

Resonance 331

Chapter 0331: Rewards after Hard Work

When Li Luo reached House Luolan, he sought out Jiang Qing'e immediately to fill her in on the conversation with the First Princess.

"She confided that much in you?"

Jiang Qing'e was astounded. Out of all the girls she knew, the First Princess rated a solid brick wall on a scale of difficulty to read. The two spoke cordially on most days, albeit with some guardedness. But getting the First Princess to open up was no small feat. And her words to Li Luo had brought them to a new level of closeness.

"Perhaps it's because I can treat the Little Emperor..." Li Luo offered.

Jiang Qing'e nodded slightly. "So the struggle at the royal court is white-hot in intensity too. It will be a turbulent six months."

"The entire political landscape of the Xia Kingdom might change." Li Luo sighed. Why couldn't they have a bit more peace and quiet?

"Will the regent give up power willingly?" he asked.

"I have not interacted much with him in the past, but he is not truly noble as he seems. I recall both the Master and Mistress saying that he was not a good person."

"Which means that buddying up with the First Princess means we're baddy-ing up with him? And I get the feeling he knows I can heal the Little Emperor," Li Luo groaned.

"That doesn't matter. Obviously the First Princess will do her best to protect you on this matter. Besides, if the regent opposes you, it shows his own lack of impartiality. It does him little good in their internal politics.

"Also... I mentioned before about the mystery of the Master and Mistress' death lottery. It seems like the regent is one of the great suspects."

Li Luo agreed. One had to wield great power to influence the death lottery. There were not many who would fulfill that criteria.

"The regent has not openly moved against House Luolan before, but still he is a suspect. I think that the First Princess gaining any advantage over him is good news for us."

Li Luo nodded.

"But outside help is still outside help. We must rely on ourselves first and foremost. In the face of absolute power, no amount of plotting can help us.

"Regardless of whether the secession goes well or not, House Luolan has its own troubles to face. We either win, or we crack."

They shared a look and saw their same resolution mirrored in the eyes of the other. They had given blood, sweat, and tears for House Luolan. They would not allow it to be broken.

"In the next two days, some of the students will be entering the Suncreek Villa. Lingqing is overlooking things over there, but we should always expect some teething problems. Please try to help out if you can," Jiang Qing'e said.

Li Luo nodded. Resonance Artificers Hall students were all prideful people, and rightly so, given their abilities. Other elite villas like the Skypalace Villa might haze them a little to wear them down, but the Suncreek Villa was not like that. Their strongest were fourth-grade resonance artificers. There would be friction that arose from this reversed dynamic.

Still, he believed that Yan Lingqing and Cai Wei could handle it. He could step in if needed.

"Besides that, I've already given all the Royal Sap to Uncle Biao. He says the miracle paste will take a while to make, and that you should be patient."

"Alrighty. That's not urgent for now anyway."

"And you should also prepare for the Golden Dragon Dao Fields."

"Got it... Hey, Qing'e, your nagging is starting to sound like my mother's."

She was quiet for a moment, and they stood together for a moment. It was a cool, autumn day, and the yellowing ginkgo leaves covered the floor in pale gold.

Li Luo looked at the smile that had lit up her face, and he suddenly had an urge to run away.

Her slim hand clamped down on his shoulder before Captain Legs could steer his vessel to safety.

"Sister Qing'e, what are you doing?!"

"Well, if I were the Mistress, then there's one more thing I would do."

"Aw, can we not?"

"Let's go. You're free anyway. The practice arena calls."

The tall girl strong-armed her protesting fiancé into the practice room, where she shut the door firmly behind her. Strange sounds could be heard from behind it.

...

Over the next two days, Li Luo spent much of his time at the Suncreek Villa overseeing the transition. They were already back to the height of the Suncreek Villa's success in the past, and their artificers were stronger than Hanzhi now as well.

The Suncreek Villa was the golden goose of House Luolan, and the golden eggs made up Li Luo's pocket money. He had to protect it carefully.

Just like the two leaders had foreseen, there were teething problems for the newcomers. This was inevitable, but Li Luo had a simple trick to deal with it. He simply released the first batch of eighth-grade secret water source, and suddenly they were all absorbed in their newest toy. It was like putting

metaphorical blinders on them. No one cared who was beside them anymore. They just wanted to charge straight onwards.

Soon, the Suncreek Villa was in a good rhythm, and the working pace was picking up steadily.

Both Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing were happy to see it take off. They decided to treat the young lord who had made all of this possible.

It was a moonlit night at the House Luolan headquarters. The wind shuffled along at a languid pace, enough to keep the night cool, but it was so barely perceptible that the night was quiet.

In a stone pavilion sat Li Luo with Jiang Qing'e, Yan Lingqing, and Cai Wei. Besides the visual feast, there was also an actual feast, laid out in sumptuous fashion on the table.

The four ate and chatted.

"It's all thanks to the Young Lord that the Suncreek Villa has found such a quick rise to success. If you have any requests, just say the word," Cai Wei said teasingly.

Li Luo looked deep into the eyes of the doll-like beauty. "Anything?" his voice trembled.

Cai Wei batted her eyelids. "Spit it out and find out," she said playfully.

"Vixen, how could you tease a betrothed man?" Yan Lingqing said in disgust.

Jiang Qing'e continued eating, smiling without comment.

Li Luo looked at the sexy Cai Wei and licked his lips. Encouraged by her come-hither look, he gathered his courage. "Dear Cai Wei, I want...

"...you to give me five seventh-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights each month!"

Her face froze. "Young Lord, tonight is actually my retirement dinner. Working as a manager at House Luolan is too hard, so I'm quitting. We will part at dawn."

Li Luo was speechless. Damn, this was a real quick change.

Yan Lingqing was shaking, smacking the table with one hand for emphasis as the laughter peeled out of her.

Jiang Qing'e just smiled.

"Sister Cai Wei, you said 'anything!'" Li Luo whined.

"Seventh-grade liquids and lights cost 300,000 skygold apiece. Five bottles is 1.5 million skygold. In a year, we would be spending over ten million.

"Sure, the Suncreek Villa is taking in good profits now, but it can't possibly all go to feed a black hole like you!

"Unless you want me to sell House Luolan's other businesses!"

Li Luo hastily laughed to soften the sharpness of her tone. "Well, maybe not five bottles a month. Surely we can negotiate it?"

Cai Wei rubbed her brow, all playfulness gone from her manner. But she did not say no either. She knew that all of House Luolan's businesses were ultimately there to serve the two leaders of the house. Still, she wanted a bigger source of wealth first before she started feeding them so much.

"Only one bottle of seventh-grade spirit liquid for now. I can provide a few more fifth and sixth-grade ones," she finally said after some lengthy calculations.

"Perhaps two bottles of seventh-grade spirit liquids when the Suncreek Villa gets a little bigger.

"Young Lord, seventh-grade spirit liquids are on a completely different level from sixth-grade ones, you know. I can count the number of qualified artificers who can make those on my fingers. They're far rarer and far more expensive than sixth-grade liquids and lights by an entire scale," Cai Wei grumbled.

"Alright, whatever you think best, Cai Wei. One bottle a month it is." At this rate, Li Luo would never fill up his acquired resonances. He was broke already at the seventh-grade. How on earth would he survive the eighth and ninth grades?

Acquired resonances had their own bottlenecks to overcome. He was feeling it now, although he couldn't really tell it to Cai Wei, who would not understand.

Since his seventh-grade spirit liquid intake was going to be limited, he had better channel more of his liquids and lights into his woodearth resonance. It was only fifth-grade for now, so it should improve a little more quickly.

If he could bring his woodearth resonance to the seventh-grade in the next half a year, he should become much stronger.

Seventh-grade dual resonances against a ninth-grade singular resonance. Surely he stood a chance?

Now that the Suncreek Villa was on a good track, he would head to Golden Dragon Bank tomorrow. It was about time for the Golden Dragon Dao Fields to open...

