

## Resonance 381

### Chapter 0381: The Difficulty of the 20th Level

As the trio ascended to the 20th level, the faint green mist immediately started to move, blowing towards a single spot. A few moments later, a figure walked out of the hazy agglomeration.

They watched the figure warily.

This one was different from the other absinthe puppets that they had faced. There was a layer of green wooden armor that glowed with some sort of mystical reinforcement. The same light was present on its wooden spear.

This was an advanced absinthe puppet, and they could feel the pressure of the fight. This was a far more formidable opponent compared to the other minions.

"Should be a Second Changing."

Li Luo noted calmly, eyes narrowed as he judged the energy flows around the puppet.

Both Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng paled slightly. They had guessed as much, but as a Third Pattern and Second Pattern, the disparity was still extremely daunting.

"Phew! Lucky it's not Third Changing."

Li Luo said with a happy sigh. His teammates stared at him.

"Carry on with the bragging, leader," Xin Fu urged him. "A few more times, and I might even believe it myself."

"Leader, you always make us feel safe in times of danger," Bai Mengmeng giggled behind her hand.

Li Luo waved modestly. This wasn't really bravado. After all, he had mostly faced Evolving Resonance tier opponents in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. Both Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying had been Second Changing, just as strong as this absinthe puppet. However, back then he had only been a Third Pattern, and already able to put up some resistance and pose a threat.

Now he was a full-blown Fifth Pattern.

The increase in strength meant that he wouldn't be fumbling around like he did previously.

In truth, he was itching to test himself out against a Second Changing. What would be the outcome?

Even if the advanced puppet in front of him was only a puppet without too much intelligence, it was still a good enough target.

"Leader, if the 20th level is just one measly advanced absinthe puppet, we've hit the jackpot!" Xin Fu exclaimed happily. Li Luo was inclined to agree. Three of them against a Second Changing was not difficult. But then it struck him that there was still a lingering patch of mist behind the advanced absinthe puppet. As that faded, he saw a few more figures walking forwards.

Xin Fu's expression froze.

Six more absinthe puppets. Although they were not as strong as the Second Changing advanced absinthe puppet, but the leader of the six was a First Changing, while the other five were either Third or Fourth Pattern.

"Jackpot?! This is a pisspot!" Li Luo said, bonking Xin Fu on the head in disgust.

Xin Fu was on the verge of tears himself. This 20th level was a huge step up in difficulty. One Second Changing alone was difficult enough to deal with. But the puppet had brought a whole host of puppet baby brothers with it.

The advanced absinthe puppet didn't give them much time to commiserate. The green spear was leveled forwards as it charged with a low, dull roar.

Behind, the First Changing absinthe puppet and its friends followed suit.

Shing!

Li Luo's swords flashed out of his scabbard. He took a deep breath. "The situation has changed. Follow Plan Two and move accordingly."

He took a quick step to his right, while Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng took a corresponding one to the left, creating some distance.

The advanced absinthe puppet adjusted its course accordingly towards Li Luo without hesitation, sensing that he was the strongest.

The First Changing puppet and its other friends moved towards Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng.

Li Luo did not let Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng's situation distract him. They might be slightly weaker, but playing off each other's strengths would allow them to buy some time. Time that he would spend - preferably as little as possible - in taking down the advanced absinthe puppet. Otherwise they would fail this level.

Failure wasn't the end of everything. They could always try again tomorrow, but it would be a waste of absinthe energy quota for both today and tomorrow.

Perhaps the breakthrough to the Evolving Resonance tier just waited on the opposite side of this level?

Cultivation was like that - an accumulation of effort.

The advanced absinthe puppet was already in attacking range, beryl-green light forming a green bird that flew towards him, wings outstretched.

Dang!

Li Luo's two rivers of energy merged within him, blue and green on his blades as he blocked the attack from the advanced absinthe puppet.

Tang tang tang!

Sparks flew, as they reported on the fury of the energy that was being traded.

The pair clashed dozens of times in a few short but breathless moments.

Although Li Luo's frame was shaken with each blow, but his feet stood firm. He smiled grimly. This advanced absinthe puppet could not compete with Second Changing elites like Zhao Ziyang. Still, from this clash he understood that he could stand up against some Second Changings now.

"If that's the case, this is going to be easy..."

Li Luo adjusted his grip on the hilts. His resonant bubbles had already increased in number from four to seven, and the additional booster was much more significant than before.

Dang!

This time when their weapons clashed, it was the advanced absinthe puppet that staggered backwards, its spear bouncing off.

Li Luo let the impact of their clash push him back as well, skidding backwards in a controlled manner. Suddenly there was a watery light on his sword. "I've just mastered a new skill," he said softly to himself. "I'd appreciate some... feedback!"

Splash! Roar!

The roar of a wave accompanied his sword as he slashed a crescent of power that was several meters wide. Like a moon of water, it whistled through the air towards his opponent.

Like a water-cutter, the velocity of the water screamed through the air.

Even the Violet Vibrance mentors stared in surprise.

"That's... the advanced form of Water Edge Art... Thousand Watery Knives art!"

### **Chapter 0382: Thousand Watery Knives Art**

Splash!

The watery blade cut down with fearful strength, hissing through the air with a shrill hum.

It scored a blow against the armor of the advanced absinthe puppet, leaving a deep, marked gash.

The advanced absinthe puppet clearly had quite powerful defenses, but it was useless against the powerful serrating capabilities of Thousand Watery Knives art, that was created to cut armor.

"Not a bad offensive skill at all," Li Luo congratulated himself. This Thousand Watery Knives art was the latest resonance art that he had been working on. It was the advanced form of Water Edge Art. Water Edge Art coated one's weapons to increase the penetrability and damage, but Thousand Watery Knives art manipulated resonant power itself through the blade in a stream. This created a much more powerful and far-reaching attack.

Even among the tiger-general resonance arts, this was considered a difficult one to master. Li Luo had set his eye on it a long time ago, but had not met with success... not until he reached the Fifth Pattern and his resonant power finally reached the requirements.

But although he was well-satisfied with the results, he could see that there was still plenty of space to grow the skill. For example, he could add light resonant energy to increase the speed of the water resonant power. Perhaps it could even rival a dragon-general resonance art in power.

However, modifying skills like that was not an easy task. Thousand Watery Knives art was difficult enough as it was.

Li Luo still had his eyes locked onto the advanced absinthe puppet. With its chest injured, the green energy dimmed a little, but did not fade. The puppets were like zombies, incapable of feeling pain. It clutched its wooden spear and continued charging, albeit a little shakily.

Leaning forward on the balls of his feet, Li Luo reveled in the power of his swords as he slashed the air in anticipation.

Dang!

The two figures crossed again. Li Luo's left sword blocked the incoming spear, while his right sword landed precisely along the previous slash he had landed with the power of a waterfall. The advanced absinthe puppet was cleaved cleanly into two, dissolving into green mist.

He had taken care of the advanced absinthe puppet in record time, and now he turned back to Bai Mengmeng and Xin Fu. Xin Fu had already locked down the First Changing absinthe puppet, although he was clearly at his limits. His resonance affinity was not suited to head-on battle.

As for Bai Mengmeng, she was keeping the other absinthe puppets occupied. She had not touched a single one of them at all, instead creating an endless stream of replicates. The low-intelligence absinthe puppets simply attacked whatever was in front of them, and so she had a more straightforward time.

