

Resonance 31

Chapter 0031: Encountering A Strong Enemy

The uproar beneath the stage continued until Yu Lang was quickly carried away on a stretcher. Despite the din dying down, looks of complete astonishment and horror were still levied upon Li Luo.

They were terrified by Li Luo's absolutely merciless blow!

Li Luo was speechless at this, silently cursing that bastard Yu Lang. That vagrant had dragged his name through the mud!

As he stood on the stage, his gaze swept the four directions before finally pausing on a particular seat.

Song Yunfeng was sitting right there with a group of friends, gaily chatting. When he noticed Li Luo's stare, he raised his head and returned him an indifferent look before continuing with what he was doing.

Li Luo was also uninterested in giving him a piece of his mind, so he turned to leave.

"Brother Luo, you are truly ferocious! Even Yu Lang was ruined by you!" Zhao Kuo praised as he ran over.

"That brat is just putting on a show." Li Luo had a good understanding of his opponent's strength, and if they had continued brawling, he might be the eventual victor, but that would have taken quite a while.

Judging by today's results, his current battle strength was on par with that of a Seventh Seal. Entering the top 20 would not be a problem.

All that remained were the last two battles tomorrow. If he was able to win both, he would definitely enter the top 20 and could finally take a breather.

It was said that once the top 20 had been determined, they could choose to continue battling to determine their ranking amongst the group. Li Luo was not interested in this competition as simply being one of the twenty meant he would be qualified to participate in the College Final Examinations. Thus, there was no need to engage in this meaningless battle.

If he had time, he'd much rather practice refining spirit liquids and purifying lights.

After the battles for the day ended, Li Luo did not immediately leave the academy, as the pairings for the battles on the following day would be released soon.

He wanted to know who he would be up against.

Luckily, he did not have to wait long, as an hour later, a metallic ringing resounded throughout the field. Li Luo and Zhao Kuo both made their way to a stone pillar.

The stone pillar was surrounded by numerous students, and Li Luo quickly glanced over the flowing characters on the projection screen. Very quickly, he managed to find his opponents for the next day.

His first opponent was a Seventh Seal student from the First School. This opponent was known to be significantly weaker than Yu Lang and would not pose a threat to him.

Unfortunately, when he discovered who his second opponent was, his gaze gradually narrowed into a squint.

"Brother Luo! What a disaster! Your final opponent is Song Yunfeng!" Zhao Kuo cried out almost involuntarily when he discovered Li Luo's opponent.

Indeed, Li Luo's final opponent was the second strongest student in the First School, Song Yunfeng!

Some of the other students had also heard the commotion, and pitiful looks fell upon him.

Although Li Luo had recently managed to make a comeback, even managing to beat Yu Lang today, it looked as though his lucky streak had ended.

"Song Yunfeng is apparently at the Eighth Seal! Shit! It doesn't get unluckier than this" Zhao Kuo sighed as he also felt pity towards Li Luo.

Li Luo, on the other hand, didn't seem too concerned. "None of those that have survived till the end are weaklings. It's not that unusual to encounter him."

"No worries! Even if you lose a round tomorrow, your place in the top 20 is basically set in stone," Zhao Kuo said, intending to console Li Luo.

Although Li Luo smiled and nodded upon hearing those words, his eyes held a trace of gloominess. No one knew exactly what he was thinking.

On the other side of the field, Song Yunfeng had also managed to identify his opponents for the next day. Upon seeing that his opponent was going to be Li Luo, he stared at the screen for a good half a minute in a daze before revealing a vicious smile.

"You've had such a glum face the entire time today, yet you're suddenly smiling? Why the change?" Difa Qing, who had been following him around, asked curiously.

"Well, that is because I finally get to face off against an opponent that brings me joy! I never thought heaven would grant me my greatest wish!" Song Yunfeng beamed.

At this point, Difa Qing noticed Song Yunfeng's opponent for tomorrow. "Wow, so it's going to be Li Luo? I suppose that's normal since both of you have had a streak of victories. The chances of this happening weren't small... However, his luck isn't great. His winning streak ends now, I suppose," Difa Qing replied, slightly shocked. She had a clear understanding of Song Yunfeng's might, and Lu Qing'er was the only student in Southwind Academy with the strength to suppress him. Even though Li Luo had finally started to ascend to the skies, there was still an insurmountable gap between him and Song Yunfeng!

She could already imagine the scene of tomorrow's battle. It would be no different from crushing dried and rotten branches underfoot for Song Yunfeng.

Furthermore, she also knew that Song Yunfeng absolutely detested Li Luo, whether it was due to personal matters or the struggle between their families. Thus, as soon as the battle commenced, Song Yunfeng would utilize the quickest measures to savagely crush Li Luo, bashing him into the ground.

For a brief moment, Difa Qing even felt a trace of pity for Li Luo. The result was already predetermined.

However, Li Luo truly had it coming! If he knew that Song Yunfeng liked Lu Qing'er, why had he not distanced himself from her? After all, an envious man that had been provoked would not act rationally.

Li Luo, on the other hand, left the academy as soon as he saw who his opponents were for the next day. Zhao Kuo could only say goodbye with a look of sympathy on his face.

Whilst on the carriage back, Li Luo's eyes were closed as he remained deep in thought.

The battle with Song Yunfeng the next day would be unimaginably difficult. The opponent was at the Eighth Seal and possessed significantly denser resonant power. Furthermore, he also had a seventh-grade Crimson Eagle resonance.

Seventh to ninth-grade resonances were considered high-grade, and thus Song Yunfeng's resonance fell in that category.

One should not underestimate what a high-grade resonance was capable of. The power produced by a seventh-grade resonance was not the same realm as middle-grade or low-grade resonances. The resonant power was denser and also possessed some form of spirituality.

Spirituality was a difficult concept to explain; it was something that was ephemeral and could only be experienced when it was used on one's opponents.

Thus, the seventh-grade could be considered to be a watershed. Those who could cross this gap would be in possession of an almighty resonance.

Additionally, within the threshold of a high-grade resonance, they were also further classified into upper and lower distinctions. This was not applicable for first to sixth-grade resonances, and it allowed one to better differentiate the potential within these high-grade resonances.

Song Yunfeng's Crimson Eagle Resonance was a lower seventh-grade.

Thus, regardless of resonant power or resonance grade, Li Luo was one step behind Song Yunfeng, and this battle was clearly not in his favor.

No one had high hopes for the battle between the two. Even Li Luo himself was no exception.

"This is truly very troublesome," Li Luo mumbled to himself. Although his waterlight resonance was unique in its own way, it was still only a fifth-grade resonance. Even though the spirit liquids and purifying lights refined by it were not inferior to what a seventh-grade resonance could refine, this was not applicable in the context of a battle. His resonance was unlikely to have any advantages in a head-on collision.

If he could somehow temper the waterlight resonance to the sixth-grade by tomorrow, he would definitely feel less pressure. Despite constantly chewing through his supply of spirit liquids and purifying lights, he had still been unable to increase the grade. More time was needed, and this was not enough to put out the inferno burning at his gate.

"Should I just concede instantly?" Li Luo scratched his head. This was honestly a possible choice. No matter how he considered the situation, this was the most normal and expected option. Everyone knew

of the huge gap between the two and that it was basically uncrossable. If he knew the result but still persisted, would that not make him a masochist?

Li Luo continued to ponder. He had no plans to visit Suncreek Villa today, so he went straight home. Even if there was no alternative choice, he would still prepare himself for the worst.

Chapter 0032: Agitated Li Luo

When the next day came, Cai Wei greeted Li Luo, who had just arisen. He looked absolutely terrible, with black eye-circles and sluggish movements. It was as though he had not slept well the previous night.

"What's wrong? Didn't sleep well?" Cai Wei asked with concern.

Li Luo shook his head and smiled. "The academy has been having their preliminary examinations recently, and I think the stress has gotten to me."

He didn't want to mention the situation of him having to face off against Song Yunfeng today. There wasn't any point.

Cai Wei nodded knowingly, and her radiant and beautiful egg-shaped face had an encouraging expression. "Do your best! I'm sure you can do it!"

"Oh, Yan Lingqing asked about you yesterday. It seems that you didn't go to the Suncreek Villa?"

While hurriedly stuffing several mouths of porridge into his mouth, Li Luo garbled, "Please let her know that once my preliminary examinations are done, I will spend more effort on resonance smithing. If she wants to find me for a chat, I will be more than pleased to do so then!"

Cai Wei smiled mischievously. "Why did you not tell her personally?"

"I was afraid she might beat me to death," Li Luo answered honestly before devouring his breakfast. After waving goodbye, he quickly ran off.

Seeing this scene, Cai Wei could only shrug helplessly as she watched Li Luo escape, wryly shaking her head. After which, she continued to have her breakfast as though nothing had happened, slowly chewing and enjoying it.

...

"Li Luo." As Li Luo made his way to Southwind Academy, he heard a familiar, clear, and crisp voice behind him. Turning around, he saw the good-looking and immaculate Lu Qing'er sitting right beneath a massive viridescent tree.

Lu Qing'er was currently wearing a black, short-skirted academy uniform. This coupled with her snow-white skin made the sight of her even more attractive. Her thin waist and short skirt further accentuated her slender legs. She was so eye-catching that everyone who was in the vicinity would furtively glance at her every so often.

Li Luo, hearing her greeting, immediately walked over and gave a casual smile.

"I heard you're going to be facing off against Song Yunfeng today?" Lu Qing'er asked as her brows knitted together in a frown.

Li Luo could only nod in response.

"What do you plan to do?" Lu Qing'er asked.

Li Luo paused for a moment before frankly responding. "I'll probably just give up on the fight."

Hearing this response, Lu Qing'er gave a light laugh, but there was no intention to mock him. Instead, she only seriously nodded. "That is a very logical decision. There is no need for you to prove yourself against him. With your talent in the resonance arts, the gap between you two will lessen in time."

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"I feel the same way too."

At this point, Lu Qing'er became slightly silent and solemn. "I'd like to apologize for what has happened. I think that part of the reason why the situation has devolved to such an extent is because of me."

Li Luo smiled, "Well, honestly, you're barely the problem. It mostly has to do with the relationship between House Luolan and the Song family. Of course, I think the bigger reason is that Song Yunfeng is afraid."

"Afraid?" Lu Qing'er's almond-shaped eyes blinked curiously.

Li Luo gave an insipid smile. "Well, he's afraid that I will return to that form I had in the past. If that were to happen, he would forever live in my shadow and all of his effort throughout the years would go to waste. People would ridicule him." If anyone else heard these words, they would think that Li Luo had a screw loose in his head. Furthermore, the Song Yunfeng of today had much more influence and standing in the academy than Li Luo.

Lu Qing'er, on the other hand, looked pensive. She was extremely clear about how outstanding and exceptional Li Luo was in his prime. Even now she found it hard to match up to him, much less Song Yunfeng.

"So, he wants to firmly suppress and completely crush you before you are able to mature? This also serves to fortify his own confidence?" Lu Qing'er asked.

"Most likely." Li Luo nodded.

"If this is the case, then he won't let you give up so easily," Lu Qing'er commented.

"I hope he won't do that. If that's the case..." Li Luo mumbled. Following which, he waved goodbye to Lu Qing'er and walked in the direction of the Second School, where he heard some indistinct shouts.

"...then I will have no other choice."

Lu Qing'er stared at his leaving silhouette, slightly shocked as Li Luo didn't seem to be pushed to his wits' end. Perhaps he had some other means to avoid the fight with Song Yunfeng?

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Li Luo's first fight ended without any surprises. The second battle was organized as the final fight of the preliminary examinations.

It seemed as though it was set up to be a fitting finale to the examination.

