

Three Realms 1631

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

Chapter 1631: Convening At Miracle City

“That’s enough, my friends. There’s no need for you to see me off any further. The most dangerous parts of the sea are past, and this place isn’t far from the Bluesmoke Isles. Don’t worry about me. Go back to Hell King Island!”

Though the Vermilion Bird and Long Xiaoxuan had agreed to Jiang Chen’s suggestion, they wanted to accompany the young man back to Bluesmoke. He refused their goodwill; seeing him through the most dangerous waters was more than enough. After all, it was quite possible they would encounter human cultivators if they went further.

Once that happened, there would be no end of trouble.

Human cultivators were the best at spreading rumors. It would only take a fortnight for news to spread from one person to the entirety of Myriad Abyss Island. These waters wouldn’t be safe after that.

“Remember the Vermilion Feather I gave you, young master Chen.”

“And my dragon scale,” Long Xiaoxuan reminded.

Jiang Chen smiled. “Don’t worry, I’ve put them away for safekeeping. If there’s trouble, I’ll use them for sure. I’m more scared of death than either of you, hahaha!”

The Vermilion Bird and Long Xiaoxuan had both given personal tokens of their utmost trust to Jiang Chen. If the human were to encounter any danger, he could refine the tokens to alert the bird and dragon. His position could then be pinpointed from the tokens, and they would go rescue him the quickest they were able.

Of course, the tokens were for extenuating circumstances only. Being safe was much more desirable.

After making their promises to each other, Jiang Chen’s figure disappeared into the air under Long Xiaoxuan’s reluctant gaze.

“Come on, Xiaoxuan. You’ve always seem so aloof. I thought you were only on middling terms with the young master. You rely on him a lot, huh?” The Vermilion Bird laughed kindly.

“He’s the only human I trust,” Long Xiaoxuan harrumphed.

The bird sighed softly. “I can’t exactly say the same, but he’s currently the human that I trust the most. I owe him a great favor.”

“Let’s go.” Long Xiaoxuan’s voice sounded oddly muffled.

“Yes, let’s.”

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Miracle City of the Bluesmoke Isles had become much more bustling as of late. The taverns and inns were filled up to their brims with visitors from all over. Some were wandering cultivators, others belonged to houses and sects.

Cultivators from the Ten Divine Nations obviously didn't take up lodgings in inns. As visitors to Bluesmoke, they were feted as the most honored guests. The local government buttered them up, providing discreet and grand residences for them – some were even official buildings.

They couldn't possibly appear in commercial residences of any sort.

Excitement enveloped Bluesmoke for several months as well. The isles had invited almost every large faction in the Ten Divine Nations to the jade festival.

Most had provided representatives to attend, which granted great prestige to the event. Clearly, the Bluesmoke Isles' jade festivals were reasonably attractive even to the Ten Divine Nations.

This was quite different to what had taken place on Winterdraw. Winterdraw had begged Polylore's eight houses to visit. Bluesmoke had merely invited. They were on a completely different level.

House Yan of Eternal Divine Nation was housed in a medium-sized residence. Their accommodations were decent enough, though they paled compared to the strongest factions in their nation. However, the house couldn't exactly complain.

Among Eternal Divine Nation's houses, House Yan had significantly declined in terms of rank and position. In fact, they were almost eliminated from being first-rate. They were lucky enough to get their own private residence. Bluesmoke could hardly be faulted for their treatment.

As one of House Yan's younger generation, Huang'er stood separate from the crowd. The other young geniuses were superficially polite to her, but they kept their distance deep down.

In their heart of hearts, these young geniuses considered her extremely unfortunate. They believed that some sort of bad luck stuck to Huang'er. Anyone who stayed near would be infected with misfortune.

Thus, they were courteous, but never invited Huang'er to any of their own outings.

Huang'er was content to keep her peace. She'd never wanted to build any relationships with these so-called young geniuses of the house in the first place. She was much happier that they chose to remain distant to her in private. In fact, she found their behavior and mannerisms mildly amusing.

No wonder House Yan is getting worse and worse over time. The younger generation is outdone by their elders. These youngsters are short-sighted and callous. How can anyone expect them to shoulder the house's responsibilities?

Deep down, she had no interest in mixing with these geniuses either. She didn't care for them one bit, nor did she hold them in any regard.

Having exchanged vows with Jiang Chen, her standards for young men were set impossibly high. Barely anyone could reach a passing grade in her mind, much less compare to Jiang Chen in any capacity.

"Elders, we've been here in Miracle City for many days now. I've spent all that time cooped up in this residence. I'd like to go out for a stroll today, if you permit it."

Four elders had come, but only two were seen to the public eye. Even Huang'er didn't know about the other two.

"Miss Huang'er, your trip was a hotly contested topic in the first place. We took a big risk in letting you come here. Please don't make things difficult for us."

"Yes, Miracle City is too crowded right now with unknown elements. What if something happens to you when you're out on your walk? How do we answer to the house?"

Huang'er frowned slightly. "There are so many others in the streets. What's happened to any of them? If I'd wanted to run away, I wouldn't have come back with Elder Xi. There's no need for you to be concerned."

The two elders exchanged glances. Huang'er looked too stubborn to dissuade.

After a moment, one of them sighed. "Huang'er, you can take a stroll if you like. But I must follow you with great embarrassment. It's not that I want to keep such close tabs on you, but the rest of the house can't afford any more missteps."

Huang'er nodded remotely. "That's fine. I have no objections if both elders want to follow me."

The elders breathed a sigh of relief at her understanding.

"Thank you for not causing us trouble, Huang'er. We're deeply regretful about your circumstances. But what can we do? House Yan is weaker than House Xiahou."

Huang'er returned a faint, silent smile.

She disguised herself slightly. She didn't want to draw any unwanted attention, since there really were too many strangers in Miracle City at the moment.

Given her natural appearance and manner, her safety couldn't be guaranteed simply being out and about. She was almost universally known as the prettiest girl among Eternal Divine Nation's younger generation.

Millions of people had swarmed into Miracle City over the past few months. It teemed with activity. Under the watchful eye of her house's experts, Huang'er cruised along the city's streets.

She wanted very much to openly ask around, but that would make her intentions too obvious. Alerting her family's wily old foxes would only ruin her plans in the long run. Everything was to be done without the appearance of impropriety.

Because of this, the locales that Huang'er chose to visit seemed rather odd.

One would expect girls to love looking at jewelry and delicacies. Huang'er, on the other hand, frequented solely taverns and bars where wandering cultivators gathered. Whenever she encountered an establishment that served alcohol, she would go in and have a few drinks.

House Yan's elders found this rather strange. Since when was Miss Huang'er such a shameless alcoholic?

But her actions quickly made more sense to them. It was normal to douse one's miseries with alcohol.

The older generation was more sympathetic to Huang'er's plight. It was a sad existence to be cursed by fate since one's birth. Alas, she had to be sacrificed for the sake of the house.

Because of this, the elders in charge of keeping an eye on Huang'er didn't prevent her from doing as she liked. As long as she didn't cause any real trouble, she was allowed free reign.

Huang'er wasn't going to the taverns and bars to drink. Instead, she was using her time there to gather information. These places tended to be hubs of rumor and gossip. Having traveled with Jiang Chen far and wide, she had a lot of experience in that field.

Unfortunately, the only subject that people seemed to want to talk about here in Miracle City was ancient jade. Discussion around jade seemed to be a perennially inexhaustible topic.

Polylore Divine Nation's bounty was hardly popular in contrast. In fact, the poster was relegated to the very corner of many notice boards, where no one paid any attention to it. Nothing could rival the popularity of the jade festival in this city.

The multitude of taverns Huang'er visited had yielded her no information whatsoever. This was a bit upsetting to the girl; had the matter sunk into obscurity after only a few months? Was there no one that would offer their opinion?

Where was that Jiang Huang? Would he come to Miracle City?

Huang'er was unsure even now whether Jiang Huang was Jiang Chen or not. Had her intuition failed her?

Finishing the wine in her cup, she turned to leave when she overheard a few tidbits from a nearby conversation. Several wandering cultivators were discussing something at an adjacent table.

"Have you heard? The wilderness near Oriole Valley saw some pretty amazing natural phenomena recently. According to people's analysis, it's quite possible that some kind of true dragon broke through there."

"I hear it was a well-kept secret for a bit, but someone exposed it very recently. The true dragon is very real, apparently. The draconic aura there hasn't dispersed completely yet."

"Sounds like fake news to me, honestly. Since when did the Bluesmoke Isles have a true dragon? Ridiculous. They're just making stuff up."

"Hard to say. What if a true dragon was passing by?"

"What, you saying that the true dragon came for the jade festival? Heh!" The wandering cultivators were so caught up in their conversation that they didn't notice Huang'er intently listening nearby.

A thought flickered into the girl's heart. A true dragon? I've never heard of such a creature in Myriad Abyss Island for tens of thousands of years.

The detail about the dragon kindled her excitement; she'd seen a true dragon before. There had been one at Sacred Peafowl Mountain!

Jiang Chen had a true dragon at his side called Long Xiaoxuan!

“A true dragon, Jiang Huang...” The fuzzy shadow in her heart grew more distinct and identifiable. She was sure that a joyful surprise was slowly approaching her.

There was a person hidden in the shadows, somewhere in the world, who was looking for her just as intently as she him. Perhaps the cogs of fate were turning anew!

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Chapter 1632: The Ancient Jade Festival

Traveling past the endless seas, Jiang Chen finally returned to the Bluesmoke Isles. His return to Miracle City found it much more bustling than his last visit. He heard wandering cultivators everywhere discussing the jade festival before he even entered the gates. Listening just a little was enough to yield a large helping of information.

“Hua Ming’s information was on point. The Bluesmoke Isles really did successfully invite the Ten Divine Nations’ peoples to the jade festival!” Jiang Chen was mildly astonished at this. Was it because of the Bluesmoke Isles’ prominence, or the value inherent in the ancient jade at the festival?

He guessed the latter was more likely. Otherwise, there wouldn’t have been so many in attendance from the ten nations in the first place. If the Ten Divine Nations’ largest factions have come, has House Yan as well? The youth’s heart quavered. Would Huang’er be with them?

He felt a certain anticipation about it. In theory, the possibility of her presence was extremely slim. But there was a strange thought in his head that it wasn’t totally out of the question.

Perhaps Huang’er has taken note of the name ‘Jiang Huang’ after hearing about Polylore’s bounty?

There had been a very good reason for Jiang Chen to use that pseudonym. It hinted at his arrival while keeping himself hidden. He firmly believed that Huang’er would be astute enough to take note of this fact. They had that much mutual understanding, at least.

It seems that the ancient jade festival will be more interesting than I first thought.

Still, he refrained from going out to gather any information himself. He chose instead to head for the inn he’d lodged at previously. Hua Ming was there waiting for him.

How is his cultivation doing after a few months?

The boy had spent the past few months laying low. He’d fully heeded Jiang Chen’s advice on the refinement of his own mental fortitude. It’d had a significant effect on him. When Jiang Chen saw him again, the immaturity was gone from his face. Much of his former flippancy and glibness had been pared away.

