

### Three Realms 731

#### Chapter 731: Regal Pill Palace Disciples

News in the Fish and Dragon District spread faster than any other place. Hushed whispers and back alley conversations soon made the robbery at Myriad Puppets Pavilion the talk of the entire district. Yet, chief among all the emotions that rippled across everyone's heart was incredulity.

The mere fact of a robbery wasn't the thing that had rendered them incredulous. Desperation had driven many a fool to tempt fate before. There were far too many of those occurrences every year to keep track of. But robbing the Myriad Puppets Pavilion, that was certainly novel! Moreover, they'd even taken two thousand slaves in one go. What exactly were the culprits trying to do? What did they need so many people for? What everyone was even more curious about was just how on earth they had pulled it off? What kind of technique was powerful enough to snatch a couple thousand people in a couple of breaths?

The most crucial thing was that both the Myriad Puppets Pavilion nor local law enforcement seemed to have caught the culprit. Let alone catch them, they didn't even seem to have the faintest whiff of a clue. This robbery had boasted of a domineering style and a mind boggling brilliance. From the top echelons to the bottom feeders, the whole of the Fish and Dragon District was in shock.

News of the robbery quickly reached House Sikou as well. Sikou Nan was first to arrive at the scene of the crime and flew into a terrible rage. Meanwhile, Lin Ming was in the middle of boiling medicine in his store not far away from Myriad Puppets Pavilion when he heard the news. The shock almost struck him dumb. The Myriad Puppets Pavilion had been robbed! He knew who had done it even if he thought with his knees. After all, there were only those two people who had asked him about the Pavilion an hour ago. This was far too much of a coincidence! They talked about the Myriad Puppets Pavilion, and then the Pavilion was then robbed in short order?

A shiver coursed through Lin Ming, traveling from head to toe. Just when did Wei Jie become so crazy? Hadn't Wei Jie always been known for being cool-headed?

"Wei Jie, Wei Jie, you're really making big waves this time. I dearly hope you won't be caught," Lin Ming felt the urge to cry. He knew full well that if they got caught, the first to be implicated would be himself. As a result, Lin Ming was painfully aware that he had to lock up whatever he knew inside his head, and leave it there to rot. No matter what, he couldn't speak of it. To speak of it would be to buy a one-way ticket to hell. Even if he was perfectly innocent, he still wouldn't escape the charge of being an accessory to the crime. Therefore, this had to be kept secret.

Jiang Chen and Huang'er strolled around for the entire day after leaving Fish and Dragon District. Only after nightfall did they make their way back to House Wei's mansion, free and easy. Both of them had changed their external appearances from the one they'd used to enter the Fish and Dragon District. With their current appearance, no one would think of suspecting them.

Seeing Jiang Chen return with a companion in tow, Wei Jie was more or less certain that the one who had robbed Myriad Puppets Pavilion was none other than Jiang Chen. He hadn't been entirely certain previously because Jiang Chen had been by himself when they'd separated.

"Brother Jiang, who might this be?" A curious Wei Jie inquired.

“Young master Wei, this is a friend of mine. I presume you already heard about the affair in the Fish and Dragon District,” Jiang Chen took the initiative. He wasn’t planning on hiding anything.

Wei Jie responded with a wry smile, “Of course I heard about something that big. I thought at first it was someone else who did it, but I have a pretty good guess now that two of you have arrived.”

Jiang Chen nodded. “The implications of this affair will likely be enormous. The two of us will depart immediately and won’t trouble you.”

Wei Jie quickly replied with a smile, “What are you saying? I feel quite thrilled that you robbed House Sikou. Don’t worry. You, me, and Lin Ming are the only ones who even know a shred of what’s going on. Lin Ming is involved himself, so he wouldn’t dare betray us. House Sikou is my House’s sworn enemy, so it’s even more impossible for me to betray you. So, just let them investigate. Things will sort themselves out after the commotion dies down.”

“We really won’t drag you down?” Jiang Chen asked once again. He wasn’t one to act recklessly without a care for consequences. If Wei Jie would be implicated as a result of Jiang Chen’s actions, he’d turn on his heels and walk out right this instant.

Wei Jie waved him off, “Brother Jiang, we’re friends who’ve been through life and death already. Don’t mention being implicated. It’s of no consequence even if I have to shoulder a little risk. A mere House Sikou? House Wei isn’t afraid of them.”

If nothing else, a ninth rank aristocratic house’s heir had the heroic spirit to willingly shoulder responsibility. Jiang Chen thought a moment. He still countered, “Young master Wei, we’re friends who’ve gone through tribulations together, so I won’t treat you as an outsider. However, people will definitely be on the lookout now that I’ve stirred up a fuss. You can’t find a place here for a couple thousand people either, I need to find another place.”

No matter how large the House Wei manor might be, it would still be hard to hide releasing two thousand people all at once. This was a situation they had to handle discreetly. Wei Jie thought a moment and responded with a nod, “House Wei has an underground estate in the capital. It’s extremely well hidden; only my father and me know about it. Brother Jiang, if you can overlook the crudeness, I’ll take you there right now.”

Jiang Chen waved him off. “Just tell me the exact place and how to get there. There will certainly be countless pairs of eyes watching you if you take a step in any direction. It wouldn’t be a good thing for you. I wouldn’t want to involve House Wei in this quarrel because of a careless mistake.”

Since House Wei and House Sikou were mortal enemies, House Sikou would definitely send people to keep watch over House Wei after something this big happened. As House Wei’s young master, Wei Jie’s every move would certainly be carefully observed. It would be a shame indeed if their charade was seen through because of a predictable action.

Wei Jie pondered a moment and nodded without arguing. He drew a map on the spot and handed it to Jiang Chen. “The exact position, concrete directions, and how to enter are all clearly indicated on this map. The place is extremely well hidden; absolutely no one from House Sikou will find it. This place is the final trump card for my father and I.”

Wei Jie disclosed all this private information to Jiang Chen with a wry smile. "Brother Jiang, I won't hide anything from you. House Wei looks full of splendor on the surface, but it's in fact riddled with troubles internal and external. That place is the final safe shelter for my father and I, the absolute last lifeline in case of an emergency."

Jiang Chen's heart faintly shook. A profoundly grateful look emerged on his face. He patted Wei Jie, "Young master Wei, you and I are friends for life."

Though he'd once saved Wei Jie's life, the sincerity Wei Jie had demonstrated again and again had clearly gone above and beyond a mere repayment of debt. One could say that they'd both made use of each other at first, but they'd now come to truly treat each other as friends from the bottom of their hearts after undergoing repeated woes and trials together. Especially now that Wei Jie had entrusted him with his final trump card, whether or not it truly was his final trump card or not, Jiang Chen still owed him a debt of gratitude. "Young master Wei, I'll come find you again after I settle them in. Here are some detoxifying pills. Take them for now, and stay vigilant against the pill master at your fifth uncle's side. He's likely hiding his real strength."

Wei Jie looked pensive. He took the pills from Jiang Chen and put them away. After a small pause, he still couldn't stop himself from asking, "Brother Jiang, I see that your talent for pill dao is marvelous. I wonder if..."

Jiang Chen smiled, "I haven't had my pill dao potential tested, so I can't tell you at what level it is specifically. That said, when it comes to pill dao, I truly haven't met anyone yet I would bow down to. So I might not be able to provide a concrete answer if young master Wei wishes to know. That said, ordinary pill kings are indeed below my notice." He patted Wei Jie's shoulder, "Take care."

After bidding their farewells, Huang'er and Jiang Chen departed under the cover of the night without any hesitation. Trackers were everywhere outside. Even so, House Sikou wasn't a first class faction in the capital, so they couldn't hunt and arrest people as they pleased without scruples. For that reason, though they put great effort into the search, it was very difficult to guarantee that they could cover every possible area. Meanwhile, Jiang Chen and Huang'er precisely happened to be experts in slipping through blockades. From the Myriad Domain all the way to the Veluriyam Capital, they'd gone through too many roadblocks to count. They simply had too much knowledge and experience dealing with such a search.

Following the map, the two of them spent quite some effort before finally locating the concealed location. It was indeed superbly hidden, even looking like an underground maze the deeper they went. Most importantly, there were even formations deployed inside, as well as early warning systems. The arrangements were close to perfection in every area. What was even more surprising was how spacious this place was. It could even accommodate several times more people than they needed to situate.

"A ninth rank noble house in Veluriyam Capital is indeed something else. This place would have been rather difficult to build without tremendous power," Jiang Chen said, sighing with feeling after he settled down.

Huang'er nodded with a faint smile. "Sir Jiang, hurry up and let these people out. I can't wait!"

He summoned his palace and was about to release the captives, but then thought better of it. The eternal imprint last time from the Eternal Celestial Capital was a mistake he'd learned from. It wasn't impossible for the Myrial Puppets Pavilion's unique imprint to be on these slaves. The palace was separated from the outside world, so this imprint naturally wouldn't be able to send out a signal. However, if they were indeed marked, releasing them would only invite his pursuers to track him all the way to this place.

"Miss Huang'er, let's go inside." *novel* **B-1n**

The two of them entered the palace. Two thousand slaves stood there like living corpses, not showing the slightest sign of resistance, not putting up any struggle. Jiang Chen walked forward, pulling off their masks one by one. His mood became heavier with every mask he pulled off. The thing he was most worried of was that those from the Regal Pill Palace wouldn't be among this batch of slaves. Even Huang'er was extremely grave. She also knew full well that if they couldn't find their people from Regal Pill Palace here, further rescue attempts would be at least ten times harder.

As masks were tugged off one by one, Jiang Chen's state of mind grew increasingly heavier. After taking down more than thirty masks, his hands spasmed as wild joy exploded on his face! A familiar face had appeared in front of Jiang Chen's eyes.

Indeed, he was very familiar with this person! "Shen Trifire!" he blurted, wild with joy. Shen Trifire was a genius from the Sovereign Area of Rosy Valley. He had been Shen Qinghong's right hand man back then. Jiang Chen had once thoroughly defeated him in a pill dao contest. Shen Trifire had repented then, and withdrawn himself from sect conflict, going into closed door cultivation. Jiang Chen never thought this peer would be the first one he'd find!

Jiang Chen and Huang'er shared a look, seeing the joy in each other's eyes. Since they saw a familiar face, this meant that those from Regal Pill Palace were at least in this batch. Thank the heavens! Jiang Chen immediately used his consciousness to scan Shen Trifire. However, the joy quickly disappeared from his face, and his brows bunched together in a frown.

Chapter 732: Running Into Yet Another Problem "What is it?" Seeing Jiang Chen's expression darken so suddenly, Huang'er realized that the situation wasn't as optimistic as she'd first thought.

"As I thought, those that work in this business are all animals. Aside from everyone's senses being sealed, their vitals have been sealed as well. If they make the wrong move, their qi ocean will self-detonate. Vicious indeed!" Jiang Chen swore in a low tone.

Hearing this, Huang'er's expression sank as well.

"Let's see if the others are here." She was the first to calm down and came forward to help. The masks were torn away one by one, and the faces of fellow sect members steadily appeared. Suddenly, there was a cry of pleasant surprise. "Big sister Gouyu!"

A mask was removed over on Huang'er's side, revealing Gouyu's face beneath. Her senses had been sealed away, but Gouyu's expression was still defiant and unyielding. Her cheeks were thin and pale. She

had evidently suffered a lot during her capture. Yet to Huang'er and Jiang Chen, the sight of her was invigorating. They removed all the remaining masks in a concerted effort.

Xue Tong, Guo Jin, the Qiao brothers, Wen Ziqi, Shen Trifire, Rong Zifeng, Ouyang Chao... There were almost sixty disciples from Rosy Valley among those rescued, but not one of the elders were present. More importantly, Jiang Chen didn't find Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie in the group either.

According to the information he'd received, it was likely that Elder Yun Nie hadn't died in battle. Those from the Great Scarlet Mid Region had been ordered to capture the elder alive so that they could pry the recipe for the Longevity Pill from his lips. The recipe for the pill had indeed changed hands at some point afterwards, which was proof that Elder Yun Nie had lived past the fall of Regal Pill Palace. The elder had also definitely been the one to disclose the recipe for the pill. Since they hadn't killed the elder then, he would have made a most valuable slave considering his identity and prior position. There was no reason for the imperial family of the Great Scarlet Mid Region to kill the elder. But even if they had killed the elder, why had the unassuming Mu Gaoqi disappeared as well?

