

## Resonance 411

### Chapter 0411: The Decider

Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding's losses was a nasty bucket of cold water on the spirits of the Astral Sage College.

The cheerful, competitive mood in the air had dried up, leaving behind a stuffy, sullen silence. The students were disgusted at the consecutive losses.

Before the Two Star Hall, the Astral Sage College had a glowing two wins and two draws. All they needed was one more win, and they would not even have to go to the One Star Hall fight. Ideally, they would secure the Holy Grail Meet invite with a comfortable margin.

But the Two Star Hall was a complete disgrace.

It was a known fact that the Two Star Hall was the weakest out of the four. The Four Star Hall had the Seven Astral Pillars—their reserve pool was by far the deepest. The Three Star Hall had the monster Jiang Qing'e, who had single-handedly lifted up her entire generation.

Even the youngest One Star Hall had the dual resonance Li Luo.

The Two Star Hall was a dim, sputtering candle amidst the bright bonfires.

Still, the Blue Abyss Sage College's Two Star Hall representatives were not particularly strong either. All they had to do was win one... no, all they had to do was secure two draws, and overall victory would still have been the Astral Sage College's.

Not even a single draw.

So now both schools were evenly matched—two wins, two draws, and two losses apiece. They were back at square one. All of the carefully groomed advantages for the Astral Sage College... now nullified.

“Grrr!”

The students hissed and cursed, making their frustrations clear. The Two Star Hall students hung their heads in shame. Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding had let all of them down.

Their failures had broken the momentum and led that the Three and Four Star Hall seniors had worked so hard to win.

And amidst the booing, the more optimistic ones turned their attention to the One Star Hall.

Specifically, the silver-haired protagonist, Li Luo.

Suddenly, the round that no one was sure would even come about had become the pivot point for the entire ticket match. "So it comes down to the One Star Hall match," the First Princess said, barely hiding her irritation.

Who would have thought that the Two Star Hall would be nothing but feeble pushovers?

On the spectators stand with her were other famous students, including the rest of the Seven Astral Pillars. They were all looking a little lost.

"It all comes down to Li Luo now. Can he carry us to victory?" a hulking youth asked in a rumbling voice. It was Wang Chao, also of the Seven Astral Pillars.

"The decider, huh... If he wins, they'll cheer him until our ears fall off. If he loses, they'll curse him until his ears fall off... Whose ears' it gonna be?" Zhong Taiqiu snickered. He was one of the Seven Astral Pillars too.

Indeed, losing such an important competition would create a lot of pent up anger and frustration, and the losers would get all the heat. Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding were on that list, of course, but if Li Luo lost as well, he would have his fair share of hostility.

"You shouldn't underestimate that junior of ours," the First Princess said with a knowing smile.

"We aren't," Gong Shenjun replied. "But I have to wonder if the Blue Abyss Sage College has been aiming for this from the start. And if all has been going according to their plan, then we can only imagine that they must have planned something for the last round too."

"You mean they're betting on the One Star Hall match?" the First Princess asked, astounded. "How risky is that?"

Gong Shenjun inclined his head. "Let's look at Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding's rounds. They're not really to blame for their losses. Strictly speaking, they were evenly matched. But their opponents brought a reckless resolution to win, and that was where the difference lay. Both their finishing moves exacted a terrible price on their bodies. They might have won, but they will be plagued by permanent damage in the future.

"To make two excellent students pay such a price... The Blue Abyss Sage College must have given them a guarantee—drowned them in riches and other compensation that would make them agree. No ordinary person would be willing to do so otherwise.

"Glory alone cannot be enough for them to give up their futures.

"Which means that the Blue Abyss Sage College must have been targeting these two Two Star Hall fights from the start. They could recoup their earlier losses in one vicious spurt of effort.

"They're gambling two brilliant students' futures... all on this One Star Hall representative. That is the level of absolute confidence they have in him. Li Luo is excellent, none of us refute that. But is he that good?"

It was an acute analysis from Gong Shenjun. The other students were in full agreement, and now they turned to regard Li Luo with new concern.

Were they all walking straight into the Blue Abyss Sage College's trap? Or would Li Luo break it all apart?

Vice Principal Su Xin turned to her Blue Abyss counterpart. "Vice Principal Qiu, Blue Abyss has held nothing back for this competition, I see."

"Your needling is very unkind, Vice Principal Su Xin," Qiu Jizi said with a mild smile. "We are not on the level of the Astral Sage College. Desperate times call for desperate measures."

"Desperation is not a sustainable form of progress," Su Xin replied.

"Is that so?" Qiu Jizi laughed.

Su Xin did not reply. She too knew that such remarks served no greater purpose. Both wanted the ticket to the Holy Grail Meet. Of course, they would hold nothing back. Still, it was grating to see their early lead gone.

The elders had come to the same conclusion now, and all their thoughts were on the One Star Hall youth.

"Keke, looks like House Luolan will steal the thunder today." House Jinque's Si Qing laughed.

Zhu Qinghuo's face was dark, anger simmering in his eyes. Zhu Xuan's loss had made him lose face among the houses!

"Perhaps the thunder might end up electrocuting him instead," Duzhe Yan said coldly.

Yu Hongxi took a small sip of tea. "It's not a bad thing for youngsters to taste failure. But the best of them know when success is theirs and reach out to take it. The pressure in this round is high, but Li Luo might just live up to it."

The house lords fell silent.

At the side, the little emperor pumped a silent fist to himself. He was rooting for Li Luo.

Li Luo stood up.

#### **Chapter 0412: Hero's Entrance**

"Is this the real hero's entrance? The sideshow of the competition is now the main event."

Li Luo sighed to himself. Not even he, who usually planned for most things, had expected things to turn out this way. He knew that the Two Star Hall representatives were pushovers, but he expected them to at least have one win in the form of Zhu Xuan. Or at least a draw.

Two losses. The unlucky kids.

He'd even mentally prepared himself to sit this one out.

Now he was going to have to work his ass off instead of resting.

The One Star Hall students were going crazy. Just one bunch in particular.

"Brother Luo, take to the skies!"

"Brother Luo, crush your ene...mies!"

"Brother Luo, Astral Sage's prize!!!"

The One Star Hall students were luxuriating in the spotlight. It was their time to shine now, and by their time, they meant "Li Luo do the honors. Thanks, man."

If Li Luo won, their hall would be the heroes!

"Rah rah, blah blah," Li Luo mumbled to himself. "What if I lose? They'll hang me from the nearest branch of the Tree of Power." If he won, his name would be right there in the books with Jiang Qing'e and the First Princess. If he didn't...

Li Luo wished that it wouldn't come to this. He would much rather have Zhu Xuan or Ye Qiuding take a win, and he could live a quiet life. All that mattered was that the ticket ended up in the Astral Sage College's hands. Why play out one's whole hand in just the preliminaries? In fact, he was only here for the reward that the Astral Sage College had promised.

But now there was going to be no walkover. The Blue Abyss Sage College would go all out for sure. And he was forced to win this. Otherwise, there would be no ticket, and no free treasure from the school vaults. He'd be lucky to escape without a beating.

"Come on, Li Luo! Don't let the One Star Hall down!" Qin Zhulu's baritone growl rumbled from behind him.

Li Luo looked over to see him standing with Lu Qing'er, Yu Lang, and the others.

"So it has come to this," Yu Lang said gravely. "I sensed it with my clairvoyant abilities a long time ago. We are a generation of heroes, and it's only fitting that we have a fitting staircase of suspense leading up to our stage.

"Li Luo, go forth!" he cried grandly.

Li Luo rolled his eyes. "Do you want your acting prize now or later?"

"What actor could become a Violet Vibrance student at the Astral Sage College only with a sixth-grade resonance?" Yu Lang demanded indignantly. "And become the cornerstone and carry of the team?"