Though the boy wasn’t yet reliable, he’d grown a noticeable amount. The process had also honed his energy and keenness – characteristics unique to the young and vigorous.

“You’re finally back, master!” Hua Ming was overjoyed to see Jiang Chen again. He had yearned day and night for his master’s triumphant return.

And now, his honored master had come back to him.

“It looks like you haven’t forgotten my instructions, Hua Ming. Well done. Your mentality has been honed quite a bit, and your martial dao hasn’t suffered either. With a couple years of training, you can overcome your late start completely. In fact, you may be able to surpass those who started earlier than you. It all depends on your heart.”

Jiang Chen wasn’t worried about Hua Ming’s talent. The boy’s mentality was a bigger concern. If Hua Ming didn’t change his mindset, no amount of talent could rescue him. The late start for the boy was a chief sticking point.

But it seemed that Hua Ming quite cherished this life-changing opportunity.

“Master, you’ve given me a new life. Of course I will listen to your instructions. Oh, registration for the jade festival is about to close soon! You came to Miracle City to attend it, yes? There won’t be any more spots left if you don’t go register!”

“Hmm? When does it end?”

“In another four days,” Hua Ming replied anxiously. “If you hadn’t come back, master, I would’ve registered in your stead.”

“Haha, that’s plenty of time. Have you picked up any important information during this period?”

“I hear the Ten Divine Nations’ factions have all reached Miracle City already. But they live in very discreet spaces, and aren’t seen unless they choose to show themselves.”

“What else did you find out?” Jiang Chen asked.

“Only things related to the festival. I hear that the Bluesmoke Isles is placing a lot of importance on this year’s. Its scale is unrivaled in the past three thousand years – apparently in order to please the guests from the Ten Divine Nations. It’s said that if the Bluesmoke Isles can satisfy the Ten Divine Nations, maybe they’ll raise Bluesmoke up as the eleventh divine nation in a couple of years!”

“Haha, that’s just exaggerated gossip, isn’t it?” Jiang Chen didn’t find that particularly credible.

Perhaps the Bluesmoke Isles was a bit stronger than the Rejuvenation Isles, but a single ancient jade festival was unlikely to be enough to garner the Ten Divine Nations’ support in such a weighty undertaking.

If it were that easy to become a divine nation, then the title itself would be a lie.

All ten of the divine nations had various trials and illustrious histories beneath their belts. The Bluesmoke Isles was several levels below them.

Perhaps this was a smokescreen deployed by Bluesmoke for its benefit. It could lord over its neighbors with the reputation alone, even if the elevation turned out to be false.

Jiang Chen didn’t care about the specifics. Huang’er was a much more pressing topic of interest for him. Was she here? Because visitors from the Ten Divine Nations were honored guests, it was virtually

impossible to find out where they lived. Still, it wasn't a bad idea for him to take a walk around town to try his luck.

"Hua Ming, I'm planning to take part in the ancient jade festival. What do I need to register?"

"It depends on who you are. The largest factions from the Ten Divine Nations have several free entries per house. Factions from other isles have a few as well, varying depending on the strength of the isle in question. Wandering cultivators will need a security deposit and a registration fee. There's a test of some sort as well, and an age restriction."

"An age restriction too?"

"Yes. The festival isn't supposed to be a free lunch. There's no way they would let ancient, secluded experts join. Won't Bluesmoke be robbed clean otherwise? The festival allows only geniuses below sixty to attend."

A cultivator below sixty was like a mortal in their teenage or twenty-something years. Geniuses in this age bracket were considered youthful. It didn't apply to Jiang Chen.

"Keep cultivating at the inn, Hua Ming. I'm going to sign up and poke around for some information."

"Yes, master." Hua Ming agreed readily.

Jiang Chen exited the inn for the street. Pedestrians were denser than on his last visit. Miracle City had six places to register at. He found a reasonably close location.

Alas, the line for registration extended out the entrance. Since every other location was probably the same, Jiang Chen got in line.

It took over two hours for it to be his turn.

Each person admitted into Bluesmoke had papers to that effect. Only once their authenticity was verified was a registration accepted.

Age of the bones was the first to be tested. There was no duplicity possible on this front. Only someone under sixty could move on. After that, a series of other tests were performed, largely involving knowledge about ancient history and jade. This was no problem at all for Jiang Chen.

He quickly passed through.

"You will receive your right to a registered spot once you pay a security deposit of two hundred thousand sky spirit stones. Non-refundable, of course."

The 'security deposit' was the same as a registration fee. The ancient jade festival would span an entire month; a registered entrant could purchase as much jade as he liked during this time. If the value of his winnings exceeded the registration fee, that was his fortune.

If it was far off in the other direction, then he would eat the loss.

The security deposit was almost exorbitant, to be sure. It was hard for the typical wandering cultivator to earn it all back within a month. How much did unidentified jade ore retail for? The largest was only a thousand sky spirit stones.

Two hundred thousand meant two hundred pieces of the largest ore — an extremely difficult task. There was a glut of contestants, and thus fierce competition.

However, Jiang Chen thought it completely worthwhile. Two hundred thousand sky spirit stones wasn't much at all to the current him. But the scale of the ancient jade festival was sure to mean that a huge mining quarry would be opened to the public. This was a great chance to strike rich.

He happily paid out the two hundred thousand required to receive a registrant medallion. Now that he was registered, he was in no hurry to return to the inn. An excursion around the city would do him some good.

He was especially interested in dropping by the most extravagant of bars and brothels. The high-class houses of ill repute were the most popular gathering spots for youths of all stripes.

He wasn't there to cavort with the pretty girls, but to gather information. The young geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations were sure to prowl out and about. What places did young people favor the most?

Taverns and whorehouses, of course, and the higher class the establishment, the better.

It took only the slightest bit of asking around to find out the most famous purveyors of such services. Jade Revel Lodge was the closest. In fact, it was in his direct vicinity.

The very name evoked licentiousness. Apparently, the girls of this lodge were famous in all of the Bluesmoke Isles.

Moreover, it had exclusive possession of fox-girls from the Azure Fox Tribe. Even in Myriad Abyss Island, the race was an elusive one. The males of the tribe were a perverted bunch, but the females were uniformly bewitchingly exquisite women.

Because Azure Foxes weren't known for their martial prowess, fox-girls tended to congregate to brothels and other such locations. Since they were also scarce, every fox-girl was a valuable prize. And yet the Jade Revel Lodge had more than a dozen of these beauties! This was the source of its fame in Bluesmoke.

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Chapter 1633: Familiar Faces

Jiang Chen soon arrived at the famous Jade Revel Lodge. Contrary to other brothels, it was designed more like a classy garden than a whorehouse. Even the doorkeepers were all great emperor cultivators, a rather mind-boggling detail.

What surprised Jiang Chen the most was the brothel's demure character. There were no women outside the door clinging to potential clients or flirting with passersby. The entire establishment veered elegant rather than base and crude.

"Jade Revel Lodge is indeed a cut above the usual." Jiang Chen had never been to a brothel, but he needed to gather information. With his jaw tightened, he entered the door.

Once inside, a staff member immediately came up with a smile. "Sir, are you here for a drink or something else?"

"I've heard much about Jade Revel Lodge, so I've come to get a glimpse for myself. I'd like to have a few drinks where the action is and experience the atmosphere." Jiang Chen naturally wasn't interested in the fox-girls.

Jade Revel Lodge conducted their business in a very principled manner. The staff didn't ask who Jiang Chen was and didn't look down on him simply because he'd come alone.

He was led to a seat by the window. Outside, a lake that rippled in the breeze and presented quite a pleasing sight.

"Here's your wine, sir. And the fruit and delicacies you ordered."

Jiang Chen nodded.

"You've come alone, sir. Would you like one of our girls to share a few drinks with you?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I'll let you know if I want a companion."

He had no need of one.

He sat at the table, leisurely enjoying his jug of wine while he used his consciousness to scan the other patrons. They all looked like people of high status. Regular wandering cultivators wouldn't come to a place such as this. The more well-established ones were the exceptions.

Jiang Chen didn't find anything useful after spending some time observing. After all, none of the patrons would announce that they were from the Ten Divine Nations. He was in no hurry. Another large group entered the brothel after fifteen minutes.

Jiang Chen was shocked when he got a good look at them. They were the Polylore geniuses who'd visited Winterdraw. He didn't expect them to come to Miracle City as well!

He hadn't cross paths with them in the Blackwraith Mountains and was now dressed differently. The geniuses therefore didn't notice him.

Jiang Chen counted about a dozen of them. Some of the ones he'd seen were missing, and some that were present were new. The new ones looked a little older, about Jiang Chen's age, if not even more.

The young men he'd seen on Winterdraw were mostly teenagers and young adults. None of them had been over thirty.

The group went straight to the private room they had reserved. Coincidentally, it wasn't far from Jiang Chen's table. He would be able to hear everything that happened inside. He pretended to not notice them. His consciousness, on the other hand, was listening in on their conversation.

They were talking animatedly about House Kuang, Xue, and Xuen of the eight aristocratic families. It was obvious from their tone that they were rejoicing in the three families' suffering. There was no doubt that the eight families didn't get along.

“Haha, I heard that the three families are protesting to Miracle City that the city isn’t taking their bounty seriously!”

“They’re out of their minds! What an embarrassment to Polylore they are!”

“I know, right? How shameless are they to spread the scandal? It’s been such a long time, are all three houses useless? They can’t even capture a murderer! No matter how powerful the murderer is, he can’t possibly vanish from this world.”

“The longer this drags on, the more serious the repercussions are. In my opinion, the three families are going to be the butt of the joke on Myriad Abyss Island if things don’t get resolved soon.”

“There’s no if about it. They already are the butt of the joke!”

From the mocking tones, it was clear that they had no sympathy for the three families. Instead, they found the whole ordeal amusing.

“It’s odd. Who exactly is this Jiang Huang? Even the authorities of Winterdraw Island don’t know who he is. Moreover, every person he’s come in contact with on the island has disappeared without a trace. It’s like they never existed.”

“Who cares about his identity? He must be someone with great influence. He wouldn’t have been able to take out Kuang Rong and Xuan Rui otherwise.”

“We got lucky. If we were the ones to get into this mess, we probably wouldn’t get off any better than the two of them.”

“Pfft, don’t compare us to that trash! I don’t think Jiang Huang is that strong. They were just too weak.”

Wasn’t the bounty for two people? How come I’ve become their only target?

Despite his bafflement, Jiang Chen didn’t care that much. He never expected Su Hong to share much of his burden. Besides, he wanted Huang’er to hear about Jiang Huang.

After a while, the group changed the subject to talk about the jade festival.

That was something Jiang Chen was interested in as well. He wanted to know how many delegates there were from the Ten Divine Nations. How had the major factions allocated their quota?

“I’ve been walking around Miracle City the past few days. The city really has created many miracles when it comes to ancient jade.”

“True. It’s about the only attraction in the Bluesmoke Isles. The ancient jade stones contain many heritages left from the ancient times. Encountering one of them will be a once in a lifetime experience.”