Not seeing Elder Yun Nie and Mu Gaoqi dampened Jiang Chen's mood. To tell the truth, he had barely any emotional attachment to the others that he'd rescued aside from his personal guards. He only knew them because they were from the same sect. His main motivation to defy all the odds had been to come to the rescue of those closest to him, Palace Head Dan Chi, Elder Yun Nie, Mu Gaoqi, and the Lin sisters. They were the only ones dear to him at Regal Pill Palace. Lin Bi'er had gotten separated from them at the Palace, and her whereabouts were still unknown. Lin Hui'er was with her father, so she should be safe.

Aware that Mu Gaoqi and Jiang Chen were the best of friends, Huang'er understood the latter's anguish upon discovering Mu Gaoqi to be still missing. "Sir Jiang, it is said that man can only propose, but it is heaven who disposes. You gave it your all. Don't blame yourself too much," Huang'er gently encouraged him. With her recent deeper understanding of Jiang Chen, she knew that he was the kind of person to carry a large burden in his heart. In particular, she was concerned with the self-guilt that he would inevitably feel.

Huang'er's words of encouragement cheered Jiang Chen up quite a bit. However, the masses of unseeing zombie-like figures in front of him, deprived of senses and life, was still a major headache. Though it wasn't particularly sophisticated work, the seals on their bodies ensured that their lives lay in the hands of their sealer. Like a puppetmaster, he decided their life and death with a single thought. If Jiang Chen couldn't disable all the seals all at once, he would alert the controller and every slave would die instantly. This was Jiang Chen's most pressing concern.

Seeing Jiang Chen deep in thought over a fresh predicament, Huang'er wanted to share his burden. "Sir Jiang, I once heard Elder Shun mention something about sealing qi oceans."

"Oh? What did Elder Shun say?" Since he'd been dwelling on the same subject, Jiang Chen was curious what the elder's thoughts had been.

"He said that when he was young, he saw something similar happen during a conflict he'd witnessed. Members of one sect had been captured by their rival, and their qi oceans sealed away. They were rescued by their peers soon afterwards, but the seals on their bodies couldn't be removed. If the seals were touched, the enemy could activate the seals to kill them..."

"What happened after?" Her words moved Jiang Chen.

"Elder Shun said that they were eventually all saved. Their peers asked a formations master to set up a formation that was filled with attacks, each tailored for each seal. Activation the formation caused all the forces within the formation to assail the seals all at once, breaking them all in a single instant. From Elder Shun's description, the formation has two particularly difficult requirements. First, each sealed individual needs to have their own force, tailored to the seal on the body. As such, you need as many attacking forces as you do people. Second, the strike on the seal must be extremely quick. If every seal isn't broken in the span of a breath or two, it would give the sealer the opportunity to kill every sealed individual."

"So you're saying the formation was successful?" Jiang Chen's heart was shaken. This was a new line of thinking that hadn't occurred to him. Thus far, Jiang Chen's head had been filled with mush, and he really hadn't thought of the idea. Huang'er's reminder gave him a burst of inspiration.

"Yes, Elder Shun said that was the case. The matter left a deep impression upon him. The method of sealing he saw was a lot more complex than this, and the difficulty of removal understandably higher," Huang'er looked at Jiang Chen reassuringly.

"Alright, since they managed to pull it off, there must be a way for us to do the same," Jiang Chen slapped his thigh. There were many ways to remove seals in Jiang Chen's memories. He had no shortage of formations either. He was no stranger to working with either ingredient.

"Sir Jiang, let Huang'er help you."

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In a secret room in the central area within House Wei, a particularly detailed discussion was taking place between the Wei father and son.

"Jie'er, is that Jiang Chen really as miraculous as you say?" The current master of House Wei was Wei Tianxiao, Wei Jie's father.

"Father, you know that I have a good eye for judging people. There is no way that I've made a mistake this time. He is a young man from the Myriad Domain, but he's able to run circles around both Eternal Celestial Capital and the Ninesuns Sky Sect. The meteoric rise of such a genius cannot be stopped." Wei Jie's tone was filled with confidence.

Wei Tianxiao gave his son a look of commendation. Truthfully, his son often exceeded his expectations.

"Mm. As always, I do not doubt your foresight and discernment. From your description of him, this Jiang Chen has pill dao talent that rivals a typical mid-level pill king. That alone makes it worthwhile for House Wei to maintain a good relationship with him. Additionally, it is also good news for us that he has fallen out with House Sikou. After all, the enemy of our enemy is our friend."

"There is wisdom in your words, father. However, what are your plans for the trouble within our house's walls? If there is no quick resolution, I fear endless trouble will follow."

A bright glint flashed across Wei Tianxiao's eyes. He responded in a solemn voice, "Hmph, that traitor Wei Tianshu, how would I not know about his wolfish nature? Since he dared to raise a hand against you, Jie'er, there is no reason for me to tolerate him any longer! When the right time comes, I shall

eradicate that pest with one fell swoop." Turning to look at his son again, Wei Tianxiao exhorted, "Jie'er, if this is the choice you've made, you should nurture your relationship with Jiang Chen carefully now. If he happens to prosper one day, you will have gained an important contact."

"I understand," Wei Jie nodded.

"Keep yourself safe, and do not let anyone from House Sikou have the chance to implicate or attack us," Wei Tianxiao advised.

"Yes, I will treat the matter with care."

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In stark contrast from the Wei family's intimate conversation between father and son, House Sikou was filled with great dejection. The family had lost great face due to recent events. That a robbery would happen to a name as eminent as House Sikou and a store as time-honored as the Myriad Puppets Pavilion was inconceivable. The simplicity of the crime was almost shameful. What had been lost was not only two thousand slaves, but also House Sikou's golden reputation.

"Nan'er, do you have any news?" Sikou Yuan, the master of House Sikou, asked his son.

Sikou Nan shook his head sadly even as he gritted his teeth. "Father, there is no news for the moment. But, even if I need to turn the city upside down, I will find the bastard responsible for this. Stealing from House Sikou is nothing short of intentionally walking into a lion's den. They must pay the price for such folly!" He thumped his chest.

"Perhaps someone from House Wei is causing us trouble?" For Sikou Yuan, the family's old rival was the first thing that came to mind.

"I suspected the same. I have already dispatched men to monitor the activities of House Wei closely. If that really is the case, it won't take long to find evidence." Sikou Nan scowled darkly. "Only a few hours before our store was robbed, their young master Wei Jie arrived at Fish and Dragon District to visit Lin Ming's store."

"Did you question Lin Ming about it?" Sikou Yuan inquired in a low voice.

"I did. There was nothing out of the ordinary during his time at Lin Ming's. Even Lin Ming himself could not make heads or tails of it. I think it is likely that he was only a decoy, meant to mislead us into suspecting Lin Ming." Clearly, Sikou Nan didn't believe that the likes of Lin Ming would have the audacity to oppose his house.

Sikou Yuan frowned. "Each slave bears our unique mark. They would be totally useless without your unsealing commands. Have you tried tracking the signatures on your seals?"

Sikou Nan answered with a wry smile. "How would I have not? Our adversary seems be very wily, and the seals are cloaked from detection. There is no way for me to detect the seals unless they are directly tampered with. Otherwise, I have no way of even knowing if the slaves are still alive."

"Cloaked? That's not something an ordinary person could manage. This unknown person is extraordinarily capable. But, seizing two thousand slaves in a single sweep is in and of itself testament to that. Nan'er, you cannot take this matter lightly."

"Father, please be at ease," Sikou Nan let out a harrumph. "Without my release commands, the goods are totally rubbish. If they truly cannot be found, I can crush the unsealing talismans to activate the self-detonating mechanisms. Then, that would put an end to this." Sikou Nan was unnerved and in a rush.

Sikou Yuan shook his head, "Search thoroughly first. That choice must only come as a last resort. The slave business is our house's primary source of income. It would be a crippling blow to our finances to abandon that batch of goods. It may even affect our day-to-day operations."

The batch in question was valued at two to three billion. The actual cost of the goods had been far lower than that, but given the breadth of the family's business activities, losing a shipment of goods was not as simple as deducting their inventory price. The loss of potential profits also had to be taken into account.

PS. There will be some celebratory releases today in honor of volareversary, volare is two years old! I will also be doing a live reading of my new novel, Phoenix Ascending, at 10am GMT+8! That's 9pm US EST 12/14, so please tune into the volare Discord then~ The new novel will launch this weekend!

### Chapter 733: Gouyu Awakens

House Sikou wouldn't choose the path of mutual destruction unless it was the only choice they had left, and on a certain level, it gave Jiang Chen some freedom to prepare. With the memories of his past life, Jiang Chen had an extremely stable foundation in formations. As such, laying down a formation wasn't a problem for him. The crux of his problem lay in making each strike true. Given that he could only spare one attack for a seal, it was imperative to make the strike count. If he were to fail and alert the sealer to what he was doing, he would be in grave trouble. If in the worst case scenario, the sealer was alerted and flew into a rage, he could very well fly into a rage and kill all the slaves. Then, Jiang Chen's failure would become an unredeemable failure in his heart. As such, Jiang Chen would not attempt anything until he was sufficiently assured of success. Time passed by day by day. Seven days later, Jiang Chen finally performed his last modification of the formation, according to the results of his experiments and deductions. This newly modified formation seemed even more precise and thorough than before, thanks to the Crimson Heaven formation flag.

"Everyone, this is the best I can do. Failure or success, I hope you don't blame me," Jiang Chen closed his eyes to offer a silent plea to his sect members. He had truly done everything he could up to this point. He had devised a method to create sixty four clumps of energy that would be held by the formation. Once the formation was activated, all the knots of energy would come alive at the same time. Fifty four of those clumps were meant for his sect members from the Regal Pill Palace, whereas the remaining ten was assigned to ten relatively strong cultivators. They were all at least earth sage realm cultivators, and some even sky sage realm cultivators. "Miss Huang, I will be starting now."

At the center of the formation, Jiang Chen nodded at Huang'er standing outside and began activating the formation. The formation slowly rumbled to life as sixty four rays of light flew towards the people inside the formation like meteors. After the flashes of light started to dissipate, countless formation glyphs crawled through the surrounding space like newly born tadpoles.

Wham! The light entered the people's qi oceans.



"Everything depends on this!" Jiang Chen gritted his teeth and started to make rapid hand seals. The light kept growing thicker and stronger with each seal. Every slave was gradually enveloped by the light; Jiang Chen could make out everyone's qi oceans as clouds of nebula. Each qi ocean seemed to be entrapped by spiderwebs of restrictions. Those were the seals outside their qi oceans!

"Break, break I say!" Jiang Chen growled as he urged the formation to its full power. The light slammed into the seals surrounding everyone's qi oceans, causing illusory sparks to scatter into the air. Bzzt!

The ear-piercing noise continued for a moment.

One breath, two breaths... It had only been three breaths of time, but it felt as long as an eternity.

Crackcrackcrack...

No sound would've sounded sweeter to Jiang Chen's ears as cracking sounds marked the moment the restrictions around the slaves started to crumble. With a sound like torn sheet metal, all the seals completely disintegrated! Jiang Chen let the formation dim, and shut down. His forehead was covered in sweat, but his eyes were shining with delighted pleasure. "It worked!"

Outside the formation, Huang'er was also wearing a look of joy as she stepped quickly into the formation and asked, a tad concerned, "How are you feeling, Sir Jiang?"

"It's nothing. I'm just a little tired because this formation used up too much energy. It won't affect my core," Jiang Chen scanned himself briefly and found nothing wrong other than a little over-expenditure of consciousness. This formation was extremely sophisticated and exhausting. It really wasn't something that a mortal sage realm cultivator should be able to control. In fact, a sage realm cultivator simply didn't possess the qualifications to control this formation. If Jiang Chen hadn't possessed exceptional advantages in every aspect of his cultivations, he wouldn't have been able to utilize this formation.

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The moment the formation broke through the seal, Sikou Nan was abruptly jolted out of his meditation far, far away at House Sikou. His command seals had all disintegrated on their own! It was the middle of the night, and he'd just been about to enter a meditative state. Unfortunately, it'd also given Jiang Chen the opportunity to break the seals without Sikou Nan noticing. By the time Sikou Nan realized what was happening, his command seals had already been shattered to bits. He took out their corresponding tokens, but noted that they too had all been reduced to fragments. When his consciousness swept through his tokens, he noticed that a total of sixty-four tokens had been broken. Sikou Nan's expression changed greatly as he swore non-stop, "Damn it! Damn it!"

He knew that the destruction of these tokens meant that all sixty-four seals had been destroyed. Moreover, the method his enemy had used to crack these seals was extraordinary! His enemy's timing and cracking method were absolutely top notch. He hadn't the slightest chance to react.