Li Luo snorted. "If cheek were a resonance, you'd be ninth-grade for sure. There'd be a seat in the Seven Astral Pillars for you."

Lu Qing'er, Bai Mengmeng, and the others all laughed.

Yu Lang grumbled and kicked the ground.

Still, taking a poke at Yu Lang lightened his mood somewhat. He spotted Lu Qing'er, a bundle of anxiety and encouragement. "Don't worry. The pressure's high, but I've dealt with high pressure all these years," he reassured her.

Lu Qing'er nodded hesitantly. Although such a final could bring Li Luo great fame, she was worried he would not be able to remain calm under the immense pressure.

She was confident in Li Luo's abilities, but it would be foolish to underestimate the unknown factor in the equation: the Blue Abyss Sage College's representative. She was objective and clever enough to know that the Blue Abyss Sage College had fielded a monster of their own, and pinned all of their hopes on him.

Li Luo would do well to keep his emotional state neutral and fight to the best of his potential.

Suddenly, there was a flurry of cries behind him, and Li Luo turned to see the crowd parting for Jiang Qing'e.

"Senior Jiang!"

The One Star Hall students cheered enthusiastically.

After her battle against Zhao Huiyin, her reputation had climbed to new heights.

She nodded politely to them, walking straight towards Li Luo.

Qin Zhulu, Bai Mengmeng, and the others backed away accordingly.

Lu Qing'er stood her ground defiantly for a moment longer, then backed away as well. Evidently, the senior girl was here to speak with Li Luo.

"Congratulations on your chance at fame and glory," she said to Li Luo teasingly.

He rolled his eyes. "Those Two Star Hall dumbos were a real letdown."

"Well, the Blue Abyss Sage College planned way ahead for this. Neither Zhu Xuan nor Ye Qiuding were exceptional enough to escape their calculations. It was to be expected."

"Still, I'm surprised they would build a trump card in the One Star Hall. It's incredibly risky," Li Luo said.

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "Their faith in Lu Cāng and Lu Cǎng is incredible," she said meaningfully.

Li Luo smiled and nodded. "I understand what you're trying to say. Don't worry, I won't underestimate them. But I'm very curious as to what the Lu brothers have, to win that level of trust."

She nodded, then reached out to take his hand in hers, ignoring the exclamations that broke out around them. "There's no need to hold back. Show them your best. I know you don't like the spotlight, but a blaze of glory will send our enemies fleeing. Warn them. Deter them."

Li Luo was surprised by her movement, but he squeezed her hand briefly to reassure her, then let go.

Lu Qing'er pursed her lips. "Senior Jiang's moves are always timed perfectly. Is she here to stake a claim on Li Luo? Bold, fearless, straightforward. Just like her fighting style."

Lu Qing'er would not give up easily!

"A loveless marriage is unfair to both Li Luo and you, Jiang Qing'e!

"I will save you both from it!"

A loud bell sounded. Signaling the imminent start of the final round.

Li Luo turned, waved to all of his friends, and then leaped down.

Jiang Qing'e watched Li Luo descend to the battlefield with a faint smile on her face. Today, he would announce to the world that House Luolan had a slumbering dragon ready to rise alongside its phoenix.

**Chapter 0413: Time for Li Luo**

Li Luo flew down like a giant bird, sending a quick burst of resonant power to his feet so he could tread lightly on the crown of a lush tree before landing on top of a lake.

Below the crystalline, green surface of the water, ancient, gnarled trunks protruded from the muddy silt at the bottom, black branches forming an aesthetic contrast against the clear water.

Above them stood Li Luo, water gently rippling out from under his feet.

His shortswords remained belted at his hip. With his water and wood resonances, this lake was a favorable terrain for him. According to the ticket match rules, the losing school of the previous round was allowed to choose the next round's battlefield. That was just about the only thing those useless Two Star Hall bums had done for him all day. Li Luo wasn't about to pass up on a free leg-up like that. The crowd turned back to look at the sky.

Another figure was descending onto the lake. He gave no heed to grace, plunging down like a cannonball. He struck the water and sent large waves crashing out in all directions.

The waves roared out, then died back down barely a meter away from Li Luo.

Li Luo saw that his opponent was a handsome man dressed in white. He smiled back kindly at Li Luo.

"Lu Cāng?"

He smiled and nodded. "That's me. Tell me, friend Li Luo—I hear you are a legendary dual resonance user?"

"Dual resonances are rare, but hardly legendary," Li Luo replied with a tight smile.

"My thoughts exactly," Lu Cāng said, still smiling. "Friend Li Luo, neither of your resonance grades are particularly high. I doubt that their combined strength is anything of substance either."

"You're exactly right." Li Luo agreed, as casually as if they were discussing the weather.

"If that's the case, how about you surrender now? We could save some time fighting."

Li Luo eyed him, then laughed out loud. "You're very similar to your senior, Zhao Huiyin. Are you trying to goad me with words? Is that the Blue Abyss style? I had thought that the abyss was some enigmatic source of power, not your mouths."

Lu Cāng shrugged. "Well, it seems like you are unaffected."

"Neither of us have any other choice in this battle. We're done talking. Let our abilities decide. It's embarrassing to resort to taunts, especially if the taunter loses."

Li Luo's shortswords flashed out in his hands.

Skimming them across the lake's surface, his resonant power welled up.

Underwater ripples churned the mirror-like lake.

Lu Cāng smiled and nodded as if he were watching an amusing magic trick. Reaching into his pocket sphere, he pulled out a long, green staff. His faint, red power circled him in a thick, tubular coil. It was a red python.

The ferocity was equal to Qin Zhulu's Snarling Golden Demon Tiger resonance.

And his opponent was also a First Changing.

Crash!

Lu Cāng leaped forward with the sinuosity befitting of his avatar, a greenish light flying out towards Li Luo.

Li Luo did not dodge, instead taking the opening blow on his crossed shortswords. Sparks and resonant power flew.

Both resonant powers nullified each other.

Li Luo could feel the angry power strike out at him like a violent python, a vicious and poisonous bite that he could not allow to touch him.

An upper eighth-grade resonance bred resonant power with a life of its own. It would enter him, corrode him, damage him... all with a life of its own. Negating any damage would be tricky at best. Li Luo had experienced as much when fighting Qin Zhulu.

Without hesitation, he fired up both his resonant palaces, allowing his two streams of energy to mix within him.

Dual resonances!

Like a volcano, the dormant power roared to life within him.

Clang!

The clash of sword and staff raised waves several meters high.

Lu Cāng's green python staff rang out loudly, and the shock of the impact numbed his fingers. His own resonant power was drowned out by the dual resonances.

Before this, he had absolute confidence in his upper eighth-grade resonant power. But even that had been repelled.

"This is the power of dual resonances? Fascinating!"

His eyes lit up with excitement as his irises started to narrow into cold and sinister snake eyes.

BOOM!

Scarlet power blasted out again, this time with even more speed from Lu Cāng. His green python staff turned into a snake that thrust itself at Li Luo's neck, fangs bared.

"Dendrical Intervention!"

Li Luo hastily skidded backwards, shaking his sleeves and summoning long, green wooden tendrils of his own. They lashed out at the weapon many times before it was completely stopped.

Lu Cāng's transformation did not stop at his eyes. Scarlet power flowed out from them, and it looked like he was crying blood. The power covered his body in red scales when it touched his skin, even as it flowed downwards to his feet. He looked like a snake man.

Li Luo knew that this was not an actual metamorphosis. Lu Cāng had simply managed to reach such a high level of affinity with his resonance that he could adhere it to his skin closely.

Lu Cāng leaped at Li Luo again.

Li Luo skidded backwards on the water, leaning away from the attack. His pointed toes glowed with power as he charged the water under them.

"Arboreal Bindings!"

The submerged branches awoke, exploding upwards as they broke the surface.

Lu Cāng was even more agile than Li Luo, who needed a way to slow him down.

