

Resonance 391

Chapter 0391: Special Training Ends

When Li Luo opened his eyes again, he saw that Qin Zhulu, Lu Qing'er, Bai Mengmeng, and the others were already done. They were gathered around him, curious.

"Leader, you managed the breakthrough?!" Bai Mengmeng exclaimed.

All of them had felt the resonant power within Li Luo's body suddenly escalate before it coalesced.

That was not a level of resonant power that a Pattern Genesis Tier cultivator could achieve.

Li Luo nodded and smiled at them. Indeed, he had reached the Evolving Resonance Tier now, although strictly speaking, only his woodearth resonance had made the leap. His waterlight resonance remained at the Fifth Pattern level.

Still, he was not worried. Now that one had succeeded, he would just put all of the worldly natural energy he got from now on into his waterlight resonance. It was only a matter of time for it.

And when the waterlight resonance breakthrough came, his resonant power would shoot up again. And then the interaction between two equal powers at a greater level would only make him even stronger.

"That's just wonderful," Bai Mengmeng said, her angelic face beaming. She knew that a lot of gossip regarding Li Luo's slump had been spreading around recently. Now that he had overcome it, all those naysayers would shut up.

"Leader, you've really done the One Star Hall proud now," Xin Fu said admiringly. The respect in his voice was evident. They knew that Li Luo's win had helped them secure the overall win. Plus, he had won faster than both Wang Hejiu and Ye Qiuding.

"Everyone played their parts," Li Luo said, shaking his head modestly.

"Li Luo, you're stronger than ever. Although I feel like you've overtaken me again, if you want to be the One Star Hall representative, you'll still have to fight me first," Qin Zhulu vowed, eyes shining with anticipation.

"In fact, let's do it right now!"

Lu Qing'er stared at him as though he was mad. "Li Luo just made his breakthrough. He's exhausted both physically and mentally. Do you think it'd be fair to fight him now?!"

"Leader Qin, it's not nice to take advantage of others." Bai Mengmeng piped up as well.

"Nnggh..." Qin Zhulu struggled for words. Sure, Li Luo had just been through a hard fight, but he seemed spry and ready after his breakthrough. Besides, Qin Zhulu himself had fought hard as well...

All in all, he didn't think that he was taking advantage of anybody, but settled for sighing inwardly, thinking that women were fearsome creatures.

Li Luo waved it away. "Indeed, this is not the place to fight. As for the ticket match representative, let's see what the Violet Vibrance mentors say."

Qin Zhulu nodded. He couldn't care less about the ticket match. All he wanted to do was fight Li Luo until either one of them dropped. Even if it was him, he wanted to know how far apart they were. The five Violet Vibrance mentors appeared in the air above them.

"Today's cultivation session is concluded. It's also the last day of special training. Angelwood Hollow is closed from tomorrow onwards," Chi Chan announced.

They all nodded, Li Luo a bit regretfully. Angelwood Hollow had been a paradise for cultivation. In a mere month, he had managed to close that gigantic gap between the Pattern Genesis Tier and the Evolving Resonance Tier. This place was actually even better than the Golden Dragon Dao Fields.

If he could cultivate here until the end of the year... Li Luo estimated that reaching Fourth Changing might even be possible.

Still, that was fancy daydreaming. The absinthe energy in Angelwood Hollow was extremely precious, and it needed to recharge and replenish for a long time after each use. There was no way they would give him such a luxury.

"The month of special training has been hard for all of you. Go back and get a good rest," Chi Chan said to them. "Also, there are three more days until the Blue Abyss Sage College's representative contingent reaches the Astral Sage College. At that time, the ticket match will officially begin."

That got their attention.

They all knew how important the ticket match was. Only with the tickets would they be able to participate in the Holy Grail Meet, the most important competition for all the elite schools in the East Divine Continent. It was not just for glory, but for real rewards.

One of the rewards was the lives of the many students that fell each year to the Umbra Cave.

The Umbra Cave was the reason for the sage colleges' establishment, but it was also a source of pain for all of them. Sacrificing student lives was just part of the price they paid for the heavy responsibility they shouldered. Being a student of such eminent colleges meant that one took the risk that came with the privileges.

If they could win the Dragon Bone Holy Grail, the Umbra Cave would be sealed for a few years. That was a priceless resource for any school.

That was why all the schools would hold nothing back at the Holy Grail Meet!

A prize that they could not pass up on.

"I'm sure you know the format of the ticket match by now: seven matches, one of which is our One Star Hall's. We don't care how the other matches go, but the One Star Hall must win.

"As for our representative, we will make a decision in the next two days.

"Also, we will be disseminating information on the Blue Abyss Sage College to all of you soon. Study it well. Although the Astral Sage College is stronger than the Blue Abyss Sage College in terms of average strength and foundation, we should never underestimate any sage college. When they set their heart to a goal, they can achieve anything."

The students nodded solemnly.

Chi Chan put up her hands formally to signify that the special training was now concluded.

Li Luo and the others shuffled out of Angelwood Hollow.

Outside, they stood on the boughs of the great Tree of Resonant Power and breathed. Li Luo stared at Xia City, barely visible on the horizon.

In about a year's time, he had gone from blank palaces to the Evolving Resonance Tier.

Still, it was no time for conceit or letting up. Li Luo knew that he had embarked on this journey as a race against his fate. House Luolan's Housemeet was coming up soon. To survive that, both he and Jiang Qing'e had done their best to improve themselves.

House Luolan was the lifework of his parents, and he would not let anyone take it away from him.

Chapter 0392: Information

Not long after special training at Angelwood Hollow ended, news had spread across the entire Astral Sage College.

The outcome shocked the entire school.

Who would have thought that Wang Hejiu, with the addition of Two Star Hall's Ye Qiuding and his squad, would still not be able to clear level 40 first? Instead, it had been snatched by Li Luo and Qin Zhulu.

Students who had not seen the battle could not believe it. They could not understand it. Ye Qiuding's Violet Vibrance squad was an elite squad in Two Star Hall. How had they not been able to beat a bunch of One Star Hall students? Had they spent the extra year of time cultivating out of a dog's kennel?

Many had assumed that Qin Zhulu and his upper eighth-grade Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance had closed the distance between the two squads.

But soon enough the truth had gotten out, and the curious gazes began to swing to Li Luo... a Fifth Pattern was capable of such feats?

The senior students were starting to seriously reevaluate Li Luo's ability and potential.

If he had been so godlike at Fifth Pattern, what more now that he was at Evolving Resonance tier? Had he already overtaken the elite Two Star Hall students like Ye Qiuding and Zhu Xuan?

A lower Hall overtaking a higher Hall.

Such a record-smashing result had only been achieved by one other in the history of Astral Sage College - Jiang Qing'e.

Was Li Luo going to join her up in the hall of glory?

...

On a balcony, in the residential tower.

Li Luo was lazing around on a chair, eyes half-closed as he soaked up some sunshine.

A thin voice and delicate fragrance approached, and Li Luo opened his eyes to see Bai Mengmeng in front of him. She had a small smile on her face, and she set down a pot of fresh tea and a folder in front of him.

"Mentor Chi Chan passed us the information."

Li Luo sat up immediately. "Information on the Blue Abyss students?"

Bai Mengmeng nodded.

Li Luo immediately took the folder with great care. For the last two days, he had been waiting eagerly for this.

