

## Three Realms 491

### Chapter 491: Gifting Pills to Ye Chonglou

Jiang Chen returned to the Rosy Valley after leaving Elder Yun Nie's residence.

"Hello, senior brother Jiang Chen."

"Senior brother Jiang Chen!"

The guards all greeted Jiang Chen with smiling faces when they saw him, without a hint of their former ornery attitudes. So the saying went, one did not reach out to slap a smiling face. Jiang Chen knew that these guards were all just eking out a life when they'd made things difficult for him before. The same went for why they were greeting him warmly now. They had to do this in order to survive.

He nodded without saying anything. That would suffice as a response. These people were acting this way likely because he had defeated Yan Hongtu, and he'd received Elder Yun Nie's favor as his position rose accordingly.

Palace Head Dan Chi showed a preference for him, but obviously wouldn't interfere with matters in the Rosy Valley. Elder Yun Nie was different. He'd gone to the level of shouting down another elder during a council meeting. When this news made the rounds, getting more embellished with the telling, it took on a completely different meaning.

Elder Yun Nie was blatantly favoring Jiang Chen. Who would dare not show respect to an honored guest of the Hallmaster of the Herbal Hall?

When Jiang Chen returned to the residence, he went into temporary closed door cultivation. He had yet to fully digest the gains from the wood spring. His physical body had been refined multiple times, greatly enhancing its original talent. The reforging from the Five Dragons Opening Heavens Pill in particular had reforged his potential to that of a "genius" level. Now that he'd been baptized in the wood spring, his potential had risen once again to that of "upper genius."

Although his innate potential was still lower than those of the most perverse, most preeminent geniuses, the gap between him and that category had drastically decreased. "The gaps of bloodlines and physical body can likewise be decreased. Further, no one else in the Divine Abyss Continent will have the advantages that I possess." Jiang Chen was filled with confidence. Ever since arriving at the Regal Pill Palace, his knowledge and understanding of this world had progressed, along with his confidence.

"The Sovereign Area, geniuses of the sky origin realm, Pill Battles of Mt. Rippling Mirage, Myriad Domain Hidden Dragon Rankings, the Myriad Grand Ceremony, the Paramount Realm...." All of these challenges started to ignite Jiang Chen's fighting spirit. He knew that these challenges would be the trials by fire that would accelerate his growth. His current rate of improvement was already verging on the perverse, but he still wasn't satisfied.

"Father left me that year with a letter and set out for the Upper Eight Realms alone. Although my cultivation level has entered the origin realm after a few years, I am still a ways off from the geniuses of the Upper Eight Realms. If I follow his steps now, father will surely be displeased." Jiang Chen was worried about Jiang Feng, his father in this life. His father had given him so much support and care when

he'd arrived in this life and won his wholehearted affection. Jiang Chen solemnly respected Jiang Feng's loyalty and stoutheartedness.

"Sage realm... I must head for the Upper Eight Realms when I enter the sage realm. I must definitely spread my name throughout the Upper Eight Realms so that father knows I have not let him down." Jiang Chen had originally felt that he would count as having made it once he entered the origin realm. But now it seemed that if he wanted to be able to say that he'd come into his strength in the Upper Eight Realms, the origin realm was far from enough. The sage realm was the absolute lowest possible starting point. He felt that his father would have no reason to disapprove if he entered the Upper Eight Realms after ascending to the sage realm. It was just that as the years passed, Jiang Chen grew fraught with worry for his father when he thought of the dangers in the Upper Eight Realms.

"Mm, time is of the essence. I can't relax for a single day." Jiang Chen began training again with an even firmer heart. Three days later, he emerged from his session.

Soon after he exited his session, Mu Gaoqi came to visit in high spirits. He was quite excited to see Jiang Chen. "Brother Chen, did you know that the Sovereign Area has released four new residences?"

Jiang Chen nodded. "Did you sign up for the competition?"

Mu Gaoqi nodded enthusiastically. "I'd actually missed out on the signup cutoff, but I went to see Elder Yun Nie. He knew that I'd out with you a while ago and agreed to put my name in. Brother Chen, there are two slots for pill geniuses this time. It'd be wonderful if both of us can make it into the Sovereign Area."

Jiang Chen smiled, "Are you confident?"

Mu Gaoqi thought for a while. "I gave it some thought, and it occurred to me that my potential for pills is definitely comparable to the upper core disciples. Also, many pill geniuses are also martial dao geniuses, so they may go for the martial dao spots instead. Therefore, I still think that there's hope."

"Gaoqi, you have many good parts, but you tend to keep too low a profile sometimes. If you're going to fight for something, pour everything you have into it and have confidence in yourself. You have an innate wood constitution and superb potential in pill dao. With the spirit pearl that I gifted to you, you'll soon be able to control fire with more precision than ever before. And that is after discounting your baptism in the wood spring. If you still have no confidence after this, what else can we do?"

Mu Gaoqi laughed bashfully. He was cautious by nature, but actually was very confident in this time's challenge for a spot in the Sovereign Area.

"It's all thanks to Elder Yun Nie fighting for us this time." Mu Gaoqi sighed.

"Make your preparations! I'll see you in the Sovereign Area." Jiang Chen said bracingly. He himself was now fully prepared and had consolidated his gains from the trip. Although he was but third level origin realm now, he was still immensely confident in competing for a position this time.

After he sent Mu Gaoqi on his way, he decided to pay Lordmaster Ye Chonglou a visit. Jiang Chen still had a particular regard for Ye Chonglou. If he had to identify a senior who'd helped him selflessly in the sixteen kingdom alliance, then it was most likely the elder whose vision was beyond the sixteen kingdoms.

“Jiang Chen! What brings you by today?” Ye Chonglou was delighted to see Jiang Chen. As an origin realm forefather in the Precious Tree Sect, he was here to look after the geniuses from the Precious Tree Sect. But in reality, there wasn’t much of a place for him in the vast Regal Pill Palace. If it wasn’t for consideration of the alliance, those in the Regal Pill Palace wouldn’t pay him much heed at all. It was a good thing that Palace Head Dan Chi had made his position clear, so no one went too far towards Ye Chonglou.

Even so, Ye Chonglou would still run into some poor attitudes every day, and sometimes even the occasional jeer. However, the lordmaster was open minded and knew that the Precious Tree Sect had overreached itself in being connected to the Regal Pill Palace, so he greeted all those sour words with a smiling face. But in the depths of his heart, he was still a bit depressed. He’d been a proud person for more than half his life. However, his cultivation level was really nothing in the Regal Pill Palace. Even an ordinary administrator in the Hall of Spring and Autumn was comparable to him.

Jiang Chen had a sharp eye and could tell from the lordmaster’s countenance that he wasn’t having an easy time of things here. “Lordmaster, are you unhappy here?”

Ye Chonglou sighed softly and began comforting Jiang Chen instead. “Jiang Chen, what part of the human heart have I not seen at my age? It’s nothing much. What does my situation matter if you young folk are doing fine?”

However, these weren’t Jiang Chen’s thoughts. The lordmaster had been a vaunted figure in the Skylaurel Kingdom and was used to wealth and respect. If he was subjected to eye rolls everyday here, how could he be at peace? “If the lordmaster is unhappy here, why not come with me to the Rosy Valley?”

Ye Chonglou waved his hand. “Forget it, this is the time that you rise above the masses. Don’t let this bit of matter from this old man affect your mentality. Jiang Chen, I’ve heard of your matters in the Rosy Valley. Very good! You’ve made a name for the disciples of the Precious Tree Sect in that fight with Yan Hongtu!”

Jiang Chen laughed heartily. He’d actually forgotten about that minor character. “Oh right, how are the others now?”

“Tang Hong is doing well, his rate of improvement is the fastest. Of the other three, Lian Canghai is more or less acceptable. Iron Dazhi and Xie Yufan have less exceptional potential, they likely will be unable to make it into the origin realm.” The lordmaster sighed lightly, obviously not thinking highly of the latter two’s future.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Without the supplementation of resources, all is as fleeting as the winds in martial dao cultivation. Of course, if their own foundation is insufficient, even the aid of pills would only given then a fifty-fifty chance of assailing the origin realm. I’ll think of something for them for making it to the origin realm, but the road after will be up to their own making.”

Apart from his brother Tang Hong, Jiang Chen really didn’t care about the others. But as fellow disciples of the same sect, if he had the ability to help them, he would be happy to do so. This would count as repayment of Lordmaster Ye Chonglou’s aid that year. “Oh right, lordmaster, here are a hundred upper

rank Origin Fostering Pills. It should be enough for you to ascend to the earth origin realm.” Jiang Chen placed a flask in front of the lordmaster.

“Upper rank Origin Fostering Pills? A hundred of them?” Ye Chonglou was thrown into disarray and kept waving his hand. “Jiang Chen, how can I accept this? You’re now of the origin realm; you can use these pills. I’m just a pile of old bones with limited potential. It’d be a waste of all these pills. Where did you get so many pills in the first place? Did Palace Head Dan Chi give them to you?”

Ye Chonglou didn’t have much status in the Regal Pill Palace and so was unaware of the detailed intelligence about Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen smiled, “I happened to complete a mission for Elder Yun Nie of the Herbal Hall. He awarded me a few upper rank pills. Lordmaster, accept them with ease. These pills will be useful!”

Ye Chonglou gave a long sigh, admiration and approval suffusing his eyes. “Jiang Chen, the greatest accomplishment in my life was to locate your sparkle in the mundane, and befriending a genius such as you. Otherwise, I would be doomed to toil in mediocrity and die in the Skylaurel Kingdom.”

Such was fate!

“Lordmaster, you don’t need to be polite with me. To be honest, if it wasn’t for your care, I wouldn’t have made it past the Iron family in the Skylaurel Kingdom.” Jiang Chen was one who deeply valued loyalty and his relationships. He would return the slightest bit of help that others offered him in spades. In addition, he wasn’t here to just give the lordmaster a few pills.

“Lordmaster, I have something even more important to give you apart from the Origin Fostering Pills. This item must be kept a secret, lest troubles rise without end.”

Ye Chonglou trembled slightly when he heard these words, a grave look in his eyes. Something that would make Jiang Chen voice these words was an incredible item indeed.

#### Chapter 492: Blood of a True Dragon

A spirit box and a small flask were placed on the table in front of them. Jiang Chen created several soundproof barriers, and also deployed the Lotus around them to ensure that no one was surreptitiously keeping an eye on them. “Lordmaster, this item is quite extraordinary.”

“Jiang Chen, what is this? I’m afire with curiosity even at my old age.” The lordmaster also asked.

“This flask contains two drops of dragon blood. The blood of a true dragon, and at that, from the noblest of dragons, the five clawed dragon. The box contains a dragon crystal.”

“What? True dragon?” The lordmaster’s face changed drastically. Ye Chonglou, a man who’d lived more than half his life with an unshaken bearing, almost fell to a sitting position on the ground. Now ashen faced and his throat dry, he stammered, “You mean, a true... true dragon?”

“Yes, a pure descendant of the dragons and not one of the variants. Its source is one that has a direct lineage of the dragons. As you can see, this is no ordinary matter.”

The lordmaster couldn’t speak for the longest time. He had sunk so deep into shock, he couldn’t extricate himself from it.

Dragons! They were a legendary existence. Even though he'd lived for so long, he'd only ever read about them in ancient books. The history of the Myriad Domain didn't have any records of a living dragon either. But Jiang Chen had actually managed to lay his hands on the blood of a true dragon! No matter how much unconditional trust the lordmaster placed in Jiang Chen, he found this more than a bit difficult to believe.

Jiang Chen also knew that this was simply too stunning, but these two items would be very useful to the lordmaster. If his Five-Winged Lesser Phoenix-Dragon partook of the blood, it would surely waken more memories from its heritage, and its strength would advance in leaps and bounds instead. Then, if followed up with a baptism in the wood spring, the Phoenix-Dragon would absolutely become a force to be reckoned with in the Myriad Domain.

Ye Chonglou had spent many years with the Phoenix-Dragon that he too had the slight dragon aura about him. His strength would surely be reforged from inside out, completely remaking him into the epitome of someone coming late into their strength. All this was Jiang Chen's expression of gratitude for the lordmaster's help in previous years.

Jiang Chen knew that some things needed some time to digest as well, so he didn't say anything and only waited for the lordmaster to come back to himself.

Ye Chonglou reacted after a long while. "Jiang Chen, do dragons really exist?"

