

Three Realms 991

Chapter 991: Five In a Row

How would anyone fail to discern that Emperor Vastsea's apparently plain question was filled with malice to the core? That was obvious to Emperor Peafowl. A conservative prediction was no good. If Pill King Zhen was anything short of remarkable, then why had the emperor made him young lord in the first place? Too much optimism was dangerous as well, though. If Jiang Chen suddenly failed because of either inattentiveness or happenstance, it was possible that the emperor would be secretly ridiculed for making too much of an early call. Therefore, Emperor Peafowl chose not to give a fixed conclusion. He stuck to the facts, and nothing but the facts.

Emperor Vastsea laughed. "Daoist Peafowl, it seems that you have high hopes for that young man. Challenging the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk? You must feel that he's the best we've gotten in five thousand years."

Emperor Peafowl returned the laughter. "You're certainly a master of conclusions, Brother Vastsea. There are many unpredictable factors in one's ability to even advance to the eighth Obelisk. Can you say for sure which one your young lord Ye Piaoling will be able to get to?"

Being upset at his fellow emperor would be only seen as petty. Emperor Vastsea wanted to ensnare him, but Emperor Peafowl was a sophisticated man. Two or three retorts were enough to silence the detractor. Could Emperor Vastsea predict the results of the geniuses under his wing? What was the point of paying more attention to Emperor Peafowl's students more than his own?

Having been quiet all along, Emperor Petalpluck suddenly asked a question of his own. "Daoist Peafowl, this rhythm you speak of... it's a rather fresh line of thought for me. Can you elaborate a little?"

Emperor Peafowl knew that his friend bore him no malice. The other emperor truly wanted to know more. "This stems from my personal experiences in times long past. Breaking through the fourth obelisk rewards its challenger with a month, the fifth three months, and so forth. It's perfectly understandable to use the extra time to cultivate and refine oneself further, only challenging the next obelisk upon sufficient preparation. Why not make best use of one's time inside the Veluriyam Pagoda, right? If one challenges the next obelisk immediately after breaking through the first one, well, doing that isn't the best use of time... regardless of how much apparent momentum is gathered by the act. After all, a single failure means elimination, which forfeits all of the previously earned time rewards."

"You mean, it's better to wait until the deadline before challenging the next obelisk? So that one can make better use of one's time?"

"In theory, yes. But exactly how one goes about it in practice, I think that will depend on the situation. I see no reason to hold off if one feels a great increase in one's prowess after cultivation, or better yet, a spark of inspiration. There's nothing inherently wrong with taking the next challenge ahead of your own timeline."

As a young genius, Emperor Peafowl had only passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. His own failure to pace himself had held him off from completing the eighth. Given his talent and potential, he'd had the very real hope of doing so, but opportunity only knocked once. A missed one was a permanent consequence. It was one of Emperor Peafowl's lifelong regrets. Evidently, he didn't want Jiang Chen to

make the same mistake he had. Anxiety in the pursuit of success was folly. Why not use the time on his hands as much as possible? There would be plenty left to tackle the Veluriyam Obelisks.

Moreover, the Pagoda had opened three secret realms this year. As someone in the first division of the Ranking of Young Lords, Jiang Chen had no restrictions on moving between the secret realms. He had both space and time on his side. There was no reason not to maximize benefits by exerting all of his advantages. However, Emperor Peafowl was dumbfounded by what happened next right away.

Jiang Chen continued his challenge! After leaving the fourth obelisk, he'd immediately beelined for the fifth. He was working ahead of schedule. Emperor Peafowl didn't know what to say. Here he was talking about rhythm and pacing, and Jiang Chen was just going for the next challenge. Though the fifth obelisk wasn't going to stop the youth, Emperor Peafowl was concerned more about the impulse. He was worried that a string of successes would make the young man overconfident and irrational. If it did, the seventh obelisk was likely to act as an immense obstacle.

Any genius who'd experienced the secret realm of heritage knew that the sixth and seventh obelisks were two immensely large thresholds. It wasn't easy to pass either of these. The majority of geniuses were stopped short by one of the two, in fact. A genius that could break through to the eighth obelisk appeared only once every five thousand years. As for one who made it to the ninth, there hadn't been a single one for more than ten. Veluriyam Capital's written records for times before then were quite vague. Nothing in recorded history indicated such an event.

"Fellow daoist, your new young lord is a curious one indeed." Emperor Mountaincrush smiled. He, for one, was impressed by Emperor Peafowl a fair bit, not only by his ability and prestige, but his eye for talent as well. Who else among the seven emperors could dig up such a genius? The sole fact that he was equally capable of pill and martial dao was enough to put him ahead of the pack. Martial dao aside, the young lord's history of pill battles was proof enough that he could perform on a grand stage despite his youth. Some geniuses were born for grand occasions. At least, that was how Emperor Mountaincrush felt about young lord Zhen. The pill battle against Pillfire City had been one such occasion. The conflict between Taiyuan Tower and Taiyuan Lodge had been another. The Martial Pagoda battles, yet another. Finally, entering the Veluriyam Pagoda to comprehend the nine Veluriyam Obelisks definitely qualified as yet another grand occasion.

Emperor Mountaincrush predicted that young lord Zhen was likely to achieve some unusually brilliant results in the Veluriyam Pagoda. Some emperors didn't want to admit it yet, but the young lord's overwhelming momentum and advantage over his competitors was hard to deny. Emperor Mountaincrush's speculation, for one, was heavily fueled by the performance.

The fifth Veluriyam Obelisk was much more difficult. At twenty days, the time limit for it was higher than its predecessors. The Obelisk involved another image clip of actual combat. It required its challenger to assimilate the essence of both parties' martial techniques, then simulate it through his own consciousness. Fundamentally, it demanded one to be able to copy a martial technique via watching it in action. This was very difficult to accomplish. Strong martial techniques hinged on both forms and mental methods. Without the latter, understanding a technique's essence was a bewildering task. Only someone with the dual powers of perception and comprehension could pull it off, by slowly reverse engineering the technique through observation alone.

Because he was unfamiliar with the martial techniques the two people in the image clip were using, Jiang Chen only had a slight advantage. Without his memory to cheat him through, he could only rely on wealth of experience and superb cognitive ability to deduce its details. Thankfully, even if both techniques were new to him, he was still a fair bit ahead of his peers. The martial dao insight from his previous life was virtually unmatched.

Jiang Chen immersed himself in the clip of combat. Without the mental details to match, it was an extreme challenge to deduce a martial technique from its physical manifestation alone. He didn't have it nearly as easy as the previous few, but was in no rush. The twenty-day period gave him plenty of room to maneuver. He had more than enough time to analyze and infer what he needed. A few days later, several of the best geniuses at the fourth obelisk finished their tasks, joining him one by one at the fifth without hesitation. Ten days later, Ji San broke through the fourth as well. He followed suit, immediately coming to the fifth.

Fifteen days later, the fourth obelisk's time limit was up. Another four geniuses were cruelly eliminated. Some of the geniuses that had succeeded in breaking through the fourth chose not to continue right away. Wanting to slow the pace a while, they planned to resume only after a period of cultivation. Thirteen geniuses remained beneath the fifth Veluriyam Obelisk.

On the day of the fourth obelisk's deadline, Jiang Chen succeeded in understanding the fifth obelisk. He had passed once more. Advancing past the fifth had cost him almost fifteen days. Its intimidating difficulty was a warning: Jiang Chen did not intend to take the following challenges lightly.

"If Brother Ji is able to break through here as well, then I have to tell him not to rush into the sixth obelisk. Holding off and cultivating here a while would be a much better use of his time." Time inside the Veluriyam Pagoda was to be treasured. Jiang Chen did not want Ji San to be kicked out purely because of foolhardiness. Therefore, he temporarily halted his own series of challenges after the fifth Veluriyam Obelisk. He hadn't lost confidence in himself. He just wanted to wait until Ji San finished before proceeding. He wasn't going to waste the time in the interim, though. Returning to his private space, Jiang Chen began to cultivate once more.

With an abundance of Heroic Sage Pills, dragon crystals, and saint spirit stones, he was set to do so to his heart's content. The relative brevity since his last breakthrough to eighth level sage realm didn't affect his passion one bit. Inside the Veluriyam Pagoda, a single day of cultivation was worth ten outside, perhaps even twenty or thirty. Each minute and second here was exceedingly precious.

As expected, the fifth obelisk required an excruciating effort from Ji San. Without exceptional mental fortitude and a startling showing at a key moment, he likely would have been eliminated himself. He passed by the skin of his teeth on the final day, barely completing the fifth obelisk's test. Even someone as self-confident as Ji San felt some lingering pressure. If he'd taken just a little longer, he would have been disqualified for sure.

"Brother Ji, now that you've passed both the fourth and fifth challenges, you have four extra months on your hands. You should use amply the time you've been awarded."

Ji San nodded several times in agreement. "Yes, I want to go further, but I must first cultivate. I need to use the time I've already got. It would be a huge loss if I'm kicked out before I get a chance to cash in."

Chapter 992: Enormous Gains

Jiang Chen refrained from resuming his challenge for the next several months, choosing to focus on polishing himself within his private space. Breaking through to ninth level sage realm wasn't exactly a matter of a day's work, but he was unwavering in his determination. He had set it as his absolute prerequisite for his trip into the Veluriyam Pagoda.

Cultivating inside his private space for a day was akin to ten or even twenty days outside, so a two-year stay was equivalent to at least twenty or thirty years. Ample time, a good environment; he'd never had those luxuries before, not since his first steps into this world. It was a perfect time for cultivating without distractions. Over the next several months, the memory of his performance faded from the minds of those in the outside world. Only Jiang Chen was aware of the true extent of his benefits.

For one, the development of the magnetic golden mountain deepened with each passing day. Every ability he drew from it was strengthened, especially his skill at summoning the Lord of the Golden Seal. His rapport with it grew deeper, as did his proficiency with the Magnetic Armor art. It had grown from its originally rusty roots to an easy familiarity. Now, he could shield up to ten people instantly. His defensive capability was now as reliable as that of an initial emperor realm cultivator. As his cultivation advanced, so would the armor's defensive prowess.

"The magnetic golden mountain is truly a treasure trove. Although I'm almost certain that I've excavated all it has to give, making the most of these will take a bit more time." While there was little left for Jiang Chen to discover in the mountain, discovery and master were two different beasts. For example, the Lord of the Golden Seal's potential was something that had to be unearthed over time. The same went for his Evil Golden Eye. He knew the extent of its abilities, but he needed to invest lasting effort to achieve their peaks.

Besides refining the mountain, Jiang Chen had also spent time on his cultivation level. While he still had a ways to go before he could break through, a new glimmer of hope had appeared on the horizon. As ever, cultivation was a walk along a winding path, each level being nothing more than a rest stop. Jiang Chen could see ninth level sage realm waving in the distance, beckoning him over for a rest. Next, he had spent time practicing his Divine Five Thunderclap Sword.

