

Resonance 491

Chapter 0491: Illusion Formation

Li Luo and the others moved swiftly across the crimson sea.

He himself took point, eyes constantly flicking around them to scan for danger, his resonant power at the ready on his fingertips to deal with any sudden changes.

The others were equally alert.

Pssht.

Hisses of vapor and geysers of fire and magma punctuated their advance, and they avoided them prudently. Although the anima dew was supposed to be able to negate the effects of the fire in the Dragon's Belly, the water membrane was also constantly being worn down just by the environment.

They had no intention of letting it wear out too liberally.

The group pressed on, tension in their movements. They came across other schools along the way, but they moved either singly or in pairs. Seeing a group of six made them fearful enough to give the Astral Sage students a wide berth, afraid that Li Luo and the others would attack them.

Which meant that they had a smooth journey.

Before they knew it, they had already spent six hours in the Dragon's Belly.

According to the information they had gathered, they had to be in the middle zone of the Dragon's Belly by now. They should be out of Dragon's Belly in another 10 hours, and on Dragonbone Island.

Li Luo heaved a sigh of relief.

Just at this moment, Lu Qing'er sped up until she was beside him. Her fragrance tickled his nose before he turned to see her.

"Li Luo, there's something odd."

"Odd?" Li Luo said tensely. "I don't like odd. I like smooth and uneventful things."

"I think the anima dew membrane is evaporating at a faster rate than before."

Li Luo stared at her in alarm. "You can detect that?" He had just taken it for granted that the membrane would be gradually evaporating as they moved on, and had not paid much attention to its condition.

"It used to take 80 breaths of time before one tick of evaporation would happen. But 10 minutes ago, the rate doubled to 40 breaths of time."

Li Luo was amazed. "You actually kept track?"

Lu Qing'er blushed. "I can't be of too much help here, so I thought I'd better pay more attention to the details that I can manage. But nothing changed around us... why would the evaporation rate suddenly double?"

Li Luo nodded. He quickly raised his fist in a sign.

The group halted, looking at him doubtfully.

Li Luo did not say anything yet. He counted 40 breaths silently to himself, and then saw a tiny shimmer on the water membrane.

His face grew serious.

"What's wrong, Li Luo?" Bai Doudou asked impatiently.

"Something's not right. The evaporation rate of our anima dew membrane has doubled, but nothing seems to have changed. That's not normal."

Lu Qing'er explained her calculations to the rest, who quickly tested it out for themselves and confirmed the situation.

"Could this be a normal thing?" Wang Hejiu asked cautiously.

"It's possible," Li Luo agreed. "But what if it's not?"

Wang Hejiu's expression was sober. If it were not a normal phenomenon, they were in trouble. Li Luo's prudence was reasonable. In such a dangerous environment, such an insidious difference could see them all eliminated.

None of them wanted to be eliminated in such an unsatisfying manner after all their efforts.

"But there's nothing unusual around us. The anima dew not only separates us from the heat of the Dragon's Belly, it also dulls our senses." Bai Doudou frowned.

And yet they could not let the anima dew membrane evaporate. That was death.

"I feel uneasy about it also," Qin Zhulu said in a low voice. "Could there be some invisible danger around us?"

Li Luo felt a chill run down his spine.

"Maybe it is our eyes that are not seeing reality," he said slowly.

"You mean... we're in an illusion?" Yi Lisha said, startled.

Li Luo formed a seal with water resonant power, creating a drop of dark-blue energy.

He dabbed it on his eyes.

"Water resonance art, Clear Eyes!"

This was a basic resonance art with not much use besides its ability to see through some illusions.

The cool liquid spread across his eyes, and suddenly the world was clearer. Li Luo looked around him, and his eyes widened dramatically.

Bai Doudou, Qin Zhulu, and the others' hearts sank. Trouble.

Without them asking, Li Luo quickly flicked several drops of the same liquid towards their eyes.

They allowed the liquid to settle, then they could also see the situation around them clearly.

Despite the heat, they all turned pale.

The sea that they were supposed to be above was now boiling like crazy. It was a flaming sea.

Even with the anima dew's protection, they flinched at the fury of the flames beneath them.

They knew that without the dew, they would have been incinerated to a crisp long ago.

And now they knew why the anima dew membranes were evaporating so quickly. Without knowing it, they had walked right into a flaming sea.

But how had they come in without realizing it?

An illusion?

But whose?

And why?

"This isn't an ordinary illusion, it's a powerful illusion formation," Li Luo said. "And someone created one so advanced that all of us walked in without knowing. I think there's only one person in the Hall-level competition who can achieve that."

Bai Doudou gritted her teeth. "Lu Ming?"

Lu Ming was nicknamed the Illusory Thunderbolt, and illusions were said to be her specialty.

Lu Qing'er frowned. "Why would she attack us?"

Li Luo looked up. "Jing Taixu," he called out sternly. "Is this your doing?"

The others jumped, looking around them in alarm. And then a person materialized out of thin air. Jing Taixu!

Chapter 0492: Perilous Situation

When Jing Taixu appeared, the rest of the Astral Sage students immediately understood what had happened.

They were being ganged up on.

By two powerhouses, one of which was last iteration's champion, no less.

Li Luo turned a cold smile to Jing Taixu. "Looks like Friend Jing Taixu is still upset by the one-step difference on the Stairway to Heaven."

"Not exactly," Jing Taixu answered seriously. "More accurately, your performance on the Stairway to Heaven made me realize that you were a real threat. That was why I gave you respect and set a trap. I felt that if I didn't do so, the Hall-level competition might well end up with an upset."

