

Resonance 291

Chapter 0291: My Hero

Heedless of the danger, Li Luo charged into the sea of Others, their arms hungry and welcoming.

The torrent of whispering voices came gunning for his mind.

He was immune. He was on the brink of death, on a strange, feverish high that closed off his mind to everything else.

He charged on, a lamb bounding into the tiger's den. There was no escape there, but he chose to go anyway.

He was enough of a tactician to understand that the stalemate could not be allowed to continue. The plan could not be allowed to fail here.

He had to push the plan along.

Only he could do it. Only he was in the right place.

Up to this point, he had come to the same conclusion as the rest of the students. But unlike them, he believed that there was a thread of hope.

A desperate hope that the three-tailed beast would not sit idly by and watch him be taken by the Others.

Li Luo knew that the three-tailed beast wanted his power. That was why it had chased him for so long.

Would it let its target be eaten by someone else? Probably not.

And once it moved, the grinning demon would move too.

Stalemate broken.

As for Li Luo? With chaos came opportunity.

But this was all a long shot. If the three-tailed beast hesitated just a moment too long, chances were that Li Luo might be eaten alive.

That would be a tragedy.

A humongous bet.

The stakes? Li Luo's life.

There was no other choice though.

He was pale but determined. Soon enough, he was in the thick of it, weaving and ducking through the mad horde. The one plus-side was that he didn't have to care about who was friendly or not. Everyone was unfriendly.

The grinning demon did not move a muscle.

But his minions were not as disciplined. They leaped up like frogs, maws wide open as they snapped at the silver fly.

Giant bodies flew left and right as he continued to dodge and pray.

They passed by so close that he could even see the spittle in their mouths.

Li Luo was purposely cutting it close with his dodges. Each one made his heart squeeze with fright. He had to keep up the danger to tantalize the beast.

BOOM!

Just as Li Luo felt like he was going to be overwhelmed, he sensed a huge movement from behind. Aha!

It charged the Others that were swarming over him.

Crackle!

A whole bunch of Others were incinerated with one angrily hot breath.

Li Luo's own skin was scorched badly, but he could move through the pain. A little giggle escaped his lips.

The three-tailed beast was attacking his attackers.

Warning them to stay away from its prey.

Li Luo waved to it energetically.

I love you, baby.

The three-tailed beast's answer was a gigantic tail swipe towards Li Luo, aiming to snag him.

Li Luo dodged nimbly, and the wide-area attack swept a few more Others away.

Painful howling.

The grinning demon could hold back no longer. It seemed clear enough that the three-tailed beast was not only saving Li Luo, but challenging it as well.

Guardian beast, confirmed.

In that case, it would fight to the bitter end!

The grinning demon snarled, its black energy surging forth in a roiling wave.

Pss!

Black sludge sprayed from its mouth. Each pile of sludge formed a pale arm in mid-air, which snaked out swiftly towards the three-tailed beast.

The sight of the grinning demon spitting a hail of disembodied arms was enough to make everyone's skin crawl.

“Roar!”

The three-tailed beast turned to face the grinning demon's attack. With a wild bellow, it released more burning energy in response. A giant claw raked out, smashing the Eroding Class Others into pathetic smears on the sides of the deep gouges it left in the ground.

Boom!

Both sides clashed in a titanic struggle.

Li Luo was sent flying by the epic aftershock.

He whooped like a madman as he sailed through the air. Mission accomplished!

Once their primal instincts took over, they wouldn't stop fighting until one side was dead.

He had done it.

He felt a hot lump in his throat. He wanted to cry from relief and elation. For all these days, he had been strung up tight, and now the tension was finally gone.

Ssshh shhhh!

He was numb from fatigue, ready to keel over and collapse into a dead sleep. But when he closed his eyes, the whispering sounds of more Others came for him. As his vision dimmed, he saw a dozen of them loping his way.

Shit.

But once he relaxed, he found that he could not summon strength again. He had lost control of his body and was lying there helplessly.

"Foiled... after all that?" he thought in frustration.

Weng!

A beam of golden light cut through the enemies.

BOOM!

A blade followed behind, beheading those that remained in a single clean stroke.

Jiang Qing'e landed beside him.

Behind her, Duze Honglian, her squad, and some other Three Star Hall students. They had come to retrieve their hero.

Li Luo closed his eyes in relief and let his body go limp.

Jiang Qing'e quickly scooped him up and then leaned his head tenderly against her shoulder. His breath was hot against her neck.

She blushed a little, but this was not enough to make her let go. She reached out to pat his head, then she lowered her own to his ear.

"Li Luo, this time, you're my hero."

Chapter 0292: Clash of the Titans

After saving Li Luo, the group quickly retreated to the high wall.

The Others slinked back, afraid now that their leader was occupied.

Li Luo was greeted like a hero.

Two and Three Star Hall students alike cheered with reverence at their exhausted hero.

He had saved them all.

If not for the huge risk that he had undertaken, all of them would have been torn to bits and eaten.

If they made it back to the Astral Sage College, Li Luo's reputation would be godly.

He would definitely be showered with awards and rewards.

Jiang Qing'e set Li Luo down to rest, and the others crowded over.

"Li Luo, you're awesome! How did you manage to get the three-tailed beast here?" Tian Tian gushed.

"It ran over the moment it saw me. I think it was dazzled by my handsomeness."

Tian Tian and the others all laughed. He wasn't cheeky anymore. To them, he was their hero, and the funniest man alive.

"It's a good thing our leader insisted on bringing you with us on this purging mission. Otherwise, we'd all be dead," Qiu Bai said piously. "I always knew our leader was perfect. I feel ashamed for ever doubting her."

Tian Tian looked at him in disgust.

Still, who would have thought that their savior would not be the strongest fighters like Jiang Qing'e or Duze Honglian, but a newcomer to the Umbra Cave and a first year?

Li Luo had exceeded all expectations this time.

Bai Mengmeng and Xin Fu squeezed their way past the crowd too.

"Leader," she said with glowing eyes, "you're going to be the school idol from now on."

Li Luo waved it away modestly.

"Leader, the moment you left the purified spot, I composed the quote for your grave, but it's okay—we can always use it another time."

Li Luo stared at his other teammate. Was this boy cursing him?

He should learn from Mengmeng.

But with the outpouring of gratitude and well-wishes from everyone else, Li Luo had to let Xin Fu go (resentfully) for now.

Duze Honglian hung back from the crowd, arms folded stiffly across her chest.

Not even she could find any fault with his accomplishment now.

He had laid his life on the line for it.

His courage had to be admitted.

In the past she had not really paid much attention to him. Jiang Qing'e had been her one and only rival. But now Li Luo was a real threat after he had proven himself in this crisis.

The young lord of House Luolan was a guy who was happiest flying under the radar, but he might just be as dangerous as Jiang Qing'e herself.

No wonder House Luolan had been recovering ever since he appeared.

She had thought it was Jiang Qing'e's credit alone, but Li Luo must have had a crucial hand in it.

Ultimately, Li Luo had saved all of them, which meant that she sort of owed him one.

Of course, it didn't mean that enemies could become friends. They were destined to be enemies.

The cheering on the wall continued for a long time, until their bubble of elation was popped by a particularly powerful energy explosion that rocked the entire spot.

Li Luo, now slightly rested, climbed back to his feet as well.

The spirit beast and Other were still duking it out, raw bolts of energy and corruption flying back and forth. The fury of their fighting left craters across the entire field.

They flinched with every impact, unable to keep their eyes open even though they knew it was coming.

