

Resonance 111

Chapter 0111: Newcomers' Rankings

Li Luo was used to Yu Lang's scummy ways, so he soon recovered from the shock. Conflicted, he eventually opened the newcomers' rankings.

The first page he flipped to contained a drawing of a long-haired youth. He was swarthy and had a wild look about his eyes. He looked like some exotic beast straight out of the jungle.

There were lines across his face that made him resemble a tiger, and made him even more intimidating.

Almost like a tiger, but in human form.

Li Luo warily looked at the picture. Even though this was but a drawing, it was still enough to convey the intimidation that the man exuded.

His eyes flicked down to the information.

"Qin Zhulu, from the Xiyu Province's Xiyu Academy. His father is an important general in the Xia Kingdom army, Qin Zhenjiang.

"He has an upper eighth-grade resonance, a Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance. About as strong as a Pattern Genesis Tier (second-tier Resonant Master) cultivator. The Xiyu Province is located at the border of the Xia Kingdom, and it is constantly locked in war. Qin Zhulu grew up in the army, and the constant fighting bred a streak of savagery in him. He is as fierce as a tiger.

"With his strength, he is practically the best among the Astral Sage College's newcomers!

"A fierce guy, Qin Zhulu," Li Luo said thoughtfully.

An upper 8th-grade resonance, with Pattern Genesis Tier strength.

This was perhaps the highest resonant grade that Li Luo had seen, except for Jiang Qing'e's. Also, he was already at the second-tier of the Resonant Master Stage... That cultivation speed was unnerving. Li Luo himself had only just made it into the Resonant Master Stage.

Looking at how terrifying he was, one could readily believe that many enemies had died at his hands. Compared to him, fresh-faced students at the Astral Sage College looked like harmless, fluffy bunnies.

"Qin Zhulu. I've heard of him before. He never makes friends. A loner and a killer. To him, there is nothing but battle. I heard that his catchphrase is: 'women, they only slow down my beheading speed,'" Lu Qing'er said, leaning over and reading gravely.

Li Luo shook his head. "That's a little too wild! No girl's gonna like him like that."

"Not true. Qin Zhulu is a favorite among many girls at Xiyu Academy. For some reason, although he is completely merciless against male opponents, he restrains himself a little against girls. I heard he's afraid of women."

Li Luo was flabbergasted. "Afraid of women?"

A god of war like him, afraid of women?!

Zhao Kuo shook his head in sympathy. "Seems like he'll be single for life. That brings an end to the general's line."

Yu Lang pondered this. "Li Luo, you had better be careful. If he's afraid of women, maybe he swings the other way. And seeing how handsome you are, he'll definitely hit on you."

Li Luo stared at him and patted his waist. Where was his sword when he needed it?

Lu Qing'er rolled her eyes. "He's appraised as even more feral than Duke spirit beasts."

"That means a lot," Li Luo said appreciatively. He had never seen Duke-class spirit beasts before, but looking at the eyes of this Qin Zhulu, he could believe it.

"Your information booklets are getting more and more polished. You've even got drawings now." Li Luo complimented Yu Lang.

This was even more comprehensive than the one that Yu Lang had made for the Tianshu College Final Examinations.

"It's really my friend who did all the hard work," Yu Lang said modestly.

Li Luo snorted. Some friends Yu Lang had. He suspected that the "friend" had seriously considered killing Yu Lang to keep his secret when he handed over the information.

Li Luo ignored him and flipped on.

"Second among the newcomers, Wang Hejiu. From the Xia Kingdom's royal family, the oldest family around. Solid foundation, with an eighth-grade poison resonance. Suspected to be at the Sprouting Seed Tier with the power of an Upper Flowering Tier cultivator.

The youth called Wang Hejiu was smiling so wide that his eyes were almost closed. In his hand he held a green fan made of jade, and he looked like a jolly enough guy. It was especially jarring that he had a rare poison resonance.

It could create a toxic resonant power that ran rampant through its victim's body.

"The Astral Sage College is really something else... All these newcomers are insane." Li Luo whistled appreciatively. This Wang Hejiu was no slouch.

"Third newcomer, Bai Doudou. From the Gusu Province's Frost Mountain Academy. The Bai family is also one of the most powerful in the Xia Kingdom. With a lower eighth-grade resonance, she's estimated to be at the Sprouting Seed Tier with an Upper Flowering cultivator's power."

Bai Doudou wore her hair neatly cropped around the ears. She had a fresh, almost boyish face, but there was a hint of steel in her eyes that showed she was not to be messed with.

"Fourth newcomer, Duze Beixuan, from Xia Academy, which is one of the top five academies in Xia Kingdom. The young lord of House Duze, he has a lower eighth-grade Deepwater Kun resonance. He is estimated to be at the Sprouting Seed Tier with an Upper Flowering cultivator's power." This one wasn't new to Li Luo. He had met him at the Golden Dragon Bank.

"..."

"Seventh newcomer, Xin Fu. From the Anhui Province's Academy of Darkness. With an upper seventh-grade shadow resonance. Sprouting Seed Tier, with a Lower Flowering Tier cultivator's power." This person had another rare resonance, shadow, so Li Luo paid them more attention. Xin Fu was pictured as wearing a black hood, their face hidden in shadow. A mystery indeed.

Li Luo continued scanning the book. The top 10 were all at least Flowering Seed Tier. He spotted Si Qiuying at number 13, and then his own name at 19. Lu Qing'er was relegated to 20.

"Talent is well-hidden everywhere," Li Luo mused. Poison and shadow resonances were so rare that he had never seen them before. It was eye-opening indeed.

"It's a great book you've got there. You should be able to make some decent cash off it," Li Luo told Yu Lang. It was very important information for him.

"Oh you... I'm embarrassed!" Yu Lang said bashfully. Still, his pride in this masterpiece was evident in his eyes.

Lu Qing'er shook her head. "If you had put all that effort into cultivation instead, you'd already be a Tenth Seal."

He was still only a Ninth Seal, while Zhao Kuo was even lower—an Eighth Seal. Yet Zhao Kuo had not slacked off much. Only, he had a fifth-grade resonance, and that held back his improvement.

Yu Lang gave her a resigned smile and then turned back to Li Luo, blinking innocently. "Do you really think that's my best work yet?"

"What else is there?" Li Luo asked, aghast.

"Well, what do you think everyone cares about the most at the Astral Sage College?"

"Who's the strongest, of course," Xiang Liang said impatiently.

"Wrong!"

Yu Lang wagged a finger at him. "Don't you want to know who's the prettiest?"

Xiang Liang and the others were interested now. This man had his head on right. Who cared who was the strongest? In any case, they wouldn't be able to compete. But the prettiest girl... Now that was a topic close to their hearts.

Yu Lang carefully retrieved another book from the folds of his clothing. "This is my magnum opus, the ratings of the newcomers at the Astral Sage College!"

Li Luo frowned. "Look here, Yu Lang," he said gravely. "That's very wrong of you. We're here at the Astral Sage College to cultivate. Your wicked ways have to be checked.

"Let me check it real quick. I will ascertain just how wrong you are."

He snatched the book.

Whoosh.

Zhao Kuo, Xiang Liang, and Zong Fu were immediately on his back.

Gingerly opening the book, the first page was a list of names. Li Luo's eyes shot back up to Yu Lang with annoyance.

Zhao Kuo and the others sat back down slowly, looking at Yu Lang with some respect. They had seen people play dead before, but here was a true master, practicing his craft as hard as he could.

Number one on the rankings... House Luolan's young lord, Li Luo!

Had this jester included guys as well?

Li Luo put down the book carefully and gently on the table. He smiled beatifically at Yu Lang.

Yu Lang could feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand. "Er, look here, Brother Luo, the ratings are not about gender. Given your good looks, of course you're first!"

"I see," Li Luo said. "I heard you're buying dinner today."

Yu Lang nodded nervously.

Li Luo banged the table with his hand.

"INNKEEPER! Bring out every treasure you have. Every delicacy you can pull out of your ass!"

