

## Three Realms 961

### Chapter 961: Geniuses of Emperor Peafowls Line

There was no need for Jiang Chen's explanation. Ji San himself knew what true dragon blood meant. A family with a dragon bloodline understood the meaning behind that much better than most, regardless of how thin that bloodline happened to run. This was especially true for Ji San, since he'd read a plethora of ancient tomes on the subject. He was no stranger to the legends and myths surrounding true dragon bloodlines in particular.

In ancient times, the dragon race was one of the few races that reigned above all others. The bloodline that flowed through their descendants was diluted after generations of inheritance. It was one of the most depressing and helpless truths for the concerned parties. Both actual dragons and humans with dragon bloodlines had no solution whatsoever to the age-old problem of blood dilution; it was simply part of the natural order. It was impossible for bloodlines to become purer over time without genetic mutation.

The appearance of true dragon blood was a kind of ancestral reversion. No matter the race, true dragon blood was the best way for draconic descendents to attain bloodline reversion. 'Bloodline reversion' was the process through which a descendant with a diluted bloodline could return their level to the same level of their ancestors, or even surpass it in some instances. It was almost impossible for such a reversion to occur without at least discovering a pureblood true dragon.

Was the thing in Ji San's hands really the true dragon blood of legend? Something that hadn't appeared for the past thousand years? He wasn't intentionally appearing incredulous, rather, it was just that he had never even dreamed of such a possibility happening to him. Even after Jiang Chen showed off his dragon's roar and devouring art, Ji San had thought that it was his brother's teacher who'd altered his bloodline. Thus, the young master's reaction to the bottle of true dragon blood was understandable.

At this point, Jiang Chen had given out several portions of true dragon blood already. Ye Chonglou had received one, his good friend Tang Hong of the Precious Tree Sect had been given another, and Liu Wencai of the mysterious bloodline powers a third. Young master Ji San was the recipient of the fourth. Ye Chonglou aside, the other two lacked any substantial knowledge about the rarity of the blood. They knew that it was precious, but how uncommon was it really? That hadn't been part of their considerations. They just knew that anything Jiang Chen gave them would be treasure.

Young master Ji San, on the other hand, knew even more than Ye Chonglou did about how valuable the substance before him was. He opened the stopper to take a whiff but was greeted by a wild aura that rushed from the bottle into his face. The aura felt like it could engulf him instantly. It called to every pore in his body, bringing the youth to a shuddering point. In the next moment, his entire body began to resonate. His bloodline began to awaken, down to every extremity of his capillaries. Ji San was shaking all over. Usually a carefree joker, he couldn't contain the fervent thrill in his eyes. He almost dropped the bottle he was holding.

Ji San wasn't inexperienced, nor was he easily agitated. The blood of a true dragon was many times more crucial for him than for others. This was probably true even in comparison to Liu Wencai. Jiang Chen smiled, but didn't say anything more. He was nonplussed by Ji San's reaction. As the possessors of

a draconic bloodline, the Coiling Dragon Clan knew exactly what the blood of a true dragon meant for them. Ji San recovered his wits after a long while.

"Pardon my bout of foolishness, brother." Ji San paused. "No words can express my appreciation. Between brothers..." His voice was a little hoarse. He wanted to express a great deal more, but could not despite his eloquence.

Jiang Chen gave him a pat on the shoulder. "We're brothers, aren't we? Let the rest of your words remain unspoken. I just hope that after your bloodline reversion is complete, you can stomp all of these so-called geniuses underfoot."

"All of them? Including you?" Ji San chuckled. He finally had the opportunity to make a joke, adjusting his emotions in the process.

"I'll accept the loss... if you're able to do so." Jiang Chen grinned meaningfully, trailing off the sentence.

Ji San sighed. "You're quite the piece of work, alright. Even if I defeat every genius under the heavens, you'll still be an insurmountable mountain in front of me."

"To completely assimilate the blood into your own will take a long time. I wouldn't count on it for the Ranking battles."

After some consideration, Ji San nodded in agreement. "There's no point to them after obtaining true dragon blood. Why chase something so pointless?" He turned to Jiang Chen, eyes ablaze with expectation. "With that being said... I'll leave the rest of the Ranking battles to you, brother."

Jiang Chen's gift of true dragon blood only increased Ji San's hopes for him. Jiang Chen truly seemed to him like a god among men now. Each time he thought he had seen his brother's limits, some new surprise would appear. There hadn't ever been an exception to that observation. The Pinecrane Pill that Jiang Chen had talked about prior, and now the true dragon blood. If either of these made their way into the public eye, there would be a great deal of bloodshed. But for his brother, they were simple presents. It was not due to magnanimity and generosity alone, but rather, a kind of trust in him. In Ji San, the person.

If Jiang Chen didn't have faith in him, why give Ji San any of these things? Precious treasures like these had the tendency to set their bearers aflame. It threatened the very lives of the people through whose hands it passed. But Jiang Chen seemingly had no reservations about the matter. Rather than the true dragon blood, what Ji San valued more was his brother's trust. What did being brothers mean? This was the answer. He told himself many a time in his heart that this was the kind of secret that he could divulge to no one else. Not even the clan lord could know. Ji San had no possible way of repaying all of Jiang Chen's help. The only thing he could do was preserve the secrets he knew.

"You should use the true dragon blood I've given you well, Brother Ji. Who knows? Maybe you'll be the one who rules Veluriyam Capital in the next three thousand years."

"What, me?" Ji San was perplexed. "But I heard that His Majesty Peafowl wants to make you the young lord. You don't need to say anything else. We're brothers, and there's no reason for me to not support you as the ruler of the city. I'll listen to you all my life."

A promise was all he could do in the face of his brother's generosity.

Jiang Chen smiled. "Even if I do become Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, it's not possible for me to stay here a whole three thousand years. If everything goes well, I hope that you can prop up the city's future in my stead."

Ji San was stunned. The leader of Veluriyam Capital was one of the most powerful positions in the Upper Eight Regions. It was a paramount existence. Did Brother Jiang Chen's ambitions exceed that?

Jiang Chen didn't explain what he meant. He merely maintained his smile. "You'll know more about it, one day. I just hope that you don't let the blood I gave you down."

Burning blood surged through Ji San's veins. "If I waste an endowment like this, then I really do deserve to be called a piece of trash. Don't worry. I'll show you what I can do!"

The next day, the ranking battles proceeded once more.

It was Ji San's turn to issue challenges. To everyone's surprise, he surrendered the opportunity. Though he'd informed the Coiling Dragon clan lord of the choice beforehand already, the clan lord still felt that it was a bit of a shame. He had asked Ji San the reason for it, but the young master had not given him one. He only told the clan lord to trust his judgment, and that he would give him a full and appropriate explanation in the future.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord had been mentally prepared, but no one else had. The ferocious young master Ji San had given up! Everyone was bewildered at this unforeseen outcome. In their opinion, someone with Ji San's strength could at least fight to boost morale and show flair, regardless of victory or loss. But before he was even able to do so, he'd already signed away the chance. He hadn't given up on only the consequences of this battle, but perhaps also the strategic movements of the Coiling Dragon Clan in the short term.

However, the young master was entirely expressionless. He had none of the dejection that one would expect to see. Those who'd always thought Ji San was a bit impulsive suddenly found themselves unable to understand him. For most people, Coiling Dragon's young master had always been somewhat eccentric, a mold-breaker, and perhaps a bit too playful for his own good. This kind of added depth to his character was something new. The change was vexing. Where had his confidence come from? Why was he so impassive about it? Didn't he know how much of a hit it would be to the Coiling Dragon Clan's plans?

The other clans that wanted to replace Coiling Dragon gloated a little. They were the ones who'd had the highest hopes of Ji San ending up with a low ranking. A higher ranking meant a bigger gap between his clan and the rest. Some thought that young master Ji San might have had cold feet, and that he was probably scared of entering the arena once more. No matter how others perceived him, Ji San's expression revealed nothing about his intentions. After Ji San came Pill King Zhen. With the Coiling Dragon young master's example before him, there was the curious sentiment going around regarding whether Pill King Zhen would give up his chance to challenge as well. Would he be satisfied with staying number twenty on the rankings?

The three-ranked geniuses immediately above Jiang Chen were especially anxious. His fierceness in the prior rounds had been seen by all. The three geniuses had mentally substituted themselves into the battles and done some inference. They had to admit that their own chances of victory in the same spots

were equally slim. They had no hope against the worldly genius who'd apparently come out of nowhere. Thus, they wanted Jiang Chen to also give up from the bottom of their hearts.

Unfortunately for them, Jiang Chen clearly had no intentions of doing so whatsoever. He challenged the 17th genius straightaway. The 17th ranked was a genius from Emperor Peafowl's faction, named Yang Sheng. It was the first time Jiang Chen was fighting against a genius aligned with Emperor Peafowl. Yang Sheng was one of the four top geniuses under the emperor's command. Yes, he was technically last place amongst the four, but nobody took him lightly nevertheless. Jiang Chen's direct challenge lit an angry flame within Yang Sheng's heart.

#### Chapter 962: A Jealous Genius

The anger hadn't been because of Jiang Chen's challenge in particular. The Ranking of Young Lords had clear-cut rules. As the 20th ranked, Jiang Chen could only issue a challenge to someone three ranks above him at most. Yang Sheng was at the tail end of that gap, so challenging him made complete sense. Yang Sheng's fury was rooted somewhere else. Pill King Zhen had only come to the Capital less than two years ago. How could he be allowed to steal so much thunder? What did he do to deserve so much adoration? The news of Emperor Peafowl's plans to make him the next young lord was just icing on the cake. Bestowing the title of young lord wasn't a big deal in and of itself. Any true disciple studying under Emperor Peafowl was automatically eligible.

However, as one of the four most intimate disciples of His Majesty, Yang Sheng had pride and ambition. Ever since young lord Fan's death, only three out of the four disciples remained, with little difference in ability between them. Given the circumstances, he saw an opportunity for advancement. Thus, he viewed Veluriyam Capital's future leadership as his own domain, as a possible future he could carve out for himself. Pill King Zhen's sudden appearance and widespread acceptance by the city greatly threatened that prospect.

His hostility in light of that was quite natural. It was a primal instinct to protect one's own territory. He wasn't at all satisfied. He didn't want Jiang Chen to be listed as one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lords, period. The trending gossip didn't only state that Pill King Zhen would be made young lord, but also that he would be young lord Fan's replacement. This only served to make his enmity explode.

Yang Sheng was an ambitious man. If Pill King Zhen was indeed young lord Fan's replacement, then the chance at future leadership of Sacred Peafowl Mountain would be lost to him once more. The young lord Fan of yesteryear was undeniably number one compared to his peers. There was no question about who would inherit the faction. They had envied the young lord too back then. The disciples had enough self-awareness about the significant distance between Peafowl's then-foremost disciple and themselves. But young lord Fan had not collected the popularity and position due to him overnight. That was why they had kept their eventual resentment bottled up.

Pill King Zhen, on the other hand, had made a name for himself by blazing a meteoric trail. He'd become Veluriyam Capital's most-beloved star in a matter of moments. Yang Sheng was not the most tolerant of individuals. He was very upset, in fact. The arena was the final catalyst for his emotions to erupt. His thin eyebrows upturned, Yang Sheng looked his competitor up and down with undisguised contempt. His gaze was both critical and provocative.