"Thanks, Mengmeng," Li Luo said, not forgetting his courtesies.

She smiled, then hurried away, leaving him to it.

Li Luo quickly opened the file, reading it seriously. Although One Star Hall only had one fight, but all seven fights were going to be important.

As for the One Star Hall representative, it was likely going to be him.

The first few pages in the folder had information on the two Four Star Hall representatives from Blue Abyss Sage College. These should be the two strongest students.

"Blue Abyss Sage College, Zhong Nan. Upper eighth-grade granite resonance, and already a Heavenly Dipper General. Hailed as the Great Shield of Blue Abyss Sage College. Threat level: 5 stars."

There were a few pictures attached behind, showing an unremarkable-looking young man with thick brows and a slight ashy-gray sheen to his skin.

"Upper eighth-grade granite resonance, and a Heavenly Dipper General huh..."

Indeed, the other sage colleges were not to be underestimated. This Zhong Nan was Seven Astral Pillar-level even within Astral Sage College. And the 5-star threat rating was probably as high as it got.

He continued reading.

"Liang Kui, Four Star Hall representative, lower eighth-grade lightning resonance. Heavenly Dipper General. Hailed as the Great Spear of Blue Abyss Sage College. Threat level: 4.5 stars."

This was an ugly man with a dangerous scowl. The frown on his face - he was the kind of guy who screamed "stay away" with every fiber of his being.

These two were probably the strongest in Blue Abyss Sage College now. On Astral Sage College's side, Gong Shenjun would probably represent them, as the strongest among the Seven Astral Pillars. As for the second representative, it might be First Princess or one of the other Seven Astral Pillars.

In truth, he did not understand their strength well, so it was hard to say how these elite battles would end up.

He did not really have a stake in the Four Star Hall battles, though. He turned instead to the Three Star Hall information. That one he cared about more.

Jiang Qing'e's opponents.

He was surprised to see a very beautiful girl in the pictures. She had a slim but well-shaped body, a lovely face like a peach blossom, and the classic fair-skin-red-lips combination. Her cherry lips were half-turned up in a smile that seemed to both challenge and invite.

"Zhao Huiyin, Three Star Hall representative. Upper eighth-grade metal resonance. Earth Fiend intermediate stage, suspected late stage. Hailed as the Vixen of Blue Abyss. Tricky opponent, threat level: 5 stars."

Li Luo was surprised to see that her threat level rating was even higher than Liang Kui's. Of course, threat level was not all about pure power. It was probably calibrated according to each Hall's average power. After all, there was no way that Zhao Huiyin would ever fight a Four Star Hall student, no matter how strong she was.

He was also surprised by Zhao Huiyin's upper eighth-grade metal resonance. From her appearance, she lacked the hardness and sharpness in her features that metal resonance users usually grew into.

He tapped the picture thoughtfully. This Zhao Huiyin might well be Jiang Qing'e's opponent at the ticket match.

She seemed like a difficult opponent, but he had absolute confidence in Jiang Qing'e. As did the rest of Astral Sage College. After all, she was not called the strongest Three Star Hall student in East Divine Continent for nothing.

He continued reading.

"Yan Tai, Three Star Hall representative. Lower eighth-grade fire resonance, Earth Fiend second stage (Fiend Body stage). Threat level: 4 stars."

"Fu Xiu, Two Star Hall representative. Lower eighth-grade sonic resonance. Third Changing. Threat level: 4 stars."

"Fan Fan, Two Star Hall representative. Lower eighth-grade bone resonance. Third Changing. Threat level: 4 stars."

He skimmed only briefly through this information until he reached the last page. If he was the representative for One Star Hall, then this one would be his opponent.

Chapter 0393: Lu Cng and Lu Cng

When Li Luo flipped to the last section, he was surprised to see two faces staring up at him, and way more information than he had expected.

"Lu Cāng, One Star Hall representative. Upper eighth-grade Solaris Python resonance. First Changing. Extremely favored by Blue Abyss Sage College, and a star at this Holy Grail Meet. Threat level: 5 stars."

"Lu Cǎng, One Star Hall representative. Upper eighth-grade Lunar Python resonance. Twin brother of Lu Cāng."

"The two brothers' resonances are naturally affiliated, and their combined power is superbly strong. The two brothers defeated a Third Changing opponent together while both at Fifth Pattern. Threat level: 5 stars."

Li Luo stared at the information, reading it through again. He wasn't quite sure what to make of it. This world was really full of strangeness. He might have dual resonances, but Lu Cāng and Lu Cǎng had twin resonances... Divided they were perhaps more manageable. Together... it was scary to think about.

[TN: The Lu brothers' names are romanized in the same way, except for the tone (pinyin). This was the best I could do, although now they look Italian or something...] Still, there was only going to be one representative from One Star Hall this time. Only one of them could fight. That made the threat a little less intimidating. Li Luo poured from the pot that Bai Mengmeng had delivered, taking small sips of the hot tea. His eyes remained on the two pictures.

Their appearance was completely the same, and the similarity ended there. One was dressed in white, the other in black. One had a warm smile on his face, the other a cold, expressionless stare. The contrast was jarring.

Li Luo's instincts told him that either one would still be a tough opponent.

"We really can't underestimate the other sage colleges," he sighed to himself. "This is just the ticket match, and already the opponents are so strong..."

The Blue Abyss Sage College representatives would be arriving in a couple of days. Many of the Xia Kingdom powers were responding accordingly with attention, and of course there were betting windows opening all over Xia City.

Many of the Xia Kingdom citizens supported Astral Sage College. Although this was technically just an interschool competition, but Astral Sage College held a special place in the hearts of the citizens. Its glory was Xia's glory; its failures Xia's failures. If entry to the Holy Grail Meet was snatched away by Blue Abyss Sage College from right under their noses on home ground, it would be a painful humiliation to bear.

Li Luo set his cup down. He was thinking of principal Pang Qianyuan's task for him. If they couldn't even take the ticket match, then it was laughable to even think about the mission of getting the Dragon Bone Holy Grail.

Still, One Star Hall only had one fight in the ticket match. Even if he was chosen and won, he would only have secured them one out of seven.

Still, that was all he could do - focus on getting that 14% or so. The rest would be left to the rest of the school management to handle.

Li Luo threw the papers back on to the table, then leaned back and closed his eyes. Time for some serious planning.

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The next day, Li Luo was notified to go to one of the practice arenas.

When he arrived, he saw Chi Chan alongside the other One Star Hall students, as well as a rare sight in the form of vice principal Su Xin.

And also, Qin Zhulu.

Today was the day that the school would choose between him and Qin Zhulu.

Vice principal Su Xin conferred with the other Violet Vibrance mentors, then looked at the two boys warmly. "Both of you are the best in your year. Tomorrow, Blue Abyss Sage College will be here, and after a day of rest and readjustment, the Holy Grail Meet ticket match will officially begin."

"Both of you know how important the Holy Grail Meet is to Astral Sage College. We must not lose this ticket match."

"Although One Star Hall only has one fight, but it is an important fight nonetheless. I hope that whoever is chosen will give it their best."

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu both nodded. They were students of Astral Sage College after all. Upholding the school's reputation and winning glory was part of their responsibility too.

"The selection method is straightforward: the winner is chosen. That's what the One Star Hall Violet Vibrance mentors have agreed upon. So..."