"Well, what an honor," Li Luo said. "And where is Lu Ming?" he asked, looking around. "I feel like getting two champions to gang up on me is quite an impressive accomplishment."

"Ah, not here." Jing Taixu smiled. "I just asked her for help with this illusion formation. I'm sure she's more than happy to see the two of us fight."

"Happy to fight someone while others wait to clean us up?" Li Luo said sarcastically. "You can't be that stupid, Jing Taixu."

"I had no choice." Jing Taixu shrugged. "You're more dangerous than she is."

"So an early ambush... aiming to take out the Astral Sage College's whole contingent in one hit. Not afraid you've bitten off more than you can chew?"

"Please, Li Luo. You should give me some credit. Do you think I would give you even a sliver of a chance in my plan?"

Jing Taixu pulled out a huge plantain fan, the leafy fan shining with a golden dot on the stalk. "Don't blame me for being so cruel. All's fair in war."

A gold-eye treasured artifact.

"Although I would have loved to fight you fair and square on Dragonbone Island, I have the school's win to think about. Eliminating you with the terrain advantage is the most prudent move. But don't worry, I'll carry your hopes on and win the One Star Hall strongest student title for us," Jing Taixu finished with a small snicker.

He brought the fan down in a massive sweep.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The fan called forth a tornado dozens of meters wide, flying out towards Li Luo's group.

The wind swept the Dragon's Belly fire into a new fury, catching flames into its deadly swirl and becoming a fire tornado.

The temperature climbed dramatically.

The sea below them was bubbling furiously.

Li Luo and the others were staring down in dismay. Their anima dew membranes were evaporating at a frightful pace. That was Jing Taixu's plan.

He did not intend to fight them head-on. Instead, he would just keep fanning the flames until they were all eliminated through heat.

Their best move now was to leave the area, but the illusion formation was preventing it. And if they panicked and moved too recklessly, the fire tornado would sweep them up and eliminate them anyway.

If they did nothing, they would die like sitting ducks. Roasted. Roasted ducks.

But what could they do against that fire tornado?

It was a mini natural disaster of its own.

"I'll do it!"

Bai Doudou stepped forward, short hair blowing backwards majestically. Her face was grim as she prepared to deal with the tornado. She knew that Jing Taixu was fueling it with his wind resonant power, wielding the tornado like a hammer to crush them. She was the only wind resonance user they had. If she could change the direction of the tornado, perhaps not all of them would die.

Bai Doudou leaped right in without bothering to wait for Li Luo's response. By the time she shouted, her Cherry Blossom Spear was stabbing out with wind resonant power charged in it.

"Wind, rise!"

She sent forth her own green tornado, although it was clearly nowhere as powerful as Jing Taixu's.

Jing Taixu was not only stronger in terms of cultivation level, he also had a quasi ninth-grade resonance. And to top it all off, his plantain fan was no ordinary weapon.

Bai Doudou's wind resonant power howled forth, picking up speed before it clashed with the larger fire tornado.

Boom!

It was winds that clashed, and yet the resultant sound was loud as thunder.

The heated environment welcomed the new winds, greedily taking up the extra air. The temperature climbed.

The situation grew bleaker and bleaker.

Both sides backed away from the winds, unable to get too close.

But the clash of tornadoes did not last long. Bai Doudou's strength waned before Jing Taixu's. A few minutes later, her own tornado was completely dispelled.

With a soft cry of pain, Bai Doudou stumbled backwards.

She gritted her teeth and made ready to try again.

Li Luo's arm stopped her. "Don't force it. It'll only make our situation worse."

He gestured to their anima dew membranes. The two tornadoes had only made them evaporate faster than ever.

"What do we do, then?" Bai Doudou said exasperatedly. "Sit here and wait for death?"

Li Luo's mood was grave. This illusion formation did not do much in the way of offense; its purpose was simply to hold them here. Ordinarily, it should not be difficult to unravel, given enough time. But they had to deal with the fire tornado, both a threat in itself, and a constant engine cranking up the heat around them. Their anima dew membranes were evaporating too quickly, and time was a precious and scarce resource right now.

"Yeah, we're going to have to go for it," Li Luo stated.

"This fire tornado is destructive. It's going to break down the illusion formation too. If we can just hold out for a while more, the illusion formation should break, and we can leave.

"I'm the commander, so I'll go first!"

He stepped out, resonant power bunching behind him as he prepared to leap into the cyclone.

A hand on his shoulder stopped him, and the person stepped ahead of him.

Qin Zhulu.

"Li Luo, what you need to do right now is remain behind. You alone stand a chance at defeating Jing Taixu and winning the strongest student title.

"You're not cannon fodder.

"If cannon fodder is needed, let it be us. Go and win this for us."

Bai Doudou stepped beside Qin Zhulu, punching him gently on the shoulder. "Well, we won't die from this, I guess."

Yi Lisha grinned. "Hey, never thought the day would come when Li Luo would depend on us for protection, eh? How moved are you right now? Gonna cry?"

Lu Qing'er smiled wordlessly and stepped to stand by their side.

Wang Hejiu was last, his face emotionless. "Li Luo, don't let us down."

Li Luo felt a blaze of warmth within him, a comfortable sensation unlike the scorching heat outside. He smiled and shook his head, then he shouldered his way between them to stand beside Qin Zhulu, Onyx-Elephant Blade in hand.

