

## Three Realms 941

### Chapter 941: There is Always a Better

The audience felt inexplicably shocked when they realized that Pill King Zhen was only at the seventh level sage realm. He was much too formidable when compared to other cultivators of the same level! Seventh level sage realm cultivators that hadn't been eliminated yet were far and few in between at this stage of the ranking list battles. In fact, Pill King Zhen might possibly be the only one left.

Even though Ji Zhongtang's sword technique was fierce and aggressive, it was evident that it wasn't something beyond the pill king's abilities to handle. It didn't seem like Ji Zhongtang had any advantage over the pill king at all. Ji Zhongtang was fated to lose if this were to continue because the pill king wasn't only adept at the sword. Ji Zhongtang didn't seem to have considered all of this; he was completely immersed in his own rhythm. He performed the Coiling Dragon Sword Technique to such an extent that his every move swept up powerful gales that moved the clouds. It was ferocious and powerful, and it seemed as if it would consume all of heaven and earth. The arena was suddenly filled with sword aura that was running amok. It was as though countless ancient dragons were soaring through the arena.

"War of Wild Dragons!" growled Ji Zhongtang. He grabbed his sword with his two hands and changed into another stance, emitting a monstrous aura. He had immersed himself fully into this sword stance.

"Good move!" Jiang Chen laughed heartily when he saw Ji Zhongtang charge towards him with his sword. He recited an incantation and activated his own sword technique's hand seals, "Qi is the origin of the gods, and gods the product of qi. The metallic might of the west originates from the lungs. Using the strength of the gods, I shall move the heavens!"

Divine Five Thunder Sword Technique, strike! Since Jiang Chen possessed the magnetic golden mountain, he didn't lack the power of metal. He summoned the metallic might of the west, and embedded it into his current attack. A formidable sword arc shot towards Ji Zhongtang's War of Wild Dragons. It was evident that Jiang Chen wanted to make this a battle between sword techniques, as he hadn't even wasted a single movement. Only the brave shall be victorious in a war between two enemies! Both their swords were immovable and unwavering. Neither were willing to step aside, and neither were willing to lose its keenness.

Clang!

The two sharp edges struck each other with extreme force. The formidable cutting power sliced numerous holes in the void, making ghastly cutting sounds in the air as gales of wind battered the arena. All of a sudden, numerous sword marks appeared on the floor and on the pillars of the arena. Even though the arena was fortified by a powerful formation, the sword energy was so intense that the arena was soon riddled with cuts and slices.

Pfft pfft pfft! Sword aura was flying everywhere, and Jiang Chen and Ji Zhongtang's clothes were shredded. Strands of cloth flew everywhere like butterflies in the wind. However, Jiang Chen faced the gusts of wind head on, as if he were an immovable mountain. In fact, he had taken a few steps forward instead of retreating. The Golden Body of Demons and Gods engulfed all of the sword aura flying at him.

Ji Zhongtang wasn't a cultivator of the Golden Body of Demons and Gods. He could only sweep his sleeves around to deflect the violent sword aura. It wasn't long before one could easily tell who had the upper hand. He looked towards Jiang Chen, only to find that his opponent was looking back at him with a faint smile on his face. It was painfully obvious that Jiang Chen was already prepared to make his next move. Unfortunately, Ji Zhongtang was still busy deflecting sword aura from the previous clash. There was no question that Ji Zhongtang had lost. He was proud, but he wasn't reckless nor was he a sore loser. Ji Zhongtang sighed softly after regaining his composure.

"Pill King Zheng, I never thought that you were so formidable in sword dao as well. Even though I still have a hidden trump card that would give me a small chance to defeat you. If I use it recklessly, that sword technique will be a great strain on my body as well. Even if I were to defeat you here, I would not be able to defeat my next opponent because I would be too exhausted from this fight. I would never do that, as it wouldn't benefit me at all. Thus, after great consideration, I concede the match."

He was rather straightforward. There was no way he could win when Pill King Zhen was able to directly battle against him in sword dao. After all, sword dao was his one and only expertise, and his opponent had many more abilities that he hadn't yet used. To put it more kindly, Pill King Zhen was only practicing with him. Ji Zhongtang might be young, but he knew when he should back off. He jumped down from the arena without looking back. He had no regrets of failing. Even though there was more that he could do, he had already learned a lot from this fight. What he had gained from this battle was more than just sword dao. He had learned that there would always be someone more capable and more powerful than he was. The sky was the limit.

Even though he was incredibly talented in sword dao and the clan lord had even evaluated him as the foremost expert in sword dao, Ji Zhongtang understood that there wasn't much meaning in gaining recognition from just a single person. After all, there were many sword dao geniuses under the seven great emperors. Furthermore, there were probably another few additional sword dao geniuses within the other great clans. His battle with Pill King Zhen today had widened his horizons. Because of that, he wasn't the least bit depressed after the loss. There was no doubt that Pill King Zhen was stronger than him.

Even though he had received some treasures and equipment from the clan lord, there was no way he would use them. His opponent was Pill King Zhen after all. Moreover, he would not stand to gain much after using such treasures anyways, as it would also cause a great strain to his own energy. There was no way he could make it to the top two hundred even if he'd won. It was only logical to admit loss. Pill King Zhen was obviously a strong contender for a place in the top thirty. There was still a possibility that he could gain a second chance.

The clan lord was no longer feeling as conflicted after Ji Zhongtang's loss too. This matchup had caused a great amount of turmoil within him. On one hand, he hoped that his clan's disciple would gain the chance to showcase his incredible talent on the arena. Yet at the same time, he was worried that if Ji Zhongtang had won, Pill King Zhen would refuse to give the Pinecrane Pill to the clan lord. However, there was no way the clan lord could ask Ji Zhongtang to deliberately lose. Thus, he was most glad that the battle had ended this way.

At least Ji Zhongtang had been able to perfectly unleash his sword techniques. The fact that he couldn't win against Pill King Zhen was only because the pill king was simply too strong. He needn't feel much

regret for losing to such a formidable opponent. He would never have admitted his loss otherwise. Ji Zhongtang might've lost, but there was still a chance that he could come back.

As long as they grasped this opportunity, there was still a possibility for all three successors of Coiling Dragon Clan to gain a spot in the final top two hundred. The clan lord breathed a sigh of relief upon that realization. Entering the top two hundred meant that they would qualify for the Ranking of the Young Lords battles. Earning a spot in these rankings would be an extremely difficult task. However, he too was a person with great ambition. He would need to have one disciple enter the rankings if he wanted to become the eighth great emperor faction in Veluriyam Capital. However, the decisive factor was still himself. If he could advance to the next level and successfully transcend from the half-step great emperor realm into the great emperor realm, his clan would become the eighth great emperor faction. In the end, Pill King Zhen was his only hope of achieving this.

With the fifth elimination round coming to a close, Ji San, who had been relaxed the entire time, began to feel some pressure as well. The pressure he felt didn't come from his opponent, but rather, from the last round of sorting. The last thing anyone would want was to have two powerful foes battle each other too early on in the contest. A top genius would have to be disqualified if that happened. Even if there was a possibility for a comeback at the end, nobody would want to humiliate themselves in such a way. After all, entering the top two hundred via a second chance wouldn't wipe away the humiliation from a loss. A loss was a loss. Even if one were to come back and successfully enter the genius rankings, there would be a crack in one's own dao heart. The best thing that could happen was still to win every round consecutively.

Wei Jie had been quite fortunate for the previous five rounds, as he hadn't encountered any particularly strong foes. One could even say that he'd had incredible luck during the sortition. He now only needed one more victory to enter the top two hundred. Even though it didn't guarantee him a spot in the Genius Rankings, it still acted as a safety net of some sort. After all, there weren't all that many strong opponents that were waiting for a comeback. Even if there were a few, they might not actually choose to challenge Wei Jie. What were the chances that Wei Jie was the weakest one amongst the top two hundred?

The atmosphere had gotten a little heavier because this was the last round. The averagely-skilled cultivators were now feeling a mountain of pressure. Lose, and they would possibly have to return home, all their efforts effectively going down the drain. Win, and it might not guarantee them a spot in the rankings, but at least there was still a seventy to eighty percent chance of them obtaining a spot. Those who weren't too confident in their own abilities were calculating and theorizing whether it would be better to admit defeat or try and win the round. They couldn't admit defeat either if they were paired against someone that was only slightly stronger than them. An opponent that was only slightly stronger than them was unlikely to place in the top thirty. Therefore, they would still have to give their all unless they were paired against an opponent that was incredibly strong. If the latter really did happen, giving up wouldn't actually be a bad decision.

#### Chapter 942: End of the Sixth Elimination Round

There was no reason for them to go all out against an opponent that was much stronger than them in the last round. They wouldn't win and they'd exhaust their energy. Worse, they'd be too worn out to compete, even if they were given a chance to make a comeback. The smartest thing to do was to give up

if they were paired against an incredibly strong opponent to preserve strength and energy. It might not be the most honorable thing to do, but it was the most logical one. These were precisely Wei Jie's thoughts right now. Of course, he was also hoping that he wouldn't be paired against someone much stronger than him.

Unfortunately, life often didn't happen as planned. The more one was afraid of something, the more likely it was going to happen. Wei Jie's name was drawn from the lot, and his opponent's name soon followed.

Wei Jie versus Pill King Zhen!

Wei Jie is actually paired against Pill King Zhen! The audience was rendered speechless by the dramatic drawing. This was an incredibly huge coincidence. There were at least four hundred contestants, yet Wei Jie had somehow managed to find himself paired against Jiang Chen. What sort of twisted play of fate was this?

Pill King Zhen was still the guest pill king of House Wei in name. Also, Pill King Zhen's rise to fame had started from House Wei. This was a duel between host and house guest! Nobody would have thought that Pill King Zhen could win in this matchup during his initial arrival at Veluriyam Capital. But now, nobody seemed to think that Wei Jie could win instead.

Wei Jie couldn't help but smile wryly. His father Wei Tian also shook his head grudgingly. He already knew what Wei Jie's choice was. The only thing his son could do when met with such a speechless pairing was to admit defeat. He'd been incredibly fortunate during the previous five elimination rounds, but the last one was a direct kick to the head. However, Wei Jie was still quite glad that he was paired against Jiang Chen, because the pill king was definitely going to end up in the top thirty.

There was still a chance for a comeback even if he admitted defeat. He was just as likely to get into the top two hundred as long as he made good use of the second chance he would soon be given. When they heard that Wei Jie had admitted defeat, many houses that had bad relations with House Wei began to disdain them. They felt that House Wei was being incredibly shameless. How could the host admit defeat against their own house guest?

Jiang Chen rather wanted to admit defeat himself to save House Wei some face. Unfortunately, with Wei Jie's abilities, it'd be difficult for him to gain a spot in the top thirty. If he admitted defeat, it was unlikely that Wei Jie would get a second chance. Thus, he had no choice but to let Wei Jie take the loss.

The sixth elimination round was supposed to be a nerve-wracking affair, but because Wei Jie had admitted defeat, he and Jiang Chen were able to relax and watch others fight instead. Wei Jie revered Jiang Chen greatly. Thus, he didn't feel that it was humiliating for him to admit defeat. In fact, he actually felt some relief instead, because he was the most afraid of encountering an opponent that was only slightly stronger than him. If that happened, he would have to put his life on the line to win the fight. There would be no second chance for him if he lost. Thus, Wei Jie genuinely believed that this wasn't the worst thing that could happen to him.