Chapter 0332: Lin Suo

The next day. *novel* 18. In

When Li Luo reached the Golden Dragon Bank, he spotted a familiar, hulking figure amidst the crowd of people.

Qin Zhulu.

He stood there like a pillar, his expression stony.

"What are you doing?" Li Luo asked him.

He looked extremely relieved to see Li Luo, and melted back down from pillar to hulking human-beast.

"Why wouldn't you go in to find Qing'er..."

A female staff member hurried over and bowed. "Young Lord Li Luo, the Young Lord asked me to wait for all of you here. Please come with me." She turned to regard Qin Zhulu apprehensively. "This gentleman arrived earlier, but he ignored me whenever I spoke to him."

Li Luo laughed. No wonder he was standing here like a pillar. He was afraid of her.

"You walk in front," Qin Zhulu said tersely.

Li Luo chuckled, then he gestured the girl on. He followed a step behind, and Qin Zhulu a few more steps behind him.

The chatter of the bank's patrons faded away when they entered the back hall.

Li Luo saw two more people ahead. One of them was not at all unfamiliar. Zhu Xuan, who had also won the right to enter the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. The last person was a stranger to him. He was rather skinny, with a plain face that was smiling slightly.

Zhu Xuan turned to Li Luo when he entered.

He put on a thin smile that was quite obviously forced as he walked up to Li Luo and Qin Zhulu.

"Junior Li Luo has been making waves at school recently," Zhu Xuan said politely.

"You praise me too much," Li Luo said modestly. "It was only 100,000 points. I'm sure that after close to two years, Senior Zhu Xuan has earned that small sum ages ago."

Cheeky bugger. Of course Zhu Xuan had not accumulated that many points yet.

He swore inwardly, but he kept his face neutral.

"Oh, is Senior Ye Qiuding not here yet?" Li Luo asked.

"He was seriously corrupted in the Umbra Cave, and he also suffered other serious injuries, so he is still recovering. I'm afraid he won't be able to enter the Golden Dragon Dao Fields," Zhu Xuan said.

"That's too bad," Li Luo said sadly.

Zhu Xuan chuckled. "I heard half of those wounds were delivered by Junior Li Luo personally," he challenged.

"Please do not slander me, Senior Zhu Xuan. Why would I attack Senior Ye Qiuding? I attacked an Other, not a human," Li Luo explained with a serious face.

Zhu Xuan sniffed but did not reply. Li Luo had indeed been justified.

"Oh, and this is?" Li Luo turned to look at the last unknown youth.

The skinny boy smiled at him again.

"This is Lin Suo. Since Ye Qiuding couldn't come, he's replacing him," Zhu Xuan said simply.

He was not interested in speaking more with Li Luo, so he turned and walked away. Lin Suo went with him.

Li Luo watched them go, especially that youth Lin Suo. He sensed that Lin Suo was a dangerous person.

"His killing intent is very strong. A savage one," Qin Zhulu suddenly said.

Li Luo looked at him. Qin Zhulu had followed his military father through battlefields uncountable, so he was extremely attuned to such things. His read was probably accurate.

He wondered who had recommended Lin Suo.

Frowning, he let the staff member usher him onwards to a beautifully decorated hall.

Zhu Xuan and Lin Suo were there.

Also, Li Luo spotted Yu Hongxi and the vice president of the Golden Dragon Bank, Ning Que.

By their respective sides, Lu Qing'er and Ning Zhao.

Lu Qing'er's features lit up with true pleasure upon seeing Li Luo, and her beauty bloomed even more radiantly than before.

Yu Hongxi noted this transformation out of the corner of her eye. It was a real pain to deal with. Her daughter made eyes at Li Luo at every turn but never admitted her feelings.

She had planned for two bright peers to accompany Lu Qing'er to the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, hoping that she would forget Li Luo after spending some time making memories with other suitors. But against all expectations, Li Luo had passed her test and made it into the placings.

A difficult child to keep down.

Still, she was too shrewd and seasoned to show this displeasure openly. She nodded in acknowledgment towards Li Luo and Qin Zhulu.

"Thank you for taking the time today," she said to the four of them.

Yu Hongxi might not have the youthful, sugary voice of her daughter, but she had her own brand of lush, mature beauty. Her voice was as rich as molasses.

"I wanted to gather you here today to talk about the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. They should be opening in a few days' time. As per the rules of the Dao Fields, all who enter form squads of three. Including Qing'er and Ning Zhao, you will be six, which nicely forms two squads."

"These two squads will be centered around Qing'er and Ning Zhao, who are part of the Golden Dragon Bank group that the Dao Fields were built for. The four of you will play supporting roles.

"Of course, even supporting roles will benefit you more than you can imagine. Besides the Golden Dragon Mountain writ, which you cannot obtain, there is no other difference for the rest of you."

"Golden Dragon Mountain writ? What's that?" Li Luo asked.

Yu Hongxi looked at him. "At the heart of the Golden Dragon Bank's headquarters is a place called the Golden Dragon Mountain, a sacred place of cultivation for our members to train. The Golden Dragon Mountain occasionally sends out these writs to the branches. These writs allow entry. Put simply, you are here to support either Qing'er or Ning Zhao on their mission to obtain one.

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu shared a sour look.

It sure was good being part of a rich conglomerate.

A super-exclusive premium cultivation place?

Given how rich and powerful the Golden Dragon Bank was, it was surely an awesome place. Probably even more awesome than the best that the Astral Sage College could provide.

Life was a bed of roses, and if you were rich enough, the roses didn't even have thorns.

"Any questions?" Yu Hongxi asked.

Li Luo raised his hand earnestly. "President Yu, I would like to make a sincere inquiry. Is it too late for me to join the Golden Dragon Bank?"

[Author's Note: I put a picture of Yu Hongxi up on my Weixin today. Go take a look, President Yu's very pretty.]

Chapter 0333: Pocket Sphere

Li Luo's ridiculous question made even the veterans like Yu Hongxi do a double take.

Lu Qing'er snorted with laughter.

"I suggest you give up on that idea. Not even ordinary members of the Golden Dragon Bank can enjoy those privileges. Only myself and Vice President Ning Que are eligible, as are our sons and daughters."

Li Luo let his regret show.

As for the awesome Golden Dragon Mountain, he was itching with curiosity. Of course he would welcome the chance to check it out.

But from what Yu Hongxi had just said, apparently only the highest echelon of the Golden Dragon Bank could qualify.

If that weren't the case he wouldn't have minded taking a position at the Golden Dragon Bank nominally. Well, he'd overthought things.

"As for the four helpers, the Golden Dragon Bank would like to express our gratitude to you. Regardless of whether you come back with the Golden Dragon Mountain writs, we have prepared this for you."

Yu Hongxi raised her hand, and four girls walked forward bearing jade platters. On them were four small, silver chests.

The girls opened the chests, and the four boys saw a silver sphere in each one. They looked like enormous pearls, although they were covered in wavy lines of power and glowed faintly.

Li Luo recognized them. "A pocket sphere?"

Like their names implied, pocket spheres were spherical tools that opened up a space within that could be used to store things.

Pocket spheres were incredibly expensive, rated at millions of skygold. Plus, they were not even readily available on the market, or even at the Golden Dragon Bank.

House Luolan had a few in the past, but his parents had taken them all away with them. Neither he nor Jiang Qing'e had any pocket spheres.

Again, this was partly because of how rare they were. Any on the market were snatched up almost immediately. Secondly, House Luolan was too poor for such luxury expenditures.

Of course, pocket spheres were incredibly handy, even though they did not directly increase one's fighting power.

Yu Hongxi handing out four of them was extremely generous. Li Luo was once again struck by how good it was to be rich, to be handing out door gifts with seven-digit prices.

They hadn't even done anything yet.

The other three were just as awed. It was testament to Yu Hongxi's ability to read them, as well as her power, to choose a gift that could excite people even of their caliber.

As the staff offered them forward with respectful congratulations, the four eagerly reached out to take their gifts.