The field was a hubbub of voices and shouts whilst innumerable students crowded around it.

On the upper platform sat Dean Wei Sha and the rest of the teachers, ready to watch the battle.

"Keke. Who would have expected Li Luo to clash with Song Yunfeng? Do you think there will even be a fight?" Dean Wei gave a lengthy laugh.

Lin Feng put on an indifferent smile. "What sort of meaning is there in such a pointless battle?"

Xu Shanyue sighed darkly. "There might not even be a battle. This is completely imbalanced, and an instant forfeit would be best. There's no need to fight and humiliate himself."

Although Li Luo was from the Second School and Xu Shanyue was extremely biased towards him, the odds were clearly stacked against Li Luo.

The gap was large, and it seemed impossible.

The old dean nodded as he sighed. "Li Luo has already entered the ranks of the top 20. This already demonstrates his exceptional speed in catching up. If he was given more time, reaching Song Yunfeng's level would not be difficult. However, with how little time there has been, he is still lacking."

As they continued to banter, the atmosphere came to a head as the appointed time of battle approached silently.

Song Yunfeng got up from his seat and confidently floated atop the battle stage. His upright posture and handsome face seemed to create an image of a heroic warrior.

When Song Yunfeng took the field, enthusiastic cheers resounded throughout. One could see his exceptional reputation and fame within the academy by looking at the crowd's display of excitement.

On the other half of the field, Li Luo also gradually made his way atop the stage under the watchful eyes of the crowd.

"Wow, he's so handsome! He's even better looking than that Yunfeng guy!" Although Li Luo did not make any fancy moves when entering the stage, numerous girls immediately screamed their heads off when he stood atop the battle stage. He had inherited his parents' excellent genes and he truly was top-notch when it came to appearances. Relatively speaking, Song Yunfeng looked like a peasant standing next to royalty.

Comparatively speaking, the two individuals atop the battle stage had tuned out all of these extraneous elements and focused their minds on their upcoming fight.

Li Luo stared at Song Yunfeng directly as he raised his hand.

Before he could speak, Song Yunfeng dully asked, "Are you planning to give up?"

Li Luo smiled. "Are you planning to humiliate me with words? So that my hot headedness will lead me into a direct clash with you?"

Song Yunfeng's eyelid twitched upon hearing this blunt accusation. He indifferently replied, "I will not humiliate you. I just think that your parents must be proud of a son like you, bringing them fame with your courageous moves."

With that provocation, the entire field turned silent. Who would have thought that Song Yunfeng's words would be so blunt and insidious?

Li Luo was also a little stunned upon hearing those words. Following which, he gave Song Yunfeng a thumbs up. "Truly amazing. This is truly a single fatal blow! Well, since it's come to this..."

At this point, Li Luo started to stretch his neck muscles and cracked his knuckles. Immediately after, he rushed at Song Yunfeng with a toothy smile. The only thing was that his pearly-white grin seemed to be filled with a trace of ruthlessness.

"Come on, then, Song family's son of a b*tch! I'll give you one chance to fight. Lets see if you're good enough to take a bite out of me!"

Chapter 0033: Egg vs Rock

Once Li Luo made that insult, everyone here knew that he was not planning to back out! He would clash with Song Yunfeng head on!

However, this collision would be akin to smashing an egg against a rock... there was no hope.

"Brother Luo..." On the side of the Second School, numerous fellow classmates were fraught with worry. Zhao Kuo especially was constantly pounding his fist in anxiety. "Song Yunfeng, you bastard! That's such a low blow!"

Everyone else nodded in agreement. Song Yunfeng had clearly resorted to underhanded means to provoke Li Luo, truly shameless.

Within the crowd was a certain Yu Lang. He was still lying on a bed, tightly wrapped all over in bandages. In order to demonstrate his professionalism in acting out his role, he remained tightly bedridden, but even then, he would not miss this show, opting to have his bed dragged near the stage...

"What is Li Luo trying to do? Does he want to be abused?"

Not far away, Lu Qing'er was also observing the machinations on the stage. Her face was wreathed in a dark frown. She had expected Song Yunfeng to throw out some taunts in order to incite Li Luo; however, even then she did not think that he would target Li Luo's two missing Duke Stage parents. Clearly, Li Luo held a deep sense of gratitude and respect for his parents. Even though he could shrug off insults towards him, he would never let anyone else tarnish his parents' names and honor.

Frankly speaking, Song Yunfeng did not possess any right or stature to even attempt to smear the Dukes. However, when faced with this situation, Li Luo was unwilling to take it sitting down.

Lu Qing'er gaze swept across the battle stage, eventually resting upon Li Luo. At this point, the thought struck her. Had Li Luo really been forced into a confrontation with Song Yunfeng because of those words?

On the stage, Song Yunfeng's icy glare was focused on Li Luo. The phrase "Song Family's son of a bitch" uttered in front of the entire audience had also caused him to feel incensed.

Despite that, he did not continue to spar with verbal barbs. That was pointless. He would wait for the battle to begin, then he would completely thrash Li Luo. The best retort would be to literally step on Li Luo's face in front of all.

Once the administrators had confirmed that neither of the two parties were planning to forfeit, they solemnly announced the commencement of the final fight.

Bang!

The moment the start of the fight was declared, Song Yunfeng immediately summoned all of his crimson-red resonant power, sheer energy blasting into the skies. Within the resonant power, one could vaguely see the form of a Crimson Eagle materializing.

This was Song Yunfeng's seventh-grade resonance, which specialized in blazing heat and berserk power.

Song Yunfeng did not hold back at all, his Eighth Seal cultivation demonstrated for all to see. A suppressive atmosphere also exuded from him, directly oppressing one's spirit.

On the other side, Li Luo similarly channelled all of his resonant power. Blue resonant power that looked like the waves of the sea wrapped around his entire body.

Directly comparing the strength and density of resonant power, it was obvious to the audience that Song Yunfeng held a significant advantage.

This directly caused the mood to turn slightly gloomy. Just how could Li Luo overturn such a stark disadvantage? Impossible!

At this moment, Li Luo placed both his palms in front of him in a stance. The blue resonant power around his body gradually started to ripple, and everyone could see that he was activating his oft used Nine Layered Jade Waves.

The Nine Layered Jade Waves' weakness was that it required a period of time for it to reach its peak. Unfortunately, Song Yunfeng wouldn't just sit around and twiddle his thumbs while this happened.

"Hmph!" Song Yunfeng, who noticed this, immediately snorted. He circulated the crimson-red resonant power around him whilst he explosively shot towards Li Luo.

A bolt of crimson light lanced across the stage with speed akin to a cannonball entrapped within a fiery tornado. A leg lashed downwards like a fiery hammer, directly chopping down towards Li Luo.

Song Yunfeng was not planning to play around, and immediately exerted his full strength. His only desire was to launch a blitz of attacks, quickly trampling Li Luo beneath him.

Facing Song Yunfeng's ferocious and merciless assault, Li Luo immediately started brandishing his palms in a circular motion, his water resonance power directly forming a water curtain to defend against the attack. *nOVeℓNext.com*

Weng!

Unsurprisingly, when faced with Song Yunfeng's berserk resonant power, the water curtain immediately gave way like a piece of paper. A simple touch of his moves directly shattered Li Luo's paltry defense, and the Nine Layered Jade Waves followed suit right after. Song Yunfeng's absolutely tyrannical force had completely crushed Li Luo's attempt with a simple move.

A dull thud resounded when Song Yunfeng's foot made contact, shockwaves rippling immediately after. Li Luo, on the other hand, was directly knocked flying tens of meters away, almost out of the stage and disqualified.

Hua!

The entire crowd gasped at this scene. This was only the first exchange, and the stark difference in strength was evident. Song Yunfeng completely suppressed Li Luo. Even though he had excellent talent in the resonance arts, it was useless against absolute might.

Lu Qing'er's pretty face looked grave at this moment. Even with her breadth of experience, she saw no way for Li Luo to make a comeback.

"Don't give up, Brother Song! Beat him up!" On the other side of the stadium, Bei Kun and Difa Qing were currently standing with a group of Song Yunfeng's friends. Bei Kun was cheering agitatedly at this point.

Difa Qing was silent though, only shaking her head in response. The gap between the two was just too vast! There was no chance to turn things around.

On the stage, Li Luo's fists were stained with some crimson-red energy. He immediately willed icy-blue resonant power to surge out and extinguish the crimson-red residue. Vapor hissed into the sky when the two energies clashed, and Li Luo slowly savored the burning pain. He finally had an understanding of how strong Song Yunfeng was.

"This level of strength..."

A glint flickered through Li Luo's eyes.

"Hu!"

Yet at this point, Song Yunfeng was not planning to give Li Luo any chance for rest. He immediately launched a vicious assault, akin to a hawk attacking its prey. The air whistled as his swift moves swept towards Li Luo.

Li Luo raised his head and saw a crimson light rapidly approaching him. He was right at the edge of the battlefield, and if he was not careful, it would be the end of the game there and then.

However, his expression did not hold any trace of worry, nor did he seem demoralized. He took a deep breath and immediately activated his water resonance power. Executing certain hand seals, a resonance art took shape.

A faintly blue water curtain took form in front of him, looking vaguely like a thin mirror.

Some of the audience immediately recognized the move. "High-grade resonance art, Water Mirror Art?"

Lu Qing'er's eyes briefly lit up. The Water Mirror Art was a defensive resonance art that did not possess much defensive power. Instead, it was able to reflect a portion of the opponent's attack to mitigate the damage.

However, the Water Mirror Art alone would be unable to even slightly hinder Song Yunfeng's savage and cruel flurry of blows.

In that brief moment, Song Yunfeng had already pounced right in front of Li Luo. Staring at the thin water curtain, a trace of ridicule and coldness could be seen in his gaze. Li Luo might have a wide repertoire of resonance arts, but if he thought that a mere Water Mirror Art was going to stop him, then he was truly too naive.

After which, Song Yunfeng mustered even more power and punched outwards. The fist that rushed towards Li Luo was like a screaming, red eagle eager to devour its prey.

At the moment the blow was about to strike the water curtain, Song Yunfeng could vaguely make out a blurry humanoid shadow within the mirror. This reflection was also simultaneously lashing out against him with a crimson-colored fist. The two fists collided, and he could feel his fist punching through the water curtain as well.

Bang!

At this point, a low rumble could be heard.

When the resonant power energies collided, they created a tempest that swept away all of the debris around them, scattering it in every direction.

Li Luo's body was shaken and he was forced back two steps. Just another step would cause him to fall off the stage. However, no one was focused on that. Instead, their attention was all placed upon Song Yunfeng, who seemed to have received a massive backlash from his attack. He had actually been knocked back countless tens of steps, barely stabilizing himself!

Immediately looking up, Song Yunfeng's face was full of shock.

He had actually been pushed back?

How did Li Luo's Water Mirror Art possess such terrifying recoil strength?

The rebounded energy had reached a level equal to 70% of Song Yunfeng's previous move!

This was in a realm of power completely impossible for an ordinary Water Mirror Art to attain!

"Hua!"

The audience erupted in endless uproar and astonishment at this scene. Song Yunfeng, on the other hand, had an expression of uncertainty as he viciously scowled at Li Luo.

Li Luo's Water Mirror Art was truly damn strange!

Chapter 0034: Li Luo's Water Mirror Art

"How is this possible? How can his Water Mirror Art block Song Yunfeng's full-strength move?!" The entire audience was shocked silly by this development. Everyone had looks of puzzlement on their faces.

They were not unfamiliar with the Water Mirror Art, and some of the water resonance users in the crowd also utilized this move. However, blocking Song Yunfeng's attack like Li Luo had just done was just a pipe dream for them.