"Well? Who do you think will win?" Li Luo asked.

"The three-tailed beast has a big advantage. It's unusually strong—seems like the rumors that it was trying to break into Duke Stage has some ground to it. It has had the grinning demon well in hand from the start of the battle."

"Although the grinning demon is a Heavenly Disaster Class, in terms of pure battle power, it's a little short. Plus, it spent a lot of its reserves breaking down the purification barrier. It's not doing well in the fight."

"I think the grinning demon will lose, but the spirit beast will pay a heavy price for the win."

The ideal outcome: one dead, one injured.

And when the three-tailed beast was injured, the seal in his hand would work just fine.

He couldn't wait.

The epic battle was a bloody affair, now white-hot in intensity.

Both were throwing out their complete arsenal in order to deal as much damage as they could.

The three-tailed beast had raw gashes all across its flanks, still smoking with black gas.

The grinning demon's face was in even worse shape. It looked like someone had stomped all over it. Claw marks riddled its body, making its grotesque Other body even more hideous than it already was.

It was badly injured.

The grinning demon lurched forward again, but its corruptive power was markedly weaker now.

It was mad with anger. Just at the crowning moment of its victory, this damn animal had come to ruin everything.

“Hee hee!”

It screamed an insane laugh, and the countless Others started to rush over as if commanded by some intangible force.

They were closing in on the three-tailed beast from behind.

The beast roared, sending jet after jet of its flame attack against them.

The horde was overwhelming.

Some of them fell, but they were immediately replaced by others. Their speed did not slow.

A torrent of black finally reached the three-tailed beast... and then moved past it.

They were not charging towards the three-tailed beast, but toward the injured grinning demon!

They didn't seem to be in the mood to treat the grinning demon's wounds.

The grinning demon sensed that something was off, and it screamed in defiance.

The scream held no more power. Overtaken by waves of Others, it disappeared under their combined power.

Anguished screams from under the mass of monsters.

The students watched wide-eyed as the seemingly invincible grinning demon was pulled apart by its minions before their very eyes.

Some ripped off chunks of flesh and then scampered away to safe places to enjoy it.

Almost like a buffet.

Its army had backfired... When its power waned in its fight, so did its control over the lower level Others.

When its mastery faded, it was simply a resource for them to eat.

A reverse devouring.

Like a swarm of raving piranhas, they tore their former master to bits, and then melted away into the gloom. Suddenly, the plains were quiet again.

No one cheered.

They could see the three-tailed beast still standing, bleeding from its wounds.

Its crimson eyes were still bright as it now turned towards them.

Chapter 0293: Green Luan

Rivulets of blood ran down the fur of the three-tailed beast as it turned to the defenders of the purified spot. It was a frightened silence that greeted it.

Li Luo might have dealt with the grinning demon, but the three-tailed beast could very well be an even larger problem!

It was even stronger than the grinning demon. And who among them could stand up against the beast that had taken down the Other?

It was heavily injured, but it was still much stronger than anyone they had.

They had celebrated too early!

The students were dispirited all over again, and their shoulders slumped in resignation of their death.

This rollercoaster of emotions between hope and despair was too much to bear.

Even Jiang Qing'e and the other third years didn't know what to do.

"Let's go. Hold out as long as we can. At least the beast is alone. If we lose here, everyone can scatter and run away. A few of us should leave," Jiang Qing'e said calmly.

The grinning demon had them surrounded with Others previously. Once their barrier broke, they would have died without exception. But now, although their new foe was stronger, it was alone. It was, perhaps, a slight improvement.

Plus, the spirit beast might be savage, but it probably wasn't as keen on human flesh compared to the Others.

The others saw the dark humor in the situation and smiled grimly.

No one blamed Li Luo for his plan. At the very least, he had bought them time, if nothing else.

Perhaps they would have been able to bring the spirit beast down if the grinning demon hadn't been reverse cannibalized by its own kind.

Or if it had bought enough time for reinforcements to arrive.

The three-tailed beast stomped its way over to them steadily, shaking the ground with each step. The students couldn't breathe.

There was some amusement in those crimson eyes. It was toying with its food.

The most classic play of beasts everywhere: play with the prey until it died.

Jiang Qing'e did not intend to go down that way. The third year veterans all stood strong with her for now, but the Two Star Hall students might break down at any moment.

Li Luo stepped out before she could.

Everyone stared at him, agog.

"Well, since I'm the one who made this mess, I guess I should clean it," Li Luo said, pulling up his sleeve as casually as if he had spilled milk on the table. He was quite satisfied with his performance so far.

This would be a very satisfying end to things. Him, wrapping up the festivities.

The seal on his palm was crying out for satisfaction.

The students looked at him doubtfully. Was he planning to do it alone?

Sure, he had pulled off some pretty epic stuff so far, but surely this was impossible, right?

"Li Luo, we're not blaming you for bringing the beast here," Tian Tian said hesitantly. "There's no need to atone with your death."

All the students nodded agreement.

"I'm not going to die," Li Luo said indignantly.

Qiu Bai sighed. "The rest of us are though."

Li Luo stared at him. "Damn, man, you're still breathing, aren't you? Don't get all nihilistic on me!

"I've been running my ass off the last few days and even I haven't given up yet."

"You're really going?" Jiang Qing'e suddenly cut in.

Li Luo nodded gravely. "One must bear one's responsibilities."

Some of the female students were in tears, but Jiang Qing'e had a look of happy amusement in her eyes.

"Go on, then."

"Er..."

This wasn't right. Had she always been such a blunt person? Wasn't she going to tearfully beg him to live or something?

He had even prepared a nice, heroic script. Now he couldn't even use it.

"Go on, then." She poked him.

"Sister Qiang, that's very unkind of you. How could you send Li Luo to face that thing alone?" a student called out.

Li Luo saw that Jiang Qing'e was still smiling. Had the plump swan sensed that he had something up his now-rolled-up sleeve?

Was she that astute?

Damn, he had been expecting some comfort or reward. Those were hard to come by.

Why did swans have to be smarter than they were affectionate?

He kicked up a cloud of dust grumpily and started forward, but a cool, slim hand suddenly slipped into his own. His heart skipped a beat.

She gave him a glowing smile, looking down almost shyly as the wind blew a wisp of hair across her face. "I'm counting on you this time. But you've made me see my own failings this time. I'll work hard in the future so you never have to take such risks again."

Li Luo's heart warmed and chilled at the same time. It was very touching, but were those words that the girl should be saying to the guy!?

Still, a little reward was better than no reward. He gave her hand a little squeeze, then he walked on.

"Leader," Xin Fu said, catching up and matching his stride. "Do you still need my gravestone quote?"

"Off with you," Li Luo said irritably. This guy must have caught on too... Why was he so damn readable nowadays?

He hopped down off the high wall, walking on towards the three-tailed beast.

It stared at him, and its killing intent filled the air.

It was the cunning human that had played it.

If not for this kid luring it here, it would not have spent so much resources and energy fighting that grinning demon.

But now that was behind it. First it would eat this kid and then the rest of the scraps behind it.

"Why, hello there," Li Luo said affably to its rumbling growl.

Like an engine roaring to life, the three-tailed beast leaped forth with a deafening cry, ready to shred Li Luo to bits. Its shadow eclipsed him, and he looked especially small under it.

No more delays.

It was time to eat the human.

Li Luo raised his palm, and the seal in his hand glowed.

Finally.

WHISH! A rumble of wind and thunder suddenly swept in.