"I'm impressed that you're able to stand here, Pill King Zhen." However, he kept his tone impassive. The pill king was an associate of the Mountain, after all. Regardless of how jealous he was in private, he could not imitate Zhuang Jie's lack of decorum.

Despite its concealment in Yang Sheng's voice, the hidden hostility from Jiang Chen's opponent was still easily detectable. The expression in the other man's eyes gave it up right away. Jiang Chen spared no politics aside from a cupped-fist salute.

"I await your tutelage in the fight," he replied with a faint smile. If his opponent had been anyone else, perhaps he would have bit back with a snappy retort. However, Yang Sheng was one of Emperor Peafowl's true disciples. Though there was no need to accord respect to the student in this case, the teacher still deserved full dignity. It was better to give Yang Sheng the cold shoulder. The best kind of retaliation lay in an onstage victory.

Yang Sheng was a little startled at Jiang Chen's unresponsiveness. An aggravated opponent was easier to deal with, but there was a factor of intimidation as well. His position as one of the true disciples under Emperor Peafowl was the perfect club. He wanted to scare his opponent into performing more poorly than usual. But the pill king hadn't fallen for it at all. Yang Sheng had been outright ignored. He smirked. "You'll have something to look forward to, alright."

With a shake of his arm, he produced a black-and-white whip in his hand. "You know, Pill King Zhen, the news is everywhere these days. People are saying that you're a genius among geniuses, a master of both pill and martial dao. Let's test that rumor out and see how true it really is!"

The twirling whip induced cracks in the fabric of its surrounding space. Countless specks of dust came out of the broken space, kicking up a storm of reduced visibility. In the next moment, the monochrome whip moved into action. The air crackled vibrantly, as if heralding an oncoming storm. Numerous bolts of silver lightning appeared in the skies over the arena, snaking through the air with a dangerous vehemence.

"Monochrome Lightning Seal!" Yang Sheng's hand drew a circle in the air. At the gesture, countless airborne energies collected themselves into two poles: positive and negative, forceful and docile. The two extremes formed an encircling approach.

Jiang Chen had met a strong opponent called Guan Yuchan during the Genius Ranking battles. That fellow favored a pair of golden cymbals. The percussive instruments, acting as positive and negative poles, had been able to create a strong suctioning force between them. This Yin Yang Whip seemed to have the same sort of ability, though the actual technique was probably more complicated and difficult to deal with. After all, the whip's power purely came from Yang Sheng's personal skill. It was different from the cymbals, which had been intrinsically strong.

Jiang Chen dared not underestimate his opponent. This kind of power was troublesome in general. Thankfully, his breakthrough into the eighth level sage realm had increased his martial prowess greatly. In his battle against Fang Yuan, Jiang Chen had been filled with boundless inspiration by the mystery of his Reverse Heaven and Earth technique. After some soul-searching consideration, he realized that the sword-strike had contained energies similar to those of an emperor realm cultivator. Therefore, his solution against a martial method such as the one he was currently facing was also to sunder it with his sword.

His Pentecolor Divine Swords swept through the air, combining blade and finesse into one. The chaos in the air marked the upending of laws governing the surrounding space. The two whip images were fragmented into a thousand pieces.

Yang Sheng harrumphed with evident displeasure. He'd observed his opponent's prior match with Fang Yuan. The power behind this particular sword technique was known to him. Still, he'd been confident that the forcefield from his Yin Yang Whip wouldn't lose. The simple motion with which the pill king shattered his offense caused his heart to sink. He began to re-evaluate the power of Jiang Chen's sword.

Is Pill King Zhen actually one of His Majesty's hidden pawns? Saved for the sole purpose of shining brightly in the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering? A strange thought couldn't help but pop into Yang Sheng's head. There was no other explanation for the absurdity of the situation. In face of the fact that he'd only been here for less than two years, Pill King Zhen's accomplishments were incredibly absurd. Someone like that couldn't have stayed so nameless. A wandering cultivator? Completely out of the question.

Yang Sheng was fully roused by now, his ire flaring. His whip twisted and wove at will, the constricting force brought to a crescendo by the movements. On the stage, Jiang Chen looked like a raft weathering an ocean tempest. Each and every wave appeared calamitous to the raft. Afterimages from the Yin Yang Whip filled the air. The weapon carried a might that split space itself, and left gashes of nothingness in its wake.

Jiang Chen had fought many geniuses in the past. But as simple as Yang Sheng's whip looked, it was the first time that Jiang Chen felt the pangs of a challenge. In terms of both power and expertise, his current opponent surpassed the two he'd just taken down by a fair amount. It was fortunate that he'd broken through to the eighth level sage realm already. Otherwise, he would have needed a lot more effort to take down the youth on the other side of the ring.

Although Yang Sheng's whip was quite potent, it failed to find any gaps in the defenses woven by Jiang Chen's Pentecolor Swords. As time went by, more and more people were clued into the reality of the battle. Those who were the keenest already had the following impression: no matter how flowery Yang Sheng's whip attacks were, they were never going to catch Pill King Zhen in their coils. On the other hand, Pill King Zhen was goofing around a bit. His sole purpose seemed to be dismantling his opponent's offense, having no intention of apparently mounting any counterattack.

"Tch. This Yang Sheng is really shameless. Pill King Zhen is giving way because of his status as one of Emperor Peafowl's closest disciples. Why is he taking a mile when he's only been given an inch? Does he really want to be stomped upon?"

"Don't say it like that. Yang Sheng is one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's four true disciples. His techniques with the Yin Yang Whip are pretty impressive. In the world of martial dao, it's difficult to judge what technique will come on top. Maybe he has an advantage of some sort?"

"That's a load of bull. I think Pill King Zhen is going easy on him on purpose. Like you said, Yang Sheng is one of Emperor Peafowl's best students. If the pill king took him out with just a couple of blows, wouldn't that be really embarrassing? People have reputations, you know."

"You're probably right about that. Pill King Zhen is going to be Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, right? He probably knows it by now. He and his opponent will both serve the same master soon, and

Yang Sheng might even be his lieutenant someday. You have to look out a bit for your second-in-command, no?" A variety of different conversations was buzzing all around the arena. Evidently, Jiang Chen's superb performances so far had caused the residents of the Capital to begin mythologizing him. He was being eternalized as someone unbeatable. Even though his opponent was one of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's finest youths, everyone believed in Pill King Zhen's victory to be a matter of course. The unconditional trust signaled a kind of common sentiment.

The battle neared the one-hour mark. Booing began to be heard all around the stage. Public dissatisfaction at Yang Sheng's behavior was palpable. The man clearly had no chance! What was he still brawling it out for? Look at how refined Pill King Zhen was being! He'd loyally cooperated with his partner all this time, never retaliating even in a slightly dangerous way. Nobody knew what Jiang Chen was actually thinking. He had taken the defensive for one purpose alone: he wanted to figure a few more things out about martial dao through battle and wanted to confirm some of his theories regarding the sword.

#### Chapter 963: Switching Between Attack and Defense

Yang Shen had run out of new tricks with his Yin Yang Whip. The execution of his attacks today had been perfect. Some might even say that he'd gone beyond his limits. Despite all that, he still wasn't able to penetrate the momentum created by his opponent's sword. Yang Shen was feeling quite aggrieved. He'd always been incredibly confident in his whip. Even though it wasn't sufficient to defeat the strongest of foremost geniuses, he was certain that he could at least put up a decent fight. It seemed that all this had been his own wishful thinking. How could he aim to challenge the unrivaled geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords when he couldn't even handle a mere cultivator that had come from the secular world? He'd been too naive.

The audience could easily tell that Yang Shen was only hanging by a thread. The disapproving jeers were getting louder by the minute. The Veluriyam Capital audience was actually quite fair. The fact that he was a true disciple of Saint Peafowl Mountain didn't mean that he was going to be spared from the jeers. One's identity didn't matter. The crowd was willing to jeer at anyone that they disapproved of. However, those who had made great contributions to Veluriyam Capital would be spared from such treatment. A good example of this was Emperor Peafowl. He'd been protecting Veluriyam Capital for thousands of years. All the citizens revered him greatly. They were even willing to get into a dispute if somebody spoke badly about the emperor. Sometimes, it would even escalate into a fight. This was out of pure reverence towards the emperor, which he duly deserved.

Young lord Fan had also received such treatment when he was alive. Pill King Zhen was the next person to receive such treatment. Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for Yang Shen. Many in Veluriyam Capital actually knew who he was, but there wasn't much to say about his contribution to the capital. He was someone who rarely showed his face to the world. His time was simply too precious to be used on anything other than cultivation. It was only natural that the citizens would feel distanced towards him, as he wasn't willing to improve his own public persona.

Jiang Chen had done the exact opposite of that. He had contributed to Veluriyam Capital by giving out all sorts of lectures on various topics. He'd also defeated Pillfire City on behalf of Veluriyam Capital and made an incredible contribution by founding Taiyuan Tower. House Wei couldn't take the credit for that.

It was the pill king who'd changed the pill dao situation in Veluriyam Capital. Suddenly, it seemed like the entire city was shouting at Yang Shen.

This further enraged Yang Shen, and his whip became fiercer and stronger than ever. He'd been trying to maintain his poise and composure, but he could no longer care less after the crowd started to jeer at him. All he wanted to do was expel Jiang Chen from the stage in one breath. Unfortunately, one couldn't win a martial dao bout with just anger and fury alone. Strength was still the deciding factor in the end.

Yang Shen was definitely a formidable foe, as he was ranked 17th. He was stronger than Fang Yuan and Zhuang Jie by a notch. And yet, Jiang Chen was also someone could adapt to the strength of his foe. The Yin Yang Whip relied on the power of force fields to control the flow of the battle, but Jiang Chen's Reverse Heaven and Earth was a sword technique that destroyed all force fields and reversed the flow of battle. The sword technique was the bane of the Yin Yang Whip. Jiang Chen's technique wasn't just effective against the Yin Yang Whip. It was actually effective against all techniques that attempted to control the flow of battle.

Yang Shen refused to give up. "Pill King Zhen! You've been using the same technique the whole time! Don't you find that meaningless in an exchange of martial dao?" he said while gritting his teeth.

Jiang Chen laughed when he noticed the expression on his opponent's face. "You say that it's the same technique, yet you've failed to notice its ever-changing nature. Come at me with everything you've got. I'll take you down with just one technique!" Jiang Chen had begun to feel a little annoyed. He had tried giving Yang Shen some leeway, but said person was too conceited to notice it.

Yang Shen cracked his whip and turned it into a long and erect spear. "Yin Yang Void Piercing Spear! Destroy!" He had finally switched up his moves. A spear was a completely different weapon compared to a whip. A whip was meant for constricting and inhibiting movements, but a spear was purely meant for piercing and destroying its target. As the name would suggest, the Void Piercing Spear contained an incredible piercing power.