"First, last, front, back, phooey. Let's do this together." He laughed.

He turned his eyes forward with a grim smile on his face. Jing Taixu felt the killing intent.

Boom!

The fire tornado roared ahead of them as all six gathered their powers, then they jumped forward to meet it.

Chapter 0493: Hunter or Hunted?

"What a united team. It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside," Jing Taixu said with a sardonic smile. He had no intention of lingering here. His anima dew membrane was being worn down as well.

"Time to go. Follow me. No missteps," Jing Taixu said to his team.

He took careful, precise steps along the water's surface, following the method of escape that Lu Ming had told him before.

His squad followed him closely. In this illusion formation, one wrong step, and they would be in the same flaming sea as the Astral Sage College was.

And then they would be the ones crying for help.

Li Luo and the others had no energy left to stop Jing Taixu's group from leaving. He would love to cut Jing Taixu down right now, but the most important thing was to get out of the Dragon's Belly.

All of them fought against the fire tornado, wearing it down bit by bit.

The tornado was stubborn. Even with its creator no longer feeding it energy, it was at a massive size already, and an uncontrollable force.

The Astral Sage students did not give up. They knew that this was their final, desperate bid. There was nothing else to fall back on.

The illusion formation was starting to fray from the tornado. If they could just hold on for a while more, they would be free.

"Left three... back one..."

Within the illusion formation, Jing Taixu led his group along a precarious route out of the illusion formation. With each step, the illusion faded a little more around them, indicating that they were slowly but surely getting out.

A few minutes later, Jing Taixu suddenly stopped.

He was at the last step now, and his foot was already midair when he paused.

According to Lu Ming, the final instruction was a step to the left, which would take them out.

The instructions up till now had been correct. Jing Taixu had no reason to doubt them... but if he were Lu Ming, would he really have given them the correct instructions to leave the illusion formation?n--
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He, Jing Taixu, was going to be Lu Ming's greatest threat.

Now that she had managed to get him into her formation, it was the perfect chance to trap him for good. Would Lu Ming pass up on this chance?

And if he wanted to trap his strongest opponent, where would he lead them wrong?

Undoubtedly on the last step.

Give them correct instructions to lure them into a false sense of security, and then trip them up on the last step with a nasty surprise.

That was why the smooth process up till now had Jing Taixu suspicious about the last step.

There were two choices available to him.

Left or right?

While he was hesitating, a voice came at him. "Jing Taixu, what are you hesitating about?"

Jing Taixu's head snapped up as he looked around him. "Lu Ming? The last step... it really is left, isn't it?"

"Oh? You think I gave you the wrong instructions?" Lu Ming demanded coldly.

"Wouldn't you?" Jing Taixu replied coolly.

"Believe it. Or not. Your choice," Lu Ming sneered. And then her voice was gone.

"Too hasty," Jing Taixu mumbled to himself triumphantly. "Lu Ming, if only you had been a bit more patient, if only you hadn't said anything. Are you that anxious to control the process, to get me to take the step?"

Silence greeted him.

Jing Taixu smiled widely. He was not a trusting person, and now he had reason to doubt Lu Ming. Of course he would not follow her instructions.

He stepped to the right without hesitation.

BOOM!

A vicious arc of lightning jolted up his leg, and he felt his body jerk and travel through space. His ears were ringing from the impact.

A ball of fire greeted his wild eyes.

Jing Taixu paled.

A fire tornado howled before him.

A very familiar fire tornado...

The very one that he had made himself.

Jing Taixu whirled around to see Li Luo and the others staring at him in surprise.

The rest of the Enlightened Sage College students were behind him.

All of them paled when they saw the fire tornado. They knew what it meant.

"Lu Ming!"

Jing Taixu screamed to the skies in frustration. He had chosen wrong!

Lu Ming had given him the correct instructions after all!

The cunning woman!

"Keh. Oh, Jing Taixu, what a clever boy you are. The clever ones are always done in by their hubris. I threw you a rope, and you saw a hangman's noose. You deserve your own ending." Lu Ming's voice echoed around him tauntingly.

"You were acting!" Jing Taixu snarled. She had faked the anxiety to stoke the paranoia within him.

This woman... perhaps he had been trapped from the moment he had gone to her.

He wanted to finish off Li Luo. Why wouldn't Lu Ming finish off both him and Li Luo?

But Jing Taixu curbed his anger swiftly. It was not useful in this situation. And he was not completely helpless even after being trapped by Lu Ming.

However...

Jing Taixu turned around. "Li Luo, I have a way to leave her illusion formation. Truce?"

Li Luo looked at him oddly. "Jing Taixu, I swear, you... just what is it you spend your days and nights doing?"

Jing Taixu grimaced. He knew how foolish, how desperate he looked at this moment. But there was no choice. Lu Ming's trap had put him in a dangerous situation.

"You go first," Li Luo said tersely. He wanted to leave the illusion formation too. Otherwise, they would sit here and be cooked.

Get out first. Settle the score with Jing Taixu later.

Jing Taixu felt relief rush through him. He knew that Li Luo was smart enough not to fight him now as well. Get out first. Settle the score with Lu Ming later.

Jing Taixu waved to his teammates.

They nodded and then all put their palms together. Each created a condensed ball of energy, pulsing with light.

Boom!

They flew out, streaking forth like a flight of birds, and then they punched a hole in the side of the illusion formation.

They continued to weave in and out of the wall of the illusion formation, tearing a rift wider and wider.

"Looks like you didn't trust me much from the start, Jing Taixu." Lu Ming's voice again.