Ji San, on the other hand, was quite fortunate during the final drawing. He was paired against a cultivator from an aristocratic background. Even though that person was also at the ninth level sage

realm, there was still a large difference in cultivation between them, as he was already a half-step emperor. Of course, that didn't mean that there weren't any other notable matches in the sixth round.

For example, there was the genius wandering cultivator, Sunyu Xiaosheng, who had performed well during the formation trials. He defeated numerous powerful opponents and was definitely a dark horse in the battles. This time, he was paired against a disciple from one of the great clans, Miao Suo from the Spirit Branch Clan. Jiang Chen had seen Miao Suo before. They'd crossed paths when Ji San brought him to Sacred Peafowl Mountain to meet a girl. It was obvious that Ji San wasn't on very friendly terms with Miao Suo.

The Spirit Branch Clan was ranked sixth amongst the twenty-eight great clans in Veluriyam Capital. Thus, Miao Suo was actually ranked somewhere around fifteenth or maybe even within the top ten amongst all disciples from the great clans. On one side was a top disciple hailing from the great clans, and on the other was a dark horse from the wandering cultivators. It was only natural that the fight between the two would garner a lot of attention.

Jiang Chen looked through the matchups and concluded that while there were a few matches worth watching, he was most interested in the one between Miao Suo and Sunyu Xiaosheng. He had seen Sunyu Xiaosheng's performance in the formation trials. Because of this, he was paying a little more attention to the always smiling, frivolous lad. Even though Miao Suo was one of the top disciples of the great clans, it didn't necessarily mean that he would be able to crush Sunyu Xiaosheng.

Jiang Chen may not know much about the wandering cultivator's background, but he was certain that Sunyu Xiaosheng had received training and pointers from an extraordinary teacher. He could easily tell just by looking at the wandering cultivator's aura. Jiang Chen could also tell that Sunyu Xiaosheng was a genuine wandering cultivator, as he possessed the same traits that many other wandering cultivators had. A wandering cultivator who's received pointers from an extraordinary teacher? He's probably much more worthy of note than a common disciple from a great clan.

"Wei Jie, don't challenge Sunyu Xiaosheng when you get the chance to," Jiang Chen warned.

Wei Jie was taken aback. "Sunyu Xiaosheng? Can he even beat Miao Suo?"

Jiang Chen smiled plainly. "Miao Suo only looks strong on the outside. He doesn't impress me at all."

It wasn't that Jiang Chen was looking down on Miao Suo. Sunyu Xiaosheng just seemed a little more enigmatic to him. The final elimination round officially began with the banging of the gong. Even though Jiang Chen was also looking at the other arenas, he was focusing most of his attention on Miao Suo and Sunyu Xiaosheng.

Confident in his abilities as a disciple from a great clan, Miao Suo started the bout with an extremely fierce strike. His attacks were incredibly powerful, as he was a disciple from a sixth-ranked great clan. The flurry of kicks and punches were like tidal waves, incessant and incredibly imposing. His fighting style matched his body type very well. He was like a ferocious bear; his attacks were crude and unsophisticated, yet somehow also very powerful. Miao Suo was planning on using the dark horse as a testament to his martial dao skills. He wanted to use this chance to show off and boost his own reputation.

However, Sunyu Xiaosheng was obviously a much smarter fighter than Miao Suo. He'd chosen not to follow Miao Suo's lead in battle, even though he was every bit capable of fighting head on. Instead, he chose to fight a guerrilla warfare. He was constantly switching up methods, sometimes harassing, other times defending. Occasionally he would even lay an ambush. This only served to enrage Miao Suo greatly.

Miao Suo wasn't the kind of person that couldn't hold his temper, but it didn't take long before he was truly enraged by Sunyu Xiaosheng's battle tactics. It wasn't necessarily a good thing to provoke one's opponent during an exchange in martial dao. Sometimes, it would actually lead the opponent into gaining an extra burst of strength and power. However, it was soon evident that Sunyu Xiaosheng was very experienced in handling such situations. In the end, he was able to easily defeat Miao Suo and achieved victory in the sixth elimination round after incessant provocation.

This truly was an unexpected outcome! The audience booed and hissed after the fight. One had to understand that Miao Suo was firmly ranked in the top fifteen among all the great clan disciples! He was also a strong contender for the top ten spots in the Genius Rankings! Who could've known that he'd be defeated by a wandering cultivator? Wei Jie was also flabbergasted by the result. "Miao Suo was defeated? Who in the world is Sunyu Xiaosheng?"

Jiang Chen looked at Sunyu Xiaosheng, intrigued. He now had an even higher opinion of this mysterious wandering cultivator. The way the wandering cultivator had won might not seem honorable, but those with keen eyes and senses were able to see minute details that others couldn't. Even though it seemed like Sunyu Xiaosheng had won by despicable means, Jiang Chen believed that the reason why Sunyu Xiaosheng didn't fight Miao Suo head on wasn't because he couldn't win, but simply because he didn't need to.

Jiang Chen guessed that he probably didn't want to tire himself out by facing Miao Suo head on, and also because he didn't want to reveal his trump cards too early on in the ranking battles. One would stand to gain more advantage in the later stages of the tournament if one kept their trump cards hidden.

Revealing everything at the start would lead to satisfying wins at the beginning, but the trump cards would become less effective the longer the fights dragged on. Sunyu Xiaosheng was quite smart. He'd utilized his brains better than most people in battle. He only used this tactic during the duel because he already had a good inkling of his and his opponent's abilities, and knew that there was a good chance of victory in doing so. Such a tactic would be meaningless otherwise.

Even though the results were within Jiang Chen's expectations, they'd served as a reminder for him that there were many hidden talents and geniuses within the Genius Rankings battles. A good example of such a talent was Ye Tianzuo, an incredible genius in sword dao. Sunyu Xiaosheng was obviously also a genius of such magnitude. The duels in the other arenas were a lot less interesting in comparison. Ji San had crushed his opponent easily and was successful in advancing to the next level.

The sixth elimination round soon came to an end. Two hundred finalists were finally chosen. The subsequent round were the battles amongst the two hundred. They were divided into twenty groups, with ten to each group. Not everyone was seen as equals in the ranking battles. For example, Jiang Chen was assigned to the first group because he was ranked first in the formation trials, had won every round

in the New Star Rankings battles, and had also easily won every single battle in the six elimination rounds. Being assigned to the first group meant that he was already ranked within the top ten. This also meant that Jiang Chen only needed to participate in the battles between the top ten cultivators. There was no need for him to fight with anyone in the lower ranks.

Very intricate calculations had been made before ten geniuses were assigned to their own respective groups. This also took their previous battle records into consideration. If battle results were similar, then the judges would consider the time it took for them to achieve victory. There were many detailed rules and specifications to divide everyone accordingly. The entire process was fair and just.

#### Chapter 943: The Ranking Battles Begin

Jiang Chen had to praise the organizers for their speed of analysis and competency. The group division had been done almost flawlessly. Most of the candidates in the other groups didn't raise too many objections either, as they'd found their allocated rankings acceptable as well. Of course, Jiang Chen didn't mind anything because he had already nailed a spot within the top ten in the first group.

Still, those who were ranked poorly were extremely concerned with their own rankings. But not everything was done and dusted just yet. For example, the candidates of the fourth, fifth, and sixth group had a chance to challenge the candidates above them. If they challenged their opponent and beat them, they could enter the top thirty all the same. For now, the fourth group could only fight for the fortieth spot up to the thirty-first spot, but they also had the right to challenge the geniuses of the first group. Moreover, they could only challenge the geniuses of the first group if they wished to bypass the rankings. This meant that they were allowed to bypass two groups and challenge the candidates there.

Just the same, the candidates in the fifth group could challenge the candidates in the second group, and the candidates in the sixth group could challenge the candidates in the third group. However, all the groups after the sixth group did not have the right to challenge upwards. What they needed to do was protect their own group ranking during the ranking battles. Finally, the forty people immediately following the sixteenth group had the right to challenge those ahead of them once and potentially increase their ranking.

This was because the last thirty-six spots of the Genius Rankings would ultimately be replaced. They wouldn't have the right to participate in the Ranking of Young Lords. They had to fight to enter the top 164 spots of the Genius Rankings if they wished to compete in the next stage. This was because thirty-six geniuses beneath the seven great emperors would be competing for the Ranking of Young Lords, so the last thirty-six of the Genius Rankings would be automatically disqualified. It was a cruel, survival-of-the-fittest circumstance.

Experts were aplenty in the first group. Jiang Chen perused the names within the first group for a bit. Besides himself, Ji San and Liuxiang of the Coiling Dragon Clan were both present. Sunyu Xiaosheng was also on the list. There was actually another wandering cultivator besides Sunyu Xiaosheng. This wandering cultivator was even more mysterious than Sunyu Xiaosheng. Apparently, the referee announced him as Mie Chenzi. [1]

He sounded like a foreigner. However, Jiang Chen didn't seem to notice any traits that identified him as a foreigner. Still, the person had hidden himself very well, so he wasn't able to determine his background solely from observing his traits alone. Jiang Chen stopped observing the man after a

moment's glance. He knew that there must be disciples of other great sects amongst all these candidates, excluding the noble youths of Veluriyam Pagoda and the wandering cultivators. They must have concealed their own identities to participate in the gathering. In fact, quite a few of them might be in the Genius Rankings right now.

Under the guise of wandering cultivators, they were here at Veluriyam Capital to sound out Veluriyam Capital's strength and determine how many young geniuses and heroes they had gathered to date. Sunyun Xiaosheng and Mie Chenzi were the only two wandering cultivators present within the first group for now. Currently, Jiang Chen was considered a Veluriyam Capital member with a slightly unusual identity. He was also close with Sacred Peafowl Mountain and a guest pill king of House Wei, so everyone thought of him as a member of Veluriyam Capital. With the aforementioned, there were only five spots left in the first group. The remaining five people were all Veluriyam Capital cultivators of first-rate great clans.

While checking everyone out, the first person to catch Jiang Chen's attention was Luo Chuan of the Great Shura Clan under Emperor Shura. The two strongest great clans under Emperor Shura were the Majestic Clan and the Great Shura Clan. Naturally, the Majestic Clan was the strongest out of the two clans, possessing enough strength to compete even against the Coiling Dragon Clan. The Great Shura Clan itself was a clan powerful enough to be ranked in the top five.

The reason why the Great Shura Clan wasn't as well known was due to the Majestic Clan's existence. However, the young master of the Great Shura Clan, Luo Chuan, was in fact even more talented than the young master of the Majestic Clan, Wang Teng, in terms of martial dao.

Wang Teng was a young master who was better at considering things from a larger perspective and commanding tactics. Meanwhile, Luo Chuan was just as competent in these areas as Wang Teng was, even though he focused more on martial dao and was content with keeping a low profile. Now that Wang Teng had perished alongside the Majestic Clan, Luo Chuan had naturally risen up in ranking to become the strongest clan youth to serve Emperor Shura. Besides Luo Chuan, there were another four youths from varying great clans in the first group. They were Guan Yuchan of the Zen Pursuit Clan beneath Emperor Petalpluck, Alchemist Xi of the Rising Tide Clan beneath Emperor Vastsea, Gongsun Yan of the Amethyst Fire Clan beneath Emperor Void, and Shen Hao of the Vast Sun Clan beneath Emperor Skysplitter.