Unlocking more and more of its mysteries only meant an increase in its strength. meant that it was becoming stronger. Finally, Jiang Chen's main target for refining had been the eight statues. Through the formation disk, he could now release more of their innate strength. As he practiced with them, he realized that the statues had nearly endless potential. He surmised that their ultimate power would likely rival that of the magnetic golden mountain. As his consciousness synced further with the eight statues, his control over them grew more precise. With the formation disk and the Eight Trigrams Assimilation Formation amplifying their strength, the eight statues demonstrated much greater combat ability.

"Who knows where the eight statues come from? Their strange, life-like will is remarkable in and of itself. It's almost like they were once alive. What a shame that I can't yet use all of its potential to augment their power yet." The eight statues' origin was unquestionably extraordinary. Especially since he couldn't see how much potential they had left. Even still, his instincts told him that something with such strong wills and plentiful untapped strength couldn't possibly be any less valuable than the

magnetic golden mountain. In the world of martial dao, there was no such thing as an excess of treasures. Even if the statues one day reached a peak in their strength, they would still be a keen tool in his arsenal. They were far too deft at both offense and defense to be ignored.

With more and more of his trump cards played in front of others, and since some of his old tricks coming up short, the eight statues were sure to be crucial to his next steps. By the time he'd completed everything he'd set out to do and resurfaced, Jiang Chen spent a full six months in seclusion.

The world had not stopped, and he immediately noticed many differences. Of the thirty-six geniuses in the Ranking of Young Lords, no more than half remained in the Pagoda. Ji San was one of them. He hadn't relented once over the past few months, spending them in cultivation and seclusion just like Jiang Chen. His own goal had been to break through to emperor realm. However, the gap between half step emperor realm and emperor realm proper was deceptively large. Many cultivators had been stopped short at that step, and even after spending their whole lives beating at its doors, fallen.

Though Ji San was remarkably talented, he had nevertheless failed to take that last step. Still, the months of tough cultivation had not been without rich rewards. He had focused on fully assimilating the true dragon's blood, strengthening his body and soul several fold. Indeed, it'd almost like he'd been reborn. As a result of completing subsuming it, he had achieved bloodline reversion in both strength and purity, a true return to his roots. Vague memories of true dragon lore had begun to awaken in the back of his mind. The dragon totem image within him had exploded in size.

There was unbounded potential in that image, enough to surpass that of all his ancestors. His ancestors had only passed down a draconic bloodline, and generations of dilution had thinned its primal strength. But the blood he'd refined was a hundred percent true dragon blood, with no impurities whatsoever. He knew his gains better than anyone. Compared to that, what did a failure to break through to emperor realm matter? They were hardly comparable. Given his new latent strength after purifying his bloodline, doing so would be a walk in the park. All he needed to do was shut himself up for a couple of months.

When Jiang Chen saw Ji San again, he felt the rich sensation of a fellow bloodline from his sworn brother's body. A faint hum of resonance sounded within him as his sharp eyes swept over the young master. "Congratulations, Brother Ji! Looks like you've brought back quite the prize in the last few months."

Without saying a word, Ji San rushed up and clasped Jiang Chen in a rough hug. "Brother, there's nothing adequate that I can say. For as long as I live, both my life and strength are yours." Ji San was very animated in his emotion. Only he could truly understand what kind of amazing potential and power lay within his bloodline and body. And more importantly, it was something that had been freely given to him by this very man. This wasn't just a favor, but something life-altering.

Without the true dragon blood, Ji San could still accomplish a modest number of things in his martial dao career. However, top twenty in the Ranking of Young Lords was probably the extent of his abilities. Breaking through that limit necessitated an almost miraculous fortune, which had an absolutely miniscule likelihood. Besides the man before him, Ji San could say with utter confidence that no one else in Veluriyam Capital had more martial dao potential. He was now confident enough to even take on the young lord Fan of yesteryear.

Ye Piaoling? Shui Rutian? He could smash all of them within three years! Even the first-ranked Li Jiancheng was someone he was sure to surpass in under ten years. This wasn't some blind egoism. The dragon bloodline in his body gave him endless courage. It made the previously impossible, possible.

Jiang Chen could feel the intrepid determination that radiated from Ji San's frame. He was filled with happiness for his friend. Smiling, he raised both eyebrows. "Don't forget our promise."

Ji San grew serious. He remembered the words Jiang Chen had spoken when he'd given him the true dragon's blood. Back then, his sworn brother had hoped that Ji San would become Veluriyam Capital's future master. He had thought it only a joke at the time, said to encourage him. Hearing it a second time shook his heart. Had brother Jiang Chen been serious back then? Was master of Veluriyam Capital not a title that sufficed for a man of his ambition?

Jiang Chen barked a soft laugh at Ji San's overreaction. He patted the young master's shoulder. "Potential and strength aren't the only things you managed to harvest this time. You have faith in yourself now, and something more intrinsic as well. So, how about it? Do you feel brave enough to challenge the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk with me?"

Ji San was completely fired up. "What could I possibly be afraid of?"

He didn't have long left in the Veluriyam Pagoda. If he could grasp the sixth obelisk, he would be rewarded with a six-month stay. It was an extremely enticing reward.

Four people had already gathered beneath the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. They were the top four ranked geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords: Li Jiancheng from Emperor Shura's faction; Zhou Yan the sword dao genius from Emperor Peafowl's faction; Shui Rutian from Emperor Petalpluck's faction; and Ye Piaoling from Emperor Vastsea's faction. Together, they were the unofficial four giants of the Ranking. Their very presence meant that they were the ones in the limelight, more so than Jiang Chen. They hadn't paused long after breaking through the fifth Obelisk. Their actions alone spoke of their dominance over the rest. In addition, there was an internal struggle between the four. In the clash between geniuses, none of them wanted to be the first one eliminated.

Chapter 993: Stunning Comprehension

As expected, the sixth obelisk was much more difficult than its predecessor. The four great geniuses weren't too surprised to see Jiang Chen still in the running either. They had already considered him as their equal. However, the sight of Ji San beside him raised some contemptuous eyebrows. In their mind, he was not qualified to challenge the sixth obelisk. But when they considered the fact that Ji San was only in the third quartile of the rankings, they understood where he was coming from. He didn't have that much time left. This was worth the gamble. His time would be extended by another six months if he somehow managed to pass.

"Brother Ji, cast away useless thoughts. Focus on what is ahead of you," Jiang Chen advised.

The contents of the sixth obelisk seemed rather easy at first glance. It was a calligraphy piece that contained no more than 200 words. However, each and every word seemed to contain some sort of profound intent. To complicate things, when linked together, the profoundness of the intent multiplied exponentially. Candidates had to sense the intent within the calligraphy, immerse themselves in it, and then completely understand the profound intent of the martial arts within.

Even though the obelisks were designed to hand out different challenges, each subsequent obelisk was legitimately much more difficult than the one before. Calligraphy was already a profound art by nature, but integrating a profound martial art intent within was certainly a twist. Jiang Chen took a closer look when he noticed each word seemingly coming to life. They seemed to twist and frolic among each other, like graceful celestial beings. Every word had its own unique charm.

Martial art calligraphy have been around since the ancient times. The elegant pursuit remains popular to this day, but those who reached the peak solely through martial arts learned from calligraphy are few and far between. I wonder who authored this particular piece. It's truly exquisite and uncommon. Jiang Chen took an even closer look and frowned slightly. These words weren't written with a mere brush. This is sword intent that took the form of a brush. That's the only way to explain the sharpness within these words.

He had seen many martial art calligraphy pieces in his previous life, but very few were comparable to the sharpness imbued within this example. The test is a lot trickier than it seems. I might not be able to comprehend the true meaning of the martial dao if I simply study the intent within the calligraphy. One must immerse oneself in the calligraphy with the mindset of a swordmaster. Only then can one comprehend the sword intent within.

Jiang Chen came to that conclusion after studying it for a while. He was the only one with enough knowledge and experience to notice the underlying problem with simple examination. The other four great geniuses had been sitting down before the sixth obelisk for some time now. They had begun to immerse themselves into the meaning behind the calligraphy, but they couldn't make head nor tails of it.

Even the most outstanding genius among the young lords was at his wit's end. But as time passed, they discovered the subtle sword intent buried within the calligraphy. When they changed their perspective to view the words as a sword technique, they finally found a lead, which then let them progress faster. However, they internally scoffed at the idea that Jiang Chen and Ji San would be perceptive enough to sense the sword dao within.

Unbeknownst to them, Jiang Chen had already utilized his vast knowledge to pinpoint the sword dao within the calligraphy. On the other hand, Ji San was fond of calligraphy. He'd already looked at it from all kinds of perspectives, but continuously failed. However, he wasn't the kind to be trapped in a fixed mindset. After a few hours of fruitlessly pursuing theories, his instincts told him that it was time to switch it up. His heritage memories, slowly rousing after his bloodline reinvigoration, stirred restlessly. Even when not fully shaped, they had already sharpened his insight and intuition.

An epiphany struck when he noticed the sharpness within each word. The calligraphy is bold and decisive, very like a dragon. It is also extremely sharp. It would be more appropriate to call it a carving than a brushstroke. Wait... maybe it wasn't written with a brush, but carved from a weapon? Ji San was quick to explore that train of thought, and it didn't take long for him to find the connection to sword dao. He was overjoyed when it really turned out to be a sword technique after putting his conjecture to the test. Calligraphy was merely a front to misguide them!

Hahaha! I was right! Ji San was jumping for joy inside. His discovery had excited him greatly. He couldn't resist glancing over at Jiang Chen. Coincidentally, Jiang Chen was also glancing at him with an expression

that seemed full of wisdom. Ji San was a little surprised when their eyes met. It seems that Brother Jiang has already figured out the secret within the sixth obelisk. Tsk tsk. His insight is simply astounding. Although, my insight and intuition would never be this sharp if he hadn't given me the true dragon's blood, His admiration for Jiang Chen grew yet again. The sword technique was ever-changing and also rich with sword intent. Every word contained an extremely profound sword move.

The calligraphy had roughly two hundred words, meaning that there were also roughly two hundred sword moves. Each and every move was unique and creative, showing an exquisite sword dance when all the moves were performed in a sequential manner. The switching of pace and sword intent seemed awfully crude at first glance, but after some scrutiny, one would realize that it was actually a brilliant execution of sword dao. Jiang Chen was extremely impressed by its depth. No wonder the time limit is one month for the sixth obelisk test. Mastering such a complex sword technique is no easy feat.

With his innate talent, he would never be able to comprehend this sword technique if he wasn't equipped with memories from his previous life. Even comprehending a third of the sword technique would be a gargantuan task for that him. New Star Ranking geniuses probably won't even comprehend half of the sword technique in a month. Genius Ranking geniuses might be able to comprehend more than that, but two thirds is probably the limit for those who qualified for the Ranking of Young Lords challenge.