"Oh, I'm sure the sentiment goes both ways, my dear," Jing Taixu replied coolly. With this gap, he could escape, but so could Li Luo.

"Hmph," Lu Ming replied. "Jing Taixu, since you came to find me, how could I let you leave empty-handed?"

Boom!

A sizzling, crackling sphere of lightning flew through the gap, flashing past both Jing Taixu and Li Luo. It was aimed straight at the fire tornado.

"GET OUT!" Jing Taixu screamed. "SHE'S GONNA BLOW IT ALL!"

Li Luo and his team fled for their lives.

Boom!

The lightning was too quick. With a terrible explosion, the fire tornado exploded, and fire rained down on them thick and heavy.

All of them were blanketed underneath it.

Chapter 0494: Bloodline Resonance Art

Crash!

The Dragon's Belly was a scene of molten chaos, lava and rocks spraying in all directions. A spectacular wave of crimson roared up from underneath, hissing at their feet.

Li Luo backed away in fright, skidding backwards with his water resonant power for a good hundred meters. The lightning and lava explosion had not only done physical damage, it had completely scrambled his insides as well. His entire system was screaming with pain and disorientation, but he ignored it to check the anima dew membrane on his skin instead.

His heart sank.

The once-sparkling membrane was now much, much dimmer. It seemed much thinner than before as well.

The explosion had badly worn down their anima dew membranes.

Li Luo swore inwardly, then he turned to the others. Qin Zhulu, Bai Doudou, Lu Qing'er, Yi Lisha, Wang Hejiu. All of them had also scrambled as far away as they could, for safety. Now they were coming back to Li Luo, making their way over as quickly as they could.

They all looked grim, having checked their anima dew membranes as well. Some of theirs were in an even worse state than Li Luo's.

"We're screwed," Yi Lisha said with a resigned smile. "I'm afraid the thickness of our membranes won't even carry us to Dragonbone Island."

"Damn! Damn!!" Qin Zhulu shouted, his voice trembling from frustration.

Bai Doudou ground her teeth in silence. It was incredibly frustrating—their minds had all been on the final battle at Dragonbone Island, and they had tripped on their first step there, before they had even expected any trouble.

That damned Jing Taixu.

The man was a maniac.

All because he thought Li Luo was a threat, he had risked it all to bring him down.

And now Jing Taixu himself was paying the price as well.

A short distance away, the Enlightened Sage students were huddled together as well, just as miserable.

Their anima dew membranes were severely depleted as well.

They would not make it to Dragonbone Island either.

This sudden slip into their doom left Bai Doudou speechless. The two most likely schools to win were going to be eliminated without even reaching Dragonbone Island?

Li Luo stared at Jing Taixu with a deep loathing. The killing intent was building up within him.

Jing Taixu gave him an apologetic smile. "Friend Li Luo, I miscalculated badly."

"You are an idiot," Li Luo said witheringly.

"Perhaps." Jing Taixu agreed with a shrug. "But maybe not all is lost."

"Your anima dew membrane is as badly depleted as ours. You won't make it to Dragonbone Island either," Bai Doudou said with a barking laugh.

"Maybe I won't make it, maybe I will."

Qin Zhulu and the others frowned. What else did this guy have up his sleeve?

"The anima dew membrane will hold out for a while more. With enough speed, I should be able to make it out. After all, speed is what I'm good at," Jing Taixu said with a soft laugh.

"Sorry," he said to Li Luo. "The situation's bad, but not all hope is lost for me. I wanted to have a good fight with you in the end, to see if my instincts were right... but that's not possible now."

He turned to his teammates. "Lu Chen, I'll head off first."

Even the second-in-command of their school knew that there was no other choice. "We don't have your speed," Lu Chen said resignedly. "We won't make it to Dragonbone Island. You'll be on your own, but I hope you bring home the title."

"Don't worry," Jing Taixu told him with a small nod of reassurance. "And I'll make sure to settle the score with Lu Ming as well."

He wasted no more time, sprouting a pair of green wings filled with wind resonant energy. He was gone a moment later.

Gone like the wind.

The Astral Sage students watched with a sick feeling in their stomachs.

With that sort of speed, it was indeed possible that he might make it to Dragonbone Island before the anima dew membrane evaporated completely.

"Damn it all!" Bai Doudou screamed in frustration.

Jing Taixu had dragged them all into the mud and then escaped by himself, leaving them doomed for a slow, unsatisfying elimination.

Li Luo watched Jing Taixu go with a blank look on his face.

"Li Luo, you should go too. Our anima dew membranes are too thin, but yours is a little better. If you hurry, you might make it," Bai Doudou said dully.

Qin Zhulu and Yi Lisha nodded as well. "Better one lives than none."

"It's no use," Wang Hejiu said with little hope. "There's no way Li Luo can match Jing Taixu's speed."

There was no comeback to this. Jing Taixu was a quasi ninth-grade wind resonance user at the Third Changing.

"We can't just give up like this!" Bai Doudou snarled.

Li Luo waved his hand tiredly to cease the quarrel. Wang Hejiu's words were depressing but true. There was no way to match Jing Taixu's speed, normally. But if he had no other choice, he wasn't completely out of options...

His hand drifted towards the red bracelet on his other hand. With the power of the three-tailed heavenly wolf, his speed and resonant power would probably get him there in time.

But...

What a waste of energy.

It was his ultimate ace.

He didn't even want to use it in the Hall-level competition.