Fortunately, Jiang Chen was using a sword technique that was destructive first and controlled the flow of battle second. They were now both using using destructive attacks, which made the match a lot more captivating. Yang Shen had thoroughly angered Jiang Chen. Fury was slowly building up inside the pill king. He'd wanted to save Yang Shen some face, as he was a true disciple of Emperor Peafowl. However, Yang Shen only cared about winning. He didn't seem to care about his own dignity at all. Moreover, Jiang Chen could sense some hostility from his opponent. This too, angered him greatly.

How dare you bear such fierce hostility towards me when I've given you so much face? If I don't take you down a notch, how will I make people submit to me when I become the successor to Sacred Peafowl Mountain one day? He no longer held himself back after such thoughts.

Even a young lord would feel intense pressure when Jiang Chen went all out. The Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique was as ever-changing as it was unstoppable. Celestial radiance from rainbows appeared in the skies when he deployed it. Thunder rumbled, and the crowd was stunned by the countless profound meanings of the sword contained within.

"Remember this move. Moving Heaven and Earth!

"And this! Yin Yang Divide!



“And also this! Sword of the Allking!” Jiang Chen revealed multiple sword techniques from his toolbox in one go. These were his most powerful attacks, if one were to ignore the equipment and heaven-defying items in his possession.

The arena was instantly flooded by a sea of sword dao, turning it into a sword dao realm. Yang Shen was poking left and right, trying to find a way out of the sea. Unfortunately, he soon realized that it was a futile attempt, as his Void Piercing Spear wasn’t able to locate a weak point at all. The audience broke into rapturous applause when they saw what had happened. They were clearly enthralled by the flashy yet dangerous sword technique.

The geniuses at the top of the Ranking of Young Lords were all in a somber mood. They were feeling intense pressure. However, their hearts were also filled with awe. Not because of Jiang Chen’s flashy sword technique, but because of his ability to control the fight. The battle had begun to feel like a one-person show due to how great he was at it. The pitiful Yang Shen was now forgotten in the background after such an intense showing.

There was normally a lot of back and forth during a battle between two geniuses. It was always an intense conflict for superiority. It was rare to see one side fully dominate the other side in such battles. Battles like these were no longer battles between equals. It would be best described as a one-sided torture. This was precisely what Yang Shen was facing right now. Fortunately, he was quick to realize how futile the Void Piercing Spear was, and transformed it back into the Yin Yang Whip. He then formed a yin yang barrier to protect himself from the piercing sword aura. The whip was a gift from Emperor Peafowl himself. It was a treasure that could be switched into many forms. It could switch between a whip or a spear, but its biggest specialty was its frightening defensive power.

The Yin Yang Barrier was able to keep most of the sword aura at bay. The scene was now one of Yang Shen turtling in and stubbornly hanging onto his defense. He had originally planned to overwhelm the pill king with his whip, but the pill king was able to deflect his advances with a sword technique. The crowd was impressed that he was the first to go on the offensive against someone as powerful as Pill King Zhen. However, the situation had instantly turned against him. He’d become a turtle that had tucked his head in for dear life.

Jiang Chen noticed that the whip had turned into a barrier with tadpole-like runes squirming around the outer surface. He instantly knew that this wasn’t Yang Shen’s doing. It was the formidable whip. However, he refused to give up. He continued escalating the sword aura and condensed its slashing power. One after the other, he continued to bombard Yang Shen’s defenses with sword strokes.

The ‘Severing Sword’ was another move from the Divine Five Thunderclap technique. It was a move that specialized in destroying all kinds of barriers. It was an incredibly powerful attack, formed by condensing and materializing sword aura into the shape of a sword.

Yang Shen was situated in the middle of the barrier and surrounded by numerous sword aura from all sides. He had become incredibly nervous, as the sword barrage continued to hammer away at his barrier. However, the defensive power of his whip had given him some inner solace.

“You won’t be able to hold out forever!” Jiang Chen was thoroughly enraged at this point. He was sending furious barrages of sword images at his opponent. Sword light upon sword light stacked on top of each other and sliced at the Yin Yang Barrier continuously.

A crack appeared in Yang Shen's confidence when he noticed the monstrous power of the sword barrage. Emperor Peafowl had once warned him not to rely on the defensive capabilities of the whip too much, as the whip was only as powerful as its user. It was evident that Yang Shen had relied on it too much! Visible cracks had appeared in his dao heart when he noticed that Jiang Chen was about to break through the barrier. His mind was instantly flooded with a sense of dread.

#### Chapter 964: A Small World for Enemies

A crack in his dao heart would naturally mean a crack in the Yin Yang Barrier as well. Jiang Chen's attack almost seemed like it had a mind of its own. It went on a frenzy and concentrated at the barrier's weak point. Yang Shen was now trembling with fear. He could sense that the barrier was on the brink of shattering. The sword aura hadn't penetrated the barrier yet, but the killing intent had already seeped through the cracks. He understood how weak his innate defense was. His body would be sliced into two if the sword aura managed to break through the barrier.

"Yang Shen, you are already on the brink of death. When will you admit defeat if not now?" A stern voice suddenly appeared from the skies. It was Emperor Peafowl!

The crowd instantly broke into rapturous applause when they heard the voice. Emperor Peafowl had spoken! He had publicly told his own true disciple to admit defeat!

Jiang Chen smiled wryly when he heard Emperor Peafowl's voice. The ties between master and disciple are strong indeed. It may seem like he was asking Yang Shen to admit defeat, but he was actually telling Jiang Chen to show some mercy.

Jiang Chen was peerless in martial dao. His vision was actually sharper than many of the great emperors. It hadn't taken him long to notice the weak point in Yang Shen's barrier. The barrier was a much greater toil on the body than any of the whip's attacks. Jiang Chen kept increasing the power and speed of his attacks because he'd noticed this flaw. He focused his attacks solely on the weak point to further increase the barrier's toil on Yang Shen's body.

Emperor Peafowl may have exaggerated a little when he claimed that Yang Shen was on the brink of death, but it wasn't too far from the truth. Yang Shen was actually in extreme danger even though he was still barely able to scrape by.

Yang Shen immediately fell down from the stage after Jiang Chen slackened his sword aura slightly. It was as though something had sucked away all of the strength within his body. All he could do was gasp for air while sitting beneath the stage. Defeat! He'd lost in the end. There was no longer any pride or arrogance to be found within his eyes. It had been replaced by exhaustion and disappointment. Jiang Chen didn't plan on kicking his enemy while he was down. All he did was wave his hands at the crowd to enjoy the victory, instead of making snarky remarks to his opponent. Yang Shen watched the scene unfold with a blank look on his face. He was feeling a little depressed and also a little helpless. He wasn't a person without ambition, but his memories of young lord Fan had begun to surface yet again. That person had been equally as insurmountable as he had been unfathomable.

Yang Shen had begun to sense something similar from Pill King Zhen. The pill king was definitely no less mysterious than young lord Fan. Young lord Fan may have possessed a higher cultivation than the pill king, but the pill king was definitely above young lord Fan in terms of potential and unpredictability. But,

no one ever cared about the thoughts of the defeated. Everyone was only curious whether the pill king would continue his challenges

According to the rules, every young lord was given three challenge opportunities. Jiang Chen had defeated the 17th ranked young lord. This meant that he still had two opportunities left. He was now allowed to challenge a young lord six places higher than him. Since he was 17th, he was now allowed to challenge the 11th ranked young lord.

11th. This was the strongest genius outside of the top ten ranked young lords. A cultivator of this rank was definitely capable of holding his own against the top ten.

"Pill King Zhen, will you be continuing the challenge?"

"Challenging the 11th ranked genius is no small matter."

"If he manages to defeat number 11, he could climb to the top ten!"

"Is there anything Pill King Zhen cannot do? I truly believe that the pill king is capable of anything, even challenging the young lord of the first rank."

"Haha! I'm so excited for that! How exhilarating would it be to watch the pill king challenge the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords? If he manages to win, wouldn't he be first person in Veluriyam Capital's history to become champion of all three rankings?"

"The champion? You're asking for too much. I've heard that there's an extreme climb in difficulty with each rank in the upper half of the rankings. Why don't we wait and see if the pill king is going to continue climbing the ranks? See who he picks to challenge?"

"I'm certain that the pill king is going to challenge the 11th ranked young lord. He's not the type to back down from a good challenge."

Jiang Chen's each and every move was now under scrutiny. People had become very expectant of him. He was the only dark horse remaining in the Ranking of Young Lords. The other challengers had very little hope of climbing the ranks. None of the other battles in the first half of the rankings identified any other dark horses. Because of that, Pill King Zhen was widely regarded as the only remaining dark horse. Many were hoping that he'd charge through the ranks and become the champion.

Even though the pill king had dominated previous matches, those with a logical head on their shoulders understood that it was going to be an uphill battle from now onwards. The power discrepancy between each rank was only going to become greater and greater. Everyone stared at Jiang Chen, waiting for him to make a decision. Was he going to remain at this rank, or was he going to continue the climb?

It didn't take long before they finally got their answer. He chose to continue. 17th wasn't enough to satiate his appetite. He was going to challenge the 11th! His words caused a great commotion within Veluriyam Capital. He'd chosen to fully utilize his rank-jumping qualifications. The seven great emperors were somewhat surprised by Jiang Chen's decision. Some factions were even privately discussing how Jiang Chen had finally worn shoes too big for his own feet.

Consecutive victories didn't count for much at this point of the tournament.

They all knew that the duels between the top ten were ones between the strongest in the Martial Pagoda battles. And to be more precise, only seven geniuses were in the run to become champion. The other geniuses were mostly just side dishes in the Ranking of Young Lords. Every great emperor would only have one true disciple that would inherit their legacy and stand heads above the others. Because they had multiple disciples, each of them were trained like eagle younglings. In an eagle's nest, only the strongest and fiercest youngling survived.

Every single great emperor had multiple true disciples, but only one would truly inherit their legacy. These seven disciples were the true main characters in the ranking battles. Even though the pill king had won every single battle up to this point, many were certain that he wouldn't win against them, save for a few optimists.

The 11th ranked genius laughed angrily when Jiang Chen had challenged him. He was the second-ranked disciple under Emperor Vastsea. His name was Zhuang Min, the older brother of Zhuang Jie and another true disciple of Emperor Vastsea. They were brothers from the same mother.

Zhuang Min was incredibly furious at Jiang Chen for eliminating his younger brother. He understood that his brother's loss was all due to his own inadequacy, but it was all the pill king's fault that his brother no longer held a rank within the Ranking of Young Lords! There was no way he wouldn't blame the pill king for this. He shook his head in disapproval when the pill king decided to skip six ranks to challenge him. Is Pill King Zhen truly that formidable? How dare he challenge my authority after eliminating Zhuang Jie?

Zhuang Min was certain that he was qualified to make it into the top ten. He had only been ranked 11th due to certain reasons. He didn't believe that he was any worse than the other geniuses in the top ten. Being challenged stoked the fires of his rage even further.

"Brother! You have to teach him a lesson! I may have lost against him, but something seemed a little off about him. I strongly believe that he managed to devour my water pillars by using some sort of cheat! Otherwise, how could I be defeated by a mere sky sage realm bastard?" Zhuang Jie was being incredibly rude. He'd been in a bad mood ever since he was eliminated. Losing a great deal of face in front of Emperor Vastsea didn't help either. Fortunately, he had an older brother that was even more formidable than him. Things were still salvageable since his brother was around. This was his chance for revenge!

