

Three Realms 981

Chapter 981: The Influence of a Young Master

The Fish and Dragon District was a quagmire of a place. Jiang Chen had no desire to stay there for long, nor did he want to bring a group of pretty girls there in any capacity. Thankfully, a man of his current station was unlikely to encounter any problems. The last time he'd come here, he'd been accompanied by Wei Jie. Despite that, he hadn't been taken very seriously by most of the people they'd come across. Back then, House Wei had still been a typical ninth-rank house on the brink of destitution. It was the very definition of insignificant. This time, Jiang Chen wasn't bringing anyone notable with him on his revisit. Both Wei Jie and Ji San were as busy as he for the next short while, having to make various preparations before entering the Veluriyam Pagoda. Nobody in their right mind would waste the three days of prep time allotted to them. These two were no exception.

Moreover, given Jiang Chen's current prominence in Veluriyam Capital, there was no one here that would dare lay a hand on him. The burning ire of Emperor Shura's faction could not manifest itself either. Emperor Peafowl's perceptiveness knew no bounds. Who knew if he was watching in secret? Anyone who schemed against the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain risked being made an example of by its master. Jiang Chen also had no interest in stirring up trouble. A few attendants in tow, he came quietly to the Fish and Dragon District.

However, after weathering the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering, Jiang Chen was a mysterious pill king no longer. He was the idol of the town! As soon as he arrived in the district, he was recognized by huge swathes of people. All of them came up to greet him. Even the most unruly of ruffians acted with modest and humility in front of him. Evidently, it wasn't his status but his performance that had conquered their hearts. Their support of him was sincere.

"Young lord Zhen, do you still remember this lowly one?" A person suddenly emerged from the throng. He was dressed in flowery clothing that could almost be described as gaudy. Such garments would be par for the course for a woman, but it was a bit over the top for a man.

"Aren't you Lin Ming?" Jiang Chen remembered the guy. When Wei Jie had brought him to the district, the first thing he did was look for Lin Ming's store. The merchant had been polite enough, but not particularly enthusiastic. He'd given Wei Jie a measure of face without being too eager to do so. Still, he seemed more than happy to cozy up nowadays. Here he was now, sidling towards him.

"Young lord Zhen, I heard that you became Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord! I surmised that you would need some high-quality slaves, so I've been turning my pockets inside out recently... I'm happy to report that I've managed to cobble a reasonable batch of goods together. May I invite you to my store to take a look?"

Jiang Chen's impression of Lin Ming was indifferent at best. The merchant had been comparatively distant back then, but that was normal. It was unreasonable to expect someone to be thrilled about dealing with a stranger. On the positive side, he'd gotten a few pieces of pertinent news afterwards from the man. Sure, that had been contingent on him curing the merchant's illness, but the transaction had yielded useful results. In particular, the location of Regal Pill Palace's group of disciples had been a key bit of information. That was why he had been able to rescue Shen Trifire, Gouyu, and the others from House Sikou's Myriad Puppets Pavilion. It had only been a fair deal, but the timeliness of the

information was not to be denied. If he'd been a few days late, it was likely that they would have been sold to the four corners of the world. Therefore, Jiang Chen remembered the favor.

"Boss Lin, you look like you're doing well lately." Jiang Chen smiled at the merchant, noticing that he was no longer powdering his face. The white spots had disappeared. That meant that the root cause of his illness was gone.

Lin Ming's heart trembled at the very thought of the disease. He had been extremely lucky. He knew that without the pill king's previous help, he would likely be a corpse by now. He had kept a Nether Felidae around as a pet. Every midnight, countless evil and yin humors were drawn to it. If it hadn't been for the pill king's keen perception, he would have been history in just a short while. No matter how much money he possessed, he wouldn't have been able to spend any of it.

Thus, his gratefulness towards Pill King Zhen was heartfelt, and by extension, towards Wei Jie as well. After hearing about the pill king's remarkable deeds and witnessing his gradual rise to his present position as Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, Lin Ming felt extremely regretful. He regretted that his attitude hadn't been the best in the past. Why had he waited until they'd struck a bargain before offering the useful piece of news? If he had been just a bit politer in terms of demeanor and behavior, he would have been able to hug the pill king's powerful thigh, so to speak, and refer to the encounter to others with ease. With Pill King Zhen's support, there was no way he would remain unknown. The backing of Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord meant that he could walk with his head held high and do as he would throughout the entire Fish and Dragon District.

House Sikou's Myriad Puppets Pavilion had only been sponsored by the Majestic Clan. Emperor Shura was a layer beyond that. Yes, it was only a single layer of difference, but it meant that the Pavilion could never become a top store. They could only grow to rival the Majestic Clan, and not become useful to Emperor Shura himself. However, Lin Ming could have established a direct relationship with Sacred Peafowl Mountain if he had been able to help young lord Zhen. Every time he remembered this matter, Lin Ming regretted his previous actions down to his very intestines. He wanted to slap himself in the face a few times. He had missed out on the opportunity of a lifetime. Fortunately for him, he had another shot at it this time.

Ever since he'd received the news about Pill King Zhen becoming Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord, Lin Ming had wondered what would be the best way to go about making reparations for his past behavior. What would be the most ideal method of connecting with the pill king? He instantly thought that because young lord Zhen was moving into Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he would need a large number of slaves. This was customary for any young lord moving into a new residence. From here, he had an idea. He used every ounce of his energy and every thread of his network to collect a large batch of high-scoring slaves. They were all very reliable to boot! He carried out all of this with caution and reliability.

After all of this, he waited in front of the Fish and Dragon District entrance for Jiang Chen to appear. Lin Ming was fairly smart. He'd fully expected that young lord Zhen would come buy slaves during the half-week prep time. He had waited here three days and nights. His labor had finally been rewarded! He was both excited and anxious.

The excitement was from seeing young lord Zhen, and the anxiety from wondering how petty he would be. Was the capital's new star going to give him attitude for his prior treatment? If the young lord truly was a vengeful one, then the tribute he was attempting to pay him might have entirely the opposite effect. It could bring him misfortune rather than favor. The Fish and Dragon District was a pragmatic place. If anyone knew of the previous bad blood between him and young lord Zhen, they would surely take the opportunity to torment him or worse. The young lord was sure to be pleased by that! Lin Ming was wise enough to acknowledge this possibility from the start.

Thankfully, young lord Zhen was a tolerant man. There had been no lingering grudge. Instead, the young lord had both remembered him and inquired after the condition of his illness. Lin Ming's smile was positively simpering as he replied, "It's all thanks to your help, young lord Zhen. I've always appreciated it, and I've wanted to repay you for a while now..."

Jiang Chen returned the grin. "Then, shall we spend a few moments at your place?"

The other shopkeepers felt a tug on their heartstrings at those words. Countless gazes of admiration and envy shot towards Lin Ming. Nobody could come up with the actual reason why Lin Ming was so lucky. What did the young lord see in him, anyway? They had all been waiting to butter up the new star. Many had redecorated their stores to the point of obsessive perfection. Some had even hired exceptionally pretty girls as employees, all for the sole purpose of pleasing young lord Zhen. If the young lord stepped into their store, business would be much easier for them in the future.

How unfortunate that he'd been intercepted by Lin Ming. Judging by the expression on his face, they were on fairly good terms too. There were smiles and small talk. A relationship like that was enough to make any onlooker go green with envy. Feeling the burningly covetous looks from everyone around him, Lin Ming felt great satisfaction. Now wasn't the time to reveal it, however. He respectfully led Jiang Chen and his entourage along with him towards his store. The group disappeared at the end of the street, but the crowd persisted still.

"Lin Ming doesn't have a big business or a big store. What's that guy up to, joining in on the ruckus like this? Why's he trying to charm the young lord, too? What an annoyance."

"That kid's won the lottery. Did he know young lord Zhen from before?"

"Who knows? He looks like he's going to have a good life from now on.."

"Ah, curses. I'll have to socialize with him a bit more in the future. I didn't know he had such a strong backer..."

Lin Ming was solidly middle-of-the-pack in terms of his prominence in the Fish and Dragon District. After today's events, though, he would likely skyrocket in importance. It wasn't a stretch to say that he would become one of the biggest shopkeepers here. This was the art of using someone else's power to one's advantage. Even the momentary presence of someone important in one's store was worth ten thousand gold. That the person in question was on buddy-buddy terms as well made it all the more weightier.

Jiang Chen hadn't considered any of this. He couldn't possibly have imagined his few phrases of casual courtesy would cause such a noticeable effect on the Fish and Dragon District. Watching the slightly over-excited Lin Ming in front of him both amused him and made him a bit sentimental. When he had first come to the district, he had felt sidelined, despite having been in the company of Wei Jie. This time,

innumerable eyes followed him at every turn, respectful and reverent. A change of standing really did have a large effect on social perception.

Chapter 982: An Immensely Respectful Lin Ming

When they arrived at Lin Ming's store, Xue Tong, Guo Jin and the other attendants stayed outside. Clearly, they didn't want anyone to disturb the young lord.

"Friends, there's no need to stand guard," Lin Ming offered a placatory smile. "My people will keep all the busybodies out."

Xue Tong shook his head coolly. "Just keep our young lord happy, Boss Lin. There's no need to be concerned about us."

The guardsman had small-town origins, but even he knew how to rely on his master's influence. Because of the young lord's rise in status, Xue Tong naturally became more assured as a result. The mild statement was practically inviolate to its listener. The only thing Lin Ming could do was to keep smiling. "Well then, I'll leave the hard work to you. Please excuse me."

These people weren't particularly strong in terms of prowess, but they were indubitably those that young lord Zhen trusted most. Why would he have brought them instead of the Peafowl Guard otherwise? Lin Ming couldn't offend any of these people, either. It was better to get on their good side. The quartet of Xue Tong, Guo Jin, and the Qiao brothers stood at the door like quadruplet gatekeepers. Despite their lack of actual ability, their very presence prevented most people from having the courage to intrude within. It was as if there was a restricted area beyond. Any trespassing would lead to disastrous results.

Lin Ming had made ample preparations for Jiang Chen's arrival. Immediately as the latter entered alongside his girls, a variety of refreshments were offered to them, all of the highest quality. Huang'er was an easygoing girl, and Wen Ziqi quite shy. Neither of them said anything. Gouyu and Ling Hui'er, on the other hand, were very chatty and active. There was no need to stop them, so Jiang Chen let them be.

Lin Ming didn't know what the girls' relationship to young lord Zhen was, but it was a given that any girls near a young lord were to be fawned over. There could be no oversight in this regard. He acted with the utmost caution in their presence, lest he did anything thoughtless.