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "The lordmaster spends day and night with the lesser-dragon. You only need to open the flask to sense the two drops of blood to know if they're real or fake."

Ye Chonglou felt that Jiang Chen's words made sense and carefully picked up the flask. He cracked the stopper open and was about to bring it close to him when his entire body trembled. His hand shook, and Ye Chonglou almost lost his grasp on the flask. An enormous and bizarrely strong force was making his heart speed up, and the blood in his veins began to rumble and boil. It was almost setting his body on fire!

"This... this..." Ye Chonglou was stunned senseless. The immense power and bafflingly aura had sent Ye Chonglou, an origin realm expert, into a daze. And all this from only two drops in the flask! It was easy to imagine how strong the source of the blood was.

"This really is the blood of a dragon! It's true!" Ye Chonglou and the Phoenix-Dragon depended on each other, and though he wasn't too familiar with the aura of dragons, the spirit creature still held hints of it. Although there were only two drops in the flask, that familiar and incredibly strong feeling was obviously more than a hundred times stronger than the phoenix-dragon. The purity of that strength had almost shattered Ye Chonglou's blood vessels! It was truly astonishing.

"Lordmaster, in order to meld with the dragon blood, you must refine the dragon core first. Only when your body holds the mark of dragons can you successfully absorb the dragon blood. Otherwise, the blood will certainly make your veins explode and maybe even reduce you to a pile of ashes." Jiang Chen was very familiar with just how domineering the dragon lineage was, thanks to his past life.

These words made Ye Chonglou so agitated that he didn't know what to do. "Jiang Chen, how can I even thank you?" He smiled ruefully. "Even if I wanted to put up a front and decline your great favor, I can't bring myself to do it at all. This temptation is far too great!"

“Lordmaster, it’s not big deal when you’re refining the dragon crystal, but if you wish to absorb the dragon blood one day, you must find a remote location. Otherwise, when others sense the aura behind this dragon blood, they will absolutely try to seize it, no matter the cost.”

One drop of blood from a true dragon was enough to send cultivators into a frenzy. An ancient race of royals, dragons had a lineage and heritage that passed unbroken since time immemorial. When one absorbed their blood, the higher their level of cultivation, the greater their gains might be. If those in the emperor realm obtained the dragon blood, they might even trigger memories from the heritage locked within and achieve an unexpected breakthrough!

This reminder was of grave importance. If news of the dragon blood was leaked, the best case scenario was assassination, and the worst case scenario would implicate the entirety of the Regal Pill Palace.

Ye Chonglou also had a grave look on his face. “Jiang Chen, I will certainly take good care of this precious dragon blood, and will definitely come discuss with you before I assimilate it.”

“That would be good as well.” Jiang Chen nodded. “I’m about to participate in the competition for a residence in the Sovereign Area. Once I succeed, a residence with a radius of a hundred miles of land will all become my private property. When the lordmaster wishes to assimilate the dragon blood there, no one will come interfere at all.”

“The Sovereign Area?” The lordmaster was stunned. “I’ve heard that that’s where the most premier geniuses of the Regal Pill Palace reside.”

“Indeed, it’s because this is where the most premier geniuses reside that I am guaranteed of my success this time.” Jiang Chen spoke with a confident and assured tone, not a hint of doubt in his words.

“Good, fantastic! Jiang Chen, I said before that the fortunes of the Precious Tree Sect might change with you in the mix. It looks like that was simply a foretelling of events writ in the heavens, hahaha! If you are able to secure a residence in the Sovereign Area, your name is sure to spread wide and far. At that time, the pressure on my survival may lessen slightly.”

Jiang Chen nodded, “Ah yes, Lordmaster, I’d like to see Tang Hong.”

“Of course, let me take you there.”

Tang Hong had long since broken through to the origin realm and had been made an inner disciple as soon as he’d entered the Regal Pill Palace. They naturally went to the area where the inner disciples resided.

Inner disciples were split into levels just as like the core disciples, however, their residential area was far inferior to the Rosy Valley. They lived in Mt. Great Drum, with tens of thousands of inner disciples living in a radius of a thousand miles in the area. Their living quarters were actually in groups, much like Jiang Chen’s during his trials in the Eternal Spirit Mountain. Only the most high level inner disciples had the right to a solitary residence with its own yard. But even these solitary residences weren’t even a tenth of the ones in the Rosy Valley.

Ordinary disciples lived four to a residence, or eight and sixteen, a clear delineation of their levels.

Jiang Chen was a core disciple, and the privileges of a core disciple let him easily enter the prohibited areas of Mt. Great Drum. When they saw his clothing, the guards all smiled ingratiatingly, almost wishing that they could carry Jiang Chen in on their backs.

The various encounters all made Ye Chonglou sigh with emotion. "Jiang Chen, do you know that this is the easiest time I've ever had trying to enter the mountain? I've always had to wait for half a day previously and be subjected to all sorts of difficulties and delays. Sometimes, I couldn't even enter. These guards just wanted to scrounge all sorts of benefits from me. Except, the goods that our Precious Tree Sect could bring out were sometimes even below their regard."

Ye Chonglou couldn't help but be filled with mixed emotions at all this. At his age, he'd always have to sweet talk the guards whenever he tried to enter, and smile so much that his face ached. Yet nothing was as useful as Jiang Chen's attire as a core disciple.

Jiang Chen didn't even need to speak a single word before being personally shown the way in, everyone flashing him a smiling face. That feeling made even the reserved Ye Chonglou feel like he could walk with his head held high, washing away the endless eyerolls and difficulties.

When the guards heard that Jiang Chen was looking for someone, they immediately sprang into action and looked through their files, locating Tang Hong's residence. The enthusiastic captain on duty very quickly brought the duo to the right location.

Jiang Chen offhandedly rewarded him with an Origin Fostering Pill. "Thanks for the effort. This Lordmaster Ye is my friend and will be passing repeatedly through Mt. Great Drum in the future..."

The captain's eyes gleamed when he saw the pill. He nodded and bowed, assuring him repeatedly, "This little one understands, this little one definitely understands. When the lordmaster enters the mountain in the future, I promise his passage will be swift and speedy."

Jiang Chen waved his hand when he saw that this captain understood very well what he meant. "Dismissed, I'll go in myself."

"Yes, yes." The captain looked enviously at this yard. He thought that this core disciple had come to select a few followers from the inner disciples. Once selected, they would be able to cultivate in the Rosy Valley. Training there for one day was the equivalent of three to five days in the outside world. Which disciple didn't yearn for the Rosy Valley?

When Ye Chonglou walked up and lightly knocked on the door, someone's head poked out from inside. When they saw it was Ye Chonglou, their expressed chilled. "How dare you intrude on the prohibited areas of the sect?"

Although Ye Chonglou was of the origin realm, his clothing denoted that he wasn't an important person in the sect, so these inner disciples would naturally not show him any pleasant faces.

However, that head immediately caught a glimpse of Jiang Chen behind Ye Chonglou.

What? A core disciple?

The owner of the head immediately rushed out and opened the door, a fawning smile on his face. "This senior brother must be from the Rosy Valley? What might you be looking for here? Tsk tsk tsk. I

wondered why the magpies were chirping so loudly when I woke up this morning, so it was a vaunted personage gracing our courtyard! You bring luster to our humble house!" This fellow changed tack with the slightest breeze, and was quite glib with his ass kissing.

Jiang Chen smiled faintly and walked in through the open door. The core disciples didn't even need to exert any aura when they appeared to produce a sufficiently dominating presence. None of the inner disciples dared be slow on the uptake as they hastily walked up to greet Jiang Chen.

"I'm looking for Tang Hong, where is he?" Jiang Chen glanced around but saw no sign of his brother.

When they heard the name of Tang Hong, a somewhat ugly expression crossed some of their faces. One or two of their expressions even involuntarily showed... a trace of fear.

#### Chapter 493: Tang Hong Becomes a Golden Thigh to Hug 1

"You, come here." Jiang Chen pointed at the fellow who'd just opened the door, his eyes so sharp they seemed to pierce through his soul. "Speak, where's Tang Hong?"

The person shivered all over as Jiang Chen's God's Eye locked onto him, his teeth actually starting to chatter uncontrollably. "I... I..."

Jiang Chen's tone chilled. "You don't know?" The disciple dropped to his knees when Jiang Chen increased the degree of his aura by one factor. He was unable to bear up any longer and sagged bonelessly to the ground.

"I'll tell you, I'll tell you... Tang Hong's gone to wash clothes."

Wash clothes?

Jiang Chen was completely baffled by these words. A vaunted Regal Pill Palace inner disciple had to do such errands as wash clothes?

Ye Chonglou sighed lightly. "Jiang Chen, the inner disciples are different from the core disciples. They don't enjoy preferential treatment and need to take care of their own day-to-day needs. They don't have the right to have followers either."

Jiang Chen nodded and looked at the disciples in front of him, roughly understanding what was going on. He snorted coldly, "This is to say, Tang Hong isn't just washing his own clothes, is he?"

As he spoke, Tang Hong's trademark rolling footsteps sounded outside the courtyard. Tang Hong was stockily built, and his gait was like a tiger, vigorous and powerful. His every step seemed like they would split the ground. When the echoes of his footsteps reached the ears of those present, the expressions of two inner disciples immediately underwent a grave change and almost wished that wings would sprout from their backs, so that they could flee the scene immediately.

Jiang Chen's suspicions were confirmed as their faces went ashens. Tang Hong walked in with two wicker baskets of washed clothing on a bamboo pole. He was about to speak when he saw the crowded courtyard, but a look of delight appeared on his face when he saw Jiang Chen.



“Boss? What are you doing here? Hahaha!” He threw the baskets aside and strode forward, grabbing Jiang Chen for a hug. He was beside himself with joy. “Boss! I heard that you made quite an impressive showing in the Rosy Valley!”

When the two inner disciples heard Tang Hong call Jiang Chen “boss” and saw how close the two of them seemed to be, they trembled all over, a bitter taste in their mouths.

Jiang Chen nodded. “Tell me, is washing clothes part of your duties or something that others have forced on you?”

Tang Hong was now peak of eight level spirit realm, almost at ninth level. The two awkward looking inner disciples with the ashen faces were obviously the leaders of this courtyard, at ninth level spirit realm.

Tang Hong grinned, “Boss, don’t worry about these small matters. Even though they forced it on me, I’m using this as a way to improve my strength of heart, surging forth with valor after experiencing humiliation! I never would’ve had this chance in the Precious Tree Sect.” In the Precious Tree Sect, although Tang Hong wasn’t part of the Sect Head or Iron Long’s faction, with his potential, no one would dare issue orders and force him run errands. When he arrived at the Regal Pill Palace with insufficient strength and a lowly background, he naturally became the target of bullying.

Jiang Chen hadn’t thought that Tang Hong was using this humiliation to temper his strength of heart. He grew thoughtful, it seemed that Tang Hong was making preparations to assail the origin realm, a breakthrough that needed great mental fortitude. This kind of hardship and shame was absolutely a trial for his strength of heart.

“Boss, don’t worry about things like this.” Tang Hong laughed confidently, only the depths of his eyes betraying his cold resolve. He stared straight at the two ninth level spirit realm inner disciples. “Zhang Lie, Gong Yue, I’ll remember you two bastards. I washed clothes for you not because I was afraid of you, but because I wanted to temper my heart. Don’t worry your heads, I’ll challenge you before too long and beat the shit out of you guys! Just you wait! Hahahaha!!” Tang Hong wasn’t the least bit inferior to these inner disciples in terms of potential. He was only behind them for now because of the difference between the Precious Tree Sect and the Regal Pill Palace.

Differences in birth had led to differences in resources, forcing him to walk a slower path. Now that Jiang Chen was taking care of him, Tang Hong’s conditions had long since bypassed all those inner disciples. He would be able to strike back with full force as soon as he broke through to ninth level spirit realm, and he would be completely capable of beating down all those who’d bullied him. In that way, the various humiliations and bullying that he’d suffered before would actually be transformed to motivation, an enormous gain for the training of his strength of heart.

When Jiang Chen heard these words, he knew that although his brother seemed crude, he was someone with great intelligence and decided not to interfere.

“Come, Tang Hong, take a walk with me.” His gaze was indifferent as it swept past the other inner disciples, as if committing them to memory. The inner disciples all averted their eyes, not daring to look at Jiang Chen.

Tang Hong laughed heartily, "Boss, my plans to temper myself is now in shambles thanks to you. But no matter, I was just about done anyway. I feel like I'll be breaking through within the month."