"Even if he was cheating, it's his accomplishment for not being caught by the seven emperors. Zhuang Jie, learn to humble yourself after a loss. You should try to learn from him. This is the only way you can hope to defeat him and trample him under your feet in the future." Zhuang Min gave a stern lecture to his slightly irreverent brother.

"Brother, can we talk about this later? You have to teach that bastard a lesson and take him down a notch!" Zhuang Jie said in an agitated manner.

Zhuang Mei frowned. "Since he dares challenge me, I'm certain he's not as simple as you say he is."

"Who cares if he's simple or if he's complex! You're an initial emperor realm cultivator! Your domain alone will make this match a cinch!" Zhuang Jie smacked his lips in an excited manner. He hated Pill King Zhen for eliminating him and was incredibly excited when he saw a chance for revenge appear.

Chapter 965: Second Encounter, Waterveil Prison

The top twelve in the Ranking of Young Lords were all emperor realm geniuses. Zhuang Min was a feminine name, but the person was not the least bit feminine. He was a very meticulous and far-looking strategist. His wits were only complemented by his power, making him heads above his younger brother in strength. His younger brother viewed this battle as a chance for revenge, but Zhuang Min was able to keep his calm. He wasn't arrogant, nor did he think that he'd definitely win due to his emperor realm cultivation.

No. He was being extremely cautious instead. He'd been paying close attention to the pill king ever since his brother had been eliminated. The closer he tried to look, the more mysterious the pill king became. He couldn't afford to underestimate the enemy even though he was already an emperor realm cultivator.

"Next match, Pill King Zhen versus Zhuang Min! Please take your places in the arena!"

Zhuang Min leaped from his seat and landed on the arena after the judge's announcement. Jiang Chen followed suit and climbed up the stairs to the arena. Jiang Chen already knew that Zhuang Min was Zhuang Jie's elder brother, and that Zhuang Min was at the first level emperor realm.

It was common knowledge that a first level emperor was at least twice as strong as a half-step emperor. It wasn't difficult for a first level emperor to defeat two half-step emperors. In fact, three might not pose a problem either. However, one couldn't just rely on theory alone to measure one's winning chances in a martial dao exchange.

Jiang Chen felt a glare as soon as he stepped into the arena. The glare contained a strange intent within it. It was like a formless air current, making him feel as if he were walking inside of water. There was an invisible force hindering his movements. Hmm? Since Zhuang Jie had an innate water constitution, his older brother Zhuang Min must have the same bloodline as well. Can it be...

He instantly realized that his opponent was trying to put on airs. Thankfully, Jiang Chen was no longer a weakling that could be shoved around by others. He circulated his inner energy throughout his body. The speed of his footsteps increased instead of slowing down.

Zhuang Min remained calm when he noticed that Jiang Chen had broken through his Oscillating Ripple technique. He'd only wanted to show his superiority through his technique, not take down his enemy. It was impossible that the opponent could eliminate his brother if he couldn't even handle such a basic ability. His blue eyes were like deep chasms. It made him seem extremely nefarious. He stared at Jiang Chen meaningfully and gave a half smile. "Pill King Zhen, I'm surprised that you've made it this far. I believe you know who I am. Do you still think that you have a chance to win?"

Jiang Chen understood that his opponent was only attempting to attack his heart. He smiled back faintly without the slightest hint of fear. "I will only know that after a fight. If I can defeat your younger brother, I'm sure I can do the same to you."

"Hahaha!" Zhuang Jie burst into raucous laughter. "I bet you've yet to realize the disparity between a half-step emperor and a true emperor!" He nodded before continuing. "If that's the case, then let me put an end to your consecutive victory streak! I'll admit that you're a dark horse in this tournament, but everyone knows that a dark horse never makes it to the end!"

Jiang Chen's dao heart was already as solid as a boulder. A few jeering words from Zhuang Min would never work on him. He snorted with laughter. "Zhuang Min! You might have a slightly higher cultivation than your brother, but you are truly no match for him in the art of ridicule!"

At their level, the confrontation between words was no longer mere child's play. It was an intense conflict for superiority.

Zhuang Min wasn't depressed when he failed to gain the upper hand. All he did was smile noncommittally and applauded. "I'm impressed. What a sharp tongue." A hint of arrogance appeared in his eyes. "Since you've challenged me, I'll let you make the first three moves."

He was truly making full use of the situation. He'd shown his magnanimity as an emperor realm genius by giving his opponent the first few moves. It was also a way for him to deride and trample on his opponent.

Jiang Chen grinned when he heard this and didn't back down. "Only three moves? How miserly! How about this? I'll give you the first ten moves!"

Zhuang Min's face darkened and his brow arched. "How delusional."

Jiang Chen laughed. "Not true. My mind is clearer than ever before. Make your move! Ten moves was what I said, so ten moves is what I'll give! However, that's under the assumption that you can make it past ten moves."

"Such arrogance!" A hint of rage had appeared in Zhuang Min's eyes despite his calm demeanor.

The arena had fallen silent. The audience couldn't believe their ears.

"Pill King Zhen is letting Zhuang Min make the first ten moves? Is he for real? It doesn't sound like a joke."

"It doesn't matter if he's serious! It takes great courage to provoke an emperor realm genius!"

"An eighth level sage realm cultivator is giving an emperor realm genius ten moves? Only the pill king is capable of saying such a thing."

"That's true. No other sage realm genius in Veluriyam Capital is capable of this except for the pill king."

"Tsk tsk. I truly am impressed by his audacity." The crowd was hot in discussion.

Zhuang Min was genuinely tempted. His instincts were telling him to make a move. However, logic stopped him dead in his tracks. If he won after accepting his opponent's offer, people were going to say that he'd taken advantage of the situation. He wanted to win, but didn't want to have a flawed victory. A grave expression appeared. "Pill King Zhen, I'm worried that you'll no longer have a chance to make your own move after I've made mine."

Jiang Chen smiled. "Is that so?"

"Want to try?" Zhuang Min replied coldly.

"I don't see why not? Give me your best shot!" Jiang Chen retorted confidently.

Zhuang Jie nodded angrily. He lifted his hands and started flicking his fingers. Whoosh! The sound of rushing water appeared out of the thin air. Steam began to appear in between his fingers. It transformed into strange, transparent water droplets upon touching the air. The water droplets began to bounce around the air like tiny marbles. The transparent marbles flew rapidly through the air, sealing off the area.

Jiang Chen was slightly bewildered by the sight before his eyes. However, his instincts told him that these weren't ordinary water droplets. He brandished his sword and summoned multiple torrents of air currents to disrupt this motion. Sword light emerged wherever the sword traveled to and shot towards the water droplets.

These water droplets were incredibly strange. They deflected any light they came in contact with, deforming slightly and then bouncing away. They were like indestructible marbles that possessed very strange trajectories. The sword didn't seem to affect them in any way. A barrage of sword intent was able to knock them off their trajectory, but it wasn't able to thoroughly destroy them. Whenever Jiang Chen slightly slackened his sword intent, the water droplets deviated from their trajectory and shot straight towards him.

Zhuang Min's fingers were moving nonstop while this was happening, creating even more tiny water droplets. The arena was soon filled with thousands of flying water droplets that were incredibly difficult to see with the naked eye.

There was no order or rhythm to their trajectory. Jiang Chen was in a difficult spot. All he could do was try to deflect the droplets with his sword aura. Their trajectories were simply too chaotic. His 'Reverse Heaven and Earth' wasn't able to effectively disrupt their trajectory. It was like pushing water uphill with a rake. His feet suddenly sank into the ground. A fist-sized water drop had landed on his feet. It was so monstrously sticky that it'd stuck his feet to the ground. His heart sank. He tried moving a little, but even more water swarmed towards him and stuck to his right foot. Water drops continued to swarm towards his arm, shoulder, and didn't stop until his entire body was enveloped.

The water drops seemed inseparable. They continued to congregate until they became a veil of water. Jiang Chen had seen someone use a similar water cloak technique when he visited the wood spirit spring. Wei Wudao, an elder from the Walkabout Sect of Myriad Domain, had used a Skywater Talisman to form an aqueous prison. However, Wei Wudao's Skywater Talisman was much weaker than the one Jiang Chen was currently facing.

Back then, he'd used his Bewitching Lotus of Fire and Ice to tunnel into the ground and escaped from the imprisonment. Zhuang Min's Waterveil Prison was incredibly formidable. Water continued flooding towards Jiang Chen. His entire body was soon enveloped by its mysterious power. Escaping by tunneling into the ground was out of the equation since there was no gap in the water.

The power of water origin operated on very mysterious laws. It was as though it could permeate into the body and form a mysterious power of enchainment. Jiang Chen's body suddenly felt a thousand times heavier. He couldn't break free from the water imprisonment no matter how hard he tried to struggle.

Zhuang Min smiled with both his hands linked behind his back. It was as though he'd already won. He stared upon his creation with a big delightful smile on his face. Zhuang Jie was celebrating below the arena as well. He was obviously very liberated by the scene. So what if the pill king is a dark horse? So

what if he's ranked 17th? He's nothing but a bug when facing the domain of an emperor realm expert! The emperor's domain rules over all! The audience had begun to lose hope. In the end, even the greatest genius was helpless when facing such a great discrepancy in cultivation.

#### Chapter 966: A Quick and Forceful Counterattack

Zhuang Min was very cautious. He kept his guard up even as he admired his handiwork. He knew about the Cicada's Disappearance ability that Pill King Zhen possessed. Many previous opponents had made the mistake of assuming that the pill king was already in their clutches, only to be deceived by a mirage. He was worried that this was more of the same. Thus, he was perfectly wary even as he observed his enemy's movements. But the sight of Jiang Chen struggling beyond the veil was extremely reassuring. His opponent looked soundly trapped this time.

"Pill King Zhen, how do you like this living coffin?" Zhuang Min's faint sneer barely contained his obvious derision. To the victor went the spoils. He could do as he liked.

Within his aquatic prison, Jiang Chen could barely contain his surprise. It was extraordinary to be able to perform such a feat with a water-attribute art. Zhuang Min was a force to be reckoned with. No wonder why he was ranked 11th. His prominence and fame were well-earned. The Waterveil Prison could not be struggled against nor could it be cut by steel. It was entirely supple, constructed out of a mysterious force. Both qualities made it almost indestructible. Water-attribute arts typically had specific characteristics. Pervasiveness and elasticity were two such qualities chief amongst them. Jiang Chen tried a variety of methods to pry open his jail, but all were fruitless. He held back an internal sigh when he saw Zhuang Min's half-smile through the watery bars.

As expected of an emperor realm cultivator. The Waterveil Prison has an emperor realm domain behind it. That, coupled with how impenetrable his ability is in its own right, makes it difficult for me to try to break it open.

