

### Three Realms 1031

#### Chapter 1031: The Shocked Crown Prince

The grand tutor was as surprised as the prince when he heard the full story. "The Prancing Pony is a second-rate faction in Goldtower City. At best, they might be able to claw their way into becoming a leading actor on that stage. But it's only the level of a city. This friend with such lofty origins came to the crown prince for something so insignificant? Truly, it is difficult to understand the whims of the great. He would have been able to settle the matter easily enough just by himself."

"He said that Steward Niu was a past acquaintance. Maybe he thinks that it would be inappropriate for him to intervene personally." The crown prince was unsure.

"Hmm. The geniuses of Veluriyam Capital tend to value their dignity. Perhaps he does not want the bad reputation that comes of interfering in a nation's internal affairs. Our friend is not only a genius, but a gentleman too. He has ability and skill, but he does not exert his authority over others casually. That is not something everybody can simply do." The grand tutor spoke of Jiang Chen's actions with respect and praise.

Looking back at the short letter in the crown prince's hand, he asked, "Is this the introductory letter he wrote you?"

"Yes. Grand Tutor, please take a look to see if this is a fake?" The prince had a lingering feeling of insubstantiality. Fortune had completely bowled him over with its speed.

The grand tutor glanced over the document. From the text alone, it looked impeccable. His gaze dwelled on the mark of the seal for a moment. In the next instant, the tutor's face changed color completely.

"What?" The change did not escape the crown prince, and now he was curious and more than a little worried.

The grand tutor's expression looked uniquely peculiar. He tossed the guards a look. "All of you are dismissed. I'd like a few moments alone with the crown prince."

There was no reason for the prince to hesitate this time. "Listen to my teacher and leave us for a bit." He waved a hand. The prince's personal guardsmen knew the extent of his respect for his teacher. They complied at once. There were no strangers present this time, hence, no risk whatsoever. After all of the guardsmen had left, the crown prince couldn't hold himself back, "Teacher, what have you discovered? Why did you dismiss the guards to tell me about it?"

The grand tutor's face shifted through multiple shades and hues. His eyes were glued to the letter in his hand, their pupils showing his unadulterated shock. It was as if the communication had been written by some long-lost family member, so excited was he.

"Your Highness, you... you missed an unbelievably wonderful opportunity." The tutor recovered himself only after a very long while. He breathed a sigh of utter disappointment, akin to someone who had come out empty-handed from a pirate's trove.

"Why do you say that, Grand Tutor?" The crown prince was stunned.

"Your youth has worked against you yet again. Is your mind still stuck on the letter's authenticity?" The grand tutor was depressed at his student's abject failure.

"Of course! He wrote the letter way too casually, right? Even now, I'm a little worried it's not the real thing."

"Foolish, foolish, truly foolish! Do you not see this seal?" The grand tutor hopped about in irritation.

"The seal? It looks like chicken scratch. I didn't really pay attention to it." The prince couldn't sit still anymore. He snatched the letter from his teacher's hands.

"Take a closer look. What does this seal look like?" The grand tutor's palm was quivering with anger as he pointed at the object of his shock and awe. "This... this is a three-feathered seal. Such an exquisitely wrought icon cannot be anything short of extraordinary. Where are your eyes!?" The grand tutor was incensed to the point of freneticism.

"Teacher, what's... what's so remarkable about this seal, exactly?" The crown prince's expression was completely innocent. He was like a child who had made an honest mistake.

"Ah, I don't want to call you a fool any more than I already have. If my guess is correct, this is a seal made by the Progeny Feather Medallion. Do you still not recognize it at all? You... you're the future king of Bluesky Nation! Don't you say everyday that you want to go to Veluriyam Capital to meet young lord Zhen?"

It was as if a jolt of electricity suddenly passed through the crown prince's body. His face blanched and his voice grew shaky. "Y-you... Grand Tutor, you... you're saying that... this is, young lord Zhen's, Progeny Feather Medallion seal? Then he... he's from Sacred Peafowl Mountain?"

"Obviously. What do you mean, 'he's from Sacred Peafowl Mountain'? He... he is young lord Zhen, in the flesh!" The grand tutor was wholly dissatisfied with the prince's sluggish mind at the moment. He rebuked his student further. "The Sacred Peafowl Mountain rules over Veluriyam Capital. The Progenitor Feather Medallion is His Majesty Emperor Peafowl's token, and as such, the Progeny Feather Medallion is appropriately the young lord's. These two items represent the highest authority within the city. Even the four monarchs of Sacred Peafowl Mountain and the Peafowl Guard must heed the Progeny Feather Medallion's orders. Do you think that young lord Zhen would give something so important to a subordinate?"

The crown prince was completely stupefied. At the end of the day, he was the heir of a great nation, not some witless dirt farmer. The grand tutor's explanation had been enough to unveil the truth of it all. Young lord Zhen!

Suddenly, the crown prince reached out both hands, slapping both of his own cheeks viciously over a dozen times. "You idiot, you bastard, you're absolutely blind for not recognizing someone so great! How could you not know young lord Zhen when he was standing right in front of you? Your eyes are thoroughly worthless!" The crown prince was filled with incredible regret. How ridiculous he must have seemed, asking about young lord Zhen to the man himself. The crown prince wanted to cry, but had no tears.

The other youth had said that he not only knew young lord Zhen, but he also had a good relationship with him. Maybe they would bump into each other, one of these days. Thinking back, there had been a number of hints in those words. Alas, his brain had been woefully underutilized, and he had utterly failed to decipher their meaning. Regret!!

“Grand Tutor, do... do you think that there’s still time if I look for him now?” The crown prince couldn’t help but ask, hopefully.

“No, I do not. It is quite possible that the young lord has already left Bluesky Nation. A young lord acts in unpredictable ways, and his thoughts are unfathomable. You being able to meet him a single time was him giving you face. Is he going to let you seek him out a second time? Without the matter of the Prancing Pony, the young lord would not have graced you with his presence at all,” the grand tutor sighed.

“The Prancing Pony... Steward Niu must have a pretty good relationship with him, then? Say, why not ask a little about him over there?”

“Definitely not,” the grand tutor’s face quickly changed hues again. “Superiors despise gossip information hoarders as subordinates. The smartest thing for you to do right now is to carry out his instructions impeccably, then take care of Steward Niu and his inn as well as you can. It is best, in fact, if you can help the Prancing Pony become one of the strongest factions in Goldtower City. Young lord Zhen will take notice of your efforts sooner or later. Actively gathering information is inappropriate.”

After mulling things over, the crown prince had to agree. If he went to ask now, he would find it difficult to avoid leaving an unreliable impression in young lord Zhen’s heart.

“Grand Tutor, I will do everything related to this myself. Dong Sheng must give up his stake, and Steward Niu must be the only person in charge at the Prancing Pony.”

“Yes, naturally. You need only command Goldtower City’s vice city lord to attend to these insignificant details, but you can keep a close personal interest as well to ensure no problems arise. The vice city lord should be made aware that you have a vested interest of your own in the matter. Indeed, it isn’t bad to directly say that the crown prince cares a lot about Steward Niu.”

“You are right, Grand Tutor. I shall do as you say.”

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The personal involvement of Bluesky Nation’s crown prince neatly took care of the matter.

When the prince made contact with the vice city lord, the latter was scared into a cold sweat by the former’s words. He spouted profuse apologies for his son’s unworthy behavior and sent his men to retrieve his son at once. The vice city lord’s son was partying and drinking with a group of fairweather friends at some brothel, among them Grand Steward Dong Sheng.

As the vice city lord’s son was enjoying himself, his father’s personal guardsmen knocked on the door to fetch him home. The vice city lord gave his son a severe beating right in front of the crown prince. There was no holding back in any of the vice city lord’s blows, even as his good-for-nothing son shrieked and howled in pain. Knowing that the vice city lord was showing his attitude on the matter, the crown prince

intervened. "No more, no more. Discipline in moderation is sufficient. Continuing with the beating would be life-threatening."

The vice city lord's cooperation made the crown prince disinclined to hound him further. The beating was actually as painful for the vice city lord as it was for his son. He stopped immediately when the crown prince spoke. "You scoundrel. If the crown prince hadn't called me off, I would have beat you to death today for sure! Listen to me, and listen well: if you keep on doing these underhanded things with those dishonest friends of yours, then I won't have a son anymore. Are we clear?"

The vice city lord was fuming with exasperation. Any matter that disturbed the crown prince personally was far from insignificant. He knew, of course, about some of his son's poor behavior. However, a faction like the Prancing Pony did not warrant his attention. Any associated issues were minor at best.

He certainly hadn't expected it to involve the very crown prince of Bluesky Nation. Moreover, from the sound and look of things, the crown prince was very close with Steward Niu Wuhua of the Prancing Pony. Without an intimate relationship to defend, why would the crown prince attend to this kind of matter in person? Why would he be here in the vice city lord's residence for an exclusive interrogation?

Having received a beating from his angry father, the dandy was like a frosted-over eggplant. Still, he was entirely perplexed. What had he actually done to deserve his dad's ire? Had he unknowingly upset the crown prince somehow? He pondered over the puzzling subject, but he couldn't make heads or tails of the situation. He had done his fair share of dastardly deeds, but he couldn't think of anything that would catch the prince's attention.

"What are you stuck there for, you idiot? Come over and apologize to the crown prince. Ask him to forgive your capital crime!" The vice city lord roared in fury. His son was largely ignorant of most things, but he knew enough about politics to behave himself. The crown prince was too high up; both he and his father were like ants before someone so prominent.

"I'm just an idiot, Your Highness. If there's anything I've done to upset you, I'm really sorry. Please let someone worthless like me go." The young man groveled before the prince.

The prince's tone was even. "Never mind. For your father's sake, I'll forgive you this time. However, this is something I'll be paying close attention to in the future."

Having said his piece, the crown prince waved before heading out, his personal guardsmen streaming out behind him. He had said enough. The vice city lord would have to be stupider than a block of wood to not know the rest. The crown prince trusted the vice city lord's intuition and own judgment on what to do next.

Seeing the crown prince leave, the vice city lord hastily chased after him, smiling ingratiatingly all the way. He maintained his simpering expression until the crown prince had left eyeshot before storming back inside in a fit of rage. The sight of his son standing up so casually was too much for him to bear. A surge of displeasure rose up like a newly tapped spring, and the vice city lord vented his ill temper thoroughly, kicking his good-for-nothing son back onto the floor.

Chapter 1032: Pillfire City

"You worthless scoundrel! You'll be the death of me one day!" The vice city lord was incredibly infuriated by his fop of a son.

His henchmen immediately ran up to hold him back. "City lord! Stop! Stop!"

"He might die if you go on!"

Held back by his henchmen, the city lord slumped into his chair and panted angrily. "You bastard! What on earth did you receive from Dong Shen for the incident at Prancing Horse Inn?!" He yelled with his eyes as wide as a bell.

"I... father... I had nothing to do with the incident in Prancing Horse Inn." The good-for-nothing continued to deny his involvement.

"Still trying to weasel your way out of this?" The vice city lord lifted his leg and was about to kick his son. His good-for-nothing son would likely be bedridden for three months if his henchmen hadn't stopped him in time. "Bastard! The crown prince will deal with you if you don't cough up the truth! You'll land me in trouble too! Nobody can save you then!"

The good-for-nothing was shocked by the vice city lord's attitude. "T-t-the incident at the Prancing Horse has alarmed the crown prince?" He stammered.

