

Three Realms 1061

Chapter 1061: Haggling over the Ancient Reformation Pill

Jiang Chen hadn't notified the bounty issuers yet because he wasn't sure if Lin Yanyu could handle the mission with the eighty million bounty. Notifying them prematurely could negatively influence Lin Yanyu's reputation. It was why he asked Assistant Temple Master Gao to notify them tomorrow. Giving Lin Yanyu one day was his absolute limit.

Minutes and seconds flew by. Jiang Chen's fame reached a new high after news went out that he was the bounty king. Both of his arenas were incredibly busy. Everything went on as usual. His assistants would take on the missions first, and he'd take over whatever they couldn't handle. His income after a day's work was rather substantial.

Lin Yanyu didn't disappoint. He found a lead right before the day was up. He was still lacking a few details, but Jiang Chen could tell that he was on the verge of completing the mission.

"Very well done, Yanyu. I shall grant you the full bounty if you finish this mission by yourself. You shan't have to split the money with me." Jiang Chen transmitted words of encouragement. Assistants were supposed to share half of their bounty with the arena lord, but Jiang Chen voluntarily relinquished his half of the bounty to encourage Lin Yanyu.

Next day, Jiang Chen told the assistant temple master to summon Lin Yanyu's mission issuer. It was one of the lowest rewards among the sovereign missions, but the issuer was incredibly excited nonetheless. He expressed his appreciation to Lin Yanyu and immediately handed over the mission reward.

It was the first sovereign mission to be completed in the current Bounty Arena, and the assistant temple master was also relieved to see the completion of Jiang Chen's first sovereign mission.

Right after that, he was told to summon the emissary from the Great Yu Skysword Sect.

The Ancient Reformation Pill mission had remained unsolved for over eight hundred years. It was on track to become one of Temple's unsolvable mysteries. Assistant Temple Master Gao didn't expect that anyone to solve it. He was skeptical when Jiang Chen accepted the mission, but he soon realized that today might be the turning point for the 800 year old mystery after seeing the young arena lord's confidence.

This mission was of great significance to the Great Yu Skysword Sect. They'd even stationed emissaries in Pillfire City just for sake of the mission. Throughout the years, they'd participated in every Bounty Arena event and replaced countless emissaries. And yet, their enthusiasm didn't diminish one bit. One could easily tell how important the mission was to them.

The Great Yu Skysword Sect's emissary was currently at the Temple out of obligation. The mission had remained unsolved for over eight hundred years, so they didn't expect anyone to solve it this time either. They were in utter disbelief when they was told to enter the premises by the assistant temple master.

"Assistant Temple Master Gao, are you certain that you're not mistaken? Is it really... our mission?"

"Elder Lu, your mission is one of the top ten missions in our Temple. In terms of age, it's definitely within top three. How could I be mistaken?" The assistant temple master smiled wryly.

The beardless elder named Elder Lu scratched his nose in an awkward manner. "Does that mean that someone is finally able to complete our mission? Who is it? Is it Pill King Blue Phoenix?" He asked in an excited manner.

The elder was incredibly curious, but the assistant temple master didn't divulge anything. "Won't you know after you enter? By the way, have you prepared the spirit stones?"

"Of course. Our sect master places much importance to this mission and demands a report every year. How could we not have the reward at the ready?" the elder immediately responded.

The assistant temple master didn't tease him any further. "Come with me."

The elder was nervous, surprised, and at a loss for what to do. This mission was simply too important to their sect. In fact, their sect master had just given them even more saint spirit stones and was prepared to increase the bounty to 800 million. Fortunately, someone accepted the mission before the bounty was increased. Maybe we'll be able to save the 300 million saint spirit stones after all? It wasn't long before Elder Lu was brought to Jiang Chen's arena.

The elder was full of skepticism. "Assistant Temple Master Gao, this is...?"

"Make no mistake. We've reached our destination." The assistant temple master answered bluntly.

"We have?" the elder was flabbergasted. "But... he's so young?"

"Arena Lord Shao, the person you seek is before you. According on the temple's rules, we shall only act as mediator. Any further discussion regarding the mission will be up to the concerned parties. We shan't have a hand in your matters."

The assistant temple master swept his arms and left after he was done speaking. The Temple was doing a very good job in this matter. Many important secrets were exchanged in bounty missions that concerned parties would like to keep confidential. Even more so when pill recipes were involved. Naturally, the temple knew that it wasn't their place to be involved.

Elder Lu had a wide grin on his face as he rubbed his fair and chubby hands together. "Let me introduce myself. My surname is Lu, and I'm an elder from the Great Yu Skysword Sect. You may address me as Elder Lu, or Ole Lu."

"Shao Yuan."

"I know, I know. I've done some research on every single arena lord in the Bounty Arena. The only person I know very little of is you, Arena Lord Shao. I simply never imagined that it was you who accepted our mission. Youth is not a hindrance to great achievements indeed. I must say I am quite surprised." Elder Lu was clearly an excellent diplomat.

Jiang Chen nodded. "Your pill recipe, I've completed it."

"Hehe. Do you mind if we take a look at it first?"

“Elder Lu, do not take me for a fool. The pill recipe is in my head and isn’t put down in writing yet. I shall only fulfill my side of the deal when I see the reward.” Jiang Chen was in no mood to pay any lip service.

Elder Lu laughed in response. “Of course, of course. The reward is right here with me. 500 million saint spirit stones. I have it with me always. However, the pill recipe...”

“I shall complete it for you. You may check upon its authenticity. I shall bear all responsibilities if there are any mistakes.”

The elder smiled wryly. “The problem is, how are we supposed to find you if the pill recipe is wrong? Forgive me for being blunt, but 500 million is a large sum of spirit stones. We cannot afford to take this lightly.”

“That should be of no concern to you. The Temple will hunt me down if there’s any foul play with the bounty missions.”

Elder Lu continued to hesitate because he was still a little wary. What if it was a scam? 500 million was simply too big of a sum! How was he supposed to explain himself to the sect master if he lost it?

“Can you verify its authenticity right now?” He couldn’t help but ask.

“The mission only asks for the completion of the pill recipe. Nowhere does it say that I have to verify it too. If you wish to go back on your word, we can summon the assistant temple master to mediate this issue right now.” Jiang Chen wasn’t going to play by the elder’s rules.

Elder Lu smiled wryly. “We most definitely won’t go back on our word! We remain committed to solving this mission. It’s just that the procedure is a little...”

“The procedure is simple. I accept the mission, complete the mission, and take my reward. If you are going to renege on the deal, I shall have to ask the temple to speak to you.”

It was simply fair trade. If Jiang Chen went back on his word, he’d be fined an amount equal to the bounty. It was only natural that the Skysword Sect would have to abide by the same rules as well. The authenticity of the deal was a matter for future discussion. If it was really a scam, the Temple would deal with it.

In reality, there hadn’t been many cases of scams throughout the five thousand year history of the Bounty Arena. It was simply too big of a risk. Many attempts were immediately exposed. Even if it wasn’t, the scammers were often hunted down by the full force of the Temple. In some cases, they were even hunted down by the full force of Pillfire City. Moreover, the city would also post arrest warrants of the criminal so that the entire human domain would join on the hunt. Only a fool would ever try to commit a scam in the Bounty Arena. Most people would never try such a thing, unless they sought death.

Elder Lu was likely wary because of Jiang Chen’s age.

“Arena Lord Shao, why don’t we make a deal? If you verify its authenticity now, I... I shall increase the reward a little.” He was prepared to bleed money.

“The verification process is extremely complicated. I can complete the pill recipe, but that doesn’t mean I can refine the pill immediately. You should understand that having a recipe isn’t all there is to refining a

pill. A lot of practice and trial and error is needed before I can successfully refine the pill.” Jiang Chen was actually capable of refining the pill now, but since they wanted him to verify it, he might as well exaggerate the difficulty to increase the reward even more. A big fat sheep had delivered itself to his doorstep. Might as well make a good slaughter out of it!

Elder Lu gritted his teeth. “If you verify it, I’m willing to add another 100 million to the bounty.”

Jiang Chen shook his head in response. “Too much labor is required. 100 million isn’t worth the effort. “200 million.”

Jiang Chen still shook his head. “Nope.”

Elder Lu was on the verge of tears. What kind of person was he? Would it kill him if to accept the 200 million? The 300 million extra he received from his superiors was an unavoidable cost after all.

“300 million for verification. I need not the pill, only proof that the theory is sound.”

The creation of a pill depended on many factors, but the affinity between the ingredients was easy to verify. Elder Lu was a seasoned expert and knew how to verify the authenticity of a recipe. A finished product wasn’t needed. The recipe wouldn’t be false as long as there was complete affinity between the ingredients.

“Give me another 500 million and I’ll give you verification. One billion, and I’ll refine a complete pill. Deal or no deal, it’s entirely up to you.” Jiang Chen finally disclosed his minimum demand.

The elder nearly fainted. The youth before him was being too cruel. 500 million for a mere verification? The amount of money he received from his superiors was only a mere 300 million! 500 million was clearly beyond his limit! However, his eyes gleamed when he fully comprehended Jiang Chen’s words. “Wait. You said you’d refine the pill if I gave you a billion?”

Chapter 1062: Celestial Cicada Court

Elder Lu had still been lingering at the bargaining stage when realization struck. I can refine a finished pill for you if you’re willing to add another billion to your bounty. The revelation was like a sudden clap of thunder that reverberated throughout his mind. When he recovered from the shock, he stared at Jiang Chen as if he had turned into an imbecile. All kinds of conflicting emotions appeared in his eyes: shock, hope, doubt, worry...

Jiang Chen was secretly amused when he saw his reaction. He understood why Elder Lu wore the expression he did. The elder had pursued this relentlessly despite failing to find an answer for eight hundred years. Thus, it must be very important to him.

The Great Yu Skysword Sect never discarded the bounty for the Ancient Reformation Pill even though it had been hung for eight hundred years. In fact, they even left some men in Pillfire City just in case someone had picked up the bounty. This showed just how important the Ancient Reformation Pill was to Great Yu Skysword Sect. That was why Jiang Chen boldly requested Elder Lu to increase the reward by a full billion. Of course, he wasn’t making an empty claim.

As expected, Elder Lu's conflicted expression turned into one of deep expectation. When Elder Lu saw that Jiang Chen was smiling wordlessly, he lost his patience first and asked, "Arena Lord Shao, are you sure you aren't joking?"

Jiang Chen smiled calmly. "Do I look like I'm making a joke?"

Elder Lu had been staring and probing Jiang Chen all this time. It definitely didn't look like the latter was joking with him. Can this young man really refine the Ancient Reformation Pill? But... isn't this a little too good to be true?

The elder hesitated greatly for a moment, his heart full of doubt. He didn't think that Jiang Chen's demand was overly ridiculous, but he did wonder if the young man truly had the skill to fulfill the task. If he truly could restore the pill recipe and refine the Ancient Reformation Pill, then Great Yu Skysword Sect was willing to pay even if his demand went higher than a billion. The question was, was it a scam or not?

"Arena Lord Shao," Elder said in a very serious tone, "I sincerely wish to work with you. Right now, I only have one question to ask: can you really refine this Ancient Reformation Pill?"

Jiang Chen frowned. "Seeing is believing. Show me one point five billion saint spirit stones, and I will exchange it with the pill."

Elder Lu was overjoyed. "Alright. Let us summon someone from the Temple to serve as the notary!"