"Who is it? Who is it?!" Right now, Sikou Nan's feelings were utterly messy. Despite the fact that it was midnight right now, he ran straight to his father's doorsteps.

Sikou Yuan was also shocked when he heard the news. Father and son exchanged looks with each other as they stared at the shattered remains of the tokens. Their fear and anger battled each other relentlessly inside, but they had no place to vent. They weren't afraid of enemies who would come after,

but an enemy who they didn't even know felt far more threatening. At least, looking at the results in front of their eyes, it was obvious that this person wasn't the type they could get away with underestimating. Even Sikou Yuan himself couldn't break through sixty-four seals all at once in just a few breaths of time.

"Nan'er, has the Million Puppets Pavilion offended anyone as of late?" Sikou Yuan sounded a bit conflicted.

Sikou Nan answered almost absentmindedly as he kept staring down, "We're businessmen who seek profit. Why would we offend someone for no particular reason? Plus, there aren't any amazing customers who have showed up as of late."

"Was there anyone of great influence amongst our goods this time?" Sikou Yuan asked again.

Sikou Nan thought for a moment and shook his head, "There really isn't anyone on the Divine Abyss Continent that could be considered as a person of great power to Veluriyam Capital. Our sources as of late have been pretty clean too. They all came from those middle and lower regions. Not a single one came from the Upper Eight Regions."

"Are there any foreign races involved in our trade?" Sikou Yuan asked again.

"Father, I am not an idiot. The Million Puppets Pavilion only works with the human trafficking trade, never other races."

Sikou Yuan nodded, "This is strange then. The fact that this robber could instantly crack sixty four seals in an instant means that his strength is terrifying. This person... could it be that they cultivate some sort of evil art that uses cultivators as cultivation furnaces?"

"Father, why do I get the feeling that House Wei probably has something to do with this?" Sikou Nan said sullenly.

"House Wei?" Sikou Yuan shook his head, "House Wei themselves are in a complete mess right now, not to mention that I know very well what level they're at. There's no way they could unlock sixty four seals at once in just a couple of breaths of time. Even in the Veluriyam Capital, only those who belong to those top forces are capable of something like this."

Sikou Nan was feeling very dejected. He dearly wished that this was done by House Wei so he could at least have the pleasure of wiping the ground with them. It was at least better than knowing nothing right now.

"Father, I'm afraid that this person will unseal the slaves one after another now that they've had their first success. If that happens, then all our slaves would become his in just half a month's time." The fact that their seals were broken meant that these slaves were no longer under House Sikou's control.

"Can we check where these unsealed slaves came from?" Sikou Yuan asked again.

Sikou Nan shook his head with dejection, "Our sources have plentiful as of late, and since they're numbered based on cultivation and potential, they cannot be differentiated at all once they've been grouped together. Moreover, we never pay attention to where our goods come from unless their identities are unusually sensitive."

If they couldn't figure out the source, then they wouldn't be able to investigate the identity of the culprit using that lead. Therefore, that line of investigation was a dead end. Sikou Yuan let out a long sigh, "Just who has a bone to pick with House Sikou?"

Ferocity flashed through Sikou Nan's eyes, "Father, in my opinion, it is best if we just bear the losses and kill off the remaining slaves. If we can't get them back, then we will at least make sure that that robber gets nothing in return." It was the second time Sikou Nan had brought up this suggestion.

Sikou Yuan was still hesitant to accept that choice. It was a final choice that he didn't want to make unless he had no other choice, because it gained them nothing except embarrassing their opponent. Moreover, Sikou Yuan was still hoping that they could somehow regain these slaves. It was just too wasteful to kill all of them just like that. In addition, this method of mutual annihilation might provoke this hidden enemy into anger. They might end up taking revenge because of this.

Sikou Yuan was old and wise, and he didn't wish to unknowingly make such a big enemy for House Sikou. "Nan'er, if this really is the act of those deviant cultivators wanting to use our slaves' physical bodies to practice their cultivation, then he will only do worse if we destroy these slaves. If this person turns vicious and causes trouble to the family from the shadows, it will become a rather troublesome issue. We may not fear them, but there's no denying the fact that it'd be an annoyance."

"Hmph, are you saying that we should endure such a huge loss and do nothing about it? Not only that, we even have to consider the robber's feelings?" Sikou Nan was ultimately in the prime of youth. He couldn't accept this conclusion at all.

"Nan'er, we must look at the bigger picture. We must not do this unless we are pushed to the cliff's edge."

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Inside the secret room, Jiang Chen had to meditate for a full day as he slowly healed his consciousness. Although the seals on those now freed slaves had been destroyed, their senses were still sealed away. They wouldn't be able to return to the person they'd been before unless these particular seals were eliminated too. However, these particular seals were not explicitly controlled by House Sikou. Therefore, their safety was no longer a concern. Moreover, unlocking the seals on their senses was a lot easier compared to unlocking the seals on their qi oceans.

When Jiang Chen had recovered, the first thing he did was to unlock the seals on Gouyu, Xue Tong and a few others. These five bodyguards had followed him all the way since the Eastern Kingdom, and their loyalty had never wavered during the whole ride. The five of them slowly regained their consciousness after their senses were unlocked. Gouyu was the strongest out of all of them, and she was also the first to open her eyes slowly.

When she saw what was before her, she thought that her eyes were blurry or she was experiencing an hallucination. She even blinked a couple of times as she alternated glances between Jiang Chen and Huang'er. "Young master, am I... dreaming?" Gouyu felt like crying. Even with her unyielding temperament, she couldn't help but feel the agitation that came after being granted a new lease on life.

"Gouyu, I'm sorry I didn't manage to save you all earlier," Jiang Chen sighed.

Huang'er's eyes had also reddened a little, "Big sister Gouyu, Sir Jiang has walked over countless miles and gone through innumerable obstacles to come to Veluriyam Capital. Thankfully his efforts were ultimately not wasted, and all of you are fine. You are safe now."

Gouyu stared at Huang'er, but wore an expression of blank puzzlement on her face, "You... are you little sister Huang'er?" Other than her clear and bright eyes, Gouyu wasn't able to connect this exquisitely beautiful girl to the Huang'er she knew back then at all.

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#### Chapter 734: Intra-Sect Friendship

After Gouyu came to, Xue Tong and the others also woke up one after another. Jiang Chen wasn't in a rush to unseal the senses of the others from the Regal Pill Palace. These particular people were those of his inner circle. After parting ways for almost a whole year, they had too many things to say to each other. If he were to unseal everyone else's senses now, it would sour the atmosphere instead. Just like Gouyu, everyone was surprised to see Huang'er's true appearance. They'd never imagined that the ugly-looking Miss Huang'er was in reality an outstanding beauty. There was nothing wrong in calling her a goddess who had descended to earth. Even Gouyu, for all her competitiveness, was completely convinced by Huang'er's temperament and beauty and felt no resistance towards her whatsoever. She naturally came to the firm opinion that Miss Huang'er was the most perfect match for the young master.

Of course, there were psychological reasons behind her acceptance. Back in the Regal Pill Palace, Gouyu had been close enough with Huang'er to be called sisters. Even before this revelation, Huang'er's behavior, temperament and grace had already won over those in Jiang Chen's circle. Now that Huang'er had revealed her true countenance, not only did they feel not repelled by it, they even thought of it as the way it was supposed to be. It was only right that Huang'er's natural and unrestrained manners, amiable and approachable temper, and extraordinary qualities were complemented with an equally unrivalled beauty. Everyone's voices grew thick with emotion as they described their experience.

"Young master, countless experts descended on the Regal Pill Palace back then, and the great formation didn't even last an hour under their attacks. All of the sect experts who'd sustained the formation were slaughtered to the last in just an hour's time. At that time, Elder Yun Nie had come to Rosy Valley to gather up the geniuses and retreat, but we recalled the young master's instructions and chose not to escape. Instead, we convinced Elder Yun Nie to hide with several dozen others inside the formation. To its credit, at first, they weren't able to break through the formation at all. But later, an even more powerful emperor realm cultivator appeared and joined hands with several other emperor realm cultivators to attack the formation in unison. Only then did they finally managed to break through the formation. As a result, all of us became captives..." Gouyu talked about that day in great detail. The sheer desperation of that battle was so vivid in her story that they felt as if they truly were present then. "Young master, those people had originally wanted to kill us all. However, it sounded like they spared us because they wanted to interrogate us about a certain pill recipe. At first, Elder Yun Nie refused to submit even in the face of death and said not a word. However, the enemy began to kill a Regal Pill

Palace disciple for every question that went unanswered. After killing a dozen or so people, they hauled Mu Gaoqi in front of Elder Yun Nie... and..." Gouyu cast a glance at Jiang Chen, looking a bit hesitant as to whether she should continue.

Jiang Chen waved his hands and said, "Continue."

"If Elder Yun Nie still refused to speak, then Mu Gaoqi would be slaughtered too. Therefore, Elder Yun Nie finally revealed the pill recipe. Young master, if it wasn't for the pill recipe, we might have been killed outright by the enemy already. Those people were extremely savage, and they'd never planned to leave anyone alive at all. In fact, they were going to execute us on the spot after obtaining the pill recipe. However, someone brought up the fact that they had a group of slavers at their place, and they could sell us to them and earn quite a lot of spirit stones..."

Gouyu didn't know from beginning to end who had destroyed the Regal Pill Palace or taken them captive. They naturally didn't know where they'd been sold to either.

Jiang Chen more or less understood the entire situation after Gouyu had finished her tale. He actually felt relieved after hearing her story. He had to admit to feeling a bit of hesitation when he discovered that the Longevity Pill recipe had fallen into the hands of the Eternal Celestial Capital. Although he didn't believe that Elder Yun Nie was a coward, it was a fact that he'd leaked the Longevity Pill recipe. Now that he learned that Elder Yun Nie had done it to save Mu Gaoqi, the last bit of suppressed emotion clogging up Jiang Chen's heart had vanished completely.

Xue Tong asked, "Young master, who on earth did the Regal Pill Palace provoke? Was it the Ninesuns Sky Sect?"

"The Ninesuns Sky Sect was indeed involved in this matter, but the main culprits are the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region. The Eternal Celestial Capital was the mastermind, and the Great Scarlet Mid Region acted as the butcher's knife. Moreover, the Regal Pill Palace was not the only victim of this incident. The entire Myriad Domain and in fact almost every sect, regardless of their size, have been eliminated."

"What?" Gouyu and everyone else was greatly shocked by this news, especially Gouyu, "What... what about the sixteen kingdoms alliance?" The sixteen kingdoms alliance might be a small place, but it was still their home.

"There is no news from the sixteen kingdoms alliance, but I notified the Precious Tree Sect about something like this a long time ago. They should have put some countermeasures in place. As for the secular kingdoms, they never even entered these forces' eyes. No matter how idle those bastards are, they wouldn't eliminate the lowest of kingdoms," Jiang Chen explained. He knew that Gouyu was worried for the Eastern Kingdom. It was her home after all, and the place where her relatives lived. To a sect, a secular kingdom was like an ant beneath an elephant's foot. It was doubtful that they would even see it, much less bother to eliminate it.

If a sect had rooted out and razed even a place like that, then they would literally draw ire from all sides. The cultivation world had its own unspoken rules. If they had really gone to bully a tiny ant, then even the heavenly laws wouldn't be able to tolerate such a despicable action, much less societal customs.

"Young master, how did you find us?" Wen Ziqi was naturally shy, and hadn't spoken a word till now.

The answer to this question however, would be quite lengthy. Jiang Chen smiled easily, "It's a long story. I'll tell you guys about it in the future."

Contrary to expectations, Huang'er actually smiled and spoke up, "Your young master is acting humble. Please allow me to tell you this story."

Huang'er wasn't a talkative person, but she'd experienced firsthand Jiang Chen's innumerable efforts during this trip and the terrible hardships he'd undergone to save his people. It was not a story she wanted to go untold.

She started from the Myriad Grand Ceremony and described everything that had happened up until their rescue. The story greatly stunned and moved everyone. The young master had traveled over several million kilometers into the Upper Eight Regions, braving innumerable obstacles and dangers, all to save them from disaster. How could they not be moved by this act? If the young master hadn't been strong enough, or if the young master had been any later, they would've been sold off as slaves already. If that happened, then not even the young master with all his power would have been able to find them again. Everyone was touched and grateful for their good fortune when their thoughts reached that point. They knew very well what kind of life a slave faced.