These four young geniuses were all the cream of the crop within their respective great clans. They also represented the face of their chosen emperors. The only emperor whose young genius was absent among the top ten was Emperor Mountaincrush. The genius of the True Profound Clan subordinate to him was just as strong, but he had been unfortunate enough to run into Liuxiang of the Coiling Dragon Clan. After a fierce fight, this genius had been disqualified and had no choice but to attempt a comeback later on.

Although these great clans' youths were undoubtedly geniuses, Jiang Chen wasn't particularly afraid of them. To be honest, he felt that these young geniuses of the great clans were at best equal to a true disciple of the Ninesuns Sky Sect. In fact, they might even be a tad weaker. After all, the Ninesuns Sky Sect's ten true disciples were comparable to the true disciples of great emperors. The great clan disciples could only be counted as second-rate geniuses within Veluriyam Capital. Even the absolute best of these great clans' youths still sat at the bottom of the barrel of first-rate geniuses. They were



ultimately a few levels away from those cultivators who possessed the true inheritances of real first-rate great emperors.

That was why Jiang Chen didn't feel too threatened in these ranking battles. In fact, he had a rough idea of the strength of all these first-rate great clan youths, including Ji San and Liuxiang. Ironically, the two cultivators that Jiang Chen was a little unsure about were Sunyu Xiaosheng and Mie Chenzi. He felt that these two so-called wandering cultivators were actually the ones who had the highest chance of entering the Ranking of Young Lords. After the list was released, the rules of the battles for each group came out as well. The battles would take place in a round robin format. All ten geniuses within each group were required to fight everyone else within the group once. The final rankings would be decided after the battles were over.

If there were two candidates with the same score, then the results of their battles with each other would decide their rankings. Whoever beat the other candidate the most would have a higher ranking. The rules were tight enough to guarantee a ranking no matter what. Jiang Chen didn't even bother to research the rules. He only had one aim, and that was to win every match.

"Pill King Zhen versus Guan Yuchan!"

Jiang Chen's first opponent was quickly decided to be Guan Yuchan of the Zen Pursuit Clan beneath Emperor Petalpluck. Guan Yuchan was actually a young genius who'd been tonsured. Dressed in pure white clothing, he gave off the impression of an elegant gentleman and appeared to be an immortal of legends. But although he possessed a kindly air between his brows, the fearsome image of a Buddha warrior flitted between them as well. It was obvious at first glance that he was a genius who had reached an extremely high level of martial comprehension.

Emperor Petalpluck himself was an extremely mysterious existence in Veluriyam Capital. He had been the second strongest great emperor in Veluriyam Capital for thousands of years. However, he stood aloof from worldly affairs. Just like a wild crane that flew among the clouds, his main interest lay in plucking flowers, listening to the rain, and pursuing zen. Therefore, Emperor Petalpluck's faction, and even some of the great clans affiliated with him, all carried themselves with an air of zen. The martial arts and techniques they cultivated also embodied the concepts of Buddhism. For example, Guan Yuchan gave off an otherworldly feeling the moment he stepped on stage.

"Your fame precedes you, Pill King Zhen. I shall be learning from you today," said Guan Yuchan calmly. He didn't look affected in the slightest by Jiang Chen's fame. It was almost as if all opponents who stood in the arena were the same to him.

Jiang Chen raised a cupped fist salute and smiled at Guan Yuchan. "Brother Guan, you definitely are one of the few with the greatest bearing out of all my opponents thus far."

"One of?" Guan Yuchan smiled leisurely. "Who else?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "You may not know him, but there was a swordsman called Ye Tianzuo during the earlier Genius Rankings competition. His temperament impressed me quite a bit as well."

"Ye Tianzuo? You mean that swordsman?" Guan Yuchan seemed to have a faint recollection.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Brother Guan, if you please."

Guan Yuchan smiled. "Alright. Know that I, a subordinate of Emperor Petalpluck, am a stepping stone. If you can defeat me, then you are at least qualified to challenge the young geniuses of the great emperors. But if you cannot surpass even me, then I would suggest that you return to improving your cultivation."

Jiang Chen knew that Guan Yuchan wasn't joking. He answered seriously, "I will do my best."

While saying this, Jiang Chen activated his golden body.

Guan Yuchan smiled a little. A trace of surprise finally appeared on his seemingly never-changing face. It would seem that Jiang Chen's action had taken him aback. The Buddha's art Guan Yuchan cultivated contained none other than a divine body protection art and an invincible golden body. They were both extremely powerful. While he had been accumulating his power, his opponent seemed to have predicted his move and activated the exact same body technique. This little detail alone proved that Pill King Zhen was extremely sensitive towards every little detail in battle.

When Guan Yuchan activated his golden body, a Buddha's aura immediately rose thirty meters above his head. Guan Yuchan's body also grew several times larger and turned him into an enormous Buddha warrior attendant. With a solemn look on his expression, Guan Yuchan grabbed the air and somehow pulled a great gada into existence.

Jiang Chen boiled with passion when he saw this. He cried out, "Well met!"

He activated his own golden body and grew nearly as big as Guan Yuchan. Suddenly, the arena battle became a battle between two giants.

Chapter 944: A Well-Rounded Martial Dao Genius

The sheer enormity of both parties' images caused the spacious arena to feel crowded. Each punch and kick was exchanged with incredible frenzy and intensity. The sounds of bodies colliding resounded like an avalanche.

Rumble. Rumble. The two colossal figures crashed together and drifted apart seemingly on a whim, weaving around the arena like bolts of lightning. Blows were delivered with extreme speed, across distances varyingly vast and minute.

Thud, thud, thud. Guan Yuchan stepped forth like a Buddha warrior attendant. He smashed the giant gada in his hands boldly towards Jiang Chen once more. Each stride seemed to shake the entire arena.

Jiang Chen chuckled. Pressing his fingers into a fist, he jabbed fiercely towards the gada with no hesitation. A painful crunch sent out countless shockwaves. The very air about them rippled with the force of the impact.

Guan Yuchan had never met anyone who could face his weapon with their bare fists before. He frowned in displeasure. His arms felt slightly numb. His opponent was truly formidable, but his battle fever surged at the challenge.

"You're a surprising one, Pill King Zhen. It's refreshing to have a satisfying fight with an opponent such as yourself!" Despite his typical tranquility, Guan Yuchan was slowly becoming increasingly excited. His voice, deep and resonant, sounded through the sphere. Its echoes reverberated in the air surrounding

the arena, and all who heard were stirred by the words. The muscles on both of Guan Yuchan's forearms flexed. Like bands of steel, their very form surged with power.

"Ascetic Slaying Demons, so I come!" With a swing of his giant gada, Guan Yuchan sent out a rumbling warrior's image. The image had a certain undeniable dignity to it, pouncing upon Jiang Chen in a frenzy.

Pleased at the force behind the attack, Jiang Chen moved to make hand seals of his own. "Giant lizard's image, break forth!" The image of a colossal reptile barreled forwards from nothingness, madly twisting its body. Trails of scarlet streaked behind it, as fiery as the clouds of a sunset.

Bam! There was another savage crash between Guan Yuchan's warrior image and Jiang Chen's reptilian image. Both scattered into infinite specks of golden light once more, diffusing into the void. Guan Yuchan was forced back a few steps, his eyes glowing with bewildered radiance. He was utterly fixated on Jiang Chen. This opponent had brought him exceptional surprise. It was his first time facing such a terrifying opponent. Guan Yuchan had naturally observed all of Jiang Chen's bouts prior. In the competitions for the New Star Rankings, Jiang Chen's defeat of a brutish man had showcased his superb close-combat abilities. Several of the battles that followed showed that he was a master of the sword as well.

Guan Yuchan couldn't help but admit that Pill King Zhen, in the same sense that he was a well-rounded pill genius, he was also a well-rounded martial genius. Guan Yuchan's image of the Buddha warrior attendant was the most intimidating of his abilities, one of his trump cards. If even that couldn't buy him the slightest of an advantage, then the difference between this Pill King Zhen and himself was undeniable.

Until now, Pill King Zhen had played by his own rhythm. He hadn't shown anything from his own hand yet. Considering the pill king's frightening aptitude in the art of the sword, Guan Yuchan was uncertain that he would've been able to react to a strong assault. Pill King Zhen's sword-strikes were far too mysterious and unpredictable, Battling with images was the method of combat he was most proud of, yet he hadn't been able to take the lead in such a battle, either. His opponent even possessed a true dragon image that he still had yet to reveal. That didn't mean that Guan Yuchan was just going to give up on the spot, though.

Guan Yuchan's eyes were clear with honesty. Looking at Jiang Chen, he opened his mouth, "Pill King Zhen, I cannot win against you with martial abilities alone. But I'm not only representing myself here. I stand on behalf of both Emperor Petalpluck and my own clan. So, I'm going to use a few of the cards and equipment I have up my sleeve. Beware!" Guan Yuchan was a proud man. Despite all evidence pointing to him being no match for Jiang Chen in terms of martial dao, he couldn't give up the fight just yet. The honor and face of various factions hinged on these rankings. He had no say in the decision himself.

Nodding, Jiang Chen replied seriously, "This is a competitive match. It's natural to give it your all."

"Very well!" Guan Yuchan returned the gesture before abruptly opening his arms. A pair of golden cymbals flew out from the folds of his sleeves, growing into two huge golden gates. They soared towards Jiang Chen with the wind, their oppressive force tangible in the air. The atmosphere around the arena became claustrophobic at once. Two powerful currents of air separated inside from out.

Jiang Chen felt a nameless strength tugging at his body. The cymbals grew and grew. Within moments, they were already ten yards tall. The two golden plates came closer and closer to him, their obvious intent to enclose Jiang Chen within. The sight of such a treasure shocked Jiang Chen.

As a battle-hardened veteran, however, he didn't panic despite his surprise. Grabbing and throwing his defensive cauldron, he tossed it over his head to slow the cymbals somewhat.

Next, Jiang Chen called upon his golden cicada bloodline. The flash of a golden cicada's image transformed into a copy Jiang Chen. He had used the Cicada's Disappearance ability in order to instantly shift himself a vast distance away. Not a moment too late. The cymbals expanded once again, swallowing the obstructing cauldron whole. They were clearly a special instrument. The closer they were, the stronger their suction was. The cauldron resisted for only a brief moment before its defense failed entirely.

Clanggg! The two cymbals closed together with a vicious clang. The discordant noise brought despair to listeners' hearts. Guan Yuchan raised his eyebrows at the sight, cheered by the turn of events.

"Pill King Zhen, I admit that you're very skilled in martial dao. However, you cannot defeat my Yin Yang Cymbals." Guan Yuchan sighed with soft confidence. He had every faith in his treasure. Like a dual-poled magnet, their strength lied at close proximity. In this respect, the pair of instruments was quite a fearsome treasure.

However, no treasure was infallible. Though the Cymbals were quite potent, there was a way to counteract their influence. Just as similar poles repel one another, opposite poles in turn attract. The Cymbals had a positive and negative pole. If one could apply the same principle to them, then it was definitely possible to render the Cymbals useless. Therefore, there was a risk to using these instruments, even if it was negligible. Thankfully, it was improbable to have both a positively and negatively-charged treasure both ready to counter the Cymbals. Guan Yuchan was reasonably sure about this fact. Truthfully, he was almost ready to announce his triumph as the victor.

