

Soon after, Bai Xiaochun hobbled back to Fragrant Cloud Peak, hair standing on end, face smudged with ash. Heart pounding with residual fear, he crawled back into his courtyard and thought back to the rain of lightning he had just passed through, and shivered. Then he swore an oath to never again fly on a sword through a thunderstorm.

That wasn't flying, that was risking one's life! Back in his log cabin, he grimaced in pain for quite some time before composing himself. Sitting down cross-legged on his bed, he looked at the rain falling outside, and then slowly rotated his cultivation base. "Tier-2 spirit medicines are appropriate for the eighth level of Qi Condensation and lower. If I want to raise my cultivation base any further, I really need to concoct some tier-3 spirit medicine." Resting his chin on his hand, he pondered the matter. "Tier-3 spirit medicines are even harder to concoct. The only way to do it with confidence is to first be very familiar with numerous tier-2 spirit medicines. Without a stable foundation, the chances of success are small." With that, he opened his bag of holding and examined his current accumulation of resources. The result was a long sigh. Although he had collected quite a few gifts due to his status as a Prestige disciple, he had consumed a terrifying amount of ingredients in his pill-concocting efforts recently. The result was that his stores were running low. "I can't keep going on this way," he said, bowing his head thoughtfully. "I'll definitely run out! I'm already a pretty incredible journeyman apothecary. Maybe I should try to sell some medicine." That thought started to get him excited. By the next morning, the rain had stopped, and he left his residence to go to the market and ask some questions. After getting a clearer idea of the prices of various medicinal pills, he bought a huge batch of medicinal plants, and then went to the sect to buy more with merit points. Finally, he took another trip to the Medicine Concocting Pavilion to begin working. Although tier-2 medicinal pills would fetch a high price, they consumed a lot of ingredients. Furthermore, considering the way he concocted, they wouldn't be the best use of his time. Therefore, he chose to concoct some tier-1 medicines that he was more familiar with. Over the course of the following days, he produced three different types of spirit medicines, each batch of which produced eight or nine pills. He also made two sticks of spirit incense. With that accomplished, he headed back to the market. The south bank market wasn't very large. Other than a few shops set up by Inner Sect disciples and other senior members of the sect, most of the establishments were run by various cultivator clans from other parts of the Eastwood Continent. It was like a little town, bustling mostly with Outer Sect disciples from the three mountain peaks. Having been there on numerous occasions, Bai Xiaochun was quite familiar with the place. After finding the shop he was looking for, he entered and cleared his throat, whereupon a salesperson approached. "Call the shop owner out," Bai Xiaochun said. "In addition to buying some ingredients, this time I want to sell some medicinal pills!" With that, he sat down in a chair, smiling so broadly that his eyes turned into slits. A short time later, a middle-aged man wearing a long violet robe walked up. When he saw that it was Bai Xiaochun, he smiled. "Fellow Daoist Bai, I am your humble servant Sun Chen," he said, clasping hands. "I've heard many stories about you, Fellow Daoist Bai, but was always worried about disturbing your peace, so I never went to offer formal greetings. I truly regret that now." Beaming, Sun Chen sat down across from Bai Xiaochun. Well aware of Bai Xiaochun's high position in the sect, he had no desire to offend him. Furthermore, the fact that he was a Prestige disciple meant that the Sun Clan still wanted to get on Bai Xiaochun's good side, despite the hundred-year-prohibition set in place by the sect leader. Bai Xiaochun laughed heartily and then exchanged some pleasantries. Next, he pulled out

three bottles of medicinal pills and two sticks of incense, which he placed on the table between them. Sticking his chin up, he asked, "Fellow Daoist Sun, how much do you think these are worth?" Sun Chen picked up the medicinal pills, and after examining them, seemed pleasantly surprised. Although they were low-grade tier-1 medicinal pills, they had an impurity level of only about eighty-one or eighty-two percent, placing them very close to the mid-grade level. The pills usually acquired by the shop tended to be low-grade pills with impurity levels of eighty-four or eighty-five percent. Looking up at Bai Xiaochun with shining eyes, he said, "Brother Bai, your Dao of medicine is quite refined. We would love to purchase all of your spirit medicines. How about we offer you 120 spirit stones? What do you say?" Bai Xiaochun was instantly