But in these circumstances, it seemed like he had no other choice. Otherwise, he could not guarantee that he would reach Dragonbone Island.

"Whew."

Li Luo made his decision.

He began to recite the Heavenly Libation Chant that would release the wolf's power.

"Maybe there's a way," a voice called from beside him.

Everyone turned around in surprise, even Li Luo. It was Lu Qing'er.

She hesitated for a moment. "Li Luo, do you trust me?"

He smiled at her. "Of course," he said simply.

She smiled back gratefully. "I have a resonance art that can sheath you in ice armor. It can slow the burn of the anima dew membrane for you."

Everyone stared at her in surprise.

"Qing'er... you must be joking," Bai Doudou spluttered. "You should know how strong the fire here in the Dragon's Belly is. How can our little bit of resonant power possibly make a difference?"

Lu Qing'er was the weakest out of all of them. Although her ice resonance was a lower eighth-grade, the rest of them were on the same level!

"Can't hurt to try," Li Luo said with a curious smile. Resonance grade was one thing, but after working with her in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, he had developed a healthy respect for the riches and powers that backed her.

It made sense to him that she would have options the rest of them did not.

"Give me your hand," she said.

Li Luo did so.

Removing her ice silk gloves, she hesitated for only a moment before taking hold of his hand with barely a blush.

Immediately, a trickle of cool energy seeped into Li Luo's hands. In the sweltering heat, he was seized with a sudden thought that it would feel so good to hug a cool thing... such as the owner of these hands.

Lu Qing'er was still a little uncomfortable at having her hand touched, but she pressed on. She bit her own finger, letting blood flow freely from the tip, then pressed it into Li Luo's palm with a curious chant.

The chant turned her blood into an icy-blue color.

Lu Qing'er's eyes closed, and she spoke a few words.

"Bloodline resonance art, Eternal Night Ice Armor."

Chapter 495: Resonance of the Plaque

When Lu Qing'er spoke with her soft voice, the icy-blue blood coalesced into a seal that radiated with splendorous light. One could see thin lines of clear, blue light emanate from the source on Li Luo's palm.

The light strands very quickly enveloped his body, gradually taking shape as a complete suit of plate mail.

Emblazoned all over the suit of armor was an intricate, dark-red engraving that emanated an absolute frost. The very presence of this rime had a suppressive effect on the berserk heat all around them, pushing it down a notch with a countering force.

Yet this was a temporary relief that was short lived when the inferno blazed up again, coalescing and renewing the unfathomable heat. Li Luo's icy platemail then began to show hints of melting.

However, all this was unimportant. What impressed everyone was that despite the blue-colored platemail melting, it covered the anima dew membrane and greatly reduced the speed of its evaporation.

The sight flabbergasted the group.

How did this make sense? Had it really worked?

What in tarnation was that resonance art, Lu Qing'er? It was so immensely mighty that it could erode even the flames of the Dragon's Belly.

How?!

Amidst the looks of shock, Lu Qing'er's complexion had paled significantly, and she wobbled, weakness taking hold of her now frail body. Luckily, Bai Doudou supported her in the nick of time. "Li Luo, this is my final gift to you. The suit of Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail will allow you to temper the rate at which the anima dew membrane dissipates, giving you that much more time and space to struggle. Whether you will be able to reach Dragonbone Island is up to you now," Lu Qing'er weakly explained.

Li Luo cautiously examined the miraculous armor that surrounded him. This was truly an unexpected solution to the dilemma at hand.

He could clearly feel that the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail was no ordinary resonance art.

Despite being taken aback, he quickly recomposed himself and gave an exuberant smile towards Lu Qing'er. "Your methods are truly unfathomable and timely." This was the best case scenario as he no longer had to pull out his trump card, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf.

Truly an unpredicted windfall.

Looking at the elated Li Luo brought Lu Qing'er a great sense of joy. This unique resonance art was something she had practiced long and arduously to master. In fact, Yu Hongxi was extremely dissatisfied that she had picked such a resonance art to train in. Lu Qing'er currently only had the capability to master one bloodline resonance art, and instead of picking one that could serve as a lethal blade in times of trouble, she had picked this turtle shell.

Ultimately, Lu Qing'er's wishes took precedence and Yu Hongxi could only sigh in helplessness.

It was doubly fortunate that this resonance art was able to achieve the goal she had wanted.

Self-satisfaction bloomed within her, knowing that she had managed to assist Li Luo. "Unfortunately, with my current resonant power, conjuring just one suit of armor is my absolute limit. I can't help anyone else," Lu Qing'er apologetically explained to the rest.

Qin Zhulu shook his head. "With such dire circumstances, being able to send Li Luo on his way is the best-case scenario."

"Hurry and move your butt, Li Luo. Don't waste any more time," Bai Doudou chided. The Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail was not a complete panacea to the problem, just a temporary band-aid. The clock was still ticking and its end would come eventually, so the quicker Li Luo took advantage of it, the better. Otherwise, if this was all for naught, that would truly be regretful.

Wang Hejiu was also feeling dour. He had struggled to obtain anima dew and finally grasped the opportunity to struggle amidst the titans on Dragonbone Island... and now he was struggling against inevitable elimination, only able to watch Li Luo take those last, glorious steps...

"Do your best, Li Luo. I hope you can beat that son of a gun Jing Taixu and express our joy at meeting him in the most barbaric way possible," Yi Lisha joked.

Knowing that time was of the essence and seeing everyone's expectant gazes, he heaved a deep sigh and nodded.