Suddenly, utter silence befell the entire arena. There was strangeness afoot. This sudden stillness was baffling to Guan Yuchan. His earlobes twitched. In the next moment, he came to an electrifying stop. The disbelief was transparent on his face, and his cheeks contorted. He rapidly tried to turn around, only to be faced with a half-smiling Jiang Chen standing right behind him.

"You..." Guan Yuchan was stunned.

Jiang Chen smiled serenely. "The Yin Yang Cymbals are strong, but I'm a bit faster than they are, aren't I?" Yes, Jiang Chen had witnessed the Cymbals' power first-hand. However, his escape from their pull with Cicada's Disappearance had gone entirely unnoticed. This difference between the two combatants would be fatal in any other setting.

Jiang Chen had just thrown away the opportunity to kill Guan Yuchan with ease. In a fight between experts, anyone that could make their way to their opponent's back undetected had more than ten ways of putting down such an unwary rival. In his battle with Xiao Paohui a short while ago, Jiang Chen had used his Disappearance to great effect, evading a critical attack from the former. The spontaneity of the Disappearance was what allowed Jiang Chen to reach Xiao Paohui's back unnoticed and deal a death-blow.

The Thundercloud Cicadas had no combat ability. The biggest advantage their heritage conferred was a mastery of escape, using the Cicada's Disappearance and Cicada's Wing. Of course, their immunity to lightning and poison were very helpful as well, both of which were rare traits in the heavenly planes.

Guan Yuchan's expression instantly fell.

"Have I... lost?" At last, all his unspoken words transformed into a deep sigh.

Yes, he had lost. Even as he asked the question, Guan Yuchan tasted bitterness in his mouth. He had every expectation to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat upon deploying the Yin Yang Cymbals. However, he had been too naïve. Pill King Zhen was evidently a great deal stronger than he. How could he not have seen a trace of his opponent's escape otherwise? His failure in perception proved only one thing—his opponent's level of martial dao far surpassed that of his own.

In that moment, Guan Yuchan lost all interest in fighting further.

"Pill King Zhen, congratulations. Having defeated me, you are absolutely qualified to challenge geniuses at the caliber of the great emperors' heirs. Your complete victory here cannot be disputed." Guan Yuchan wasn't a clingy good-for-nothing. He knew that he'd been shown mercy. Otherwise, even ten lives wouldn't have been enough to save him just now.

This battle was the second time Jiang Chen used his Cicada's Disappearance, Xiao Paohui's fight having been the first. Alas, there's nothing for it. The ability was just too useful and deceptive. It was difficult to pick up on or think about. Thus, it was amazing at overtaking an opponent with the element of surprise. Unfortunately, an oft-used method meant that it would be more easily understood by others. Unless it possessed overwhelmingly crushing power, the likelihood of using it as a key to victory decreased exponentially with frequent usage. The first battle's conclusion heralded Jiang Chen's victory over Guan Yuchan. Despite his defeat, the latter acted with incredible grace. Guan Yuchan's loss didn't result in a soul-crushing mentality. "Pill King Zhen," he even had the presence of mind to give some friendly advice, "You won against me because my strength is not yet perfected. If you want to compete in the Ranking of Young Lords, you'll need to hone your own strength even further."

There was a short break before the subsequent drawings were made for the second battle's assignments. This time, Jiang Chen's opponent was the brightest genius of the Amethyst Fire Clan, Gongsun Yan.

#### Chapter 945: I Will Make Only One Move

The competitions this time around were of the round robin format. Each section's ten geniuses were guaranteed to fight each other once, meaning each man had nine opponents. The organizers intentionally set it up in such a manner. Intense battle tested substance, ability, and improvisation. Unless a particular side exhibited an overwhelming advantage, continuous melee was a breeding ground for spontaneity. No matter how deep one's reserves of strength were, extended combat would eventually exhaust one's stamina. This kind of exhaustion was fair to everyone.

As the foremost genius of the Amethyst Fire Clan under Emperor Void, Gongsun Yan had the same bloodline and heritage as the other geniuses of his clan: the Amethyst Fire Bloodline. It was named as such because their innate constitutions were attuned to purple fire from birth. Gongsun Yan

distinguished himself from his peers because his bloodline was a cut above the rest. The purple fire he carried within was equivalent to an innate fire constitution of medium order.

Mu Gaoqi had an innate wood constitution of high order, a bloodline that drew even Jiang Chen's respect. This was especially true since Mu Gaoqi's elemental alignment was wood, a true rarity. Fire and water constitutions were much more common. Nevertheless, Gongsun Yan's constitution was still very rare. Many people had fire or water constitutions, but far fewer of them were innate. Those that did for the most part had constitutions of a low order, barely enough to be counted as innate. Above medium order was high order, of course, and perfected above that; but ninety-nine percent of constitutions were low order only. A medium order constitution had the probability of one in a hundred thousand, if one were to speak optimistically.

As for high order? It would be lucky to find one in even a hundred million people. And on Jiang Chen's part, the only person with an innate wood constitution that he had seen was Mu Gaoqi throughout all these years. This made his high order even more remarkable. Because Gongsun Yan had a natural born constitution, he possessed many fortuitous advantages. However, it was hard to exploit any of them against Jiang Chen.

If it wasn't for the fact that Jiang Chen couldn't publicly use his Bewitching Lotus, taking down Gongsun Yan would have been a piece of cake. Even so, Jiang Chen successfully defeated this opponent after a fierce battle. He was matched with Vast Sun Clan's Shen Hao in the third round. This opponent was viewed as the weakest amongst the top ten. Shen Hao wasn't much perturbed by it, though. He sparred against Jiang Chen with a learning attitude, not at all saddened by his loss. After three consecutive victories, Jiang Chen was greeted with his fourth opponent.

Young master Liuxiang from the Coiling Dragon Clan. Though Ji San had never mentioned Liuxiang's hostility towards him, Jiang Chen could nevertheless still detect a trace of antagonism. Jiang Chen knew the hearts of men well. The young master likely had a distaste of him because his appearance propelled Ji San into the stratosphere in front of the clan lord. Ji San had become the number one heir to the clan because of this. This was clearly detrimental to Liuxiang, who was forced to maintain an elegant and gracious façade despite his extreme antipathy for the pill king. Jiang Chen knew it was only pretense, but he found no value in dispensing with the charade.

"Pill King Zhen, you've hidden your abilities from us until now! Your martial talent is quite stunning. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to experience it personally, but please, do go easy on me," young master Liuxiang smiled faintly.

Jiang Chen nodded, "I've always heard that you are one of the best geniuses of this fine city, young master Liuxiang. Today is the perfect opportunity for a friendly fight."

Neither spared niceties for the other.

"Please, go ahead."

"After you."

Once the courtesies were over with, however, neither party held back either. Liuxiang's cultivation level could definitely put him within the top three amongst the scions of the great clans. It was quite possible

that he was worthy of first place. But the question had always been, who was stronger, Liuxiang or Ji San? That had always been inconclusive.

Still, Jiang Chen felt that aside from the mysterious large brute that he had faced during the New Star Rankings, this young master was definitely one of the most difficult opponents he'd come across. Liuxiang was at the half-step emperor realm, an impressive feat of cultivation. Moreover, he was cautious on both offense and defense. It was difficult for Jiang Chen to quickly defeat such an opponent.

Since he knew Liuxiang's style of combat, Jiang Chen had no plans to rush into things. Instead, he matched Liuxiang in a series of unhurried, probing attacks. As a scion of the Coiling Dragon Clan, Liuxiang was sure to have a slew of aces up his sleeve—things like the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, for example. Thus, Jiang Chen had no plans to use his strongest attacks straight off the bat.

If his opponent used a Talisman, none of his attacks would be of any use, aside from the restriction left in the palace abode. There was no conceivable way that he could actually use that. Doing so would give away his identity and bring unnecessary trouble. As Jiang Chen guessed, Liuxiang waited only a few moments before activating an Imperial Advent Defense Talisman. For the next two hours, his defense would be comparable to an emperor realm level's. Though that didn't mean it was necessarily the same as an emperor realm cultivator's personal defense, the sheer rank of the shield meant that it was difficult for Jiang Chen to break through it.

Watching from a distance, the Coiling Dragon clan lord didn't quite know what to say.

"Liuxiang isn't taking the bigger picture into account. He's using a Defense Talisman! That's tearing off the pretense of courtesy a bit, isn't it?" The clan lord was none too pleased with the turn of events. It wasn't that he didn't want the young master to win. With any other opponent, the clan lord would have been fine with him using every method at his disposal. But young master Liuxiang was facing Pill King Zhen! The pill king's value to the clan lord aside, there was a slight difference in raw ability between the young master and him. That much was evident from the battles prior.

"I hope Pill King Zhen won't be offended by this," the clan lord silently sighed. He saw as clearly as anyone that the pill king wouldn't give up the rankings so easily. Even if Ji San was onstage, the pill king would be unlikely to sandbag the match. This was the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering after all, a sacred stage.

Jiang Chen was unsurprised at Liuxiang's activation of the talisman. He found it pointless to attack in light of this, instead fighting very conservatively. A Jiang Chen in full defense was difficult for Liuxiang to do much about. Though his offensive power was decent, there was no hope of it being strong enough to overpower Jiang Chen, much less incapacitate him. Given this, the previously even-handed combat became slightly one-sided.

Young master Liuxiang was in full-out assault, while Pill King Zhen was focused on dragging out the conflict. Strangely, Liuxiang seemed to be at his wits' end. Despite exerting all his strength, Pill King Zhen remained unfazed at the onslaught, easily warding off attack after attack. No matter the method that the young master employed, the pill king on the other side of the ring effortlessly repelled it. Watching the anxiety building on Liuxiang's face, Jiang Chen knew that while he was a genius, his combat strength couldn't even compare to Xiao Paohui's. There was no need for Jiang Chen to resort to any other methods. He'd been able to deflect sixty to seventy percent of the force behind any of the young

master's attacks with the Featherflight Mirror alone. The remaining thirty or forty percent was hardly enough to endanger its target.

Two hours passed. The battles in the other arenas were generally concluded, but heated blows were still being traded here. Though young master Liuxiang tried using his various trump cards, it was as if he were punching cotton—completely fruitless. The Imperial Advent Defense Talisman was only effective for two hours. Two hours had since elapsed from its activation, and Liuxiang lost its benefits accordingly.

The corner of Jiang Chen's mouth moved. "Young master Liuxiang," he smiled, "you've been on the offense for so long! You must be tired. Why not try taking one of my attacks instead?"

To Liuxiang's ears, the pill king's joking tone was as harsh as the most mocking taunt. However, Jiang Chen had no desire to tangle further with the young master. He was tired of the youth. Since Liuxiang would always be one of Ji San's opponents, their differences were essentially irreconcilable. Therefore, there was no need to have any second thoughts. Sure, the Coiling Dragon clan lord might express his displeasure later, but this was a competitive fight in a proper arena. He stretched out his arms. At the gesture, the Pentecolor Divine Swords flew out in unison.

"I'm only going to make one attack." Jiang Chen smiled faintly. He made a hand seal, causing the swords to erupt in radiance. They turned into five streaks of light, bursting into the sky. In the next moment, they inflated into five dragon forms, turning the heavens into stormy skies with their presence. Lightning crackled and thunder roared.

In the style of the ancient celestial swordmasters, Jiang Chen sang out, his sleeves fluttering in the wind.

"The first sword, shaking heaven and earth..."