Chapter 0112: Rated Number One

The shop's finest delicacies were not dished up, after much sniveling and a mental breakdown on Yu Lang's part. However, the condition was that all guys would be removed from the book.

Zhao Kuo and the other guys heartily approved of this. Who cared about the guys' ratings?

"I think it's good. Can't we girls get some eye candy too? I think Li Luo is definitely the best-looking guy among the newcomers!" Lu Qing'er objected.

"I would rather people appreciate my hard work in cultivation rather than my looks," Li Luo grumbled. "Cut it!"

She rolled her eyes at him. "They might be against it, but I support you," she told Yu Lang.

"Me too." Chi Su chimed in.

"Sister Qing'er is the kindest," Yu Lang said tearfully.

Li Luo again turned back to the book. He was amazed to see that the girl ranked first on the list was not Lu Qing'er, but someone called Bai Mengmeng.

Picture included.

A girl in a white skirt, her youthful beauty radiated out of every pore. Her long hair flying free and a soft, welcoming look in her eyes. One could not help wanting to rest in her embrace.

There was information below. Bai Mengmeng was from the Bai family of the Gusu Province. She was the younger sister of Bai Doudou, and she had a water nightmare butterfly resonance.

"I think... you shouldn't support Yu Lang just yet," Li Luo said softly. Seeing Lu Qing'er's puzzlement, he handed the book over without saying another word.

Lu Qing'er did not take it. "I'm not interested in that," she said loftily.

But still her eyes flicked down briefly. When she saw Bai Mengmeng's name in first place, the temperature in the inn suddenly fell.

Yu Lang sensed trouble. "Sister Qing'er, I can explain."

Lu Qing'er gave him a sweet smile. "Yu Lang, where exactly do you think she has me beat?"

Zhao Kuo was suddenly full of sincerity. "Bai Mengmeng might be extraordinarily pretty, but I think she's a point short of Sister Qing'er."

"Sister Qing'er has an aura that outclasses her." Xiang Liang agreed.

"Bai Mengmeng can definitely be number two," Zong Fu said, nodding rapidly.

Yu Lang quailed under Lu Qing'er's glare. "Er, Sister Qing'er, in terms of just looks alone, that is to say, er... On paper you might be ahead of her, but she has this presence, you know..." he stammered. "When I look at her, she makes me go soft and mushy inside. It's very moving," he concluded.

Lu Qing'er nodded slowly. "True. I guess I can't match that softness."

She turned around, speaking in her softest, kindest tone. "Oh, innkeeper, Sir, today my friend here is buying dinner. For the entire inn."

Yu Lang's face drained of all color. "Wait! I just did some reconsidering. Actually, Sister Qing'er has an independent and cool streak that is a perfect fit for what youngsters are looking for nowadays! How silly of me not to consider that! The only one who belongs in first place is you, Lu Qing'er!"

She raised a brow at him. "I don't really care about such things. Change it or not as you wish."

Yu Lang hesitated. "Then... not?"

"Innkeeper." She waved.

"I understand! Sister Qing'er!" Yu Lang howled. He was truly naive to take a woman's words at face value.

Lu Qing'er smiled back at him. "Yu Lang, your book will definitely be a big hit!"

He sat back down and stared glumly at his cup. It was so hard to make art these days. Powerful factions would twist the work to suit their agendas one way or another.

He was left largely by himself, the others poring over the books and discussing them. The information within was definitely going to be helpful for the Choosing of the Mentors that was so important for their time at the Astral Sage College.

The gathering ended on a happy note.

They walked out of the inn, hearts content. They were just about to go their separate ways when they spotted a figure leaning against Li Luo's carriage, her golden eyes watching them.

Her incredible beauty froze Zhao Kuo, Xiang Liang, and the others in their tracks, and they struggled with themselves.

They obviously recognized that face, being famous throughout the Tianshu Province.

Jiang Qing'e!

They could feel an inexplicable sense of dread as they looked into those eyes of pure gold. Even the miserable Yu Lang gulped nervously, his legs turning to jelly.

Somehow, they felt like kids who had snuck out and were caught by their parents.

Jiang Qing'e might not be Li Luo's parent, but she was his fiancée!

Li Luo was surprised to see her as well. "Sister Qing'e? What are you doing here?"

She stalked over, her dark-blue wrap and long hair flowing backwards as she walked. She was one sexy woman.

"I just finished some business here, by coincidence. I saw your carriage, so I thought I would wait for you and go home together." She smiled at him.

Her eyes drifted past Li Luo to Lu Qing'er behind him, who was also staring at her. Their eyes met in an electric moment.

Yu Lang, Zhao Kuo, and the others had a sudden urge to start running away. This was Jiang Qing'e, for goodness' sake. A legend at the Tianshu Province.

"Junior Qing'er, we meet again," Jiang Qing'e said, smiling at her politely.

Lu Qing'er stared at the confident features of the other woman. Even she had to admit that Jiang Qing'e was perfect in every way.

Still, she did not look away, nodding and smiling back. "Senior Qing'e is as pretty as ever."

"Li Luo told me all about the College Final Examinations. I hear that I have all of you to thank for his win," Jiang Qing'e said.

"Given his strength, first place was all too easy, even though he didn't want it," she replied.

The others had fallen as quiet as mice while this exchange played out. Senior Jiang was too intimidating. Only Lu Qing'er could stand up to her, but just barely.

Jiang Qing'e's polite smile was still firmly in place, but she did not comment further. "You are all friends of Li Luo. If you meet any trouble at the Astral Sage College, come find me. I'll do what I can to help."

"It's getting late. I'll head back with Li Luo now."

She stretched out a hand to pull Li Luo into the carriage.

It rolled away, the wheels clattering against the well-lit path.

The remaining people stood at the inn's entrance and watched them go for a few moments.

"So that's Senior Jiang? She's so sexy!" Chi Su gushed, her eyes bright as stars.

Yu Lang wiped the cold sweat off his brow. "For a moment there I thought I was going to be beaten up."

Lu Qing'er did not comment, gesturing for the Golden Dragon Bank carriage to come over. "Well, I'm heading home too. See you at the Astral Sage College."

The carriage rolled away as well, the curtain falling over the window.

The others looked around at each other.

Yu Lang sighed. "Well, I pity Li Luo a bit at least. So good looks can be a problem."

Zhao Kuo and the others were about to nod in agreement, but they caught themselves just in time. Damn, were they in any state to be pitying others?

Who're you kidding?!

Chapter 0113: School's In

After the night reunion, Li Luo again buried himself in his resonance art research, and soon enough school rolled around.

In this time, he had managed to use a ton of spirit liquids and purifying lights before to catapult his woodearth resonance from the first grade to the fourth grade.

At this level, his woodearth resonance would be of some use.

Li Luo was not doing so bad in terms of strength. He was a Clear Seed Tier cultivator, but one with a sixth-grade waterlight resonance and a fourth-grade woodearth resonance.

The two resonance seeds absorbed worldly natural energy simultaneously, allowing him to cultivate faster than he did before. Plus, his resonant power capacity was higher than that of his peers.

Li Luo was finally starting to enjoy the various benefits that his resonant palaces brought.

With all these advantages, it shouldn't be too difficult to snag himself a Violet Vibrance mentor, right?

...

There was an unusual buzz in Xia City on the day of the Astral Sage College's opening.

Although the Astral Sage College was not even within Xia City's limits, it was a mere half day's journey away and was still considered to be within Xia City's influence.

As such, it was necessary to pass through Xia City to reach the Astral Sage College. And as the capital of the Xia Kingdom, many students would pass through or linger there.

The Astral Sage College had an exalted status in the Xia Kingdom. Its every move was watched by the great powers within the kingdom. These new students were the fresh blood that would one day make their way into the elite ranks of power in the Xia Kingdom. In the future, Duke experts might well rise from their midst.

Any early investment into these talents would definitely pay off exponentially.

While Xia City was buzzing with excitement, House Luolan's carriage had already rolled out early.