"Do I seem like I'm in the mood for jokes? How dare you put your hands on one of the crown prince's men! Your bastard! You've given me nothing but trouble!"

"Wu Niuuhua... h-he's one of the crown prince's men?" The good-for-nothing seemed confused. "That's impossible! How could he be exploited by Dong Shen if he's the prince's man?"

"Exploited? Do you really think he was being exploited by Dong Shen?" The vice city lord's voice sounded extremely cold. "What does a jackass like Dong Shen know? He's done for! You shall sink in the same ship as him if you remain this ignorant!"

The good-for-nothing realized that this was no longer a laughing matter after seeing how serious his father was being. His face turned deathly white as he muttered. "I'm innocent! I've received nothing from Dong Shen! I was only trying to be a good brother by backing him up a little! How could I have known that Niu Wuhua had direct relations to the crown prince?"

"I don't bloody care about your history with him! From now onwards, you must make a clear divide between you and him! Report every single untoward act he's done. If you don't rat on him now, don't blame me if this backfires." The vice city lord sounded sinister.

The good-for-nothing trembled when he was asked to betray his brother. He seemed hesitant.

"What's wrong? Can't bear to do it? He's nothing but a fairweather friend good for drinking and eating together. How deep can your friendship be?" The vice city lord laughed. "Don't say that I didn't warn you. You shall join him in deep waters if you don't grab this opportunity to rat on him."

Dong Shen never imagined that things would turn sour so quickly. He was detained by the authorities of Goldtower City on the same afternoon. People were reporting him nonstop for his misdeeds and acts of debauchery. The entire House Dong was also detained.

Niu Wuhua however, was receiving one good news after another. Dong Shen was detained, Dong Shen's residence was raided, House Dong was in total shambles...

Three days later, all of Dong Shen's businesses were transferred to Niu Wuhua. The latter was almost in disbelief by how little price he had to pay for so much to happen. The fighters that Dong Shen had assigned to Prancing Horse Inn had also abandoned the sinking ship. Some were detained, some left for a different opportunity, and others ran away. Dong Shen's brother-in-law was also thrown into prison.

The great turnaround at Prancing Horse Inn left the citizens at Goldtower City speechless. Everyone was certain that Dong Shen would end up winning the dispute. Suddenly, there were all kinds of speculations about Niu Wuhua. Various types of rumors were being spread around the streets and back alleys of Goldtower City.

Some speculated that Niu Wuhua was directly connected to the throne and had close relations with the crown prince. There were even rumors that Niu Wuhua wasn't just closely related to the crown prince, but also with a great emperor realm faction from Veluriyam Capital.

Niu Wuhua, a second-rate character in Goldtower City, was suddenly catapulted to the top of the hierarchy. Never in his mind did he expect this to happen. He knew that he had young master Ji San to thank for all of this. However, he didn't expect that Ji San was such an influential person. He was overwhelmed by emotions. The turnaround was so surreal that it felt like a dream. The amount of fortune required for this to happen was uncanny.

The perpetrator behind all of his good fortune was already a few thousand miles away from Bluesky Nation. What happened at Goldtower City was Jiang Chen's way of repaying a favor. The information that Niu Wuhua had given him was of incredible significance. To him, repaying the favor was as simple as lifting a finger, but it was absolutely life changing for Niu Wuhua.

Of course, Jiang Chen had other reasons for doing this too. As young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, he would eventually have to rule over the entire Veluriyam Capital. These nations and cities under the capital's rule had to be roped in appropriately. It was also the reason why he'd invited the crown prince to Taiyuan Tower. Bluesky Nation was one of the most outstanding nations under the capital's rule. It was only natural to treat them well and take proper care of them.

One had to traverse at least half of the Upper Eight Regions to reach Pillfire City from Veluriyam Capital. Fortunately, Jiang Chen had cultivated all kinds of travel arts, especially Kunpeng Meteoric Escape. It was capable of both short distance burst of speed and long distance traveling. He didn't cause any trouble during his journey and kept a low profile throughout every land he traversed. He managed to keep his rage in check even when he traveled across Eternal Celestial Capital's territory. He currently only had two targets. One was Pillfire City, and the other, Tilted Moon Region.

Pillfire City and the Star Harvesters... He continued to make haste and eventually arrived at Pillfire City a few months later.

Pillfire City was situated in the northern region of the Upper Eight Regions. Its territory spanned for miles and miles and wasn't less than Veluriyam Capital's at all. In fact, they might be a little larger. The land under Pillfire City's jurisdiction was also much more fertile than Veluriyam Capital. Their soil had a

lot more spirit energy by comparison. They were the foremost pill maker in the human domain mainly because of their geographical advantage and pill making pedigree.

Upon entering the city, Jiang Chen immediately noticed how adept they were at the refinement of spirit medicines. Their medicine businesses were also flourishing and incredibly successful. As expected, they have a very deep roots in the art of pill making. The pill industry plays an integral part in every piece of land under Pillfire City's jurisdiction.

Jiang Chen was in awe. He'd seen many things when he traversed through the Upper Eight Regions to arrive at Pillfire City. Veluriyam Capital was no match for Pillfire City in terms of pill dao throughout the Upper Eight Regions and maybe even the entire human domain. Veluriyam Capital held less than twenty percent of the market, while Pillfire City held at least seventy percent of the market. It was an incredible disparity.

The dependence on Pillfire City's pills grew increasingly apparent as one moved closer to the city. Pillfire City didn't become one of the strongest factions in the Upper Eight Regions without reason. Their influence in pill making alone would solidify their position in the region. Every other faction somewhat depended on Pillfire City for their pills. This meant that they could never afford to become enemies with the city. They had to show great reverence and respect to the city, which only further intensified the power the city held.

It was an endless feedback loop. Unless Pillfire City burned itself to ground, there was no way any other faction could possibly replace or take over the power they held over the entire human domain. Not even Veluriyam Capital. Of course, that was assuming that Jiang Chen wasn't factored into the equation. Nothing was impossible when a monster like him was around.

The capital here was extremely prosperous and on par with the capital city of Veluriyam Capital. The three pagodas were the landmarks of Veluriyam Capital, while the landmark for Pillfire City was the Pill Emperor Mountain. The Pill Emperor Mountain was situated in the middle of Pillfire City. The entire city itself was built around the mountain and expanded outwards from there.

There were statues of various pill emperors on the peak of the mountain. These statues were so tall and mighty that they seemed to tower beyond the clouds. Each statue represented a period of prosperity and excellence throughout the city's history. Each pill emperor was at the forefront of their own respective era of pill dao. They were the pride of Pillfire City and also represented the heritage of the city. There were nine pill emperor statues erected on Pill Emperor Mountain. This meant that throughout the history of Pillfire City, there were at last nine great emperor realm pill experts worthy of being written into the history texts. They bore the fate of the city upon their backs and contributed greatly to the land.

Jiang Chen immediately realized that these towering statues were the totem buildings that represented the pride of the city. The city had very rigorous security checks. Fortunately, Jiang Chen had been traveling under the guise of a wandering cultivator. The checks failed notice anything amiss. He could immediately feel the prosperity when he set foot into the city.

Pillfire City had an atmosphere that couldn't be seen in Veluriyam Capital. It was an atmosphere unique to only Pillfire City. However, he was in no mood to enjoy the prosperity of Pillfire City. He immediately

tried to contact Lin Yanyu using a secret method they'd agreed on beforehand. It didn't take long before he located him.

Lin Yanyu was no match for Jiang Chen in speed after all. He'd left months before Jiang Chen did, but he arrived only two weeks earlier than him.

"Young lord, I've made inquiries and confirmed that the Star Harvesters have purchased a slave with an innate wood constitution of high order. They seem to view the slave with high regard. Many nobles and factions in Pillfire City have tried to purchase the slave, but the Star Harvesters rejected every single one of them. It's the current hot topic in Pillfire City. It didn't even take that much effort to gather this much information.

#### Chapter 1033: Star Mill

Lin Yanyu was quite competent. Although he had only returned to Pillfire City for half a month, the intelligence he'd gathered was extremely detailed. After a brief overview, Jiang Chen gained a rough understanding of the situation.

"Young Lord, the Star Harvesters know that a lot of factions are keeping an eye on their slave with the innate wood constitution, so they've made sure to obfuscate their activities and keep a tight ring of protection around him. Not many people have even seen this slave in Pillfire City. Therefore, I believe it is very difficult to snatch him by force. As for buying him outright, that seems unlikely as well. They seem to be holding on for a greater profit."

"Hold onto him for greater profit, you say?" Jiang Chen smiled. "If that's the case, then that means buying the slave isn't completely out of the question. In their eyes, a genius with an innate wood constitution is only a product. They're just waiting for a good offer."

The Star Harvesters was ultimately a gang, not a sect. A gang cared most for profit. The reason they were boosting interest this way was simply to raise the price and get a better offer. They wanted to wait until their slave had an astronomical price tag before selling him.

Jiang Chen might not know the Star Harvesters, but what Lin Yanyu had found from his investigation proved that they were boosting interest and hyping up Mu Gaoqi's value. Jiang Chen also realized that Star Harvesters had been very successful in their endeavor. Once the price had gone beyond a certain bar, and Mu Gaoqi became a hot topic, the factions that truly appreciated real talents would fight for him. The greater the competition, the bigger the profit the Star Harvesters would earn.

"Young Lord, are you saying that... we can buy him?" Lin Yanyu asked in surprise.

But Jiang Chen smiled and shook his head. "We're not going to buy him. I'm confident in my wealth, but this is Pillfire City, so doing something like that would be a risk. Plus, even if I did win the bid, I don't know if I can leave with him."

A giant like Pillfire City wouldn't allow an outsider to take their pill dao genius away. Even if the buyer was wealthy beyond measure, Pillfire City wouldn't allow him to take a genius away unruffled. Although Mu Gaoqi didn't have any relation with Pillfire City, since the gang had bought him, the city would tyrannically think that he belonged to it without a second's thought. They wouldn't allow an outsider to touch a genius even if he was a slave.



That was Pillfire City's modus operandi. They wouldn't allow any element that might affect their monopoly to exist, and if it did, they would do their best to obstruct or destroy it.

It was similar to how they'd tried to monopolize the Longevity Pill for themselves. After their scheme failed, they'd even visited Veluriyam Capital and challenged the Sacred Peafowl Mountain for the right to the pill. Lin Yanyu's family was another example. After their accidental discovery of their family's ancient pill recipe was exposed, it didn't bring them any glory. On the contrary, it'd pushed them completely into the abyss. There was only one reason behind those unfortunate events. Someone in Pillfire City who was stronger than the Lins had set their sights on that ancient pill recipe.

There was only one rule of survival in Pillfire City. All interests must serve the best interests of Pillfire City. Naturally, the powers who represented Pillfire City's best interests were first rate powers or top rank great emperors, like Pill Emperor Pillzenith.

"Yanyu, is there any way to approach the Star Harvesters?" Jiang Chen asked after pondering for a moment.

"That's easy. The Star Harvesters have a lot of pill stores in Pillfire City, and their biggest is the Star Mill. This store only trades in high-rank pills, so it's quite the high-end shop even in Pillfire City. Recently, many of the pills created by this pill dao genius have appeared in the Star Mill. If I have to guess, the Star Harvesters probably put them on display on purpose."

"Oh? Where is this Star Mill?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

Lin Yanyu took out a map. "Young Lord, this is a map of Pillfire City. Star Mill's location is well known and very easy to find. The Star Harvesters' headquarters is nearby too. The Star Harvesters has a lot of say in this region. They're also different from other factions. While the other factions focus on conducting business with great families, they focus on conducting business with wandering cultivators and other gangs. Therefore, their business is quite extensive."