When they thought of the amount of opponents Jiang Chen had obliterated along the way, they couldn't help but feel the pleasure of vengeance suffuse them. Although they hadn't taken revenge personally, they all felt their blood boiling as they listened to Huang'er's narration. No matter how fierce or terrifying their opponents were, they were never able to escape their young master's grasp. In fact, their young master had even killed dozens of emperor realm cultivators! It was only now that they realized just how incredible and wonderful their young master was!

"You may keep this in your heart, but please don't tell the other Regal Pill Palace disciples about this. Although we are at Veluriyam Capital now, the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region won't give up just like that. The Ninesuns Sky Sect is also waiting for an opportunity to jump into the fray. That's why we absolutely cannot let our guard down!" Jiang Chen reminded them.

They all nodded, "You're right, young master. We've become your burden once, and we mustn't drag you down a second time."

"Mm. We won't be able to leave Veluriyam Capital for now. Here at least, those forces wouldn't dare to act wantonly. We may very well be hunted down again the moment we leave."

"We obey your orders, young master."

"Yeah, we'll do as you say, young master."

Jiang Chen nodded as the crowd stared at him. He had in fact formed this plan long before today.

"We'll be living in Veluriyam Capital for the foreseeable future. However, we'll have to change some of our identities. The Regal Pill Palace will become a thing of the past until we can fully guarantee our own safety. No matter what, our identities are our greatest secret. I'll think of a way to help you all settle in," Jiang Chen cast another glance at the unconscious fellow sect disciples. "I'll have to arrange these people properly as well. If any one of them is exposed, we will all fall prey to disaster."

Huang'er also remarked, "Considering the number of people involved, this will need proper planning. Sir Jiang, in my opinion, it'll be best if we build a force of our own in Veluriyam Capital. If people are relocated into someone else's domain, it's only a matter of time before they're exposed." It was a certainty that they would be interrogated and investigated if they were to live under someone else's roof. As a result, it was very likely that their real identities would be exposed. If they had their own force, then they would have their own territory and no fear of investigation.

Jiang Chen pondered for a moment and said, "I've given it some thought. We will definitely draw a lot of attention if we were to establish a sect in Veluriyam Capital. I personally think that there's no need for us to do that. If we must build a force, then we should establish a business group or operate a store. That'd be the safest method."

It was quite normal for a sizable store to accommodate several dozens of people. It'd also be much easier to make arrangements for these people and hide their identities.

"Mm, that's a good idea," Huang'er nodded in full agreement. Gouyu and the others naturally had no opinions regarding this matter. Right now, they only wanted to avoid becoming Jiang Chen's burden and dragging him down. They wouldn't mind whatever Jiang Chen planned to arrange them. Seeing that no one else had an opinion to offer, Jiang Chen cast a glance at his other sect mates, "Let's wake these people up. They are our sect mates, and I hope that they wouldn't act stupidly."

If he were to be frank, he hadn't stayed at the Regal Pill Palace for long enough to form connections with these people. He had no real feelings for the others, and the only reason he even bothered to care, arrange and rescue these people was his principles and morality. Their rescue was for Palace Head Dan Chi's sake and as a member of the Regal Pill Palace. If these people chose to act stupidly and disobey his arrangements, then he would have no qualms in employing a more forceful method.

As their senses were unsealed, the Regal Pill Palace disciples slowly awakened from their slumber. Everyone's first reaction when they fully woke was that they were dreaming. Some of them even thought they were dead already. More or less, their reactions were similar across the board.

Jiang Chen didn't speak up immediately. He waited until they had calmed down a little before speaking to Shen Trifire, "Shen Trifire, do you still remember me?"

Shen Trifire was one of the top geniuses in Regal Pill Palace. He was steady and had a clearer mind than most. "Senior brother Jiang, were you the one who saved us?"

Shen Trifire was very smart, and had placed himself in a very good position. Although he was quite a bit older than Jiang Chen, and had entered the Regal Pill Palace much earlier, he still addressed Jiang Chen as his senior brother. This way of addressing was rather quick thinking on his part. If he were to call Jiang Chen junior brother Jiang, he would sound too arrogant and full of it. But if he were to call Jiang Chen brother Jiang, he would sound a little too distant and fail in displaying the relationship between sect members. Right now, Shen Trifire knew better than anyone just how important this relationship was.

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## Chapter 735: Group Acceptance

"Senior brother Shen, we would have all been condemned to eternal servitude if not for our young master. We would have no opportunity to resist or rebel, only endless suffering and shame," Xue Tong spoke up. Unlike the other sect members who had been executed or slain in the conflict, these people had been able to hide away in Jiang Chen's residence. Thus, they dared not show disregard for these members of his personal guard.

"Brother Xue, what's going on? Can you talk about it in detail? Who is this enemy of the Regal Pill Palace? Is the sect alright?" Shen Trifire asked.

Xue Tong didn't hide the specifics from them. He gave a comprehensive account of events, omitting only the things Jiang Chen had instructed him to. All of the disciples were shocked, their faces gone bloodless. The sect had been shattered! Almost no living members of the sect remained aside from themselves. Palace Head Dan Chi was nowhere to be found!

The Regal Pill Palace wasn't alone in this predicament. The entire Myriad Domain was in shambles. All of its sects had been attacked, regardless of size, and it had been almost a total rout. In other words, they were all now as homeless as unburied ghouls, with no news of whether their sect head was even still alive. A collective feeling of bleakness entered their hearts. Many of them couldn't help but show their despair on their faces. That they were still alive was the only thing they could be thankful for. They were certainly a hundred times luckier than the others who had died.

After hearing this weighty news, Shen Trifire also sank into a long silence. This news was unbearable regardless of one's mental fortitude, and he was no exception. The sect ruined, their elders cut down, their comrades vanquished, and the sect head's fate still unknown. Though they weren't technically wandering cultivators, was there even a difference anymore? They didn't even enjoy the latter's freedom. If their enemies knew that they lived and still walked free, that would be the day of their doom.

Shen Trifire was the first to shake off his miserable mood, and moved his gaze to Jiang Chen. A moment of clarity flashed within Shen Trifire's mind. That's right! The Palace wasn't completely destitute; it still had Jiang Chen! When the Myriad Domain was surrounded and overwhelmed, Jiang Chen had been able to escape. Returning after the sect had fallen, Jiang Chen had then escaped encirclement a second time! It was Jiang Chen who had crossed several million kilometers to rescue them from their sad fate of enslavement, navigating the Eternal Celestial Capital's innumerable obstacles in the process. Was a comrade like this unfit to be relied on?

An idea came to Shen Trifire, and he stood up, raising a cupped fist salute to Jiang Chen. "Senior brother Jiang, our sect is fragmented. Only you are able to lead us now. Shen Trifire is at your absolute command. My only desire is that one day, we may be able to revive our sect, and take vengeance upon our foes!" n/-D--V//E(/L-(ℓ-.l).n

The other sect members were startled by Shen Trifire's words. However, they soon realized that without Jiang Chen's protection, they would have nowhere to go. Stay in Veluriyam Capital? On whose



authority? Even Shen Trifire hadn't entered the sage realm, having only attained the eighth level origin realm. Someone with that level of strength would only be considered third or fourth-rate here. Even if they joined another faction, they would still receive no respect. After all, they hadn't been counted among the top tier even in the Regal Pill Palace. Aside from Shen Trifire, the rest were only second-rate existences in the sect. As for those considered first-rate, some had died, and still others had fled. Almost none remained except Ling Bi'er.

"What do you think, Rong Zifeng?" Shen Trifire glanced at the man. Rong Zifeng was the furthest ahead in cultivation among the rest, and certainly wanted to side with Jiang Chen. But, he had quarrelled with Jiang Chen when he was still under Shen Qinghong's authority, and had even fought each other. His perspective was different from Shen Trifire's.

Rong Zifeng was embarrassed by Shen Trifire's question, and he looked at Jiang Chen with some difficulty. In his heart, he had already submitted to Jiang Chen. Like everyone else, he was no fool. Jiang Chen had saved his life, and Shen Qinghong had reconciled with Jiang Chen much earlier as well. There was no need for Rong Zifeng to play the role of an apostate. In a time like this, did he really have a choice?

"Senior brother Jiang, I have much offended you in the past. Only after this catastrophe did I come to see your magnanimity. You have my utmost respect. As long as you don't consider me too weak, I am willing to follow you in your efforts to re-establish our sect!"

"I, too, am willing to follow senior brother Jiang Chen," Ouyang Chao stood as well. He had competed against Jiang Chen for the quota of Rosy Valley's sovereign area, and his grandfather Ouyang De had been an elder of the Herbal Hall. They'd all had some bad blood with Jiang Chen as well. But, these past disagreements were no longer important.

"We will all follow senior brother Jiang Chen, and contribute to re-establishing the sect!" Following Shen Trifire and Rong Zifeng's lead, the others declared their allegiances as well.

Jiang Chen didn't doubt their loyalty to the sect. Though there may have been disagreements between individual disciples of the Regal Pill Palace, they all felt a strong sense of belonging when it came to the sect. Otherwise, the invasion wouldn't have claimed so many in casualties.

Jiang Chen had expected a few to be contrarian, so things had gone smoother than he'd anticipated—though that was no surprise either after he took a moment to consider. A great calamity had just befallen the sect; only someone with brain damage could remain oblivious to that. Furthermore, it was abundantly clear that only in unity was there even a chance of a ray of hope. After all I've done for them, there's no reason for them to spurn my protection.

Having thought things through, Jiang Chen nodded with a serious expression. "I don't doubt the loyalty of anyone to the sect here. But I'll be upfront and frank. Sink or swim, we must stand together. If something bad happens to one of us, the rest will surely suffer as well. The tiny prospect we have for rebuilding the sect can be snuffed out like a candle in a hurricane. So, I hope that certain habits from back home will not be carried over here. You are all comrades, with only each other to rely on. There should be no disputes over feelings, or any petty tricks. Our most important goal is to keep on living!"

"Senior brother Jiang is right. Politics and intrigue can no longer be tolerated. Selfishness will only hurt us all!" Shen Trifire agreed loudly. "Think about it carefully, everyone. Don't be that rotten apple in our barrel."

"That's right, with the way things are now, anyone that acts up is no better than a criminal to the sect!" Everyone present murmured various affirmations. Finally, it was unanimously agreed that they would defer to senior brother Jiang Chen in all things. He didn't particularly shy away from the responsibility either. He might have been able to ignore these people when they weren't in front of his eyes, but he'd rescued them already. There was no way he could leave them alone. Though it was more convenience rather than intent that had precipitated his rescue of these people, he couldn't just leave them in the lurch, nor could he just let fate take its course with them after rescuing them. For good or for ill, they were once his fellow disciples.

"Since you hold me in such high regard, it is natural that I arrange a future for you here in Veluriyam Capital. My only wish is that our past shame will forge future bravery. Though it may take a hundred, or even a thousand years, I hope that one among you may rise up with unrivalled strength to avenge our sect and rebuild the sect." After experiencing such adversity, Jiang Chen doubted that they lacked the motivation.

There was a flurry of head bobbing. "That's right, there is something else. Were Elder Yun Nie and Mu Gaoqi with you on that day?" Jiang Chen asked again, quite suddenly. He was deeply concerned with the duo's disappearance.

"Yes, we were together, and we were sold here together too. Our senses were sealed away upon arrival, so we don't know anything after that."

"That's right, everyone was together before we were sealed."

"I was near senior brother Mu Gaoqi at the time, and I think I heard them mutter something about an innate wood constitution, and whether they should put a price on him for separate sale, or something ..." one of the fellow disciples said.

"Are you sure?" Hearing that made Jiang Chen very excited.

"Yes, I definitely heard those mumblings back then, but I don't know anything after that because my senses were then immediately sealed."

There can be no mistake if he heard that! So, it was quite likely that Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie had been labeled for separate sale, or had even gone unpriced. No matter what, if those assumptions were true, they should still be safe. Jiang Chen knew in his heart that it was unlikely that the Regal Pill Palace could be rebuilt just by rescuing these people alone. In fact, the possibility was still quite slim. But, if they could rescue Mu Gaoqi, the future hope of rebuilding the Regal Pill Palace would rise by more than ninety percent. The high-order innate wood constitution that Mu Gaoqi possessed was definitely something capable of altering the prospects of their sect in the next thousand years.