A bolt of green light appeared, swifter than anyone could register. It arced across the entire sky, in the shape of a green luan on the wing.

The students gasped.

"Hold it right there, foul beast!"

BOOM!

The howling wind formed a green wall around Li Luo, and the three-tailed beast ran headlong into it. The wall shattered, and the beast was thrown back, winded.

While Li Luo was still reeling, a column of green light suddenly landed before him.

Li Luo saw a tall, willowy figure with a staff of white jade.

That arresting figure, that strength, Li Luo recognized her in an instant.

The First Princess!

Reinforcements were here!

But Li Luo felt a strong surge of resentment come forth.

"I've hunted this thing for days. Are you going to steal my thunder just like that in the end?!"

Chapter 0294: First Princess' Timely Arrival

The opportune appearance of the First Princess left the entire group of students momentarily dumbstruck, then they erupted with raucous cheers of excitement and relief.

Their faces were scrawled with expressions of fervour and solace. They had been granted a new lease of life.

No one had foreseen this development, that a savior would appear in their most dire of times.

The First Princess possessed almighty Heavenly Dipper General strength, ensuring that even the three-tailed beast would not find her an easy foe to dispatch, despite its power.

Furthermore, her arrival heralded the fact that reinforcements were likely to be approaching as well.

Their sticky situation had been resolved by a significant margin.

At the same time, hearing the hallelujahs from the crowd caused the First Princess to heave a sigh of relief. It looked as though their defenses had not been breached completely. She had made it in time.

Turning her head to glance at Li Luo, she queried, "What is our lone hero doing against the three-tailed beast? Hurry and leave this place to me."

Li Luo blankly stared at the First Princess's heavenly features, an expression that looked as though he was on the verge of breaking out into tears. "Dear Princess, couldn't you have taken a detour?"

If the First Princess had arrived just a tad later, he would have cleaned up the entire situation perfectly. That would have been the ideal ending!

The truth was that Li Luo had been hunted by this three-tailed beast for many days. Pent up frustration and fury had built up within him, and this was the best opportunity to let himself loose.

The First Princess was a little shocked, immediately shooting an annoyed glance at Li Luo before huffily replying, "A detour? So that I would be just in time to retrieve your corpse? You little bastard, you don't know how to appreciate others' good intentions! I have not rested a wink during these last few days, rushing here without pause through the days and nights. In the end, I even left my team behind, all so that I could arrive here even quicker!"

Li Luo finally had a good look at the First Princess at this point. To his surprise, her usually immaculate bun had a few strands out of place and her usually pristine and noble charm seemed to have been lost.

She had clearly selflessly rushed here with all her strength when the clarion call for help was made.

"The First Princess is truly a sterling paragon of our generation.." Li Luo sighed as he gave her a thumbs up.

Although the situation had been stabilized through his actions, the lady in front of him had rushed here to save them. This debt of friendship had to be recognized and returned!

"Are you alright though?" the First Princess queried as she inspected Li Luo from head to toe. Surprisingly, this devious man seemed to be completely fine. He was a little worn out, but otherwise, he seemed to be in the pink of health.

"I thank the First Princess for her concern." Li Luo grinned.

"Of course I'm worried. Why else would I have bolted over here? Well, you clearly know the reason why. His Majesty finally has a faint ray of hope in recovery, so how can I condemn him to his doom?"

Nodding, Li Luo agreed. With the other party's strength and status, there was no need to do so.

She did not beat around the bush and got straight to the point. Li Luo was her only concern and nothing else.

However, it was not for him as a person, but the fact that he was the only source of salvation for her brother.

The First Princess did not continue with idle words, directly turning to face the three-tailed beast, a grim look forming upon her face. "Didn't you say that a Heavenly Disaster Class Other had appeared? How did it turn into a peak stage Heavenly Disaster Class spirit beast?" Furthermore, she was a little confused as the spirit beast in front of her also seemed a little familiar...

"The Heavenly Disaster Class Other has already been dealt with," Li Luo replied dryly.

This answer left the First Princess dumbfounded. The Heavenly Disaster Class Other had been killed? Just who could have managed such a feat amongst this group? Was it Jiang Qing'e? That didn't seem very plausible.

A ninth-grade light resonance was tyrannical, but it did not possess such demonic might.

Additionally, Jiang Qing'e was still in the Earth Fiend Stage.

Suddenly, a realization dawned upon her. "Could it be that this spirit beast was the one who finished it off?"

"Oh! The First Princess truly is a sharp one!" Li Luo smiled.

Even though she had managed to guess what had happened correctly, she still felt that something just didn't seem right. "Then how did this peak General Stage spirit beast appear here?" It was too coincidental that a spirit beast could conveniently dispose of their troubles at their moment of crisis.

"Hmm, that... Well, I lured it from the forbidden zone," Li Luo cheerily explained.

The First Princess looked as though she had been struck by a thunderbolt. No wonder this spirit beast seemed familiar. This was the spirit beast that had been imprisoned in purified spot 13's forbidden zone zone!

But how had Li Luo managed to bring it out?

Sweeping her gaze across the battlefield, she finally noticed the signs of a cataclysmic and grisly battle, most likely the result of the confrontation between the Heavenly Disaster Class Other and the spirit beast.

"You purposely led the spirit beast here to borrow its might to handle the Heavenly Disaster Class Other."

Her expression and gaze towards Li Luo were filled with complicated emotions as she had fully understood the daring and danger of this plan.

However, she still had to admit that this was the one solution that could have changed their fate.

At the very least, this spirit beast's confrontation with the Heavenly Disaster Class Other had bought them precious time. Otherwise, the only thing she would have been greeted with would have been a pile of dried husks.

"Li Luo, you're truly impressive," the First Princess reluctantly conceded.

"You truly deserve the title of the hero of the masses if everything was truly orchestrated by you!"

"First Princess, there's no need to exaggerate. I'm just trying to save myself after all."

A wry smile on her face, she replied, "However, your current predicament isn't any better than your previous situation."

Her lovely eyes once again focused on the three-tailed beast that had paused in its tracks upon her arrival. A trace of seriousness gradually materialised in her gaze. "Unfortunately, this spirit beast is even stronger than that Heavenly Disaster Class Other. The only bright side is that it has been injured heavily. If I had to face it at peak condition, I would not be its match unfortunately. Perhaps I would only be able to buy time for reinforcements to arrive. By then, this would no longer be an issue."

Although the First Princess possessed Heavenly Dipper General Stage strength, she was still a notch weaker than the three-tailed beast. This was a peak General Stage spirit beast that had even touched upon the path of the Duke!

A victory against it would definitely be hardfought. However, buying time was of no concern.

"You should retreat back to the wall." The First Princess' grip tightened around a white jade staff, preparing to clash against the spirit beast.

Upon seeing this, Li Luo could feel a headache coming. "Your Highness, although I am very thankful for your timely intervention, to be honest... you can just leave this up to me." The First Princess was

stopped right in her tracks, a look of complete bafflement on her face. The entire scene was head scratchingly strange.

Li Luo wanted her to leave the spirit beast to him? One that she would have trouble dealing with?

"Li Luo, are you trying to pull a prank on me? This isn't the time to mess around," the First Princess spoke in exasperation.

Li Luo did not continue to speak superfluous words. Instead, he took a deep breath and raised his palm towards the beast, pointing it directly at the spirit beast not too far away.

The seal in the middle of his palm began to emit a radiant glow.

Splash! Roar!

In that very moment, tens of thousands of scintillating rays of light lanced out of his palm, directly piercing the void between the two before completely enveloping the massive body of the three-tailed beast.