The Star Harvesters' status was slightly higher than that of House Wei's in Veluriyam Capital. However, it was at most a standard great clan in Veluriyam Capital. It was absolutely a first rate faction, but it definitely didn't belong among best of the best either.

Just like Veluriyam Capital, Pillfire City's great emperor factions seldom participated in the power struggles of the secular world. However, the ones in Pillfire City tended to interfere more. Most importantly, they held a stricter leash over the secular world.

Jiang Chen took the map from Lin Yanyu, "Keep up your investigation, Yanyu. I'll be making a trip to the Star Mill."

Jiang Chen had memorized the map of Pillfire City. Once he acquired his bearings, he pinpointed the Star Harvesters' headquarters.

Thirty minutes later, he'd found the Star Mill. When he entered the establishment, Jiang Chen immediately felt the thick fragrance of spirit medicine wafting over his face. The unusually rich scent of spirit medicine was immediately indicative of the exceptional quality of their products.

Star Mill's standards were quite high. Their counters were arranged to give a feeling of picturesque disorder, and the front desk itself was made of high quality transparent crystals. It looked incredibly high

class. The spirit medicines were also organized based on various specifications. Many assistants in unified attire were leading around groups of customers within the store. They looked very patient and professional, and it was evident that they were well trained.

This scene surprised Jiang Chen a little. The Star Harvesters was nominally known as a gang, so he thought that their stores would have a similar air and be roughly handled. However, seeing was indeed believing. He realized after he entered the store that the Star Harvesters was far from the disgusting bunch he'd initially imagined.

"What can I do for you, sir?" A pretty girl with a very sunny appearance beamed warmly at Jiang Chen when she arrived at his side.

Although Jiang Chen wasn't a lecher, he couldn't help but feel cheerful to meet a girl as sunny as her. He smiled. "I'm just looking around."

The girl smiled brightly. "My name is Keke. Let me know if there's anything you need."

Jiang Chen nodded before he swept a gaze across the entire store. Then, he casually asked, "I hear that the gang has recently taken in a genius pill master with an innate wood constitution of high order, and that he has released several products."

"You wish to see Master Mu's pill products?" The girl looked a little surprised.

"Master Mu?" Jiang Chen stared blankly at her.

"The genius pill master we recently recruited is Master Mu. His creations are on the second floor, but..." Keke looked a little hesitant.

"But what?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"Master Mu's creations are extremely precious. Therefore, not only do you need to be a pill king to see Master Mu's products, you must also pay an entry fee." She responded seriously.

"How much do I need to pay?" Although Jiang Chen was shocked by the Star Harvesters' ability to fleece customers, he wasn't so poor that he couldn't afford an entry fee.

"You must first show your pill king medallion. Then, you will need to pay ten thousand saint spirit stones."

It costs ten thousand saint spirit stones for one visit!? Although Jiang Chen didn't mind paying the fee, he was still stunned by the Star Harvesters' money grubbing methods. He had never seen such overt highway robbery until today.

Even if Mu Gaoqi was a very impressive pill dao genius, he was at best still an unpolished jade. He was far from reaching the level of a top rate pill master. If he was touring a pill emperor's products, then the admission fee would cost more than a thousand spirit stones. But Mu Gaoqi was at most a novice level pill king currently, wasn't he? Even if Mu Gaoqi had improved so rapidly that he was now an intermediate level pill king, it still shouldn't cost ten thousand saint spirit stones to tour his products, should it?

Jiang Chen arrived at an answer after thinking for a moment. I guess the Star Harvesters really is planning to raise Mu Gaoqi's value as high as possible before selling him. They aren't beneath charging their customers ten thousand saint spirit stones for admission, and customers are willing to pay the price. The gang really is doing their best to squeeze every bit of money and value they can get out of Mu Gaoqi.

Jiang Chen hadn't actually gotten his pill king medallion yet. However, he did still have Shi Zhen's pill king medallion. It was this medallion that'd enabled him to slip into Veluriyam Capital. He waved the pill king medallion before Keke before producing ten thousand saint spirit stones. "Miss Keke, please lead the way."

Jiang Chen stared at Keke smilingly, so much so that the charming, sunny girl turned slightly red. For some reason, this man's eyes made her heart flutter a little. It was exactly because she was distracted that she didn't even catch the name that was written on the pill king medallion. However, she was too embarrassed to ask Jiang Chen to show it again while he was staring at her like this. Left with no choice, she accepted the ten thousand saint spirit stones and said softly.

"Please wait here for a moment, sir. I'll grab an admission medallion for you immediately."

Jiang Chen relaxed minutely after seeing that Keke hadn't told him to produce his pill king medallion again. He had no intention of parading his fake pill king medallion around if he could help it. If someone happened to know that Shi Zhen was a member of Ninesuns Sky Sect, he would only be creating more issues for himself.

Miss Keke was a quick worker. It wasn't long before she'd obtained an admission medallion and passed it to Jiang Chen with a red face. "Please come with me, sir. This is a reminder, but the second floor of the Star Mill is a VIP area. Therefore, please obey the rules and maintain your decorum once you've entered the second floor."

Jiang Chen smiled and accepted the medallion. He then headed up to the second floor behind Miss Keke. The second floor of the Star Mill was just as wide as the first floor, but its arrangements were also clearly of much higher class. It was also slightly busier. Keke led the way and brought Jiang Chen to a rather crowded region.

"These are some of Master Mu's recent pill products," Miss Keke introduced.

Jiang Chen's eyes scanned the area thoroughly. Although there weren't many pills in this area, every one of them was put on display in an extremely eye-catching way. When he scanned the pills with his consciousness, his heart immediately skipped a beat. As he had expected, the pills gave off a familiar feeling that was unique to Mu Gaoqi.

#### Chapter 1034: Mu Gaoqi's Unique Style

Although it had been many years since he'd seen Mu Gaoqi, Jiang Chen still hadn't forgotten his brother's unique aura. Mu Gaoqi was born with the natural aura befitting that of a graceful immortal, and his pills also accordingly possessed this unique quality. During his baptism in the wood spirit spring, Mu Gaoqi absorbed some of the spring's intrinsic qualities as well. Naturally, having spent so much time with him, Jiang Chen was quite familiar with his aura.

Therefore, Jiang Chen immediately recognized the pills when he saw them. There was no mistake. These pills had been refined by Mu Gaoqi. They possessed a certain quality that no one else could imitate, not even Jiang Chen himself. He might be able to imitate the wood spring's aura, but he doubted that he could imitate Mu Gaoqi's unique, graceful aura.

What surprised him was that he discovered Mu Gaoqi's pill dao level had improved tremendously. Although these pills weren't considered first rate in Jiang Chen's eyes, they would still be deemed amongst the finest of other similarly-ranked pills. These pills possessed a unique quality that clearly distinguished them from the products of other pill masters in that there was a distinctive, personal label accompanying each of them. This particular discovery gladdened Jiang Chen. Although Mu Gaoqi's recent fate was terrible considering that he had been turned into a slave, at least his cultivation hadn't stagnated.

An innate wood constitution of high order... maybe this trial served as a catalyst, allowing him to tap into the greater potential hidden inside his body and, in doing so, fully unlocked his talents? Jiang Chen had to hide his astonishment at the speed of Mu Gaoqi's improvement as he continued to observe his products. Although he hadn't quite yet reached the level of advanced pill king, he was unquestionably at the level of intermediate pill king. This rank didn't imply a lack of strength on Mu Gaoqi's part, however. On the contrary, it was proof of his talent and skill. He was about four years younger than Jiang Chen. It was immensely impressive for someone so young to have already attained intermediate pill king level.

Even the pride and invincible legend of Pillfire City, Pill King Ji Lang, couldn't possibly have surpassed Mu Gaoqi by much when he was his age. In fact, Pill King Ji Lang might not have even been an intermediate pill king when he was in his twenties. Even if he had been, it was unlikely that he'd been as distinguished as Mu Gaoqi currently was.

Mu Gaoqi was literally born for pill dao, having been born with a unique quality that gave him a distinct advantage no one else possessed. Considering how cautious and timid he used to be, the fact that he had been able to become a core disciple solely because of his pill dao merits left no question that he was extraordinarily talented.

Jiang Chen wondered if Mu Gaoqi had managed to free himself now that he had arrived at the Star Harvesters. Despite sensing the familiar presence, his excitement lasted for only an instant, and he quickly regained his calm. He guessed that Mu Gaoqi was likely currently still a slave. After all, the Star Harvesters were clearly trying to put him on the shelf for display and sell him off at a high price. If this truly was the case, there was no way they would allow Mu Gaoqi to free himself.

"Sir, are there any pills that you find to your liking?" Keke suddenly asked after noticing that Jiang Chen had fallen into a daze.

Jiang Chen shook his head with a smile. "These pills are pretty good, but they don't look like the work of a first-rate pill king. So, why is the admission fee ten thousand saint spirit stones?"

He purposely asked a question to which he already knew the answer to.

Keke smiled slightly and politely replied, "You've only mentioned these things because you aren't aware of Master Mu's background. You are right in that his pills aren't the best products out there, but Master Mu is only in his twenties. There are only so many twenty-year-old pill kings in the entire human

domain, and you won't find a single person who dares to claim that their level is higher than Master Mu's. Don't you think that the creations of a future master in his youth are worth collecting?"

This marketing was extremely well done. Not only did they neatly package Mu Gaoqi as a future first-rate pill dao master of note, but they even topped this assertion off with a nicely-wrapped bow, highlighting the pills he created during his youth. These promotional skills were truly impressive. Jiang Chen smiled. "These products aren't bad, but they aren't entirely flawless either. Personally, I don't think that they're worth collecting."

Keke's brilliant smile immediately turned into one of slight embarrassment. With reddened cheeks, she rebutted, "Well, even so, many people have purchased Master Mu's products for their personal collection."

"Wealth makes people foolish," Jiang Chen said with a faint smile on his face.

"Sir, you may be a customer of the Star Mill, but please don't insult the products we make, especially Master Mu's," Keke protested in a very serious tone. Even she maintained her professionalism as a store assistant, she still felt a little unhappy when she heard Jiang Chen's comments.

Jiang Chen shrugged. "I'm just telling the truth. Even Master Mu wouldn't dare claim that these pills of his are perfect. If I were to take a guess, these products are only as perfect as the Star Mill's packaging."

"Sir!" Miss Keke's appearance was like that of an angry lamb. Lambs were born docile, so whenever she grew angry, she looked unusually attractive.

"Fine, fine. If you won't accept the truth, then just pretend like I didn't say anything."

If Miss Keke hadn't previously accepted his admission fee, she might have kicked him off this floor already. Jiang Chen circled around the area another two times.

"Miss Keke, is Master Mu in at the moment?" Jiang Chen asked in a seemingly casual tone.

However, Miss Keke still gave off the impression that she was angry with him. She cast him a slightly resentful glance but didn't give him an answer.

"Well, I guess he'd be ashamed of showing his face around here. After all, his pills are being blown way over the top even though they're obviously imperfect. Not even he could be that thick-faced."

This time Miss Keke was truly angry at him. She protested loudly, "Please conduct yourself with dignity, sir. If Master Mu's products are not up to your liking, you can always choose to return to a lower floor!"

Her raised voice immediately drew everyone's attention. They couldn't help but stare at Jiang Chen with a bit of hostility when they saw that such a sweet-tempered girl had lost her cool because of him. They obviously thought that he lacked tact, having incited such a sweet and charming girl into angrily raising her voice. What kind of an outrageous person was he?