"How's business lately, Boss Lin?" Jiang Chen didn't want to see the merchant's excessive busyness and courtesy. Lin Ming was being too careful! This was not the kind of respect that he wanted.

"To answer your question, young lord, business is as usual. It's hard to make a living here in the Fish and Dragon District, and it's thanks to Veluriyam Capital that I'm able to eke out a few proceeds." Lin Ming's answer was humble.

Jiang Chen laughed. "You're a smart man. If even smart people can't stay in business, then the district would be in big trouble."

There were sweat drops on Lin Ming's forehead still. Jiang Chen smiled again, this time placidly. "Alright, you should take a seat as well. Relax, Boss. I'm still me. Treat me like one of your regulars."

The merchant wanted to do that more than anything, but psychological barriers were hard to break. Who could possibly treat Sacred Peafowl Mountain's young lord as an average Wang, Chen, or Lin? [1]

The young lord raised the teacup in his hand. "Cheers to you, Boss Lin. Pardon the substitution of wine for tea. I haven't yet thanked you for your help last time."

Lin Ming immediately stood up. "Not at all, not at all. I really didn't do much. It is I who should thank you for your lifesaving kindness."

Jiang Chen shook his head. "I saved only a single life in your case. But you... you helped me rescue a few dozen. It is right for me to respect your aid."

The robbery of a few thousand slaves from Myriad Puppets Pavilion was widely known. Lin Ming had heard of it almost instantly after the fact. At the time, the young master of House Sikou had investigated even him. Thankfully, Lin Ming had been extremely tight-lipped about the entire affair. Having failed to unearth any useful clues, House Sikou gave up the endeavor as fruitless. Both the event and aftermath made him wonder about Jiang Chen's origin. And yet, he could only speculate about these things internally. Announcing them to any outside parties was absolutely out of the question. Neither House Sikou nor young lord Zhen was an entity he could trifle with. Angering either one would lead to a swift and painful death. Though Lin Ming did not have a stalwart patron, he made his way around the Fish and Dragon District with his innate guile instead.

"No matter what you say, young lord, I cannot forget your compassion in saving my life. I've prepared a batch of slaves today, all of them sage realm or above. Perhaps they might yet be fitting for someone of your greatness. If it pleases you, do grace us with your presence at the back of the store?"

Jiang Chen raised an eyebrow, looking at Lin Ming with some surprise. He knew that sage realm slaves cost two to ten million saint spirit stones per head. Lin Ming's store was not big at all. It couldn't compare to the scale of an establishment like the Myriad Puppets Pavilion. The merchant was quite capable to have pulled off such a feat. More importantly, he was also shrewd enough to have foreseen that Jiang Chen would come buy slaves in the first place. That was why he'd maneuvered his resources like this.

The young lord's ruminant gaze made Lin Ming feel somewhat nervous. "Young lord, I've always felt a bit sorry about meaningful last encounter," he stammered. "As soon as I heard you became Sacred Peafowl Mountain's new young lord, I wanted to make it up to you. I spared no expense when gathering these slaves, and only barely made ends meet. I only hope that you'll be willing to accept them, as both an apology and a token of my appreciation." Lin Ming was a clever man. Worried about possible misunderstandings, he plainly explained his motives ahead of time. Jiang Chen smiled and nodded at his words.

"No problem. Shall we go see? It is not good to seek two solutions to a single problem. If we can get business done here, there's no need to trouble another." Jiang Chen didn't exactly approve of the slave trade at his core. But, he was in dire need of additional help that could maintain the day-to-day operations of his residence. After he cultivated his own followers, the slaves could then be slated for eventual release. An opportunity at a new life, so to speak. The response cheered Lin Ming up. The young lord hadn't borne a grudge after all. To the contrary, he was going to do him the favor he'd wanted. The merchant led Jiang Chen into his courtyard.

A hundred and fifty or so sage realm slaves were lined up here, row by row. All of their masks had been removed ahead of time. The supposed rules of the trade: no revealing appearances, no checking identities, none of them were imposed here. Jiang Chen gave the group a casual scan with his God's Eye. He passed over their faces one by one. There was no one he knew among them.

"These slaves are from all over the world. Most are wandering cultivators. As to their identities, I don't think there's much worry about any resulting trouble," Lin Ming explained.

The young lord nodded. He knew what 'no resulting trouble' meant. There was no need to worry about anyone who was going to come find them. In general, slave sales did not extend to those affiliated with large sects. No slave trader wanted to attract an inconvenience, especially since any such inconvenience was likely to devolve into a very sticky affair. The largest sects were especially vengeful. Buying or selling their disciples was like playing with a keg of gunpowder. Jiang Chen checked all of the slaves' consciousnesses. All of them were sage realm and above. Some were young, some much older.

"These are fine." A single examination was enough for him to make his decision. A man of his station normally kept three to five hundred servants. However, he had no such designs of excessive grandeur. He had only become young lord for a short while. There was no need for him to flaunt his newfound eminence. A hundred or so sage realm servants was already quite staggering. It was many times more than Regal Pill Palace used to have, once upon a time. Of course, Sacred Peafowl Mountain could not be compared to a mere fourth rank sect. It was at least as powerful as a first rank sect, likely even more so. As the second-in-command of the power and its future leader, Jiang Chen could easily justify a degree of ostentation. Lin Ming was very pleased at young lord Zhen's decisive patronage.

"How many spirit stones do I owe you, Boss Lin? Give me the bill, if you would be so kind."

"If the young lord finds it satisfactory, how can I take..." The merchant hurriedly replied.

Jiang Chen waved a hand. "Don't say anything about not taking my money. Firstly, I'm not a fan of what essentially is outright robbery. Secondly, I'm not going to miss that money anyway. Finally, your store isn't big enough to play ball like that. Name a price."

Lin Ming was ashamed. The young lord had hit the mark with his comments. He really couldn't afford to give the slaves away. Stocking them had cost the majority of his personal fortune. If he wasn't recouping any of the cost, his store would suffer a grievous blow virtually impossible to recover from. But making young lord Zhen's acquaintance was more important. If the young lord wanted them for free, then he would get them. Lin Ming wouldn't bat an eyelash. As long as he had young lord Zhen's support, there would surely be future opportunities to prosper. Merchants were adept at guessing their betters' thoughts, however, and Lin Ming was no different. There was no hint of freebooting intent in Jiang Chen's tone. If he forcefully gave the slaves away, it would upset the young lord instead.

Young lord Zhen had said it himself just now: he didn't need the money. Still, he had to be careful about how much money he did take. "Then I'll quote you the cost of the goods straight. Three hundred million saint spirit stones would be enough to cover my expenses." The sum was fairly accurate, in a fashion. It was only missing a few dozen million saint spirit stones from the actual cost. He could bear a loss like that fairly easily.

Jiang Chen nodded, tossing the merchant a storage ring. "Here's four hundred million. I know there's some water to your quote. You wouldn't just tell me the full amount. No matter the difference, you can keep everything there. I don't think there's any need for further courtesy.

Taking the storage ring in hand instinctively, Lin Ming's mouth was agape. He didn't know what to say, but the gesture warmed the cockles of his heart. Such exceptional generosity! As expected of a young lord. Any more bargaining or pushiness was excessive and a little boorish. Clearly, young lord Zhen didn't care about a trifle in difference. He quickly sang the young lord's praises. "Thank you for being so thoughtful, young lord. This'll make me a tidy sum. Here are the slaves' identification tablets and jade tokens..."

Lin Ming presented the necessary accessories one by one. Jiang Chen waved a hand for Gouyu and Ling Hui'er to collect the items. "Alright. I have business elsewhere, so I won't stay any longer." He gave the slaves another once over. "Boss Lin, would you mind delivering them to Sacred Peafowl Mountain for me?"

"Of course, of course." Lin Ming hastily nodded. "A visit from a young lord is a very rare occurrence, so I was originally thinking of setting a banquet, well..."

"Next time." Jiang Chen was in no mood to stay. Lin Ming's disappointment made him smile, though. "I'll bring Wei Jie sometime. The two of you should get to know each other better."

Overjoyed, Lin Ming silently cursed his own stupidity. How could someone of his standing just invite young lord Zhen to a banquet like that? On what basis would the young lord have come? The insinuation in the young lord's words was clear. If he wanted to hobnob with the young lord, getting on Wei Jie's good side was the first thing to do. He accompanied Jiang Chen's entourage out the door, incessantly nodding all the while. There was no more mention of a banquet.

Chapter 983: The Courteousness And Dignity Of A Young Lord

Lin Ming toiled tirelessly once he realized that young lord Zhen didn't bear any grudges against him. Moreover, the young lord had even told him to get to know Wei Jie more. It was an indication that the boss was tacitly accepted by the young lord. This incredibly motivated Lin Ming, and he even brought all of his most trusted men with him to personally escort the newly purchased slaves to Sacred Peafowl Mountain.

Jiang Chen had Xue Tong and the others to await Lin Ming's arrival at the entrance of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. The slaves were subdued, so Jiang Chen didn't need to worry that they might rebel against their masters. After all, the Peafowl Guard could easily eliminate them at any moment's notice. However, the slaves were still at the mercy of their owners even without the guards. This was because their ownership jade token were in their owner's hands. The owner need only break the tokens in half to activate the restrictions within their consciousness. Their mind would then collapse, instantly killing them. The slaves would never do anything rash under such conditions, unless they were tired of living. Moreover, the owner could simply check the tokens at any moment to find out if they were planning to revolt.

The slaves had no choice but to resign to their fates and listen to their owner's orders if they wanted to live. Pride and honor had no place in their life. The owner could kill them with the snap of a finger if they

disobeyed his orders. However, Jiang Chen wasn't such a tyrannical person. He'd bought these slaves, but he didn't plan to enslave them for the rest of their lives. He actually disliked ordering the slaves around. It wasn't that he believed that all life was equal, but he understood how difficult it was to be a cultivator. Becoming a slave after so much cultivation was a fate crueler than death.

The first thing he did was gather the slaves when they arrived at his residence. "I know not why or how you were reduced into slavery, but it is not my intention to enslave you for the rest of your life. With that said, I still require a lot of help as my residence was only recently established. I hope that you will be responsible in all matters and do whatever it is you are asked to. I will one day return your freedom and your lives back to you. You need not doubt the authenticity of my words. I guarantee that you will not spend more than a hundred years as slaves in my residence."