"Roar!"

These chains of light had taken the spirit beast by surprise, eliciting an immediate struggle to escape.

Yet the seal left no space for retreat, immediately glowing with even more resplendent intensity. They were like snakes made of light, drilling their way into the already gaping wounds of the spirit beast, further rending its flesh and coiling themselves around the bones of the beast.

"Roar!"

The three-tailed beast roared with mournful and pitiful cries at this act.

Realizing that the situation was not looking optimistic for it, it began to struggle with renewed ferocity, a raging flame bursting out and enshrouding it, turning it into a flaming titan of a beast.

Its very existence scorched the earth and caused it to crack.

With its last struggle, the massive creature began to retreat.

Seeing this sight, Li Luo was extremely surprised. He had truly underestimated the intelligence of this three-tailed beast—he had never expected it to retreat in such a situation. Its self preservation instincts were truly exceptional.

Ultimately, the seal on his palm was lacking in strength.

Furthermore, his body just wasn't strong enough, and he could not supply the seal with greater amounts of resonant power.

A furrowed frown on his face, he immediately turned to face the First Princess, stretching out his hand and very naturally lightly grasping hers, completely disregarding the look of shock on her face. "Sorry, but I need to borrow you for a second," he chimed in with a radiant grin on his face.

Right at this moment, the First Princess could feel the resonant power from within her, explosively rush out like a tide through their combined channel.

Chapter 0295: Sealing the Three-tailed Beast

With the First Princess' deep reserves of power working as a battery, the seal on Li Luo's palm powered up, its energy swelling.

More and more chains of light lashed around the three-tailed beast, biting deep into its flesh until it caught against bone.

"RAWGH!!"

Like never-ending thunder, its howls shook the earth.

No use.

Supported by the First Princess' resonant power, the three-tailed beast was finally caught, and its body began to fly towards Li Luo.

Its ponderous body was rapidly shrinking, and it soon dissolved into a mere stream of light that was sucked up by the seal on Li Luo's palm.

"Seal!" Li Luo shouted, slamming his palm on the ground.

The light rays reversed directions obediently, now splaying out over the ground in a formation that cracked the soil. From underneath, a stone statue of the three-tailed beast emerged.

The statue was trussed up in chains.

Finally, the three-tailed beast had been sealed for good.

At that moment, the ancient seal on Li Luo's palm faded, but in its place he felt a warmth around his wrist.

A dark-red bracelet was forming around his wrist.

He shook his sleeve down over it instinctively, hiding it from view.

Whew.

"All done."

He turned around to see a pair of astonished phoenix eyes regarding him.

The First Princess could not process what had just happened.

She had fought tooth and nail against the three-tailed beast in a harrowing fight, and yet Li Luo had sealed it away so easily?

What sort of sorcery was this?

What had happened in his short time here in the Umbra Cave?

Her mind was still reeling, but her court training allowed her to hold her composure.

"What did you just do?" she asked in a steady voice.

"I used the seal that the principal left behind." Li Luo grinned. "It's a sentient piece of work, so it grasped my plan and transferred itself to my hand. But the seal wasn't strong enough, so I had to weaken the three-tailed beast first."

"The principal's seal..." It had never occurred to her that the seal could be used in such a way.

Her face went dark as realization hit her. "Which means it didn't matter whether I came or not?"

She had charged towards them at full speed for days, not even caring that her hair was a mess. But they actually didn't need her?

She glowered at Li Luo, seized with an urge to clobber his silver head.

Li Luo started and backed away. "Er... don't say that. Without your resonant power, I might not have been able to seal the beast."

She glowered some more. Anyone could be a battery. Plus, they had other strong fighters here like Jiang Qing'e and Duzhe Honglian. Their powers combined were probably pretty close to her own.

Of course, it was great that they were all safe, but the First Princess still felt somewhat resentful.

Her ample chest heaved with a sigh. "Well, I have to hand it to you, Li Luo." Her tone was neutral, and he had no idea what she was implying.

She turned and walked off towards the purified spot.

Li Luo watched her slender figure go. Women were really hard to please sometimes. Even royalty had their immature moments.

"Was I wrong to seal the three-tailed beast?!"

"You couldn't beat it either..."

That was just plain unreasonable.

Li Luo turned back to look at the statue, and he rubbed at the red ring on his wrist. A moment later, he headed back for the purified spot too.

On the high wall, everyone was still entranced by the statue.

The spirit beast had been even more terrifying than the grinning demon, but Li Luo had easily sealed it away... That's right, not the First Princess, but Li Luo!

They had seen clearly that the First Princess had not done anything. Li Luo had handled it all by himself.

It was so preposterous that they started to wonder if they were all in a dream...

Or perhaps the grinning demon's illusion world?

One student slapped himself, and the sound was enough to convince other students.

Yup, it was real. Li Luo had sealed the beast.

"That seal he used... it must have been the one that the principal left at the forbidden zone. Somehow he must have managed to transfer it to himself and then used it when the beast was injured." Jiang Qing'e spoke their thoughts.

"No wonder it looked familiar," Tian Tian confirmed.

"Which means," Qiu Bai added, "that guy already had the way to suppress the beast prepared? Then all that martyr act was bullshit?!"

"Junior Li Luo's seal must not have been a guaranteed win. He was still very courageous." A random senior girl defended him.

"..."

Qiu Bai was speechless. Li Luo's popularity was already taking root. Did it really mean so much to be handsome? The girls had been blown away by him so easily.

Still, none of it really mattered compared to the fact that they had finally overcome the crisis.

Many students were ecstatic, on a high of relief at having survived. They were totally worn out after everything that had happened in the last few days, both physically through fighting and mentally after struggling with their imminent deaths.

Moreover, they had survived completely uninjured.

The First Princess walked among them, reassuring the students that more reinforcements were following soon and that they would soon be safe.

She walked over to Jiang Qing'e and the other third years.

"Thank you, Your Highness," Jiang Qing'e said in greeting.

"Don't mention it. So many days of road dust, all to be a resonant power battery," the First Princess said dryly. "House Luolan's young lord is a real madman, to take on a Heavenly Dipper General Stage spirit beast as a Resonant Master."

Jiang Qing'e shook her head. "That was not his strength, Your Highness. It was the principal's."

"Still, the beast was even stronger than a Heavenly Disaster Class. The guts on the boy to lure it over from the forbidden zone... House Luolan has a sleeping dragon in its eaves."

In the past, Duze Honglian would have jeered, with no care that it was the First Princess who had said it. But now she held her tongue.

Because if not for Li Luo's plan, the purified spot would have fallen to the grinning demon, and all of them would be dead.

There was nothing that anyone could criticize about Li Luo's contribution.

In the past, she thought that her younger brother was highly talented, that he wouldn't lose to anybody. But having seen Li Luo's performance here, Duze Beixuan started to pale in comparison. "After this, Li Luo's popularity and reputation in school will skyrocket. He'll be the star of his year."

Reputation was a curious thing. Sometimes, strength alone couldn't earn it.

Jiang Qing'e looked at her fiancé, who was currently chatting and laughing with his own squad. They were thronged by many grateful students, including many Three Star Hall students.

She smiled. Reputation? As if Li Luo ever cared about such things. The guy only cared about getting 100,000 school points on this trip. Still, at least they were out of danger now.

Even for someone as tough as her, it was a huge relief.

Chapter 0296: Dark Red Bracelet

Approximately half a day later, the majority of the dispatched reinforcements steadily streamed in.