The sixth obelisk challenge was unbelievably difficult. So much so that the four great geniuses themselves were now in a race against time. They didn't have time to spare on worrying about others. As for Jiang Chen, his memories from his past life gave him an incontrovertible advantage in comprehending martial dao. The words arranged themselves in front of him like an exquisite painting. A vivid image of a celestial being was performing a sword dance within his mind as the words linked together, one by one.

The singular sword dao describes a sword intent that flows smoothly like water, which is a characteristic shared by this sword technique. However, this sword technique also incorporates huge changes of sword intent between each move. An amateur of sword dao would never be able to wield it. Just like a mountain road was filled with unforeseen ups and downs, one could never predict what would happen in the next sword move.

The ebbs and crests in the sword intent were beyond normal imagination. It didn't just stay unpredictable, instead sometimes returning well within the confines of reason before once again skipping beyond rational practice in sword intent. This sword technique is truly extraordinary. An enemy facing this would wish for a quick death. Jiang Chen's admiration grew as he comprehended more of its mysteries.

Before Jiang Chen and Ji San arrived beneath the sixth obelisk, the four great geniuses had already been studying it for a some time. Thanks to his heaven defying speed, Jiang Chen caught up to their progress in just three days. On the tenth day, he was already at the final parts of the test.

On Jiang Chen's fifteenth day, Li Jiancheng was the first to stand up. He'd fully comprehended the technique. It was the fifteenth day for Jiang Chen, but the twenty sixth for Li Jiancheng. Still, one had to commend him for his superior insight.

The second to finish was Zhou Yan. He had comprehended the sword technique at almost the same time as Li Jiancheng, and successfully moved on to the next stage. They expected Shui Rutian, who was from Emperor Petalpluck's faction, to come third. But never in their minds did they expect Jiang Chen to finish an hour after them. A mixed expression crossed Li Jiancheng's face when he saw the obelisk turn cyan after Jiang Chen stood up. Zhou Yan was also flabbergasted when he saw Jiang Chen take his leave from the obelisk. It had taken them twenty six days to fully comprehend the sword technique, but young lord Zhen had finished at the same time as them, even though he started more than ten days later than them! Just how monstrous was his comprehension of martial dao?

"Senior brother Zhen, have you... seen this technique before...?" Zhou Yan couldn't resist asking.

Jiang Chen smiled in response. "I've not seen the exact technique, but I've crossed paths with a few other techniques that were also assimilated into calligraphy. People called them calligraphy pieces, but they were actually sword techniques. I already realized that this wasn't just a simple calligraphy piece from the beginning, and concluded that it was a sword technique after noticing the sharpness within the words. It was simply the sword technique itself that completely astounded me."

Zhou Yan's mouth was agape. The only emotion he could feel right now was admiration and speechlessness. It had taken him four days to pivot from the calligraphy mindset into a sword technique mindset, but young lord Zhen had never caught in the wrong mindset in the first place! His comprehension level, observation strength, and knowledge was enough to put him to shame, even though he was a true disciple from Sacred Peafowl Mountain! Even Li Jiancheng, typically an opinionated and self-centered person, could only look at Jiang Chen with a complicated expression.

Chapter 994: A Conflict of Pride

Li Jiancheng, nicknamed the crown prince, had been publicly acknowledged as the number one genius of the Ranking of Young Lords after young lord Fan's unfortunate demise, before Jiang Chen appeared. Neither Zhou Yan nor Shui Rutian had the qualifications to challenge his position as the strongest young lord. However, right at this moment, he felt an enormous shadow threaten his number one position. As he cast a complicated glance at Jiang Chen, he had to admit that young lord Zhen definitely deserved his full attention. In fact, young lord Zhen possessed many qualities that exceeded his own.

It was enough to depress Li Jiancheng. His domain was being encroached on, his status challenged. But like any fierce animal's first instinct in defending its territory, his hackles rose. When he saw Zhou Yan and Jiang Chen talking and laughing with each other, the threat seemed even greater than before. Zhou Yan was clearly giving a sign that he didn't plan on competing with young lord Zhen. This naturally wasn't what Li Jiancheng wished to see. He wished to see Zhou Yan and young lord Zhen would fight each other out of jealousy. He wished for a conflict between the two members of Sacred Peafowl Mountain that would lead to internal strife. Only then could he rest easy. If the two great geniuses of Sacred Peafowl Mountain were to come to a compromise with each other... or worse, if one of them were to submit to the other, that would be the worst outcome for the young lord of Emperor Shura's faction.

This cannot stand. I mustn't allow them to enter a honeymoon period. If these two doesn't fight each other, they'll absolutely work together to attack me. Li Jiancheng knew very well what kind of situation he was facing. But, he wasn't in a hurry to take action. If he were to rashly do something now, he was

sure to fail to attain his goals. He would have to endure and wait until the right opportunity presented itself.

Two days later, Shui Rutian finally completed his challenge. As Emperor Petalpluck's young lord, Shui Rutian wasn't lacking in either wits or talent. However, he wasn't familiar with sword dao because of Emperor Petalpluck's school of teaching. That was why he had fallen slightly behind when studying sword dao. That being said, he was still faster than the fourth ranked young lord Ye Piaoling. He finished his challenge just four hours before his one month time limit, cutting it very close to the wire.

Young master Ji San was now the only person left beneath the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. He still had plenty of time since he and Jiang Chen had arrived a dozen or so days later than the others. A sneer crawled over Ye Piaoling's face when he saw the lone remaining candidate beneath the obelisk. "Ji Ole Third is such a blind fool. Does he really think that a mere great clan descendant like him is qualified to challenge the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk? Should we call this the final desperate struggles that precedes impending failure?"

Zhou Yan frowned. "Ye Piaoling, you barely squeaked through yourself. Are you sure you have the leisure to criticize others when your own position is at stake?"

Ye Piaoling smiled faintly. "When all is said and done, I passed the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. I heard that Emperor Peafowl himself only managed to reach the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. This also means..."

"Stop right there. Let me guess: You want to boast that your talent is comparable to that of a young Emperor Peafowl, am I right?" Zhou Yan sneered derisively. As a true disciple under Emperor Peafowl's personal command, Zhou Yan naturally knew why Emperor Peafowl's progress had halted at the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. In reality, Emperor Peafowl hadn't been lacking in talent. He'd been too young and failed to keep his emotions in check. That was why he'd fallen for the goading from his peers. Emperor Peafowl hadn't talked about this with the other great emperors, but Zhou Yan knew a bit about what'd happened back in the day. There had been a lot of geniuses back in Emperor Peafowl's era. He'd also been rather cocky in his youth and high off his fame. This had made him an easy target for provocation, and he'd chosen to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk right after completing the sixth. As a result, his consciousness and train of thought weren't fully prepared, and his desire for haste only bogged him down further. In the end, he'd failed moments before he was about to complete the obelisk's challenge.

Although Emperor Peafowl hadn't relayed this to him directly, he had warned his disciples to never lose control over their emotions or act irrationally while they were inside the Veluriyam Pagoda. Zhou Yan was a detail oriented person and had deduced the facts from some of Emperor Peafowl's words. It would appear that even someone as great as Emperor Peafowl had a preposterous past. Talent wise, the emperor was absolutely qualified to make it all the way to the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk. In fact, there had been those who felt that the young Emperor Peafowl's talent had been good enough to carry him to the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk. But that was all in the past now.

Although he'd learned from this lesson and later become a mighty ruler over Veluriyam Capital for three thousand years, that failure remained a twinge of regret in his mind to this day. He didn't regret falling for his enemies' provocation back then, but he did regret missing the opportunity to get to know and interact deeper with the Veluriyam Pagoda. He knew very well that this Veluriyam Pagoda was extremely wondrous, filled with limitless possibilities. That was why he attached so much value to the

gathering and went so far as to appoint Jiang Chen as his heir, pushing the latter into participating in the Martial Pagoda Battles and enter the Veluriyam Pagoda.

He wanted to make up for the regret he'd harbored since then. Zhou Yan was Emperor Peafowl's true disciple, and he had always respected his master like a living god. That was why he was extremely offended by Ye Piaoling's words. But Ye Piaoling just cackled oddly. "Zhou Yan, each new generation exceeds the previous one. Is no one allowed to be better than Emperor Peafowl? Have you never heard of the saying that 'each age bring forth new geniuses onto this noble land, each to rule their own domain for years to come'?"

Jiang Chen couldn't hold himself back from a snort, casting a glance at Ye Piaoling, "'Each age bring forth new geniuses onto this noble land', huh?"

Ye Piaoling frowned. "What?"

Jiang Chen smiled leisurely. "Oh, nothing. I have nothing but agreement for the sentiment. That being said, I can't help but laugh if you're applying it to yourself to signify that you're better than the older generation."

"What's so funny about that?" Ye Piaoling's tone abruptly turned cold. "Are you saying that I'm boasting? Do you really think that you are the only genius that exists in Veluriyam Capital?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I don't know how many geniuses there exist here, but I'm going to throw your comment about Ji San being a 'blind fool' right back at you."

Ye Piaoling laughed oddly. "You want to throw it back at me? What, you can't possibly be thinking that this Ji Ole Third will succeed in passing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk!" He threw his head back in laughter, ridicule in every guffaw.

"You don't think he'll succeed?" Jiang Chen asked, a ghost of a smile appearing on his face.

"Of course not," Ye Piaoling said with a sneer on his face. "Even the top ten of the Ranking of Young Lords dare not claim that they can easily pass the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. Who the hell does he think he is?"

Even Zhou Yan couldn't hold himself from speaking up at that. "If you're going to use the Ranking of Young Lords to prop every one of your arguments, then I have to ask: why did you come out later than senior brother Zhen, even though you're ranked fourth on that list?"

His question was a huge slap right across Ye Piaoling's face. But the latter snorted softly. "We can stop right now if you insist on using Zhen to boast. I'm talking about Ji Ole Third. What does it have anything to do with Zhen?"

"Very good, very good." Jiang Chen started clapping. "Then let us assume that you're talking just about Brother Ji. I'm still going to fight for justice on his behalf though."

"Fight for justice on his behalf?" Ye Piaoling asked coldly, "How?"

"I bet that the time Ji San spends on the the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk will be shorter than yours," Jiang Chen said calmly.

Ye Piaoling thought he heard wrong. "What? You're going to bet that he will spend less time than me? Are you seriously thinking that he'll succeed?"

"Just say if you're willing to bet or not." Jiang Chen's eyebrows wrinkled slightly.

"What's at stake?" Ye Piaoling's eyes lit up, even as a trace of dark malice appeared in his eyes.

"The bet is between you and I. Whoever loses leaves the Pagoda. What do you say?"

Zhou Yan hastily interjected. "Stop this. We shouldn't let emotions get to our heads. There's no meaning behind this bet at all. Senior brother Zhen, you..."

