

Three Realms 1521

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1521: The Confounding Puppets Whirl Into Action

Jiang Chen was very excited. This spiralized dimensional labyrinth was none other than the Nine Labyrinth Formation he'd received from the third of the Six Palaces of Heritage, Palace of the Grand Marquis.

Once deployed, the Nine Labyrinth Formation created a nine-fold maze capable of locking down an enormous patch of space, losing anyone present within.

Jiang Chen was innately sensitive to formations. Moreover, the Nine Labyrinth Formation had an affinity with him. His use of it took even an opponent like Shu Wanqing by surprise. The formation's mysteries were not to be understood in any short span of time.

After all, this was an ancient treasure, the pride of the Grand Marquis who'd previously owned it. When Jiang Chen wasn't limited by his own cultivation level, he would be able to trap someone many times stronger than Shu Wanqing once he used it at peak strength.

The young lord had turned the tables by taking the initiative. He stood commandingly outside the formation, dismantling the opposing force within moments through the power of his Holy Dragon Bow. The Order's cultivators scrambled to flee in every direction.

This was the kind of effect Jiang Chen wanted. If they were together, it would be very hard for him to do anything to them. However, their retreating backs made much easier targets.

Jiang Chen's goal was none other than Protector King Gentlewind. Rather than killing the protector king, he wanted to take the other alive.

With a flourish of his hand, Jiang Chen sent a ray of light into the Nine Labyrinth Formation, dispatching a humanoid puppet.

Jiang Chen had obtained seven of these Confounding Puppets from the third palace. Each puppet was a crowning achievement of the Grand Marquis, and embodied his will and power. Any individual puppet contained thirty percent of his ability. The strongest of them, seventy percent.

Jiang Chen could scarcely believe how strong these puppets were himself. He'd heard Master P'eng and Venerated Skysoarer talk about how different the third palace and its treasures would be. Nevertheless, the sheer value of the Nine Labyrinth Formation and Confounding Puppets took him off guard.

He could only make use of two of them at most, even with the fullest measure of his own exertion. And the two weakest, at that.

But in actual combat, a Confounding Puppet couldn't match up to a real empyrean expert. After all, puppets remained constructs regardless of how much will they had been imbued with. This meant that they required a human hand behind them and couldn't act autonomously.

Under Jiang Chen's control, the Confounding Puppet morphed into the guise of Everviolet.

He had disguised himself as Everviolet in order to trick Protector King Gentlewind, but had fallen prey to the other man's trap instead.

He was trying the same trick a second time.

Gentlewind had been separated from everyone else for a long time now. Currently, he was panicked and clueless. His head felt strangely chilly out of fear of Jiang Chen's life-reaping arrows. They could very well be planted into the back of his head at any moment.

The protector king had more than enough reason to be afraid. He had been the mastermind and executor of the previous trap. It was quite likely Jiang Chen would assign him the majority of the blame.

"Daoist Gentlewind, over here..." Everviolet's voice echoed by his ear in his throes of dismay. Gentlewind hurriedly glanced over to see the great emperor waving to him not far from here.

"Daoist Gentlewind, that kid's archery skills are worrisome. We're both his worst enemies and will absolutely be taken down separately if we're apart. Why not put our backs against each other so that we have an extra person to rely on? This way, we can at least guarantee not being flanked. How about it?" Everviolet made an extremely reasonable offer.

Gentlewind wanted more than anything for a lifeline in the midst of his hysteria. This was a crucial moment for survival. They had every basis for sound cooperation, and neither man needed to fear being sold out by the other.

Doing so was tantamount to sacrificing one's own safety.

Gentlewind darted over to stand by Everviolet with his back turned. Confidence instantly flourished after the two men stood together.

"Daoist Shockcloud, that kid is beyond comprehension. What method or ability is he using? Or perhaps a heaven-defying treasure of some sort? Why does he have such an overwhelming advantage over us?" Gentlewind found it rather perplexing. Just like Xiahou Jing, he couldn't quite accept reality.

They had been on the cusp of triumph. Jiang Chen had been a beast caught in a trap; there was no possibility of a reversal. However, what had happened next had dumbfounded everyone. Thus, Gentlewind was both startled and resentful.

He was answered not with Everviolet's words, but a paralyzing jolt in the small of his back. In the next moment, he felt his own body go limp. He collapsed to the ground with an incoherent thought.

This 'Everviolet' was a Confounding Puppet in disguise. Under Jiang Chen's control, the puppet placed Gentlewind on its back, then disappeared in the formation in a burst of light. All had happened without none being the wiser.

When Gentlewind came to, he noticed that he was outside the formation. Joy filled his heart for a split second before he realized that he was probably not in a situation that warranted it.

As expected, Jiang Chen's face appeared before Gentlewind, making the man blanch.

"We meet again, Protector King Gentlewind."

Jiang Chen's tone was cool, but his Evil Golden Eye carried a kind of killing intent that was almost militant in nature. It seemed to pierce Gentlewind's very soul. The protector king felt like his soul was being cut by countless razors.

"Ah, I have nothing to say. I'm the loser today." Gentlewind wanted to feign nonchalance.

Jiang Chen smiled placidly. "Really? My spirit beasts will appreciate the nutrition then. You're a great emperor, aren't you, Gentlewind? Good eating, as they say."

The protector king's face changed color once more.

"What do you want to do with me, Jiang Chen? Kill me if you want. Why toy with me like this?" Gentlewind was worn thin.

He didn't actually want to die, but he was worried that pleading for his life would anger Jiang Chen. Making such a misstep would likely cost him any hope of getting out of this relatively intact. Besides, Jiang Chen would just look down upon him. This conflicting mentality bothered the protector king.

"Stop pretending." Jiang Chen shook his head emotionlessly. "The fear at the corner of your eyes betrays your heart. It's normal for humans to fear death, so there's no need to hide your own nature. You'll have a chance to live, but it'll be up to you to grasp it."

Jiang Chen didn't hold such people in high regard, but he had killed more than his fair share of them. He'd taken this particular one alive for a different purpose.

"You want to know the truth behind those Precious Tree Sect people, right?" Gentlewind was clever enough to immediately understand what Jiang Chen wanted.

Jiang Chen smiled coolly, but neither confirmed nor denied it. If Gentlewind was smart enough, he would spill the beans of his own volition. If not, Jiang Chen had plenty of ways to make him do so, though with significantly less courtesy.

Gentlewind sighed. "Never mind. It's understandable that I'd lose to you, young lord. If you can easily play with the supreme lord and Senior Shu Wanqing, an errand runner such as I cannot possibly win.

"I'll tell you everything. We did capture and secretly imprison a few from the Precious Tree Sect. The supreme lord suggested we use it as bait to hook you in, which everyone agreed with heartily. Many people know that you are adept at laying low and hiding yourself, so much so that they were worried you'd infiltrated the Order itself. Thus, there was a trap for you from the start. The fact that you were able to escape unscathed from the trap we prepared was totally unexpected, though."

Gentlewind sighed at this point. He felt completely defeated given the circumstances. There was no way they could've made better plans than these.

"Where are those prisoners?" Jiang Chen was uninterested in hearing his lamentations. He headed straight for the important part.

"I'm keeping them in another jail," Gentlewind supplied honestly. "That place was just where we set up the deathtrap."

Jiang Chen finally understood all.

“How devious of you,” he harrumphed. “If I hadn’t intuited that it was a bad idea to head straight in, I would have been incapacitated by an even more powerful restrictive formation behind the door, hmm?”

Gentlewind sighed. “Victory and defeat were decided by a single thought. Your win was well-deserved. If you’d blundered into opening the door, the outcome would have been very different.”

It was as he had said. There had been a powerful restrictive formation behind the door, waiting for Jiang Chen. If he hadn’t been wary about a possibility like that, it would have been easy for him to bungle the whole affair.

Once he was held in place by a restrictive formation, no method would be able to save him.

“Lead the way to the prisoners and you’ll live. If the Precious Tree Sect’s captives are still alive, perhaps you can live as well. If not, then you’re done for.” Jiang Chen’s voice was cool and dispassionate. His care for the Precious Tree Sect’s members was without question.

Gentlewind didn’t play any tricks this time. He was sincere in his escort. They came very quickly into another jail area.

This jail contained several people from the Precious Tree Sect as well as Ye Chonglou himself. They were all close to Jiang Chen. These captives had lost all hope after being kidnapped and had anticipated the worst. Jiang Chen’s arrival was a scene beyond their wildest dreams!

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1522: Severely Injuring Shu Wanqing

Protector King Gentlewind was a very astute man. He removed the restrictions on Ye Chonglou and the rest without prompting, bringing out the antidote to their ailments as well.

“Let me see that,” Jiang Chen interrupted coolly when he saw the antidote.

Gentlewind compliantly provided the medicine. “I guarantee there’s nothing wrong with it,” he swore. “If there is, let me be smited by heaven and earth!”

His life depended on present performance. Gentlewind didn’t dare attempt anything rash. He only wanted to seek Jiang Chen’s forgiveness and favor.

Jiang Chen gave the old tutor and the others a once-over before nodding. “You can take it. The antidote is real.”

The Precious Tree Sect members were quite embarrassed. “Young lord Jiang Chen, we always cause trouble for you.”

Jiang Chen smiled. “Why say such things, lordmaster? This is a season filled with many problems. I don’t think you should go back to the sect for the time being. Come to Veluriyam’s young lord residence. That place is well-defended and safe. You won’t have to worry for your lives.”

The old tutor was very pleased. “Why would we refuse an invitation to the young lord residence? Tang Hong, be sure to thank your Brother Chen!”

Tang Hong was a big and stocky man. He was almost twice the size of some regular folk — not as gigantic as a stone golem, but exceptional enough.

“Thanks, Brother Chen.” The big guy scratched his head. He was a straightforward, simple guy who’d first met Jiang Chen through a quarrel.

But since their days at the Precious Tree Sect, the gap between Jiang Chen and himself had grown bigger and bigger. This had made their relationship become more distant as well. Right now, he felt mildly inferior to Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen patted on the shoulder. “Ole Tang. You’ve wasted a bit of time in the mundane kingdoms. A man of your talents should have gone to Veluriyam instead!”

He regretted that hadn’t brought Tang Hong there earlier. It had been out of a worry that the Precious Tree Sect would think too much about things. After all, the sect saw him as its best heir. If Jiang Chen were to take him away so recklessly, wouldn’t he be perceived as out of line?

But the current situation was more than clear enough. The smaller sects and factions had to join their larger peers or retire out of history. Failing to choose one meant that they would be destroyed. No one would be spared in this world-engulfing tide.

This was the simplest of reasons. No one man could stand alone against the rest of the realm.

The Precious Tree Sect had actually kept quite a low profile. They weren’t easily noticeable among the mundane kingdoms. Who would’ve expected the Order to be so pervasive? It had captured them at such a crucial time.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen had been there to help them out.