Once Mu Gaoqi was rescued and given a few decades or a century to develop, he would definitely have the ability to rebuild the Regal Pill Palace! It was too bad that he hadn't been able to rescue the person he wanted to the most. Among the youth of the sect, with the exception of the Ling sisters, Mu Gaoqi was definitely the closest to Jiang Chen. Jiang Chen saw him as something of a younger brother. At the

same time, he was the one Jiang Chen was most optimistic about. If Jiang Chen was asked who would be the most likely to rebuild Regal Pill Palace in the future, he would answer Mu Gaoqi first, then Ling Bi'er. As for Shen Trifire and Rong Zifeng, neither of them were cut from that cloth. At most, they would make good advisors, but they lacked that intrinsic ability to turn back a tide.

"Alright, you will all be very safe here. For the next few days, I will ask Miss Huang'er to teach you a few ways to change your appearance. From this day forward, you must adopt different identities. When the time comes, I will open a pill store here in Veluriyam Capital, and openly recruit staff from the public. Then, you can come join me as wandering cultivators. That way, your new identities will be legalized and transparent."

Everyone was reassured by Jiang Chen's preparations. Now that everything was taken care of on that front, Jiang Chen turned his attention to the remaining ten slaves. They had been unsealed with the group shortly prior, and even the weakest among them was earth sage realm. Jiang Chen had plans to put them to good use. As their savior, he had an obligation to extract at least some value from them.

*Happy volareversary, volare is two years old! Click through to the official announcement post for pictures of volare staff, WW staff, and yours truly! I did a heart pounding live reading of my new novel, Phoenix Ascending, those battle scenes! The new novel will launch this weekend!*

#### Chapter 736: Ten Sage Realm Cultivators Submit

His mind made up, Jiang Chen messed around a little in each consciousness before unsealing their senses.

"Who ... who are you?"

"Where am I?"

"Am I dead?" Awakening one by one, the dazed people blurted out questions in rapid succession. Jiang Chen had already sent his fellow sect members to another floor of the hideout. Besides the yet sealed slaves beneath them, only he and these ten remained. A faint smile on his face, he waited for them to sort out their thoughts rather than answering straightaway. Though he didn't know their pasts, it was unrealistic to expect instant submission from sage realm cultivators.

However, he did not plan to actively persuade them either. It was better for them to come to their own conclusions about the situation rather than expending needless effort. A few more moments passed before the ten sorted out their thoughts. When they looked at Jiang Chen again, their gazes were filled with animosity, some almost bordering on malice.

"Excuse me, where are we?"

"Hmph, it's just a kid. Don't try to scare us!"

"Where are we, cough it up! Who sent you, kid?!" Upon discovering that the brat before them was below them in cultivation, they shed any pretense of self-restraint and let their emotions run free.

"It looks like your heads have cleared, but you still don't know what kind of state you're in, huh? I've only heard of the fable of the farmer and the viper where kindness is met by betrayal. I guess you're the kind of people it describes?" Jiang Chen sneered.

"Kid, what are you talking about?"

"Speak clearly!"

"Speak clearly?" Jiang Chen's expression darkened. "Need I remind you of your capture and enslavement? Or maybe you already remember, and you're feigning forgetfulness?"

Of course these people were aware of their situation. But when they only saw a youth before them, they merely saw him as an opportunity to exploit. Faced with Jiang Chen's plain speech, their affectations of arrogance were instantly cut short.

"Little brother, please give us a clear explanation. I am an old man of several hundred years, and it has been a shameful experience to be ambushed and sold into slavery. If you're looking to subjugate this old pile of bones, I would rather die."

"Yes, that's right. You will enslave us only in death!" Shouts of agreement echoed around the room.

"You have hands and feet, and you're free to move about. I won't stop you if you want to die. Would someone take the lead? After all, leading by example is a fine trait" Die? Who didn't know how to speak in hyperbole? These people would actually be quite reluctant to really die. As expected, the expressions of those present grew a little unnatural, even awkward. They had no resolution to instantaneously commit to death.

"I don't know who sold you, neither do I know who you were going to be sold to. I can only tell you this: we are in Veluriyam Capital, and you were held captive at the Myriad Puppets Pavilion, priced and ready for sale. If I hadn't rescued you, perhaps you would already have been sold to some family to be their servant, doomed to eternal servitude as a slave of the lowest class." Jiang Chen's explanation was lengthy but measured, with no hint of disdain. He smiled as he finished. "If anyone here thinks that I've made a mistake, I can take you back to Myriad Puppets Pavilion right now. As for where you'll be headed after that, or whose slave you'll become... that will no longer be my concern."

He really had nothing to ask of these people. He only wanted them to understand the situation they'd found themselves in. "Look, down there... that mass of unsold slaves was also part of the group that I rescued. It was but mere convenience to rescue. But take a good hard look. Compare their state to yours, and you'll see how lucky you are." Jiang Chen pointed downwards, guiding their gazes. "Why don't we go down and take a closer look," Jiang Chen smiled faintly.

Though their bodies were not fully recovered still, they'd just regained consciousness after all, the ten had no problems taking a few steps. They were all completely shocked after probing the larger group below them. It wasn't only the slaves' senses that had been sealed, but also their qi oceans as well. Moreover, the seal on the latter had clear indications of its destructive nature. The sealer only needed to destroy the corresponding tokens to destroy the slaves utterly. Adopting complicated expressions, the ten ascended slowly. Their prior arrogance had all but disappeared.

"Well?" Jiang Chen smiled. "You were actually in the same state as they are a little while ago. If I hadn't spent some of my consciousness in order to remove the seals on your qi oceans, your lives would still be subject to the whims of House Sikou."

"Who are you?"

"Why did you rescue us?" Having no basis for further arrogance, the ten adjusted their attitudes. They knew as well as Jiang Chen did that if they didn't cooperate, they could simply be sent back to the Pavilion.

"As I said, your rescue was merely a matter of convenience. The only reason I removed your seals because I thought you had some use," Jiang Chen spoke slowly.

"So you mean, you're going to enslave us as well?" Their expressions changed in unison.

"What difference is there between this and being sold at the Pavilion?!"

"Hmph, aren't we still slaves in the end? Huh, I suspect that you're from House Sikou yourself. This is just a type of brainwashing, isn't it?"

Well, their imaginations were certainly vivid. Jiang Chen was expressionless, but his gaze gradually cooled. "My plans for you aside, what kind of attitude is this? Did you somehow pick up the mistaken notion that you're irreplaceable? There are still a thousand-odd people over there, do you think I won't be able to find substitutes from them?" His tone was ice, and his demeanor no longer as polite. These people had no previous relationship with him, nor were they members of his sect, so it was difficult for them to conjure up feelings of unity.

A red-haired man spoke up, "Sir, to me at least, you do not appear to me to be a malicious man. I am personally quite thankful that you came to our rescue. If I may ask, what are your exact plans for us?"

"Yes, tell us the truth. If it's not too difficult, then of course we will do our best to repay this debt." One person's surrender led to the softening of others. After all, this was the way of human nature. Besides the debt they owed to the young man for his rescue, they could also sense the subterfuge within their consciousnesses, though neither party alluded to this fact a single time. They understood better than anyone that the young man could destroy them with a single thought.

Jiang Chen's face softened slightly, declining further pursuit of their concessions. "Like I said, I rescued you because I thought you of some use to me. If you're not willing to accept that, say so now. I can take you back to the Myriad Puppets Pavilion at the next opportunity."

Back to the Pavilion? Back to being a slave with a price tag? Their faces all changed. A fate like that would really be worse than death. Though the young man before them wasn't easy to deal with, at least he didn't look like the vicious sort.

"Let's cut to the chase. I need some subordinates who can help me with various things. Though I can't say that you're amazingly superb, you're at least sufficient for my purposes. Here, you can count yourselves as employees or subordinates. If you treat yourselves with respect, I will do the same. Furthermore, I have no desire to take away your permanent freedom. The longest I'll need you for is a decade or two, though you yourself might not be willing to leave when the time comes."

Truthfully, Jiang Chen hadn't actually come up with the proper arrangements for these people just yet. But if he wanted to make a name for himself at the Veluriyam Capital, he needed a group of his own men. His fellow sect members from Regal Pill Palace lacked both the strength and the ability to share his burdens. He didn't know the origins of these people, but at least they were all sage realm cultivators, with even the least amongst them in the earth sage realm. Although this kind of strength was insufficient to vie for hegemony in the Capital—truthfully they weren't even third-rate, really—it was still better than the origin realm guys from the Regal Pill Palace.

The most important factor was Jiang Chen's inability to heavily use and yell at his comrades, but these people were free from that worry. Having saved their lives, Jiang Chen felt he had every right to command them for a mere decade or two. By the time he was set up at the Capital, they probably wouldn't want to leave any more.

"You have fifteen minutes to consider it. Remember, I don't need an insincere answer, only a choice made from the heart. If you think my conditions are unacceptable, there is no problem in bringing it up with me. On the other hand, feigning compliance while secretly acting in opposition will bear grave consequences," Jiang Chen said quite seriously.

The fifteen minutes passed by very quickly; the ten of them embroiled in their own thoughts. Evidently, the choice wasn't easy to make.

"I've thought it through. Ten or twenty years is nothing. I, Meng Redhair, am willing to follow you for even thirty or fifty years. The time spent is worth it in repaying your kindness." The red-haired man was first to reply.

"I, too, am willing," an old man of the sky sage realm also responded. In the world of martial dao, ten or twenty years would pass by with the flick of a finger. The lifespan of sage realm cultivators numbered in the thousands, often longer than two thousand years. Twenty years was really nothing. Furthermore, their rescue was now an established fact. If they took a step back and contemplated their return for eventual sale as a slave, that sort of horrible fate was easily visualized.

"Ah, well, let's be done with it. I suppose it is a kind of silver lining to have this as the conclusion to a calamity in life."

"Twenty years it is? I too wholeheartedly entrust myself to you." With the first capitulation, a second soon followed. No one here was a fool. It was better to take the lighter consequence than the heavier. Twenty years of subordination versus a lifetime of servitude—it was a simple choice between the two.

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#### Chapter 737: Lord of the Majestic Clan

However, Jiang Chen wasn't easily fooled. It was easy to claim loyalty, but it wasn't that easy to actually feel loyalty. "Everyone, I have no way of knowing how sincere you are, so I'm just going to ask one question: do you want me to use restrictions in your consciousness to restrict you until the day you are

freed, or do you want to take the initiative and swear to the heavens that you'll serve me loyally? I'm not a greedy person. A mere twenty years is all I ask."

Everyone was overjoyed when they heard Jiang Chen's choice. Meng Redhair hastily asked, "Young master, will you truly unlock the restriction in our consciousness if we swear to the heavens?"

Everyone else were staring at Jiang Chen in surprise too. They obviously hadn't expected to be given such a pleasant choice. Both choices were restrictions of a sort, but the heaven's oath was far less strict than a restriction in one's consciousness. But the difference between the two restrictions were obvious.

It was true that a heaven's oath was extremely strong, but there wouldn't be any consequences as long as they didn't willingly go against their oath. However, a restriction in one's consciousness was different. Such a restriction meant that their lives were completely in the other party's hands. Even if they were to obey Jiang Chen's every whim, he could still kill them with a single thought if he felt like it. It was the same as a lit candle in the wilderness. The tiniest wind could threaten the flame. But if the candle was put inside a house, it wouldn't be extinguished as long as they didn't act stupid and blow it out themselves.

"That depends on your performance," Jiang Chen smiled calmly. He wasn't an easy person to bargain with. He was simply giving them a bite of the carrot so they would remain hopeful for the future. With this rule in place, it would be odd if they didn't work hard for him.

"The time limit on your restriction depends on your behavior and your performance, but you still have to swear a heaven's oath before I unlock your restrictions. After all, there are plenty of ungrateful people in this world, and I cannot say for sure if no such person exists among you. I may have saved your lives, but that won't stop some of you from consciously ignoring that debt and focusing on the fact that I'm going to order you around for twenty years."

"That's unacceptable, that's absolutely unacceptable!" Meng Redhair shook his head repeatedly. "It is only natural to repay one's debt. Anyone who doesn't do that is the worst of ingrates!"

"Yes, yes, we are all willing serve you from the bottom of our hearts. Being your subordinate for twenty years is 100 times better than serving as someone else's slave forever. We all know that very well."

Their words were pretty, but it didn't deter Jiang Chen's decision in the least. He smiled and waved his hands, "Actions speak louder than words. Oh right, please tell me who you guys are. As I've said earlier, I like honesty and detest half-heartedness."