"Please summon Emperor Peerless too." Jiang Chen wasn't completely sure about the Temple's integrity, so he wished to involve Emperor Peerless in this affair. He was now in the same boat as the emperor anyways. If the great emperor truly desired the Pinecrane Pill, he would stand by Jiang Chen's side.

Elder Lu had no problems with this demand. He nodded. "No problem. As long as this is a fair trade, Great Yu Skysword Sect will treat this with absolute sincerity!"

Jiang Chen answered indifferently, "The same goes here."

Elder Lu cupped his heads. "In that case, allow me to head back and prepare the saint spirit stones. I'm not authorized to carry one point five billion spirit stones, so I need to head back and report to the higher up first. It should be a simple matter, and I can be the decision maker if necessary, but even then I need some time to gather all the money."

"Do as you please, but I'm still going to repeat what I said earlier. The bounty is complete, so you must pay five hundred million to me first. Otherwise, I will take this as a breach of the agreement." Jiang Chen had no intention of letting Elder Lu go without payment. If the old man decided to renege on the debt, then his efforts would become wasted.

Elder Lu reluctantly agreed. "Alright, please accept five hundred million saint spirit stones. In return, please give me the complete pill recipe."

This was the content of the initial agreement. The pill refinement was something that was added later on, so it would be dealt as such. The trade was completed on the spot. Once the trade was complete,

Elder Lu hurriedly left the Temple in an obvious hurry to prepare the money and report to his higher-ups. Since he had obtained his reward, Jiang Chen didn't care if the elder showed up later or not.

Surprisingly, Assistant Temple Master Gao walked over to Jiang Chen with a smile after witnessing Elder Lu's departure. "Elder Lu looks to be in a hurry. Is there something urgent?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "He needs me for something else, but that is a matter for another time. Oh right, please invite the third bounty poster over to my arena too."

Jiang Chen had a total of three sovereign rank bounties in his hands. Elder Lu's bounty was just the second. The third sovereign rank bounty was about a formation. Truthfully speaking, Jiang Chen was far more interested in this bounty than the one regarding the Ancient Reformation Pill.

Although the reward of this bounty was incomparable to the Ancient Reformation Pill, it was intricately tied to Jiang Chen's person. He had obtained the Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect's inheritance, so he possessed both the sect's keepsake and medallion. That was why he was so curious about Celestial Cicada Court's formation. Where the Celestial Cicada Court and Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect connected to each other?

Assistant Temple Master Gao quickly brought the bounty poster to him. To his surprise, the bounty poster was a woman. It was only after Assistant Temple Master Gao had introduced her that he learned that she was of deep background. She was a newly appointed keeper who was ranked last among all other keepers of Celestial Cicada Court.

But despite her ranking, she was without a doubt a person who wielded great authority. After all, there were only a few keepers in the Celestial Cicada Court. Jiang Chen examined this woman of unknown age and felt a little curious.

Assistant Temple Master Gao introduced Jiang Chen. "Keeper Xia, this is Arena Lord Shao and has already resolved the most difficult bounty of the event before you. Do not underestimate him because of his youth, his talent is in no way inferior to the three great seniors."

"If that is true, then I am the ignorant one here." Keeper Xia's voice was rougher and louder than an average woman's.

Assistant Temple Master Gao smiled slightly. "Enjoy your talk. Please summon me for anything you need."

It was inevitable that the two parties would talk about the heart of the matter, so he would do well to stay away from it. After Assistant Temple Master Gao had left, a bit of judgment immediately entered Keeper Xia's eyes. She immediately cut to the heart of the matter. "Arena Lord Shao, can you complete this formation?"

Jiang Chen smiled but didn't give her a direct answer. Instead, he asked, "Keeper Xia, I will like to ask you a question before answering yours. Where did you get this formation? Judging from its patterns and characteristics, I believe this is an ancient formation."

His words caught Keeper Xia off guard.

"Does this have anything to do with our trade?" Keeper Xia sounded a little displeased.

“Very.” Jiang Chen smiled. “If you won’t tell me how you come by this formation or its origin, then I won’t complete this formation for you.”

He didn’t beat around the bush either and spoke candidly.

“Arena Lord Shao, please don’t forget that you’ll have to pay us the compensation fee if you renege on your promise.” Keeper Xia obviously didn’t expect this young man to be such a character.

But Jiang Chen didn’t care about her threat. He smiled indifferently. “It’s not like your reward is anything generous, so I’m able to pay it in full. In case you didn’t know, that Elder Lu who left earlier already gave me five hundred million.”

He had money, and he could do whatever he wanted. That was the impression Jiang Chen gave Keeper Xia right now.

Keeper Xia inhaled deeply before frowning. “Are you sure you can complete this formation?”

“In the past, I coincidentally came by some text about ancient formation models and read about them. Not only have I seen this model before, I’ve even studied it intensely for a while. It is truly an impressive ancient formation.” Jiang Chen’s tone was filled with implied meaning.

Keeper Xia was speechless. The arena lord’s intentions were as clear as day.

“Arena Lord Shao, what is the point of you knowing its origin? This formation is something our Celestial Cicada Court inherited since ancient times. That is why it means next to nothing to an outsider.”

“It’s an inheritance of Celestial Cicada Court?” Jiang Chen looked a little doubtful.

“That’s right. This formation is something we inherited since ancient times. Unfortunately, much about this formation has been lost today.” Keeper Xia let out a quiet sigh before casting Jiang Chen a doubtful glance. “You said that you’ve seen this formation model before, but I must say that I seriously doubt your claim.”

But Jiang Chen didn’t follow her line of thought. Instead, he changed tack. “You say that this is an inheritance of Celestial Cicada Court, but to my knowledge it belongs to a great formation sect of ancient times. Unfortunately, that ancient sect fought to the last and perished in a blaze of glory during the war against the demon race.”

Keeper Xia looked incredibly surprised when she heard this. “What? When you say a great ancient formation sect of ancient times, do you mean... Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect?”

Jiang Chen was surprised by her answer, but maintained a confident smile on his face. Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect? Perhaps Celestial Cicada Court really was related to Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect. How else could she have uttered their title otherwise? After all, the sect had sealed its headquarters and ceased passing down their inheritance.

“Is it truly Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect?” Keeper Xia stared stupidly at Jiang Chen. Her aged but still beautiful eyes shone with deep desire as she asked excitedly, “If I may be so bold, may I know where have you seen this formation model?”

It was obvious that Jiang Chen's discovery was terribly shocking news for Keeper Xia. It might involve the very fate of Celestial Cicada Court.

"It is in a place that you can never reach." Jiang Chen smiled calmly.

"A place we can never reach?" Keeper Xia whispered to herself. "But where? Arena Lord Shao, this matter is of the utmost importance to Celestial Cicada Court. Please tell me."

By now, Jiang Chen had confirmed that Celestial Cicada Court and Ancient Crimson Heavens Sect had no direct ties with each other given the keeper's attitude.

"I saw this formation in Myriad Abyss Island." For now, there was no way Jiang Chen was going to tell Celestial Cicada Court about the secret realm in Mt. Rippling Mirage.

Chapter 1063: A Great Haul

Myriad Abyss Island? Keeper Xia's reaction was identical to that of Assistant Temple Master Gao, Emperor Peerless, and the rest. Her eyes widened and her slender body shook. "You... you're talking about that place?" She gasped.

Jiang Chen nodded impassively. His makeshift secret was out in the open. If he was going to lie, he might as well go the full length.

'Myriad Abyss Island.' These three words almost had a magic to them. Anyone who heard them behaved exactly the same way, no matter how lofty their position, how distinct their strength. Once again, it was utter and unreserved shock. It took a long while for the female keeper to recover herself. "Myriad... Abyss... Island," she muttered. "That place of legend... does it actually exist?"

Jiang Chen laughed briskly. "Why does everyone think otherwise?"

"No, that's not it," Keeper Xia sighed softly. "It's just... Myriad Abyss Island is too mysterious. Since time immemorial, countless experts from the human domain have dedicated their lives to seeking that insubstantial, mythical place. But there's never been any news."

As a poet once wrote, 'Of immortal isles seafarers speak / Beyond mist and wave, their shores so hard to seek.' Many immortal lands were spoken of in legend and lore, yet a scant few could actually be found.

"Enough. Look, I've completed the formation." Jiang Chen waved a hand. He took out the diagram he'd finished, tossing it to the keeper.

Keeper Xia hadn't expected such generosity from the young man. She hadn't paid yet, but he was already letting her see the diagram. How remarkable he was showed through his actions. Her face changed color with only a single glance. Her expression grew solemn, eyes glittering with consternation. The formation diagram that the Celestial Cicada Court supplied had been completely rough. The completed version before her now was much clearer. As an expert herself, she saw his supreme expertise.

Keeper Xia had devoted countless hours studying formations. One look was enough to cement her opinion of Jiang Chen as a true master. After a long pause, she finally moved her eyes reluctantly away from the diagram. They pointed towards the youthful arena lord once more, their contents overflowing joy and respect.

There was a sliver of puzzlement as well, but she decided to hold her tongue from inquiring further. Handing over the agreed-upon bounty to him, the keeper accompanied it with another meaningful glance.

“Arena Lord Shao, I’ve never imagined this mission would be completed by a youngster. It is as the age-old adage. Ambitious young men can accomplish great things despite their youthfulness.”

Her tone was filled with approval. In addition, she extended an invitation to the promising star. “Arena Lord Shao, I would like to formally request you to come visit our sect, on behalf of the entire Celestial Cicada Court. Personally, I sincerely hope that you have the time to drop by. Our Court is situated in the southeast of the Upper Eight Regions, a resource-rich land teeming with genius. In particular, a great number of beauties hail from our vicinity. If you’re still single, perhaps you’ll consider...?”

Jiang Chen tried and failed to stifle a laugh. He was going to the Celestial Cicada Court, alright, but not because of the pretty girls there. Definitely not, not at all. His lack of an answer only spurred Keeper Xia on.

“It’s a promise, then! Our doors will always be open for you.”

The young arena lord responded with a carefree chuckle and a wave. The three sovereign missions thus completed, Jiang Chen thought he’d have a moment’s reprieve. To the contrary, however, he spotted Master Wang Xuetong approaching mere seconds after Keeper Xia’s departure. The old formation expert wore an astounded expression. “Arena Lord Shao, was that... someone from the Celestial Cicada Court? The formation that they had a bounty on... has it been, ah, completed?”

Wang Xuetong was an old man whose life had been dedicated to the art of formations. He was absolutely enamored by them, and anything formation-related was able to draw his interest. He had seen the Celestial Cicada Court’s formation-related bounty himself before. Alas, he’d been hopelessly lost as to how exactly to approach it. He did know one thing, though, despite his lack of a solution. The Court’s formation was related to an ancient formation-based sect’s heritage.

Keeper Xia’s reluctant departure gave him an indistinct clue. The conclusion that it led to was utterly disquieting, and he wanted to see if he could ascertain its veracity. An initial supposition was that Arena Lord Shao had completed the bounty. There was no explanation for Keeper Xia’s cheerful walk out otherwise.

Jiang Chen saw no point in deception. “I happened to see the formation once back at Myriad Abyss Island,” he chuckled. “So... I got off easy with this one.”

Master Wang Xuetong’s jaw slackened. His mouth was wide enough to stuff several buns into. How could it have been such a coincidence? He felt nothing short of disbelief, yet—what other explanation was there? Was the young man instead a formation master that surpassed even him, instead? Gulping down his accumulated saliva, the formation master sighed softly. “Arena Lord Shao, I find it hard to see through you. Are all of the young geniuses from Myriad Abyss Island as heaven-defying as you?”