“Now’s not a good time to talk. Hurry and be on your way. Take my Progeny Feather Medallion and find Veluriyam’s army. I’ll send others to protect you on the way.”

They were still in Order territory; Jiang Chen’s Nine Labyrinth Formation was the only thing holding its executives in place. If they did manage to free themselves, they would be a serious threat.

Summoning his Goldbiter Rats, Jiang Chen tasked them with escorting the Precious Tree Sect people to safety as quickly as possible.

Protector King Gentlewind, in the meantime, was as honest and humble as a quail before Jiang Chen.

“Never mind. You don’t need to die, but you’ll suffer a bit.” As Jiang Chen said this, Gentlewind collapsed to the floor.

Rather than killing the man, Jiang Chen dumped him into a corner before returning to the field. This time, his goal was Xiahou Jing.

However, when he approached the Nine Labyrinth Formation, shock coursed through his heart. Shu Wanqing was almost out!

Currently, Jiang Chen could only make use of a sliver of the formation's true power. Therefore, he couldn't entirely ensnare an expert of Shu Wanqing's level yet. Allowing Shu Wanqing to escape now would be as fatal as giving amnesty to a bloodthirsty criminal!

But without the four stone giant brothers by his side, Jiang Chen could only use his Confounding Puppets in order to hold any ground. Given his cultivation level, he could only use two at the same time. He would have a very hard time facing the empyrean expert.

Jiang Chen guessed that Shu Wanqing was at least third level empyrean realm. Slightly stronger than Xiahou Jing, who was only second. Though he was still minor empyrean realm rather than mid, the difference between empyrean levels was marked and significant.

It was extremely difficult to bridge that kind of difference without being a special sort of genius.

Nearing his formation, Jiang Chen wordlessly fired an arrow within at the nearly-escaped Shu Wanqing.

The empyrean expert was focused wholly on a way to break through when he suddenly felt a lethal force coming from behind. In that instant, he barely evaded enough to escape the brunt of it.

However, Jiang Chen's archery was legendary. Another two arrows arrived almost simultaneously behind the first. Shu Wanqing's movements were immensely swift, but the missiles were even faster than that.

Pfft!

A vicious-looking arrow embedded itself into Shu Wanqing's thigh. The empyrean expert howled in pain.

The Holy Dragon Bow's power was unmatched. A single arrow was enough to incapacitate more than half of his capabilities.

Shu Wanqing's shrill shriek drew the others' gazes. Sweat beaded on the empyrean expert's forehead. He dragged along his lame leg, dodging as a streak of light into the crowd. Though he was officially disabled, he was still incredibly fast if intent on escaping.

Jiang Chen held onto his Holy Dragon Bow without firing any more. Firing the bow in rapid succession required a great deal of energy. He didn't want to waste his limited stamina on pointless strikes.

These Order executives were all experts, but they weren't worth his effort. He would target Shu Wanqing and Xiahou Jing alone. The latter was wily enough to know that things had gone quite bad given the former's hasty fluster. He dodged briskly in emulation of Shu Wanqing's rhythm.

Clearly, both the empyrean experts and the others were wary of Jiang Chen's killing arrows. For the time being, they were trapped beasts within the Nine Labyrinth Formation.

"Daoist Shu, didn't you say you'd almost found the exit?" Xiahou Jing couldn't resist asking after catching up.

Shu Wanqing snapped back unbridled fury. "If you'd backed me up, I would've found the exit long ago for everyone!"

His heart quailed. This was the first time he felt a personal threat from this human youngster. Before now, he'd solely been hostile towards the young lord. He'd never considered it possible for Jiang Chen to be able to threaten him in any concrete way. But now, he was forced to admit he'd underestimated the youth.

The disturbing injury on his leg wasn't something that would heal in the short term. The destruction of these arrows extended deeper than the flesh into his tendons and meridians. Most worryingly, his bodily operations had been affected.

If the wound wasn't treated in a timely manner and allowed to worsen, he'd be even more disadvantaged.

"You see what's happening, Supreme Lord? If things are allowed to spiral out of control like this, we'll be cut down like wheat, stalk by stalk. That's hardly an exaggeration." Shu Wanqing's expression darkened, as did his tone.

Xiahou Jing's facial muscles twitched slightly. He could see as well as everyone else that even Shu Wanqing had been grievously hurt. The young man from Myriad Abyss felt himself to be weaker than the human domain expert. This meant Jiang Chen had more than enough ability to threaten his life!

"Daoist Shu, what shall we do? Do you have any good ideas?"

"Hmph, I do! I've found the approximate location of the exit, but that kid's arrows are nigh unstoppable. I need your people to shield me." Shu Wanqing was brutally truthful.

In other words, he needed meat shields to stand in the way.

It wasn't necessarily effective, but it was much better than facing Jiang Chen's arrows head on.

"Must that be done?" Xiahou Jing mused.

He didn't care for the lives of his subordinates, but such an order was difficult to make in the first place. If he did, these Order executives would leave him, making the Order would be an empty shell of its former self.

If his followers no longer wished to follow him, the Order could very well close any time.

His hesitation angered Shu Wanqing. "You don't want to? Then let heaven decide our fates! I'm hurt, but I can protect myself with no problem. We'll see who dies first!"

Xiahou Jing was very conflicted. He knew only the two empyrean experts could find a way out. The others couldn't possibly carry out such a feat. But if they were to face Jiang Chen's arrows, how could they concentrate at all?

This was a quintessential impasse.

Xiahou Jing chose to be blunt. "Friends," he shouted, "you heard what Daoist Shu said! We have to find the gap in this formation if we want to get out of here, but only Daoist Shu and I have a chance to do so at all. Thus, we need someone to protect us, which is an extremely dangerous proposition. If I were to delegate this to any one of you, you would be dissatisfied with me, but it must be done. What do you think I should do?"

The atmosphere became very heavy.

Everyone had been plotting for self-preservation after hearing Shu Wanqing's declaration. Still, it was hard to deny that the supreme lord had a strong argument. This was the only solution. Without doing this, it was probable that Jiang Chen would harvest the lives of everyone in the end.

"Supreme Lord, we have to risk our lives if this is the only strategy."

"Let the heavens decide. We should draw lots!"

"Yes, let's draw lots. Whoever's drawn must do his duty!"

The Order executives couldn't come up with a better way to decide. They were forced to rely on this most primitive of methods to determine the unlucky bodyguard.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1523: Continued Misfortunes

Drawing lots was an extremely primitive solution. Thankfully, there were more than enough here to pull it off.

Xiahou Jing nodded after a head count. "We're missing a few, including Protector King Gentlewind. Has anyone seen him?"

Everyone shook their heads. They'd been set on escaping the chaos prior; what energy did they have spare to keep an eye out for others?

"Never mind that. If no one's seen him, he is probably dead." Xiahou Jing couldn't care much more than that. "There are twenty-four of us here. Aside from Daoist Shu and I, there are twenty-two of you. You will be numbered from one to twenty-two. Numbers one and two will be up first, three and four close behind, and so on. If nothing unexpected happens, one and two will protect us until we're done. Of course, the later numbers can help us mitigate any dangers noticed! Does that sound fair?"

This makeshift method was reasonably fair. These Order executives discussed it among themselves for a few moments before deciding this was largely acceptable for everyone.

Everyone gathered together and drew lots. The randomization process proceeded apace.

In no time at all, the numbers were assigned. A protector king and Celestial Star were chosen. The unlucky louts paled when they realized their unfortunate fates. Had they really been chosen as the first sacrifices?

Numbers three and four were extremely grave too. Clearly, neither was thrilled with the high-pressure role of being the first backups. If harm befell the two before them, they would need to brave the front lines at any time.

The emotions of five and six were comparatively more stable. Still, there was some worry between their brows. This was true for seven and eight too.

Outside the formation, Jiang Chen could easily guess that the executives had gathered together to discuss a strategy. He was in no rush to attack. He sat cross-legged in place to recover his qi.

His continuous attacks with the Holy Dragon Bow and usage of the Confounding Puppets meant that he had expended a lot of energy. He was able to get only some of it back after modest recovery.

It was at this time that he received a piece of excellent news. The four stone golem brothers were coming toward here, having heard his summons.

At the same time, Veluriyam's army was advancing inexorably in preparation for an all-out attack. All of this was greatly reassuring for Jiang Chen.

He didn't mind the Order's desire to drag things out at all. The Nine Labyrinth Formation was adept at sapping their strength.

Shu Wanqing especially had been, at minimum, crippled by the Holy Dragon Bow. If his wound didn't heal in time, Jiang Chen would have an even better chance at hunting him down.

There was a sudden clamor of noise from outside. The Order's members surged towards this direction as well. The stone golems' earthshaking presences were the catalyst that drove them onwards.

Jiang Chen immediately perceived that the four stone golem brothers had arrived. He was overjoyed. Their arrival meant that his forces on hand were significantly bolstered. It was perfect timing, since he had a use for fresh troops in the slaughter of his enemies.

Big Stone strode over rapidly, his huge legs thundering. Order members fell like dominoes wherever he went, swept to the ground in swathes.

"Savior, we are here!" Big Stone's furious roar was a clap of midday thunder, deafening enough to raise a figurative roof off the rafters.

The stone golem was superbly excited to see Jiang Chen. They'd been worried for their benefactor's well-being during their assignment to destroy the Order's foundations, since splitting up had been required.

Big Stone grinned at the sight of Jiang Chen safe and sound. "Where are the Order bastards, Savior? Where they hiding?"

Jiang Chen smiled smoothly, pointing to the formation. "They're all stuck inside."

Big Stone was completely lost. He couldn't make heads nor tails of the nine scrolls of mazes suspended in midair. From the outside, they were just pretty pictures. Someone unversed in formations wouldn't be able to see inside, much less understand its mysteries.

Jiang Chen instructed rather than explained. "Big Stone, you and your brothers should be on high alert. There are two empyrean experts inside the formation. I shot one of them in the thigh, so he's kind of badly wounded. Still, he should be more of a threat. The other one is the Order's supreme lord. He's younger and comparatively weaker than the old guy, but he's not to be underestimated either."

"Good to know where they are," cackled Big Stone. "We brothers are looking for a fight! The supreme lord is empyrean realm? Perfect. We fight him!"

Just as the stone golem brothers had joined up with Jiang Chen, the Order members outside came to the field when they heard the supreme lord was trapped here.

Order members swarmed all around. However, with the golem brothers' hindrance, these people were unable to approach at all. Any that made the attempt were cut down in droves. There was blood and bodies and death everywhere, a gory sight to behold.

The Order hadn't been composed of staunch warriors from the start. Moreover, since it was so young, its members felt little loyalty and duty to it.

After several charges that led in only death, terror prevailed in the crowd. The ordinary Order members began to flee, no longer interested in their supreme lord and protector kings. If they couldn't save even themselves, what point was there in worrying about others?

Jiang Chen took a deep breath, reaching for his Holy Dragon Bow again. This time, his prey were Xiahou Jing and Shu Wanqing. He could no longer suffer them to run amok. He had had enough of being stabbed in the back.