The ten began to introduce themselves to him. As he thought, a large majority of these former slaves were wandering cultivators. Seven out of ten of them were generic cultivators coming from all sorts of regions, some middle and some lower. Strictly speaking, the remaining three didn't count as wandering cultivators, but rather as sect disciples. One of them had suffered the same fate as the Regal Pill Palace and had been sold as a slave after being captured when his sect was destroyed. As for the remaining two, one of them had been baited into a trap while he was journeying, whereas the other guy was an even unluckier person who'd been traded as a bargaining chip after his sect had participated in a gamble and lost.

Jiang Chen couldn't help but sigh at the size of the world and its innumerable strangeness as he listened to their odd experiences. However, their background and identity gave Jiang Chen a little peace of mind.

At the very least, none of these ten people seemed to have extraordinarily powerful backgrounds. The size of a person's background often determined the amount of their arrogance. It would be much easier to order them around if he didn't need to account for backlash. Of course, intimidation was also an important part of control. Jiang Chen understood that the stick alone wouldn't be enough to control these people. He must also offer them the carrot and make them genuinely acknowledge him. If they felt like they had found a home with him, they might not even be willing to leave even if he told them to get lost.

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The Majestic Clan was one of the twenty eight great clans in Veluriyam Capital. They were the highest ranking existence in Veluriyam Capital, second only to the seven emperors. Since the seven emperors often secluded themselves from the world and abstained from personally participating in the management of Veluriyam Capital, the twenty eight clans were actually the true holders of power in Veluriyam Capital. Any one of these clans could summon the wind and the rain in the Capital.

Currently, the Majestic clan lord was secretly meeting a mysterious guest in his residence. There were only four men inside the secret room. The clan lord was seated at the master's seat. A casually dressed pill master was standing beside him.

In the guest's seat was an eighth level emperor realm cultivator. He wore flowing white robes and appeared unusually humble before the clan lord. He too had a pill master standing just beside him.

"Clan Lord, I can confirm that this pill is of good quality. I do believe that it's the Longevity Pill." The pill master next to the clan lord inspected the pill for a moment and put it back on the table before making his report.

The clan lord nodded slightly without batting an eyelid. Then, he looked at the guest sitting at the opposite side. "Brother Ke, this is indeed a very good pill. I can see that the Eternal Celestial Capital had reaped quite the profits from your invasion of the Myriad Domain," the clan lord smiled faintly.

The man dressed in flowing white robes sitting on the opposite side of the table was none other than a saint holy king of the Eternal Celestial Capital. He had arrived at Veluriyam Capital just that day to personally promote the Longevity Pill and open up retail channels in Veluriyam Capital. The saint holy king looked very at ease even though the other party had brought up the subject of the Myriad Domain.

"Clan Lord, I can guarantee that this Longevity Pill will accomplish impressive sales figures once released into the open market. However, Veluriyam Capital has always stood alone, and we of Eternal Celestial Capital dare not push our own businesses in. That is why I have come to Veluriyam Capital to inquire about the possibility of opening up a trade route. Of course, the first group to pop into my mind was none other than the Majestic Clan." n)(0ve1BIn

"Hehe. And are you planning to ask my clan to open the way for you?" The clan lord asked indifferently.

"Merely opening up the channels of trade isn't sustainable for a long period of time. I am here today with the Eternal Celestial Capital's utmost sincerity with me. Even sharing our profits is possible. If you support us, clan lord, then we are willing to let you manage the market in Veluriyam Capital on our behalf."



The clan lord's mask slipped just a little when he heard this. A gleam appeared in his eyes as he stared intently at Holy King Ke, obviously trying to peer into the latter's heart and figure out his true intentions. It was obvious that the clan lord couldn't quite believe that a free meal would drop from the sky and hit him on the head like this. The Longevity Pill was such an extraordinary pill. If his clan were to become the sole retailer in Veluriyam Capital, then they would basically monopolize the entire market. He could hardly imagine the sheer amount of profit they would rake in!

The Majestic Clan might be wealthy and rich, but who ever would begrudge having more money? Plus, this Longevity Pill was a breakthrough in the history of pill making. If this pill could be mass produced, then the profits it would bring were unimaginable. Even as a retailer, the profits they could earn would still be massive.

"Brother Ke, forgive me for being direct, but why would such a good offer land in my lap?" The clan lord was ultimately a man of great importance. He found it entirely beneath him to beat around the bush.

"Honored Clan Lord, I understand that this offer may come as a bit of a surprise. However, there is a reason behind our offer." Holy King Ke wasn't in a hurry to seal the deal. The bait had been dangled, and it was now time to haggle. "Firstly, I don't know many important figures in Veluriyam Capital. In fact, I am most familiar with you, my lord. Secondly, we are planning to open a trading channel in Veluriyam Capital, and you are without one of the best choices we have in terms of network and connections."

The clan lord chuckled, "I won't deny this, but being the best choice and the only choice are two different things, no? There must be another reason right, ole brother Ke?"

"My lord is wise. Our final reason is because we wish to borrow your network and status in Veluriyam Capital for a bit."

"What do you mean?" The clan lord asked indifferently. Free gifts could always be turned down, and he would see what his gifter requested from him before he made a decision.

"You and everyone else may be aware of this, but while we have eliminated the Regal Pill Palace, some of them have managed to escape our grasp. These people are an enormous hidden threat if they are not eliminated completely. Among these people, there is even one who holds an irreconcilable grudge with us. This man even went so far as to kill one of our holy kings..."

"You're speaking of the young man you are pursuing. What is his name again?" The clan lord had vaguely heard of this. It was just that he didn't pay too much attention to it. After all, this was all minor news for someone at his level.

"His name is Jiang Chen, and he's an extraordinarily cunning person. In fact, we suspect he has already infiltrated Veluriyam Capital. If that is the case, then our investigation attempts will be greatly obstructed since Veluriyam Capital is not a place where we can chase him down at will. If we give him time to grow powerful, he will inevitably become a huge threat to the Eternal Celestial Capital. That is why... I have come today for two reasons: one, to promote the Longevity Pill and two, to obtain a minimal right to arrest in Veluriyam Capital. Naturally, it would be best if our arrest is supported by the heads of Veluriyam Capital, and you are the best choice I can think of, my lord." Holy King Ke was quite gifted in eloquence. He wove half truths through his words and spoke as if with great sincerity. He didn't speak in a secretive manner and even snuck in some flattery while explaining his reasons.

As expected, Clan Lord Wang Ting pondered for a moment before raising an eyebrow, “Is that all?”

“Yes. Hunting down the remnants of the Regal Pill Palace is our only wish,” Saint Holy King nodded without hesitation. Of course, there was no way he was going to explain his reasons any further.

The clan lord nodded slightly, but gave a noncommittal response. Holy King Ke was rather experienced in the art of the deal. Now that all the demands had been aired, it was time to talk about splitting the profits. After all, how could he convince the other party to accept his wishes delightedly if he wasn’t willing to offer them a nice, juicy carrot? “Our master has personally given his word that anyone who can help the Eternal Celestial Capital in solving this problem would be given the retail rights of the Longevity Pill in Veluriyam Capital. We are willing to bear all the costs and give the retailer twenty percent of our profits.”

*Twenty percent!* It might not sound a lot, but it was almost sheer profit for the retailer. They didn’t need to bear any costs at all, other than the establishment of shops and the costs associated with the employees. This meant that they would be gaining this twenty percent for almost nothing. After all, the cost and fees necessary to sustain the shops were nearly negligible compared to the Longevity Pill’s priceless value.

Moreover, this pill was one of a kind product, and thus was ripe for a monopoly. In fact, the retailer didn’t even need to open a shop for this type of business to flourish! They only needed to sit at their homes and wait for the orders to come in. Their buyers would come present themselves and beg for a sale! This was the benefit of a monopoly! To be honest, even ten percent profits to a retailer was a shocking sum already in this kind of business, much less twenty!

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#### Chapter 738: Wave After Wave

Even the Majestic clan lord could feel his heart palpitate in eagerness in that moment. However, as the leader of a great clan, his appetite was one that would never be fully sated. He smiled faintly, “Thirty percent. For thirty percent, I’ll sign the contract here and now, without another word!”

The seller asks for the moon, the buyer counter-offers in the same vein. Since this was a transaction, one had to fight for the greatest benefits. Would it not be a waste if they didn’t latch on firmly to an opportunity presenting itself on a silver platter? The Majestic clan lord knew full well that they would have considered things from every angle before coming to him. They certainly wouldn’t settle on someone else without rhyme or reason.

Indeed, after muttering to himself for a moment, Holy King Ke said, “Thirty percent is far too high, my lord. Especially since we have to shoulder the manufacturing costs as well as the costs of transportation. Pills like these obviously cannot be transported by your everyday person, we would need masters, so costs will be very high. My lord, twenty percent is already a great show of sincerity.”

Indeed, as Holy King Ke said, twenty percent was already a great show of sincerity. The Majestic clan lord didn't deny this point. With a smile at Holy King Mu, he said, "Ole brother, let me simply say this. I would sign the agreement for twenty percent as well, but I might not provide my full assistance. My sincerity depends on your own sincerity."

Holy King Ke forced a smile on his face, "Twenty five, that's my upper limit. I beg the clan lord not to force me into a difficult spot. This is the highest I have been authorized to go. Thirty percent is beyond the scope of my authority."

There were only a few percentage point difference between twenty five and thirty. The Majestic clan lord was rather ambitious and very much wanted thirty percent. But then he thought better of it. If this is really as high as Holy King Ke can go, then the Eternal Celestial Capital would send someone else if I stand my ground too firmly. If that happens, the ones they'll negotiate with might not be our Majestic Clan...

After all, the Veluriyam Capital was big, with many great clans in it. The Majestic Clan was a well-known faction, but they weren't the only ones who had clout. With these thoughts, the Majestic clan lord smiled cheerfully. "Twenty five then, it's so decided."

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"Brother Jiang, did you say you want to open a pill store?" Wei Jie asked, a little startled.

"Indeed. I wonder if there is a decent storefront that House Wei can provide?"

Wei Jie said with a smile, "A storefront isn't actually a problem. House Wei has an abundance of properties in the capital, so that won't be an issue. Only, there's great competition in the pill market in the capital. The great pill stores are more or less entirely monopolized by the great clans. Even the next tier of pill stores are supported by noble houses. As a result, in the capital, the profits to be had from pills are almost next to nothing."

It wasn't that Wei Jie didn't want to help. The competition in the pill market inside the capital was indeed very fierce. It was hard to tell how many pillmakers there were in the capital, even if one just counted the pill kings. Every pill king was supported by a powerful faction. Some formidable factions even had a number of pill kings in their ranks. These pill-making factions were the big players in the capital's pill market. The lion's share of the profits went into their pockets, leaving only scraps for the others to fight over. It would be extraordinarily difficult for an outsider like Jiang Chen to even get a toehold in the pill market.

He was still new to the Capital, but he didn't doubt Wei Jie's words. Some things never change. No matter whose territory, no matter the market, the majority of the profits were always monopolized by a few. Back then in the tiny Eastern Kingdom, the Hall of Healing and two other factions had managed to corner off the pill market. He had seen the same when he travelled to the Skylaurel Kingdom.

As a power even stronger than first rank sects, Veluriyam Capital controlled countless territories and consumed an astronomical amount of pills. The profits to be had were certainly astounding. However, astounding profits didn't mean that just anyone could corner a share. Many pitfalls awaited an ordinary outsider trying to squeeze their way in, even if the big players didn't actively try to crush them. With so many pill stores around, why would someone come and buy pills in a tiny little shop?

“Young master Wei, I already have a preliminary plan on the matters of survival and development. I’m not asking for anything huge, a simple foothold will suffice. I will also pay a fixed amount for the required rent. How about it?” Jiang Chen had no desire to explain too much.

Wei Jie smiled wryly when he saw Jiang Chen’s attitude. “I can make the decision myself for an ordinary store, but I feel that it wouldn’t be showing you enough face. Let me ask my father first.”

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“Open a pill store?” Wei Tianxiao, Wei Jie’s father, was greatly taken aback.

“Yeah,” Wei Jie repeated what Jiang Chen had told him.

“Open a pill store in the capital? Will that even work?” Wei Tianxiao’s smile also wry. “Even dragons bow down to snakes when far from home. Not to mention, he’s no mighty dragon when it comes to pill-making, while the local magnates aren’t simple ground snakes either. It’d be too difficult for him to survive.”

“But he won’t change his mind no matter what. I think he might have a hidden ace no one expects! The Longevity Pill, for example?”

“The Longevity Pill? That’s impossible! If he refines the Longevity Pill, he’d definitely be exposing himself?” Wei Tianxiao shook his head. “That’s absolutely impossible.”