Jiang Chen took a tour of Mt. Great Drum with Tang Hong before returning to Ye Chonglou's residence.

Ye Chonglou had a faint smile on his face the entire way. He knew that this was Jiang Chen purposefully putting on a show in support of Tang Hong, letting the inner disciples know that Tang Hong was Jiang Chen's brother. This way, anyone who wanted to bully Tang Hong would have to think twice first.

"Tang Hong, you must live up to Jiang Chen's care for you." Ye Chonglou reminded.

Tang Hong grinned. "Don't worry, Lordmaster. When I reached the Regal Pill Palace, I understood that I'm but a frog in a well. But, I firmly believe that I'll be able to break through to the origin realm within a year.

Tang Hong was known for great strength of heart already when he was in the Precious Tree Sect. If he ascended to spirit king, he would have great hope in breaking through to the origin realm.

When they arrived at Ye Chonglou's residence, Jiang Chen gave a few more pointers to Tang Hong as well as some spirit stones and Spirit Consolidation Pills. However, of the dragon blood and crystals, he said not a word. Ye Chonglou knew that it wasn't that Jiang Chen didn't want to gift them, but that Tang Hong was incapable of using such items at the moment. Giving them to him would actually be harming him instead.

"Tang Hong, come find me in the Rosy Valley when you make it into ninth level spirit realm. I'll bestow upon you a gift of fortune."

"Boss, you've already given me too much. If this continues, won't I have to promise myself to you to thank you? What a pity that I'm no beauty." Tang Hong quipped.

Ye Chonglou couldn't help but smile, but he was still very happy to see Tang Hong's rate of growth. At this speed, there was much hope for the Precious Tree Sect.

Jiang Chen finally rose to leave after chatting with the lordmaster and Tang Hong for a while. "The competition for Sovereign Area residences is about to begin. Await my good news, gentlemen."

Tang Hong laughed heartily. "With the boss making a move, that residence is already within grasp! I'll go take a look then and broaden my visions as well, hahaha!"

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When they parted, Jiang Chen returned to the Rosy Valley while Tang Hong returned to his residence within Mt. Great Drum. When the latter reached his quarters, he could feel the difference in treatment. The captain on duty even came up to greet him warmly, as if the two were originally close friends.

Tang Hong may look rough around the edges, but his heart was quite meticulous. He knew this was all because of his boss. "Boss, it looks like I still need to depend on you in the future. A core disciple is the center of attention no matter where they go." The experiences that he'd just been exposed to just made Tang Hong's fighting spirit increase even more.

When he returned to the yard, those who lived with him were all overflowing with enthusiasm, as if welcoming back a victorious hero.

“Brother Tang Hong, you’ve come back!”

“Brother Tang Hong, you’ve washed clothes for us for so long. Here are some spirit stones. Although it’s not much, it’s a token of our appreciation, please don’t decline them.”

“Brother Tang Hong, I have two Spirit Consolidation Pills, upper rank...”

Tang Hong was openmouthed with surprise. “You... what... the heck?”

“Ai, Brother Tang Hong, please be magnanimous. It was us who were immature before and offended you. But that was Zhang Lie and Gong Yue fanning the flames. The two of them are too scared now, and have requested to switch residences.”

“Left?” Tang Hong’s eyebrow arched. “Those two bastards will be unable to escape their beating no matter where they go!”

“You guys have always been threatened by them. Ah forget it, I won’t argue with the likes of you. I’ll accept the items, and we’re all still be brothers who live underneath the same roof in the future.” Tang Hong was a generous one. These fellows were weaker than him and would never dare bully him under normal circumstances. It was only because Zhang Lie and Gong Yue kept pushing at them that they had been forced into creating a ruckus. Given that they were now offering gifts in apologies, giving him spirit herbs and spirit stones, his straightforward personality naturally wouldn’t continue to let him hold a grudge.

“Great!” One of the disciples said. “I said that Brother Tang Hong was a broad-hearted genius! He’s sure to enter the Rosy Valley in the future!”

“Brother Tang Hong, you’re the boss in this house in the future. You’re still the boss no matter who comes!”

“Right, we’ll support Brother Tang Hong to the end!”

“Brother Tang Hong, please take care of us brothers in the future when you enter the Rosy Valley. I’ve heard that the core disciples of the Rosy Valley can have followers. Don’t forget us brothers at that time!” Although these fellows were lowly, they were all smart people. Who couldn’t tell that Tang Hong was destined to have a bright future ahead of him with such a close relationship with Jiang Chen?

Who was Jiang Chen?

He was a core disciple that Palace Head Dan Chi had personally anointed, a genius highly valued by Elder Yun Nie. There were also rumors that he was aiming for a residence in the Sovereign Area this time. Even the once overweening Yan Hongtu had been absolutely powerless in front of Jiang Chen.

Yan Hongtu’s cultivation level had been fifth level origin realm, the undisputed tyrant of the Soaring Clouds. And what of him? He’d still been beaten to smithereens and had to leave the Rosy Valley and train outside to avoid the aftermath?

Beating one of the fifth level origin realm as a minor origin realm, this kind of genius was destined to exist at the apex of the Regal Pill Palace. And Tang Hong was his death sworn brother!

Compared to these inner disciples with no patrons and had to fight for everything themselves, he was undoubtedly a golden thigh that they had to hug onto fiercely.

In Mt. Great Drum, those inner disciples with connections and pull had long since latched onto a core disciple, becoming their follower and earning the right to train in the Rosy Valley. Those who remained on the mountain were those with no connections and background. They'd be idiots if they didn't latch tightly onto the golden thigh that appeared at this time!

#### Chapter 494: The Open minded and Straightforward Palace Head Dan Chi

The contest for the residences raised a great furor amongst the younger generation of the Regal Pill Palace. Apart from those with absolutely no hope, almost everyone in the Rosy Valley was eying the four places covetously. If they could move to the Sovereign Area, they would represent the peak of the younger generation of the Regal Pill Palace!

There were currently only eight of those residences in the entirety of Rosy Valley. With the new four, it would make for a total of twelve. There were more than a thousand core disciples in the Regal Pill Palace, ten thousand inner disciples, and more than a hundred thousand outer disciples. Given this scale, how great of an honor would it be to become the honored twelve above them all! How lofty one would be!

As long as their path was smooth and they didn't fall halfway, there was not a shadow of a doubt that entering the Sovereign Area would guarantee one as a heavyweight of the sect in a few decades. Moreover, a heavyweight with power and clout!

The list of those interested in competing for the residences was more ridiculous than previously imagined. More than two hundred signed up for the martial dao competition, and more than three hundred signed up for the pill dao competition. This was to say that almost half of the core disciples in Rosy Valley had entered the competition this time.

Jiang Chen wasn't surprised by this. The competition of pills was lower risk, relatively speaking. Although competition would be just as fierce, at least they wouldn't be injured. Therefore, it wasn't unexpected to find more signing up for the pill dao competition.

The entire Regal Pill Palace heated up as a fervent atmosphere began to spread before the contests had even begun. Regardless, Jiang Chen's heart was as still as water. After all, he hadn't come to the Regal Pill Palace for long. Although his name was on the list, he wasn't the one most favored to win.

It was rather Mu Gaoqi who was considered one of the top five candidates. Jiang Chen was actually just around number ten or so. But of course, this order of candidates was merely the speculation of the outside world. No one was able to truly know who would win out in the end.

Jiang Chen once again appeared in Dan Chi's residence on the eve of the competition.

"Greetings to Palace Head Dan Chi."

“Haha, not bad kid! How long has it been since you’ve arrived at the sect? Even the Hallmaster of the Herbal Hall has begun speaking on your behalf. Jiang Chen, you’re not bad at all.” Dan Chi looked at Jiang Chen with smiling eyes. A trace of disbelief appeared in his eyes as he took a second look, the disbelief turning into outright shock. “You’re third level origin realm already?! In this short a span of time?!”

“I happened to obtain a core of a Redscaled Firelizard by chance and refined it. The resulting benefit barely allowed me to break through.”

“Nice going kid, ‘barely allowed you to break through’ eh?” Sage Dan Chi laughed heartily. “You’ve risen from first level origin realm to third level in just a few months. This, this is called barely managing to break through?” Dan Chi’s tone was full of admiration. “My speed of breaking through was already quite rare in Regal Pill Palace history. It seems like you’ll whip right past my record.”

“And that is all due to the Palace Head’s mentoring.”

“Haha, to be honest, I haven’t done anything other than bringing you to the Regal Pill Palace. Everything else has been your doing. Jiang Chen, Elder Yun Nie is very confident in your chances of seizing a residence in this time’s Sovereign Area. What about you? How confident are you?”

“If I’m participating in the pill contests, I have a ninety percent confidence in my chances. If martial dao, then sixty to seventy percent.” This was Jiang Chen’s own estimation of himself, so there was no need to hold back anything.

“Ninety percent?” Palace Head Dan Chi was slightly shocked. “Does that mean the rumors of Elder Yun Nie successfully refining the Hexarune Dragon Pill thanks to you are true?”

Jiang Chen nodded, not denying things. He trusted that if the Palace Head was asking, he must have received concrete intelligence to this regard.

When Dan Chi saw Jiang Chen nod, his expression also became complex. He sighed as a smile began to tug at his lips. “To think that this was truly the case! I’d only thought that I’d discovered a martial dao genius for the Regal Pill Palace, but your potential for pills is even more amazing!”

In terms of pill dao potential, there was likely no other like Jiang Chen. Palace Head Dan Chi furrowed his brow after this emotional reflection, seemingly thinking of something. He sighed again after a long while, “Jiang Chen, you’ve taught me a lesson this time, and Elder Yun Nie even more so.”

Jiang Chen was surprised. “What do you mean, Palace Head?”

“I suppose this story starts when I took the reins of power in the Regal Pill Palace. Before that, the sect had emphasized the tradition of pills, never deviating from that path. When I took control and elevated the Hall of Might to the foremost of the nine halls, the Herbal Hall was relegated to secondary importance. I still don’t know if Elder Yun Nie ever resented me for those actions. Currently, the Regal Pill Palace has indeed ignored our traditions in pill dao and focused overly on martial dao. To go too far is just as wrong as falling short. Now that I look back on my actions, they may have been too radical. I may have actually ended up throwing away the traditional advantages of the Regal Pill Palace.” Palace Head Dan Chi was a martial dao genius, and he’d emphasized the development of martial dao after

taking his position. It'd been a matter of personal style when he'd raised the Hall of Might to the position of first hall.

The effects of his actions had been apparent. In the last few decades, whether in terms of experts or young disciples, there had indeed been an upsurge in martial dao geniuses. In contrast, the numbers and quality of talent of those studying the dao of pills had greatly decreased. It was apparent from this time's competition entrants that there were almost no first class pill masters anymore.

This had greatly moved Palace Head Dan Chi, and he had begun to reflect on his strategy. He didn't feel that there was anything wrong in promoting martial dao, but it was a grave mistake to allow it to indirectly affect the advances of the dao of pills. Therefore, when Elder Yun Nie and Hallmaster Lian Cheng had been screaming at each other from across the table, he'd been deeply moved and ultimately agreed to Elder Yun Nie's suggestion.

If martial dao geniuses lived in all twelve residences of the Sovereign Area, what would that mean then? It meant that Regal Pill Palace's long tradition of pills had been utterly refuted and abandoned. Elder Yun Nie's rare loss of composure wasn't due to personal gain, but for the heritage of the sect and for protection of the sect's traditions.

"Jiang Chen, what do you think of this matter?"

Jiang Chen only had to think briefly before grasping where the dilemma was. "In the world of martial dao, martial dao is always first. There's nothing wrong about that. However, the Regal Pill Palace was founded for pills, and this advantage cannot be discarded. In cycles of martial dao, the names of the strong and weak often change. But rises and declines in the dao of pills rarely occur. The latter emphasizes tradition and foundations more, whereas the changes of martial dao are often determined by just a couple of geniuses."

Palace Head Dan Chi nodded his head lightly at Jiang Chen's words. It was just like he'd said, the establishment of the Regal Pill Palace had enabled it to maintain its leadership in the Myriad Domain because the dao of pills focused on foundations and heritage.

Yet, martial dao was different. If an unparalleled genius appeared in a sect, such a development would benefit the entire sect, just as even one man's pets would become immortal when he ascended to heaven. In the same vein, if an expert of a sect suddenly fell, it would also cause the sect to take a sharp downwards turn, possibly plunging immediately into decline.