If the person using the ability had been a sage realm cultivator, Jiang Chen could easily force it open via his body alone, tempered by the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. There would have been no need for these pointless attempts. Alas, that was not the case. As an emperor realm cultivator, Zhuang Min's Waterveil Prison was at least ten times as strong as one that a sage realm genius could set up. The domain and aura of the emperor realm were truly exceptional. Feeling the aquatic cell pressing in all around him, Jiang Chen sensed the water-attribute energy crushing him in its tightening grip. He would be smashed to a pulp any moment now.

"If you forfeit now, Pill King Zhen, maybe I'll show you some mercy. But if you intend on resisting, then enjoy the agonizing fate of being slowly sucked dry!" Zhuang Min cackled. As the clear winner, he was not obliged to show compassion. Rather, the achievement of defeating the pill king cheered him up greatly. No one else had been able to stop the man's advance but him! He felt motivated enough to make it into the ranking's top ten now. However, his expression froze in the next moment. His jaw was slack in absolute disbelief.

"How can this be possible?" Zhuang Min's eyes were glued to his prison. The Waterveil Prison's water energy was turning into water vapor, evaporating into thin air! His opponent seemed to be completely unharmed. He moved as languidly as if he'd just woken up from an afternoon nap.



Jiang Chen stretched. "Is this all that you can do, Zhuang Min? I seem to remember you being very proud of your abilities. You're very brave to have said what you did, given... this. Am I supposed to be unable to counterattack now?"

His smile was extremely wily. Zhuang Min's hairs stood on end.

"Eat my blade!" Not allowing his opponent a moment's notice or thought, Jiang Chen took advantage of his opponent's momentary sluggishness. His sword surged forth in offense. The Pentecolor Divine Swords stirred up the air. A strike that rent heaven and earth asunder swept towards Zhuang Min, leaving faint afterimages behind it. The haste and ferocity of the attack allowed its target no time to react.

Though his rhythm had been disrupted, Zhuang Min was still a very competent cultivator. Seeing the incoming sword strike, he rubbed his hands in self-defense. In the next instant, a rippling curtain of water filled the air about him with indistinct ripples. Pfft! Sword connected with curtain, leaving a deep gash in the defensive veil. The curtain was pushed to its breaking point, persisting only after wavering for a long period of time. Leaving no rest for his opponent between attacks, Jiang Chen stormed forth once more.

"Yin Yang Divide!" Once more, it was a technique derived from the marvels in nature. As a poet once wrote of a mountain, 'Ethereal beauty springs from creation distills. There, yin and yang split dusk and dawn.' so too, did the sword technique aim to slice existence itself. On one side of the edge was yin, the other yang. The mystery contained within the cut was almost incomprehensible.

The light of the sword rushed through the air, creating two swathes of color. The contrast of endless night and brilliant day sent onlookers back to the genesis of the universe, viewing the moment in which earth and sky first came to be. Bringing the power of yin and yang in its wake, Jiang Chen's sword was almost at his enemy's throat once more.

This time though, Zhuang Min was prepared for it. Despite scrambling a little to do so, he managed to activate two Skywater Talismans at once. Two series of rippling waves blocked the terrifying attack—just barely, but it was enough. However, the defenses mounted by the watery ripples were soon ripped open. At the same time, Zhuang Min leapt out of Jiang Chen's range of attack with a small bounce.

What a pity. The two attacks Jiang Chen had delivered were a progressive series, but he hadn't expected his opponent to react so quickly or use such powerful Skywater Talismans. He had seen Wei Wudao use the same kind of talisman earlier. In fact, he had firsthand experience of them. They hadn't been much to write home about at the time. But Zhuang Min's Skywater Talismans were more than ten times stronger than Wei Wudao's. His yin-yang dual assault was barely able to do more than break open its defenses.

This Zhuang Min is a lot more difficult to deal with than Zhuang Jie. He has real expertise in the use of elemental water. Zhuang Jie, on the other hand, only has unexcavated talent. No wonder why this one's number eleven while Zhuang Jie is only twenty. As a true expert, Jiang Chen could see the difference between the two very easily. His inability to take down Zhuang Min in two swings made him a little annoyed. Allowing Zhuang Min to escape meant his opponent was going to use stronger abilities than the Waterveil Prison he'd used before.

Jiang Chen was on his guard. Belittling his opponent at any point could be fatal. He'd had a leisurely time fighting cultivators who were at the half-step emperor realm. Nothing they did could really threaten him. Cultivators who were at the true emperor realm, on the other hand, were entirely different. There was no room for error against such opponents. Any slight blunder was an invitation for them to launch a lethal counter strike. Though Jiang Chen was capable and possessed numerous trump cards, emperor realm cultivators did indeed have the raw strength to surprise him. Merely someone at the first level emperor realm was enough. As he thought things through, he felt something strange on his face. The backs of his hand and neck both felt the same thing.

"Is it raining?" Jiang Chen raised his head. The space all around him was covered in a dense drizzle, watery needles pattering onto the ground below. When had the weather changed? The timing of the rain was very strange. A blazing sun still hung overhead in the skies over the arena. Suddenly, Jiang Chen realized something. His eyebrows moved in anticipation and he hurriedly called his golden body to action.

In the twinkle of an eye, the countless needles of rainwater began to glow with a despairing brilliance. Tss, tss, tss, tss, tss! The threads of rain became a deluge of sword auras, inundating and fine. They enveloped the entire arena in their coverage.

Swords of Rain Mist! The sword auras could cut the very air like invisible needles. They slashed against Jiang Chen's tempered body in a frenzy. He'd steeled himself just in time. Even so, the raindrop sword auras permeated into his skin with ubiquitous force. Thankfully, the durability of his golden body shielded him from the majority of the damage. The effect that the sword auras had was minimized. That aside, it was still a harrowing experience.

Jiang Chen's formation disk moved into action. The Prince of Shangping's eight statues emerged one by one from thin air. He held nothing back this time. His hands skillfully manipulated the eight statues via the disk. He had them to assume the Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation, a battle formation that he'd taught to Xue Tong and company a long time ago. Back then, his personal guard had only grasped some rudiments of the formation. With only average cultivators manning it, the formation itself was just ordinary. Since the eight statues had a strong innate martial will, they could move as one unit in either an offensive or defensive stance. Though Jiang Chen wasn't able to scratch past the surface of their full potential, their value had nevertheless been greatly improved in the formation.

In the Prince of Shangping's hands, the eight statues had been largely useless. With a formation disk in hand, Jiang Chen was able to control them with significantly better fluidity and efficiency. He had needed to expend considerable effort in its creation, of course, but that was the way of the world. The Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation allowed the eight statues to absorb the brunt of the raindrops' offense.

It relieved a lot of pressure off of Jiang Chen himself. His God's Eye and Evil Golden Eye both deployed to their maximum, Jiang Chen began to scan his surroundings for his opponent with eyes ablaze. Although Zhuang Min could not be seen, he was definitely concealing himself using a water-attribute method. He'd made himself as transparent as water energy itself, completely translucent in the air, and was waiting in ambush somewhere. Zhuang Min was getting more and more on his nerves. Even so, his Evil Golden Eye had never failed to find any of his enemies before.

Jiang Chen's eyes came to a still. "Why are you so busy smuggling yourself away, Zhuang Min? You're worse than your younger brother." His tone was unkind and unrelenting.

Zhuang Min did indeed have a technique called Waterveil Illusion, which used water energy to hide his figure within the space behind the veil. He had wanted to use two sword auras to attack Jiang Chen before attempting a more covert approach. After he was in position, he could then humiliate Pill King Zhen with a powerful ability in one fell swoop. The pill king's proficiency was entirely unexpected. His Swords of Rain Mist had been unable to break through his opponent's defense. On top of that, his own presence had been detected.

Locking eyes with Jiang Chen's own, Zhuang Min felt his body slow down. There was a vague excitement in his heart, like his soul was being tugged on by an indescribable power. For a moment, his mind had been on the edge of disarray. He was secretly shocked. This Pill King Zhen is a freak! The average sage realm cultivator would lose instantly to my Waterveil Prison and Swords of Rain Mist. I could say the same for the majority of cultivators who were halfway to the emperor realm. But he's only, what, at the seventh or eighth level sage realm? The power he holds doesn't match up to his age.

#### Chapter 967: Windrider Wings

The power of Jiang Chen's Evil Golden Eye had risen with his level of cultivation. The gaze he'd exchanged just now had almost unsettled his opponent's mind entirely. However, he hadn't counted on winning in a single look. He only wanted a moment's hesitation. In that small window of opportunity that Zhuang Min offered, his eight statues leapt into the fray, thoroughly encircling his opponent.

Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation, Offensive Mode! With wind and lightning in their steps, the eight statues began their frenzied onslaught towards their master's enemy once again. Fortunately for Zhuang Min, his defensive capabilities were above-average. Though he was being pressed in upon, there was no struggle. The statues' dogged assault didn't affect him very much. He opened both hands, slamming his palms down four times each. Four beads of water turned into four sprays of foam, draping towards the eight statues like a shower of glass.

Jiang Chen smirked at the effort. Zhuang Min was trying to use his Waterveil Prison to lock down the eight statues. However, water-attribute abilities had no effect whatsoever against him. He had been released from the Waterveil Prison prior not by his own hand, but by Long Xiaoxuan's. The dragon was superbly stealthy, nesting himself away in Jiang Chen's vicinity without even the seven emperors taking notice.

Sure, there was the faint scent of dragon's blood, but there was plausible deniability. It made much more sense for the scent's origin to be Jiang Chen himself. In several of his previous battles, Jiang Chen had used many draconic powers. The dragon's roar was one of them, the ability of devourment was another... In actuality, though Jiang Chen had a grasp of the former, he wasn't yet equipped in many respects to learn the latter.

All eight veils of water dissipated into nothingness, as if ripped apart by an invisible, giant hand. Zhuang Min began to panic a little. Water-attribute abilities were what he was most well-versed at. Moreover, they lacked an obvious weakness. They weren't the strongest offensively, but opponents had a hard time piercing their line of defense in the heat of the moment. Well, in most cases anyway. Today was an exception.

This Pill King Zhen had some kind of natural advantage against his water-attribute abilities. Even using the power of his emperor realm domain did nothing to salvage that fact. Pill King Zhen... what kind of monster is he? I know my domain isn't the strongest, but it gives a significant boost to my Waterveil Prison. Why is he able to counteract it so effortlessly? Is my domain actually unstable and weak?

It was clearly an anxious topic for Zhuang Min. During casual bouts with his fellow geniuses, his water-attribute domain had always proved to be quite useful. Many higher-ranked geniuses had a difficult time breaking through his reliable defense. How could Pill King Zhen crush his defenses so easily? He couldn't let things go on like this. If he couldn't get the appropriate usage out of his domain, then the outcome of the battle became much more uncertain. Zhuang Min simply couldn't accept it. The entire affair was beyond strange.

This kid must have some kind of legendary treasure that naturally counters water-attribute abilities. How can he negate my domain power otherwise as a sage realm genius?

First level emperor realm geniuses didn't necessarily have the most established domains, but having one at all allowed them to significantly surpass the geniuses that did not. Zhuang Min repeatedly called upon his water veils in defense, but they were torn apart by the same mysterious force each time. He was so distressed that his heart was on fire. There was a final card that he hadn't played yet. His original intention had been to use it in order to challenge someone higher in the rankings, but it was possible that he'd lose here if he hid it any longer.

