

## Three Realms 921

### Chapter 921: The Start of the Martial Pagoda Battles

It was easy for one to say that one should not discriminate against the poor, but in the world of martial dao, the rich will always triumph against the poor, regardless of the latter's talent. The reasoning behind this was because the poor did not have the privilege of being born with a silver spoon in their mouths nor did they have any access to formidable cultivation techniques, potent medicinal pills, pointers from formidable elders, and other additional resources. The poor simply lacked far too many things.

The starting line for the poor was already all the way in the back, and there was no way for them to catch up. The odds were extremely stacked against them if they wanted to shorten the distance. The world of martial dao had always been this ruthless. The reality of such truths would manifest itself in the three ranking battles in the Veluriyam Pagoda. The hierarchy and divide between the two would be obvious.

The geniuses under the great emperors need only take part in the Ranking of Young Lords. There was no need for them to take part in the lesser ranking battles, nor would they care to take part. As for the normal geniuses from great families and clans, they need only participate in the Genius Rankings. There was no need for them to fight for a place in the New Star Rankings. There was, in every sense of the word, a clear divide between those from differing levels of social status.

Emperor Peafowl flashed a meaningful smile when he noticed Jiang Chen's silence towards the matter. "Why? Are you surprised? Or do you feel that it's unfair?"

Jiang Chen did truly feel that it was unfair, but there was no way he'd voice such an opinion. It might seem unfair at first glance, but one should always be farsighted during their journey in martial dao, as the heavens were always fair. He was not the type to fret over such matters.

"Your Majesty, there is no such thing as absolute fairness in this world. If one strives for fairness, then one should fight for it with their own hands. This junior is not so foolish as to hope that the heavens would bestow fairness upon this world."

Emperor Peafowl broke into a laugh. "I can definitely tell that you are quite sensible! You're not fretting over this at all!"

"There is no need for me to fret over such matters. Climbing to the top, one step at a time, will be a good experience. Those geniuses that you speak of have already gotten used to being at the top. They would never be able to experience such a thing." Jiang Chen spoke from the bottom of his heart. Because he hadn't been able to cultivate in his previous life, he had no way to experience the pleasure of competing with the geniuses of his previous world. Since he was given the opportunity to do so in his second life, he would cherish this moment incomparably. As the Celestial Emperor's son, he had already experienced what it was like to be above everyone else. However, he was never given the chance to experience anything else other than that. All he had felt was incomparable loneliness. Why would he complain after being given a chance at a new life? Even if Emperor Peafowl had given him some special privileges, Jiang Chen might not have accepted them.

“Good!” Emperor Peafowl praised. “If this is truly what you believe, then you will surely surpass all those geniuses in the future! However, I must remind you to mentally prepare yourself. Compared to the lower geniuses, geniuses under the great emperors are at a completely different level.”

There was no need for Emperor Peafowl to issue this reminder. Due to the presence of countless young geniuses in Veluriyam Capital, those who stood at the top were undoubtedly the cream of the crop. Jiang Chen would never belittle his enemies. Of course, he would never improperly belittle himself either. They had their advantages, and he had his own. “This junior will bear Your Majesty’s advice in mind. The Martial Pagoda battles are about to begin. Since there are only a few days left, this junior will now return home to prepare.”

Emperor Peafowl nodded. “Go. I look forward to seeing you soar through the heavens in half a year’s time.”

The look of admiration in Emperor Peafowl’s eyes still hadn’t diminished one bit after Jiang Chen was gone from sight. He gently sighed and muttered to himself, “This child is destined to achieve great things. He is so remarkable even though he started out in such a tiny and mundane place like the Eastern Kingdom. I truly cannot imagine the height of his achievements if he had started out in Veluriyam Capital instead.” Emperor Peafowl wasn’t concealing his admiration towards Jiang Chen in the slightest.

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Wei Jie was coincidentally just about to exit the building when Jiang Chen returned to Taiyuan Tower. When he saw Jiang Chen, he immediately approached the latter and greeted him in an excited manner. But inevitably, Wei Jie had become a little more reserved in terms of his attitude and familiarity. Jiang Chen was slightly unaccustomed to this.

“Wei Jie, you’re being distant!” Jiang Chen said while smiling.

Wei Jie scratched his head. “You’re now the number one pill dao expert in Veluriyam Capital. My father warned me to not be too casual in front of you. I...”

“Don’t listen to him! We are brothers that have been through thick and thin together. Once a brother, always a brother! By the way, what are your thoughts on the upcoming Martial Pagoda battles?”

Wei Jie sighed. “I’m not required to enter the New Star Rankings battles as I’ve already qualified for the Genius Rankings battles. But reaching the top two hundred on this list is a daunting task. I’m not putting much hope into achieving that.”

“It’s that difficult?” Jiang Chen was slightly surprised.

“It’s impossibly difficult.” Wei Jie forced a smile. “I’ve estimated that I might be able to climb to the top three hundred if I’m lucky. To be within the top two hundred, I’ll probably need the luck of a lifetime.”

“Surely that can’t be true. Are there really so many geniuses?” Jiang Chen was slightly skeptical.

“I’m not exaggerating at all! First of all, there are already thirty-six geniuses under the emperors. That means that there are only 164 places left in the Genius Rankings. There are also twenty-eight clans with multiple outstanding geniuses from each clan. Cultivators from the aristocratic houses can never dream

of defeating them. They will take up around a hundred places or so. The remaining places will then be taken up by some of the cultivators from the surrounding lands and additional cultivators from other aristocratic families. There will occasionally be a few geniuses amongst the wandering cultivators... After my estimations, I really don't have much confidence that I will be able to climb to the top two hundred." Wei Jie was not being humble. Such was the reality of things.

In House Wei, Wei Jie was the most outstanding person amongst the younger generation, but Veluriyam Capital was simply too gargantuan. There were too many outstanding geniuses here. Most importantly, the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering was open to not just Veluriyam Capital citizens. The geniuses from surrounding regions were also allowed to attend. House Wei wasn't just competing with the elites of Veluriyam Capital.

"What does House Wei expect from you?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"They expect me to be in the top two hundred of course. If I manage to enter the Genius Rankings, my place as the heir of House Wei will be solidified." Judging from Wei Jie's expressions, it was obvious that he wasn't too confident that he could achieve such a feat. He had only been at the seventh level sage realm when Jiang Chen had first met him. He'd since broken through and was now at the eighth level sage realm. Unfortunately, he was still one step away from the peak ninth level sage realm. To compete for a spot within the top two hundred was quite an enormous task. After all, for a stage of this level, sage realm geniuses were probably not a rare sight.

That especially held true at the peak of the Genius Rankings. Those who could manage to enter the Genius Rankings were likely not beneath the ninth level sage realm, unless they were ridiculously strong like Jiang Chen. In fact, some of them were only half a step away from the emperor realm. There were even a few that had already taken half a step into the emperor realm, and were as powerful as emperor realm cultivators. Jiang Chen didn't inquire as to who they were, nor was he planning to do so in the short term.

Noticing Wei Jie's predicament, Jiang Chen suddenly remembered that he still had one Sage Smile Pill left, a pill which would help a sage realm cultivator break through to the next level without any side effects. He'd received two in the past and had already consumed one pill.

"Young master Wei, I still have one Sage Smile Pill with me. This will help you break through into the ninth sage realm level. That's all I can do to help you." Jiang Chen wasn't a stingy man. Moreover, the Sage Smile Pill was already useless to him. It would bring him no benefit if he used it, so he might as well give it to Wei Jie. He wouldn't feel a sense of loss if it would help Wei Jie in his time of need.

Wei Jie was so taken aback that he stood there with his face aghast. He didn't dare to reach his hands out to take the pill. Jiang Chen reached for his hands and handed it to him directly. "Just take it. Since you don't have to enter the battle for the New Star Rankings, you should have enough time to cultivate and break through into the ninth sage realm level. Remember, you must enter the Genius Rankings. Don't waste the Sage Smile Pill that I just gave you."

Wei Jie felt his nose sting with gratitude.

"Brother Zhen. I..." Wei Jie wanted to say something in a refined manner, but the words were stuck in his throat.

"You deserve this." Jiang Chen patted Wei Jie on the shoulder. "If it weren't for you, I would never have been able to enter Veluriyam Capital, nor would I have had the pleasure of being your friend today."

Wei Jie nodded. "I will forever remember Brother Zhen's magnanimity. I won't be able to part the seas, but if you ever need me or my family's help, just say the word and I will come to your aid without even the slightest frown, even if I have to cross a mountain of daggers and an ocean of flames. Otherwise, may the heavens and earth shall condemn me to death."

Wei Jie wasn't the kind of person who would abandon his previous allies after achieving his goal. He was an honest and loyal person. If it weren't for that fact, Jiang Chen would never have created a partnership with him in the first place. Even though they'd been partners for a long time, Wei Jie remained incredibly honest. Moreover, he was also a very tight-lipped person. He hadn't told a single soul about Jiang Chen's position at Regal Pill Palace or Taiyuan Tower, nor did he ever inquire about anything else. Jiang Chen was quite fond of people like him. Thus, he didn't feel even the slightest regret when he gave the Sage Smile Pill to Wei Jie.

"Time is of the essence. Go. Break through to the ninth level and enter the Genius Rankings. Let the entire House Wei know that you are the most outstanding heir. Nobody can ever stand to replace you."

Wei Jie was also incredibly excited. He would never have imagined that he would be able to get his hands on such a miraculous pill like the Sage Smile Pill. Not even in his dreams. But today, he'd gotten his hands on one at an incredibly crucial timing! This Sage Smile Pill meant the world to him. Other than simply raising his cultivation by one level, it gave him the opportunity to fight his way into the Genius Rankings so that he could solidify his position as heir to House Wei and silence those who opposed him. This was the greatest significance of the Sage Smile Pill.

Seeing Wei Jie leave in high spirits made Jiang Chen very happy too. He had no intention of wasting the few final days he had left to prepare. He consolidated his own cultivation realm, practiced various martial methods, and prepared his various equipments, being as thorough as possible.

The Martial Pagoda battles officially began five days later.

On that day, all employees from Taiyuan Tower were allowed a day off so that they could go cheer Jiang Chen on. The famous Pill King Zhen was going to participate in the Martial Pagoda battles. News of this spread like wildfire, and it didn't take long before all of Veluriyam Capital had heard of it. In the beginning, everyone thought that Pill King Zhen would be given special privileges in the Martial Pagoda battles.

But news soon spread that Pill King Zhen hadn't been given any special privileges at all! Like other wandering cultivators, he would have to start from the very bottom and fight for a spot out of the ten thousand available in the New Star Rankings. Even the cultivators from surrounding lands were taken by surprise, not to mention the normal cultivators from Veluriyam Capital. With Pill King Zhen's fame, nobody would ever deny him any special privileges if he'd asked for it. However, he didn't want any special treatment and was willing to fight his way up from the very bottom!

## Chapter 922: First Round of Selections

Veluriyam Capital exerted every resource at its disposal for this gathering's sake. Most surprisingly, the assembly wasn't disorderly despite the number of entrants. Even Jiang Chen was impressed by this kind

of administrative ability. Of course, the sheer volume of millions still put considerable stress on the organizers' shoulders. Standing in the crowd, Jiang Chen breathed in and scoped his surroundings. People were everywhere around the Veluriyam Pagoda, mountains and oceans of teeming activity.

"I don't know what to say, brother. What are you doing signing up for the New Star Rankings? If you ask me, you should've just asked the Coiling Dragon Clan to get you a slot. There's no need for even His Majesty to intercede. You could have gotten yourself into the Genius Rankings straightaway." Ji San was standing beside Jiang Chen. Though it wasn't necessary for him to compete in the New Star Rankings, he was Jiang Chen's sworn brother. He had to attend an event like this, if only for support alone.

Smiling faintly, Jiang Chen refrained from giving a proper explanation. Instead, he gazed intensely at everything around them. "Wouldn't I then miss this million-strong competition? I couldn't just leave the festivities alone."

Ji San laughed, baffled. "These are just the qualifiers. Honestly, a lot of these people are simply here to have fun. That's why we need to filter them out. There'll only be a hundred thousand once that's done. Afterwards, we'll have to choose a tenth of those guys. Only then will they have a place in the New Star Rankings."

Jiang Chen knew the rules for the Martial Pagoda battles now. The registered million had to go through an initial round. The people that passed this round were actual contestants. After this first layer of filtration, one million would shrink into a hundred thousand.