“Uh huh! That’s why the Ten Divine Nations is putting so much emphasis on the festival. They’re hoping they’ll get lucky.”

“Bluesmoke is generous to invite us here without asking for anything in return. If we take all the good stuff, they’re going to feel the loss keenly.”

“Tsk, they’re just trying to butter up the Ten Divine Nations like the Rejuvenation Isles.”

"You're wrong. Bluesmoke isn't at the same level as Rejuvenation. In Rejuvenation's case, it's an attempt to curry favor. In Bluesmoke's case, it's a favor given. The circumstances are different."

"Maybe so. Bluesmoke is very well governed. Everything is in perfect order. It's miles ahead of Rejuvenation."

Jiang Chen could tell from their comments that they preferred the Bluesmoke Isles and took issue with Rejuvenation. The conversation was sporadic, and the topics they talked about were trivial. Frankly, it was getting rather boring.

"Why aren't you saying anything, Brother Ye Zhou?" One of them suddenly piped up.

"Hehe, don't you know that our Brother Ye Zhou is in love?"

"What? Is it true, Brother Ye Zhou?"

A slightly older man smiled slightly. "Keep chatting. Why did you drag this foolish brother into your conversation? Don't spread such nonsense, or I'll kick your butt."

Ye Zhou was clearly a mild-tempered man. It was obvious that he was the most respected and influential person in the group. And yet these young geniuses had dared to tease him.

Of course, they knew not to cross the line with their jokes, lest they upset Ye Zhou.

"Is it true that you're in love, Brother Ye Zhou? Who's the girl?"

"Hehe, there are sixteen golden hairpins in the Ten Divine Nations. Shall we have a guess at which Brother Ye Zhou has set his eyes on?"

Sixteen golden hairpins?

Jiang Chen blinked in surprise. That was a thing? Was this kind of thing part of the popular culture in the Ten Divine Nations?

"Is she from our Polylore?"

"Nonsense. If it's someone from Polylore, it'd be an honor for the woman no matter who she is."

"Hehe, among the eight aristocratic families in Polylore, House Ye is the unequivocal first. Among the sixteen beauties, only one of them is from Polylore, and that one's Brother Ye Zhou's younger sister, Ye Ying. So I don't think the woman Brother Ye Zhou's in love with is from Polylore."

"Come on, Brother Ye Zhou, tell us! Maybe we'll be able to give you some ideas."

Ye Zhou was a handsome and elegant man. There was an air of nobility to him. He folded his fan and knocked on the table. "Alright, you're forgetting yourself. Drink up and stop gossiping."

The young men laughed and cheered as they drank. Their deference for Ye Zhou was obvious.

"Let me guess, Brother Ye Zhou, is it Holy Girl Yao Guang from Radiance Divine Nation?"

"Or Miss Yuling from Martial Divine Nation?"

"Yan Qinghuang from Eternal Divine Nation?"

Jiang Chen took notice when he heard the name Yan Qinghuang. He didn't care about the others. Yan Qinghuang was Huang'er's full name. His curiosity was therefore piqued.

Is Huang'er one of the sixteen golden hairpins of the Ten Divine Nations?

To put it simply, a golden hairpin was a woman as beautiful as a goddess, publicly acclaimed for her beauty. The list of sixteen in the Ten Divine Nations ranked the top comprehensive beauties. Everything from talent to popularity was taken into account.

Jiang Chen missed some of the conversation due to his distraction.

"Give us a hint, Brother Ye Zhou. It must be one of the sixteen beauties. My guess is Miss Yuling. Am I right?"

"By the way, do you know how many of the sixteen beauties have come this time?"

"I know that Holy Girl Yao Guang is here. Miss Yuling too."

"Also Holy Girl Si Tong from Sunrise Divine Nation."

The group demonstrated their deep reserves of information. They brought up every of the sixteen beauties with great familiarity.

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Chapter 1634: Houses Yan and Xiahou

The fellows continued in heated discussion about the Ten Divine Nations' sixteen beauties.

"That's right, has Eternal Divine Nation's Miss Yan Qinghuang come?"

"She shouldn't have, right?"

"I hear that because of past enmity between their houses, she was reserved by House Xiahou's Xiahou Zong when she was young?"

"Something like that, yeah. House Xiahou has grown rapidly in recent years, while House Yan has only declined. What a shame. Miss Huang'er is in the top three among the sixteen, but she's fated to become Xiahou Zong's cultivation vessel."

"Isn't Xiahou Zong worried that he'll become a public enemy in our circle?"

"Heh, that's between their two houses. It's not our place to interfere."

"That's not technically wrong, but it's a waste for someone like her to become a cultivation vessel. What a buzz kill. I think many geniuses will secretly hate Xiahou Zong. If there's a battle between geniuses of different divine nations in the future, he'll have no shortage of eager opponents. Many will target him without even realizing it!"

"That's definitely possible, though I hear Xiahou Zong's extremely talented and capable. If he's not the top genius in the Eternal Divine Nation, he's at least one of the best contenders for it. I hear that House

Xiahou has boasted he'll take the crown in a battle between the Ten Divine Nations' younger generation."

"What, he thinks he'll win? I hope his bite can match up to his bark. If he wants that accolade, he'll have to answer to our Brother Ye Zhou first!"

"Enough," Ye Zhou smiled coolly. "We shouldn't gossip about others behind their backs. I've met Xiahou Zong once, and he is every bit as talented as they say. But every participant in the battle of geniuses is a genius himself, no? Perhaps the bit about taking the crown is only hearsay."

"Has Xiahou Zong come to the festival?"

"I hear he's been cultivating behind closed doors for several years now. He hasn't come out yet, right? If he did, Miss Huang'er would be done for."

"So he shouldn't have come then."

"What does it matter to us? I don't give a hoot about him. I just want to know whether Miss Huang'er's here."

"No idea. Let's ask someone from the Eternal Divine Nation when we spot one next."

"Why ask? The jade festival is about to begin. She'll be at the festival if she's come at all."

"Haha, you're right. Just the thought of seeing the sixteen beauties together is so crazy exciting. They'd be the most beautiful sight in the world!"

"Oh, for sure. I'd give up ten years of my life for a single look at the full set."

Jiang Chen found the conversation rather amusing. These so-called geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations weren't so different from ordinary people. The only significant distinction was their status and social circles.

The affairs they paid attention to, the things they cared about – there were more similarities there to normal cultivators. Martial dao, pretty women, and all kinds of exciting rumors and stories.

As he lost himself in their words, another group came up from the corner of the stairs.

Polylore Divine Nation's group caught sight of them from the window. "Aren't those guys from Eternal?" someone cried out.

There was a dozen or so in this new group as well, demarcated into a number of different houses.

Jiang Chen was shaken by the loud comment. He glanced over at the group at the top of the stairs.

Huang'er was nowhere to be found.

He burst into quiet laughter. His concern had overtaken reason. How would a girl like Huang'er come to a pleasure house like this? Still, he kept an eye on the Eternal group with his peripheral vision. He wanted to see if anyone else from House Yan was here.

“Yan Jinnan, I invited Brother Xiahou for you. You said you were going to apologize on your house’s behalf to him. I’d like to see your sincerity in that.” One of the youths who looked rather pale in the face delivered this indifferently to another in a yellow tunic.

The young man in yellow was Yan Jinnan, a scion of House Yan. His expression was full of appeasement and servility.

There were a few others dressed similarly near him. They were clearly from House Yan as well, having invited a number of their peers from Eternal’s other large factions.

But everyone deferred to a silver-eyed young man. He looked almost boyish, yet had a mane of signature, silver hair. The silvery locks near his temples were especially striking. While he stood, no one else dared sit. They were uniformly meek in their attitudes toward him.

“Everyone, sit down and talk.” The silver-eyed youth was another genius from Eternal’s House Xiahou, Xiahou Xi.

The others in his group complied with his declaration, save for a few simpering youths from House Yan.

“Big brother Xiahou, we ventured to invite you here today as a token of apology... please feel free to spend as much as you like today. House Yan will pay for everything, as long as you’re happy.” Yan Jinnan tried to liven up the atmosphere.

He fawned palpably over Xiahou Xi. He was very much worried about relations between House Yan and House Xiahou. If they worsened, the former could very well be pushed out of the ranks of first-rate factions by the other houses.

No one in the house wanted to see that.

Yan Jinnan was sending out a friendly signal through this private gathering to butter up Xiahou Xi as well as his Eternal Divine Nation peers. His objective was to not get kicked out of their social circle.

“Yan Jinnan, was it?” Xiahou Xi smiled faintly. “How come House Yan’s biggest genius isn’t here? Where’s Yan Zhenhuai?”

“Haha, he’s cultivating behind closed doors right now. The house didn’t tell him to come.”

“Is that so? What a shame.” Xiahou Xi’s tone was even-handed and difficult to respond to.

Outside, Jiang Chen was secretly astonished. Yan Jinnan, Xiahou Xi!

From what it sounded like, someone from House Yan was trying to curry favor with House Xiahou. And I just happened to run into it!

This immediately piqued his interest. The relationship between Houses Yan and Xiahou was what he was most concerned about currently. This directly related to Huang’er’s circumstances.

“Big brother Xiahou, Brother Zhenhuai has always said that you were one of the top geniuses of House Xiahou. He’s reminded us time and again to constantly ask for your advice and greet you with respect. That’s why we brothers dared to request your generous presence today.”

Xiahou Xi smiled coolly. "Alright, enough with the courtesies. I don't represent the rest of my house, you know."

"Yes, yes. We don't either. We merely wanted to express our utmost respect for you." Yan Jinnan was the perfect image of adulation.

Jiang Chen inwardly shook his head. House Yan didn't appear to be in a good spot if such kowtowing was reasonable. Xiahou Xi's presumptuous airs indicated a total disregard for the people acting as his lackeys today.

"Yan Jinnan, how come I hear that Yan Qinghuang came to Miracle City as well?" Xiahou Xi asked suddenly.

Yan Jinnan trembled. The blood went out of his face, but he dared not deny it. "Yes, she did. The house didn't want her to come, but she threatened us with death. She really wanted to get some fresh air, you see, and no one wanted to push her too far. The house elders are keeping an eye on her, so she shouldn't be able to pull off any tricks. I doubt she has any hope left anyway. She's done nothing out of the ordinary so far."

Xiahou Xi snickered. "House Yan should keep a closer tab this time. If something happens, you better watch out for House Xiahou's fury."

"Yes, yes, she won't be allowed to escape our control again!" guaranteed Yan Jinnan.

Jiang Chen's heart was set aflame. Such fortuitous news!

It was fantastic that Huang'er had come. Unfortunately, she lived under the watchful eye of her house elders. It wasn't possible for her to do much to resist.

He was overcome with emotion. Huang'er's fine. She's alright still.

As long as that was the case, no other bad news could faze him. This was the only thing he'd wanted to hear. Moreover, she was here in Miracle City too!

I have to see her. His heart raced with anticipation.