The arrival of these saviors greatly strengthened the morale in the stronghold, giving rise to endless cheers.

These reinforcements were led by Gong Shenjun, and they marched in valiantly. However, the first thing that caught their eye was the colossal three-tailed beast statue.

Everyone looked around in confusion.

"Wasn't the call for help due to a Heavenly Disaster Class Other's sneak attack? How did it transform into a spirit beast?"

"This seal looks extremely complicated. Could this perhaps be Your Highness' doing?"

"Amazing."

"It looks like our effort was for naught. Your Highness has already single handedly dispatched of the danger."

One Four Star Hall student after another began to chime out in praise. Although they could not understand even an iota of the intricacies of the seal, this did not prevent them from instinctively comprehending its magicalness.

Gong Shenjun pondered over the situation with an absentminded look on his face, slowly shaking his head. "No. This is definitely not the handiwork of Luanyu. However, the resonant power emitting from the seal clearly originates from her." Yet all these thoughts only brought about even more questions that baffled him. Only the First Princess had the power to deal with such a creature. Who else could have resolved the students' predicament?

Then again, just who could create a seal of such power?

They had many questions but no clear answers. The team of rescuers then swarmed into the stronghold, where they were met with the raucous cries of happiness.

All of the students immediately came up to welcome them. The First Princess, Duzhe Honglian, and the rest were no exception.

"Luanyu, I had not expected you to snatch away the prize." Gong Shenjun laughed with a warm expression on his face.

Yet a hint of suspicion lurked within his gaze. The First Princess had simply arrived too quickly. The location she had come from was further than him.

Ultimately, she was the first to arrive, demonstrating that she had truly exhausted herself to respond to these summons.

Although rescuing a fellow student was their duty, her swift response and the lengths she had gone through to save the students seemed abnormal to say the least.

Based on his estimates, if Purified spot 13 had truly been attacked by a Heavenly Disaster Class Other, this could only have been chalked up to bad luck. Even if they had rushed over, he would only have found rotting corpses, making their journey a complete waste of time and effort.

With this in mind, why would they even bother to rush over?

On the contrary, the First Princess had made her way over with all due haste.

None of this seemed to add up in his mind, especially with his understanding of the First Princess' personality. She might seem amiable and approachable, but beneath that warm exterior hid a cold and steely personality. As members of royalty, they had lived through too much political intrigue, and naturally this resulted in all of them wearing a mask for their own protection.

The First Princess wore one, and so did he.

Hence, everything about this rescue led to countless questions and surprises.

"Could it be that it was due to Jiang Qing'e? Perhaps she's trying to sway her heart?" Gong Shenjun's gaze glinted with curiosity as he continued to guess.

He knew that the First Princess had been striving to pull Jiang Qing'e into her orbit. Her potential was worth the investment.

The First Princess' beautiful face let out a wry smile. "With how dangerous things were, if I had come any later, countless students might have perished. Hence, I did my best to get here, hoping to save whomever I could."

The surrounding crowd's gazes were filled with endless gratitude upon hearing the words of the First Princess.

Although the situation had been resolved by Li Luo's numerous measures, the First Princess' timely arrival had demonstrated her concern and care for the students.

Gong Shenjun smiled in response, unsure if the First Princess was merely trying to rally the crowd. She had indeed arrived quickest and was deserving of praise. "It looks like the credit for being the savior will only belong to you."

Upon hearing those words, an incandescent smile lit up on her face without skipping a beat. "Does Brother Gong believe that I have the capability to overpower a spirit beast that was approaching the Duke Stage?"

"A great spirit beast which has begun to comprehend the path of the Duke?" He immediately focused his attention onto the stone statue. Even he would have difficulty dealing with such a beast's attacks. He was only at the Heavenly Dipper General Stage, far from comprehending the mysteries of the Duke Stage.

"Then just whose handiwork was responsible for the sealed spirit beast?"

Everyone was equally flabbergasted at that realization. If the First Princess had not taken action, how had these students resolved their predicament?

"To be honest, this was all for nothing. Even if I had not come, this purified spot would have been fine," the First Princess spoke frankly. She had no intention of lowering herself to steal someone else's credit.

"I don't get it. What happened? Only you could have possibly dealt with such a great spirit beast. Which one of these muppets could possibly stand a chance?" Gong Shenjun retorted with a furrowed look on his face.

Jiang Qing'e? She might be overflowing with potential, but ultimately she was merely at the Earth Fiend General Stage. If she had entered the Heavenly Dipper General Stage, things may have been slightly different.

"Li Luo brought about this miracle," the First Princess explained with a complex look on her face.

This bombshell left the Four Star Hall students shellshocked. Even Gong Shenjun's jaw dropped as he looked at the slightly dispirited First Princess.

It took a moment before they were able to compose themselves. "You mean Li Luo had a way of dealing with this great spirit beast?"

Some of the Four Star Hall students burst out in laughter at the outlandishness of this statement. Impossible! Yet their guffaws were met with a somber expression on the First Princess' face. She was not joking, it seemed. The students who had been saved did not retort either, merely nodding their heads in agreement.

Staring blankly at each other, the guffaws gave way to another round of confused looks. Wasn't Li Luo a new One Star Hall student, on his very first expedition to the Umbra Cave? It was mind-boggling to even think about how this newbie could have resolved a situation that the First Princess and Gong Shenjun would struggle with.

"It was truly settled by Li Luo." At this point, Duze Honglian spoke up with a complicated look on her face. She had never expected that there would be a day where she would stand up for Li Luo. This was the cold, hard truth after all.

After which, she briefly explained Li Luo's entire plan and how he had managed to seal the great spirit beast.

With Duze Honglian's narration, Gong Shenjun's expression couldn't help but turn awe-struck, and his gaze seemed to deepen.

The rest of the Four Star Hall students had incredulous looks on their faces. Their impression of Li Luo had undergone a massive change.

A new student, thrown into a new environment, had achieved so much?

Being able to summon such bravery amidst dire circumstances was truly not a simple feat.

Gong Shenjun gradually snapped out of his trance, immediately sweeping his gaze across the crowd. Surprisingly, Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo were nowhere to be found. "Junior Li Luo is the master of miracles." No one had expected that such an unorthodox plan would resolve their situation. It undoubtedly required a trace of luck, but this was merely one part of it. Being able to come up with this audacious plan and executing it himself demonstrated the mettle of a man.

A hint of respect flickered through Gong Shenjun's eyes. For one, he had never looked down on Li Luo. How could the esteemed Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan give birth to a complete wastrel?

At the same time, he still seemed to have underestimated that unassuming young lord...

Meanwhile...

"This dark-red bracelet appeared after you sealed the three-tailed beast?" Whilst Gong Shenjun was enjoying his reception, Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo were huddled together in a nondescript stone hut. She was very naturally holding on to Li Luo's hand, her golden irises focused on the bracelet.

Li Luo had taken the initiative to inform Jiang Qing'e of this new development. Furthermore, the two were extremely close, so there was no room for secrets between them.

As the two held hands, Li Luo was once again given the opportunity to fully appreciate Jiang Qing'e's ravishing countenance. It was indeed a soul-stirring sight. Her snow-white complexion gave one the impression of holding the finest polished jade. Taking advantage of this moment, Li Luo couldn't help but give her little hand a tight squeeze.

"Stop messing around," Jiang Qing'e snapped as she glared at Li Luo, almost causing his soul to fly out of his body in fright.