Emotions began to appear on their expressionless faces when they heard his words. Emotions had ceased to be a part of them ever since they were reduced into slaves. They were humanoid tools. All they could feel was fear and obedience. A hint of skepticism appeared in the slaves' eyes when they heard his promise. They were aware of the identity of their buyer. He was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and also one of the most popular people of Veluriyam Capital. This was exactly the reason why they were incredibly nervous while they were on road to his residence. There was no say what their life would be like at the Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Young lord Zhen had a good reputation in the capital, but who knew what he was really like in private? Was he a tyrannical person with a short temper? Would he take his anger out on the slaves?

Slaves often led pitiful lives in aristocratic residences. They were treated as mere cultivation tools and were used as targets for skill testing. Some were even used as punching bags. Their masters would beat them whenever they were in a bad mood. It was difficult to gauge how many slaves were beaten to death in the Upper Eight Regions everyday. A slave had no rights. The death of a slave was like the death of a mere hound. Nobody would ever question or investigate, because a slave was nothing more than a commodity. They didn't believe Jiang Chen one bit when he said those words. However, it was evident that he had a different attitude towards slaves compared to others.

"Maybe there are some among you that think that I'm lying or that I'm only putting on a show. But let me ask, what do I stand to gain by lying to you?" Jiang Chen cut straight to the point. "I'm not trying to please anyone by promising you anything. I merely wanted to let you know that only I have the power to control your fate. And only I can grant you a new lease in life."

"Some of you might ask why I'm doing this. I can only say that it's because I understand that you have gone through all kinds of difficulties to cultivate to your current level. Forever reduced into slavery must've been a fate worse than death for all of you.,I'm not fond of such cruelty. This is why I'm offering you an opportunity for a new life! But I will not do it unless you prove that you deserve it. If you dawdle around without any sincerity in your work then I can only apologize. You will have no choice but to be a slave for the rest of your life. I will not offer you the opportunity to turn your life around." The meaning behind Jiang Chen's words were clear. He wanted to unite these slaves from different backgrounds by offering them a common goal. It was impossible to brainwash them with the limited time that he had. So, the best way to do that was to entice them by offering their freedom back and a new life. This was something all slaves craved for. It was also the only thing they could look forward to. Jiang Chen glanced briefly through the crowd.

“I will now allow you three questions. Only three.” Jiang Chen gave them a stern look before he continued. “You better make them count.”

The slaves finally realized that the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain truly was different from the others. Their icy cold hearts began to thaw, and their minds slowly unwinding themselves. The crowd quickly gathered together to discuss their questions. They sent out three representatives after fifteen minutes had passed. These three were the oldest and strongest among the slaves at ninth level sage realm. They were a few hundred years old. It was obvious that they were very experienced in the cultivation world. Elderly cultivators were often reduced into slaves due to a painful past or because they were backstabbed by others.

“Young lord, this old slave has a question.” A grey-haired man with a beard was the first to speak. “Is it true that you will release us from slavery after a hundred years if we unite as one to serve under your banner?”

Everyone was dying to know the answer to this question. Jiang Chen nodded without hesitation. “You needn’t worry. You will be released as long as you pass the test and satisfy me with your service. It doesn’t have to be a hundred years. It’s possible that I might release you within fifty years, thirty years, or maybe even twenty years.”

There was no vagueness in his answer. The grey-haired man was satisfied. He nodded and returned to his original place. Another middle aged man stepped up to ask the second question.

“Young lord, this lowly one is called Dan Qinzi. I only wish to ask if we are allowed to leave Sacred Peafowl Mountain after we regain our freedom.”

This was also a question that some were concerned about. What use would freedom be if they couldn’t leave this place? Jiang Chen smiled. “It’s your own choice whether you wish to leave or to stay. What would people say if the Sacred Peafowl Mountain had stopped a person of free will from leaving?”

The slaves exchanged glances and communicated with their eyes. Many seemed very content with the answers they’d received. The last person to step up was a big and burly man. He yelled, “Young lord! My surname is Tu! Everyone else calls me Ole Tu! It’s a given that we will serve you after you’ve bought us. However, I wish to ask if there’s anyone among you and your followers that has the habit of beating slaves.”

His boldness had grown bigger after hearing the young lord’s sincere answers. His question was also slightly more sensitive than the others.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. “What, is there a trend in Veluriyam Capital for beating up slaves? I don’t know about others, but you need not worry about such matters in my residence. You are slaves in name, but you are more likely to be treated as a common follower. Nobody will give you any trouble as long as you work hard and do your job. Remember that you are now a member of the young lord residence. You should always act in the interest of the residence. I only ask for your loyalty and commitment. I don’t want to see anyone evade their responsibilities and create havoc within these walls. As long as you manage these things, you will one day see the light as free men.”

Jiang Chen could’ve used strong handed methods to make them obey, but he was well aware that such methods would often backfire after a period of time had passed. Most of his followers weren’t as

powerful as them except for Huang'er. There were many instances where a slave's sage realm cultivation could be put up to good use. Inflicting fear into them could make them obey, but it couldn't motivate them to give their all. However, giving them encouragement and a taste of the good life could do exactly that. They weren't going to be lazy or hide their true abilities so they could stand out and pass the test set by the young lord. The slaves were delighted. They had a feeling that young lord Zhen wasn't lying to them. He seemed like a man who kept his promises.

"You three. Since you were sent out as representatives, you must be well respected by the others. I will temporarily set you as leaders among the servants. Each of you will be in charge of fifty people. Naturally, somebody will divide work among all of you later." Jiang Chen had given them a sweet taste of what was to come. Setting three of them as leaders might seem like a small matter, but there was an enormous signal behind it. As expected, the slaves were elated when they heard that. What did it mean to have one of them as a leader? It meant that the young lord was giving them right to make their own decisions! It was now up to them to perform. The slaves had become infinitely more motivated. Hope had dawned and a new life awaited ahead of them.

Chapter 984: Nianer

Jiang Chen had paved the road for the future. Gouyu and Xue Tong were put in charge of the slaves and allocating work. Jiang Chen also gave them the full management rights to every slave. They were flattered by his trust in both of them, but they also felt quite pressured. Jiang Chen didn't meddle much with matters relating to the slaves. In fact, he distanced himself from the management of the entire residence. Gouyu and Xue Tong were in charge of everything. Two days had already passed and there was only one preparation day left. Since Jiang Chen was already fully prepared, he decided to go for a stroll around Sacred Peafowl Mountain while there was still time. He was, after all, still new here.

He decided to pay some of the elders a visit before he had to leave for the main pagoda. He visited the four monarchs, some high-ranked Peafowl Guard officers, and Elder Gu Yu, who was from the same generation as Emperor Peafowl. They were the ones who were supposed to visit him now that he was young lord. However, they decided against it, as they didn't want to disturb what little time he had left for preparation. They were entirely astonished and fearful when Jiang Chen took the initiative to pay them a visit.

He was the owner of the Progeny Feather Medallion, making him the next heir to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He held a higher position than any of them. Having the young lord visit them instead of it being the other way around was a slight miscalculation on their part, so the first thing they did was try to explain themselves.

"Young lord! We didn't visit you in the past three days because we thought you'd be busy with your preparations for the main pagoda. This is truly embarrassing. I apologize that you had to come visit us instead." Cloudsoar Monarch explained to Jiang Chen patiently. Jiang Chen was not the kind of person to quibble over such pointless issues. He was certain that the monarch had spoken the truth.

"Cloudsoar Monarch, His Majesty often tells me that I should pay you a visit if I have any questions about Sacred Peafowl Mountain."

Cloudsoar Monarch smiled. "His Majesty truly flatters me. I must say that I am quite impressed by the amount of foresight His Majesty possesses. Back then, I was too short sighted to see what His Majesty

saw in you when he revealed his intentions to make you his heir. I had even expressed my concerns to him regarding his decision. But time has proven me wrong.”

Jiang Chen didn't stay for long. He said his goodbyes after chatting for a bit. After that, he visited Wildfox Monarch and Chronobalance Monarch. Wildfox Monarch had the temperament of a leisurely wild crane. He was slightly surprised by Jiang Chen's sudden visit and acted neither overly distant nor overly close.

Chronobalance Monarch was slightly more laid back. He didn't flatter Jiang Chen, but he did give the new young lord some encouraging words. Jiang Chen offered a gift of pills to every monarch he visited. It was the best thing he could offer right now. He visited Plumscore Monarch last, as she lived the furthest away. There were many mountain ranges in Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and every monarch possessed their own territory.

The Plumscore Retreat was at the northernmost region of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was the mountain range where the plum blossoms bloomed the most. Plumscore Monarch loved the flower, her personality just as cold and as lofty as her namesake. It was the reason why she had personally chosen the dao name of Plumscore Monarch. Jiang Chen had seen her many times, but they never truly interacted. He only knew that she had a slightly colder personality than the others.

Jiang Chen didn't expect the four monarchs to be too courteous towards him. After all, only a few days had passed since he had become heir. The four monarchs had followed Emperor Peafowl for thousands of years and held very high positions within Sacred Peafowl Mountain. It was only natural that they would find it difficult to lower themselves to the new heir's position. The barrier within their hearts was too high. It wasn't easy for them to forgo their pride and dignity.

He had visited them on his own accord to shorten the distance between them. He was a young man. Dignity wasn't a big concern to him. His relationship with the four monarchs, however, was. Visiting them seemed to have brought them closer. Of course, this didn't necessarily mean that Plumscore Monarch was going to give him face like the other three monarchs had. According to his sources, Plumscore Monarch had opposed the hardest when he was first proposed to be the next heir. Although, it wasn't truly an objection; she had merely voiced her concerns.

Jiang Chen stood outside the entrance of the Plumscore Retreat and admired the unique view. Because of the altitude and terrain, the mountains here were covered in snow all year round, except during the summer. There were all kinds of plum blossom species here. Every seasonal change produced a different view as the flowers bloomed and wilted. He was mesmerized by the scenery as he stood at the entrance.

One couldn't help but praise the beauty of the Plumscore Retreat. The pristine mountains stood high above the clouds. One could faintly see them amongst the snow storm. It was like a view taken from a celestial realm. Plum blossom trees stood tall amongst the billowing snow. The plants here were green and full of life, even though all around them was a world of ice. They seemed to be unaffected by the ongoing snow storm. They must've been specially chosen for this climate.

In the midst of being deeply enthralled by the enchanting view, Jiang Chen suddenly heard a sharp cry. A white flash of light had shot down from above the clouds and was headed straight at him at a frightening speed. A youthful voice was heard crying out anxiously at the same time, “Whitey! No!”

