

The Fall 689

Chapter 689: The Value of Money

The general meaning of a Pseudo D-grade pill was somewhat self-explanatory, but Zac had never heard of any such terminology for pills before. Was it pills designed for Half-Step Hegemons or just extra good pills for E-grade cultivators? He had already confirmed that Half-Step cultivators wouldn't be able to join the trial, so it should be the latter.

Asking would immediately ruin his facade though, and Zac could only look on as the screen in front of him changed, turning to the 'Dawn' pill series the attendant mentioned. Zac almost felt like he was online shopping as he read the description that boasted huge savings compared to buying single pills. There were three kits to choose from, and reading the descriptions was pretty eye-opening.

The smaller kit included eight different types of pills and the medium one eleven. The eight basic pills were two types of healing pills based on the type of injury, one soul mending pill, two types of antidotes, a soldier pill and a soul restoration pill, and something called [Dawn Life-Shield].

The medium kit added one more type of antidote, two premium healing pills, one for the body and one for the soul. All three were the kind you'd save as a last resort, and not something you'd use to speed up recuperation judging by the description. The peak package actually only included twelve different pills, adding a pill called [Dawn Awakening].

The pills were the same in both the Peak E-grade and Pseudo D-grade kits with only their grade differing, and after reading things through he started to get an idea of what was going on. Pseudo D-grade actually seemed to be the same thing as low-grade D-grade Pills in the Zecia sector.

Zac wasn't exactly clear why it was termed differently here, but guessed it might be the same as how Zecia fuddled the grades for their factions, making things sound more impressive than they actually were.

"What is the [Dawn Life-Shield]?" Zac asked after having glanced at the products.

"It is a pill especially designed for the Twilight Ocean, but it also shows decent use when exploring the living territories," the clerk immediately explained. "It helps weaken the corrosive effect of Twilight Energy. The Quasi D-Grade version naturally has a far greater protective effect."

"Will it work even in the heart of the ocean?" Zac asked a bit dubiously.

"Unfortunately, that's impossible," Yilian sighed. "The inner reaches of the Twilight Ocean ultimately rely on your own methods. The E-Grade pill is completely ineffective that far inside, and the Quasi D-Grade pill only lessens the strain by 5%. However, those five percent can be the difference between life and death!"

"Hmm... And the [Dawn Awakening]?" Zac continued.

"It's a proprietary pill that allows cultivators to make the most out of the treasures in the depths of the Twilight Ocean," the clerk said. "The pill is actually made from herbs from the Twilight Ocean itself, and the supply is limited. We believe it will be sold out before long, so if young mast-"

"And what does it do?" Zac asked with a raised brow.

“Ah, my apologies,” the specter said with a bow. “I simply get a bit excited when talking about such a great item. Its effect is simple but exquisite; harmonization. There are many unique supreme items in the depths of the Twilight Ocean that cannot be taken outside, forcing you to imbibe them during the trial. The [Dawn Awakening] allows you to temporarily harmonize with the Twilight Ocean, which in turn will help you to gain more from these supreme treasures.”

Zac’s brow’s rose when he heard the description, and the ghost attendant quickly continued when she saw his interest.

“It’s a must-have item for those planning on exploring the deeper parts of the Mystic Realm. It can be the difference between a fate-changing breakthrough and getting stuck at the precipice,” Yilian exhorted. “The only downside of the [Dawn Awakening]-pill is that it can only be used once, so it’s best saved until the perfect opportunity presents itself.”

Zac nodded in understanding, and he felt that it really was a must-have pill if it worked as advertised. He didn’t immediately place his order though, but first read through the kits once more. Each kit included two pills of the cheaper variants, and one each of the top-quality ones. Each one of the pills that helped against the Twilight Energy worked for 1 hour, and you could only eat one each day, meaning they were only meant to be used during fights or other critical situations.

“I’ll take one big Quasi D-Grade, three middle Quasi D-Grade, and five hundred small peak e-grade packages,” Zac said. “However, for the small kits, I want the [Dawn Life-Guard] exchanged for [Dawn Life-Ward].”