"The Astral Sage College is at the southwest of the Xia Kingdom. It was built against the back of the Gukun Mountain Range, the longest and greatest in the Xia Kingdom. You should learn about it. It basically divides the Xia Kingdom into two regions. Many spirit beasts dwell in those mountains—perhaps half of all spirit beasts in the Xia Kingdom. In the deepest regions, there are King spirit beasts, so even Duke stage cultivators do not dare to wander too deeply." In the rumbling carriage, Jiang Qing'e was giving Li Luo a brief sketch of the Astral Sage College's basics.

"Still, the Gukun Mountain Range is a natural training ground for the Astral Sage College to hone its students. The school even creates assignments to develop parts of the Gukun Mountain Range, sending students out to hone themselves," Yan Lingqing supplemented.

She and Jiang Qing'e were both Three Star Hall students. After her stint to the Suncreek Villa to polish her skills, she was back now that school had reopened.

"You will slowly get more familiar with the information over time. But for you newcomers, the Choosing of the Mentors today is critical, as I told you before. Before you enter Three Star Hall, your mentor will be your guide and supporter."

Jiang Qing'e fixed Li Luo with her golden eyes. "Li Luo, do not take the status of an Astral Sage College student lightly. Nor should you take the power of being a Violet Vibrance mentor's student lightly. It is no lighter than your position as the young lord of House Luolan, because it means that you have a Duke Stage expert behind you.

"Just like House Luolan now, so frail that it sways with the winds of fate in the Xia Kingdom. Yet because I have a ninth-grade light resonance, everyone knows that I am the uncommon power holding down things for the house. Do you think they have not considered assassinating me?"

"They have. But they do not dare."

"Because of how brilliant I am, I have special favor from the Astral Sage College. This means that no one dares to touch me. They can only come at me in fair and open ways. As long as I can deal with these, we will have our opportunity to strike back in the future."

"So, Li Luo, you must demonstrate your potential at the Astral Sage College and make them acknowledge you. It will be your greatest safeguard."

He looked at her face, more serious than usual, and nodded. House Luolan was a juicy piece of meat for the taking, and many would risk a lot for a bite, even if they had to commit crimes like assassination. It was not an uncommon method. Securing a Violet Vibrance mentor was evidently the best way to stave off these predators.

"Don't worry. I'll definitely do my best."

Yan Lingqing tapped her cheek. "Qing'e, it's rare to see you being so talkative."

She cocked her head towards Li Luo. "You have a water resonance. When you start specializing in earnest, why not try entering the Resonance Artificers Hall? Come find me and I will help recommend you."

"Thanks, Sister Lingqing."

"When you reach the Astral Sage College, Lingqing will bring you to registration and then preparation for the Choosing of the Mentors. It is a grand event for the Astral Sage College, and many of the powers in the Xia Kingdom will send representatives to witness it," Jiang Qing'e said.

"You won't take me?" Li Luo asked.

"Do you want to experience hell on earth? If you don't mind, I can definitely accompany you," she said amusedly.

Li Luo started. "Ah, actually, I would prefer to grow a little stronger first."

He had caught on. Given how popular she was in the Astral Sage College, if the two appeared close right from the start, it would make Li Luo a living beacon for "unfortunate accidents."

Although this was not going to help much, aggravation should be avoided where possible.

Li Luo had no intention of whacking everyone over the nose right after strolling in the door.

Seeing his fumbling expression, Yan Lingqing burst into laughter, and even Jiang Qing'e was smiling.

Their horse and carriage sped on. A few hours later, Li Luo heard the loud sounds of the crowd outside.

He pulled aside the curtain, looking out at the street.

A majestic mountain immediately crowded most of the horizon in his view. Behind it, he saw an entire forest of mountains, stretching out far beyond what he could see. There was a pageantry about them, their age a declaration of their power and endurance. Just looking upon them was awe-inspiring.

There was a set of stone steps ascending the side of the mountain, climbing all the way into the clouds. At the top of the stairs was the entrance, made out of white jadestone. It twinkled with a mystical, starry light, three words carved into the banner above in an impressive hand. The artistic masterpiece was a bold declaration of the school's domination.

Astral Sage College

"The words above the entrance were written by a King expert," Jiang Qing'e said from behind Li Luo.

A King expert...

He looked at the words with renewed awe. They were just carved characters, but there was life and energy in them.

It was hard to imagine how powerful the writer must have been, to leave behind such energy even in their writing.

It made one... look beyond.

A brief flash of excitement tingled through Li Luo as he looked up the stone stairs and the large collection of buildings at the top. His new school.

He had a feeling that the story of his life would begin its first real chapter here.

Chapter 0114: The Belle Sisters

As they rolled up to the gates of the Astral Sage College, Jiang Qing'e disembarked first, flitting up the endless flights of stairs towards the campus.

Li Luo and Yan Lingqing left a little later.

He could clearly see that there were many older students who gave way to Jiang Qing'e as she passed, nodding in greeting, while trying (and failing) to hide their feelings for her.

The new students looked at her with a mixture of surprise and respect as she passed.

This was Jiang Qing'e, the legendary ninth-grade resonance user.

She was famous both in the Astral Sage College and throughout the Xia Kingdom.

They could not help feeling excited, looking forward to cultivating in the same school as such a legend.

"Weeew," Li Luo whistled. "That's some reputation indeed."

"This is nothing... Soon you'll know the true extent of your fiance's star power here in the Astral Sage College," Yan Lingqing said.

Li Luo sighed. No need for soon, he already knew—if even Duke Stage Violet Vibrance mentors were chasing her, what more did he need to know?

Wrestling with his complex feelings, Li Luo followed Yan Lingqing up the stairs. The view changed dramatically when they passed through the white jade doors.

Firstly, they saw an endless buildup of school buildings—tall, towering architecture that sprawled in every direction.

There was a dignity to the campus, built up over thousands of years of history. A wealth of years that demanded respect from the visitors within its halls.

The buildings were just a small part of it. Even more impactful was the enormous tree whose canopy nearly blocked out the sky.

The Tree of Resonant Power looked like an embodiment of eternity itself. It made one feel small and insignificant.

Its branches covered most of the sky above the Astral Sage College, and gathered worldly natural energy to it. Even from a distance, Li Luo could sense the terrific speed at which it was gathering energy from all around.

No wonder it could produce a treasure like the Royal Sap.

Truly, the Tree of Resonant Power at Southwind Academy was like a tiny seedling compared to this...

Still lost in awe at his surroundings, Li Luo let himself be dragged to the newcomers' reporting place by Yan Lingqing.

After a simple registration process, Li Luo was given a newcomer's jade tablet, which he would need for the Choosing of the Mentors.

"Now shoo."

The one handling registration was a Two Star Hall student. He stared at Li Luo's information for a long time, as if trying to remember something. Seeing the situation, Yan Lingqing quickly ushered him away.

As he was leaving, Li Luo heard a small commotion behind him and turned to see two figures walking together.

One of them was leggy, hair neatly cropped around her ears. She had fresh features and a smattering of freckles. Her cool expression was a subtle warning of danger to those around her.

Li Luo recognized her immediately. Third place on Yu Lang's ranking—Bai Doudou.

Behind Bai Doudou was another young woman who resembled her. She was more than a class ahead of her. Her perfect features were almost doll-like—porcelain skin and wide, sparkling eyes that were like jeweled pools come to life.

Compared to Bai Doudou's taller and slimmer figure, she was slightly shorter, but that only made her even more appealing and huggable.

The commotion was a horde of admirers gawking at the young lady.

Bai Mengmeng.

Li Luo recognized her as well. The sister belles among the newcomers.

Bai Mengmeng was indeed very pretty. She had the potential to compete against Lu Qing'er. No wonder Yu Lang had risked life and limb to rank her first.

"Worthless flies, shoo."

Bai Doudou gave an icy glare to the hot, passionate looks being thrown their way.

The fan club scattered, ashamed and not expecting such vehemence from Bai Doudou.

Bai Doudou sniffed, leading Bai Mengmeng on to register.

Li Luo kept his eyes to himself, preparing to leave with Yan Lingqing.