Releasing her hand, she spoke solemnly. "This bracelet contains some sort of mighty power within, something even my resonant power is unable to penetrate. The strength within is vast and boundless, something I am unable to handle. It should not have been created by the three-tailed beast.

"I'm afraid this has to do with the Principal. Perhaps it's something he left for you."

Chapter 0297: Sealing Treasured Artifact

"The principal left me something?"

Li Luo had thought that the seal's power was gone when it vanished from his hand. Had it been transferred to the dark-red bracelet instead?

King Stage experts worked in mysterious ways.

And how this bracelet worked was a real mystery to him indeed.

"Maybe you should try channeling your resonant power through it. If the principal left it to you, maybe only you can unlock it," Jiang Qing'e suggested.

Li Luo nodded and sat down in the lotus position. Closing his eyes, he summoned his resonant power and pushed it towards the bracelet.

He felt a strange jolt when his power touched it—a vast consciousness that swallowed up his own.

The principal!

Li Luo jerked within his mind, and he suddenly found himself in a black void.

The only thing present was a stone platform a few meters across, the one that he was currently standing on.

In the middle of the platform sat a cross-legged person, smiling at him.

"Principal?" Li Luo exclaimed with surprise and relief.

"So you pulled off the plan. Not bad," Pang Qianyuan said with a hint of approval.

"You are too kind," Li Luo said modestly. "If not for the Principal's support, I wouldn't have been able to run away from the three-tailed beast for so long.

"My plan was just hare-brained madness. It was full of holes."

"Not everyone could have kept to their method in the madness." Pang Qianyuan chuckled. "It takes a rare combination of courage and coolness. That character trait is more important than any high-grade resonance, mark my words."

On the outside, Li Luo smiled bashfully.

On the inside, he thought, "More, Principal, Sir! Praise me more! I just love to hear those words from you!"

But Pang Qianyuan suddenly stopped talking, fixing him with a penetrating look.

Li Luo squirmed a little, hiding his transparent thoughts with a cough. "So, Principal, Sir, what brings you here? And what's with the bracelet?"

"This is just the last shred of my will I attached. I'll soon fade away." The figure smiled. "As for the bracelet... it's a treasured artifact. It is a special present for you."

"A sealing treasured artifact?" Li Luo marveled at the bracelet anew. Even among treasured artifacts, it was probably quite a high-quality one.

Treasured artifacts were a higher grade of resonant artifacts, and commensurately stronger. Crucially, treasured artifacts had mystical powers that would help one in both cultivation and battle.

Some of the stronger and rarer treasured artifacts could even help build ones' resonances naturally, without spirit liquids and purifying lights.

However, those treasured artifacts were so rare that the Xia Kingdom's Golden Dragon Bank probably had never even seen one. A flash of understanding came to Li Luo soon enough. "A sealing treasured artifact... So what's sealed inside?"

"You're a sharp one, aren't you?" Pang Qianyuan laughed. "Well, surely you've guessed by now?"

He flicked a finger, sending a little light forth into the darkness. It danced like a drunken firefly out into the blackness, then exploded like a mini firework.

In the brief moment of illumination, Li Luo caught sight of what lay below the platform they were on, and he inhaled sharply.

He could not repress an involuntary shiver. Below him, a huge beast lay in slumber. Its three tails were locked down by huge chains.

The three-tailed beast! Li Luo immediately recognized it. "But you- Wasn't it sealed?" he stammered.

He could not help but doubt what he had just seen.

The three-tailed beast wasn't in the stone statue at all! It was in his bracelet!

"The thing outside's just for show. It's meant to help you avoid some unwanted attention, is all. Well? Are you happy?" Pang Qianyuan grinned.

"No way..."

Happy? Li Luo was probably closer to tears. He had a literal horror locked away in his wrist. Logically, no seal would hold forever. What if one day the three-tailed beast found a way out?

"Principal, please stop toying with me. I just did the school a favor," Li Luo whined.

"I know my dad scolded you before, but surely you shouldn't take it out on me."

Pang Qianyuan snorted. "Alright, enough faking it, kid. You're just trying to find out what I'm intending..."

"This beast's name is the three-tailed heavenly wolf. It's already close to Duke Stage. One day, if it truly reaches that level, it will be quite a force to be reckoned with.

"Currently, I have it sealed, and I can teach you a secret art that will allow you to draw on its strength by utilizing the treasured artifact. For a short amount of time, you will receive tremendous strength.

"Well, what do you think?" he said with a half-smile.

Ulp.

Li Luo swallowed, highly tempted. "The three-tailed heavenly wolf's strength in addition to my own?"

Li Luo would take all the strength he could get. In half a year's time, House Luolan's Housemeet would require every resource he could muster, if he wanted to see the house safely through the crisis.

He would have to participate in the battles, and there would be strong opponents aplenty. By Li Luo's estimation, only Heavenly Dipper Generals would qualify.

In all likelihood, he would be watching Jiang Qing'e from the sidelines, helpless to do anything for her against the layers of intrigue and plotting that were sure to make an appearance.

That was hard to bear.

He wanted to be with Jiang Qing'e, to fight side by side to protect House Luolan.

But he was too weak. Half a year was too little time. But with Pang Qianyuan's secret art, maybe there was a shot.

Li Luo calmed down quickly enough. This was still too good to be true. Pang Qianyuan wasn't about to give him the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power just as a mere reward.

Surely there was another price to be paid.

Seeing Li Luo move from eager temptation to calm calculation, Pang Qianyuan smiled even wider, pleased with his control.

A steady mind in the face of both danger and riches... this kid was truly of Heavenly King Li's bloodline...

"Indeed. You're not getting it for free. I will give you this, but you need to do something for me in return..."

"Do you accept the deal?"

Chapter 0298: The Principal's Request

Accept the deal?

Li Luo stared at Pang Qianyuan with some confusion. What could a mighty King like Pang Qianyuan need from a weak little Resonant Master like himself?

A king asking a beggar for a favor?

If the principal ever left the Umbra Cave, the whole Xia Kingdom would bow in submission before him. Duke experts were nothing before him!

And now this King was asking him, humble Li Luo, for a favor...

He shrugged off the dissonance. "What does the Principal want of me?"

For now, the opening offer of the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power was very tempting. It would allow him to participate in the battle at House Luolan's Housemeet in half a year's time. He would not have to sit on the sidelines and let Jiang Qing'e face the wolves alone.

Pang Qianyuan did not answer him immediately. "I'll tell you in a bit. First, let me warn you that the three-tailed heavenly wolf's powers might be very tempting for you, but you're clever enough to know that no power in this world comes for free.

"The heavenly wolf is a feral creature," Pang Qianyuan continued slowly. "And you are far from it in strength. The power you borrow will be tainted with its feral nature, and it will affect you. It will make you bloodthirsty... a process I call 'lycanthropy.' Once you go too far, you will be a slave to the wolfish nature. It is a terrible fate.

"So I have to warn you to use the power judiciously—only in the most dire of situations."

Li Luo nodded gravely. He had considered such a possibility as well. Every power had its drawbacks. He knew this too well from the price that he had paid for his acquired resonances. He fully intended to use it sparingly.

Just another trump card up his sleeve. "My thanks to the Principal for the warning."

Li Luo was still grateful that Pang Qianyuan was looking out for him to such an extent.

The principal nodded with a smile. "You are a clever child. I sense that you would have felt that corrupting tug on your mind even without my warning. But as your teacher, I guess I do have a duty to warn you. And more importantly..."

"I wouldn't want your mother to come after me."