delighted. That price was almost four spirit stones per medicinal pill, which was just about the highest price possible for low-grade tier-1 medicinal pills. Actually, the production cost for such a pill was, on average, only about half a spirit stone. Thrilled, the two of them completed the transaction and then continued to chat a bit. Eventually they came to an agreement; as long as Bai Xiaochun continued to supply the shop with medicinal pills, he could acquire ingredients without handing over any spirit stones. In the end, Bai Xiaochun left feeling very pleased. More time passed. Months went by in a flash, during which time Bai Xiaochun continuously concocted tier-1 spirit medicines to sell in exchange for ingredients. He also spent time familiarizing himself with tier-2 spirit medicines. Gradually, he grew more and more adept. At the same time, his relationship with the Sun Clan's medicine shop grew more stable. The Sun Clan bought virtually all of his medicinal pills. One day during the course of doing business, Sun Chen took a few bottles of medicinal pills and handed some plant ingredients over to Bai Xiaochun. As they chatted, Sun Chen sighed and said, "Brother Bai, considering your skill in medicine concocting, why don't you concoct some tier-2 spirit medicine? Every few years a hundred clans auction is held, and as of today, it's only about three months away. If you concocted some tier-2 spirit medicine, I could help you put some of it up for auction. I'm sure you'd get a great price." After their months of doing business together, Sun Chen had come to find that Bai Xiaochun was cheerful and charismatic, and quite the joy to interact with, which was why he was being so helpful. Bai Xiaochun had also heard of the hundred clans auction, which was arranged by roughly a hundred of the cultivator clans from the Eastwood Continent. There were three locations where the auctions would be held. One was in the north bank market, the second was the south bank market, and the third was in the largest city of cultivators on the continent, Eastwood City. Bai Xiaochun had been in the Spirit Stream Sect for several years already, and the last auction had been held around the time he had first joined the Outer Sect. Back then, he had been mostly focused on stealing spirit tail chickens, and hadn't been interested in auctions. His interest having been piqued, he asked a few questions about when exactly the south bank auction would be held, and then finally took his leave. After returning to the Medicine Concocting Pavilion, he sat down cross-legged to think for a while before finally making a decision. "What Sun Chen said makes sense. Instead of selling a little bit here and there, I might as well take advantage of the situation to sell something really expensive. Afterward, I can purchase a whole bunch of ingredients." After considering things, he thought of some various tier-2 spirit medicines, and finally decided... to concoct the one he was most familiar with, the Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pill. Having made his decision, he went into seclusion at the Medicine Concocting Pavilion and began to work on concocting Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pills. Two months went by. After exchanging all of the medicinal pills he could for ingredients, he was able to concoct three bottles of Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pills, each one containing ten pills. He also ended up with one pill whose color was different from the other light violet pills. This pill was dark violet, and didn't have a very strong medicinal aroma, as if it refused to let such an aroma waft out from within it. When that particular medicinal pill had emerged, the pill furnace had shaken in a way that was clearly different than the previous times. It was even been accompanied by a burst of earthflame. Upon closer examination of the pill, Bai Xiaochun's eyes gleamed with excitement. "Mid-grade! I, Bai Xiaochun, have finally concocted a mid-grade spirit medicine! "There probably won't be very many mid-grade spirit medicines at the auction. However, if I really want to cause a stir, I'll have to do better than this. After all... this auction only happens once every few years. There will surely be plenty of rare items up for sale." After some thought, he gritted his teeth and then took out the turtle-wok to perform a spirit enhancement. After the threefold enhancement was completed, silver light glittered, and the spirit medicine was no longer mid-grade. It had broken all the way past superior-grade to be... premium-grade! This type of