But just as he turned around, he took an inadvertent step back as he found himself face to face with two people staring at him.

One was a face familiar to Li Luo. Duze Beixuan was staring at him with a toying look.

And beside Duze Beixuan was a tall girl with a head of flaming red hair and lips. She was a beauty in her own right, but there was a meanness in her eyes.

"Are you Li Luo?" she asked coolly.

He frowned, trying to place her. Since she appeared so close to Duze Beixuan, she was the friend of his enemy. "Yes?"

Yan Lingqing was looking unfriendly. "Duze Honglian, what are you up to?"

Li Luo took in this information. Duze Honglian... She was a member of House Duze as well.

"Yan Lingqing. I'm just here to see Jiang Qing'e's future husband. Why so protective?" She smirked.

Her voice was just high enough to carry to those nearby, sparking a small commotion.

The murmurs spread quickly, and astonished looks were soon trained on Li Luo.

"That's Jiang Qing'e's future husband?!"

"Yeah, he's called Li Luo. The young lord of House Luolan, and he does have a marriage commitment with Jiang Qing'e. She's even said so herself!"

"Disgusting. What does this kid have that makes him think he stands a chance with Senior Qing'e?! Besides those pretty boy looks, he's got nothing."

"Well... honestly, he's more than just a little handsome though..."

"Tsk, shallow. So what if he's handsome? Handsome guys are aplenty in the Astral Sage College! Plus, we're talking about talent and potential here!"

"..."

An undercurrent of jealousy and resentment ran through the crowd around Li Luo, and there was definitely a belligerent mood in the air.

Li Luo was again tasting the star power of Jiang Qing'e at the Astral Sage College. He had thought it would be enough to keep his mouth shut, but still this conundrum was going to rear its head at the first instance.

"Duze Honglian, what mischief are you up to now? Just because Qing'e has always thrashed you, that doesn't mean you should take it out on Li Luo," Yan Lingqing retorted angrily. She could see that Duze Honglian was painting Li Luo red for the angry bulls all around.

"Just speaking the truth. Or are you saying your darling junior here doesn't have the guts to acknowledge it?" As sexy as her flaming red appearance was, her words reminded one of a devilish snake spitting venom.

"You!" Yan Lingqing glared at her. She had masterfully maneuvered Li Luo into a dilemma. If he acknowledged it, it would be an open invitation for resentment. If he denied it, he would be seen as lacking a backbone. That was not going to help his cultivation at the Astral Sage College one bit.

Li Luo looked at her for a moment, then he smiled and took two steps towards her.

She continued staring at him coolly, with no intention of backing away. Why should she be afraid of some kid?

His eyes met hers. "Duze Honglian..." he said softly.

She snickered. "Well? No answer?"

"Duze Honglian!"

Li Luo shouted angrily at her, the impatience and anger in his voice carrying far.

He took two steps back, still shouting. "Stop trying to force yourself on me! Stop confessing! I already said that it's impossible between us! I'm an engaged man! Even if you degrade yourself to a mistress, Qing'e would never agree to that! Just let me go, please!"

His pained plea hushed up the whispers all around them, turning them to shock at the sudden development.

Even the disdain on Duze Honglian's face froze in an instant.

Chapter 0115: Honglian Wants to Be a Mistress

When the crowd suddenly hushed, they looked back and forth between Li Luo and Duze Honglian, unsure of what to make of what they had just heard.

Even Duze Honglian liked Li Luo?

Willing to be his mistress?

That was insane!

Ordinarily, such a claim would be laughed at. But Li Luo was as handsome as they came. It made them rethink if Duze Honglian really had a soft spot for him.

"Damned pretty boy young lord!" Some of the male students were getting wild-eyed and looked ready to swallow Li Luo whole. Although Duze Honglian was constantly being outdone by Jiang Qing'e, she was still a Three Star Hall student and excellent in her own right.

She had her fair share of admirers as well.

Had even Duze Honglian fallen to Li Luo's damned good looks?

That bastard! Not only does he have Jiang Qing'e on the marriage table, he snagged Duze Honglian's modesty too?!

The covetous glances that came their way was enough to freeze the smile on Duze Honglian's face. Hot anger flushed through her at his impudence. How dare he besmirch her reputation!

Like you?! Be your mistress?!

Who do you think you are!?

"Li Luo, I'll kill you!" Her voice was shaking from the barely suppressed rage.

Li Luo took two more hurried steps back. "Honglian," he pleaded plaintively, "forcing it won't make it work. Let me go."

There was amusement in his look, just for her. Weren't you trying to sling mud at me? Well, here's some right back! It was a pyrrhic victory at best, but he wasn't going to back down from this.

"Li Luo, what nonsense are you on about?!" Duze Beixuan shouted. Li Luo's vicious reply would be dismissed as nonsense by anyone with half a brain, but rumors rarely went north of the mouth to that cerebral filter. If word got out that his elder sister and Jiang Qing'e were fighting over the same guy, many heads in the Duze family would explode out of sheer anger.

"Beixuan, we both need to seriously think about this as well. Will I end up as your brother-in-law? Married to your elder sister?" Li Luo sighed in brotherly commiseration.

Boom!

As he spoke, a terrifying blast of resonant power exploded from Duze Honglian, wreathing her in maroon flames.

"Li Luo, I'll kill you!"

There was killing intent in her hot eyes. She sent forth a terrible blast of maroon fire at Li Luo.

"Duze Honglian, how dare you!"

Yan Lingqing shouted, leaping forth to shield Li Luo with her body. Water resonance power welled out of her to quench Duze Honglian's attack.

Peng!

The two resonant powers clashed together, but it was obvious that Duze Honglian held the advantage. Yan Lingqing winced, forced back under the weight of the attack.

She was only a third-tier Resonant Master, far below Duze Honglian.

"Yan Lingqing, fuck off, you weakling," Duze Honglian screamed.

"I'm going to seal that yapping trap of his!"

She was moving almost as soon as she had finished speaking, another scorching palm attack burying Li Luo and Yan Lingqing in flames.

Twang!

A column of light descended from above like the sword of god. It was aimed directly at Duze Honglian.

She could clearly sense the immensity of the power behind the impending attack. Her eyes narrowed.

Not an unfamiliar power... She had fought its user one too many times.

Jiang Qing'e!

She rolled her eyes in frustration, but she did not dare to take Jiang Qing'e's attack. With a clap of her hands, the maroon power blossomed mid-flight into a flaming, red lotus that rescinded back into her body.

Boom!

The tremendous power of the light column blasted the red lotus into smithereens, creating an aftershock powerful enough to send the nearby students flying.

Duze Honglian herself was forced back many steps, her maroon fire sparking weakly before fizzling out. Anger and embarrassment swamped her, but she finally forced down her resonant power.

"She's too weak? What about me?"

An unfriendly voice came from above. The light parted above Li Luo and Yan Lingqing, and Jiang Qing'e appeared.

She had a huge sword in hand and a menacing look in her golden eyes as she challenged Duze Honglian.

"Duze Honglian, after losing so many times to me, are you too scared to challenge me anymore? Decided to switch to easier targets like freshmans?" she said mildly.

"If you want to fight, I'll see you on the battleground. I'll beat you until you can't walk out on your own." She was riled up by Duze Honglian picking on Li Luo.

"Just go ahead and try!" Duze Honglian spat.

The rivalry between the two girls was apparent to all.

This only further confirmed things for the other students. Jiang Qing'e was fighting Duze Honglian? Over Li Luo!?

Sensational news in the Astral Sage College!

But at this time, a bunch of people clad in gold and silver leaf-patterned robes ran out. The older students backed away when they arrived. This was the law enforcement squad of the Astral Sage College. They were usually Three and Four Star Hall students, and they maintained order in the school.

A handsome youth with bright, green hair stood in front of the squad. He looked at the two girls impatiently. "Jiang Qing'e, Duze Honglian, today is enrollment day for the newcomers. Fighting is bad for the Astral Sage College's reputation."