"The second sword, moving existence itself..."

"The third sword, separating yin and yang..."

"The fourth sword, claiming dominion over the world..."

"The fifth sword, gathering the five elements and forming thunder itself. Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords, slaying the heavens themselves!"

Thunder rumbled in the firmament. The five-colored streaks of light gathered into an ocean of swords that culminated in an abrupt explosion. The sky was filled with sword aura. The momentum of myriad blades exerted an immense pressure on everything beneath it.

Another hand seal from Jiang Chen brought everything crashing down. In the next instant, the entire arena was filled with the shapes and shadows of swords. Sword aura snaked through the air, as if moving in harmony with the heavenly thunder. Behind the deafening crashes, there was an infinitely incomprehensible killing intent. An inexorable tide of swords flooded the world.

In that moment, a pervasive sword aura was the only thing that apparently remained. Like a hundred thousand divine soldiers, it enshrouded everything beneath the four corners of the sky. The fireworks display that the sword technique put on was blinding. The entire audience was dazzled by it. A common thought popped into their minds, What attack is this, that it can strike such madness into our hearts?!

Chapter 946: Eight Consecutive Victories, Battle for First Place



Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique, Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords! Jiang Chen had been trying to comprehend the sword technique for a few months, and this was actually the first time he'd truly executed the technique. Everything had gone better than expected. In fact, it had achieved the level of strength that he had been aiming for.

Countless sword auras rushed towards young master Liuxiang in unison, as though they were locked onto him. Liuxiang had faced many powerful foes since he'd stepped on the road of martial dao and had seen many powerful killer techniques, but he'd never seen one as savage as the one he was currently facing. A sudden inexplicable sense of doom rushed over him and made him feel like a fish on a chopping board. There was no way he could retaliate. Instinct instantly took over. Flee!

He would surely perish if he chose to meet the strike head on! He hesitated no longer after reaching that conclusion. His face aghast, he immediately shot off the arena. Wham!! The Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords viciously arrived the moment after Liuxiang had jumped down, turning half of the arena into ruins.

The arena was protected by restrictive formations. Many powerful attacks were only capable of causing a chip or two in its structure. However, Jiang Chen's sword strike had managed to destroy half of it! The might and power behind the strike stunned the audience. The area was so silent that for a brief moment, one couldn't even hear the sound of people breathing.

Liuxiang was also rendered speechless when he saw the half-destroyed arena after he got back on his feet. The area instantly filled with a tidal wave of applause. Even the Coiling Dragon clan lord was applauding Jiang Chen. He'd noticed that Jiang Chen had retracted some of his sword intent and gave Liuxiang a chance to escape in that perilous moment. It was fortunate that Liuxiang hadn't been a fool and grabbed the window of opportunity that he was given. The clan lord was skeptical that Liuxiang would still be alive if otherwise.

Jiang Chen cut a dashing figure as he stood proudly with his sword in his hands. He was also in a very excitable mood right now. He'd finally made some small progress with this sword technique. Vastsky Divine Emperor, this junior will make your Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique renowned in the world! He was overcome with emotion. This was his idol's sword technique. He had cultivated this sword technique and executed it, all to show reverence to his most respected idol!

Liuxiang's defeat had made the other great clan's disciples lose their will to challenge Pill King Zhen. Jiang Chen easily achieved six consecutive victories after that. He was then paired against Sunyu Xiaosheng on the seventh round. Interestingly, Sunyu Xiaosheng actually decided to admit defeat instead. This was a surprise. Jiang Chen was actually quite interested in the dark horse. He thought initially that they'd have a gruelling match, but Sunyu Xiaosheng had suddenly admitted defeat. In fact, he'd even seemed quite good-natured while doing so.

Jiang Chen was extremely confused. He couldn't make out whether Sunyu Xiaosheng had thrown the match on purpose or if the other truly believed that he wasn't a match for Jiang Chen. In any case, this meant that Jiang Chen had achieved seven consecutive victories. On the eighth round, Jiang Chen was finally paired with Ji San.

Ji San was deeply immersed in his own thoughts before he smiled wryly, “That sword technique of yours... I’ve put a lot of thought into it, yet I still can’t seem to find a way to defeat it. I think there’s no need for either of us to waste our time here.”

His opponent had admitted defeat yet again. This had put Jiang Chen squarely in the spotlight. Every single round was pivotally important in the ranking battles. Every win or loss could determine one’s final placement in the rankings. A single loss would mean that one had lost their chance for first place. Ji San hadn’t thrown the match to his brother on purpose. He had only admitted defeat after lengthy consideration because he simply couldn’t figure out a way to defeat Jiang Chen’s formidable sword technique. Thus, Jiang Chen achieved his eighth consecutive victory without even breaking a sweat.

Normally, achieving eight consecutive victories would mean that first place was within reach. However, such was not the case this time, because Jiang Chen’s final opponent was just like him and hadn’t lost a single battle yet. His name was Mie Chenzi. This man had fought Ji San, Liuxiang, and Sunyu Xiaosheng and had won against all of them! Because of that, Mie Chenzi had replaced Sunyu Xiaosheng as the most talked-about and mysterious dark horse in the tournament. Everyone was extremely curious about this mysterious wandering cultivator. Where was he from, and how had he managed to defeat so many geniuses consecutively?

Ji San even gave Jiang Chen a warning after conceding, “Be wary of Mie Chenzi. This man’s cultivation is beyond even mine. He’s no ordinary wandering cultivator.”

Jiang Chen also understood the other reason why Ji San had chosen to forfeit the match—Ji San wanted his brother to be in peak condition when he battled Mie Chenzi. They both had eight consecutive victories. Whoever won this round would be ranked first in the Genius Rankings. Thus, the final ranking battle was actually the battle with the most on the line. The winner of this battle would become the champion, while the loser would only be a measly runner-up. Even though the results of the other matchups would affect the rankings as well, they weren’t even close to being as significant as the result of this battle.

The grand final of the ranking match was scheduled to take place after all the other ranking matches so that everyone would have the chance to watch the match between the strongest two. Jiang Chen wasn’t too bothered by that. He was even more curious about the origins of his opponent. He’d felt intense disdain for his opponent the moment he’d laid eyes on him. The opponent’s name had annoyed him greatly too.

Mie Chenzi? Can this be a coincidence? My name is Jiang Chen while his name is a moniker for Death To Chen... He’s obviously talking about me right? Could he be here for my life just like that large brute in the New Star Rankings? Jiang Chen was wary. The more he thought about it, the more suspicious he grew.

Even though he’d already become Pill King Zhen of Veluriyam Capital, he knew that there was a possibility that the Ninesuns Sky Sect and Eternal Celestial Capital could find the breadcrumbs that led back to him if they investigated closely enough. All he could do was try not to leave too many crumbs out in the open for them to find. If they suspected something, it was entirely within the capabilities of the two major sects to send out their genius disciples to scope things out.

Jiang Chen had long suspected that the mysterious large brute was a disciple from one of these two sects. This Mie Chenzi was probably another disciple sent to kill him. He began to laugh coldly upon reaching this conclusion. You want to kill me? Come then. It doesn't matter whether you're from the Ninesuns Sky Sect or Eternal Celestial Capital. I'll collect some interest from the both of you before I seek my revenge!

#### Chapter 947: A Strong Opponent

All the other battles ended after two hours. It was finally time for the penultimate round! Because Jiang Chen and young master Liuxiang's battle had been too destructive earlier on, the organizers had prepared a sturdier arena for this last round. This arena was usually brought out for emperor realm cultivators, yet here it was, making an appearance ahead of time.

This particular arena was twice the size of the others, and its various defensive restrictions very solid and airtight. Jiang Chen glimpsed various runes and glyphs carved onto the four pillars, further reinforcing this arena. On one side of the arena stood Jiang Chen, victor of a successive string of countless battles. He had grown entirely accustomed to the tempo and atmosphere of the Martial Pagoda battles by now. His emotions were completely at ease. No matter who his opponent was or where they came from, his tranquil mind had only one thought in it, Knock them off the arena! If his opponent really had come just for him, he wouldn't mind killing his opponent in the arena again as soon as he detected a hint of that kind of hostility.

Mie Chenzi was, in the likeness of his name, landing silently on the other side of the stage like a speck of dust. [1. Chen also means dust.] The final tussle over the top spot in the Genius Rankings would be decided right here, right now. Amazingly, neither of them was a great clan disciple from Veluriyam Capital. None of the highly favored candidates had made it to the finals at all. Instead, one of the candidates was Pill King Zhen, famed for his knowledge of pill dao, while the other was a wandering cultivator that no one had heard of before.

Mie Chenzi was of average height and had nondescript features. No matter what angle one considered him from, one would think that he was just an ordinary person in the vast world. There was no obvious edge to him, no dashing air, no hint of arrogance. He really was, as his name suggested, a speck of inconsequential dust in the ground. Yet it was this kind of person who had achieved eight consecutive victories to finally stand on the stage for this last match.

For some reason, Jiang Chen wasn't particularly surprised as he looked at the opponent in front of him. He'd had a hunch the first time he noticed this person that he would be a tough rival. Indeed.

"Pill King Zhen, I've waited for this battle for a long time. I just hadn't thought that it'd come at the end of all the ranking battles and that it would be the decider of who is the champion," Mie Chenzi spoke in an unhurried voice, giving one the feeling of extreme steadiness. It was obvious that there were no ripples of emotion in his heart now. He was wholly focused on the battle to come.

Jiang Chen arched his eyebrow slightly and scanned Mie Chenzi with the God's Eye. "Whether you're anticipating it or have other plans, you have no chance of winning this battle," he spoke with an unprecedented assurance.

His opponent laughed without a flicker of change in his expression. "You've got that much confidence, hmm? I only know that there is always someone better in martial dao. You've had a consecutive string of victories only because you've yet to run into a truly strong opponent. I will end your legend with this battle!"

"Perhaps my string of victories will end, but you won't be the one to end it!" Jiang Chen laughed heartily.

"How arrogant!" Mie Chenzi roared with laughter as well. "I admit that you have the capital to be so full of yourself. But this is all just a joke to me."

This nondescript Mie Chenzi had actually been greatly gathering his aura as he spoke. Bizarrely, the light of someone superior blossomed on his ordinary face, instantly propelling him to a height where he could vie with Jiang Chen. The two geniuses had already exchanged many rounds of blows as they spoke.

Clang! Mie Chenzi's arm suddenly shook slightly as a keen ray of light broke through the void, like a flash of lightning streaking across the horizon. A blade appeared in his hand, one brimming with killing intent! Mie Chenzi's bearing changed drastically when the blade appeared. What had once seemed like an ordinary cultivator was now akin to an ancient deity struggling to break free of its shackles, awakening in the mortal world. Similarly the blade in his hand embodied the likeness of an ancient beast, suppressed for millennia and full of an uncontrollable savagery, as if it wanted to swallow the very world.

Jiang Chen had fully deployed his God's Eye and Psychic's Head. All of his senses had entered a very delicate state of perception that allowed him to clearly evaluate his opponent's every move.

Mie Chenzi only needed to move his arm slightly to have that fierce blade churn up a sharp light. A bolt of lightning appeared out of nowhere, suddenly materializing and striking towards Jiang Chen. The air shuddered wherever the blade's edge passed, disturbing the very order of the laws of space. Jiang Chen's eyes moved rapidly as he lightly swept his arms with the Featherflight Mirror in his sleeve.