Though Huang'er would certainly appear at the jade festival, Jiang Chen couldn't wait that long. He wasn't much interested in listening to these guys talk anymore. He wanted to sprout wings and fly to where Huang'er was. But where was she? Miracle City was such an enormous place. It wasn't going to be easy to find her without at least a hint.

That's right, if Yan Jinnan and his groupies are in the same house as Huang'er, they should share the same accommodations. If I follow him back, I'll know where Huang'er lives!

An issue with that idea popped into his head immediately. The Ten Divine Nations' accommodations must be very well hidden. I may be caught if I blindly follow House Yan's youths. If the house's elders are alerted ahead of time to my intentions, it will be very bad for us.

This made him hesitate as to what to do next. From what he could glean from Yan Jinnan's words, Huang'er was under strict supervision. It would be nearly impossible to approach Huang'er without her captors not noticing.

Sneaking into House Yan's temporary residence was nothing but a daydream. Jiang Chen's current cultivation level couldn't remotely accomplish that feat, even considering his concealment talisman.

I need to find a more aboveboard way of getting into where House Yan is. Jiang Chen's brain began to whirl with a new plan. His eyes lingered on Yan Jinnan and company. If there was a point of attack to be found, it would be through these people.

Still, he was thoroughly disgusted by how Yan Jinnan fawned over Xiahou Xi. The man was vile all around. A genius of a large faction without any self-respect was worthless.

One of the other geniuses from House Yan looked different. A lanky youth didn't seem to be particularly pleased about the proceedings. Though his companions hinted to him otherwise, he didn't cooperate willingly; his brow was slightly furrowed the entire time.

He looks a bit more interesting. Jiang Chen locked his consciousness onto the new guy.

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

Chapter 1635: Approaching Proactively

Jiang Chen couldn't bear to see Yan Jinnan's deferential attitude, but it wasn't his place to interfere. Instead, he focused his gaze upon the thin youth. This House Yan scion was evidently being forced against his will.

A single round of toasts later, the youth put his cup down and raised a cupped fist salute. "Friends, I have a few matters to attend to. Please excuse me." He motioned to leave as soon as he finished saying this farewell.

Yan Jinnan's face darkened. "What are you doing, Qingsang?"

The lanky youth's name was Yan Qingsang. As a young genius of his house, his position was possibly even lower than Yan Jinnan's. His heart was in the right place though, and he was a straightforward sort. He couldn't stand Yan Jinnan's obsequious behavior and thus was taking his leave early.

"Brother Jinnan, I haven't felt well these past few days. Perhaps my inner demons are attacking me. Please suffer this small indiscretion and allow me to return and rest." Yan Qingsang was filled with a bellyful of displeasure, but he knew this wasn't the time to get angry. The most he could do was bite it back and take a low posture.

Yan Jinnan was somewhat exasperated. It had taken quite a bit of effort to get Xiahou Xi to come, and for what? For maintaining their social standing, obviously! He didn't want House Yan's young geniuses to be pushed out and ostracized by their peers in Eternal Divine Nation.

Why was Yan Qingsang not playing along with him at such a critical time? He wasn't happy at all.

"Sit down!" Yan Jinnan commanded.

Xiahou Xi laughed softly. "It seems you barely have any authority in House Yan, Yan Jinnan. If you can't settle affairs at home, why invite the rest of us? Did you want us to come laugh at you?"

Everyone in attendance cackled and jeered. The words added insult to injury; Yan Jinnan's expression became even darker.

The young geniuses from the other houses had no skin in the game. They peered at Yan Jinnan through supercilious smiles, not a single one interested in interceding for him.

Yan Qingsang became blue in the face. He stood in place, his chest heaving a little. The other two scions of House Yan also glared at him, pressuring him as well as they could.

After an internal struggle, Yan Qingsang exhaled softly. "Sorry, Brother Jinnan. Apologies, everyone." Raising a cupped fist salute once more, he went down the stairs without turning back.

Yan Jinnan flew into a rage. He stood up and was about to give chase when Polylore's room door opened.

Ye Zhou marched out, the other geniuses from his divine nation close behind.

"It sure is lively outside," he smiled. "Fellow geniuses from Eternal Divine Nation, hmm? I am Ye Zhou."

Ye Zhou?

Everyone from Eternal colored at the name. Even Xiahou Xi had to stand.

Ye Zhou was a genius from Polylore's strongest house, House Ye. Moreover, he was as well known and reputed as Xiahou Xi's clan brother, Xiahou Zong.

Even the arrogant genius from House Xiahou was diminished before him.

"Big brother Ye Zhou." Xiahou Xi's arrogance was completely gone. His tone became exceedingly humble. "This little brother is Xiahou Xi. My heartfelt greetings."

"Greetings, big brother Ye Zhou." All of the geniuses from Eternal Divine Nation raised cupped fist salutes.

Ye Zhou smiled a little. "We are all fellow daoists and travelers. There's no need for so much courtesy. What a shame that Brother Xiahou Zong hasn't come today, though. I've missed him since our last meeting."

Xiahou Xi laughed ingratiatingly. "Big brother Zong has often mentioned you as well, big brother Ye Zhou. He says you are one of the few he respects in our generation."

Ye Zhou was clearly a well-composed individual. He didn't become puffed up because of Xiahou Xi's praise. "He rates me too highly then."

Conveniently enough, the meeting of the two groups covered for Yan Qingsang's departure. Though Yan Jinnan was still sore about it, there was no place for him to speak now. He awkwardly stood to the side.

Jiang Chen had no interest in listening to the two groups catch up with each other. He glanced at Ye Zhou, committing the young man to memory, then put down what he owed for his drinks and left.

Once outside of the establishment, he saw that Yan Qingsang had gone several miles ahead of him. He caught up quickly with the indignant youth.

"Please give me a moment, friend." This was no time to be shy. Jiang Chen called out to Yan Qingsang. The young man in question wasn't in a good mood. He blinked when he turned around. "Who're you?" Jiang Chen smiled a little. "Just a patron at Jade Revel Lodge just now."

"You followed me?" Yan Qingsang's eyes widened in fury. He was typically a nice enough person, but events in recent memory had made him extremely irritable. Plus, no one would be happy about being followed.

"Oh, don't misunderstand!" Jiang Chen waved hurriedly, offering another smile. "I had a business proposition I wanted to be so bold as to ask you about. I'm looking for a reliable partner, you see."

"Not interested." As a scion of a great house, Yan Qingsang was uninterested in commercial ventures. Compared to that, Yan Jinnan's shameless behavior was a much more interesting sticking point. House Yan really was going downhill if that kind of groveling was necessary!

Jiang Chen sighed. "Are all the geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations as patronizing as this? How sad. I have a perfect plan for making a ton of stones. It won't work if no one recognizes my talent."

"What kind of 'perfect plan' do you have?" Yan Qingsang sneered.

Because Jiang Chen was dressed like a wandering cultivator, the young man from House Yan was rather suspicious whether the stranger had anything of value to offer in the first place.

"Are you interested in hearing about it, friend?" Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "It's related to the jade festival."

"No." Yan Qingsang shook his head, turned around, and set off.

"How absurd. I don't know exactly where you come from, friend, but I happened to see everything that happened in the Jade Revel Lodge. Your status in the house is quite average, no? And your house is quite average among its peers too. If you're unhappy about these things, why not take a chance to improve your position? And perhaps your house's too, in the process."

Jiang Chen hit several key notes in Yan Qingsang's heart. It was enough to compel the youth to halt in his tracks.

"What're you getting at?" Yan Qingsang stared at Jiang Chen coldly.

"The Bluesmoke Isles has placed a lot of importance on this jade festival. Many ancient ruins are being opened up to the public. Aren't the Ten Divine Nations gathered together here to search for treasure?"

"So what if we are?"

"There you have it then. I've a method I inherited from my forefathers to identify ancient jade with striking accuracy. Because I'm a wandering cultivator, I won't be able to make it out intact with too much treasure. That's why I want a larger faction I can cooperate with, ideally one with a good sense of right and wrong. After all, I'm not interested in sleeping with the fishes after my usefulness is spent." Jiang Chen had already made up this speech when he exited the Lodge.

Yan Qingsang scrutinized the purported guru before him more closely.

"Identifying ancient jade? If you have that kind of skill, wouldn't Bluesmoke be turned upside down by now? You can only trick little children with a lie like that!"

"Haha, none of my ancestors are as talented as I am. It seems I've learned it better than any of those before me. I've only recently made my way into the world, so I haven't had time to test extensively yet, but I have profited several times over already. If you don't believe me, why don't we try it on any jade store you like?"

"What's your success rate?" mused Yan Qingsang.

"When most people bet on jade, they rely on their luck alone. The more skillful gamblers might be able to strike gold one in a thousand times. But my method has to do with the uniqueness of my bloodline as well. I can get it right somewhere between one in ten to a hundred."

Jiang Chen didn't paint too grand a picture.

"Oh?" Yan Qingsang became more interested. "You sure you're not making stuff up?"

"Try me." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

"Alright. I'd like to see if you really are as good as you say." Yan Qingsang wanted to see this miraculous skill with his own eyes.

"Pick any jade store you like. You'll see that I'm not tricking you then." Jiang Chen was forthright about it because he wanted to win Yan Qingsang's trust.

The young man from House Yan nodded. "Sure. Like you said, I'll pick."

He'd become strangely trusting because of Jiang Chen's confidence. They strode toward a street with an abundance of jade stores. Such avenues were trivial to find in Miracle City.

Yan Qingsang didn't head for a large store. Instead, he arbitrarily chose a smaller one. "Here's fine."

Jiang Chen nodded. "Alright. If you're not happy with the place, we can switch anytime."

"I see no problems with here," Yan Qingsang chuckled. "If you can find one piece of valuable jade within a hundred, I'll believe you."

"I don't think we'll need that many. Thirty should be enough. I'll have to select the ore myself though."

"Of course," Yan Qingsang acquiesced readily.

They wandered around the store. Jiang Chen slowly searched the stockpiles on the shelves. There wasn't much jade that contained ancient heritage in the first place. Sometimes none existed even in a hundred pieces. Therefore, the selection process wasn't an easy one.

He made one round, then a second.

"The jade here is too mediocre. Shopkeeper, is there any new stock?" asked Jiang Chen.

"There's a VIP area inside. However, the price will be three times that of here," the shopkeeper replied.

"Well, let's go have a look." Yan Qingsang took the initiative.

Under the guidance of an employee, the two men entered the VIP area. There were significantly fewer people here, though plenty of jade still. As a result, there was much less competition for rifling through the ore.

Jiang Chen nodded slightly to himself, then renewed his search.

It didn't take long this time. He carefully combed through the stockpiles for an hour before he produced twenty pieces of raw jade. "These will do."

"Friend, each piece here is three thousand sky spirit stones."

"I'll take them. Wrap them up for me." Yan Qingsang made the purchase without thinking twice. A scion of House Yan didn't need to care about such a trifling sum.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1636: Completing the First Step of the Goal

Yan Qingsang handled payment. He hadn't interfered at all while Jiang Chen was selecting the ores. Once they left the shop, he asked calmly, "Do you think there's any ancient jade among these ores?"