Zhou Yan's feelings towards Jiang Chen were rather complicated. In fact, he even felt a twinge of jealousy from time to time. However, Zhou Yan was extremely loyal to Sacred Peafowl Mountain. He realized that young lord Zhen was currently the face of his faction, and that he represented the interest of Sacred Peafowl Mountain. If he was forced to leave the Veluriyam Pagoda due to a meaningless conflict, then they would lose out horribly in this venture. Zhou Yan wouldn't have cared if Pill King Zhen had bet on himself instead. It was highly doubtful that Ye Piaoling would even consider agreeing to such a bet.

But they were betting on young master Ji San's progress right now. Zhou Yan himself didn't think that Ji San had much of a chance to succeed. After all, the foundation of a great clan descendant could only prop him up so much. Even Zhou Yan himself thought that young master Ji San was simply here to earn some cheap experience. He didn't believe for a second that the young master could grasp the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk.

Footsteps rang out from behind the group, and a vigorous but calm voice reached their ears. "Junior Zhou, we are fighters, are we not? Some emotionally charged conflict is the millstone that pushes us to become better. You are free to act as overly cautious as you wish, but must you interfere with another person's decision?"

It was none other than the leader of the ranking board, Li Jiancheng. When he saw that young lord Zhen had chosen to butt heads with Ye Piaoling and then come up with such a ridiculous bet, he couldn't help but entertain some thoughts of his own. If he could disqualify young lord Zhen with this bet, then he could remove this latent threat as easily as pulling a thorn from flesh. A person who was disqualified from Veluriyam Pagoda so early had absolutely no chance of competing against him in the future. Moreover, Li Jiancheng had always believed himself to be the genius who was born to fulfill a great destiny; the genius that would control Veluriyam Capital's fate in the future. Therefore, he only had one thought in his mind towards every person who showed even a tinge of becoming a threat. Suppress them all.

Ye Piaoling's complexion looked dark with anger, but he was inwardly a bit unsettled. If this bet had happened some time ago, he would have agreed without a second thought. But after witnessing young lord Zhen's miracles again and again, he was instinctively wary of Jiang Chen. He couldn't help but feel the presence of enormous risk even when he was certain that he would win without question. If he won and disqualified young lord Zhen, then it would without a doubt great news. But if he lost? After a moment spent in deeper thought, Ye Piaoling realized that he would only be benefiting Li Jiancheng regardless of the outcome. He was also the only one taking any risk. He hesitated for a moment.

Chapter 995: A Stunning Young Master Ji San

Zhou Yan was anxious. Ye Piaoling, hesitant. Li Jiancheng had turned dark and brooding. Shui Rutian distanced himself from this seeming powder keg of a situation. The only one standing confidently was Jiang Chen. It was as if the bet was just a small game to him, a passing fancy. Ye Piaoling looked at Jiang Chen, his eyes filled with a sliver of concentrated dread. Finally, he inhaled deeply and shook his head. "Zhou Yan is right. Contests born out of personal feelings are meaningless. Ultimately, we are all scions of Veluriyam Capital. We should bare our steel against outsiders, not each other."

Though the statement was a veiled admission of defeat, he had still managed to recover a portion of face. On the other hand, Jiang Chen was a little surprised. He'd thought his provocation enough to spur the other youth into the bet. Was Ye Piaoling just giving up? His opinion of Vastsea's young lord imperceptibly rose a notch. Though his trouble-stirring attempt failed, Li Jiancheng was still entirely unaffected. He wasn't the least bit self-conscious about his villainy, much less embarrassed. Faintly smiling, he drifted away.

Ye Piaoling gave the others a cupped fist salute. "I'm taking a break from the Veluriyam Obelisks, everyone. I'm heading to the secret realm of battle for a while. Who's with me?"

"I want to take a stroll around the secret realm of adventure." The previously aloof Shui Rutian chose this moment to pipe up.

Zhou Yan looked at Jiang Chen. "How about you, senior brother Zhen?"

Jiang Chen smiled placidly. "I'll stay here for now."

The declaration moved Zhou Yan. "Does senior brother intend to challenge the seventh obelisk?"

Despite the four geniuses' exceptional talent and potential, they had in common a pessimistic view of their chances against the seventh obelisk. It was why Shui Rutian and Ye Piaoling had both departed in order to better themselves within the other secret realms. The geniuses of the first division had plenty of time left. They were in no rush at all to get the results they wanted.

"Of course I'll challenge it," Jiang Chen affirmed. "But I haven't decided exactly when yet."

Remembering the speed with which his senior brother had comprehended the obelisk, Zhou Yan sighed. "You started more than ten days later than us, but we finished on the same day. If there's one person among us who can get past the seventh obelisk, it's probably you."

Though Li Jiancheng ranked number one on the Ranking of Young Lords, Zhou Yan was sure that Emperor Shura's young lord would assuredly fail if he were to challenge the next obelisk immediately. On the other hand, senior brother Zhen had at least a thirty to forty percent chance, possibly even sixty to seventy right now.

As they spoke, the obelisk beeped once more. Young master Ji San opened his eyes in the next moment, his face splitting into a wide smile of success. This was no illusion, the obelisk was indicating that he had passed!

"What?" Ye Piaoling hadn't left the vicinity yet. He couldn't resist turning his head at the commotion, and the sight that greeted his eyes stunned him. The young master Ji San that he'd belittled had

comprehended the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk—in a shorter amount of time than he had taken as well! Though Li Jiancheng had been the first to comprehend it, even he had taken more time than Ji San in total.

The perpetually calm Shui Rutian examined the approaching Ji San with appraising eyes before tossing a thoughtful glance at Jiang Chen. He turned to depart, a soft sigh escaping him. Ye Piaoling was speechless and ashamed. The outcome was more powerful than any verbal smackdown. He had almost no courage to continue heckling. With a wry chuckle, he hastily followed suit. If there had been a hole in the ground, doubtless he would have headed straight for it. At the same time, he felt a frisson of lingering fear. If he'd gone and made the bet with young lord Zhen on a moment's impulse, he would be out of the Pagoda right now.

He was the fourth-ranked genius in the Ranking of Young Lords. Being kicked out now would be one of the heaviest blows one could strike against Emperor Vastsea and his faction. Even removal by more typical means was more preferable than that. Failure due to raw arrogance was extremely likely to earn him a severe cursing-out from His Majesty Vastsea, and possibly demotion from young lord as well. As an onlooker, Zhou Yan had only a dry smile and utter silence to give. His vehement opposition to the bet prior had been wholly unnecessary, it seemed. If senior brother Zhen was inclined to open his mouth, then it was probably a foregone conclusion. The fact that Ji San had used less time than a sword dao genius like him instilled a strong sense of danger in Zhou Yan's heart. He felt the metaphorical whip crack behind him. If he didn't put in more effort, then he would only be left behind.

Outside the Veluriyam Pagoda, the seven emperors were on careful watch for any changes from within. When they saw that six people had passed the sixth obelisk, there were sighs and exhales all around. Besides Emperors Peafowl and Shura, none of the seven emperors had passed the sixth obelisk during their trials within the Veluriyam Pagoda. Although the obelisks' content changed with each iteration of the Meeting, their relative levels of difficulty remained the same. The discovery that six people had conquered the sixth obelisk was tremendously rewarding news.

"Who is number twenty-one?" In the heat of the moment, Emperor Skysplitter couldn't quite remember whom that number in particular belonged to.

"Number... twenty-one?" It wasn't a hard question for Emperor Mountaincrush. He recalled that his very own Gu Zhenshan had been the former occupant of that spot. He smiled wryly, his expression slightly odd. "Number twenty-one is a scion of the Coiling Dragon Clan. Ji Ole Third."

These words jogged the other emperors' memories. Their expressions too grew slightly strange.

"I remember Coiling Dragon's Ji Ole Third. Weren't there rumors that he's just a frivolous dandy?"

"But he passed the sixth obelisk. Has he been concealing his strength this entire time?"

"It's quite possible. Even the geniuses in the top ten of the Ranking will find it hard to comprehend the sixth obelisk. It's very surprising that he completed it in just over twenty days. That's a superior showing than the top four, isn't it?"

"Tsk, tsk. Li Jiancheng, Zhou Yan, Shui Rutian... he's outshining all of them. Is the Coiling Dragon Clan kid going to set the world on fire?" The seven emperors were absolutely astounded. Jiang Chen's overabundance of absurdities had numbed their expectations of him. They'd long accepted that young

lord's position to be head and shoulders over everyone else. But Ji San had just appeared out of the blue. He was a scion of the great clans, a fair bit lower in position and standing than the other young lords. The very fact that he'd even entered the Veluriyam Pagoda proper was striking in and of itself. How could the fact that he had comprehended the sixth obelisk... not be?

"Daoist Peafowl, everyone under your wing seems to be full of surprises. They're sweeping up everything good. What's up with Ji Ole Third, eh?"

"That's right, brother Peafowl. The Peafowl faction is simply ludicrous already. Maybe you can let me have Ji Ole Third instead, huh?"

"Daoist Peafowl, my Skysplitter faction has a shortage of geniuses. Why not give Ji Ole Third to me?"

Emperor Peafowl laughed. "Please, everyone. Coiling Dragon Clan is allied with Sacred Peafowl Mountain, but they are ultimately a secular faction. I cannot take away what is rightfully theirs."

In truth, he was just as shocked as everyone else. He had entered the Veluriyam Pagoda himself before. The sixth obelisk's difficulty wasn't something that great clan's scion could handle. They needed a miracle to stand the ghost of a chance in front of it. He knew that the geniuses this year were some of the best he'd ever seen, but the scion of a great clan? It really was amazing where one found excellence sometimes.

"Is Jiang Chen's excellence contagious?" He allowed himself a wry smile. He had originally been very satisfied with the fact that he had been able to keep Jiang Chen around. But now, it was amplified by newfound expectancy. Jiang Chen himself was outstanding enough, but he could also elevate those around him to the same heights! Emperor Peafowl was happy to see a change like that.

The Coiling Dragon Clan did not have the right to sit in on matters relating to inside the Veluriyam Pagoda. Only the seven titled emperors and their personal factions had the right to observe, and of that, only certain results and details that the image formation saw fit to display. However, Emperor Peafowl quickly sent them the good news.

The Coiling Dragon clan lord was quite reclusive nowadays, and barely left his residence. Though Jiang Chen had used the Five Elements Augmentation Art upon him, it'd only given him a few extra years of life. Each of his days was spent in nervousness and apprehension. He suddenly received a message glyph. Glancing at the time, the clan lord let out a low laugh. "It's already been half a year now. Is Ole Third coming out from the Main Pagoda, finally?"

He opened the glyph as he thought idly. A brief once-over brought flushed color to his cheeks, and his eyes bulged out of their sockets. "What? Ole Third succeeded at the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk? He's one of only six geniuses that managed to do so?"

The clan lord almost thought he was hallucinating. He rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn't reading incorrectly. The glyph had been sent from His Majesty Peafowl himself. The clan lord's aged hands, wrinkled like deadwood, were trembling slightly.