Li Luo prioritized Xin Fu. With his added strength, the battle was swiftly concluded. The First Changing absinthe puppet fell within a minute to their combined strength, cut down cleanly and dissolving into mist.

With the two greatest threats mitigated, the two boys went to help Bai Mengmeng finish off the other absinthe puppets, and then the 20th level was clear and empty.

The three flopped to the floor in ungainly fashion, tired but exuberant.

Three portions of green energy appeared from above, descending into them.

The warm and pure energy was bliss, and the three closed their eyes, enjoying the rewards of their labor.

While Li Luo and the others absorbed the absinthe energy, the other squads found that the mist on their platform was gradually fading away.

It was the same phenomenon that had happened at the end of the last few days. It meant that the quota of absinthe energy had been reached for today.

Clearly, Li Luo and the others had taken the rest of the quota with their triumph over the 20th level.

"Damn, Li Luo beat us to it." Qin Zhulu said regretfully as his opponent faded away.

They had been preparing for their own 20th level challenge, but were a step behind. Li Luo's squad had taken the lion's share of the energy today.

"When did Li Luo become so strong?" Yin Yue sighed to herself.

Although Li Luo had performed well enough in the past, but many of the One Star Hall students still regarded Qin Zhulu as the strongest in their year. However, Li Luo's performance during the special training had outshone Qin Zhulu's own showing.

"Seems like the One Star Hall representative for the ticket match will be between you two," Lu Qing'er told her leader.

Qin Zhulu's eyes shone with great excitement.

"I don't really care about representing. I just want to fight with him all out."

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"That guy's gotten ridiculously good after going to the Golden Dragon Dao Fields," Yu Lang complained.

Bai Doudou looked at him sidelong. "Li Luo came out of Southwind Academy, same as you. Look how far he's pulled ahead. You better not be thinking of slacking off during this month of special training."

Yu Lang was crestfallen. What gave you the idea that all students who walked out of Southwind Academy were the same anyway?! Jiang Qing'e came out of Southwind Academy too. Am I supposed to compare myself to her too?! This woman could be very unreasonable at times.

Still, his past painful beatings told him that now was the time to nod and shelve his emotions, before another painful beating was added to the grand collection.

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"Dual resonances are quite impressive. That 20th level advanced absinthepuppet must be a Second Changing? To finish it with some composure... Li Luo's really untouchable now," Yi Lisha said admiringly.

"I guess the ticket match representative is Li Luo's. Qin Zhulu seems like he can't beat him now. I wonder if he might even be the strongest One Star Hall contender at the Holy Grail Meet? That would be a real glory that Astral Sage College hasn't seen before." Qian Ye said to his team. Yi Lisha started. "Strongest One Star Hall student in East Divine Continent eh... that's a pretty bold declaration."

"Don't you think it's possible?" Qian Ye laughed.

Yi Lisha hesitated. "It's very difficult. Even with dual resonances, we can't estimate the power that other elite schools have. Who wouldn't come to the Holy Grail Meet with their best preparations?"

"In truth, I wouldn't be surprised no matter what sort of monster appears at the Holy Grail Meet."

"Well, we'll just have to see."

Si Qiuying listened to her two teammates talk, her mood dull. She was remembering a fateful day half a year ago, when this youth had been completely unremarkable. And now people were considering him as the strongest One Star Hall student in the whole of the East Divine Continent?

When had this guy reached such heights?

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Compared to the half-celebratory mood of the other squads, Wang Hejiu and Duze Beixuan's squad had the grimmest mood of them all.

Both of them were looking bitter. They were the ones who wanted to see such an outcome the least. After all, both of them bore a grudge against Li Luo, not to mention that their own mentor also wanted to see him fall.

None of them had seen Li Luo as a rival back at the beginning, disdainingly looking back when school had first started.

And now they realized that the one they had held in contempt was a step ahead of them. That was hard to stomach.

But Li Luo was already ahead of them now. Catch back up to him? Easier said than done.

"We have to think of something," Wang Hejiu said tersely. "Otherwise we'll never be able to catch up to Li Luo during the special training. If this chance passes us, we might never get another one to turn the tables."

Duze Beixuan's eyes glittered as he nodded.

### **Chapter 0383: Li Luo's Slump**

Time flew during special training, and before they knew it, half a month had passed.

In these two weeks, news of the upcoming ticket match and the Holy Grail Meet had spread all around the school, and it was all the students could talk about. After all, it concerned the school's reputation, which was glory for all of them.

All of the students were proud to be members of Astral Sage College. There was a new sense of unity amongst them that had grown in the last month, as they looked forward to the ticket match where they would all be on the same side: Astral Sage College against others, trying to get into the Holy Grail Meet.

As for the ticket match format, that had also been announced, and the seven representatives was also a hotly discussed topic.

While the other students were busy talking each others' ears off, Li Luo and the others were working their butts off, cultivating furiously within Angelwood Hollow. They charged up the platforms, fighting hordes of absinthe puppets.

In the past two weeks, Li Luo's Fairness & Justice squad led the way, already reaching the 33rd level.

After the 30th level, the difficulty increased sharply. From 20 to 30, they could still break through multiple levels a day, but once they hit 30, it was strictly one level per day before they ran out of steam, unable to go any further.

After 30, the absinthe puppets grew overwhelming in both quantity and quality.

They almost lost once as well - if not for a clutch piece of teamwork, they would have wasted an entire day.

And as they faced harder and harder tests, all of them were pushed to their limits. This was normal, and in the history of Angelwood Hollow, all of the One Star Hall students had basically gotten stuck around stage 30 plus.

Still, the last half a month had seen great improvements in the Violet Vibrance squads.

Bai Doudou, Wang Hejiu, and Duze Beixuan had all managed to push one level up to Fifth Pattern, while Xin Fu had reached Fourth Pattern. Bai Mengmeng had reached Third Pattern, and even Yu Lang managed to reach Second Pattern. Still, the most outrageous of all was Qin Zhulu. Three days prior, he had managed the most difficult breakthrough of them all, completing his Pattern Genesis tier and ascending to the Evolving Resonance tier. With it had come a huge boost in power.

Qin Zhulu was the first in their cohort to reach Evolving Resonance tier!

As news of his breakthrough spread through the school, he immediately catapulted past Li Luo to become the most favored for representing the school. The students even formed friendly factions that supported Li Luo and Qin Zhulu respectively, and many hot debates broke out between them.

"Qin Zhulu has an upper eighth-grade Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance. He's a monster in battle, and now a First Changing monster at that. He's definitely going to represent One Star Hall against Blue Abyss Sage College. I heard that they have an upper eighth-grade student too."

"Li Luo's dual resonances has complexity for days. Do you know how many battles he's won from a cultivation level deficit in the last half a year?"

"But if he's not making it to the Evolving Resonance tier, that's a big handicap."

"There're another ten days or so to the ticket match, right? Li Luo's going to make it for sure. You heard it here first." "Still, there's something odd about this. Li Luo was a Fifth Pattern, same as Qin Zhulu, when they went to Angelwood Hollow. I hear that their squad is pushing at a higher level than Qin Zhulu's, so how is it that Qin Zhulu made the breakthrough first?"

"Who knows? Maybe it's got something to do with his dual resonances."

Such thoughts were echoed tirelessly throughout the school. After all, One Star Hall might only be sending one representative compared to two from the other halls, but this one spot was extremely important.

Li Luo's slump was of great concern to not only the students, but even some of the One Star Hall Violet Vibrance mentors.