These pocket spheres were even threaded with custom gold bracelets that fit snugly around their wrists.

Li Luo immediately put his on and used his resonant power to activate it.

The space within was not that vast. One could probably fit two tables inside. It was an ordinary pocket sphere. The highest grade ones could probably fit the entire Golden Dragon Bank inside if one wished to. And someone who could afford something that expensive might just wish to.

"Our thanks to President Yu," all four chorused together with deep satisfaction.

Yu Hongxi waved it away with a smile. "One more thing. We need to decide the squads."

"Let's leave it to Qing'er and Ning Zhao to choose."

"Choosing your teammates is very important," she said in a purposely casual tone while staring hard at her daughter. "Stronger teammates give you a better chance of getting the Golden Dragon Mountain writ. Your choice should be based on that alone."

Lu Qing'er stared straight ahead and blinked.

"Keke, let Qing'er choose, then," Vice President Ning Que said with a fawningly generous smile.

Lu Qing'er stepped forward.

Yu Hongxi examined her tea cup with deep interest, posing as if she did not care.

Zhu Xuan puffed up his chest and put on his best smile. Warm. Friendly. Confident. "The writ will be yours, girl. Just choose me."

Lin Suo stood there with his usual, faint smile.

Li Luo stood there with his usual smile.

Qin Zhulu took a huge step backwards.

"I think the most important thing for a squad is synergy. I choose Li Luo and Qin Zhulu," Lu Qing'er said after only a short moment's consideration. Her voice rang out loud and clear.

Zhu Xuan's smile froze.

Li Luo was sort of expecting this. Qin Zhulu trembled in fear.

Bang.

Yu Hongxi set her teacup down on the table with just a little more force than required. "Synergy is important, but so is raw power. Will you not reconsider?"

Lu Qing'er shook her head.

Yu Hongxi clenched and unclenched her fist, then breathed out heavily. She had expected Lu Qing'er to make such a choice, but it was still vexing to hear it confirmed.

Her daughter was too free with her heart!

Better options had been prepared for her, and still she was choosing Li Luo!

This was for the Golden Dragon Mountain writ! It concerned her future!

Still, she was outwardly composed. Since Lu Qing'er had made such a choice, she could not oppose it outwardly. If her daughter's rebelliousness was stoked, there would be a huge fuss.

"Alright, since that is your choice, take responsibility for the outcome, whatever it may be," she said coolly.

"Keke, is this alright President? It seems like you've left Ning Zhao a better deal." Vice President Ning Que laughed.

Out of the four, Zhu Xuan was the strongest, a Second Changing of the Evolving Resonance Tier. Lin Suo was a First Changing. In comparison, Li Luo and Qin Zhulu were both still at the Pattern Genesis Tier.

With the first two as teammates, Ning Zhao seemed to stand a better chance of getting a Golden Dragon Mountain writ.

"The teams have been decided," Yu Hongxi said neutrally. "Vice President Ning Que will take Zhu Xuan and Lin Suo to the adjourning room to brief them more."

Ning Que nodded cheerfully. He knew that Yu Hongxi was angry right now, and it was best not to push her too far. Standing up, he led Ning Zhao and a frustrated Zhu Xuan and Lin Suo away.

Qin Zhulu's lips almost moved. He wanted to tell Zhu Xuan that he would have traded places with him any time.

But before he said anything, he could feel a sharp, piercing look from Lu Qing'er warning him to do nothing of the sort.

It was a very uncomfortable look. Plus, he knew that if he did it, Lu Qing'er would definitely take revenge on him.

The two were in the same squad in school, and they had been working together for a while now. He was all too familiar with her methods. Based on his experience, it was best for him to keep his mouth shut.

It was best not to anger the women.

Chapter 0334: Dao-gold and The Reservoir

The hall was much quieter after Ning Que led Zhu Xuan, Ning Zhao, and Lin Suo out. Yu Hongxi's face was carefully blank, although her disapproval was radiating off her in waves.

Lu Qing'er was worried that Yu Hongxi would speak words in her upset state and make things awkward. She quickly went to tug on her mother's crossed arms and played coy. "Mom, Li Luo and Qin Zhulu might be a teensy weensy bit weaker than Zhu Xuan, but I'm familiar with them. I believe that trust is more important than power."

Yu Hongxi looked at her sharply. "So Zhu Xuan is not trustworthy? I don't think he's done anything to deserve that unkindness."

"I'm just not familiar with him," Lu Qing'er protested. "We haven't really talked much. Of course I can't just trust him."

Yu Hongxi sighed deeply. "There are few Golden Dragon Mountain writs out there. And even within the area you will be in, the competition is strong. There is an ability cap of General Stage, and also an age cap this time around, but the three of you are still at a sore disadvantage.

"Other teams will at least have a Second Changing teammate. All three of you are at the Pattern Genesis Tier. How will you compete?"

"Team composition-wise, Ning Zhao's side stands a much better chance of getting a writ."

"Not necessarily," Lu Qing'er argued back. "Li Luo might only be a Pattern Genesis Tier in strength, but he managed to take down even a Heavenly Disaster Class Other in the Umbra Cave. The school gave him 100,000 points. As strong as Zhu Xuan might be, he would be dead in a flash in the same position, wouldn't he?"

Yu Hongxi was a little taken aback. This was the first time she had heard such news.

"President Yu, please do not believe Qing'er's exaggerations. I had many other factors on my side. If it had been me alone, I too would have been dead in a flash in the same position," Li Luo hastily explained.

Lu Qing'er was too good at boasting.

Yu Hongxi pondered this strange, new information, then finally shook her head. "Since Qing'er has chosen you, then I will not say any more."

She turned to Li Luo. "Li Luo, you owe me a favor. You said you would do something for me. I will not make it too difficult for you. Just bring Qing'er out with a Golden Dragon Mountain writ, and the debt will be cleared. What do you say?"

Li Luo's eyes almost rolled into the back of his head. This was "not making it difficult" for him?

Although he did not know what other squads the Golden Dragon Bank would have inside, they could not be weaker than Zhu Xuan's team. Snatching a writ from under all their noses would be no easy task.

Lu Qing'er quickly jumped to his defense. "Mom, you can't put people on the spot like that. I was never that interested in Golden Dragon Mountain anyway. I think the Astral Sage College's great enough as it is." n//OveLbIn

Yu Hongxi looked at her daughter sternly. "The Golden Dragon Mountain prepares your future. The Astral Sage College is barely a place for the present."

She looked back up to Li Luo. "Will you promise? If you can do this, you will not only have repaid the debt, but when you meet trouble in the future, perhaps I will even aid you."

Li Luo frowned. "And what is this aid that President Yu speaks of?"

She looked away. "Who knows?" she said mildly.

Li Luo considered this for a few moments. "Firstly, let me say that President Yu has no need to extract such promises from me. I am in the same squad as Qing'er, so naturally I will spare no effort in getting a writ for her. Qing'er has helped me greatly in the past, and I will do my best to help her achieve her goals here.

"Perhaps I will not be enough. But I will not give up until the last scrap of energy leaves my body.

"As for President Yu's offer for help, that tempts me greatly too, but there is no need. If I accept that, then my help to Qing'er becomes conditional... and tainted."

Yu Hongxi looked straight at Li Luo, who met her gaze unflinchingly.

She was struck by the resemblance to the man who had taken the Xia Kingdom by storm. His emotional intelligence and skill had opened the door to every noble girl's heart... including herself.

Li Luo might be lacking in many aspects compared to his father, but this deep-seated pride was not one of them.

She sort of admired it.

Lu Qing'er was biting on her lip as she stared at Li Luo with shining eyes. Quiet.

Qin Zhulu was quietly commiserating by himself as well. "Why on earth am I here?! Why can't these Ghostly Dog Dao Fields ask for two-man teams? Why did he have to be in this team?"

"As proud as your father," Yu Hongxi finally said. "But sweet words can roll off any tongue. Let's see how it ends.