Not knowing how to answer the question, Jiang Chen stayed quiet instead.

Wang Xuetong had some professionalism left in him, and chose not to inquire further about the bounty’s specifics. He knew that it was strictly forbidden to ask about others’ missions. Forcibly

suppressing his rampant curiosity, he left Jiang Chen's arena with a bellyful of suspicions. Because Arena Lord Shao was the first to complete all of his sovereign missions, the two arenas under his jurisdiction were subject to even better business prospects.

Furthermore, this increased the arena lord's personal fame. All around the Bounty Arena's premises, news spread of the rise of an Arena Lord Shao who was young but extremely proficient. His ability did not pale in comparison to any of his three seniors. The other arena lords were far below their collective level.

By now, insubstantial rumors had spread to Pill King Blue Phoenix about the completion of the Great Yu Skysword Sect's eight-hundred-year bounty. His heart itched to unearth the specifics. Without the heavy workload on his hands, he had half a heart to go ask about it immediately. The final three days were as spectacular as advertised.

Sovereign missions aside, ninth rank missions appeared with alarming regularity as well. This was yet another form of elevation for the current iteration of the Bounty Arena. As with many things in the world, the Bounty Arena was benefiting from a positive feedback loop.

Jiang Chen's outrageous performance had made the rounds by now. Everyone knew that the eight-hundred-year sovereign mission had been completed today, which generated a sort of invisible push. Those who hadn't been particularly optimistic about the event had their interests piqued. They came out of their homes and into the Arena's audience. There were even outcries for the Temple of Cleansing Fire to add a few days, that those who missed the Bounty Arena earlier could have a chance at participating.

Unfortunately for that, rules were rules. Even if the Temple agreed, the arena lords who worked here were unlikely to do the same. It was easy money, but also very demanding. Fatigue had started piling up on them. No one here was an unthinking automaton.

It wasn't until the latter part of the Bounty Arena's final day that the Great Yu Skysword Sect's Elder Lu arrived, rather belatedly.

"My apologies, Arena Lord Shao. I am a little late." The elder's forehead was beaded with sweat. It seemed as if he'd rusheed here in great hurry. His expression told all. He was both anxious and excited.

"The Bounty Arena is about to close, Elder Lu. Your eleventh-hour arrival is a little more than just simple tardiness." Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Elder Lu was deferential. He could not criticize what Jiang Chen had said, but he hadn't planned to keep the Temple of Cleansing Fire as the middle-man in the first place.

He spoke in a low voice. "Arena Lord Shao, I came here today to tell you something more. We want to add a billion to your reward as long as you're willing to refine a single Reformation Pill for us. It's a private invitation, and the Temple is not involved. You won't need to give them a cut of the money."

Any bounty posted at the Bounty Arena entitled the Temple of Cleansing Fire to a portion of the earnings. It wasn't a large percentage, but an enormous principal still made for a sizable deduction.

"Deal." Jiang Chen did not hesitate. Refining the Reformation Pill wasn't hard for him at all. "But you have to provide the materials, and I'll do it when I see fit."

Elder Lu was glowing with happiness. "Of course, of course. As soon as possible would be amazing, but at your convenience."

"I, too, hope to get it done as soon as possible," Jiang Chen said coolly. "It's just, there's an auction after the Bounty Arena that I'm planning on attending. The pill will have to wait until after that."

Elder Lu knew about the auction. "Alright. The auction will only take a day or two. We can wait that long, no problem."

The agreement with the elder made, Jiang Chen no longer planned to accept any more missions. Any missions that were submitted would be left up to his assistants. Though there were tons of people swarming in still in the last few hours, most arena lords followed Jiang Chen's lead. Thus, the assistants had to shoulder the bulk of the work on the last day.

With the passing of its final moments, the present Bounty Arena finally came to a resounding close. All of the assistants were very pleased. Business had been excellent this time. The last couple of days especially had enriched each and every one of them substantially. Half of their bounties had been given to their arena lords, but they still brought in a tidy sum.

After paying the portion that was rightfully the Temple's, Lin Yanyu's personal net income exceeded two hundred million. For him, it was a king's trove. Lin Zhirong had made only a little less than Lin Yanyu did. Both the Lins' incomes ranked within the top five among all the assistants of the Bounty Arena.

Jiang Chen's income was even more ludicrous than that. His profit amounted to two or three billion. This serendipitous influx of wealth multiplied his fortune. He now had access to a greater sum than the majority of emperor realm cultivators. However, the best takeaway had been the boost to his reputation. It emboldened him for the auction ahead.

Chapter 1064: Invitation To The Auction

The scale of the Bounty Arena had ballooned with each passing day. At the very beginning, the Temple only aimed to make it a once in a decade event. With the participation of the three great seniors, it became a once in every three centuries event. However, the insight provided by the three seniors and Jiang Chen had elevated it even further, making it a once in a millennia event.

That Jiang Chen was able to solve the Great Yu Skysword Sect's mission even though it had been unsolved for over 800 years caused a great sensation in Pillfire City.

Even though the great emperor factions didn't attend the Bounty Arena themselves, the Temple of Cleansing Fire made sure to report the daily affairs of the event to them. The arena lords' achievements were reported in full. The Temple didn't divulge Jiang Chen's identity as they'd sworn an oath, but his achievements were strongly highlighted by Assistant Temple Master Gao.

When the Skysword Sect's mission was completed, the assistant temple master immediately reported it to the various great emperor factions. Thus, all factions in the shadows were growing aware of the person named Shao Yuan.

Countless people in Pillfire City were astounded. What exactly was his background? How did he solve a mission that nobody else could in 800 years? Of course, those who didn't participate in the Bounty Arena knew nothing about the details of the mission. And there were some who knew, but they weren't

allowed to divulge the contents. However, the fact that it had been unsolved for over 800 years was proof of its difficulty.

The name of Shao Yuan became the focus of the entire city. Pillfire City was a painfully pragmatic place. Since Shao Yuan was currently the hot topic in the city, many factions immediately attempted to rope him over to their side. Their attempts were all in vain. Many tried to borrow the Temple's influence to recruit him, but the Temple only responded with discouragement. They were certain Shao Yuan would never join any of these factions.

Pill King Blue Phoenix visited Jiang Chen immediately after the conclusion of the event. He wanted to know more about the Great Xia Skysword Sect's mission. The pill king smiled wryly after hearing Jiang Chen's affirmative response, as he was completely speechless. To think that he'd once thought that the youth before him was desecrating pill dao during the selection! His cheeks flushed red when he recalled the matter.

"Brother Shao, I'm truly ashamed. Today, I finally understand there is always someone better me, and that the sky's the limit. I was conceited and was way too proud of myself just because I was ranked thirty-sixth in the Hall of Millennial Legends. Compared to you, I'm but a worm." The pill king had an odd personality, but he always looked up to those that were better than him, and owned up to his mistakes.

"Pill King Blue Phoenix, you are too harsh on yourself. I only completed this mission due to sheer luck. My master once tested me on a similar topic. He and I have done extensive research on this pill recipe." Jiang Chen explained.

Blaming it all on luck might not seem very convincing, but it worked more often than not. He was too young after all. Nobody would believe his over-the-top words. Putting the blame on coincidence would ease the burden of their hearts. Just like many powerful pill kings in Veluriyam Capital, Pill King Blue Phoenix greatly revered this "master" that Jiang Chen so often spoke about.

Emperor Peerless walked over at this point and laughed joyfully. "Little junior, I heard that you're the bounty king of the event!"

Jiang Chen responded with a smile. "It's all just blind luck."

"It could be blind luck if it has only happened once or twice. But more than that? I'm afraid luck is no longer a suitable explanation." Emperor Peerless laughed.

"I agree. If it was blind luck, you could never have gotten first for both the pill dao and general zone. It's clear that these results are the fruit of your labor and talents." The pill king spoke with every ounce of seriousness.

Master Wang Xuetong soon arrived too. "Brother Shao, for a moment, I even considered becoming your disciple. I have too many confusions regarding formations. Won't you consider exchanging some pointers with me when you're free? We might learn a lot from each other!"

Emperor Peerless immediately poked fun of him. "You should give up you old fool, I've already reserved all of Brother Shao's free time."

Wang Xuetong protested. "Emperor Peerless, that's not fair! Sniff sniff... I'll soon fall ill if I don't clear up my confusions!"

“No use crying in front of me.” The emperor smiled cunningly. He knew that Wang Xuetong was a seasoned actor.

Assistant Temple Master Gao arrived while they were in the middle of their jokes. “I apologize for the interruption. Will all of you be attending our auction tomorrow? We have collected many incredible items. It’ll be our honor to have you as guests.

The assistant temple master had issued a blanket invite to everyone. Emperor Peerless was indifferent. If Jiang Chen was attending, then he would too. Otherwise, he’d rather bring Jiang Chen to the Tilted Moon Region as soon as possible. Pill King Blue Phoenix didn’t seem interested. The amount of money he made from joining the Bounty Arena was beyond count, but Jiang Chen’s heaven defying talent in pill dao had dealt a large blow to his confidence. It served as reminder to his inadequacy. All he wanted to do now was go home and enter closed cultivation.

Wang Xuetong looked at Jiang Chen with an odd smile. “I’ll let Brother Shao decide. If he attends, then so shall I.”

The assistant temple master was rather surprised. Since when did these eminent figures care so much about the opinions of this young man? All of their decisions revolved around him. He was impressed by Jiang Chen’s charm. He knew from personal experience just how difficult it was to invite these figures. Doing so increased the prestige of the event greatly. Yet somehow, their attendance was dependant on this young man.

Jiang Chen didn’t hide his intentions. “I will attend the auction.”

Wang Xuetong’s eyes glimmered. “Then I shall too! Don’t want to miss out on the fun!”

Emperor Peerless laughed. “It’s been years since I’ve attended an auction. Is there anything that might pique my interest?”

“Finding something that that might pique the interest of a great emperor is truly easier said than done.” The assistant temple master smiled wryly.

Pill King Blue Phoenix had wanted to leave at first, but his interest was piqued when Jiang Chen agreed to attend. “If Brother Shao is going, then I shall too. I wonder what treasure will catch the eye of a genius as talented as him!”

The assistant temple master was ecstatic when all three eminent figures agreed to attend. “With all of you attending, the prestige of our auction will be brought up a notch again. You have my sincerest gratitude.”

“Thank Brother Shao.” Wang Xuetong laughed slyly. “We’re only attending because of him.”

Emperor Peerless smiled without saying anything, but it was clear he agreed with the sentiment.

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Star Harvester Headquarters.

The boss of the Star Harvesters and his lieutenants were gathered in a meeting. An outlier stood out amongst them. It was Miss Keke, the shop assistant from the Star Mill.

“Keke, what have you learned from your past few visits?” Gai Zonglin, the boss of the Star Harvesters, looked at Miss Keke.

Keke’s voice was crisp and clear. “He... he’s still very much interested, but he seems very dissatisfied with our price.”

Gai Zonglin burst into an odd laughter. “You might not know this part, my newest intelligence will definitely shock you. That brat is called Shao Yuan. He has taken part in the Bounty Arena, earned two arena lord seats, and became the bounty king of the event. He even resolved a pill dao mission that nobody else could in 800 years. Almost all factions within Pillfire City are trying to recruit him.”

Manager Xiao from the Star Mill sighed. “One should never judge others by looks alone. I’ve truly underestimated him.”

Gai Zonglin waved his hands disparagingly. “There’s no use saying all this. Master Mu must be taken off our hands in the coming auction. Many great factions are interested in Master Mu, but many of them want to acquire him without paying the appropriate price by forcing our hands. We, the Star Harvesters, will never settle for a loss! In the coming auction, he shall be sold to the highest bidder!”