"The possibility is very high," Jiang Chen answered with a smile. "If you don't believe me, we can go have them appraised."

He'd picked the ores with great care. There might not be a hidden treasure of the kind he'd discovered in Oriole Valley, but he believed there was at least one ancient jade with heritage in the batch.

"Come then." Yan Qingsang wasn't one to waste time on talking.

They entered another shop. It took many steps to appraise an ore, which wasn't something they could do manually.

A formation designed to process the ores was needed to peel away the surface. It required a professional's delicate approach throughout. One mistake was all it took to compromise the ore's structure and destroy the ancient jade. Therefore, not everyone could process an ore on their own. Thankfully, the processing fee wasn't that expensive.

The two of them paid the fee and followed the processing expert into the workshop. The expert fired up the formation and got to work. When he got to the sixteenth ore, he breathed lowly, "There's something here!"

The surface of the ore was gradually ground down to reveal the glow of an ancient jade. In no time at all, the entire ancient jade was on display for all to see.

The expert sucked in a breath. "Hot damn, this sure is something. I can say for sure it's of premium quality. Are you willing to sell it, my friend?"

"How much will you pay for it?" Yan Qingsang asked nonchalantly.

"This peasant can't afford it! But I can contact a buyer. According to my estimation, this is worth at least a couple millions!"

Jiang Chen smiled. "We're not selling for anything less than three million!"

The expert simpered. "You know the business alright. You might be able to get three million if you auction the jade, but stores will only pay about one and a half million to one million eight hundred thousand! If you're going to auction it, the price will be affected by the market, and there'll be a processing fee."

"Alright, there are still some ores left. I'll keep going." The expert calmed himself and continued to process the ores. There were no other surprises. The rest of the ores yielded nothing. But the one hunk of jade alone was good enough.

Yan Qingsang still hadn't recovered after they left the shop. He held up the ancient jade and considered it. It was a fine piece of wild ancient jade. A mild cooling presence brimmed inside. It was likely to be a treasure that imparted calm and serenity.

What was special about Bluesmoke Jade was that every piece of wild jade contained a different heritage and served a different purpose.

Some were ingredients for medicine. Some could be used to refine other treasures. Some could be worn as personal items. Some recorded ancient cultivation methods. Others held great energy. There was even jade that contained ancient bloodlines.

One could say that Bluesmoke Jade contained the most fascinating ancient jades in Myriad Abyss Island. That was why it was so popular, and why people from the Ten Divine Nations were willing to come all the way for it.

The prospect of high return made it an attractive investment. Buying a random piece of jade could give one ten, a hundred, or even a thousand times the value back.

Yan Qingsang couldn't be more excited. It took some time for him to calm down. He stared at Jiang Chen. "I still haven't asked your name, my friend."

"I am Shao Yuan."

The alias Jiang Huang could no longer be used after what'd happened in Winterdraw, so Jiang Chen picked the old name he had used in the human domain.

The human domain was worlds apart from this place, and Shao Yuan had never been that well known. Even in the human domain, only a handful of people knew of it. More importantly, Huang'er knew the name Shao Yuan.

If one day the alias was burned as well, Jiang Chen planned to use the identity Zhen Shi the pill king, which Huang'er knew as well.

However, Pill King Zhen was too famous. Jiang Chen worried that Elder Xi might have heard of it. That was why Jiang Chen chose to call himself Shao Yuan rather than Pill King Zhen.

"Very good. I'm curious, Shao Yuan," said Yan Qingsang. "Do you know me?"

Jiang Chen shook his head. "We've never met."

"Then why did you pick me?" Yan Qingsang remained cautious even though a great opportunity was waving at him.

"It was just good timing. I've been looking for geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations to find myself a reliable partner, but you know how geniuses from big factions are. Many of them aren't necessarily dependable. I won't settle for anyone but the trustworthy sort."

Yan Qingsang smiled slightly. "Oh? You think I'm trustworthy?"

"You were the most upstanding one from the group at your table. That Jinnan from your family? Not so much."

Yan Qingsang sighed. "Don't say that. He holds a higher status in the family than I do."

"He might not in the future." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Yan Qingsang perked up. It was obvious that he was seriously considering the possibility as well.

"I still don't know your name after all this time, my friend." Jiang Chen knew the answer already but just wanted to get more information.

"I'm Yan Qingsang from House Yan of the Eternal Divine Nation."

"House Yan?" Jiang Chen affected a surprised look. "So you are from the famous House Yan. I thought it was different Yan character and was wondering who you were."

Since he had assumed the role of a wandering cultivator, he shouldn't appear to be too knowledgeable, or his cover might be blown.

"Do you know House Yan?"

"I've heard of it." Jiang Chen nodded. "Before you entered the brothel, the men from Polylore Divine Nation were talking about House Yan."

"Oh?" Yan Qingsang blinked. "What did they say?"

"They mentioned a woman from your family and a House Xiahou. Oh, and they talked about the sixteen golden hairpins."

Yan Qingsang scoffed. "How ridiculous. They waste all their time talking about women."

Jiang Chen knew when to stop and turned to Yan Qingsang. "The jade festival is coming in a few days, Brother Yan. Please tell me if you'd like to take my offer. If you don't, I'll look for another partner. I'm going big or going home."

Determination flashed through Yan Qingsang's eyes. "I'll do it. There's no reason for me to turn you down. But what can I do for you?"

"You don't have to do anything but to lend me your identity as a member of House Yan. I'll give you half of the ancient jade I acquire in the festival."

Yan Qingsang hummed. "You're taking only ores from the mines. Why would anyone give you trouble even if you take a great amount with you?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "You're underestimated those of the world. I have a secret method. Who knows if anyone else of higher power in the Bluesmoke Isles won't be able to sense what I can do?"

"If there's someone like that, you know better than I do what will happen to a wandering cultivator in possession of great treasure."

Yan Qingsang found no flaws in Jiang Chen's explanation after a once-over. He made up his mind.

"Alright. We have a deal."

Jiang Chen mentally celebrated his success, but kept a calm expression. "Then we should find a place to go over the details."

Yan Qingsang checked the sky. "It's getting late. How about another day?"

"Time is precious. If we don't talk about the details, all our work may turn out to be for nothing. Besides, I have to get to know Brother Yan as well. I don't want my efforts to be in vain. How about we talk in the inn I'm staying at?" Jiang Chen played a masterful game of cat and mouse.

"I..." Yang Qingsang hesitated before shaking his head. "My family has strict rules. What's more, I got into an argument with Yan Jinnan today. If I don't return tonight, he's going to talk me down in front of the elders again."

"Well... that's a problem." Jiang Chen put on a hesitant look.

Yan Qingsang gave it a moment. "How about you come back to where I live, and we'll talk there?"

He was a cautious man. He didn't think anyone would dare take advantage of House Yan, but there were precautions he had to take. It was safer to invite Jiang Chen back to the manor than to go to this stranger's inn. Yan Qingsang had nothing to worry about in his own territory.

Besides, he wanted to keep Jiang Chen in his pocket and prevent him from going to other people. He wouldn't let the others acquire the help of someone with such a unique skill. The opportunity to profit was his and his alone.

It was undeniable that Yan Qingsang had a quick mind. Nonetheless, he would never fathom that his offer was exactly what Jiang Chen had been angling for from the beginning. He wanted to get closer to the manor the Yan families were staying in. His heart pounded at Yan Qingsang's invitation.

Jiang Chen almost blurted out his agreement, but he managed to stop himself. In a hesitant tone, he said, "Is that appropriate? I've heard that the biggest factions in the Ten Divine Nations are staying in the most obscure regions in Miracle City. No one knows where to find you. If wandering cultivators like me barge into your manor unnoticed, won't the elders in your family disapprove of me, or even threaten me?"

"Relax. I'm not a complete nobody in the family. Who's going to criticize my friend? The family didn't ban us from making friends in the Bluesmoke Isles!"

Jiang Chen sighed. "Alright, I hope Brother Yan is telling the truth. I did come to you because I trusted you."

"It's fate that you came to me. As long as you don't betray me, I promise that I won't betray you."

“Then here’s to a happy partnership.”

The two of them high-fived to seal the deal and broke into laughter.

Yan Qingsang led Jiang Chen back to the family manor. They arrived at their destination after roughly an hour.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1637: Zither Music Through the Walls

Buying and processing raw ores was a time-consuming task. Naturally, Yan Qingsang returned long after Yan Jinnan and his cronies had. Evidently, they’d already lodged complaints about him.

The residence that House Yan’s visitors lived in was shrouded with displeasure. Wherever Yan Qingsang looked, he found faces with dark expressions. As a temporary sidekick, Jiang Chen feigned unease as well. In truth, he’d never been more excited in his entire life.

He had a feeling that he and Huang’er were right under each other’s noses. The sensation of being unable to acknowledge each other made his heart beat faster. He was anxious and sorrowful all at once.

“Who is this, Qingsang?” One of the house elders furrowed his brow further when he saw a stranger being brought in.

“Elder He, this is a friend I’ve made here. We get along pretty well and I’ve learned much about ancient jade from him. I invited him back so I can learn more.” Yan Qingsang fashioned an even-handed reply.

He had taken a softer approach back at Jade Revel Lodge for the sake of the greater good. He didn’t want to show House Yan’s internal strife before outsiders. Now that he was back and knew Yan Jinnan had already tattled, he was in a sour mood. He saw no reason to hold anything back now.

“Hmph!” Yan Jinnan slammed his hand on a table. “Qingsang, you’re falling further by the day. I’d like to know what you meant by your actions back at the Jade Revel Lodge. Are you trying to drag the house down? It took a lot of effort to invite Xiahou Xi, but you intentionally ruined the situation! Your obstinance destroyed any good we were doing!”

The other House Yan members glared at Yan Qingsang as well. Clearly, Yan Jinnan had riled up their anger ahead of time.

Yan Qingsang snickered. “Yan Jinnan, I didn’t turn on you back at Jade Revel Lodge because I wanted to hide any internal bickering from outsiders. I have no problem if you want to build a good relationship with Xiahou Xi, but your shameless groveling and brown nosing was only losing the house’s face! You were itching to kowtow to him! House Yan’s heritage spans tens of thousands of years, and we’ve maintained an excellent reputation for millennia. Actions like yours are the kind that really humiliate our house!”

“That’s a load of bull! You didn’t know what’s good for you, and now you’re slandering me!”

“Good for me? What, is licking Xiahou Xi’s boots supposed to be a good thing, Yan Jinnan? Don’t you see how they saw you as a clown? You were paying for their drinks and whoring, but you were also part of the show! We are a first-rate house just like them. Why can’t we socialize with a bit more pride, even

when we want to offer an olive branch? There's no need to stick your head into their crotch. Unless you were born wanting that, of course!" Yan Qingsang had finally had enough.

"Quiet, both of you! You can't talk like that, Qingsang!" Elder He hectored.