The [Dawn Life-Ward] was almost the same type of pill as the one included in the normal kits, but they were instead a general pill that the Undead used in life-attuned environments. It was useless against Twilight Energy, but it worked a lot better under normal situations, which was exactly what Zac needed since he was planning on bringing those pills back home.

The clerk’s eyes lit up, as this was a pretty big order. It obviously couldn’t match the purchasing power of a Hegemon, but those kinds of customers didn’t appear every day, even in a place like this. And even if they did come, it wasn’t the turn of someone like Yilian to serve them and get the commission.

“The lifeward pill can absolutely be exchanged. One High-quality Pseudo D-Grade Kit is priced at 2 D-Grade Nexus Coins. The middle comes to 1.1 D-grade Nexus Coins each for a total of 3.3. The five hundred lower kits come to 3 D-Grade Nexus Coins. For a purchase of this magnitude, I can give a fifteen percent discount, and we’ll round down to 7 D-grade Nexus Coins,” the clerk smiled. “Is there anything else Young Master requires?”

Zac froze for a moment when he heard the price. So expensive?

He had gained a pretty decent understanding of general prices over the past years, and the quoted prices were not just a little more expensive compared to what similar items should cost in establishments like the Zethaya Pill house. They were in the range of between ten and one hundred times more expensive going by the peak quality pills.

This single purchase would not only have completely bankrupted him if not for Leandra’s bestowment, he wouldn’t actually be able to stomach it at all. The biggest culprit was obviously the Pseudo D-grade

pills, where one big kit cost more than 300 peak E-grade kits. It wasn't like he couldn't afford it, but he also didn't like the feeling of getting taken for a ride.

"These prices... Are quite steep," Zac slowly said as he looked at the attendant with a frown.

"Ah, my apologies," the attendant said with some embarrassment. "I can assure you that we are not trying to overcharge our valued customers. I am sure young master have heard a thing or two about frontier sectors such as our Zervereth. It is true, prices are normally significantly lower in small C-grade sectors, but the Twilight Ocean is different. Because our connection to the higher realms is much closer due to the wormholes.

"We both get a large number of esteemed visitors such as young master, and there is regular trade going on between Twilight Harbor and the Empire. As such, prices have almost reached the same level as in the higher-grade Kingdoms. If the young master is interested in bargain shopping, you would have to travel to other parts of the Sector, or perhaps even another Sector altogether."

Zac slowly digested the new information, and he couldn't help but feel like a country bumpkin. At least the attendant had got the wrong idea, and looked up to him rather than looked down on him. He had always guessed that things would be more expensive in the more flourishing parts of the Multiverse, just like how it was back on Earth before the integration. But he had never expected the difference to be this massive.

He almost wanted to slap himself for not buying a mountain of resources before coming to this place, but it was too late for regret now.

"Hm, a shame. I was looking forward to making some bargains," Zac shrugged. "Well, it doesn't matter."

"I understand the feeling," Yilian said with a knowing smile. "Young master is not the first one to be met with this surprise. It is possible to enlist the Space Gate Guild to take you to the opposite side of the Sector, where prices are roughly 40% of here. But truthfully, there is not much of interest over there, and the volumes you'd need to purchase to make up for the transportation fees and import tariffs..."

"Perhaps if I get the time. I am thinking of nurturing a small squad for adventuring after this trial. After all, there should be ample supply of bodies inside the Twilight Ascent. Let's look at your leveling resources as well," Zac said, and Yilian's smile grew even wider.

Zac emerged from the Pill shop an hour later with Yilian passionately leading him all the way, a mountain of resources added to his Cosmos Sack. Altogether he had spent over 80 D-grade Nexus Coins, of which half was for himself and the other half was for the Einherjar. It was a shocking sum, and a harsh wake-up call just how poor he was before his bestowment.

He had bought thousands of standard-quality leveling pills that would allow all his followers to sweep through the first sets of levels at the E-Grade. Zac had also bought ten sets of top-quality Race Upgrade pills along with tens of tons of cheap compounds meant to be used in Medicinal baths. The pills were mainly meant for his elites back home, but also for himself in case nothing better cropped up at the auction in a few days.