“Mm. I hope Arena Lord Shao will attend the auction. He’s gained a strong public following and is thus worthy of bidding against all the strong factions. It might not be a bad thing if he wins the bid. He’s more generous than any of the factions in Pillfire City.” Manager Xiao theorized.

Gai Zonglin agreed, but an elder didn’t share the same sentiment. “Boss, we don’t know if the auction is a blessing or a calamity in disguise. Many factions covet Master Mu. If he’s sold to an outsider, we might be shunned by the society at large!” There were also a few others who agreed with this opinion.

Gai Zonglin frowned. “Our city runs by its own set of rules. If they’re interested in Master Mu, they should show their sincerity! We must not be held hostage by their power!”

“Yes! We can’t allow that to happen!”

“The auction is fair. Whoever bids the most gets the prize. Those without the power or strength deserve to lose.” The crowd mostly agreed with Gai Zonglin.

Chapter 1065: Radiant Celestial Grass

In the end, Gai Zonglin made the final decision to auction off Master Mu. The highest bidder would win. Although they risked offending some factions by doing this, the Star Harvesters knew very well that they were going to offend someone no matter what their choices were.

They knew that it was almost impossible to offend no one in this endeavor because no matter what happened, there was still only one genius with an innate wood constitution of high order in stock. Someone would be offended no matter who they sold Master Mu to, and chances were some were going to be more offended than the rest. But if the Star Harvesters auctioned off Master Mu, then they could at least limit the damage. After all, they could hardly be blamed for their bidders’ inability to afford a product.

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The Temple's Bounty Arena this time was of incredibly high standards, and it attracted a lot of eyeballs as well. Its popularity indirectly boosted the auction's popularity, and the Temple took the opportunity to strongly promote the key arena lords who were participating in today's auction. All of this contributed to the auction's popularity.

Jiang Chen had transformed from a nobody to a person of much greater status and importance thanks to his feats in the Bounty Arena. His qualifications had been questioned when he first registered, but now he was an arena lord who stood on an equal footing with the three great seniors.

His identity and the halo behind said identity had proven that he was no one to be underestimated. This was without mentioning the sheer amount of money he'd earned from the Bounty Arena. It automatically made him one of the most welcomed VIPs of the auction. There was no need to verify his buying power and wealth anymore. As of now, there were only a handful of wealthy locals who could compete against him after he'd earned more than two billion saint spirit stones from the Bounty Arena. That was why Jiang Chen received VIP seating along with the three great seniors.

There were twenty to thirty seats in the VIP area, but unlike last time, the place was packed full of people. Moreover, it looked like they might have to add seats to accommodate more guests. Thankfully, the VIP area was very spacious, and the Temple was ready to deal with any kind of situation.

Lin Yanyu had also participated in the auction, but he was only qualified to sit in the common area. Every person who sat in the VIP area had to go through a series of strict evaluations. No one who hadn't reached a certain level of importance were allowed to sit here.

Although there were some complaints in the back that Jiang Chen shouldn't be seated alongside the three great seniors, no one dared voice them out loud, especially considering how highly the three seniors regarded the young man. The rumor was that Emperor Peerless admired him so much that the great emperor had offended a couple of Pillfire City factions for his sake.

According to the rumors, a lot of factions had tried to recruit the young man, but he had turned them all down. Some factions had tried to use both carrot and stick, as well as some other more shameful methods to force the young man to comply, but they had all been taken out by Emperor Peerless without mercy.

Although these were just rumors, there wouldn't be smoke without fire. No one knew why Emperor Peerless would regard the young man so highly, but judging from the way he was talking and laughing animatedly with the young man, there had to be some truth behind the rumors.

"Brother Shao, do you realize that you're more popular than me right now?" Wang Xuetong joked laughingly.

Pill King Blue Phoenix deeply agreed with this sentiment. "I too feel like some Pillfire City's powers are just itching to carry you off right now. I must admit that I'm feeling a little envious."

Although the pill king's tone was a little exaggerated, there were some truth behind his words.

Jiang Chen smiled wryly. "Maybe they're just eyeing what I earned during the Bounty Arena."

“There’s no need to be humble, kid. There is a reason why Pillfire City is the heart of the Upper Eight Regions. Their thirst for talent is something you cannot possibly imagine. Your wealth possess may be very attractive, but those top rate factions care far more about your talent.” Emperor Peerless smiled.

Pill King Blue Phoenix agreed with him. “Emperor Peerless is absolutely right. Maybe they’re acting so hasty because there hasn’t been an outstanding young man in Pillfire City in far too long.”

Wang Xuetong chuckled. “Brother Shao, if you wish to stay indefinitely in the human domain, I believe that Pillfire City may be your best choice.”

Formation Master Wang Xuetong was a denizen of Pillfire City. Unlike Emperor Peerless, he felt a deep sense of belonging to his homeland. That was why he spoke up on behalf of Pillfire City. But before Jiang Chen could say anything, Pill King Blue Phoenix shook his head. “I think Brother Shao will shine wherever he goes. It is true that Pillfire City is the heart of the human domain, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it has to be Brother Shao’s final destination.”

Emperor Peerless praised him. “You’re right, Blue Phoenix. Pillfire City may be great, but it’s absolutely not going to be Brother Shao’s final destination.”

The quartet chatted cheerfully with each other. Occasionally, a bigwig or two would show up and greet them courteously. Emperor Peerless maintained an almost emotionless mask on his face. He wasn’t unapproachable, but he wasn’t too friendly either. Formation Master Wang Xuetong was a lot more courteous than Emperor Peerless. He was willing to hold a conversation no matter who approached him.

As for Pill King Blue Phoenix, he was infamous for his hot temper and straightforwardness. He obviously didn’t want to be disturbed by anyone right now, so his response to the greetings was even cooler than Emperor Peerless’. That being said, he had the right to put on airs just like Emperor Peerless.

Countless factions in Pillfire City had tried to recruit Pill King Blue Phoenix into their fold, but he never joined any of them even though so many years had passed. The heavyweights wisely stopped disturbing the group and went to their seats after noticing the cool indifference on Emperor Peerless and Pill King Blue Phoenix’s faces. Not long after, Assistant Temple Master Gao of the Temple of Cleansing Fire announced that the auction had officially begun.

The professional auctioneer who was going to direct this auction was an absolutely tantalizing woman with an hourglass figure. Everyone in the Temple called her Madam Man. [1]

The atmosphere of the auction immediately heated up the second she stepped on stage. The participants at the common area grew noisy as they hooted continuously at the woman. Madam Man was obviously not a stranger to this scene at all. She was charming but not vulgar, and she graciously accepted the crowd’s cheers.

“Honored guests, the kind of Bounty Arena that happens only once in a millennium has just ended not long ago. Thanks to this opportunity, we are likewise able to raise the quality of this auction by quite a bit. We are lucky to have invited many seniors, masters, and powerful tycoons of Pillfire City to this auction, and we will like for everyone to enjoy a beautiful night today.” Madam Man had a crisp voice that was pleasant on the ears. It was a voice that seemed able to pierce one’s heart and draw the listener towards her before they realized it.

“This woman is no ordinary person.” Formation Master Wang Xuetong sighed quietly. Pill King Blue Phoenix still had no sentiments to offer. It was obvious that he wasn’t very pleased with Madam Man’s methods.

Emperor Peerless smiled faintly, but turned his head to ask Jiang Chen a question. “My young friend, is there something in particular that you wish to bid for?”

“Yes.” Jiang Chen didn’t try to hide his intentions.

Emperor Peerless gave the young man a smile after seeing his honesty and patted him suddenly on the shoulder. “Just ask if you need me for anything.”

Jiang Chen didn’t turn down the favor. Again, he nodded slightly.

Madam Man’s voice rang once more. “The first item to be presented in our auction today is a sky rank spirit herb. This spirit herb is the Radiant Celestial Grass, also known as the main ingredient to refine the Sage Smile Pill.”

The Radiant Celestial Grass? Everyone was startled to hear this. The auction had just started, and the value of the first auctioned item was a great surprise. A sky rank spirit herb was no ordinary item. Even a common sky rank spirit herb was auctioned at a starting price of several tens of millions, and this was assuming that the price wasn’t raised beyond a reasonable level due to malicious bidding.

The Radiant Celestial Grass was even more extraordinary. It was a rare item even amongst sky rank spirit herbs, and it was at least several times more expensive than the common sky rank spirit herb. The Radiant Celestial Grass had incredible medicinal effects. A common shoot of it could be used to refine at least a few cauldrons of Sage Smile Pills.

And what was a Sage Smile Pill? It was a pill that could unconditionally increase the cultivation level of a sage realm expert by one. Origin realm cultivators had the Origin Doubling Pill, and sage realm experts had the Sage Smile Pill. Both pills had the same effect.

A pill like this wasn’t sold in the markets at all. Even if there was a market, they would only ever be traded in private. It was impossible for anyone to buy a pill like this in public. The number of such pills was too little, not to mention it was the kind of pill that no one would sell. Even if the owner of the pill couldn’t use it themselves, there were countless friends and families to give away too, so why would they ever sell such a precious pill?

That was why a Sage Smile Pill was almost impossible to buy no matter how rich one was. What was even better, the Sage Smile Pill’s pill recipe wasn’t lost to the world. It might still be rarer than staple goods, but there were a lot of pill dao factions who knew how to refine a Sage Smile Pill. The problem was that the ingredients to refine a Sage Smile Pill was difficult to find. They could only be chanced upon.

Out of all the ingredients that made up the Sage Smile Pill, its main ingredient, the Radiant Celestial Grass, was the most difficult to gather as it was hard to find. Therefore, the production of Sage Smile Pill decreased massively as a result. All of this led to the ultimate question: why was the Temple was able to auction off a blade of Radiant Celestial Grass?

When Madam Man saw that the crowd's reaction was cooler than expected, she understood immediately that they were still coming to terms with the fact that a Radiant Celestial Grass was being auctioned off. Logically speaking, no one in their right minds would ever auction a precious spirit herb like this.

"Everyone, you must be asking: why is the Temple of Cleansing Fire auctioning a Radiant Celestial Grass? It's actually a funny story. First, it doesn't belong to us. It was consigned to us, and this seller is just an origin realm cultivator. He doesn't even know what this is, much less the value of this spirit herb. He simply thought that it looked extraordinary and decided to auction it through us."

Chapter 1066: Jiang Chen Takes the First Crack

Hearing those words left Jiang Chen's jaws slack. Could this really be true? Did someone really not know what Radiant Celestial Grass was? Most present reacted the same way. They were stuck at an awkward state between tears and laughter. Evidently, the reason had shocked them the same way it did Jiang Chen.

Pill King Blue Phoenix vehemently shook his head. "Shame, shame."

Master Wang Xuetong laughed. "I hardly think the seller feels ashamed. Maybe it's actually a clever ruse. He's just an origin realm cultivator, right? A treasure like this wouldn't have a fraction of its true effect in his hands. Pretending he doesn't know what it is and auctioning it off is much better in the long run. Sure, the Temple of Cleansing Fire gets to take some of that money, but it maximizes his profit nevertheless."

The formation master's words made perfect sense. Still, Jiang Chen preferred to believe that the Radiant Celestial Grass's current owner simply failed to identify the plant.

Emperor Peerless seemed to have a different opinion. "Don't forget, for an origin realm cultivator to have Radiant Celestial Grass... well, it may spell disaster for him. In this case, having something that he cannot protect is quite undesirable. Possession alone is his sin, as it were."