“Indeed. The Regal Pill Palace might be a pill dao sect, but what kind of extraordinary pill could a puny fourth rank sect have?” Wei Jie was also skeptical. “Father, don’t we have a storefront in Farmer God Market?” Wei Jie probed.

“You want to give him that storefront?” Wei Tianxiao was stunned. Farmer God Market was a famous street market in the capital, even more famous than the Fish and Dragon District. That was because almost all the pill retail storefronts for the Capital and even many surrounding cities were gathered inside Farmer God Market. It was a paradise for pill merchants. Almost all the big pill players in the Capital had pill stores there, and all of them core shops. House Wei also had a storefront in Farmer God Market. However, House Wei had always been tepid when it came to pills. They owned the property rights to the storefront, but they often sold other items there instead of pills. But still, profits had always been mediocre.

“Father, that shop isn’t very useful in our hands anyway. Why not let him give it a try?” Since they wanted to rope in Jiang Chen, that was actually a most excellent opportunity.

He would be labelled as man of House Wei if he was to use a store belonging to House Wei, whether House Wei participated in the venture or not. Their mutual relationship would then very naturally become a firm collaboration. Wei Tianxia became contemplative. He would never have considered it for an ordinary person. However, he just couldn’t see through this Jiang Chen. He could only feel a boundless potential from this young man, as though nothing was impossible.

Breaking through the Eternal Celestial Capital’s encirclement again and again, exterminating several thousand people from the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Ninesuns Celestial Sect... Now he had come to Veluriyam Capital and caused House Wei’s mortal enemy, House Sikou, to suffer a great loss almost

immediately. These glorious achievements were far from what one would expect from a young man coming from a fourth rank sect. And yet, he'd accomplished them.

And now this person wanted to open a pill store in the Capital, who said he would necessarily fail? It was worth giving a young man like this a chance to try! Wei Tianxiao smiled. He remarked, "Jie'er, invite him to my residence. I want a face-to-face conversation with him. You and he are friends, so you can only play the part of the good guy. Only your father can play the part of the bad guy. Let me be the villain."

"Father, you..." Wei Jie stared.

"Don't worry. I won't hinder him. However, since he's going to use our store, we're bound to talk about how to split the profits! Our business has been declining for these years, so this might actually be an opportunity."

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Jiang Chen also knew that Wei Tianxiao, the lord of House Wei, would certainly request to see him. This was an eighth level emperor realm man in charge of a noble house, and furthermore, someone he had to meet sooner or later.

The meeting proceeded in an extremely relaxed atmosphere. Wei Tianxiao was someone who knew how to conduct himself well. He never broached matters outside the subject at hand. He merely told Jiang Chen many secrets about the pill market in the capital, his undertones hinting that doing pill business inside the Capital wouldn't be so easy an affair. In the end, both of them reached a very happy agreement. House Wei would provide the storefront and the raw material for the pills, while Jiang Chen provided the manpower and the refining techniques. The profits would be split evenly between them.

The negotiations went without a hitch. Jiang Chen didn't care unduly about the division of profits. When Wei Tianxiao mentioned splitting half and half, he agreed with barely any hesitation. This took Wei Tianxiao slightly aback. He couldn't but admire this young man's daring and vision. He had been prepared for a long bout of haggling. He would have even accepted forty percent for House Wei. He didn't think Jiang Chen would actually agree without a second thought.

Both of them happily reached a verbal agreement, and agreed they would sign a formal contract after Jiang Chen proceeded with his initial preparations. Jiang Chen was about to take his leave at the end of the negotiations when the guards reported a visitor at the door.

"Lord Wei, I came charging over, so don't you go blaming me!" A voice rolled in like rumbling thunder, very much at odds with House Wei's tranquil style. One could know just from the sound of his voice that he was used to forcing his will upon others. He didn't curb his manners even when visiting someone else's house.

"Is it the lord of House Tong?" Wei Tianxiao walked outside after a momentary pause. Jiang Chen and the rest of House Wei also followed behind him. Wei Jie secretly transmitted his voice to Jiang Chen, introducing this visitor, "House Tong is also a ninth rank aristocratic house with a very high status in the Capital. It's one of the noble houses beneath the Majestic Clan. As for the Majestic Clan, they fly under Great Emperor Asura's flag. Great Emperor Asura is nominally third among the seven great emperors, but his real influence actually ranks second."

Wei Jie's introduction was very detailed. Jiang Chen understood the situation as soon as he heard. "Is House Wei in the same camp as them?" Jiang Chen inquired.

Wei Jie shook his head with a wry smile, "House Wei is closest to the Coiling Dragon Clan. The Coiling Dragon Clan is a faction under Great Emperor Peafowl's banner. When it comes down to it, our House Wei should be in Great Emperor Peafowl's camp."

Jiang Chen could read between the lines. No wonder Wei Jie had been so heartbroken when Great Emperor Peafowl's true disciple, young master Fan, had passed away. It turned out they had ties to each other. And judging from Wei Jie's tone, the relationship between the second-ranked Emperor Asura and the first-ranked Emperor Peafowl weren't entirely harmonious. As a result, relations between the factions under their flags were likely to be very strained. For that reason, it was startling for the lord of House Tong to visit a house that belonged in the Emperor Asura's camp.

Wei Tianxiao had already begun to engage Lord Tong in small talk as Wei Jie transmitted information to Jiang Chen. "Which wind has blown Brother Tong this way today?"

"House Lord Wei, I wouldn't be here for no good reason. I came here this time to rent the store your house owns in Farmer God Market."

Both Wei Jie and Jiang Chen were startled at that. They looked at each other, both of them baffled. What an admirable coincidence! Someone came to rent the store just moments after they concluded their negotiations? Judging from Wei Jie's flabbergasted expression, it was clearly not something House Wei had planned for in advance.

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#### Chapter 739: The Goal of Establishing Himself in Veluriyam Capital

"Heh heh, Brother Tong, what an unfortunate timing. We'd just decided to implement some new plans for that store. I fear Brother Tong has made a trip for nothing." Rather than beating around the bush, Tong Tianxiao made his position clear by refusing directly.

"House Lord Wei, you're not deceiving me on purpose, are you? That shop's business has always been, well to say the least, lackluster. If you rent it to me, I can guarantee at least the double your current profit. Are you sure you can find that much success with anything else? In Farmer God Market, it's a dead end if you don't deal in pills." The leader of House Tong nattered on as though he were releasing firecrackers. His words came out in rapid fire, persuasive, yet still sounding very arrogant.

In contrast, Wei Tianxiao was slow and leisurely, "This is my house's business; there's no need for Brother Tong to be unduly worried."

The leader of House Tong chuckled. "Tell me the secret, what are you planning? You're not thinking about selling pills, are you? Your House Wei, hehe, better forget about pills..."

Those words completely crossed the boundary of rudeness. Even Wei Jie's face became frosty. However, Wei Tianxiao was still as tranquil as a drifting cloud. "Won't Brother Tong know the answer as soon as we open for business?"

The lord of House Tong rolled his eyes, then flashed a confident smile. "No matter what you're planning, you're still going to end up leasing it to me! Hahaha, farewell." Who knew where his confidence came from? He threw a casual salute at Wei Tianxiao, then shook his sleeves and left unceremoniously. Such rude actions didn't seem at all like a conversation between the leaders of two equally ranked aristocratic houses. This House Lord Tong had almost seemed like he was addressing an inferior. Even one as shrewd as Wei Tianxiao frowned slightly. He was also obviously dissatisfied with House Lord Tong's discourtesy.

Wei Jie was a fiery young man. He was furious seeing such rudeness, and shouted loudly, "House Lord Tong, I have no idea where your confidence comes from, but our house will never rent that storefront to you, even if we have to let it rot there!"

The lord of House Tong had already stepped outside the door when his figure suddenly froze. He turned his head back abruptly, a cold glint flashing in his eyes. "Isn't a mere junior like you afraid of the consequences of running your mouth?"

Wei Jie didn't back down, "Coming to our house and showing off, shouldn't you Tongs be mindful of running your mouth? Why should I be afraid in my own house?!"

House Lord Wei actually smiled in his fury. He was about to speak when Wei Tianxiao's face suddenly darkened. "Lord Tong, forgive me for not escorting you any further. Farewell!"

Wei Tianxiao was obviously angry as well. He'd courteously called his guest "Brother Tong" till now, but now his title had changed. Moreover, the two weren't even in the same camp. Now that this Lord Tong had forsaken any semblance of courtesy, Wei Tianxiao would naturally not keep tolerating his mannerless behavior. House Lord Tong smiled with unbridled arrogance. He nodded and looked at House Wei's father and son with a gaze charged with meaning. He smiled in contempt, and left without a word.

"Wise nephew Jiang, don't worry, we of House Wei are men of our words. We'd never rent the store to someone else now that we've reached an agreement, to say nothing about a house from a different camp like House Tong." Wei Tianxiao looked in Jiang Chen's direction. His words were meant to allay the latter's fears.

Jiang Chen smiled, he didn't doubt House Wei's sincerity. He said with a nod, "Uncle Wei, I'll take a stroll around Farmer God Market first."

Wei Tianxiao thought a moment, then nodded. "That works too." He looked at Wei Jie, "Jie'er, you should accompany wise nephew Jiang."

After taking their leave of Wei Tianxia, Jiang Chen and Wei Jie left the Wei manor and headed towards Farmer God Market. Farmer God Market was one of the three famous street markets in the capital, and was even more famous than Fish and Dragon District. It could almost be said to be the most famous market in the Capital, and was by far the most bustling, thriving one. This wasn't just the heart of pill provisioning for the Capital. Its influence even spread to seven or eight cities in the surrounding area.

Rare were the places that flourished as much as this one in all those cities. On top of that, in the wake of the pill business, every business and profession prospered here. Pills, talismans, spirit beasts, formations, spirit stones, weapons and armor...

Every business related to cultivation was included in Farmer God Market. All sorts of stores were laid out in endless rows. It was a sight that bedazzled the eye. House Wei was clearly no stranger to the market. Although they didn't play a preeminent role there, and were somewhat marginalized when it came to the pill business, House Wei still had other properties and businesses after all. Otherwise, how would they be able to afford the upkeep for a ninth rank aristocratic house? That being said, Jiang Chen was clearly focusing on the pill market.

Wei Jie explained things carefully to him along the way, giving him many details about all the heavyweights of pill dao inside the Market. In Veluriyam Capital, since the seven great emperors stayed away from mundane vying, the core of the Farmer God Market was controlled by the twenty eight great clans, as well the mighty aristocratic houses under these great clans.

In this Market, there were more than a dozen first-tier pill sellers, all of them controlled by the great clans. There were even more second-tier ones, numbering in the several dozens, perhaps even more than a hundred. Almost all of them were dominated by the aristocratic houses. The third-tier ones were too many to count, numbering in the hundreds, large and small. The number of these stores seemed very high. But compared to the enormous number of cultivators in the capital, as well as the cultivators from the surrounding cities who came to visit, the supply from these pill stores was still far from enough to meet the demand. After all, there were simply too many cultivators in the various cities in the area. In all seriousness, they were even more numerous than the stars in the sky. Of that, Jiang Chen had no doubt whatsoever.

He could remember how prosperous the pill market was even back in the tiny Eastern Kingdom, and how many pill sellers it could host. Veluriyam Capital's area of influence was more than ten thousand times bigger, while the realms and levels of the cultivators here were many times more sophisticated. There was definitely an astronomical demand for pills.

"Brother Jiang, if we were to include all the small operations, the Farmer God Market has at least ten thousand shops. Any single shop is supported in some form from a faction. Our House previously had a pill store that could barely make the cut as a second tier. Afterwards, because of our pill king's sudden death, House Wei's pill business instantly suffered a devastating decline. Now, several years later, we're in an awkward position. The profits are too small, so our House has gradually stopped our participation in the pill market."

It wasn't because of a lack of desire to participate. Rather, it was simply impossible to do pill business on a large scale without a pill king in charge. There might be a little profit, but it would be like a drop in the ocean for House Wei. House Wei had always devoted their efforts to inviting another guest pill king, but for various reasons, their wish never came true. This put House Wei in an extremely awkward situation when it came to the pill business. They clearly had a top-notch store in Farmer God Market, but they could only use it to conduct other business. ~~no ve. l~~(In

Jiang Chen merely listened and looked around without saying much. He nodded after Wei Jie's presentation. "Let's go, we'll have a look at every store."