"Have the Martial Pagoda battles in previous years also hosted this many people?" He asked, curious.

"Yes, it's always been this many. According to the clan lord, more than one and a half million people have participated in some of the previous Pagoda gatherings. But this year is the most popular in the most recent millennium."

Jiang Chen laughed. His heart was moved by the eager faces all around him. In the world of martial dao, it was difficult to make a name for oneself and climb up the social ladder. Chances to do so were exceedingly rare. Everyone wanted to grasp such opportunities and become famous overnight. The wandering cultivators with grassroot origins especially desired to do so, so that they could change their own destinies.

It was a pity that these opportunities, when all was said and done, were still stages reserved for geniuses. Most who came with beautiful dreams in their hearts were doomed to return with spirits laced with disappointment. Those especially unlucky would even lose their lives here. Nevertheless, their passions could not be quenched. The world of martial dao was cruel. Risking life and limb in the course of adventure was a common occurrence. How could one hope to succeed without such a mindset?

The first round's process was very simple. A formation would be activated around the base of the Veluriyam Pagoda. The million entrants would be split into twenty waves of fifty thousand each. The five thousand and fewer that lasted the longest within the formation's aura were eligible to move on to the next round. Thus, the purpose of this round was to eliminate ninety percent of the entrants. The tenth that remained would then compete for the New Star Rankings' ten thousand spots. Jiang Chen was

assigned to wave eighteen, out of twenty. He wasn't going to enter for a while. That was good in its own respects, though. He could use the extra time to gauge the overall quality of the entrants.

Rays of colorful light flooded down from the peak of the Veluriyam Pagoda's main pagoda. Seven-colored auspicious radiance hurtled towards the ground, giving off a feeling of sacred regality.

"The formation has been activated, and the first wave is inside. Please pay careful attention, contestants. If you cannot hold on, crush the jade slips in your hands immediately and you will be automatically ejected. Remember, the formation will not respond to your emotions, and you are responsible for your own life and actions. Don't struggle in vain. However, staying as long as your strength permits is naturally better as well. Your present performance will determine the arrangements for future selections." An intimidating voice echoed around the Veluriyam Pagoda. It was both a reminder to the immediate first wave and an admonition to all the entrants in the ensuing waves.

Jiang Chen watched the main Veluriyam Pagoda become enveloped in powerful streams of rainbow-colored air. From the outside, the main pagoda was like an isolated space. The sheer sense of dissociation gave off a feeling of dimensional independence.

Ji San yawned from the side, "Brother, this kind of selection isn't that interesting. With your level of strength, there's no need to worry at all."

As if on cue, it wasn't even fifteen minutes before masses of cultivators began to continuously stream out, unable to bear the pressure of the formation any longer. The final results of the first wave were decided after about an hour.

"The first wave's number of eliminated entrants is now sufficient. Congratulations to the five thousand who remain. You've passed the first round. Now, it's up to you to decide how much longer you'd like to stay."

"Does the amount of time you stay in the formation matter for subsequent rounds?" Jiang Chen asked, curious.

Ji San nodded, "I've heard the clan lord discuss the specifics of this rule. Apparently, the longer you stay, the better it is for you later on."

However, there wasn't likely to be a significant gap between the entrants at this level of competition, and evidence supported this. Two hours hadn't even passed before the entire first wave emerged. The exact ranking of the wave was immediately tallied up, another testament to the efficiency of the organizing party.

Ji San shook his head thoughtfully, "There was no one remarkable in that wave."

"Why do you say that?" Jiang Chen didn't quite understand.

"According to the clan lord, this is actually the first chance to observe all of the contestants. This formation is a kind of touchstone. Many geniuses that rose from the bottom in previous years had amazing performances in this formation."

"Oh? How amazing?" Jiang Chen's interest was piqued.

“The year that the clan lord participated in had a lot of geniuses. There was a guy that stayed inside for an entire six hours. He was a wandering cultivator, too!”

Anything that the Coiling Dragon Clan lord participated in was definitely considered ancient history. Jiang Chen recalled the lord’s age. The man was almost at the end of his natural life, so it must have been at least a few thousand years ago. “Is six hours the record?”

Ji San moved his head from side to side, “Definitely not. Genius abounded in ancient times. Those that could stay inside for six hours were fairly common. But in the recent few millennia, especially the past one thousand years, there has been a clear decline in the number of wandering cultivator geniuses.”

Jiang Chen didn’t find that surprising at all. The increasingly tight control of the largest sects and factions over the Divine Abyss Continent’s territories was proof enough that wandering cultivators had less and less room to thrive. It was harder to make up the difference between those hailing from sects and the sect-less. With the increasing monopolization of various large sects over all kinds of resources, not much remained for the wandering cultivators. Understandably, fewer of them could even think of rising up as a result. That was plain enough to see. There was something Jiang Chen wanted to know even more, however—how long could Veluriyam’s own noble scions last in this formation?

“Brother Ji, do noble youths enter the formation to be tested as well?”

The young master smiled. “Some people are bored enough to give up their special treatment and take part, yes. Their performance has always been pretty good overall as well. However, I’ve not heard of any true top-ranked genius do something like this. Six hours should be likely enough for the young lords and such, at least by my estimate.”

The disparity was clearly illustrated. There were none in the first wave that could last even two hours, but young lords and their peers were able to stay for six. Jiang Chen was silent, having come up with a rough plan. By now, the second wave had entered the formation as well. Just like the first wave, the second wave was unimpressive. No suspension of disbelief was necessary. Nothing was surprising at all. It continued on like this for another two waves.

There was a little jolt during the fifth, though. There were three geniuses in that wave that stayed past the two hour barrier. The most adept among them lasted an entire three. It gave people watching the first round a hint of excitement, a little bit of conversation-eliciting material. The three geniuses instantly became the talk of the crowd. As the top three of fifty thousand entrants, getting into the New Star Rankings was no problem for them.

Quite a few, in fact, felt like they had the ability to reach the two hundred strong Genius Rankings. After all, there were only twenty waves. If there were three as strong as these fellows in every wave, that still meant only sixty total. Even if noble youths commandeered the vast majority of spots, there was still hope for a small group about that size to contest the rest.

Perhaps it was due to the fifth wave’s stimulation, but three-hour-plus geniuses kept popping up in the few waves that followed. There was even one person in the eighth wave that almost reached four hours, though he fell short of that line in the end. Ji San felt a little regretful on his behalf. “I feel for him. Anyone that stays past the four hour mark is clearly on another level. It’d be a definite confirmation that they are capable of challenging the Genius Rankings as well.”

Though they had broad horizons, noble youths like young master Ji San found that kind of ability respectable nevertheless. Each subsequent wave carried a few marvels of their own, but no one could break the four-hour line. It wasn't until the thirteenth wave that this statement no longer held true. A genius in that wave managed to remain inside for four hours and fifteen minutes. It was the best record yet for this first round. As a result, the person's name was easily committed to memory.

"Chu Jianhuan?" Ji San quietly muttered the name over and over. "This guy... it's definitely possible for him to go for the Genius Rankings. Not every genius has to come from a highborn background, huh."

For Ji San to find him so valuable... this Chu Jianhuan's excellence was undeniable. Jiang Chen gave the cultivator two glances. From a cursory inspection, the man was at least in the ninth level sage realm. A hint of sternness flashed across his visage. Jiang Chen filed the man into memory. Chu Jianhuan's results were positively intriguing. There were two geniuses after him that almost broke the four-hour mark, but they didn't quite manage to reach it.

Four days passed by very quickly. When the seventeenth wave had entered the formation, Jiang Chen finally felt a sliver of anticipation in his heart. It was almost time for him to engage.

"Brother, your time is almost here. Be bold, be dazzling, show them that our very own Pill King Zhen is a genius of many talents! A master of both martial dao and pill dao!" Ji San encouraged Jiang Chen.

#### Chapter 923: The Much Acclaimed Pill King Zhen

Even as Jiang Chen flexed his muscles in preparation for battle, an irregularity arose in the seventh wave. A genius named Sunyu Xiaosheng stayed a full five hours inside the formation. It broke Chu Jianhuan's previous record in one fell swoop! The result sent ripples of shock all through the Pagoda's surroundings.

Sunyu Xiaosheng replaced Chu Jianhuan as the hottest piece of news. He'd stayed in the formation for three more quarter-hours than Chu Jianhuan had. Anyone who'd been in a formation before knew that it was increasingly more difficult to resist the longer one stayed. These three quarter-hours showed a clear edge in both strength and formation-resisting ability.

Ji San sighed softly, "Where did this guy come from now, huh? Could he be a genius from a nearby faction? I don't think even I could stay for twenty quarter-hours if I were to go in."

It was rare for Ji San to praise a stranger so. His words oozed respect for this Sunyu Xiaosheng. However, he remembered in the next moment that his own brother was about to experience the same trial. Praising Sunyu Xiaosheng like that seemed like an unnecessary knock on Jiang Chen's confidence. Smiling wryly, he moved to console his friend, "No pressure, brother. Just do the best you can. With the mental fortitude that you've shown in your pill-related pursuits, surely you won't be affected by outside factors like this?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly, refraining from giving a concrete response. He clearly understood that compared to his pill talent, extolled as the best in Veluriyam, his martial talent wasn't known by nearly as many in the city. A fair few knew that he'd received a reward from Emperor Peafowl back at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. But since that time, nobody had actually seen his performance with their own eyes. Many suspected that the emperor had intentionally given Jiang Chen a treat and that it hadn't been entirely meritorious.



Though Ji San didn't particularly believe these rumors, he nevertheless didn't have nearly as much faith in Jiang Chen's martial ability as he did his brother's pill ability. After all, the level of martial expertise that Jiang Chen had showed was still a ways off from geniuses who were nearer to the pinnacle. Yes, Jiang Chen had broken through to the seventh level sky sage realm, but Ji San had been at the ninth level sage realm for a long time already. There wasn't any top-ranked genius in the great clans at a lower cultivation level than that. The top geniuses of the great clans were all in the ninth level sage realm. As for the young lords closest to the emperors, many were already halfway to the emperor realm; some had even reached it already. In the martial world, such differences were marked. Ji San's words to his brother, therefore, meant absolutely no ridicule.

In separate secret rooms within the Veluriyam Pagoda, all seven great emperors and their retinues were attentively focused on the selection process. It was simple on the surface, but every emperor assigned significant importance to this round in particular. No matter what level of genius one was at, it would be reflected accurately in this process. For example, the Chu Jianhuan from before was held in high esteem by several emperors.

When Sunyu Xiaosheng appeared, no emperor apart from Peafowl could keep their calm. Even Emperor Shura was greatly astonished, instructing his Moon Monarch to keep close tabs on this particular genius. If the kid could make it into the two-hundred-strong Genius Rankings, then he absolutely had a place under Emperor Shura's banner. Emperor Shura's faction had collected many geniuses over the years. Not every genius could achieve individual prominence in maturity, but that was no obstacle to the practice. More geniuses meant more that would be able to last to maturity.

Moon Monarch nodded, "I will definitely do so. I'm just worried that he'll be as unappreciative as that Lin Yanyu from the previous Pill Pagoda battles."

Lin Yanyu's first place result amongst the Pill Pagoda battles' wandering cultivators made him a primary target for Emperor Shura's recruitment. Unfortunately, it only resulted in double the disappointment. Not only had their efforts in recruiting Lin Yanyu proven ineffective, but they'd lost their very own Pill King Bu in the process as well. The most upsetting thing about it was that Pill King Zhen had been the person to win both of them over. He was virtually best buds with Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

According to rumors, Emperor Peafowl had plans to make heavy use of Pill King Zhen. There were other rumors that if the pill king showed an excellent performance at the Martial Pagoda battles, Emperor Peafowl would possibly make him Sacred Peafowl Mountain's next young lord. The news hadn't spread externally, but it had certainly made the rounds internally amongst the seven emperors. Though everything was still yet unknown, the other titled emperors' keen instincts told them that the well-timed comments were far from baseless.

A sliver of coldness flickered across Emperor Shura's eyes. Evidently, he found the previous events quite unpleasant, even shameful to an extent. "Which wave is that Pill King Zhen in? Has he not passed the first round yet?" He didn't know why, but the emperor had become a bit wary towards this Pill King Zhen.