This clearly incomprehensible situation had unfolded right in front of their eyes.

Difa Qing's beautiful eyes had widened into full moons and her jaw dropped.

"Did I just see something supernatural?" Bei Kun was equally dumbfounded.

Lu Qing'er, who was not far away, also had a look of surprise. Her slender eyebrows were raised, her eyes focused on Li Luo. It was as she had guessed: Li Luo did have some means to deal with Song Yunfeng! *NOVELNext.com*

Even an impossible situation could be turned around by him!

Amidst the cacophony of shouts, Li Luo shook his stinging arms before making his way into the inner part of the stage. He stared at Song Yunfeng, whose expression was flickering between jubilation and frustration, smirking and rushing towards him.

Deep down, he could feel a great sense of accomplishment and joy spreading through him.

His experiment had truly succeeded!

The resonance art he had just used looked like the Water Mirror Art, but there were some additional intricacies to it. This was because Li Luo had infused it with light resonance power, layering the Shadow Reversal Art atop it.

The Water Mirror Art would reflect a portion of the attack back to mitigate its effect, while the Shadow Reversal Art was designed to reflect the opponent's attack as a counterattack. These two reflective resonance arts had layered to become an exceptionally strong Water Mirror Art that could reflect even the strongest attacks!

Li Luo had experimented and discovered that when the two arts were perfectly synchronized, they might even be able to cause severe harm to the opponent!

Using their own abilities to counter themselves!

This modified version of the Water Mirror Art had been renamed to the Waterlight Demon Mirror.

"Stop screwing around and pretending to be mysterious! Do you really think that you can change the inevitable outcome?" Just as Li Luo was celebrating to himself, Song Yunfeng's expression turned gloomy

and he shot out explosively towards Li Luo. His fingers were arched like talons, and as he slashed down, sharp, crimson-red talons materialized from his resonant power, tearing through the skies.

There was no hesitation as he continued his stream of attacks.

Li Luo immediately reacted with his strengthened Water Mirror Art, and a thin curtain once again appeared in front of him.

Peng!

Song Yunfeng's savage blow collided directly. A muffled sound could be heard when their moves clashed. Both of them were simultaneously forced back.

Song Yunfeng had prepared himself for the recoil and hence did not end up embarrassed like the previous exchange. However, his expression instantly became uglier as he realized that Li Luo's Water Mirror Art was too insidious. Every clash felt as though he was punching himself instead of the opponent!

What in tarnation was this? Could it even be considered a Water Mirror Art?

Song Yunfeng's blitz had been stonewalled by Li Luo, and the entire audience gulped in trepidation. This happening once could be considered luck, more than that demonstrated skill.

It wasn't only them who were confused. Even the ones sitting on the raised platform, such as the old dean, Xu Shanyue, Lin Feng, and so on, were equally startled by the scene before them.

"Li Luo's Water Mirror Art is clearly normal," the old dean commented in surprise.

The rest of the teachers nodded in agreement. The run-of-the-mill Water Mirror Art would never be able to leave Song Yunfeng in such a miserable state.

"It's reflective strength has similarities to the Duke resonance art Mysterious Water Mirror," a teacher commented.

However, this was quickly met with a rebuttal. "Do you really think Li Luo is able to utilize a Duke Stage resonance art with his Sixth Seal Stage resonant power?"

The one who previously raised this point was silent and unable to reply. Duke Stage resonance arts required immense amounts of resonant power, so much that even a Tenth Seal Stage cultivator might not be able to utilize them.

"That is definitely a Water Mirror Art," Xu Shanyue concluded after close observation. "However, it looks as though Li Luo has also modified it."

The other teachers stared at each other blankly. Modifying a resonance art? Although they all knew that Li Luo was extremely gifted in understanding and executing resonance arts, this idea seemed preposterous. Could a person of his caliber and cultivation level even have the ability to do so?

Unfortunately, this seemed to be the only possible explanation.

"He truly is the son of those two..." In the end, the rest could only sigh at the thought of this.

On the other hand, Teacher Lin Feng had been completely silent from the beginning, his face completely black. This entire scene had played out completely different from his expectations.

Back to the battle stage, the audience were cheering repeatedly in waves at the intensifying battle.

Song Yunfeng looked so gloomy, it was frightening. He stared daggers at Li Luo as he continued to ponder his next action. Every time he wished to take action, he would be reminded of that special Water Mirror Art and could only stop himself.

"Do you dare to attack me?" Song Yunfeng said through gritted teeth.

He realized that Li Luo could only use the Water Mirror Art to counter his moves. So long as he did not take the initiative to strike, Li Luo's Water Mirror Art would be useless!

Li Luo grinned upon hearing those words. Slightly shaking his head, he retorted, "I wouldn't dare. Why don't you try?"

Song Yunfeng was so furious upon hearing this that he was trembling in anger! He finally experienced firsthand what it meant to be frustrated and indignant! He was clearly multiple times stronger than Li Luo, but this damned tortoise shell of a move just kept hindering him! His hands were truly tied!

Song Yunfeng was not a complete imbecile. He gradually calmed himself down and began to consider his options. All of a sudden, he dashed towards Li Luo.

The difference this time was that he had suppressed his resonant power significantly.

"This Water Mirror Art is a high-grade resonant art, so it's resonant power consumption must be considerable. If I can force Li Luo to consistently activate it, then he will be drained of his resonant power! When he is no longer able to sustain the move, he will no longer have any means to fight back anymore, and there will be nothing to fear," Song Yunfeng mused to himself.

When Li Luo saw Song Yunfeng's change in tactics, he could also sense the reduced resonant power output by Song Yunfeng. Thinking things through, he was quickly able to grasp his intentions.

"Looks like he does have a brain after all. However, if he suppresses his resonant power, why would I be afraid of him?" Li Luo smiled. Song Yunfeng's tyrannical advantage came from his superior resonant power. Now that he was resorting to his hands and feet instead, what was there to fear?

Hence, he took the initiative to move towards Song Yunfeng. The two bodies directly clashed, hands and feet pummeling each other, bereft of resonant power. Even then, their physical prowess could produce sonic booms upon attacking.

The two were fighting in close combat, a complete frenzy from the position of the onlookers. However, as things went by, Song Yunfeng's expression changed for the worse. He had discovered that without the assistance of his resonant power, he had no way to overpower Li Luo!

Song Yunfeng's gaze was filled with fury, and he suddenly burst out with his full potential, punching out with a berserk blow infused with crimson resonant power, hoping to deal an unexpected, vicious blow.

When his fist was about to collide with Li Luo, the dreaded water curtain once again appeared. Clearly, Li Luo had prepared himself to execute the resonance art at a moment's notice.

Peng!

When his furious fist collided with the water curtain, massive amounts of resonant power rebounded back towards Song Yunfeng, forcing him to retreat in complete depression.

Li Luo had similarly been forced back, but the strain on him was less evident. Rubbing his knuckles, he gave a smile that was not a smile to Song Yunfeng, seemingly provoking him.

"Li Luo!!!! I would like to see just how many times you can keep this up with your paltry Sixth Seal resonant power!" Song Yunfeng screamed with an ashen face full of exasperation. Crimson-red resonant power surged out of him like a tide as he attacked with everything he had.

He was at the Eighth Seal Stage, so his resonant power was significantly denser and greater than Li Luo's. Even though Li Luo possessed a water resonance, he would still use the most direct method to grind down his reserves!

Song Yunfeng did not bother to take a break. He immediately activated all of his resonant power to launch yet another battery of blows.

In response, Li Luo continued to use his Water Mirror Art as per before.

Peng!

A familiar scene took place when the two were knocked back.

For the next few moments, the audience continued to watch dumbstruck as the two continued the exact same set of motions...

Song Yunfeng charged forward like an enraged bull, while Li Luo activated his Water Mirror Art much like a matador with his cape. Then a bang would be heard and the two would separate.

No one felt that this was exceptionally strange. They all knew that Li Luo had less resonant power to begin with and that it would be a matter of how long he could keep up. These repetitive clashes continued until Li Luo's thirteen Water Mirror Art was broken.

The water resonance power shrouding Li Luo seemed to have thinned out and lost its original sheen.

This was the sign of resonant power exhaustion.

Some within the crowd immediately voiced their regrets. It looked like things were coming to a close.

Song Yunfeng on the other hand finally leaked out a cold smile. "What are you going to do now Li Luo? You're all out of juice!"

Bang!

Never one to let up an opportunity, he sprinted forward, summoning up all of his crimson-red resonant power. At this point, even his eyes had been infused red, making him look like a demonic eagle pouncing on its prey.

Seeing Song Yunfeng's relentless offensive, Li Luo did not do anything. Instead, he silently stood at his current position, watching the furious, red shadow gradually growing larger in his view.

At the moment when that blazing fist was about to strike, when Song Yunfeng was just an inch away from Li Luo, the attack was suddenly forced to a halt.

A hand had tightly clutched onto Song Yunfeng's arm, preventing him from going any further.

Frustrated, he turned to look and noticed the administrator standing right beside him, directly preventing him from making any further moves.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Song Yunfeng howled.

The administrator was expressionless, directly pointing at a stone pillar. Atop it was an hourglass, and no one else had noticed that the sand had stopped flowing.

Li Luo exaggeratedly loosened his sore shoulders, giving the most radiant and gentle smile he could at Song Yunfeng.

"Oh! It looks like time's up, you idiot... Perhaps you wanted some overtime?"

Chapter 0035: Draw!

Instead of the expected cheers, the crowd had gone silent.

Everyone looked at the scene before them in complete stupefaction before turning towards the hourglass.

The battle had been too intense and no one had paid any attention to the round timer. The battle was over before they had realized it...

They suddenly understood that although Song Yunfeng was planning to deplete Li Luo's strength, Li Luo was similarly also playing for time! They had completely overlooked this fact.

Now that the hourglass had completely emptied, the battle would be over as a draw, based on the rules.

This was to say that Li Luo and Song Yunfeng had actually fought to a standstill.

This was completely unexpected!

No matter how one looked at it, this sort of result should not have occurred. Song Yunfeng was superior to Li Luo and had a huge advantage in both resonance and resonant power. Thus, this was supposed to be a walk in the park for Song Yunfeng, akin to him crushing dried roots underfoot.

Regardless of how much Li Luo could struggle, there was no way to compete against a seventh-grade resonance coupled with Eighth Seal Stage resonant power. He had no advantage whatsoever.

Unfortunately, the result begged to differ.

A scene of complete domination had been juxtaposed into a draw...

Their gazes naturally drifted towards the individual who had overdrafted his resonant power, the sickly-pale Li Luo. Gradually, admiration emerged within their eyes.

The only exception was Bei Kun. He looked as though he was constipated, and his complexion was truly a sight to behold.

Difa Qing, who was standing at the side, sullenly stared towards the stage. Her gaze seemed lifeless and her heart was in turmoil. Only after a period of time did she take a deep breath, deeply gazing at Li Luo.

Although Li Luo looked pale and weak, it was as though she could see a radiant brightness emanating from him.

It reminded her of a particular legend who had been immortalized in Southwind Academy's monument of honor.

However, she quickly snapped out of that strange dream. Li Luo might have created a miracle, but he could barely hold a candle to Jiang Qing'e.

On the battle stage, Song Yunfeng was sluggishly taking in the scene in front of him. All of a sudden, he lashed out at the administrator. "I was clearly about to beat him! He had no more resonant power left! I would have won! Just give me another second. Just one second!!!"

The administrator frowned at the irate and completely ballistic Song Yunfeng. This fellow used to be a gentleman who spoke kindly to everyone around him, but now that he didn't get what he wanted, his true colors were shown.