"Ole Third, Ole Third... you've really given this old man a pleasant surprise." Alone in his room, unseen, the clan lord allowed himself to give vent to his outburst of emotion.

During the battles for the Ranking of Young Lords, Ji San had given up on his opportunity to challenge those ranked higher than him. His decision had led the clan lord to suspect whether the young master was missing a key component in his determination. At the time, Ji Ole Third had promised him that the young master would one day stand upright before him. This result, from within the Veluriyam Pagoda, was the best display of that promise.

Only six geniuses had comprehended the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. What did that mean? Young master Ji San was effectively in the top six in the Ranking of Young Lords! No matter what the numbers on the Ranking had been, the geniuses were tested like gold in the refiner's fire after entering the Pagoda proper. Who was the wheat and who was the chaff? The fires of Veluriyam Pagoda's furnace revealed all. Certainly, with this, young master Ji San was showing himself to be the former.

Chapter 996: The Sole Regret in Breaking Through to Emperor Realm

Passing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk had given young master Ji San another six months of time within the Pagoda. The same went for Jiang Chen, added to the two years he was originally eligible for. Time had suddenly become far more abundant. However, the other geniuses in Ji San's percentile from the Ranking of Young Lords had run out of time. The ones that still remained in the Veluriyam Pagoda were either recipients of bonus time or originally eligible for a year or more. The top-ranked geniuses from the Ranking of Young Lords, to a one, had no intention of continuing to challenge the obelisks for the moment.

Li Jiancheng had retired into seclusion to cultivate further. The other three split themselves among the two other secret realms. Staying here had little benefit aside from pure cultivation. But they couldn't just head straight for the seventh obelisk. All of them had enough basic self-awareness to know that doing so now would only end in tragedy.

Instead, they sought inspiration in the other two secret realms. There had to be a reason for all three secret realms to be open this year. Perhaps there was some kind of discovery or rare opportunity to be found that would help them with the seventh obelisk. Or it might possibly help them with the eighth obelisk, a feat that even Emperor Peafowl hadn't managed back in the day.

Though the youngsters all knew that Emperor Peafowl was Veluriyam Capital's foremost expert for the past three to four thousand years, youth are always peerlessly confident in the face of overwhelming odds. They had the luxury of daydreaming: perhaps I'm actually a genius beyond compare? Maybe I can surpass Emperor Peafowl? I don't think that's altogether impossible, is it?

Jiang Chen did not leave the secret realm of heritage, instead returning to secluded cultivation. Before he'd challenged the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk, he had reaped great rewards from doing so for a few months. He decided to ride his current momentum and attempt to break through to ninth level sage realm. Because he'd comprehended the sixth obelisk, he was granted entrance to an area that had a higher concentration of spirit energy.

Cultivating here a single day was as good as cultivating outside for twenty. Everything had slotted perfectly into place to allow him to reach the finish line. He was going to get to ninth level sage realm this time for sure.

Ji San's choice was similar to Jiang Chen's. He became a lot more confident after comprehending the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk. The true dragon blood was forging both his body and mind for the better every day, constantly expanding the limits of his cultivation. A potent, turbulent power had welled up within his body without him even realizing it. It hungered, calling him to break through to emperor realm.

He had stagnated for a long while at peak ninth level sage realm, also known as half step emperor realm, almost too long. But finding the opportunity to actually break through was tough, so his cultivation had slowed to a standstill for the last few years.

Luckily, the true dragon blood's immense potential smashed through his bottleneck like a giant hammer, giving his own potential wings. Now, the previously impenetrable emperor realm was urgently beckoning him over. Ji San needed to re-enter seclusion, and tightly grasp this chance. Once he took the jump, he would make that final step into emperor realm.

His horizons would expand beyond his imagining. In this world, sage realm was only the beginning of proper martial dao. On the other hand, emperor realm signified a higher level, giving one the right to launch oneself to further heights. For the strongest experts, emperor realm was akin to a permit of entry. Someone who couldn't achieve emperor realm couldn't possibly call themselves an expert.

Ji San had never lost hope to break through to emperor realm. But, his age when he did so would decide the scope of eventual accomplishments. It would dictate how deeply he would delve into the truths of martial dao. The true dragon blood had shattered all his plans and expectations, leading him into a brand-new world. It'd enriched his martial dao experience and raised his level by several degrees.

What was previously a painful obstacle was no longer even a stumbling block. The awakening of his bloodline simplified the process even more than Ji San had thought. He'd originally envisioned his breakthrough taking four months, but in reality, it only took two. Moreover, he hadn't spent the two months only on breaking through. He'd also consolidated and improved his own martial techniques as well.

"I can't believe that I've broken through to emperor realm before the age of forty! Haha, the students of emperors aside, I must be the best from the great clans in three thousand years." To say that Ji San wasn't proud of the achievement would be a lie. His breakthrough to emperor realm would drastically improve the Coiling Dragon Clan's status and outlook as well. The likelihood becoming the eighth emperor faction of Veluriyam Capital had taken a quantum leap upward.

"We only need Brother Jiang's Pinecrane Pill now. If the clan lord lives for another thousand years, then surely he can break through from emperor realm to great emperor. I'll be able to use that time to rise up, and no one will be able to stop the clan's ascension to becoming the faction of the eighth emperor." Ji San's entire mindset opened up. Suddenly, he found the fact that he'd fought over the paltry position of clan heir childish and amusing. With his current state of mind, the inheritance of a clan could no longer disturb his heart. He had loftier goals now, establishing the faction of an eighth emperor. No one else in Coiling Dragon Clan's younger generation could help the clan accomplish this noble task.

Completing the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk had given Ji San a boost of six months. After spending two odd months on his breakthrough, he still had more than enough time. Therefore, Ji San resolved to continue polishing his current level of cultivation. He wanted to stabilize his new realm a bit more. The true dragon bloodline that he had received naturally gifted him with a stronger domain than most emperor

realm cultivators. Though he was still first level emperor realm, his bloodline domain rivaled that of a third level cultivator's. It excited and motivated him even more. He almost wanted to challenge the seventh obelisk right away.

"Let's take things slowly. Compared to my brother Jiang Chen, I still have many things to improve when it comes to my composure. In that regard, I am still many leagues below him." Sometimes Ji San was really, really impressed with Jiang Chen. His genius and poise were both outstanding. Each move he made had a reason behind it.

"There are many things I can yet learn from my sworn brother." He sighed, and went back to cultivating.

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In another corner of the Pagoda, Jiang Chen was fully invested in breaking through to ninth level sage realm. Because he wasn't in a particular hurry, his movements were unhurried and smooth. His actions were deliberate as the unraveling of a cocoon, unhurried as the simmering of a broth. Jiang Chen knew well that his body had been severely disadvantaged from the start. Though he'd undergone several reforgeings of the flesh since his transmigration, there were still flaws that had persisted from his childhood. That much was undeniable. His cultivation journey, to any eye, had been very mind numbingly fast. In his pursuit for speed, he had foregone polishing some of the minor details of his foundations. But presently, he had ample time to solidify and reinforce the basics... to a degree. Doing that was the key to breaking through to ninth level sage realm. After all, the step after that was straight to emperor realm.

The threshold between ninth level sage realm and emperor realm was quite tall. However, not everyone had to experience the state of being stuck at half step emperor realm. Ultimately, 'half step emperor realm' only meant 'peak of ninth level sage realm'. The reason why Jiang Chen was being so careful was because he wanted to strengthen his fundamentals to prepare for his eventual breakthrough to emperor realm proper.

The defects of his ten-year cultivation history were obvious to him. He had bridged the gap from true qi realm to close-to-ninth-level sage realm in an incredibly short span of time. Therefore, Jiang Chen was more than happy to hunker down and grind things out for a while. It was time to make up for some of the fundamentals he had been ignoring.

"Although my breakthroughs have been very fast, my fundamentals aren't actually that horrible. When I broke through to spirit realm, I used the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill to stabilize the process, which gave me a big advantage over many of my peers. Alas, I haven't yet found an earth attribute treasure to make up my elemental deficiency. For metal, I have the magnetic golden mountain; for wood, the wood spirit spring and the Taiyi Jade Vine; for water and fire, the Bewitching Lotus. Earth is the only one that I'm missing something. If I can plug that gap, then I will have all five elements ready. It'll be a big help for when I break through into emperor realm."

He understood perfectly that a battle between emperor realm cultivators was a clash between their domains. And the strength of an emperor domain depended on how polished one's fundamentals and intrinsics were. Many cultivators used pills and alternative methods to break through to emperor realm, so they couldn't at all compete against others who broke through via hard cultivation.

“Completing the five elements and refining all five elemental meridians will allow me to form a perfect cycle. It’s rare to be able to imbue a domain with that kind of powerful quality.” Jiang Chen was absolutely confident. Even the seven titled emperors of Veluriyam Capital couldn’t train in all five elements. Most martial dao geniuses didn’t have the predisposition or necessary qualities for such an enormous undertaking. This was especially true for those with strong innate constitutions.

Geniuses with an innate constitution of every attribute were an exception, not the rule, but they were essentially impossible to find on normal planes. Rarer than once every ten thousand years, certainly. Natural born constitutions of one or two attributes led to a bias that worked in favor of the same. The biggest advantage of Jiang Chen’s cultivation thus far was his refining of all five elements. It wasn’t something obviously manifest before emperor realm. However, it would slowly show itself once he did break through. Jiang Chen’s only regret was that he did not have a treasure for the earth attribute yet.

Chapter 997: Breakthrough, Ninth Level Sage Realm

Emperor Peafowl had bestowed the Pentecolor Divine Swords to Jiang Chen after great consideration. The emperor himself was a born genius who could cultivate all five elements. The biggest reason he liked and appreciated Jiang Chen was also because he noticed that Jiang Chen was also a genius who could cultivate all five elements.

“Perhaps I should head out and take a walk before I attain emperor realm?” Jiang Chen suddenly felt that he didn’t necessarily have to push himself to reach emperor realm in one go. Considering the amount of time he would be spending in the Pagoda, reaching emperor realm wasn’t impossible. He already had two years of time. After grasping three Veluriyam Obelisks in a row, another ten months had been added to his time limit.

He was confident in his abilities to comprehend the next few Veluriyam Obelisks. At the very least, he was sure that the seventh obelisk wouldn’t be a problem for him. If he did succeed at the seventh, another year would be added to his time limit for a total of three years. Cultivating three years in here was the equivalent of cultivating sixty years in the outside world.

“I’ve spent less than ten years to break through to eighth level sage realm from third level sage realm. Therefore, sixty years is more than enough for me to ascend from ninth level sage realm to emperor realm.” He still had confidence enough in this area. Emperor realm might be a near insurmountable wall for some cultivators, but it wasn’t all that difficult for Jiang Chen. His memories from his past life alone offered many methods to help him break through to emperor realm, not to mention the many trump cards he possessed in this life. After deliberating again and again, Jiang Chen ultimately thought that it might not necessarily be a good idea to break through all the way to emperor realm right now.