"I will."

Just as his weighty words descended upon the group, resonant power burst out from his body and he flashed forward with blazing speed. When his feet made contact with the sea of flames, water resonant power rippled forth in response. Gathering force like a coiled spring, he then violently launched himself outwards.

A single leap covered over a hundred meters. Although he was not as fast as the sky-soaring Jing Taixu, the speed at which he moved through the sea of flames was nothing to scoff at.

Briefly turning around, he could see from the corner of his eye that in a small area far, far away, his compatriots were gradually being smothered by the flames, eventually turning into streams of light that were the sign of elimination.

The sight caused him to pause in his steps for a few seconds before he turned and proceeded with renewed vigor. His expression remained impassive, but a hint of malice could be seen within his eyes.

“Jing Taixu.

“No. Lu Ming as well.”

Although Jing Taixu was the main antagonist, Lu Ming had clearly given a significant helping hand. Regardless of her objective, she had played a part. They would reap what they sowed.

Otherwise, how could he face his disqualified companions?

Li Luo proceeded to rush forward, and the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail began to slowly melt. Luckily, so long as the armor held up, the anima dew membrane would only dissipate at the lowest possible rate!

“Judging by the rate at which it melts, I should probably have another eight hours of time left.” After which, the anima dew membrane would begin to wear down.

When that occurred, it would be impossible to arrive at Dragonbone Island, as the vicious flames of the Dragon’s Belly would force him out of the competition.

“I hope I can make it,” Li Luo murmured to himself as he redoubled his efforts to speed ahead.

He had even bumped into competitors from other sage colleges on the way. Upon seeing his anxious state of mind, they were slightly taken aback. Yet upon closer inspection, they could sense his frail anima dew membrane, which brought joy to those who reveled in seeing others suffering.

Who knew how the dratted Li Luo had squandered his anima dew membrane. It was no surprise he’d be nervous in this situation. If he failed to reach Dragonbone Island, cheering would be his only game.

Thus, the other competitors were full of smiles. Li Luo was considered a potential champion, and being eliminated before the main competition would mean one less tiger on the mountain.

Of course, none of this fazed Li Luo. His only play was to make his way.

Time passed, and only two hours remained for him.

The Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail had shrunk to its thinnest state at this point.

Li Luo’s gaze was unyielding and focused. This was expected, and there was nothing to freak out about. Instead, he channeled more resonant power from his dual palaces, further bolstering his speed.

“I should be able to make it! Li Luo! Don’t give up on yourself!” His heart palpitated with emotion as he steeled himself. He didn’t want to be kicked out on the cusp of success!

Boom!

As he continued to push forward relentlessly, a sudden gout of flame burst out from beneath his foot. Dodging reflexively, he managed to avoid the sudden danger. However, a stream of dragon's bloodfire seemingly followed him, rushing at him as though attracted by something on his wrist.

This sight unnerved Li Luo as that was his pocket sphere!

He could not afford to have this treasure damaged, as all of his treasures would inevitably fall out!

Despite his best efforts, he was unable to react in time and could only blankly watch that stream of dragon's bloodfire collide directly with his prized pocket sphere.

Mentally preparing himself to watch the total destruction of his pocket sphere, the sight that unfolded surprised him as well. The pocket sphere was undamaged, and the stream of dragon's bloodfire seemed to have vanished completely.

Li Luo continued to push forward undeterred, but his expression was one full of confusion.

He could feel that something was going on within the pocket sphere.

Just what could have absorbed that trace of dragon's bloodfire?

Li Luo paused for a moment before reaching within, and an object fell into his hands.

It was that black plaque engraved with the word "Li," which was emanating a mysterious glow.

Chapter 496: Dragon's Bloodpearl

"What in the world just happened?" Li Luo wondered to himself, staring down in surprise at the cool, black plaque in his hand. It had been left to him by his parents.

It had something to do with the bloodline of Heavenly King Li. ~~no~~ **V**e/**B**(In

And now the black plaque had absorbed a dragon's bloodfire for him?

Li Luo inspected the plaque closely, but nothing seemed to have changed... No, wait. There was something on the bottom of the "Li" character.

There was a faint imprint of a dragon there. It was a vague, barely visible imprint, but Li Luo could sense a special and ancient power emanating from it.

It was, for all intents and purposes, a shallow, vague imprint of a dragon, and there was no explicable reason why he should feel such tremendous power coming from it.

And at the head of the dragon, roughly at the mouth's position, there was a faint, red dot.

It was so small that Li Luo would not have noticed it if not for his super-thorough inspection.

Still, he was sure that there had been no such red dot at the dragon's mouth back when he had first received the plaque.

So...

It had just appeared?

A jolt of realization hit him. Could it be that the dragon's bloodfire had been absorbed into the plaque?

What was going on?

Li Luo was sweating like crazy from the confusion. He didn't like it when he didn't understand what was going on. Even if it seemed to be a good thing for him.

While he was still reeling from his serendipitous encounter, another barrage of dragon's bloodfire came at him from all sides. Rudely shaken out of his reverie, Li Luo scrambled to protect his anima dew membrane from instant evaporation.

But his alarm was not necessary, and it was soon replaced with pure astonishment.

He realized that the dragon's bloodfire was flying like birds heading home to nest... straight towards the black plaque in his hand.

Li Luo froze on the spot, too dumbfounded to move.

More and more jets of dragon's bloodfire streamed into the black plaque like some sort of magical vacuum, and the dull, red dot was now growing clearer by the second.