Jiang Chen used his God's Eye to take a closer look and noticed that a fierce eagle was barreling towards him. Its feathers were as white as snow, camouflaging it in the world of ice. It was diving at him! He was a little taken aback by the power of the eagle's attack. It was equivalent to an all-out strike by an earth sage realm cultivator! Of course, there was no reason for alarm.

He cracked a gentle smile as golden brilliance surged from his body. A magnetic power instantly shot up thirty feet above his head. The white eagle came within range of the magnetic power and slammed into an invisible energy wall. Screech! It immediately cried out in pain. Some of its feathers fell off and fluttered away with the snow. However, the eagle's aggression didn't wane. It continued to glare at Jiang Chen, but it no longer dared attack. It was obviously wary of an unwanted guest like him. Jiang Chen found the eagle's human-like expressions quite funny. It had probably attacked him because it thought that he was up to no good in the Plumscore Retreat.

Another white flash of light suddenly shot down from the sky. It was another snow eagle, but this one stopped halfway in the sky. A young girl, roughly about five or six years of age, was mounted on the eagle's back. Her long black hair was wrapped up into many small braids, and her eyes shimmered like the stars in the night sky. Her white feathery dress only accentuated her fairy-like appearance. Jiang Chen was surprised by her sudden appearance.

One could easily tell how sorry she was by looking into her big watery eyes. "Sorry big brother! Whitey is a bad bird. Did he hurt you?"

The little girl's voice was crisp and the tone tender. There was an innocence to the voice that could only be found in children. Anyone who heard her voice would feel an urge to dote on her.

"Whitey! Why did you attack big brother?" the little girl asked the eagle as she caressed its feathers. Her voice was full of compassion. "You're lucky that big brother showed you mercy! You could have suffered from a much worse fate!"

Jiang Chen was equally as curious as he was entertained by her manner of speech. A weird feeling rippled through his heart. For some reason, he felt an instant connection to the little girl when he saw her. Her cuteness tugged on his heartstrings. Jiang Chen was full of smiles as he looked at her. He could feel a warm feeling permeate through his heart. He had very little experience with children in his previous life. It was genuinely a wonderful feeling to have a little girl suddenly barge into his world with such a beautiful scenery in the background. Sigh... I can't believe that I've never had the opportunity to experience a carefree childhood even though I've already lived two lives. The little girl's unique aura flooded his heart with tenderness for some inexplicable reason. It stoked feelings of benevolence from him.

The little girl could sense the kindness within his eyes. She looked back at him with lively eyes and asked, "Big brother, are you alright?"

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "I'm fine. Little girl, what's your name?"

The little girl breathed a sigh of relief when she heard that he was fine. The worry in her eyes diminished greatly. "My name is Nian'er. Mommy says that my name originates from the word 'longing'," she replied earnestly. [ref] 'Longing' in Chinese can be "si nian".

“Nian’er? Mm. That is indeed a very lovely name. By the way, Nian’er, why are you playing alone at the entrance? Aren’t you afraid of bad people?”

Nian’er tilted her head and laughed. “This is Sacred Peafowl Mountain! Bad people wouldn’t dare come here! Grandpa emperor will send them running if they ever try to. There’s also grandma... they say that bad guys fear grandma the most.”

“Grandma? Who is your grandma?” Jiang Chen wondered if this child was Plumscore Monarch’s grandchild.

Multiple white silhouettes shot out from the entrance of the Plumscore Retreat while he was deep in his own thoughts. They were surprised to see Jiang Chen. “Young lord Zhen?”

Jiang Chen cupped his fists and smiled. “Greetings, fellow daoists. It’s been a few days since I’ve moved to the mountains. I’ve come to pay Plumscore Monarch a visit today, as I’ve finally found some free time.”

They became extremely courteous when they realized that he was young lord Zhen. They quickly bowed and greeted him. “We didn’t know that the young lord would be coming today. Please excuse us for not welcoming you outside. Young lord, please. Come in.”

Another cultivator went to the little girl and said, “Nian’er, it’s stormy outside. Come back in. Hurry!”

Nian’er seemed quite curious about Jiang Chen. Her big expressive round eyes darted around Jiang Chen’s body. “Big brother, you’re young lord Zhen? Nian’er hears that everyone in Veluriyam Capital sings you praises and calls you a great hero!”

Chapter 985: Plumscore Monarch

Jiang Chen didn’t think much of it when others called him a hero of Veluriyam Capital. However, he felt some embarrassment when the little girl said the same thing. He had made some good contributions to Veluriyam Capital, but he knew very well that none of them were worthy of him being hailed a hero. Plumscore Monarch was obviously surprised by Jiang Chen’s sudden visit, but she wasn’t an apologetic sort of person.

“Young lord Zhen, I had my doubts and voiced my opposition when His Majesty made you heir. With that being said, you are welcome to prove me wrong with your actions. I will not oppose your succession just for the sake of opposition. As long as you prove yourself worthy, I will offer you more support than anyone else. There’s no ulterior motive behind my words, simply that Sacred Peafowl Mountain needs an exceptional successor.” She was very cold and straightforward. If others had tried to convey such words to him, they might’ve said it in a more tactful manner to soften the blow. However, words that she delivered were forever cold and impersonal.

Those with a petty personality would be offended by her. After all, she was speaking to the young lord whom she was technically a subordinate to. Jiang Chen smiled and nodded. “Plumscore Monarch, you need not explain yourself to me. I fully understand your position. The monarchs have been by His Majesty’s side for over a millennia. It’s proof that you have all passed his test and aren’t the sort to lose sight of the greater picture when intermixing right and wrong. Otherwise, His Majesty would have never promoted you to such great heights. Of this I have never held any doubts.”

He was being incredibly straightforward as well. A hint of surprise appeared in Plumscore Monarch's cold eyes. She had never expected young lord Zhen to hold such an opinion. When a young person was made heir, it was expected that he would also gain an accompanying air of arrogance or maybe even a bit of recklessness. However, young lord Zhen had managed to maintain an objective stance regarding the issue.

Plumscore Monarch was mildly surprised by how mature and level-headed he was. Her expression warmed a little as she nodded in response. "His Majesty didn't make the wrong judgment when he chose us, so I'm inclined to believe that he's made a sound judgement in choosing you as well. But unlike the commoners of Veluriyam Capital, I will not be blinded by your minor achievements. You have made some contributions to the capital, but you are still not worthy of being hailed as Veluriyam's hero. A person's true character and moral values are only revealed when one goes through hardships. I saw your talent in pill dao when you battled Pillfire City and then your talent in martial dao when you joined the Martial Pagoda battles. I recognize your immense talent in both, but I have yet to see your true character as well as your moral compass. These things take time, and I promise that I will always observe you in an impartial manner."

Jiang Chen viewed the monarch with solemn respect. As heir to Sacred Peafowl Mountain, his authority was now only second to the emperor. None of the other monarchs would say such things to him. However, this didn't mean that he had already gained their tacit approval. It was likely that they had the same unvoiced doubts as Plumscore Monarch. She was the only one who dared speak her mind.

Narrow-minded folks likely couldn't even stand the sight of her. But as someone who had lived two lives, Jiang Chen knew just how important these kinds of people were to a person of high power. In fact, it was actually dangerous to not have these kinds of people around. Jiang Chen had already achieved what he'd come here for. He hadn't visited the monarchs to show off his new authority or to make Plumscore Monarch kowtow in submission. That would be asking for too much. He had visited them as an expression of his sincerity. He took his leave after chatting a while longer.

Plumscore Monarch didn't stop him from leaving and sent him off all the way to the entrance. "There's no need for us to exchange pleasantries. I'm certain you will seek out Cloudsoar Monarch if you have any problems. Since you're the owner of Progeny Feather Medallion, you can also summon the Peafowl Guard at your own discretion. I can save myself the trouble of saying you can come to me with any questions."

Jiang Chen smiled. Her sharp tongue was truly formidable. He immediately changed the subject. "Before I entered your retreat, I saw an adorable girl, roughly five or six years of age. Is she your granddaughter?"

"You mean Nian'er?" Plumscore Monarch was surprised by the question. She never thought that Jiang Chen would ask about her family matters.

Jiang Chen smiled as he nodded. "Ah, yes. She did say that she was called Nian'er."

The monarch's eyes became a lot more gentler at the mention of Nian'er. The angelic girl seemed capable of melting even the iciest of hearts. "Sigh... cultivation has always been my one focus. How can I have a granddaughter when I've yet to marry? I was kindly asked by the emperor to nurture and take good care of Nian'er. She's a kind girl that has led a hard life. I can only imagine that it was much worse

for her mother.” She suddenly glanced at Jiang Chen. “Did you hear about the marriage proposal nonsense a few days ago?”

Jiang Chen raised his eyebrow, catching her drift. “Do you mean Nian’er is Miss Dan’er’s daughter?”

Jiang Chen had never met Dan’er. They were supposed to meet two days ago, but she had locked herself away in closed door cultivation for three years due to her inability to cope with the harassment from her suitors. Emperor Peafowl told him that she had a daughter. Who would have thought that Jiang Chen would bump into her today? It felt as though he’d been poked in the softest parts of his heart when he’d met the little girl. He felt an inexplicable sense of kinship and curiosity towards that girl. He couldn’t help but wonder why. It was this precise feeling that prompted him to ask Plumscore Monarch even more questions about her. His heart trembled when he heard that the girl had led a hard life. He felt a slight mixture of pity and empathy.

Cultivators often had hearts that were as solid as rock. He was left deeply confused when such feelings had surfaced within him out of nowhere. Sigh... I guess I have no immunity to children because I didn’t spend much time with them in my previous life. However, that still doesn’t explain the inexplicable sense of kinship I feel... Jiang Chen pondered, but he eventually concluded that he was just innately fond of children. He couldn’t resist looking back when he walked out of the Plumscore Retreat.

Unfortunately, fate deemed that he would have to walk away disappointed. He wanted to see the girl again, but it’d be weird if he acted overly familiar with a five-year-old child, especially when this was his first time visiting them. A person like Plumscore Monarch would absolutely read too much into his actions.

Nian’er immediately ran up to Plumscore Monarch after Jiang Chen had left.

“Grandma! They brought big brother to see you, and Nian’er wants to talk to big brother more!” Nian’er was full of joy and excitement when she ran towards the monarch.

Plumscore Monarch had just returned after sending Jiang Chen off. A rare smile appeared on her face when she saw the girl. “Nian’er, do you know who that big brother is?”

The little girl nodded in a sensible manner. “Yeah! His name is young lord Zhen. They say that he’s a hero of Veluriyam Capital!”

Plumscore Monarch frowned a little. “Does Nian’er think that he is a hero too?”