"I've looked into it already," Moon Monarch replied hurriedly. "His name is in the eighteenth wave, coming up next. Looks like the kid didn't want any special treatment. He's starting from the bottom. What's he got up his sleeve?"

Emperor Shura found it somewhat baffling as well. “Perhaps Emperor Peafowl intended for this to happen?” He murmured to himself. “He doesn’t want others to have any room for criticism?”

“Does Emperor Peafowl really want to make this kid Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s young lord? That... that seems positively ridiculous. How long has it been since he first arrived here—not even three years?”

Emperor Shura was quite serious. “A number of signs point towards this being a distinct possibility. But, how good is this Pill King Zhen’s martial talent really?”

“We’ll see shortly,” Moon Monarch harrumphed.

“Still, what is Emperor Peafowl really playing at?” Despite his years of experience interacting with his fellow emperor, Emperor Shura still couldn’t see the intentions behind the gesture. Was it a smokescreen, or was it to test him?

“Your Majesty,” Moon Monarch interrupted, “no matter what Emperor Peafowl is planning, control of the city will fall to you come his retirement for sure. Nobody else is adequate.”

Yes, that was true in theory, but Emperor Shura wasn’t convinced. He had always tightly controlled himself in front of Emperor Peafowl, lest the latter build up a dislike for him. Only then would it be possible for him to justifiably inherit Veluriyam Capital and thereby become its actual leader. However, Emperor Peafowl had never clearly expressed any inclination towards such a plan.

It was soul-crushing for Emperor Shura. In recent years, these negative emotions had become sharp edges, perpetually showing themselves and cutting against Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Still, he knew as well as anyone that as long as Emperor Peafowl remained, all of his machinations had to remain as ambition alone and could not be carried out concretely. The past several thousand years had been Emperor Peafowl’s era. As long as the emperor still remained, the years accounted to his period would stretch on and on.

“Your Majesty, that kid has entered the formation. I see him now,” Moon Monarch advised.

Emperor Shura’s eyes moved towards the center of the formation. He was able to find the pill king very quickly. He was the young man who had stirred up so many storms in the city lately. That young man was like an unsolved riddle. The emperor had guessed endlessly at Pill King Zhen’s identity during his idle hours. He’d crafted many hypotheses, but none of their accompanying conclusions satisfied him. He had even suspected the pill king to be Emperor Peafowl’s illegitimate child... for a time. But there was no tangible proof for such an absurd conjecture. Moreover, the kid’s pill talent wasn’t something that Emperor Peafowl could instill.

Emperor Shura didn’t put much stock in calling this Pill King Zhen merely Emperor Peafowl’s game piece. This was because the pill king’s strength was greater than the other emperor could possibly cultivate.

Two hours passed very quickly. Moon Monarch firmly furrowed his brow, muttering, “How unexpected. That kid is pretty strong. He made it past two hours. Eh? There’s four others that did as well?”

This was a little excessive. There hadn’t been a single two-hour survivor in the first three waves. Were geniuses better and more numerous in the later waves? Of course, one couldn’t rule out the possibility that the first few waves’ entrants were keeping their strength in reserve or hiding it outright, really. In fact, the possibility was quite high.

Nobody had known the finer details of the round at first. Passing, and thereby guaranteeing moving onto the next round, had been enough. This wasn't the case for the later waves. With more and more geniuses displaying their radiance, the conflict beneath the table grew white-hot. It was normal for better and better results to continually surface.

"There's three left still after three hours. Tch, will there be a heaven-defying genius appearing in this eighteenth wave?" Moon Monarch's eyes were half-shut, his tone perplexed. Most importantly, Pill King Zhen—who was the object of their scrutiny—had still not departed. To add insult to injury, there was no sign from the pill king's expression that he was struggling at all.

"This Pill King Zhen's martial talent is not to be underestimated, Your Majesty... even if it may not be as remarkable as his pill talent."

Emperor Shura smiled faintly, "Three hours isn't much. If he doesn't pass the four-hour line, even the Genius Rankings might be too good for him."

"I suppose you're right," Moon Monarch nodded. "The longer it goes on, the more difficult it becomes. He's worthy of our scrutiny only after he crosses that line. If he can't, then he'd better be content with simply staying as just a pill genius."

It wasn't just Emperor Shura who was captivated by Jiang Chen—he was the talk of the town with the other emperors as well. Because of his status as the foremost in pill dao, it was difficult for Pill King Zhen to stay under the radar. The seven emperors, the other contestants, and even the various factions... all had only one question on their minds—how long could Pill King Zhen stay in the formation?

#### Chapter 924: To Go Against the Heavens

At this moment, Jiang Chen's heart was as tranquil as still water. The formation had indeed impacted him after he'd entered it. However, the heavy pressure that it exerted was clearly intended not to kill, but to test him. It not only put the defensive ability of cultivators to the test, but also examined their willpower and the strength of their consciousness. This formation was not filled with killing intent, nor was it intended to cause despair. As Jiang Chen sat within the formation, his mind was clear and calm. He experienced the immense pressure the formation exerted and slowly adapted to its rhythm.

Not bad, it doesn't feel like much even after three hours. It seems that using the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods to refine my body was quite effective. My physical strength should be more or less on par with those so-called half-step emperor realm cultivators. As for my willpower, I've seen so many heavyweights from various realms when I accompanied my father in my previous life. Naturally, I will not quake before the pressure of this formation. And with my Boulder's Heart, coupled with the remarkable power of Psychic's Head, my consciousness has far surpassed that of an ordinary cultivator. This means that this formation was completely made for me.

If Jiang Chen had only possessed these advantages, he might be able to stay in the formation for a good while, but he could still not surpass those top geniuses from ancient times. However, he was coincidentally incredibly talented at formations. After inheriting the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's prowess at formations, he could adapt to the rhythm of this formation very quickly.

There was still a considerable difference between a genius who understood the art of formations and a genius who did not. Certainly, the Veluriyam Capital carried on the will of the ancient era. Their

powerful formations were not ones that Jiang Chen could shatter. However, he could still find ways to counter them. These details could allow him to endure for longer than the others. He actually came to like the feeling of the formation battering against him. The pulses of frightening pressure that this formation exerted on him might be called a test, but in reality, it was also a form of training. Particularly, the longer he stood in it, the harder the formation hammered at him.

"A tidal wave against sand. The formidable pressure of this formation batters not just a cultivator's corporeal body but also their will and consciousness. It's like forging steel. The formation is the forge, and I am a sheet of quality steel. I'll allow this formation to hammer me into shape," Jiang Chen repeated this silently to himself.

As time passed, the strength of this formation continued to rise. The pressure on Jiang Chen also continuously increased. But his internal mantra allowed him to persevere within the formation.

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At this moment, the outside world had fallen into an uproar. The other geniuses of the eighteenth batch had already been expelled from the formation. The only one left within it was Jiang Chen. He was like a small sailboat circling the vast open seas, but was never engulfed by the waves.

"Pill King Zhen still hasn't emerged. Is he really an omnipotent genius?"

"It's been four hours. Who'd have thought that Pill King Zhen's martial talent would be so strong! Since he's surpassed the four hour cutoff, he would at least be able to break into the ranks of the top two hundred geniuses, right?"

"Extreme respect! I won't ask for the entirety of Pill King Zhen's talent but if I had even a third of his skill, I'd be bringing honor to my clan!"

"What wishful thinking. Pill King Zhen is the best in pill dao in our Veluriyam Capital. If you had even a third of his skill, at the very least you'd be comparable to a ninth rank pill king."

"Haha, I guess you're right."

"Let's guess how long this Pill King Zhen can stay within the formation! Do you guys think he can break the previous record?"

"As long as Pill King Zhen is the one doing it, anything is possible."

"Right? Pill King Zhen seems to leave a trail of miracles everywhere he goes." Loud praise erupted from the area surrounding the Veluriyam Pagoda. Some had even abandoned the envy in their hearts, leaving behind only endless admiration and respect. This was because everyone was aware that Pill King Zhen was on a completely different level. Being jealous of him was completely pointless.

Ji San stood within the crowd, surrounded by sounds of various discussions. At this moment, he felt as though the synapses in his brain were failing to connect to each other. Indeed, the shock he was experiencing was comparable to everyone else present at the scene. Everyone knew that Pill King Zhen was a genius in pill dao, the absolute number one. But his martial talent had never been revealed and not much was known regarding it. Even Ji San had been bamboozled. At this point, he could only force

out a rueful smile. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Dear brother, I worried needlessly for you. I didn't think you'd be able to keep your composure. It's funny. I even tried to comfort you earlier..."

He was naturally aware of what staying for more than four hours inside the formation meant. One had to know that from the first time this formation had been used to sift for talent until now, just how many people had managed to persist for more than four hours? Of course, some people might be deliberately concealing their talent, but it was obvious that anyone who surpassed the four-hour mark was a top-tier genius. What was more, Jiang Chen was still in the formation. There was still the possibility that he could break the previous record.

"This brat, could he be thinking of breaking the record that Sunyu Xiaosheng had just set?" The idea of this piqued Ji San's interest. If Jiang Chen put up such an outstanding show even with regards to his martial talent, then the happiest one here would definitely be Ji San. He wasn't a jealous person. He knew how to be happy for the people around him. If his brother possessed extraordinary martial skill, he would definitely be even more grateful to know that he had a good eye for people.

"You can do it!" Ji San clenched his fingers into a fist and pumped it into the air in support of Jiang Chen.

On the side of Emperor Shura, Moon Monarch's brows had furrowed into deep ridges.

"Your Majesty, as expected, this brat possesses some crafty technique. He's actually already surpassed Chu Jianhuan's record. It seems that he's targeting Sunyu Xiaosheng's record of twenty quarter-hours."

Emperor Shura's remained impassive as he replied without inflection, "If the person chosen by Emperor Peafowl couldn't even endure for four hours, that would be the biggest joke of all. You saw during his confrontation with Pill King Ji Lang that this child wasn't ruffled at all. At the very least, that proves the degree of his mental fortitude. This kind of person with such a strong resolve would definitely not be lacking in martial willpower. As long as his innate skill isn't too bad, his martial skill will be fairly successful. What's more, he can still fall back on that skill in pill dao he was blessed with."

For an ordinary martial genius, even if he had some innate skill in pill dao, there was still a limit to how much he could use pill dao to complement his martial talent. But this Pill King Zhen was different. The extent to which his heaven-defying level of pill dao complemented his martial dao was alarming. Historically, there was no lack of powerful pill dao masters who used their unnatural talent in pill dao to artificially expand their ordinary martial skill, hence becoming top-ranked martial dao masters.

The frown on Moon Monarch's face had not dropped. It was obvious that he was more and more unwilling to accept Jiang Chen's unnatural performance. His enmity with Jiang Chen had been unconcealed all this time. From his point of view, the culprit behind the destruction of the Majestic Clan was this Pill King Zhen. Some parties rejoiced while others fretted. As for Emperor Peafowl, he remained completely calm, as though Jiang Chen's development was within the sphere of his predictions.

Conversely, it was Cloudsoar Monarch who exclaimed upon seeing Jiang Chen's performance, "Your Majesty, your subordinate has once again been subdued by your eye for talent! Who would have thought that this Pill King Zhen's martial talent would be this extraordinary?!"

When he recalled the time when he'd questioned Emperor Peafowl's judgment of Jiang Chen, he couldn't help but flush with shame. He suddenly understood why Emperor Peafowl was so adamant in

instating Pill King Zhen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It seemed that it was still the emperor who possessed the most foresight.

“Cloudsoar, how long do you think Pill King Zhen will be able to endure the formation?” Emperor Peafowl suddenly broke into a small smile.

Cloudsoar Monarch contemplated briefly before he spoke up, “Perhaps, he’s hoping to break the record Sunyu Xiaosheng set just now? Twenty quarter-hours?”

“Haha, it’s not just pure hope that he can break twenty quarter-hours but rather, it’s a fact that he will.” Emperor Peafowl smiled blithely. “What this emperor is curious about now is, will he able to surpass six hours?”

“Six hours?” Cloudsoar Monarch was at a loss for words. “Your Majesty, the last time this record appeared was two or three thousand years ago, wasn’t it?”

“Is it not precisely because it’s been so long since we last saw it that we should eagerly anticipate it?” Emperor Peafowl said with deliberation.

