius like him here."

Emperor Peafowl didn't go on, but the implication was clear. Because of that, Veluriyam had a worthy heir as well. However, he didn't want to lay too many burdens on Jiang Chen all at once, nor cause the young man any undue trouble before the appropriate time came.

All of the other emperors reeled at his words.

"Brother Peafowl, do you truly want to make him Sacred Peafowl Mountain's heir?" Emperor Void was the first one to speak up and inquire. Continuing to look at Emperor Peafowl, the other emperors were

just as surprised. Sacred Peafowl Mountain's successor was a serious matter, but they hadn't heard the emperor mention such a thing previously.

Did this recent notion mean something was about to happen...?

#### Chapter 910: Pill Recipe Selection

A mysterious, calm smile persisted on Emperor Peafowl's face, leaving the other emperors to speculate the hidden meaning behind it.

"Brother Peafowl," Emperor Shura suddenly declared. "First, know that I don't mean to inquire deeply into the matter of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's inheritance. I understand that Pill King Zhen has talent with pills, but he has few martial achievements to speak of. I doubt everyone will be internally satisfied with him as the heir, hmm? Unless he proves an exceptional martial ability as well, of course."

"He will prove himself. Hasn't an opportunity already presented itself?" Emperor Peafowl smiled with great wisdom. It was difficult to know what he was truly thinking.

"Opportunity? Do you mean the gathering's Martial Pagoda battles?" The other emperors glanced sidelong at Emperor Peafowl as well. Any news relating to a new heir for Sacred Peafowl Mountain was of personal interest for everyone present. Sacred Peafowl Mountain was the keystone that had propped up Veluriyam for thousands of years. Any changes to it would affect the city's fate directly, so a certain degree of concern was necessary. Aside from giving an ambiguous smile, Emperor Peafowl didn't respond.

His silence stopped the other emperors from asking any further questions. After all, Emperor Peafowl was the true master of the city. Though the other emperors were nominally his equals, they were in fact mere assistants. Veluriyam Capital would still be the same without any of the other emperors. Without Emperor Peafowl, however, it would never have achieved its current day prominence. Even Emperor Shura couldn't deny this fact.

At the judges' table, Pill King Bu had admitted defeat without much struggle. The other pill kings previously antagonistic to Jiang Chen were thankful that none of them had been the one to provoke Pill King Zhen. They didn't particularly relish the possibility of a disastrous fate befalling them.

Because Pill King Bu hadn't tried to renege on his promise after the fact, Jiang Chen backed off as well. "I'm glad you're so faithful, Pill King Bu," he smiled faintly. "And I am equally glad to accept you as my disciple. However, do realize that since I'm formally your master now, you'll have a lot of trouble if you try to deceive me from this day onwards."

"Don't worry. I agreed to the bet in the first place. I can take the loss." Though Pill King Bu was upset, he was at least true to his word. He was a bit too proud and stuck-up, sure, but he was no lying ruffian. Moreover, there was the matter of the heavenly oath as well.

Jiang Chen smiled casually at Pill King Bu's attitude. "Then we'll leave it like this. You shouldn't feel too bad about it, though... maybe you'll be happy that this happened, one day."

He wasn't merely pushing his advantage. It was the reality of the situation. Pill King Bu was extremely fortunate to have him as a master given his actual pill dao level, even though nobody besides him knew that at present.



The sideshow concluded, and the Pill Pagoda battles continued. Now that the first two rounds were over, the next round was related to refining pills. This round required heavy involvement from all of the participants. Over a month of time was allotted to its completion. Every judge needed to come up with a question to test the participants, just like they'd done during the theoretical round. However, the skill being tested this time was the participants' finesse over the pill refining process. Each judge would teach an exclusive recipe to the participants. After they were furnished with materials, the participants would then refine the pill according to their intuition. Finally, they would be graded based on the quality of the finished product.

Each judge had five days of time—one for teaching the recipe, three for the time it took the contestants to refine the pill, and the last for examining the pill's quality... and tallying up the results, of course. Eight judges meant at least forty days for the competition.

Jiang Chen didn't want any special treatment. Because he was the last judge to arrive, he voluntarily placed himself in the final timeslot. That way, all seven of the other judges would finish before it was his turn. His deference to the other judges earned him a reduction in enmity and an increase in respect from all of them. It was normal for a youth who was the idol of an entire city to be puffed up. If he wanted to make any demands of them, it was entirely within his right. Who were the other judges to deny him? But Pill King Zhen was following the rules to the letter. He treated everyone else with full respect and volunteered to be last. Such character was extraordinary.

Ordinary people found it difficult to stay calm in the face of fame. It was rare and unexpected for someone to keep their composure given the circumstances. A young man that was able to control himself was quite respectable. That he managed such a feat made him greater than many other pill kings with centuries of experience.

The Veluriyam Pagoda gathering had the undertones of being a festival. Even though it took place over an entire year, no one had ever felt that it overstayed its welcome. Rather, they relished in its length. Jiang Chen began preparations for his own recipe. He chose yet another work from the Deviant Pill Faction's repertoire. After all, he'd made a name for himself in Veluriyam by using the Deviant Pill Faction's fame. Why not see that charade through to the end?