Jiang Chen was obviously doing this on purpose. Him beating around the bush and criticizing Mu Gaoqi's products non-stop was to see if Mu Gaoqi himself would show up. Unfortunately, his attempts didn't yield any results. In fact, he had irritated Miss Keke instead. Jiang Chen hadn't intended to butt heads with her.

A well-dressed middle-aged man, giving off the appearance of the person in charge, walked over with a frown. He looked at Jiang Chen and asked, "What's wrong, my friend?"

The middle-aged man appeared a bit impressive. Jiang Chen guessed that he probably held a higher position in the Star Mill. He smiled and glanced at the pills. "Oh, it's nothing. I simply thought that Master Mu's products aren't as good as you promoted. I'm just a little surprised that you would charge ten thousand saint spirit stones for this."

"My friend, anyone can make baseless accusations, can't they?" The middle-aged man frowned slightly. "Master Mu's products may not be considered to be at the zenith in terms of their quality, but he's only in his twenties right now. These products are impressive enough considering how young he is. If you still wish to nitpick his work, then maybe you shouldn't come to the Star Mill."

His words made sense. The other customers also echoed, "We are here to gauge Master Mu's potential."

"Yeah, Master Mu is incredibly young. We can't evaluate him by the standards of a ninth-rank pill king. After all, every ninth-rank pill king out there is at least hundreds or thousand of years old."

"Exactly. That a pill king in his twenties could create pills of such high quality is already an incredibly impressive feat. He's absolutely a pill dao genius, the likes of which appears only once every five millennia."

"Five millennia? I doubt you could find someone like this even in the span of ten millennia." The crowd shot out their individual opinions, but they all praised Mu Gaoqi's products unanimously. Jiang Chen hid his amusement. If he didn't know any better, he would have suspected that these people were supporters hired by the gang.

Even Jiang Chen himself admitted that Mu Gaoqi's work was incomparable to most for his age. However, he also wasn't lying when he said that these products were imperfect. When he'd made those remarks, he wasn't referring to the creator's expertise in pill dao, but rather, the mental knot that existed within the pills themselves. It was almost as if the creator of the pills had been shackled and unable to work freely.

Only sophisticated pill masters could have noticed this. Jiang Chen knew very well that this strange mental entanglement hidden within the pills was related to Mu Gaoqi's current circumstances. From examining these pills, he deduced that Mu Gaoqi was still a slave, and because of this, his creations lacked a certain sense of freedom and fulfillment.

Although Mu Gaoqi's graceful qualities were extremely distinct in his pill products, so too was a lack of freedom. Jiang Chen ignored their comments. He said indifferently, "It seems that the Star Mill only intends to receive praise but not criticism. I suppose I have said too much if that is the case. How unfortunate. If the creator of this pill were here, I'd shut him up so thoroughly that he wouldn't even be able to respond."

The person in charge sneered. "Are you trying to say that you wish to challenge our Master Mu to a pill battle? Am I correct to interpret your words as a challenge to the Star Mill?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Challenge the Star Mill? Have you ever seen someone challenging a pill store alone?"

"Then what exactly do you mean?"

Jiang Chen said indifferently, "What I'm trying to say is that the Star Harvesters currently own an exceptional genius, a treasure trove, yet you've only dug out a portion of his potential. Worse, you're satisfied with keeping it this way and plan to sell him once his value reaches a certain threshold. This is truly amusing."

Suddenly, Jiang Chen was praising Mu Gaoqi but belittling the Star Harvesters. This change in stance confused the person in charge as to Jiang Chen's true motives.

"Who are you really, friend? You've come here to cause trouble, haven't you?" The middle-aged man's face turned chilly as his tone turned unfriendly. It was clear that he thought that Jiang Chen was a hooligan trying to stir up trouble.

#### Chapter 1035: The Temptation of a Deal

Jiang Chen was indeed trying to cause trouble, but it was all to see Mu Gaoqi. Thus, he didn't even attempt to deflect when the manager glared at him angrily. "You're half correct. I'm also here for Master Mu," he replied while smiling.

"Oh? Don't tell me that by challenging Master Mu, you're planning on using his fame to catapult yourself to success? Isn't that a little too much wishful thinking on your part?" The manager's tone was extremely cold.

"Borrowing his fame for success?" Jiang Chen burst into laughter. "You're overthinking things. I'm only here to propose a deal to the Star Harvesters.

"A deal?" The manager tried very hard to suppress his vexation. "What kind of deal?"

"Are you allowed to make decisions for the Star Harvesters? Can you sign off on matters related to Master Mu?" Jiang Chen asked in response.

At first, the manager was stunned by his reply, but he quickly recollected himself and scrutinized the plain-looking wandering cultivator standing before him. He wasn't sure whether Jiang Chen was truly so dumb and fearless, or if he actually had a card up his sleeves. How dare he quibble with me, a manager of the Star Mill, in Star Harvester territory of all places? Who does he think he is? He's nothing but a wandering cultivator! Even though he'd almost burst with rage a few times throughout this encounter, his reason managed to keep him sane and his temper in check.

"It doesn't matter whether I have the proper authority to make decisions. If the esteemed customer wants to make a deal, please at least show us some sincerity. Can you prove that you are worthy of proposing a deal to the Star Harvesters?" The manager sounded cold and aloof.

"Having come all the way here, it's only natural that I'd have a few cards up my sleeves," Jiang Chen replied with a faint smile.

"Please forgive me for failing to notice said hidden cards of yours." The manager didn't try to be courteous either.

Jiang Chen rummaged in his sleeves and casually took out three spirit herbs. "I have three spirit herbs here. Do you have anything amongst your vast inventory that might rival them?"

The Star Mill possessed quite a few herbs, but sky rank spirit herbs were indescribably rare. They were meant for great emperor realm cultivators, which was why they were rarely ever found in the market. The majority of spirit herbs for sale in the Star Mill were only spirit rank. There were a few earth rank spirit herbs as well, but they possessed none of sky rank.

The manager's eyes nearly fell out of his eye sockets when Jiang Chen casually took out the spirit herbs. An expression of greed immediately flashed across his face.

"Sky rank spirit herbs?" The manager gulped audibly.

"Good eye." Jiang Chen praised.

Attempting to distract from his loss of composure, the manager hastily cleared his throat. "Sky rank spirit herbs are rare indeed, but it's not as if we don't have any; we just don't usually display them. I suppose that since you've managed to acquire three sky rank spirit herbs, you are barely qualified to propose us a deal."

"Just barely?" Jiang Chen laughed heartily. "What if I have something worth ten times more than that?"

"Something worth ten times more than sky rank spirit herbs?" The manager was flabbergasted.

Jiang Chen quickly continued. "Are you allowed to make decisions for a deal of such a magnitude?"

The manager almost lost his temper again. Something that was worth ten times more than a sky rank spirit herb was beyond his imagination. Indeed, he truly didn't possess the authority to make a deal of such caliber.

He took a deep breath. "Dear customer, what kind of deal are you proposing?"

"I intend to exchange my treasure for Master Mu." Jiang Chen cut straight to the point.

"Exchange your treasure for Master Mu?" The manager immediately turned him down. "Never. Master Mu isn't for sale."

Jiang Chen broke into laughter. He mockingly responded, "If Master Mu were truly not for sale, why would the Star Harvesters go to such an extent to promote and publicize him? I rest my case. You'd never spend so much effort promoting him if you didn't intend to sell him. You would have kept quiet and used him to covertly make money if that were the case."

The manager was rendered speechless. He couldn't think of a good rebuttal. Only after a few moments had passed did he manage to eke out a reply. "Customer, surely you don't think that three sky rank spirit herbs are enough to exchange for Master Mu?"

The manager continued before Jiang Chen could even reply, "If that's your line of thinking, you should just give up right now. Master Mu isn't merely worth three sky rank spirit herbs. Even thirty wouldn't suffice!"



Jiang Chen didn't argue. "An exchange can only be carried out if both sides are satisfied. Without either side agreeing to its terms, the deal wouldn't be successful. Naturally, I have my own way of making sure that your side is satisfied."

"What way?"

"If you can't represent the Star Harvesters, do you think there's any meaning in continuing this conversation?" Jiang Chen asked in response.

"Do you think that I will report this matter to my superiors if you don't show me anything noteworthy?" The manager laughed coldly, refusing to budge.

Jiang Chen laughed slyly. "Hehe, it's your problem if you don't want to report this. I imagine that there's a rather handsome reward for whoever is involved in Master Mu's sale right?"

"So what?"

"If your boss happened to find out one day that you lost an exceptional deal relating to such matters, what will he think of you?"

"An exceptional deal? How can you be that confident?"

"Why would I be here if I weren't confident?" Jiang Chen gave a casual reply. "Since you're not capable of making decisions on behalf of the Star Harvesters, I have no choice but to personally pay your boss a visit. Once I do so, you can wave goodbye to any rewards you would've received otherwise."

His confidence gave him an air of assertiveness that made him seem extremely convincing. Even the manager had become a little persuaded. He stared at Jiang Chen and asked, "You're certain that you have an extremely attractive offer?"

"Yes." Jiang Chen assured.

"You do know what'll happen to you if you try to con or fool us, right?" The manager still seemed a little hesitant.

"You've been prattling on all day. Are you going to say that you don't have the necessary qualifications to report to headquarters next?" Jiang Chen asked with a faint smile.

The manager snorted and stared at Jiang Chen. He mused for a long time before he finally nodded. "I really hope that you don't have any tricks up your sleeves. Otherwise, I guarantee that you won't be leaving the Star Mill alive. Tell me, who do you want to see?"

"Someone who has absolute authority, of course. Ideally it would be someone who has the final say in Master Mu's fate," Jiang Chen replied blandly.

"Then I shall have to report to the boss. Let me remind you that anyone who mocks our boss or challenges his authority will be met with a terrible fate."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "Even if I mock you, these sky rank spirit herbs won't do the same. Remember, it doesn't matter who talks to me as long as I get to see Master Mu with my own two eyes. I want to make sure that his innate wood constitution of high order isn't just something you made up."

It was only fair to inspect the goods before making a deal.

The manager turned towards Keke. “Keke, escort our friend to the honored guest area. Serve him tea and take care of his needs.”

Keke’s anger had yet to subside. “Come with me,” she said indignantly. She served him tea when they arrived at the resting area. When she saw how casual Jiang Chen was acting, she couldn’t resist questioning him. “You’re such a heartless person. If you’re so interested in Master Mu, why did you ridicule his products in such a way?”

Jiang Chen was rather amused by the nosy young lady. He shrugged and looked at her innocently. “When did I ever ridicule his products? I was only speaking the truth.”

“Hmph! How can that be the truth? You were just nitpicking!”

Jiang Chen laughed in response. “Miss Keke, you’re a good employee, but I still stand by my opinion. Master Mu’s products may appear to be quite good on the surface, but there’s an aura of oppression contained within. If I’m not mistaken, Master Mu must’ve felt quite oppressed when he created these spirit herbs, which is why all these spirit herbs possess a similarly wary and oppressive quality—he was mentally torn.

No matter how good it appeared to be, any creation produced from such a mentality would never be perfect. Keke seemed skeptical at first, but she soon began to doubt her own understanding. Master Mu was indeed a slave of the Star Harvesters, so it made sense that there would be a mental knot in his pill dao. The common person would never be able to notice such a detail. In fact, many pill dao masters wouldn’t be able to either.