The emperor had spoken truly. Radiant Celestial Grass was not necessarily safe in the hands of even a sage realm cultivator, much less an origin realm one. It was a sky rank spirit herb, and medicine of that caliber wasn't regularly used by the likes of anyone at emperor realm, much less those below. Sky rank herbs corresponded with great emperors, after all.

Thus, an origin realm cultivator having a valuable like this spirit herb probably was criminal. The choice of selling it off was quite wise in light of that. The Temple of Cleansing Fire was a fair organization, with maintaining its clientele's secrecy a top priority. An origin realm cultivator could do significantly worse than selling off the Grass for a princely sum of saint spirit stones.

The only concern was the possibility that the Temple could sell off his information and whereabouts. Given its reputation in Pillfire City, though, something like that was virtually unheard of. In fact, the Temple's pristine record was probably one of the contributing factors for the Radiant Celestial Grass's presence here in the first place. No matter the reason for its auction, the spirit herb had been submitted as one of the items to be sold today.

All eyes shot greedy looks towards the herb, their expressions betraying their eagerness for the prize.

“Hah, are you interested, Brother Blue Phoenix?” Master Wang Xuetong laughed.

The pill king in question was the equal of a pill emperor, the thirty-sixth ranked within this millenium’s Hall of Fame. How could someone like that not thirst after a spirit herb as rare as Radiant Celestial Grass?

“I am a lonely old man,” Pill King Blue Phoenix smiled faintly, “childless and without disciples. Obtaining the herb holds little meaning for me.”

“What, you’re not planning to fight for it in the auction?” Wang Xuetong was stunned.

The pill king shook his head. “There’s no point. For those who need it, the Sage Smile Pill is a pearl without price. I am not one such, and I don’t see much value in it.”

The Sage Smile Pill was intended for sage realm cultivators. If Pill King Blue Phoenix had sons and nephews, or perhaps students and their students, he would definitely compete for the Radiant Celestial Grass. But he had none of those things, and he cared not for the struggles of youth. It was no surprise that the Radiant Celestial Grass didn’t have hold allure for him.

On the other hand, Jiang Chen’s look towards the spirit herb was very thoughtful. Madam Man clearly wanted to whet her audience’s appetite. She held the herb in her hand, showing it off to the crowd. Its glistening light reflected the desire in their eyes.

“The starting price for the Radiant Celestial Grass is eighty million saint spirit stones. The minimum bid increment is one million. Tycoons of Pillfire, now is the time for you to flaunt your wealth!” The madam’s tone animated her listeners and enlivened the atmosphere.

“I bid a hundred million!”

“A hundred thirty!”

“A hundred fifty!”

“A hundred eighty!” The crowd began bidding furiously after she finished speaking. It seemed that many were dead set on taking the spirit herb home with them.

Jiang Chen did not make any bids himself, however. Seeing this, Pill King Blue Phoenix couldn’t help his puzzlement. “Brother Shao, will you not make a move for the Radiant Celestial Grass? I saw you thinking about it. That’s why I didn’t, really.”

Blinking, Jiang Chen burst out laughing. “I thank you, Senior Blue Phoenix, but there’s no need for that. I like a fair competition between fellow bidders more.”

“Ah, well. For something like that, those who love it want it to death, while those who don’t could not care less about it. Not everyone falls in the former category.” The pill king’s commentary was reasonably representative of common thought on the subject. A lot of people had placed bids on the spirit herb, but a fair few more were completely unmoved, signaling their total lack of interest.

After all, not everyone needed the Sage Smile Pill. The heads of important factions were, in fact, typically unwilling to see youngsters who were close to them consume the pill. In their eyes, the Sage Smile Pill’s level increase risked negative effects in the future. This was a common misconception.

Some pills were like that, but the Sage Smile Pill and the Origin Doubling Pill weren't. As long as one's foundations were solid and there were no intrinsic problems with cultivation otherwise, no side effects would be experienced as a result of using those pills. Still, many of the rich were unaware of that.

Regardless of its exact usefulness, the appearance of the Radiant Celestial Grass heated up the auction's atmosphere. In no time at all, the current bid exceeded three hundred million.

Pill King Blue Phoenix sighed softly. "These people are all crazy. The true value of the Radiant Celestial Grass is two hundred million at most. What a waste of spirit stones!"

Emperor Peerless did not agree, however. "Just like you said, those who love it want it to death, while those who don't, wouldn't be willing to pay even a few dozen million. As long as the buyer gets what they need, it's fine."

Suddenly, Jiang Chen raised a hand. "Four hundred million."

He'd increased the current bid by another hundred million! The bid ushered in instant silence from the surroundings. It was as if time stood still.

Four hundred million? The price went up by a whole hundred million? This is... that guy's first bid? Heads roiled in an attempt to get a better look in Jiang Chen's direction. Everyone wanted to know who the mad bidder was.

One of them identified the young man immediately. "It's Arena Lord Shao, the bounty king of this year's Bounty Arena."

"Arena Lord Shao? Is that the arena lord who is exceedingly young, yet esteemed by Emperor Peerless? He... he bid four hundred million? Isn't that a little ridiculous?"

"Those who are wealthy can afford to do ridiculous things. Who would want to compete with a bid like that? Even if there was someone, I doubt they'd win the bidding war. That young arena lord made more than two billion stones off his bounties just a short while ago."

"Arena Lord Shao is sensational indeed!" There was a smattering of mutterings within the crowd. Rumor and hearsay circulated very rapidly to and fro. The bid had set the atmosphere aflame.

Pill King Blue Phoenix couldn't close his mouth. Remembering what he'd said just now, he felt tangible pain to the skin of his face. He couldn't stomach such an embarrassment. As soon as he'd said three hundred million was a waste of money, Arena Lord Shao bid four hundred. It seemed suspiciously rude in context.

"You're intentionally doing the opposite of what Blue Phoenix says, aren't you?" Emperor Peerless said, half-jokingly, laughing at Jiang Chen's antics.

Master Wang Xuetong chuckled as well. "What a disaster, Brother Blue Phoenix."

The pill king's face reddened, his expression dubious. "Brother Shao, the Radiant Celestial Grass really isn't worth four hundred million. It's not worth it just for a few cauldrons of Sage Smile Pills."

Even if a couple dozen of those pills could be refined to benefit the same number of sage realm cultivators, what then? Four hundred million spirit stones could help hundreds to the same goal, and there was no risk involved in doing so. Four hundred million wasn't pocket change.

It was large enough for all but the most powerful factions in Pillfire City to have reservations about. Only the best of the best, the first-rate factions and some of their equals, had the financial clout needed to throw that much away on a whim. Second-rate factions had the money, but not necessarily the freedom to spend it.

Yet this Arena Lord Shao had slammed down the stones without so much as an eyeblink. This expansive gesture sent all his competitors reeling. His opponents were mostly the city's noble youths, each with his own robust purchasing power. But in the latter stages of the bidding war, they'd only raised the price by a few million each time.

Jiang Chen's overwhelming determination shown in the hundred-million increment crushed the others' wills to fight. Everyone knew that Arena Lord Shao was fabulously affluent. It wasn't particularly worthwhile to try muscling him aside with sheer finances. No matter how nice the Radiant Celestial Grass was, what was the point of spending four or five hundred million saint spirit stones?

Plus, there was the ever-present possibility that the arena lord was a secret shill, hired to artificially inflate the price. If so, competing with him was absolutely no good. No amount of money would fill up an endless void.

Seeing the wills of the competing bidders crushed, Madam Man tried to incite their fervor again. "Our local tycoons frequent us every year, but I see an exceptionally large number of you here with us today. A friend over here has bid four hundred million saint spirit stones. Can no one from Pillfire City compete with that number? Is that the extent of your fortunes? Four hundred million saint spirit stones. Surely there's someone that'll call a higher price, no?"

It was a very effective speech, but the natural weight of the current bid required anyone and everyone to carefully consider before they named a new competing bid. Any new bid could end up being a sale. It wasn't worth spending so many saint spirit stones for one specimen of Radiant Celestial Grass.

For the time being, all the other competitors ceased their bidding, returning to their respective seats. Resignation and dejection were plain on their faces, and they cursed Jiang Chen's apparent stupidity again and again. However, it was unrealistic to expect them to continue the bidding war.

No matter how Madam Man tried to provoke them, she could not invoke their fighting spirit. Jiang Chen had brought the auction for the Radiant Celestial Grass to a screeching halt. In fact, he was the auction's first winning buyer.

"Haha, Brother Shao, congratulations. It is a good omen that you've taken the lead in this auction. I'm confident in whatever you're planning to do here." Wang Xuetong gave the younger man a big thumbs-up.

Pill King Blue Phoenix flashed a wry smile. "Once again, my intentional villainy has gone to waste. Still, Brother Shao... this is four hundred million saint spirit stones you're spending."

The young man knew that the pill king bore no ill will. He also responded with a smile. "I like this spirit herb very much. It's more valuable to me than four hundred million spirit stones."

The pill king spluttered when he heard that. "If we do the math and say you can refine fifty Sage Smile Pills with one Radiant Celestial Grass, how much can you sell them for? Ten million each? Your average sage realm genius can't afford to pay that. The cultivators from wealthy families who can, might not be willing to. They typically prefer to get there by cultivating themselves, or use more beneficial routes."

The math checked out. The Radiant Celestial Grass didn't seem to be worth four hundred million at all.

Chapter 1067: Fifth Item On Auction, Master Mu

Jiang Chen obviously disagreed. His understanding of the Radiant Celestial Grass was deeper than Pill King Blue Phoenix. It didn't take long before someone brought the spirit herb to Jiang Chen. He generously handed over 400 million saint spirit stones to the Temple. For this auction, money was to be paid immediately after the bid was won. The transaction was incredibly straightforward and direct, which caught the eye of many.

A 400 million bid for the first item wasn't something one could see everyday. In fact, it was the first time it had ever happened throughout the Temple's history. Jiang Chen tended to the plant and placed it in a spirit container for safekeeping before storing it in his storage ring. He smiled as though he'd received an extremely good deal. Emperor Peerless couldn't help but wonder why.

"Little brother, the Radiant Celestial Grass is a spirit herb meant for refining the Sage Smile Pill. The biggest yield from this amount is at most fifty pills. Even if you sold it for ten million saint spirit stones per pill, you'd only get back 500 million! You'll also have to consider the price of the remaining ingredients and this is before considering the cost for your time, energy, and expertise spent! This is a bad deal no matter how I look at it. Pill King Blue Phoenix's estimations should be correct. Is there something we're missing?"

The emperor was intrigued. The pill king was also staring at Jiang Chen suspiciously. Jiang Chen quickly realized that they'd never put the matter to rest if he didn't spill the beans.

"I was fortunate enough to have received a lecture about the Radiant Celestial Grass from my esteemed master. It has a hidden attribute that not many know of."

"Hidden attribute?" Pill King Blue Phoenix was stunned. "What hidden attribute?"

Wang Xuetong stretched his neck closer to hear what it was all about. The four of them squeezed together like a rice ball.

Jiang Chen laughed. "Well it's not like I can't tell any of you. The herb won't be as valuable anymore if the secret is exposed, so please keep it a secret."

Pill King Blue Phoenix immediately swore a vow. "I swear upon my inner demons to never reveal the secret to anyone else!"

Wang Xuetong immediately followed. "I, too, swear upon my inner demons to never reveal the secret! Well... as a formation master, I know nothing about your herbs and pills!"