"The rules are THE RULES. If there has been no victor declared once the hourglass is out of time, the result is a draw," the administrator stated flatly. *NOVELNext.com*

"Bullshit!" Song Yunfeng growled ferociously.

How could he accept a draw as a result? His face would be dragged through the mud if word got out!

The administrator did not bother with him. He proceeded to announce, "This battle is now over. It is a DRAW!"

"Brother Luo is AWESOME!" The moment the administrator announced the result, the Second School erupted into violent cheers and celebration loud enough to topple a mountain... Everyone in the Second School was exceptionally excited as Li Luo's excellent performance had brought much face and respect to their Second School.

The completely bandaged Yu Lang even managed to barely open his mouth to croak out some comments. "Is this weirdo truly rising to the top again? Even Song Yunfeng suffered..." Amidst the ear-piercing howls of jubilation, Lu Qing'er quietly stared at Li Luo's silhouette. It felt as though she had been transported into the past, staring at that still immature but exceptionally talented genius who had taken the first step into learning resonance arts before any of them. Even then, he would casually give out pointers to help everyone out.

The Li Luo from back then was extraordinarily outstanding.

Lu Qing'er even saw him as something of an idol back then, setting him as her target.

However, once his blank palace manifested, all of his wonder completely shattered.

"I just knew that he would definitely get back on his feet. Back then he was truly dazzling. However, he is still too weak. I want to see you climb to the top. Then I will defeat you fair and square!" Lu Qing'er's

hair gently swayed with the wind whilst her bright pupils burned with anticipation of their future battle. She gave Li Luo another glance before turning to leave.

Who would have expected the demure and sweet beauty Lu Qing'er to possess such a strong intent to compete and battle!

On the battle stage, Li Luo stared at the extremely gloomy Song Yunfeng and sighed. "Sheesh. I gave you a chance, but you didn't want to take it. You truly ARE useless, my friend."

Hearing that jibe, Song Yunfeng became even more incensed. He scowled at Li Luo.

"Now that you've missed this opportunity, I don't think you will ever have another chance to do so!" Li Luo completely disregarded Song Yunfeng's venomous glare as he walked forward and even lightly patted him on the shoulder. With a smile on his face, he continued his tirade. "I haven't forgotten your attempt to smear my parents' names. We will settle this properly in the future."

Gritting his teeth, Song Yunfeng gave a cold chuckle. "Well, then, I'll be waiting."

Li Luo nodded and, without uttering any more extraneous words, proceeded to leave the battle stage. The students of the Second School were already waiting for him, hoisting him above their heads and cheering as they departed as a group.

With that group leaving, the atmosphere of the field died down. The remaining audience members curiously looked at Song Yunfeng before gradually dispersing.

Li Luo was simply supposed to forfeit today. Instead, he had been provoked by Song Yunfeng into a fight, and instead of an overwhelming victory for Song Yunfeng, he had been taken for a ride by Li Luo, turning him into the butt of a joke.

One could imagine how this news would spread throughout Southwind Academy and what sort of legends it would give rise to. Song Yunfeng had officially become a stepping stone of someone else's story!

On the raised platform, the old dean and the teachers were silently in deep thought. This result had also exceeded their expectations.

After a period of time, the old dean finally sighed. "Li Luo never sought to win. His intention was always to play for time and obtain a draw. No one expected him to actually succeed."

Xu Shanyue, on the other hand, had smiled until his cheeks were sore, letting his expression do the talking instead. Li Luo had won him a lot of face and respect. Despite Song Yunfeng being one of the most elite students of the First School, almost on par with Lu Qing'er, he had actually been taken for a fool and dragged into a draw.

Would anyone dare to say that the Second School possessed insufficient talent now?

No one truly felt that this was a draw. This was because the difference in strength between Li Luo and Song Yunfeng was just too vast. One was at the Sixth Seal Stage and had a fifth-grade resonance. Song Yunfeng? Eighth Seal Stage cultivation and a seventh-grade Crimson Eagle resonance. This was incomprehensible. Even if a teacher was placed in this scenario, they would have no idea how they could

possibly turn the tables. Li Luo, on the other hand, had done so! This was truly something deserving of praise.

Not everyone was like Jiang Qing'e, with a ninth-grade resonance. When there was a will, there was a way!

Lin Feng's expression was also as dark as night. Faced with Xu Shanyue's laughter, he couldn't hold it in any longer. "Li Luo's performance today was impeccable. However, the preliminary examinations have a time limit. What about the College Final Examinations? He will require true ability then and will be unable to rely on such underhanded means. There's no meaning in this." Xu Shanyue coldly snorted. "Li Luo might make further improvements by then."

"Even if he improves again, he'd at most be at the Seventh Seal Stage," Lin Feng coolly retorted.

The old dean waved his hand, indicating for the two to stop bickering. He stared in the direction where Li Luo had gone before giving the duo a good look. His face immediately became stern. "Li Luo's performance is his problem. I want to remind you that during the College Final Examinations, our Southwind Academy needs to maintain our position as the number one academy of the Tianshu Province. If any mistake arises—hmph!" Upon hearing the old dean snorting coldly, the teachers all shivered within their hearts.

Lin Feng paid particular attention to those words as he knew that they were meant for him. The First School had the best students and also monopolized the lion's share of resources. The College Final Examinations was a litmus test for whether they truly deserved all this.

Lin Feng also knew that the previous First School teacher had ruined Southwind Academy's prestigious name of the number one academy during the last College Final Examinations. He had been directly booted out of the academy by an incensed old dean.

Thus, if the academy did not perform well, he would not be spared either.

The thought of that caused Lin Feng to feel shivers down his spine. He hurriedly assured, "Please relax, Dean. Our First School's might is evident for all to see. We will maintain the academy's honor and reputation."

"Good." Only then did the old dean's expression soften a little. Without speaking further, he turned and left.

His departure allowed everyone else to heave a sigh of relief. An angry dean was truly frightening...

"Eastpool Academy seems to be extraordinarily aggressive this year. I hear that they have the full backing of the Governor's Mansion and that they've been rising through the ranks recently, almost catching up to Southwind Academy. The top student is the son of the governor, and I believe he goes by the name of Shi Huang? It's said that he possesses heavenly talent and is no weaker than Lu Qing'er. Thus, this year's College Final Examinations will not be so simple." Some of the teachers discussed worriedly.

Lin Feng gave that teacher a glare and indifferently replied, "Eastpool Academy's foundation cannot compare with ours. If they want to wrest our title away, they have to get the agreement of the First School." Following which, he walked off.

The rest looked at each other in dismay. Some weren't happy with Lin Feng's arrogance, but they were helpless in this situation. Grumbling to themselves, they walked away as well.

"Well then, we'll leave you to handle it. If something goes wrong, then let's see who gets the last laugh."

Chapter 0036: First Grade Tempering Treasure Market

With the final battle leading to a draw, Li Luo's position was now firmly entrenched within the top 20 for the preliminary examination.

Based on what had happened in the past, the top 20 would have another round of selections to determine their internal ranking. However, Li Luo was completely uninterested in this meaningless demonstration. Whether one was the twentieth or the first, they would all still get an equal chance to participate in the College Final Examinations.

Participating actually had a chance of being detrimental, because if one were to reveal their trump card, other academies would prepare for it and it would only make their life more difficult.

Therefore, wasn't it better to keep a low profile? It wasn't as if getting first place warranted a reward from the old dean or anything!

In fact, if it was not for Song Yunfeng stubbornly provoking him repeatedly, he would have chosen to forfeit instantly!

He never felt any shame in giving up if he was unable to win. It was a loss as far as he was concerned, as he had been forced to reveal his upgraded Water Mirror Art. This was too unworthy a platform to demonstrate his ingenuity!

Hence, when Xu Shanyue had asked if he was willing to compete for the top 20 ranks, he simply responded with one word. If he had time, he would want to temper his resonance and hopefully upgrade it to the sixth-grade before the final examinations started.

Xu Shanyue was not surprised and wished him well. Preparations for the final examination were key after all.

The rankings were out the next day, and the Second School had two representatives: Zhao Kuo and Li Luo. The two could be considered peas in a pod, with Li Luo getting the fifteenth position and Zhao Kuo the sixteenth, separated by just a hair.

Li Luo's fame had greatly risen as a result of that final battle. The students all reckoned that if he was willing to compete, the top ten positions were not out of reach. However, he had given up the opportunity to compete and was given the rank accordingly.

These twenty would represent Southwind Academy in two weeks' time at the College Final Examinations. They would struggle for the right to enter the Astral Sage College.

As the most elite school of the Xia Kingdom, the Astral Sage College provided a certain number of places for entry each year. The only catch was that each and every place would be hotly contested for.

Each and every year, Southwind Academy usually managed to obtain the greatest number of spots, which was how they had cemented their reputation as the top academy in the Tianshu Province.

It was not as though they did not have competition. Eastpool Academy, for example, was a close competitor. Although they did not have as great a foundation, their rate of ascension through the ranks had been ferociously quick. Coupled with the support of the Tianshu Province's Governor's Mansion, they had managed to prove themselves a worthy contender for the position of top dog, especially with their stellar performance in recent years.

It was rumored that Eastpool Academy was hoping to unseat Southwind Academy this year, and a fierce battle between giants was expected.

After the preliminary examination, Southwind Academy would normally have a week of holidays. Students could choose to head back home or continue to cultivate within the school. Li Luo chose the former.

Within the old manor, inside Li Luo's room.

Li Luo's eyes were closed tight, his body lightly emanating light. In front of him was a pile of already-utilized fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights

After a long period of absorption, he gradually opened both his eyes. A trace of blue light flickered through his pupils.

"This is the last bottle..." He stared wistfully at the now-empty crystal bottles and shook his head in sadness. Cai Wei had already managed to purchase 83 bottles of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights for over 400,000 pieces of skygold. This was a massive investment. If not for the sale of certain House Luolan businesses, their finances would have been unable to support his lavish expenditure.

The worst part was that even after utilizing so many tempering treasures and his fifth-grade resonance improving by quite a bit, the distance to the sixth-grade was still quite large.

As a result, he had to figure out some way to allow his waterlight resonance to reach the sixth-grade before the final examinations.

The most recent battle with Song Yunfeng might have been a draw, but Li Luo did not feel proud or content with that. He knew that if not for that time limit, he would have suffered a complete loss, left defeated and on the ground.

A draw could not possibly occur within the final examinations.

If one wanted to earn the right to enter the Astral Sage College, they were also required to possess sufficient strength.

The most elite students across the academies of the Tianshu Province would participate. The battles would undoubtedly be intense and fierce, far from what occurred within Southwind Academy.

Additionally, Li Luo had already selected a new energy cultivation art, which required a minimum of a sixth-grade resonance to practice.

Thus, the sixth-grade waterlight resonance was something he urgently required.

"Based on the rate of my progression, if I want to temper my resonance to the sixth-grade, I still require one more batch of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights.

"However, it seems like Elder Sister Cai Wei often takes the long way around whenever she spots me. It's almost as though she doesn't want to see me..." Li Luo was left with a conundrum. Cai Wei had even avoided breakfast in recent days, perhaps spooked by the idea that Li Luo would want some more spirit liquids and purifying lights.

Fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights weren't random cabbages found on the street. Each one cost at least 5,000 pieces of skygold, and 50 would be 250,000 pieces of skygold. This was already close to a year of income for House Luolan's businesses in the Tianshu Province.

Thus, Li Luo completely understood why Cai Wei would avoid him. Even though she was an excellent general manager, the moment she took over the Tianshu Province's businesses, she had only constantly sold off House Luolan's properties instead of turning things around. This was basically ruining her reputation and career...