Cloudsoar Monarch seemed to have come to a realization as he stared at Jiang Chen with thoughtful eyes. There was both amazement and admiration in their depths. If this young man could really set a record unseen in the past three thousand years, then he would truly be qualified to reach the same level as that of the geniuses from the ancient era. For this kind of genius, there was no need to even mention entering the top two hundred rankings. There was even the possibility that he could contest the ultimate ranking of the top thirty-six. Once Pill King Zhen entered that ranking of the thirty-six young lords, Emperor Peafowl could then legitimately establish him as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Cloudsoar Monarch finally understood why Emperor Peafowl had insisted that Pill King Zhen claw his way up from the bottom instead of granting him any special privileges. As it turned out, His Majesty was hoping that through a series of events, Pill King Zhen would publicly display his martial talent to others so that the entirety of Veluriyam Capital would recognize his skill. This had all been done in preparation for the next step.

“Your subordinate bows before Your Majesty’s foresight.” Unexpectedly, Cloudsoar Monarch was not jealous of this youth. He had served Emperor Peafowl since the beginning and as a long-time follower of the emperor, he had never once hoped to become his heir.

After all, the four monarchs had also grown old. They couldn’t be considered viable long-term choices. He had worried about the matter of Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s heir for a long time. He didn’t want Sacred Peafowl to become marginalized in the future and to be roughly jostled out of power by Emperor Shura. And now, he gazed upon the new person chosen by Emperor Peafowl, a person with raw talent comparable to young lord Fan. This caused Cloudsoar Monarch to feel at ease.

“Twenty quarter-hours... As expected, he surpassed twenty quarter-hours. Your Majesty, Zhen’s talent in both pill and martial dao are absolute. He’s a genius descended from the heavens!” Cloudsoar Monarch stared at the time and could not help but exclaim in wonder. This was a heaven-defying development of events.

## Chapter 925: The First Victory

Absolute in both pill and martial dao. These words were continuously surfacing in the minds of everyone present. The person who had set the record earlier, Sunyu Xiaosheng, also fixed his narrow eyes on the formation below Veluriyam Pagoda. The apathetic expression on his face had shifted to one of bewilderment. The record he had just set had been broken as simply as that. Obviously, he was curious about the person who had surpassed him.

"Sigh, if I'd known, I would have persevered a little more." He felt a little regretful. He still had a bit of energy remaining when he'd left the formation. He hadn't wanted to push himself too much, afraid that he would affect his performance in the remaining competition, so he hadn't tried his best. He felt that he definitely could have persisted for a longer time if he hadn't held back. Since his record was broken, the on-site discussion only grew more intense.

Now, the only question was, could Pill King Zhen break the record that no one had surpassed for a few thousand years? Could he persist within the formation for six hours? As Jiang Chen sat within the formation, it never occurred to him that he had become a topic of heated debate in the outside world.

Unknowingly, the sixth hour approached.

"Hm? It seems that I've come close to six hours. I heard from Brother Ji that for these past few thousand years, six hours has been the highest record. I still have some remaining strength so I might have a chance to surpass seven hours, or perhaps even eight hours. But this is only the preliminary selection. I should quit while I'm still ahead. There's no need to show off quite so much..." Jiang Chen monitored the time as he decided that he would leave the formation the moment it reached six hours.

When the hourglass indicated six hours had passed, a tidal wave of cheering swept over the outside world. It was clear that in this era, a record of six hours was truly an enormous inspiration. It didn't matter that he was their competitor. At this moment, everyone was cheering for Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen also did not dally within the formation. He crushed his jade token and was instantly teleported back to the outside world. In order to avoid showing off, he deliberately stifled his facial expression to a deathly pale shade, as though he had been greatly weakened. Nonetheless, no one really paid attention to those details. Everyone was only concerned about the record of six hours.

"Long live Pill King Zhen!"

"As expected of Veluriyam Capital's idol! Absolute in both martial and pill dao!" Within Veluriyam Capital, Pill King Zhen was originally someone worthy of idol worship. As of today, his enchanting performance that had broken a millennia-old record naturally won him plenty of support.

Ji San also walked up to him and pounded his shoulder with a fist. "You little brat, you really concealed your power from everyone!"

When Jiang Chen glanced at the joy laced across Ji San's face, he knew that the latter was delighted for him. He immediately smiled and replied, "It's not that I was concealing my strength. I just happened to know a little bit about formations. It was a struggle to be honest."

Ji San laughed uproariously, "Reasons don't matter. What matters is that you've persisted until the six hour mark. I believe that after this selection, the fame of your martial dao will spread to every corner of

Veluriyam City, just like that of your pill dao. It'll even spread to the entirety of the Upper Eight Regions!"

Conversely, Jiang Chen was not overly prideful of his accomplishments. The rankings for the eighteenth batch of cultivators was quickly tallied. Amongst the cultivators here, Jiang Chen was at the top of the list. There was no question about that. The remaining two batches had possibly been spurred on by Jiang Chen. Multiple extraordinary candidates popped up, one even surpassing the six hour mark as well. This grand occasion instantly shook the entire Veluriyam Capital to its core. Who would have thought that even the preliminary round of selections would erupt in such a fiery battlefield of hot-blooded cultivators? After this selection, ninety percent of the one million competitors was instantly eliminated. The hundred thousand people left would officially begin the fight for the ten thousand spots on the New Star Rankings.

"Congratulations to the qualifying competitors. Next, the hundred thousand of you will be divided into a thousand groups, a hundred people to a group. Every group will have ten designated spots on the New Star Rankings. Hence, ultimately a group of ten thousand people will be accepted onto the list."

"The top one thousand competitors from the preliminary arena just now will not meet each other in battle. They will be split evenly across the thousand groups."

Jiang Chen had stayed within the formation for six hours and was tied with another person for first. He was the most popular candidate for entry into the New Star Rankings. Moreover, the one thousand competitors who had topped the preliminary competition would be split into a thousand different groups. This way, the top-ranked one hundred geniuses would not run into each other beforehand. This would also ensure that the top-ranked geniuses would not be preliminarily eliminated as a result of a precursory fight.

Jiang Chen's exemplary performance within the formation placed him into the first group as the arena lord. Naturally, as the lord of this group, he had certain privileges. According to the rules, the arena lord only needed to defeat ten people in a row to advance. The rankings on the New Star Rankings would be decided by the number of victories one held. In the end, the one with the highest number of victories across all the competitors in every arena would be ranked at the top of the list. Every spot on the New Star Rankings would be decided entirely based on the number of victories one held. If there was a tie, the person who performed better on the previous formation challenge would be granted priority in placement.

In the first group, Jiang Chen's performance in the formation challenge was the best. Hence, if he could secure the greatest number of victories here, he would be ranked first even if there was someone who tied with him here. Of course, apart from the arena lords, the other participants had a fixed number of entries every day. In the end, every competitor needed to guarantee that he had participated in ninety-nine fights. In other words, he needed to ensure that he had fought every other person in his group at least once.

As the lord, Jiang Chen's greatest advantage was that as long as he achieved ten victories in a row, he could advance forward. As for the others, their chances of advancement were solely dependent on their final number of victories. However, if the lord could not achieve a record of ten straight victories, then



he would be judged just like the rest, based on total victories. Ultimately, this rule was still advantageous towards the arena lords.

As the arena lord, Jiang Chen was naturally part of the first battle. He stood on the elevated arena granted to the lord and swept his eyes across the ninety-nine opponents beneath him. Some of their gazes were veiled, making it difficult to tell what they were truly thinking about. Others' gazes were filled with heated passion, as though they were about to jump onto the arena and challenge him straightaway.

Everyone here hoped to use this as an opportunity to gain renown. However, not everyone would have the chance to challenge the lord. Within a day, the lord would generally only have to accept three challenges. Of course, if the lord himself was willing, continuing to battle was completely fine.

"Let me take on the illustrious Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital!" Suddenly, a short and fat fellow yelled out from beneath the arena. The fat covering his body made him look like a meatball. He bounced directly onto the arena. Jiang Chen glanced at the fellow.

This newcomer's cultivation was not low. He had already reached the fifth level sage realm. However, as he watched Jiang Chen's reserved behavior, he could not see through the latter's level of power. Hence, a seed of wishful thinking sprouted within him, that he might actually make his name known through this single match. The moment Jiang Chen spotted the sneaky smile that had snaked across this guy's face, he knew that the latter was an opportunistic fellow.

"Hehe, Pill King Zhen, everyone knows that you are number one in pill dao within Veluriyam Capital. As everyone's idol, don't be too harsh on me!" The fellow might act jovial and agreeable, but his eyes carried hints of craftiness in their depths.

With just a glance, Jiang Chen could tell that this person was someone who would distract him with honeyed words while slipping a sword into his back. He immediately schooled his face. "After you."

The short fatty suddenly grinned nastily before Jiang Chen finished speaking. With a flick of his sleeves, two concealed weapons arched through the air in inky streaks as they hurtled directly towards Jiang Chen. The appearance of these concealed weapons was too sudden and their technique was extremely clever. Clearly, this short fatty had used this trick to plot against countless people in order to have trained to this level of proficiency.

Immediately, a series of hisses and boos emanated from beneath the arena. This short fatty's tricks had obviously not been well-received by the spectators. There were no rules that prohibited concealed weapons on this battlefield arena. Nonetheless, everyone was aware that even if one wished to use concealed weapons, one should at least wait until the match had officially started.

Jiang Chen had only just agreed to the match before this fellow had unleashed such a sudden attack. This was definitely not morally upright. Nonetheless, this short fatty didn't seem to mind at all. With a chuckle, he curled his hands around the shaft of a deadly-looking scimitar. Waves of intense and savage blade aura broiled in the air. This sinister aura immediately stirred up pulses of miserable cries, like the howls of ghosts and wolves, engulfing everything around it.

Jiang Chen's heart grew cold. As expected, his judgment had been correct. This short fatty might appear genial, but behind that facade, he was incredibly crafty. However, it was too naive for a mere fifth level sage realm to even think about ambushing him.

Jiang Chen lightly flourished his sleeves, silently activating his Featherflight Mirror. With a light brush, the two concealed weapons slowed down greatly as though they had met with some invisible resistance in the air. He chuckled coldly before he flicking a finger.

Pop pop! With two consecutive popping noises, the two concealed weapons made a complete turn around before they crashed back towards that short fatty.

The short fatty had trained his attack to perfection. His concealed weapons had never once failed him. As he suddenly saw the two weapons make a sharp turn and shoot back towards him, he was completely dumbfounded. His scimitar glinted in the light as it raised a mighty tidal wave to stop these concealed weapons. However, unexpectedly, he felt a titanic weight press against his palms. The next moment, the power flowing through his scimitar had only built halfway before its effect completely dispersed. It was as though some unseen force was suppressing his hands.

"Not good!" The short fatty's face instantly turned green. Everything happened in a single second. In an instant, the two concealed weapons plunged into his own chest.

Bam bam! The two concealed weapons instantly detonated, blowing up the short fatty's chest in a shower of flesh and blood. Fortunately, this short fatty was incredibly scared of death and had equipped himself with a set of rather overpowered defensive armor. But even so, the explosive power behind these weapons was akin to an all-out assault from a sky sage realm practitioner. As the short fatty's blood spurted into the air, he instantly lost the strength to keep fighting. He collapsed soullessly to the ground, his face ashen in defeat. A venomous glare flashed across his eyes. He was obviously uncomfortable with the way he had disgraced himself before spectating eyes.

"Haha, he got what he asked for, didn't he?"

"I'll accept his use of concealed weapons but he actually attacked while his opponent was still speaking. Despicable! We should all be mindful of this fatty."

"Get off the arena, you disgrace!!" Waves of condemning voices rose and fell from the cultivators beneath the arena. It was clear that everyone was against the use of such ambushing tactics.

"The winner of the first match is Pill King Zhen!"

## Chapter 926: Nine Consecutive Victories

There would always be opportunistic people and those who wished to become famous overnight amongst cultivators. As the arena lord of the first arena, Jiang Chen was of course the best shortcut for these people to become instantly famous. Therefore, he didn't lack challengers after the short fatty was forcefully swept off the arena. However, everyone quickly realized that their opportunistic thoughts were a massive joke. Two challengers in a row had gone up to the arena after the fatty, but none of them managed to hold out for more than ten bouts.

This truth finally wiped the challengers' eyes clean—Pill King Zhen didn't just possess outstanding pill dao. His martial dao was just as monstrous. He hadn't held out for six hours inside the formation because Emperor Peafowl was helping him cheat. He truly was that capable.