"Hiss, hiss!"

Lu Cāng's forked tongue flicked in and out of his mouth almost mockingly. His green python staff swept out left and right, smashing the wood into splinters.

"You think these twigsss will sstop me?!"

Li Luo ignored him, flicking out a bead of concentrated, dark-blue energy onto the wood.

"Heavy Water Art!"

The branches groaned under their newfound weight, and they reached upwards anew.

Whack! Whack!

The reinforced branches were enough to give Lu Cāng pause. One broke past his staff, reaching around to smash into his back.

Lu Cāng was smacked out of the sky, landing heavily in the water and plunging down a dozen meters deep.

He had barely stabilized himself on the surface when the water moved under him.

"Flowing Shear!"

The water rose up in a prison that surrounded Lu Cāng, spinning violently. It began to close in on him, the swift water threatening to shear him down to bits.

"Water Arrow!"

Li Luo flicked out with his fingers, sending little darts of water resonant power flying into the water sphere, where Lu Cāng could not see what was coming. Little flowers of blood bloomed within the sphere.

It was a brilliant performance, each move carefully layered on the next, building and enhancing the effects of the last.



"A masterful plan," the First Princess said approvingly. "Water and wood resonances already have a good affinity. Even though his resonance arts are not particularly strong, he's using them cleverly to draw out the best results. Li Luo's talent in resonance arts is underrated."

Gong Shenjun nodded. "This is the advantage of dual resonances, and Li Luo understands this well. Still, he might hold a slight advantage, but it's hard to say that the outcome will follow suit. If that's the limit of the Blue Abyss Sage College's ultimate secret weapon, I'll be very surprised."

The other Seven Astral Pillars nodded, eyes on the swirling water sphere.

Swish!

The water sphere was suddenly torn apart, thinning out under the angry heat that came from within before evaporating completely. A blast of radiating fire energy pierced the skies.

Lu Cāng emerged, bleeding slightly from multiple cuts. They were light wounds, but they demonstrated that Li Luo's masterful resonance art blending had broken past Lu Cāng's guard.

Li Luo looked at him mildly.

Through the previous exchange, he had already ascertained his opponent's abilities. Lu Cāng was roughly on the same level as Qin Zhulu, or perhaps slightly stronger. Among their peers this was quite good, but still not enough. Li Luo could beat Qin Zhulu, and so naturally he could beat Lu Cāng too.

It was just a matter of time.

"Show me your secret weapon. This level of testing is banal and boring," he said indifferently.

He did not believe that this level of ability was the fount of the Blue Abyss Sage College's confidence. As a strong card, yes, but not enough to be the decider in the all-important ticket match.

Lu Cāng's glowing-red snake-eyes watched Li Luo closely. He stood silent for a moment, then he closed his eyes.

On the Blue Abyss viewing platform, the One Star Hall representative called Lu Cāng closed his eyes too.

#### **Chapter 0414: Amalgamation**

When Lu Cāng shut his eyes, Li Luo did not sense any disturbance or change. And yet his gut was telling him that something was very wrong about the whole situation.

He decided it was best to find out, via taking a nice, big swing with his swords at Lu Cāng's neck.

He wasn't about to hang around waiting politely for his opponent to finish his grand transformation. Attacking was the only reasonable option.

But when his sword was half a meter away from Lu Cāng, it bounced off an invisible barrier, leaving a red scorch mark behind.

Lu Cāng was not stupid enough to leave himself defenseless.

But neither was he attacking right now. A barrier was still ultimately a punching bag. It wasn't hitting him back. He rained down slashes on it, moving speedily to cut through it. With each blow he landed,

the resonant power barrier shook and wavered. A few moments later, he cut through it with a well-placed double slash from both sides.

Lu Cāng was open. A blade flashed towards his face.

BOOM!

His eyes flew open and he punched Li Luo's sword with a powerful uppercut, so it flew harmlessly above his head.

Lu Cāng's fist was unharmed.

Li Luo's eyes widened. Lu Cāng's hair was growing longer right before his eyes, and half of it turned white. The mix of black and white hair was bizarre. The transformation did not stop at the hair. Lu Cāng started to vibrate with resonant power.

It far exceeded the First Changing level that he had just demonstrated.

The sheer volume of resonant power was enough to stir up the lake water around him, gravitating around him in a conical, upward twist.

Li Luo was frowning so hard that his eyebrows almost touched. It was uncanny that Lu Cāng's resonant power would grow so much all of a sudden. Even his own Resonant Bubble art only increased his resonant power by a portion of his actual strength. Lu Cāng's resonant power had grown exponentially!

The current Lu Cāng was definitely a Second Changing in strength, and perhaps at peak strength within the Second Changing.

As ridiculous as this boost was, there was more to come. Ordinary Evolving Resonance Tier cultivators could not compare to geniuses who could wield their powers more skillfully than others. Li Luo was not the only one who could beat opponents above his level.

If his calculations were right, this current version of Lu Cāng surpassed Ye Qiuding and Zhu Xuan.

A horrific improvement.

Li Luo noticed that Lu Cāng's eyes were different now. One was red, the other black. The only thing that had not changed was the animalistic ferocity reflected in them.

At the spectator stands, many of them had noticed the change as well. Lu Cāng had become even more dangerous than ever.

"How did his resonant power increase so much?" Lu Qing'er bit her lip as she clenched the rail tightly.

"Something's not right," Qin Zhulu growled. He had an upper eighth-grade beast resonance too, but he could not fathom how Lu Cāng had suddenly increased his own strength twofold.

"It's not just a simple increase in strength. There's a... shifting in the resonant power within him. Another element. He has a Solaris Python resonance, but now a darker one has arisen within him..." Jiang Qing'e said quietly.

She looked at the Blue Abyss Sage College spectator stands, at the youth called Lu Cāng.[1]

"I wonder if it belongs to Lu Cǎng, who has a Lunaris Python resonance."

Lu Qǐng'er, Qín Zhūlu, and the others all stared at her, aghast. "You mean he transferred his resonant power to Lu Cāng?"

Jiāng Qǐng'e inclined her head. "Lu Cǎng is in some sort of semi-comatose state. The resonant power aura around him has completely vanished. This must be the Blue Abyss Sage College's ultimate move. The twins have a miraculous link between them.

"Which means that Lu Cāng is now also a dual resonance user? And it seems like his resonances have an even higher grade than Li Luo's."

Bái Měngměng frowned. "Leader is in danger!"

Dual resonances had brought Li Luo to fame, and his opponent having the same advantage was not good news.

"They're not the same," Jiāng Qǐng'e said, shaking her head. "Each of Li Luo's dual resonances has a resonant palace. The affinity between resonant palaces allows him to bring out the best of both powers in what we see as dual resonances. Although Lu Cāng might have transferred the resonance and resonant power of his twin, the resonance does not have a resonant palace home within Lu Cāng's body. He cannot bring forth true multiplication of power, but only an addition of two distinct powers.

"Besides, without a resonant palace to anchor the power, the borrowed power will not be stable. It will weaken before too long, and even vanish completely.

"Of course, Lu Cāng is currently very strong. Perhaps not even Third Changing cultivators could beat him right now. No wonder the Blue Abyss Sage College believes that he can turn the battle for them. This level of power could trump most other sage colleges in the East Divine Continent easily, let alone take a ticket match. The twins are a walking miracle.

"If Li Luo wants to win this, he'd better have a whole storehouse of ability hidden."

Jiāng Qǐng'e's analysis had put worried frowns on all of their faces. This battle was going to be incredibly difficult. They did not know if Li Luo could pull through.

All across the other spectator stands, the Astral Sage College students had noticed the change, and panic was spreading through the crowd.

Li Luo's slight edge had vanished with this devastating doubling of his opponent's power.

Only now did they realize that the initial advantage had been an illusion—the two fighters had been merely testing each other.