His followers were nowhere to be found when Zac exited, but the spectral attendant led him to a small garden where he found Vilari enjoying some high-quality incense, no doubt a small complimentary

gesture after he started dropping some serious money in their establishment. The Mentalist stood up with a smile after he appeared and they immediately set off.

"I want to look at some spare weaponry as well today," Zac said to Nala as they passed through the haze hiding the plateau, and she immediately set out toward another plateau.

"By the way, can you explain the prices of things?" Zac asked his guide as she steered the vessel through the void, which prompted her to look over with confusion.

"Young master seldom leaves the Clan and rarely purchases things himself. The prices of items are a bit unclear, especially in a foreign sector such as this," Vilari added.

"Oh, I see!" Nala quickly nodded.

"Prices have essentially standardized over the long eons, and they only really move if there is some unexpected shortage. Items are generally graded between Low and Peak quality. A low-quality material generally costs between 1 to 5 Nexus Coins of matching grade per unit. So a low E-grade metal might cost 5 E-grade Nexus Coins per kilogram," Nala said. "Whereas herbs might cost the same per stalk. The unit depends on what kind of item it is."

"A processed item of a similar grade generally costs twice their raw components with some sort of minimum fee," Nala added. "The difference is a remuneration for the craftsman and to allow for some chance of failure."

Zac nodded, but he was inwardly shocked. It really was a huge difference between The Twilight Harbor and back home. He remembered how he felt like a tycoon after slaughtering beasts for a few days back on Earth, making over a hundred million Nexus Coins from kill rewards alone. Here, that only amounted to a handful of low-quality pills.

No wonder most cultivators were broke.

"From there it's very straightforward. Middle-grade items are ten times as expensive as low-grade, and the same goes for high and Peak-quality items. This means that a peak E-grade pill costs a thousand times as much as low E-grade pills, generally somewhere around 5,000 to 10,000 E-grade Nexus Coins.

"Above that are Pseudo D-grade pills, the grade that I guess young master generally uses. Those are pills partly made from D-grade materials, but are still consumable by E-grade cultivators. These are around ten times more expensive than peak E-grade items, but the span is a lot higher there," Nala said.

"Why?" Vilari asked after seeing Zac's blank look.

"Some Pseudo D-grade pills might contain 2% D-grade materials, and others 20%," Nala explained.

"Higher-grade materials are generally dangerous to imbibe, so it requires a far more skilled alchemist to put 20% D-grade materials into a pill while keeping it absorbable for E-grade warriors. Those alchemists would naturally charge a higher fee."

"So, a Pseudo D-grade pill can cost anywhere between 50,000 to 500,000 E-grade Nexus Coins. The risk of getting tricked when buying these kinds of items is the highest, where a common item is marketed as something full of expensive materials. Of course, the Karabas Pill House wouldn't stoop this low," Nala

explained. "The lower grades are mostly standardized, and there are no pseudo-D-grade raw materials. They are either E-grade or D-grade."

"Anything else?" Vilari asked.

"Um..." Naha hesitated, seemingly unsure what would be pertinent information. "The efficacy increase per quality stage is roughly a factor of two. So a Middle-quality pill is twice as good as a Low-quality at ten times the price. The span is naturally a lot greater among the Pseudo D-grade pills."

Zac nodded as though that was a matter of course, but he inwardly swore at the usurious pricing practices. He just paid a thousand times extra for items that were less than ten times as good as low-quality goods? Then again, eating a healing pill with eight times the efficacy was priceless when it was the difference between life and death.

"Furthermore, this is just how pricing work for readily available products. When it comes to unique natural treasures with effects that can't be replicated by cheaper means the price can go anywhere. I have heard of unique E-grade treasures costing as much as Peak D-grade Pills," Nala continued with some longing in her eyes. "Some items like that will likely appear on the grand auctions before the Twilight Ascent."

Zac made a mental calculation, and he could confirm that the prices Yilian had given him were more than fair if the pills lived up to the quality the Karabas Pill House was known for. However, he no longer felt like a financial tyrant, though his resources were still shocking for someone at his level. He also realized that the cash infusion might only last him to the middle stages of Hegemony or thereabouts.