Even so, she had not given up on the situation nor resigned, leading Li Luo to look at her with immense respect and appreciation for her broad-mindedness.

Unfortunately, Li Luo had no alternative. This acquired resonance was a money-sucking black hole. It was a great thing that his parents had left behind House Luolan for him! Otherwise, he would just drop dead in five years...

"Let's first head to the Suncreek Villa." Li Luo was a little depressed. House Luolan was surrounded by both internal and external problems, so he could not keep taking without giving back. Even if all of it could be mobilized at his beck and call, he would not actually take it to the extreme and completely sell off everything. If he actually did so, he would inevitably fall into disrepute.

Most importantly, everyone would think of him as an ignorant, arrogant young master! This was a label that Li Luo did not want...

Thinking things through, he came up with a few ideas and made his way towards the Suncreek Villa.

At the Suncreek Villa, he directly went to Yan Lingqing's refining workshop. However, once he pushed the door open, he saw two familiar silhouettes sitting together, discussing something. A trace of concern could be seen on their expressions.

Naturally, they were Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing.

When they saw Li Luo, they exclaimed in surprise, "Young Lord?!"

"What are you guys talking about?" Li Luo smiled as he walked in. Numerous crystal bottles containing spirit liquids and purifying lights were on the table in front of the two beauties. One of the bottles contained the first-grade spirit liquid he had personally refined before.

"We are discussing this year's sales performance of the Suncreek Villa," Cai Wei answered directly without any reservations.

"It's not great?" Li Luo frowned slightly when he heard this. The Suncreek Villa was responsible for half of the Tianshu Province's income, and if performance faltered, this would affect him greatly.

Yan Lingqing pointed at the crystal bottles with her slender, jade-like finger, her voice clear and cold.

"There are two families competing with us in the first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights market.

One is House Luolan with our Azure Jade Spirit Liquid, while the other is the Song family's Pine Nut Villa. They produce this product known as the Wondrous Sunshine Light. Both are quite similar in tempering strength, and in previous years, we captured perhaps 80% of the market as a whole. However, in recent times, the Pine Nut Villa has improved the tempering strength of their Wondrous Sunshine Light. The average tempering strength is now close to 57%, which is almost on par with the best spirit liquids that the Suncreek Villa is able to produce. As a result, they have managed to control over half of the first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights market, and our corresponding portion has decreased accordingly. If this continues, the Suncreek Villa will eventually lose the battle against the Song family, bringing about great harm to the Suncreek Villa and, more importantly, House Luolan as a whole!"

Li Luo listened intently, and his expression became solemn. "How is the Suncreek Villa's production rate when it comes to first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights?"

"The Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa is able to produce five first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights a day, 150 in a month. This goes into the market for roughly 50 pieces of skygold per item. In a year, the total comes up to about 90,000 pieces of skygold. Deducting the costs would give us a profit of about 30,000 pieces of skygold," Cai Wei said honestly. It was clear that she possessed an in-depth understanding of House Luolan's finances within the Tianshu Province.

Li Luo gave Cai Wei a thumbs up in praise before becoming slightly surprised at these estimates. The first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights alone brought in 10% of the Tianshu Province's profits! One could tell how important the sales of spirit liquids and purifying lights were.

This was not completely unexpected because high-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights were not wilfully squandered by people. Most of those who purchased first-grade and second-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights were not individuals with first or second-grade resonances. Instead, it was people who wanted to support the expenditure of squandering higher grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, thus utilizing these lower grade treasures as replacements.

The trade-off was that these lower grade tempering treasures would inevitably cause a quicker build-up of impurities. There was no other option as not everyone was a rich young master like Li Luo.

After hearing about this, Li Luo's first thought was that he could not let the Suncreek Villa's businesses be affected. This would inevitably hurt him directly when it came to obtaining more spirit liquids in the future...

"How could the Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light improve in tempering strength?" Li Luo asked.

"What determines a spirit liquid and purifying light's tempering strength is dependent on three aspects. The formula, the experience and strength of the individual, as well as the quality of the materials."

Yan Lingqing continued indifferently, "After investigating the Wondrous Sunshine Light, it looks as though they have made minor changes to the formula. It looks as though the Song family has spent a large sum to hire an expert to make adjustments to it."

Cai Wei's left hand was wrapped around her lower chest, propping up her right arm, which her chin was resting on. Frowning, she said, "Furthermore, that troublesome Zhuang Yi has been using this as a pretext to attack Lingqing, clamoring for her to be kicked out of the Suncreek Villa as if this entire issue of lessened sales is due to her."

The two of them were standing side by side, and Cai Wei with her unknowing actions had accidentally caused the natural differences between the two to be accentuated even further. Yan Lingqing's lack thereof could only be described as unfortunate...

As though Yan Lingqing had subconsciously realized something, she emotionlessly pushed Cai Wei's right arm down.

Cai Wei did not react initially, but her egg-shaped face was quickly flushed red in embarrassment. At the same time, she gave Yan Lingqing a strong pinch.

After this brief exchange, the two focused their attention back onto Li Luo but realized that he was completely in a daze. Recovering gracefully, he put on a serious expression. "When we are discussing serious issues, don't fidget around. You two are mature adults after all! If this happens again, I will have to criticize your actions," he admonished. This immediately elicited cold snorts from the duo before they continued their discussion.

"Is Zhuang Yi still creating trouble?" Li Luo asked to get things back on track.

Upon hearing his name, Yan Lingqing's face blazed with fury. "That bastard has been finding trouble for me all day long. He has been creating layers upon layers of internal conflict within the Sun creek Villa. The reason for our reduced production rate has to do with him."

"He truly is a disaster. Can we not figure out some way to get rid of him?" Li Luo grinned evilly, completely dissatisfied. Here he was, trying his best to raise a large amount of funds, but this troublemaker was creating more trouble instead of assisting him?

Cai Wei frowned. "The current Sun creek Villa is a group lacking a leader. Lingqing is too new and does not wield much influence. Zhuang Yi, on the other hand, is an old and established individual. Many of the resonance artificers within the Sun creek Villa trust him, and without a proper reason to dispose of him, it would inevitably create even more internal troubles. Furthermore, that damned Pei Hao is also supporting him." *NovELNext.Com*

Li Luo scowled upon hearing this. Pei Hao, that white-eyed wolf, was the greatest danger to House Luolan. Zhuang Yi could only truly affect the Sun creek Villa. Pei Hao, on the other hand, sought to gobble up the entirety of House Luolan.

This was someone trying to steal his lifeline. The moment House Luolan was gobbled up, how could he find resources to satiate his bottomless acquired resonance? With his looks?

Pei Hao had already established himself, while Li Luo was just a growing sprout, completely incapable of contending against him. In the meantime, all he could do was hide behind Sister Qing'e and slowly develop...

As he continued trying to think of a method, someone came to report a new development.

"Young Lord, General Manager, and Vice President Yan... Vice President Zhuang has summoned Sun creek Villa's entire management. He says there is a huge issue at hand. Would the three of you kindly attend?" Upon hearing this announcement, the three of them were stunned by this event, looking at each other whilst frowning in dismay.

Just what was that troublemaker up to this time?

Chapter 0037: Battle for President

Suncreek Villa, discussion hall.

When the trio arrived, they noticed that there were no empty seats. This was because the entire senior management of the Suncreek Villa had arrived.

Right in front of them was Zhuang Yi with a beaming smile on his face. Sitting right by his side was a dour-faced old man

"Hmm?" Upon seeing that old man, Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing both let out soft cries of surprise before explaining the situation to the slightly confused Li Luo. "That old man is known as Zheng Ping. He is an elder of the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. His influence in the organization is huge, and he belongs to the founding generation of the Suncreek Villa. He has been around since it was first established by the House Lords. However, this old man is known to be extremely pedantic and strict, a bag of smelly and stubborn bones. He usually resides in the Xia City headquarters. Now that he has suddenly arrived without giving us any notice, I can only imagine that things have gotten pretty bad." After the explanation, everyone in the discussion hall stood up and greeted Li Luo respectfully.

Even Elder Zheng Ping from the Suncreek Villa's headquarters stood up and respectfully uttered, "We greet the Young Lord."

"Elder Zheng is too courteous." Li Luo flashed him a smile as the trio got to their seats.

"May I kindly know when Elder Zheng arrived in the City of Southwind?" Yan Lingqing suddenly asked.

Elder Zheng Ping expressionlessly replied, "The Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa has been performing poorly this year. Headquarters has thus sent me here to take a look. At the same time, they've dispatched me to settle the issue regarding the presidency of this branch." At the same time, he glared strictly at Yan Lingqing. "Vice President Yan, I've already seen the reports. The first-grade refining workshop under you has performed abysmally. As a result, the reputation of the Suncreek Villa in the Tianshu Province has been tarnished. What do you have to say about this?"

Yan Lingqing coldly replied, "If you want to know why, you can ask Vice President Zhuang. I'm sure he can provide a more accurate answer." *NOVELNext.com*

Zhuang Yi immediately retorted, "Vice President Yan is simply incapable. Don't push the blame onto others."

"If it was not for you secretly blocking the supply of materials to my first-grade workshop, to a point where I was unable to operate on certain days, would I have had such a terrible result?" Yan Lingqing snorted.

Zhuang Yi immediately protested, "House Luolan's situation in the Tianshu Province is simply not great. Some of the materials come from the three families as well, and they have always sought to suppress us. What lands in my hands is naturally not much. Furthermore, the third-grade refining workshop in my management is the best performing workshop in the Suncreek Villa! Should I simply give it to you too? To let you reap the benefits of my efforts?"

"You!" Yan Lingqing was so incensed she slammed the table beside her.

"Silence!" Elder Zheng Ping bellowed. He severely glared at both Zhuang Yi and Yan Lingqing. "All of you have your reasons, but this old man does not care. I'm only concerned about the Suncreek Villa's results. Whoever causes the Suncreek Villa to decline, or tarnishes its reputation, will not be forgiven. The Tianshu Province's performance has been getting worse, and the key reason is that there is no president. Thus, headquarters has discussed the issue and given the order. The branch in the Tianshu Province will immediately elect a new president!" His proclamation immediately silenced the entire discussion hall. The members of senior management did not make so much as a squeak, as they understood that this would be a battle between Yan Lingqing and Zhuang Yi. The worst part was that they were just the vanguards. There was an entire larger battle raging around their skirmish, thus they would only quietly watch from the sidelines.

A glimmer flickered through Li Luo's pupils. What Zheng Ping had said was not wrong. The Suncreek Villa in the Tianshu Province had too much internal conflict, and if stability was wanted, a new president would be necessary. Most importantly, just who would the elder choose?

As he pondered over the circumstances, Li Luo smiled and asked directly, "Elder Zheng Ping, who do you feel is most suitable to be president?"

Zheng Ping may have treated Yan Lingqing rudely, but when facing Li Luo, he maintained a sense of decorum. After deep thought, he announced, "If we follow the Suncreek Villa's eternal rule, it should be the one who is best at managing the refining workshops."

Zhuang Yi, who was at the side, let out a sneaky smile. He personally managed the third-grade workshop, which also surpassed the other two in absolute sales. Hence, this rule was most beneficial to him.

At this point, Elder Zheng Ping continued, "This is, of course, according to the rules. If the Young Lord has any suggestions, please let them be known. This old man can relay your suggestion to headquarters as well. However, we will still have to decide who will be the president now; otherwise, this old man will be stuck here until that has been done. I hope the Young Lord will not fault me for this, as I only have the Suncreek Villa's and House Luolan's interests at heart."

Although Zhuang Yi's expression remained unchanged, his heart was in turmoil! Why did that damn old man have to speak so much??