Lu Cāng stretched out his neck, and a curious clacking sound could be heard from his spine. He turned his red and black eyes on Li Luo with a chilling smile.

"Well, Li Luo? I take it your boredom has vanisshed?" he said with a hissing laugh.

Li Luo nodded vigorously. "Oh, yes. In fact, my boredom has vanished so completely that I wish some of it would come back. I didn't know you brothers could do that."

"The world is vast, and all miracles are possible. You have dual resonances. Other miracles might happen."

"That makes sense." Li Luo agreed affably.

Lu Cāng swept up his green python staff and twirled it lazily. "Well, if you have no other hidden trump cards, I think the outcome of this match is decided, Li Luo. You might as well give up."

Li Luo was just about to reply, but he stopped himself.

Lu Cāng had not expected a response anyway, preferring to follow up with a deadly attack. He thundered forward, footsteps smashing into the surface of the lake, raising a humongous splash that rained down on the entire arena.

Within the splashing rain, black and red resonant power grew steadily larger before it shot forth as a pair of pythons, coiling and twisting around each other.

Li Luo reacted without hesitation, his twin shortswords chopping downwards.

Clang!

A direct clash.

This time it was Li Luo who almost lost his grip on his swords. The overwhelming resonant power tore into his defenses with ease. He felt his breath whoosh out of him, and a searing pain burned his chest as he was sent flying backwards.

The tables had turned.

The crowd gasped.

Lu Cāng laughed long and loud, sweeping his green python staff back and forth exultantly.

"Tell me, Li Luo, is this the first time you've felt outclassed by someone at your cultivation level?" he asked eagerly.

"How does it feel?"

1. TN: Cáng = hidden

### **Chapter 0415: Epic Fight at One Star Hall**

Li Luo did not respond to Lu Cāng's taunts. He knew his opponent was simply trying to make him lose his cool.

His water and wood resonant powers circulated within him, healing his wounds quickly.

"The Blue Abyss Sage College has done well to bet on a horse like you. Or should I say snake?" Li Luo grinned.

He did not even bother to protest that this was actually a two-on-one. If the Astral Sage College's invigilators had not called a halt to the competition, then it was legal. No news was good news for Lu Cāng.

So the time for speeches was over. Now was the time for action. He had to take down the snake with cold steel.

Easier said than done.

Lu Cāng's boast was true indeed—he was by far the strongest opponent that Li Luo had encountered that was at the same cultivation level. These two brothers' resonance transfer was stupidly strong.

In terms of raw resonant power, there was no doubt that Lu Cāng had him beat.

But size wasn't all that mattered. That was why matches were fought.

Li Luo grinned to himself. A light of interest and battle will lit up his eyes.

BOOM!

Lu Cāng had stopped the taunting as well, seeing that Li Luo was unaffected. He instead dug deep and produced another two streams of energy. Solar and lunar pythons, their unique elements a deadly combination.

There were Three and Four Star Hall talents present, already at the Earth Fiend or even Heavenly Dipper General level. For them, a fight between Resonant Masters was usually quite underwhelming. But now they were all watching intently. Lu Cāng had brought something new and deadly to the table.

The fact that these seniors had taken notice of a One Star Hall battle proved that Lu Cāng was indeed something very special.

Their absolute faith in Li Luo was suddenly looking sort of frail. If they lost this battle, they wouldn't even be able to go to the Holy Grail Meet! This would be a devastating blow to the reputation of the school, and the morale of all its students.

The green python staff smashed into the lake.

Crash! Swoosh!

The water parted, and from the watery gap rose a ten-meter-long twin-headed snake. It was striped elegantly down its length in scarlet and stone-gray. It lunged at Li Luo.

Li Luo ran as far back as he could, his woodearth resonance throwing up a tree-shaped shield before him. It sparkled beautifully in the sunlight.

"Arboreal Bindings!

"Heavy Water Art!"

Again, he used his trusty combination, wrapping his solid tree in sheets of heavy water to further reinforce it.

Clang!

The twin-headed serpent smashed into the tree, sending splinters flying.

The red-and-black snake crashed through the obstacle that Li Luo had put up with a dreadful hiss, then it charged at him again. Swinging around, its muscular tail sent a powerful wave of water sweeping out towards Li Luo.

The wave crashed down... and Li Luo was nowhere to be seen.

Water Shadow Art.

Li Luo reappeared on the other side of the lake. In the same moment, the lake water exploded before him, and a sizzling light of red and black shot out, narrowly missing him. He could smell singed hair. Lu Cāng was somehow already in front of him, his green python staff crackling with boundless energy.

He pointed it at Li Luo's chest, the snake head carving at the top seemingly ready to bite Li Luo at any time.

Lu Cāng had seen through his Water Shadow Art and predicted where he would escape to.

The Astral Sage College students groaned in dismay.

"You can't hide, Li Luo!" Lu Cāng cackled.

The staff steadily grew larger in Li Luo's view, but he remained calm as he faced Lu Cāng's attack. Lifting his shortswords, his eyes flashed.

All nine resonant bubbles within him burst at once.

The boost of resonant power flooded his body.

"You're not the only one who can boost!"

Li Luo's shortswords flashed up to meet the python staff.

A sapphire-blue light flashed against the staff, boosted power against boosted power.

Clang!

There were no more spider-shaped impacts now that they were in a watery terrain instead of a land one. However, they managed to raise impressive waves that rose and fell on the crowd.

Wiping the water from their eyes, the spectators watched on.

To everyone's surprise, Li Luo had not fared too badly. He was just about equal.

"So you were hiding more!"

Lu Cāng barked a short laugh as he sensed Li Luo's increased power.

Li Luo ignored him. Instead, he shook out his sleeves, sending several light balls flying out to explode between the two. They released blinding lights.

Waterlight Balls!

Li Luo had developed a thin film of water resonant power over his eyes that would cut away most of the light. One-way blinding was a perk that he had deemed worth the effort of training that tricky bit of resonant power control, and now he leaped at Lu Cāng with clear eyes.

Clang, clang, clang!

Amazingly, his opponent was able to sense him somehow, and he blocked all of Li Luo's slashes.

Lu Cāng hadn't been affected by the light, somehow.

They traded more furious blows back and forth. When Li Luo's blades landed on Lu Cāng's body, they raised sparks, but the red and black scale armor on his body was another layer of defense that frustrated Li Luo's attacks.

Lu Cāng's attacks on Li Luo were not doing too much damage either. There was a thin water coat on Li Luo's body that quickly dispersed the blows all across its frame.

Heavy Water Toga.

For the moment, neither could find a gap in the other's armor.

The fight time ticked on.

Clang!

Another furious exchange sent both Li Luo and Lu Cāng staggering backwards.

"Li Luo, your boosted resonant power ran out too quickly." Lu Cāng was panting, preparing another vicious swing of his staff as he caught his breath.

"Your state doesn't last very long either though." Li Luo laughed.

"Longer than yours!" Lu Cāng retorted.

Li Luo looked over at the joss stick that marked time on the viewing platform. "But I can hold out until the end of the round. Do you know what's going to happen if it's a draw? According to the rules, there'll be a tiebreaker. The two strongest representatives will fight again. Probably Gong Shenjun against Zhong Nan.

"Not even Gong Shenjun can take down Senior Zhong Nan's defenses," Lu Cāng sneered confidently.

"Aha. Perhaps, perhaps... and then we go to the next tiebreaker at the Three Star Hall level," Li Luo pointed out with relish.

This drew Lu Cāng up short. Another Three Star Hall match? They would be screwed. Jiang Qing'e was unbeatable. Not even their better option, Zhao Huiyin, who hadn't lasted long in their first encounter, would be able to fight. It was impossible to win there.

"You think I'll let things go that far!?" Lu Cāng snarled. He took a decisive step forward, stomping the ground. His shirt exploded, falling to the ground in shreds to leave him topless.