"Whoever wins today will be chosen," vice principal Su Xin finished.

The two nodded and entered the arena.

Qin Zhulu was as excited as he had been back in Angelwood Hollow - he was almost crying from excitement. "Li Luo, I have waited for this day for so long."

Li Luo grinned back at him. "For the longest time you could have beaten me easily, any time you wanted."

Indeed, he had been much weaker than Qin Zhulu for a long time. If they had faced off then, Li Luo would have stood close to no chance of winning.

Qin Zhulu shook his head. "I don't care about winning. I want to fight an opponent that will make me sweat out of my toenails."

"The you back then could not give me that."

"But the you today can!"

Through all the times they worked together, both had a measure of the other's strength. In truth, he himself knew that his chances of winning were quite low, but he did not care. He just wanted to fight a no-holds barred battle with Li Luo.

Li Luo reached into his pocket sphere and pulled out his swords. "Come, Qin Zhulu," he called, twirling them into complex patterns. "Today, I will satisfy you."

Qin Zhulu smiled widely, his eyes turning red as his golden tiger stripes started to emerge. The animalistic aura overtook him.

ROAR!

Two savage resonant powers ripped into each other.

An hour later.

The doors to the practice arena opened again.

Students were already gathered outside, waiting to see the results firsthand.

Two people walked out.

The first was an exceedingly bright-eyed Li Luo, silver-gray hair handsomely tousled on top of his head. His clothes still bore sings and marks of battle, but he walked with a strut in his step.

Behind Li Luo was Qin Zhulu, slouching his way forward. He was covered in many more wounds, but he looked equally pleased and satisfied, with no discouragement to be seen.

Before all the students, Qin Zhulu pulled out a dark green ring, made of greenwood. The emblem of Astral Sage College was carved into it.

ROAR!

Seeing the ring, the students cheered. This was the mark of a representative, and others like Jiang Qing'e and Zhu Xuan had already received theirs.

A ceremony.

Qin Zhulu presented the ring solemnly to Li Luo.

Li Luo took it and wore it on his finger, then raised his hand for all to see.

Under the bright sunlight, the moss-green ring shone brightly.

A moment's pause in wonder, and then the cheers broke out like a waterfall.

With this, the final representative for the ticket match had been decided.

One Star Hall representative, Li Luo.

Chapter 0394: Zhao Huiyin

The next day, Astral Sage College buzzed with a lively mood.

It was the day that the Blue Abyss Sage College contingent would arrive.

The school had arranged an appropriate welcome, and even the VIPs from Xia City had made an appearance. Of course, the students had also all turned out - to see other sage colleges was a rare chance.

Loud chatter filled the school.

Li Luo stayed away from the chatter. He had already studied the information from Blue Abyss Sage College, so there was no need to go see the real thing. Not like he could glean anything new anyway. He spent his time in the middle of a lake, just opposite his tower.

Li Luo stood on the middle of the lake, eyes half-closed in concentration as his light blue water resonant power started to flow forth. It rippled down from head to toe in a pulsating rhythm, forming a sort of water armor.

In front of him, Chi Chan stood with arms crossed. She spoke softly, letting the wind and water carry her voice over to him. "With your dual resonances and the gilded white-eye Lambent Hawkeye, your offensive abilities are considered outstanding among those of your caliber. But you lack defensive abilities. I recommend you choose this tiger-general resonance art: Heavy Water Toga."

"It concentrates your water resonant power into heavy water, then cycles it around your body as a water armor that is not easily detected. It can give you a measure of safety against surprise attacks that could otherwise be deadly."

As she guided him, the water began to condense into a thin, dark armor that flowed across his skin.

Chi Chan took a hard look at his attempt, then poked at his chest with one finger. She had not put much resonant power into the poke, but it was enough to pop the water toga like a bubble.

"Your heavy water lacks sufficient speed," she said strictly, as the water crashed down back into the lake. "Use your whole body. Again."

Li Luo did not lose heart, but silently began his next attempt.

"If your heavy water is not sufficiently concentrated, then it's just a flashy waste of resonant power."

She continued to poke away at his armor again and again.

"Heavy water needs to be three-ply. You have them, but you're not layering them well together. Shapeless, yet with form. Unseeable. Continue."

"Your heavy water's too thick. Are you trying to make elephant skin?"

On and on it went.

Time ticked on, and Li Luo grew steadily more exhausted as the sun began to set over the lake. The red glow lit up both of them like an alarm.

"Mentor, I've no more resonant power," Li Luo groaned.

She laughed. "Your technique's still full of holes, but to be able to get Heavy Water Toga to this state in a few days speaks of your talent in resonance arts. The ticket match starts the day after... we will continue tomorrow."

"If you can finish it in time, it will supplement your fighting abilities greatly."

Li Luo nodded. "Thank you for the guidance."

"As your mentor, it's just my duty," she said unconcernedly. "If you can win at the ticket match, I'll get some of the credit too."

She walked off across the water, vanishing quickly into the distance. Li Luo followed, putting heavy foot after heavy foot one in front of the other until he had plodded his way back to the stone bridge that would take him back to his tower.

Finally, the excitement around school had died down in the evening, although he could still hear discussions here and there about the Blue Abyss Sage College students.

Li Luo ignored it all, lost in thought about the Heavy Water Toga art.

He was not paying attention when someone coming from the opposite direction collided with him, pressing up against his body.

Li Luo's instinctive reaction was to stick out his hand to support the person, but his palm connected with soft, fragrant flesh, eliciting an almost sexy moan.

Whoops. It was a girl.

She tumbled past his hand into his arms, and clutched at his chest for balance as well. Li Luo was afraid to move any further, putting on a friendly smile instead. "Friend, are you alright?"

The girl in his arms looked up at him and smiled. She was beautiful.

Li Luo felt a jolt of electricity run through him. Hanging around the likes of Jiang Qing'e gave him a strong immunity to beauties, but he had just seen this face yesterday...

Blue Abyss Sage College's Three Star Hall representative, Zhao Huiyin.

To think that this would be their first encounter.

Around them, people were slowing or stopping, curious and envious.

Many recognized Zhao Huiyin. After all, she was the most easily recognized out of the Blue Abyss Sage College group. It had nothing to do with her ability, and everything to do with the fact that she was a total babe. The Astral Sage College male students were looking enviously at Li Luo. Damn this guy and his luck with girls!

Zhao Huiyin blushed, and quickly stood up. "Sorry, I was looking at the scenery and didn't see you."

Li Luo quickly retracted his hand and gave her a friendly nod.

"Senior Zhao is gracious."

"You know me?" Zhao Huiyin said in surprise.

"I've read your information, and someone as beautiful as yourself is hard to forget. I'm sure that senior Zhao recognizes me as well?" As the One Star Hall representative, he was sure that Blue Abyss Sage College would have done their research on him.

Zhao Huiyin looked closely at him. "You're... Li Luo from Astral Sage College's One Star Hall?"

He nodded, then realized that they were standing a little too close. He could smell the fragrance coming off her body. He took a step back.

Zhao Huiyin took a step forward, clutching onto his arm. "I twisted my leg. Sorry, can I lean on you?"

More jealous hissing from all around them.

This luck with the ladies was going too far.