Li Luo gave the elder an eye and had an idea. It seemed as though Elder Zheng Ping's appearance was not as Yan Lingqing had suspected, that someone else had dispatched him to cause trouble for their faction. At the very least, he was not on Pei Hao's side.

The biggest fear for them was if the individual suddenly appointed by headquarters to visit the Tianshu Province was involved in the proxy war between Jiang Qing'e and Pei Hao. Luckily, Elder Zheng Ping was a neutral party and was known to be a stickler for rules. It seemed as though this was the result of the battle fought in the shadows.

From a certain point of view, this was not bad news.

The only issue was that if traditional rules were utilized to judge the most suitable candidate for president, then Yan Lingqing would be at too much of a disadvantage. Furthermore, the third-grade refining workshop that Zhuang Yi controlled was the Suncreek Villa's most profitable one as well. What it raked in was significantly greater than both the first and second-grade refining workshops combined.

Yan Lingqing also understood this point, and her pretty face turned frigid. Her pretty eyes were also laced with fury, almost as if she was about to erupt.

Li Luo, sensing the anger, immediately grabbed the back of her hand before looking at Elder Zheng Ping with conviction. "So whoever's refining workshop does the best will then become the president?"

"Yes." Elder Zheng Ping nodded.

Li Luo sighed deeply before continuing, "This idea isn't bad. Let's go ahead with this."

His words were immediately met with hushed discussion.

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing were astonished by this. They were unable to understand his intentions. This seemed to mean that he was giving up the fight for president.

Zhuang Yi was also shocked at this development for a moment before quickly recovering. "The Young Lord truly is broad-minded! Isn't it right that we just want the Suncreek Villa to be the best that it can be? Ultimately, doesn't the Suncreek Villa exist to enrich the Young Lord?" he said with a huge smile. Elder Zheng Ping was a little surprised as well. "Young Lord, do you truly wish to do this?"

Li Luo nodded and did not say anything else. He immediately got Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing to follow him out of the discussion hall.

Once out, Li Luo separated himself from the two. At this point, Yan Lingqing immediately berated him. "Li Luo, just what are you trying to do? This rule does not favor me, so why did you agree? If you don't want me to be here, just say the word! I will immediately head back to Xia City!"

Cai Wei was also staring at Li Luo intensely. From what she knew of him, he was not an impulsive individual, but his actions today seemed to show otherwise.

Yan Lingqing had come to the Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa to provide help and reinforcements. Only with her here were they able to prevent their current state of affairs from getting worse. However, everything seemed to have been thrown into disarray with that one line.

Li Luo smiled in response. "My two dear elder sisters, I am definitely not a fool. Can't you see that I'm worthy of your trust?"

Cai Wei shot him an unconvinced look before the two of them turned around and left in a huff, not interested in entertaining him any longer.

"Although the rules don't benefit Elder Sister Lingqing, don't you think that this is the best sort of situation, one where she can legitimately compete for the role of president? At the same time, we have an opportunity to get rid of this cancer known as Zhuang Yi." Li Luo smiled.

The two paused in their tracks and turned back to look at Li Luo. This was a good opportunity... However, Zhuang Yi clearly was in a position of strength! If they were to play with fire, they might very well get burnt.

At this point, a glint flickered through Cai Wei's eyes as she stared at Li Luo in shock.

"Could it be... that you have a way to turn the tables?"

Chapter 0038: Secret Art Watersource

The moment Cai Wei blurted out those words, Yan Lingqing couldn't help but to turn and glare at her. "What sort of solution can this buffoon have? He's barely spent any time on resonance artificering!" she spat out furiously. She did not continue her tirade because Li Luo had not even spent a month on this. It would be a fantastical story if he was able to reverse the dreadful situation they were in.

Li Luo smiled and did not speak. Instead, he beckoned for the two of them to enter Yan Lingqing's refining workshop, closing the door after them. Only then did he continue speaking. "I understand that the Suncreek Villa is responsible for half of House Luolan's Tianshu Province profits, roughly 150,000 pieces of skygold. Within the Suncreek Villa, the first-grade refining workshop contributes 30,000 pieces of skygold, the second-grade workshop 40,000 pieces, and the third-grade 80,000 pieces."

"If you understood the situation, then why did you go and shoot your mouth off? There's clearly a huge gap! How can we possibly catch up?" Yan Lingqing angrily thundered.

As she was managing two of the refining workshops, she was extremely clear of the facts. The third-grade workshop significantly exceeded the first-grade and second-grade workshops in value and also had the best performance each year. This was like the difference between heaven and earth, something extremely hard to bridge.

"More importantly, the Suncreek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid has been suppressed by the Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light. This has directly reduced our sales of spirit liquids, and in this situation, forget turning things around, our performance will only get worse!"

Li Luo smiled again. "And so this is our top priority to fix! We need to first stabilize the Suncreek Villa's first-grade sales and improve its reputation in the market."

Yan Lingqing snorted. "As I previously explained, there are three aspects that affect the spirit liquids and purifying lights' tempering strength. Materials, the resonance artificer, and the watersource or lightsource. The Azure Jade Spirit Liquid has a perfected recipe, and with our current abilities, we cannot make further inroads in terms of improving it, unless we can hire an expert resonance artificer. However, this requires a lot of time and capital, neither of which we have!"

"A slow remedy cannot address our current situation. I'm sure the Song family has prepared for quite a while for this, waiting for the perfect time to strike. As House Luolan is now struggling internally, they took advantage of the opportunity to deal this vicious blow!" Cai Wei mused.

"Our only response is to improve our resonance artificers' skills and experience. However, with such a small period of time, it's impossible to suddenly expect everyone to explode in potential and for the standard to rise just like that. This isn't a fantasy story! Its unrealistic!" Yan Lingqing quipped.

Cai Wei continued to stare intensely at Li Luo, smiling. "Didn't the Young Lord produce an Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength?"

Yan Lingqing rolled her eyes at Cai Wei. "How many spirit liquids do you think a single person can produce? Even if we turn him into a cash cow, he can barely squeeze out any milk!"

Li Luo's handsome face turned a shade of black. Although he didn't mind refining first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, he was still a respectable individual! Why did they have to demean him like that? And a cow of all things!

"Well then, the only solution is to improve the watersource or lightsource," Li Luo continued, not willing to bicker with the two.

Yan Lingqing unhappily replied, "This is dependent on the resonance artificers' resonance grades and affinities. Could it be that you're willing to improve the resonances of all the resonance artificers in the Suncreek Villa? If we had a secret art watersource or lightsource, it could allow us to improve the tempering strength of our spirit liquids and purifying lights. However, this is a closely guarded secret for even major powers! Our Suncreek Villa simply does not possess this."

Li Luo lightly chuckled upon hearing this. "That might not be the case."

The duo stared at him with a trace of bewilderment.

Under their careful scrutiny, Li Luo removed a crystal bottle from his robe. The bottle was half-filled with a deep-blue liquid.

"Do you want to give this a try?" he asked. *NovELNext.Com*

Yan Lingqing's eyebrows rose in suspicion. "As I told you before, you simply can't just use someone else's watersource. Only a secret art watersource..."

Before she could finish her sentence, Li Luo uncorked the bottle and a steady stream of pure energy wafted outwards. This was what caused Yan Lingqing to pause in her tracks, staring in astonishment at the crystal bottle.

As though possessed, she immediately snatched the crystal bottle out of Li Luo's hand and gently poured a droplet onto her finger. Carefully inspecting it, the shock on her face only grew more intense.

"There is no attribute or characteristic mixed into this. Could this be a secret art watersource? This sort of purity is even higher than what someone with a seventh-grade water resonance can produce. How could you have obtained such a high grade secret art watersource?" Yan Lingqing asked as she grasped Li Luo's hand crazily. It seemed as though she had lost all sense of rationality at this sight.

Secret art watersources were differentiated by grade. The one Li Luo had taken out had already reached the purity of a seventh-grade one. Such a pure watersource could definitely increase the success rate and tempering strength of spirit liquids when utilized, something truly rare.

Li Luo could feel a piercing pain due to how tightly Yan Lingqing was squeezing his hand. Seeing how agitated she was, he slowed down his words in an attempt to calm her down. "Elder Sister Lingqing, don't be too flustered. Can we use this watersource for refining spirit liquids and purifying lights?"

"Of course we can! A secret art watersource of this purity would definitely allow the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid to reach 60% tempering strength, at the least when used in the refinement process. This would be more than enough to beat the Wondrous Sunshine Light at its own game! The only problem is that the amount is too little. If we were to use it for refinement, it would only be enough for around 30 spirit liquids." Her beautiful pupils were firmly affixed on Li Luo, completely different from her usual, indifferent, and icy gaze. It seemed almost incompatible with the personality Li Luo knew her for.

"What if we were to use it on second-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights?" Li Luo asked after a moment of thought.

"It might be true that using such a treasure on first-grade spirit liquids would be almost wasteful. However, it's as I said—the amount of watersource is simply too little. If we were to use it on second-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, I'm afraid we would only be able to refine a few of them. It might be more efficient to use it to refine first-grade spirit liquids..." Yan Lingqing replied.

Li Luo felt a little awkward deep down. This "secret art watersource" was the watersource condensed by his waterlight resonance. Due to his blank palace, even the watersource he condensed possessed a trace of its void affinity. In essence, it was just like a secret art watersource, able to be used by anyone for resonance artificering.

However, this half a bottle was something he had managed to produce only after three days. He was currently only at the Sixth Seal Stage, so his resonant power was not extremely dense nor plentiful. Thus, the amount of "secret art watersource" he could produce was also limited.

"I guess we can first use it on the first-grade Azure Jade Spirit Liquid for now then. If I'm able to pass a bottle like this to you every three days, would it allow the first-grade refining workshop to become the best performing workshop within the Suncreek Villa?" Li Luo asked.

Cai Wei paused to consider. "The first-grade refining workshop sells about 150 bottles of Azure Jade Spirit Liquid a month. This roughly adds up to about 90,000 pieces of skygold a year. The third-grade refining workshop brings in 210,000 pieces of skygold. For the first-grade refining workshop to surpass the third-grade, we would need the sales to increase manifold. There will be some significant difficulty involved if we wish to purely rely on the first-grade refining workshop."

"Well, if we have sufficient amounts of this secret art watersource, it would not be difficult to increase our sales by that much! With how pure this secret art watersource is, utilizing it on first-grade spirit liquids for refinement is akin to using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. Thus, the tempering strength would definitely increase significantly." Yan Lingqing said confidently.

Clapping his hands, Li Luo laughed. "Then it looks like our problem has been solved."

Yan Lingqing was a little dazed at his response, spacing out for a moment. Had this arduous problem been resolved in such a simple manner?

How could it be so simple?

Yan Lingqing exhaled deeply. It truly wasn't as easy as Li Luo had mentioned. It was only because Li Luo had managed to produce an item that surpassed everyone's expectations. If anyone else knew that he

was utilizing such a treasure to create first-grade spirit liquids, they would inevitably curse him angrily for being the fool and wastrel that he was!

The two ladies glanced at each other, tacitly agreeing to not ask Li Luo how this secret art watersource had come about. The way they saw it, it likely had to do with a secret passed down by the two House Lords.

"It looks like the Young Lord might be House Luolan's harbinger of wealth!" Cai Wei laughed whilst coyly covering her mouth. Her beautiful face was absolutely bursting with joy.

"Although the secret art watersource might be a little small in amount, it will definitely be more than sufficient to meet the Suncreek Villa's needs in the interim." Yan Lingqing's small and square head lightly nodded. The Suncreek Villa currently only sold 150 bottles a month, and at the rate which Li Luo would provide it, this would definitely meet all their existing needs.