"Hmm? What are they doing?" Looking inside, he found the Order executives' formation a bit odd.

They had apparently been reduced to a team of expendables. They shambled on ahead, while Xiahou Jing and Shu Wanqing lingered behind.

"Tsk tsk, those two are really pompous. Making the executives stand in front of them as meat shields to save their own lives?" Jiang Chen saw with a single glance how irresponsible these two supposed empyrean experts really were. They were using their subordinates as human shields against his arrows!

He held such behavior in disdain, knowing that Shu Wanqing was scared of the Holy Dragon Bow.

"That old bastard seems to have found some clues as to the function of the Nine Labyrinth Formation. He's probably using these people to protect himself in order to find the exit and escape." A different kind of thought flashed across Jiang Chen's mind. "How can I let him do as he wishes?"

He raised the Holy Dragon Bow, then lowered it. His enemy's cowardly method meant that the bow could only get through six or seven targets before his strength failed. He didn't have a ton of energy in reserve, and squandering it this way was an absolute waste.

He decided to send another Confounding Puppet in to muddy the waters. A single thought was all that was needed; the puppet disappeared into the formation without a trace.

The puppet disguised itself as Protector King Gentlewind in a few moments. It clutched its chest, limping in Xiahou Jing's direction.

"Supreme Lord," a hoarse voice called out.

"Protector King Gentlewind?" Xiahou Jing was shocked. "You're not dead?"

Under Jiang Chen's control, the Confounding Puppet shook its head, sitting down as if out of energy.

Xiahou Jing thought dispassionately that the man was heavily injured. "Sit and rest a while," he said coolly without sympathy. "While we find a way out from this trap, save up some energy for the final charge!"

His tone clearly indicated to the protector king that each man was going to need to fight for himself. The Confounding Puppet sat down cross-legged, nodding without reply.

Xiahou Jing's attention wasn't on 'Gentlewind'. His full focus was with Shu Wanqing and any breakthroughs he could make. Shu Wanqing was their biggest hope at the moment.

"Supreme Lord Xiahou, this formation is a dimensional ability that isn't really complicated. This vast space is composed of many images, trapping us within a limited patch of space that merely seems unlimited." Shu Wanqing was garnering more success the harder he looked.

"Where's the exit then?" Xiahou Jing couldn't help asking.

"Don't be so hasty. I'm puzzling things out. These identical images have given us many incorrect ideas... Don't interrupt me. I'm on the cusp of a spark of inspiration."

People tended to be especially focused on the verge of a breakthrough. It was precisely then that the cross-legged 'Protector King Gentlewind' shot up in a streak of light.

Wham!

'Protector King Gentlewind' had become a tornado. He swung a heavy punch into the small of Shu Wanqing's back.

The empyrean expert had been wholly focused on observing the formation. He'd never expected an ambush from behind him! There'd been no one there a moment ago.

Thump!

This punch of despair smacked Shu Wanqing with devastating force. His entire person convulsed as if a vital acupoint had been hit.

Wah!

A mouthful of fresh blood was vomited out alongside last night's dinner.

The Confounding Puppets' individual offensive strengths could not come close to matching their maker the Grand Marquis, but a single concentrated blow from them was nevertheless astoundingly potent against opponents caught off-guard.

Shu Wanqing hadn't had the remotest inclination to defending against this kind of attack!

The punch landed squarely, creating a depression at its point of impact. He found it difficult to breathe given the repeated severe injuries.

Xiahou Jing paled as well. He stared at Gentlewind in shock, unable to recover himself for a long while. It wasn't until the 'protector king' began to attack Shu Wanqing once more that he snapped back to reality!

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1524: Inching Closer Step By Step

"Gentlewind! Have you lost your mind?!" Xiahou Jing broke out in loud curses.

The puppet was fully capable of simple speech at Jiang Chen's current mastery level, but long conversations were still too draining. He'd rather hurl a few more punches at his target instead.

However, Shu Wanqing still had the strength to react even after taking multiple heavy hits. He leaned into the motion of his body falling and wriggled away like a fish.

The formation instantly fell into disarray.

"Protect Daoist Shu!" Xiahou Jing yelled fiercely as Shu Wanqing was his only hope of getting out alive. Without further ado, he charged at the puppet and went toe to toe with it.

The puppet's battle style was very straightforward and brutal. It was dishing out punches and kicks with no wasted movement.

Xiahou Jing sucked in a breath of cold air as they exchanged moves. He couldn't believe that "Gentlewind" was so powerful! They were equally matched! Moreover, his opponent kept going at him like a suicidal maniac that didn't possess any concept of self-preservation!

The intensity and recklessness left him breathless and overwhelmed. Soon, he found himself on the back foot, alarm bells ringing loudly. His mind was in shambles. The plans and schemes that he'd so meticulously thought up were falling apart. When had Gentlewind switched sides?

Also, how had he made such a giant leap in martial dao and completely changed his martial style? He almost seemed like a different person!

...a different person? A frightful thought suddenly flashed across his mind. Can the real Gentlewind have been switched out?

The mere thought of it sent shivers down his spine. How could an imitation look so similar to the real thing?

Can it be Jiang Chen?

Impossible! He's not even a great emperor yet! How can he possibly stand toe-to-toe against a second level empyrean master?

But if not him, then who?! How many capable subordinates does that bastard have? Why does this one feel like he'll fight to the death?

While Xiahou Jing was kept preoccupied, Jiang Chen activated a second puppet and transformed it into another member of the Order.

With all the chaos and mayhem going on in the background, it slipped into the crowd unnoticed.

The senior executives of the Order had formed a human barrier around Shu Wanqing as per their supreme lord's orders. They were to keep him safe at all costs.

Shu Wanqing sat in a meditative position. His injuries were grave and serious. They could be life-threatening if he didn't treat himself in time. Sadly, the second puppet wasn't so kind to give him that opportunity.

"Y-you!! Why are you here?!" One of the senior executives finally noticed the puppet.

“Didn’t you die to an arrow already?”

“He’s a fake!”

Unfortunately, the discovery was made too late. The puppet charged the human barrier, created an opening, and hurled a ferocious punch at Shu Wanqing.

Shu Wanqing was exasperated. He’d been extremely unlucky today. First, he was injured by a seemingly endless strings of attacks, and now a difficult foe had come for his life.

He of all people knew that this was no time to be distracted, but his leg was maimed and his back heavily mutilated. He could barely muster half of his potential. Naturally, he struggled against his opponent.

“What are you imbeciles waiting for? Hold him down!” He yelled angrily. He’d begun to regret his decision to become involved with an organization filled with mindless trash. The events of today were the greatest humiliation he’d ever suffered in life.

It was utter chaos. A group of senior executives ran in to help after hearing Shu Wanqing’s cries, but there wasn’t much they could do in a battle between empyrean masters. They charged in valiantly, only to be blasted away by one of the two’s aura.

Shu Wanqing was on the verge of going insane. He had a deep understanding that he was going to die if this continued. He raised his head towards the sky and bellowed. “Jiang Chen! That’s enough! Killing me won’t net you anything!”

He was both frightened and angry. It was more than obvious that Jiang Chen was resolved to kill him.

He’d survived and remained hidden for tens of thousands of years, longer than even tortoises. For what had he suffered all this for and why had he refused to show his face in public? All for the sake of longevity! Because of that, he couldn’t help but tremble that his life was about to be forfeit.

Jiang Chen had gone too far. Was the brat really going to ruthlessly kill his senior? Perhaps this was time for a proper conversation with the kid.

“Jiang Chen, if you kill me, you’ll invite the combined wrath of the hidden empyreans! You should know that we are a very tightly-knit group. They may not help me while I’m alive, but know that if you kill me, someone will definitely give you trouble for it. I have countless friends and many of them are empyrean masters! Do you really want to kick the hornet’s nest? Can Veluriyam even withstand the assault from a group of empyrean experts?”

Shu Wanqing was clear with his threats.

Unfortunately for him, Jiang Chen never did respond well to threats. He chuckled easily. “Shu Wanqing, back when we were at Veluriyam, you told me smugly that you’d take me down a notch. Look at you now. Is this all there is to an empyrean master’s pride?”

Jiang Chen genuinely had a very low opinion of Shu Wanqing. He’d seen his share of vile filth over the years, but the sight of secluded expert still made his stomach roil.

Shu Wanqing was exasperated after hearing Jiang Chen's response. His wounds were growing ever more serious while the puppet encroached ever closer. He was in a panic and all a-fluster, his life in terminal danger at any moment.

"Jiang Chen! Don't you push me into a corner! There will be consequences far greater than anything you or your capital can handle!" Shu Wanqing shrieked desperately.

Jiang Chen smiled as though he was watching a comedy. "My capital has been through so many things that others say it couldn't handle. But every single time, it came through just fine.

"We managed just fine when Pillfire tried to suppress us.

"We were completely fine too when the Order stirred up trouble!

"So what makes you think that we can't you being an accessory to a tyrant's crimes?

"The Embittered Savages? They too will fall against us! Even if the sky were to collapse, we will carry the burden upon our shoulders! Look at you still trying to wriggle your way out of the situation with a glib tongue? Aren't you a little too old to be so naive?"

Jiang Chen clearly wasn't going to spare Shu Wanqing.

Boom!

The Nine Labyrinth Formation was withdrawn. The illusory realm vanished before the crowd's eyes. They'd just heaved a collective sigh of relief, but pupils contracted violently in the next second when they noticed that four golems were charging at them from all sides.

"Those who kneel shall live, and those stand shall die! This is the final mercy I will show to the members of the Order! Obey or die!" Jiang Chen shouted.

His voice was filled with dominance. Any remaining bit of fighting spirit departed from the senior executives of the faction at the sound of his voice. One by one, they abandoned their weapons and armor and plonked to their knees.

Out of twenty-two, eighteen had knelt. Only four were brave enough to stand with teeth clenched, sneering coldly, or emotionless.

Everviolet broke out in loud curses. "Cowards... cowards, the bunch of you! We are so many! We could've put up a fight! But alas, alas!" He turned into a ball of purple light and attempted to flee to safety.

But how could he possibly succeed before an empyrean master's might? Big Stone grabbed at the air and created a prison of air that trapped Everviolet, dragging him to a halt in midair.

"Forget it, forget it. A loss is a loss." This came from another protector king — specifically Emperor Sabledeep of the wandering titans.

Sabledeep had made a deep study of the arts of life and had been tempted by the supreme lord into joining the Order. He hadn't done anything particularly evil all along, but neither had his support

wavered like some of the others. Add to that the supreme lord's promise of an empyrean opportunity — that had been enough to win his steady loyalty.

But looking at the situation now, none of Xiahou Jing's promises had come true and the Order was now on the brink of collapse.

As for Shu Wanqing, he refused to believe that any of this was happening. He was an empyrean master! An elite of the human race! In his eyes, he was a dragon amongst men.