Why couldn't they be the ones who had bumped into Zhao Huiyin instead? Li Luo stared at her for a moment, feeling something was off. Soon enough he realized that the temperature around him was falling rapidly, and it had nothing to do with the setting sun. He looked up.

And saw Jiang Qing'e standing in front of him.

Chapter 0395: Emotional Plotting

Li Luo jumped a little to see Jiang Qing'e here at the bridge as well. Could it really be such a coincidence?

She was watching his every fumble and fondle with Zhao Huiyin calmly, neither distress nor amusement in her eyes.

And she stood her ground, not approaching.

Li Luo was just about to wave to her, but Zhao Huiyin took the chance when he raised his arm to press closer. The two looked as though they were embracing.

Jiang Qing'e turned and walked away.

Li Luo frowned, then gave her a rough shove, uncaring of their gender difference anymore. It was a good, solid push, but she barely moved an inch, as though he had only nudged her gently.

Li Luo, on the other hand, had pushed himself backwards two steps. Her exquisite face was looking forlorn, in a pouty, seductive sort of way.

"Junior Li Luo," she said with a hint of a smile. "Is this the rough hospitality of Astral Sage College? It's not very gentlemanly, you bad boy." "Senior Zhao, what exactly do you want?" he asked testily.

Zhao Huiyin batted her alluring lashes innocently. "Whatever are you talking about?"

"That collision was intentional, wasn't it? Truly the Vixen of Blue Abyss. Barely set foot in Astral Sage College and already stirring up trouble. I know your goal is not me, but Jiang Qing'e."

"Let me see... you knew about me and Jiang Qing'e, so you decided to play this trick and get her riled up?"

"You know how good Jiang Qing'e is, and you know you'll likely face her in the ticket match. You're trying to get an advantage, using me to provoke her and make her lose her cool," he said coolly. "Very clever, senior Zhao."

She smiled knowingly at him. "Junior Li Luo's perceptiveness is matched only by your handsomeness."

"As for Jiang Qing'e, I've read the information on her many times. She's unassailable on any front, except a soft spot for you. Seems like the betrothal between you two is more solid than most people imagine."

"I didn't really believe it myself. An exceptional girl like that, I didn't believe she would go for the other sex. But from her reaction just now, I guess I underestimated what's going on between the two of you."

"Well, at least I learned something from my little play," she laughed.

Li Luo stared at the vexing but gorgeous girl for a moment, then laughed a little strangely. "Oh senior Zhao. Angering Jiang Qing'e is not a wise decision at all."

"Believe me, you might just regret it the day after tomorrow."

Zhao Huiyin smiled unconcernedly. "Oh really? I can't wait." "Rather than me, I think junior Li Luo should worry about yourself. Our Lu brothers are hard to deal with, no matter who takes the stage."

Li Luo only smiled in response. There was no need to explain or argue further. He flicked a hand dismissively and brushed past her.

She watched him go with a half-smile on her face, then stuffed her hands in her pockets and turned to watch the lake.

A moment later, she was joined by two figures who stood one at each side.

They were dressed in black and white respectively. If Li Luo were still here, he would have recognized them immediately. They were Lu Cāng and Lu Cáng of Blue Abyss Sage College's One Star Hall.

"Senior, did your plan work?" The white-clothed Lu Cāng asked brightly.

"Plan? It was just a casual pass," she said indifferently. "I just wanted to see if the engagement was anything serious. After all, I'm quite curious as to Jiang Qing'e's orientation. If only she was a Blue Abyss student. I'd love her."

She spoke boldly, with no care as to who heard her.

The white-clothed Lu Cāng was not surprised at her declaration. Senior Zhao's sexual orientation was well-known in Blue Abyss Sage College.

"But from that little test, I think there's some real feeling between those two. I'm not sure what kind of feeling it is, but it's quite solid."

She laughed. "Of course, I wouldn't rule out the possibility that Jiang Qing'e did that on purpose to make me feel like I've successfully angered her, so that I would be the one to get careless in our fight."

Lu Cāng was stunned.

"Did you see that Li Luo?" she asked, swinging around to face the white-clothed youth on her right.

Lu Cāng nodded. "Sources say he has dual resonances, water and wood... That's really rare, but I think my chances of winning are a little higher than his."

Zhao Huiyin looked back out over the water. "Don't underestimate him. Astral Sage College is a stronger school than ours. We've bided our time for many years before the school managed to nurture this

lineup. It's just bad luck that Astral Sage College would draw a trump card like Jiang Qing'e in the same hand. And also a dual resonance Li Luo."

"Well, the only way to find out who's better is to fight," Lu Cāng laughed, a little arrogance in his tone.

Zhao Huiyin nodded slightly, then turned to leave.

"Let's go. See what sort of delicacies Astral Sage College has."

...

Li Luo walked briskly back to the tower. When he pushed open the door, he saw Jiang Qing'e and Bai Mengmeng sitting opposite each other at the table, sharing pleasant conversation.

Her golden eyes flicked up to him, then away just as quickly.

Bai Mengmeng got to her feet. "Leader, are you back from cultivating? I'll go brew you some tea." Li Luo smiled his thanks, then sat down on Jiang Qing'e's side. Hands on his cheeks, he smiled sunnily at her.

"You wouldn't really be angry, would you? You're smart enough to see through Zhao Huiyin's little tricks."

Jiang Qing'e took a delicate sip from her cup with a smile.

"I guess I'll have to thank junior Lu Qing'er for my lack of anger. With her around, how could a feeble attempt like Zhao Huiyin's hope to anger me?"

Chapter 0396: Reward

Li Luo was taken aback by Jiang Qing'e's words.

"Er, surely not? Lu Qing'er hasn't done much," he said, scratching his head.

She sniffed lightly to herself. Nothing much? Lu Qing'er had come to her and suggested that she call off the engagement to Li Luo. Of course, Lu Qing'er believed that there was no true love between her and Li Luo, and that the engagement was a burden to both parties. Still, anyone who dared to go that far with her had done a lot indeed.

Compared to that, Zhao Huiyin's little bit of skinship was nothing at all.

Of course, someone as proud as Jiang Qing'e would never let Li Luo know about it. She would deal with any real problems that came up.

"I know what Zhao Huiyin wants to do, so I'm happy to let her feel that she's accomplished it. Let her play her little games - I'll bait her back with them. Let's see who suffers at the ticket match in the end," Jiang Qing'e said indifferently as she set her teacup back down.

Li Luo was a little startled. Was he just a pawn in the game of chess between the two girls?

"Do you really need to play such games given how strong you are?" Li Luo grumbled.

Zhao Huiyin might be strong, but Li Luo had absolute confidence in Jiang Qing'e.

"Even a lion dedicates its full effort to catch rabbits. And saving every little bit of energy counts. Zhao Huiyin is a clever person - and wiser people make bigger mistakes. Any of those would be welcome indeed."

Jiang Qing'e laughed lightly. "Still, she's smart enough not to buy my act... maybe. It doesn't matter. Just a small hedging either way. The real result still depends on our abilities."

"I hope she doesn't let me down. Even Duze Honglian has been squashed so flat she doesn't even have a temper anymore. I'm totally bored in Three Star Hall. Except for the occasional happening, I don't find much meaning here."

Li Luo was in awe of her boredom. That was the result of her relentless pursuit of self-betterment. It was always lonely at the top of the mountain.