Nian’er’s big watery eyes blinked as she pondered the question. “Since everyone calls him that, Nian’er thinks that it’s probably true!”

Plumscore Monarch gently sighed and said nothing else. She couldn’t deny the young lord’s contributions to the capital. He had defeated Pillfire City and Pill King Ji Lang, both of which had definitely been great deeds of valor. Unfortunately, the monarch simply knew nothing about the young lord’s background or character. A person like her absolutely found it difficult to accept him on such short notice. But since the emperor had already made his decision, it wouldn’t be right for her to be overly pessimistic. She would never oppose a decision made by the emperor.

“Grandma, has big brother left already?” Nian’er’s eyes were darting around but she couldn’t find Jiang Chen. She seemed a little disappointed.

“Mm. He’s left. Nian’er, why are you looking for young lord Zhen? You’re too young to play with him.” Plumscore Monarch didn’t think much of it. She passed it off as a whim of a child.

“Big brother is a nice person. Nian’er found him very friendly when I first saw him. It feels like he will protect Nian’er even if the sky were to collapse one day. Grandma, big brother will protect Sacred Peafowl Mountain, the people here, and Nian’er right?” Nian’er almost seemed afraid that her grandma wouldn’t give her an answer she wanted to hear. Her tiny little face was all tensed up when she asked the question. She stared at the monarch expectantly, waiting for an answer.

Plumscore Monarch sighed yet again. “Let’s hope so.”

Nian’er quickly yelled, “He definitely will! Nian’er can tell that big brother is a good person just from his eyes alone! He will protect Nian’er and all of Sacred Peafowl Mountain!”

Plumscore Monarch sighed deeply in her mind when she heard what the girl had said. Sigh... young lord Zhen, if you are truly the esteemed protector of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, then it will be our honor to have you here. But if you are actually a miscreant with evil intentions, I have no choice but to commend you for your flawless acting. You might have fooled the entire capital, His Majesty, and even this innocent five-year-old girl...

Emotions lingered within Jiang Chen’s mind even after his return to the residence. The little girl’s smile was seared into his mind. He felt that his fate with Sacred Peafowl Mountain had suddenly become even more entangled. Not much else happened that night. A day later, the geniuses who had made it into the rankings gathered. The top thirty-six ranked geniuses were allowed entry into the main pagoda first, and those on the Genius Rankings were allowed to enter the Martial Pagoda. Jiang Chen was about to enter the best quadrant within the pagoda and stay in there for up to two years.

Chapter 986: The Three Secret Realms

The geniuses of the seven great emperors had once again gathered and were awaiting further instructions. Those chosen for the Pill and Martial Pagoda had already gone on, while the thirty-six slated for the main pagoda were still waiting. Jiang Chen knew that the seven emperors were intending to pay their respects to the main pagoda first.

The main pagoda was a structure that symbolized the Capital and was considered its sacred legacy. A solemn ceremony needed to be performed for each entrance, with all sorts of omens appearing after the ceremony. These omens also decided some of the specifics relating to the main pagoda’s opening. It took about an hour for the seven emperors to bring the ceremony to a close. When they exited the main pagoda, their expressions were curiously uniform with surprise and serendipity. It was an easy guess that the augury within the pagoda had gone fairly well. There was no alternative explanation for the coordinated joy of the seven emperors otherwise.

All of the geniuses present felt a certain degree of anticipation. What could have made the seven lofty emperors so happy? Did they foretell something exceedingly good? The seven emperors traded furtively communicative looks. Finally, their collective gazes settled on Emperor Peafowl to announce the results. There was no reason for the leading emperor to refuse. He spoke with an expression of unmistakable joy, “Apologies to have kept everyone waiting. However, I think that you’ll find that it’s been worth your while.”

The emperor's words successfully piqued his audience's curiosity. "This particular opening of the Pagoda is different from usual. Typically, when the Pagoda opens, only one single secret realm is accessible. This time, however, three will be opened to you fortunate entrants. Such an occurrence, while not strictly unique, has only happened three times in total since the beginning of antiquity. Therefore, you should count yourselves greatly blessed by providence. Countless Veluriyam Pagoda gatherings have been held throughout millennia, and yet only thrice has this happened before now." Emperor Peafowl's tone became a little more passionate. "Gentlemen, this is both a time of boon and a time of doom. In the past, these special occasions have also heralded eras of great turmoil for the Divine Abyss Continent. It is quite likely that a new age of martial anarchy is upon us. I am not here to prophesy doomsday, however, so feel free to simply treat my words as advice. Make the best of this opportunity. Exert yourselves to your utmost and receive plentiful experiences, advancements, treasures, and traditions. No one can predict the future. Obtaining a more varied arsenal now will provide better security down the road."

All thirty-six young lords in the Ranking became quite serious. They deciphered great opportunity from the emperor's speech, but a hint of worry as well. In the crowd of people, Ji San couldn't resist exchanging a look with his sworn brother.

"So that you can better deal with the problems you'll encounter on this excursion, I would like to tell you about the three secret realms opening this year. They are, in order, the secret realms of heritage, adventure, and battle. Heritage is a place of cultivation and meditation. Adventure, a place where you can gather experience and forge yourselves anew. Finally, battle is where you may test your mettle, an arena to assess the results of your cultivation.

"This year, everyone on the Ranking of Young Lords can choose between the three secret realms freely. Each man can decide on his own which is best suited for him. However, note that the thirty-six of you are divided into four divisions. The fourth division may stay in the Pagoda for only three months, and switch between realms only twice. The third division will be given half a year and four changes. The second, one entire year, eight changes. And lastly, the first division has two full years, and an unlimited number of changes between the secret realms."

The details made the first division's nine geniuses grin with glee. Making it into the top nine had reaped a lion's share of benefits. The freedom to change between the secret realms at will gave them unlimited flexibility. It was an overwhelming advantage. On top of that, they had the longest stay inside the main pagoda.

"Finally, one last reminder. You are not a hundred percent safe inside a secret realm. Moreover, the risk of being kicked out is present at all times. As for when that might happen, you will be informed once you go inside." Emperor Peafowl smiled at this point. "Alright, I think that's enough. I'm sure I haven't mentioned everything, so try to be mindful of the finer details after you go inside. To sum up everything I've mentioned: This is a rare opportunity. Whether you do or die here is entirely up to you. Prepare yourselves and receive your jade tokens, because a new realm awaits you all very soon. Note that your jade token is a proof of both your rank and identity. In addition to your authorizations, it will record all of your scores. Don't lose or destroy it! If the latter happens, you'll be kicked out instantly."

Each of them came up to receive a jade token according to their ranking. Beginning from number thirty-six, the geniuses were sent into the main pagoda one by one via the transportation formation. Naturally, everyone coming forward was asked the same question: What secret realm were they entering first?

Jiang Chen answered it with zero hesitation. He picked the realm of heritage. He firmly believed that it was the preferred choice of most of his peers. The secret realm of heritage was a place of cultivation and understanding. The entire reason for the grueling competition had been to vie for a chance into the Veluriyam Pagoda. The cultivation environment there was vastly different from that of the outside world.

The transportation formation activated, and he was whisked directly into the secret realm of heritage. Bzzt! An ear-screaming noise blasted against his eardrums. In the next moment, he found himself within a veluriyam world filled with fantastical color. He was standing upon an enormous field. Even with his God's Eye, he was unable to see an end to its boundaries.

"Congratulations on entering the secret realm of heritage. You are the twenty-fifth entrant here." An emotionless voice sounded near his ears.

Twenty-fifth? Jiang Chen furrowed his brow. If he remembered correctly, there were twenty-eight cultivators who had entered the Pagoda before him, since he was in eighth place. Including himself, there should have been twenty-nine.

Did four cultivators choose another secret realm? Though Jiang Chen was a little surprised, he didn't find it very unusual. People had different natures. Some naturally fancied risk and speculation, and there was certainly nothing wrong with an unconventional choice. It wasn't necessarily good for everyone to choose the same secret realm, either. At the end of the day, though, Jiang Chen didn't particularly care about the choices of others. He cared more about what he himself could get out of the trip into the Veluriyam Pagoda.

"Each entrant has his own cultivation area. All areas are separate from each other, and interference between one another is not allowed." Another voice sounded. "You are in the secret realm of heritage. Please listen carefully to the instructions before continuing. You have hereby received the right to cultivate within the secret realm of heritage, and your first mission is as follows: you must comprehend three Veluriyam Obelisks. Note that you must complete the task within half a month or be eliminated. All who are successful shall receive randomized rewards. What you receive is dictated by luck alone."

Jiang Chen didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Was this kind of thing alright? The rewards were apparently different to the point of being completely arbitrary. The Veluriyam Pagoda was definitely a unique place.

"Even in ancient times, what kind of amazing powerhouse did one have to be to build a structure as remarkable as the Veluriyam Pagoda?" The prized construction aside, Jiang Chen had to admit that despite his wealth of experience, the Pagoda was truly a distinct design. The person who had built it was absolutely a divine level genius. They had been erudite and multi-talented, possessing a mastery of spatial powers and an understanding of various kinds of intricate machinery. Moreover, they must have been fabulously wealthy. It was impossible to design such a miraculous, interdimensional tower without possessing all of those factors

All three Veluriyam Obelisks each contained a martial mystery. The first was a boxing technique. Observing it a few times over, Jiang Chen did not feel that the technique was particularly familiar. However, it clearly wasn't difficult for him to learn the technique on the spot given his wealth of second-hand experience. He understood its intricacies in only around half a day or so.

The technique was between a sage realm technique and an emperor realm one in terms of complexity—enough to keep a typical genius occupied for a few months. It was hardly any trouble for any genius listed on the Ranking of Young Lords, though. Of course, understanding had to be followed by an immediate display in the form of a practical examination. A genius was considered to have successfully learned the technique only after passing the test given by a mirror. A single set of forms was enough for Jiang Chen to pass the test on the spot. The mirror gave the highest possible evaluation almost instantly.

The test of the Veluriyam Obelisk was divided into four marks: failure, acceptable, excellent, and perfect. Jiang Chen received the impressive distinction of 'perfect'. The entire Obelisk became a pure cyan hue, indicating the impeccable result of its pupil. Because they were outside of the Veluriyam Pagoda's formation, the seven emperors didn't know the specifics of what was happening inside. Still, they were able to notice some of the more basic things. For example, they were aware of the number of people that had entered each secret realm.

"Tsk tsk, it looks like thirty-one went into heritage, three into adventure, and two madmen directly into battle."

"Most geniuses were reasonable enough. The largest number of people picked the safest choice. Going into the secret realms of adventure and battle risks being ejected at the slightest of errors."