Secluded experts like him had always viewed the greater population as their subjects and looked down on them from the lofty perspective of superiors. Who would've thought that the masses he'd dismissed would produce such a perverse genius that could so unequivocally threaten his life?

He refused to accept any of this and was also incredibly depressed. "I can't just die like this. I need to find an opportunity to break out! I have to do that even if I'm heavily injured!"

Jiang Chen instantly understood the subtle undercurrents when he noted the unusual behavior from the empyrean master. "Big Stone, you brothers keep him down no matter what. Don't give him a chance to breathe!"

A centipede still continues to wriggle even when dead. Shu Wanqing wasn't really dead until he'd breathed his last!

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1525: To the Victor Goes the Spoils

Shu Wanqing was undeniably powerful, but Jiang Chen was no slouch either. He had noticed an inkling of the expert's intent very early on.

The four stone golem brothers swarmed up, not giving the old man another chance to do anything else. The other Confounding Puppet was sent to deal with Xiahou Jing.

The Order's supreme lord found it reasonably easy to deal with a single puppet, but two was much more difficult.

No, I can't be kept here like this. I must retreat to fight another day! Shu Wanqing's agitation demonstrated the hopelessness of today's situation to Xiahou Jing. He had to make a run for it!

Now was the perfect time since Jiang Chen's Nine Labyrinth Formation was inactive.

Just as that thought came into his head however, the formation whirred back to life. The annoying pocket maze dimension appeared before their eyes once more.

Xiahou Jing regretted his indecisiveness a great deal. He had very likely missed the only chance at escape just now.

Shu Wanqing also despaired at the reappearance of the formation. He had many secret methods that gave him a reasonable probability of fleeing. Now that the space was locked down though, he would need another ability to break the formation itself before he could escape.

His raw strength was useless here.

The din of battle sounded from outside.

Jiang Chen probed outward with his consciousness, then grinned. Veluriyam's armies had effortlessly broken past the Order's defense. The city's main force had completely occupied the Order's territory!

Experts filled in one by one.

"Young lord!" Peerless and Wellspring came in ahead of the pack.

The other great emperors followed closely behind as quickly as they could. They were very excited to see Jiang Chen again. Truthfully, they'd been a bit concerned about the plan for Jiang Chen to sneak into the Order solo.

Only when they saw the young lord once more did they realize that all their worries had been for naught. Jiang Chen wasn't only unharmed – he was very much at ease.

When Veluriyam's armies arrived and the Order's headquarters was fully secured, the only objective that remained was to exterminate all resistance.

"These are the young lord's orders. The heavens look favorably upon life. Anyone currently a member of the Order who wishes to redeem themselves need not die. However, an oath must be sworn to refrain from betraying humanity or fighting against Veluriyam Capital forevermore! Betraying one's own race for an alien one is especially forbidden. May heaven and earth take those that break their vow!"

Jiang Chen wasn't some kind of cold-blooded murderer. He had killed enough to intimidate the rest. Moreover, he firmly believed that the inhabitants of the human domain would no longer dare be hostile to Veluriyam after this battle. After all, there were no longer any worthy opponents in the entire domain.

His orders averted a bloody slaughter. However, he did execute a small group of die-hard fanatics without hesitation. Meanwhile, the battle in the Nine Labyrinth Formation waged on.

Shu Wanqing was at the end of his rope.

"Jiang Chen, you'll regret this! You'll regret this for sure. If you kill me, there will be other secluded experts who will take revenge for me upon Veluriyam!" Shu Wanqing's resentful voice lingered in the air above the battlefield.

Jiang Chen smiled coolly. "Other experts? It's been many years and more dangers than I can bother counting for the human domain, but not a single one of these supposed secluded experts have shown up. Isn't it a good thing that your death will draw more of them into the open? I always appreciate an eye-opening experience."

Jiang Chen's words took away Shu Wanqing's last breath. He collapsed to the ground, unable to gasp for more air. Animosity combined with his severe injuries caused him to die on the spot.

Jiang Chen immediately summoned Long Xiaoxuan and Little White.

"Here's your chance!" The corpse of an empyrean expert was a sumptuous feast for the two sacred beast cubs.

Xiahou Jing was frightened to death by Shu Wanqing's collapse. "Jiang Chen, Brother Jiang Chen!" he clamored incessantly. "I have something to say!"

"Take your time with it. No need to take your last words to hell, hmm?" Jiang Chen replied impassively.

Xiahou Jing became distressed. "Brother Jiang Chen, I opposed you out of utter foolishness. I didn't know how great you were. I fully admit my naivete now. It was completely stupid of me to struggle against a genius that occurs only once every ten thousand years!"

"I know where I went wrong. Please, let me live. Don't worry, if you allow me to leave, I'll go back to Myriad Abyss Island straightaway. Plus, I'll intercede with my third brother on your behalf!"

"You know, your cultivation partner Miss Huang'er will become my third brother's cultivation vessel soon. You don't want her to die so pathetically like that, do you?" Xiahou Jing talked a pretty convincing talk.

However, Jiang Chen heard only the ugly barks of a loser in his death throes.

Intercede with his third brother?

If Xiahou Jing was important enough to be able to succeed on that front, why would he have left Myriad Abyss Island in the first place? Clearly, he wasn't having a good time back home, especially in the competition against his third brother.

Xiahou Zong wasn't necessarily going to take note of a single word from Xiahou Jing, regardless of topic.

Thus, Jiang Chen was unswayed by his offer. Such promises made for the sake of living had little meaning or surety.

"Listen up, Xiahou Jing. I can forgive the others, but your actions have crossed over my bottom line again and again. Even if you promise that I'll become king of Myriad Abyss Island tomorrow, I would still kill you today every time!" Jiang Chen's judgment was cold and emotionless.

Xiahou Jing roared in frustration. However, the four golems, done with Shu Wanqing, were there to surround and attack him. Xiahou Jing had to fight one against six.

None of the six combatants was noticeably weaker than him. Most importantly, he was within Jiang Chen's formation. His previous exertions had weakened his combat ability by several degrees.

After all, even the strongest human genius had a body of flesh. Mortal men weren't invincible.

Desperate fury filled Xiahou Jing when he heard this. He wanted more than anything to duke it out with Jiang Chen face to face with all he had. His shrieks were suppressed time and again.

The Order of Wind and Cloud's prestige was peeled away layer by layer. Under the assault of four stone golems and two puppets, Xiahou Jing didn't even have the chance to self-detonate before being slain.

"This is Xiahou Jing's storage ring, young lord." Big Stone was a clever boy. He grabbed the ring off of the dead body, delivering it to Jiang Chen.

At the same time, Long Xiaoxuan transformed into human shape and delivered a different storage ring. This one belonged to Shu Wanqing.

Jiang Chen unceremoniously took the rings from his companions.

“My friends from Veluriyam!” he shouted. “The wealth of the Order’s executives will be confiscated, whether their owners are dead or alive. The great emperors may divide up that portion of the spoils. The others who came today will receive the general resources we collected. I hope you understand that we came here to mete out justice, not commit banditry. The loot we’ve obtained today was the fruit of the Order’s underhanded machinations. I hope none of you will forget this fact.”

It was very wise for Jiang Chen to give a portion of the Order’s ill-gotten gains to the others.

He didn’t want to leave the wrong impression though. In general, robbery was not to be encouraged.

The Order was hardly comparable to most factions, and Veluriyam wasn’t a city of thieves.

After Xiahou Jing’s death, the Order was finally no more.

“Young master Chen, Xiahou Jing’s body...” Long Xiaoxuan licked his lips.

“I have another use for it. That’s enough, now. You’ll get indigestion if you eat too much at once.” Long Xiaoxuan and Little White had consumed plenty of nutrition today.

Jiang Chen wanted to give Xiahou Jing’s body and bloodline to the Goldbiter Rats. They were arguably one of the biggest contributors to today’s victory.

Appropriate rewards was beneficial to garnering increased devotion from the Goldbiter Rats. Just like the sacred beasts, the rats were also his indispensable allies. They were even more important, perhaps, than Long Xiaoxuan, and obviously much more so than the almost infantile Little White.

Jiang Chen’s decisive maneuvers had finally removed the thorns in his side. The young man knew that his dispatch of these two empyrean experts would create a problem in his future.

After all, slaying two cultivators of such high level was no laughing matter. Shu Wanqing was a pinnacle of wandering cultivation, but Xiahou Jing’s background was too prominent to ignore.

A senior expert who’d once reigned supreme and a descendant of a great house of Myriad Abyss Island...

Their deaths would no doubt cause greater waves later on.

“Don’t worry, young lord. Maybe Shu Wanqing’s threats were entirely baseless. Plus, we don’t know whether Myriad Abyss Island actually cares about Xiahou Jing or not. Why hadn’t they sent more people otherwise, given how strong his house is?”

“I don’t regret my choices, regardless of how much trouble they cause later on,” Jiang Chen smiled faintly. “If I hadn’t killed them, we might not even be able to weather this oncoming storm.”

He was unexpectedly broad-minded.

In actuality, Jiang Chen looked down on both the secluded experts in the human domain and Myriad Abyss Island’s descendants. Neither party had the responsibility mandated to an expert.

“My orders are as follows: the army embarks on the morrow back to Veluriyam Capital. No former Order members will be accepted into our ranks!”

The fact that he had spared their lives was more than merciful enough. He had no interest in taking in these unprincipled people. It would be personally irresponsible to do so.

A battle that hadn't been particularly difficult was finally concluded. Veluriyam Capital had swept the Order's ragtag troops clean.

Jiang Chen summoned the king of the Goldbiter Rats. “Ole Gold, do you want this empyrean expert's body? This is guaranteed to be the best of the best!”

The rat king was overjoyed. This wasn't the first time he had received this kind of gift, but this particular instance wasn't nonetheless.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1526: An Empyrean Decree

The rat king's surprise was understandable. An empyrean body's life and blood essence were extremely potent nourishment.

Xiahou Jing had earned himself a pitiable fate. A genius of House Xiahou of Myriad Abyss Island had died ignobly in a foreign land, his corpse unable to escape desecration. His misdeeds meant that this conclusion was well-deserved.

The rewards of this battle had been tremendous.

Jiang Chen toyed with Xiahou Jing and Shu Wanqing's empyrean decrees, wondering how to divide them up.

Each empyrean expert's understanding of the heavenly dao created a personal decree through refinement. A great emperor without much hope to break through would have a very good shot at ascending to empyrean realm with such a decree in hand.

Therefore, these two ownerless decrees could very well mean the creation of two new empyrean experts. These, plus the ones from Xiahou Jing's subordinates – Elders Peng and Mo – meant that Jiang Chen had four empyrean decrees on hand.

How to distribute them needed to be carefully considered.

Wellspring and Peerless didn't need them any more. They had the kungpeng bloodline, which meant they were more than likely going to break through at some point. There was no need to waste decrees on them.