Li Luo saw red and black cursed snake patterns burrowing in and out of Lu Cāng's flesh. They were impressive inkings, vividly lifelike and with a hypnotic, scaly pattern. Li Luo followed their twists and

turns up Lu Cāng's well-muscled body and saw that they both ended with their fangs bared on his cheeks.

His face was absolutely horrifying to look at, and Li Luo could not help shuddering.

From afar, it seemed like a twin-headed snake speeding across the lake.

Li Luo could feel the incredible threat.

**BOOM!**

Before he could react, Lu Cāng had already made his next move. An enormous tsunami, thirty meters high, had risen up and was bearing down on Li Luo.

Cries could be heard from the crowd.

Li Luo scrambled to find his rhythm. Behind the wave attack, Lu Cāng himself was speeding towards Li Luo, his green python staff revving up for a follow-up strike. He smashed the water, disrupting Li Luo's energy flow and causing him to stumble into the waves.

A humongous serpent tail swung out at him.

**Clang!**

Li Luo met it with his blades.

In the next instant, his blades shattered, and he himself was badly injured. The multi-layered attack from Lu Cāng smashed him deep into the lake, fossilizing him in the muddy silt at the bottom. The wave died down and the ripples slowly faded in the horrified silence of the crowd.

All was silent in the mountains.

### **Chapter 0416: Li Luo's Goal**

The crash of the wave was still ringing in their ears, and the quiet drip of lake water off the platforms and trees was barely heard in the stunned silence.

No one had imagined that Lu Cāng would be capable of so much. He had sent Li Luo to the bottom of the lake in one single terrifying attack.

Even the Fourth Changing students were looking amazed.

Clearly, Lu Cāng had been hoping to finish the battle before the joss stick timer ran out.

"The moment Lu Cāng pulled out his Twin Python Malediction, the battle was over one way or another," Zhao Huiyin and the other Blue Abyss students whispered among themselves.

The Twin Python Malediction burned both energy sources within Lu Cāng's body to produce an overwhelming but ephemeral strength. Once Lu Cāng entered that state, the battle had to end.

No opponent at Lu Cāng's level could possibly deal with it.

"Li Luo's dual resonances are superb. He's unlucky he had to fight against the Lu Cang brothers. Their unique birth, their transferrable resonant powers, resonance affinity... one might consider them dual



resonances as well. Although the combination is short-lived due to the lack of a resonant palace, it definitely trumps Li Luo's in terms of raw power," Zhao Huiyin said with a satisfied smile.

"The ticket match belongs to the Blue Abyss Sage College for sure." The other Blue Abyss Sage College representatives laughed with relief. Although they had been steamrolled for the most part in the first half, they had made a heroic comeback. Now the smell of victory was in the air.

If they could win here, the reputation of the Blue Abyss Sage College would skyrocket. And with a better reputation would come better students, and the building of a stronger foundation.

Even the top students from Astral Sage like the First Princess and Gong Shenjun showed their surprise. With their powerful sight, they could see just how powerful the attack had been from the penetration depth into the lake.

If even they were shocked by the strength, what about Li Luo, who had to take the hit?

Even the First Princess, with her rock-solid confidence in Li Luo, started to doubt.

All of them had underestimated Lu Cāng.

"Leader!" Bai Mengmeng screamed, her hand flying to her mouth. Her doe-like eyes were wide open in horror.

"F\*ck, these Blue Abyss dogs hid their sh\*t real deep in the blue abyss!" Yu Lang swore colorfully.

"What strength! If that were me, I'd be completely incapacitated already," Qin Zhulu muttered begrudgingly.

Lu Qīng'er remained silent, her hands gripping each other tightly as if in prayer.

She looked over at Jiang Qīng'e, whose elegant face was as cool as jade. She was not at all panicked, and this gave Lu Qīng'er some comfort. "Senior Jiang," she asked hesitantly, "will Li Luo be fine?"

"Lu Cāng is very strong," Jiang Qīng'e said, watching the waves subside. "In any school in the East Divine Continent, he would be considered one of the best. The Blue Abyss Sage College has done well to raise such a freak."

She turned to look at Lu Qīng'er. "But strength does not always equate to victory. I do not know what else Li Luo is hiding, but I can sense that he did not try to dodge Lu Cāng's attack. On the contrary, he seemed to welcome the attack..."

Lu Qīng'er's jaw dropped. "What are you saying?"

"Just a hunch." Jiang Qīng'e shrugged and turned back to the front.

Lu Qīng'er was a little irritated, but she did not press. In any case, Jiang Qīng'e's words had put her mind at ease somewhat. And all those who knew Li Luo held an irrational belief in him, Jiang Qīng'e most of all.

Lu Cāng was strong, but those who had worked with Li Luo before knew that he had a curious tendency to overcome impossible circumstances.

Lu Cāng might have exceeded everyone's expectations, but who was to say that Li Luo had nothing else left in the bag?

...

At the bottom of the lake.

Li Luo relaxed, inert, feeling the weight of the water above him. His arms were hurting like crazy, fresh blood flowing freely out into the water and forming murky, maroon clouds around his shoulders. A foreign resonant power continued to eat away within him.

Lu Cāng's resonant power.

The blow from before had severely injured Li Luo.

His body was in a woeful state, but his expression was surprisingly calm. There was no fear, no panic, and strangely, it was lit with triumph.

He had not had an opponent like this in a long time now.

Lu Cāng was a worthy opponent for him to show his best against.

The corner of his mouth twitched.

He looked up through the sparkling water to see the shadow of Lu Cāng above, homed in on him.

Their eyes met.

Lu Cāng's expression darkened, and he gripped his green python staff tightly. He saw a look of challenge in Li Luo's eyes, as if to say "Come on! Do your best! What else have you got?"

It infuriated him. This guy had been completely pummeled and was still trying to act tough?

There was no coming back from this!

"If you don't want to surrender, I'll beat you until you surrender!"

**BOOM!**

Again, red and black power flowed out of Lu Cāng, this time with a stickiness to it. It crawled along his body to his hand, finally reaching the green python staff.

The red and black sludge continued to meld with the green python staff. The lake water turned black around it, as though it were being poisoned.

Lu Cāng stomped.

Splash! Roar!

The lake waters parted under his foot, and thick jets of black and red resonant power burrowed downwards, twin pythons of power coiling around his staff.

They were headed straight for Li Luo.

The entire lake was boiling from the power of his attack.

Everyone held their breath, and even the Violet Vibrance mentors were prepared to step in and halt the battle. This attack was way too powerful. If they misjudged the situation, Li Luo might not even survive.

At the bottom of the lake, Li Luo watched the spear-like staff-thrust parting the waters above him, drilling its way down. Under him, the silt bed shook with the impact.

If it hit him, he'd probably die.

This was way stronger than when he faced Lin Suo back at the Golden Dragon Dao Fields!

The prickly fear of imminent death quietened the world around him, heightening his senses in wave after wave of adrenaline-fueled clarity. Clearer and clearer—he had never felt water this cool before, seen it this beautiful before...

And then he was pushed over the tipping point, and all of his senses vanished.

He no longer felt the currents pushing gently against him.

He no longer heard the dull roar of resonant power bearing down on him from above.

Only the steady, dull thump of his heartbeat, telling him he was still alive.

Li Luo smiled to himself. “Yes. This is it.

“The zone.”

He closed his eyes.

He was with his waterlight resonant palace.

Here, his waterlight resonance seed was shining, already saturated with lines of power.

Back during the special training period at Angelwood Hollow, Li Luo had managed to complete the evolution of his woodearth resonance, formally reaching the Evolving Resonance tier. However, it was only a partial evolution. His waterlight resonance had not yet reached that state.