How did he notice so many details with just a single glance? Keke was astounded. Perhaps it was just an empty guess? Many people in Pillfire City were already aware of Master Mu’s status as a purchased slave, so maybe he’s intentionally saying these things because he already knew about the rumors?

“Miss Keke, I already know full well that I’m speaking the truth, but you’re having doubts about the authenticity of my words, aren’t you?” Jiang Chen read Keke like an open book. It almost seemed like he possessed a mind-reading ability.

Keke tried her best to suppress her astonishment, but curiosity got the best of her. “Sir, what exactly is your background? Were you sent here by one of the great families of Pillfire City to acquire Master Mu?”

Jiang Chen broke into laughter. “If so, which family do you think sent me?”

Keke pondered for a moment before she shook her head. “I don’t know. That’s beyond my ability. However, you don’t seem like you’re from Pillfire City.”

“Congratulations. Your guess is correct.”

“Where are you from then?” Keke asked curiously.

“Myriad Abyss Island.” Jiang Chen was lying through his teeth. The Star Harvesters were unlikely to fear him if he gave them his true background. Since that was the case, he might as well exaggerate and say

that he was from the Myriad Abyss Island. The Myriad Abyss Island was considered a mythical island in the Upper Eight Regions and the human domain. It belonged in the legends.

“Myriad Abyss Island?” Keke’s big watery eyes filled with astonishment and doubt when she heard the name.

“Does that place really exist? I thought that it was merely fiction!” Keke was suddenly filled with curiosity.

#### Chapter 1036: Star Harvesters Boss

Though Jiang Chen was no expert at dealing with young girls, he knew that girls of such an age were typically extremely curious. The more mysterious one seemed, the more one could pique a her curiosity. Thus, when faced with Miss Keke’s inquisitiveness, he returned no explanation, only a faint smile. The more he refrained from speaking, the more unfathomable he appeared.

It was enough to make Miss Keke look at him in a rather different light. Her gaze was not that of a newly-charmed young girl, but rather filled with interest, fascination, envy, and admiration. There was the very real desire to unravel any secrets he held. After a few moments, the supervisor returned to the resting area, making straight for Jiang Chen.

“Friend, the boss has agreed to an audience with you after hearing about the deal.”

Jiang Chen had fully expected that sort of answer. “Is Master Mu present or not?”

The supervisor hadn’t seen anyone brave enough to haggle so rudely on the very grounds of the Star Mill before. But the deal was too important for them for him to get angry. “Why don’t you go and see?” He replied.

“Take me there then.” Jiang Chen waved a hand.

Miss Keke hastily put herself at the front. She walked right beside the supervisor, whispering a few phrases into his ear. Her voice was as soft as the sound of a mosquito, but Jiang Chen’s Ear of the Zephyr ability allowed him to clearly hear every detail. She was telling the supervisor that he came from Myriad Abyss Island.

The latter’s body shook when he heard that particular piece of information. He turned his head to glance back at Jiang Chen, his gaze somewhat more inspecting than before. He wasn’t as gullible as Miss Keke. He did not immediately accept the information as true.

The Star Mill was not far from the Star Harvesters’ headquarters. It was only a short walk between one point and the other. The building itself was quite majestic. It was situated among more common elements in Pillfire City, but its dignified style was comparable to at least a handful of hidden sects.

“Friend, keep your eyes out after you enter the headquarters. Clean up your act before the boss especially, because, otherwise... heh heh...” The supervisor warned. Jiang Chen’s cheerful expression was unchanged. The warning seemed kind-hearted on the surface, but it was actually just a tool to intimidate. Any amount of additional pressure during the negotiation process was beneficial.

He had no intention of following his adversaries' lead. They passed through numerous checkpoints before reaching the heart of the headquarters. Walking past the well-guarded gate, Jiang Chen entered into a courtyard.

The yard itself had been decorated with care. The Star Harvesters really were measurably more cultured than the average gang. However, Jiang Chen saw it as only pretentiousness. A gang was coarse and crass by nature. Anything that they did to the contrary was a pointless veneer.

"I've brought the guy you wanted, boss." The supervisor came to a stop on the outer edges of the courtyard, speaking into its interior.

"Bring him in," a commanding voice boomed from behind an apricot grove.

"Come on," the supervisor threw Jiang Chen a look.

Past the grove stood a yellow-robed burly man. Both hands behind his back, he overlooked a pool of clear water. The rock formations within the pool were mountain-shaped, water dripping down from their craggy tops. It was quite scenic. However, the yellow-robed man's figure ruined the picture's composition. The yellow-robed man was the Star Harvesters' boss, Gai Zonglin. The boss's eyes shone like lightning, and two bolts snaked towards Jiang Chen. His gaze was as ferocious as a tiger's, making their target thoroughly uncomfortable.

Thankfully, Jiang Chen had a disciplined heart. He showed no cowardice despite the overbearingness of the gaze. He smiled, returning a cupped fist salute. "I've heard for a long time now of the peerless bravery of the Star Harvesters' boss. Having met him today, I can note that the rumors are wholly accurate."

In the wider world, Gai Zonglin had the nickname of 'Peerless Brave'. He was very happy with that fact, and thoroughly enjoyed it. However, his current expression was as impassive as when Jiang Chen had come in. "I hear that you want to make a deal with us Star Harvesters? May I hear the exact details?"

Jiang Chen looked all about him. "I don't see anyone I'd want to make a deal with."

Gai Zonglin raised an eyebrow. "I lead the Star Harvesters. Who else are you going to make a deal with, if not me?"

"I am absolutely certain of your leadership over your gang," Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "So I'd like to make why I'm here obvious as well. I'm here for Master Mu."

"Master Mu?" Gai Zonglin snickered. "Are you interested in his innate wood constitution as well? Forgive my bad eyesight, but which Pillfire City faction do you represent?"

"I represent no one," Jiang Chen looked plainly and forthrightly into Gai Zonglin's eyes.

"Truly?"

"...Except my own master," the young lord smiled once more.

"Who is your master?" Gai Zonglin was moved.

"Even if I say his name, I doubt that you would recognize him, Boss Zonglin."

Gai Zonglin roared with laughter. "In all the Upper Eight Regions, there is no senior with any degree of fame that I do not know, regardless of what sect or faction he is from. Why don't you try me?"

"My master is not from the Upper Eight Regions," Jiang Chen shook his head tranquilly.

"From a middle or lower region, then?" The gang boss felt his interest drain away. A guest from one of those places could only waste his time.

"Does someone have to come from one of those places? The human domain is not the only place in the world." Jiang Chen's smile was ruminant.

"What do you mean?" It was a perplexing statement for Gai Zonglin.

"Has Boss Gai heard of Myriad Abyss Island?" Jiang Chen asked.

Gai Zonglin trembled, his eyes ablaze with a shocked stare. "Myriad Abyss Island? Is your master from there?"

"Is that a problem?"

Gai Zonglin tossed an ambiguous look towards the Star Mill's supervisor, who hurriedly defended himself. "He didn't tell me that earlier, boss. Miss Keke said something to that effect, but I don't know if I could believe it myself."

The boss slowly nodded. "Word of mouth is no proof," he said calmly, eyes trained on Jiang Chen. "The Myriad Abyss Island is a blessed place heard of only in myth. Even the Upper Eight Regions' best and brightest have never set foot there. How do I know that you're not telling tall tales?"

Jiang Chen chuckled. "You're right, words alone are insufficient. But, does who I am matter to the exchange itself?"

"Of course it matters," Gai Zonglin snickered. "If you're just another run-of-the-mill swindler, the Star Harvesters has no interest being tricked by the likes of you."

"When did the human domain become so rich? Can some common swindler simply afford to give away three sky rank spirit herbs? The Star Harvesters have great stature here in Pillfire City, I understand. How many sky rank spirit herbs can you provide on the spot?" Jiang Chen remarked indifferently. The question stumped Gai Zonglin.

"Three sky rank spirit herbs are not enough to trade for Master Mu," Gai Zonglin contested coolly. "If you want to trade sky rank spirit herbs for him, come back with a hundred!"

This initial offer touched on the patently absurd. A hundred sky rank spirit herbs were significantly more valuable than just one genius pill master. When the Star Harvesters bought Mu Gaoqi, they had paid at most around a single herb's worth. If they were to accept Jiang Chen's offer on the spot, they would have made two hundred percent profit off the deal. Unfortunately, the Star Harvesters had an extremely large appetite. They went to great lengths to embellish Mu Gaoqi solely to maximize their profit.

"A hundred herbs?" Jiang Chen chortled. "You have an impressive appetite, Boss Gai. If I had a hundred sky rank spirit herbs, I could just give thirty of them to Emperor Pillzenith and ask him the favor instead. If Emperor Pillzenith were to ask you for Master Mu, I daresay that you'll yield nine times out of ten."

"I'm brave enough to ask the question, and I hope you're brave enough to answer. If Emperor Pillzenith really does make that specific request, would you have it in you to deny him?"

"Emperor Pillzenith is an honorable and respectable man. He will not blackmail the Star Harvesters for no reason. Your question is nonsense." Gai Zonglin retorted dismissively.

"The emperor hardly needs blackmail you. Would you consider a present of three sky rank spirit herbs from His Majesty to be insufficient?" Jiang Chen grinned shrewdly. "You know best how much you spent on this slave when you first bought him."

Gai Zonglin could muster no response.

"Are you willing to hear a new offer, Boss Gai?"

"Go ahead," the boss looked sober as ever.

"Three sky rank spirit herbs, plus a true sage rank ancient pill recipe." Jiang Chen made his first formal offer.

"If the recipe is something that's well-known or worthless, then it's worth even less than another spirit herb. An exclusive recipe, perhaps several spirit herbs. The total value won't exceed more than ten. You're slashing down the prices by quite a bit. My price was a hundred sky rank spirit herbs, but you've reduced it to less than a tenth." The boss sneered coldly.

"We're still discussing the price, no? It is the seller's right to quote an astronomical price, but it is also the buyer's to cut it figure down to earth. Everything the Star Harvesters have done in this case is to look for the right buyer, from whom you can ask a high price. I've given you what I think is fair, and most would agree. It's up to you to decide, Boss Gai." Jiang Chen had more weights to place on the scales, but he didn't want to show all of them just yet.

"My answer is the same as before. Impossible." Gai Zonglin's tone was as firm as ever. "I will give you a counteroffer, however. Thirty sky rank spirit herbs, and three unique ancient pill recipes. If you come from Myriad Abyss Island, I'd think this easily affordable."

He was one of the most black-hearted merchants Jiang Chen had seen.

The young lord clearly did not have as many as thirty sky rank spirit herbs. He had harvested some from Mt. Mirage's restricted area, but not more than several. His findings in the desolate wildlands added to this number, but he was still definitely short of thirty. The current price was highway robbery, clear and simple.

#### Chapter 1037: Two Plans

Jiang Chen thought for a few more moments before speaking once more. "Five sky rank spirit herbs, plus two exclusive true sage realm ancient pill recipes. That's my final offer."

Gai Zonglin mulled it over for only an instant before cackling. "Not a bad bid, but it's far from what I'd expect out of a legitimate deal. If that truly is your final offer, then my apologies, but no deal."

"I doubt that the local leading factions are willing to pay a similar price, Boss Gai." Jiang Chen frowned.

“Haha, then you underestimate Pillfire City’s wealth. Even if you truly hail from Myriad Abyss Island, I would not belittle the locals’ purchasing power. Their thirst for talent is much stronger than you might imagine.”