"This Li Luo doesn't seem to be showing signs of breakthrough at all," Cao Sheng noted, as he watched the students below fight.

Mi Er nodded. Ever since Qin Zhulu's breakthrough, they had been watching Li Luo closely, but six days later there was still no news from Li Luo.

"Evolving Resonance tier is a completely new tier compared to Pattern Genesis," Chi Chan said with a worried frown. "At that level, the resonance seeds within the cultivator's body will begin to evolve according to their resonance affinities. With dual resonances, Li Luo will need to undergo two evolutions while others only need one. And to do a dual evolution simultaneously... it's more than twice as hard to control."

"Still," Chu Zi said, "it means that if he completes it, his ability will rise far more than that of other single-resonance cultivators."

"The special training will end soon," Shen Jinxiao said with relish. "And soon the ticket match will begin. His time is running out. A mere Fifth Pattern? I would nominate Qin Zhulu without a doubt."

"It really doesn't matter who, as long as they do Astral Sage College One Star Hall proud," Cao Sheng shrugged. "And anyway Qin Zhulu has been eying Li Luo as his rival. Given his nature, I'm sure he wants to see Li Luo reach the Evolving Resonance tier as well, before they have a formal battle to see who's stronger."

Shen Jinxiao shook his head. "It doesn't matter how unique dual resonances are. I cannot accept a Fifth Pattern representing One Star Hall. On this matter I am purely impartial. I am merely thinking of Astral Sage College's One Star Hall reputation."

"Your acceptance or otherwise matters not," Chi Chan said snappishly. "There will be due process to decide such things."

"Ah, please don't get angry, mentor Chi Chan," Shen Jinxiao said with an oily smile. "I am indeed just expressing my opinion. Of course we will vote accordingly when the time comes. But do not expect many of us to vote for a Fifth Pattern to represent, even if he fights way above his cultivation class. Imagine the message that we would be sending to the other sage colleges. Astral Sage College's strongest One Star Hall student is a Fifth Pattern? How ungainly." "So what if he's a Fifth Pattern?" Chi Chan retorted. "Surely you know that Li Luo defeated a Third Changing as a Third Pattern in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields?"

"I have indeed," Shen Jinxiao replied. "But that was not Li Luo's work alone. He had the help of Qin Zhulu and Lu Qing'er. Besides, the Third Changing he fought had not earned his cultivation level truly, but was boosted through some unknown arts. He might not be much stronger than a Second Changing with an eighth-grade resonance."

"Even Bai Doudou, Wang Hejiu, and Duze Beixuan have reached Fifth Pattern. If Li Luo stalls here, he might soon be left behind."

Chi Chan shot Shen Jinxiao a filthy look, but did not engage further. Arguments here were useless. She had better spend more time thinking about how to help Li Luo achieve his breakthrough. Although it was an even higher hurdle for his dual resonances, but she believed that he could overcome it.

Besides, even if Li Luo failed to make the breakthrough in time, his unique fighting abilities might still see him triumph over Qin Zhulu.

While Chi Chan and Shen Jinxiao bickered, the topic of their argument was busy doing his best in the fights, oblivious to the politics above.



Actually, he knew the reason for his slump better than anyone else.

Others thought that he was wrestling with two simultaneous evolutions... But actually he had four resonances to worry about...

Water and light resonances.

Wood and earth resonances.

Primary and secondary.

Others just needed a simple, straightforward evolution, while he had to deal with the interaction between four. Of course it was going to be extremely difficult. He sighed to himself. For now, he could only curb his impatience. They had a bigger problem to deal with.

Their squad had reached their limit, and it was hard to go any further...

### **Chapter 0384: Cooperation**

Li Luo's team was stuck at level 36 of Angelwood Hollow.

This level had completely stumped them.

"It's too hard, how can we beat it?!" Xin Fu complained. Li Luo massaged his brow, irritated at their predicament as well. There were dozens of absinthe puppets here, and four armored advanced absinthe puppets leading them. From their energy flow, these were probably Second Changing.

Behind the four Second Changing absinthe puppets were three more First Changing ones.

And behind them a dozen more ranging from Third to Fifth Pattern.

Put bluntly, this was a freaking mini zombie army.

The line-up was much harder than level 35, which had already taken every last bit of strength out of them. They knew that given their ability, it was close to impossible to beat level 36.

The absolute limit of their strength.

Although Li Luo had not made it to Evolving Resonance tier yet, his resonant power had grown much stronger. He was able to take on two Second Changing advanced absinthe puppets by himself. But four... that was too much.

More importantly, even if he could deal with the four big guns, Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng together could not deal with the other absinthe puppets.

And if the two of them fell, then Li Luo would be overwhelmed and buried alive by the minions. The outcome was clear.

Li Luo felt a headache incoming. He looked glumly around, where there were energy disturbances from the other squads fighting. It was not just from the One Star Hall Violet Vibrance squads, but also the Two Star Hall ones.

They were also undergoing special training in Angelwood Hollow, although they were far ahead of the first years.

"Level 36 is too hard for us. We won't be able to complete it. Let's go back to do level 35 again," Xin Fu said resignedly.

"Second time clearing a level, the absinthe energy is much weaker," Li Luo groaned.

He still needed an ocean of absinthe energy to reach his breakthrough. Repeating levels? Could he reach his target in the next 10 days?

Xin Fu scratched his head. He knew that Li Luo had to be worried about his breakthrough to Evolving Resonance tier. After all, Qin Zhulu had already done it. With Wang Hejiu, Bai Doudou, and the others reaching Fifth Pattern, it felt like they were on the verge of overtaking him now.

But without any change to their firepower, they were not going to be able to clear level 36 for sure.

In their glum silence, Bai Mengmeng spoke up timidly. "If we can't beat level 36 alone, how about working with other teams? We might have to split the absinthe energy, but if we're efficient enough, I think it could make up the difference."

Li Luo looked at her in amazement, then started to clap. The idea was simple, but he had not thought of it before. This was not an unreasonable thing - at the earlier levels it was not at all feasible to split up the absinthe energy, but now if they were unable to push ahead alone, perhaps a strong ally was exactly what they needed.

Win-win.

"Mengmeng's the smartest," Li Luo praised her with a huge thumbs up.

She laughed shyly. "Well, it's normal for weaker people to think this way. You're too strong, so you always think of relying on your own strength."

What a great girl. She was even good at consoling him.

"I'll go talk to Qin Zhulu's guys. They're already at level 35, so they'll be stuck here soon." Li Luo called out to them, already hurrying back downwards.

When Li Luo reached Qin Zhulu's platform, he saw Qin Zhulu finishing off the last absinthe puppet, releasing a whole cloud of green mist.

He was an incredibly impressive sight. His entire body thrummed with power, and the tiger-shadow of burnished gold layered over him was intimidating, to say the least.

Now he was at the Evolving Resonance tier, his Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance was starting to reach a new dimension of strength.

Lu Qing'er immediately spotted Li Luo's arrival, and hurried towards him with a smile. "Stuck at level 36?"

"You even know that?" Li Luo blurted out.

Lu Qing'er waved it away. "We're near our own limits, so we know all too well what you must be facing. We had to fight level 35 a few times before we could pass it. I guess we won't be able to beat 36 by ourselves as well. If you didn't come to find us, I would probably have gone to find you to talk about the exact same thing."

Li Luo nodded, then explained the enemy line-up of level 36.

"Four Second Changing advanced absinthe puppets..." Lu Qing'er was stunned. That was indeed much stronger than the level 35 lineup. It was going to be difficult for one squad to beat it alone.