“Of all five elements, my understanding of the earth element is still a little lacking. Although ascending to emperor realm now may appear to be a good thing, I actually lose more than I gain. If I can fix the flaw in my understanding first before I break through to emperor realm, then there will be no flaws in my cultivation.”

After pondering for a while, Jiang Chen ultimately felt that he should stop at the peak of sage realm for now. He also only had one chance to enter Veluriyam Pagoda. If he exited now, he wouldn’t be able to re-enter. Jiang Chen didn’t want to give up on exploring Veluriyam Pagoda. He also knew that Emperor

Peafowl likely had high expectations for him. If he were to leave now, the emperor might be disappointed in him.

“I can’t give up on exploring the Veluriyam Pagoda, but I must get out at least once to perfect my understanding. In that case, the only way left before me is to pass all nine Veluriyam Obelisks and enter the Six Palaces of Heritage!”

Anyone who passed all nine Veluriyam Obelisks would have another opportunity to enter the Six Palaces of Heritage. Moreover, they were granted an additional chance in the event of failure. This meant that entering the Six Palaces would also allow him to reenter the Veluriyam Pagoda in the future. Of course, his age had to be younger than sixty years old.

Veluriyam Pagoda’s rules were extremely strict. All cultivators above sixty years old were barred from entry. All who exceeded this age might be attacked by Veluriyam Pagoda’s powerful restrictions. Of course, it was a different story if a cultivator was less than sixty years old when they first entered the Veluriyam Pagoda and stayed there until they were over sixty.

“Mm. I will dominate all nine Veluriyam Obelisks no matter what. I want to know what the Six Palaces of Heritage are about.” Jiang Chen’s mind became free of all stray thoughts after making up his mind. He began cultivating with all his might once more.

Three months later, a powerful heat surged into his ocean of qi. A comfortable warmth spread throughout his entire body like an electrical shock.

“Ninth level sage realm...” Jiang Chen opened his eyes and huffed out a mouthful of putrid breath. He had used half a year to ascend to ninth level sage realm. He could’ve completed the process in just three months’ time, but had chosen to spend another three months in cultivation. Given where he was, this meant that he’d cultivated for ten years, and he’d done so to patch up holes in his cultivation caused by previous swift breakthroughs. He felt the time was well spent. He’d been worried that his foundations were destabilized from his rapid progress, but the half year in the Pagoda was enough to vanquish this worry.

Much had changed inside Veluriyam Pagoda during this time. When Jiang Chen walked out of his private domain, he noticed that there were only a few people left inside the secret realm of heritage. The others had either been disqualified or had left to explore other secret realms. There were only three to four people left inside the secret realm of heritage besides Jiang Chen.

Three were gathered beneath the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. They were pointing and gesturing, seemingly discussing something. When the trio saw Jiang Chen walking towards them, they all nodded their heads at him in greeting. One of them even greeted him warmly. “Young lord Zhen, your seclusion lasted quite a long time, I see. Have you broken through to new heights?”

Jiang Chen gave him a slight nod in response. He then asked, “Why are you three lingering before the Veluriyam Obelisk instead of challenging it?”

The genius who’d offered a greeting was ninth on the Ranking of Young Lords. Jiang Chen remembered that he was a member of Emperor Petalpluck’s faction, and that his name was Zhang Moheng. The other two cultivators were ranked sixth and seventh on the list. They were all geniuses from the first quartile.

However, these two cultivators didn't treat Jiang Chen as warmly as Zhang Moheng because they were ranked higher. They would lose face if they treated him too warmly.

Zhang Moheng had no such qualms, so he laughed wryly. "Brother Zhen, I for one know the limit of my capabilities. I am not able to grasp the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk thoroughly even to this day, much less the seventh. If we haven't comprehended the fourth and fifth beforehand, we would've hit the time limit already. The reason we came here today is because we heard that Young lord Li Jiancheng of Emperor Asura is planning to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. We've come to see if he can succeed in his endeavor."

The other two cultivators shared the same thoughts. They hadn't even managed to pass the sixth, so naturally it was impossible for them to study the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk.

Jiang Chen smiled. "What a coincidence! Li Jiancheng is planning to challenge the seventh obelisk too? Is he planning to be the first to pass it?"

Zhang Moheng smiled ruefully. "The first? He may be too late already."

Jiang Chen was surprised. "Why is that?"

Zhang Moheng stared at Jiang Chen with exaggerated surprise. "You don't know?"

The other two cultivators were also staring at Jiang Chen in puzzlement. It was obvious that they were somewhat surprised by his reaction. He smiled wryly in response. "I was cultivating in seclusion all this time. I have no idea what's happened in the outside world."

Zhang Moheng sighed. "Does that mean you don't know that someone has already passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk?"

Jiang Chen's heart skipped a beat. "Who is it?"

"You really don't know?" Zhang Moheng looked up and down with an expression of surprise, wondering if Jiang Chen was pretending or not. When he finally confirmed that this wasn't a front, he sighed. "Aren't you and young master Ji San brothers? Didn't he tell you that he passed the seventh?"

Jiang Chen really didn't think that the first person to pass would be Ji San. His mind went blank for a moment before he broke into laughter. "Well, isn't he in a rush!"

Zhang Moheng exclaimed in surprise, "Aren't you surprised at all? Your reaction is a bit unusual."

Jiang Chen shrugged. "Brother Ji is a man of many hidden talents. You all feel strange only because you don't know him too well. I know that he had this potential in him since a long time ago, so I'm not surprised by this."

A man of many hidden talents? Zhang Moheng and the other two cultivators exchanged glances with each other. It might've been reasonable if he had used this description on Li Jiancheng, Shui Rutian or Zhou Yan. But Ji Ole Third? Wasn't that a bit unsuitable? This was a fellow of loose restraint. Could a man like this really hide many talents?

Jiang Chen wasn't paying attention to their reactions. He smiled and cupped his hands. "Do keep yourselves busy, everyone. I have other things to do." With that, he headed straight towards the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk.

All three were transfixed by this action. "What... what does he want to do?" The trio communicated with each other through their eyes. Their heads were buzzing with great shock. Look at him. Could it be that young lord Zhen was planning to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk too? What was wrong with this world? Even now, none of the geniuses under the great emperors' command had dared take up this challenge. Instead, the two common geniuses who fought their way up to the Ranking of Young Lords were the ones to challenge it first. Something was very wrong with this picture!

Complicated emotions assaulted the trio for a time. But their feet wouldn't move according to their wishes, almost as if they had rooted themselves in the ground. One young master Ji San was shocking enough already, and now young lord zhen had shown up too. Was the Ranking of Young Lords really going to undergo a massive change?

When young master Ji San successfully grasped the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk and left in style, he'd also left behind a legend. It had been the topic of discussion for several days then, and to this day they still weren't able to digest the news entirely. Now that young lord Zhen had made his move, their minds couldn't keep up. Was this the era of the dark horses?

Out of the four strongest geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords, Li Jiancheng had the only one who revealed that he was ready almost ready to challenge the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. The rest of the three had gone to other secret realms to train. It was likely that they wouldn't return to make their challenge until the final moment. After all, no one wanted to risk starting a challenge that they weren't confident in passing. It'd be a great waste of their accumulated time if they failed.

Chapter 998: Conquering The Seventh Veluriyam Obelisk

Jiang Chen didn't think that Ji San's actions were inappropriate. His brother had no way to contact Jiang Chen while the latter had been in seclusion. Challenging the seventh obelisk was the natural course for Ji San as he was ranked in the third quadrant and didn't have much time left in the Pagoda. He would've been ejected by now if he wasn't granted six more months after grasping the sixth obelisk. He'd succeeded in challenging the seventh obelisk with whatever time he had left. Jiang Chen was genuinely happy for him.

It seems Brother Ji's assimilation of the true dragon's blood has gone perfectly. I'm certain he has broken through the emperor realm by now and awakened another part of his heritage memories. It's given him a great boost in both his martial knowledge and martial dao realm. Grasping the seventh obelisk was only the natural next step.

Ji San was granted one more year after comprehending the seventh obelisk. He now had more time to cultivate within the Pagoda.

Brother Ji is being sensible. Testing his mettle within the secret realm of battle is definitely the best course of action. He has already done all he can within the secret realm of heritage. He won't be able to make any more significant breakthroughs right after reaching the emperor realm, so it's better for him to find inspiration in real battle. Jiang Chen approved of these actions greatly. After all, Ji San wasn't like

him. Jiang Chen didn't need to worry about the lack of inspiration even if he continued to stay within the secret realm of heritage. The knowledge from his previous life had given him an advantage that others could only dream of. There wasn't even an inkling of worry in his mind when he sat down in front of the seventh obelisk. He was extremely confident that this challenge would pose no trouble for him.

This wasn't blind confidence, but Zhang Moheng and the others couldn't help but think that young lord Zhen had been a little too rash. The three looked at Jiang Chen from afar, curiosity and doubt writ all over their faces. Can he really do it?

Jiang Chen sent his consciousness towards the seventh obelisk.

"Welcome to the seventh obelisk challenge. This obelisk is called the Prehistoric Flame Obelisk. You are given one month to pass the test and obtain a single prehistoric flame essence," a voice announced blandly.

The Prehistoric Flame Obelisk? Jiang Chen's heart trembled. The prehistoric flame was a type of heavenly fire, and also one of the oldest fire sources in the world. How is the obelisk connected to the prehistoric flame? He began the test with such questions in mind, but the truth didn't elude him for long. The powerful flame was contained within the obelisk. It emitted the might of the flame which tempered the contestant's consciousness. This was both a test and also a rare opportunity to strengthen oneself.

One's consciousness would definitely be several multitudes stronger after suffering through a month of arduous tempering by the prehistoric flame. However, it would be a much greater fortune if one obtained a single spark of the prehistoric flame essence for themselves. One could refine a single spark and strengthen its flame, helping it eventually grow into a blazing fire. The prehistoric flame was ranked thirty six among countless heavenly flames. It was a frighteningly powerful heavenly flame. In the ancient times, there were a few occasions in which an entire sect was razed into ashes by a single prehistoric flame. Jiang Chen treated the test with all due seriousness after hearing this description.

In the beginning, it was only a tiny flame that was no stronger than a candle flame. Despite its size, it would actually cause an enormous amount of destruction if materialized. Jiang Chen didn't dare to take it lightly. He linked his consciousness to the obelisk and allowed the flame's power to temper it freely. He didn't feel much strain for the first seven to eight days as there wasn't much movement to the flame. However, Jiang Chen could feel the minute changes as the flame evolved with each passing second. The changes were miniscule, but persistent.

On the ninth day, Jian Chen could feel a great change in the flame's intensity. Its impact on his consciousness had also increased by four times. Previously, the flame had only been as small as a candle fire, but it had now bloomed into the size of a lotus flower.