"Let me explain the rules of Golden Dragon Dao Fields," she continued. "It is extremely vast, and it is divided into the inner fields and outer fields. You will be at the outskirts of the outer fields.

"There are too many branches in the Golden Dragon Bank group, so not everyone can be together. We are often divided into a multitude of field zones.

"Each field zone will have close to 100 squads, and there will only be five or six writs available."

Li Luo swallowed. Five or six percent chance was quite tight.

"There are two key features that you will need to know about: dao-gold and the Reservoir."

"Dao-gold? The Reservoir?" Both Li Luo and Qin Zhulu were listening intently.

"Dao-gold can be thought of as a special currency, but it is not made of gold at all. Rather, it is fashioned from the energy of the Golden Dragon Dao Fields.

"When you enter the Dao Fields, you will be given a length of dao incense. If you find any treasures, wondrous herbs, or kill any spirit beasts, you may light it, and the Dao Fields will take them away naturally, leaving dao-gold of equivalent value behind.

"You may also light it if you defeat others. They will not be killed, but eliminated instead."

"And what do we do with the dao-gold?" Li Luo asked.

"That brings us to the Reservoir. Within the Reservoir lies many treasured artifacts, a veritable hoard that exceeds our Xia Bank's own stash by an exponential scale. Everyone who enters the Golden Dragon Dao Fields can enter the Reservoir once, to find the treasured artifacts that you desire.

"Of course, if you wish to take them away, you will need to buy them with dao-gold. The higher the treasured artifacts' quality, the higher the dao-gold price. Call it welfare for you supporting fighters."

Li Luo's eyes were round as saucers. The Golden Dragon Bank was too damn rich! An entire reservoir of treasured artifacts? He trembled at the opulence.

Treasured artifacts! Besides the pocket sphere that he had just gotten, the only other artifact he had was the seal from the principal.

Not even his two short blades were treasured artifacts.

The Golden Dragon Bank was drowning in riches. Even a testing affair for their juniors was conducted so luxuriously.

"Dao-gold is not just for purchasing at the Reservoir. When you leave the Dao Fields, the dao-gold in your hands will burst into flare, and the power they hold will be transferred to your bodies. If you're lucky, you might get a breakthrough on the spot.

"That is why dao-gold is also known as the fortune that makes you rise," Yu Hongxi said with a smile.

Li Luo was suitably awed. "I really want to join the Golden Dragon Bank family."

What was this overwhelming jealousy that was consuming him?!

The Golden Dragon Dao Fields were too awesome!

"I understand now," quipped Li Luo. "We're going there to earn dao-gold, right? Get filthy rich, arm ourselves to the teeth at the Reservoir, and then go snatch the writs?"

Yu Hongxi nodded.

"That's very characteristic of the Golden Dragon Bank's way of doing things," Li Luo observed.

"Still... it sounds fun."

Yu Hongxi rose. "Those are the rules of the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. There are a few days before it opens. Prepare as best as you can."

She walked over to stand right in front of Li Luo. "Do your best. Show me how much of Li Taixuan's talent you've inherited."

"I hope you don't disappoint me."

Chapter 0335: Resonant Reserve Secret Art

For the next few days leading up to the Golden Dragon Dao Fields' opening, Li Luo did not rest. Rather, he spent all of his time deep in cultivation.

He had no choice—it would not be easy to get Lu Qing'er a Golden Dragon Mountain writ. Especially not when the three of them had no real talent to bring in.

He had no idea how strong the other Golden Dragon Bank branches were, but just Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo alone were already stronger.

It was going to be difficult to shine among all those strong teams.

Still, Li Luo could not blame Lu Qing'er for choosing him. He had only gotten the chance to enter largely thanks to her, and she had helped him plenty as well in the past. It was a welcome opportunity to try and repay her.

Therefore, Li Luo spent a few days in a mad whirlwind of cultivation, even inviting Jiang Qing'e to spar with him.

...

House Luolan headquarters, practice room.

Li Luo shot out like a bolt of lightning, shortwords shining with resonant power. He unleashed them in a torrential storm of power that flashed out towards Jiang Qing'e, standing calmly with a black, wooden practice-sword.

She took a single step, measured, confident, and unhurried. A quick twist of her wrist, a gleam of light on her sword tip, and Li Luo's attack was completely negated. The storm of resonant power flew by harmlessly.

The exchange continued for a while more, then Li Luo's eyes flashed. Crossing his swords, he executed a perfect combination of his two resonances. The sound of titanic waves and colossal trees swaying filled the room.

Dang!

He brought them down parallel in a swing against Jiang Qing'e. It took all his might, and the resonant power poured out in a magnificent cascade. Jiang Qing'e stood there like a rock. Li Luo was sent flying several dozen paces backwards.

Li Luo was sweating profusely as he lay there on his back like an upended turtle. "That's insane. I used all my strength. Couldn't you at least... take a polite step back or something?"

Jiang Qing'e laughed. "I almost decided to catch that attack with my hands. Don't underestimate the Fiend Body Stage. I'm many magnitudes stronger than you are."

He couldn't even break her defenses with his full strength? That was screwed up.

He creaked up to a sitting position.

Jiang Qing'e walked over with a steaming, fragrant handkerchief, handing it to Li Luo.

He wiped his sweat, closing his eyes as he deeply inhaled the intoxicating scent. "Honestly, a squad like yours might sneak around and get some lucky breaks in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, but it's going to be quite difficult to get the writ," Jiang Qing'e told him bluntly.

"Lu Qing'er made her choice not to get any writs," she said with a knowing smile. She was there to enjoy the sights.

Li Luo sighed. He had sensed it too. Lu Qing'er had shown no real interest in the Golden Dragon Mountain writs. Otherwise, she would have chosen Zhu Xuan and Lin Suo. Choosing him and Qin Zhulu was tantamount to a confession.

He did not blame Yu Hongxi for being angry. Lu Qing'er had chosen a couple of tourists for her team.

"Lu Qing'er is not unintelligent," Jiang Qing'e noted. "Maybe she purposely chose this team to make you give up on the writ, and then you can focus on growing at your own pace."

Li Luo nodded. It was a possibility. However...

"Even if she's not interested in the writ, I cannot go in with that mindset. President Yu's already hammered it into me. It would be letting her down, and also irresponsible towards Qing'er."

Jiang Qing'e smiled. She agreed with Li Luo—it was not seemly to ride Lu Qing'er's coattails into the Golden Dragon Dao Fields and then spend the time playing around. Plus, it was not at all like Li Luo.

Of course, it was also unwise to offend Yu Hongxi, one of the most powerful women in the Xia Kingdom. The Golden Dragon Bank might have been neutral all the while, but it still paid to remain in their good books.

"That's a lot of pressure."

Li Luo nodded back. "I'm prepared. Besides, there's no way it can be worse than a Heavenly Disaster Class Other from the Umbra Cave, right?"

Jiang Qing'e nodded, her mind already on ways of improvement.

"Your dual resonances are quite impressive. When the power gap is not too big, the sudden outburst can overwhelm many opponents and turn the tables in most situations."

"But there's a glaring weakness: the unsustainability. That's normal since you're only at the Pattern Genesis Tier. You lack resonant power in general, and even more so when you're burning it at twice the rate."

Li Luo nodded glumly. The price of power—a Duke's power—was high. His window was always uncomfortably tight, and one wrong movement or mistiming would cost him dearly.

Plus, Mentor Chi Chan had told him about the three steps of dual resonances before. First, a minor merging. Second, two becoming one. Thirdly, sentience. He was only at the roughest stage of the first tier.

"Since a lack of resonant power is the problem, are there ways for me to strengthen that?" Li Luo asked.

"A secret art to temporarily enhance it? Those harm the body greatly, and are generally only used in life or death situations. I'm afraid they won't suit you."

Li Luo sighed.

"But..." Jiang Qing'e said as a thought occurred to her. "There might be something else that's suitable.