Compared to the stability in the dao of pills, there were many more unknown factors and coincidences in the world of martial dao.

It wasn't a bad notion to greatly revitalize the position of martial dao in the Regal Pill Palace, but Jiang Chen felt that it was an unworthy trade off if the price was the sect's original advantage in pills. Of course, that hadn't been the Palace Head's original intentions, just that things had unconsciously developed thusly.

"Jiang Chen, you're the only one who dares speak so openly and honestly in the younger generation." Palace Head Dan Chi sighed softly. He had great ambitions, but he wasn't an arrogant and self serving autocrat. Everything he'd done had been for the goal of reconstructing the Myriad Empire.

Although he'd never spoken of this ambition, the senior executives of the Regal Pill Palace could still more or less sense his intentions. Using Elder Yun Nie as an example, he was well aware of Palace Head Dan Chi's aspirations. Therefore, even though Dan Chi had weakened the Herbal Hall's position, he didn't actually hate the Palace Head. On the contrary, he quite agreed with the Palace Head's goals and lofty aims.

A great sect should indeed possess such an ambition and direction. But in terms of details, Elder Yun Nie still felt firmly that the Regal Pill Palace should never lose its advantage in pills. Never! The truth of the situation was that the Regal Pill Palace's traditions were slowly vanishing.

"Elder Yun Nie spoke in confidence to me last time regarding his concerns for the Pill Battles of Mt. Rippling Mirage. He said that although the Regal Pill Palace was still foremost in the Myriad Domain thirty years ago, he was uncertain if this is still the case thirty years later."

Jiang Chen also knew that Palace Head Dan Chi was blaming himself for his oversight. He could only speak up in comfort, "Looking at the greater picture, the Regal Pill Palace has made great strides in martial dao. Our foundation and traditions still exist in the dao of pills, we just need time to adjust ourselves so that we can rise again."

Sage Dan Chi laughed heartily, "Indeed! What is frightening isn't a temporary loss of advantage, but refusing to change even when knowing that the advantage is lost. I am no god, it's impossible that I avoid mistakes. The direction of the Regal Pill Palace will not veer from the proper course as long as we make the appropriate corrections. Jiang Chen, your appearance truly is timely. You have formed a bridge of communication between me and Elder Yun Nie. I hope that you can leap to the skies in a single bound and attain a residence in the Sovereign Area."

"I will try my best." Jiang Chen nodded. "In actuality, Elder Yun Nie still speaks highly of your ambitions and strategic mind." Elder Yun Nie had indeed mentioned this before, and had spoken highly of Dan Chi. Jiang Chen had to admire Elder Yun Nie's personality as well.

Business was business, and personal affairs another matter entirely. Elder Yun Nie was scrupulous in separating public affairs from private matters. And at the same time, Palace Dan Chi was open minded and straightforward, not covering up his mistakes but openly admitting to them and looking for ways to resolve them. This was indeed the mindset that one of great talent and bold vision should have.

With Dan Chi at the helm and an elder like Yun Nie, the Regal Pill Palace was sure to live long and prosper.

#### Chapter 495: The Tussle Begins

Jiang Chen's presence acted as a lubricant, creating a smooth bridge of communication between Palace Head Dan Chi and Elder Yun Nie.

"Jiang Chen, our chat today has cleared up many things for me and put me in a wonderful mood. I have to say that despite the difference in our ages, you are truly one of my good friends. Alright, go make your preparations for the pill battles, I look forward to your exciting performance!" Dan Chi spoke another few words of encouragement and made a grasping motion in the air, pulling out a pill cauldron. "Jiang Chen, this cauldron is the Skyweave Cauldron, something my teacher gifted to me when I was young. It's a pity that it never could display its full splendor in my hands. Now that my teacher has

passed on, I have utterly disappointed his sentiments in giving this to me.” Dan Chi sighed lightly, traces of regret, shame, and nostalgia in his tone. “And now, I pass this cauldron onto you. Perhaps the hopes that my teacher had for me back then will be fulfilled by your hands.”

This Skyweave Cauldron was one of the top five cauldrons in Regal Pill Palace history. It had boasted an illustrious name in the past thousand years, and Jiang Chen was able to identify its exceptional qualities with one glance. Although it wasn’t on par with divine level cauldrons, this was without a doubt a preeminent cauldron in the mundane world. The Regal Pill Palace truly did have a stunning foundation in pills.

Jiang Chen didn’t actually find it that easy to accept such a precious cauldron all of a sudden.

“Haha, what of this? You’re embarrassed to accept it? I once promised you when you entered the sect that I would give you a welcoming present. You said you hadn’t thought of one then, and I’ve made the decision for you today. As a martial cultivator, the Skyweave Cauldron is a bright pearl covered in dust in my hands. Perhaps it can shine with its true glory in your hands. At long last, I might be able to slightly make things up to my teacher.” Dan Chi had set his goals in martial dao and made it his ambition to rebuild the Myriad Empire. He would never be content being just a pill master. Everyone had their own plans, and the cauldron truly wouldn’t be able to give full display to its brilliance in such a person’s hands.

When Jiang Chen saw the look of true sincerity on Palace Head Dan Chi’s face, he knew that this was the Palace Head’s desire to pass on his heritage and thus no longer protested. He nodded, “This kid will accept the Palace Head’s great favor with a thick face. If I am able to refine a Hexarune Dragon Pill in the future, I will surely place the first batch in your hands.”

“What? The Hexarune Dragon Pill?” Sage Dan Chi was startled. “You only viewed the recipe once and was able to memorize the steps to refining it?”

Jiang Chen smiled without saying a word. Compared to the advanced version, the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill, the Hexarune Dragon Pill was so much simpler in both theory and process. Jiang Chen didn’t even need to peruse it fully before coming up with the proper refining process.

“Good, good, good! A young man should have this kind of confidence. Since this is the case, I shall impatiently await your Hexarune Dragon Pill, hahaha!” Sage Dan Chi was in a wondrous mood. No matter the angle, Jiang Chen looked pleasing to the eye. If it wasn’t for Elder Shun’s existence, he almost wanted to accept Jiang Chen as his personal disciple. However, reason told Dan Chi that Jiang Chen was someone Elder Shun valued. He absolutely had no right to take Jiang Chen for his own.

When he sent Jiang Chen on his way, Dan Chi suddenly recalled the phenomenon in the skies the day he’d allied with the Precious Tree Sect. He’d always felt that the earth shattering phenomenon had something to do with Jiang Chen. “Ai, if that phenomenon really had something to do with Jiang Chen, then that youth’s future is truly limitless. Even the reclusive Titled Great Emperors hadn’t been this beloved by the heavens when they’d broken through to the origin realm.” But of course these were all Dan Chi’s speculations.

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With regard to the residences of the Sovereign Area, this was a matter of grave importance that almost the entire sect mobilized for. Palace Head Dan Chi was acting as head judge and overseeing the competitions. Hallmaster Lian Cheng of the Hall of Might was in charge of the contests of martial dao, and Elder Yun Nie of the Herbal Hall was in charge of those for pills. Elder Chang Feng and Elder Jin Gu, two elders of noble character and high prestige, were in charge of supervising the proceedings for cheating.

The sacred ground for these competitions, Shen Li Palace was situated within the Rosy Valley. It was divided into the martial and pill areas inside, with almost all the senior executives gathered at the great hall to the doors of the Palace at the moment.

Palace Head Dan Chi looked around with solemn gravity, opening his mouth to proclaim loudly, "The residences in the Sovereign Area should be reserved for the utmost of geniuses. We have created four more this time in order to uncover even more geniuses. As a fourth rank sect, our advances in martial dao and pills should be proceeding at the same pace. Therefore, two residences have been reserved for pill dao geniuses this time."

Although the words didn't blatantly criticize himself for his past failings, the intention for self correction was obvious. Standing next to the Palace Head, Elder Yun Nie was slightly surprised by this. He looked at Sage Dan Chi, then at Jiang Chen, sinking into thought.

"In the contest for the residences, I only emphasize one point. The proceedings must be fair without malpractice for selfish ends. No matter how great your status or your background, you must rely on your own strength in the contests. Once cheating is discovered, you will be eternally barred from participation. If anyone decides to help in the background, know that the investigation that follows will leave no stone unturned, no matter one's position. The sect's rules will be applied to all!"

Order came from rules, and ruling over a sect required charisma. Palace Head Dan Chi had never been one to relax the rules, and he enforced them with an iron fist. His words brought the geniuses participating to solemn attention. Even those harboring secret schemes in their hearts all quietly shelved their ideas. Everyone knew that Palace Head Dan Chi was a man of his word. Whoever challenged the rules in the Regal Pill Palace would surely be subjected to the most severe of punishments.

After Dan Chi finished his speech, Elder Lian Cheng and Elder Yun Nie all spoke a few words on behalf of their areas. Following that, everyone filed into their respective areas. Mu Gaoqi and Jiang Chen headed for the pill area together.

"Brother Chen, I believe that you'll be number one, and I'll be number two, heh heh!" Mu Gaoqi's confidence had noticeably risen after being baptized in the wood spirit spring. Jiang Chen had told him last time to be not overly humble in some matters, to stride forth with bold confidence.

Jiang Chen was nodding when a sharp voice pierced their ears. "Mu Gaoqi, when did you stoop to such depths? There are so many geniuses in the Rosy Valley for you to kiss up to, but you choose to suck up to an outsider? And what is this talk about being number one? Is number one that easy to obtain?" The person speaking was a young genius with red lips and white teeth. He had gentle and refined features, but his nose was tilted to the sky and an arrogant look was playing around in his eyes. It was obvious at a glance that he was the sort of person who felt that apart from himself, everyone else beneath the heavens was extraneous.

“Hmph, Linghu Feng. I’ll say what I want and you talk what you want. Don’t you have somewhere else to stick your nose?” Although Mu Gaoqi didn’t jeer back, his tone had noticeably cooled.

Linghu Feng started, obviously not having expected that the normally docile Mu Gaoqi would actually talk back to him. “Yo! Mu Gaoqi! I’ve underestimated you huh? You’ve learned to talk back now, eh? Do you think you’ve grown up into a real man now or what, huh?”

Mu Gaoqi responded unhappily, “Linghu Feng, don’t throw away what face we’re giving you. Show off everything you’ve got in the pill contests. I’ll accept your superiority if you can win a residence, or do you think you’ll obtain one just by talking big here?”

Linghu Feng laughed heartily. “Mu Gaoqi, do you think a little wretched tramp like you is worthy of talking about ability with me? Have you let that little bit of talent in refining pills get to your head, huh? Remember, there’s only two slots in the pill battles. It won’t be your turn no matter what!” There was a vicious undercurrent to his cocky tone.

Mu Gaoqi obviously didn’t wish to argue with him. He pulled at Jiang Chen, “Let’s go Brother Chen.”

Jiang Chen nodded. There was truly no need to be angry at a prancing clown like this.

“Jiang Chen, is it? I’ve heard of you. An outsider with an unstable foundation, and you think yourself capable of competing for these residences? Why don’t you take a piss first and take a good look at yourself?”

Jiang Chen’s body suddenly froze as God’s Eye gleamed and swept up and down Linghu Feng’s body. “Idiot.” With that one word response, he walked inside with a dismissive smile.

Linghu Feng had purposefully provoked Jiang Chen, but was slightly surprised to see Jiang Chen hold himself back. He was about to speak again when a light cough sounded by his side. He turned back to see his own grandfather, Linghu Xian by his side with a few Herbal Hall elders. Bringing up the rear was none other than Elder Yun Nie. The elder’s expression was emotionless as he walked inside, flicking a noncommittal glance at Linghu Feng in passing. The glance alone made Linghu Feng break out in a cold sweat.

“Control yourself!” Linghu Xian’s silent message sounded just as Linghu Feng started panicking. “If you anger yourself first in wanting to provoke Jiang Chen, what kind of great deeds will you be able to accomplish in the future? With such a great opportunity in front of us this time, see how I’ll take care of you if you don’t win a residence!” Linghu Xian snorted lightly as well, walking in after sending his grandson the message.

There were three hundred disciples participating in the pill contests, making it exceedingly difficult to narrow down the selection to just two. Therefore, this pill contest topics had been divided into preliminaries and final contests. The preliminaries would run until only thirty were left.

Mu Gaoqi stood below with Jiang Chen, introducing those they’d just seen. “Linghu Feng is the lineal grandson of Elder Linghu Xian of the Herbal Hall. His potential in spirit medicine is not bad, and he’s ranked in the top three for the competition this time. His arrogance is backed by ability, as he comes from a family devoted to learning for generations.”