This was Si Qiuying's elder brother, Si Tianming.

Jiang Qing'e stared at him. Now that the enforcement squad was here, fighting was no longer an option. Reluctantly, she let her light resonant power fade away.

Duze Honglian was still chomping at the bit. "Li Luo besmirched my reputation! He must be punished!" she snarled at Si Tianming.

Li Luo sai in a martyred tone, "Honglian, if you must be unreasonable, I'm willing to be punished for your sake."

He made it seem like he was willing to take on all the blame on her behalf.

But this only made her angrier than ever. Li Luo was only making her sink deeper and deeper.

Si Tianming felt a headache incoming. He actually already knew the truth of the matter. The Duze siblings had come to aggravate Li Luo and cause him trouble. But Li Luo was not about to lie down and take it, biting back as good as he got. Duze Honglian then flew into a rage.

"Alright, that's enough. Leave," Si Tianming said to Duze Honglian and Duze Beixuan.

He turned to Li Luo. "You should know when to stop as well," he warned him.

Li Luo merely smiled. If Duze Honglian hadn't come to cause trouble, he wouldn't have started any. But he was going to fire back if he did.

Duze Honglian looked like she was ready to incinerate Li Luo to ashes where he stood, but she knew it was not possible now. "Little brat, I'll remember this! I won't let you get away with this!"

Li Luo opened his mouth for another retort, but Si Tianming quickly stepped between them.

"Alright, alright. Go on now."

He was almost positive that Duze Honglian would lose her mind if Li Luo spoke any more.

Duze Honglian whirled and stormed off. Li Luo was evidently more than she could handle.

Duze Beixuan looked darkly at Li Luo. His intentions were clear, although he said nothing.

After the Duze siblings left, things gradually returned to normal, although odd looks were still occasionally thrown Li Luo's way.

Jiang Qing'e cocked her head at Li Luo. "Now you've opened hell on earth for yourself, haven't you?"

He shrugged. "I was forced."

How was he to know that Duze Honglian would come looking for trouble. Since he couldn't beat her, he could only ensure that her reputation was tarnished as black as his own.

"That was a sick move, Li Luo. Hahaha! She must be seething." Yan Lingqing shook with laughter, looking at Li Luo with respect.

She turned to Jiang Qing'e. "So... willing to accept Duze Honglian as the mistress?" she teased.

Jiang Qing'e gave her a sweet smile. "No. But I'll accept you as a mistress," she countered.

Yan Lingqing blushed and stammered, "You wish."

"Ahem."

Si Tianming had come up to them. He shot the girls a look, then he directed his comments to Li Luo.

"Junior Li Luo, in trouble from the moment you stepped into the Astral Sage College.

"Oh, let me introduce myself. I'm Si Tianming, Si Qiuying's elder brother."

Li Luo took one look at his bright, green hair. "Funnily enough, I guessed that."

Si Tianming was a little taken aback. He seemed a little snippy from the get-go.

He shook his head, looking past it. "Although Duze Honglian started it, your insults were quite cutting. She has her own admirers in the Astral Sage College. There's going to be trouble for you from now on."

Li Luo smiled back a little more warmly. Si Tianming had a cooler head than his younger sister.

"I didn't want to anger her either. But it seemed inevitable," he replied.

"Then be ready for the trouble that's in your future," Si Tianming stated.

Li Luo sighed, then stood dramatically behind Jiang Qing'e. "I have friends in high places."

Si Tianming goggled at him, then barked a wry laugh.

"Your House Luolan young lord is a special one."

Chapter 0116: Are You Challenging Me?

Jiang Qing'e said indifferently to Si Tianming, "Li Luo has a knack for using his advantages."

Si Tianming could do nothing when they were that united. With a final warning to Li Luo, he left with the squad and a slightly wounded heart.

Jiang Qing'e turned to Li Luo. "Done with the registration?"

He showed her his jade tablet.

"Let's go, then. To Newcomers' Hall. The Choosing of the Mentors will begin there," Jiang Qing'e said.

"Must we go together?" Li Luo grinned.

"At this point, there's nothing left to hide," she said, then she blinked innocently at him. "But I must say I quite like the way things turned out. You always lack a little pressure. Perhaps this is for the best."

"Best?!" Li Luo objected as he followed her.

"What's up with Duze Honglian anyway?"

"Just someone who lost to me for three straight years. Perhaps she turned on you after finding no breakthrough against me."

"That's heartless. I'm just a child."

"Child? I think the rumors of me and Duze Honglian fighting over a husband will never end."

"Oh well. The defense of the weak; all I had to attack her with were words. It made her suffer a hundred times worse than any slap though."

They walked away as they spoke, ignoring the glances thrown their way.

Within the crowd were the sisters Bai Doudou and Bai Mengmeng as well.

"Was that Jiang Qing'e? She's beautiful." Bai Mengmeng marveled in her breathy voice.

"Ninth-grade light resonance..."

Bai Doudou was mesmerized. "Truly a legend. That light resonant power just now was unnervingly strong. Even someone as strong as Duze Honglian had her defense easily broken."

"Is Li Luo the young lord of House Luolan? Is he really engaged to Jiang Qing'e?" Bai Mengmeng giggled.

"But he is very handsome."

Bai Doudou gave her a stern look. "Stay away from that guy, you hear me? You're not allowed to have any relations with him."

"Elder Sis, what are you talking about?" Bai Mengmeng said lightly. "I'm not interested in him. I just want to research spirit liquids and purifying lights."

Bai Doudou nodded approvingly. Her younger sister was too soft. She would curl up when bullied, and that Li Luo looked like he could eat her for breakfast. It would be best if she kept the two apart.

"Excuse me, are you Bai Mengmeng?"

From behind, a warm and compelling voice greeted them. The two sisters turned around and saw a youth with bangs and a small frown on his face.

"Hello, I'm Yu Lang. I wonder if we could become friends." The downcast youth gave her a bright smile.

Bai Mengmeng took one look at him and hid behind Bai Doudou without saying a word.

"Go away," Bai Doudou said acidly.

"I have no other intentions. I just want to get to know her and be friends," Yu Lang said very sincerely.

"I give you three seconds to disappear from our sight. Otherwise, you won't even make it to the Choosing of the Mentors," Bai Doudou said. She had spoken with a quiet lack of emotion that was especially unnerving.

His sense of danger as acute as ever, Yu Lang was gone almost as soon as she spoke.

"....."

Bai Doudou sniffed. "Ball-less rat. You dare flirt with my sister in front of me?"

"It's a gall-less rat." Bai Mengmeng poked her cheek. "Sis, Dad and Mom have corrected you many times. You have to get rid of that habit. It sounds too vulgar for a girl."

"Ball, gall, it's all the same," Bai Doudou said impatiently. She took her younger sister by the hand and left.

.....

Li Luo, meanwhile, had arrived at the site of the Choosing of the Mentors with Jiang Qing'e and Yan Lingqing, which invited many stares.

It was a huge, circular hall with a dome roof that exposed the sky. The outer edge was lined with many rings of spectator stands built in a theater style.

The arena was packed full of people, a sea of black heads bobbing about. There had to be thousands of people here.

"Your position should be written on your newcomer jade tablet. Go find it, then wait for the Choosing of the Mentors to begin," Jiang Qing'e told Li Luo.

"It starts here?" he asked quizzically.

"No, this is just a holding area. When the Choosing of the Mentors begins, there will be a transport design beneath the hall that will bring you to a special place," Jiang Qing'e clarified.

Li Luo nodded hesitantly.

"Good luck, Li Luo. We'll be watching you from here." Yan Lingqing waved encouragingly, then she dragged Jiang Qing'e by the hand to the spectator stands.

Li Luo looked at the two beautiful girls disappearing off into the crowd and then tugged his eyes unwillingly back to the crowd in front of him.

He looked at his jade tablet.

"Third northern ring, vertical 39, horizontal 56."

Li Luo puzzled it out and headed for his designated position.

He had spotted complicated markings on the ground, with circles a meter and a half in diameter drawn at regular intervals. He guessed that these were the transport designs, and their jade tablets told them which design they had been assigned to.