Moreover, empyrean decrees had the disadvantage of locking one's cultivation achievement at the previous owner's. It was virtually impossible for any higher martial dao achievements. For example, since Shu Wanqing had been third level empyrean realm, someone that succeeded his empyrean decree could at most get to third level as well.

Breaking through third level would be a hundred times harder than doing so as an empyrean expert in one's own right.

Of course, this was a non-issue for the majority of great emperors. Those experts would take more than ten lifetimes to break through on their own strength; it was unlikely they would be able to break through to further empyrean levels.

If Jiang Chen were to publicize these four decrees, countless great emperors in the human domain would be driven mad with desire. These empyrean decrees were more attractive than everything else. The Pinecrane and Emperor Supremacy Pills paled before the potential a decree offered.

Wasn't the Pinecrane Pill used for extending one's lifespan past a great emperor's? But if one could simply ascend to empyrean realm and gain a huge chunk of lifespan, what was the point of struggling with a pill for a fraction of that?

A single empyrean expert would only produce a single order in their lifetime. Empyrean experts were rare specimens in the human domain. An old codger like Shu Wanqing never showed himself in public if he could help it.

"Old Brother Mo, Old Brother Hui, who under my banner do you consider worthy of an empyrean decree?" Jiang Chen found it hard to decide.

He had a few possibilities in mind: Void and Coiling Dragon, for starters. Alas, neither of these great emperors was peak great emperor, which meant it was far too difficult for them to refine the empyrean decrees.

Most importantly, they were Jiang Chen's direct subordinates. He didn't actually want them to make use of the decrees. Because of their closeness, he wanted them to achieve empyrean realm through their own ability. Only then could they have better futures beyond that.

"Young lord, we must be careful about this. These decrees may cause unwanted problems to arise in the people's hearts. When some invariably feel that your distribution of them is unfair, internal strife and all kinds of other problems will ensue." Wellspring was a wizened old man, able to see further than most.

Peerless nodded as well. "If you give them out to your closest great emperors like Void and Coiling Dragon, no one will say a word about it. Other great emperors with greater seniority in Veluriyam though, may talk behind your back... Petalpluck and the others. As for the wandering great emperors and ones from the other sects, they've only temporarily joined up. They wouldn't dare expect a decree, unless you have plenty of orders to go around someday."

Jiang Chen smiled. "I have the same hopes for Void and Coiling Dragon as I have for you two. I want them to break through on their own merits. Coiling Dragon especially so. I consider him capable of real greatness."

"Oh?" Wellspring's eyes brightened. "What kind of greatness, may I ask?"

"He is a descendant of a true dragon bloodline and I have a true dragon right here. When Brother Long reaches empyrean realm, a single drop of dragon blood could turn Coiling Dragon into an overwhelming draconic warrior! There's no problem with his compatibility. True dragon blood is perfect for him."

Peerless and Wellspring traded an understanding look. The method of their own breakthroughs was kungpeng blood.

The bloodline belonged to an ancient sacred beast, the kunpeng. In ancient times, such a bloodline rivaled true dragons' in prominence. The only difference was that kunpengs tended to be less prestigious and thus less well-known as well.

Peerless applauded with laughter. "Very good, very good! You seem to have planned for absolutely everything, young lord. What can possibly prevent the human race from flourishing?"

Wellspring stroked his whiskers with a smile. "This was why I joined the young lord, my friend. He is a genius chosen by heaven. Any time the human race experiences a tempestuous era, all kinds of geniuses spring forth out of the woodwork, heralding in a new eras. So it is with young lord Jiang Chen. Under his leadership, humanity will enter into a new age. A new path will be open to us as a result of this catastrophe!"

The two had both sensed the heavenly dao and were only one step away from empyrean realm. This meant that they were superior in terms of heart and mindset to other great emperors.

Even the Ninesuns Sky Sect's Clearsky and the Skysword Sect's Han Qianzhan – these two esteemed masters – were inferior in this regard. Despite the fact that they were both near peak great emperor, Peerless and Wellspring had transcended higher.

Among the six wandering giants of yore, Everviolet was clearly lower in level compared to Peerless. In the last battle, he had been captured alongside the other Order executives.

Saying this, Jiang Chen smiled. "Have Everviolet and Sabledeep accepted their lot at all?"

Wellspring couldn't help laughing out loud. "Everviolet is a stubborn man. He sticks to his choices. If he had been friends with you from the beginning, young lord, he would have supported you unto death. Unfortunately, fate didn't allow that to happen. He followed Pillzenith in the past, and his hatreds there spurred him to join the Order. Now that his two masters have both lost to you, he has little to live for anymore."

Jiang Chen nodded. "His arts of the eye are quite remarkable. I value his genius enough to show him leniency. As long as he swears never to betray humanity again or work for alien races, he may go free."

After killing Shu Wanqing and Xiahou Jing, his mood had significantly improved. These tangential supporters no longer seemed so necessary to kill.

"Much obliged for your mercy, young lord. I'll release him in a bit," Wellspring smiled.

"Sure, I'll come with you when that happens. What about Sabledeep?" asked Jiang Chen.

"Sabledeep has no record of doing evil under the Order's banner. Rather than saying he joined the Order, it may be more accurate to say he was beguiled by its supreme lord. Ah, he usually cares a great deal about his reputation, so these happenings have been a tremendous blow to him. I trust that he can recover in due time. If he is sufficiently comforted, I see no problem in winning him over to our side. He is fundamentally pure of heart."

Wellspring's magnanimity was such that he didn't add insult to injury for either of his former fellows.

“Daoist Sabledeep is indeed an authentic man,” Peerless chimed in. “He’s obsessed with martial dao and a deeper comprehension of life. He does lack somewhat in social graces, but his integrity should not be questioned.”

“If that’s the case, take me to him.” Given his recent string of successes, Jiang Chen was quite enthusiastic. He had an assembly of capable subordinates already, but his appetite for savants was undiminished.

Sabledeep was dressed in white from head to toe. There was no mote of dust upon his garments, producing an almost otherworldly effect. His eyes were clear, with an indescribable depth.

“Daoist Sabledeep, young lord Jiang Chen is here to visit you,” laughed Wellspring.

Sabledeep’s eyelids drooped. “How do I deserve such a visit? I am an utter failure. Daoist Hui, Daoist Mo, I know you must have interceded for me before the young lord. But, my crimes...”

Jiang Chen chuckled. “But I heard quite the opposite. In the Order, Sabledeep had a perfectly pristine record as to reprehensible acts. Why be so hard on yourself? I’m going to spare the courtesies and cut to the chase. You must be disappointed, now that Xiahou Jing’s promises to you have disappeared along with his life. However, I can promise you much the same, with one key distinction: I always make good on my promises. Wellspring and Peerless can bear testament to that.”

Wellspring was very pleased when he heard what Jiang Chen had to say. “Daoist Sabledeep, the young lord is a man of his word. Brother Peerless and I have already begun to sense the heavenly dao. Emphyrean realm is only a matter of time for us. Didn’t you join the Order solely to ascend to a higher level of existence? Why must you be so foolish as to avoid the closest source of help?”

Sabledeep’s entire body shook. His eyes radiated incredulity. “Y-you...” he stuttered. “B-both of you have sensed the heavenly dao already?”

The great emperor had been equals with Wellspring and Peerless once. In fact, he’d been ranked higher than the latter. Hearing that they’d both come closer to the heavenly dao made him rather upset. It wasn’t really envy, but he was hardly in a good mood.

“Daoist Sabledeep, you should’ve heard what kind of man the young lord is. Right now, he’s the only one the human domain can rely on, one way or another. Who else is worth joining? You can’t shove your head in the sand, nor can you succeed through self-preservation alone! If you were willing to cooperate with Xiahou Jing, why not accept young lord Jiang Chen?”

Sabledeep was looking more and more persuaded.

There was one last obstacle in his own heart to overcome. Wasn’t shifting his allegiance so quickly a display of disloyalty? But it seemed that Veluriyam didn’t care about that and was being very sincere!

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1527: A Stunning Move

Sabledeep’s internal obstacle was dissolved by Jiang Chen’s sincerity. “I was foolish one when I joined the Order,” he sighed softly. “And I may be again, if I refuse Veluriyam today. Young lord Jiang Chen, I am willing to be an ordinary soldier in your service – if you’ll have me.”

“Haha, that’s the Sabledeep I know!” Wellspring roared with laughter, delivering a resounding clap onto his fellow emperor’s shoulder. “Brother Sabledeep. You, Brother Peerless, and I – we’re birds of a feather. Why should we be separate in the first place?”

Peerless nodded as well, becoming emotional. “Let us all follow behind young lord Jiang Chen and accomplish something truly amazing! The human domain is on the verge of total collapse. We are in chaotic times. It would be pathetic for us to be concerned only with our own lives. We should be looking to accomplish great things and strive for something on a larger scale! Not for the sake of being recorded in history, but for being true to our own hearts, no?”

The three old friends traded glances, then collectively chuckled.

Now that the internal demons hindering these cultivators had been dispersed, what came next was much easier.

Jiang Chen avoided disturbing their reunion. Once they’d largely finished catching up, he turned to Wellspring. “Old Brother Hui, shall we take a walk while Old Brother Mo remains here with Emperor Sabledeep?”

Wellspring knew what he had in mind. They walked out side by side. The treatment for Everviolet was much worse than for Sabledeep.

Jiang Chen’s subordinates were strict when it came to discipline. Sabledeep had a pristine record and the care of Peerless and Wellspring, which meant that he had been treated as an honored guest.

Everviolet had been taken down by the stone golem brothers. If not for Jiang Chen’s instructions, he might have lost his life then and there. Therefore, he was treated as a high-profile prisoner.

Right now, Veluriyam Capital’s forces were still at the Order’s former base. They planned to head back to the city after two days of rest. Thus, Everviolet was being kept in the Order’s dungeons.

“Young lord, Emperor Wellspring.” The expert guarding the prison hurriedly saluted when he saw Jiang Chen and Wellspring visit.

The great emperor smiled slightly, nodding in reply. “How is he feeling? Is his mood stable?”

“Yes. He seems normal enough just sitting there. He hasn’t troubled us, nor has he shouted or screamed,” the guard replied.

“Open the door,” Jiang Chen smiled. The dungeons had powerful restrictions over each cell door.

The cell’s occupant didn’t lift a finger despite hearing the commotion. His only movement was a slight lift of an eyelid. A surprised flicker flashed across his eyes when he saw Jiang Chen and Wellspring walk in together. However, his eyelids then drooped without much of a reaction. It was as if the only thing he looked forward to was death.

“Daoist Everviolet,” Wellspring greeted.

Everviolet’s voice was hoarse. “Old Man Hui, are you here to laugh at me?” His violet eyes radiated rays of pride. “Kill me if you like,” he glared coldly at Jiang Chen. “I am in your hands, but that doesn’t mean you can shame or torture me.”

Jiang Chen laughed, but his only direct response was to look coolly back at the great emperor.