Through his experimentations, Li Luo had finally hit upon a likely theory - his waterlight resonance was far higher in grade compared to his woodearth resonance. That was why it was harder to evolve, and needed a lot more grinding.*novE-lb/1n*

Li Luo had thought so at first, but now perhaps there was a way to skip that.

This was Li Luo's true goal.

He wanted to use the pressure from fighting Lu Cāng to complete his waterlight resonance!

#### **Chapter 0417: Waterlight Resonance Evolution**

Blub, blub, blub!

The water pressure on top of Li Luo threatened to crush him. It was not just the weight of the water, but the fact that it was being rapidly compressed from above by Lu Cāng.

The threat of death loomed all around him, but Li Luo was at peace.

Because within his waterlight resonant palace, his resonance seed was jumping rapidly like a heart, coming to life now that it was at its limit.

Badump!

The sound filled his ears and his mind.

Lu Cāng's staff continued downwards. It was only a dozen meters from him now.

The pebbles on the lake bed were jumping and crackling wildly, like popcorn on a pan. They trembled accordingly as the attack bore down from above, turning the lake water black in its wake.

Crack!

Li Luo heard a distinct cracking sound within him. A solid line gradually grew on his waterlight resonance seed, then it split.*novE-lb/1n*

Rain fell within his resonant palace, a golden rain warmed by the light of the sun.

The thin, golden threads fell on his resonant palace, a nourishing blend of light and water that grew and grew until it was a clear lake within.

This was no ordinary lake. It had a mystical resonant power that Li Luo had painstakingly gathered over the course of his entire Pattern Genesis life.

Those who could see within the lake would see a glowing ball of holy light that blended gracefully into the waters of the lake, brightening it with a yellow glow.

Lost in a trance, Li Luo rejoiced.

He had completed his waterlight resonance's evolution.

At the merest thought, Li Luo summoned a shower of translucent, navy-blue pearls of power. Each one glimmered with a fey light within.

All of them were made with his waterlight resonant power.

It was on a level way beyond what he had been capable of previously.

Li Luo whooped inwardly as he reveled in his newfound power.

His eyes flared open, and he was back, fully aware of his position and situation at the bottom of the lake. There was a new light in his eyes as they flicked up to the attack bearing down upon him. His two resonant palaces roared defiantly, flushing him with power.

Dual resonance power!

He cooked it within him, building it up within the furnace of his body. More. More. He poured on the power, heating it to new heights.

This burst of dual resonance power was stronger than anything he had ever made before!

Lu Cāng's eyes narrowed as he sensed Li Luo's heightened power. There was a new sheen to his power that had not been there before.

There was nothing he could do at this point. He had committed so hard!

"Li Luo, I'll end you!!" Lu Cāng roared.

Li Luo reacted with composure. Folding his five fingers into a fist, he attacked without any flashy moves. Just raw dual resonance power, exploding from his wrists as two faint halos of light.

Li Luo himself did not know yet, but the two resonances within him had achieved a new level of perfection in their synergy. BOOM!

The surface of the lake exploded with the fury of the attacks in its depths.

Li Luo's punch crashed straight into Lu Cāng and his staff.

Bang!

Lake water exploded outwards in a crown shape, in a radius of dozens of meters around Li Luo and Lu Cāng.

Lu Cāng's face changed.

"F\*ck!"

He swore fearfully. Li Luo's punch had been powerful enough to knock the additional sludge power off his green python staff.

"It can't be!" He was already in his strongest state. Not even an ordinary Fourth Changing cultivator could defend against his attack. Li Luo had his weapons shattered, and he had been sunk to the bottom of the lake. How had Li Luo suddenly produced power that eclipsed his own?!

Bang! Bang!

Li Luo sent another two power punches flying out, crashing into the green python staff.

Clang! Clang!

The deafening booms churned the lake waters furiously, as though it were a cup being shaken by a giant hand.

Finally, Lu Cāng's defenses crumbled. Desperately holding on to his green python staff, his palm split apart from the impact and started bleeding freely, the skin rubbed clean off. His fingers were bleeding and broken too. Li Luo's resonant power smashed into his body.

Swoosh!

The green python staff fell from his unfeeling, trembling fingers, carried away by the impact of Li Luo's punch. It sailed through the air.

Lu Cāng wanted to run, but fear and fatigue numbed his movements.

As if he were trapped in slow motion, he could only watch in horror and disbelief as Li Luo easily caught up to him.

"Sorry, I was using you as a whetting stone... but you're a good whetting stone." Li Luo laughed happily, then he let loose another solid punch at Lu Cāng's chest.

It was like a cannon blast.

Lu Cāng roared and gathered all his remaining energy into one final blast. His Twin Python Maledict fueled him with wicked strength, and he met Li Luo's punch with one of his own.

BOOM!

The fist-on-fist clash was epic to behold.

The audience held their breath.

Swoosh!

From the bottom of the lake, a blur of green light shot out, piercing through the trees and smashing straight into a mountain wall.

The dust cleared, and the audience gasped.

It was the green python staff!

Half buried in the mountain wall, and still vibrating from the impact.

What was going on? Why was Lu Cāng's weapon here?!

On the Blue Abyss Sage College spectator stands, Zhao Huiyin's smile was wiped clean off her face. She tried to look into the lake, but the water was too murky to see what had happened.

"What is going on down there?!"

"Wasn't Lu Cāng winning? Why would he let go of the green python staff?"

The situation seemed to have changed.

In any case, the ticket match was about to be decided for good.

In whose favor?

Lu Cāng, surely? They had all witnessed his strength. Li Luo had been completely outclassed.

The silence wore on.

Finally, one person emerged from the water, stepping up carefully onto the lake surface.

He lifted his head, and smiles broke out all across the spectator stands.

It was... Li Luo!

They saw that he was dragging another person along.

Lu Cāng.

Lu Cāng's eyes were shut, and he looked like he had fainted.

The result was obvious.

Li Luo tottered on the spot, smiling vaguely, his face pale. He looked up at the crowd, which was speechlessly silent.

It was at this moment that an indignant voice yelled out from the One Star Hall stands.

"Hoi, where the f\*ck's the applause?!!"

### **Chapter 0418: Reversal**

Some students laughed at the ridiculous comment, but most of them were still looking curiously at the youth who had emerged victorious.

Li Luo had won?!

They could not believe their eyes. How had he turned the situation?

Before they had plunged into the lake, Lu Cāng had been dominating. And yet he had lost?

And from his unconscious state, he had been outclassed by a fair amount.

Their disbelief and curiosity finally gave way to exuberance, and the Astral Sage students started to cheer for their champion. "Li Luo!"

"Li Luo!"

They were hyper-excited. This was a ridiculous comeback. Lu Cāng's overpowered ability had seriously diminished their confidence in Li Luo, and the more pessimistic ones had already given up on the Astral Sage College's chance at the ticket.

No one had expected this turn of events.

Of course, without those like Gong Shenjun and Jiang Qing'e, Astral Sage would not even have made it this far. But the excitement and spectacle always belonged to the finale.

More importantly, Li Luo had managed to pull free of the danger at the most critical moment, and he had stopped the key part of the Blue Abyss Sage College's plan to take the ticket match away from the Astral Sage College.

This alone was enough for many to brand Li Luo's victory with the seal of absolute perfection.

The overseeing Violet Vibrance mentors called out the result formally. "Astral Sage College, Li Luo. Winner!"

"With this, the ticket match is over. The Astral Sage College ended with 3 wins, 2 draws, 2 losses. The Blue Abyss Sage College ended with 2 wins, 2 draws, 3 losses.

"The winner is... the Astral Sage College!"

ROAR!

The spectators cheered again, a deafening chorus of whoops and yells that shook the mountains themselves.

The mood was as high as could be. For the students, the Holy Grail Meet was the greatest event in the East Divine Continent, a competition at the highest caliber. Every school spent years carefully preparing for it, biding their strength and resources accordingly. There were two things that all schools prioritized above all else: one was the Umbra Cave. The other was the quadrennial Holy Grail Meet.