"How do you weigh our chances of winning the ticket match, do you think?" Li Luo asked her.

She dipped an elegant finger in her tea, then dripped it on the table and used light resonant energy to shift it into shimmering words.

"The Four Star Hall representatives are already decided. Gong Shenjun and First Princess. The two strongest among the Seven Astral Pillars... do you think they'll secure two victories there?" she asked him back.

Li Luo rubbed his chin. "I guess?"

He had never seen Gong Shenjun fight before, but he had a rough sense of First Princess' power. If Gong Shenjun was even stronger than her, then surely the two could take down Blue Abyss Sage College's representatives?

Jiang Qing'e shook her head. "You've underestimated that Zhong Nan."

"I've analyzed his battle scores before. Do you know that he's never lost a single battle ever since he entered Blue Abyss Sage College?"

Li Luo's jaw dropped. "Not a single one?!"

She smiled at his reaction. "Most of his battles have ended in a draw. No one at his cultivation level has ever broken his defenses. They have all had their resonant powers run dry at the end. Not even that Wang Chao from the Seven Astral Pillars can rival his defense."

Li Luo shook his head in disbelief. Senior Wang Chao was hailed as the strongest defender of Astral Sage College. And still he was weaker than Zhong Nan?

"If Gong Shenjun meets Zhong Nan, there's a 40% chance it ends in a draw. If First Princess, 60%. The best that Four Star Hall can hope for is one win, and one draw," she said.

"As for Three Star Hall, the chances of my win are over 90%. Duze Honglian is not very stable, but there's no one outstanding for Three Star Hall on the Blue Abyss side either. I'd rate her chances fifty-fifty."

"Two Star Hall is a wasteland this year. It's a matter of who's worse, really. Nothing much to rate there."

"One Star Hall... what do you think?" she suddenly turned to stare at him.

Li Luo pondered her question. "In terms of facial aesthetics, charismatic persuasion and sexiness, factor in charm and mainstream appeal, and recalibrate for wit... I think Astral Sage College's One Star Hall representative stands an overwhelming chance to win," he said with utter conviction.

Jiang Qing'e stared at him. Did he think the ticket match was a beauty contest? If that was the case, she'd be invincible in this world already.

Li Luo allowed himself a little giggle, then got serious. "I've never met Lu Cāng or Lu Cáng before, but they make me a little uneasy, somehow. I really can't speak from blind confidence, so I guess I'll just try my best."

She nodded in approval at his caution. "That makes me relieved. The world is big, and there are unknown miracles everywhere. Even with your dual resonances, there can be others who can rival you for sure. Lu Cāng and Lu Cáng give me sinister vibes as well. They might be the real aces of Blue Abyss Sage College."

"Putting their trump cards in the One Star Hall match?" Li Luo asked. "The element of surprise only works when no one is paying attention. You should know that Blue Abyss Sage College has bided their time for many years to make this bid for the Holy Grail Meet. They're slightly weaker than Astral Sage College on average. Without some trump card, it'd be hard for them to win."

Li Luo nodded. "I'll be careful."

The two continued to chat, and soon the sun had fully set before they knew it. Jiang Qing'e rose to leave.

Li Luo walked her to the door. The golden girl was bathed in the light of the full moon, her glowing complexion mellowed in the fair cast of lunar silver. She was like a night lotus, freshly bloomed.

Li Luo's breath caught for a moment.

Jiang Qing'e smiled at his staring. "Am I pretty? Better than Zhao Huiyin?" "I'd be lying if I said the difference was as big as clouds and mud, but with you around, her honey trap's more likely to give me diabetes before I take off my clothes," Li Luo said, summoning his wit back to the rescue.

She laughed. "Tongue as silver as ever."

She waved as she turned to leave.

Li Luo caught the wrist of her outstretched hand. Jiang Qing'e jumped a little, but did not pull away, instead staring at him curiously.

"Is there something else?"

Li Luo cleared his throat. "Ahem. So I became the One Star Hall representative."

"I know?"

"I beat Qin Zhulu two days ago."

"I have heard this." She nodded.

Li Luo glared at her. "So I've become the most valuable player in One Star Hall at Astral Sage College now! Jiang Qing'e, do you remember the promise you made previously?!"

"You said that if I became first in Astral Sage College One Star Hall, you'd give me a reward!"

"Now I've done it! Where's my reward?!" She stared at him, eyes wide.

Li Luo looked at her surprised face, then sighed with disappointment. "Forget it, I know you were only joking. It's nothing. Go on then."

Hearing his resignation, Jiang Qing'e was a little indignant as well. "I really hadn't thought about it yet. What reward do you want?"

Li Luo rubbed his chin, affecting casualness. He took a good look at Jiang Qing'e's beautiful face to weigh his chances.

She seemed to welcome his staring, completely unbothered. Their relationship ran too deep. She had not shown any resistance to Li Luo's advances or movements so far. Even if he did something pretty intimate, she'd probably go with it.

But her willingness instead disappointed Li Luo, who sighed again. He dropped the casual act.

"What is it now?" Jiang Qing'e asked impatiently.

"Qing'e, you make me feel very unaccomplished," Li Luo complained.

"What? Am I supposed to pull away or resist? I was more worried I'd hurt you!" she replied. Li Luo mimed being stabbed in the heart as he forced a laugh. "Qing'e, we've had a complicated relationship in the past, but you know what I really want, including the annulment of the engagement that I've worked so hard for."

Jiang Qing'e looked closely at him. She knew that this was not about the annulment, but rather, a change in the nature of their relationship.

Li Luo had grown at superhuman pace over the course of the last year. The blank palace youth from Tianshu province had now become one of the greatest in his generation throughout Xia Kingdom.

He had been working so hard to get closer to her level. No one doubted his potential anymore, nor did anyone call them unmatched partners. "Qing'e, I don't need any reward, really," Li Luo sighed. "I just want you to lay down the complicated emotional baggage from our past. Treat me as just another interested pursuer."

"Think about it. If it was just another interested pursuer just now, what would your reaction have been?"

Jiang Qing'e pondered briefly. "He'd be dead."

Li Luo blanched. "Er, surely not?"

Jiang Qing'e laughed. "Li Luo, I know what you want to say," she said softly. "Even I've been surprised by your rise in the last year. Like I told you before, you're the match of anybody, including me."

"But to call you just another admirer... that's something I can't do."

Before Li Luo could retort, she continued. "But whatever you do, whatever we have, you're definitely the admirer with the most chance, and the best able to do so."

And the only one worthy of consideration, she added to herself in her heart.

It was a bittersweet reply for Li Luo. At least he had a grasp of reality now.

Something swirled in her golden eyes. "Li Luo, you're right - there's been too much between us in the past. Too deep for me to put aside, but I can try..."

"And there is one very clear promise I can give you."

"What is that?" Li Luo's heart skipped a beat.

She smiled, and again his breath was taken away.

"On the day you become stronger than me, we'll annul the engagement."

Chapter 0397: Gathering of Elders

The day of the ticket match finally dawned upon them.

On this day, half of Xia City had a ear out towards the nearby campus, and many of the city's highest elites had secured seats through their various connections. Those not as well-connected had to settle for watching footage through specialized equipment that had been placed throughout the cities.

It was the match of the year, citizens of Xia Kingdom spraining their necks craning out for the event on the horizon.