premium-grade pill was quite shocking, with an impurity level of only ten percent or so. Bai Xiaochun was very pleased. The Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pill resting in his hand was now so dark it was almost black. It had three spirit designs on its surface, which were faint but clearly visible; anyone who laid eyes on the pill would be able to tell that it was something extraordinary. Bai Xiaochun suddenly had the feeling that this pill was another tool he could use to become famous. Laughing proudly, he pulled out a little knife and carved a picture onto it... a lovely little turtle. "Lord Turtle will once again make an appearance!" Bai Xiaochun rose to his feet in excitement and anticipation. He took his medicinal pills out of the sect, and returned two hours later in high spirits, looking very pleased with himself. He could still picture the shock on Sun Chen's face the moment he saw the three bottles of Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pills. The moment he noticed that there was also a premium-grade spirit medicine which had received a threefold spirit enhancement, his jaw had nearly dropped to the floor in astonishment. "Only one more month to go until the auction," Bai Xiaochun thought, looking at the jade slip he held, which was his ticket to the auction itself. Throughout the following days, everyone was talking about the auction. Soon, the disciples of the three mountain peaks on the southern bank began to make various preparations, hoping to strike it lucky at the auction. The market also thrummed with activity. "One of my clanmates from the north bank said that in the last auction, a Yellow Springs Flame went up for sale, a legendary item! It was only a spark, but could still be considered a unique treasure. One of the disciples from the north bank bought it at an exorbitant price." "There should be tons of unique treasures up for sale at this hundred clans auction, including a lot of shocking medicinal pills. That's because the Outer Sect Chosen battles will be coming up. They only happen once every thirty years!" "You're probably right. The joint north and south bank Outer Sect Chosen battles are a grand occasion for the entire Spirit Stream Sect. It's too bad that the top ten from the south bank haven't been able to match up to the north bank for years now! I wonder if one of the south bank's top ten will be able to get revenge this year!?" Over the following month, talk of the auction grew more and more common throughout the sect. Bai Xiaochun heard much of the talk, and noticed a lot of people discussing the joint north and south bank Outer Sect Chosen battles. However, he didn't pay much attention to such talk. Soon, the month had passed. One morning at dawn when Bai Xiaochun was meditating, his eyes suddenly opened, and he pulled a glowing jade slip out of his bag of holding. "The auction is going to start," he thought, eyes shining with anticipation. He quickly hurried out of his courtyard and raced down the mountain. Along the way, he passed quite a few Outer Sect disciples, until he noticed a few beams of light speeding by over head. He smacked his own forehead at the realization that he'd forgotten about being able to fly. Quickly performing an incantation gesture, he summoned the Golden Crow Sword. Stepping onto the golden crow, he transformed into a beam of golden light that shot off into the distance. He soon reached the market. Head high and chest out, he entered the auction pavilion. It was a huge structure, with several thousand seats set up on the auction floor, as well as an open area behind the seats where a crowd of people stood, packed together tightly. As for Bai Xiaochun, he was whisked away by Sun Chen, who took him to a private room on the second floor, and then left. The room was relatively small, with a narrow balcony, beneath which was the main auction floor. The auction stage was also clearly visible. This was not Bai Xiaochun's first time being present for such a lively affair. Instead of behaving like the Foundation Establishment cultivators in the other private rooms, who stayed out of sight, Bai Xiaochun made sure to lean out of the balcony. Worried that people might not notice him, he began to clear his throat as loudly as possible. Soon, some people down below saw him, casting odd glances at him before turning away. Unfortunately, there were simply too many people present, so no matter how loudly he cleared his throat, the sound would only go so far. Off in the distance, he caught sight of Hou Xiaomei, as well as Zhou Xinqi and some of the other people he knew. However, they were too far away to notice him. Even after yelling at the top of his lungs, they didn't turn his way, and he started to get a bit depressed. Finally, he lost interest. In any case, sticking himself out of the balcony was a bit tiring.... Furthermore, there was always the danger of accidentally falling.... If that happened, then it would only take a day for everyone on the entire south bank to hear about it. Time passed, and more people showed up. After about an hour, the sound of a cauldron being struck rung out, and everything went quiet. Countless eyes were all fixed on the auction stage. Soon, a middle-aged man in a green garment appeared. Smiling, he stood there and greeted everyone with clasped hands. "I am your humble servant Qian Song. I presume many of you Fellow Daoists are