“The one that’s most favored to take the top this time is Ouyang Chao, another lineal grandson of an Herbal Hall elder. His grandfather Ouyang De has a slightly higher position compared to Linghu Xian. That little girl Ling Hui’er is also favored to win as well.” Mu Gaoqi patiently described all their major competition.

Elder Yun Nie began announcing the rules at this time. “There are five topics in the contests. The first thirty to complete the topics will make it into the final contests.”

“The five topics are cauldron inspection, fire control, seed identification, medicine assembly, and recipe analysis.”

“I take it that no further explanation is needed for cauldron inspection and fire control. This is basic homework for the Regal Pill Palace. Seed identification is the act of finding the designated spirit herb seed within a thousand seeds, and medicine assembly is to complete a predetermined number of matches within a collection of spirit herbs. As for recipe analysis, we will give you five recipes for you to analyze. Your task will be to locate the only one with no mistakes.”

The five topics weren’t actually that complicated.

#### Chapter 496: A Dominating First

Jiang Chen was familiar with cauldron inspection and fire control after his bet with Yan Hongtu. Although the contents were different, the format was the exact same, so he felt absolutely no pressure. To Jiang Chen, this kind of testing was as effortless as eating and drinking. He would be able to utterly dominate in cauldron inspection and fire control. Therefore, he sped into the third test at the fastest speed possible—seed identification.

This segment had a slightly higher difficulty, but it still posed no challenge to Jiang Chen. Out of a thousand seeds, one had to choose the only five seeds that had the same attributes. There were only five of them, so the slightest mistake would disqualify a contestant. In addition, one of the seeds was a dead seed, and they had to pick it out too.

Jiang Chen utilized his God’s Eye to scan for the most minute of details, employing it like a magnifying glass and enlarging all the attributes of the seeds in his eyes. His fingers flew as he quickly picked out the five seeds. Dead seeds might have been a difficult twist for an ordinary alchemist, but it was still nothing to him.

Dead seeds were simply seeds with no signs of life. He merely sensed for a bit and picked it out from the five. He maintained his overwhelming momentum in the third test.

When the others saw how fast Jiang Chen was, they were completely baffled and shocked. Even the most favored contenders had only just entered the third test, whereas Jiang Chen had already made it into the fourth.

The fourth had to do with assembling medicines, and the difficulty was again slightly higher than the previous. There were 99 spirit herbs present, contestants were required to find eighteen combinations from them. The so-called medicine assembly was just matching up spirit herbs. In the world of refining pills, ingredients could be divided into main ingredients and supplemental ingredients. Identifying and using herbs as main ingredients, supplemental ingredients or both was an art. The matter of how to

match them together was another question entirely. In the end, whoever grasped the most knowledge would have the highest level of pill dao.

This kind of game was child's play to Jiang Chen. He only needed to look at these spirit herbs, touching and smelling them once to fully know them inside and out. He quickly made 36 combinations, and there was no error with any of his pairings.

The judge's jaw dropped at the sight of Jiang Chen breezing through the segments. How was this a contest? It was a tutorial! These methods, this speed, this attitude—it was even more relaxed than a tutorial.

At this moment, the most stunned one present was undoubtedly Elder Yun Nie. He was naturally aware of Jiang Chen's high potential in pills. Otherwise, he would've never been able to so easily destroy Yan Hongtu, much less help Elder Yun Nie complete the refinement of the Hexarune Dragon Pill. However, Jiang Chen was still young, and the elder had always thought this might've been a fluke.

Perhaps Jiang Chen had happened to come into contact with this pill at sometime. However... judging from his domineering performance, Elder Yun Nie now understood that Jiang Chen was an absolute genius in matters of spirit medicine. Such a genius had likely never appeared in the history of the Regal Pill Palace. He was simultaneously beset by astonishment and rising excitement.

In the past couple of decades, the elder had been concerned that Sage Dan Chi was overly emphasizing martial dao and thus was greatly affecting the Regal Pill Palace's pill dao. More and more young folk were overlooking the practice of pills in favor of martial arts. It could even be said that the level of pill dao level in the sect had been gradually decreasing in the past sixty years. This decline had not materialized in the elder generation, but in the form of no successors appearing in the younger generation.

This was also the truth. If it wasn't for a shortage in talent, a pill master such as Mu Gaoqi who'd just entered the origin realm would've never been able to strut around with such pride.

Elder Yun Nie was even more worried about the Pill Battles of Mt. Rippling Mirage. He'd obtained intelligence over the past decade or so that indicated the six premier sects of the Myriad Domain were all furiously cultivating pill geniuses. The Tristar Sect and Walkabout Sect in particular had raised many young geniuses under their wing.

In comparison, the young geniuses of the Regal Pill Palace had thrown away the traditions of their ancestors and devoted themselves in pursuing martial dao. Martial dao was a nice thing, Elder Yun Nie was well aware of this. But their focus had been too narrow, resulting in a loss in their traditional advantage in pill dao along the way. Therefore, Elder Yun Nie was quite worried. He was uncertain if the younger pill masters would be able to triumph against their counterparts from the Tristar Sect and Walkabout Sect in the battles of Rippling Mirage.

He was finally able to heave a sigh of relief as these worries vanished—because he'd discovered Jiang Chen!

While Elder Yun Nie was lost in thought, Jiang Chen had increased his pace and arrived at the fifth topic of analyzing pill recipes. This was the hardest of the five, because only one of the supplied recipes were correct, with other four being erroneous. The contest requested that all five had to be analyzed

regardless of their errors, and the contestants had to provide a justification for choosing the correct and erroneous recipes.

This was the greatest barrier amongst the five topics, and the clearest indicator of pill master's level. But even with the enhanced difficulty, it was still nothing to Jiang Chen.

He'd actually been paying attention to the other contestants as well. When he saw that Mu Gaoqi and the others had only just completed the third round, he felt that he would be too shocking if his speed was this fast. Therefore, he purposefully slowed down a bit and used his consciousness to observe the others.

The most favored Ouyang Chao whom Mu Gaoqi had introduced before, the lineal grandson of some Herbal Hall elder; the previously provocative Linghu Feng, lineal grandson of old man Linghu Xian, and the tiny female pill master Ling Hui'er were all Mu Gaoqi's strongest rivals. Jiang Chen took a look at them and saw that Mu Gaoqi was holding his own against them. However, he could also tell that whether it was Mu Gaoqi or the other three, all of them were holding some strength back, seemingly hesitant at bursting forward with all their strength. They were slightly surprised at Jiang Chen's momentum, but kept their heads and didn't lose themselves in shock, preventing their mindsets from being affected.

They felt that if they had called on their full capabilities early on, it would affect their performance in the final rounds. Therefore, they were highly dismissive of Jiang Chen's actions, thinking that this outsider was purposefully showing off for the limelight. Mu Gaoqi however, naturally knew differently. He knew that this was Jiang Chen's true strength.

Jiang Chen purposefully held himself back in the fifth topic, but he was still the first to complete. The examiner who looked over his results was also quite astonished, because not only had Jiang Chen passed every topic, he'd done so with perfect results. The examiner surreptitiously walked over to Elder Yun Nie and murmured a few words in the elder's ears. The elder smiled slightly and nodded lightly. It was apparent that he was quite impressed at Jiang Chen's results.

Standing off by Elder Yun Nie's side, Linghu Xian perked up his ears as he heard the examiner's soft words. Shock jolted his heart as he narrowed his eyes, casting a glance full of wariness at Jiang Chen as enmity flashed through his heart. Emotions rocked his heart like great waves. "That lad Jiang Chen rejected my invitation last time and now is gaining great recognition in the competition for the residences. Is this animal trying to ruin my plans?"

Linghu Xian greatly spoiled, doted on, and was biased towards his grandson Linghu Feng. He was absolutely sure of his grandson's victory in the fight for the residences this time, but felt a sliver of danger now that he'd witnessed Jiang Chen's unbroken momentum. Linghu Feng already had to face competition from Ouyang Chao, Ling Hui'er and Mu Gaoqi. He was completely dismissive of Ling Hui'er and Mu Gaoqi. They were just a bunch of unorthodox disciples. No matter how high their potential was, it was limited without the support of a Herbal Hall heavyweight.

Ouyang Chao was different. He was also the lineal grandson of a Herbal Hall elder, and his achievements in pill dao was a hair stronger than Linghu Feng. This meant to say that one of the two residences reserved for pill masters was already predestined for Ouyang Chao, and Linghu Feng had to fight for the remaining one. In Linghu Xian's eyes, his grandson should've led the pack in the fight for the remaining

residence. But when he saw Jiang Chen's dominating performance in the preliminaries, his confidence developed a hairline crack. As Linghu Xian then looked at Ling Hui'er and Mu Gaoqi, it was obvious that they were both still holding back, they clearly wouldn't be pushovers.

Jiang Chen took first place and entered the finals as the champion. Ouyang Chao was the runner up, Linghu Feng third, Ling Hui'er fourth, Mu Gaoqi fifth and so on...

The rankings surprised no one, apart from Jiang Chen in the lead. They still had to wait for the others to finish the contests and form the list of top thirty for the finals before proceeding. The other geniuses all completed the five topics after roughly two hours, and the final rankings for the preliminaries could finally be finalized.

The first ones to be disqualified weren't the ones last to finish, but the ones who'd made errors in the previous contests. Any mistake was grounds for disqualification. Therefore, those who'd finished later still had the chance to make it into the top thirty.

The final list was produced after four hours of checks and census. Jiang Chen remained first, his rank unshakeable.

"It's been a long and tiring day, but the list for the final round is now out. The finals will commence early tomorrow morning. 1. Go back and recover your strength, the tests for the final will be much tougher than the preliminaries." With Elder Yun Nie's parting words, the preliminaries drew to a close.

#### Chapter 497: Threats and Temptation

"Brother Chen, you're simply too awesome!" Mu Gaoqi's brows danced as they left Shen Li Palace. He was sincerely happy to see Jiang Chen take the championship in the preliminaries.

Jiang Chen himself was rather calm. With his foundations in the dao of pills, it was only right and proper that he'd taken home the championship in the preliminaries.

"Hmph, victory for now means nothing, just like being fat initially is nothing. It's only the final weight that tips the scales. The hell kind of use is a champion of the preliminaries? The residences of the Sovereign Area will only be settled in the finals. What kinda use is gaining the limelight in the preliminaries?" Vicious, cold mockery rang out behind them. It was Linghu Feng's irritating voice again.

Mu Gaoqi snorted derisively. "Pssht. Linghu Feng, why didn't you take the championship if you're so good? Don't tell me you're jealous, hmm?"

Linghu Feng glowered at Mu Gaoqi in a sinister fashion. "Huh, Mu Gaoqi? Who would've thought that you'd grow a pair? You don't believe that I can run you right out of the Rosy Valley, ah?"

Jiang Chen didn't wait for Mu Gaoqi to respond when he heard this. He reached out a hand to stop Mu Gaoqi, laughing coldly, "Now that I really don't believe."

"Jiang Chen, don't you strut around either! I know you have someone backing you up, but you're just a country bumpkin. A mere rookie trying to throw your weight around in the Regal Pill Palace!" Linghu Feng didn't dare tell Jiang Chen that he would run the latter out of the sect. He could only glare viciously at Mu Gaoqi with an expression that shouted "just you wait!".

However, Mu Gaoqi wasn't the same person of old. He wasn't stopped in his tracks by Linghu Feng, merely shrugging with a cold snort, dismissing Linghu Feng's threats.

Some of the other core disciples had walked out at this time. Jiang Chen didn't want to make a spectacle of himself like Linghu Feng was so keen on doing, and so left with Mu Gaoqi.

Linghu Feng cursed loudly as he watched Jiang Chen and Mu Gaoqi leave. "A wuss and a bumpkin, the shame of our Regal Pill Palace!"

Suddenly, someone walking up to him smiled leisurely. "Linghu, if you're looking down on them that much, why are you so angered by them? I say, are you feeling a bit insecure?"

"What do you mean by that, Ouyang Chao?!" Linghu Feng was even more incensed when he saw that the newcomer was Ouyang Chao, the heavily favored candidate in the Regal Pill Palace.

Ouyang Chao responded noncommittally. "I didn't mean anything. I'm just saying that if you're feeling low on self confidence, you should back out while it's still early."