He didn't have much more time to mull over the choice. The eight statues' attacks became more and more impenetrable, the deployment of their formation's might improving with each moment. After his rippling water veils were dispelled, Zhuang Min had only his physical evasiveness to rely on. But trying to combat a formation with his body alone was folly. There were eight statues, but only one of him.

The few always had trouble against the many. In the world of martial dao, that was one of the simplest rules. He was currently being hit over and over again by the statues. Because his body was much stronger compared to someone halfway to the emperor realm, he received no critical injuries. Still, he knew better than anyone else that continuing in this same manner would only lead to him wasting away.

I don't care anymore. Let's deal with the current crisis first. Zhuang Min hadn't expected to be pushed to this point. His emperor realm domain was supposed to have steamrolled his opponent with ease. It turned out that he was the one being rolled into a pancake instead!

Offstage, Zhuang Jie watched the proceedings with wide-eyed amazement. He sneaked a glance at Emperor Vastsea. "Your Majesty, this Pill King Zhen... is he cheating with a treasure of some sort?" he couldn't help but ask. "Not even my brother's domain power can stop him."

"In the world of martial dao, geniuses are given all sorts of opportunities all their own. No matter what kind of legendary treasure he has, only the result of the match matters in the end," Emperor Vastsea replied coolly. There was a hint of dissatisfaction in his tone.

However, the emperor could see as plainly as anyone else that it was not Zhuang Min's fault. The youth was capable and had exerted himself fully for the occasion. It was his opponent that was beyond the comprehension of mortal men. If this Pill King Zhen managed to defeat Zhuang Min as well, then he was

a genius that few under Vastsea's command could hope to match. Thankfully, the first-ranked genius in the faction was still undefeated. Even someone as strong as Zhuang Min had to bow down his head before him. The provisional heir of Emperor Vastsea, the young lord of young lords. His name was Ye Piaoling, ranked within the top five in the Ranking of Young Lords. One of the most elite in the list, a brilliant nova amongst a sea of stars.

"How do you think Zhuang Min's doing in this battle, Piaoling?" Emperor Vastsea asked, a spontaneous test for his best pupil.

"He has thirty percent odds, at best." Ye Piaoling's voice was cold and aloof. There was no compassion in it, almost as if the subject of the conversation was a stranger rather than a peer.

"What? Thirty percent at most?" Zhuang Jie wasn't happy to hear the conclusion. "Are you kidding, senior brother Ye?"

The senior brother in question didn't even turn his head. The only answer Zhuang Jie received was a lukewarm smile. It was depressing being the target of such frivolous treatment. However, Ye Piaoling's temperament was well-known to both Zhuang brothers, and Zhuang Jie didn't dare act up in front of the senior disciple. The only thing he could do was close his mouth. He was filled with a thousand disagreements, though. In his heart, he considered his emperor realm brother to be a true top-notch genius.

How could someone who possessed so much fortune lose? Less than thirty percent? He couldn't accept it at all. Ye Piaoling was just boosting the morale of others and lowering their own for no reason at all. This senior brother was probably scared that his older brother would beat him! Why not beat down his strongest competitor's morale while he can, hmm! But Zhuang Jie felt bad nevertheless when he saw how passive his brother was being in the arena. He'd thought that it would have been easy for his brother to avenge him, a naïve sentiment in retrospect. His brother was embroiled in a tough fight as well, now.

"What kind of weirdo pill did this weirdo Pill King Zhen eat? A sky sage realm cultivator facing off evenly against an emperor realm... how can this be?" No matter how unhappy Zhuang Jie was with the situation, Jiang Chen had the upper hand in the duel.

Zhuang Min's heart was resolved. He shook both arms. Tunes filled the air all around him, ripping open the clothing on his back. The muscles on his back bulged and expanded. A moment later, the flesh ruptured open to reveal two expansive, feathery wings.

"Windrider Wings?" There was a collection of gasps from the crowd.

"Zhuang Min has managed to develop Windrider Wings? Tsk. Looks like his wind constitution is of even higher caliber than his younger brother's!"

"Both brothers have such special constitutions... it's truly formidable. Zhuang Min seems a lot more talented than Zhuang Jie."

"The Windrider Wings move as quickly as lightning. They can even cut open space itself, producing chaotic windstorms from the gaps."

“Chaotic windstorms are fearsome indeed. The most powerful ones can even drag people into the darkness of voidstorms.”

Voidstorms were named as such because they were storms that occurred in the void between the folds of space and time. Though the fabric of space and time rarely had rifts between its threads, any that did form always had peculiar constructions. The most masterful of experts had an easy time upending mountains and draining oceans. Reaching the moon and the stars were trivial for them. They traveled by tearing apart the seams of space, entering different dimensions by surpassing the limitations of material existence. Space torn apart in such a way often created terrifying voidstorms in their wake.

Zhuang Ming’s Windrider Wings originated from an ancient, mysterious wind bloodline, specifically, a mythical divine beast of some sort. It was one of his secrets, one of his trump cards.

The cries of surprise all around clued Jiang Chen in to the Windrider Wings’ marvel. In truth, he had heard of these wings before, and knew their capabilities to an approximate extent. That didn’t mean he was scared of the wings. Dragons themselves rode the cloud and wind. Given his draconic bloodline, Jiang Chen had no fear of any kind of bad weather. He feared neither their speed nor might, confident that his own bloodline would surpass them in both aspects.

Whoosh!

A trail of afterimages marked Zhuang Min’s escape from the eight statues’ encirclement. The Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation couldn’t entrap that kind of reality-warping speed.

Jiang Chen’s heart itched at the sight of it. He’d refined a pair of wings like that as well: Emperor Featherflight’s Featherflight Wings. It was a shame that he couldn’t use them openly in public. He still had his Cicada’s Wings, though. They weren’t as impressive in broad strokes, and didn’t possess a ridiculous elite speed either, but they excelled in maneuverability. Thus, he maintained perfect calm in the face of the Windrider Wings’ newly-posed threat.

Chapter 968: The Darkest Amongst All Dark Horses

“A match of speed eh?” Jiang Chen activated his Golden Cicada Wings and shot towards the air. He hid the Featherflight Mirror within his sleeves and aimed it at the disturbances within the void. The Mirror was truly formidable. Zhuang Min’s speed was greatly reduced even though he possessed the Windrider Wings.

“How can this be?” His body suddenly sank due to the great reduction in speed. It was as though a great invisible force was pulling at him. He looked towards Jiang Chen with a solemn expression. He wanted to see how his opponent had managed such a feat. The Windrider Wings’ biggest advantage was their overwhelming speed. With it, he could tear apart the void and summon voidstorms. This was his ultimate move and also his greatest trump card. Unfortunately, he was unable to fully bring out the Windrider Wings’ full might due to the suppression of his speed.

Absolute speed was required to tear the void apart. Without enough speed, he couldn’t even manage to fulfill this basic requirement, let alone summoning voidstorms. It was evident that Jiang Chen was well aware of what Zhuang Min’s thoughts, and also clearly knew why the Windrider Wings were so formidable. There was no saying who would end up the victor if his opponent had managed to slice open the void to produce chaotic windstorms.

I must suppress his speed. I cannot afford to let him summon voidstoms. Jiang Chen remained resolute as he fully understood the weight of the situation. The formation was activated again, separating the eight statues. He then brought the Golden Cicada Wings to their maximum capacity and barely managed to catch up to the Windrider Wings. This was all done while he continued to shine the Featherlight Mirror on Zhuang Min.

This extremely depressed Zhuang Min and made him incredibly anxious and mortified.

“You bastard! What have you done? How are you managing to keep me from my top speed?!” Zhuang Min was now at the verge of vomiting blood.

This amount of frustration was exactly what Jiang Chen wanted to see. The eight statues would immediately surround Zhuang Min if he slowed down ever so slightly. The great emperor disciple had begun consuming his inner energy after a few more attempts, but he still wasn’t able to reach the limits of his speed. Maintaining this battle state was a great burden on his body. He was well aware that this could not go on, but he simply couldn’t break free from his opponent’s bindings.

The Featherlight Mirror was Emperor Featherlight’s heirloom after all. If Jiang Chen could manage to fully utilize its full potential, it could even suppress peak level emperor realm cultivators, let alone Zhuang Min. Because of it, Zhuang Min had become the passive side in the battle. The effects of overconsumption of inner energy was also evident. After about an hour of battle, his strength was no longer what it was initially.

Jiang Chen had suffered greatly during the entire clash as well. He had consumed all of the energy within his body just to keep up with Zhuang Min’s speed and to increase the efficacy of the Featherlight Mirror. Fortunately, Jiang Chen had an abundance of inner energy. Moreover, Long Xiaoxuan had been secretly offering his assistance as well.

Even though Zhuang Min had already exerted his inner energy, Jiang Chen remained spirited and energized. He didn’t seem the least bit exhausted. The eight statues were becoming more and more coordinated as well. The Eight Trigram Assimilation Formation’s power was fully on display. Zhuang Min was out of options. He no longer had a winning chance unless he was willing to consume his life force to continue the battle.

“Zhuang Min has lost.” Ye Piaoling sighed while shaking his head. “Pill King Zhen is truly a monster. Does Sacred Peafowl Mountain specialize in producing monsters like his? They’ve had young lord Fan back then, and now they have Pill King Zhen. Are they truly the luckiest amongst the seven great emperor factions?”

Ye Piaoling’s comment had left a bitter taste in Emperor Vastsea’s mouth. He wasn’t happy that Sacred Peafowl Mountain had possessed such great luck. Emperor Vastsea was allied with Emperor Shura after all. It would be more preferable if Emperor Shura were to govern Veluriyam Capital instead of letting Sacred Peafowl Mountain continue their reign. If Pill King Zhen were to become heir, he would take over the throne after Emperor Peafowl’s retirement. Wouldn’t that mean that Emperor Shura’s previous work had been all for nothing?

Zhuang Jie’s face was as white as sheet. He kept muttering profanities as he couldn’t get over his resentment towards Jiang Chen. “This bastard! Damn... even the Windrider Wings are no match for him?”

No. Brother wasn't even able to bring out its full potential. Oh how I wish that this is all just a bad dream. Maybe I will still be ranked 20th, and my brother 11th when I wake up..."

The arena fell silent when Zhuang Min was thrown off the arena by the statues. Clearly, everyone was shocked by the result of the match. Pill King Zhen had put on yet another great show as a dark horse. The pill king was now ranked 11th, while Zhuang Min was ruthlessly sent all the way back to 17th! He no longer had the chance to fight his way back up the ranks as he was defeated by someone of a lower rank. His ranking was set in stone.

The results of this battle caused a great commotion. The news of Jiang Chen's victory instantly spread throughout Veluriyam Capital. A miracle rarely seen throughout the history of Veluriyam Capital of a sky sage realm cultivator defeating an emperor realm cultivator had occurred! Winning or losing in itself didn't really matter as it was just a difference of ranking at the end. However, watching a sky sage realm cultivator defeat an emperor realm cultivator in spite the odds was no doubt the most sensational thing ever.