No bargaining tactic seemed to be working on Gai Zonglin. His original plan to directly purchase Mu Gaoqi from the Star Harvesters was probably a failure. Even so, although he couldn’t hand over the spirit herbs that Gai Zonglin had demanded, he could definitely offer up more ancient pill recipes in substitution. Forcing his way through the transaction was definitely a viable option. However, that was outside the scope of Jiang Chen’s consideration. For one, Gao Zonglin’s demand was already lower than this bottom line.

For another, if he really had been able to pony up the contents of such a shocking offer, it would be akin to painting a target on him for all of Pillfire City to see. Countless pairs of greedy eyes would be trained upon him then. In fact, a gang boss like Gai Zonglin would probably be amongst the first to pounce.

Money was of no concern for Jiang Chen—he possessed sufficient financial strength. Nevertheless, he was unwilling to yield his bottom line on principle. If he did, he would face an endless amount of trouble. There was no reason for him to stay once the dysfunction of the deal was set in stone. “Since you insist on making such ridiculous demands, Boss Gai, there’s no point in doing business with you.” Standing up, Jiang Chen casually cupped one hand over the other. “I assure you that I’ll keep tabs, though. I’d like to see what price will get you to eventually part with your prize.”

Gai Zonglin roared with laughter. “It’s not like my gang needs the money. We’re in no rush. As long as Master Mu continues performing up to par, the price will go nowhere but up. If you come back in the future for a purchase, friend, it’ll cost you a good deal more.”

The gangster’s fearlessness impressed Jiang Chen. The Star Harvesters were shrewd in commerce.

“We shall see, hmm?” He snickered before heading out. The Star Harvesters made no effort to bar his departure.

After he left, Gai Zonglin’s face darkened. He looked at Star Mill’s supervisor. “Little Xiao, where did that person come from? He’s as superficial as they come, judging by how indiscreet he was.”

“It’s hard to say, boss. Although, I think he has way more money than the average country bumpkin.”

“No, considering his manners just now, he’s definitely not from the country.” Gai Zonglin nodded. “He said he was from Myriad Abyss Island, but I’m not so sure how true that is.”

He was evidently wary of the island’s name. Even if the claim wasn’t true, he was still bothered by the mere mention of the island. If the young man truly was from there, then him having refused the proposed deal just now might end up starting a grudge or feud, creating further trouble for them down the line. The Star Harvesters weren’t afraid of trouble, but fear of Myriad Abyss Island’s residents was perfectly healthy. Even residents of Pillfire City were susceptible to such a fear, much less one of its street gangs. Gai Zonglin felt increasingly annoyed by the complications.

“Get someone to check him out later. We have to figure out where he’s from.” He was strangely bothered. He had a vague premonition that his choice today had been unwise.

Star Mill's supervisor turned to Keke. "Keke, I think that kid has a pretty good impression of you. I have a task for you: Try to get close to him. No matter what you have to do, you need to find out more about his origins. Even if you can't, any additional information is good."

Miss Keke had stood timidly on the sidelines throughout the entire exchange. She knew that as an inconsequential employee, she had no right to speak before the boss. Upon hearing the 'task' delegated to her by the supervisor, she fell into a panic. "Manager Xiao, I... I... I really can't."

She didn't know what to do. 'No matter what you have to do' included the implication of sacrificing her body. Seduction was a perfectly reasonable tactic in their books, but for Keke, doing something like that was unthinkable. As an unsullied girl, considering such a thing was worse than the prospect of death itself.

"What? You can't do something as simple as that?" Manager Xiao's face darkened. "The Star Mill does not employ the useless. If you can't even carry out such a small task, what's the point of keeping you around?"

Gai Zonglin chuckled, glancing towards the delicate girl. "Little girl, our gang is kind to anyone that can do good work. If you manage to pull this off, both you and your family will receive the Star Harvesters' protection and care. Why not make your ancestors proud?"

Keke's face became even redder. She began to sob inconsolably. "Keke is too stupid, boss. I'm worried that I can't. What if I let you down?"

"How do you know you can't if you haven't tried yet?" Manager Xiao was impassive. "You're the one I'm most impressed with in the entire store. Keke, the boss has spoken. If you do well with this task, then everyone around you will benefit. Both you and your family will be treated as heroes in the gang. This is the only chance for any of you to move up the social ladder. Even if you're not interested personally, you should consider the future of your loved ones. Don't you have a younger brother working as an apprentice armed escort? His dangerous and violent lifestyle must make the rest of you worry a great deal. If you succeed at this task, I will personally allow him to join the Star Mill, and he will receive a great deal of resources to help him grow."

Keke's family was her soft spot. Manager Xiao's words convinced her to wipe away her tears. She began to think that the boss's idea was perhaps a little feasible. Honestly speaking, the likelihood of it succeeding was very low, but was she was willing to do anything for her family. Her parents' hard work, her younger brother's risky lifestyle at the armed escort agency... Keke was quite tempted.

"Our visitor just now, I noticed that he had a strong interest in Master Mu. I don't think he'll give up this easily. Just keep him interested, Keke, and see exactly how much he's willing to part with. If you can find out his origins, even better. You have my word as the boss that I will grant your younger brother the status of a rank four disciple." Gai Zonglin tipped the scales with a much richer reward.

The Star Harvesters' disciples were ranked from one to nine. After the disciples were the administrators, then the elders, then the grand elders, and finally the vice boss. The actual boss was only one rank above the vice. The status of a rank four disciple was not particularly high, but it was the perfect placement for a newcomer. Most disciples started from rank one. They needed twenty to thirty years before they could make their way to rank four. Starting from rank four would shave off several decades



of work. Most importantly, Keke's younger brother was currently only an apprentice armed escort. He wouldn't have had the right to join the Star Harvesters in the first place. Hence, the boss's promise to issue her brother the status of rank four disciple was a heart-wrenchingly enticing temptation.

"Boss, Manager Xiao," Keke bit into her bright-red lips, a light blush creeping into her pale face. The resolve in her eyes, however, was undeniable. "I'm willing to try, but I have a tiny request... if I mess up, please punish only me and not my family."

She knew that it was a difficult life living amongst gangsters. Many rules, once broken, affected both oneself and one's family. Therefore, her greatest worry was not her inability to complete the task, but rather how it would affect her loved ones.

Gai Zonglin roared with laughter. "The Star Harvesters are a principled bunch. We don't blame a family for a man's errors. Plus, the most you could do is fail personally. I doubt it'll hurt the gang in the long run. So, don't worry about it."

"Thank you for your kindness, boss, and Manager Xiao as well." Keke had no way out now. She had been ensnared the moment Manager Xiao had said her name.

As he left the Star Harvesters, Jiang Chen felt eyes following his every movement from the shadows. This observation was unsurprising. A gang like the Star Harvesters was far more unlikely not to keep tabs on him after that entire ordeal. It wasn't necessarily out of malice either. Perhaps Gai Zonglin saw him as a potential customer in the future.

The Star Harvesters were waiting for the highest bidder. If the various other factions of Pillfire City couldn't offer up a similarly hefty bid, then the gang might reconsider a deal with him. However, that was only one of the possibilities. There were worse ones to be considered, with one of them being that the Star Harvesters were now after his three sky rank spirit herbs, and by foul means rather than fair at that.

It was an off-the-cuff thought, not to mention extremely unlikely, but there was no reason not to prepare for the worst possibility. The world was a dangerous place, and caution was a man's most stalwart companion. Knowing that he was being watched, Jiang Chen refrained from returning to Lin Yanyu's place. Instead, he chose an extraordinarily luxurious inn and checked in there. There were a million ways for him to shake his unwanted friends off. However, any action on his part would only cause undue alarm. The more unpolished his behavior now, the less of a threat he would be perceived as. If he showed remarkable cunning, then the Star Harvesters would only be warier. This was of no benefit to his future plans.

Jiang Chen had two plans at his current disposal. One was to use his original bid to trade for Mu Gaoqi while the other was to use more underhanded methods. Gai Zonglin's attitude had made him lean towards the latter.

#### Chapter 1038: Miss Keke Pays a Visit

Jiang Chen did nothing much over the next few days. He was aware that the gang was keeping an eye on him, but didn't expose its watchers. Instead, he strolled the streets of Pillfire City everyday and even visited the slave market on several occasions. It was an act to make his observers feel like he was thirsty for talent. As a result, his watchers felt like they weren't able to grasp his true objective. Because the

Star Harvesters was surveilling him, Jiang Chen and Lin Yanyu now communicated through consciousness messages instead of meeting directly with each other. So far, there had been no trouble.

Lin Yanyu had managed to gather a bit of intelligence through all sorts of channels. It was all related to the Star Harvesters, but the amount of information that was actually useful was pitifully small. Jiang Chen had considered using the Goldbiter Rats to gather information from underground, but a place like the gang headquarters would certainly be protected by all kinds of restrictions. Although the Goldbiter Rats could travel through earth, they couldn't break open layers of restrictions. A gang as powerful as the Star Harvesters must be protected from head to toe. He was sure that their restrictions stretched all the way down into the ground. And so, Jiang Chen ultimately gave up on the idea.

He'd met with the boss of the Star Harvesters last time. That was a good start. However, his request to meet Mu Gaoqi still hadn't been realized. This depressed Jiang Chen a lot. It also made him realize how cautious the Star Harvesters was acting for this matter.

"I guess it will be extremely difficult to take Mu Gaoqi away from the Star Harvesters. But first, I must see him. I need to know how he's doing right now." His current biggest problem was the inability to see Mu Gaoqi. The Star Harvesters just wouldn't let him meet Mu Gaoqi no matter what he tried. Right now, he felt was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Jiang Chen was able to rob Myriad Puppets Pavilion of their slaves back then was because they weren't on their guard. Moreover, those slaves weren't too valuable and Myriad Puppets Pavilion didn't think that someone would dare commit a robbery at the Fish and Dragon District. But the Star Harvesters was different. Mu Gaoqi was a treasure to them from the beginning, so they were very much on guard against any unpleasant scenarios.

"Master, I still think we should begin by targeting someone inside the Star Harvesters." Lin Yanyu gave his personal opinion.

"What suggestions do you have?" Lin Yanyu's intelligence was one of the qualities Jiang Chen valued in him, especially since he was a local in Pillfire City.

"I think we should focus on investigating those people who can get close to the Star Harvesters' boss, especially those who can walk in and out freely of their headquarters." Lin Yanyu suggested.

"Yanyu, do you know if the Star Harvesters' boss is particularly fond of anyone, like his children or his direct disciple?" Jiang Chen asked.

"Master. Gai Zonglin doesn't have any direct disciples because he's currently in his prime. As for his children, the Star Harvesters has done well to keep it a tight secret. I tried investigating into this matter, but wasn't able to gather anything concrete."

It was understandable that the Star Harvesters worked hard to maintain a high level of secrecy. The Star Harvesters was a gang, and a gang was different from a sect or a family. The way of living and conflicts between gangs were often crueler and more primal. Therefore, a sect member wouldn't easily reveal their privacy to others. The moment any private relationships were revealed, the people involved might become targets.

Therefore, no one but those who were extremely close to Gai Zonglin would know if he had a family or children. This was especially true since he was a gang boss. The fact that the Star Harvesters was tightly knit despite its gargantuan size impressed Jiang Chen even more. If the Star Harvesters had existed in Veluriyam Capital instead, it was definitely a match for some powerful great clans. There was no way an aristocratic family could compete against the Star Harvesters at all.