After accepting three challenges in a row, Jiang Chen didn't grow impatient and try to rush things. Instead, he chose to rest for a moment. According to the rules, it was completely within his power to accept more challenges and even finish ten consecutive victories in a row, allowing him to ascend to the next round. But considering that the Martial Pagoda battles had just begun and that this was just a stage in the New Star Rankings, he found no reason to fight that hard at all. Therefore, he decided to follow his own pace. Jiang Chen's steadiness won Emperor Peafowl's praise.

"He has the strength, but he doesn't try to rush things due to impatience or arrogance. I am growing more and more optimistic about this boy," Emperor Peafowl smiled leisurely.

Cloudsoar Monarch very much agreed with Emperor Peafowl's opinion. "There is absolutely no problem for this boy to enter the Genius Rankings. Perhaps he may even qualify to fight for the final Ranking of Young Lords. Unfortunately, his realm is ultimately a fatal flaw. If he encounters a genuine first-rate opponent later, with just the power of seventh level sage realm I fear that..." Right now, this was Cloudsoar Monarch's only worry.

Emperor Peafowl smiled, "He is the kind of genius who becomes stronger if his opponent is strong. You don't need to worry about this, Cloudsoar. All we need to do for a genius that appears only once in a millennium like him is to relax and enjoy the show."

The next day, Jiang Chen continued to accept more challenges. Since he was the arena lord, he was the target of all cultivators. Everyone in the world of martial dao wanted to fight against the strongest opponent. So even though Jiang Chen was very strong, it didn't stop his opponent from challenging him. Still, his performance on the second day was as steady as ever.

In fact, one might even say that his performance was so boring that one could fall asleep during the battle. It wasn't that he wasn't weak, but because he was so steady, it seemed like he would never put on a brilliant, gorgeous display. His performance disappointed all onlookers who were hoping for a fantastic show. They all knew that Pill King Zhen was extraordinarily talented in pill dao, but they also wanted to see him perform brilliantly in martial dao. However, the pill king was always able to take out his opponent without having to execute any unbelievable techniques. A lot of people couldn't even tell how his opponents lost.

"Simple, practical, and completely unobtrusive movements. This Pill King Zhen is such a difficult man to see through."

"This is just a stage in the New Star Rankings, so of course Pill King Zhen hasn't employed his full strength. If he displays his trump cards now, won't that mean that he'll be fully exposed?"

"That's true. A fight at this level is probably just a warm-up to him."

"Hehe, he's already accumulated six consecutive wins. There should be no problems for Pill King Zhen to take ten consecutive victories and move on to the next round, right?" No one particularly begrudged Pill King Zhen for moving on to the next round because he possessed true strength. This contest would be a joke if someone with genuine strength like him couldn't ascend to the next round.

Back at the Coiling Dragon Clan, Ji San had returned to an audience with the clan lord. Three young men were currently standing before the clan lord. Ji San aside, Jiang Chen had seen the other two men before. They were Liuxiang and Ji Zhongtang. These two young men and Ji San were said to be the most hopeful young geniuses to succeed the Coiling Dragon clan lord.

“Ole Third, your friend Pill King Zhen is truly an eye-opener. His pill dao talent is already unparalleled, but is his martial dao talent so monstrous too?” The clan lord had obviously been drawn to Jiang Chen’s performance.

Ji San answered smilingly, “He has hidden his strength well and even I was fooled by this fellow, Clan Lord. If I’m not mistaken, he seems to have set his sights pretty high this time around.”

The Coiling Dragon clan lord let out a soft sigh, “What an enviable genius he is.”

He wasn’t trying to be courteous. Right now the clan lord couldn’t even begin to describe how impressed he was at Jiang Chen’s astounding talents. He was one of those who knew about Jiang Chen’s true identity, and the fact that Jiang Chen had been born in a tiny place like the Myriad Domain only served to impress him even further.

However, Liuxiang was frowning slightly, “Clan Lord, this Pill King Zhen is a little too extraordinary, don’t you think? Maybe I’m overthinking this, but I can’t help but think that he’s a spy planted in our midst by an enemy power.”

Ji San was unhappy with this comment, “Don’t tell me you’re getting jealous, Liuxiang?”

Liuxiang said calmly, “You are overthinking this.”

“You’re the one who’s overthinking this. Or do you think that your insight is better than Emperor Peafowl’s?” Ji San snorted coldly. Jiang Chen was his brother, and he knew of Jiang Chen’s background. Naturally, he wouldn’t allow anyone to slander his brother. Not even another one of his fellow clansmen.

Liuxiang smiled calmly and turned the question to Ji Zhongtang, “What do you think, Brother Zhongtang?”

Ji Zhongtang’s voice was indifferent, “We cannot determine a definite answer for this, nor do we need to. Our emperor will be the one to decide if this Pill King Zhen is genuine or not.”

Ji San praised him, “You are truly open-minded, Zhongtang.”

The clan lord smiled leisurely, “There is no need for argument. As Zhongtang said, our emperor must have his own plans in mind, not to mention that we are talking about his martial dao talent and not his background. What do you guys think about his performance? You first, Zhongtang.”

Ji Zhongtang pondered for a moment before replying, “Pill King Zhen’s martial dao talent is beyond first rate. In my opinion, he has the qualifications to compete for the Ranking of Young Lords. However, he hasn’t showed any unusual performance in terms of martial dao foundation yet, so there is still much to be seen.”

The clan lord smiled and looked at Liuxiang. Liuxiang was holding a bit of a grudge right now, and he didn’t particularly like Pill King Zhen either. It was because he knew that Pill King Zhen was Ji San’s

brother. If Pill King Zhen's status were to grow higher in the future, then Ji San's status would subsequently rise as well. Therefore, this outcome was extremely disadvantageous to him. However, right now the clan lord had asked him a question personally. Naturally, Liuxiang didn't dare shoot off a careless comment. Even if his opinion was biased, he couldn't let it show too much.

"Liuxiang believes that Pill King Zhen's foundation is one of the more solid ones amongst the geniuses of Veluriyam Capital. However, his realm is obviously his weakness. Right now it hasn't posed a problem, but it's hard to tell if he can win the difficult battles that are to come later. As for the Ranking of Young Lords, I don't think that a seventh level sage realm cultivator has the right to challenge those young lords. Maybe he'll be qualified several decades later, but now? Now is too soon." Liuxiang thought that his commentary was already quite fair.

The clan lord chuckled and looked at Ji San. Naturally, there was a reason behind his decision to ask Ji San the question last.

"Clan Lord, Pill King Zhen is my brother, so it's only natural that I support him unconditionally. Right now, he hasn't displayed too many essences of martial dao because his opponents are too weak. Also, preparing for future battles might be a problem if he were to display too much of his real skills, so I think that his choice of tactics is correct. Most importantly, since when has this guy done something that he isn't confident of success in? He has always been the type of guy who brings many pleasant surprises against all odds and expectations. So this time around, I think he'll give Veluriyam Capital a pleasant surprise too." Surprisingly, Ji San didn't hide his favoritism at all. One did not avoid appointing the wise just because they are related, much less in a mere commentary.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord chuckled and nodded, "You all have your own opinions, and you all have good reasons to think that way. We will know if this Pill King Zhen is a dragon or a snake after this Veluriyam Pagoda gathering."

As a trusted aide of Emperor Peafowl, naturally the Coiling Dragon clan lord knew of some of Emperor Peafowl's intentions. He knew that Emperor Peafowl had the intentions of appointing Jiang Chen as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he were to be honest with himself, the Coiling Dragon clan lord was greatly looking forward to that day.

Competition was exceedingly fierce over the course of two days of battles. Arena lords aside, the rest of the candidates were also battling each other. After all, every candidate was required to fight a total of ninety-nine battles. There were still no surprises during the third day.

Almost all the challengers who had challenged Jiang Chen were defeated in the same way. This outcome made the challengers feel very depressed. Forget defeating the arena lord, it would appear that they couldn't even force something new from him. Up until this point, none of the nine defeated cultivators managed to hold out for more than ten bouts. No one managed to force out a real trump card from him either. The candidates of this arena quickly realized, to their dismay, that Pill King Zhen was absolutely unbeatable.

"Sigh, forget beating our arena lord, we can't even force out a new move from him!"

"A genius is a genius. A genius like him should have moved on with special privileges instead of participating in the New Star Rankings, don't you think?"

One must admit that Jiang Chen had won the general acknowledgement of this arena zone with his strength after a mere three days worth of consecutive battles. He had fought nine battles in three days and won all of them. Almost everyone thought that Pill King Zhen would move on to the next round with ten consecutive wins.

However, at a certain corner of the first arena zone, there was an inconspicuous cultivator observing Jiang Chen in the arena with remote eyes. It had been three days already. The only thing this cultivator did other than fighting his own battles was to observe Jiang Chen.

“Paohui, remember, this is your one and only shot.” A voice cut across the darkness like a blade to a cultivator.

Harsh killing intent fled across this cultivator’s eyes.

“Pill King Zhen... you better be him, or else I, Yan Hu, will be adding another wronged soul to my score.” The cultivator shot an indifferent stare at Jiang Chen.

#### Chapter 927: Three Images

As Jiang Chen stood on the arena after his ninth consecutive victory, he suddenly felt a piercing gaze shoot right through him. However, the person had already retracted his gaze before he could even react to it. He wanted to find the culprit, but there wasn’t any leads. It seems like I’ve summoned the true geniuses into motion after my ninth consecutive victory. Maybe this will make my following battles slightly more interesting?

Achieving nine consecutive victories in three days hadn’t been much of a challenge for Jiang Chen. After all, the top one thousand geniuses had all been separately placed in different arenas. Thus, it only made sense that he would meet slightly less capable geniuses as opponents. Even the strongest genius that he’d previously fought was only at the sixth level sage realm.

Sixth level sage realm cultivators were already no match for Jiang Chen when he was at the initial sage realm. What hope could they have of defeating him now that he was at the seventh level sage realm? There wasn’t even a need for him to use powerful martial methods when he was matched with lower level opponents. He could squash them on a whim.

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At a dark corner of Veluriyam Capital, inside the Eternal Celestial Capital’s other secret base. Three holy kings—Holy King Bei, Saint Holy King Ke, and Saint Holy King Mu were gathered here.

“Holy King Bei, is everything prepared?” Saint Holy King Mu asked.

Holy King Bei had a somber expression. “The preparations are done, but none of our people were placed in the first arena.”

“Hmph! Doesn’t matter unless that brat fails to enter the top two hundred Genius Rankings,” Saint Holy King Mu snorted.

Saint Holy King Ke nodded in agreement, “Yes. As long as he manages to enter the Genius Rankings, there will be a great possibility that he has to face our geniuses.”

However, Holy King Bei was filled with worry. “Noble holy kings, your subordinate has suffered greatly after the punishment from last time. I truly can’t predict whether your arrangements will eventually end in happiness or doom.”

By last time, he naturally meant that time when Emperor Peafowl had blocked their way while they were chasing Pill King Zhen and sealed off every single escape route. At that time, Emperor Peafowl had chosen not to kill them after he’d considered his own position. Holy King Bei genuinely felt that messing with Jiang Chen again was like playing with fire. He’d always been against such plans. Unfortunately, Saint Holy King Mu was determined to get his hands on Jiang Chen. He strongly suspected that Pill King Zhen was Jiang Chen, and was willing to pay any price to check if that was the case.

“Holy King Bei, stop entertaining groundless fears. We’ve done nothing wrong this time. There’s no rule to prevent foreign sects from joining the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering.”

Generally, great sects didn’t send people to attend something like the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. This was because geniuses were too precious to these sects. It would be a great loss if anything were to happen to those talents. However, these geniuses would occasionally attend these meetings of their own volition.

But this time, the Eternal Celestial Capital had dispatched three very extraordinary geniuses to attend the meeting. One of them was even ranked fifth amongst all youths in the Eternal Celestial Capital! As for the other two, while they weren’t amongst the top ten, they were definitely well-situated within the top twenty. With such a lineup, the organization was confident that they would succeed in assassinating Pill King Zhen.

“We didn’t make any contact with them this time around. No matter how powerful he is, there’s no way Emperor Peafowl will be able to connect them to us.” Saint Holy King Ke asserted.