Yan Qingsang kept his head held high. "Elder He, I'm not good at with wordplay. But I do know that strength and foundations are the basis of mutual respect between first-rate houses. Flattery and currying favor will only yield temporary self-delusion. We can't possibly hope to be respected in the long-term doing that. If we don't want to be pushed out by our peers, we must hone ourselves and rise up again, not debase and make fools of ourselves. That will only make others think even less of us!"

He made a good amount of sense too. House Yan had been one of the biggest houses once upon a time, essentially on the same level as House Xiahou. Its weakening had occurred only in the last few centuries or so.

Thus, Jinnan's slavish behavior did cheapen and dishonor the house to a degree.

The house elders traded looks with each other, unsure of how to respond. Because Jinnan and Qingsang were backed by different parties, they weren't at liberty to easily pronounce judgment. They couldn't afford to be biased to either side, since they would face wrath from the other.

"Jinnan, Qingsang," Elder He advised. "You two have different approaches to things, but you're both acting for the good of the house. I hope you can let go of your prejudices towards each other and discuss a unified course of action ahead of time. Don't leapt into things impulsively. Our house can't take much more conflict. Don't mind what happened this time. Xiahou Xi is a genius in his house, but he is far from one who holds authority. His likes and dislikes can't influence decision-making... at least, not for now."

"What, that's it?" Yan Jinnan was dissatisfied with the conclusion. "Isn't it obvious Yan Qingsang was thwarting the house's interests?"

"Enough of that, Jinnan. Qingsang is part of House Yan as well. No one in the house would tolerate him if he were to intentionally act to our detriment."

"You should be a little more careful, Qingsang. Calm yourself in situations like these. No matter how unhappy you are, you should discuss it only after you're home."

"I understand." Yan Qingsang nodded coolly.

Butting heads with Yan Jinnan any more wasn't going to get anything done. A lukewarm resolution like this was probably already for the best.

Yan Jinnan thought rapidly and snorted. "I suppose that can slide. But what about Qingsang bringing a stranger back? That's pretty undisciplined, right? Elder He, Elder Quan, do you think this should be allowed?"

Yan Qingsang burned with indignation. "Yan Jinnan, you just won't let things rest, will you? What's wrong with me making a new friend? Is there some rule forbidding that?"

"There are bad apples everywhere," Yan Jinnan cackled. "You might think he's a friend, but how do you know he thinks the same of you?"

Elder He glanced at Jiang Chen, then back at Qingsang. "Where is your friend from, Qingsang? Why did you bring him back?"

"His name is Shao Yuan. He's a master of all things jade-related. The jade festival is about to begin, and I'd like to learn as much as I can from him. Is there a problem with that, Elder He?"

Elder He was foiled by this explanation. Yan Qingsang's actions were mildly inappropriate, but there was certainly no regulation forbidding making acquaintances of outsiders. He couldn't exactly say that things were inconvenient right now, could he? The reasons for it were too clandestine to divulge.

"I can't really criticize you, Qingsang, though I do think you're young and rash. However, you're responsible for anyone you bring back. Take care he doesn't inconvenience the rest of the house."

"Naturally," Yan Qingsang retorted indifferently. "I have my reasons for doing things. This is better than trying to butter up people that don't care about us anyways, no?" Saying this, he raised a cupped fist salute. "I'm going back to my room."

He turned to Jiang Chen. "Brother Shao Yuan, come with me."

Jiang Chen put on an apologetic expression, pointing abashed looks at the members of House Yan. Deep down however, he was mildly disappointed. He didn't see Huang'er anywhere.

Huang'er, where are you? He called out silently. The residence and its courtyards were quite sizable. Where was Huang'er within these walls?

He lost himself for a few moments, the strength sapped from his soul as he shambled along behind Yan Qingsang.

Back in the hall, Yan Jinnan gritted his teeth. "Why do you keep spoiling him, Elder He! He's positively lawless. If something happens because of the stranger that he brought home, who's going to be responsible?"

Elder He sighed. "Elder Quan," he turned to the old man by his side. "Do you think there will be issues with the man Qingsang has brought back?"

Elder Quan sighed as well. "He didn't look like he meant us any ill will. He's not plotting anything, as far as I could tell. Perhaps he's a wandering cultivator who wants to earn our favor?"

"Should be." Elder He nodded as well. "Qingsang's grandfather is a venerated elder of the house. We can't apply too much pressure to him. Let him be and keep an eye on his new friend. If the stranger really does have ulterior motives, we'll just kill him at the earliest juncture."

"A wandering cultivator is nothing to worry about. Be at ease," Elder Quan assuaged the crowd. "House Yan may be down, but we are still an enormous entity. A mere wandering cultivator here in the Bluesmoke Isles won't dare cause trouble for us!"

Everyone could agree with that statement. More than likely, this was simply an overreaction. The cultivator wasn't even empyrean realm. So what if he'd gotten in? What could he possibly pull off?

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Jiang Chen recovered from his reverie. While he walked behind Yan Qingsang, he used his consciousness to probe all around himself for Huang'er's presence. Suddenly, he stopped dead in his tracks. There was music from the other side of the wall – the sound of a familiar zither.

It was the Ethereal Soothing Melody!

He had taught this piece to Huang'er many years ago. How would he not know it? In fact, it was what they'd cemented their affections with.

He froze, petrified.

"Are you alright, Brother Shao Yuan?" Yan Qingsang turned around.

Jiang Chen finally realized his loss of composure. Reacting quickly, he asked with some emotion, "Brother Yan, do you hear that? The zither! The melody is excellently played, an almost heavenly musicality. May I ask where it comes from?"

He could barely restrain himself. It was all he could do to show no aberrant behavior.

Yan Qingsang blinked. Sorrow flashed through his eyes. "It comes from a younger female cousin of mine, Brother Shao Yuan. Let's go!"

"Hold on," Jiang Chen waved. "This zither is so captivating to the ear. I'll regret it for my entire life if I miss it."

How could he manage another step? He desperately wanted to flip over the courtyard walls to find the source of the sound. He was almost a hundred percent sure that Huang'er was behind the music.

Yan Qingsang was taken aback. "Do you understand music theory, Brother Shao Yuan?"

"A bit," Jiang Chen admitted readily. "Such music can't possibly have been played by mortal hands. Do you house an immortal in this residence, friend? May I see the fairy behind these notes?"

Yan Qingsang's face colored. "No, absolutely not. Don't chase after impossibilities, Brother Shao Yuan. Let's go."

Jiang Chen sighed softly, then suddenly shouted. "Oh, fairy beyond the wall, I am Shao Yuan, a wandering cultivator. The honor of catching such a wondrous piece is one unparalleled by three lifetimes!"

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

Chapter 1638: Meeting Once Again

Jiang Chen's shout was extremely sudden; Yan Qingsang didn't have the space to stop him in time. The young man's expression darkened. "Brother Shao Yuan, what are you doing? Such behavior is unbecoming of a gentleman."

Jiang Chen chuckled. "Sorry, I couldn't help myself. Let us proceed."

If Huang'er really was on the other side of the wall, she would've heard. There was no need for him to linger; he'd give himself away if he did.

"Never again, I hope," Yan Qingsang harrumphed.

Jiang Chen nodded with a smile. "Your blunt refusal makes me a bit sad, my friend. Even if your sister is breathtakingly beautiful, I don't see anything wrong with what I said. Why are you so tense about it? Has she never seen a person from the outside world in her entire life?"

Yan Qingsang had no desire to continue the conversation. He sighed. "Well, I hope you took what I said to heart. No more of that. As for why? Honestly, it's a long story... and not one that has to be told."

He evidently wanted Jiang Chen to move on as quickly as possible. "Let us observe civility, Brother Shao Yuan," he remarked coolly, then turned. "Come."

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The music came to a sudden halt as soon as Jiang Chen's shout was heard. Huang'er's fingers pressed down on the strings of her zither. Her body trembled, and she almost collapsed. Then, she recalled what Elder Shun had told her.

He'd said her that she was likely under constant surveillance.

Thus, she kept a lid on her rising excitement. But it was difficult to smooth over her inner turmoil for the time being. How could she play any more?

Shao Yuan? Shao Yuan? Countless thoughts flickered across her mind. Didn't Brother Chen use that name all those years ago? When he passed by Pillfire City on his journey to Tilted Moon Region, this was the name he used. This is the name that Peerless first knew him by. Can... can it really be him?

Her questions were more self-reassuring rhetorical than anything else. She was almost certain that it was indeed Jiang Chen!

The thought of it filled her with uncontrollable passion. She wanted to take a look herself several times, but held herself back each time.

She warned herself over and over not to make a wrong move. If there were hidden observers, she would only elicit their suspicion by doing so. She was clever enough to gradually calm down after realizing this fact.

Her heart had been like a boat in the midst of a tempestuous sea, helpless in dilapidating despair. But a ray of sunlight had dawned on her dark soul, filling her with incredible warmth.

Brother Chen had come!

The man that she'd wished for night and day had finally arrived!

She had firmly believed that her beloved would eventually come find her in Myriad Abyss Island. And now, he was finally before her!

Though this wasn't Eternal Divine Nation, what difference did that make?

Brother Chen must have suffered a lot to find me. The man from Winterdraw with a bounty on his head – Jiang Huang – that must be him as well!

He must've heard about the ancient jade festival in Bluesmoke, how the Ten Divine Nations' houses would participate. He must've known through intuition alone that I would come. His pseudonym was to notify me, and he purposefully loudly complimented my music just now. All his trouble sneaking into House Yan's residence was to look for me, to tell me he's here so that I can be at ease...

Huang'er felt that her heart was going to melt.

Brother Chen...

She could imagine the amount of trouble he'd gone to in order to find and approach her. It both touched and pained her heart.

A youth from the human domain coming to Myriad Abyss Island was arduous enough. That, plus a bounty from Polylore Divine Nation... Huang'er understood all the hardship and difficulties involved, very much so.

She wanted to leap into Jiang Chen's arms right now. Only that could alleviate the heartache caused by their separation. But reason told her that now was the time to remain absolutely level-headed.

If she acted rashly, the house elders could utterly crush their dreams of reuniting with mere moments.

On the other side, Jiang Chen had been dragged off by Yan Qingsang to learn all about ancient jade secrets.

Jiang Chen's own heart was entirely tied to Huang'er right now. Still, he mustered all his intellect to tackle seriously each and every question Yan Qingsang had, while he tried to brainstorm a way to meet his beloved.

He could vaguely sense two presences where Huang'er was, watching her in secret. It was enough to sober him up completely.

Huang'er wasn't in a good spot at home. She was carefully guarded even in this temporary residence. It was virtually impossible to speak with her one-on-one. But his shout had been more than enough to inform her of his presence. That was enough for now.

Yan Qingsang turned out to be a studious and single-minded youth. He discussed ancient jade for three days and nights straight, stopping only when Jiang Chen mentioned several times that he wanted to rest. All food and drink consumed during that time had been delivered to the room.

The jade festival was about to start in another few days. Jiang Chen wanted to bid farewell and return to his inn, but Yan Qingsang was reluctant.