It looked like an orb of ruby in the dragon's maw.

Li Luo's eyes sparkled with deep interest. Was dragon's bloodfire food for the dragon imprint on his black plaque?

And what uses did the red dot have?

He pondered this for a moment. Should he head to Dragonbone Island as quickly as possible, or let the dragon imprint continue to absorb its fill of dragon's bloodfire?

His gut told him that a little patience would pay off. The red dot smelled like power and goodness in his future.

Li Luo made his decision very quickly.

The island could come later. First, the dragon's bloodfire stockpiling. Dragonbone Island had to be in chaos right now. The elite schools had all arrived, and intense eliminations were probably going on at this very moment.

Li Luo was more than happy to give it a miss. Less work, more rewards—he would sign up for this every time.

If he could skip past the first grueling phase of elimination on the island, and also stockpile dragon's bloodfire, he might be able to emerge on top of the world.

Of course, there was an important disclaimer to all this... that the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail would hold out. How strong was Lu Qing'er's technique?

It was a difficult question to answer. The platemail was unique, but it was limited by Lu Qing'er's resonant power. Neither was it completely impervious to the extremely destructive heat of the Dragon's Belly. Li Luo had been very worried about it up until now.

His worries were gone.

Because the depletion rate of the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail had slowed.

This was no misperception on Li Luo's part—he had paid close attention to it.

By right, being swarmed by dragon's bloodfire should have melted the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail significantly, not slowed down its depletion rate.

"Is it because of the absorption?" Li Luo mused. In any case, this was good news for him. If the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail could hold out, his plan was good to go.

"Qing'er's really did me a solid on this one," Li Luo thought to himself cheerfully. Without her protection, his anima dew membrane would have torn long ago, even with the black plaque to absorb dragon's bloodfire away from him. He would have had to give up on this competition.

"But just to be safe, I should drift a little closer to Dragonbone Island, so I can immediately head up the moment I'm done here."

Li Luo set off again, but at a much more moderate pace this time.

Along the way, he sucked more jets of dragon's bloodfire into the black plaque like some sort of magnet for fire, making the red dot glow even more brightly than ever.

The silhouette of Dragonbone Island could be made out in the distance now, but the black plaque seemed limitless.

Li Luo frowned. His Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail was wearing very thin now. Once it broke, there would probably only be ten minutes left on his anima dew membrane.

"Five more minutes!" he thought. If he could not finish filling his plaque in five minutes, he would head off regardless.

There was no point in filling the bucket to the brim if he was going to spill it.

300 seconds passed in the blink of an eye.

The black plaque was far from satisfied.

Li Luo sighed to himself, but he didn't hesitate to make his way towards Dragonbone Island.

The Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail melted fully, and now his anima dew membrane started to tank the brunt of the heat again.

It was uncomfortably thin now, and he felt the prickling heat on his skin.

He curbed the rising panic within him and pressed on.

A few minutes later, the red water under his feet grew shallower and he rose up into the air, landing safely on the ground of Dragonbone Island.

He was here.

Li Luo sighed at the plaque in his hand. "You disappoint me," he told it petulantly. He'd wasted so much time on it.

Just as he was about to stow it away, the plaque suddenly started vibrating.

The red dot was glowing brightly now, and a ball of fire seemed to be emerging from it, hovering above the plaque like a mini sun.

"It's done?" Li Luo exclaimed. But then again, what was done? What was this bunch of dragon spit supposed to do, even though it was very pretty?

As though hearing his question, the ball of fire resonated with the "Li" character on the plaque.

Again, he felt the ancient power present around him.

And then, to his surprise, a scarlet-pearl object materialized out of the black plaque, with fiery marks deep within its crystalline, garnet depths.

The red light faded away from the mouth of the dragon imprint.

"This is the result of all the dragon's bloodfire it absorbed?"

It seemed magical enough, but what was this thing supposed to do?

Li Luo hesitated, then he gripped the garnet sphere tightly in his hand. A dragon's roar filled his ears.

His eyes widened.

He understood.

He knew what it was for...

Wasn't it a primary material for his third acquired resonance?

A... dragon resonance?

Chapter 0497: Red Carpet to the Core Arena

Dragon tribe... an extremely strong and mysterious tribe.

They were part of the apex layer of the food chain among spirit beasts.

Of course, a dragon resonance was considered a beast resonance.

It was said that those who possessed dragon resonances had a special ability called dragonfear, which weakened the effects of other beast resonance users significantly. Of course, the effect was slightly weaker against pure elemental resonance users.

Still, this unique ability proved that dragon resonances were, at some fundamental level, superior to the other common beast resonances.

Back when Li Luo had been considering his third acquired resonance, he had of course thought about this unique and mighty beast resonance, but he was well aware that he would have to procure something with dragon essence.

Objects with dragon essence were extremely hard to come by. Li Luo had scoured all the treasures of the Golden Dragon Bank and found none.

With that, he had given up on the notion—no point dying on this hill.

But he had found one here in the Hall-level competition. A dragon essence object.

The dragonpearl he was now holding in his hand.

He could clearly feel the heat of the dragon fire within, and he had no doubt that it was worth trying to use it to temper an acquired dragon resonance.

If he succeeded, it could well be his third primary resonance.

Then again, dragon resonances were further split into many different types, each of different strengths. And there might be no way to find out before he refined it.

His fingers tightened around the pearl, savoring the feel of latent energy at his disposal and the potential of what he could achieve with it.