"Bullshit! What do I have to doubt?! I'm a proper scion of the Herbal Hall, how can a country bumpkin compare to me? How can a wuss like Mu Gaoqi compare to me?"

"Is that so? I don't know about Mu Gaoqi, but I feel that Jiang Chen is exceedingly likely to claim a residence in the Sovereign Area." Ouyang Chao's tone was relaxed.

This of course, further displeased Linghu Feng. "Pah! You talk like he's not one of your competitors! Aren't you afraid of him threatening your position?"

Ouyang Chao shrugged. "I don't care. If he really is stronger than me, then I'll go for the second slot. If there are two stronger than me, then my skills are just inferior. I'll accept that and try harder."

Linghu Feng was almost breathless with rage. He knew that Ouyang Chao was jeering in saying that he'd go for the other residence if Jiang Chen was stronger than him. If this was the case, there'd be nothing for Linghu Feng.

Linghu Feng's gaze wandered around and stopped on a little girl. A sinister grimace crossed his face. "Junior sister Ling, this Jiang Chen is being so blatantly cocky that he's slapping our faces! He's not even in the top five favored candidates but is coming on so strong. He's obviously making a statement to us!"

The little girl was short in stature, and her cheeks that were heavy with baby fat made her both cute and likable. If it wasn't for her enormous womanly wiles that even her disciple uniform couldn't conceal, it was likely that no one would think she was eighteen years old when looking at her. She was one of the favorites of this time's competition, Ling Hui'er. Famous amongst the pill masters in the Rosy Valley for both her potential and her youthful looks, all the male disciples drooled over her, especially when combined with the fatal attraction of her chest.

"Senior brother Linghu, Hui'er has no grudge with senior brother Jiang Chen. He has no reason to make a statement to me." Ling Hui'er made a face and walked off, beaming. It was obvious that she hadn't been affected by Linghu Feng's crude provocation.

When he looked around and saw how the smiles on everyone else's faces carried a bit of mockery within them, he knew that he'd become a laughingstock.

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“Gaoqi, this Linghu Feng possesses extreme pettiness of character. Come to my residence tonight, I can share some pill dao reflections with you.”

Mu Gaoqi was overjoyed. He’d long since viewed Jiang Chen as a god and was quite excited that he’d been invited to Jiang Chen’s residence. He knew that this was Jiang Chen thinking enough of him to go to this much effort.

“Of course! This is a most welcome opportunity.” Mu Gaoqi was actually worrying about the possibility of Linghu Feng getting up to any tricks in the middle of the night, like disturbing his sleep or otherwise. It wouldn’t be a good development for him if this happened.

Although Palace Head Dan Chi had said that whoever cheated would be punished, one still had to guard against some things.

Jiang Chen made the appropriate arrangements when he arrived at his residence. Mu Gaoqi was a frequent visitor anyways; his appearance wouldn’t cause much surprise. It was actually Mu Gaoqi who was slightly taken aback when he saw Gouyu and the others. His venerated brother’s followers seemed to have grown mightily in a few short months.

Jiang Chen was of a mind to teach Mu Gaoqi a few things with this invitation. Although Mu Gaoqi possessed good potential already, he was still a bit shaky in his theoretical knowledge. His potential was very high due to his wood constitution and his ability in refining pills. However, there was much in his foundations that lagged far behind Ouyang Chao and Linghu Feng, scions of the Herbal Hall. Jiang Chen wanted to shore up these gaps for Mu Gaoqi tonight. Although pill dao theory was as vast as the misty ocean, if one grasped one part of foundational theory, one would be able to grasp all of it.

Mu Gaoqi thought it odd at first, but he was stunned as he continued to listen. He knew that an immense stroke of luck had fallen into his lap. Much of what Jiang Chen was teaching him was absent even in many of the scrolls in the Regal Pill Palace library. The theory in particular started off easy, then quickly ventured into deeper territory. This kind of mindset and level completely shattered Mu Gaoqi’s usual understanding.

The two became more engrossed in their conversation as they chatted. Mu Gaoqi didn’t even notice the sky darkening to night as he’d sunk into the chat. Suddenly, a visitor came knocking.

“Elder Linghu?” Jiang Chen was a bit surprised that Elder Linghu Xian from the Herbal Hall was paying him a visit.

Linghu Xian’s youthful looks contrasted his white hair, standing there with a benevolent smile on his face. However, Jiang Chen didn’t relax his guard at all. For Linghu Xian to come knocking at this time was a hint of nothing good to come, particularly as he’d tried and failed to recruit Jiang Chen last time as a medicine boy. There was an obvious grudge between the two. He’s also clashed twice with Linghu Feng today. Being his grandfather, it was impossible that Linghu Xian would sit idly by.

“Haha, what, are you not going to invite me in to sit?” Linghu Xian smiled.

Jiang Chen frowned. “It’s the finals of the competition tomorrow and we are in tense preparation. What business might Elder Linghu have?”



Linghu Xian's smile remained in place, "Let's go talk inside, let's go inside."

Jiang Chen was about to decline with a darkened face, but Linghu Xian spoke lazily, "Jiang Chen ah, you declined me last time I came to visit, are you not even going to let me in the door this time? Then I'll stand at your door all night!"

When he saw how shameless the elder was being, Jiang Chen snorted softly, not knowing what the elder was up to. However, given that Linghu Xian was willing to play the fool at his age, Jiang Chen could only let him in.

When they'd taken their seats inside, Linghu Xian smiled. "Young friend Jiang Chen, I still quite admire you. I've actually been planning on asking Elder Yun Nie to make you an administrator in the Herbal Hall; how about it? You'll receive the stipend of an administrator and that of a core disciple. It's a wonderful deal to be able to draw on two stipends."

Jiang Chen smiled faintly. "I've only entered the Regal Pill Palace for a short amount of time. I'm afraid I haven't the fortune to enjoy your largess."

Linghu Xian's forehead creased when he saw Jiang Chen turn him down without a second thought. "Jiang Chen ah, I only have the best intentions. Don't always look at me with such prejudiced eyes! We can chat about anything!"

"My apologies, Elder Linghu. If this is the only thing you're here about, I find no need for us to continue talking. I still need to prepare for tomorrow, so I won't keep you any longer." He waved his hand and issued his intention to show his guest out.

Linghu Xian had not reached his current position without possessing a face thicker than the city walls. He didn't mind in the slightest when he saw Jiang Chen gesture to send his guest off. He just laughed leisurely, "Jiang Chen, name your price. I'll give you whatever I can as long as you're willing to withdraw from the competition for the Sovereign Area residences. Even my proposal to enter the Herbal Hall still stands. I know you're from the Precious Tree Sect and are certainly short on resources. I happen to have quite a bit of family wealth to draw on. If you want it to, we can absolutely make this transaction happen."

He is indeed here for the residence. Jiang Chen looked at Linghu Xian with a faint smile. "One, I'm absolutely confident in winning a residence. Two, your grandson still may not win one even if I withdraw."

"His success and failure is not your burden to worry about. Our transaction will remain in effect as long as you back out." Linghu Xian was very confident in his grandson. Only Ouyang Chao was only a bit stronger than Linghu Xian when the unknown factor of Jiang Chen was removed. He truly wasn't worried about the others.

Jiang Chen laughed, at ease, and lightly shook his head. "Elder Linghu, Palace Head Dan Chi emphasized most gravely that cheating would have dire consequences. Strictly speaking, your words are already cheating on behalf of Linghu Feng."

Linghu Xian's expression grew frosty. "Jiang Chen, be careful with what you say. I'm only worried about your future out of the goodness of my heart. Isn't it just a residence? There will be doubtless be more

created in the future and act as opportunities for you. I can promise to help you obtain one in the future if you promise me this now. The Sky Pillar Area is second only to the Sovereign Area. That's not too much of an insult for a Precious Tree Sect newcomer like you, is it?" His words conveyed both overt and covert disdain for Jiang Chen's background.

Jiang Chen gave a bark of laughter. "Even half a sentence is too much when the conversation is unpleasant. Elder Linghu, I'm from the Precious Tree Sect alright, but who told you that I'm unworthy of the Sovereign Area? I gave you some face because I respect you as an elder of the Herbal Hall. But I'll have to report this to Palace Head Dan Chi if you refuse to leave."

Linghu Xian's expression changed drastically when he heard Dan Chi's name. He surged to his feet in a rage. "Good, good, good! Jiang Chen, you're something else, huh! You've got some guts! You're the only junior who dares treat me like so in all my years of dominating the Regal Pill Palace!"

"The Precious Tree Sect, is it? Sixteen kingdoms alliance, hmm? Jiang Chen, I'll remember that!"

Jiang Chen frowned. Did Linghu Xian meant to covertly suppress the sixteen kingdom alliance and attack the Precious Tree Sect?

#### Chapter 498: Jiang Chen Strikes Back, Linghu Runs Into Bad Luck

With Jiang Chen's understanding of Linghu Xian, the old man may look friendly, but overflowed with rotten schemes. Petty beyond belief and narrow-minded to boot, he would stop at nothing to achieve his goals. Jiang Chen had declined him twice now, so their relationship was as inharmonious as fire and water—particularly this time, since Jiang Chen's rejection was a direct blow towards his grandson's opportunity.

Once Jiang Chen obtained a residence and Linghu Feng failed, Linghu Xian would be sure to take his revenge. He might not be brave enough to act against Jiang Chen in the Regal Pill Palace, but he could absolutely send people to harass the Precious Tree Sect in private, or even act against it.

"Linghu Xian, you and your grandson have challenged me time and time again. If you cross my bottom line, I'll let you know what it means to feel regret!" Killing intent flashed through Jiang Chen's eyes as he saw the elder depart.

If Linghu Xian and Linghu Feng wanted to fight with Jiang Chen, they were welcome to try. He wouldn't be afraid of them in the slightest. The only thing he was afraid of were despicable, petty characters who would focus their attention on those unrelated to this matter. Take the Precious Tree Sect for instance, although Jiang Chen didn't have a deep relationship with them, he didn't want to see them affected because of his matters. Given that Linghu Xian had issued this kind of threat, Jiang Chen wanted to nip it in the bud. He absolutely couldn't dither until Linghu Xian acted. It would be far too late by then.

When Mu Gaoqi saw Jiang Chen's solemn expression as he walked back into the residence, he hastily inquired why. Jiang Chen didn't hold back his thoughts and summarized everything.

Mu Gaoqi began cursing loudly, "The Linghu clan has always been arrogant, and Linghu Xian is a particularly sly old fox. Many people in the sect know not to provoke him, as he tends to be vicious in return. Whoever becomes embroiled with him is certainly unlucky. Brother Chen, you need to be on your guard against him."

Jiang Chen nodded. "This man is petty and narrow minded, and I must stay on my guard. He must think he has me for sure. Don't worry, I won't give him a chance to make a move."

Mu Gaoqi was much more at ease when he saw how confident and relaxed Jiang Chen was.

"Alright Gaoqi, let's ignore this and continue our discussion about pills." Jiang Chen then proceeded to give Mu Gaoqi many pointers with great patience that night. As the discourse continued back and forth, Mu Gaoqi felt like the clouds had parted over the horizon of his understanding. He realized that he had entered a world that was far more magnificent than he'd realized.

"Brother Chen, a conversation with you is worth more than ten years of study. You are truly my benefactor. If I amount to anything in the future, it will because you shone a light on the path forward for me, Brother Chen." Mu Gaoqi thanked Jiang Chen from the bottom of his heart.

"You and I grew to know each other as well. I wouldn't have spoken of all this to you if it wasn't for your kindness and honesty. Gaoqi, you taking down a residence in tomorrow's finals is more convincing than any words of gratitude you can voice."

Mu Gaoqi nodded firmly. "Brother Chen, I only had fifty to sixty percent assurance before, but now I feel that I have a ninety percent guarantee. I must seize a residence after you do! I'll have those snobs know that I, Mu Gaoqi, am not the coward they hold in their eyes!" His personality previously had been a bit cowardly. He'd always rather come up short in any matter than others, and always treated others nicely, wanting to be the good guy and please everyone.

However, at the end of the day, he hadn't found favor in anyone's eyes. There weren't many core disciples who'd truly taken him into their confidence in Rosy Valley. It wasn't because he wasn't friendly or sincere enough, but that his martial dao potential and cultivation level were truly insufficient. In terms of pill dao, although his potential was good, it wasn't at the level where he dominated everyone else in the younger generation.