"I wonder if we could work together. Both of us could get rewards otherwise unattainable," Li Luo offered brightly.

Lu Qing'er cocked her head at him, then suddenly smiled. "Sure, I've no objections."

She looked over at where Qin Zhulu was sitting with his eyes closed, absorbing absinthe energy. "Don't worry, I make the decisions in this squad."

Li Luo grinned and nodded.

She hesitated for a moment. "Are... you alright? You're not affected by the whispers going around school, are you?" Of course, she was referring to Li Luo's slump over the last two weeks.

"Don't worry, I expected as much. Evolving Resonance tier... that wall won't hold me forever," Li Luo reassured her with a smile.

She was relieved to see him in good spirits, and pumped her fist.

"Go, Li Luo! You can do it!"

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The alliance between Li Luo's and Qin Zhulu's squads to take on level 36 had been well noted by the other three Violet Vibrance squads. They had to respond accordingly as well - a different approach was going to be needed once the going got too difficult.

After some consideration, Bai Doudou's squad went looking for Wang Hejiu's squad. After all, they were the next strongest squad available.

To their amazement, Wang Hejiu's squad rejected the offer to cooperate.

Bai Doudou was a proud personality as well. From the first word "No", she was already stalking off angrily.

"Why did you reject Bai Doudou?" Duze Beixuan asked Wang Hejiu doubtfully, watching her go.

Wang Hejiu smiled thinly. "Bai Doudou's squad does not meet my requirements. Even if we work with them, we can't catch up to Li Luo and Qin Zhulu."

"You can't be thinking of Yi Lisha, surely? They're even weaker!" Duze Beixuan frowned.

Wang Hejiu smiled smugly. "Don't you think there're other better choices?"

"Nonsense," Duze Beixuan said irritably. "There are only five of us One Star Hall Violet Vibrance teams..." His voice trailed off in realization, then looked up at the platforms far ahead. "You... want us to work with Two Star Hall Violet Vibrance squads?!" "The other One Star Hall squads are going to call us freeloaders!"

"Words," Wang Hejiu said coldly, "are just words." "As long as we can find a Two Star Hall Violet Vibrance squad willing to cooperate, we might even break level 40. We could make history in the One Star Hall records. Or do you want to see Li Luo get the majority of the absinthe energy day after day? I'm not going to play second fiddle to that guy!" Those words stiffened the back of Duze Beixuan, and he fell silent.

### **Chapter 0385: Wang Hejiu's Choice**

With the alliance between Li Luo's and Qin Zhulu's squads, the meta finally started to shift.

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu took on the four Second Changing advanced absinthe puppets together, while Xin Fu, Bai Mengmeng, Lu Qing'er, and Yin Yue worked as a separate team to hold down the other absinthe puppets.

In truth, Li Luo and Qin Zhulu needed less than 10 minutes to finish off their side, destroying the advanced absinthe puppets as ruthlessly as if they had been removing weeds.

With the four advanced absinthe puppets taken down, the problem became much simpler. Li Luo and Qin Zhulu cut off manageable waves of absinthe puppets while leaving the rest with their teammates. As a result, the level which had stumped them all was now cleared easily.

As the voluminous absinthe energy descended upon them, they all cheered happily.

This alliance had changed the dynamic of the special training.

In one day, the two squads did not even stop at their usual one level per day. They continued to move on to level 37.

With this newfound speed, they started to pull further ahead of the other squads.

Bai Doudou's and Yi Lisha's squads started their own alliance, and they too found new speeds.

Surprisingly it was Wang Hejiu's squad which continued their slow, individual crawl. Soon enough they were left far behind by the other four, who had no idea what they were thinking...

The next day, their questions were answered.

Wang Hejiu's squad had cleared four levels in one day!

Originally, the Li Luo-Qin Zhulu squads had reached level 38, while Wang Hejiu's squad was only at level 34. But in a single day, Wang Hejiu's squad shot up to level 38, as though they had doped up on steroids or something.

The results were stupendous.

How had Wang Hejiu's team suddenly become so strong? Impossible!

Staring over, they spotted a team with them that they had not seen before... It was the Violet Vibrance squad led by Ye Qiuding from Two Star Hall! Wang Hejiu was actually working together with a Two Star Hall in Angelwood Hollow! "Damn, that's against the rules, isn't it?!" Yu Lang swore.

The others were not happy about it either. After all, the absinthe energy quota in Angelwood Hollow was divided by halls. For example, 10 portions for One Star Hall, to be divided between five One Star Hall squads. That was the size of the pie. If now Ye Qiuding's Two Star Hall squad joined them, then it was basically six squads fighting for the same pie!

He was basically giving away what belonged to One Star Hall!

Li Luo frowned. Wang Hejiu's actions were bending the rules dangerously far.

He understood the thought - with the help of a Two Star Hall squad, they could clear more levels, and get more absinthe energy. Sure, maybe Ye Qiuding's squad got the better end of the deal, but of course Wang Hejiu would rather help Ye Qiuding than the other One Star Hall squads.

They were his rivals after all. Plus, the personal grudges.

With Ye Qiuding's squad in the mix, Wang Hejiu's squad fought like hamsters put into cyborg suits. They could get the majority of the absinthe energy... that was bad news for Li Luo.

"That's too much," Lu Qing'er said angrily, stomping her food.

"Leader, since they want to play dirty, why not ask senior Jiang to help us as well?" Xin Fu suggested.

"Three Star Hall is not training in Angelwood Hollow," Bai Mengmeng reminded him. "So it's not possible."

"What then?" Xin Fu moaned.

"Well strictly speaking, what they're doing is unfair, but not against the rules," Li Luo said thoughtfully. "Let's see what the five Violet Vibrance mentors think about this."

The others nodded glumly, settling back to wait.

Li Luo was right. While Wang Hejiu and Ye Qiuding teamed up, the One Star Hall Violet Vibrance mentors were indeed embroiled in a bitter argument.

"Shen Jinxiao, just how unscrupulous are your students? In order to get more absinthe energy, they would stoop so low and harm everyone? Or is this all just part of your plan?" Chi Chan was the first to fire an accusation.

"Mentor Chi Chan," Shen Jinxiao said mildly. "Is this against the rules?"

"Shen Jinxiao, this is not a wordplay debate. Rules are guidelines for morals. As One Star Hall students, of course they should preserve goodness for One Star Hall. To give it away to others speaks of their traitorous hearts." Chi Chan shouted.

"It seems like mentor Chi Chan does not see Two Star Hall students as part of Astral Sage College?" Shen Jinxiao countered.

"Preposterous!" Chi Chan thundered.

The other mentors frowned, unsure of how to deal with this. The matter was not clear-cut. Indeed, Wang Hejiu's actions were over-the-top, but such conduct had not been explicitly banned in Angelwood Hollow. They might chastise Wang Hejiu's squad for using unscrupulous means to get absinthe energy, but they could not stop it.

Therefore, after a heated discussion, Cao Sheng stepped in. "Let's report this to the Gilded Palace first, and leave it to vice principal Su Xin to adjudicate."

The other Violet Vibrance mentors nodded. Chi Chan gave a final cold sniff. She knew that this would be the final course of action, actually, but still she wanted to give Shen Jinxiao a piece of her mind before that.

The other Violet Vibrance mentors held their peace, but it was clear that they were not happy with Shen Jinxiao either. This had gone too far, and if word got out, the other Halls and mentors would laugh at their shame.