"There is a rare secret-art," she continued, "that can allow the cultivator to store resonant power temporarily within the body. They are called resonant reserve secret arts. If you can cultivate one, you can use it to store a reserve of power within yourself and then unleash it in a time of need.

"It's not as extreme as the other kind, which will damage your foundations."

Li Luo was overjoyed. This seemed like a match made in heaven for him!

"That's awesome!" Li Luo whooped.

Jiang Qing'e smiled at his happiness, but she splayed her hands helplessly.

"Awesome, but no such secret art exists in our House Luolan archives."

Li Luo stomped the ground childishly. Then what on earth was this? A prank?!

"Resonant reserve secret arts are quite rare, and it would be strange if we had one. If you really want one, you can ask the Golden Dragon Bank. Since you're on decent terms with them at the moment, President Yu might just acquiesce to extending a favor."

Damn. Yu Hongxi again. She was formidable enough that Li Luo was always a little nervous to go to her. He was more scared of her than he was of the First Princess.

Still, it was not like he could choose to not go.

"Besides that, you should also ask about the background of that newcomer, Lin Suo. From what you described, he doesn't seem like a simple person. Best be careful," she advised.

"What do you mean?" Li Luo asked, surprised. "You think he's after me?"

"It's not impossible," Jiang Qing'e said analytically. "The Golden Dragon Dao Fields are not within the Xia Kingdom. It's a good place for murder.

"As for who sent him, I do not know either. Perhaps Pei Hao, perhaps House Duze or Jiyan. House Luolan is not short of enemies, and finishing off our young lord would be a welcome move for many of them.

"In any case, best err on the side of caution."

Li Luo was extremely discomforted by this new, sinister thought.

He got to his feet resignedly.

Well, off to the bank.

Chapter 0336: Resonant Bubble Art

"You want a resonant reserve secret art?"

Yu Hongxi looked up from her desk at Li Luo, frowning. "Such things are highly uncommon."

Li Luo nodded. "Precisely the reason why I thought the Golden Dragon Bank would be a good place to start. Please, President Yu. The Golden Dragon Dao Fields are opening soon. It's a bit last-minute, but I think I could get a little stronger."

She approved of his desire for improvement. In truth, she had given up on securing the writ from the moment Lu Qing'er had picked her team. She would think of another way to get it for her daughter.

But even still, she approved of Li Luo's desire to face the Dao Fields head-on. Clearly, he was not one to just lie down and wait for opportunities to be served up to him.

She called in one of her staff members and gave some orders. The girl nodded and backed away obediently.

After a short wait, she returned with a box that held two scrolls of jade.

"Resonant reserve secret arts are not easy to procure. The Golden Dragon Bank only has two. See if they suit you."

Li Luo's eyes lit up with pleasure. The Golden Dragon Bank was amazing—they even had two of such a rare thing.

He walked forward and gingerly unrolled both scrolls.

One was called the Inner Pocket Art, the other was the Resonant Bubble Art.

The Inner Pocket Art was suited for cultivation with specialized materials—a pouch of sorts within the body where one could store excess resonant power.

The Resonant Bubble Art was rather similar, also requiring some crystalline dust in its cultivation. Once completed, there would be a bubble of sorts within one's body where resonant power could be stored.

Each had their advantages. The Inner Pocket Art could store resonant power for longer, whereas the Resonant Bubble Art could store more resonant power. However, the bubble would automatically dissipate as time passed, and it needed to be supplemented with energy constantly.

Li Luo considered at length, and he eventually chose the Resonant Bubble Art. It required water resonant power, which Li Luo happened to have. Of course, the more important consideration was its capacity. More capacity, more power for the dual resonances.

For him, the constant energy upkeep was not as much of a concern. He had two resonant palaces active, and so he could absorb worldly natural energy faster than others. This drain would be minimal.

"President Yu, I'll choose the Resonant Bubble Art."

Yu Hongxi suddenly flashed a smile at him. "Then I thank you for your business. The Resonant Bubble Art costs 3.53 million skygold."

Li Luo resisted a sudden urge to throw the scroll in her face. "3.53 million for this?!" As powerful as this scroll might be, surely it was not worth that much. At over three and a half million, it was more expensive than some dragon-general resonance arts.

"Rarity comes at a premium. This is business," Yu Hongxi said with a beatific smile.

"I can't afford it!" Li Luo scowled.

He was already scrimping and saving just to get some seventh-grade spirit liquids. Where was he going to find three million and change to buy this? If Sister Cai Wei knew, she'd probably quit on the spot.

"Oh Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan, you have raised your child poorly. He groans and grumbles over the slightest expense!" Yu Hongxi exclaimed.

"I don't want it anymore," Li Luo said, now surly.

He turned to leave.

"Wait, wait," Yu Hongxi called out. "Kids. Can't hold their temper."

She gestured to the box. "Take it. Consider it my investment in Qing'er's writ. If you can get it, the secret art is yours for free. If not, then 3.53 million skygold and not a penny less. I will not leave Jiang Qing'e alone for a day until I am paid."

"You think I, the grand young lord of House Luolan, cares about a paltry few million skygold of pocket change?" Li Luo said, puffing up indignantly as he reached out to grab the scroll greedily and stuffed it into his pocket sphere. "But Qing'er and I are friends. For the sake of her future, I had best do what I can for me... for her."

Yu Hongxi watched his charade with amusement. Li Luo had as much bluster as he had speed and greed. He was a more flexible character compared to his father.

"Oh, and President Yu..."

Now that the resonant reserve secret art business was settled, Li Luo's mind turned to Jiang Qing'e's other reminder. "What's the deal with that Lin Suo person?"

Yu Hongxi understood his line of thought immediately. "You think he's targeting you?"

"You think it's impossible?"

"I understand your caution." She nodded with sympathy. "House Luolan is beset with wolves, and such care is necessary. But Lin Suo does not come from other powers. He is from the Golden Dragon Bank's branch in the Tiancang Province. We gave the slot to another of ours, since Ye Qiuding is absent."

Oh, so Lin Suo was one of their own... Had he overthought things?

In any case, it was still better to be cautious.

He noted Yu Hongxi's reassurances and then rose to leave. He was eager to give the Resonant Bubble Art his full attention.

He paused at the door, then turned back to Yu Hongxi, who was already poring over her documents. "President Yu, thank you."

She might have said that she was helping him as an investment in the writ, but she had still shown him much kindness. Li Luo did not know if it was because of Lu Qing'er or his father, but favors were favors.

Although someone of her stature probably did not need his gratitude, he would repay it if the chance arose.

Yu Hongxi waved in acknowledgment without looking up.

Only after the door closed did she put down her papers.

"Li Taixuan, Tan Tailan," she said softly to herself. "You're really sanguine about leaving this broken mess of a place behind."

Chapter 0337: Entry

After getting the Resonant Bubble Art, Li Luo spent all of his remaining time learning it. Efficiency-wise, it seemed to be his best chance of growing stronger quickly.

Fortunately, cultivating the Resonant Bubble Art was not too difficult, especially with Li Luo's natural aptitude and intuition for resonance arts. In a mere day of experimentation, he had gotten the basics down.

House Luolan, in a room somewhere in a tower.

Li Luo was sitting in the lotus position. He jerked his palm upwards in a lifting motion, and a sapphire-blue pearl appeared on his palm. This was a water jewel, an essential material for the cultivation of the Resonant Bubble Art.

In just two days, Li Luo had wasted hundreds of pieces of this precious material before he finally got the hang of the Resonant Bubble Art. Fortunately, these water jewels were not particularly expensive.

Boom!

Li Luo clenched his fist, shattering the water jewel into dark-blue dust. He breathed hard, inhaling the crystalline dust.

The cool, icy sediment started to move through his body.

Li Luo used his water resonant power to enclose each piece of crystalline dust, then they started to work their magic within him.

Li Luo had done this step countless times in the last two days, and he was practiced enough to do it in his sleep. He closed his eyes and put his hands together, repeating the process yet again.

As time passed, his resonant power began to fuse with the crystalline dust, and finally faint bubbles began to emerge within his body.