Emperor Peerless laughed. "Very well, I shan't be an exception. I swear upon my inner demons to never divulge the secret."

They weren't the sort to let their curiosity get the better of them, but Jiang Chen's actions had truly bewildered them. They simply couldn't understand his reasoning behind the purchase!

Jiang Chen smiled and spoke mysteriously. "Come to think of it, the hidden attribute is truly a well hidden secret. Indeed, the Radiant Celestial Grass is an ingredient for refining the Sage Smile Pill, but it possesses another very unique attribute. It's capable of regrowth."

"Regrowth? What do you mean?" The pill king was puzzled. "Can a spirit herb regrow?"

"I don't mean reincarnation, but like the common chive. If you cut it in half, it'll regrow from its cuttings."

Many plants had a similar attribute. It was how they bloomed and wilted with the change of the seasons. However, spirit herbs didn't share this attribute. Most of them were only meant for one time use. There were some that could be used more than once, and even a few that could last for thousands of years without degrading. However, in the world of pill dao, the Radiant Celestial Grass had always been known as a herb with only one use. It was a consumable item, not to be reused over and over again.

Pill King Blue Phoenix immediately disagreed. "It's widely known that the Radiant Celestial Grass is not capable of regrowth in the pill dao world. Are you perhaps... mistaken?"

"Indeed, that's the case. But just because it's widely known doesn't mean it's true. There are a few conditions that must be fulfilled for it to regrow. Without extensive research, one can never unearth these conditions."

"What are the conditions?" Pill King Blue Phoenix's curiosity was piqued.

"First of all, one must never pluck more than a quarter of the plant or else risk harming its ability to grow back. Secondly, it takes at least three years for the plant to grow back, and in rare cases it might even take five. Thirdly, to stimulate its regrowth, one must apply an ample amount of spirit fertilizer. This is the most critical step. The spirit fertilizer must fully complement the attributes of the plant and its growth rate. Only by meeting all three conditions will the plant regrow. This process can be done in endless succession until the plant reaches the state of decline, which can take at least two thousand years."

The pill king was utterly baffled. Emperor Peerless and Wang Xuetong had awe written all over their faces. The emperor smiled wryly. "are you going to say that your master has coincidentally lectured you on this too?"

He chalks it up on luck whenever he does something extraordinary. If this is also luck, then he must be the luckiest person ever to walk the realm.

Jiang Chen didn't panic or overreact. Instead, he responded with unabashed laughter. "This isn't a coincidence. The attribute of spirit herbs was part of my basic education when I was young. A lot of emphasis was placed on the study of earth and sky rank spirit herbs."

The pill king's eyes glimmered when he heard that. "Is that so? Brother Shao, does that mean you know earth and sky rank spirit herbs like the back of your hand?"

"Not quite, but I do know a lot about them."

Pill King Blue Phoenix was speechless. They were equally envious as they were jealous, but there was nothing they could do about it. It was the discrepancy between the Myriad Abyss Island and the human domain. The pill king was almost like an ant when compared to the upbringing and legacy shown by a genius from the Myriad Abyss Island. If a person of his age could be so monstrous, then the Myriad Abyss Island must be ten times stronger than the human domain at the very least!

The auction went on as usual in the midst of their discussion. The bid for the second item was nearing its end. It was a pill that was auctioned off at an astronomical price.

Jiang Chen had no interest in pills. Only a spirit herb as rare and precious as the Radiant Celestial Grass could catch his attention. Spirit herbs were created by nature, and thus remain untainted from the hands of other pill masters. Pills however, had to be refined by pill masters, and he wasn't interested in the work of others.

The third and fourth items quickly followed. Not a single item was of subpar quality. Every one of them caught as much attention from the crowd as the Radiant Celestial Grass. Unfortunately, none of them could catch Jiang Chen's eye. He truly desired the Radiant Celestial Grass, but the others were mere trash to him. He wondered if Mu Gaoqi was going to be put on auction. Were the Star Harvesters really telling the truth?

Out of eight items for auction, four were already sold.

"Next up is our fifth item. Every single item before this was incomparably precious, but our fifth item takes it to the next level! What we have next is an actual human! A living breathing human!" Madame Man smiled radiantly. "I believe various Pillfire City factions have already begun to move in anticipation. Yes it's true, our fifth item is Master Mu, a pill king with an innate wood constitution of high order, entrusted to us by the Star Harvesters!

"I'm sure everyone has heard of him, and is well aware of what he's capable of. An innate constitution isn't something you can see everyday and a wood innate constitution is as rare as a phoenix, but an innate wood constitution of high order? A constitution like his has never been seen within our city gates throughout our thirty thousand years of history! He's practically an uncut diamond! The Star Harvesters have put him up on auction before he's cut and polished so that his magnificence can be unearthed by a better candidate! Is everyone ready to place your bids?" Madame Man's crisp and stirring voice reverberated throughout the auction house.

"An innate wood constitution of high order?" Emperor Peerless was slightly taken aback. "Such a great seedling! The Star Harvesters are one of the strongest factions in the city, are they not? How can they be so foolish? They should've given him time to grow before selling him!"

Emperor Peerless wasn't aware of the situation in Pillfire City as he wasn't a citizen here. A person of his stature had no interest in such things.

Master Wang Xuetong laughed in response. "Emperor Peerless, you're aware of one thing, but not the other. The Star Harvesters are in a terrible spot. After all, it isn't presumptuous to say that an innate wood constitution of high order is wasted in their hands. Many various factions have been giving them pressure lately. They're only putting Master Mu on auction because they have no other choice."

Pill King Blue Phoenix sighed. "It's a pity that Master Mu is a slave as one cannot free themselves from slavery. He'll have to live the rest of his life as a puppet pill king, never to fully realize his true potential. I must say, they've truly butchered a real talent."

The pill king had spoken the fair truth.

The emperor seemed a little sullen. "I can't help but wonder who invented slavery. They've single-handedly ruined so many talents. Master Mu, do you know of his background? Is Pillfire City so boneless that they can't even accommodate a pill dao talent of his caliber?"

Wang Xuetong sighed. "It's not that we can't. The main issue is that Master Mu's background remains uncertain. What if he was a spy sent by an enemy faction to trick us? He might become a huge threat if he regains control of his body and mind..."

The words wasn't pleasant to the ear, but it was the truth. It was the common consensus towards slaves. They'd rather waste talent than allow a slave freedom.

Madame Man's voice was heard yet again. "An innate wood constitution of high order is almost certain to become a pill emperor. His starting bid will be 300 million. Isn't that such a good deal for a seedling as excellent as him? That's right! We'll begin at 300 million, with minimum increases of ten million!"

The starting bid wasn't too exorbitant, but the ten million minimum bid was indeed a little over the top.

Chapter 1068: Emperor Peerless Strikes the Gavel

The Temple personnel brought out a youth in pill dao garb after Madame Man waved her hands.

Jiang Chen was elated when he saw the familiar face. It really is Mu Gaoqi! Even though it'd been years since they last met and the person in question was now a slave, his elegance and poise hadn't diminished one bit. Although, one could now see misery and oppression on his face. He seemed distraught with worries. Unfortunately, his innate wood constitution of high order drew all attention away from his suffering.

"As you can see, this is Master Mu that was entrusted to us by the Star Harvesters, a rough diamond with an innate wood constitution of high order! Esteemed guests, the bidding shall now begin!" Madame Man announced passionately.

"Brother Mo, his constitution is extremely crucial to the creation of the Pinecrane Pill. Even without my master, we will be able to refine a Pinecrane Pill as long as we have a pill king of his caliber. In fact, there's even a possibility that he might be able to cure your dao partner's injuries." Struck by inspiration, Jiang Chen immediately transmitted this message to Emperor Peerless.

Visibly moved, the emperor glanced towards Jiang Chen to seek confirmation. The latter immediately met his gaze and nodded gently without hesitation.

"Rest assured, I'll definitely win the bid. Nobody can stop me." The emperor nodded.

Jiang Chen had been a little worried at first that he wouldn't be able to dominate the field. By luring the emperor towards the same goal, he'd gain a much better stronger foothold. By relying on the emperor's authority, he was capable of doing things that he'd be otherwise incapable of with wealth alone.

"Brother Mo, I'll compensate you for every single stone you spend on my behalf. I only ask that you win the bid. He's of great importance to me."

"I understand." The emperor answered firmly.

An innate wood constitution of high order wasn't just talented in pill dao. They were also incredible masters of healing. Jiang Chen hadn't spoken randomly. It was all based on some degree of truth. Even though Mu Gaoqi had good mastery over pill dao, he was merely a mid level pill king at most. He wasn't yet capable of curing Emperor Peerless' dao partner due to his cultivation level. However, it didn't matter as Jiang Chen possessed the wood spirit spring. The spring water had incredible healing properties. Even a formidable curse like the Generation Binding Curse which Huang'er was afflicted with back then was suppressed by the spring's power. The wood spirit spring was almost like the holy spring of heaven and contained the life giving properties of the wood element. Its healing prowess was not to be scoffed at.

300 million was a relatively low opening price, which led to a huge bidding war at the start. The price broke through the 500 million mark within just a few moments. Judging by the look of things, it was unlikely to slow down until the bid had reached one billion.

The demand for pill dao talents in Pillfire City was insane. Mu Gaoqi probably would never have dreamed that he'd one day be worth so much money. 500 million saint spirit stones was an amount of money never seen before in the Regal Pill Palace, including Palace Head Dan Chi or any of the great elders such as Elder Yun Nie. It might still be within their reach if it'd been 500 million origin spirit stones, but 500 million saint spirit stones was simply too far fetched for a fourth rank sect like them.

Judging by the momentum, the auction was absolutely not going end at 500 million. The price kept on increasing until it quickly went past the 600 million mark.

700 million soon followed. The bidding war only showed signs of slowing down when the price reached the 800 million mark. However, there were still a few powerful clans trying to outbid each other.

At this point, there was no longer any huge fluctuations in price. Instead, it was slowly creeping up, 10 million at a time. Soon, it reached 900 million. This was when Jiang Chen decided that it was time to place his bid. "I bid one billion!"

He broke the stalemate with just a single sentence. The atmosphere in the auction house was brought to a new boil.

"Him again? He must really hate having too much money."

"Is he planning to spend every single spirit stone he made from the Bounty Arena?"

"Tsk Tsk. By the heavens is he wealthy. One billion! I can't even spend that much money in a single lifetime!"

“Tsk tsk tsk. It’s the first item to reach the one billion mark today. The winning bid might actually reach the one billion and two hundred million mark!”

“This is insane! The Star Harvesters must be laughing their teeth off right now. Didn’t they pay less than twenty million for Master Mu originally?”

“They’ve made a huge fortune!”

“They’re well known for their competency in business, but this fortune is truly beyond anything they’ve made!”

Jiang Chen preferred to impart despair unto others by massively outbidding them. As expected, two factions with a weaker resolve decided to back out. Other than him, only three other factions remained. These three factions seemed adamant on getting their hands on Mu Gaoqi.

“I bid one billion and ten million!”

“One billion and twenty million!”

“One billion and fifty million!” It was obvious that these three factions were very annoyed by their new rival. However, they remained very level-headed with their bids. They didn’t act brashly like Jiang Chen, who raised the bid by 100 million in one go.

Jiang Chen laughed. “One billion and two hundred million.”

He raised it by 150 million in one go this time.