And indeed, the Holy Grail Meet had plenty to warrant that level of importance.

The Dragon Bone Holy Grail went without saying—the ultimate prize. With that holy object, the Umbra Cave would be shut away. The winning school could save many of its talents from brutal death and sacrifice. Besides that, the placings of the Holy Grail Meet would also be reported to the Academic Federation, who would then distribute resources accordingly.

Resources from the Academic Federation were a huge boon for any sage college.

"He actually won..."

The First Princess, Gong Shenjun, and the others were still staring down at the battlefield in wonder. Not even at their level had they predicted this outcome.

"Li Luo is a bag full of surprises." Wang Chao, one of the Seven Astral Pillars, laughed.

The others nodded in agreement. A moment ago, Li Luo was getting wrecked, and badly. Yet the moment they had gone underwater, things had been completely reversed. Li Luo must have been hiding some skill up till now.

The First Princess' phoenix eyes surveyed Li Luo thoughtfully. He was truly one to work miracles when no one expected it.

In truth, when Lu Cāng had revealed his true powers, no one would have blamed Li Luo if he had lost. Lu Cāng was undeniably strong in that state, at the top level even at the Holy Grail Meet.

There would have been no shame in losing to him.

But Li Luo had prevailed, putting an abrupt end to the Blue Abyss Sage College's plans.

The First Princess leaned forward on the railing, arms crossed beneath her ample chest. Her red lips parted slightly. She was curious about Li Luo. Of course, not in a romantic way—she simply wanted to know how much more Jiang Qing'e's consort was hiding.

"Do you think he might win the strongest One Star Hall student title at the Holy Grail Meet?" She smiled.

The others turned to look at her.

"That's a little ambitious," Gong Shenjun said casually. "Lu Cāng might be in the top 10 among One Star Hall students, and Li Luo beating him would put him in the top 8... top 5 even. But the strongest? Those guys are on a different level.

"You should know what sort of monsters there are at the Holy Grail Meet... and Li Luo's not the only dual resonance cultivator in the world."

The First Princess had to agree with his analysis. Dual resonances were rare, but those who gathered at the Holy Grail Meet were the best in the entire continent. You could not really be surprised by all the



walking wonders and unimaginable unicorns that were sure to show up there. When you set your sights that high, what was a mere dual resonance cultivator?

"Still, even if he doesn't take the title, Li Luo will definitely be one of the most closely watched at the Holy Grail Meet."

This observation was one they all agreed with. The battle they had just witnessed would be considered high level even at the Holy Grail Meet. Li Luo's victory spoke volumes about his ability.

...

The One Star Hall cheers were still going strong. They were flushed and heady with excitement. Their champion had won a splendid victory for all of them.

They were screaming and crying, flailing their hands and yelling nonsense words in glee.

Lu Qing'er and Bai Mengmeng slumped in relief, the long-held tension seeping out of their bodies.

"Leader is really awesome," Bai Mengmeng said adoringly.

Lu Qing'er's smile was the mirror image of Li Luo's own, broad grins of pure happiness as they enjoyed the moment. There was a soft look in her eyes as she watched the silver-haired youth down below. His handsomeness was like a fine wine, and only got better and better with time. He had matured significantly since their time at Southwind Academy—he was now a more confident, attractive person.

She had always thought well of his talent, and that he should get more attention.

He was just as good as anyone else.

Including Jiang Qing'e.

She looked over at the golden-haired girl.

Sensing Lu Qing'er's gaze, Jiang Qing'e turned to her, a knowing look in her eyes.

"Well? What do you think of my fiancé?"

#### **Chapter 0419: Conclusion**

Jiang Qing'e's question was an unwelcome sting. Lu Qing'er scowled prettily. "Did she have to pull this card now?" To her, the engagement between Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo was one in name only. On the contrary, she would be more worried if the engagement was annulled. But her woman's instinct was telling her that their current relationship was deep but not romantic.

Close? They definitely were. Their trust in each other was absolute, but it always looked like Jiang Qing'e was taking care of her little brother.

That was why Lu Qing'er felt the engagement should not exist.

If it were not there, she would have openly chased Li Luo a long time ago. They might even be together already. She might even be able to speak openly to the sisterly Qing'e about it.

Lu Qing'er recovered quickly. "Li Luo did very well," she said sweetly. "Senior Jiang has a wonderful little brother."

Jiang Qing'e's amusement did not fade. She was in an excellent mood, and she had to acknowledge Lu Qing'er's bravery in challenging her. "No need to be envious. You're Li Luo's good friend as well."

"Good friend." Those two words packed a powerful punch.

Lu Qing'er's smile was painful to hold.

The girls were not speaking loudly, but Bai Mengmeng was still close enough to hear. She smiled at both of them, and inwardly gave Lu Qing'er a big thumbs up. Just about no one had the guts to take on Senior Jiang. It was a pity that Lu Qing'er wasn't strong enough. If she had a bit more firepower to pose a threat, perhaps they could test Senior Jiang for real. While she was intrigued by the "friendly" atmosphere here, the mood over at the Blue Abyss Sage College was much darker.

Zhao Huiyin included, all of them were staring out at the lake, dispirited. All the excitement had leached out of them.

This was not the result that they had hoped for.

"Damn it all!"

Zhao Huiyin slapped the railing emphatically. "How did we lose?!"

Zhong Nan sighed. "Li Luo is harder than he looks." *noVe/lb)1n*

"Which we planned for in our calculations!" Zhao Huiyin shouted.

Lu Cāng was their ultimate secret weapon, and he had been used to full effect. And still they had lost. What more was there to say?

Zhong Nan laughed bitterly. There was nothing they could do about it. They were weaker. That was all.

"The Astral Sage College's foundation is stronger than the Blue Abyss Sage College's. If not for their weak Two Star Hall, we might not even have made it to that last round," Zhong Nan pointed out. Zhao Huiyin gnashed her teeth. She still could not accept the outcome. Victory had been so close.

She stared out at the lake, thoughts stormy. "Li Luo. He is... he is..."

She yelled her frustrations out, voice echoing over the gray lake.

Li Luo was just defending his school's glory. They were opponents, fair and square. He had not done anything wrong.

Still, he was a surprising one for sure.

She recalled her conversation with Jiang Qing'e. When she asserted that Lu Cāng would beat Li Luo, Jiang Qing'e had told her that she wouldn't be the first to underestimate him. And now Zhao Huiyin herself had joined that group.

"Truly, no common pleb can become Jiang Qing'e's fiancée," Zhao Huiyin thought to herself.

She had sensed some talent in her encounter with Li Luo, but nothing compared to the monster that Jiang Qing'e was. They looked incompatible on so many levels, besides their equally good looks.

But at the conclusion of this epic battle, Zhao Huiyin was forced to change her opinion.

No matter what he had used at the bottom of the lake, Li Luo had proved his ability for sure.

The rest was unimportant. The Blue Abyss Sage College had lost.

Zhao Huiyin stretched lazily, her curves pressing up against her clothing on both front and back. "Forget it, a loss is a loss. Li Luo. I'll remember you. And I'll see how far you can get at the Holy Grail Meet."

...

On the highest platform, the atmosphere was equally stilted.

The elders of the Xia Kingdom were brooding about the smiling young man below. He reminded them of two familiar personalities.

Two personalities that had troubled them greatly in the past.

So greatly that they had basically been squeezed and strangled by the power of the pair.

Zhu Qinghuo, Duze Yan, and the others kept their expressions carefully masked.

"Like father, like son," House Jinque's Si Qing finally said. "We have underestimated that old adage."

No one replied. Even Zhu Qinghuo and Duze Yan had to admit that much. They had underestimated this young lord for too long. To be fair, they had had their hands full dealing with Jiang Qing'e. And with her around, who would pay any attention to a once-blank palace young lord?