Wellspring smiled wryly. "Daoist Everviolet, your temper is as fiery and explosive as always. Who said that the young lord is here to shame or torture you? Is there a point for him in doing that right now?"

Everviolet harrumphed. "What do you intend then? Do you want me to kneel and beg for mercy? Impossible! Give me death instead!"

Jiang Chen sighed softly. Truthfully, Everviolet should have been killed by the standards for an ordinary person. This wasn't the first time he had been the enemy.

It was just, Jiang Chen's loftiness meant that he'd never treated Everviolet as an equal opponent in any capacity.

"If I were to execute you, no one would think that an injustice. What say you, Everviolet?"

Everviolet's face darkened, wanting to utter a retort or three, but nothing came out from his mouth. Sadly, he had no ammunition to fire back with.

"What did your former master, Emperor Pillzenith, do?"

"What about the Order of Wind and Cloud's supreme lord, hmm?"

Everviolet's expression was agitated. After calming down, he'd been able to realize that he'd supported rather questionable individuals in the past.

Jiang Chen didn't care to embarrass him further. He waved. "Alright. I'm not interested in killing you or making you any more uncomfortable than you already are. The door's open, so you can leave anytime. You do have to make an oath before that though. Remember, this isn't for my sake, but for humanity and all who live in the realm!"

Jiang Chen's tone was deadly serious. "Old Brother Hui, you tell him," he turned to his trusted advisor.

Wellspring inclined his head, sighing in lamentation. "Daoist Everviolet, I would still like to call you fellow daoist for the same reason as the young lord. A man of your talent is rare. Do you know why the young lord doesn't want to kill you? He admires your arts of the eyes because of their similarities to his. You didn't come by your cultivation easily, and you were never the root of evil in any encounter. There's not much point in killing you, and the point of this oath is quite simple. I believe you know that the young lord wishes only to avoid your abilities being used for evil in the future, whether that villain is human or alien. The human race can't bear much more of this!"

The color had drained from Everviolet's face, his eyes bloodshot. He smashed both hands viciously into the wall.

"Old Man Hui, I've cultivated my arts all my life, but it seems I wasn't able to identify the right people in the end. Thus my life ends in ignominy. We used to be called equals many years ago, but you've risen far beyond my reach.

"Never mind. What good are my abilities of the eye?" As he said this, Everviolet raised his arm, jabbing his index and middle finger into his eye sockets.

“Huh? Fellow daoist, you...” Wellspring hadn’t expected Everviolet to choose such an extreme method of self-mutilation.

He didn’t quite know how to console or convince the emperor with bloodied eyes. Wellspring knew of Everviolet’s uncompromising nature, but not that it was to this degree.

Two streams of blood trickled down from Everviolet’s eyes. The man intoned in a low voice, “Young lord Jiang Chen, Old Man Hui. I have never been forced into anything my entire life. I will not make any such oath. Whether to kill me or not is entirely up to you. There is no point keeping these foolish eyes around since I can’t even see through who I deal with. From now on, I am totally useless, so you don’t need to worry about anything resembling your so-called betrayal to an alien race... haha, another race, another race...”

The emperor howled. “That bastard Pillzenith described a blueprint of a united human domain to me. The Order’s supreme lord did the same. How laughable for me to fall down in the same place twice! Even so, Pillzenith and Xiahou Jing were humans, not aliens!”

Wellspring was about to say something more, but Jiang Chen waved. “You can go,” he said coolly. “I doubt you’ll make the same mistake again.”

Everviolet raised his head. “Will you really rest easy, letting me go?”

“You were blind before to the incompetence of others,” Jiang Chen said smoothly. “If you stumble any more, then your heart will prove to be blind as well. What can a chronically sightless person do? Not much, I wager.”

Everviolet barked a humorless laugh, then nodded, raising a cupped fist. “I see. As expected of Jiang Chen.”

He was determined enough not to express any pain despite his self-inflicted wounds. Biting back agony, he strode out the door.

Jiang Chen flared his consciousness.

“All guards and checkpoints, let Emperor Everviolet go free. Don’t stop him.” His orders allowed the man to regain his freedom without a single obstruction.

Wellspring tasted bitterness in his mouth. Everviolet’s actions could have been considered as a kind of atonement, but he regretted the man’s particular method of doing so.

Deep down, he had hoped for Everviolet to soften and Jiang Chen to take the genius in. Their enmity could’ve been resolved into friendship then. What a shame that Everviolet’s proud nature meant that he would feel too embarrassed to join Veluriyam Capital.

“Young lord, this...”

Jiang Chen sighed softly. “Don’t worry, Old Brother Hui. I’m not angry. I thought Everviolet would intentionally provoke me into killing him.”

“Ah. I’m sure he won’t blindly use his abilities for evil any more.”

"I hope so, too." Truthfully, Jiang Chen regretted the loss of the great emperor's arts in the end. His self-inflicted blindness meant that the arts he'd practiced for the better half of his life were completely useless.

But Jiang Chen wasn't fundamentally vexed by what had taken place.

After most of the affairs at the Order's former headquarters were settled, he gave the order. "Let the army prepare to return to Veluriyam tomorrow morning. We must prepare for a decisive battle with the Embittered Savages."

Now that the biggest problem was gone, the slightly smaller one was next.

"Come with me, Jiao Yun and Jiao Feng." Jiang Chen planned to have a private chat with the Jiao brothers.

Ever since they'd joined up, the Jiao brothers had been very active in winning Jiang Chen's trust and support. Their time with the Order hadn't shifted their loyalties. Instead, they had colluded with Emperor Peerless to come back to Veluriyam at any time.

"What did you want to tell us, young lord?"

Jiang Chen smiled as he looked over the two brothers. "Sit down first."

The Jiao brothers had nothing but the utmost respect for Jiang Chen, now. In fact, they were somewhat awed by his accomplishments as well. The young lord had proven himself more extraordinary than met the eye in countless battles.

To view young lord Jiang Chen as a typical high rank emperor realm cultivator would be a fatal error. A thousand experts the same level as the young lord wouldn't have been enough to match him.

"I asked you to come here today because I have an important issue that I want your opinion on."

"Not at all, young lord. Please, do tell." The brothers were the image of humility.

"Perhaps you already know that I have four empyrean decrees on hand. Each decree has a large probability of producing an empyrean expert. I want to make good use of these decrees, and you two are within my scope of observation for them."

The Jiao brothers couldn't contain their delight. "Y-young lord..." Jiao Yun stuttered. "Y-you... you want to give those to us?"

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1528: Each With Their Own Arrangements

The Jiao brothers hadn't expected to hear such great news when Jiang Chen summoned them over. They exchanged glances, eyes agitated red with tears.

"I once promised both of you a series of fortunes. After imparting my martial art techniques to you, I considered following that up with an empyrean opportunity. If you wish to ascend to the empyrean realm by yourselves, I'll do my best to make it a reality, but your ascension isn't guaranteed. The empyrean decree is the most guaranteed route you can take. If you refine it, the probability of you

becoming an empyrean master rises to at least ninety percent,” Jiang Chen explained patiently. “The decision is in your hands. Do you wish to take the riskier or more conservative path to the empyrean realm?”

“Young lord, what are the advantages and disadvantages of each path?” Jiao Yun regained his composure and wanted to weigh the pros and cons.

The brothers were well aware that this was the sole opportunity to change their lives, and possibly the biggest decision they could ever make. They had to choose their path wisely.

“Your ascension isn’t guaranteed if you choose the first path, but your growth will be greater with limitless possibilities. Of course, the extent of your growth depends entirely on your potential and talent in martial dao. Even empyrean masters that ascend with their own strength may not make it all the way to the end. Everyone has their own limit! Geniuses who break through their limits are far and few between.

“The second path is a safer choice, but its flaws are also apparent. Your potential will be limited to what decree you receive. If you refine a second level decree, then your maximum potential will be exactly that. Any progress beyond that will be a hundred times more difficult than usual.”

The pros and cons were clearly listed. The rest was now up to the Jiao brothers. They exchanged glances. “Young lord, can we discuss between ourselves first?”

Jiang Chen smiled. “Take your time. You needn’t rush your decisions. The two empyrean decrees are yours to keep if you choose the second.”

The two brothers headed into a corner to discuss and soon came back with a decision.

“Young lord, we are well aware of our limits. We choose the second path. It’s better to refine the empyrean decree.”

“Are you sure?” Jiang Chen smiled.

Jiao Yun nodded without hesitation. “Yes.”

“Would you care to explain why?” Jiang Chen was quite curious.

“First of all, we aren’t cream of the crop among the great emperors. If we ascend with your help, our innate potential might not get us very far. Moreover, there’s no guarantee that we can even break through in the first place! Refining the decree is much more guaranteed.

“Secondly, cultivating by ourselves will take too much time. The world is falling into chaos as we speak. Refining the decree is perhaps a shortcut, but we’ll be able to protect ourselves and contribute a lot more to the young lord’s cause.”

Jiao Feng nodded. “Young lord, we owe you a mountain of gratitude and wish to share some of your burden. We aren’t doing this just to show our resolve, but also our gratitude! A young lord like you deserves our utmost loyalty and dedication!”

He was a little worked up. Back when they'd been wandering cultivators, Emperor Pillzenith had brainwashed them into doing many ludicrous things. However, they'd since found a new goal in life after they were recruited by Jiang Chen. Their integrity and morals grew with each passing day.

They'd become much more mature and level-headed decision makers.

"Mm. Your decision is proof that you're no longer the same Jiao brothers of yesteryear. You've made the wise choice," Jiang Chen answered encouragingly. "I've always been generous to my confidantes. Since you're my personal guards, I shall grant you the two decrees of the highest grade. However, once you've refined them, you won't have a chance with any higher grade decrees that I might come across in the future."

Jiao Yun laughed. "There are countless treasures and fortunes in the world, but it's not like all of them will come to us brothers!"

"Isn't there a proverb? Something about three thousand mile rivers and me drinking with a cup?" Jiao Feng quipped.

Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "A river can be three thousand miles long, but a person can only drink from it one cupful at a time."

Jiao Feng scratched his head with a chuckle. "Yes! That's exactly what I meant! Perhaps the young lord will find more powerful subordinates in the future. The two of us should eat within our means."

Jiang Chen brought out Shu Wanqing and Xiahou Jing's empyrean decrees without hesitation.

"Here are the decrees. One is from Shu Wanqing, third level empyrean realm, while the other is from Xiahou Jing, second level empyrean realm. You two will have to decide who gets what. Xiahou Jing's decree has the greater potential, but Shu Wanqing's decree isn't that far behind."

"Let's draw lots." Jiao Yun suggested as he didn't want to damage his relationship with his brother. Drawing lot was the fairest.

Jiao Yun nodded. "Agreed."

Jiang Chen supported their decision. He made the appropriate preparations oversaw and the process. In the end, Jiao Feng drew Shu Wanqing's decree and Jiao Yun drew Xiahou Jing's.