"I hope that those unorthodox geniuses can rise to the challenge." The seven emperors were engaged in lively conversation.

Suddenly, one of the emperors called out, "So fast!. There's someone who's already grasped the first Veluriyam Obelisk in the secret realm of heritage. It's only been half a day, hasn't it? That's unbelievable."

"How could that be?"

"See for yourself."

Outside the Veluriyam Pagoda's formation was a formation of images. Though it did not record any specifics from inside the main pagoda, it reported a large portion of the results and scores to the outside.

"Huh, so it's true after all. Looks like they're the first one to finish. What's more—look, that's a perfect score! Half a day to attain perfection... what kind of inhuman powers of understanding does he have?"

"Quick, what number genius is it?" There was a flurry of commotion amongst the emperors.

Chapter 987: The Astounding Young Lord Zhen

The scenes kept flickering until they locked onto this astounding genius. "It's number 8... number 8... isn't that Pill King Zhen?"

The seven emperors might not have remembered anyone else's number, but who wouldn't remember the genius behind number eight? The darkest of all horses from the Genius Rankings, having won his eighth rank on the Ranking of Young Lords after thoroughly trouncing Gao Zhan with flair.

Pill King Zhen! This was a name deeply branded into every one of their minds. Emperor Peafowl designating the pill king as his heir afterwards had raised an even greater furor amongst them. It had shocked and stunned many of the emperors and made the Capital erupt in jubilation.

"Haha, Daoist Peafowl, your eye for talent is as keen as ever. Pill King Zhen is indeed an uncommon genius," Emperor Mountaincrush spoke with obvious admiration.

Emperor Skysplitter also sighed. "Daoist Peafowl always recognizes the gems from the masses. You discovered young lord Fan back then, and now young lord Zhen as well! With each of them more accomplished than the last, I really am a bit jealous. Brother, all of Veluriyam Capital is speculating that you had long since placed young lord Zhen as a hidden pawn. Are these rumors true?"

The other emperors also looked inquisitively at Emperor Peafowl, evidently curious as well. He laughed softly. "A true genius is born as a result of the times. I only discovered him. It'd be too much to say that I had cultivated him or made specific plans for him from the start."

"I really wonder how you raised him. Pill King Zhen possesses such stunning pill and martial dao potential that it truly makes him a one-of-a-kind cultivator in Veluriyam Capital history."

"He's not only one of a kind; he's as rare as the scale of a dragon or the feather of a phoenix!"

Emperor Peafowl smiled slightly. "It's too early to say all this. After all, perhaps he's already comprehended the mysteries of the Obelisk before?"

That made sense as well. Pill King Zhen possessed a wide breadth of experience and astounding talent. Perhaps he had already come in contact with this technique in the past. Having mastered the first obelisk, Jiang Chen continued onwards and proceeded to the second. The second was one that involved tempering the heart and mind, with its difficulty being noticeably higher than before. Not only was a strong understanding of martial dao required, but an even stronger strength of mind, observation, and perception was also needed.

There were ninety-nine images on this obelisk, and each one represented a blade technique. What the candidate had to do was discern which of these blade techniques was unlike the rest. All of the techniques looked like they derived from the same school of thought, so there was no fundamental difference between them. This made the test much harder, as all the techniques looked the same.

Jiang Chen fully deployed his Psychic's Head and observed the ninety-nine images, the different blades trailing imaginary paths in his mind. This was undoubtedly a complete set of blade techniques and even encompassed an entire martial school of thought. It would serve as good material for an emperor realm cultivator. If they couldn't identify which stroke of the ninety-nine blade techniques was different, that meant that the cultivator hadn't fully comprehended the technique. They could only guess blindly as a result, and their chances of success would be exceedingly low.

Given the standards of the Ranking of Young Lords, they would all certainly be able to tell which stroke stood out given enough time. And time was precisely the field that they were competing in. They only

had half a month to spend on three obelisks, which immensely increased the difficulty level. The other key point was that the order of the strokes was jumbled, so there was no hope in finding the answer by successively sorting out each stroke. The contest not only involved the foundation of martial dao, but martial dao potential and understanding as well.

Thankfully, discerning such things happened to be one of Jiang Chen's strengths. They were all required to deconstruct this blade technique, but his mind operated at a much higher speed than that of most of his peers. He called upon the immense collection of memories and foundations from his past life, deploying them to the utmost. He entered each stroke into his mind and reordered them, organizing and analyzing them... He immersed himself in this task as the technique became increasingly clearer to him.

After roughly eight hours, the various strokes had slowly settled themselves into a certain order. Jiang Chen's eyes suddenly widened with joy. As I thought. This stroke looks different, but its meaning overlaps with the one preceding it, and it transitions stiffly to the next stroke. It doesn't look different if analyzed separately, but when it's put in order like this, it's apparent that it could possibly follow the one before it, but it couldn't possibly precede the one following it. Mm, it's this one without a doubt.

Although Jiang Chen had identified his answer, he wasn't in a rush to submit it. He went over the technique a few more times in his mind until he was certain there was no doubt that he had chosen the correct answer.

This is it! He locked onto that jarring stroke with his mind. According to the rules, the candidate would fail after four incorrect choices and be transported out. They would be given acceptable if they picked out the right answer within three tries, excellent within two, and perfection within one. Not even a day had passed for Jiang Chen to reach his answer, which made for astounding speed indeed. If they can see our performance in the outside world, would mine be a bit over the top?

Despite his thoughts, he didn't slow down and submitted his answer. The familiar azure color appeared once again. Another correct answer, another perfection grade! A trace of a confident smile appeared on Jiang Chen's face. His two attempts had gone very smoothly, and he was now more assured in his strength and capabilities. Although he also surmised that the outside world would be surprised by his results, he still underestimated their shock.

"No way! Him again? He's passed the second obelisk?"

"This speed is simply too heaven defying! Pill King Zhen's martial dao talent is absolutely frightening!"

It was no wonder that the seven emperors were stunned. One had to know that during this time, only three out of the premier geniuses had completed the first obelisk, and that was a much simpler task. Here Pill King Zhen was full speed ahead, already passing the second obelisk. The difference in comparison was simply too great, and even the top three cultivators on the Ranking of Young Lords suffered a great loss of face. It was a good thing that no one knew of anyone else's scores during this period, so there was no risk of anyone's mentality being affected. But once this stage was over, their scores would all be announced publicly to goad the geniuses into trying harder and stoke their competitive spirit.

“Daoist Peafowl, I completely submit to you. Young lord Zhen is a heaven-defying genius and he outshines the top three geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords. He’s only at the sage realm now. What heights will he reach in the emperor realm?”

“He’s truly the foremost genius of three millennia. It looks like the heavens favor Veluriyam Capital. Our fortune is still exceedingly high!”

“Haha, indeed! Why would such a heaven-defying genius appear if it not for great fortune?”

Emperor Shura was the most depressed to hear all this. His true disciple Li Jiancheng stood at the head of the rankings, but even he seemed subpar in comparison now. The most important was that the more brilliantly Pill King Zhen performed, the more people would approve of his position as the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. That position would be cemented as time went on, and everyone would naturally assume that he would take over running Veluriyam Capital as well.

But what of Emperor Shura then? The emperor was greatly put out. He was ticked at Pill King Zhen and Emperor Peafowl. Emperor Peafowl owes me! I’ve been number two for so many years and deserve recognition for my efforts, and if not, at least for my achievements! Why not let me inherit the Capital? Why raise another young lord? Is your Sacred Peafowl Mountain going to rule over the Capital generation after generation? Why don’t you ask how others feel about that?

Jiang Chen didn’t pause and continued onto the third obelisk. The difficulty of this one was raised a bit further. On the obelisk, an image of two experts fighting each other was shown. The fight lasted for roughly an hour, and one was to identify three moments of when one side could seize victory from the other. There were always crucial points in a fight; it was just a matter of seeing who would first grasp the opportunity and win.

Chapter 988: The Opening of the Magnetic Golden Mountain

The third obelisk required a high amount of technical knowledge. Simply put, it was a test of observation skills. A third party would have a clearer view of the fight and see things in more detail. ‘Those closely involved cannot see as clearly as an onlooker’ was a saying that best described the situation.

However, exchanges were over in a split second. Failing to grasp the complexity of the moves within such a short amount of time was normal. Finding a critical moment was relatively easy, especially when one could watch the image again and again from the view of a third party. However, finding all three critical moments was at another level of difficulty. Finding the first one was relatively easy, but the second one was twice as difficult. Finding all three however, ramped up difficulty by several multitudes. Those who used up more time in the previous two obelisks would definitely be short of time in the third one. This would limit their performance to a certain extent. The test wasn’t too difficult for Jiang Chen. After all, his power of observations was even stronger than Emperor Peafowl himself.

However, his power was shackled by his cultivation level to a certain extent. This time, he was no longer restrained by such as he could repeat the scene as many times as he wanted. He could simply rewind the scene if he failed to understand something. The two cultivators in the image seemed to be mid level emperor realm cultivators. A battle of this magnitude wasn’t exactly heaven defying for a person of Jiang Chen’s stature.

He immediately noticed a critical moment in his first viewing. He watched it again to find the second one. However, he failed to notice the third one even after watching for the third and fourth time. The established rules of the Veluriyam Obelisk was incredibly strict. There was definitely three critical moments if it gave the participants a task to find three.

Jiang Chen wasn't discouraged. He stopped watching the image and closed in meditation. He simulated the battle in his mind and repeated it over and over again. He began by studying the battle from the point of view of one of the cultivators. Then, he switched to the other cultivator and did the same thing. He was able to gain many insights by fully immersing himself into the mindset of the two cultivators.

Two days later, he finally found the third critical moment after picking every detail apart and analyzed everything. Tsk tsk. The last critical moment is hidden so incredibly well. I would never have found it unless I picked it apart and analyzed it bit by bit. Jiang Chen was secretly glad that he had taken great pains to pick the fight apart, and had used the correct method to do. The third obelisk is extremely difficult. If it took me two days, then Brother Ji will probably need six or seven to fully comprehend the fight. I can only pray that he do well in the previous two obelisks so that he will have enough time in the third one.

Analyzing a full battle between experts had benefited Jiang Chen greatly. He didn't just gain insight on how battles were conducted between emperor realm cultivators. He'd learned to analyze battles by putting himself in the shoes of others. Nothing could be benefit more than an actual battle, but it was still good experience. He was about to turn in the answer with his consciousness after he found all three critical moments. However, he ultimately decided not to.