The Eternal Celestial Capital had learnt their lesson. This time, they’d chosen to relay a message back to the Eternal Celestial Capital and ordered the sect to deploy three geniuses. They were to disguise themselves as wandering cultivators and join the Martial Pagoda battles. These three were also intelligent enough as to not reveal their true talent too early. In the first screening selection, they performed very mediocrally, only revealing enough capability to qualify.

This was just the New Star Rankings battles. With their abilities, they could definitely move to the next level with ease if they’d gone all out. Instead, they chose to suppress their abilities. Their one and only target was Jiang Chen. They couldn’t reveal their true identities before they met him in battle. They hadn’t met any of the holy kings ever since they’d left the Eternal Celestial Capital. Thus, it was imperative for them to keep a low profile.

This was also why Saint Holy King Mu and Saint Holy King Ke were so confident. They simply didn’t believe that Emperor Peafowl would be able to identify them. However, Holy King Bei had been stationed in Veluriyam Capital for a long time, so it was only natural for him fear the emperor. His intuition told him that Emperor Peafowl simply had a way of knowing things, despite everything they’d done to conceal themselves. However, this was the final decision made by the two saint holy kings. Holy King Bei had a lower rank than them, so he had no choice but to follow the orders from above.

“Brother Mu, you’ve been observing Pill King Zhen for a while now. How sure are you that the pill king and Jiang Chen are possibly the same person?” Saint Holy King Ke asked.

“In regards to my own intuition, I’m at least ninety percent certain. However, if you want an educated guess based off of our various leads, I’m only forty to fifty percent certain,” Saint Holy King Mu responded lowly.

“It doesn’t matter if they are the same person or not. This brat must be killed,” Saint Holy King Ke said coldly. “Life and death are hard to predict in the arena.” This was what they hoped would happen.

Killing Pill King Zhen in any other situation would carry a risk of them being discovered, regardless of how secretive they were. But in the arena, they could kill the pill king in front of everyone and not care about any repercussions. Life and death in the arena was up to fate.

Saint Holy King Mu displayed an ominous expression for a fraction of a second. “The plan might be perfect, but we should not underestimate the enemy. Pill King Zhen has already achieved nine consecutive victories, yet he hasn’t even shown any of his trump cards. In fact, nobody can even tell what the origins of his martial arts are. Young geniuses like him are very unnerving.”

“Hehe. His talent in pill dao might be because of a fortuitous encounter. But for martial dao, he won’t be able to soar through the heavens with just one bound even if he managed to have another fortuitous encounter! It’s only been three years since the shattering of the Myriad Domain. Even if his cultivation were to improve quickly, what can he achieve within three years?” Saint Holy King Ke asserted.

“Mm. Based on his abilities alone, any of the three that we’ve sent should be enough to squash him like a bug. However, this brat has encountered many fortuitous events. He will surely have a hidden trump card. We must keep testing the waters with actual combat. Since we have three people, it doesn’t matter if two of them are to fail. As long as we manage to get to the bottom of his abilities, we can subdue him!”

“Mm! Two will test the waters, while the other will finish him!”

However, Holy King Bei suddenly interrupted, “Now that we’ve set a base here, Ninesuns Sky Sect will surely follow suit. Maybe we should also consider how they might influence our plans?”

“Ninesuns Sky Sect?” Saint Holy King Mu was slightly taken aback. “Have they also guessed that Pill King Zhen and Jiang Chen are somehow connected?”

“Better safe than sorry.”

There’s nothing we can do to prevent Ninesuns Sky Sect’s influence now. We need only proceed according to our plans,” Saint Holy King Mu waved his hands. “

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Even though the Martial Pagoda battles had only just begun, Jiang Chen had no idea that numerous powers had already set their targets on him. Even though he’d won nine consecutive victories, he didn’t let success get to him. The New Star Rankings were only a warm-up. The true battle would begin at the Genius Rankings. However, the fight he was looking forward to the most was the Ranking of the Young



Lords. He was looking forward to sparring with the strongest geniuses in Veluriyam Capital. One who knows oneself and their enemies best shall never fall in battle.

At this very moment, Jiang Chen was cultivating the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. He'd already mastered the initial five transformations. The golden body of demons and gods had made his defenses impregnable. However, he was dissatisfied with the protection offered by this golden body at present.

The final four realms of the were the true essence of Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods, the formation of the images of demons and gods. There were a total of four levels comprising the formation of the image of demons and gods—the Preliminary, Intermediary, Advanced, and Heavenly Images. Of course, to form the image of demons and gods, one needed to reach the sky sage realm. Only at the sky sage realm could one practice the various divine arts.

Jiang Chen was now capable of forming three preliminary images. The first was the Redscaled Firelizard Image, which could also be simplified as the Giant Lizard Image. He had already assimilated the Redscaled Firelizard bloodline in the past. Now that he was at the sky sage realm, the Redscaled Firelizard Image that he'd formed naturally surpassed the strength of the spirit creature he'd met all those years ago.

Other than the Redscaled Firelizard, Jiang Chen could also form the Golden Cicada Image. The Golden Cicada Image had no offensive power, but it had a remarkable ability known as Cicada's Disappearance, which could confuse the enemy. Moreover, the Golden Cicada Image conferred immunity from any lightning and poison attacks.

Aside from the Giant Lizard and Golden Cicada Image, there was also the True Dragon Image, which was the most powerful image of all three and in turn, also the most difficult to form. Jiang Chen had assimilated the true dragon bloodline, which meant that he also possessed the dragon clan's bloodline. Because of this, the difficulty involved in forming the image was also greatly reduced. But even so, he still had to expend a great deal of energy. The True Dragon Image required excessive energy and was difficult to conjure, but in exchange, it was incredibly powerful. Conjuring the True Dragon Image was almost like summoning a true dragon. Its aura was capable of making all beasts bow in its wake.

"It's a pity that the Golden Body of Demons and Gods can only form images from bloodlines. This art is restricted by its bloodline requirement. It would be almost impossible to form a image without the possession of a bloodline." Of course, Jiang Chen was already quite formidable for possessing three different images. In the world of martial dao, some wouldn't even cross paths with a single bloodline in their lifetime. Yet within a short time, he'd managed to acquire three bloodlines. His luck was truly heaven-defying.

"It's unfortunate that I can only form preliminary images since I am only at the sky sage realm. When I enter the emperor realm, I will be able to form an intermediate image. I will then be able to flatten all enemies at the same level without breaking a sweat."

A divine art like the Hundred Transformation of Demons and Gods was truly one of a kind. One was able to gain invincibility, yet also possess many variations of attacks. It was considered an incredible ability even in the heavenly planes. Jiang Chen consolidated the three images and entered a state of oblivion.

With the passing of the night came the fourth day of battle. According to the rules, with just one more win, he would have achieved ten consecutive victories and would thereafter be promoted to the New Star Rankings. He was going to be directly promoted regardless of his score from then onwards. Naturally, Jiang Chen wouldn't be satisfied with just ten consecutive victories. Ten consecutive victories might guarantee him a promotion, but it would do nothing to help his placement in the New Star Rankings. He didn't want to have a miserly rank.

"The arena lord is now seeking challengers! Who wishes to be the first to challenge the arena lord today?" The host's soulful voice reverberated through all corners of the arena. After witnessing his battles for three consecutive days, everybody now understood just how powerful the arena lord was. Thus, it was only natural that they were no longer as enthusiastic as they had been three days ago.

"Let me!" A loud voice suddenly thundered through the crowd.

The voice reverberated throughout the arena like thunder and immediately captured everyone's attention.

#### Chapter 928: A Miraculously Powerful Opponent

The challenger was an enormous brute, as buff as a ferocious lion. His golden mane gave off an aura of power and glory. He had popped out of nowhere, overwhelming the people around him.

"Just where did this brute come from?"

"He's laid low all this time. Why does he suddenly want to flaunt himself?" The candidates of the first group began to heatedly discuss the situation when they saw the newcomer leap onto the arena. Clearly, everyone could tell from the imposing manner of this challenger that he was not the typical contender. Even Jiang Chen was caught slightly off guard when the brute hurtled into the arena from below. His incredible intuition as a cultivator prickled as a hidden wave of menace swept over him.

Ever since Jiang Chen had embarked on his martial journey, his instincts had always been very powerful. This brute might look impulsive, but if he could cause Jiang Chen to feel threatened, he was definitely going to be an extraordinary opponent.

"Who'd have thought that there were indeed people who'd concealed their true power?" Jiang Chen swept his gaze over the challenger's figure. He was very sure of the fact that the new challenger must have hidden his potential during the formation challenge. With his power and potential, there was no way he wouldn't be in the top thousand. Jiang Chen even had a feeling that he could possibly be in the top three.

At that moment, a shiver ran down Jiang Chen's spine. His expression remained impassive, but he silently put up his guard. This brute had not hesitated to hide his potential and had chosen to issue his challenge at this time. This was definitely not a series of coincidences.

"Pill King Zhen, let me challenge you!" There was an august manner with which the brute spoke. His voice was as deep as the chimes of a grand bell.

Jiang Chen kept his gaze indifferent, "And who might you be, sir?"

The man laughed disparagingly, "There's no need for questions. I only wish for a battle. A battle disregarding life and death, where we fight to our hearts' desire."

Disregarding life and death? Generally, this selection's arena might occasionally result in fatalities, but everyone usually restrained themselves and took care to avoid deaths whenever it was possible. Although there were no rules that prohibited killing, no one would deliberately aim to murder another candidate.

"What, you too scared to accept the challenge?" The brute bellowed in laughter. As he stepped closer, power suddenly flared from his body. A wave of imposing pressure surged outwards, like a male lion who was about to break his iron tether and subsequently proceed to ferociously devour the people around him. Every movement that this person took along with his head of wild hair completely complemented his aura, exuding an omnidirectional intimidating feeling.

This flare of power instantly shot towards Jiang Chen like an earth-shattering force. Every spectator watching from below the arena immediately sucked in a breath of cold air. Where had this perverse power come from? This person's potential obviously far surpassed that of the previous nine challengers. In fact, the combined power of those nine people might not even reach half of this brute's.

In that moment, the arena was so silent that you could hear a pin drop. It was as though everyone had been suffocated into silence by the brute's aura. Jiang Chen abruptly laughed, "Are you hoping to suppress me with your aura and win without having to fight?"

That brute replied arrogantly, "So what if I am? I don't care if you're the arena lord. Only if you can survive this next strike will you be qualified to accept my challenge!"

His tone was extremely violent, to the extent that he appeared like a tyrant. An unruffled smile appeared on Jiang Chen's lips. "What a clumsy mental attack. You probably think your power is quite intimidating. But to me, you're just a wimpy little brat throwing a loud tantrum."

Wimpy little brat? When the challenger heard this, he merely laughed and nodded instead of growing angry. "Such clever eloquence. Then taste my attack now... oooooow.... oooooow...."

That brute's voice suddenly exploded like a crack of thunder. He had unexpectedly dragged out the last word he'd uttered, "now", shaking the air like the howl of a tiger or the wail of a legendary beast. In that instant, his voice formed a massive soundwave that crashed violently towards Jiang Chen like a tsunami.

The sky immediately turned dark as the light from the sun and moon was completely obscured. Even the spectators below paled drastically while activating their defensive abilities and covering their ears, not to mention the one in the arena. However, this soundwave was clearly not an ordinary strike. It attacked not only one's hearing, but also one's consciousness. This kind of sensation felt as if numerous wild beasts were pouncing on one's consciousness in a flurry of teeth and claws, ready to destroy one's mind at any time. The cultivators watching below weakened successively as they retreated one after another. At the same time, they sealed their consciousness to defend against the soundwave's assault. Luckily, this sound wave was not directed towards them; the brunt of it was aimed at Pill King Zhen.

But even so, the soundwave still battered against them violently. If this was the case, wasn't Pill King Zhen facing an imminent crisis akin to a small sailboat attempting to stay afloat amidst powerful ocean waves? Jiang Chen's brows twitched as a look of astonishment entered his eyes. Obviously, no ordinary

cultivator could refine the soundwaves of their voice to this extent. He thought furiously and finally decided that this person was definitely specifically targeting him.