"Alright, I won't speak of this anymore. I have to go and make use of the time we have to produce the first batch of enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquids. We first need to build a reputation for our new product and improve public opinion..." Yan Lingqing tightly grasped the bottle of deep blue liquid as though it was her baby and immediately rushed off.

Li Luo and Cai Wei could only helplessly look on before they left the refining workshop together. Yet before Li Luo could say anything, Cai Wei immediately started to stride away quickly, and he had to quickly reach out and stop her.

"Elder Sister Cai Wei, are you trying to get rid of me?" Li Luo asked angrily.

Cai Wei innocently looked at him. "Young Lord, what are you trying to say? I have many tasks to settle!"

"Elder Sister Cai Wei! I've just resolved the Suncreek Villa's predicament! You can't just ignore my outstanding service and contributions..." Following which, Li Luo furtively glanced around in every direction before lowering his voice. "I still need a batch of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights."

A trace of bitterness could be seen in Cai Wei's eyes as she looked at Li Luo. "Young Lord, it has barely been a month, yet you've gobbled up almost 800,000 pieces of skygold. This is two years of the Tianshu Province's profits. At the rate you're going, we just can't afford to feed you any longer!"

Li Luo seemed a little ashamed at this point. The speed at which he burned through skygold was indeed a little excessive. However, he had no choice! This acquired resonance was a skygold-devouring beast! He could only praise his parents for leaving behind an entire house as the foundation for him. Otherwise, reaching the Duke Stage within five years would be an impossible dream...

"This will be the last batch of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. I promise," Li Luo swore.

Upon hearing those words, Cai Wei paused for a moment before lightly gritting her teeth. "Fine... then I will have to sell two more businesses."

Simply saying that caused Cai Wei to feel a little bit of sadness in her heart. With her abilities in management, she had never thought that she would have to sell the businesses under her to maintain the state of affairs. She had no choice in this matter... Li Luo was, after all, a bottomless pit. Still she was extremely dissatisfied.

Li Luo gave a dry cough and smiled as he nodded. He truly wasn't lying. His waterlight resonance was about to reach the sixth-grade, so fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights would no longer be required.

At that point, he would only require sixth-grade ones...

Of course, this was something he hid in his heart and refused to speak of. At least for now...

Otherwise, Cai Wei might simply just quit in frustration on the spot.

Chapter 0039: Buffed Azure Jade Spirit Liquid

For the next few days, Li Luo spent half of his time cultivating the old manor and the other half at the Suncreek Villa, practicing his resonance artificering arts. He was already able to produce a single first-grade Azure Jade Spirit Liquid reliably each day. He could be considered a full-fledged resonance artificer now.

Additionally, the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid he refined had tempering strength that was constantly increasing as he gained more experience.

However, he was not satisfied with just this. Thus, he started to experiment with second-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. These were several times more complex to refine than first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, with more complicated materials and processes. As a result, he was faced with innumerable failures.

Li Luo was not disheartened or anxious despite this. Failure was the mother of success and also an invaluable experience. So long as he continued to accumulate experience, it was just a matter of before he would succeed in becoming a second-grade resonance artificer.

Luckily, the last batch of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights were finally sent over by Cai Wei. As he continued to guzzle these tempering treasures down, he could faintly feel that his waterlight resonance was gradually approaching the sixth-grade.

In the interim, he had also managed to raise his resonant power to the Seventh Seal and was jubilant. He was not surprised by this, as he had spent painstaking effort cultivating in the cultivation room of the old manor. Coupled with the purity of the resonant power produced by his waterlight resonance, his cultivation was simpler and quicker. Thus, he was effectively no weaker than an individual with a seventh-grade resonance.

At the same time, he had also received good news from Yan Lingqing. The first batch of enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid had been refined.

The Suncreek Villa.

An intricately carved box was placed atop the table. Inside it were 40 crystal bottles, filled to the brim with azure-green liquid.

This was the enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid.

Yan Lingqing's face was full of undisguised excitement. She said to Li Luo and Cai Wei, "The secret art watersource provided by Li Luo is unfathomably pure! As a result, the first-grade refining workshop's

success rate has increased significantly. Originally, we could only produce five spirit liquids a day, but now we can produce ten! Furthermore, the tempering strength of these spirit liquids is around 60%. These are definitely considered high-quality first-grade spirit liquids!"

As Li Luo listened, he frowned. Based on his quick math, if they produced ten bottles a day, a year's income would only be around 180,000 pieces of skygold. There was still a gap between that and the 3rd-grade refining workshop.

He immediately voiced his concerns as a result.

"That's something I can solve. Leave it to me!" Cai Wei flashed an enchanting smile at the group.

"How does Elder Sister Cai Wei plan to do this?" Li Luo asked with a little bit of surprise.

Cai Wei continued to smirk. "The Golden Dragon Bank has been stocking up on first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. They are also paying higher than market price, at almost 60 pieces of skygold a bottle. If they choose to purchase the Suncreek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid, we can set up an agreement that will definitely allow us to exceed the profits of the third-grade refining workshop.

"Additionally, and more importantly, the Golden Dragon Bank possesses a stellar reputation, and their choice will definitely demonstrate just who produces the highest quality first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights in the Tianshu Province. Their endorsement is actually the most valuable thing here."

Li Luo took all of it in and understood the situation. The Golden Dragon Bank had always been a purveyor of fine goods and would normally never even deign to look at low-grade treasures. If they had a need for them, they would naturally gravitate towards the very best. If one were chosen by them, they could even work out an agreement for future business whilst improving the reputation of the maker's products. This would be excellent publicity in and of itself.

"I will drop by the Golden Dragon Bank later. I hope the Young Lord will also accompany me. I want to take advantage of your looks... and reputation," Cai Wei stated with a grin.

The Golden Dragon Bank had always remained neutral. However, it also possessed titanic strength, and in the Xia Kingdom, no one would wantonly provoke them. On the other hand, they also prized harmony and wealth creation, thus they never sought to create enemies either.

Li Luo was House Luolan's Young Lord. Even though his influence in the family had wavered, his title was still his own, deserving of respect.

He had no objections, and frankly, he only wanted to ensure that the Suncreek Villa was under his tight control. That way, it could continue to churn out skygold for him... He definitely wouldn't mind being brought along as a mascot.

"Let's go." He picked up the box and left with a smiling Cai Wei.

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The dazzling and luxurious-looking Golden Dragon Bank was constantly bustling with people as one of the most popular areas in the City of Southwind.

When Li Luo and Cai Wei entered the bank, a female attendant immediately rushed out to attend to them. After finding out that they were looking for President Lu, she explained that he was currently welcoming another group of guests and that they would have to wait for a while.

Without anything else to do, the two found a place to sit and awaited President Lu.

Yet just as Li Luo sat down and started staring at the fascinating tiles on the ground, he noticed a slender leg appear in his sights. Glancing upwards, he realized that Lu Qing'er's pretty face was directly in front of him. *novelnext.com*

She was wearing a black, short skirt, contrasting against her white thighs, creating an enthralling sight. Combined with her fine, black hair draped behind her, she was like a fairy in the flesh.

"What is the Young Lord doing here?" she asked curiously.

"I'm looking to discuss business with President Lu." Li Luo smiled.

Lu Qing'er stared at the box beside him, directly getting to the meat of the question. "Is it first-grade spirit liquids?"

She was naturally well-versed with all the issues regarding the Golden Dragon Bank, especially their recent demand for first-grade spirit liquids.

Li Luo nodded.

"Does such a simple matter require the involvement of the Young Lord?" Lu Qing'er continued to question. Ultimately, high-quality first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights were still just that! First-grade treasures! Whether it was House Luolan or the Golden Dragon Bank, the cost to purchase them would merely be a drop in the ocean.

Li Luo sighed and said in a low voice, "You will never understand the struggles that a young lord in dire straits faces..."

Lu Qing'er couldn't help but laugh, then her gaze shifted to the mature and charming beauty beside him. "This elder sister is extremely gorgeous. Does the role of a general manager in House Luolan have such strict requirements too?"

Cai Wei lightly laughed. "Younger Sister, you are also very beautiful. I'm sure your suitors in Southwind Academy are as plentiful as the clouds. I wonder if the Young Lord is also one of them?"

"Don't drag me into this pointless thing..." Li Luo dryly coughed.

"Let me bring you to find Second Uncle. He's currently dealing with the people from the Song family. They've taken the initiative to approach us, directly hawking their Wondrous Sunshine Light after they found out that our Golden Dragon Bank was searching for first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights."

Li Luo and Cai Wei glanced at each other. It had slipped their minds that the Song family would have similar thoughts. They weren't idiots after all, and they wanted to borrow this opportunity to rise above their stature and improve the reputation of the products they refined.

"Won't we be interrupting their discussion?" Li Luo may have sounded a little embarrassed, but he had already stood up, ready to go.

"Well, there's no decision being made," Lu Qing'er commented indifferently before turning around to lead the way. "Though you should already be aware of the quality of the Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light. I might be able to lead the way, but if you want Second Uncle to change his mind, you need to prove your ability with the quality of your goods."

"I, Li Luo, have always been an outstanding and upright individual. I would NEVER rely on my connections," Li Luo declared heroically...

Lu Qing'er sighed lightly and did not want to bicker any further. She directly led the two through the corridor. They eventually reached a VIP room, and someone familiar was seen walking out of it.

"Song Yunfeng?" Li Luo exclaimed in surprise.

Song Yunfeng also saw Li Luo and was slightly astonished. At the same time, he frowned and addressed Lu Qing'er directly. "Qing'er, why did you bring him here?"

"Li Luo and my Second Uncle have a meeting, and so I decided to lead them here," Lu Qing'er said with an unchanging expression.

Li Luo looked at her radiant and beautiful face. A beauty was truly able to lie without batting an eyelid! Her performance was absolutely perfect!

Song Yunfeng's expression turned dark as he couldn't tell if she was lying. However, he had no choice—this was the Golden Dragon Bank and not his Song family stomping grounds.

In the end, he could only stare wistfully at Lu Qing'er walking in. Glancing at the box in Li Luo's hands, he indifferently commented, "Li Luo, there's no need to waste your time. Your Sun creek Villa cannot compete with my clearly superior Pine Nut Villa."

Li Luo chuckled. "You might be surprised. Did you ever consider the idea that we would end up in a draw if we fought?"

Song Yunfeng's composed demeanor was instantly shattered, his face a steel green as he furiously glared at Li Luo. If looks could kill, Li Luo would have been shredded into a thousand pieces!

Li Luo, on the other hand, ignored him, directly walking into the room with Cai Wei.

Chapter 0040: Ambushing Pine Nut Villa

Bright incandescent lamps illuminated the massive reception room.

The portly President Lu with a face full of smiles was sitting right in the front. A tall and well-built middle-aged man with an imposing aura was sitting opposite him.

This was the Song family's Head, Song Shan.

They were clearly in the midst of a discussion when Lu Qing'er led Li Luo and Cai Wei into the room, directly interrupting their conversation. Song Shan was slightly taken aback by these new proceedings.

However, once he saw Li Luo and Cai Wei, the smile on his face receded slightly and his expression turned a little apathetic.

President Lu was similarly astonished, but before he could speak, Lu Qing'er gently said, "Second Uncle, the people from House Luolan are here."

When he noticed the look in his niece's eyes, his lips twitched slightly as though he wanted to say something. Despite the sudden developments, he reacted quickly and started nodding his head. "Since you're here, why don't you quickly take a seat?"

Song Shan immediately placed the teacup in his hand on the table with neither too much nor too little force and frowned at President Lu. "President Lu, could you kindly explain what is going on?"