He finally found his position, but he was surprised to see that everyone else was giving the area a wide berth.

He saw that there was a single person standing in the middle of the circle.

His heart almost stopped. A sight to instill fear in even the bravest hearts.

Shoulder-length hair, a swarthy complexion, and tiger stripes on his face. Li Luo immediately understood why people were avoiding him. Number one on Yu Lang's power rankings, Qin Zhulu.

"He is truly terrifying."

Li Luo shook his head in amazement. The drawing had been enough to make him wary, and the real deal was far scarier.

No wonder no one dared to go near him.

Li Luo double checked. Qin Zhulu was standing in the space he was assigned to.

He hesitated, then stepped out.

As he neared, Qin Zhulu's eyes shot open. They were as cold as death, and Li Luo felt like he was being stalked by an apex predator.

He did not falter, but continued forwards.

"Excuse me." He gave Qin Zhulu his best friendly smile. "Sorry, but you're in my spot."

Qin Zhulu looked down at the position marker, then looked back up with a stony face, dumb as a post.

"Excuse me. This is my spot," Li Luo repeated.

Qin Zhulu stared at Li Luo. "Are you challenging me?" he rumbled in a deep, bestial voice.

Li Luo was speechless. "How did you work that one out? I was just telling you you're in the wrong spot, for goodness' sake."

"I'm not challenging you," he clarified. "But this is really my spot. Show me your jade tablet."

Qin Zhulu pulled out his newcomer jade tablet and stared at it.

Li Luo peered over. "Look, yours says sixth southern ring, vertical 76, horizontal 58. You can just head over there."

Qin Zhulu stared at Li Luo and stuffed his newcomer jade tablet back into his pocket. "Are you challenging me?" he asked in his deep voice.

"Who the hell is challenging you, damn it! You're the one challenging me, eh?!"

Li Luo was dumbstruck. Was this guy from military school or barbarian school?

Did he even understand human speech?

Li Luo stared at him for a moment. "You can't find your position, right?"

It was indeed a rather confusing layout here in the arena, and even Li Luo had taken a while to puzzle it out. This guy seemed to lack any sense of direction. He likely had a simple mind.

Qin Zhulu stared at Li Luo even more fiercely, but Li Luo sensed that he was covering up some insecurity.

"He can't be this weird," Li Luo thought to himself. "Look, give me your jade tablet, we'll swap. You can stand here, and I'll go find the other spot."

He offered his jade tablet.

Qin Zhulu looked at the proffered jade tablet for a good, long time. Finally, he took out his own and made the swap.

Their trade done, Li Luo stared at him with odd fascination. This guy really had just decided to wing it after he could not find his spot.

Qin Zhulu accepted Li Luo's incredulous stare impassively. He was still dumb as a post. For some reason, Li Luo felt that his dark face had gotten even darker.

Finally, he shook his head and turned away with the tablet.

Qin Zhulu watched him go. Then he closed his eyes again and started meditating.

Chapter 0117: Vice Principal Su Xin

The number of newcomers only continued to increase, and the noise of the crowd swelled in proportion.

At the theater-like seats, powerful Xia Kingdom officials had started to gather as well. They were very respectful, a testament to the Astral Sage College's special power.

Heralded by a small drum roll, a few people walked out with a special escort on the highest platform.

One of them was a beautiful middle-aged woman in lavish robes of red. The red robes were patterned with a constellation centered around a moon in the midst of the stars.

She seemed like a personable character, smiling warmly at those around her.

"That's the vice principal of the Astral Sage College. Seems like she'll be hosting this one," someone remarked.

Li Luo studied her closely. She reminded him of a vast ocean—lulling on the surface, with great power running deep.

The vice principal of the Astral Sage College was a Violet Vibrance mentor. Clearly, she was at least a Duke expert, and perhaps the best of them.

By her side was a small child wearing robes of gold. The child did not look more than seven or eight years old. He was a pale child, with a pair of bright, black, button eyes that shone with intelligence.

The golden robes with dragon patterns was enough to declare who he was: the ruler of the Xia Kingdom's royal court.

"The little emperor I met at the Golden Dragon Bank?" Li Luo looked at him in surprise. He looked different from how Li Luo recalled.

Beside the little emperor was another tall woman in white royal robes. Her hair was elaborately tied up in a phoenix knot, and she exuded grace with every step. She was a born aristocrat.

Her features were extraordinarily exquisite too: a high nose-bridge; lovely, slim eyes; and alabaster skin. Most attractive of all were the two generous mounds on her chest, a bust that had Li Luo sighing in appreciation. Finally, he had seen someone comparable to sister Cai Wei.

Still, their demeanor was completely different. One was coy, the other demanded respect without exception.

"It's the Emperor and First Princess!"

"The First Princess is a Four Star Hall student at the Astral Sage College. She also runs the enforcement squad. If you cause trouble in school, you're screwed," someone whispered.

Li Luo finally took his admiring eyes off the First Princess, turning to the last person. It was a tall-shouldered middle-aged man with a solid charisma to match his stature. His face was unreadable and mysterious. In terms of sheer presence, he probably overshadowed Vice Principal Su Xin.

Li Luo immediately knew who this stern-looking man was.

He was the man holding the most power in the Xia Kingdom. The Regent, Gong Yuan.

The appearance of these four demanded absolute respect, and everyone bowed before them. The Astral Sage College discouraged kneeling within its grounds. Even the head of the royal court was a mere spectator here.

The four nodded in acknowledgment. The little emperor, the First Princess, and the Regent took their seats, while Vice Principal Su Xin moved forward.

"New students, on behalf of the school, I welcome you to the hallowed halls of the Astral Sage College."

Vice Principal Su Xin's warm voice washed over them, and the crowd quietened in peaceful obedience.

Li Luo sensed this and was amazed by how deep her power ran. Mere words were enough to sway the mood of the entire crowd.

Any banal inanities that fell from her lips were given new life, soothing feelings and compelling the listeners.

"Next, we will begin the Choosing of the Mentors, the most important event for new students. This will decide your mentors at the Astral Sage College, which will greatly affect your lives here."

There was a sharpening of interest as she spoke of the competition. They hung on every word she spoke.

"When the Choosing begins, the transport designs beneath your feet will be activated, and you will be transported to a different region. There will be many spirit beasts of different strengths. They each carry either a silver or gold talisman.

"Silver talismans correspond to a Silver Spark mentor, while gold talismans correspond to a Gold Gleam mentor. Defeat any spirit beast, take their talisman, and you will be assigned that mentor.

"There are also additional missions that award gold and silver talismans. As for how they will be announced, you will know once the competition begins.

"Of course, some will ask: what about Violet Vibrance mentors?"

Vice Principal Su Xin smiled slightly. "Violet Vibrance mentors do not have a corresponding talisman. They will be watching all of the students during the Choosing. If they feel that you have potential, they will naturally choose you."

Wow!

A mixed bag of responses greeted this. Some students shook their heads sadly, all too clear about their own strength. The Violet Vibrance mentors were Duke experts. Cultivating under their guidance meant receiving the lion's share of guidance and resources, but it was not at all easy to be noticed.

Li Luo frowned. This "potential" thing was a little vague.

Vice Principal Su Xin continued explaining a few more rules. "In ten minutes, the Choosing of the Mentors will begin. Prepare yourselves." She concluded, then turned to sit back down.

"Vice Principal Su Xin, I hear there are five Violet Vibrance mentors choosing this time," the First Princess said with an endearing smile.

Vice Principal Su Xin nodded back. "I wonder if any of these kids will catch their eye."

"This batch of students is quite strong. I'm sure the one from the military academy will be hotly contested by the mentors," the First Princess replied.

"An upper eighth-grade resonance is rare in any cohort. It's expected to be popular."

The Regent joined in the conversation. "The students are great, but even more impressive is the power that backs the Astral Sage College. Duke Stage experts can easily start their own houses or sects in the Xia Kingdom, but seeing them consent to teach at the Astral Sage College impresses me greatly."