That was a future worry though, and it wasn't all bad. Prices had gone up, but that also meant the value of anything he'd find in the Twilight Ocean would go up as well. If he managed to get his hands on a few once-in-a-century supreme treasures he'd make enough money to actually make some Hegemons green with envy.

The group eventually landed on another disk, and Zac emerged from a blacksmith clan's storefront three hours later with a small mountain of weapons for his followers. Zac had managed to loot quite a bit from the Undead Incursion, but they didn't suit all his people.

Furthermore, the smithy actually belonged to the local Elementals. They catered to both the unliving and the alive so Zac also managed to get an upgraded set of gear for the Valkyries. The new spears he had bought obviously couldn't match the Spirit Tool that Joanna used, but among non-spiritual E-Grade weapons, they were extremely high-quality.

The following days continued in much the same manner, and Zac shored up on everything he or Earth lacked.

He hadn't initially planned on buying this much, but the level of Twilight Harbor far surpassed what he expected since it had connections to multiple proper B-Grade forces. He had even been forced to buy a few new Spatial Rings since the one he got from Vilari's predecessor was filled to the brim, and he didn't want to walk around with Ten Cosmos Sacks attached to his belt since that would ruin his image of a noble Draugr.

Zac also followed up on Calrin's sage advice and stocked up on huge quantities of materials that were scarce in the Zecia Sector. For example, he bought fifty thousand Soul Crystals in one go, even though they each cost 10,000 E-grade Nexus Coins. It was a huge expenditure, but Zac knew he would probably be able to make a profit even at this price point back home if he ever put them for sale.

His inquiries into Soul Crystals had also exposed something extremely unexpected. Crystals in general were actually not graded in Twilight Harbor, but rather simply called Low, Medium, High, and Supreme-quality Nexus Crystals or Attuned Crystals. High-quality crystals were the same as D-grade crystals back in the Zecia sector, and the Low-quality the same as standard F-grade Nexus Crystals.

The low-quality Nexus crystals were just at twice the price in Twilight Harbor compared to Zecia, clocking in at 100 Nexus Coins each. The Medium Quality crystals cost 10 000, and the high-quality crystals cost 1 E-grade Nexus Crystal each. Above that were the Supreme Crystals, which didn't seem to have any equivalent in the Zecia Sector.

They cost 1,000 E-grade Nexus Coins each, and they were mainly used by Peak E-grade cultivators and Half-step cultivators. Early-stage hegemon generally used them as well to recuperate lost energy, but the crystals used by greater Hegemons weren't actually Nexus Crystals at all.

They were rather using something called Cosmic Crystals, which were clearly a far superior natural energy crystal. Their pricing was the same as Nexus Crystals, though they were priced in D- and C-grade Nexus Coins instead. However, only Low and Medium-quality Cosmic Crystals were publicly available. The two higher grades were aimed at Monarchs, and they were essentially strategic resources of the biggest clans.

Cosmic Crystals were probably what was called C-grade Nexus Crystals in the Zecia sector, but Calrin could not even get his hands on low-grade ones there. Perhaps they'd pop up on auctions on D-grade worlds now and then, but you definitely couldn't purchase them in stores.

Even Zac would explode if he tried to absorb energy from a Low-grade Cosmic Crystal since they required users to have a Cultivator's Core with their vast energy storage capabilities. But Zac had still bought ten low-quality Cosmic Crystals and one Medium-quality even if he couldn't use them at the moment.

There was no telling when he'd have direct access to them in the future, so Zac figured might as well keep a few around. He also bought a large store of Supreme Crystals, both attuned and unattuned.

Things finally calmed down after five days, at which point Nala seemed to finally have become inundated to Zac's shocking reserves of wealth. She had accompanied him for one of his smaller purchases, but that visit to an incensary alone had run up a tab of over 50,000 E-grade Nexus Coins, which almost made Nala faint.

"Where to today, young master?" Nala asked as she picked up him and Vilari on the sixth day.

"Hmm..." Zac mused. "I have bought most of what I need for now. I guess it's time to visit the Eldritch Archivals."