Jiang Chen warned after he handed over the decrees. "Remember, you're no longer like the others from now on. You're quasi-empyrean masters. However, it's best that you don't widely brag or show off your newfound strength until your breakthrough, or you just might invite death upon your doorsteps."

This wasn't an exaggeration.

It was widely known that the decrees were the keys to the empyrean realm. If word got out that the brothers had received two empyrean decrees, the whole world would come looking for them.

Even though the human domain had already been united by Veluriyam, who could know for certain how many secluded masters inhabited the vast continent?

The brothers nodded solemnly.

“Don't worry, I'll also lessen your responsibilities in the near future so that you'll have more time to refine the decrees.”

The Jiao brothers were deeply moved. Meeting Jiang Chen was the greatest fortune of their lives.

“Young lord, dumb folks like us are bad with words, but one day, if you need us to jump into the boiling sea, we'll do so without so much as a frown.”

“Alright, enough of that. Put them away properly.”

Jiang Chen sent the Jiao Brothers off and summoned Emperors Coiling Dragon and Void. They were his closest allies in Veluriam Capital, and so he had to tell them about the decrees, or else their minds might wander into dark places.

“Young lord, why did you summon us in such a hurry? Has something good happened?” Coiling Dragon laughed joyfully. He'd benefited a lot from Jiang Chen over the years. The Pinecrane Pill, Emperor Supremacy Pill, and many other treasures had fallen into his lap.

Their friendship had also been strengthened considerably by the flames of adversity, and because of that, he was the only one who'd dared crack a joke with the young lord.

“Actually, you're right.” Jiang Chen chuckled. “As old friends, you should know by now that I've gotten my hands on a few empyrean decrees.”

Coiling Dragon smiled gleefully. “Hehe. Young lord, are you going to gift them to us?” He lit up with joy.

Void smiled gently. Hints of surprise flashed across his eyes, but he managed to keep his cool.

“Coiling Dragon, that's not why I summoned you here. The decrees are not for you.”

Coiling Dragon was instantly depressed. “Why? Is it because I'm not a peak great emperor?”

Void burst into laughter. “Coiling Dragon, can't you tell that the young lord has other plans in mind? You're worrying over nothing!”

Coiling Dragon's eyes lit up again. “Is that so? Young lord, care to share them with us?”

Jiang Chen nodded. “I will search for an empyrean opportunity for you. I don't want you to ascend with the help of the decree. Your talent and potential would go to waste.”

“Do you mean that we'll have to rely on ourselves to break through?” Coiling Dragon was dejected once more. “That's so much easier said than done. It's been thousands of years since anyone's succeeded.”

“How would you know? Are they supposed to inform you if they happened to break through?” Jiang Chen was skeptical. How could there possibly be no empyrean masters?

The human domain hadn't deteriorated to that extent yet. The master's must've hidden themselves because they no longer wanted to have ties with the human domain. Perhaps worldly matters no longer mattered to them, or perhaps there were other reasons.

Whichever it was, empyrean masters were definitely present in the human domain. Even if the ancient demonic war had laid waste to the human domain, it couldn't possibly remain in decline forever. Spirit veins could be destroyed, but they could also be born anew.

Where there is death, there is also life.

Jiang Chen had believed the rumors at first, but after meeting Shu Wanqing, this was no longer the case.

Even backwater races like the Southern Celestials and Embittered Savages had empyrean masters. The human race had been many leagues stronger in the ancient age. No matter how great their decline, there was no way they'd be inferior.

Void was visibly moved. "Young lord, do you really mean it? Can we really ascend to the empyrean realm with our own strength?"

Jiang Chen smiled reassuringly. "I might've said otherwise if you were someone else, but I assure you that I'll bring you an empyrean opportunity no matter what. There will be other arrangements in store for you."

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1529: A Strong Enemy Comes Calling

Coiling Dragon grinned. "I knew that I didn't have to worry about the benefits of following young lord Jiang Chen."

Void burst into laughter as well, but said nothing more. Instead, he awaited for Jiang Chen's next words expectantly.

"Coiling Dragon, you are the descendant of a true dragon bloodline. I've always had high hopes for you. When you break through to empyrean realm, you will be capable some of truly astonishing things. You won't lose to His Majesty Peafowl in terms of potential."

"His Majesty Peafowl?" Coiling Dragon and Void were bewildered.

"Yes, His Majesty Peafowl has peafowl blood in his veins, another ancient sacred beast. You, Coiling Dragon, are aligned with the ancient true dragons. Both of you are heirs of top-quality bloodlines from ancient times. Therefore, I have high expectations especially for you, Coiling Dragon!" Jiang Chen exclaimed.

The great emperor found it hard to remain completely composed.

He smiled wryly. "Young lord, I'm the least talented among Veluriyam's great emperors. I broke through to great emperor only because of your Pinecrane Pill. Ah..."

"You don't lack the talent. You merely need to make use of it more effectively." Jiang Chen waved a hand. He didn't cherish Coiling Dragon just because the man was an old acquaintance; his bloodline was equally important and incredible.

"You mentioned His Majesty Peafowl just now, young lord," Void suddenly interjected. "Is he... truly... still living?"

"I cannot make any guarantees as to that," Jiang Chen mused. "But my intuition tells me that he still lives. When he reappears in the world once more, he will surprise us all – not as 'Emperor' Peafowl, but as an empyrean senior."

“An empyrean senior?” Everyone drew in a sharp breath.

“Young lord, His Majesty, he...”

“Yes,” Jiang Chen nodded. “His Majesty Peafowl first sensed the heavenly dao many years ago. Moreover, he has more than sufficient opportunity to break through. It should only be a matter of time. I only wonder what level he will be when he comes back to us?”

Jiang Chen reminisced about his time with the kind ruler.

Coiling Dragon and Void had both been very close to Emperor Peafowl. Hearing Jiang Chen relate this warmed their hearts.

Apart from them, Jiang Chen saw little reason to comfort others’ emotions. Most others were not nearly as close as the few he’d already spoken to, which meant that they wouldn’t have second thoughts about his actions.

After a night’s rest, the army embarked to return journey to Veluriyam.

Before the Embittered Savages had invaded, this army would have been sufficient to conquer the entire human domain. No one would’ve dare touch a force in such numbers and strength.

Jiang Chen hurriedly entered seclusion after returning to the capital proper. In his last battle, he had attained a new understanding of the Nine Labyrinth Formation. He wanted to take a few days off to digest what he had learned. The battle had indirectly taught him the potency of the formation.

Even a third level empyrean expert like Shu Wanqing had been unable to free himself for a time within the formation. If the formation could be strengthened even further, Jiang Chen would have an easier time both offensively and defensively in future battles.

He’d realized that he needed some sureties if he wanted to venture into a place like Myriad Abyss Island. The Nine Labyrinth Formation and Confounding Puppets were superb candidates.

However, the Embittered Savage armies remained in the Moon God Sect’s lands without much activity, surprising everyone. This held true ever since Jiang Chen left closed door cultivation.

He was just like everyone else. That didn’t seem like the Embittered Savage style. Why were they holding back like that? As he guessed at the motives of the Savages’ inaction, Veluriyam saw the arrival of an unwelcome guest.

.....

Outside Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s entrance, a gray-robed old man stood aloft in the clouds with a frigid expression. It was as if an iceberg hovered overhead.

The appearance of the old man alone lowered the ambient temperature. The air had seemingly frozen over as well. This drastic change shocked every observer in the vicinity, including Jiang Chen.

The eight stone golem brothers gathered quickly together at Jiang Chen’s side, flying rapidly together to the source of the disturbance.

“You are Jiang Chen?” The gray-robed old man was a glacial statue amid the clouds. His wintry arrogance caused everyone in attendance to shiver.

Jiang Chen hadn’t even begun his approach when there was a low cry near him. The Vermilion Bird rushed here from Sacred Peafowl Mountain’s back, stream of crimson carrying its wings.

It had been purifying its body via the wood spirit spring at the back of the mountain as of late. Doing so didn’t fundamentally resolve the bird’s problems, but it did stabilize its condition. At least right now, the Vermilion Bird was not bound from acting like before. At its worst, any attempt at combat meant a grave injury to itself.

“Back off, Jiang Chen!” The Vermilion Bird swiftly rushed forward, guarding and preventing the young man from moving forward.

Jiang Chen stopped his advance at the bird’s nervousness. He focused his gaze on the gray-robed old man.

The old man’s eyes were clear as crystal. It was impossible to see any human emotion in them. Replacing that was a magic that seemed to make Jiang Chen’s consciousness tremble. However, the chain seal in his consciousness countered this mysterious force immediately.

Jiang Chen braced himself. “Close your eyes,” he called out to the stone golems. “Don’t look into his.”

The golems were usually a fearless bunch. Just a moment prior, they’d been glancing over the gray-robed old man with provocative looks. Jiang Chen’s warning rang an alarm in their hearts. The brothers hurriedly turned their heads.

The gray-robed old man was mildly startled to see a Vermilion Bird blocking his way. Clearly, he wasn’t reckless enough to disregard or disrespect a divine creature. He could feel the ancient aura radiating off of the bird in a palpable way.

“Such potent fire energy. Is this an ancient sacred fowl? No wonder you were so brash, Jiang Chen. Is this ancient bird your backer?”

The gray-robed old man bore a frosty, detached attitude. Every word he uttered seemed capable of freezing over one’s soul, their syllables almost a curse.

Jiang Chen was much more alert than usual. The old man was unquestionably an extremely fearsome foe, much more so than any previous opponent he had faced. Perhaps the only other impenetrably mysterious characters he’d encountered in the past were Elders Shun and Xi. The others couldn’t compare to this gray-robed old man’s power, Shu Wanqing included.

“Who are you?” That aside, he was visibly frustrated. Regardless of his identity, the old man had come without notice in a display of force and dominance. The harassment and incitement was obvious in the gesture. Jiang Chen had more than enough cause to be annoyed.

“You don’t need to know who I am. I am only here to ask you whether you killed Shu Wanqing.” The old man spoke with the authority of someone in a superior position.

Shu Wanqing?

Jiang Chen had a vague idea of where the old man had come from.

“What’s it to you?” He was trying to come up with a plan on the spot. Jiang Chen remembered that before he died, Shu Wanqing had warned through frenzied shouting that killing him would lead to other empyrean experts seeking to punish the act.

Was this iceberg of an old man one of those supposed empyrean experts?

“Oh?” The old man’s eyes spun in their sockets. He cackled callously. “A child as young as you is rather too murderous. And quite so impolite to your elders. I’d like to know who your master is. Who taught you, hmm?”

He didn’t buy the possibility of Jiang Chen being a self-taught genius at all. He felt that there had to be someone more mysterious and powerful behind the curtain.

Jiang Chen sneered. “Senior? If you really were a senior that deserved respect, I would’ve welcomed you with more than enough. However, your hostility to me is showcased through your attempt at demonstrating your brawn before my gates. Am I supposed to be courteous despite that? You’re too naïve, old man!”