"The royal court rules the hundred provinces of the Xia Kingdom. Your power is indisputable. The Regent is too kind," Vice Principal Su Xin replied politely.

"Not at all, not at all." The Regent laughed.

A gong struck, and there was a tightening of concentration among those present. A blinding light flooded out from the floor of the hall.

Columns of light appeared, enclosing the students within.

Li Luo could not react to it, and a light column quickly whirled him away.

Let the Choosing of the Mentors begin.

Chapter 0118: Mentor Shen Jinxiao

When Li Luo recovered his vision, he found himself on the side of a mountain, surrounded by huge trees. It was a wild and untamed world.

Deep in the jungle, occasional bestial cries sounded, followed by rising flocks of alarmed birds.

Li Luo took out his shortswords from his bag, strapping them to his waist. He picked a direction and moved swiftly.

He occasionally ran across other students, but they simply moved on with no intention of conversing.

Keeping up his hurried pace for a few minutes, Li Luo ran into a black spirit beast that looked like a cross between a tiger and a leopard.

A weak spirit beast, a black panthera.

Spirit beasts were classified into several categories. Weak spirit beasts were at the Ten Seals Stage in strength, while average spirit beasts were roughly at the first-tier of the Resonant Master Stage. Strong spirit beasts were at the second or third-tier of the Resonant Master Stage.

Spirit beasts beyond that level would undergo a metamorphic change. They would be a lot more sentient, and their strength was stupendous.

They were simply dubbed General spirit beasts, for their commensurate strength.

Higher than them were the legendary Duke spirit beasts, each one powerful enough to raze a city by themselves.

Li Luo spotted a faint, silver gleam on the black panthera's head. He looked more closely. A silver talisman.

"So defeating this weak spirit beast gets you a silver talisman and a Silver Spark mentor."

It was likely that the gold talismans were on the average spirit beasts. A first-tier Resonant Master beast was roughly what he could handle.

What about Violet Vibrance mentors?

Was he supposed to defeat strong spirit beasts? Those had to be at least at the second-tier of the Resonant Master or above. Was the system forcing the elite students to challenge themselves?

High standards... as the Violet Vibrance mentors deserved to set.

Li Luo did not attack the black panthera. He had no interest in wasting time getting silver talismans that he did not need. He turned and left.

Back in the Newcomers' Hall, the sea of heads had disappeared, now replaced with light screens projected through crystals. They reflected where the new students were, including Li Luo, who had turned in search of his next target.

Yan Lingqing watched the screen with mixed feelings. "I wonder if Li Luo can catch the eye of a Violet Vibrance mentor."

"With his abilities, he'll be fine," Jiang Qing'e reassured her.

She knew that Li Luo's dual resonant palaces were a rare talent comparable to her own ninth-grade resonance. If everything was just a matter of strength, she was not at all worried about a Violet Vibrance mentor taking a liking to Li Luo.

But...

There was worry in her golden eyes. She was worried about Shen Jinxiao, one of the Violet Vibrance mentors.

She was wary of this man who had once mentored her. He was a man who had kept his true self behind a wall, concealed so cleverly that even her ninth-grade light resonance had barely helped her glimpse the true nature of that person. She knew that he was cunning.

And he bore ill will against her.

That was why she had decided to change mentors. Given the immense potential of her 9th-grade light resonance, the Astral Sage College had consented.

And if Shen Jinxiao was going to take a hand to interfere with Li Luo, it would be much harder to deal with.

He knew all too clearly that her Achilles' heel was Li Luo.

...

Tang!

Sounds of heated battles echoed in the forest.

Li Luo had his swords in hand, charging them with blue resonant power. Shaping them into Water Edge, he sent his power slicing forth with a shrill whistle.

His swords glinted dangerously as he launched a barrage of attacks on the average spirit beast before him.

Ting! Tang!

Sparks flew as steel clashed against scale. Charged with light resonant power, his Water Edge was even sharper than before. Soon enough, he cut his way through the scaled armor, leaving the average spirit beast's blood streaming out.

"Roar!"

Infuriated by its injuries, the average spirit beast grew more violent, swinging and smashing with its heavy, spiked tail. In its wild thrashing, the tail whipped up to some serious speed.

"Waterlight Demon Mirror!"

A mirror of water shimmered into existence before him. Now that he was at the Resonant Master Stage, it was much brighter than before.

Boom!

The ponderous tail slammed into the Waterlight Demon Mirror, breaking it. Still, the backlash of energy ran right back up the beast's tail.

"ROAR!"

The spirit beast howled painfully as the tail was pummelled from the counterattack. It knew fear now, and it turned to flee.

Shoosh!

Li Luo gave it no such opportunity. A Waterlight Bullet burst before its eyes, blinding the miserable beast.

It ran blindly, crashing into trees as it went.

It was a hopeless escape. When it recovered its vision, the first and last thing it saw was a blue blade lancing towards its shoulder.

A clean skewer through its brain from the side.

It buckled one final time in a death throes and then ceased.

Li Luo wiped his brow in relief, then he took the gold talisman from its tail. With this, he had at least secured a Gold Gleam mentor.

With his insurance in place, he could now turn his attention to the problem of securing a Violet Vibrance mentor.

He continued forward until the trees gave way to a pristine lake, then suddenly he stopped on his tracks.

Beside the lake was a person holding a bunch of leaves. He was folding each one into a little leaf boat and then floating them down the lake.

Li Luo did not know who it was, but he recognized this person's clothing.

The robes of an Astral Sage College mentor. With purple light.

A Violet Vibrance mentor.

Finished with the leaves, the Violet Vibrance mentor stood up and turned to him with a genial smile.

"There you are, Li Luo. I've been waiting for you for so long.

"Let me introduce myself. I'm one of the five Violet Vibrance mentors... Shen Jinxiao."

Chapter 0119: The Methods of Shen Jinxiao

Sunlight glinted merrily off the ripples on the lake's surface.

The Violet Vibrance mentor called Shen Jinxiao stood by the lake, looking down at his own reflection. He looked friendly enough, but a chill ran down Li Luo's spine when he saw him.

This... Was he the Shen Jinxiao that Qing'e had mentioned?

Li Luo looked at him closely. He was a handsome man, and the Violet Vibrance robes added prestige to his charm. There were golden runic patterns extending out from both his temples, ending in a pale-gold rune on his brow.

Even without exuding any resonant power, his very person screamed danger.

Li Luo was sizing him up cautiously when the latter smiled at him. "I was once Jiang Qing'e's mentor. I wonder, has she mentioned me to you before?"

Li Luo ignored his question. "What is Mentor Shen doing here?"

Although he was very cautious of this person, there was nothing he really feared. This was the Choosing of the Mentors, an event that countless people were watching. Even though he was a Violet Vibrance mentor, there was nothing he could do to him openly.

Shen Jinxiao walked forwards. "Li Luo, I've taken a liking to you. I intend to take you under my wing," he said cheerfully, handing over an item he had pulled out.

Li Luo looked at it. A violet talisman shining with a curious light. This was a Violet Vibrance mentor's talisman. With it, one would become their student.

Exactly what Li Luo needed, except not this man's.

"Li Luo, take it, and you will have completed your goal," Shen Jinxiao said with an encouraging smile.

Li Luo looked up slowly from the violet talisman. He took a step back. "This doesn't seem in line with the rules, does it, Mentor Shen?"

"Violet talismans should be earned after rigorous trials. Giving it to be like this puts me in a difficult spot."

Shen Jinxiao waved it away lightly. "I know your potential. So we can skip the rigorous trials part."

Li Luo shook his head. "Mentor Shen, we seldom treasure things that come to us too easily," he said formally. "I wish to go through difficult trials and come to a final decision.

"If Mentor Shen is free, perhaps you could stick around. I'll go prove myself, then I'll come back and find you."

He continued to back away.

But he immediately felt a surging of worldly natural energy from all around him. It felt like his feet were glued to the ground.

"Mentor Shen, you won't let me go?"