It had only been three days since the start of this fifteen day test. He was worried that he would bring too much attention to himself if he completed all three obelisk tests right now. Jiang Chen wasn't necessarily afraid of someone, but the tree that stood out the most in the forest was more likely to be fallen by the gale. He decided to wait awhile before he proceeded. One day of cultivation in this secret quadrant was equivalent to ten days in the outside world. Now was a good time to cultivate.

He'd gained much insight in martial dao ever since he broke through the eighth level sage realm. He was now closer to the emperor realm than ever before. Since he succeeded in summoning the Lord of the Golden Seal in the previous battle, he could now add the lord's attack to his arsenal of moves. The lord was incredibly destructive. It was absolutely a worthy addition to Jiang Chen's box of trump cards.

The lord had revealed incredible strength and might during the fight with Gao Zhan, but Jiang Chen knew that that wasn't the limits of its potential yet. There was still a great deal of untapped potential in both the Lord of the Golden Seal and the magnetic golden mountain. Jiang Chen made refining the magnetic golden mountain his priority. He wanted to comprehend the profound mysteries behind metallic power and metal attribute. Comprehending the origin power of metal was of utmost importance to him. Metal represented the power of sharpness and destruction. It contained the power to cut and sever everything.

The Lord of the Golden Seal was made up of an amalgamation of powerful metallic essences. Its entire existence was contradictory. it relied on the magnetic golden mountain for its own existence, yet it always seemed to yearn for freedom and independence from the mountain. Jiang Chen had made the

lord a promise that he would one day release it when he finally gained the ability to do so. There were two ways for the lord to gain freedom.

For the first way, the lord would have to fully refine the magnetic golden mountain and digest its components. The mountain would then merge with it and become part of its body. The other method was to borrow the power from another powerful metal attribute treasure or formation to release it from the shackles of the magnetic golden mountain. In other words, Jiang Chen would have to borrow an outside power to destroy the chains between the lord and the mountain, and extract it from the mountain, freeing it.

Of course, Jiang Chen required a condition before he promised to help it. Once freed, it would have to serve by his side for ten thousand years in gratitude. He had put significant effort and constant diligence into refining the magnetic golden mountain. Jiang Chen had constantly cultivating the magnetic power and the magnetic storms. It was an art that he constantly used in battle. These two abilities grew in tandem with Jiang Chen's cultivation level. He didn't use metallic monsters and Lord of the Golden Seal often. The monsters were made for group battles, but Jiang Chen didn't often run into an opportunity to call upon them.

Previously, his cultivation level hadn't been high enough to summon the Lord of the Golden Seal. There simply wasn't much reason to summon it by force, only to find out that it had only achieved a low level of awakening. Jiang Chen had also put utmost effort into refining the Evil Golden Eye. It was truly a heaven defying art. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to utilize its full potential yet. Once the Evil Golden Eye is refined to the limit, I can penetrate a person's consciousness even if his eyes are closed. It will only takes a single glance to petrify a person's mind and body. Right now, I can't even even invade a person's mind without direct eye contact. At the end of the day, the art's true might is still limited by my cultivation level. I will have to reach the great emperor realm for the eye to reach its terrorizing potential.

Refining the Evil Golden Eye wasn't an overnight job. One needed to gradually refine and improve upon the art. Moreover, one also had to ensure full compatibility with one's physical abilities and conscious might. The current level of Jiang Chen's conscious might could instantly kill those with a lower cultivation level than him. Geniuses of the same cultivation level could be instantly killed as well if they weren't careful. In fact, those with higher cultivation levels could find themselves petrified by the Evil Golden Eye if they dropped their guard. However, the effectiveness of the Evil Golden Eye was greatly reduced against cultivators with a powerful consciousness and geniuses who cultivated eye techniques.

I guess I still need to raise my cultivation level so can that I can improve the level of my conscious and its penetrative strength. Maybe I can pair the Evil Golden Eye with a spine-chilling image to improve its effects? The Evil Golden Eye was an art that worked best against opponents that were dominated from all sides. The effect of the eye technique was greatly reduced when up against another eye technique. However, if an image attack or a powerful technique was used in tandem with the eye technique, it would greatly improve its potency. There was no limit to the refinement of eye techniques.

The art of eye techniques is as deep as the ocean. A powerful eye technique doesn't merely deal physical or mental attacks. It can also be used to read the opponent's mind and hear their deepest, darkest thoughts. One can find out if the opponent is lying, has evil intentions, speaks empty words, bears a hidden grudge, or hides a true identity. One can even unmask the true identity of someone

corrupted by evil. All truths are brought to light under a powerful eye technique. Eye technique cultivators were celebrated individuals in his previous life. He couldn't resist being fascinated by their power. Eye techniques were ever changing. People were often astonished by how many variations there were in their tricks and attacks. Of course, they hadn't gained their ever-changing abilities in just one night. The Evil Golden Eye had a great potential when used in tandem with the magnetic golden mountain. He was absolutely going to use this rare opportunity to improve his own eye technique's cultivation.

The God's Eye had already begun to merge with Evil Golden Eye. This had improved his eye techniques immensely. There was actually another art that Jiang Chen hadn't unearthed yet, the Magnetic Dao Armor. As its name would suggest, it was a magnetic art that protected the body with strong, magnetic armor. This magnetic armor could deflect powerful attacks of varying strength.

The Magnetic Dao Armor wasn't too useful for him as he already cultivated the Nine Transformation of Demons and Gods, and possessed the Demon and God Golden Body. Moreover, he could already manipulate magnetic energy at will. However, it was the best way to protect a group of comrades in a group battle. The armor could only last for an hour. It was roughly as effective as a defensive talisman. The Imperial Advent Defensive Talisman that he used last time also lasted around that amount of time.

Chapter 989: The Six Palaces of Heritage

Jiang Chen turned in his answer on the fifteenth day and successfully passed the test. He had been the fastest among the young lords in the first and second obelisk test. The outside world had waited in anticipation for his next achievement. Unfortunately, it took him until the fifteenth day to pass the third test. This greatly diminished the crowd's enthusiasm.

"It seems that young lord Zhen is still limited by his cultivation level. His observation skills aren't up to par for the analytical test."

"Heh. That's to be expected right? How can the other geniuses compete if he excels at everything?"

Emperor Peafowl smiled without saying a word. He didn't seem fazed by the results. In fact, he suspected that Jiang Chen had taken such a long time on purpose. Of course, nobody could really know for sure as Jiang Chen hadn't emerged yet. The three obelisk tests were merely a preliminary test, but some were already eliminated at this stage. Six cultivators from the Ranking of Young Lords failed to pass the test within half a month and were given the boot.

Ji San also exhibited some potential. It only took him thirteen days to finish all three obelisk tests. He was ranked twelfth among the geniuses who made into the secret quadrant, while Jiang Chen's rank wasn't a true reflection of his abilities.

A voice sounded in the ears of the geniuses who had passed the three Veluriyam Obelisk tests.

"Candidates may now choose to continue or give up the challenge. If you give up, you're allowed to cultivate in peace until your time limit is up. If you continue, you are given an opportunity to increase your time limit in the pagoda.

"You'll be given an extra month if you pass the fourth obelisk test within fifteen days. An addition of three months is given if you pass the fifth test, six months if you pass the sixth test, one year if you pass

the seventh test, and two years if you pass the eighth test. However, if you manage to pass the ninth obelisk test, you'll be given an opportunity to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage in tandem with another two years in the pagoda.

"The Six Palaces of Heritage is the vital core of Veluriyam main pagoda. If a genius inherits the legacy within the palaces, his abilities will be recognized by the pagoda, making him the next master of the pagoda. There are three secret realms within Veluriyam Pagoda, but the realm of heritage is most vital to the pagoda. The Six Palaces of Heritage contains the core legacies of the secret realm."

The Six Palaces of Heritage? The hearts of everyone present began to palpitate, including Jiang Chen. Emperor Peafowl had told him about the cavern-like nature of the pagoda. It was an enormous quadrant filled with secrets of unfathomable depth. Not even the ancients had ever explored the pagoda in full. No one truly understood the Veluriyam Pagoda. Not even a great legend like Emperor Peafowl had been able to conquer the pagoda in his youth. This was a testament to its mysteriousness and strength.

"Some of you might be curious about the Six Palaces of Heritage. Frankly, it doesn't appear at every Veluriyam Pagoda Gathering. It only appears when the pagoda senses a great change of fates of the heaven and earth. It has only appeared three times throughout the history of the pagoda."

This piqued Jiang Chen's curiosity. How did the voice know that this was the third appearance of the Six Palaces of Heritage, as the voice had obviously obviously implemented since the ancient pagoda was first built? However, it didn't take long for him to understand why. The pagoda was designed so that every single step and every single detail was automatically controlled by a formation. Jiang Chen was in awe once he realized this. What a monstrous formation. The amount of minute detail within this formation is simply unimaginable.

Jiang Chen wasn't unfamiliar with formations. He'd become quite adept in the art of formations after he inherited the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's legacy. This was the exact reason why he knew how difficult it was to realize every single detail found within the pagoda. The progenitor who built the Veluriyam Pagoda must be an extraordinary being. The common empyrean cultivator would never be able to build such a miraculous quadrant. Jiang Chen even suspected that the progenitor of this quadrant had a cultivation beyond that of the empyrean realm. But this was nothing but conjecture.

"Remember, you must conquer all nine obelisk tests to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage. The tests have to be done in a sequential manner. You are not allowed to skip any of the tests. If you manage to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage, you shall gain an opportunity that nobody else will ever receive: a second admission to the Veluriyam Pagoda. Once you've entered the first palace, you shall be granted a second admission to the pagoda, even if you failed the first palace test. You will also be granted one more admission with every subsequent palace you enter. Once you've entered the sixth palace, you shall be granted three more admissions.

"Do not think that this is absurd. Those who find their way into the Six Palaces of Heritage will all be seen as future lords of Veluriyam Capital. Geniuses like these will only be seen once in every thirty to fifty thousand years. It is only natural that they would be granted a few more admissions to the pagoda." The voice continued to speak indifferently. "The Six Palaces of Heritage has appeared for third time because it has sensed a great change in the heaven and earth. There is someone among you with a

great destiny ahead. It could be a single person, it could be two people, or it could even be a group of people.

The geniuses were flabbergasted. A second opportunity to enter the Veluriyam Pagoda? More admissions for every subsequent palace entered? And three when one reaches the sixth palace? This overturned everything they knew about the Veluriyam Pagoda! This was information that the seven great emperors weren't even aware of! Didn't he say that the Six Palaces of Heritage has appeared thrice in history? Why wasn't this information passed down the generations?