These bubbles were curious things. They floated around with a swirl of resonant power on their thin membranes, as though ready to pop at any time.

These were the resonant bubbles that the Resonant Bubble Art made.

Four bubbles was currently Li Luo's limit. From the scroll's description, the maximum was 12 resonant bubbles.

Li Luo divided them up, sending two each to his waterlight and woodearth resonant palaces.

When they entered, a connection formed. His resonant palaces began to feed a slow drip of power to the bubbles, filling them up.

The resonant bubbles began to change in nature. Two of them were now glowing with a resplendent blue, while the other two were a dull, deep green.

Waterlight and woodearth resonant powers.

Li Luo smiled to himself. Success.

He considered his current state. Four bubbles would probably allow him to become significantly stronger for a moment, but once they broke, the resonant power would quickly dissipate, and not return to his resonance seeds. He would have to use it up quickly.

The Resonant Bubble Art had many drawbacks—wonky power, a cap to the power storage, and even a time limit.

No wonder few people wanted to cultivate it.

Still, there was one advantage for Li Luo that did not apply to anyone else. He had dual resonances, which were able to best utilize the additional resonant power. It made the Resonant Bubble Art much more powerful for him.

Others might not know what to do with that additional bit of power, but Li Luo knew exactly where to put it.

“Whew.”

Li Luo exhaled deeply, turning to the window to watch the rays of sunlight streaming in. Today, everything was complete. Tomorrow, the Golden Dragon Dao Fields would open.

He was quite excited to take on this legendary place.

...

The next day, Li Luo bade farewell to Jiang Qing'e and headed for the Golden Dragon Bank.

The serving girls led him to the inner sanctum, and finally out again to a large courtyard made of an ashy brown-stone.

Some of the huge rocks had been carved into statues.

In the middle, there were other complicated heaps of stone that formed a raised platform.

By the time Li Luo arrived, Yu Hongxi, Ning Que, and other important people of the Golden Dragon Bank were already waiting.

Lu Qing'er waved to Li Luo, while Qin Zhulu stood petrified by her side.

Not far away were Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo.

As he approached, Lin Suo smiled at him.

Li Luo smiled back out of reflex, then moved to stand by Lu Qing'er's side.

"Everyone's present now," Yu Hongxi said. "We will activate the transporter and send you all into the Golden Dragon Dao Fields."

"Remember that you must hold tight to the Golden Dragon Secret Keys you got earlier. When the Green Alioth comes for you in the Dao Fields, none of you will be able to withstand it. The Golden Dragon Secret Keys will help reduce its power by 90%."

That threat made Li Luo double check his pocket sphere, closing his fingers over the comforting metal key to reassure himself.

So it was not just proof of entry, but also a talisman.

"But don't think that the Golden Dragon Secret Key means you can underestimate the Green Alioth. The remaining 10% is still enough to wipe you all out individually," Yu Hongxi warned them. "If you want to pass each wave, your entire squad will need to work together. If you reach your limits, the keys will break and release enough energy to send you back. But you will no longer be allowed to enter."

They all nodded solemnly.

"That is all I have to say. Prepare to enter," she commanded.

Everyone moved to prepare, and soon the entire courtyard was humming as a portal of energy opened up before them.

The statues also started to glow, then they shot beams of light towards the center.

They formed a large door of energy.

Yu Hongxi watched it with a critical eye, judging its size. When she was satisfied, she turned to the six youngsters and nodded.

They all moved forward and then jumped into the portal together.

Yu Hongxi watched them go. The portal would remain open until all of them returned.

Whether that was with a writ or without, it was out of her hands. Fate would decide.

Chapter 0338: Golden Dragon Dao Fields

Li Luo felt space warp around him as his senses faded away. It felt like forever, and it felt like only a brief moment.

Suddenly, the Golden Dragon Secret Key started to burn in his hand, then a golden light burst forth like a compass arrow, expanding until it formed a large bridge.

It breached the void, opening a way forward.

When Li Luo stepped on it, he was immediately blinded by golden light, too dazzling to look at.

His eyes were scorched sore by the dizzying brightness, and he took a long time to recover. When he finally adjusted, he saw that there was a piece of land far ahead in the distance.

It looked huge, but Li Luo was able to see its ends because of how far away he was.

He realized that the golden arrow-bridge was carrying him toward that piece of land with incredible speed.

He glanced around and saw two more beams, carrying Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu, and then further away a cluster of three streaks that had to be Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo.

Casting his eye further, he could see hundreds more, all headed for the same piece of land.

They had to be the squads from other branches of the Golden Dragon Bank.

It was a spectacular sight.

The golden bridge carried him on, faster and faster, until he was finally in the air above the land, looking down at mountains and rivers that dotted the terrain.

Whoosh!

Suddenly, a powerful, green wind swept towards Li Luo.

Screech!

The green wind clashed against the golden light with a shrieking sound, biting away at it until the gold started to give way at certain points.

Li Luo already had his resonant power ready to defend himself, but when the green wind came for him, it bit through his defenses as easily as if they were tofu. His skin was torn, leaving a small gash behind.

As thin and inconsequential as it looked, Li Luo gasped sharply. The pain was excruciating, cutting deep into his soul.

More and more jets of wind were starting to pierce the golden defense now, and Li Luo started to sweat.

He saw that the others were also panicking at the sudden appearance of the wind.

"So this is Green Alioth? Terrifying." Clearly, Green Alioth not only blew throughout the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, but also around it. All who wished to enter had to pass its trial first.

Fortunately, the Golden Dragon Secret Key blocked most of it; otherwise, he would not have been able to survive even one wave of it. It was powerful enough to shred him until not even a bone was left intact.

Even with the key's protection, it was very difficult to defend against alone.

Li Luo gestured to Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu, then they grouped up rapidly so the golden light overlapped for all three of them.

Not far away, Ning Zhao and the others were doing the same.

Those three were all at the Evolving Resonance Tier, and were more or less dealing with it well after an initial adjustment period.

In comparison, Li Luo's squad was being worn down quickly, since they were much weaker.

If this continued, they might not even pass through the belt of Green Alioth.

"Li Luo, what do we do?" Lu Qing'er asked urgently. Although she was not too interested in the writ, she still wanted to bring Li Luo in to look for opportunities. It would be a huge waste if they could not even get in.

Li Luo thought for a moment. "We're losing out because we don't have enough resonant power. We don't know how long this belt of wind will last. If we run out of resonant power, we'll be in a bad spot.

"The wind is coming from the front. We cannot take turns tanking it at the front like the others are doing. We'll put the strongest defender in front, while the others support that person."

They turned to look at Qin Zhulu.

He cringed. With an upper eighth-grade Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance, he was clearly their best defender. Which meant that he had been nominated as meat shield.

Still, Qin Zhulu was cool-headed enough to consider the bigger picture, so he stepped forward mutely, taking up his duty without complaint.

"Little Lu is a very dependable man," Li Luo said.

Qin Zhulu glared at him. "Don't go around giving me weird names! Tchah!" Green Alioth swept in again, and he closed his mouth, setting his jaw grimly.

Lu Qing'er laid a hand on Qin Zhulu's back, sending forth her power. "Black Ice Armor!"

Qin Zhulu was immediately encased in shining, transparent armor with a faint, black cast to it. It protected him from much of the Green Alioth's damage.

Li Luo reached out as well, still grinning. He used his own healing powers to boost Qin Zhulu's recovery.

With their support, Qin Zhulu bellowed with triumph, drinking in the newfound boosted power. His muscles bulged, and golden tiger stripes began to show faintly on his skin.

Phish!

Green Alioth blew with renewed frenzy, but with the ice armor and Li Luo's healing, Qin Zhulu stood strong.

Their advancement speed picked up.

Nearby, Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo saw Li Luo's squad pushing ahead with a new burst of speed. This shocked them. They had expected them to be badly beaten by the wind, but they had quickly adapted.

All across the breadth of the void, streaks of gold light pushed against and then past the belt of Green Alioth, making it safely to the land beyond.