Shen Jinxiao regarded him with his smile still in place. "Why won't you accept my good will? Any other student would be dying for this chance."

Li Luo hesitated. "Because..."

"I want a female mentor!" he declared righteously.

Shen Jinxiao's smile looked more like a dangerous leer now. "Li Luo, will you really not reconsider? There are only five Violet Vibrance mentors in this Choosing. If you reject me, the other four might not take you, out of respect for me. After all, you are no Jiang Qing'e. You do not have her potential to appeal with.

"They will probably not risk offending me for a passably good student like yourself."

Li Luo frowned. "Is Mentor Shen threatening me?"

"You can say that."

Li Luo laughed. "Since you think I'm only passably good, and there are so many better candidates out there, why would you only invite me?"

"Make good use of your last chance, Li Luo."

"Mentor Shen, you seem a little overeager," Li Luo said warily. "I don't know what you're up to, but nothing in this world comes for free."

Shen Jinxiao regarded him for a few seconds, then he stowed the violet talisman back in his robes.

"You've lost your last chance, Li Luo.

"It seems like you have to taste pain before you will treasure a violet talisman." He raised two fingers and spoke through them.

His voice echoed around the entire area. In a radius of dozens of miles, all students suddenly heard his voice in their ears, Li Luo included.

"Violet Vibrance mission: take down Li Luo. Whoever defeats him will be awarded one violet talisman."

This put a real damper on Li Luo's plans. This was low. The moment Li Luo didn't take his carrot, he whipped out his stick.

"Don't worry about whether my actions are against the rules or not. Here at the Astral Sage College, Violet Vibrance mentors have far greater power than you can imagine. As long as your life is not threatened, there's just about nothing I can't do," Shen Jinxiao said mildly.

He reached out with one finger and poked Li Luo lightly on the head. Suddenly, a column of light surrounded him, extending up towards the sky. It could be seen clearly for many miles around.

"This pillar of light will linger for a while. All the other students will be able to find you thanks to it. You want the favor of other Violet Vibrance mentors? Here's your chance to acquit yourself. If you can get yourself out of this one, perhaps other Violet Vibrance mentors will notice you."

Shen Jinxiao snickered to himself. "Well... begin your performance. I'm very much looking forward to it."

He dissolved into a speck of light, vanishing on the spot.

Li Luo watched him disappear with a dark look. "Shen Jinxiao, was it? You dog, I'll remember you."

Looking up, he tried everything he could think of to get rid of the pillar of light, but he failed. Finally, he gave it up. Something a Duke expert had pulled off was not something a puny Resonant Master like himself could dispel.

He drew his shortswords and charged back into the forest, hoping the trees would at least dim the light somewhat.

Time to see the extent of the incoming gank.

Hopefully, there wasn't anyone too strong. Otherwise, he would be screwed.

When Li Luo rushed into the forest and the hunt began, the announcement of the Violet Vibrance mission appeared for those on the spectator stands as well.

Its appearance was greeted by a collective gasp of surprise.

Chapter 0120: Getting Ganked

Shen Jinxiao's Violet Vibrance mission had appeared on the screens in the hall.

Immediately, students in Li Luo's vicinity were starting to converge on his position.

"What's going on?"

"Is a Violet Vibrance mentor giving this new student a test?"

"Li Luo? The young lord of House Luolan?"

"Hehe. Poor fella. How's one supposed to survive a gank like that?"

"A bit harsh, yeah."

"..."

On the highest dais, the little emperor recognized Li Luo on screen. "That's unfair. Isn't this bullying?" He piped up innocently.

The First Princess laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Absolute fairness rarely exists in this world," she said softly. "Violet Vibrance mentors have the highest authority to test the new students. It is one of their responsibilities."

"Of course... this test from mentor Shen Jinxiao seems a little slanted, doesn't it?"

She directed the last question to Vice Principal Su Xin.

Su Xin nodded solemnly. "Indeed, it is a little outside the box. But during the Choosing, Violet Vibrance mentors can do anything they wish to test students, as long as they do not risk their lives."

"Still, this might be a good opportunity for the student Li Luo to prove himself. If he can demonstrate his potential and excellence, he will be showered in laurels."

The First Princess did not comment. Performing well when ganked was no easy task. It was likely that he would end up being a stepping stone for others.

Li Luo was in trouble.

"Shen Jinxiao is going too far!" Yan Lingqing cried from her seat.

This was blatant bias. Who could deal with a gank like this?

Jiang Qing'e was expressionless. There was no outward anger, but her calm eyes held killing intent.

Jiang Qing'e reached out a finger and traced it lightly on the stone railing in front of them. Bits of stone flew as she carved two words into it.

Shen Jinxiao.

Yan Lingqing had a look of surprise when she saw Jiang Qing'e calmly carving his name. "What are you doing?" she asked in a hushed voice.

Jiang Qing'e wiped the words away as casually as she had carved them. "Practicing the markings I'll leave on his grave. After all, he once taught me before; it's only proper for me to buy him a gravestone."

Yan Lingqing's jaw dropped, then she giggled. Jiang Qing'e, you're really a monster. Already ready to bury a Violet Vibrance mentor?

Are you that angry?

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The stir that the Violet Vibrance mission had created in the Newcomers' Hall was nothing compared to the action on the battleground.

In a radius of dozens of miles, the students that received the mission perked up with wild enthusiasm.

A Violet Vibrance mission so quickly?

Defeat Li Luo? That was an easy violet talisman!

Many of the students pulled out books containing the newcomers' information that they had bought at exorbitant prices. They looked up Li Luo.

"First in the Tianshu province? Completely average in strength—how did he trigger a Violet Vibrance mission?!" There was nothing in his bio that gave them pause besides his identity. But on the battlefield, status was irrelevant.

"It's basically a free violet talisman!"

Many students rejoiced. They raced at full speed towards the column of light.

The lure of a violet talisman was enough to get them riled up.

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"Hahaha, Li Luo I can't believe you're in so much trouble already!"

In another region, Duze Beixuan erupted in raucous laughter when the mission appeared.

"Impressive. Truly impressive, to be worth a Violet Vibrance mission.

"So be it. I was planning to take you down anyway. Is this not the perfect chance?" Duze Beixuan chortled, still shaking his head. He began to move too.

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"Are Violet Vibrance missions all so strange?"

The short-haired Bai Doudou was puzzled. Li Luo was that guy they had met at the registration, right? He was a handsome guy, but what had he done to trigger this mob mission?

"Forget it, I don't care. I just want a violet talisman."

Bai Doudou hefted her long spear, dragging the tip across the ground and creating a shower of sparks. Her wind resonance surged forth to carry her forward as swiftly as the breeze.

The secret behind her speed was in her feet, which seemed to ride the wind itself.

...

Somewhere in the forest.

A swarthy and fearsome youth was sitting on a mountain of average spirit beast corpses, his hands full of gold talismans. He gave them a shake, and they tinkled gently against each other.

He had received the Violet Vibrance mission too.

Qin Zhulu.

"Gank? Li Luo?"

Qin Zhulu did nothing for a moment, then he pulled out the newcomer jade tablet from his robes. Li Luo's name was written on it.

"It's him?" He recalled the silver-haired youth who had swapped tablets with him.

So the Violet Vibrance mission was to take that guy out.

He stuffed the jade tablet back and carelessly tossed the gold talismans out. They were not what he wanted.

Here at the Astral Sage College, he needed the best mentors. Those below the Duke stage were not qualified to teach him.

Still, a violet talisman won in such an unfair fight meant nothing.

"Maybe beating strong spirit beasts will get me violet talismans? That's better."

Qin Zhulu looked up at the light column in the distance. He shook his head. "I'll not attack you. Count this as returning the favor for taking your spot.

"May luck be with you."

He stood up, uncaring of his gore-covered appearance. He moved casually, heading in the direction where he sensed stronger spirit beasts. Those had to be strong spirit beasts. Perhaps he could find one that was at least equivalent to a third-tier Resonant Master in strength.

Hopefully, it would be strong enough to amuse him.