Pill King Zhen had created a legend for himself within Veluriyam Capital yet again. He always seemed to be accompanied by some sort of miracle. While still anonymous, he'd foiled the Majestic Clan's plot which ended in their expulsion from Veluriyam Capital. With that, he was able to end the argument on which was the foremost clan in Veluriyam Capital. After that, he took on the identity of the owner of Taiyuan Tower and defeated Pill King Ji Lang on behalf of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He was able to put an end to Pillfire City's undefeated legend. And now, he'd made triumphant progress in the Martial Pagoda Battles as well. He was able to fight all the way to 11th on the Ranking of Young Lords and made a marvelous comeback. Even 'miracle' was no longer the best way to describe the great amount of heaven defying things that he'd achieved.

"Liuxiang, you've felt somewhat resentful over losing to Pill King Zhen right? What about now?" Ji San asked sarcastically.

Liuxiang snorted. "It's not like you're the winner. Besides, what right do you have to lecture me when you don't even have the courage and bravery to continue fighting after you've made it into the rankings?"

He was very frustrated due to his poor performance in the Martial Pagoda Battles. Because of this, the words that he had bottled up inside suddenly came bursting out. He no longer maintained his usual courteous front.

Ji San would've called Liuxiang out for getting angry, but all he did was continue laughing this time. "How can the sparrow know of the greatness of a swan?"

Liuxiang snorted and laughed coldly. It was obvious that he was irked by how Ji San was tooting his own horn. The Coiling Dragon clan lord's eyes were glued to the arena. He seemed to be in deep thought. Jiang Chen had surprised him time and time again. He was now convinced that the pill king was fully capable of concocting the Pinecrane Pill. After all, he was the very personification of the term 'miracle' itself. The Pinecrane Pill no longer seemed too far a reach anymore.

Emperor Peafowl's faction were also very astonished by Jiang Chen's performance.



“Your Majesty is truly far-seeing. Your subordinate is now thoroughly convinced.” Cloudsoar Monarch was also flabbergasted by Jiang Chen.

Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. “Cloudsoar, you’ve been wondering if Pill King Zhen is truly up to the task of becoming the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. I’m sure that you no longer possess such doubts?”

Cloudsoar Monarch was remorseful. “Truly. I am sure my other three fellow daoists are the same as well?”

He was referring to the other three great emperor realm experts of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. They were Chronobalance Monarch, Plumscore Monarch, and Wildfox Monarch. These four were the four great protectors of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and also Emperor Peafowl’s most trusted advisors. Emperor Peafowl naturally hoped to gain their approval in the matters of the heir. It wasn’t because he had no authority, but because he didn’t wish that the four monarchs would disapprove of his heir.

Wildfox Monarch flashed a witty smile. “The child seems to possess bottomless talent. There’s no end to the surprises that he brings. It’d be our loss if we don’t make him the next heir.”

Chronobalance Monarch nodded in agreement. “That is true. Nobody can ask for a better successor than him. If we miss this opportunity, others might snatch him away from us.”

This was no exaggeration. The amount of skill and potential that the pill king had revealed was more than enough to influence the structure of Veluriyam Capital’s future. Every faction would be more than willing to accept such a talent into their banner.

However, Plumscore Monarch, the only woman among the four monarchs, had her doubts. “Pill King Zhen truly has limitless potential. However, this also makes him incredibly suspicious. Your subordinate can’t help but have some doubts. Since his background is still a mystery, I wonder if this child is truly reliable?”

She was a towering figure amongst women. She had always been a cold and incisive person. Someone who always spoke her mind. She didn’t hesitate to voice her concerns.

Emperor Peafowl smiled gently. “Everyone need not worry about this child’s background. In my opinion, you can only encounter such talent once in every three thousand years.”

Emperor Peafowl had meant young lord Fan. In truth, the loss of young lord Fan wasn’t really a pity at all. Emperor Peafowl had recognized the young lord’s demon bloodline, but he wanted to use this opportunity to test the four monarchs. Unfortunately, not a single one of them managed to realize the truth. This had made Emperor Peafowl give up the notion of handing any of them the power.

## Chapter 969: The Most Essential Battle

The Ranking of Young Lords had become incredibly suspenseful after Jiang Chen’s victory. The appearance of an outlier like Jiang Chen had caused a great disruption in the clear-cut rankings of the top ten. He was like a butcher’s knife suspended in midair. The question was... who was he going to strike at next? Would the pill king choose to continue challenging ranks above his own? Would there be a change within the top ten? The various possibilities threw an interesting twist into things. Everyone was certain that the pill king wouldn’t give up his final challenge after so many battles.

According to the rules, he was allowed to challenge six ranks ahead in his second challenge. In his third challenge, he was allowed double of that. He could now challenge twelve ranks ahead. Since he was ranked 11th, he was now qualified to challenge the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords. However, was he really going to do that?

Jiang Chen was in deep consideration as well. Since he had replaced Zhuang Min as the 11th ranked young lord, he clearly understood what sort of challenges awaited him in the ranks ahead. Defeating Zhuang Min would have been an incredibly difficult task if Long Xiaoxuan hadn't quietly dealt with his water abilities. Every single opponent from henceforth would be even more powerful than him. According to his optimistic calculations, there was no chance of him defeating anyone in the top three if he couldn't utilize the rest of his trump cards. In fact, making it into the top five was only a pipe dream as well. Those monsters were all third level emperor realm geniuses.

Even the overweening Gong Wuji from yesteryear was only a third level emperor. Back then, all Jiang Chen could do was flee when he'd encountered him. The Divine Befuddlement Miasma in Infant Shriek Valley was the only reason why Jiang Chen had managed to eliminate him in the end. It had all been due to fortunate timing and favorable conditions.

Jiang Chen was certain that he could challenge a young lord within the top five if he could use all of his trump cards. There was a possibility that he could win as well. Unfortunately, there were just too many restrictions preventing him from doing so. His current goal was to make it into the top nine. Only the top thirty-six finalists of the Ranking of Young Lords were qualified to enter the Martial Pagoda to cultivate.

There were all kinds of legacies from the ancestors of Veluriyam Capital and all sorts of encounters waiting to be stumbled across within the Martial Pagoda. Most importantly, a single day of cultivation within the Martial Pagoda was equivalent to ten days outside of it. And of course, not all thirty-six young lords were treated equally. Only the top nine would receive the best treatment. They were granted access to the highest region in the pagoda that allowed for the ten day equivalent cultivation. The rest would be allocated to other lower levels in batches of nine. Since Jiang Chen had fought his way up the rankings, he was going to aim to finish in the top nine even though he was temporarily incapable of challenging the top five. He made the decision to continue the climb. However, he wasn't going to challenge twelve, or even six ranks ahead of him. Instead, he was going to challenge the eighth rank genius who was only three ranks ahead of him. Of course, there was a proper reason for why he had decided to challenge the eighth rank genius. His target was actually a disciple from Emperor Shura's faction that went by the name of Gao Zhan, but he preferred for others to call him the Beheader. [1]

He was ranked second amongst Emperor Shura's true disciples, and he had a cold and ruthless personality, as he was focused on the ways of demonic slaughter. He was a genius in the art of killing.

People were mildly surprised when Jiang Chen challenged Gao Zhan. Nobody had expected this. After all, Gao Zhan was a famous killing maniac! He possessed the aura of a demon hailing from the depths of hell due to the cultivation path he chose to pursue. Ordinary cultivators would collapse just from the might of his killing intent alone. Challenging Gao Zhan was like challenging a young lord ranked within the top five.

Jiang Chen could have challenged the ninth ranked young lord if he had wanted to make it into the top region of the pagoda. The latter was equally as powerful, but there was still some disparity between him

and Gao Zhan. Moreover, Gao Zhan had cultivated the path of demonic slaughter. Even the higher-ranked geniuses were reluctant to go face to face against him.

Gao Zhan was in slight disbelief. "You're challenging me?" he asked while licking his lips. A cold smile flashed across his face as killing intent came bursting out of his eyes. There seemed to be no limit to his thirst for blood.

"Gao Zhan, don't belittle your enemy. His opponents have all thought that he had overestimated his capabilities, when in reality it was quite the opposite." Emperor Shura reminded blandly. The emperor had a very deep impression of Jiang Chen. Pill King Zhen was actually the perpetrator behind Majestic Clan's downfall during the battle that took place in Veluriyam Capital. It hadn't been Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Rumors that Jiang Chen would become heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain that had recently arisen definitely spelled bad news for Emperor Shura. The heir was very likely to gain reign over Veluriyam Capital after Emperor Peafowl's retirement, meaning that he would be sidelined yet again. He disdained Jiang Chen because of this. However, despite his hatred, he couldn't just ignore an incredible young genius that had come from nowhere, especially since said genius had just challenged his own disciple! Emperor Shura was certain that this was no coincidence. The pill king had done it on purpose as a demonstration of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's power.

"Esteemed master, please set your mind at ease. Your disciple is not the same as those other simple fools. This pill king may be somewhat abnormal, but your disciple is already familiar with his tricks. My demonic slaughter emperor domain will shred him to pieces once we get into the arena." Gao Zhan's cold voice was filled with killing intent.

Emperor Shura was quite pleased with his disciple, as he had inherited the emperor's thirst for blood along with his path of demonic slaughter. Unfortunately, his young disciple was too focused on the pursuit of martial dao to be interested in anything else. Thus, Emperor Shura had no choice but to train him as a second rank true disciple instead. Gao Zhan didn't care about all this. He was more interested in improving his martial dao and breaking through to higher levels.

"Fool!" Emperor Shura yelled as soon as he heard Gao Zhan's words. "This child is as unfathomable as he is obscure! You will not win if you think that this is all there is to him!" Emperor Shura didn't often scold Gao Zhan like this. However, the importance of this match had caused his mood to sour. He could tell that Gao Zhan had already belittled his enemy in his mind.

Gao Zhan was much stronger than Zhuang Min. There wasn't much he could study from Zhuang Min's match, as it was far too beneath him. However, there was a high chance that he might be tricked by the pill king if he went into the match with that kind of mindset. The pill king was much too cunning.

Fortunately, the sky was already getting dark. The match would have to be held on the second day. Emperor Shura believed that there was still time to alter his disciple's mindset by giving him a small lecture.

Upon nightfall, Emperor Peafowl left the Veluriyam Pagoda to visit Jiang Chen.

"Your Majesty?" Jiang Chen was surprised by Emperor Peafowl's sudden arrival, as the emperors were usually in the pagoda at this hour.

Emperor Peafowl had a smile on his face. "Good lad. Your climb is a lot more aggressive than I'd imagined! I thought you'd stop when you reached the 20th spot, but you didn't! You just keep surprising me again and again. I can still hear the entire capital talking about you even after covering my ears."

"What are they talking about?" Jiang Chen laughed.

"What? Are you asking for praise from me?" Emperor Peafowl laughed. "You are now the biggest idol for all the youths in this Capital. Even the five strongest young lords are no match for you in terms of popularity."

Jiang Chen smirked. "Those geniuses are high and aloof. How can they gain the adoration of the city's citizens when they won't even bother stepping on the same soil as commoners?"