Li Luo's and Qin Zhulu's squads waited for a long time, and heard nothing from the mentors. They understood what it meant then.

Silence meant consent.

Wang Hejiu had found a powerful exploit that not even the Violet Vibrance mentors could stop by rescinding their cultivating privileges in Angelwood Hollow. They suspected that Shen Jinxiao had a strong hand in this whole affair.

"That son of a b\*tch..." Li Luo swore inwardly.

Outwardly, he turned to Qin Zhulu's squad. "Well, are you brave enough to go up against the Two Star Hall Violet Vibrance squads?"

Qin Zhulu gave him a lopsided grin, his eyes half mad and half determined.

"Exactly what I wanted!"

### **Chapter 0386: The Final Day**

Wang Hejiu's invitation to Ye Qiuding's Two Star Hall squad definitely angered the One Star Hall Violet Vibrance squads. After all, it had been a fair, internal competition before this. Wang Hejiu was the one who had thrown the door open and invited the wolves in.

There was only so much absinthe energy to go around. If Ye Qiuding took most of it, then it was them who would lose out!

But since the Violet Vibrance mentors had not intervened, then they must have accepted it. After all, there had been no explicit rule against it. Perhaps none of the mentors had anticipated that someone would get desperate enough to disadvantage their own peers so viciously.

Anger right now was not helpful. The other four One Star Hall squads redoubled their efforts. Every level they beat was one less portion of absinthe energy for Ye Qiuding's squad.

Of the four, Li Luo's and Qin Zhulu's squads were doing better.

As the two strongest One Star Hall squads, the alliance crushed their way through level 38, and began level 39 on the same day.

Level 39 was much harder than level 38, and both squads could feel the tremendous pressure during the fight. They did not cave in, but continued fighting onwards. The two leaders took on 70 percent of the enemies, and with that, carried their team during the fight.

They were fighting against the clock, because they knew that the Wang Hejiu-Ye Qiuding alliance had already reached level 39.

Tomorrow was the last day of special training.

The goal for Wang Hejiu's alliance was clear: to beat level 40 by that time, and gain a boost of absinthe energy that would be beyond their dreams.

His overweening ambition whispered to him that this would be exactly what was needed to reach the Evolving Resonance tier.

If he really succeeded, he would be the first One Star Hall student to reach after Qin Zhulu. At that time, Li Luo would fall behind again.

"Leader Ye, Li Luo has already started on level 39," Wang Hejiu said anxiously. Now that they were technically on the same level, he was starting to feel a little uncertain.

Ye Qiuding took a look as well. "Don't worry," he said calmly. "Li Luo and Qin Zhulu might be strong, but level 40 is not so easily beaten. Back then, even Zhu Xuan's team had to reach Two Star Hall before they could pass it."

"I see," Wang Hejiu said, forcing a smile. "But that Li Luo is a bit of a demon. Especially after Umbra Cave..."

Ye Qiuding's expression darkened. Umbra Cave. With it, Li Luo had risen to glory, and he, Ye Qiuding, had become a joke.

It was all because Li Luo had stolen his spot. If not for Li Luo, Jiang Qing'e would probably have chosen to ally with him. And the outcome would have been very different.

His jealousy and anger consumed him. As Li Luo proved himself time and again, everyone was coming around to the idea that this young lord of House Luolan was brilliant in his own right.

Before, everyone had felt pity for Jiang Qing'e. Compared to her brilliance, Li Luo looked like a blemish, a dark spot, the mud in which the pearl had fallen in. They whispered of his status as young lord, and of Jiang Qing'e's sense of duty and obligation to her missing master and mistress. The relationship had looked as unequal as could be.

No one felt that more strongly than Ye Qiuding.

He considered himself better than Li Luo in every regard, except status at birth. He felt that he could compete with Li Luo... and now found himself a laughing stock.

"Let's go. Since you invited us, we will definitely fulfill the task to your satisfaction," Ye Qiuding vowed. Squashing his jealousy back down, he stood up.

Wang Hejiu smiled and nodded. Ye Qiuding's anger was so strong he could smell it. He would use it, harness it to his advantage. Both of them wanted the same thing, united in their enmity against him. That was part of the reason why he had turned to Ye Qiuding's squad as well. Zhu Xuan's squad was stronger, but they were busy with an even higher level, and had no time to come down to help.

The two squads made their preparations, then began level 39, an intense fight against the absinthe puppets.

Battle raged back and forth.

Both Li Luo's alliance and Wang Hejiu's alliance beat level 39 almost at the same time. The remaining absinthe energy for the day was drained clean.

Still, everyone knew that level 39 was just the appetizer. Tomorrow's level 40 was everything.

Whoever passed it first would get the majority of the absinthe energy available.

Bai Doudou's and Yi Lisha's squad gave up on the push. They knew that they would have no chance to compete against Li Luo and Wang Hejiu, and were now taking the last day easy.

The last day of special training arrived in due time.

When Li Luo and the others reached the Tree of Resonant Power, they found a large crowd of One Star Hall students there.

"Li Luo, Qin Zhulu, do your best! Beat the traitor Wang Hejiu!"

"Wang Hejiu, vile dog! I can't believe you went crawling to Two Star Hall!"

"One Star Hall betrayer!"

"..."

The insults from his peers made Li Luo grin. He snuck a look at Wang Hejiu's squad. They were looking embarrassed as hell.

Wang Hejiu met his gaze. "Li Luo, is this your doing?" he demanded.

Li Luo shook his head. "Nothing to do with me. But I would like to formally state my commendation to whoever did it."

"I care not at all about reputation," Wang Hejiu said coldly. "As long as we beat level 40 first today, we would have made history. I might even reach the Evolving Resonance tier myself. Who cares about a little chatter in that case?"

"Ah, but what if you're chatted about, and also denied the benefits?" Li Luo laughed.

Wang Hejiu gave him a chilly stare, then turned away.



Li Luo watched him go as he rubbed his own chin. He beckoned to Yu Lang, who was lurking around behind him.

"A familiar modus operandi," Li Luo said to his friend, who was grinning ear to ear. "Your work?"

Yu Lang waved it away modestly. "Since he dares to do it, I thought I'd help him get the word out. He might say that he doesn't care about it, but it sure does satisfy me enormously."

Li Luo gave him an approving shake on the shoulder.

Amidst the cheers, Li Luo's alliance walked into Angelwood Hollow like heroes.

No judgment, no booing. It was a heartening feeling.

The two squads prepared themselves to take on level 40 on the final day of special training.

### **Chapter 0387: The Level 40 Fight**

Clang!

On level 40, Li Luo led the way with his shortswords in hand, Qin Zhulu and his heavy spear right behind him. Backing them up were the other four members.

They were focused firmly on the front, eyes straining to see what awaited them when the mist cleared. The answer was three figures.

Three absinthe puppets clad in full battle armor, their slightly crooked bodies bent over giant halberds blade down in the ground.

They could feel the pressure radiating from these three.

Surprisingly, Li Luo was quite relieved. These three might be stronger than any puppet they had fought before, but they were not Fourth Changing yet.

From the energy around them, he judged them as elite Third Changing.

Each of them were a notch stronger than Lin Suo had been at the Golden Dragon Dao Fields.

However, puppets still had the dullness of puppets. They might have power, but not the higher intelligence needed to fully utilize it. Their battle tactics were limited, which made them slightly easier to deal with.

"Wow, three advanced absinthe puppets of this level..."