Pfft pfft pfft pfft! When the light hit the blade's edge, the previously impervious edge seem to crash head on into a wondrous power. A grating sound rang out as the cutting light broke up and dissipated into motes of light. Mie Chenzi had deployed this stroke in an exceedingly subtle fashion, and its greatest strength was in that the light would hide in the void after it was deployed, making people unable to even track where the attack was coming from.

But with Jiang Chen's Psychic's Head bolstering his senses to be many times stronger than that of the average cultivator, he could accurately grasp the path of the blade's light. Although it truly was very fast, on par with a shooting star's speed, slowing down swift attacks was the Mirror's specialty. It could take on all comers unless the opponent's speed was faster than Jiang Chen's reaction speed.

Sadly for Mie Chenzi, although his attack was very discreet, it wasn't faster than his opponent's reaction time. The light from the slash broke up, scattering all over the arena. Impacts onto the four pillars in the corners also sounded. Marks from stray sword aura were left on them, causing the audience to suck in breaths of surprise. This arena was much more durable than the one prior. Its restrictions were several times stronger as well. However, Mie Chenzi's sword aura had still been strong enough to leave marks on the infrastructure. Though the marks weren't very deep, it was still shocking nonetheless. It would seem that even the remnants of this wandering cultivator's strike was stronger than many's geniuses'

full strikes! After all, full hits from many of those participating in the Genius Rankings may not even leave such a deep mark on the pillars.

The audience was holding their breath out of nervousness and their hearts were in their throats. Many of them still wished that Pill King Zhen would win. Although the pill king wasn't a Veluriyam Capital native, he was still considered as one of them now. Who was Mie Chenzi? No one knew of him. Since he was a complete stranger, no one wanted him to win. They didn't want him to take the championship at all. It wouldn't be a loss of face for just the geniuses if a random stranger were to win that highest honor, but for the entirety of Veluriyam Capital too. Therefore, not only did House Wei, Taiyuan Tower, and Emperor Peafowl's faction wish that Pill King Zhen would win, but many of the other great emperor factions and other Veluriyam Capital cultivators did as well.. In this way, he could at least guard this last bit of face for them.

"Clan Lord, do you have any thoughts about this Mie Chenzi?" Ji San couldn't help but ask in the end.

However, the clan lord also shook his head. "No one's been able to find out where he comes from; his background is hidden deep. However, I speculate that he's from a great sect. It's just that there are too many of such people in the Upper Eight Regions, and the young disciples of the various sects rarely get together. Everything is shrouded in mystery, so it truly is too hard to determine where he's from."

The various Upper Eight Region sects surely raised many geniuses in private, but they rarely showed their faces, even for an occasion like this. The sects wouldn't be willing to expose their trump cards either, so it was very difficult to find out anything about their geniuses without a special investigation. The Coiling Dragon clan lord wasn't able to glean much about Mie Chenzi. But of one thing he was certain, and that was that with this person's degree of strength, he would certainly be a true disciple, even in a first-rate sect. He'd be ranked within the top five or even within the top three.

Young master Ji San and Liuxiang had all crossed paths with this fellow before, so they were naturally aware of how frightening his strength was. Young master Liuxiang had left after his defeat to Jiang Chen, with only Ji Zhongtang staying with the clan lord. His eyes were fixated on the arena as he gave the fight his full attention. He was a martial dao fanatic. Although he'd lost to Jiang Chen, he wasn't in the least bit depressed. Defeat was nothing in his eyes. One moved forward on the path of martial dao only after repeated defeat. What he had to do was to observe his opponents and continuously aim for self-improvement with the hopes that one day, he'd be able to mount a comeback.

Back on the stage, Mie Chenzi didn't feel that he had suffered a setback after his move had been parried. Rather, he struck out repeatedly instead, forming sixty-four slashes, as if he had a dozen arms. They were completed in the blink of an eye, with the afterimages of arms being raised to deliver a sword strike appearing everywhere on the stage. In the next moment, they actually formed an enormous eight trigram formation of sword shadows, sealing off all the space around Jiang Chen for a hundred mile radius.

The sword's light was like a dragon ravaging the void. It's most critical aspect was that each stroke was untraceable and unfathomable. They were akin to a meteor shower, suddenly here and then gone without a trace. These sixty-four strokes were the pinnacle of Mie Chenzi's essence of sword dao. He'd deployed its maximum speed and profound mystery.

Even those with the most confidence in Jiang Chen couldn't help but feel nervous in this moment. The sword light attacking from all fronts covered every angle of approach; there were no gaps whatsoever. When the formation closed in on ten meters away from Jiang Chen, the sword images suddenly all darted out of the void and shot out stunning splendor. The extreme bloodthirsty aura they exuded seem to carry the summons from hell itself. Ghouls and spirits howled, dragons and tigers roared, the very earth and sky itself was collapsing...

In that critical moment, all sixty-four beams of light landed solidly on Jiang Chen. Blood burst out of his body in the next second as his entire body exploded.

"What?!" The audience was stunned by the sight. A deathly silence descended, as no one was able to accept this cruel development. Shen Trifire and the others watching beneath the stage could barely remain on their feet. Ling Hui'er cried out, the two great mounds on her chest heaving as her eyes grew red and tears trickled down her face. Gouyu's strikingly fair face drained of all its color as she grasped Huang'er's arm, her entire body trembling uncontrollably. Huang'er eyes darted around rapidly. A trace of a smile suddenly appeared on her lips as she lightly patted Gouyu's shoulder. "Don't worry, sister Gouyu. Everything's fine."

A smile played about on Mie Chenzi's lips. However, he suddenly wavered as he seemed to detect something. His arm quickly whirled in a backhand slash.

Pfft! This stroke was extremely sudden and it screamed through the air.

Bam! The powerful light hit nothing, however. It just crashed into the pillar.

"Hmm?" The candidate frowned. He'd felt the slightest twinge of danger just now, so why had his stroke landed on empty air? When he turned to view the location of his opponent's destruction again, he found nothing in front of him. The so-called gory scene had just been an illusion.

"Cheap tricks!" He was finally certain that he'd been played. Pill King Zhen had an ability to disappear that he'd already used twice, so Mie Chenzi was surprised but not dumbfounded by this development. "Pill King Zhen, I'll humor you since you're afraid of fighting me face-to-face. I'll have you know that these little parlor tricks are nothing in the end!"

He was fully displaying his domineering bearing at this moment, no longer emanating the demeanor of an ordinary wandering cultivator. It would seem that having his moves miss several times in a row had angered him. He reached out with a grasping motion, coming up with a bell in his hand. It was a sinisterly designed bell, as the handle looked like a sword's handle, whereas the bell itself was designed as a grimacing monster with a pair of wings on its back. The item was accompanied by an eerie aura, instantly dampening the arena's atmosphere.

Chapter 948: Counterattack, Dragon Roar!

The handbell exerted a sinister influence upon the several thousand meters of space in the arena. A sense of disgust was universally felt; nausea, blindness, and a generally nameless malaise. A shadowy haze seemed to set in over the arena. The bright sun and blue sky were no longer, obscured by a billowing gray. Mie Chenzi raised his left hand high into the air and shook the bell.

Ring, ring, ring. The sound was best described as bizarrely magical. It resounded outwards from the stage. Nothing unusual about the noise appeared at first hearing. But when it echoed and resonated with the material of the arena itself, the reverberations created a strangely mesmerizing tune that filled up the space. The flow of air itself was altered. The atmosphere filled with a kind of disorientation and bafflement that couldn't easily be described.

Though he was both airborne and well-hidden, Jiang Chen nevertheless fell into a brief daze. His face colored in the next moment. The sound of the bell had the power to attack a person's consciousness! It brought discord to its listeners' hearts. It wasn't merely a mental attack, either. The clinking metal also disrupted its audience's biological functions. Even someone as composed as Jiang Chen had been affected by uncontrollable confusion! Many parts of his body simply became unresponsive. Steeling his heart with cold resolve, Jiang Chen brought his Boulder's Heart to bear in order to counteract the demonic percussion's effects.

The bell's cacophony was quite potent. It wasn't limited to merely disrupting one's body or consciousness. It also attacked one's dual nature, assaulting flesh and spirit both. For the typical soft-minded genius, the first attack would have been sufficient to confuse them completely. Once they were thrown into disarray, they would become a member of the living dead, entirely at their conductor's disposal. In order to combat the sound, Jiang Chen exerted the Boulder's Heart to the fullest of his ability. In the meantime, he had a few reservations. Mie Chenzi has come amply prepared. A mere wandering cultivator couldn't possibly possess a bell like this. A treasure that can attack both the body and mind is hard to come by. He must be a genius from one of the top sects, and I am his goal. This revelation incensed Jiang Chen.

"Mie Chenzi, your sonic attack might work on others, but you'll have no such luck with me!" A faint humming from his mouth turned into a full-fledged roar. In the next moment, he pushed his bloodline to the maximum, making the image of an ancient dragon erupt from nothingness. It hurtled into the firmament, carrying rain and wind in its wake. The sounds of his roar became deeper and more intense with every passing moment. It was as if the dragon itself was roaring.

"Is that really the roar of a dragon!?" Ceaseless and piercing, the draconic cry evoked surprise from every observer present. Their expressions of amazement from the shift in the battle turned into shock. A dragon's roar!

Only a true dragon could produce such a feat. Jiang Chen's dragon image had already been quite startling, and there had been suspicions circulating whether he truly possessed the bloodline or not. This deafening display was far more substantial. It was as if a true dragon had descended onto the earth, as a resounding cry permeated the air surrounding the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Like a small stream being taken as tributary by a larger river, the sound of the bell was swallowed whole. A dragon's roar reigned over all, suppressing all. Mie Chenzi looked absolutely horrified. Having just unleashed his trump card, he felt as secure as Mount Tai. He was sure that his Souldrain Bell would guarantee him victory. There had never been anyone who could resist the Bell's lure, especially when used as an ambush. Certainly, anyone on or slightly above its level had no chance of resisting whatsoever against it. The Bell was a timeless treasure of the olden ages. Alas, Mie Chenzi's calculations were awry this time.

His opponent hadn't lost himself under the Bell's influence. Neither consciousness nor flesh had been destroyed, or even damaged for that matter. That such a stalwart defense had been conjured up in a mere split-second... how could Mie Chenzi not be surprised? His opponent's instantaneous counterattack was what scared him the most, though. The overwhelming din of the roar ate up the tinkling of the Bell perfectly. The Souldrain Bell's strength lay in the peculiar cadence of its percussive notes, and it relied on these notes to disorient and distort. The instrument itself couldn't produce any kind of sound waves that rivaled a dragon's vocal chords.

Pill King Zhen's draconic roar was like a tsunami, encompassing and incorporating everything in its wake. It broke up and devoured the Bell's own sounds completely. The worst thing was that the roar itself was becoming a mounting threat. His eardrums and consciousness were both continuously assaulted by the strident barrage.

The pressure that came with the roar was dignified and grand, as broad and all-encompassing as the heavens and the earth themselves. A lofty sense of commanding contempt filled the space. Compared to this roar, the ringing of the Souldrain Bell was wretched, almost clownish. Though he'd ridiculed how outlandish his opponent was, Mie Chenzi was the one that felt like a clown after contrasting the two. He didn't have the time to think about much more than that. If he didn't respond now, the force of the roar would totally consume him, ripping his body and consciousness to shreds.