The first ray of morning sun pierced the horizon, shining onto the cloud layer like a spotlight from below.

The ticket match was held at the back mountain range - the clusters of mountains were perfect for stadium seats - stone steps carved into their natural elevation.

There was no arena specially carved out for battle, but there were different terrains available, including forests, lakes, and swamps.

By the time Li Luo, Bai Mengmeng, and Xin Fu reached, the crowd was already out in strength, little dots of faces covering the mountain faces. The enclosing geography of the mountains only helped to amplify their loudness.

"Li Luo!"

At the entrance, he heard the familiar voice of Lu Qing'er, and turned to see her waving at him. Yu Hongxi was by her side, in her signature sexy red.

Li Luo had expected to see them around, but he was still surprised by the unusual company around them on this day.

To Yu Hongxi's right was Zhu Qinghuo, the house lord of House Jiyan. Behind him was Zhu Xuan.

The Duze siblings were present as well, although they too were standing behind a black-robed man with an unfriendly demeanor. His hands were crossed in front of him, striking an imposing manner.

Li Luo had never seen this man before, but immediately knew who he was.

House Duze's house lord, Duze Yan.

Si Qiuying could be spotted among them as well. There was a man in golden robes before her. He looked to be about the same age as Duze Yan, but much more cultured and polished, looking like a gleaming bar of gold where Duze Yan was an iron ingot. This was the house lord of House Jinque, Si Qing.

This was a group of extremely powerful elders. Three house lords of the five Great Houses - that was how important the ticket match was.

The elders had been talking among themselves, but paused when Lu Qing'er called out. They all turned to the youth walking towards them.

Li Luo walked towards them, head held high. After all, he too was the young lord of House Luolan. Even though he might be far from them in terms of ability, but in the absence of his parents, he represented the house. He could not let House Luolan lose face here.

The three house lords watched his fearless approach with some wariness. In his stride, they saw an image of the legendary duo.

And thinking of those two... a measure of caution crept into their eyes.

When Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had been around, the entire Duke class in Xia Kingdom had been crushed by them.

"President Yu, house lords." Li Luo greeted them calmly.

House Jiyan's Zhu Qinghuo acknowledged him with a small smile. "In less than a year, this boy Li Luo has already become the foremost fighter in Astral Sage College One Star Hall. Seems like there will soon be a new dragon and phoenix risen within the halls of House Luolan. Keke, it reminds me of House Luolan's golden days when Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan were around."

Duze Yan narrowed his eyes at that remark. When House Luolan fell, the other houses had all risen correspondingly. None of them wanted to see House Luolan rise again. If a new Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan emerged, the rest of them would be doomed for more long years of misery!

Li Luo looked mildly at Zhu Qinghuo. Of course he understood the malice hidden in those words. There was already a big target on House Luolan's back, but Zhu Qinghuo was happily painting the bullseye bigger, and in a brighter shade of red.

Sly old dog.

"Zhu Qinghuo, surely you're thinking too far. Li Luo is only a Resonant Master now. Were you traumatized by the beatings from Li Taixuan back in the day?" Jinque's house lord Si Qing laughed.

Zhu Qinghuo's shoulders froze. "As if you weren't the same," he said coldly.

"Can't help it if I'm not as good," Si Qing said, shrugging it off easily.

Li Luo did not rise to the taunts of Zhu Qinghuo, nor was he overcome by Si Qing's intervention. The five Great Houses were locked in a complex political mesh. Even if House Jinque appeared a little more friendly, it was ultimately in their own interests to keep House Luolan around as cannon fodder against the firepower of Houses Jiyan and Duze.

He would be naive to think that it was out of the goodness of their hearts.

"Enough, Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan might not even be dead yet," Yu Hongxi cut short the oily musings of the house lords.

Her words cut back deep, shutting them all up. Zhu Qinghuo and Duze Yan gave it up immediately. That the pair had not yet been confirmed dead was the reason why House Luolan had been left alone all these years, even though it had been vulnerable.

The Nobles' Battlefield was a very real danger, but if the pair could emerge alive, Xia Kingdom would be shaken up by their return.

Besides, they too felt a little hint of defensiveness from Yu Hongxi, which had not been present before. Hadn't she always been cold towards House Luolan before? The two had rarely interacted in the past. Why had things changed since Li Luo's rise?

Was it because of Lu Qing'er?

In any case, she was the center of financial power here in Xia Kingdom, and neither dared to reply. They turned away and walked into the tournament grounds.

"You grow fast, Li Luo," Yu Hongxi said as they left. "But you're still a long way away from protecting your house."

"I know," he agreed. "Still, I'll do my best."

"You're much more reserved compared to Li Taixuan. Maybe it's just your blank palace start that conditioned you to caution," Yu Hongxi said. "But now you're in the open at Xia City. There can be no more hiding. And if you can't hide, perhaps it's time to embrace your full shine."

"Besides, Jiang Qing'e might be hailed as a genius of your time, but I don't think you'd lose to her. Do your best. House Luolan has always had stronger women than men. About time you flipped the tables for your time, eh?"

She turned to leave as well.

Lu Qing'er beamed at him. "Good luck, Li Luo!"

She followed her mother in.

Li Luo stared ruefully at the mother and daughter pair.

Was Yu Hongxi helping him? Or was she trying to stir something between him and Jiang Qing'e? Women were complicated creatures indeed.

Chapter 0398: Ticket Match Begins

At the One Star Hall stands, Li Luo filed in with the others to loud cheers.

"Go, brother Luo!"

"Brother Luo, show them you're the One Star in One Star Hall!"

"Brother Luo, sweep me off my feet until they're over my head and-"

"..."

The cheers today were raucously creative, for what was now the undisputed first in their cohort after he had defeated Qin Zhulu formally.

The One Star Hall area got so noisy that even the Two Star Hall crowd started to look over. Although they traditionally held a psychological advantage over their juniors, it had evaporated ever since the Angelwood Hollow incident, when Ye Qiuding's squad had lost out to Li Luo's squad. The message was loud and clear now. The One Star Hall cohort's quality was not the same.

Although Li Luo was only a First Changing for now, but he could probably take on Third Changing cultivators and win.

Which meant that only Zhu Xuan in all of Two Star Hall could give him a fight.

Such a glowing record had not been matched by many in the history of Astral Sage College. And none of them had ever been nobodies.

Look all they wanted - they had no choice but to acknowledge that Li Luo's generation was much stronger than theirs.

Plus, when they were in One Star Hall themselves, the goddess Jiang Qing'e had been in Two Star Hall, crushing them flat into the dust. They themselves had never even dreamed of challenging their seniors. Not even for the likes of Zhu Xuan.

"Leader, Astral Sage College will win this thing, right?" Bai Mengmeng asked Li Luo.

"Hard to say before the outcome is decided," Li Luo said with a rueful smile. "Blue Abyss Sage College might have a weaker background than Astral Sage College, but they haven't been sitting around on their asses doing nothing, that's for sure. And they probably have an ace or two up their sleeve somewhere."

"Of course, we don't need to be overly paranoid either. Our lineup is freaking awesome too. Let the results speak for themselves."

Besides the burden Two Star Hall members, the other Halls all had heavy-duty fighters anchoring the matches. Gong Shenjun in Four Star Hall, Jiang Qing'e in Three Star Hall, and himself, the mighty Li Luo, in One Star Hall.