Whose lackey is this? Some other disciple of Veluriyam Capital's emperors? Or maybe even someone from the Ninesuns Sky Sect or the Eternal Celestial Capital? Various possibilities flashed across Jiang Chen's mind. He twisted his body and activated his Golden Body of Demons and Gods, immediately shrouding himself in ten rays of golden light. At the same time, he swirled his sleeves around himself. His Featherflight Mirror swayed in the air, turning the space around him into a protective barrier. The soundwaves pressed down upon him like a tidal wave that was being continuously dissipated under the brilliant rays reflected from the Featherflight Mirror.

The strength of the sound waves lay in their focus. It lay in their sharpness, in the ferocity of their combined power. Once they were split apart, this kind of soundwave would be no different from an ordinary aerial attack. Jiang Chen suddenly burst into loud laughter. Instead of retreating, he stepped forward boldly, "Your insignificant attack stirred up quite an enjoyable breeze, didn't it?"

What? Upon seeing this, the challenger widened his eyes. Disbelief shone from their depths.

The spectators below the arena were all dazed with shock. They could sense how fierce the attack was even as pure bystanders. Yet Pill King Zhen, who had stood in the eye of the storm, had withstood it without getting so much as a scratch on him? Moreover, he had stepped forward instead of retreating?

"You... you actually deflected my soundwave attack, Thunderous Lion Roar?" The brute also seemed to be slightly shocked. However, he immediately calmed himself and smiled, "I knew it. You possess a treasure that can greatly reduce the speed of any attack. It seems that compared to you, I have no advantage in terms of speed."

Jiang Chen's thoughts chilled. He had concealed the use of his Featherflight Mirror very ingeniously. From the perspective of outsiders, they would not have seen it at all. They would only have thought that he had used some particular method or special ability. But this brute had actually seen through him with just a glance? Nonetheless, Jiang Chen didn't fall for his tricks. Who knew if the brute could be deliberately trying to bait him? Naturally, he would not admit to possessing the Featherflight Mirror so easily. He immediately sneered, "Stop making excuses for your incompetence."

That brute's smile disappeared, "Incompetence. Brat, that was just the appetizer. Don't be so full of yourself this early on. Even if you have some kind of speed-reducing treasure, do you think that I can only rely on my speed to defeat you??" As the brute spoke, he flexed his palms. His hands abruptly transformed into a pair of sharp claws, similar to that of a male lion. "Brat, my strength lies in close combat!"

He sprinted towards Jiang Chen the moment he said that. There was not a trace of deception in his movements as he dashed straight at Jiang Chen. From his pose, he was obviously planning to engage in a head-to-head fight. This brute's power was indeed terrifying. With every pump of his legs, it seemed as though an enormous mountain was crashing forward. Moreover, that pair of brightly glinting, keen claws was filled with a strong thirst for blood. Clearly, this fellow was definitely a bloodthirsty berserker. Nonetheless, Jiang Chen was truly not afraid of anyone in close combat. Especially after he had perfected the Golden Body of Demons and Gods, he had never doubted his own close combat ability.

Back at the Myriad Grand Ceremony, when he had fought tooth and nail with Xiang Qin of the Sacred Elephant Clan, he had given Xiang Sheng such a beatdown that the latter had no choice but to capitulate. This terrifying opponent today was obviously more powerful than Xiang Sheng, and not just by a little bit. But the Jiang Chen of today was also a different person compared to the Jiang Chen of the past. Back then, he had been a mere mortal sage realm cultivator, whereas presently, he had already advanced to the sky sage realm.

Golden light poured forth as Jiang Chen brandished his fists. His movements were as plain as day as he collided directly with those showy, sharp claws.

Bam! In that moment, the air seemed to have stopped flowing. The brute's movements slowed. The deep crevices beneath his feet clearly indicated how powerful his earlier attack had been. However, at this moment, he actually stopped. Indeed, it wasn't just him. Jiang Chen had also stopped.

Time seemed to have frozen. In the next heated instant, the two's bodies shot away from each other. The brute stumbled ten steps back. Jiang Chen also did the same before he steadied himself. Hot blood frothed within their bodies. Only after breathing heavily could they suppress the rush of blood in their veins.

Just now, that straightforward collision had almost caused Jiang Chen to spit out blood. However, it seemed that his opponent had not gotten off lightly either. His face alternated between shades of white and red before it finally stabilized.

The brute sighed lightly. A look of astonishment made its way onto his face as he scrutinized Jiang Chen briefly. Evidently, he had never thought that someone would dare to fight him head-on. What's more was that they had fought to a standstill! He also knew that if he had continued his assault just now, he would definitely have completely overwhelmed his opponent. However, his inner energy and blood had surged within him to the extent that he had no way to focus on a follow-up attack. By the time his inner energy had calmed down, so had his opponent's.

They were still even at this point.

Jiang Chen was equally appalled. He knew better than anyone just how powerful his Golden Body of Demons and Gods was. Who would have thought that a direct hit had given him no advantage at all? On top of that, the terrifying strength of his opponent was absolutely on par with a genius disciple from any of the first-rate sects. He might even surpass that Cao Jin in terms of raw power. Back when he had killed Cao Jin, Jiang Chen had made use of the terrain and all kinds of lucky coincidences. Moreover, he had called on Long Xiaoxuan for help. But today in this arena, he obviously stood on equal ground with his opponent. Alarm bells clanged loudly in Jiang Chen's mind.

#### Chapter 929: An Eye for an Eye

Jiang Chen's battle with this mysterious brute had attracted a lot of attention. The intensity of their fight had exceeded everyone's expectations. Originally, they'd thought that Pill King Zhen would easily achieve a streak of ten victories. There could be no doubt about it. Who would have thought that such a mysterious brute would pop up out of nowhere? This brute's imposing manner and his cultivation skills had all appeared out of the blue. As the saying went, "While the connoisseur recognizes the artistry of the fight, the layman simply enjoys the show."

From the moment he'd appeared, this challenger's aura had been completely different from that of other candidates. As of now, his combat ability had also caused the people around him to suck in a breath of cold air. As Cloudsoar Monarch watched this bitter fight, he was immediately at a loss for words. "Your Majesty, just where did this prodigious cultivator come from?"

Emperor Peafowl was watching the fight with a meaningful gaze. He also appeared to be deep in thought. "Every movement of this cultivator has the bearing of a disciple from a large sect. Although he had been concealing his strength all along and although he simply appears to be displaying boorish violence, there is actually a rhyme and reason to his every action. Everything he has done so far has been meticulously calculated. I believe he was sent here to directly target Pill King Zhen."

"Oh?" Cloudsoar Monarch was a little shocked. "Directly target Pill King Zhen? You don't mean..."

Emperor Peafowl's tone was grave, "Pill King Zhen has been too carefree up until now. This will be a good test for him. If he can clear this stage, there will be hope for him to make it onto the Ranking of Young Lords."

"This stage is that difficult?"

"Extremely so. His opponent presents a thornier problem than what you might expect," Emperor Peafowl sighed lightly.

Cloudsoar Monarch could also see that this opponent was not an easy one to handle, but he had not thought that it would be as bad as his liege had described. He couldn't help but inspect the challenger a little more closely.

On the stage.

The brute howled at the sky. His voice crescendoed like a tidal wave, as though it was heralding the onset of an imminent thunderstorm. In that moment, the entire stage was enveloped by a heavy pressure. Numerous dark clouds weighed down upon the arena. One by one the strands of the challenger's wild mane stood up like copper needles.

"Brat, again!" With a ferocious roar, his powerful legs pushed forwards as he hurtled towards Jiang Chen with heavy footsteps. He twisted his body like a high-speed spinning top. His immense arms swung in a circle and swept towards Jiang Chen.

"Fine by me!" Jiang Chen licked his lips, a cruel smile appearing on his face. It had been a long time since he had been able to let loose so carefreely against an opponent. While his Golden Body of Demons and Gods took effect, his fists pounded again and again on his opponent like an unrelenting downpour.

Their shadows collided rapidly, growing even faster and wilder as the fight dragged on. In the end, their figures blended together into two streaks of lightning-fast movement. It was impossible to tell which one was Pill King Zhen and which one was the challenger.

Bambambam! The sounds of battle raged around them, burning the space surrounding them with pulses of ear-splitting whistles. This was how intense their battle was.

“Who’d have thought that the elegant and scholarly Pill King Zhen would be this strong at hand-to-hand combat. He’s actually going toe-to-toe with a genius who obviously trained specifically in martial arts. Amazing!”

“Hehe, aren’t you too naive? Previously when Pill King Zhen was the judge for the Pill Pagoda battles, he taught everyone how to refine a type of strengthening pill. Do you know what this means?”

“What?”

“You still don’t get it? It means that Pill King Zhen is also an expert in physical arts. Otherwise, why would he be so interested in body-strengthening pills?”

Jiang Chen had previously provided the recipe for the Hundredfold Marrow-Cleanse Pill for free. This had created quite a stir. Thereafter, everyone had begun guessing at his background. Currently, every candidate within thirty meters of the stage had already retreated out of the fight’s range. The intensity of the battle raging on stage had spread in all directions, causing the weaker cultivators to feel a little uncomfortable.

“Pill King Zhen, I never imagined that you’d be this talented at close combat. This is unexpected. I admit that you’re an interesting opponent. But if this is the limit of your abilities, then prepare to perish before what’s coming next!” The brute brandished his steel-lined hands to the extreme. He emanated a dominating aura, sometimes resembling the might of ten thousand stampeding horses, other times embodying the destructive capability of a catastrophic landslide as he roared his intent at Jiang Chen.

If Jiang Chen’s consciousness had not been resolute or if his willpower had not been sufficient, he would have quailed and his spirit would have been shattered under the sheer pressure exerted by his opponent. Under the overwhelming force of his lion’s roar, a normal cultivator would’ve been done for if they’d showed even the slightest crack in their resolve. However, he wasn’t even slightly moved by this display. It wasn’t as though he’d never been in a more ferocious, more bloodthirsty situation than this. Naturally, he would not be scared of his opponent’s mere aura. Jiang Chen sneered thinly, “If the winner of this competition was determined by how big you can talk, you’d be the uncontested number one.”

How would he be unaware of his opponent’s psychological tricks?

“Hah, little brat, why don’t you eat three more punches?” The brute viciously clawed at the air. As his fingers sliced through the air, arcs of electricity gathered at their tips and then shot directly at Jiang Chen like crackling lightning,

“Lightning attribute?” When Jiang Chen saw the brute’s lightning-coated fists, he knew that the incoming punch would be no ordinary attack. He silently cursed at the challenger’s craftiness. His opponent’s attacks may look straightforward, but in reality, the rhythm of the battle had already shifted. Aside from raw power, the punch was also suffused with thunder and lightning. This attribute may not look too conspicuous on its own, but once it entered his body, it would immediately paralyze him from head to toe.

Although he might only be briefly immobilized, on a battlefield even a second of carelessness would mean the difference between life and death. Jiang Chen smirked, completely unfazed. Not only did he

refuse to activate any techniques, he charged straight at his opponent, leaping fearlessly towards that fully-charged fist.

A second away from impact, he suddenly twisted his body to the side. The brute's enhanced punch slammed heavily into his shoulder. At the same time, Jiang Chen brutally rammed his own fist into his opponent's chest!

Bam bam! Both of them had taken each other's punch. The challenger's body curled backwards. An almost imperceptible smile appeared on the corner of his lips. The next moment, his stomach contorted before he vomited out a spurt of fresh blood.

Jiang Chen's punch had not been inferior to the power of an emperor realm cultivator either. Even with the brute's martial training and his set of high-grade protective armor, he had still been pummeled to the point of coughing up blood. However, silent glee bubbled up within the brute's heart. Evidently, he had anticipated this punch. His goal had been to exchange blows with his opponent. His body suddenly stopped as the brute screeched to a halt. His gaze was deadly as he glared at Jiang Chen and bared his teeth into a smile, "Brat, you're courting death."

Jiang Chen stood his ground as though he had been completely frozen. He didn't move a muscle. A look of astonishment was plastered on his face, as if he had been shocked to a standstill. The brute roared with laughter, aware that his opponent had been momentarily immobilized by his lightning-covered punch. Since he knew this, the brute would naturally take advantage of the moment. With a curl of his fingers, an enormous spear appeared in his hands. The tip of the spear shot towards Jiang Chen's jugular, akin to a venomous cobra striking from the darkness of its lair.

A fatal strike! The spear shot forth like a pouncing dragon, reaching Jiang Chen in the blink of an eye. Jiang Chen remained motionless. The brute's lips curled into a triumphant grin. He knew that if this spear collided, even if his opponent was an emperor realm cultivator, his death would still be unavoidable.