A dragon's roar didn't only attack through sound alone. There was another frightful component: its draconic aura, and the terrible, destructive energies contained therein. It was fortune among misfortunes for Mie Chenzi that Jiang Chen hadn't actually practiced the technique. He had acted on Long Xiaoxuan's suggestion alone when he'd been forced into a corner by the bell. However, he did possess the blood of a true dragon. With this, even this inaugural roar shook its hearers to the core.

People several thousand meters out felt a mountain weighing down on their chests. They couldn't help but back off in order to avert some of its crushing weight. At the center of the storm, Mie Chenzi was fully surrounded by the dragon's roar. Since Jiang Chen was using the ability for the first time, it lacked both offensive and staying power. Still, it was a fearsome ability to contend with.

When it came to true dragons, even an ordinary ability was much more potent than anything that the average cultivator could muster. The true dragon race was one of the strongest races that had descended from ancient times, reigning above most others! True dragons could move unfettered throughout the entirety of the heavenly planes. A place as small as the Divine Abyss Continent couldn't hold a candle up to that.

Now that Jiang Chen had surpassed his opponent in terms of presence, it was time to press the advantage. With a few movements of his hands, the Pentecolor Divine Swords reappeared in the air. He began to chant once again. Verse called upon sword, and thunder rolled behind the clouds. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword technique conjured a rainstorm of rushing swords, raining down on Mie Chenzi with a frightening vehemence.

Jiang Chen held nothing back this time. When he previously mobilized the strength of ten thousand swords against young master Liuxiang, Jiang Chen had kept some of his power in reserve. He'd given his opponent the option of withdrawing in the face of adversity. There was no such grace shown this time.



He was going to utterly crush his opponent in a candid and forthright way! The roar and the Thunderclap Sword were both incredibly straightforward and aboveboard methods.

A terrifying sword aura flew out in every direction, cutting off all means of escape, all hope of life. Thunder and lightning served as the scene's backdrop. Like a hundred thousand divine warriors, the swords were overwhelming and relentless.

Having witnessed the restrained version of the sword technique used on Liuxiang, Mie Chenzi had judged it to be flawed and incomplete. He felt that Jiang Chen hadn't trained to the level of true perfection yet. He laughed to himself upon seeing Jiang Chen use the technique once more. It was a superb chance for him to reverse his odds. However, he quickly discovered his naiveté.

When Jiang Chen used the technique on him, the flaws he had observed earlier were no longer apparent. There were no weaknesses, be it big or small, that he could exploit. No matter which direction Mie Chenzi wanted to escape to, every path was closed off to him. The streaks of sword aura were absolutely endless; they became a network of interlocking blades, carrying lightning and thunder in their wake. Every side and corner combined to form an immaculate whole. He could find no advantage, no matter which place veered towards.

Mie Chenzi colored in fear. He knew that he couldn't evade the sword technique any longer. Hastily, he activated a talisman, crumbling it in his hand. Reddish-copper rays lit up over his entire body. In the next moment, a suit of armor appeared, covering his entire physique with iridescent fish-scales in defense.

"Facing it head on is the only option!" Mie Chenzi had a lot of confidence in the talisman. Though he'd rushed to activate it, he made it in time in the end. The countless streaks of sword aura plunged onto his body in the next instant.

Ping ping ping... Endless sounds of collision could be heard around Mie Chenzi, brutal in severity and volume. Sword aura sent him flying every which way, but the talisman's defensive fortitude was undeniable. It might not have been as effective as the Imperial Advent Defense Talisman, but it wasn't far from that. Despite being immensely powerful, Jiang Chen's blitz of a countless number of sword strokes failed to penetrate the glyph-armor. Mie Chenzi was now coughing up blood at an alarming frequency, but his internal organs hadn't been pierced. His vitals were mostly in fine shape. However, his injuries were definitely serious enough to make him suffer.

Jiang Chen furrowed his brow at his opponent's strong defense. His hands didn't remain idle. He activated his formation disk once more, the eight statues within came blitzing out in a renewed assault. He'd taken the eight statues from the Prince of Shangping. Jiang Chen's modifications had brought out more of their abilities, further increasing their combat strength. The best thing about them was that there was no need to devote any resources to defense.

Controlled by Jiang Chen's formation disk, the statues encircled Mie Chenzi. A little winded from the onslaught of sword strokes, Mie Chenzi had expected a window to retaliate. Unfortunately, the aggression he faced was dogged and implacable. No matter what he did, he was unable to free himself from the mob of statues. Most concerning was they they entirely ignored his attempts to damage them. Like mad tigers and frenzied hounds, they nipped at him, awaiting the moment to strike a finishing blow.

Chapter 949: Unexpected Forfeiture

Mie Chenzi was a veteran of countless battles. In every one of his past conquests, he'd maimed, crushed, and mercilessly tricked his opponents without mercy. There had never been a battle as unpleasant as today's. He'd been outmaneuvered at every turn, stifled at every move, and to top it off, he couldn't even begin to think of any solutions to his predicament. He had seen the eight statues before. Their previous owner had been a wandering cultivator known as the Prince of Shangping. But in his memories, the eight statues lacked both the terrifying offensive strength and the astonishing mobility that they currently possessed. The statues now had a new spirit to them along with several degrees of increased intelligence. They had become similar to real cultivators, both in terms of raw power and battlefield awareness.

That wasn't the most annoying aspect about them, however. The most irritating part was that the statues weren't of flesh and blood; they were inorganic objects! None of his retaliation had any effect whatsoever. The most a strike that landed did was leave a faint scar. Mie Chenzi's blade hacked at the statues again and again, but he had no way of totally annihilating them. As essentially puppets of their controller's will, the statues could not be counted as completely destroyed unless they were shattered. The problem with this proposition was that... puppets were unafraid of taking a beating, but he was.

Yes, he'd instantly increased his body's defenses several times over, but the torrent of attacks he'd experienced just now had already inflicted a few wounds. Though he would be fine in the immediate future if he allowed the statues to continuously land blows on him, it would surely be a problem if stretched over a longer period of time. Most importantly, the glyph's defensive boost had a time limit. Once its duration was up, he had no way to protect himself against the frenzied assault from the pack of statues. His fleshly body wouldn't last long against the inorganic statues once a pitched battle ensued. Mie Chenzi's heart was aflame with anxiety.

This was a predicament that he'd never encountered before. He still possessed a final trump card, but it was difficult for him to draw it under the present circumstances. More importantly, if he did show it to the audience, his identity would be revealed, and that would bring disaster onto himself and his sect.

In this moment, Mie Chenzi was hopelessly uneasy. The match had three secret observers who were even more restless than him. The three holy kings from the Eternal Celestial Capital—Saint Holy Kings Mu and Ke, and Holy King Bei— were watching from a safe distance. The 'Mie Chenzi' in the arena was a top-ranked genius from the Eternal Celestial Capital, one of the sect's true disciples. Having seen all of Pill King Zhen's successive victories prior, they'd witnessed the brutal killing of someone who looked suspiciously like a similarly prestigious disciple from the Ninesuns Sky Sect. They'd already had second thoughts about whether they should send their own best genius in the first place.

The Eternal Celestial Capital had sent three geniuses in total. However, the other two were already useless. Even if they were to take the stage, the only thing that fate had in store for them was death. Only Mie Chenzi stood a ghost of a chance. When he'd produced the Souldrain Bell, all three holy kings were absolutely astounded. Truly, the head of the sect's favor for 'Mie Chenzi' knew no bounds.

Strangely, the Bell that they saw as a path to certain victory had little effect on Pill King Zhen. Quite the opposite, the counterblow that Pill King Zhen struck allowed him to gain the upper hand instead. Wave after wave, the pill king's barrage was inexorable. It seemed that Mie Chenzi was having a fair bit of trouble warding off his attacks. The trio was flabbergasted by this. They'd had their previous suspicions that Pill King Zhen was actually Jiang Chen, but this time they started second-guessing themselves. Jiang

Chen was extraordinary, sure, but all news of him indicated that this kind of capability was beyond his abilities.

Is... is this Pill King Zhen really not Jiang Chen? This was the question that each and every holy king had in mind. Given what had happened so far? It was honestly hard to tell. Pill King Zhen's abilities had surpassed their estimates to the point of absurdity. Could any of their true disciples overcome the man?

Likely not.

Was Jiang Chen a genius that could accomplish such a feat? Ultimately, Regal Pill Palace was only a fourth-rank sect, and Jiang Chen was just a genius from that sect. Being able to rise out of the Myriad Domain and amounting to anything in the Upper Eight Regions were two very different things. Even the most diehard Zhen-Chen theorist, Saint Holy King Mu, became uncertain.

Unfortunately, the current state of affairs was difficult to recover from. The sight of Mie Chenzi in imminent danger on the stage only increased the three holy kings' anxiety. Among the Eternal Celestial Capital's best disciples, Mie Chenzi easily made it into the top five and was even a reasonable contender for the top three. Furthermore, he was the grandson of the sect head. The latter heavily favored him.

"Brother Ke, shouldn't Mie Chenzi have more trump cards up his sleeve? He is the grandson of the sect head, after all. Is continuing to take Jiang Chen's beating the only thing he can do?"

"I don't think the sect head would've let Mie Chenzi take such a big risk by coming here without the necessary preparation." Saint Holy King Ke returned a wry smile. "My guess is on him waiting for a window of counterattack." With things as they were currently, that was the only thing they could hope for.

In the arena proper, Jiang Chen looked leisurely and relaxed. In actuality, he was constantly observing his surroundings. He was waiting for a chance to land the killing blow. He no longer had any doubts that his opponent was an envoy from an enemy sect.

The Ninesuns Sky Sect, Eternal Celestial Capital, or Pillfire City... it had to be one of these. The Great Scarlet Mid Region was hostile to him as well, but he was confident that no genius from it could possibly reach the level Mie Chenzi was at, hence his hypothesis about the other's origin. As for exactly which one, Jiang Chen had no interest in finding out. He had only one thought in mind: to kill his opponent before he could leave the stage. The target of this murderous intent sensed Jiang Chen's motives, his disposition turning serious. For a time, his movements became more guarded, and he was almost able to maintain defensive equilibrium.

Jiang Chen started brainstorming how to break the stalemate when he saw this. He had many other methods, of course—formations, his Bewitching Lotus, his magnetic golden mountain... But he wasn't planning to use any of them for the time being. Flourishing his sleeves, he shot out an invisible ray from his Featherflight Mirror.

Mie Chenzi was already busy enough handling the eight statues. How would he be prepared for the Mirror's unforeseen intervention? His back swayed, and his step slowed a beat. This momentary delay caused two statues to collide into both his left and right shoulders. Bam bam! Though he had a strong defensive ward over his entire body, the attacks were fierce enough to cause him bone-splitting pain. His breath became ragged, his vitals disturbed by the impact. They weren't exactly lethal, but the attacks

definitely did a number on him. Twenty or thirty of those swings would be enough to cause heavy trauma.

Jiang Chen repeated his previous gesture. Constant rays from the Featherflight Mirror beamed towards Mie Chenzi's body, perpetually opportunistic in their timing. Being constantly slowed by the mirror impeded him enough to be hit seven or eight more times in succession. None of them caused any critical bruises, but the nonstop bashes only worsened his condition. The talisman's warding ability was formidable, but it couldn't stand up to an unbroken stream of blows.