Li Luo smiled sheepishly. Was his mother really that much of a tigress? She could be very motherly... although he admitted that it wasn't often. "As for the favor..." Pang Qianyuan brought the topic back, his face turning serious.

"In truth, you should probably do it even without me asking you to."

Li Luo cocked his head, puzzled.

"At the end of this year, the various schools in the East Divine Continent will participate in the Holy Grail Meet, a grand affair organized by the major schools in the East Divine Continent.

"The winner will be awarded a holy object known as the Dragon Bone Holy Grail, something handed down by the Academic Federation. It's incredibly powerful, and one of its functions is its ability to suppress the Umbra Cave."

"If our Astral Sage College can take the Dragon Bone Holy Grail this year, the Umbra Cave will remain silent for many years, and the dark tide will also subside. We will not have to risk student lives to purge the corruption.

"That is why the Dragon Bone Holy Grail is so coveted among the schools in the East Divine Continent," Pang Qianyuan continued seriously. "Do you see how it could boost a school's resources? Many cultivation resources and lives could be saved."

Li Luo was awed by this information. Now that he had experienced the Umbra Cave first-hand, he had a newfound appreciation for its dangers. Even though they had gotten over the past crisis largely unscathed, there had still been a few casualties. Bright young men and women of roughly the same age were now dead, their potential gone. As for the survivors, they had come in laughing and smiling, but the harsh reality of Umbra Cave had left them grim. Everyone had lost friends here.

What if his friends had been among the dead? Yu Lang, Lu Qing'er, Zhao Kuo... how would he feel?

A look of resolution crept over his face.

The Umbra Cave was endless, a yawning abyss that demanded the constant sacrifice of lives to keep it placated.

The burden could not be given up—holding it was the purpose of the Astral Sage College after all.

To suppress the Umbra Cave and prevent the Others from rushing out into their world and causing untold destruction.

At that time, the innocent humans in the Xia Kingdom would be devastated.

Li Luo believed that their Astral Sage College was not the only one who faced such problems. Every other school had to be pained by the toll of lives that the Umbra Cave exacted on them.

The Dragon Bone Holy Grail was a reprieve from that heavy burden. With the few years of time it could buy, the school that held it would see their talent pool flourish.

They would save a ton of cultivation resources, including, of course, their most precious resource: human talent.

Which was why the prize was so attractive.

"Sir..." Li Luo snorted in disbelief. "You would have me go compete for the Dragon Bone Holy Grail? I'm just a newcomer. I wouldn't be able to do well in a competition with such heat."

Pang Qianyuan chuckled along. "Of course not... each school sends their creme de la creme to the Holy Grail Meet. You might be one of our best, but it wouldn't completely be on your shoulders.

"I want you to do something if we end up winning the Dragon Bone Holy Grail."

He contemplated Li Luo carefully. "If we can get the Dragon Bone Holy Grail, I need you to put some of your blood essence into the cup at a special place. Li Luo, that is my request.

"Your blood essence," Pang Qianyuan said soberly, hiding nothing from him.

Li Luo started at the strange request. It was bizarre, and he had not seen it coming at all.

What on earth did Pang Qianyuan want with his blood essence?

Chapter 0299: Heavenly Libation Chant

Li Luo stood in silence for a moment on the stone dais. Pang Qianyuan's curious request had him at a momentary loss.

A mighty King needed the blood essence of a mere resonance master?

The difference in power was like the gap between a human and an ant. What would he ever want with an ant's blood essence?

Because of his special triple resonant palaces?

Surely not.

Three resonant palaces was rare, but a King already had his three resonant palaces!

Three mighty resonant palaces, all filled up. There was no reason to hanker after his three resonant palaces, which were only partially filled.

But if not the resonant palaces, then what on earth could he offer to a King?

Li Luo's head jerked up. He understood.

"Is it the blood of Heavenly King Li that the Principal is after?"

Pang Qianyuan looked at him oddly. "Well, I already said you're a sharp one," he admitted with a nod. "Your bloodline is special. I need it as a catalyst. But rest assured, I will not do anything to harm you. If I might be allowed to brag, I am a King after all. There's nothing I need to fear from someone like you, regardless of your bloodline," he said with a hint of complacency.

"As for why I really need your blood essence... I can't tell you that for now.

"All I can say is that in half a year, there might be some major changes at the Xia Kingdom. Perhaps not even the Astral Sage College will come through unscathed. I need to make preparations."

Major changes? In half a year's time?

Wasn't that exactly at the time that there would be major changes for House Luolan? Were the two somehow connected?

"Sir, you are a King, and there's no one in the Xia Kingdom who is your match," Li Luo blurted. "What could be so momentous that even you can't control?"

"And isn't the Astral Sage College backed by the Academic Federation? With such a powerful institution, what is there to fear?"

"It's complicated," Pang Qianyuan said after a pause. "Besides, our Astral Sage College might be a member of the Academic Federation, but you should be aware that struggle is everywhere. Do you really think all is well and harmonious within the Federation?"

Li Luo stared at the principal with some alarm. A steady pair of eyes met his own.

"I am just doing the best I can to protect the Xia Kingdom. Whether I succeed or not is up to fate."

Li Luo pondered this. Everything the principal had said today spoke of forces far beyond the power of a puny little Resonant Master.

As if the Xia Kingdom would soon be shrouded in darkness.

"If you still have doubts, there's no need to answer immediately. The matter can wait until we return triumphant with the Dragon Bone Holy Grail in tow. Without it, there will be no need for your blood essence," Pang Qianyuan said in concession.

Li Luo nodded. He did need some time to take it all in.

"As for the secret art I mentioned, I will give you the first half for now. It's no big secret, but given your current ability, you won't be able to draw out too much of the heavenly wolf's power without losing control."

Pang Qianyuan laid a fingertip on Li Luo's brow, and a little bolt of light wriggled into his head. There was a flash, and a string of information was suddenly clear in Li Luo's mind. He carefully read the information, mouthing the words silently.

"Heavenly Libation Chant?"

"This secret art needs to be paired with a special formation that I've already put into the bracelet. You just need to join the two in the future, and the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power will be available to you.

"But be warned," Pang Qianyuan said solemnly. "Only use it when you must. It is a tricky thing to deal with if you turn feral."

Li Luo nodded. "Don't worry, Sir, I understand. And I will think carefully on what you said, at least until we return with the Dragon Bone Holy Grail."

Pang Qianyuan nodded.

Without the Holy Grail, there was no need for this conversation.

"As for the Holy Grail Meet, you can ask your mentor for more information. I don't have much time. I won't linger here."

His figure started to fade away.

Li Luo leaped forward with his brightest smile. "Principal, Sir, a moment, please."

Seeing Pang Qianyuan's suspicious look, he pleaded, "Sir, it's said that a commander never lets his men go hungry. And I've done great work here in the Umbra Cave now, haven't I?"

Pang Qianyuan eyed him. "And I've given you the seal, haven't I?"

"Well, but someone had to go lug the wolf over from the forbidden zone, didn't he?" Li Luo countered.

"What do you want?" Pang Qianyuan grunted.

"I've shed blood, sweat, and tears for the school, but it can all be replenished for the small price of 100,000 school points," Li Luo said.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, boy! Trying to climb all over me now?" Pang Qianyuan snapped at him.

"Climb over you? I saved all the students at the purified spot. Surely the school owes me a reward for this?"

"And surely it's not 100,000 points," Pang Qianyuan countered back. "Besides, the school has its own rules for rewards and punishment. Your merits will be decided in due time, and Su Xin will surely come to a good conclusion. What's your rush?" Pang Qianyuan said churlishly.