The Star Harvesters wanted to smother Jiang Chen with kisses when they saw this. Their boss, Gai Zonglin, sighed. “He really is rich after all. He’s the benefactor that our gang needed. If we’d sold Master Mu to one of the clans directly, we’d never receive more than 200 million. By putting him on auction, the price has skyrocketed all the way to a billion and two hundred million! This is what a little bit of ingenuity gets you! Do you guys see this?!”

Gai Zonglin was elated that he’d played his cards right. His plan was perfect, but it’d only work if someone with too much money to spend was present. He wasn’t the only one thinking that Arena Lord Shao had too much money to spend. The entire audience in the arena house seemed to be synchronized in thought.

“Keke, you’ve earned a great merit.” Manager Xiao gave Miss Keke an approving glance. “I don’t know what you’ve said to him, but since he’s willing to spend so much money, I will make sure to request a big bonus for you when we return.”

Miss Keke forced a smile though she was feeling extremely complicated over it all. She knew more than anyone what their conversations had been like. Even calling it a conversation would be an overstatement. He hadn’t given her any face at all. At that time, she’d even felt that he was going to give up on Master Mu.

However, things never truly went as expected. That man had actually gone on to take part in the Bounty Arena and made more than 3 billion! He now had enough money to take part in the auction! Even though Manager Xiao was going to put in a good word for her, she found it difficult to get excited about

it. Instead, all she felt was an odd sense of emptiness. She couldn't quite put the feeling into words. The more Jiang Chen showed off his wealth, the more sullen she became.

He probably thinks that I'm just a Star Harvester lackey trying to swindle his money. A girl's thoughts was truly peculiar sometimes. Even though they didn't even know each other well, she couldn't help but be self conscious about what a man as excellent as him thought about her.

She began to detest her job greatly when she recalled the various unsavory things she'd been ordered to do. She used to be a kind and pure of heart, but because of her job, she had to say and do many things that went against her conscience.

The atmosphere in the auction house was getting so heated that nobody would have the time to care what a young nobody like her was thinking. A competitor backed out after Jiang Chen's insane raise. The other two factions were incredibly unyielding. They refused to come to an agreement or concession. Jiang Chen threw a glance at Emperor Peerless. The latter immediately realized it was his turn to make a move.

"I raise the bid to 1 billion and five hundred million! Master Mu is of great importance to me. I hope everyone can give this old man some face. The price is already beyond what's considered normal, but I shall persist until the very end if anyone still wishes to continue the stalemate. I'm not afraid of a showdown!"

The crowd was flabbergasted by the emperor's dominating words. Who would've thought that a great emperor would join the fray out of nowhere? Like a deflated ball, the other two competitors had no choice but to give up begrudgingly. Everyone instantly knew that this was the end of the bid when they saw the emperor's unrelenting face. They were still able to counter bid, but not after a speech like that. They were certain to lose if they continued the bidding war and they'd even run the risk of offending him.

A wandering great emperor was oftentimes more frightening than an established one, because there was nothing to hold him back. Without a faction of own, he had no burdens or obstacles. He was free to do as he pleased. One might receive a huge surprise after offending someone of his stature. No one would ever want such a surprise.

Since they were certain to lose, counter bidding would only raise the price even further. What was the point of that? The emperor's money wasn't going to line their pockets. The only party that would gain from this was the Star Harvesters. They weren't going to do something that would benefit others at their own expense.

"So be it then. With such a large increase, we have no choice but to admit defeat."

"It's truly a pity. We,too, admit defeat."

Madame Man threw a flirtatious glance at the emperor that also contained a hint of resentment. "Emperor Peerless, by saying that, you've prematurely hammered down the price and ended the bidding game!" she complained coquettishly.

It was only natural that the Temple of Cleansing Fire would want the price to go as high as possible. One billion and five hundred million was already an incredible amount of money. However, greed eats at the heart of all men. She wanted to make use of her womanly charms to vent her frustrations a little.

Chapter 1069: Secret Realm

The most she could do was grumble. Faced with someone as forceful as Emperor Peerless, even a temple master of the Temple of Cleansing Fire had to yield several miles. As a lowly auctioneer, she could do even less than that. Madam Man aimed a flirtatious smile at the expressionless emperor. "I'd like to congratulate you in advance, Emperor Peerless. One and a half billion is a lot to pay for Master Mu, and absolutely appropriate for someone of his skill and station. Everyone, please applaud!"

She'd changed tack very smoothly. She knew immediately from Emperor Peerless's impassive expression that her complaints had displeased him. The tide of her words turned immediately to something much more placatory.

Nobody could act with disregard for a great emperor. Instantly, thunderous applause filled the space. Pillfire City's own emperors regularly taught their factions who they should try not to tango with and who they should absolutely not anger.

Emperor Peerless was in the second category. Clapping didn't cost any money. There was no reason for anyone not to give the emperor a little respect. In the next instant, the sound of applause increased in a crescendo. The emperor waved his hand as a gesture of thanks.

Gai Zonglin of the Star Harvesters was jubilant about Emperor Peerless' purchase of Master Mu. There was no better outcome than this. The other factions could say nothing about their loss at the emperor's hand.

The Star Harvesters had every right to contest any bullying of the gang after the fact. After all, there was no shame in being outbid by the likes of Emperor Peerless. Though there may be internal dissatisfaction, not much could be done about it. The occasion was cause enough for Gai Zonglin to come forward personally. He handed the slave's jade token to the emperor with all deference. The token was the key to controlling its associated slave. Its holder could release the captive from his chains at any time to restore freedom.

Mu Gaoqi was before Jiang Chen's very eyes, yet the young man did not know his friend. It was a sad state of affairs that pained his heart to see. 'Master Mu' had increased his expertise in pills over the years in a zombie-like state, a tool fit only to be used by others. Though he reviled Gai Zonglin's euphoric expression, Jiang Chen could not hate the gang boss.

With the Star Harvesters, his friend Mu Gaoqi at least hadn't been mistreated. He was still alive. As for Elder Yun Nie, he too was definitely in the gang's hands. But he had Mu Gaoqi now, and prying away the elder from his captors wasn't far off. Jiang Chen had already made up his mind that he would go find the Star Harvesters again after he was finished here. It should be an easy transaction then. He could simply hand them the cash in exchange for whom he wanted.

Gai Zonglin happily and gratefully left after receiving the spirit stones. The fact that Mu Gaoqi was by his side now reassured Jiang Chen greatly. The auction had proceeded much more smoothly than he'd first thought. If he had been the bidder instead of Emperor Peerless, a billion and a half would never have

been the final price. It seemed that the name of a titled great emperor alone was enough to daunt the competition.

The remainder of the auction was still fairly interesting, but both Jiang Chen and Emperor Peerless had little concern for it. On the other hand, Pill King Blue Phoenix became preoccupied with one of the cauldrons presented later on. After a tough back-and-forth, he won it at a steep price.

Jiang Chen had a smattering of cauldrons in his possession already. He had the Five Treasured Cauldrons of Regal Pill Palace in his collection, and the Skysnatcher Cauldron that he'd managed to buy back at Veluriyam on top of that. Though the cauldron that Pill King Blue Phoenix managed to win was of somewhat higher quality, Jiang Chen did not find it sufficiently enticing. A man of his expertise in pills did not need to dwell on a specific vessel overmuch. He could easily refine sky rank pills in just the Skysnatcher.

After endless clashes between tycoons and magnates, the auction finally came to a successful close. Following the curtains' fall, Pill King Blue Phoenix and Master Wang Xuetong were both reluctant to depart. They separately invited Jiang Chen to visit with them. Jiang Chen fended their overtures off only after several rounds of pleasantries.

Observing the inseparability of Emperor Peerless and the youth, the two seniors realized that it was likely necessary to move the older before they could move the younger. Though they had a bellyful of questions about why the emperor was favoring his young companion so, they didn't dare inquire into such a powerful man's affairs.

Jiang Chen grinned as he watched the pill king and the formation leave. "Are both of them a bit scared of you, Old Brother Mo?"

Emperor Peerless grinned back, but said nothing. As a titled great emperor, he was used to others' wariness.

"Where are you staying tonight, my friend?" The emperor changed the subject.

"A tavern, but I'm not in a rush to return there." Jiang Chen laughed. "Old Brother Mo, let's go to the Star Harvesters again."

"The Star Harvesters again?" Emperor Peerless blinked once before unfurling a smile once more.

"Alright. I did say I would listen to you. Wherever you want to go, feel free."

Jiang Chen nodded, then abruptly asked something unrelated. "Ah, actually, I have a slightly impolite question. Would you mind, Old Brother Mo?"

The emperor waved a hand in the negative. "Just say it. No need to worry about decorum between the two of us."

"I'd like to know, are you on good terms with Pillfire City? Especially the great emperors here."

This surprised Emperor Peerless a little. He became quiet for a moment before sighing softly. "I can only call my relationship with the city quite average. The great emperor that I dueled once upon a time was, in fact, Pillfire's very own Emperor Pillzenith."

"What?" Jiang Chen was absolutely shocked by the news. "Old Brother Mo, you're not joking, are you?"

"It's a well-kept secret, so not many know about it. Pillzenith, that old coot... he is the number one great emperor here, and he has a slight edge over me in terms of cultivation. But after hurting Ah Yun, he's not bold enough to maintain a pretense of civility up close any more. He's never admitted it was his fault, of course, and he tries even now to make amends, but even the foremost great emperor of Pillfire City cannot save her. I consider him somewhat of an ignoble fraud. He's scared of others finding out about his misdeeds, because it would tarnish his reputation. That's why he's anxious every time I come to his city. If not for Ah Yun's injury, why would I even set foot here?"

There was an undercurrent of indignation in the emperor's speech. Clearly, he hated Emperor Pillzenith's guts. Because he had to maintain some dignity of his own as a great emperor, he couldn't exactly curse openly.

Jiang Chen clucked his tongue to himself. So there was something more to that story! He finally understood why every faction in the city feared Emperor Peerless so. The things he'd just heard about Emperor Pillzenith definitely played a part. Emperor Peerless was someone that even Emperor Pillzenith flinched at the prospect of. No city faction would find it wise or agreeable to anger someone like that. There was the additional worry, as well, that the wandering emperor would use them as punching bags in a fit of temper.

This was why the leader of Pillfire City had warned the factions under his hand ahead of time to avoid provoking the other emperor at all times. He smiled when he saw Jiang Chen's confusion. "What're you asking about that for, partner? You want to go to the Star Harvesters, hmm? Don't worry, I'll be there for you no matter what. Maybe we'll even stir up a storm here, eh?"

Emperor Peerless was a fearless and audacious man. In truth, though he had been a touch inferior to Emperor Pillzenith all those years ago, he'd worked very hard since then on cultivation. Even if he was still weaker after all this time, it wasn't a hopeless difference. He might not be able to win, but neither would he lose.

The emperor's youthful heroism evoked similar emotions in his young companion. "Old Brother Mo, there's someone else on the Star Harvesters' hands that I'd like. They're a fickle bunch, and not likely to give up the chase until they squeeze as much profit out as possible. If I just ask it of them, they're going to jack up the price to high heaven. So... that's where I'd like you to come in."

With a great emperor at hand, the Star Harvesters needed to think twice before unnecessarily inflating the price. If they made Emperor Peerless unhappy, they wouldn't find anyone to cry foul for them even if the emperor stamped them out entirely. Great emperors who were also wandering cultivators were the hardest to deal with.

"Just a person? Should be easy, then." The emperor laughed. "Let's go."

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The Star Harvesters' headquarters was holding a celebratory banquet. The price that they'd sold Master Mu for at the auction greatly exceeded their expectations. Eight hundred million would have been a high enough price, but the closing bid was almost double that. One and a half billion! Everyone who'd opposed the auction idea were instantly silenced by the absurdity of that number.