"If you find this strange, it's because all information of the Six Palaces of Heritage is kept an absolute secret. If you failed to qualify for an entry into the palace, all memories of it will be wiped off from your mind when you leave. This is why information regarding the palace has never been brought to light." The voice quickly answered the questions within everybody's mind.

Jiang Chen was still at a loss for words. The person who designed the Veluriyam Pagoda had done so with extreme prudence. Everything was calculated. No detail was left unchecked.

"Alright, you may now make your choice. The extra time given as prize for taking on the Veluriyam Obelisk challenge may seem extremely tempting, but please keep in mind that you will be ejected from the quadrant if you fail any of the tests. Also, all memory of the Six Palaces of Heritage will be wiped from your mind."

Many were in a dilemma. Were they going to continue the challenge? Or were they going to take the safe path and cultivate until the time limit was up?

Jiang Chen had no need to mull over such decisions. The challenge was much more attractive to him than anything else. He was filled with enthusiasm. He felt compelled to explore the entire pagoda. He didn't have enough information about the Divine Abyss Continent to link it to the world from his previous life. There were simply no leads. It was evident that the pagoda was no common secret realm. He was convinced that this was his chance. Maybe... the pagoda has traces of ancient secrets that I can use as a lead? He was resolute. He must proceed with the obelisk test.

"Brother, are yo-... are you going to take on the fourth obelisk challenge?" Ji San noticed that Jiang Chen was walking towards the fourth obelisk.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Brother Ji, what about you?"

Ji San grit his teeth. "I will make the gamble as well. The obelisk test will no doubt be equally as rewarding as a peaceful cultivation. I will be ejected from the quadrant if I fail, but rich rewards have always come with an equal danger. How can I expect big rewards without first taking big risks?"

Jiang Chen was fond of Ji San's fighting spirit. "A daring attitude is required to walk the path of martial dao."

Ji San now looked to Jiang Chen for all advice and opinion. He could refine the true dragon blood even if he was ejected from the Veluriyam Pagoda anyways. However, entering the main pagoda was a once in a lifetime event. He possessed some ambition for the Six Palaces of Heritage, but he wasn't too hopeful that he could somehow make it into the palaces. But even though he knew that his chances weren't very high, a tiny, restless flame had already begun smoldering within him. He also felt some anticipation for

what was to come when he looked at Jiang Chen. He was certain that the Six Palaces of Heritage had only appeared because of Jiang Chen. It was merely a conjecture as he had no proof, but he believed what his instincts had told him.

If one insisted that he give a reason, it would be due to the numerous heaven defying acts that Jiang Chen had achieved. The Pinecrane Pill, the Longevity Pill, the defeat of Pillfire City, his rank in the Pagoda Battles, and the true dragon blood... Looking back on these events, Ji San had no choice but to admit that Jiang Chen was the bearer of a great destiny. His brother was a genius that he would forever look up to!

Chapter 990: Breaking Through Forcefully, Leaving Others in the Dust

The personalities of the young lords began to surface now that they were forced to make a choice. Those prudent and cautious chose to give up the challenge. They would stay and cultivate. Those focused on improvement continued to stride forward. The majority chose to continue, including those at the bottom of the ranks. Almost everyone at the top of the ranks chose to continue as well.

They were obviously enticed by the Six Palaces of Heritage. Why would any of the geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords think that they were inferior to others? The top ten were the biggest proponents of this mindset. All of them believed that they were favored by the gods, and that their potential was limitless. For all they knew, they might be the destined genius.

In the world of martial dao, there wasn't a single genius who lacked confidence. Moreover, there were all kinds of fortuitous encounters, so one could never know if they would eventually have the last laugh. A head start wasn't everything. After all, it'd been the turtle that won the race in the end. It didn't matter if they failed to enter the top three or even the top five ranks. Throughout the history of Divine Abyss Continent, there had been many top geniuses who were nameless at the start. They only gained success in the later parts of their lives. Very few geniuses had a smooth journey to the top. Because of this, they weren't too perturbed about their low rankings. Their confidence remained high.

Jiang Chen and Ji San walked through the wide open Veluriyam Square and headed towards the fourth obelisk. They found an inconspicuous spot and sat down. The other geniuses slowly made their way towards their own chosen spots as well.

"It seems like you have made your decisions. Geniuses under the fourth obelisk, I must commend you for taking the smart choice. However, this is a decision in which risk and opportunity dwell alike. Some of you will be disqualified on the fifteenth day, but there will also be those who succeed. Remember, you're not allowed to exchange any information through your consciousness, voice, or any other means. You should rely on your own talent and wisdom. Cheaters will be ejected from the premises immediately."

Geniuses from the same factions who'd planned on working together smiled wryly. The Veluriyam Pagoda was extremely strict and meticulous. They wouldn't have the chance to cheat. Jiang Chen wasn't too surprised. If cheating was allowed, only one person would need to comprehend the test for all to pass. The test would lose its meaning.

He threw Ji San a glance of encouragement, and started to focus on his own preparations. With his understanding from the previous obelisk tests, even if the difficulty was raised, he was confident that he

could solve the fourth one. He held his breath and concentrated deeply while he waited for the fourth image to appear.

The place was so silent that one could hear a pin drop. Everyone was self aware and did nothing to harm the atmosphere, or break the silence and disrupt everyone's concentration. They wouldn't be ejected from the palace if they made some noise, but they would certainly be drowned by the spit of others. Doing so wouldn't bring them any benefit. They should focus on the image instead. This time, a formation appeared. To be more specific, it was a trap formation.

"Right now, you are trapped within the formation before your eyes, and you must decipher it within your consciousness. Doing so within fifteen days is proof that you've comprehended the fourth obelisk."

Deciphering a formation wasn't a rare sight. This formation itself however, was. Making heads or tails of it was the biggest difficulty for everyone. Jiang Chen remained calm as he was already quite proficient with this art. He hadn't seen this exact one in "The Heart of Formations", but formations often shared similar foundations and profound mysteries. He was able to cut right into the heart of it all by combining his knowledge of formations from his previous life and the knowledge from that tome.

Reading, analyzing, and deciphering formations was a very specific set of skills. Of course, if one was powerful enough, one could use brute force or some kind of heaven defying treasure to break one's way through a formation. But this time, the task was to decipher the formation in their consciousness. This meant that they would have to fully comprehend the formation and identify the correct way to decipher it. This test assessed the foundations of their knowledge and comprehension of formations. A true genius would need to have the ability to handle all kinds of unexpected situations and problems. Being trapped within a formation was something they would all eventually face on their journey to the top. It was impossible that a cultivator could reach the top while being completely ignorant of them. Nobody was immune to formations in the path of martial dao.

Jiang Chen observed the formation meticulously and slowly deconstructed it in his mind. It didn't take long before he caught a lead. The formation was actually much simpler than it seemed. It was likely an earth rank formation. It was meant to be used against emperor realm geniuses and didn't actually pose a danger as it was only meant to be used as a test.

Jiang Chen finished studying the formation within two hours and began to decipher it. He was able to find the perfect answer after a series of conjectures in his head. This time, he didn't choose to hide his abilities. He submitted his answer with his mind.

"Success. You are the first to decipher the formation." The obelisk had turned cyan yet again.

"Number 8 has passed the test. You may take your leave." The obelisk pinpointed his number and told him to make his exit.

Jiang Chen immediately stood up without any pretentiousness. He glanced at Ji San and gave him a look of encouragement before he left. His actions caused quite a bit of commotion. It hasn't even been six hours yet right? He was able to comprehend the fourth obelisk in such a short amount of time? Has he seen this one before?

Many found this difficult to accept. Even the top geniuses were affected by how long Jiang Chen had taken to comprehend the fourth obelisk. A ripple appeared within their dao hearts. However, Ji San only

felt encouragement when he saw Jiang Chen dominate the test. The warm look from his brother only gave him more confidence. While some delighted and others fretted, the young lords quickly suppressed the commotion within their hearts and continued to study the formation.

“Surely not? He... grasped the fourth obelisk already? Number 8? It’s young lord Zhen again?”

“It’s only been six hours! Can this be yet another coincidence? Daoist Peafowl, your Sacred Peafowl Mountain has truly picked up a monster!” All seven emperors were astounded by Jiang Chen’s heaven-defying speed.

Emperor Peafowl smiled wryly. “Don’t look at me like that. He must’ve solved a question similar to the one from the fourth obelisk before. Otherwise, there’s no way he would’ve solved it in such a short time.”

It was the only logical explanation for this situation. There was nothing he could do about it if others chose not to believe him. However, their expressions suggested that they believed every word. After all, it was the only logical answer to this. Even if he was much talented than the others, there shouldn’t be such a big discrepancy between them. These were all young lords of Veluriyam Capital after all. They were some of the most talented geniuses throughout the Upper Eight Regions.

“Will young lord Zhen challenge the fifth obelisk? If my memory serves me right, you are awarded with three more months if you beat the fifth obelisk.”

“He will get half a year if he beats the sixth obelisk too.”

“I remember that there are nine obelisks in total. If he grasps all of them, he will gain another six to seven years. If you add in the two years he was originally given, won’t he be in there for almost ten years?”

“Comprehending the ninth obelisk is easier said than done. The furthest anyone has ever gotten in the past few thousand years was the eighth obelisk.”

“Mm. And he failed at the eighth one too. That was over five thousand years ago.”

“Didn’t Daoist Peafowl make it to the seventh obelisk and was a hair away from fully understanding it?”

The crowd turned with looks of curiosity. The emperor laughed gently. “That is indeed the case. I was young and full of vigor back then. I tried to do everything in one go, failing to realize the importance of pacing myself. If I had paced myself a little, I might’ve made it to the eighth obelisk. It’s really a pity that we only get one chance at it.”

The emperors already knew this, but they couldn’t help but feel admiration. After all, the other emperors hadn’t even gone as far as he had. Emperor Shura and Emperor Petalpluck had progressed the furthest among the six other emperors. They were able to make it to the sixth obelisk, but failed to comprehend it in the end.

“By the way, how far do you think young lord Zhen will go?” Emperor Mountaincrush suddenly asked. This drew everyone’s attention.

“Daoist Peafowl, since he is the heir of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, how far do you reckon he will go?” Emperor Vastsea asked.

Emperor Peafowl smiled in response. "Hard to say. It depends on how well he can pace himself. He has already made it through the fourth obelisk, and did it with much more ease than any of us. This is proof that he has the potential to make it to the seventh obelisk, or maybe even the eighth one. But to make it to that point, he will have to pace himself well and take many other variables into account."