Li Luo put on his best puppy face. "Since you ask," he said mournfully, "I'll just have to give you the details. Because of my blank palaces, I ended up with a hollowness in my foundations. With your might, surely your greatness can sense it within me. I need 100,000 points worth of Royal Sap, or I might just be dead by the end of the year. And then even if the Astral Sage College lifts the Holy Grail in triumph, I'll already be with the holy spirit. There won't be any blood essence left for you to have, Sir."

Pang Qianyuan looked at Li Luo again, his suspicion softening. "I did sense an emptiness within your body from before..." he conceded. "I thought it was just due to your youth and wanton recklessness..."

Li Luo winced. That was harsh. He could count the number of girls whose hands he had held... on one hand. How on earth was he wanton?

But for the 100,000 points, he would let it slide.

"Principal, Sir..."

Seeing Li Luo prepare another salvo of wheedling, Pang Qianyuan cut him off irritably. "Alright, I'll talk to Su Xin about it. That's it, then. Goodbye."

Without waiting for Li Luo's reply, he vanished in a puff of green smoke.

"He probably has a wind resonance," Li Luo grumbled. "He sure runs away fast."

Well, he had shot his shot. Time to see if the principal would accommodate him later.

He turned back to look at the darkness all around him and peered down at the beast again. This time, he was no longer afraid. In fact, he was feeling quite excited.

All in all, a good turn of events.

Although the three-tailed heavenly wolf had more power than he could handle, it was still a trump card.

Still, the foreboding news about trouble in half a year's time was a bit of a sobering thought. It seemed like the Xia Kingdom was in deeper waters than he had thought.

Still, that was a problem for another day. And he could only do something about it if he was stronger.

All he had to focus on now was making it past Resonant Master. With that thought on his mind, he walked out of the black space.

Chapter 0300: River Of Evil

Darkest part of the Umbra Cave.

The world here was warped, twisted in a constant doomsday state. The natural elements had gone mad, an endless conflict of water, wind, earth, and fire throwing up natural disaster after natural disaster. Not even Duke experts dared to set foot here.

There was a single golden lotus amidst the chaos, on which a person quietly sat.

He was clad in the Astral Sage College's uniform, although his uniform was lined with stars made of gold thread.

Principal Pang Qianyuan.

His eyes slowly opened, deep and thoughtful. They surveyed his surroundings for notable changes while a smile slowly spread across his face.

"The House Luolan kid is quite an interesting one. His personality is completely different from Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's."

Back when he had met Li Luo's parents, they were only at the Duke Stage. But with his Heavenly King Li bloodline, Li Taixuan had shown him not an ounce of deference at all.

Li Taixuan was naturally brilliant, and there wasn't much of a doubt that he would eventually make it to the King Stage. The two treated each other as equals.

As for Tan Tailan... She was another special one. She seemed to have come from humble stock, but her talent was beyond doubt. Even someone as brilliant as Li Taixuan bowed before her talents. It was said that she had raised waves in the divine continent even before she had become a Duke. She was a woman to walk the world with, and even someone as proud as Li Taixuan had bent his head and followed her to the rural East Divine Continent.

Both Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan were bold, bright characters, naturally born to talent and brilliance that burst out of them at every turn. It gave them a confident swagger in their demeanor.

Compared to them, Li Luo was a lot more cautious. But from the events at the purified spot, Pang Qianyuan knew that he had a lot more hidden under the surface.

He was the complete opposite of his parents, and yet he was not one to be bullied easily either.

Pang Qianyuan turned his attention back to the dystopia around him. There was a huge fracture in the earth, revealing a yawning abyss that roared with the sound of rushing water. He was strong enough to see past the darkness to the dark river that ran within.

The dark river water moved sluggishly, thick with corruption.

Any amusement from thinking about Li Luo vanished. This was a river of evil, where all the evil in the world eventually ended up.

It was said that at the heart of the shadow world was a sea of evil, where all the rivers of evil flowed to.

Even a King like himself was wary of the river of evil. Even Dukes would lose themselves within, turned into monsters.

The river of evil was the root of all the problems here in the Umbra Cave.

From within its meandering length, a pair of eyes peered out, meeting Pang Qianyuan's own.

They were a good distance apart, but sparks of tension still flew.

In its state of chaos, the worldly natural energy churned up more disasters for thousands of kilometers.

"Krrk krrk."

Hints of malicious, mocking laughter came at him from the dark waters.

Pang Qianyuan noted it impassively. He had fought the being in the dark river for many years now, and they understood the other well.

They were closely matched, still waiting to see who would make the first slip up.

Privately, Pang Qianyuan felt that the scarier thing was humans. They were a complicated mess of goodness and evil. They were hard to classify, and therefore he didn't know how to act upon them.

And for all these years, he had been trapped here against his own will.

Although within the Xia Kingdom, within the school...

Dark forces were stirring too.

He wondered if they would be able to bring the Dragon Bone Holy Grail back this time. Life would be much easier with it.

Sighing to himself, he closed his eyes again.

...

When Li Luo regained consciousness, he was already out of the black space. Well, all in all it had been a productive talk with Pang Qianyuan.

He looked up to see a pair of clear, golden eyes watching him tenderly.

"Well, how are things?" Jiang Qing'e asked casually.

"It's indeed a present from the principal," Li Luo said. He was about to tell her what had happened, but she cut him off with a wave.

"Since the principal chose such a subtle method, he must have his reasons. Better not tell me anything for now."

Li Luo paused, then nodded. Whether the three-tailed heavenly wolf or the matter of his blood essence, both seemed like they would just make Jiang Qing'e worry anyway.

She might even control the bracelet to prevent him from using it with disastrous consequences.

As for his blood essence, that was another big question. For his safety, it was likely Jiang Qing'e would tend towards overprotection.

Li Luo decided he would judge these things for himself. He could always tell her when he got a little stronger also.

"Ah, do you know about the Holy Grail Meet?" he asked instead.

"Holy Grail Meet?" She nodded, surprised. "Of course. It's one of the most intense clashes between schools in the East Divine Continent. It might well be the highlight of one's school life.

"The Holy Grail Meet is usually held once every four years. The next one should be at the end of this year."

"I heard that the winner gets the Dragon Bone Holy Grail," Li Luo continued. "Who won the last one?"

"Last time it was the Enlightened Sage College, from the Holy Sun Dynasty. A very strong school that often dominates. We have had many clashes with them in the past," Jiang Qing'e answered. "Most of the time, they win," she added.

"Holy Sun Dynasty, Enlightened Sage College, eh..."

Li Luo frowned. He hadn't followed such news closely before. A school much stronger than the Astral Sage College? Their own school seemed powerful enough already.

Just how strong was this Enlightened Sage College?

"There are a total of five sage colleges in the East Divine Continent. Besides the Enlightened Sage College, the other three are pretty strong too. And of course, it won't just be these five schools competing. There are also many other darkhorse schools that should not be underestimated, even if they haven't won the title of sage college yet."

It seemed like the Holy Grail Meet was much tougher than he had expected. "Has the Astral Sage College even won this thing before?" he asked, dismayed.

Jiang Qing'e thought it over. "I think so... but maybe not in the last 30 or so years."

Li Luo's jaw dropped.

"Damn, Principal, not even once in the last 30 years? Why the hell would you think we stand a chance this time? Forget the second half of the Heavenly Libation Chant. I'll just play around with the first half... because that seems like all I'll ever get."