Li Luo was watching the left platform as he chatted with Bai Mengmeng, watching an unfamiliar group navigate the crowd. They were a few dozen strong, and Li Luo spotted Zhao Huiyin in their midst.

The Blue Abyss contingent.

She seemed to sense his eyes on her, and turned in his direction. Their eyes met, then Zhao Huiyin looked away with a coy smile that was noted by the hungry gazes of the Astral Sage College male students.

Had Li Luo already subdued one major opponent with his charms even before the battle started?

"Leader, are you planning to win the war without fighting? That's impressive." Xin Fu sighed in admiration. His leader was always reaching new heights before he could even dream of them. Li Luo rolled his eyes. It was Bai Mengmeng who had a better read of the situation. "Senior Zhao is a master of emotion. I think perhaps only senior Jiang or First Princess can rival her in that."

Li Luo gave her a solid thumbs up. "Mengmeng's read is spot on. That Zhao Huiyin is no kind soul. Those who underestimate her will be swallowed whole without even a bone left behind."

Bai Mengmeng giggled. "Well, that's if she gets the chance to do the eating. Leader is too smart to not have seen through her tricks."

Li Luo sighed happily. Mengmeng was the best cheerleader.

A sonorous chime rang through the mountains.

As it died away, all eyes turned to the highest platform, where a group of purple-robed figures walked out.

These were the Violet Vibrance mentors of Astral Sage College.

Following them were the VIPs of Xia Kingdom, including Yu Hongxi and the other house lords. Li Luo also spotted the little emperor, with the Regent by his side.

Lastly was the representative of the hosts, vice principal Su Xin. She was escorted by another elder in blue robes, the vice principal of Blue Abyss Sage College. His name was Qiu Jizi. As for principal Pang Qianyuan, he was nowhere to be seen... as usual.

Many students were disappointed, hoping for a glimpse of their greatest leader at one of the most important events for the entire school. No luck here.

The Regent noted the disappointed murmurs of the crowd. "Vice principal Su Xin, is principal Pang still inside?"

The Xia Kingdom elders, including Yu Hongxi, all turned at his question, interested in the answer. Everyone knew that Pang Qianyuan was considered the strongest in all of Xia Kingdom.

Su Xin shook her head apologetically. "The principal has been shut away for many years, unable to take his leave."

"That's a pity," Regent said. "I've not seen the legend for a good few years now."

"Please be assured that he should be able to get away soon," she assured him.

He smiled and nodded. "That's good. Principal Pang is the only King in all of Xia Kingdom. I have wanted to consult him on the path to King for a while now."

Vice principal Su Xin nodded pleasantly back to him before walking to the central position on the platform. She first addressed their guests, Blue Abyss Sage College, speaking courtesies and words of welcome. And then she got down to business.

"This ticket match will decide whether Astral Sage College is granted a place to compete at the Holy Grail Meet. It goes without saying that we have sent our seven strongest representatives for this fight. I hope that you will do your best. This too is a mark of respect for our guests who have come from afar."

The students cheered.

"It is about time. The time for speeches is over. Let me formally declare the beginning of the Holy Grail Meet ticket match!"

"According to the rules, the battles will be fought from highest to lowest. The first match will be between the Four Star Hall representatives."

The crowd roared its approval.

"Gong Shenjun!"

"Gong Luanyu!"

As the two strongest students of Astral Sage College presently, their reputation among the students was unrivaled. It was a reputation born of experience and proof, solid and dependable. It was much more real than the reputation of someone like Li Luo, built on intangible potential.

The two champions walked out to a stone platform.

Gong Shenjun and the First Princess.

On the other side, their opponents walked out to face them.

Blue Abyss Sage College, Zhong Nan and Liang Kui.

All four nodded in acknowledgment to each other.

Next would be the drawing of lots to decide their opponents.

Both sides were familiar with the process, reaching into a stone box to pull out a pellet that opened to reveal slips of paper within. All four held their slips up.

All eyes strained to read them.

First Princess held the slip with "One" written on it, and the corresponding slip from Blue Abyss Sage College was held by...

Zhong Nan!

The Four Star Hall students were looking concerned now. First Princess was going to have to go against Blue Abyss Sage College's greatest shield...

Did she really have the firepower to take down that defense?

Otherwise, the first match might well end in a draw.

Chapter 0399: First Princess VS Zhong Nan

When the match up was revealed between First Princess and Zhong Nan, many of the students looked concerned, but quickly rallied in support behind their representative.

"First Princess, you got this!"

"First Princess, you're the best!"

"The Star of Astral Sage!"

On the lot-drawing platform, First Princess acknowledged her supporters with a gracious smile. Today, she had shed the luxurious outfits, clad in simple purple robes. Still, her natural attributes were too voluptuous to be hidden even by simple clothing. Her fair complexion, too, was a classic mark of royalty.

Today, she had tied her hair in a long ponytail, a new style that drew additional attention to her. It was as though she had shed her status as First Princess, and was now just another member of Astral Sage College.

Even without the gild of royalty on her, First Princess had raw beauty abound. No wonder all the male students in Astral Sage College had been enamored... before Jiang Qing'e showed up.

"First Princess is not only beautiful, she has the charisma." Even Bai Mengmeng was charmed by First Princess. And of course, she was awed by the curves of her senior.

Li Luo nodded fervently. First Princess was an exceptional woman indeed. Despite her royal status, she had an approachable feel to her in school. She spoke well, was good natured, and was different from other girls who wielded their charms aggressively. Her stability and cool nature were also her strengths.

Still, the results of this lottery were not the best.

From Astral Sage College's perspective, it was best that Gong Shenjun face Zhong Nan. He stood a better chance at breaking through that rock wall, although it was still not a guarantee... In the end, either one might have only secured a draw.

The great aegis of Blue Abyss Sage College was as strong as they came.

Still, there was great anticipation for this battle. And for Li Luo, he could witness a fight between Heavenly Dipper Generals firsthand. That was a real treat.

First Princess turned her phoenix eyes to the young man with a grayish cast to his skin. "Senior Zhong Nan, I hope to learn much from you."

Zhong Nan simply nodded. "I thank First Princess for your courtesy," he droned tonelessly, sounding almost bored. "This match concerns the future of my school, Blue Abyss Sage College, so I will do my best."

"As will I."

Dong!

The chime sounded to signal the start of the battle.

Both Zhong Nan and First Princess leaped down from the stone platform to the mountain range below that would be the battlefield for this match.

One's connection with the world deepened at the Heavenly Dipper General, enough to be able to move through the air at will. This was one of the main differences from the Earth Fiend stage, where one remained grounded. The two descended into a sea of trees.

First Princess raised a slim hand, and the worldly natural energy leaped obediently to her command. Thin streams of energy flowed towards her, pooling together in the form of a green Luan that stretched out for a hundred meters behind her.

The Luan continued to grow, until every beat of its wings summoned a fearsome wind that made the forest bend and groan.

This was her opening move?

Li Luo's eyes were almost popping out of his sockets. Was this what the Heavenly Dipper General stage was like? Capable of summoning catastrophic levels of damage at will, it was truly worlds above his Resonant Master stage.

"Caw!"

The green Luan keened, then swooped out on its wings of light when First Princess jabbed her finger forwards.