Qin Zhulu gripped his spear tightly and licked his lips. "I can only hold off one," he said to Li Luo.

Li Luo stared at him with amazement. "That's a very bold statement, Little Lu. Do you recall how badly Lin Suo trounced us back at the Golden Dragon Dao Fields?"

Qin Zhulu scowled at him. "I was only a Third Pattern then. I'm a First Changing now! If I had to face Lin Suo again, I'd beat him one-on-one!"

"Well, it's a good thing you'll probably never see him again." Li Luo grinned. "Well, as you wish, one of them is yours to beat."

Qin Zhulu stared back at him. He had only said he could hold off one, not take one down... but then again, he wasn't about to admit that to Li Luo's face. "Sure. No problem."

Surely things couldn't get any worse than when they fought Lin Suo. He was much stronger now that he was at the Evolving Resonance Tier, and his Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance had also grown accordingly.

"What about the other two?" Qin Zhulu asked.

"I'll deal with one, and the last one will be left to the other four. If they team up, they should be able to buy some time," Li Luo stated.

"You can deal with one?"

The special training had given them all surprising improvements, and only Li Luo had remained at the same level as he was. Qin Zhulu was not trying to put him down, but rather give him a good reminder.

These advanced absinthe puppets were stronger than Lin Suo!

Li Luo gave him a haughty look as thanks for his concern. "Looks like you forgot who did the most work in defeating Lin Suo."

Qin Zhulu gave no further comment. After all their time working together, he knew that Li Luo was not a reckless person. Since Li Luo had decided this was the arrangement, Qin Zhulu was happy enough to follow along.

"Well, this is the plan, then. Still, even if Xin Fu and the others work together, they probably won't be able to buy much time. If neither of us can secure a win, they might be the first to crumble.

"Besides... even if they can buy time, if we lose in speed to Wang Hejiu and Ye Qiuding, then there's not much point."

Li Luo paused for a moment for his point to sink in. "In the end, it all comes down to us."

He looked Qin Zhulu square in the eye. "The glory and reputation of the One Star Hall—we are its protectors!"

Qin Zhulu was getting fired up as well, flexing his muscles enthusiastically.

"Let's fight!"

His savage resonant power roared forth, and suddenly he was more beast than man.

Li Luo nodded approvingly at him. This berserker was really easy to rile up.

He turned to Xin Fu, Lu Qing'er, and the others, but Xin Fu cut him off before he could deliver his rousing speech. "Dispense with the chicken soup for the soul, Leader. We'll buy you every minute we can. If you can't take yours down, shout and we'll all run away together."

Li Luo sighed. Smart teammates were useless. He preferred big, dumb muscle like Qin Zhulu. Shout and bluster a little, and they would run forth like madmen.

"Well, take care of yourselves," Li Luo called out to them as he turned to face the second advanced absinthe puppet.

Xin Fu and the others turned towards the last one.

Over on the other side, Wang Hejiu's alliance had made their own decisions as well.

Ye Qiuding was the strongest among them, a Second Changing. With his versatile skillset, he should be able to deal with one of the advanced puppets, although he would probably need quite a lot of time. His two teammates would deal with one more, while Wang Hejiu's squad would face the last.

In terms of line-up, it was clear that Wang Hejiu's side had a big advantage. And it was basically a guarantee that Ye Qiuding would take down his puppet, and the way forward was clear for them.)-  
*Orelb1n*

On the other hand, Li Luo's side didn't even have a victory guaranteed.

Above, the five Violet Vibrance mentors watched the two fights silently.

Chi Chan was tense, her lips white from how hard she was pressing them together.

Shen Jinxiao's own lips were slightly parted in a smirk. He had brought many fine wines with him today, and he sent full cups flying towards the other Violet Vibrance mentors with a flick of his finger. The other mentors were not inclined to make a fuss over his facetious attitude, and smiled politely as they accepted the cups.

Only Chi Chan reached out to crush the cup to dust, its contents evaporating with a harsh hiss. "Professionalism."

Shen Jinxiao was unfazed, drinking happily as he occasionally looked down at the battles. He smiled.

### **Chapter 0388: Hard Fight**

The 40th level rang out with explosions and bangs, blasts of energy being traded back and forth.

Li Luo shot forth amidst the chaos, eyes firmly fixed on the advanced absinthe puppet and its huge halberd. He had tuned out all the other fights. His only mission was to take down this stronger-than-Lin Suo puppet in record time.

If they lost the advantage to the other alliance here, it would all be for naught.

Li Luo's shortswords gleamed with Water Edge.

As he neared, he lifted off the balls of his feet, light as a dancing swallow. His resonant power was concentrated on his swords, two twig-like blades against the tree-trunk monstrosity of an ax.

The absinthe puppet raised its halberd in defense. The blades were deflected with a pitiful spray of sparks, and the puppet stood like a rock.

The huge halberd was flipped, swung out in a reverse sweep aimed to cleave Li Luo into two.

He dodged adroitly, allowing the huge and deadly arc of green light to pass by harmlessly. He shivered a little, knowing that it could have ended him if it had connected.

Its first move not succeeding, the advanced absinthe puppet leaped forward, its ax spinning in a blur as it closed in on Li Luo with a deadly whirl of blades.

The hum of blade through air made a keen, whining sound, as though the weapon was crying out for his blood.

Li Luo watched it carefully while summoning his resonant power up.

An azure-blue sword flew out, charged with incredible penetrative power and leaving after-images of blue swords in its wake.

Thousand Watery Knives Art!

With such a powerful advanced absinthe puppet as his opponent, Li Luo did not hesitate to pull out his dual resonances as well as the Thousand Watery Knives Art, one of his strongest moves to date.

Weng!

The water-charged weapon crashed against the advanced absinthe puppet's halberd, and this time the cascade of sparks was impressive to behold.

Li Luo was sent flying, while the advanced absinthe puppet staggered back two steps. Its defenses were rock solid, and it felt no fear. It steadied itself before coming at Li Luo again.

Li Luo leaped backwards. He was still reeling internally from the last clash, and afraid of the absinthe puppet's attack.

In the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, he had his trusty meat shield Qin Zhulu to help him tank attacks. This time, he only had himself. Fortunately, his resonant power was much stronger than before. Although he had yet to make it through to the Evolving Resonance Tier, Angelwood Hollow had helped him grow stronger nevertheless. Previously, that attack would have left him bleeding internally.

As he flew backwards through the air, Li Luo carefully watched the absinthe puppet chasing him. Reversing the grip on his hilts, he sheathed his swords and reached into his pocket sphere to pull out a silvery-white bow.

Lambent Hawkeye.

This bow made the absinthe puppet slow its advance as it assessed the new threat. After a moment, it glowed green again, and its armor was suddenly coated with a fresh layer of energy swirls.

An armor reinforcement.

Although these puppets lacked greater intelligence, they still possessed a threat assessment function to calibrate their defense and offense accordingly.

Whish!

Li Luo's finger was a blur on the string, sending out a dozen light arrows that screamed forward, filling the air with hawk cries. Each one flew straight and true towards the absinthe puppet's vital points.

Every single one was blocked, only shaking the absinthe puppet slightly. More energy vortexes bloomed across the surface of its armor to negate the light arrows.

Occasionally, an arrow found its way through the bolstered defenses, but these did not deal too much damage, especially not to a puppet that did not feel pain. It muscled onwards through Li Luo's arrow storm.