He felt that young lord Fan had done a great job in this regard. The late young lord was similarly adept at gaining the adoration of the masses even though he possessed a status just as high and beyond reach as that of the other young lords. It was truly a pity that the demon race's bloodline had coursed through his veins

Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. "Kid, you're so unorthodox compared to them. By the way, how do you plan on challenging Gao Zhan? Do you not know that Gao Zhan is said to be the most likely candidate to break into the top five?"

"Who else in the top twelve doesn't possess that same potential? Potential is one thing, but reality is another. He should be in the top five if he truly was that powerful. Potential is nothing but empty talk." Jiang Chen made a great point with his argument. Competition was intense, as there were only so many places within the rankings. True strength was still the most important factor in the end. There was still a legitimate reason why seven people were ranked higher than him.

"Seeing as how you could say such a thing, I'm sure that you've thought this all through. However, the reason why he is said to have such high potential is all due to his focus on the path of demonic slaughter. He will be a lot harder to deal with than the common enemy." Emperor Peafowl paused for a moment before he continued with a smile. "If I'm not mistaken, Emperor Shura must be giving him a small lecture right now. He isn't willing to lose this match. He believes that he cannot afford to."

"Emperor Shura has no choice but to spend an eternity as runner up as long as Your Majesty is around," Jiang Chen replied with a laugh.

"An eternity in second place? Haha! What an amusing thought!" Emperor Peafowl burst into laughter. "Since Emperor Shura is giving a lecture right now, it is best that I grant you some knowledge as well. Let me tell you a little something about this path..."

Jiang Chen had only just realized the motive behind Emperor Peafowl's sudden visitation. He was here to offer him advice. He appreciated Emperor Peafowl's good intentions even though he had no need for the advice. The emperor hoped that Jiang Chen wouldn't lose this crucial match, as he was about to announce the lad as his heir.

## Chapter 970: Wrath of Demons and Gods

The curtain rose on the most anticipated battle of the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. After a night of tutelage from Emperor Peafowl, Jiang Chen had a much better understanding of the path of demonic

slaughter. It made him a lot more confident in his odds. But still, he knew how troublesome his opponent was going to be. Not that his opponent's style was anything to write home about, but a cultivator who was at the peak of the first level emperor realm naturally dominated a majority of the other geniuses. As strong as Zhuang Min was, he probably couldn't hold half a candle to this Gao Zhan.

The difference between the first level emperor realm and the peak of that level was marked. The possibility of stepping into the second level emperor realm was present in the latter and absent in the former. Garbed in red, Gao Zhan was like a fiery ball of crackling flame. His wild and fierce eyes stared Jiang Chen down. The corner of his mouth was slightly upturned, its curvature a little uncanny. His entire person appeared unceremonious and unrestrained, filled with a primitive vigor.

"Are you the Pill King Zhen who's been hopping around lately?" Gao Zhan raised an eyebrow. His voice was as grating as a sharp blade, filled with an uncomfortably spiteful edge.

Hopping around? Jiang Chen snickered internally. He cast a cool sidelong glance at Gao Zhan, his face emotionless. "Is the foremost genius in demonic slaughter as second rate as everyone else? The only things you seem to possess are empty words."

The foremost genius of demonic slaughter. This phrase was particularly sinister. It goaded Emperor Shura's entire faction. Gao Zhan was actually the number two genius under his emperor's command. That notwithstanding, his martial cultivation capably rivaled that of number one in every way. He leered back at his opponent. "Genius or second rate, I only have one goal for coming here... anyone who provokes me shall die under a single stroke of my blade!"

"I've heard meaningless statements like those so many times that I've lost count." Jiang Chen casually picked at his ears, his tone playful. "Spit out anything fresh you've got. If not, then let's get to it. Time's a-wastin'."

"Very good, very good!" Gao Zhan grinned with fury. "I've seen my share of thrillseekers, but I've never seen someone so keen to seek out their death. I'll make sure to satisfy that desire."

The corner of Jiang Chen's mouth curled up. "You talk too much." He drew the Pentecolor Divine Swords as he spoke, his voice's volume ascending as he did so. "Then I'll go first!"

He wanted to launch a preemptive strike in this particular battle. "Qi is the origin of the gods, and gods the product of qi. I summon the five thunders with my five attributes. Five thunders of calamity, a divine hymn of my sword!" The forces of heaven and earth congregated at his beck and call. The sky darkened, thunder rang in the firmament, and his sword aura burst forth in the likeliness of a geyser.

It was one of the Divine Five Thunderclap Sword Technique's most powerful moves, Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords. Whenever it was used, even heaven and earth were moved. The Torrent mixed the five thunders and sword aura into a veritable tempest of thunderous swords. As the primary target of this assault, Gao Zhan dared not underestimate the attack. His expression was serious as he activated a defense glyph. It shimmered into place around him. Evidently, even someone as competent as him was unwilling to face such a force directly.

He clapped his hands together. Billows of red-hot air appeared around him, condensing themselves increasingly with each passing second. Like a geyser of gushing flame, they enshrouded the image of his

silhouette within. All of the momentum generated by Jiang Chen's sword was eaten up at once, consumed by the fiery domain.

"A domain of fire?" Jiang Chen frowned. He hadn't studied Torrent of Ten Thousand Swords for long. Thus, his level of understanding for it remained at the stage of 'strong, but unrefined'. He could produce the intended effect the technique was supposed to, but couldn't yet manage to condense it into a line or a point. It was effective against large groups, but less so against single individuals. In particular, some of its flaws emerged when dealing with stronger opponents. His understanding was rudimentary, after all. In a perfected state, any arbitrary attack from the Thunderclap Sword Technique was lethal.

"Hmph. An attack like this is only good against cultivators who are at the half-step emperor realm. It's completely useless against the ones who possess domain power like us!" A sneer played at the corner of Gao Zhan's mouth. He rushed forward with remarkable haste, the enormous aura of flame still surrounding him. A malevolent saber materialized in his right hand, the entire length of steel shimmering with a bloody light. As soon as it was drawn, a potent aura of bloodthirst cascaded forth in every direction. It was as if an opening had appeared to the lowest depths of hell, and an atmosphere of demonic slaughter permeated the air.

"What an evil weapon!" The aura of slaughter rammed into him, possessing enough piercing force to penetrate one's mind and soul. Thankfully, Jiang Chen's Boulder's Heart rendered him immune. Though the feeling shook his heart a little, there was minimal actual damage.

"Eat this, brat!" Gao Zhan cackled strangely, his voice as grating as metal scratching against a wall. He flourished his arm a little. The accompanying attack carried no exaggerated motion, but the simple cut made its way in front of Jiang Chen in the blink of an eye. The technique's speed and simplicity were simply masterful.

Jiang Chen was no slowpoke either, however. He casually flipped his Pentecolor Divine Swords upward. "Reverse Heaven and Earth!" The sword light reversed the reality of the surrounding space.

Though the saber looked like it had reached Jiang Chen, it in fact had veered off to the side, missing him by two or three feet. The result of the first-traded blow was that the combatants appeared to be evenly matched.

Gao Zhan was a little surprised. Though his attack had looked simple, he had actually fused his own domain power into the stroke. During the movement, he had placed an ample amount of the space from the stage into his own domain. In this way, he was able to essentially ignore the constrictions of distance. The saber went from far to near instantly, as if it had happened in the blink of an eye. But in the end, such a seemingly simple maneuver like that had been broken by an equally seemingly simple sword strike.

Gao Zhan wasn't someone who needed to fight over an extended period of time. He usually finished his opponents off in anywhere from one to three saber strokes. It was pitifully rare that he met an enemy who required him to dole out five or more. In other words, anyone that could remain undefeated after five of his attacks meant that he was definitely much stronger than Gao Zhan. The angry saber wielder grinned, revealing a row of humorlessly white teeth. He hadn't gained an advantage with his first strike, but he was not discouraged. "One more!" he yelled.

A crimson edge rolled backwards off the saber's physical edge, a jet of bloody air hot on its heels.

"Blood Drinker's Banquet!" The power behind the attack did not lie with the saber edge itself, but rather, in the profound mystery behind it. The bloody air was thickly seasoned with a consuming power, outright stunning any cultivator with a slightly weak will.

The saber stroke blended splendidly with the air, the entire attack possessing an unbroken form. Feeling the full brunt of the flood of bloody air, Jiang Chen was not cowed in the slightest. His consciousness was more than a match for any emperor realm cultivator in the lower levels. In fact, even mid-emperor realm cultivators couldn't necessarily beat him in that regard. Fixing his God's Eye on the boldly oncoming attack, Jiang Chen began to move.

He didn't avoid the wave of bloody air at all. Like a bird flying to its home, he swept into its midst with his sword. The weapon flashed with light before colliding with the biting edge. Jiang Chen halted for a brief moment, then accelerated his body once more. His left hand pointed several times into the air.

Tss, tss, tss, tss. His Supernova Point sliced towards Gao Zhan's vitals with powerful, space-slicing force.

The counterattack caught Gao Zhan completely unawares. Normally, the bloody air from his attack would easily drive his opponents aside, even forcing them to flee. His saber edge would then proceed to chase them down to their deaths. But Jiang Chen had done quite the opposite. Rather than fleeing, he had charged towards the air instead. There was no reward without risk. His maneuver aimed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Fundamentally, he was willing to go through with such an action because he didn't fear the bloody air's corrosive influence.

Because of his misstep in judgment, Gao Zhan was forced into a defensive stance by Jiang Chen's Supernova Point. Lacerating force after force slashed his body with unbelievable speed. Despite his ironclad defense, Gao Zhan still felt a stream of agitation in his chest thanks to the cuts.

What a pity. If Jiang Chen's point had been just a bit stronger, he would have been able to cleave his opponent in half with just that move alone... well, as long as his opponent didn't have any special defensive strength either.

Gao Zhan's eyes flared with ferocity. All of his savagery was brought to the forefront. He took a few steps back to steady himself, staring daggers at Jiang Chen. He looked as if he could spit out furious balls of flame at any moment. More than anything, he wanted to burn the pill king to a crisp.

"Okay, kid. I'll admit it. Congratulations on not dying to my attack. Congratulations on making me suffer. But I'll let you know right now: that technique hasn't been perfected yet. I originally decided to kill you in five strokes, but I've changed. My. Mind." Gao Zhan's tone was ominous. He raised his vicious saber high into the air, a sanguine radiance blazing into existence all about him. It was as if something living had awakened from a long slumber. "You did it; you made me angry. I'll use my strongest blade technique to send you to your grave!"

His voice grew colder and colder, like a demon god freshly emerging out of hell. "Know your place!"

The saber, too, became inexplicably brilliant. By now, it had practically become a living spirit, filled with demonic energy and charm. The giant image of a demonic deity flickered into existence behind it.

“Demon God’s Bloodthirster—Demonic Wrath!” [1] The weapon struggled like a primordial beast, attempting to break free of its prison. Gao Zhan was forced to use both hands to maintain his grip. At the same time, the image of the demon god accumulated more and more power. It was no longer blurry, growing in both clarity and terrifying pressure with each passing second.

Jiang Chen stared seriously at his opponent opposite him. He knew that his Supernova Point had incited his opponent to anger, resulting in many stages of the battle being skipped. It was time for their most powerful attacks to clash head on.