The astronomical sum received universal praise, a stark contrast to the harshness of previous opinion. Gai Zonglin felt incredibly proud. This decision cemented his position as boss even more. His detractors within the gang were utterly quashed. Understandably, the boss was the star of the banquet. Manager Xiao, of Star Mill fame, garnered a considerable amount of attention as well.

Miss Keke was also present. Though Emperor Peerless was the one to win Master Mu's auction, the Star Harvesters' executives all saw that Arena Lord Shao was right beside him when he did. It was quite likely that the young arena lord was the source of the funds for the purchase. She had been the one to communicate with him all this time.

"Keke, the boss has agreed to induct your younger brother. He'll start as a sixth-rank disciple, two levels higher than what we talked about previously. The gang will take good care of your parents as well, naturally, and you're getting a promotion to supervisor yourself," Manager Xiao said to the girl cheerfully.

Miss Keke belonged to Star Mill—his Star Mill. Boasting about her accomplishments to the boss was a matter of fact for him; it showed off his contribution as well.

Keke didn't know what to feel. She knew that she hadn't actually done much in the grand scheme of things. She was reaping the benefits of happenstance.

Gai Zonglin roared with laughter. "Don't be so embarrassed, little girl! This is the way of our gang: those who do well are rewarded, and those who do poorly, punished. Come, cheers to our prosperity!"

In the heat of the celebration, a messenger came suddenly from outside. "Boss, elders, uh, Master Mu! Master Mu is back."

"What?" Gai Zonglin's arm trembled. He almost spilled the wine from the glass beside his lips. Master Mu was back? What was he back for? He'd been sold already, hadn't he? This was likely the start of something bad.

Chapter 1070: Saving Elder Yun Nie

"Is he alone?" Gai Zonglin asked, frowning.

"No... no, he's not. He brought two others with him." The person who had come in to deliver the message had not been at the auction. Thus, he didn't recognize either Emperor Peerless or Jiang Chen.

Hearing this, Gai Zonglin's expression descended into terror. "What? There's two other people? What do they look like?"

"One old, one young. They don't look like normal people."

Everyone colored at that. Did anything more need to be said? It was Emperor Peerless and Arena Lord Shao. What were they here for? Did they want the one and a half billion back? That would be a big problem. There was no possibility of the gang spitting out a morsel that was already in its mouth. But regardless of how hard-headed its posturing was, it did not match up well against a great emperor!

In that moment, everyone behaved as if a powerful enemy was upon them. Some immediately began to complain. "Just as I thought, there was nothing good about that auction!"

“Selling to a great emperor... there’s no telling whether that’s a blessing or a curse. We were probably too optimistic.”

“Why not halt the banquet altogether?”

Gai Zonglin’s face was as black as a piece of cast-iron cookware. These people were the same ones that had opposed him about the auction in the first place. As soon as they saw a slight change in the situation, they started singing a different tune. What about the praise they’d showered him with during the banquet just now? They changed minds as quickly as a spinning weathervane!

Gai Zonglin didn’t have the time to fuss over them now, however. He barked instructions in a low voice. “Battle preparations, everyone. No matter what happens, we Star Harvesters have done everything within the rules. So what if they’re a great emperor and our senior? Can they break the law?”

As the boss of a large gang, he was composed despite his fearfulness. “Some honored guests have arrived! Come in, come in, invite them to come in and drink with us,” he shouted loudly. No matter their intentions, the Star Harvesters would use fair means before force. That was Gai Zonglin’s strategy. If they were really here to cause trouble, the gang couldn’t show weakness either.

“No need for invitations. We’re already in.” Even as the sound of the boss’s voice disappeared, Emperor Peerless’s own cool voice was audible against the gangsters’ eardrums. A single flicker heralded the arrival of three to the Star Harvesters’ banquet hall.

Emperor Peerless took center stage, with Jiang Chen and Mu Gaoqi flanking him to the left and right. The latter’s jade token had not yet been destroyed, so his consciousness was still sealed. The suddenness of the appearance prompted everyone to stand, no matter their actual willingness. No one dared remain seated in their chair.

Gai Zonglin approached the trio with a full smile and a cupped fist. “Senior Peerless, we thank you for gracing us with your presence on such short notice. Apologies for not greeting you more formally. Please, take the best seat, have a few drinks on us. It’s the least we can do in your honor.”

The Star Harvesters’ boss was a capable entertainer. He postured absolute humility before Emperor Peerless. Calling himself a junior of such a legendary man was not embarrassing in the least. There was no worry of being laughed at. Who wouldn’t bow to a great emperor?

“So, you’re Gai Zonglin, are you?” Emperor Peerless said, rather coolly.

The man in question could not stop nodding his head. “Yes, yes. I am truly floored that you actually know my humble name, Senior Peerless.”

The emperor spared no useless words. He tossed the gang boss a pointed glance before sweeping a razor-sharp look across the rest of the room. Everyone cowered before the keenness of his gaze.

“Are you worried that I’m planning on robbing you of the one and a half billion I just paid, Gai Zonglin?” Finally, the emperor’s eyes came to rest on the boss again. He smiled faintly, but his stare stung sorely into Gai Zonglin’s back.

“Oh, not at all. You’re a senior expert, Emperor Peerless. I can’t imagine someone as great as you doing anything reprehensible.” The boss was quick to cover himself.

"Hahaha, an impressively nimble tongue. As a matter of fact, I did come for something today... not spirit stones, but a person."

"A... person?" Gai Zonglin was stunned.

"Yes, a person is the only thing I would like. If I cannot find that person here, then I hope you do not mind me taking back the one and a half billion." There was a tangible threat in the emperor's tone.

"Oh, er, who would you like today, Senior Peerless?" Gai Zonglin replied, hurriedly. "I am too slow to tell if we have anyone you'd actually want. Has someone under my command angered you?"

"You're overthinking things." The emperor maintained his half-smile. "The old man that you bought along with Master Mu. Where did you leave him? I don't care what method you use or what you have to do. Deliver that man to the inn I am staying at in twenty-four hours, or we will need another talk." The emperor's voice was impassive.

Gai Zonglin put a hand to his head. The mountain of pressure that he'd felt only a moment prior flowed off him like water. "Oh, hmm, that old man. I believe there was someone like that, yes. He is here with us, in fact, in our pill refining area. I will send for him immediately."

The boss didn't want to ask why the emperor wanted that particular slave. The old man was relatively ordinary in most respects.

"He's still here?" It was the emperor's turn to blink.

"Ah, indeed, he's still here. We're not in the habit of torturing or killing our slaves. Everyone that we buy is treated with reasonable indifference at worst." Gai Zonglin breathed a sigh of relief. It was good that he had the man the emperor wanted. Otherwise, he might've had a real problem on his hands.

Elder Yun Nie was brought forth after another few moments. The elder hadn't looked very old before the fall of his sect. After all the calamities and ordeals he'd been through, though, his appearance had aged quite a bit. Evidently, he had not been treated as well as Mu Gaoqi. However, the Star Harvesters were definitely off the hook for maltreatment. Elder Yun Nie looked a bit shabbier and worse for wear, but largely normal otherwise.

"Name your price," the emperor said, his voice still frigid.

"Name... my price?" Gai Zonglin was startled a second time.

"I won't have the reputation of taking things for free." Emperor Peerless harrumphed.

"Oh, not at all," the boss offered a placatory smile. "The old man isn't worth much. We only bought him for about ten million saint spirit stones. Senior Peerless, as repayment for dignifying us with your purchase earlier, allow us to offer him as an additional present." Gai Zonglin was astute about social behavior. Hearing about the fact that the emperor was only here to get an irrelevant person relaxed him greatly. His one and a half billion were safe.

As for the slave in front of him, the boss didn't care a whit about the old man. The Star Harvesters traded slaves of his caliber in great volumes. Each individual one had some value, but nothing close to one and a half billion. Thus, he had no compunctions whatsoever about using it as a tool to leverage a relationship. Anything to get Emperor Peerless out of here more quickly. The emperor glanced at Jiang

Chen. After verifying that they did, indeed, have the right person, he casually tossed twenty million saint spirit stones to Gai Zonglin's direction.

"I have no interest in taking advantage of others. Take the money. Twenty million is absolutely higher than market, I'd surmise."

The boss was bewildered at the gesture. His mouth remained open for a long time with shock.

"Let's go." Handing over the stones was the last of Emperor Peerless's business here. He led his companions to immediate departure, with little disregard to the throng of surprised Star Harvesters present.

When the emperor finally left the premises, it was as if a great weight had been lifted off Gai Zonglin's shoulders. "A senior's style is hard to comprehend," he sighed softly. "I thought he was here to interrogate us, but he was just here to make another deal. Can this be called adding icing to a cake?"

The gang members traded confused looks among themselves. They thought uniformly that what they'd just witnessed was nothing short of marvelous. They'd even prepared to fight to the death!

"Boss, why was Emperor Peerless so interested in that old man?" Manager Xiao couldn't help but ask.

Gai Zonglin's face darkened. "That's not something we're in a position to ask. Remember, a great emperor's actions are always inscrutable. No news of what happened today can be allowed to spread. Whoever does will be branded a criminal among us."

A great emperor was not a topic of discussion for the common people. Idle gossip that led to the emperor's fury would spell certain doom for the Star Harvesters. No matter what, they hadn't lost money. Master Mu had made them one and a half billion, and the old man, more than a dozen million. If they could make that much money on every slave, the Star Harvesters would rapidly become the most affluent faction in the city.

Outside the Star Harvesters' headquarters, Emperor Peerless roared with laughter. "How did I do, young man?"

"Simply amazing." Jiang Chen gave him a big thumbs-up. "Haha, after seeing how Gai Zonglin was acting, I finally know the true meaning of kowtowing to one's every will. I remember when I was first talking to him. Gai Zonglin wouldn't budge at all. In fact, he wouldn't even talk to me." Jiang Chen's exclamations came from the heart. The title of a great emperor was extremely useful, much more so than his attempt had been. Today, Gai Zonglin had been fearful enough to almost relieve himself. He didn't have the courage to ask a typical price, much less jack it up. If they'd wanted to take away Elder Yun Nie for free, there was no way the boss would've prevented them. Rather, he'd give them only smiles for it.

After returning to the inn, Emperor Peerless handed over both Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie to Jiang Chen.

"Then I'll leave those two in your care, my young friend."

"Old Brother Mo, I owe you one for this. Don't worry about your cultivation partner. I'll think of something to help her out—a perfect solution for sure."

“I’ve made many mistakes in my life, but I certainly don’t think getting to know you is one of them.” Emperor Peerless’s words always had a mysterious power and magnanimity to them. One instinctively wanted to trust him. “Just like I said, do whatever seems good to you. Even if the sky falls, I’ll shoulder the burden for you.”

“Thank you for your trust, Old Brother Mo. I’ll go back to my room and remove the seals. I’ll be in your care for the next bit.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t let anyone disturb you.” Emperor Peerless’s answer was dominating.

Returning to his inn room, Jiang Chen set up a formation that cut contact off with the outside world. Only then did he begin to prepare for removing his friends’ seals.

It had been many years since the fall of the Regal Pill Palace. Remembering his friendship with Mu Gaoqi back when they were still peers filled Jiang Chen with nostalgia. The successful rescue of an old friend comforted him immensely. With the slaves’ jade tokens in hand, it was no effort at all to restore their freedom. Using the held token as a conduit, Jiang Chen poured a stream of power into Mu Gaoqi’s own consciousness.