Still, the young man had enough self-awareness not to force Jiang Chen into extending the teaching session. They settled into a routine of lessons during daytime, and regular sleep schedules at night.

"Brother Shao Yuan, the jade festival is in three days. There's a family dinner tonight that I'd like you to attend as well. Teach them a few things about ancient jade. I'd like to show them that a friend of Yan Qingsang is far from a waste of food."

A family dinner?

Jiang Chen was assailed by a number of thoughts. "Sure. But is it really alright for an outsider like me to attend your family dinner?"

"Why not? You're a brother of mine. I say that you can!" After a few days of discussion, Yan Qingsang was thoroughly impressed with Jiang Chen's wealth of knowledge.

He'd been hesitant before that, but true wisdom was difficult to falsify. Additionally, Jiang Chen had inserted a fair deal of his own ideas and ideologies into their teaching sessions. His learning and mastery of the world was more than enough to win Yan Qingsang over completely. This was exactly the kind of effect he'd wanted to achieve.

The family dinner was simply a casual gathering between all House Yan members who'd come to the Bluesmoke Isles.

There was a matter to be discussed at this dinner, naturally. The topic du jour: the jade festival.

When Yan Qingsang appeared at the dinner with Jiang Chen in tow, Yan Jinnan launched another offensive. "What do you mean by this, Yan Qingsang? Why have you brought the outsider to a family dinner? I guess you really don't consider him an outsider, do you?"

"Certainly not! He's a brother to me." Yan Qingsang's rebuttal was straightforward. "Yan Jinnan, enough of your ravings. I called you Brother Jinnan back at the Jade Revel Lodge because I wanted to give you some face. I don't feel that you deserve it anymore – you have no right to mouth off like this."

These two were completely at odds with each other now.

As an actual outsider, it wasn't Jiang Chen's place to intercede. He merely stood before Yan Jinnan with calm and poise, unfaltering before the latter's feeble attempt at intimidation.

At this moment, a pretty figure walked out from the end of the hall. Jiang Chen looked over.

His heart almost leaped out of his chest.

Huang'er!

It was the girl that occupied his thoughts day and night. She'd appeared before him so easily!

Yan Jinnan glanced at her with a sneer. "Yan Qingsang, your entire branch is heretical and traitorous. This missy here betrayed the house by fleeing many years ago, and now you've brought in an outsider to a family dinner. Are you trying to tell me something...?"

"Shut up, Yan Jinnan." Huang'er was the one to reply. Her exquisite visage was positively frigid. "Do you believe that if I were to kill you now, no one in the house will do anything to me?"

She leveled an emotionless gaze at him, her eyes flashing with cold fury.

It was daytime, but Yan Jinnan shivered at the chill. Though he was a genius of the house, Miss Huang'er was too.

Even the best genius of the house, Yan Zhenkui, couldn't claim that he was more gifted than the young woman before him. She had simply remained reticent all these years.

Jiang Chen was astonished by Huang'er's movements. She was shockingly half-step empyrean already. Hadn't she been below great emperor the last time he'd seen her? Evidently, she'd made tremendous progress in the interim.

When he'd first made her acquaintance, Huang'er's cultivation had been far above his. A single motion from her back in Regal Pill Palace had scared off an arrogant Ninesuns disciple at the time.

She had superb martial dao talent, but her Generation Binding Curse had limited her. Now that it was gone, her cultivation surged, unimpeded like a flood breaking through a dam. It had taken her the short span of several years to breeze past great emperor, reaching half-step empyrean with ease.

Yan Jinnan paled. His lips curled, and he moved as if to retort something, but stopped himself.

He didn't suspect the veracity of her words for a moment. If she did manage to kill him, there was no way the house would punished her. As of right now, she was the entire house's lifeline.

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

Chapter 1639: Huang'er's Anger

The atmosphere froze. Qingsang scoffed at the long face Yan Jinnan pulled. It was quite a satisfying sight.

Yan Qingsang and Huang'er had the same grandfather. That made them cousins — closer on the family tree. He was sympathetic to his cousin's plight, but her fate had been decided by the patriarch of the clan and their grandfather.

Though he pitied her, he didn't have a say in anything. He also knew that Yan Jinnan was asking for humiliation himself in provoking Huang'er. House Yan had plenty of geniuses. Yan Jinnan was nowhere near the top. How dare he have a go at Huang'er?

If Huang'er hadn't been cursed by destiny, she would be the most remarkable genius in the family. Not even Yan Zhenhuai would be able to outshine her. What the hell was a mere Yan Jinnan?

Jiang Chen secretly cheered on Huang'er. This was a side of her he hadn't seen before. When they were together, Huang'er had been polite to everyone. She rarely grew angry, let alone glare coldly and deliver threats. He admired her assertiveness.

He cautiously refrained from looking at her; he could feel two pairs of eyes staying doggedly close to their target.

The two elders openly chaperoning the outing walked in from the other side of the room.

Elder He had a stern look on his face. "Enough! Haven't you gotten tired of fighting? Are you proud of tearing the family apart?" His tone was grave. The youths lowered their heads and didn't dare say anything in their defense.

However, Huang'er remarked faintly, "Elder He, Huang'er has done nothing wrong. Yan Jinnan mocked me as soon as I showed up. Yes, I am cursed by destiny and can't blame anyone for being the house scapegoat, but that doesn't mean the family can jeer at me for it. Don't forget, I'm bearing the sins for all of you. Every one of you is responsible for my cursed fate!"

Elder He couldn't argue with that. With an awkward scowl, he snapped at Yan Jinnan, "Apologize, Jinnan! What do you think you're doing? Huang'er is suffering greatly for the family. Watch your mouth!"

Yan Jinnan didn't have a choice when he noted how harsh the elder's tone was. He reluctantly cupped his hands at Huang'er. "I apologize."

Huang'er huffed and asked indifferently, "Am I still allowed to dine with the family?"

"Haha, what are you talking about, Huang'er?" Elder He said with a smile. "You're part of the family. Of course you're welcome at the table."

Huang'er nodded. Without another word, she picked a spot and sat down.

Yan Qingsang sighed and didn't say either, taking a seat next to Huang'er. He might not be able to help her, but he wasn't going to avoid her like she was some monster the way the rest of the family did.

Jiang Chen naturally took the seat next to Yan Qingsang.

Elder He's lips twitched. He gave Yan Qingsang and Jiang Chen a pointed look. Words danced at the tip of his tongue, but the elder swallowed them in the end.

"Who is this, elder cousin Qingsang?" Huang'er's eyes flicked to Yan Qingsang.

Yan Qingsang hadn't expected his cousin to strike up a conversation. He smiled and quickly answered, "This is a new friend of mine from the jianghu. He's an expert of ancient jade. I invited him here to share his knowledge with everyone. I've learned a lot from him over the past couple of days."

Once everyone was seated, Elder He turned to Jiang Chen and said, "Shao Yuan, is it? Is your knowledge of ancient jade a family heritage?"

"Yes," Jiang Chen bowed slightly from his seated position. "My family's teachings combined with my bloodline allows me to reach some level of proficiency."

"Oh? Are you going to show everyone what you've got in this jade festival?" Elder He asked probingly.

"I do very much look forward to the festival," Jiang Chen responded in a dignified tone.

"Don't beat around the bush, Elder He," Yan Qingsang cut in. "I know you have your doubts about my friend. That's fine. The ancient jade festival is starting soon. If any of you doubt my judge of character, how about a bet? If anyone can reap more than I do in the festival, I'll give you ten million sky spirit stones!"

Ten million sky spirit stones was a great fortune. Even the first bounty the three Polylore houses had put on Jiang Chen's head was only ten million stones. Though, they'd steadily increased it to fifty million stones since.

Yan Qingsang's declaration sent a ripple of astonishment around the room. Even Elder He was shocked to hear the ten million stones wager.

"Are you really that confident, Qingsang?" Elder Quan smiled at him.

The boy smiled back. "I am, but they may not be confident enough to take the bet.

"Haven't you always considered me an eyesore, Yan Jinnan? Wanna bet? Ten million sky spirit stones are yours for the taking. Do you have the balls to take the challenge?"

Yan Jinnan was tempted. He considered himself stronger than Yan Qingsang. Still, strength in martial dao wasn't the determining factor in the jade festival. He couldn't make an immediate decision.

Ten million wasn't a small number. He could afford it, but it would hurt greatly if he lost.

"I'll bet with you," Huang'er piped up.

Everyone in the room started. Huang'er? What was she taking the bet for?

Elder He smiled wryly. "Never mind that, Huang'er. You can't."

"I'm taking part in the jade festival," she responded, unfazed by his words.

Elder He froze. He hadn't given her permission and never would. He exchanged a look with Elder Quan. For the moment, neither of them knew what to do.

"We can give you everything else, Huang'er," Elder He finally said, shaking his head slowly. "But I'm afraid we can't fulfill this request."

Huang'er smiled coolly. "Worried that I'll run away?"

Elder He and Elder Quan paused awkwardly. They were indeed worried that Huang'er would flee. After all, only the contestants could enter the trial grounds once it started. The age limit meant that old men like them couldn't even get in. If Huang'er did something then, they'd be completely helpless.

"We've already submitted the list of applicants, Huang'er," Elder Quan spoke persuasively. "We can't change it."

Huang'er shook her head. "You put together the list without asking me. I'm going to the festival, with or without being registered."

Elder He became a tad displeased. "Don't make things difficult for us, Huang'er."

"House Yan has never made things easy for me. You can't blame me for giving you the occasional trouble." Huang'er's tone was aloof. "Don't worry. I just want to experience the jade festival for myself. If you're worried that I'll run away, I can swear an oath."

"Huang'er, we still wouldn't dare take the chance even if you swear a death oath," Elder Quan laughed wryly.

A death oath wouldn't make a difference. The worst that could happen to her was death, which wasn't any worse than becoming Xiahou Zong's cultivation vessel.

“Then I’ll swear an oath on my parents,” replied Huang’er. “If I make a run for it in the jade festival, let my parents languish in prison forever with no hope of resting in peace.”

Her parents were her biggest weaknesses. If not for them, she wouldn’t have returned to House Yan. Them being held in a hellish prison was her biggest concern. If not for them, she wouldn’t have agreed to becoming a cultivation vessel, either.

She would’ve run away from Myriad Abyss and never looked back. Even if Elder Xi went to her, she could’ve threatened to kill herself. She only came back for this particular familial bond.

Swearing on her parents was the most convincing argument. This put Elder He and Elder Quan in quite a dilemma.

They exchanged a look and held a muttered conversation. Huang’er was determined. If they didn’t let her go, it was very likely that she would force her way into the forbidden area of the festival. If Huang’er was killed on spot, how would they explain to the family?

If they let her go, she might run into dangers in the festival. What if something bad happened to her? What were they going to do then? It was a difficult decision to make.

“Of course we believe you with the oath, Huang’er, but the jade festival isn’t completely safe. You’re too important to the family for us to risk losing you.”

“The festival is for people to extract ancient jade,” Huang’er remarked coolly. “It’s not a battle royale. What’s there for you to worry about?”