Li Luo took a quick look around to assess their situation. Qin Zhulu didn't seem to be faring too well himself, although he was definitely keeping his absinthe puppet busy. As for Xin Fu and Lu Qing'er's side, the situation was a bit worse. Even with numbers, the absinthe puppet was smacking its way through them. It didn't seem like they would last too much longer.

The puppet was closing in on him, but Li Luo couldn't resist. He looked further over to Ye Qiuding's side.

Two figures were fighting well, keeping level with their opponents. Ye Qiuding was evenly matched with his, trading blows in a good exchange. That was to be expected—Ye Qiuding was a Second Changing. With his other skills and weapons, he would definitely be able to match up to a Third Changing advanced absinthe puppet.

Ye Qiuding was the one who would swing the battle for them.

Time was running out.

While Li Luo thought, his hands were still busy, sending a constant barrage of arrows towards the absinthe puppet.

It responded accordingly, its armor blooming with energy vortexes that blocked the arrows.

This was not a useless endeavor, because Li Luo was marking out the weak points on the puppet's armor. Strictly speaking, they were not weak points, but rather bands on the armor where the energy vortexes spawned a little slower.

"Right hip..." Li Luo muttered to himself. He understood that he had to take his shot now. Time didn't permit much dawdling, and Ye Qiuding was going to win his fight soon as well.

"Whew."

He sucked in a deep breath to steady himself, a look of determination creeping into his eyes.

He would only have this one shot.

"ROAR!"

Just then, the ground shook as his own opponent roared. The halberd swung around in a fury to whip up a green cyclone that bore down on Li Luo's position.

He hurriedly raised his hand, calling up his water resonant power to form defensive whirlpools.

"Whirlpool Barrier."

Swish, crash!

The green cyclone smashed through them as though they were brittle cones of glass. Li Luo held up his bow as his last defense.

CRACK!

Li Luo was sent flying, his sleeves completely ripped up by the force of the attack. A trickle of blood stained his forearm.

Li Luo ignored it, instead taking advantage of the distance to draw his bow again.

Dual resonances activated!

Seven resonant bubbles popped!

Weng!*nove/lB*/In

Within him, his resonant power ratcheted up again and again, condensing on his bow. The arrow's wings of light spread wider and wider.

He breathed out halfway, then released his finger.

The scream of the hawk announced his attack. High up, the Violet Vibrance mentors watched him.

Li Luo's arrow punched far above his cultivation class.

But as Duke experts, they could tell immediately... Li Luo's attack was not going to be enough.

### **Chapter 0389: Feather in the Cap**

Swoosh!

The piercing arrow from the Lambent Hawkeye torpedoed through the air towards the advanced absinthe puppet.

It was too fast for the eye to track, and even from above, the Violet Vibrance mentors only saw a streak of light. The absinthe puppet fared even worse—the attack had already connected by the time it reacted.

The arrow punched into its right hip.

The defensive vortexes were not fast enough.

An overwhelming injection of light energy sheared its way through the vortexes and armor.

This time, the attack sent the absinthe puppet flying. Its armor was badly damaged now, but it was not completely broken yet.

Green energy held the parts of the armor together like sinew, an organic, reactive defense that would not break.

Li Luo frowned when he saw this. Its defense was frustratingly resilient. Even his full-powered arrow had not managed to penetrate it cleanly.

"One more..." he muttered to himself.

Putting away his bow, he pulled out his shortswords to finish the job. Resonant power surging forth, he sprinted forward.

His blades gleamed.

Lifting them high, he brought them down in a powerful, diagonal slash.

"Thousand Watery Knives Art!"

His attack wobbled out through the air, a graceful arc of water that looked soft and elegant but actually packing deadly power.

The Violet Vibrance mentors shook their heads. It was a powerful attack, beautifully executed, but still not enough to take down the absinthe puppet's armor. And if his best attack could not take it down, the armor would eventually heal itself. Li Luo would run out of firepower.

"Pity, he was so close..." Cao Sheng sighed.

"Hey..." Mi Er suddenly said. "This Thousand Watery Knives Art is much stronger than before."

The Violet Vibrance mentors looked closer. True enough, the water resonant power flowed much faster this time. The speed of the resonant power's flow determined the damage this attack could cause. It was the core of the attack.

With a flow this fast, it was definitely much stronger than before.

Bringing the Thousand Watery Knives Art to this level not only demanded a high level of resonant power, it also required a deep mastery and understanding of the nature of the move. And Li Luo had mastered this move not too long ago!

While the Violet Vibrance mentors were still puzzling it out, Li Luo was sure of himself. His Thousand Watery Knives Art had been strengthened with his light resonant energy, drawing out the best of his waterlight resonance.

This was another advantage of his dual resonances. Any resonance art could be easily modified to become much stronger thanks to his additional elements. Li Luo had not spent the last month of special training idly—he had experimented tirelessly to refine his Thousand Watery Knives Art.

This one should be enough.

Weng!n--o)(v//E/)I)-B-(l.)n

The attack cut through the advanced absinthe puppet's hip, devastating energy burrowing its way into the gash on the armor.

Li Luo stood easily on the spot, watching the absinthe puppet take step after step towards him.

A few steps later, its halberd slid from its unfeeling fingers, and its entire torso flopped over at the hip, separated cleanly into two.

The absinthe puppet's demise was met with much consternation from all around.

Qin Zhulu could not believe his own eyes. He himself was locked in a tough fight, but Li Luo had already finished up his? Who was the real Evolving Resonance Tier cultivator here?

He stared so hard that his own puppet almost got a free swing through his neck. He hastily turned back to his own fight. He had thought that reaching the Evolving Resonance Tier ahead of Li Luo meant that the gap was closed... but now it looked like a naive thought.

Slightly further away, Xin Fu, Lu Qing'er, Bai Mengmeng, and Yin Yue cheered. Li Luo had broken the fight clean apart, and now things were in their favor.

On the other platform, Wang Hejiu was the first to notice this development, because he had been watching Li Luo closely all this time. He almost tripped over his own feet in surprise, and barely avoided taking an ax to the face.

"Wang Hejiu, what the hell are you doing?!" Duze Beixuan yelled at him. Even though they had the numbers advantage, the absinthe puppet was a deadly foe. There was no room for carelessness.

"Li Luo's beaten an absinthe puppet!" Wang Hejiu shouted back.

Duze Beixuan's dismay was clear on his face. He could not resist looking over. Indeed, one absinthe puppet lay fallen at Li Luo's feet.

"Impossible! He's a Fifth Pattern just like us!" Duze Beixuan snarled. The three of them together could barely hold their own, but Li Luo had beaten one alone?!

That was even faster than Ye Qiuding!

Were dual resonances really that powerful?! Could he really sneer at the usual concepts of cultivation levels and resonance grades?!

"Leader Ye, please hurry it up! Li Luo's already taken the lead!" Wang Hejiu shouted over desperately.

Ye Qiuding was locked in a harrowing battle with the absinthe puppet. He was gaining an advantage, slowly but steadily. With a little more time, his victory was assured.

Wang Hejiu's shout made him anxious, but he was an experienced enough fighter not to make careless, panicky mistakes. He gritted his teeth and did his best to fight faster but with equal prudence.

Still, he could not completely eradicate his nerves. Li Luo's faster win had severely affected his state of mind.

On the other hand, Li Luo did not care about what was happening on their end. After taking down his absinthe puppet, he reassessed the situation and moved towards Qin Zhulu.

Although Qin Zhulu was on the back foot, with Li Luo joining the fight, they should be able to secure a win in record time.