ROAR!

The bird continued gathering energy as it flew, absorbing it from both sky and ground. It flew out like a sword of Heaven, straight and true as it sliced through the treetops, its claws raking deep troughs in the ground.

It looked strong enough to level the entire mountain range.

The spectators' scalps prickled with fear, and thanked the gods that such power was not aimed at them. In the face of the green destruction bearing down on him, Zhong Nan barely blinked. He was perched on top of a tree, stretching out a hand and bringing his own power to bear.

A gray-white resonant power started to condense in the air, and soon formed a wall of rock, as wide as the Luan's wingspan.

ROAR!

The green light smashed into the outer face. The first layer of rocks were pulverized immediately. Deeper and deeper it bit into the rock wall. The second layer of rocks were ground down into dust. The third layer was ripped out of the wall easily. On and on the attack traveled, and yet there was always another layer of rock waiting behind. Finally, the attack fizzled out against the last wall of rock.

First Princess' first attack had been blocked.

She accepted it calmly as well. If Zhong Nan could not even defend against such an attack, his reputation had to be a sham.

The battle was just beginning.

First Princess' slender frame rose into the air, green Luan wings spreading out behind her. Blades of green wind showered down on Zhong Nan in a majestic storm of knives.

Zhong Nan remained immovable. Again his gray resonant power rose, this time rising through the air like smoke until it covered half the sky. It solidified in an instant, an impregnable rock wall that sheltered him from the rain of knives.

All around his umbrella of rock, trees fell to the rain of devastation.

The destructive power was incredible.

Seeing that her attack was having no effect on Zhong Nan, First Princess desisted. Closing her eyes, she began to gather her resonant power again.

This time she was transforming her resonant power within her, fashioning them into tangible shapes.

Little orbs of light started to appear behind her.

Each of these orbs held a green jewel of light within them, condensed resonant power in deadly amounts.

There were a total of seven orbs that began a lazy circle around First Princess.

On the viewing platform, even the Dukes' eyes were wide open in admiration at this mastery and power.

Seven heavenly pearls, that First Princess had produced. This was quite a feat, and not an attack to be underestimated.

Chapter 0400: Seven Heavenly Pearls

"Seven heavenly pearls... First Princess has both talent and foundation, for sure."

Everyone, including Li Luo, was very impressed with her display of power.

The Heavenly Dipper General stage was divided into two sub-stages.

Heavenly Pearl stage.

Heavenly Resonance stage.

It was called the Heavenly Pearl stage because one's resonant power would begin to naturally condense into these pearl-shaped forms at the Heavenly Dipper General stage. They were called heavenly pearls because of their magical properties; when resonant power formed these pearls, they became even stronger.

Because heavenly pearls were condensed energy bodies, they reacted crisply to the worldly natural energy around them. In battle, they made one even stronger.

It was said that the Heavenly Pearl stage had nine pearls. This meant that one could technically max out with nine heavenly pearls. However, those that reached that stage were rare. Creating each heavenly pearl not only severely tested one's talent and potential, but also required a ridiculous amount of

cultivation resources. That was why most of the Heavenly Pearl stage cultivators chose to aim for the breakthrough to the Heavenly Resonance stage once they reached about five pearls. Only the truly brave would choose the longer path of condensing more heavenly pearls, maximizing their capacity before they chose to make the breakthrough.

Of course, their eventual breakthrough would pay off with both a deeper foundation and power ceiling compared to those who made the breakthrough at five heavenly pearls.

The Heavenly Pearl stage was basically a preparatory stage.

This was also why it was impressive that First Princess had seven heavenly pearls. It was testament to her ambition and drive to go for more.

From the moment she revealed her seven pearls, it signaled the beginning of the battle in earnest.

BOOM!

Worldly energy started to gather naturally around her heavenly pearls, forming a cyclone of worldly natural energy powered by the seven pearls.

The pearls hummed as they gravitated towards each other slowly, until they were touching. The ring of pearls was vibrating with such energy that it were warping the space around it.

First Princess' face was tense with concentration as she bent her fingers slightly, then extended them with a decisive point towards Zhong Nan.

Behind her, the seven heavenly pearls roared forwards, re-entering her body and flowing to her fingertip.

Her fingertip glittered with brilliant green light.

"Luan's Wingstorm."

The scream of the luan filled the skies as a thin thread of green power shot forth. The power of typhoons were contained within that thin thread of power.

Evidently, First Princess had prepared a special move to take down the defensive specialist Zhong Nan.

First Princess' move was enough to put a look of concern on Zhong Nan's face. He took a deep breath and dug deep into his own reserves of resonant power. Behind him, pearls of light began to form as well. There were seven of them as well!

However, the seventh heavenly pearl he produced was noticeably dimmer in brilliance compared to the other six.

He stomped the ground heavily. "Nine-layered Heavenly Stone Barricade!"

Rumble!

The earth opened up obediently with craters, hissing a grayish resonant power upwards like geysers. They formed layer after layer of stonework in front of Zhong Nan, interlocking and reinforcing each

other. They were further linked by threads of glowing white power. It made one despair just looking upon it. Whoosh!

The green light lasered the doors, and the overflowing power leveled the trees nearby.

Three stone barricades fell in an instant.

Which left six more.

Still, it was just the beginning. By the time the dust and debris cloud from the first impact dissipated, three more laser beams had flown out to take down a barricade each. With a tremendous rumbling, the last remaining barricades fell soon after, and still there was one last laser beam that punched clear through, zipping towards Zhong Nan's body.

As the green light flashed towards him, Zhong Nan took one heavy step back, his foot smashing into the ground with the weight of a mountain.

He crossed his arms before him, and they glowed with ashy gray power, hardening into ancient rock.

Ping!

The green light flowed around his arms, pushing him further and further backwards. His legs strained to anchor him, but he was carried away hundreds of meters backwards as they left two narrow furrows in the ground.

Finally Zhong Nan managed to hold his ground. He still showed no signs of panic, and a crack appeared on his forearms, but was quickly patched by his white resonant power.

Gasp!

On the viewing platform, everyone inhaled sharply. To think that Zhong Nan was so sick that he could defend against First Princess' best attack and emerge unharmed.

The great shield of Blue Abyss Sage College was nobody to mess with.

Everyone could tell that Zhong Nan had not made a single offensive move yet. All of his skill was concentrated in defense, and his goal was clear - not to secure a win, but to endure until time was up.

The students' eyes flicked frequently to the brass pot on the viewing platform, in which a half-meter long joss stick was planted firmly. When the joss stick was completely burned, then a draw would be declared.

First Princess did not seem to share the same fears as the spectators. Her eyes were just as steady. She had expected as much - especially because her sources of information extended far beyond what Astral Sage College could provide. When she studied his battle records, she had seen such defensive abilities well recorded.

Still, she had come prepared as well; prepared to test who had the greater endurance.

She was not one to surrender easily.

Eyelids fluttering down in concentration, the green luan figure appeared beneath her feet again, as did the seven heavenly pearls behind her. The pearls entered the green luan figure.

Whish!

The ethereal figure grew more and more solid with each heavenly pearl that entered it, until now it looked like a real green luan ready to take flight.

Overwhelming power threatened.

First Princess stood precisely on the head of the figurine, and then her cherry-red lips moved.

"Secret green luan technique: Luan's Conflagration!"