already familiar with me. I will be presiding over the auction today. The rules are the same as ever, all lots go to the highest bidder." Without any further ado, he waved his right hand, and a glowing door rose up on the auction stage. A young woman emerged, holding a platter, atop which was an oddly shaped rock formed of various metals. The rock glowed with garish, multicolored light that reflected within the excited, shocked eyes of the thousands of auction attendees. Bai Xiaochun looked closely at the rock but couldn't quite tell what it was. However, other people in the crowd seemed to know exactly what it was, and were already getting excited. When Qian Song spoke, his voice was soft, but he boosted it with his Foundation Establishment cultivation base, ensuring that it spread out for all to hear. "Lot one is a piece of Auric Ore. Minimum bid, 300 spirit stones. Bid increment is a minimum of 50 spirit stones!" "350 spirit stones!" someone cried out. "400!" Almost as soon as the first bid came out, another topped it. Before long, the price reached 700 spirit stones, and the item was sold to a disciple from Violet Cauldron Peak. Bai Xiaochun looked at the piece of ore with wide eyes, trying to figure out why it could possibly be worth 700 spirit stones. Another thing he'd noticed was that after the auction had begun, a spell formation had been activated which amplified the voices of anyone calling out bids. "It's just a piece of metal," he thought a bit sourly as he sat there watching. More items appeared and were sold. One of them was a green horn from a juvenile dragon, which had apparently been struck by lightning, leaving sparks of electricity coursing along its surface. It fetched a price of 8,000 spirit stones, which left Bai Xiaochun completely shaken. After the auction had been going for about an hour, Qian Song's voice rang out with the following words: "The next lot is a bottle of tier-2 spirit medicine. Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pills, a total of ten. They are close to mid-grade, with an impurity level of eighty-one percent. Minimum price, 100 spirit stones. Bid increment is a minimum of 10 spirit stones." Bai Xiaochun instantly perked up, and stared out at the auction floor in anticipation. Thinking nervously about how much he might make, he waited for someone to call out a bid. However, for some reason, the only thing that met his ears was silence. Even as his heart began to pound, someone called out an opening bid. "110 spirit stones." The bidder was an Outer Sect disciple, and the amount bid was apparently all of his savings. After calling out the bid he stared around nervously. However, Bai Xiaochun was even more nervous than he was. That bottle of Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pills had cost him about 50 spirit stones to manufacture, and if he sold it at the market, would fetch a price of 150 or 160. At the moment, all he could do was scowl at the audience in astonishment. Just when Qian Song was about to strike down with the auction hammer, someone else called out another price. Then, more people jumped in. In the end, the price jumped all the way to 180 spirit stones. "180 spirit stones isn't bad. That's about 20 higher than at the market." Sighing in relief, he wiped the sweat from his brow. The truth was, the price the bottle had fetched earned him a tidy profit, although it didn't come close to the value of some of the other precious items which had gone up for bid so far. Soon, his second bottle went up, and ended up selling for a slightly higher price, 200 spirit stones. Bai Xiaochun was very pleased. By the time the third bottle went up, the Qi Condensation disciples were getting very excited, and more people jumped in on the bidding. In the end, Bai Xiaochun was ecstatic; the final price reached 230 spirit stones. "More than 700 spirit stones! Now this is what I call an auction! I already have enough spirit stones to concoct a tier-3 spirit medicine." Bai Xiaochun was an easy person to please. His sour mood from before was completely gone, and he sat there happily waiting for the premium-grade spirit medicine to appear. "Considering the price the other bottles fetched, I think the premium-grade might get... 300 spirit stones?" After a bit of hesitation, he changed his mind. "200 would be fine!" He nodded confidently. Time passed. Bai Xiaochun sat there waiting until it was afternoon. There on the auction stage, Qian Song's expression suddenly turned a bit strange. Looking around at the audience, he cleared his throat. "The next lot is something a bit interesting.... It's a tier-2 spirit medicine, also a Violet Qi Spirit Ascension Pill. However... there's something different about it." Bai Xiaochun sat there anxiously on the balcony, mind buzzing with nervousness.