House Yan had six spots. They could afford to give Huang’er one.

After some discussion, Elder He let out a long sigh. “Us two old men have been hypervigilant ever since we take on this duty, Huang’er. You must remember your oath and refrain from fleeing, but at the same time you have to stay safe and protect yourself. If you can’t agree to the two conditions, we won’t let you go to the festival.”

“I agree.” Huang’er was nonchalant.

Jiang Chen was separated from Huang’er only by one person. He was ecstatic that Huang’er would be in the festival. He had thought that she wouldn’t be allowed to, no matter what. But Huang’er had won for herself the opportunity to attend! Once they both entered the festival, they would be able to reunite!

Since the elders had given the permission, the others weren’t going to argue. Though it rankled slightly that someone would be replaced by Huang’er, none of them dared to take a stand against her.

Huang’er was currently someone they couldn’t afford offend, more so than any elders.

“That’s decided then. Let us eat.” Elder He motioned for the family dinner to begin.

Yan Qingsang tried to make use of the dinner to have Jiang Chen show everyone what he was capable of, but Elder He and Elder Quen didn’t give him any opportunities.

This slightly frustrated Yan Qingsang, but he was more determined that he would thoroughly impress everyone this time. He would show these arrogant snobs that he was more capable than they thought, and that he was a greater judge of character!

Thinking of the ten million stones bet, Yan Qingsang suddenly chuckled. "Did you mean it when you said you'd take my bet, Huang'er?"

Huang'er smiled gently. "Of course I meant it. Money means nothing to me, Brother Qingsang. I'm not going to feel bad even if I lose to you."

"Good! Who else dares bet with me?" Yan Qingsang was in high spirits. He fit the image of a genius superior to the rest of his peers in the clan.

Yan Jinnan had had enough. "I'm sick of your smug face! I'll take the bet!"

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Chapter 1640: Yellow Dragon Ridge

"I'll take that bet too!"

Yan Qingsang was patently quite good at provoking people. Yan Jinnan's agreement was met with a flurry of responses from the other two geniuses on his side. All of them could afford the ten million, though it would be a big hit to their personal finances if they lost.

Yan Qingsang cackled. "Sure, no problem. I'm glad you're all generously contributing to my pocket funds."

"Don't busy yourself with boasting yet, Yan Qingsang," Yan Jinnan snickered. "If we include Huang'er, there are four people betting against you. Do you even have forty million?"

"What're you worried about? Any betting defaults between house members are sorted out by family rules." Yan Qingsang shied away from saying that he didn't. "Plus, I'm more worried that you won't be able to afford it!"

Yan Jinnan slammed a table. "I don't want empty promises. If you want to bet, take out your spirit stones to show us. We won't take anything else as proof."

"Yes, yes, show us the stones!" The other two chimed in noisily as well.

Huang'er smiled faintly at the developing scene. "If you're all betting, then I'll pass. Brother Qingsang, do you have enough? I can lend you some if you don't."

Yan Qingsang was rather flattered. Huang'er was famous for her frostiness. Normally, she completely ignored everybody in the family. She had some past relations with him, sure – but that was solely due to their status as cousins. Her willingness to lend him some money was rather a surprise.

"If you're not betting, Huang'er, I have exactly thirty million for those three." This was just about Yan Qingsang's current entire net worth. It was a mad prospect to bet all of it at once. But he had the confidence to take that bet and win!

Without hesitation, he flung all thirty million spirit stones from his storage ring onto the table. "Win these stones from me... if you dare!"

Yan Jinnan and his cronies were indignant. They pulled out their respective ten millions eagerly.

"Elder He, Elder Quan, please serve as our witnesses!"

The elders didn't intervene in the rivalry between the house's youths. In fact, they tended to encourage healthy competition. Though the sum on the line was rather large this time, it might stimulate their initiative.

"Alright. If you've all agreed to the bet, then we'll be reluctant witnesses. But remember: no matter who wins, the losing party shouldn't be sore about it. Familial harmony shouldn't be harmed in this."

Yan Qingsang chuckled. "If they can win against me, that means they're stronger than me. I hold only admiration for the strong. Why would I bear a grudge?"

Yan Jinnan snickered. "I'm just worried that you won't pay up after you lose."

With the bet concluded, the family dinner continued. The elders related a few things more about the jade festival, wrapping the tidbits into a hefty helping of encouragement for the younger generation.

Jiang Chen laid low through the entire affair. Occasionally, he pretended to sneak a glance or two at Huang'er in admiration before his eyes quickly darted away. Doing so allowed him to draw less suspicion. It would be far stranger for him not to turn even once towards her throughout the evening.

After all, Huang'er was too remarkable a girl not to be the center of attention of every man. Feigning lack of interest was too fake.

In the latter stages of the banquet, Jiang Chen made a show of working his courage up for a round of toasts.

Elders He and Quan politely accepted the toasts to them with easy reciprocation. Yan Jinnan and company put on airs, and responded reluctantly with a sip only after Jiang Chen had courteously drained his own.

He didn't care about those people. His sole purpose for this round of toasts was to raise his cup to Huang'er.

When it was finally her turn, Jiang Chen acted like a brainless fan. "Miss Huang'er, I heard amazing zither music from the other side of a wall the first day I came here. You must be the musician. An immortal beauty such as you would be the only one to play such music. I am Shao Yuan, a wanderer in the world. Please accept my humble toast."

After all this time, he could finally speak with her face to face.

His words thoroughly warmed Huang'er's heart. She wanted more than anything to throw herself into his embrace. However, this wasn't the time to let anything show.

Instead, she assumed a guise of complete serenity. Lightly lifting her wine cup, she touched her lips barely to its contents. "Do you understand the zither, sir?" she asked indifferently.

"I'm a crude wanderer, Miss Huang'er. I know only the bare basics of music, so I dare not discuss the zither with you."

"Alright, alright," Yan Qingsang coughed meaningfully in interruption. "Enough with your rambling, Shao Yuan. My cousin's sights and future are lofty indeed. I hope you don't have any unbecoming thoughts aside from appreciating her music. Otherwise, we won't be brothers any more."

Jiang Chen laughed with some embarrassment.

"You talk too much, just like everyone else." Huang'er shot Yan Qingsang a detached glance.

"Haha, I was just reminding him not to create worries for himself." Yan Qingsang clearly didn't want Jiang Chen to strike up a lengthy conversation with Huang'er. Though he sympathized with her, he had to put the house's benefit first and foremost.

Elders He and Quan heaved internal sighs of relief when they saw Yan Qingsang's interference. They hadn't been happy about the outsider's toast and associated speech. In fact, they were worried that he would do something as foolish as profess his love. If that were going to be the case, they would have to think about how to kick him out.

They were very satisfied to see Yan Qingsang taking preventative initiative. Though he was a bit ornery, Qingsang knew what was best for the house. With him nearby, Shao Yuan wouldn't be able to do much even if he had any tricks up his sleeve.

Plus, Huang'er had incredibly high standards of her own. Why would she take an interest in a jianghu wanderer?

Jiang Chen drank the wine in his cup, then sat back down in his seat. He didn't linger on that topic of conversation. The family dinner came to its natural conclusion and everyone returned to their room.

There was some residual bewilderment, however, inside the mind of 'Shao Yuan'. He remembered when Huang'er left, she'd said that she would be delivered to Xiahou Zong as his cultivation vessel when she reached peak great emperor or half-step empyrean.

At the time, she had also said it would take fifty years. But it hadn't actually taken long at all for her to get there.

Huang'er's martial talent was much more incredible than he had thought. After the removal of the Generation Binding Curse, her repressed martial cultivation had undergone a tremendous breakthrough.

Because of Yan Qingsang's repeated invitations, Jiang Chen agreed to come back straightaway after attending to his personal matters at the inn.

His disciple Hua Ming was still there; Jiang Chen couldn't just abandon the boy. The young student was overjoyed to see the return of his master.

"Master, you were gone for several days for the registration. I was getting a bit worried."

"Haha, I'm fine. I'm going to the jade festival tomorrow. Keep cultivating here in the meantime."

“Yes, master.” Hua Ming now valued his current opportunity a great deal. The more his cultivation progressed, the more he realized how uncommon his experience truly was. The path of martial dao became more and more attractive to him.

He now quite regretted his good-for-nothing time in Oriole Valley and was thankful for having met such a discerning master. How could he not be grateful for the life-changing events that had taken place?

Having settled the boy in, Jiang Chen returned once more to House Yan’s residence.

Holding back his longing for Huang’er, he met with Yan Qingsang once more. The young man trusted in Jiang Chen almost implicitly now; there was nothing he would not talk about to his new friend.

The morning of the next day and under the elders’ supervision, the group departed for the location designated by the jade festival.

They arrived at Yellow Dragon Ridge in about four hours’ time.

The ridge was a vast expanse that occupied almost a quarter of Bluesmoke’s total size. The mountainous terrain, a hundred thousand miles in radius, was a sacred place that produced plentiful ancient jade.

Reportedly, it was once a battlefield in the primordial times. Much bloodshed had occurred back then, and the corpses of their expert participants were buried here.

Their flesh, blood, bone, and heritage had melded into the earth. An aeon of nurturing from the earth was sufficient to transform all of this into the unique jade that was the Bluesmoke Isles’ speciality. In fact, some claimed that Yellow Dragon Ridge was unique in all of Myriad Abyss.

There was already an overabundance of people when House Yan’s team arrived. Bluesmoke had invited thousands of factions, big and small in their varieties.

The Ten Divine Nations’ representatives received the most attention. Aside from those, a number of other isles on the same level as Bluesmoke had been invited as well. Each set of isles had its own assortment of powers.

As such, the jade festival bustled with activity. And this was all without mentioning that the festival was technically open to wandering cultivators as well!

The Ten Divine Nations had several dozen factions in total. Each faction was eligible to enter five to ten people. Considering these alone yielded several hundred.

The lesser isles’ factions received fewer entrant slots, but the factions themselves were far more numerous. In total, they amounted to about three thousand. The Bluesmoke Isles’ own nobles and factions took another few hundred or so placements.

Lastly, about three thousand wandering cultivators had signed up. Adding all of these subdivisions up, the final total was almost eight thousand people. This was an extremely sizable event, considering the caliber of participants.

The upper crust of the Bluesmoke Isles stood above everyone else, paying their respects to all the honored guests they’d invited. There was a lot of grandstanding and speechmaking, but it generally

boiled down to something resembling how pleased and privileged they were to have everyone gathered here.

Jiang Chen had no interest in listening to empty words. He devoted his time to observing the Ten Divine Nations' teams and geniuses instead. The Ten Divine Nations' geniuses really were on another level. A single one of them would be considered an extremely powerful expert in the human domain.

No wonder Huang'er told me that I couldn't come to Myriad Abyss without ascending to great emperor. She certainly had her reasons for saying that.

The more Jiang Chen looked around, the more solemn he became. Presumably, the strongest geniuses hadn't come to this event. Even so, there were more than enough terrifying strong attendees. He wasn't afraid of them though. So what if they were geniuses? He'd seen many like them and more in his last life.