Scrambling in panic, Mie Chenzi shouted at the top of his lungs, "Pill King Zhen, your methods are too strong. I admit defeat!"

He... admits defeat?

Jiang Chen hadn't at all imagined the possibility of Mie Chenzi's forfeiture at this crucial juncture. Had he just been shamed into submission by a volley of attacks? The very purpose of shaming him was in order to provoke him! Preferably so that in the heat of the moment, he'd blurt out something like, "I'll never surrender!" Alas, Jiang Chen had underestimated the thickness of this Mie Chenzi's hide. Surrendering! What a turn of events... at such a key time, too.

When all was said and done, this was only a competitive match. There was no justification for cutting down one's opponent after a public surrender. It was in the rules as well—upon a forfeit, the winning side could not pursue the losing side any further. Jiang Chen wanted more than anything to kill his opponent right then and there, but reason told him that victory was already decided.

Holding back his Mirror, Jiang Chen sneered. "Mie Chenzi, you talked so much smack about ending my winning streak. Shame that it's all bluster and no bite, huh?"

This was an attempt to aggravate Mie Chenzi anew. Mie Chenzi had a dark expression on his face. "The match is over. What's the point of saying anything more? Winners are always right, losers are always wrong. You're the former, so whatever you say is fine."

He was rather decisive about it all. Those were the words of a man with nothing left to lose. They were difficult to sink one's teeth into. Jiang Chen could only maintain his sneer, his God's Eye looking profoundly into the other man's soul. Mie Chenzi became impassive again. With an utterly undecipherable look, he appeared perfectly ordinary once more.

"Pill King Zhen, nine wins in a row! First place in the ranking battles, top of the Genius Rankings!" The match concluded, the judge stood forward to loudly announce the result. The other groups' ranking battles were over now as well. The chance to challenge others came next. According to the regulations stated previously, the fourth to sixth groups had the right to challenge the top thirty geniuses within the first to third groups.

Very few of them actually exercised the option, however. They'd been witnesses to the differences in strength firsthand. Clearly, everyone had a certain fear that issuing a challenge was equivalent to an open insult. As such, it could be the spark to further aggression in the arena. If by chance a higher-ranked person was challenged and took it as an affront, the lower-ranked person's life would be in danger when he faced the full brunt of the higher-ranked person's might.

Given this consideration, there were only six instances of such challenges. All of them ended in failure without exception. The last four areas had a similar opportunity open to them in order to enter the top 164 spots. The stakes were slightly different—they opened up the door to competing in the Ranking of Young Lords. It was an opportunity that almost none of the particularly low-ranked cultivators wanted to give up. Thus, the battles that occurred afterwards between the lower ranks were far fiercer.

#### Chapter 950: The Ranking of Young Lords

Thirty-six contestants from the last four groups were going to be disqualified because their places would eventually be taken by the thirty-six geniuses of the seven great emperors instead. Competition was very intense at the bottom of the rankings because of that, with eight geniuses launching successful challenges at the end of the battles.

The final segment came right after that. Some disqualified geniuses were now given their second chance. They had to have been beaten by a contender in the top thirty to qualify for a second chance, with this chance being their final attempt. They would have to challenge the 164 finalists for the Genius Rankings. There weren't that many unlucky cultivators worthy of a second chance amongst the disqualified, but Wei Jie was one of them. However, there was one more genius disciple from a great clan that had been even more unlucky than him. He was defeated when he was still talking.

Roughly a dozen contenders claimed their second chance, but only Wei Jie and the great clan disciple succeeded. Wei Jie had chosen his opponent very carefully. After a hard battle, he finally won and took over his opponent's place. He was now ranked 156th. With that, the Genius Rankings finally came to a close.

164 contestants from the Genius Rankings and thirty-six geniuses under the seven great emperors were now going to fight for a spot in the Ranking of Young Lords. Only thirty-six of them would qualify for the Ranking of Young Lords. Many contestants among the Genius Rankings were only lesser characters when compared to the true geniuses. Probably less than ten of them were actually qualified to challenge the Ranking of Young Lords. However, there probably wouldn't be more than three that would successfully enter the Ranking of Young Lords.

The Ranking of Young Lords battles had an entirely different set of rules than the previous two ranking battles. Thirty-six successors of the seven great emperors were already listed in the Ranking of Young Lords. The other 164 geniuses were merely given the opportunity to challenge them. Each contestant only had one chance and one specific target to challenge.

Those in the first group of the Genius Rankings were only qualified to challenge the twenty-first ranked genius of the Ranking of Young Lords, while those in the second group were only qualified to challenge the twenty-second ranked genius. This pattern continued all the way down to the sixteenth group that could challenge the thirty-sixth ranked genius. The ten geniuses in each group were only given one chance, and they all had to face the same opponent.

Jiang Chen's first challenge was naturally the twenty-first ranked genius since he was in the first group. The top twenty geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were not required to accept any challengers at this stage. Only those ranked twenty-first to thirty-sixth were required to defend their places in the Ranking of Young Lords as an arena lord. This stage of the tournament often ended with the total defeat of all challengers in past tournaments. In fact, it was commonplace for the geniuses affiliated with the

great emperors to occupy all the places in the Ranking of Young Lords. This time, however, many were optimistic that a few could possibly overcome this challenge. Everyone had placed their hopes on the first group.

The rules of the challenge were quite brutal. If a genius within the first group was able to successfully defeat the twenty-first ranked candidate, the other geniuses in the first group would have to move up the list and challenge the twentieth ranked genius in the rankings. If two were somehow able to succeed, then the rest would have to challenge the nineteenth ranked genius. The same rules applied for the other groups as well. However, the possibility that the other groups could succeed was close to zero. Geniuses who managed to win the challenge had historically come from the first group. Those who couldn't even manage to enter the top ten were unlikely to defeat their opponent in the Ranking of Young Lords.

The geniuses in the first group had already battled amongst themselves. Now, their common enemy was the twenty-first ranked genius. His name was Gu Zhenshan, a true disciple of Emperor Mountaincrush. [1. Gu Zhenshan's name also means Mountaincrush.] Gu Zhenshan possessed a very impressive cultivation level, and was ranked third amongst the geniuses under Emperor Mountaincrush. However, Jiang Chen didn't seem to know much about him.

Geniuses under the great emperors didn't often engage with the commoners. A great number of citizens in Veluriyam Capital weren't even familiar with these young lords. These young lords pursued their own dao and had their own plans. Those who kept a high profile were more well-known, but those who kept a low profile were so secretive that even their peers weren't sure of their cultivation levels.

The geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords were actually ranked by the seven great emperors after an internal discussion amongst themselves. However, this also meant that the rankings sometimes didn't precisely reflect their true capabilities.

The first genius to challenge Gu Zhenshan was Alchemist Xi from the Rising Tide Clan. Jiang Chen had a few impressions of Alchemist Xi. Alchemist Xi was actually quite talented in pill dao. However, the alchemist seemed to enjoy pill dao more, and was actually one of the weakest amongst the top ten in the Genius Rankings. This of course meant that he wasn't even capable of giving Gu Zhenshan a warmup. He was promptly kicked out of the arena in just three strikes.

It wasn't that Alchemist Xi was so weak that he couldn't even handle three basic moves from the young lord. Jiang Chen could tell that Gu Zhenshan had used very powerful techniques right from the beginning to set an example. He wanted to scare the other competitors with his might and show the disparity between them. He had killed a chicken to scare the monkeys, so to speak. True enough, the few geniuses next in line after Alchemist Xi were also easily defeated. They couldn't even manage to last more than fifteen minutes.

Jiang Chen had begun to understand Gu Zhenshan a little more after these fights. He was worthy of being a true disciple of a great emperor due to his exceptional talent, but he was just a little too petty and narrow-minded. He was definitely not the one who would eventually succeed Emperor Mountaincrush. Of this, Jiang Chen was quite sure of. He was a fair judge of character. Gu Zhenshan wasn't fated to be the patriarch of a great emperor clan, but was rather a suitable elder candidate.

People continued to challenge him, but they all lost. It was soon young master Liuxiang's turn to challenge him, which he still lost after fighting a hard battle. According to the rules, the arena lord was allowed a few hour's rest after every three rounds. It was already Gu Zhenshan's sixth consecutive victory by the time he'd defeated Liuxiang. He decided to rest when he considered the difficulty of the battles from there on out. The four remaining contenders were Sunyu Xiaosheng, Ji San, Mie Chenzi, and Jiang Chen.

To prevent accumulation of fatigue from previous bouts, the arena lord was given an option for six hours' rest after every battle from the fifth round onwards. This was to prevent fatigue and also to prevent giving the person next in line an unfair advantage.

After six hours had passed, it was Sunyu Xiaosheng's turn. Jiang Chen had been paying close attention to the frivolous wandering cultivator. This was a matchup which Gu Zhenshan could possibly lose. As expected, Gu Zhenshan started the fight by trying to overwhelm Sunyu Xiaosheng with a flurry of attacks. However, Sunyu Xiaosheng was able to suppress the attacks with his superior ability to control the flow of the battle. Gu Zhenshan felt like he was dishing out punches to a heap of cotton.

Sunyu Xiaosheng was able to control the flow of battle at an incredibly frightening level. Gu Zhenshan's tried-and-true method of overwhelming his opponents was rendered useless, as he simply couldn't bring out the full might of his punches. It could have been an incredibly entertaining match if Gu Zhenshan had been paired against a similar opponent to him. But unfortunately, he was paired against Sunyu Xiaosheng. Each strike only made him even more frustrated and depressed.

However, he was still a successor to a great emperor in the end. After a series of bitter exchanges, he finally decided to use the trump card of a great emperor's true disciple. Through the might of his equipment, he was able to suppress Sunyu Xiaosheng and defeated him in a moment of carelessness. Sunyu Xiaosheng earned the respect of everyone present despite his loss. A wandering cultivator was able to break into the top ten of the Genius Rankings and almost make it into the Ranking of Young Lords? If Gu Zhenshan hadn't overpowered his opponent through the might of his equipment, there was no say in how the fight might've ended.

Everyone present strongly believed that Sunyu Xiaosheng had caught the attention of the seven great emperors, even though he hadn't entered the Ranking of Young Lords. If he made good use of this opportunity, he could possibly have a meteoric rise and become a great emperor's true disciple. He wasn't beneath Gu Zhenshan in terms of pure talent and battle instinct. He'd only lost due to the discrepancy between their equipment. Such was the flaw of being a wandering cultivator.

This only made Jiang Chen even more curious. Sunyu Xiaosheng had obviously been taught by an incredibly formidable master, so why was his equipment so inadequate? It was obvious that he'd only been using the type of equipment wandering cultivators had access to. Jiang Chen theorized that Sunyu Xiaosheng might have been taught by a formidable master, but he didn't belong in any powerful clan or sect. Since Sunyu Xiaosheng was defeated, it was now Ji San's turn to challenge Gu Zhenshan.

Gu Zhenshan no longer dared to belittle his opponents. He chose to take a rest instead of accepting consecutive fights, as his opponents were no longer slouches. Ji San also wasn't the kind of person to capitalize on another person's disadvantage. While his opponent was resting, he consulted Jiang Chen about Gu Zhenshan's martial methods and abilities. Jiang Chen managed to give very important pointers

to Ji San, as he was extremely good at deduction. In order for Ji San to have a chance of winning, they agreed that he would have to suppress Gu Zhenshan's equipment advantage first.