While Jiang Chen was musing, he suddenly heard a series of small, quick footsteps from the corridor in front of him. They were very familiar. Why has she come? He didn't even need to look to know that his visitor was the assistant with a bit of a personality, Miss Keke.

Knock knock knock. Someone knocked on Jiang Chen's door.

"Come in," Jiang Chen responded indifferently. As expected, the door opened to reveal the beautiful Miss Keke. Her eyes looked a little shifty, and her cheeks were a little reddened. She looked like a girl who was secretly meeting her lover that she was privately engaged to.

"Miss Keke?" Jiang Chen frowned. "Why have you come?"

He knew that the Star Harvesters was watching him, but he couldn't fathom why Miss Keke had chosen to show up. That being said, this meeting was not unwelcome. He knew that Miss Keke must have been ordered by Star Harvesters to meet him, and he welcomed their approach, whatever their intentions might be. Maybe they were trying to sound him out through her, but he could also do the exact same thing. Furthermore, the watchers and now this visit proved that the Star Harvesters was still interested in him. It was gratifying news.

Of course, they might just be interested in the three sky rank spirit herbs he showed them.

"Can I come in, sir?" Keke sounded a little timid and hesitant.

"Hmm. Do as you please." Jiang Chen didn't show too much enthusiasm. Miss Keke walked in before closing the door carefully behind her. She took a few small and quick footsteps to a chair and perched carefully on it.

"I thought you couldn't stand my presence, Miss Keke, so I never thought you would visit me one day. Should I say that it is an honor to have you here?" Jiang Chen said smilingly. He had purposely spoken in a joking tone to liven the atmosphere and ease the girl's tension.

Miss Keke squeezed her fingers together so tightly that the joints looked a little pale. She pondered for what seemed to be a very long time before she finally mustered the courage to say, "Sir, I asked around and learned that you live here, so I've purposely come over to apologize."

Apologize? Jiang Chen broke into involuntary laughter. "Miss Keke, you have been responsible and diligent, haven't you? If I remember correctly, you don't owe me an apology at all."

"That's not right." Keke's face turned even redder as she said somewhat agitatedly, "I want to apologize for my attitude towards you that day, sir. I... I actually thought that much of what you say is true, sir. I am very much impressed by your words that day. But... I'm an assistant in the Star Mill. They can fire me at any moment if I don't toe the line."

Jiang Chen stared at the girl but didn't take her apology too seriously. It was possible that she was as upright and honest as she appeared. But her apology was obviously not entirely genuine. For example, her claim that she asked around and learned where he lived was a complete lie. The only reason she could've known this was because the Star Harvesters was watching him.

He didn't expose her lies though. Instead, he flashed a calm smile. "We are here now, so that's a pointless subject to dwell upon. I admit that I am somewhat interested in that pill master with an innate wood constitution of high order, but there is no way I can possibly fulfill your gang's demands. So if you are here to peddle him, Miss Keke, then I can only say that you've wasted your time."

Whatever her intentions might be, Jiang Chen decided to back down for the moment and see how she would respond.

"Sir, it is as you said earlier. The reason the Star Harvesters worked so hard to package Master Mu is because we intend to sell him." Miss Keke sounded rather forthright at least. "But that doesn't mean that we plan to sell him carelessly for a quick spirit stone. On the contrary, our standards are very high. If our customers don't meet our standards, we can't possibly sell Master Mu to them, can we?"

"But Miss Keke, don't you think that such words are wasted on me right now? I've already given up on buying Master Mu." Jiang Chen smiled.

"Are you giving up already, sir?" A trace of disappointment immediately colored Miss Keke's face.

"Manager Xiao had sent me over today to learn exactly how passionate you are about buying Master Mu. If you can confirm this, then I am certain that the price can be renegotiated."

"Any further negotiation is pointless. There is no way I can pay what the Star Harvesters demands even if you were to cut that price in half." And it was true that Jiang Chen had no wish to buy Mu Gaoqi any longer. He didn't want to fall into his opponent's rhythm and be baited like a fool at every turn.

"Sir..." Keke bit her lips softly and said with reddened cheeks, "I would like to ask one more question. Do you really come from Myriad Abyss Island? I heard that Myriad Abyss Island is a legendary holy land. It is said that the greatest experts of Divine Abyss Continent take pride in being able to enter Myriad Abyss Island. Also, I heard that even the most average person in Myriad Abyss Island is stronger than our sage realm experts. Is that true?"

Jiang Chen smiled. "Now that is what you call the spread of falsehoods. It is true that Myriad Abyss Island is very impressive, but average fighters also exist everywhere in the world. All fighters must start from the beginning and build the foundation of their martial dao step by step."

"If that is so, then may I know what level you are in Myriad Abyss Island? Manager Xiao says that your background must be extraordinary to be able to offer what you offered. He believes that you are of a high status. That is why Manager Xiao is certain that you can afford our price, if you truly wish to buy Master Mu that is."

She was trying to fish for information.

"Even if Myriad Abyss Island is a holy land of wealth, I am not a fool. I will not pay what the Star Harvesters demands even if I can afford the price." Jiang Chen's tone was calm. "This is a matter of principle and bottom line. I have no choice but to give up on this trade."

"If you are here to persuade me to pay the price you've quoted for Master Mu, then you may return and report back to your superiors already." Jiang Chen opened his hand and gestured to the door.

"Sir, the price can be renegotiated. Our ultimate objective is just to maximize our profits. I'm sure that you can understand this. I have been requested by Manager Xiao to communicate with you as best I can. If you truly intend to buy Master Mu, I am sure that we can still talk this over."

It was obvious that the Star Harvesters didn't want to miss out on any potential clients.

#### Chapter 1039: The Star Harvesters Decision

Jiang Chen didn't chase Keke away because she had been sent by the gang. That was proof that they were still interested in him as a potential buyer. He paid no heed to whatever ulterior motive they had. As long as they continued showing interest in him, there was still a possibility that the deal could happen.

He didn't fret after sending Miss Keke off, because he knew that Mu Gaoqi was simply too important to the Star Harvesters. He had to construct a meticulous plan before making his next move. He would have to succeed in his first try. If any mistakes were made, his previous efforts would have all been for naught. Moreover, it would make the Star Harvesters more vigilant as well. This was also the reason why he hadn't refused to talk with Miss Keke. The gang's stance was unclear, as they hadn't fully refused the trade. Things were at a standstill.

He made his decision, choosing to follow Lin Yanyu's suggestion and tackle the problem from within. It wasn't easy to infiltrate a gang like the Star Harvesters. However, there were no ununlockable doors and unbreakable forts in the world. One could find spies in even the strictest of clans, with the six great sects of the Myriad Domain being a perfect example of this concept. Almost every single clan had been infiltrated by spies. The Tristar Sect was practically a puppet of the Ninesuns Sky Sect.

Hence, infiltrating the gang was still within the realm of possibility. Jiang Chen decided to make full use of Lin Yanyu's capacity as a local and tasked him with collecting all sorts of information about the Star Harvesters.

However, four days later, he received another bit of news.

"Master, I've just received inside information that the Star Harvesters is planning to auction off Master Mu after the Bounty Arena."

Jiang Chen was extremely surprised by the news. Was the clan finally revealing their true greedy selves? Auctioning a pill dao genius like any ordinary product was actually incredibly shameful for a gang of their stature.

"Tsk tsk. It seems they really do prefer money over face." There was some contempt within Jiang Chen's comment.

However, Lin Yanyu had a different view of this matter. "Master, based on my observations, I can say for certain that the Star Harvesters are no admirers of talent. However, from a long term perspective, they would almost certainly gain more value if they foster and nurture Master Mu."

These words made sense. Auctioning off Mu Gaoqi at this stage isn't the best deal as his value was yet to reach its peak. It was definitely not a smart business decision by the Star Harvesters. Jiang Chen had thought that they were doing this because they'd run out of patience and instead preferred to make some quick money.

"Yanyu, are you saying that there's more that meets the eye here?"

"Master, the power struggle here is a little different from what you're used to in Veluriyam Capital. The Capital is a little more orderly compared to this place. There is competition between factions and also all kinds of disputes, but overall it is a place where laws are abided by and rules are obeyed. The same can't be said for Pillfire City. The laws here are slightly more primitive. Rules of the jungle and the survival of the fittest is taken as gospel." Lin Yanyu gritted his teeth upon reaching this point. "After what happened to my family, I've realized that owning something precious might not actually be a good thing. One's fortune will arouse the envy of others. If my family hadn't found the ancient pill formula, and that certain someone hadn't envied my father's pill dao talent, they would never have been annihilated for no particular reason!"

A deep hatred suffused his voice. It was evident that he felt a lot of contempt for the laws of Pillfire City.

"You mean that the Star Harvesters has begun to feel pressure from owning Master Mu?" Jiang Chen seemed a little intrigued.

"Your disciple cannot offer you confirmation, but based on my knowledge on the current state of affairs in the city, I have confidence that it is likely the case." Lin Yanyu theorized calmly. "The Star Harvesters is one of the strongest factions in Pillfire City, but they are not the cream of the crop, and nowhere close to being the strongest. Master Mu's talent in pill dao has probably exceeded what they can manage. The consensus in the city is that the Star Harvesters is not worthy of Master Mu."

Stories of trouble stemming from fortune was a daily occurrence here. The same also happened in the Myriad Domain. The Eternal Celestial Capital and the Ninesuns Sky Sect believed that Emperor Featherflight and an empyrean heritage was lost in the domain, which was why they plotted and invaded the entire region, causing chaos and destruction. A weak and puny faction possessing a treasure greatly beyond their abilities was recipe for disaster.

In some ways, Jiang Chen understood what sort of pressure the Star Harvesters was facing. Mu Gaoqi wasn't the only pill dao genius with a wood constitution in the world, but he was definitely a phoenix to be found only once every few thousand years. An innate constitution was rare in the Upper Eight Regions, but it was still possible to locate some. Almost every single sect would have a few members with an innate constitution. However, an innate wood constitution was fewer in numbers compared to other elements. That made one of high order was as rare as a phoenix or a dragon.

An innate wood constitution genius was basically a body built for the pursuit of pill dao. An innate wood constitution of high order however, was a genius beyond that of common geniuses. The Star Harvesters realized that they couldn't hold onto Mu Gaoqi for too long, which was why they made so many high profile promotions. Since they couldn't hang onto him for the long term, they might as well sell him off for a high price. It would bring them a sizable profit and create a good relationship with the buyer.

Their issue was that they'd been waiting far too long for the right price. They'd shown too much ambiguity and given no definite answer. Many leading factions were incredibly dissatisfied. They believed that the gang had gone overboard. Therefore, it was natural that they would exert some pressure to the gang, instantly making life harder.

The Star Harvesters realized that they could delay the matter no longer after receiving all kinds of pressure, overt and below the table. Time was of the essence. If they continue to delay, the masses might lose all of their patience. They would become a public enemy if the leading factions flew into rage. They would have to live the rest of their lives like rats, a target of scorn.

They were smart enough to realize that they couldn't delay matters any longer. It was the reason why they announced that they would auction Master Mu after the Bounty Arena.

It was the smartest choice they could make. If they ever conducted a deal in private, they would offend other factions. By having an auction, they could protect themselves from this problem. They would offend nobody if they left the final decision to the auction house. Everyone was clamoring after Pill Master Mu, was it? Then name a price. An auction was a free-for-all. The highest bidder would win the item. If one couldn't manage to win the bid, it meant that one wasn't wealthy or powerful enough. There was no one but themselves to blame. The Star Harvesters were sheltered from any fallout. One had to praise them for making such a smart move. Jiang Chen understood their train of thought after Lin Yanyu explained the current situation.