When playing the pill market, a lone dragon like him would never prevail over the local snakes if he were to try the conventional way. Know thine self, know thine enemy and you will be victorious in a thousand battles. Jiang Chen decided to first observe the business models the others were using, then strive to find a model different from theirs in order to survive.

Gain a footing, earn money, expand, build strength. These were Jiang Chen's successive goals. After experiencing the Regal Pill Palace's disaster, Jiang Chen realized very clearly everything would be nothing but a fleeting dream without powerful backing. Enough power and strength to evoke respect, these were the only resources one could build a footing on. A clear example of this was the Eternal Celestial Capital and then the Ninesuns Sky Sect. They clearly knew he might very well have escaped to the Veluriyam Capital already, yet they still didn't dare barge in. What did that mean? This was precisely the best proof of power. When the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region massacred their way into the Myriad Domains, they didn't show the slightest scruple; they did whatever they wanted to do. However, they didn't have the guts to run rampant in Veluriyam Capital. Even a noble house therein wasn't something they dared strongarm.

These things had left a deep impression on Jiang Chen. He secretly vowed to put down roots in the Capital and develop a faction of his own. Only then could he cultivate in ease. Only then could he stop going on the run time and time again, uprooting and moving repeatedly. From the Eastern Kingdom to the Skylaurel Kingdom, to the Precious Tree Sect, then again to the Regal Pill Palace... He'd been forced to move almost every time because he had been passive. The primary reason was that his power was lacking, that he was too insignificant in front of the then absolute powers. In direct contrast, Veluriyam Capital was an apex level colossus even in the Upper Eight Regions. This was undoubtedly the most optimal choice for Jiang Chen, whether to rescue his father Jiang Feng, rescue Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie, or rebuild the Regal Pill Palace in the future. All of these required the backing of a formidable power.

Without the support from a mighty faction, every plan was but a fleeting dream. A life of always running away like a stray dog might help sharpen himself, but ultimately, it was too depressing when all was said and done. And so, engaging in the pill business was the first step of his goal in establishing himself in the Capital!

Wei Jie was indeed offering his full support. He took Jiang Chen to store after store. The two of them visited every first-tier and second-tier store that day. Even some more distinctive third-tier stores weren't spared his presence. Jiang Chen certainly gained a lot that day.

"Brother Jiang, there are still four stores I haven't taken you to. These four stores are the biggest top-tier players, they control the pill market's lifeline in the Capital. They won't look any different from first rate stores on the surface, but some top-level pills will only appear in these four stores."

Jiang Chen hadn't gone to those stores, but it was hard to count just how times he'd heard people mention them in the market throughout the day. Big players monopolizing the market wasn't something Jiang Chen was unfamiliar with. "There's no need to go to these four stores. Our present goal is still far from that level. Let's first set our sights on the second or third tier, then strive for the first tier when we get the opportunity."

Jiang Chen didn't want to promise Wei Jie miracles. As a matter of fact, with Jiang Chen's talent in the dao of pill-making, he could force these four big players to close up shop with only half his talent, to say nothing about first tier stores. However, he would obviously not do so immediately. With his current strength and manpower, the backlash of such a grand move wasn't something he could withstand. The nail that sticks out is certain to get hammered down. If he recklessly attracted attention to himself, then they could casually crush him with the wag of a finger. When all was said and done, mighty players in the pill market would never be lacking in support from mighty martial powers. Jiang Chen was cooperating with House Wei at present, but even if House Wei threw its whole weight behind him, it was merely a noble house in the end. It was not a great clan, to say nothing of the great emperors.

*We'll be updating Patreon later tonight, but we've got a pretty good stockpile if you want to know what happens next~*

*Happy volareversary, volare is two years old! Click through to the official announcement post for pictures of volare staff, WW staff, and yours truly! I did a heart pounding live reading of my new novel, Phoenix Ascending, those battle scenes! The new novel will launch this weekend!*

Chapter 740: Inner Turmoil Surfaces in House Wei ~~novel~~**1b/1n**

Slow and steady wins the race; no great city was built in a day. No matter how much expertise I have, I can't apply it without sufficient strength to back me up. That fact had been proven to him numerous times in the past. He'd thought the Longevity Pill to be something insignificant, but the consequences it had given rise to had been astonishing. Though it wasn't the main reason for the joint invasion of the Eternal Celestial Capital and the Great Scarlet Mid Region, its existence had certainly caused the invaders to focus on Regal Pill Palace.

However, it had also allowed the lives of Elder Yun Nie and his peers to be spared. Regal Pill Palace still had a remnant of life left, unlike the other completely exterminated sects. The world was transient. Good and evil accompanied each other in unpredictable ways. Learning from his past mistakes, Jiang Chen decided to be more cautious. "Young master Wei, let's go take a look at your family's storefront," Jiang Chen suggested with interest.

Wei Jie had no objections. Through the trouble with the Ninelaugh Golden Buddha Powder, he'd come to realize the extent of his difficulties, both internal and external. He urgently desired to find a breakthrough point, and Jiang Chen's appearance seemed to be the stroke of providence that might help him. If he could really start a pill business with Jiang Chen, both he and his father would gain a more dominant voice in the affairs of the house.

The reason for the various voices of dissent within the house was because all of its businesses were bottlenecked, or even regressing. It was enough for some members to begin to hatch plots against Wei Jie. As a ninth ranked aristocratic house, House Wei's members were extraordinarily sharp at predicting crises. It was normal for their hearts to waver if the house showed signs of going downhill. If House Wei were to be demoted to an eighth ranked, or even seventh ranked house, its position in the Veluriyam Capital would be greatly affected, and it would even risk being sidelined. Thanks to these considerations, Wei Jie had no shortage of motivation to succeed.

Jiang Chen needed House Wei to cover for him, and House Wei needed Jiang Chen to be a game-changer. This mutual necessity was one of the main reasons that Jiang Chen's and Wei Jie's relationship had developed so quickly.

"Brother Jiang, the store is up ahead," Wei Jie pointed forward.

Jiang Chen scanned his surroundings and was a little surprised to see that they were in one of the most prosperous parts of the Farmer God Market. House Wei has stores located in such a prime location? How unexpected. To think that even with such an advantage, their pill business hadn't flourished... what a waste. As they walked nearer, Wei Jie's face colored imperceptibly. He pulled lightly on Jiang Chen's arm, and the two of them ducked behind the guardian lion statue of a nearby store.

A group of people walked out from House Wei's store. One of them was Wei Jie's fifth uncle, Wei Tiantong, as well as his son Wei Xiu. They were accompanied by several elders from House Wei. Though Jiang Chen didn't know the elders' identities, their unique dress gave away their origin. Most importantly, the House Wei members were gathered around one person. It was a young man some twenty years of age, clad in luxurious robes. There was a hint of regality in his expression, and the House Wei members appeared to be giving him their full respect. Wei Jie frowned a little at the scene.

The group walking out had clearly not noticed Wei Jie and Jiang Chen. Several of them were talking and laughing. Foremost among them was Wei Jie's cousin, Wei Xiu, whose tone oozed flattery. "Young master Wang, your word is as good as done. We will definitely rent this store to House Tong," Wei Xiu's voice oozed charm.

The young man hummed in agreement, but ignored Wei Xiu. "I hear that the one who still has final say at House Wei is still Wei Tianxiao." He turned to Wei Tiantong.

"As the master of the house, of course he has the final say on many things. We don't bother arguing with him on smaller things, but a store in the Farmer God Market is an important matter. Neither I nor the house elders will allow him to mess about in this matter." Offering a placatory smile, Wei Tiantong tossed a few looks at the house elders, who nodded successively in agreement.

"If that's so, then I thank your hard work in this matter. I will inform father of all these details once I return, including your cooperative attitudes. If all goes according to plan, father will be sure to personally host a banquet of gratitude," the youth surnamed Wang smiled serenely.

"The lord of the Majestic Clan has much to attend to. It would be an honor for us to receive such an invitation," Wei Tiantong declared hurriedly.

The Wang surnamed youth nodded slightly at the words, but said nothing further as the group departed.

Wei Jie's face was very pale behind the statue. He had inadvertently stumbled on a great secret. Its contents shocked and terrified him. "Brother Jiang, there may be a change in the proceedings." His tone was grave.

"That youth... is from the Majestic Clan?" During Jiang Chen's time at House Wei, the lord of House Tong had come to visit. The Majestic Clan had been mentioned several times in conversation back then.

House Tong was one of several houses under the Majestic Clan's command. Moreover, the Wang surnamed youth was the son of the clan lord. Putting the details together, Jiang Chen understood the

chain of events. So it wasn't House Tong alone that was after the store. The Majestic Clan was involved as well!

No wonder Wei Jie was so pale. This new development was wholly unexpected. Wei Tianxiao easily had the authority to refuse House Tong's request, since ninth ranked aristocratic houses were evenly matched. There was no fear of offending anyone. But as one of the strongest clans in Veluriyam Capital, the Majestic Clan possessed a strength which House Wei could not hope to resist.

From what they had just seen, some House Wei members obviously intended to change their allegiances, and flock to the Majestic Clan banner. More incredibly, both house lord Wei Tianxiao and heir Wei Jie had been unaware of it. And now, there were plans to reduce the father and son to figureheads. Decisions were being made before approval had been granted. Judging from their tone, House Wei members would stop at nothing to appease the Majestic Clan. They were even willing to band together in opposition against the nominal master of the house. For Wei Jie, the situation had worsened beyond belief.

Used to various conflicts, Jiang Chen knew that House Wei's circumstances were about to come to a head. "Young master Wei, is your father completely oblivious about all of this?" Jiang Chen couldn't resist the question. Being in the dark, the Wei father and son were at a clear disadvantage. If things were allowed to continue, it was likely Jiang Chen himself would be dragged in as well. At that point, cooperation would be out of the question.

"Let us return first, brother Jiang," Wei Jie replied in a low voice. He too felt how dangerous this situation was.

Jiang Chen was no stranger to the grand stage, so he wasn't in the habit of retreating at the slightest sign of a problem. Aside from the connection to House Wei, he currently had no other options for connections to higher society. There were many other houses, true, but it would be hard for one of them to accept him. Starting from scratch? That was even more absurd. Though the Veluriyam Capital appeared to be a free city, the hierarchy between social castes was quite defined. As an outsider with no background, he would be devoured instantly regardless of how unassuming he was. The only way to grow was to build a relationship with a native faction.

Wei Jie's expression was heavy throughout the return trip. "Brother Jiang, I am very sorry. These developments are quite unexpected. As you've seen, the circumstances of our house are very complicated at the moment. Though my father has some grasp of the situation, a small change may have great effects. Sometimes, it is hard to deal with things even when you know what is happening. For example, I was poisoned a while back. Father's investigation led to my fifth uncle, but his hands were tied without evidence. Furthermore, house matters are actually decided on by six people. My father is the master of the house, but doesn't hold absolute power." Wei Jie had nothing further to hide given how far things had progressed. He explained House Wei's plight in detail. "Brother Jiang, if this blows up, both my father and I may lose our position in the house. So, I understand if you want to back out now." Wei Jie added honestly after thinking for a moment.

'Backing out now' was not Jiang Chen's style. He would have no compunctions about it if they had faked their regard for him, but Wei Jie had treated him with honesty and sincerity throughout their friendship.

"Though I couldn't take a look inside, your store's location is quite amazing. I have my mind set on it." Jiang Chen's words were not a direct response, but they expressed his sentiment.

Wei Jie was overjoyed. "You are truly a chivalrous man, brother Jiang. It is no surprise that you came to the rescue of your fellow sect members, despite the distance or difficulty," he praised.

"Let us spare the niceties, young master Wei. First describe to me the decision making process within your house. Which six people are part of it? How are they related to each other..." Internal change was needed to achieve a reversal. If the problems within House Wei couldn't be suppressed, taking over their store would be like wishing on fairy dust.

Wei Jie went over the details with Jiang Chen. At House Wei, there were six people with executive power, including house lord Wei Tianxiao and second-in-command Wei Tiantong. Being second-in-command meant that if something were to happen to Wei Tianxiao, Wei Tiantong would rightfully take over his role as house lord. In addition, there were four house elders.

Only one of the elders was indubitably loyal to Wei Tianxiao—his own uncle, Wei Jie's grand-uncle. Out of the other three, one was Wei Tiantong's confidante, and the other two generally held a neutral position. From today's events, however, both of the neutral elders had seemingly been persuaded by Wei Tiantong. They would not have appeared at House Wei's store otherwise, nor would they have cavorted with the young master of the Majestic Clan!