Li Luo's squad managed to make it through safely, and then a powerful gravitational force brought them back down to land. Their keys helped guide them back until solid ground was beneath their feet once more.

Li Luo looked around. He saw that they were in a deep mountain-gorge, covered in thick snow. The trees around them were frozen.

"This is the Golden Dragon Dao Fields?" all three wondered privately.

"The worldly natural energy is very dense here—it's nothing like the world outside," Lu Qing'er observed.

Li Luo nodded. This was only the outskirts of the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, but already the worldly natural energy was more saturated than he could remember. He could only imagine how favorable the conditions could be when one went deeper in. The Golden Dragon Dao Fields were truly a Mecca for cultivation.

Suddenly, Li Luo found that an extra item had appeared in his hand. It was a short piece of golden incense. This had to be what Yu Hongxi had mentioned earlier. Burn this to get your loot redeemed for dao-gold.

"Alright, let's get started. We'll head east, pick herbs, kill beasts, earn dao-gold, and then swim at the Reservoir with our treasures!" Li Luo punched the air.

Lu Qing'er looked up from her cupped hands, still trying to blow some hot air on them. "As if it'd be so easy," she laughed.

She was buoyed by the beauty of the landscape. Unlike the Umbra Cave, the Golden Dragon Dao Fields were breathtaking. There were no abominations like the Others. If not for Qin Zhulu sticking around, she would have considered this trip perfect. Dong!

Something fell from above, hitting her squarely on the head and making Lu Qing'er yelp.

She caught the object before it touched the ground and saw that it was a snow-white fruit with runic patterns on it. It also emitted an alien fragrance.

She examined it for a few moments, then turned to her team. "Do you think this is one of the rare herbs?"

The two boys looked at each other and shrugged. "Maybe. Want to try?"

They gathered a few of them, then lit the golden incense.

Golden smoke rose, circling the white fruits.

To their astonishment, the white fruits started to fade away and then disappeared before their very eyes.

At the same time, a rift appeared in front of them, and four round, golden coins rolled out, landing at their feet.

They looked at the golden dragon marks on them and fell silent.

Dao-gold... was this easy to get? n//0vELbIn

After their hellish time in the Umbra Cave, this seemed too good to be true.

Chapter 0339: Deal's A Deal

"Maybe it's just a coincidence. It would be a freaking fairytale if dao-gold was so easily earned," Li Luo said.

"The Golden Dragon Bank might be rich, but they can't possibly make it so easy, right?"

Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu expressed agreement. Logically speaking, dao-gold was like any other currency—if it were too easily obtained, it would lose its value.

Perhaps they were really just plain lucky.

"Let's continue on. We've just gotten started. Harder days will come." Li Luo grinned, waving them on.

They plodded through the thick snow onwards into the forest.

About 40 minutes later, Lu Qing'er suddenly stepped on something in the snow. She bent down curiously and picked up a crystal-like root. It smelled fragrant too.

She turned it over in her hands. "Is this a rare herb too?"

Li Luo was stunned for a second, then he shook his head. "C'mon, no way. What do you think they are? Cabbages? We can't possibly be finding them left and right!"

"One way to find out," Qin Zhulu said in his gravelly voice. He lit the golden incense and then the same process happened. The glass-like root faded away and disappeared, and three shiny gold-coins rolled out of a rift to land in the snow.

Another silence.

The three stared at the coins, nonplussed. "Er," Lu Qing'er said with uncertainty as she picked up the coins. "Why does it seem like dao-gold isn't particularly important here at the Dao Fields?"

"Can it be that the amount of dao-gold needed is huge? Like maybe we would need thousands of dao-gold to get one treasured artifact?" Qin Zhulu scratched his head.

Li Luo was completely confused as well. "But surely such rare herbs need time to grow, right? They can't be all that easy to produce even at the Golden Dragon Dao Fields..."

"Am I some sort of bumpkin?" Li Luo wondered aloud. "Do I just... not understand the scale of this holy land of cultivation?"

Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu had no reply to him. They had never set foot outside of the Xia Kingdom before, so they had no idea about how the larger world outside worked.

Perhaps they were indeed the proverbial frogs in the well.

They continued forward, occasionally coming across more herbs, and not once meeting any danger. They already had more than 50 dao-gold pieces...

Because they had no basis for comparison, they had no idea if 50 pieces was extremely few or many.

"We might have just stumbled across an herb-rich patch," Li Luo finally concluded. That was his best guess.

Just when they spoke, a wounded spirit beast charged out of the trees nearby. But before they could act, the spirit beast toppled to the ground and died from its wounds. They stared at each other.

"Something's wrong, right?" Qin Zhulu swallowed hard. This spirit beast was not easy to deal with. In good condition, the three would have had to combine their full strength for a chance to beat it. But now it was dead at their feet.

It felt like an insult to their intelligence if they were supposed to take this as luck.

It was raining presents everywhere, damn it!

"I got itm" Li Luo said in a low tone of relief, slapping his forehead.

Li Luo patted the carcass of the spirit beast. "You see, there's a very simple explanation... It means I'm the Chosen One."

Qin Zhulu stared at him. "What the hell has any of this got to do with you? You haven't even found a single rare herb along the way, it's always been..."

They both turned slowly to look at Lu Qing'er.

Her beautiful eyes went round, and she pointed at herself disbelievingly. "Me? How is that possible?"

Neither Li Luo nor Qin Zhulu could see how it was possible, but it had indeed happened. All of their bounty so far had been picked up by Lu Qing'er.

And this beast that had conveniently died at their feet.

Li Luo sighed solemnly. "I have a bad feeling about all this."

It was too good to be true. And in Li Luo's experience, that not only meant it wasn't true, but that something very, very bad was coming.

"That just makes it all the more interesting!" Qin Zhulu declared, his face flushing with excitement.

Li Luo was speechless.

"Brother, you're really a battle demon. But can you at least look at where you are? Everyone here at the Dao Fields is basically an Evolving Resonance Tier cultivator. We three Pattern Genesis scrubs would be lucky to survive, you know?"

Lu Qing'er tugged at Li Luo's sleeve. "Let's just stay here and not go anywhere. Then we might not be targeted."

She was not too interested in the Golden Dragon Mountain writs anyway. This snowy gorge was quite picturesque and fun to play around in.

And they could get some dao-gold and some good rewards when it all ended.

"If I stay here with you until it ends, your mom will stick my head in the vault and open and close the door on my neck repeatedly," Li Luo protested. n-)0Vεtβ1n

He could only imagine the extent of her fury. She had paid good money for him to be a qualified bodyguard. Romp in the snow?!!

"I'll explain it all to her," Lu Qing'er said hurriedly. "She won't be mad at you."

Li Luo was just about to speak when he abruptly stopped. Qin Zhulu had frozen on the spot as well. He pulled out his spear.

Li Luo turned around to the snowy forest on the right side. "Alright, sneaking's over. Come on out."

Lu Qing'er had a fright when she heard this, and she quickly channeled her ice resonant power.

Three figures suddenly emerged from the snow. Li Luo and the others watched them warily.

They were all youngsters, and the one in the middle seemed like their leader. He gave them an odd smile. "We accidentally drew too near. You're sharp. I didn't expect you to detect us."

"Seems like you've been following us for a while now," Li Luo noted mildly.

The green-robed leader nodded with a smile. "A while. So, I wonder, could you enlighten us on how you managed to get dozens of dao-gold without doing anything?"

"As for us..." He wrung his hands irritably. "We've been in this area for half a day, and haven't seen a thing."

Li Luo nodded sympathetically. "That's a real shame."

"So how did you do it? How do you stroll around and just get gold? What's the deal?"

Li Luo's face was serious. "The deal's a deal. But we'll have to know what's your deal and if you're the real deal before we deal."

Confused silence.

"Heh." The green-shirted leader laughed. "Looks like we got ourselves a real wisecrack here.

"Well, if you don't want to talk..."