President Lu chuckled and replied, "The Song family's head need not overthink things. Our Golden Dragon Bank believes that harmony breeds wealth after all. At the same time, we also have another condition: that is the goods sold by the Golden Dragon Bank must be of certain quality."

"First-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights can be considered lower in grade, but we also require them to be of the highest quality. Otherwise, our reputation would be tarnished. Hence, we will have to do a final selection."

Li Luo and Cai Wei immediately took their seats and nodded in agreement. "President Lu is truly wise."

Song Shan's expression turned cold, as if he'd been submerged in freezing water. He indifferently glanced at the duo before removing all pretenses of politeness, whilst playing with the teacup in his hands. "President Lu, let's not waste any more time. The Sun creek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid cannot compare with my Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light. We have absolutely trashed them in the market in terms of sales and performance. The difference in tempering strength is vast, and I'm sure President Lu has already done his own investigations on this. Frankly speaking, there is no one within the Tianshu Province with the ability to produce a first-grade purifying light that can surpass ours. It's impossible. If President Lu feels that the Sun creek Villa truly is the better choice, you can say so directly and the Pine Nut Villa will pull out of this competition." Song Shan truly was a bold individual. He had spoken convincingly and without holding back, directly stating the truth.

President Lu chortled to defuse the tension. "Please don't be angry. I am aware of the Pine Nut Villa's high-quality Wondrous Sunshine Light. However, we also have to let others demonstrate their capabilities in the spirit of fairness. If your product is the best at the end of the selections, I will have to sincerely apologize to you."

Song Shan's expression immediately eased up upon hearing those words, then he continued to banter with President Lu for a bit more. Occasionally, he would glance briefly at Li Luo and Cai Wei, a cold smirk on his face.

He knew all about the Sun creek Villa's internal situation. For a long time, the position of president had been left unoccupied. Yan Lingqing and Zhuang Yi were constantly scuffling, neither willing to give in, and chaos roiled the villa. In the end, Li Luo had been sent to the Golden Dragon Bank to compete against their Pine Nut Villa. That brat clearly couldn't fathom how high the heavens were. Did he really think that his position as a Young Lord was worth anything?

Song Yunfeng was sitting next to Song Shan, expressionlessly watching the show.

Lu Qing'er, on the other hand, was standing beside President Lu. She was a slender beauty, looking pure and sweet, a completely different sort of beauty compared to the mature Cai Wei.

Unfortunately, her gaze held a trace of doubt and worry. She understood that if Li Luo was unable to bring out first-grade spirit liquids that were at least comparable, there would be no chance of her Second Uncle choosing the Suncreek Villa.

On top of that, Song Shan and Song Yunfeng would only look down on them even more.

Once President Lu placated Song Shan, he immediately looked towards Li Luo and Cai Wei. "The two of you should also understand the Golden Dragon Bank's requirements. First-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights might be considered low grade, but we require a minimum tempering strength of 55%. Anything less than that will not be considered."

Cai Wei gave a confident smile. "President Lu, the Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light have a tempering strength that barely reaches 56%, is that right?"

"Barely?" Song Shan's eyelids twitched upon hearing her derogatory comment. "General Manager Cai is truly arrogant. If I recall, the Suncreek Villa's high-quality products barely reach 52%."

"Well, as the head of the Song family, you ought to know that this is all in the past." Cai Wei smirked.

Li Luo immediately placed the box he had brought atop the table, revealing the 40 bottles of Azure Jade Spirit Liquid for all to see.

"President Lu, let me introduce you to our newest product from the Suncreek Villa. This is our enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid. It's tempering strength is 60%," Cai Wei announced in a gentle and soft tone.

"60%?" Both President Lu and Song Shan's expressions fluctuated greatly, the former looking very surprised, the latter coldly smiling.

President Lu waved his hand and an attendant arrived with a tempering measurement needle. After inserting it into the liquid of one of the bottles, the group closely scrutinized the result as it stabilized at the 60% mark.

"It really does possess 60% tempering strength," President Lu said in shock.

Song Shan indifferently replied, "The Suncreek Villa truly has many tricks up their sleeve. The only question here is which third or fourth-grade resonance artificer produced this Azure Jade Spirit Liquid? Could it have been one of those two fourth-grade resonance artificers of the Suncreek Villa?"

President Lu was lost in thought for a brief moment. A first-grade spirit liquid was extremely low-grade. If a few third or even a fourth-grade resonance artificers opted to lend a hand to refine this, then attaining a 60% tempering strength spirit liquid would not be hard. However, wasting a skilled resonance artificer's time to produce such a spirit liquid would essentially be a huge loss for the Suncreek Villa.

Using their time to create third-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights would be significantly more efficient in terms of value, vastly surpassing the profits first-grade spirit liquids could bring.

Song Shan's subtle meaning was that the Suncreek Villa was willing to go to any means to achieve their goals, even if they had to get their third-grade resonance artificers to refine a batch of these spirit liquids and purifying lights.

President Lu turned to look at Li Luo. "Young Lord, you must understand that what the Golden Dragon Bank requires is not just a single batch. These orders will continue over an extended period of time. If the Suncreek Villa is unable to reliably produce spirit liquids of a similar tempering strength, that would not be pleasant for any of us." *novelnext.com*

Song Shan indifferently drank two sips of tea. He obviously did not believe that the Suncreek Villa had the ability to consistently produce Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength. Could they really afford to constantly sacrifice the time of third-grade resonance artificers to refine these low-grade goods? If they truly did so, it would just be a matter of time before the Suncreek Villa collapsed due to their foolishness.

Li Luo faced President Lu's questioning gaze directly, remaining as calm as before. "President Lu, please rest assured. House Luolan is a big family with big businesses and corresponding interests. We would not act foolishly over such a small matter. We wouldn't be so foolish as to use our third or fourth-grade resonance artificers to refine such low grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. This is something House Luolan would never do. If President Lu chooses to purchase our Azure Jade Spirit Liquid, I can guarantee that the Suncreek Villa will be able to produce this reliably in the long run. Additionally, the tempering strength will be no lower than 60%. In fact, all of the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid produced by the Suncreek Villa will be of the enhanced version. We will produce the best first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights in the entire Tianshu Province!"

Looking at how calmly Li Luo had responded, President Lu felt his heart quaking. Could it be that the Suncreek Villa could reliably improve the quality of their Azure Jade Spirit Liquid without relying on the assistance of third-grade resonance artificers? Li Luo had given his guarantee on it!

He wasn't the only one who was shaken by this fact. Song Yunfeng and Song Shan were equally shocked by this revelation. Li Luo was simply too confident, and it looked like he was speaking the truth.

Even Song Shan started to question himself. Did the Suncreek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid have some sort of breakthrough in quality?

How could this be possible!?

Just half a month ago, the Suncreek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid could barely reach 52% tempering strength. How could it have improved so greatly in half a month's time!?

If that was not the case, then how could Li Luo declare so confidently that they would be able to produce this enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid for the long run?

The entire room was plunged into a brief period of silence. Lu Qing'er, on the other hand, was looking at the box of spirit liquids with renewed interest. She was surprised too, and she had a strong feeling that this had to do with Li Luo.

President Lu's plump hand grasped a bottle of Azure Jade Spirit Liquid and he paused in deep thought. A few moments later, his face burst out into a smile and he looked at Song Shan. Apologetically, he addressed him. "Song family's Head, I believe we are temporarily unable to cooperate with you."

Song Shan did not burst out in anger upon hearing those words. Instead, he placed his teacup down and gave a resigned smile. "President Lu, I believe we will have further opportunities to collaborate in the future. Since you've made your decision, we will take our leave. Haha. If the Suncreek Villa's goods ever have issues, please come and find our Pine Nut Villa instead."

Song Shan truly had the grace and magnanimity expected of a family head. He was not put down by Li Luo's ambush and instead even gave Li Luo a smile. "The Young Lord is young and capable. I heard that you even managed to fight my son to a draw during the preliminary examinations. It looks like House Luolan will be in good hands. I'm sure that it will have a limitless future."

Li Luo courteously replied as well. "It was merely a fluke."

Song Shan simply smiled, no longer speaking, directly leading a glum Song Yunfeng away.

Once the two Songs took their leave, President Lu made his way to Li Luo with a hearty smile. "I've heard from Qing'er that you've resolved your issue with the blank palace. That is truly a cause for celebration! But before that, why don't we sign an agreement regarding the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid?"

Cai Wei immediately took this as her cue to walk forward and directly settled the conditions with President Lu.

Whilst the two were busily discussing the terms, Li Luo stretched lazily. Lu Qing'er walked over at this moment. "Congratulations."

"It's all thanks to you. Otherwise, things might have gotten dicey." Li Luo thanked her sincerely. Without Lu Qing'er's help, the Song family might have signed the contract with the Golden Dragon Bank before they got a chance to hawk their wares. The situation would've been extremely tricky in that scenario.

Lu Qing'er waved her hand and reminded him, "However, you need to put in more effort. Don't forget about the College Final Examinations that are coming up. The biggest regret will be if you miss out on the opportunity to enter the Astral Sage College." Li Luo nodded in agreement.

All of a sudden, Lu Qing'er spoke out. "Are you free during this holiday? I have no one to spar and exchange pointers with. If you're free, come and spar with me. It's mutually beneficial."

"Do you take me for a sandbag? No, no, no..." Li Luo hastily said. He was speechless! How could this even work out? Upon hearing his reply, she gave him a faint smile and glared at him for a good few seconds before swiftly turning to leave.

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Outside the Golden Dragon Bank, in the Song family's carriage.

Now that there was no one else around, Song Shan's expression turned incomparably gloomy. The Suncreek Villa had indeed been heavily suppressed by their Pine Nut Villa in recent times. Who would have expected them to counterattack with such a vicious blow, directly slapping them across their faces?

Although the cooperation with the Golden Dragon Bank would not be significantly profitable, the crux was that it would raise the reputation of their Wondrous Sunshine Light. It would further cement their position in the Tianshu Province's first-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights market.

However, it had all been ruined by Li Luo.

"Dad, can the Suncreek Villa reliably produce Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength?" Song Yunfeng couldn't help but ask.

Song Shan gave an insipid reply. "We will have to wait and see."

"This is truly a vicious blow. We've paid a huge price to tap into Elder Sister's connections and invited an expert resonance artificer to improve upon our Wondrous Sunshine Light's formula. In the end..." Song Yunfeng lamented.

"This is just first-grade purifying lights."

Song Shan shook his head. "Even if the Suncreek Villa wins this battle, they will not be able to win the war against the Pine Nut Villa.

"Your elder sister has already sent news that she's about to return to the City of Southwind. At that point, she will directly take over the Pine Nut Villa and we will naturally be victorious."

Song Yunfeng revealed a look of excitement. His elder sister, Song Qiuyu, was a student of the Astral Sage College's Resonance Tempering Hall with outstanding achievements. With her support, the Pine Nut Villa would truly have a pillar to rely on.

"The most important thing now is the College Final Examinations. I hope that you will be able to regain the face that you've lost," Song Shan stated coldly.

"I will bring you with me on a trip to the Governor's Mansion for the next two days. Shi Huang, the son of the governor, is Eastpool Academy's number one student and also the same age as you. Perhaps the two of you can get along and become fast friends."

"Governor's Mansion?" Song Yunfeng was a little startled at this. Shi Huang was Southwind Academy's greatest fear in the upcoming College Final Examinations. With his background as the son of the governor, he was the most influential individual in the Tianshu Province amongst the younger generation. He was head and shoulders above everyone in terms of background, with the exception of Li Luo.

Of course, that would only be the case if House Luolan was in its golden era.

No one would speak of Li Luo and Shi Huang in the same breath, whether in terms of influence or background. They were seemingly miles apart.