Mm. The prehistoric flame has begun its evolution. The common cultivator would probably be satisfied if they merely withstood the flame's test, but Jiang Chen wouldn't be done with just that. He continued to observe the changes within the flame. The prehistoric flame didn't change much in form, but its flickering movement brimmed with profound meaning. The extremely famous prehistoric flame had its own unique characteristics, and the ability to grasp and control them was the main test of this obelisk. How was one supposed to absorb the essence if one couldn't even understand its main characteristic?

Jiang Chen's consciousness grew increasingly resilient in tandem with the intensity of the prehistoric flame. He was fully immersed in that frame of mind. The prehistoric flame is a heavenly fire from the ancient times with a mind of its own. Absorbing its essence is an task easier said than done. One must begin by understanding its nature, then communicate with it, and slowly absorb and harmonize with it...

He was so immersed that he no longer noticed the passage of time. The minutes and seconds quickly passed by. By the twenty eighth day, the prehistoric flame had reached its final and most ultimate form. The obelisk was fully immersed in a sea of flames. Jiang Chen's consciousness was like a dragon, twisting and meandering among the sea of flames, in search of the prehistoric flame essence. A bright flash suddenly appeared within his consciousness.

A crimson light had just shot across his sea of consciousness. A great force immediately surged across his consciousness in pursuit of the crimson light. Moments later, the crimson light transformed into a miniscule speck of flame and was drawn into the sea of consciousness, becoming one. Jiang Chen blew a gentle sigh of relief. It's done.

That was the prehistoric flame essence that he'd been searching for the past thirty days. The sea of fire that covered the obelisk was merely an image created by the prehistoric flame essence. The obelisk hadn't actually been covered by an intensely burning prehistoric flame. If an prehistoric flame really combusted into a sea of flame, it would be enough to destroy half of Veluriyam Capital. Even though it was merely an image, it was still an intense test to one's consciousness. The test not only tempered one's consciousness, but also one's perception. Finding the single spark of true essence within a sea of imagery was something easier said than done. Capturing and refining the prehistoric flame essence meant completion of the test.

The seventh obelisk shone in a mesmerizing cyan when Jiang Chen opened his eyes. He'd conquered the seventh obelisk! Zhang Moheng and the others had been observing for over a month in the distance. Their faces were full of shock when Jiang Chen conquered the obelisk test. Two more had joined their cohort. One was Li Jiancheng, and the other was Shui Rutian. The latter had just come back from another secret realm, while the former was waiting for his turn to challenge the seventh obelisk. The seventh obelisk and the subsequent obelisks could only host one challenger at a time.

Li Jiancheng carried a sombre expression as all kinds of emotions filled him. It was evident that Jiang Chen's success had pressured him greatly. After all, he was the champion of the Ranking of Young Lords. Two had conquered the seventh obelisk already. It would be humiliating if a champion like him failed to follow suit. Jiang Chen didn't act too cordially towards both of them. He nodded at them slightly and walked right past them.

"Brother Zhen, please wait." Zhang Moheng couldn't resist calling out.

Jiang Chen stopped dead in his tracks. "What is it?"

Zhang Moheng smiled wryly. "Brother Zhen, will you be challenging the eighth obelisk?"

Jiang Chen responded with a bland smile. "Maybe."

There's no way Jiang Chen would ever tell him anything of substance as they weren't even acquainted. Such information shouldn't be shared with mere strangers. Zhang Moheng didn't dare to chase the matter after seeing Jiang Chen's distant expression. He laughed awkwardly and said nothing else.

If Jiang Chen did what was expected, he would visit the other secret realms after conquering the seventh obelisk, but he chose not to after some careful thought. He decided to go after the eighth obelisk after some slight preparations. The difficulty of the seventh obelisk gave him confidence that he had a good chance at conquering the eighth obelisk. There was some difficulty to the seventh obelisk, but it had been nothing too precarious. He still had innate potential that wasn't fully utilized yet. It was the reason why he believed that he still had energy left within him to go for the eighth obelisk.

Time waits for no one. If I visit the other secret realms, three to five years will pass in a blink of an eye. I have no qualms with spending that much time, but the situation outside could turn sour at any moment. Moreover, I've also promised the Coiling Dragon clan lord a Pinecrane Pill. The Five Elements Augmentation Art might lose its potency if I take too long. Jiang Chen was someone who held onto his promises. He would never go back on the promise he made to the clan lord.

Thus, he made the decision to conquer the eighth obelisk so that he could move on to the ninth. One would only be granted entry to the Six Palaces of Heritage after one conquered the ninth obelisk. He would gain a re-entry chance to the Veluriyam Pagoda in doing so. He would be able to leave the pagoda without worrying about coming back in.

Chapter 999: A Mad Young Lord Zhen

"What?"

"Did someone comprehend the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk again?"

"It's Li Jiancheng this time, isn't it?"

"Tsk tsk, it actually isn't Li Jiancheng. Brother Peafowl, it would seem that congratulations are due again. The Sacred Peafowl Mountain is really hogging the limelight. The dark horse this time is Pill King Zhen."

"Incredible. Two geniuses have passed the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk in a row, and they're all from Sacred Peafowl Mountain, and they're both dark horses. Seriously, this is just unfair!"

"Can it really be that the geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords are actually incomparable to the dark horses who fought their way up from the bottom? That's a little too difficult to believe, isn't it?" It didn't matter if they believed it or not; the truth was right in front of them.

Young master Ji San had defied all expectations to be the first to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. Not even Emperor Peafowl had managed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk back then, although that had been due to some unexpected twists. The emperor had been talented enough back then that the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk was very much within his reach. Some people even said that he had the power to grasp the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk successfully as well.

Today, the younger generation was surpassing the older generation. Young master Ji San being first to attain this milestone was completely different from just passing the obelisk. The achievement of becoming the first to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk alone was something to be recorded into the annals of history. After all, not a single genius had managed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk in almost five thousand years. This included all the great emperors currently in power.

Although conquering the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk didn't mean that Ji San's achievements might necessarily be greater than these great emperors, it was at minimum proof that everyone had

underestimated his potential, and by quite a lot. That being said, the great emperors normally didn't extend their care to a great clan descendant at all, so it was only inevitable that they would overlook him. Even the Coiling Dragon clan lord himself was a little dumbfounded after receiving one good news after another.

It wasn't that he didn't wish for Ji San to create a miracle or two, just that the clan lord had imagined that conquering the sixth Veluriyam Obelisk was Ji San's absolute limit. But realistically speaking, the clan lord predicted that Ji San could only go as far as the fifth. He was sure that the boy wouldn't be able to go any further than this. Who would've imagined that Ji Ole Third would amaze the world and be the darkest horse of all? In fact, he was looking like the dark horse who would overcome expectations all the way until the end.

The clan lord felt that his brain couldn't catch up to reality. How had that scoundrel Ji Ole Third even managed to pass the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk and be the first ever to do so? Were the geniuses of the Ranking of Young Lords all dead? Li Jiancheng, Shui Rutian, Zhou Yan... had they fallen asleep?

Sometimes, people couldn't understand why their family members were good-for-nothing. In this case, Ji San's family couldn't quite understand how Ji San was able to bring great honor and glory. Why? Just why?

The clan lord itched for an answer. He even suspected that Veluriyam Pagoda's systems had gone awry. Perhaps the rankings were displayed incorrectly? The system couldn't have mistaken number one for number two, could it? He couldn't make himself to calm down no matter what. Although he was slightly worried about his health and felt that his cultivation would begin to fade again in another year or two, he felt a lot calmer than before for some reason.

One, he didn't think that his life was destined to end here. Pill King Zhen had promised him the Pinecrane Pill, and he was certain that the pill king wouldn't disappoint him. Two, even if the Pinecrane Pill didn't happen and he were to pass away, the clan lord believed that the clan would still thrive. Ji San's sudden burst of potential had fanned his confidence. It was why he felt that he would have no regrets even if he were to lose his cultivation and bid the world goodbye. If he could pass the clan onto Ji Ole Third, his dream of the clan climbing to greater heights a few hundred years later would absolutely be more than a dream. After all, the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk was something even Emperor Peafowl had failed to conquer in the past.

Although the content of the seventh test would certainly be different now, the difference in difficulty was miniscule. This meant that Ji Ole Third's current performance in Veluriyam Pagoda had at least exceeded Emperor Peafowl's of yesteryear.

Outside Veluriyam Pagoda, the experts under the seven great emperor's personal command were still absorbed in Jiang Chen's successful domination of the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. Suddenly, someone cried out, "Look, a challenger has appeared inside the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk's area. Is something planning to challenge the eight Veluriyam Obelisk? Is it young lord Zhen? Or is it Ji Ole Third?"

"Let's take a closer look."

“Eh? That looks like young lord Zhen. Didn’t he just pass the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk not long ago? It hasn’t even been six hours yet, has it? He... maybe he’s just checking out the eighth obelisk. He can’t possibly be planning to challenge it right away...” The speaker himself didn’t sound too sure.

“It doesn’t look like it though. He’s already stepped into the core area of the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk. It’s definitely looking like he’s planning to challenge it!”

“This kid is taking too much risks, isn’t he? He’s being overconfident.”

“Yes. He hasn’t systematically improved himself, and he just grasped the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk. It really is quite risky to take the next challenge right away. There’s practically no chance that he’ll succeed.”

“If he chooses to challenge the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk now, I can only say that his mentality hasn’t fully matured yet. It would be a complete disregard of discipline when challenging the Veluriyam Obelisks just for glory’s sake.”

“We shouldn’t come to conclusions so quickly. In my opinion, everything Pill King Zhen has done from the beginning has been universally shocking, but he hasn’t failed to prove himself yet. I’ve never seen him be frivolous. Have you?” This counter caused many to shut up. They realized that it was the truth upon introspection. Pill King Zhen had run into many troubles since he arrived in Veluriyam Capital, but he always had the last laugh. The crowd couldn’t help but look at Emperor Peafowl. They wished to know if everything was happening according to his plans.

Emperor Peafowl smiled. “Don’t look at me. Everything he did after he entered Veluriyam Pagoda is of his own will. Plus, you all should know that Veluriyam Pagoda changes every time it reopens. Therefore, my experience from a couple thousand years ago is completely useless now.”

It was true. Veluriyam Pagoda was everchanging, and no one could say for sure what was happening inside. Emperor Shura was suffering a bit from this ordeal. There were already two geniuses who had conquered the seventh Veluriyam Obelisk, but none of them were named Li Jiancheng. This made him slightly anxious. If Li Jiancheng failed to conquer the seventh Veluriyam Pagoda, it would be an enormous blow to the Shura faction. When that happened, his ambition would have even less space to grow than before. The sheer gap between his genius and Emperor Peafowl’s geniuses was making Emperor Shura appear very pathetic.