"Ah!"

"How did this happen?"

"In the end, it was Pill King Zhen who underestimated his enemy."

However, in the second that followed, the brute's line of vision suddenly became unfocused. He abruptly felt as though his spear was coming to a stop. His opponent, whose death he'd thought was certain, blurred into motion again.

This is bad! A hint of alarm entered the depths of the brute's eyes.

"Lightning attribute? Too bad, that's not enough," a cold voice whispered into the brute's ear. The next instant, another powerful punch smashed into his stomach.

Bam! This punch was even more powerful than the previous one. It battered against his stomach without the slightest warning. Previously, he had deliberately eaten Jiang Chen's punch and had been mentally prepared to activate his defenses. Moreover, the impact of his own punch had canceled out his opponent's power to a certain extent. Therefore, although that punch had hurt him to the extent that he spat out blood, he had not suffered any severe injuries. But with this punch, another heavy impact



crashed into the area where he'd been injured. The formidable true origin energy coating his opponent's fist coursed past his defenses, directly striking his most vital organ, his heart. The brute was scared witless as he instinctively put up his defenses to guard against this unforeseen punch.

Wah! The brute coughed up several mouthfuls of blood. His complexion had instantly paled to a sickly white. But even so, he didn't dare let down his guard. His hands were still curled tightly around his spear. He affixed his gaze at Jiang Chen, ignoring the wounds that covered his body. Obviously, he was more afraid of his opponent's follow-up attacks than his current injuries.

When Jiang Chen saw his opponent maintain his battle stance in spite of his condition, he knew that any subsequent attacks would be unable to bypass the latter's defenses. He immediately restrained his steps and gazed meaningfully at the brute, "How did that taste?"

The brute spat viciously on the ground. "Brat, you damn cheat!"

Jiang Chen replied indifferently, "And you think your punch was so noble? You call me a cheat but I'm just following your rhythm and using a few tricks of my own, that's all."

Previously, Jiang Chen had seen his opponent suffuse his fist with electricity and instantly predicted the latter's actions. He had only seized the opportunity to trick his opponent into thinking that he had been momentarily immobilized by the lightning attribute so that the latter would let down his guard and launch an impulsive attack. It was because of this that he had the chance to land a heavy blow when his opponent was least expecting it. After Jiang Chen had refined the Golden Cicada Bloodline, not even a hundred poisons could invade his system nor could a thousand weapons injure him. He would remain unfazed even in the face of a torrential thunderstorm.

That brute's stomach twinged with pain. He knew that that he had been too careless this time. Not only had he failed to take down his opponent, he had suffered quite a heavy injury. However, this only served to send another rush of hot blood through his veins. He bared his teeth into a grin. His gaze turned frigid as he said, "Brat, you've successfully roused my ire. Your cultivation efforts have not been a total waste. Next, I'll use all of my power to send you on a trip to the underworld!"

Every bone on the brute's body crackled and popped like hot oil in a pan. It was as if every bone and tendon in his body were simultaneously resonating with one another.

#### Chapter 930: Image Versus Image

Jiang Chen wasn't sure what his opponent was thinking, but he was sure that the other was going to use a trump card, considering that he had just suffered a couple of losses in a row. This brute must have beef with me considering how hostile he is. But no matter what background he has or what power he hails from, he is my opponent and enemy as long as he is standing in this arena. If he wants me dead, then I won't let him live either!

The brute waved his arms and instantly ripped through the clothes on his upper body. The muscles on his torso looked incredibly powerful and impactful, almost as if they had been smelt by copper and forged by iron.

Jiang Chen snorted derisively at the display. This was a fight between experts and not a brawl in a tavern. Taking off one's clothes and showing off one's muscles in a battle like this was pointless.

However, he didn't dare let down his guard. He was sure that his opponent hadn't made such a bizarre action just to flex his muscles flauntingly.

As expected, the brute made multiple hand seals and conjured many strange runes from his palm. He then slapped them into his muscles repeatedly. When he was done, strange runes slowly surfaced on every part of his body. They looked like numerous tadpoles swimming across his body. When these runes reached their rightful places, they abruptly united to form an entire entity. A fierce lion suddenly appeared from the brute's upper torso. The lion sat with its head held high and peered disdainfully at everything before it. It looked incredibly formidable.

Jiang Chen paid attention to the brute's every move. For some reason, the scene before him felt very familiar.

"Totem! This is the power of totems," Jiang Chen immediately recalled the time he had fought against Xiang Tai at the Myriad Grand Ceremony. One could say that his current opponent's technique was so similar to Xiang Tai's that almost no difference could be spotted. His opponent was just an enhanced version of Xiang Tai. Back when Jiang Chen had fought against Xiang Tai, the physical brawl had only lasted for a brief moment before they had switched to another way of competing. They hadn't fought each other to the bitter end. His current opponent, on the other hand, obviously had a different idea in mind.

Jiang Chen knew a little about the power of totems. It was a truly astounding power that boosted a cultivator's combat strength massively once obtained and summoned. Even scarier was a totem's ability to create images of greater power. There weren't many factions that wielded the power of totems on the Divine Abyss Continent, but those who did were normally stronger than their peers. Jiang Chen stood alert, ready, and full of anticipation. He too wanted to know just how mighty this so-called power of totems was.

Emperor Peafowl also frowned when he saw this, "The power of totems? This young man can actually summon the power of totems! He can't possibly be a wandering cultivator."

"Your Majesty, just what is his background?"

"The legacy of totems has always been quite secretive, and a lot of great sects possess hidden totem inheritances. Therefore, it is very difficult to distinguish a cultivator's background from their display of totems alone. However, I am sure that this young man is a youth of a great sect or a great power. Moreover, Pill King Zhen is definitely his target."

Cloudsoar Monarch frowned, "Should we expose him then?"

"Expose him? How will you expose him without actual evidence? Plus, this fight is a rare opportunity for Pill King Zhen. If he misses this opportunity to temper his strength, he is certain to hold a grudge against you and me," Emperor Peafowl said leisurely.

Cloudsoar Monarch looked surprised, "But Your Majesty, this brute should be at least a peak sage realm cultivator. With the power of totems on his side, he is absolutely capable of holding his own against normal emperor realm experts."

“Just watch. Pill King Zhen has always been good at creating miracles. Perhaps this will be the battle where he becomes famous for his martial dao?” Emperor Peafowl’s smile was as calm as ever.

The rest of the spectators weren’t as collected as Emperor Peafowl, however. On the Coiling Dragon Clan side, the clan lord said worriedly, “Pill King Zhen may be in trouble this time.”

After a moment’s thought, young master Ji San finally recalled what the brute’s strange actions meant and blurted out, “Is that the power of totems?”

The clan lord nodded, “The power of totems... just who is this brute? Is he someone from Pillfire City? Are they trying to kill Pill King Zhen because they hate him to the bone for his victory over the Longevity Pill?”

Ji San muttered angrily, “Dammit, fame truly has its price!”

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As the brute continued to call upon the power of totems, his aura swiftly grew stronger and stronger. Jiang Chen was also fixated on the brute and gathered his own strength in secret.

“Kid, you can die now that you’ve forced me to use my power!” The brute let out a sinister laugh before he flexed his towering body. The man actually grew bigger and taller again. In the next moment, the brute grabbed his spear with both hands, stepped forwards, and stabbed it at Jiang Chen’s chest with the might of an ancient demon god.

The benefits of the power of totems were obvious once executed. It literally doubled the brute’s aura and granted him immense power. The air gathered at the tip of his spear and transformed into the pale shadow of a male lion in an instant. It pounced towards Jiang Chen with brandished claws and teeth, appearing as formidable as an ancient god or demon. It could likely tear a defenseless mountain to pieces instantly.

Jiang Chen didn’t hesitate. Instead of using weapons, he deployed the Golden Light of Demons and Gods to its utmost and used the power of his blood at the same time, swiftly creating his own image. He punched out with both fists, and the image of a giant lizard howled and slammed into the male lion without any fear or show of weakness.

“What?!” The scene stunned every onlooker present. The brute’s strength had at minimum doubled after he’d activated the power of totems and created an image. Everyone thought that Pill King Zhen was down on his last legs. But contrary to expectations, Pill King Zhen had actually created an image of his own! Although his image didn’t contain any power of totems, it was powered by Pill King Zhen’s bloodline. Not all images were totem images. The Golden Light of Demons and Gods that Jiang Chen cultivated could conjure images as well.

The surprising clash of images made the battle incredibly entertaining. There was no doubt that a melee battle was completely incomparable to a battle of images. Although the former was fairly entertaining in its own right, it wasn’t nearly as pretty as a battle of images. A battle where both parties were blasting each other with ostentatious attacks made the fight incredibly exciting.

Rumble! Although the giant lizard was bigger than the male lion, it was still ultimately torn apart. Even so, the giant lizard’s ramming had managed to stun the male lion a little and cause it to grow fainter and

more blurry. Jiang Chen didn't have time to care about the clash of images at the moment, however. The enemy's deadly spear had come within three meters of him as the images clashed. He grabbed at the air and summoned a large cauldron right in front of him.

The big man felt like he was stabbing a mountain when he hit the big cauldron. An astounding burst of light and a horrific sound of clashing metals rippled out from the point of contact.

"Mm?" The brute obviously didn't expect Jiang Chen to take a defensive stance instead of fighting him head on.

Furthermore, the cauldron looked a little familiar for some reason. Suddenly, the brute recalled something and asked agitatedly, "Where did you get this cauldron from?"

Jiang Chen smiled coldly, "Are you always this chatty in arena battles?"

He had gotten this cauldron from Lu Shinan, and Lu Shinan was a cultivator who deserved worse than death for submitting to the demon race. Jiang Chen felt no remorse about robbing his possession. Before this, he already thought that this cauldron's defensive power was quite impressive. It didn't disappoint him after he used it to block the spear strike.

The brute abruptly turned angry. "You show off your ill-gotten goods before me? I'll destroy you with the power of my totem!"

He was in an obvious rage as he created another three images even at the cost of expending his energy. The formidable-looking images attacked Jiang Chen from the top, middle, and bottom. It was as if the power of an apocalypse was rushing towards Jiang Chen.

"Remember not to be so arrogant the next time you reincarnate, kid!" The brute said bitterly. It was obvious that he hated Jiang Chen to the bone.

Jiang Chen realized that the three male lion images were incredibly dangerous, and they had almost cut off all of his escape routes. If he chose to avoid the attack or defend passively, he would absolutely be torn to shreds and die a horrible death.

Jiang Chen knew that he had no other choice during that split second of thought. This male lion image was not just any image. It was an image that was fused with the willpower of a totem, and it possessed the instinctive warlike behavior and bloodthirst of a real male lion.

"Come." Suddenly, Jiang Chen urged his bloodline into resurgence once more with a solemn look on his face. He awakened all of the energy in his body and made a series of hand seals with incredible speed, preparing himself for the ultimate gamble.

"With demons and gods as the foundation and inner energy as the guide, I summon my image to shatter a myriad laws!" Jiang Chen burnt his inner energy to the max as he chanted. The power in his blood detected the true essence of martial dao in that fleeting second. It was completed in the moment that followed. Hanging above Jiang Chen's head was an image created from his bloodline and inner energy. It rose into the air behind Jiang Chen.

"What... what is that?"

"It's a dragon!"

“It really is a dragon! Oh heavens, what am I seeing?”

“This Pill King Zhen can create an image of a true dragon. This is too scary. Does Pill King Zhen have the power of totems too? A dragon’s totem no less?”

“Impossible, Pill King Zhen doesn’t have the aura of totems on him. His image probably comes from some other powerful ability, one that can create a true dragon image no less.”

“Amazing, this is too amazing! Pill King Zhen is literally as omnipotent as people say.”

For a time, every spectator was speechless with shock. A true dragon was an existence that lived in legends. Most importantly, Pill King Zhen’s true dragon image was incredibly realistic. They could sense a powerful aura and the accompanying willpower of a true dragon from it.

The moment the true dragon image appeared, the three male lion images immediately let out plaintive whines, like a commoner seeing a king. Their wills were completely shattered by its appearance. Forget the spectators beneath the arena, even the great emperors inside the Veluriyam Pagoda were stunned to the core. It was obvious that the true dragon image had caused the battle to become unpredictable even to them!