He respected his elders, but not those who liked to flaunt their seniority. To him, any senior who had real character and integrity – even cultivators who were the epitome of mediocrity – deserved treatment according to their age.

This old man’s behavior made it extremely difficult for Jiang Chen to consider him a senior, regardless of his level of cultivation. This was one of his life principles. He showed respect only to those who gave it to him.

The old man’s tone darkened. His cold eyes flared with arctic light. “A lawless brat indeed. Do you really think that Veluriyam Capital has taken over the entire human domain? Do you think yourself the lone voice in the realm?”

Jiang Chen smirked. “I don’t know about the entire human domain, but on Veluriyam Capital and Sacred Peafowl Mountain territory, I certainly am! You’re dreaming if you expect me to answer your aggression with simpering sycophancy!” He dispensed with courtesy altogether.

“Impudent brat! Ignorant fool!” The old man was very displeased. “Shu Wanqing is an old acquaintance of mine and one of the empyrean leaders of humanity. Your unpermitted killing of him runs counter to humanity’s interests and dishonors your ancestors. Do you know how reprehensible and vile your actions were?”

Jiang Chen broke into laughter when he heard what was said. “Runs counter to humanity’s interests? Old man, you’re puffing him up to be some kind of empyrean leader of humanity. Let me ask you, what has he done in this hour of crisis to deserve that title?”

“Did he repair the broken Boundary Stele in Agarwood? Did he stand in the Embittered Savages’ path in the northwestern wastes? Or did he quell the rebellion of the Order of Wind and Cloud?” Jiang Chen was laughing because of how angry he was.

These hermit experts had inflicted some kind of brain injury to themselves by going into hiding. Their logic was that of bandits. Though they had done absolutely nothing, they were proud to call themselves humanity's leaders.

It was as if they were fit to lead solely because of their strength. Even if the only thing they did was sleep all day, the world had to bow to their wishes. Others might have acquiesced to his intimidation, but not Jiang Chen.

Leadership required responsibility. Even without being the strongest in the world, it was possible to take up the mantle through all-encompassing empathy and constant work for the race's behalf. Only a man like that deserved to be called a leader!

Someone as presumptuous and vain as this wasn't remotely close to leading anything.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1530: True Motive

The Vermilion Bird nodded slightly without speaking. Clearly, it agreed completely with Jiang Chen's speech.

The bird had had good relations with the ancient Primosanct Sect, and ancient humanity as a whole. It had experienced the ancient demon-sealing war and thus knew the internal strife that tended to exist between man.

Even in the most dangerous of times, humans constantly bickered. It had seen more than its fair share of similar situations in its long lifetime. The bird admired Jiang Chen all the more because of this. This was partially why it had remained impassive before Xiahou Jing's temptation.

It had already seen the responsibility and poise that had characterized the human leaders of yore in Jiang Chen. Though the young man was still incredibly fresh and immature, the direction he was going in was quite apparent.

"You're a real fast talker, boy." The glacial old man fumed at what he was hearing. "We secluded experts have a bigger picture of the proceedings. Do you think us the same as you mortal ants? Unlike you, we don't worry ourselves all day about the slightest of commotions."

"Same to you, old man! What's this big picture you're talking about? I don't see it at all. The first thing Shu Wanqing did when we met was ruin my plans, that old buffoon! He ended up joining the Order of Wind and Cloud, then disguised himself to pin a failed ambush on the Embittered Savages on me! If that's what the big picture told him to do, then you're all blind!" Jiang Chen was truly livid. These so-called hermit experts were masters of twisting fact into fiction.

The old man felt the same way. A man of his cultivation level made him one of the strongest among his secluded expert peers. Near the top, if not the pinnacle. In the human domain, he and his empyrean expert friends had always considered themselves above everyone else. Equality was an empty and meaningless concept for them.

Thus, they regarded it mandatory for each and every one of their actions to be upheld as an imperial decree for those in the mundane world. The disrespect that Jiang Chen embodied was completely unheard of!

“Who’s your backer, kid? Your ego is through the roof!” the old man inquired stonily.

“You’re trying to gather information from me now? If I said ‘nothing’, are you going to attack Veluriyam Capital immediately?” Jiang Chen shot back with a humorless half-smile.

“Hmph, you have no room to argue. No matter how strong the person behind you is, your unpermitted killing of Shu Wanqing is a crime most grave. Even if he was in the wrong, he was still one of humanity’s remaining empyrean experts. The removal of even a single one is a heavy blow to the pillars that support our race. Neither you nor Veluriyam can sustain the associated guilt!” He was attempting to be judge, jury, and executioner all in one.

“Are you planning to start your own court? Is that some kind of verdict you’re proclaiming?” Jiang Chen’s expression was mocking. “However...” he suddenly raised an eyebrow. “What right do you have to do any of that? What makes you qualified to spew ignorance before my gates? Just because you’re an empyrean expert?”

The old man piled on the pressure. “What? You don’t believe I have the right to condemn you for your crimes?”

“Certainly not,” Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

The Vermilion Bird hurtled into the heavens, its own aura bursting to life. Powerful tides of flame spread out in concentric circles, running counter to the old man’s glacial presence. The clash of ice and fire caused the temperature around Sacred Peafowl Mountain to return to normal levels.

“Senior Vermillion,” Jiang Chen proclaimed aloud, “there’s no need for you to exert yourself too much. Don’t be anxious. I’d like to see what this so-called human leader can do to me!”

A man fought harder when faced with condemnation.

The glacial old man had evidently noticed the strength of the Vermilion Bird. He silently retracted his pride, bracing himself.

He’d wondered on his journey here how someone of Shu Wanqing’s level had died at the hands of an ordinary kid. He’d come up with many ideas, finally concluding that Shu Wanqing had probably been tricked. How could a third level empyrean expert be killed by a mundane brat otherwise?

Coming to Sacred Peafowl Mountain made him think twice about that though. The sight of the Vermilion Bird and the eight stone golem brothers had gradually clued the old man into the possibility of another reason for Shu Wanqing’s death.

Moreover, the look he’d exchanged with Jiang Chen should have been enough to freeze the young man’s soul... And yet, his ocular strike hadn’t hurt Jiang Chen in the slightest. There had been a little mental oscillation, then nothing. It was a pebble dropped into a vast lake.

Because of this, the old man no longer looked down upon Jiang Chen.

He had come on wings of burning fury, intent on quashing the young upstart and his forces altogether. It seemed now that his initial sentiment had been far too naïve.

Biting back indignation, the old man glared at Jiang Chen with frost in his eyes. "Don't think that you'll escape judgment just because you have an ancient sacred beast behind you. I can smash you into the ground if I'm a bit more serious about it. Don't take me for a blind man! This ancient sacred bird has little of its lifespan left. It's nowhere near peak strength. If we fight with any rigor, it is eighty percent likely to die on the spot! Those big guys look intimidating, but I doubt they can match up to me."

The old man definitely had a keen eye. Jiang Chen's faint smile was unchanged. "If you're so sure, why waste words like this?"

At the same time, he turned to the Vermilion Bird. "Senior Vermillion, you don't need to do much here. Please, take a break. I'd like to try how far this old man's mettle will take him."

The Vermilion Bird was a bit surprised at Jiang Chen's declaration, but nodded and retreated nonetheless.

The eight stone golem brothers stood at Jiang Chen's side, clamoring for a piece of the action. "Young lord, let us brothers fight this old farts."

"Yeah, we hate old farts like him!"

"Not all old farts. Just cocky ones."

"Not just cocky either. Cocky and stu-u-u-upid!" The stone golem brothers clowned around, adding to each other's words in a circle.

The old man was positively incensed. Ever since he'd first made a name for himself, anyone that knew about him in the human world of martial dao had only shown him the epitome of courtesy and respect.

That he was being ridiculed and shamed to such a degree before Sacred Peafowl Mountain's gates...

Despite his rage, the old man didn't lose his reason before Jiang Chen's impudence, but there was a twinge of regret in his heart.

He had acted with too much haste and impatience this time. If he had two or three companions nearby, he would be in a much better place right now. It was partially his fault for being overconfident.

The old man took a deep breath at this thought. "Jiang Chen," he conceded emotionlessly, "it wasn't easy for you to get to this point from scratch. I'm giving you a final chance to profess your sins, and if you do, I promise I will intercede for your life. There is a condition, though: you must give up Shu Wanqing's storage ring and empyrean decree."

Jiang Chen snickered to himself. They were finally at the crux of the matter.

It was impossible for the old man to simply be here to seek justice for Shu Wanqing. Given the kind of person the expert had been in life, what kind of acquaintance could he possibly have had that would do that for him?

Any that did come would've only done so to protect the interests of empyrean experts as a whole, not Shu Wanqing on a personal level.

The old man had done a good impression of an indignant speech, but he was far from being a good person.

Now that the true motives were known, Jiang Chen finally understood his purpose for coming here. He hadn't come to seek justice for an old friend at all, but to engage in banditry.

Jiang Chen couldn't resist cracking a smile at the revelation. "This is what you came here for, right? Why circle around it so much? Shu Wanqing's storage ring and empyrean decree, hmm?"

"Quite. If you give me these two things, I can guarantee your life." The old man cut to the chase.

"You're saying I don't need to die if I give you these two things?"

"Obviously," the old man affirmed with some displeasure.

"Then..." Jiang Chen laughed. "I won't give them to you."

"Why? Aren't you afraid of an alliance of empyrean experts forming against you?" The frigid old man no longer hid his malicious attempt at intimidation.

Jiang Chen shook his head slowly and responded resolutely. "I am the master of my own destiny. You can't do anything to me. Those two things are my spoils and I won't give them up. You've made a mistake by trying to extort me."

"Hmm? Are you resisting to the bitter end then? Stupid." The old man thought that Jiang Chen would be swayed by the fact he'd given ground twice. But the young upstart hadn't given him the smallest modicum of respect.

The empyrean expert was furious. If he wasn't wary of the Vermilion Bird and the eight stone golem brothers – and Shu Wanqing's death besides – he would have begun a thunderous assault on Sacred Peafowl Mountain a long time ago.

"Resisting?" Jiang Chen smiled coolly. "If that's what you think, then so be it. Oh, and another thing: don't pretend like you're here to get even for your friend. Your actual reason for being here is obvious. You just want to loot the dead like a vulture! Shu Wanqing's corpse, to be exact. If you'd been polite about it at the outset, I might have considered negotiating with you. Alas, your behavior has disgusted me beyond my tolerance. Get out of here, you hear me? Scram!"

"So what if you're an empyrean expert? I've seen more than my fair share of them." Disdain was plainly writ on his face.

He wasn't boasting at all. In his previous life, even his shoe-shiner had been at least empyrean.

The old man's face colored. Clearly, his anger had flared up several times over. If not for his uncertainty, he wanted to arrest Jiang Chen on the spot and rip him to shreds. Only then would his hatred be abated.

Jiang Chen hadn't given him an inch. The only things he'd gotten today were a series of slaps against his cheeks.