The two spent the rest of the night gathering their strength, sitting down cross legged in meditation. The two arrived in vigorous spirits at Shen Li Palace early the next day, and were met with a supercilious look from old man Linghu Xian. He swept right past Jiang Chen, a warning look flashing through his eyes.

This was evidently his final warning.

Jiang Chen pretended not to have seen it and laughed coldly in his heart. "Old Linghu, I don't mind sending you and your grandson on your way if you want to court death!"

When Linghu Xian saw Jiang Chen only smile coldly and ignore him, he grew incensed and sent a silent message. "Jiang Chen, I give you a final chance. Find an excuse to withdraw now, and all our previous matters can be forgotten. Everything I promised you before still stands. You'll regret it if you refuse!"

Jiang Chen's footsteps suddenly halted as he looked at Linghu Xian with a mocking look. He purposefully spoke loudly, "Elder Linghu, I'd like to see how you'll make me regret things."

Linghu Xian hadn't expected that Jiang Chen would suddenly speak out loud. He'd sent the previous messages with his consciousness before so that he could naturally deny things now. He put on a baffled expression, "Jiang Chen, are you speaking to me?"

Playing dumb!

A cold smirk played about Jiang Chen's lips. "Elder Linghu, is it fun to play dumb at your age in front of all these young folk? You dared threaten me in my residence last night and now you're publicly sending me a silent message with another threat. What, now you don't have the courage to admit to things?" Jiang Chen purposefully spoke loudly and immediately attracted several curious stares. Several elders in charge of the proceedings all walked up, wanting to ask what was going on.

Linghu Xian spoke with a self righteous look plastered across his face. "Jiang Chen, perhaps my grandson Linghu Feng clashed verbally with you yesterday? Even if that's the case, you don't need to frame me like this, do you? Everyone knows about my character in the Regal Pill Palace. You're just a newly entered disciple, do I need to threaten you? What would I threaten you for?"

Elder Yun Nie happened to walk in at this point. His brow furrowed when he saw how many people had gathered, "What's going on?" Someone immediately walked up with a report.

Elder Yun Nie looked at Linghu Xian, then at Jiang Chen. From his position as the Hallmaster of the Herbal Hall, he couldn't blatantly succor Jiang Chen and suppress his own subordinate. "The Palace Head himself is overseeing the competition for the Sovereign Area residences. I don't care who is in the right and who is not, only know that I will be the first to take to task anyone who dares disturb the proceedings."

Linghu Xian nodded successively, as if in full agreement. "Indeed! I also resolutely support Elder Yun Nie. Those who maliciously seek to disturb the competition should be punished!" His tone was full of justice as he put on a great act.

Jiang Chen snorted derisively and grasped with his hand, sending a message glyph in a beam of light hovering in the air. "Elder Linghu, you can't have forgotten what you said last night, could you? There happens to be so many people present, so why don't I ask everyone to take a listen?" He made a quick gesture and the message glyph materialized in the air, playing back the previous day's conversation.

When Linghu Xian had come visiting, Jiang Chen had secretly taken precautions, and recorded the conversation between the two into a message glyph. The technical requirements needed to do so weren't high, and Jiang Chen's sophisticated methods had left Linghu Xian without an inkling that such an act had taken place.

The atmosphere immediately became awkward, as a message glyph would essentially recreate the entire scene. Linghu Xian knew things would only get worse when he heard the replay. He suddenly gave a great shout and leapt forward, grasping at the glyph before a third could be played. "How dare you simulate my voice and frame me, kid?! You deserve to die for your crime!"

He was about to bound forward when Elder Yun Nie snorted and flourished his sleeves, sending Linghu Xian skidding back a few steps with a flash of light. His face was stony. "Why are you nervous if you aren't feeling guilty?"

The other elders all nodded, their gazes laden with contemptuous overtones as they looked at Linghu Xian. It was obvious that they believed the contents of the message glyph.

The glyph disappeared as soon as it'd finished its playback. Elder Yun Nie's chilly gaze was merciless as he stared at Linghu Xian, full of authority.

"Elder Yun Nie, you must believe me! I have such a high position, what need would I have to suppress a new disciple? Everyone, you all should uphold justice! Tell me, what reason would I have to suppress Jiang Chen?" Linghu Xian had an imploring expression on his face as he stumbled and stammered through an explanation, trying to persuade his peers in the Herbal Hall to speak out or argue on his behalf.

However, who would stand out to speak for Linghu Xian in the face of such incontrovertible evidence, even if they had a strong relationship with him? He wasn't much for making friends to begin with, and with the competition for slots in Mt. Rippling Mirage staring them in the face, many Herbal Hall elders were secretly applauding in their hearts. It was good enough that they weren't fanning the flames at this moment, let alone speak up on his behalf.

One less Linghu Xian meant one less competitor for the slots of the Pill Battles!

"Elder Yun Nie, I... I've really been framed! Jiang Chen has a conflict with my grandson and wants to suppress Linghu Feng so that he can't enter the competition! These are despicable methods he's using to suppress the competition!" Linghu Xian screamed hoarsely, but Elder Yun Nie's eyes only grew colder and colder.

"Linghu Xian, are you stupid, or do you take all of us for fools?" Elder Yun Nie responded coldly. "Voices can be imitated, but do you think we aren't able to tell apart an imitation from reality? Good, very good! You're something else, aren't you Linghu Xian!?"

Linghu Xian's expression changed drastically. "I... I'm innocent! Elder Yun Nie, you can't persecute me!"

"Persecute you?" Elder Yun Nie asked frostily. "You disturbed the competition and paid no heed to the Palace Head's words, and you dare say that I'm persecuting you?!"

"I... I don't accept this! I want an appeal! I want to accuse Jiang Chen of framing me!"

Elder Yun Nie couldn't be bothered wasting further words with him. "Where are the law enforcers? Strip him of his elder robe first!"

He was an elder if he wore the robe, and nothing without it.

Linghu Xian started screaming and raving, "Yun Nie, you're framing me! Everyone knows that Jiang Chen is your man and you're using his hand to persecute me!"

Elder Yun Nie smiled faintly and looked at the other elders. "Everyone, Linghu Xian says I am persecuting him. You are all witnesses, what do you think?"

An elder immediately jumped out. "Linghu Xian is a thief calling for others to stop the thief! How can any of us fail to determine the veracity of that recording? And he certainly has motive enough to really threaten Jiang Chen."

"Yes! This miscreant dares openly flaunt the Palace Head's words, he should be handled according to the sect's regulations!"

People band together to push down a falling wall. Everyone knew that Linghu Xian was done for, so no one minded adding a few footprints on his body.

#### Chapter 499: Astounding Answering Speed

One had to say, Linghu Xian had been well and truly caught in a web of his own making. As the Hall of Law Enforcement investigated, his crimes began to pile up, including threats towards disciples participating in battle, insubordination towards the Palace Head, and severe interference with the objectivity of the competition. Linghu Xian had even threatened the Precious Tree Sect, so he had the added crime of undermining the alliance between the two sects added to his list. When punishment was handed down for his crimes, he was immediately removed from his position and sent to the Regal Pill Palace dungeons.

Linghu Feng was likewise stripped of his competition qualifications and replaced with the disciple who'd ranked 31st.

With Linghu Xian gone, the power of the Linghu clan also plummeted. The Herbal Hall elders who were dissatisfied with Linghu Xian to begin with also stepped out to expose his crimes. When everything came into the light of day, it was greatly shocking and actually involved the loss of several lives.

Everyone within the Regal Pill Palace was enraged as they bore witness to a list of crimes too numerous to even fully record. Palace Head Dan Chi and several heavyweights came to an immediate decision that when the competition ended, Linghu Xian's head would be displayed for all to see!

The rules had been strictly adhered to ever since Palace Head Dan Chi had taken power. All of the crimes that Linghu Xian had committed were enough for him to die ten times over. When he'd settled on Linghu Xian's sentence, Dan Chi once again lectured the sect, a forbidding expression on his face. "Why is our Regal Pill Palace one of the six great sects of the Myriad Domain? It's not only because of our rich heritage, but our strict sect rules. The rules that are the product of the combined effort of all those who have guided our sect with vision. A bad egg such as Linghu Xian envies talent and is corrupt. If he is not eliminated, he is certain to become the scourge of the sect. I hope the younger generation will treat this as the warning it is. The sect is everyone's sect. Whoever seeks to bring disaster to it is the enemy of us all. The rules will be strictly enforced, and no one is exempt!"

It was easy to imagine the strong deterrence that the example of Linghu Xian set. "Elder Lian Cheng, Elder Yun Nie. Please keep a closer eye on things and don't let any more unexpected developments occur in the competition." The two elders bowed as they received their orders.

Linghu Xian was suitably punished, and Linghu Feng was revoked of his right to participate. This interlude imparted a more tense atmosphere to the competition. Everyone was finally aware of how important this competition was to the senior echelon of the sect.

The contests began after the interlude. The thirty pill dao geniuses participating in the finals gathered in a hall inside Shen Li Palace.

Elder Yun Nie swept bright eyes across the faces of all the participants. "Everyone, Palace Head Dan Chi, Elder Lian Cheng and myself have come to a decision after lengthy discussions last night. Anyone who enters the finals this time can advance to the Sky Pillar area for cultivation, even if you do not ultimately win out in the finals."

The Sky Pillar Area was second only to the Sovereign Area in the Rosy Valley, and was far superior to the Soaring Clouds and Peerless Areas. Some of the participants in the finals were originally from the Sky Pillar Area, so this news didn't have much meaning for them. But for those from the Soaring Clouds and Peerless Areas, this was obviously a solid benefit.

Many of those in the finals knew that they didn't stand much of a chance of winning out. After all, there were only four combined spots from the martial and pill dao competitions. But to be able to advance to the Sky Pillar Area without obtaining a Sovereign Residence, that was an unexpected boon!

"Alright, I now pronounce that the pill dao finals as officially open. Begin!" Elder Yun Nie gave the order to officially start the finals.

"Ten years of practicing martial dao, a hundred years of refining pills. What does this saying mean? I'm sure all of you are well aware of its meaning. If a genius practices martial dao, not only will he see great improvement in ten years, but his speed determines his potential and future. The dao of pills, however, is a long term venture. Just as wine ages into its true fragrance, ten years is sufficient to identify a martial dao genius, yet a hundred years worth of winters and summers are needed to see the true potential of a pill dao heavyweight. Just from this, it is easy to see that the path of pill dao is not for the faint hearted."

Elder Yun Nie continued. "You emerged from the masses of the Regal Pill Palace disciples and number among the top 30. You each have displayed a strength beyond your peers, and this is something to take pride in. Even if you do not succeed in the finals, I would hope that you do not give up on yourself, because competition in the dao of pills is one that spans decades. Perhaps you may not be on the same level as the premier geniuses today, but history has shown many pill masters who have risen to prominence well into their lives. Since my Regal Pill Palace was founded for pill dao, we have the foundation and ability to cultivate pill masters of all ages. Of course, I hope that all of you will bring forth your all. Leave no regrets behind, and give it your best shot."

Elder Yun Nie began announcing the rules after a round of encouragement. "My Regal Pill Palace emphasizes four points in cultivating pill masters. The first is theory; this is the foundation. Progressing forward is something as intangible as the fleeting winds without a solid theoretical foundation. The strength of one's theory will determine the level of a pill master.

"The second is vision. To a pill dao genius, strong vision and minute observation skills is the key that unlocks the prowess of a superb pill master.

"The third is strength of heart. A pill master faces critical moments at every refining, and without the requisite strength of heart to support their refining, they are sure to make mistakes at critical moments. It is very difficult for those to become a superb pill master.

"The fourth is one of manipulation. After all is said and done, dexterity is still vital. The deftness of a pill master's hands is the most direct display of one's competency.

"Therefore, we have four areas in the finals: theory, vision, strength of heart, and manipulation."

Jiang Chen nodded inwardly after hearing Elder Yun Nie's words. The Regal Pill Palace may not be comparable to the divine level of pill dao powers, its fundamentals were perfectly formed. Its thoughts

were completely accurate from a pill dao perspective. These were indeed the four most important points for pill dao.

“And now, the first category of theory will officially begin. The time limit is two hours, and there will be a hundred points in every category. We will generate rankings based on the scores, and if two scores tie, the first to complete will be ranked higher!”

The rules stated that everyone would enter secret chambers according to their ranking in the preliminaries. Everyone was to be in their own sealed off chamber for the theory category. Each chamber was outfitted with all sorts of containment restrictions that made it impossible for participants to communicate with the outside world, preventing all cheating.