The hate in the emperor’s heart even extended to Jiang Chen. This brat seeks more glory from grandiose deeds. He’s running to the eighth obelisk so soon after passing the seventh. His frivolous temper is proof that he will never be able to accomplish great things. Hopefully, Jiancheng can keep his pace in check and tune out all external influences. Anything can happen in Veluriyam Pagoda. This brat may look like he’s in the lead, but one careless move is all it takes for him to collapse before the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk and be rightfully disqualified.

Emperor Shura was yearning ardently for Jiang Chen to fail the eighth challenge and be kicked out of Veluriyam Pagoda. It was the only way Li Jiancheng could protect his reputation and dignity. Otherwise, if this brat successfully conquers the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk, the emperor’s ambition would be completely turned into dust. The world of martial dao worshipped the strong.

If Jiang Chen successfully conquered the eighth obelisk, this would mean that he'd qualified to ascend to the peak that was the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk. What did this mean? Even if Jiang Chen ultimately failed to conquer the ninth Veluriyam Obelisk, it was still an achievement tall enough to carve his name into the hearts of Veluriyam Capital's citizens forever. He would become their greatest idol. How on earth could Li Jiancheng go to challenge him if that actually happened?

Jiang Chen sat cross-legged and cleared his mind. Then, he activated the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk with his consciousness. He was itching to pass the eighth challenge already. An indifferent voice rang out. "Congratulations. The fact that you've stepped before the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk proves that your talent is one that appears only once every ten thousand years. The eighth challenge is an extension of the challenge you faced in the seventh. Your task is to ascend the Prehistory Flame you've absorbed at the seventh. The eighth Veluriyam Obelisk is also named the Vermillion Bird Obelisk. Here, you will perceive the might of the ancient divine vermilion bird, visualize its image, and use your Ancient Flame Essence to refine a vermilion bird image."

A vermilion bird was sometimes called a phoenix. It was one of the noblest of divine beasts. It was an innate fire constitution beast and ruled over one of the most terrifying heavenly flames to exist: the vermilion bird fire. The vermilion bird's bloodline was one of the rare few bloodlines that was a match for a dragon's bloodline, and its spirit in no way inferior to that of a true dragon.

"How unfortunate that the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk only has a vermilion bird image. How good will it be if the reward is a vermilion bird's true spirit?" Admittedly, Jiang Chen saw an inch and hoped for a mile. Still, he was very certain that he would be able to meet the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk's requirement.

Creating an image was no difficult ordeal for Jiang Chen because he cultivated the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods. The final four transformations of the Nine Transformations of Demons and Gods was about the cultivation of the images of demons and gods. Naturally, the vermilion bird's image was one of the most powerful images of demons and gods that existed in the world. This was similar to encountering a question to do with a field he was most proficient in during an exam. It was a pleasing sensation that was almost like cheating.

Chapter 1000: A Comparison of Geniuses

His consciousness locked onto the eighth obelisk, Jiang Chen went over all knowledge of the vermilion bird image that the obelisk was imparting. The image underwent a myriad of transformations. It was sometimes a mere mirage or a chaotic fog, sometimes a fiery ocean that immolated all. Its wings were outstretched, ready to receive the energy of the heavens and earth at any moment. Any movement of its blazing eyes were as radiant as the celestial heavens.

Jiang Chen carefully took in the various changes of the image, slowly refining the spark of Prehistory Flame within his body. He would first have to refine the essence of this flame and manipulate it at will before he could use it to coalesce the vermilion bird image. The vermilion bird was a divine beast born of flames and its very fate was tied to fire. Therefore, the core to grasping the image was one's control over the element of fire.

"It's a pity that I don't have the vermilion bird bloodline within me. Even if I use the essence of Prehistory Flame to simulate the vermilion bird image, it still won't compare to an image refined from

vermillion bird blood.” Jiang Chen was well aware that since the image in the obelisk didn’t contain the divine beast’s bloodline, there would be certain flaws in it. To put it plainly, it was an image without substance. However, even though the vermillion bird image wouldn’t have the power it would be backed by the divine beast’s bloodline and would still pack a punch. Jiang Chen sat quietly beneath the eighth obelisk. It was almost as if he had become one with it. He rather enjoyed this feeling, and time slowly passed by.

Beneath the seventh, Li Jiancheng had pulled out all stops but was still one step short of fully comprehending it. He was regretfully out of the running, and his elimination caused a great furor within and outside of the Pagoda. The champion of the Ranking of Young Lords failing at the seventh obelisk wouldn’t have been a big deal before, since the best competitor within the last five millennia had been Emperor Peafowl, who had also failed at the seventh obelisk. The others didn’t even have the right to challenge the seventh obelisk. So logically speaking, this wasn’t an embarrassing occurrence for Li Jiancheng. He was now on par with Emperor Peafowl of yesteryear. If it hadn’t been for the previous results of Jiang Chen and young master Ji, people would actually think that being on the same level as Emperor Peafowl would be a highly honorable matter.

But because of those two, it became rather ironic when Li Jiancheng failed the seventh obelisk. He was the champion of the rankings while young master Ji was ranked 21st. Even Pill King Zhen, with his unsurpassed talents and appointment as the new young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, had only been ranked 8th. All things were leery of comparison. With this kind of comparison, Li Jiancheng came up rather short in the end.

Emperor Shura could no longer sit still on the outskirts of the Pagoda. This wasn’t wholly unexpected, but when he’d heard that young master Ji and young lord Zhen had passed, he’d naturally felt that perhaps the Pagoda’s difficulty was a bit easier this time, or that the geniuses in this gathering were possibly more fortunate than before. Thus, he felt that as the champion of the rankings, Li Jiancheng wouldn’t have much trouble at grasping the seventh obelisk either.

Fantasies were always the most beautiful, and reality was harsh. Li Jiancheng had failed in the final moments, instantly crushing Emperor Shura’s daydreams. Regardless of why his disciple had been eliminated, he’d been eliminated nonetheless.

“Sigh, even Li Jiancheng’s been disqualified. It looks like Sacred Peafowl Mountain has greater fortune after all.”

“Indeed. Comparisons can be scary sometimes. Li Jiancheng is very accomplished, but it’s apparent at crucial moments whose fortune is greater, and whose potential and talents are superior.”

“Right. I’ve always felt that he’s been able to shore up any flaws he’s had in the past, apart from a certain something in his demeanor, and most certainly luck.”

Emperor Shura clearly caught all the low voices of discussion. Everyone present here were the direct followers of the emperors. Apart from Emperor Peafowl having absolute authority, there was some conflict in the other factions. At the heart of it all, it had been Li Jiancheng who hadn’t been up to snuff.

Zhang Moheng was also eliminated as time went on. And so the sixth and seventh ranked geniuses on the ranking had their progress halted by the seventh obelisk, unable to tangibly proceed further. The emperors reacted with heartfelt emotion to this.

“This is the true strength of the Ranking of Young Lords! Us great emperors also halted at the seventh obelisk during our gathering. Although there are more geniuses this time, it’s not as if everyone’s going to be as legendary as a dragon or fierce as a tiger!”

“Definitely. One or two perverse geniuses is one thing, but it wouldn’t be normal if everyone was one. The overall strength of our Veluriyam Capital hasn’t increased, so it doesn’t make sense for all of our geniuses to suddenly become stronger.”

“Hmm. Perhaps some extraordinary geniuses will appear this time, but the overall skill level the gathering will remain the same.”

The crowd had finally calmed down. Some had already hung their heads in dejection when two geniuses broke through obelisks one after another earlier. It would be too insane if this was replicated on a wide scale. Nothing like that had ever happened in the history of the Veluriyam Pagoda, so it wouldn’t be too realistic if it happened now.

“According to my views, young lord Zhen is the one to keep an eye on this time. Don’t you see that he’s already challenging the eighth obelisk? If he succeeds, that’ll be a heroic feat that no one’s managed to achieve for the last ten thousand years!”

“I wouldn’t think anyone else would be able to pull this off. But there’s never been any absolutes when it comes to young lord Zhen. I think highly of him!”

“No shit. I told you a long time ago that Pill King Zhen is absolutely someone who possesses great fortune. I say he has at least a fifty percent chance of passing!”

“Heh heh. Daoist Peafowl certainly plays his cards close to his chest. Young lord Zhen must be a pawn that he strategically placed a long time ago. He’s certainly showing great dominance now!”

Setting aside Jiang Chen’s prior achievements, his actions in challenging the eighth Veluriyam Obelisk this time were enough to spread his name far and wide.”

“There’s also young master Ji who went to the secret realm of battle. Why do I also get the feeling that he’s some mysterious, unfathomable fellow as well? Perhaps we can have some sort of expectations for him too?”

“Ji Ole Third is normally a frivolous dandy, but to think that he would possess such incredible potential and decision-making skills in crucial moments! This is natural talent!”

“Mm. So it seems that personalities can only truly be determined from great happenings. Who would have thought that he’d possess such skills and comprehension ability when looking at him ordinarily?”

Young master Ji San was a descendent of a great clan, so his identity brought him more scrutiny now. After all, people would normally pay special attention only to the great emperors’ disciples. What did they care about the great clans? Even if one or two of them made it onto the Ranking of Young Lords, they were just there to accompany the young lords. It was almost impossible for a great clan disciple to

claim the limelight on the Ranking. But young master Ji San had completely upended that notion this time.

“Hmm? Seems like there’s some new disturbance.”

“What is it this time?” All those under the great emperors, including the emperors themselves, stared intently at the image crystal. After such a long period of eliminations, any hint of information from within the Pagoda would be major news. Those remaining sought to, or were in the process of, creating miracles. Images slowly formed to show that it was news from the eighth obelisk.

“What?!” someone exclaimed. “The eighth obelisk’s been comprehended? And... it’s still young lord Zhen?”

“Incredible, absolutely incredible! The eighth one’s been passed! Are we going to see a miracle this time?”

“Will we finally see a grand occasion at the Veluriyam Pagoda after so many years?!”

“Absolutely, definitely! Young lord Zhen was truly born for these times! The other geniuses have all stopped at the fifth obelisk, but he’s passed the eighth! This is the truest gap!”

“Absolutely. If it had been between the fifth and the sixth obelisk, then the gap wouldn’t be so large; it’d be more due to a matter of execution and luck. But someone able to progress past the eighth obelisk is definitely an unsurpassed genius!”

Of this, no one could doubt. Good luck might come around once or twice, but repeated successes wasn’t down to luck.

“Your Majesty, young lord Zhen has comprehended the eighth obelisk!” The Cloudsoar Monarch was quite moved. Emperor Peafowl was also immensely stunned. Jiang Chen’s progress surprised him. He rather felt as if he were dreaming.

Even the Wildfox Monarch with his high standards was murmuring, “Genius, genius! I have to say, Your Majesty, your vision is something that none of us can match.”

The Chronobalance Monarch was smiling and nodding as well. “I truly like young master Zhen more and more now.”

Even the pickiest Plumscore Monarch looked on with gleaming eyes, obviously stunned by Jiang Chen’s performance as well.