He lazily unsheathed his lancet, its keen blade gleaming with a green energy that they recognized as wind resonant power. As he curled his fingers more tightly around the hilt, a small gust cleared the snow away from his feet.

"...then I guess I'll have to beg for alms..."

Chapter 0340: Harsh Beatings

Clang.

As the green-clothed leader made his threats, the other two pulled out their weapons as well. There was a mean glint in their eyes.

Li Luo shook his head disapprovingly. "That's a nasty attitude, guys. No alms today."

The leader snorted. "Let's not do this the hard way. By the looks of your golden dragon design, you guys are from the Xia Kingdom. It's not that weak a place, but why is your squad so pathetic?"

"And I see that you three are from the Polar Wolf Kingdom's branch."

"Ji Sun, at your service," the leader said with a mocking bow. "These two are my friends.

"Come now, lady and gentlemen. I don't want to have to fight you. In fact, if you wish, we could even team up. Of course, you'll have to give us 80% of the profits.

"In exchange, we'll protect you."

Lu Qing'er's face was rigid with anger. Li Luo sighed. "80%? Are you sure you guys aren't loansharks? Because your hearts are black as hell.

"Besides... look at you. One First Changing and two Third Patterns. You're not that much stronger than us, brother. What makes you think you can charge a protection fee like that?"

Ji Sun's eyes narrowed.

"Seems like you don't just want to be taken down.

"You want to be taken out!" These words were punctuated by a deafening crackle, a violent streak of energy that came from behind Li Luo. He shuddered as it passed him, an avatar of savagery with his spear out, attacking Ji Sun.

He was a tiger incarnate, burning through snow as he charged.

Qin Zhulu.

Fighting was in his blood, and he had an instinctive grasp of when things were about to turn violent... and to act one step ahead of that.

“Roar!”

Ji Sun leaped back with alarm, taken back by the ferocity of this sudden attack.

"An eighth-grade beast resonance! No wonder he's such an animal!" Ji Sun yelled to his companions. Still, he was only a Third Pattern!

Ji Sun stepped forward to meet him, lance at the ready. Wind energy twisted around it.

He cut out in a curious, slicing motion, sending a fan of wind that cleanly chopped away at the trees around them. It made its clear imprint in the snow.

Bang!

The two clashed with a monstrous bang, resonant power on resonant power.

Ji Sun staggered back two steps from the impact, while Qin Zhulu was sent back a few steps, almost losing his balance. n//0vELbIn

Qin Zhulu had come out worse from their clash due to the marked difference in their cultivation levels.

He was completely unfazed, the bright joy of battle burning bright in his eyes. His entire body trembled with the excitement of being in battle.

Ji Sun eyed him warily. "Impressive Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance. If you were a Fifth Pattern, I would be pretty scared of an upset. But a Third Pattern... far from sufficient."

"I'm guessing you're the strongest in this squad. Will you all behave if I take this guy out?" Lu Qing'er was about to retort, but Li Luo cut her off. "Yup. You got it, boss man. Old Lu here is our strongest.

"Old Lu, he's all yours. Buy us all the time you can."

Qin Zhulu looked approvingly at Li Luo. He wasn't happy that Li Luo had called him the strongest. He was just happy that Li Luo had left him the strongest, Ji Sun, to fight.

He probably couldn't win, but it did not matter. Fighting was all that mattered, and who cared if the result was death or injury.

“Roar!”

Qin Zhulu plunged his spear into the ground and roared, his resonant power swelling forth with his voice. Golden tiger stripes began to surface on his skin, and his voice deepened with a tiger's growl.

His eyes had become cat eyes, deadly and watchful.

He was a hunter now, ready to take down his target with any means possible.

Snatching up his spear, he shot forth in a blur towards Ji Sun.

Ji Sun watched him come. "Guo Xiang, Xu Ling, the other two are yours. I'll handle this guy."

"Haha, no problem, Boss. Let's see who can finish off their opponent first."

They were both Third Patterns, while Li Luo and Lu Qing'er were Third and First Patterns respectively.

Ji Sun nodded. The gap in power on all sides was clear—he was not worried for them.

He turned back to his target. Green wind resonant power started to swirl around his entire body, until he seemed to almost hover just above the ground. His steps were light and speedy, his control precise. He darted forward, seemingly floating from position to position like a dragonfly.

Qin Zhulu showed none of that precision. A wild tiger with a single fang—his outstretched spear, roaring loud enough to shake the air.

Ji Sun snapped his wrist forward with a powerful blast, snuffing out the energy around the spearhead.

"I have time. I'm going to play with you." He smirked.

"Or perhaps you care for a wager? Want to see if my friends over there will end things faster than us?"

Qin Zhulu smirked right back at him, his tiger stripes glowing anew.

"Not sure how long you can last, but your friends over there are about to be ended real quick, I reckon." He bared his teeth.

Ji Sun looked at him as though he was crazy. Qin Zhulu was already on the move, a relentless attacking force.

...

At the same time, Guo Xiang and Xu Ling were pincering Li Luo and Lu Qing'er. Both were eying the latter with great interest.

"Hey, Old Xu, leave the girl to me, eh? I'll wipe your loan clean from last time," Guo Xiang said, pumping his eyebrows at his friend.

Although they would not dare to do anything blatant here at the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, copping a feel or two in battle wasn't going to incriminate them.

Xu Ling swore. "Alright, you bastard. Don't take too long, eh? We might attract others. I'll test out this other bugger."

He turned to Li Luo. He would rather take on the pretty girl than the handsome guy any day. What the hell did a guy need to look that good for anyway?

Well, he would bring him back to average looks later with a few well-placed stomps on his face.

Shing!

Xu Ling spread his palms, and razor-sharp claws extended out from his fingers, glowing silver.

At the same time, his stance opened up with a wildness that was reminiscent of Qin Zhulu, and icy power swirled around him.

Seventh-grade snow wolf resonance.

He was quite strong as well. Probably as strong as an average student in the Astral Sage College's Two Star Hall.

He was not planning to be careless against Li Luo. They were evenly matched as Third Patterns after all. Still, all he needed to do was play it safe until Guo Xiang finished his battle, then they would be on good footing again.

"You're not very smart, friend, turning down our leader like that."

Xu Ling did not wait for Li Luo's reply. Bending down, he loped gracefully towards Li Luo, a white wolf imbued into his spirit.

His claws glittered in the snow.

Li Luo let the white shadow flit closer to him, his own shortswords held loosely in his hands as his waterlight resonant power played over them.

He darted forward to meet Xu Ling square on.

Water Edge Art? Xu Ling smirked to himself. Common plebeian street trick.

Coating his claws in a layer of icy crystal to reinforce them, he slashed out.

"Tiger-general resonance art, Icy Wolf's Fangs!"

His fingers were spread in partial imitation of a snarling wolf's maw.

Li Luo was unimpressed by his opponent's fancy moves. He countered with a simple sword slash.

Dang!

The clean ring of metal.

Xu Ling paled.

From the power on Li Luo's swords, he knew that the Water Edge was not ordinary. His own hardened claws had deep scratches on them.

What the f*ck was this Water Edge Art?!

How could a Third Pattern make such a cheap trick so strong?!

He had to at least be a Fifth Pattern in power!

Xu Ling felt his insides twist with panic. This person was cunning!

He did not know how strong the tiger-man tussling with his captain was, but he couldn't possibly be stronger than this freak!

They had been had!

Xu Ling's voice bubbled in his throat, but a withering force clamped down on his claws before he could call out to his teammates. He screamed as they shattered.

He tried to retreat, but his feet seemed to be moving in slow-motion. His attacker was already behind him.

The two short blades slashed across his chest, sending fresh blood spraying.

Xu Ling's eyes were wide as he crashed heavily to his knees. He could not believe that he had lost in one move.

Li Luo plunged his swords into the bloody snow and squatted down, bringing his face close to Xu Ling's.

"You see, my friend," Li Luo sighed. "The harshest of words deserve the harshest of beatings."