Still, hindsight was now slapping them in the face. The overlooked young lord was a dragon in disguise.

Perhaps still not as strong as Jiang Qing'e, but a formidable foe nonetheless.

"Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan are really lucky—they have such great heirs for House Luolan," Zhu Qinghuo said.

Duze Yan's eyelids drooped downwards in thought.

Yu Hongxi was immune to their commiseration. She did not intend to participate. The Golden Dragon Bank was always neutral, and she was not about to change that.

Clap, clap!

The sudden applause from a single pair of hands made them all turn around. It was the little emperor. "The Astral Sage College represents the Xia Kingdom. Li Luo's win today has made him a hero not just of the school, but for all of us," he said with a bright smile.

Zhu Qinghuo gave a sour smile.

"Indeed, it is as His Majesty says," the Regent smiled broadly. "Li Luo is a real talent in the Xia Kingdom. When he and Jiang Qing'e grow up, I daresay we will have two new Dukes."

The elders nodded and forced smiles. They had to be happy for the kingdom, but not for themselves.

Vice Principal Su Xin stood up, turning to Vice Principal Qiu Jizi. "Our apologies, Vice Principal Qiu," she said with a sincere smile. "We are the hosts, but this time we are unable to send you off with a smile on your face."

Qiu Jizi sighed. "Vice Principal Su Xin, you are too courteous. The Blue Abyss Sage College is not as strong as your school. We have no one to blame but ourselves."

They exchanged a few more pleasantries, then Su Xin turned to the crowd, her voice carrying clearly to the furthest corners.

"Our highest commendations to the seven Astral Sage College representatives. They have acquitted themselves well and brought glory to the Astral Sage College. At the same time, we thank the Blue Abyss Sage College's seven representatives for the spectacular competition that they have brought us. We will carry their ambitions with us to the Holy Grail Meet.

"And with this, I declare the Holy Grail Meet ticket match concluded."

#### **Chapter 0420: A Nice Aftertaste**

That spectacular rollercoaster of a ticket match was over just as suddenly as it had begun. Some students felt a little melancholy in the following days, coming off the high of the fight.

The students dealt with it by talking about it. The battle might be over, but it lived on long within their memories. One moment they excitedly relived was the Li Luo fight. Objectively speaking, the One Star Hall fight was the lowest level one, and yet it had been the most thrilling of them all.

This also rocketed Li Luo's reputation through the roof, earning him a silent supporter base that almost rivaled that of the First Princess, Gong Shenjun, and Jiang Qing'e.

Reaching this level of fame while at the One Star Hall was a feat that only one person had accomplished before him: Jiang Qing'e.

Besides, the impact of such an outcome was not just limited to within the school walls. Before Su Xin had even announced the conclusion, messengers were moving swiftly to the rest of the Xia Kingdom to report the news. Not a single detail of the battle had been overlooked.

Before long, House Luolan's reputation was just as high as its young master's.

House Luolan's reputation had been hollow all these years, a shell that was accorded some cursory respect. Still, no one ever dared break the shell, for fear that one day the two house lords would actually return... that they were not dead but only incognito.

And a new phoenix had risen from the ashes of the house, biding her strength against any foe that dared to make a move.

The young lord, Li Luo, had been cleanly forgotten, hiding behind the brilliant wings of the phoenix.

The only time his name was even mentioned was as Jiang Qing'e's fiancé.

But after this ticket match, people sat up and noticed him. The ordinary young lord had shown them a bone-chilling display of power and tenacity in the ticket match.

No one would look down on him anymore.

And now his helpless display made it look like he was disdaining everyone else.

After all, he had been born to such great parents, Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan. How could he ever have been average? He was surely destined for great things.

After the ticket match, House Luolan's reputation was given a healthy boost that trickled down to its businesses. Especially the Sun creek Villa—now one of House Luolan's main businesses—it enjoyed a nice boom in sales.

...

Li Luo spent the next few days recuperating. The fight with Lu Cāng had been the closest one he had ever fought. The one with Lin Suo had not been as close thanks to the power of the three-tailed heavenly wolf.

It took a few days before his lethargy started to wane, his empty tanks of energy filling up again.

On the third day of rest, Jiang Qing'e dropped by to see him after some errands.

The two walked shoulder to shoulder along the cobblestone path that circled the lake. They moved in a content and easy silence, oblivious to the students that looked their way curiously.

This time, they looked much more friendly towards Li Luo, and some even nodded respectfully as they passed.

The two had not strolled for long before they came across another pair.

The two people ahead of them had been waiting for them.

Zhao Huiyin and Lu Cāng.

After the ticket match, the Blue Abyss Sage College's contingent had not left immediately, instead lingering for a few days to play.

Zhao Huiyin smiled widely and waved at them energetically.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e shared a look, then they walked up to them.

"You haven't left yet?" Li Luo said a little suspiciously.

"Not welcome, are we?" Zhao Huiyin laughed prettily. "Anyway, we'll be leaving today."

"We welcome you back to the Xia Kingdom after your graduation," Jiang Qing'e said.

"Like I said." Zhao Huiyin winked. "Dump Li Luo and take over House Luolan, and I'll come join you for sure."

Li Luo's eyes narrowed.

He looked over at Lu Cāng, who was still staring closely at him. He seemed to have something to say to Li Luo. Jiang Qing'e noticed as much, and walked away with Zhao Huiyin as they chatted.

"Well? Still can't accept the loss?" Li Luo grinned at him as he leaned against a stone banister along the lake.

Lu Cāng shook his head. "Not at all. Strictly speaking, I'm the one who cheated, using someone else's strength. It was a one-on-two for you."

Li Luo felt a little warmer to him. Lu Cāng was quite an honest one.

"Well, it's not really cheating. It's your special gift after all."

Lu Cāng hesitated. "Actually, I wanted to know why your final attack that beat me was so strong."

Li Luo was surprised. He recalled his final punch back at the bottom of the lake. In that moment, he had evolved his waterlight resonance, but he had managed what he could because of an additional clutch epiphany that he had had regarding his dual resonances.

Dual resonances had three steps: minor merging, becoming one, sentience.

Previously, his dual resonances had always been at the first step, but his punch back then had reached over into the becoming one step for a brief moment.

The dual light halos had been proof enough.

In the last two days, he had continued experimenting with his dual resonances as well, but he had not managed to replicate his success. His brief breakthrough was not true mastery.

Still, it was a good sign. It indicated that his skill with the dual resonances was improving. Even a brief breakthrough was better than no breakthrough. One made their own luck, after all. Surely he would reach the becoming one step before long.

"That's the true power of dual resonances, the becoming one step," Li Luo said cheerfully. He did not hide it.

Lu Cāng inhaled sharply, then he let the breath out heavily. "That's the power of a true dual resonance user. I might be able to borrow my brother's strength and elemental affinity, but that's only two resonances, not a dual resonance. I can't merge them. I can't get that becoming one power."

Li Luo nodded thoughtfully. He had realized as much in their fight. With Lu Cāng supporting him, his resonant power was very strong, but the two powers would be separate till the end.

They could not merge, and the true power of dual resonances eluded him.

Two pythons could not defeat a dragon.

"Well, you're pretty awesome yourself," Li Luo said with true feeling, giving him a big thumbs up. Definitely still a power worth respecting.

Lu Cāng smiled back at him. "I guess the Blue Abyss Sage College won't be at the Holy Grail Meet this time. But I'll be watching you. All the best. I hope you do well. Your opponents there will be far stronger than me."

He hesitated.

"Another piece of news, for free. You will not be the only true dual resonance user at the Holy Grail Meet. Whoever they are, I'm sure you'll face the true power of dual resonances as well."

Li Luo was surprised, but not too surprised. He nodded gratefully.

"In that case... I might even be a little interested."