Qin Zhulu heaved a huge sigh of relief when he saw Li Luo hurrying to his rescue.

"Chop chop, no time to waste," Li Luo called out as a reminder. His dual resonances had a time limit to them. In a long fight, he would run out of firepower.



Qin Zhulu answered with a terse nod, ramping up his own resonant power to the maximum. With a tiger's roar, he pounced forward to rip into the absinthe puppet.

The battle was a race against time.

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu's teamwork had been honed in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. They fell into a familiar rhythm and broke their second absinthe puppet's defenses shortly after Ye Qiuding had taken down his own.

A few minutes later, their second absinthe puppet was down.

They turned to their teammates immediately, before the second body had even hit the floor. Bai Mengmeng and Yin Yue were already injured, and only Xin Fu and Lu Qing'er were still holding on desperately.

They had endured enough. Rescue was here.

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu charged straight in, and immediately the pressure was all but gone. The situation became a lot safer for all of them.

The five Violet Vibrance mentors watched the turn of events with amazement. The outcome seemed pretty clear at this point... Despite the best efforts of Ye Qiuding and Wang Hejiu's squad, they were a step behind.

Shen Jinxiao's wine-sipping had already stopped. He was now watching intently, his wine cup held aloft but forgotten. Cao Sheng and the other Violet Vibrance mentors were watching with surprise but also some amusement. It was indeed an unexpected outcome.

Wang Hejiu had called a Two Star Hall squad to his rescue... and still lost. Once word of this got out... it would be a real feather in the cap for the One Star Hall students.

Li Luo was really a mysterious, little rascal.

The other mentors were a little more reserved, but Chi Chan was openly laughing. One could just imagine how widely she was smiling behind her veil. When the third absinthe puppet on Li Luo's platform fell, she rose to her feet slowly and stretched lazily.

"Mentor Shen Jinxiao, you've really helped out the reputation of the One Star Hall with this brilliant maneuver. Allow me to thank you on behalf of all the One Star Hall students."

Shen Jinxiao's face was like stone, but in his hand, the wine began to bubble and evaporate.

### **Chapter 0390: Woodearth Evolution**

When the third absinthe puppet faded away into green mist, Li Luo, Qin Zhulu, Lu Qing'er, and Xin Fu all plopped down to the floor, completely spent. They exchanged excited and tired smiles.

They had overcome all expectations and beaten level 40 first!

A result that would make anybody doubt their eyes.

This was going to be a huge feather in their cap once word got out. The Two Star Hall students would not dare to assume any superiority over them just because they were seniors; they would probably be a lot more humble after this.

A brief minute after Li Luo's side won, Wang Hejiu's side finished up their battle as well.

But there was no celebration for them—they knew that they had lost this race.

Since Li Luo's alliance had beaten level 40 first, they would get the full amount—far more absinthe energy than second place would.

Wang Hejiu and Duzhe Beixuan kicked out at the ground in disgust and anger. They had paid a heavy price and even endured the insults of their peers, all to secure the help of Ye Qiuding's squad to beat level 40 first and indulge in the bonanza of absinthe energy that awaited the winner. But now all that abuse was for nothing.

Like going for wool and coming back shorn.

They were completely devastated, and Ye Qiuding was equally aghast. Although their loss here did not affect them too much, they had trashed the reputation of the entire Two Star Hall. Their peers would definitely hate them for it. Why would you stick your nose in other halls' business if you couldn't handle it?

"F\*ck!" Ye Qiuding swore colorfully. He had already lost much of his reputation after the fiasco that was the Umbra Cave. After this, he would be the fool of the Two Star Hall.

Li Luo was really a f\*cking demon!

On the other side, the f\*cking demon was busy high-fiving his friends and enjoying their much-anticipated rewards of absinthe energy.

After the three advanced absinthe puppet corpses faded away, the absinthe energy rained down upon them, thick columns of pure energy that encompassed them within.

Li Luo and the others sat in the lotus position, allowing the absinthe energy to wash over them.

Even split between the two squads, the energy was plentiful for all of them.

Soon enough, their bodies were teeming with energy.

Li Luo was busy filling his two resonance palaces to the brim with the powerful and pure energy. Soon enough, both his resonance seeds were shining and full.

The five patterns on his resonance seeds were already as bright as could be.

Both of them glimmered and shimmered, as if on the verge of transformation. And yet... not yet.

Li Luo still could not reach the breakthrough.

He did not fret. Instead, he started to try other methods. He put the absinthe energy equally into both his resonant palaces, trying to get them to trigger the evolution at the same time to get him into the Evolving Resonance Tier.

So far, he had underestimated the tremendous amount of energy he needed to fill two seeds.

The ticket match was nearing. If he wanted to represent One Star Hall, he had better haul his ass over to the Evolving Resonance Tier. Even if he failed, he could still fight his way there, of course... But sometimes, cultivation level spoke loudest.

Best to get this breakthrough here and now.

Li Luo hesitated no more and switched his energy direction—he plugged his waterlight resonance and sent all of the energy towards his woodearth resonance.

Li Luo's new plan was to first get his woodearth resonance to the limit. Since the resonance grade was lower, it would require less energy.

And once the woodearth resonance evolved, he would be in the Evolving Resonance Tier. Even if the evolution was not complete, he should be able to bring his waterlight resonance through sooner rather than later.

Wave after wave of absinthe energy.

They flowed into his brownish-green resonance seed, flushing it with energy until it was shining like a star.

Li Luo could feel that it was on the verge of bursting, unable to take any more energy.

He did not stop, continuing to force feed more energy in. More. More.

Soon enough, his woodearth resonance seed was quivering, the patterns on its surface spreading like lava overflowing from a volcano.

Li Luo knew that the limit had been reached.

Crack!

He heard something breaking apart, and Li Luo instinctively felt his woodearth resonance seed give way.

He was not alarmed, but instead triumphant.

This had to be the evolution.

More and more cracks started to appear along the patterns of the seed, then an emerald-green resonant power oozed out.

Slowly, the resonant power formed a little sapling of jade.

Its roots were planted firmly in the resonance seed. It laid down more and more, until the entire seed was covered with the roots.

Roots digging deep, the sapling grew into a tree that replaced the resonance seed, silently taking its place in the resonant palace.

This was an affinity evolution—no longer raw, shapeless power, but a manifested symbol of the element.

Basically all wood resonances grew trees. For the Duke experts, their wood resonant power manifested as an entire forest, so bountiful was their power.

Li Luo only had one handsome, little tree for now, but there was an additional patch of brown dirt at the base of the tree.

The dirt was also glowing with life.

Li Luo knew that the tree was the manifestation of his wood resonance, while the dirt was the manifestation of his earth resonance.

His woodearth resonance's manifestation might look similar to other wood resonance users, but the little patch of dirt could not be underestimated. It was a base for his tree to grow even stronger, making it more difficult to uproot.

Within his resonant palace, the little tree swayed happily.

As it swayed, resonant power fell from its leaves, and the resonant power... it was even stronger than that which came from his waterlight resonance, even though the latter had the higher grade.

Such was the power of the Evolving Resonance Tier.

Of course, strictly speaking, it was his woodearth resonance that had kicked him over the line...

Li Luo sighed with relief. In the end, the copious amount of absinthe energy from level 40 had managed to get him over the line.

Although his dual resonances had allowed him to enjoy some ridiculous advantages in battle, it sure was a pain in the ass to upgrade.

Still, the hard part was over now.