Jiang Chen had once arrived in the same world for the pill dao tests of Eternal Spirit Mountain. He’d used pill dao that year to farm points, drawing great attention to himself and inciting the geniuses of all four sects as well as the organizers to team up to suppress him. Therefore, he wasn’t the least unfamiliar with this kind of testing condition.

He entered the secret room and saw three scrolls placed on the table, having to do with the theory tests. He opened all of them to see that there were ten questions on each scroll. There were questions that were worth two points, worth three points, and ones worth five points.

There were 10 two point questions, worth 20 points total. 10 three point questions, 30 points total. 10 five point questions, 50 points total. The thirty questions all together made for 100 points.

Jiang Chen quickly glanced through the questions. They went from easy to complex in increasing difficulty. The two point questions were quite basic and didn’t cover a wide range of topics. They all had to do with raising spirit herbs and analyzing their properties, as well as spirit herb combination questions. This wasn’t difficult for a pill dao genius who’d made it through to the finals. He quickly went through the scroll.

Although the difficulty of the second scroll rose slightly and covered more topics, it was still a walk in the park for Jiang Chen. He quickly finished with it as well.

The five point questions were undoubtedly the hardest, and each question was very unique as well, covering a wide range of topics. Not only did it ask about growing spirit herbs and refining pills, it talked even more about the control of fire and cauldrons. The final three questions even had to do with ancient recipes, and they were undoubtedly the defining ones of this category. This was because when it came to ancient recipes, if one’s knowledge and breadth of experience was shallow in any area, it was possible that they wouldn’t be able to even start answering the questions.

With Jiang Chen’s grasp over ancient pill recipes, there wasn’t another who would top him in the entire Divine Abyss Continent, much less the Regal Pill Palace. To him, even if he didn’t recognize the recipe, he only needed to somewhat analyze it and find the advanced version in the memories of his past life. After working backwards from the advanced recipe, he’d be able to dissect the recipe in front of him.

It was just like the Hexarune Dragon Pill. He hadn’t known what it was originally, but after some analysis, he understood that it was the same as the Ennearune Heaven Grievance Pill, just simplified.



Jiang Chen finished all three question in one stroke. He then double checked his work, made sure it was fine, then rolled up the scroll and walked out of the secret room. Only one hour had passed.

Outside of the testing center, all the heavyweights of the Herbal Hall were sitting there solemnly, keeping an eye on all candidates. They were slightly surprised when he walked out. Only half of the allotted time had passed!

“Jiang Chen, once you exit the testing area, you won’t be able to return.” An elder spoke up in warning.

Jiang Chen smiled and nodded his head. “In response to all the elders, I have finished my scrolls and request entry to the second category.”

“What?” Ouyang De, one of the elders present, was flabbergasted. He looked at Jiang Chen incredulously. “Jiang Chen, you’re finished?”

“In response to the elder, I’m finished.”

Elder Yun Nie had been smiling without a word since he’d seen Jiang Chen walk out. He spoke up at this time. “Since you’re done, you can enter the second category. Send him along.”

An administrator immediately took Jiang Chen to the second area, leaving behind several shell shocked elders. Those thirty questions weren’t that easy, particularly the five point questions! Jiang Chen had finished them in only half of the allotted time? This performance was a bit too perverse! Or was it that he’d given up on them because they were too hard?

#### Chapter 500: Temporarily First

Many of the elders guessed that Jiang Chen had simply passed over the more difficult questions to finish faster. Given the difficulty level, it was an entirely reasonable supposition. Candidates who finished faster would hold a greater advantage if everyone’s scores were similar.

“This Jiang Chen is still too young, it seems. He couldn’t retain his composure and thought the finals would be as casual as the preliminaries.” An elder sighed softly.

It was apparent that some of the elders had already made their own judgements about the quality of Jiang Chen’s answers, given that he’d finished in an hour. They all felt that Jiang Chen was doing this for the limelight, placing far too much emphasis on speed. This kind of method would absolutely impact the quality of his answers.

Elder Yun Nie, on the other hand, remained serene and impartial. Jiang Chen was someone he had his eyes on. From what he knew of Jiang Chen, the latter wasn’t the sort to lose his cool so easily. He must have had his own reasons for handing in his answers this early.

However, the rules prevented him from looking at Jiang Chen’s scroll before all the others had finished. All the scrolls had to be graded at the same time.

At that moment, Mu Gaoqi was answering the last couple of five point questions in his room. He was quite agitated at this moment, because he’d just discovered the fruits of his discussion with Jiang Chen last night. The last three questions were directly referencing two of the ancient recipes they’d talked about! This made Mu Gaoqi feel that a stroke of luck had descended from the heavens and smacked him upside the head.

“Brother Chen, you are truly my benefactor.” Mu Gaoqi was excited beyond belief. “It’s impossible for me to get anything wrong on the two point and three point questions, and I’m quite certain about the five point questions earlier. If I can answer two of these final questions correctly, I’ll be able to sit at a solid 95 points! Even Ouyang Chao won’t be able to do this, right??”

It would be a lie to say that Mu Gaoqi wasn’t flustered at this moment. However, he quickly calmed down. He knew that now wasn’t the time to be proud. He who laughed at the end would laugh the loudest.

When he reached the last question, Mu Gaoqi was at a loss when faced with the ancient recipe. But he quickly made the decision to give up on it. As opposed to wasting time here, he was better off checking his other answers. He should make certain there were no mistakes and hand it in earlier to gain more time. After all, it was highly likely that a competition of this caliber would come down to completion time when deciding the final rankings.

Mu Gaoqi’s greatest gains after following Jiang Chen, apart from pill dao knowledge and the baptism in the spring, was the shift in his personality. He’d been indecisive and spineless before, afraid of loss, but now there were some hints of determination and resolve in his personality.

Outside of the testing area, the elders were still sitting there. Even fifteen minutes after Jiang Chen, not even one person had walked out. “Heh heh, everyone, who do you think will be second?” An elder started chatting to pass the time.

“I’m going to guess that it’s Elder Ouyang’s grandson, Ouyang Chao?”

“Mm, I too look favorably upon Ouyang Chao. He’s a scion of the Herbal Hall after all! From where I sit, he’s a dependable asset, with a solid foundation in theory. He’s absolutely a hot contender this time!”

“Haha, it seems that everyone thinks the same as me. We think highly of Ouyang Chao!”

Elder Ouyang De smiled gently, his heart filled with pride. He firmly believed that his direct grandson Ouyang Chao would seize one of the residences. He’d never once doubted it. Even if Linghu Feng hadn’t been stripped of his qualifications, Ouyang De didn’t believe that anyone could threaten Ouyang Chao. Even though he couldn’t quite see through Jiang Chen, even if the latter had taken a slot, the other would still go to his grandson.

Therefore, he was quite at ease and had a proud smile on his coolly composed face. A figure walked out of the chambers as they continued chatting.

“Mm?” Ouyang De’s body suddenly trembled, because he was the first to realize that this wasn’t his grandson, but someone else. This person was noticeably younger than Ouyang Chao, and a few hints of a lighthearted, carefree attitude about him that didn’t resemble Ouyang Chao. His robe and upswept hair made him appear quite ethereal, and it gave him a vaguely otherworldly feeling.

“Mu Gaoqi?” An elder recognized the person.

One had to say, Mu Gaoqi truly didn’t have much influence in the sect. He didn’t have much of a backer in the Herbal Hall, and wasn’t a scion of the Hall either.

Elder Yun Nie was also slightly surprised to see Mu Gaoqi. He knew of the name, and that Mu Gaoqi had recently grown close to Jiang Chen, but what surprised him at this moment wasn't just Mu Gaoqi's speed, but rather his demeanor.

There was a particularly otherworldly aura that wreathed around Mu Gaoqi, making him appear quite extraordinary. This kind of aura was almost nonexistent among the pill dao geniuses of the entire Regal Pill Palace. No wonder the Regal Pill Palace disciples all called him the Wood Demigod. He certainly wasn't a simple character indeed.

"Disciple Mu Gaoqi has completed the first category and requests to enter the second." Mu Gaoqi's personality had previously been weak, but now he seemed to be able to stand on his own two feet in front of so many sect elders. He didn't look the least bit uncomfortable.

"Mm? This Mu Gaoqi is normally vacillating and cowardly, unable to even speak in front of sect heavyweights. How is he so at ease today, and neither cringing nor arrogant to boot?" Some of the elders were surprised as well.

The more Elder Yun Nie saw of Mu Gaoqi, the more he liked what he saw. He nodded, "Go, lead him to the second category."

After Mu Gaoqi left, Ouyang De's expression became a bit ugly.

Everyone favored Ouyang Chao, and he had tacitly agreed to it as well. But the second to come out was Mu Gaoqi, not his grandson!

"Heh heh, young folks now are unable to remain calm. In my eyes, a pill dao genius should be as steady as Ouyang Chao!" An elder firmly in Ouyang De's camp tried to comfort the elder in this manner.

"Indeed, Ouyang Chao's mindset is steady and he keeps his cool in the face of adversity. This is the basic quality of a pill master."

Yet the other elders seemed to have temporarily gone deaf, not joining in on the stream of praises. It was obvious to everyone that Hallmaster Yun Nie seemed to admire Mu Gaoqi a tad. Since the Hallmaster liked this boy, it wasn't a good idea to overly praise Ouyang Chao. When it came to fawning on Ouyang De or Elder Yun Nie, did such a decision even need second thought?

Ouyang Chao finally emerged after two thirds of the allotted time had passed. One couldn't glean any trace of emotion from his face. Baby faced Ling Hui'er walked out shortly thereafter, with her stunning body on display. When the others saw how she was slightly pouting, they could tell that she wasn't quite satisfied with how she'd displayed her skills in the first category.

Ouyang De actually really wanted to ask Ouyang Chao how he'd done, but he controlled himself in the end. If he asked now, he would give others something to criticize about and might even disturb Ouyang Chao's train of thought. As such, he kept his mouth shut.

The second category was that of vision, and it was a truly important dividing line for a pill master.

Supreme observation was required to prevent any accidents from happening when refining pills. An eye for detail was even more necessary when determining the growth of spirit herbs, and an absolute prerequisite for selecting seeds of proper grade.

There were only ten questions in this category, and each was worth ten points. There were five topics to focus on, identifying seeds, flames, cauldrons, pills, and recipes. There were two questions within each topic, for a total of ten questions.

For someone trained in the God's Eye like Jiang Chen, his vision truly had no equal. Add that to his rich knowledge of pills, there was no doubt about his victory.

He used an even shorter span of time to complete the ten questions of the second category. When he emerged, most candidates had only just finished the first category, and the elders who'd previously questioned him were speechless.

They were no longer certain that Jiang Chen was purposefully pursuing speed. Even if a young pill master was a genius, they still wouldn't have this speed.

He likewise displayed an implacable momentum in the strength of heart category, completely unstoppable in his progress. When he emerged from the third category, the scores for the answers to theory had just been tallied up.

Jiang Chen's name was at the top of the ranking with a full score.

Astonishment rippled across the scene. The elders were struck speechless, and had no idea how to react. They even felt their faces burn with the feeling that Jiang Chen had slapped them all.

"What a perverted genius, this is absolutely astounding! Finishing the scrolls in an hour. And with full marks... is Jiang Chen really from the sixteen kingdoms?"

"Indeed! It makes more sense if he came from the Upper Eight Realms! From the sixteen kingdoms? This doesn't make any sense at all. Just how strong are the Precious Tree Sect's foundations that they could cultivate such a genius?"

All of them sighed, hearts awash with deep emotion.

A few of them whose thoughts ran a bit quicker couldn't help but wonder if Palace Head Dan Chi was colluding with Elder Yun Nie to ensure that Jiang Chen won? However, they didn't say anything.

If this wasn't the case, then why was Jiang Chen so powerful? He didn't seem like it at all! It didn't make sense for him to achieve this score with his age and background.

Of course, they could only speculate. They didn't dare voice anything out loud. Wouldn't they just be courting death if they questioned the Palace Head or Elder Yun Nie?

Ouyang De's face was ashen; he was the most dejected out of the group. Thanks to Jiang Chen's performance, his grandson was firmly suppressed. The most critical thing wasn't just that Jiang Chen was first in the rankings, but that Ouyang Chao had only come in third place! Mu Gaoqi actually held second!

Jiang Chen: 100 points

Mu Gaoqi: 95 points

Ouyang Chao: 90 points