The recipe he wanted to put forth this time was the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill. As a pill that perfectly answered the demands of body-refining cultivators, it was an excellent pill for its niche. In addition to strengthening the flesh and reinforcing bone, it could remove the lingering pains of old, long-healed wounds. It was a rare effect for an equally rare pill. Though there were other pills that purportedly did the same available on the market, they were largely mediocre. Moreover, they were often singular in their function, and carried a number of undesirable side effects.

The Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill had no side effects whatsoever. It could both help in cultivation and heal one's body. It held two uses within one pill. The best thing about it, though, was that anyone from origin realm cultivators to emperor realm cultivators could use it... depending on the pill's quality. Emperor realm cultivators would find it somewhat less effective, especially those at the pinnacle of the realm, but it was still quite good for those at the lower ranks of the emperor realm. For sage realm cultivators, it was an amazing, top-notch pill.

After deciding on the pill recipe, Jiang Chen carefully examined it to determine how exactly it should be taught. He was putting in quite a bit of effort for the judging process. If the pill was presented at Taiyuan Tower, it would surely cause yet another wave of publicity. But he was willing to publicly give away the recipe for the sake of the competition. Not for fame alone, of course.

For what exactly? Jiang Chen wasn't able to say himself. Perhaps it was to give some face to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, or perhaps this level of pill recipe wasn't really much to someone like him. Regardless of the reason, he knew very well that his recipe would definitely overshadow the other judges' yet again. It wasn't his original intention, but he didn't just want to give out a normal recipe in order to make a show of mediocrity.

It had been a struggle for the pill geniuses present to enter the top hundred. As a judge and an object of admiration, he felt that it was fitting that he give them both a present and an opportunity. This time, none of the other judges wanted to bet with Jiang Chen. Everyone knew just how terrifying the young pill king was. Anyone that did want to bet with Pill King Zhen should be prepared to lose in advance. Nothing good had ever come of a bet with him, starting from the first day he showed up in the city.

At the opening of Taiyuan Tower, Pill King Rong had challenged Pill King Zhen on the Majestic Clan's behalf. The result? The Majestic Clan lost one of their stores in the Farmer God Market. The second enemy was even more formidable—the indomitable legend of Pillfire, Pill King Ji Lang. It resulted in a devastating loss for Pillfire City. The third time—well, it was that Pill King Bu. Everyone had seen how that had turned out.

The present Jiang Chen was a horseman of the apocalypse, an omen of bad luck. Maybe it was alright to make bets in other subject matters, but betting against him on anything pill-related meant a sure-fire loss. If there had been any dissatisfaction before, Pill King Bu's misfortune removed any and all ideas of causing trouble.

The judges' segments went by without a hitch. Understandably, the only recipes presented were for pills of normal quality. These judges preferred to keep the best pills to themselves. It was customary, but not particularly challenging for the pill geniuses. There had been no method of differentiating between skill levels. So far, the refining round could even be called boring.

The seven titled emperors saw the phenomenon, of course, but came to a tacit understanding. Having top-ranked pill kings to part with their best exclusive pill recipes was unrealistic. There was no reward for doing so. Yes, every top-ranked pill king had many great recipes, but who wanted to simply give one out for the sake of teaching the youth? Even Emperor Peafowl knew that the situation couldn't be helped. Still, he wasn't particularly pleased with their behaviour. I wonder if Jiang Chen will be as miserly as those other pill kings? The pill kings were the cream of the crop of the seven emperors' representatives, but they didn't carry themselves in a way that befitted that fact.

Emperor Vastsea smiled suddenly, "Brother Peafowl, I hear that Pill King Zhen's astounding genius is due to his tutelage from a secluded hermit. I wonder if he will show us something amazing this time, too?"

Emperor Peafowl laughed, "Don't ask me. I have no idea who his master is, either. I do know one thing, however. He is no threat to Veluriyam, but rather, a boon."

Emperor Vastsea laughed as well. He wanted to question Pill King Zhen's identity, but he knew as well as anyone that it was taboo. If anyone openly questioned someone that Emperor Peafowl was so optimistic about, then wasn't that person just openly rebelling? Vastsea was a great emperor, but he knew that he didn't have the qualifications to challenge Emperor Peafowl's authority, nor was it possible, really. History had proved Emperor Peafowl's foresight many times. He was rarely wrong about anything.

Emperor Void had his own opinion. "If this kid can disregard the shackles of profit and differentiate himself from the cheapskates, then I'll change my opinion of him."

Emperor Peafowl chuckled. "Then you may very well have to do that, Brother Void."

"Oh? Are you positive, Brother Peafowl?" Emperor Void's interest was roused. He had no opposition to Pill King Zhen, and in fact respected the young pill genius quite a bit for his victory over Pillfire City.

"Quite sure. The size of his heart is much larger than that of ordinary men." Emperor Peafowl stroked his moustache, smiling.

It was finally Jiang Chen's turn to teach and judge.