"Yanyu, what exactly is the Bounty Arena?" Jiang Chen asked. He knew nothing of the customs and practices in Pillfire City, so the Bounty Arena was also foreign to him.

"Honored master, the Bounty Arena is one of Pillfire City's traditions. Actually, it's a tradition also found in many other places in the Upper Eight Regions," Lin Yanyu explained.

"Oh? Is it similar to the gathering we just had in Veluriyam Capital?" Jiang Chen asked curiously.

"Not quite. Pillfire City indeed has a similar event to Veluriyam Capital's recent gathering, but the Bounty Arena is an entirely different kind of event."

"Oh? Explain."

"The Bounty Arena is a yearly event, with it sometimes being held at the change of every season. There is no regularity to the event. However, it seems that the coming one will be one of the largest they've held in the recent decade. I heard that there will be nine full arenas in total, with each full arena housing nine sub-arenas."

"Is there a specific meaning behind this particular arrangement of arenas?"

"The main motive behind this event lies not within the arenas, but rather within the bounty. There will be numerous bounties in each arena that come in the shape of all kinds of forms and requests. Some might come as questions about martial dao, issues regarding cultivation, inquiries in pill dao, and many other fields. One might even have to expect issues regarding talismans, formations, and perhaps even beast taming. It's a good platform for someone to earn fame with the common people and build connections. Sometimes, you might even come across an exorbitant bounty for an extremely difficult question!"

Jiang Chen was slowly realizing the purpose of the Bounty Arena. Simply put, it was a platform for solving problems. If someone had questions that they couldn't solve, they could issue a bounty and collect help from the masses.

"If that's the case, it's likely very difficult to become the lord of a full arena." Jiang Chen immediately noticed the crux of the matter.

"That is correct. The lord of an arena is handpicked after a series of filtering. However, one stands to gain a lot of wealth if a position in the full arena is acquired. Past Bounty Arenas had three full arenas, or maybe even six at the most. Nine full arenas makes it the largest Bounty Arena in the recent decade." The more Lin Yanyu spoke, the more excited he became. "Honored master, I'm certain that you'll gain a position if you join the arena lord tryouts!"

"Me?" Jiang Chen laughed but was actually considering the same thing.

"The Star Harvesters are going to auction Master Mu off after the Bounty Arena. People will no longer doubt your abilities if you join the auction as an arena lord."

Jiang Chen pondered deeply after hearing these words.

#### Chapter 1040: Signing Up

In the world of martial dao, seniority and status were common notions. Though he was the young lord of Sacred Peafowl Mountain, prominent in the entire Upper Eight Regions, he could not let that slip here. Pillfire City was extremely hostile to Veluriyam Capital at present. It was better to leave his identity unrevealed rather than risk spoiling the proceedings. That was why he'd said that he was from Myriad Abyss Island instead.

Myriad Abyss Island was mysterious and unfathomable. Anyone who tried to figure out who he was shrank a few degrees from hearing those three words. Though he was falsely flaunting someone else's reputation as his own, he couldn't avoid some petty deceit if he wanted to carry out business here. It was a common saying that it was difficult for heroes to triumph over local villains.

Though Jiang Chen was sufficiently heroic, he had to yield before the critical mass of local villains here in Pillfire City. He knew when to lay low and when to rise up. There was wisdom in measuring one's responses. When he'd first come to Veluriyam Capital, there was no way he could have made such great waves without House Wei as a bridge. Proceeding without information or support could only end in failure. In the worst of circumstances, his life could be forfeit.

During the events at Veluriyam Capital, his Taiyuan Tower wouldn't have been able to open without the Coiling Dragon Clan's help. The Majestic Clan certainly had more than enough strength to crush it in the crib. Jiang Chen knew these truths well. He'd exhaustively considered the details and possible problems.

Though Lin Yanyu's suggestion was admittedly risky, it was also the best for his current situation. If he didn't participate in the Bounty Arena, he might not even get a chance later to participate in the auction. The Star Harvesters' murky grace aside, he had no authority of speech without a prominent title or position. Thus, the Bounty Arena was a golden opportunity.

"When does the Bounty Arena begin, Yanyu?" Jiang Chen asked.



Lin Yanyu actually really wanted his master to participate. He wanted Jiang Chen to spread his name far and wide across Pillfire City as a show of dominance. So, the fact that Jiang Chen was asking after it made him quite happy. "Master, the selection process for the Bounty Arena's arena lords has already begun," he answered hastily. "The actual event begins a week from now, so there's still time to sign up. I can take care of it, if you'd like."

"We're in no rush. Tell me about it first." Jiang Chen had no information whatsoever on his prospective goal. He needed to educate himself first. "The sign-ups right now, are they for arena lords proper or their assistants?"

"There's no need to choose assistant arena lords, master," Lin Yanyu chuckled. "They're only trialing for arena lords proper."

"Oh? How are the assistants chosen, then?" Jiang Chen blinked.

"The assistants are entirely chosen by the master of the main arena. In fact, sometimes they are not chosen at all. An arena lord does not necessarily require assistants," Lin Yanyu smiled. "Historically, there have been many who were selfish enough not to. Still, most masters do pick a number of assistants. Typically, those who attain the post of arena lord are otherwise prominent in Pillfire City anyway. They don't lack power-hungry peers or associates."

That was enough to convey the essence of things to Jiang Chen. To put it more plainly, the assistants shouldered the arena lord's burden and were helpful aides.

"Wandering cultivators have a hard time becoming even these assistant arena lords, then," Jiang Chen sighed.

"Heh, not necessarily." Lin Yanyu's smile did not abate. "The Bounty Arena attracts the attention of many powerful wandering cultivators as well. There's no shortage of past arena lords not tied to a specific faction. They've chosen assistants for the most part, though their main criterion in this case is individual ability. Moreover, any bounties that an assistant collects are split fifty-fifty with the actual arena lord."

Was this way of doing things really feasible? Jiang Chen didn't know what to say. Such behavior was almost equivalent to putting up jobs for sale. There was even a fair-ish split of profits! I suppose it's a much more blunt and straightforward method.

"Master, do you think fifty percent to be too much to give away?" Lin Yanyu smirked. "It's a considerable share, but a lot of people compete to become assistant arena lords anyway. There's no cost to doing so, right? The more bounties collected, the greater the raw profit for the lucky ones who do. At the end of the day, it's all spirit stones in the pocket."

Jiang Chen nodded. On second thought, that made more than enough sense. He himself would be equally happy to take up the offer, were he in the same shoes. The amount given to the arena lord notwithstanding, he still stood to benefit from the remainder. That was much better than those entirely ineligible. One only needed to invest time and skill to be rewarded with a respectable return. The arena lord proper had effectively paid their sign-up fee, after all. It was reasonable enough that he would want a return on his investment.

Naturally, Jiang Chen had no intention of fighting for a mere assistant's post. The only job that was worthy of his time was a true arena lord's. "Then it's settled, Yanyu. No need for you to sign up for me. It's better to keep your identity hidden for now. Just tell me the specifics. I'll do it myself."

Lin Yanyu could not give away anything related to his identity. Otherwise, he would potentially be exposed to much more danger than Jiang Chen was currently exposed to. If Pillfire City's factions knew that a remnant of House Lin lingered within the city still, they would stamp it out at any cost.

Lin Yanyu was touched by the gesture. His master was as good of a man as he could hope for. Ordinarily, masters treated their disciples as slave labor. There was no reason for them to care overmuch about what happened to their lessers. But Jiang Chen showed an honest kindness and care. Though he was nominally Lin Yanyu's master, he acted more like an older brother.

Lin Yanyu knew that he was physically older than the other youth, but there was a psychological reliance nevertheless. He admired Jiang Chen almost blindly. He understood better than anyone else that if he wanted to make something of himself and one day avenge his house, he could only hope for his master's aid.

Jiang Chen gathered some preliminary information from Lin Yanyu. The Bounty Arena was run by Pillfire City, but any genius or expert from the Upper Eight Regions was eligible to attend. However, the most elite experts didn't show themselves at such occasions. There was no reason for them to unless it was a once-in-a-millennium opportunity. The big-names in the world of martial dao cherished their reputations and cared for modesty to a certain degree, just like everyone else. They never participated in the seasonal Bounty Arenas to avoid damaging their prestige. It was unlikely for them to show up to this one as well, despite its decennial nature.

There was certainly no reason for Pillfire City's own great emperors to show. Whether their subordinates and attendants would was slightly more uncertain. Emperors' factions did not concern themselves with events that occurred more frequently than once every century, in general. There were exceptions to every rule, though, and this particular one had been broken reasonably frequently in the past.

Jiang Chen came to Pillfire City's most famous attraction, Skyfire Avenue. The city viewed it as a symbol of great pride and unrivaled glory. The avenue headed straight towards the Pill Emperor Mountain.

The venue for the Bounty Arena was Skyfire Avenue's very own Temple of Cleansing Fire. It was home to an official faction of the same name. It was quite well known throughout the Upper Eight Regions. The head of the Temple was also the host of the Bounty Arena. Though the Temple of Cleansing Fire itself did not house any great emperors, it was uniformly recognized by all of the others within Pillfire City. In fact, it was a kind of compromise that they had reached within the city. The Temple had access to a collective smattering of channels, made available by the emperors' factions. It had perhaps the widest variety of tricks available to it on its home turf.

Even in the wider Upper Eight Regions, it had a formidable reputation.

It was because of the Temple of Cleansing Fire that the Bounty Arena was so alluring to its participants. Indeed, half of the event's impressiveness came from its sponsor. This decennial occurrence of the Bounty Arena stirred Pillfire City abuzz. As Jiang Chen walked on Skyfire Avenue, the emotional

atmosphere hit him with a wave of nostalgia. It was almost as if he'd been taken back in time to the Veluriyam Pagoda gathering. Though there was a measurable difference in the amount of airborne passion, it was a similar sensation.

Suddenly, Jiang Chen looked forward to the Bounty Arena a great deal more. Judging by the enthusiasm alone, this was quite the festive setting. If he could distinguish himself at such an event, it would be very advantageous to his future plans. Attending the Star Harvesters' auction, for example. Jiang Chen wanted decisively to show himself off just this once. He needed the enormous amount of capital that the Bounty Arena could provide him, financial and otherwise.

The site was absolutely packed where the sign-ups were taking place. The insurmountably high fee served as a helpful deterrent. Without it, ten times over the amount of people would have showed up. But even so, he felt the electricity in the air.

"You want to sign up?" After a lengthy line-up, it was finally Jiang Chen's turn. The person in charge from the Temple of Cleansing Fire was quite surprised at seeing such a young and unfamiliar face.

"Yes, that's right," Jiang Chen blinked innocently.

"There's a security deposit of a hundred million saint spirit stones. According to the rules, if you fail to complete any of the bounties during the Bounty Arena, the entire deposit will be withheld from you. Each successful bounty completed entitles you to a tenth of your principal. If you finish ten bounties, you're eligible to the entire sum. Ah, yes, and the Temple of Cleansing Fire also collects ten percent of your finished bounties. Do you understand all of this?"

"Yep," Jiang Chen smiled. "I understand perfectly."

"Well, you can give me your security first, then. Oh, yes, there's something else also. If you fail at becoming a master of the main arena, you will be deducted ten percent of your security as well."

This was the most important point. This particular rule shut out people giving the arena a random shot, hoping to get luck. The organizers used it to ensure that only those who had the ability, qualifications, and financial clout could sign up.