He looked down at the black plaque in his hand. Materials with dragon essence were rare, and they had strict and complicated conditions and creation processes. It wasn't as simple as gathering some dragon's bloodfire.

Which made the black plaque all the more enigmatic and powerful.

"Heavenly King Li's bloodline... What in the world is it, actually?"

He had no answers, so Li Luo gave up on the thought. He carefully stowed the garnet dragonpearl and black plaque.

It was really a piece of unexpected luck. A dragon essence object was immeasurably valuable, especially to an acquired resonance user like himself.

Perhaps it alone was enough to justify his participation in the Holy Grail Meet.

Li Luo looked up from his possession management and finally took a good look at Dragonbone Island, considering his next move.

The island itself was red ocher in color, with large, reddish-brown trees that stretched up to the skies. These trees were completely bare of leaves, and their red, skeletal branches were menacingly raised across the skyline. Beyond them was a jagged mountain range that promised a harsh and chilly terrain at the top.

"So this is the stage for the final battle, huh..." Li Luo found the island especially quiet, but he was not too bothered by it. After all, he had been in the Dragon's Belly for a long time. A round of eliminations had probably passed him by already.

Silence just meant that people were resting up.

By Li Luo's estimation, less than 10 percent of the students who reached the island remained.

That was good. It saved him time.

"I must be the guy who had the easiest journey here." Li Luo chuckled to himself. Thanks to Lu Qing'er's Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail and the black plaque absorbing most of the dragon's bloodfire for him, his journey through the Dragon's Belly had been as good as a leisurely stroll. The others would have been yelping their way over hot coals just to make it here.

Even someone as strong as Jing Taixu had no choice but to flee once his anima dew membrane weakened, not daring to linger.

After a moment's rest to compose himself, Li Luo set off for the middle of Dragonbone Island.

He moved briskly but without hurry, giving himself time to take in the surroundings and note signs of battle.

Each time he came across a battlefield, he tried to get a rough gauge of the numbers remaining and strength of the fighters before moving on.

As he neared the middle, Li Luo spotted a few heavily injured students. They were on the verge of being eliminated, but they had not yet broken their anima gourds, choosing instead to linger on this island for a while longer. When Li Luo appeared in front of them, they acted as though he were a ghost.

They did not understand why he would appear at this time and place.

Had he been hiding?

But Dragonbone Island was not large. With so many people crowding it, there wasn't much room to hide. But the sauntering Li Luo did not seem like he had been in many fights. He looked fresh as a spring flower, as if he'd just gotten out of bed or something.

Li Luo smiled affably at them, then he asked a few simple questions. Had they seen Jing Taixu? Where was Lu Ming?

But they merely rolled their eyes at him. Some even chose to break their anima gourds on the spot and leave. They had fought tooth and nail for a chance here, and their efforts had been frustrated. Seeing Li Luo strolling through the battlefield like a visitor was doubly frustrating.

Li Luo did not mind. He continued on deeper into Dragonbone Island.

Approximately two hours later.

Li Luo was nearing the core arena now.

He had to be the only one on Dragonbone Island to have reached so deep and showed up to the finals without having fought a single battle yet.

The core arena was an extremely tall and steep mountain that reached all the way into the clouds.

There were two paths that wound up its conical face.

At the top was the Dragonbone Throne. If anybody could sit on it without facing resistance, the strongest student title of the Hall-level competition would belong to them.

Surely Jing Taixu was hauling ass there so he could plant said ass on the throne.

Although the Enlightened Sage College had been similarly decimated in the Dragon's Belly, Jing Taixu alone was probably strong enough to reach the core arena, Li Luo believed.

Which route would he have chosen?

Li Luo looked at the two routes and scratched his head. Then he fished out a piece of skygold.

He flipped it in the air, then he smothered the gleam of the golden coin between his palm and the back of his hand.

He decided to take the left path.

He liked this path. It was a good path.

And a little ways up the path, he could hear the sound of thunder rumbling in the distance.

Chapter 0498: Lu Ming, Again

Li Luo strolled up the mountain path. Dull sunlight filtered down through the bare branches above his head, striping the mossy path ahead with yellow and gray.

His footsteps were quietened by the carpet of moss, in an already quiet environment.

It was almost peaceful, if not for the signs of battle that littered the way.

One could only imagine how intense the fighting must have been over the last few days.

Meanwhile, Li Luo strolled up the mountain like a hitchhiker.

Only at the halfway mark did he start to see scorch marks reminiscent of a lightning resonance user.

Three people lay inert on the floor.

Their entire bodies were badly burned, flesh grotesquely split as they groaned miserably.

Li Luo paused and looked down at them.

"Li-Li Luo?" one person stuttered in amazement.

Li Luo gave a small laugh when he recognized the person. It was Zhao Xingying, who he had fought when he found his first medium anima cumulonimbus. They had actually made it all the way here. More credit to them.

"Looks like you're out of this one," Li Luo said with a sympathetic smile.

"I don't know when you got here," Zhao Xingying said sourly, "but do you really imagine things are going to go well for you?"

Li Luo looked up at the forest ahead. "Lu Ming?"

Seeing these three badly done in by lightning resonance, he could not imagine there were many suspects around besides the Illusory Thunderbolt.

Zhao Xingying nodded, then he grimaced at the pain of the simple action.

"Jing Taixu didn't choose this path?" Li Luo asked.

"Jing Taixu and Sun Dasheng met on the other path, I heard."

"Hmm, hmm." Li Luo stroked his chin. The unstoppable versus the immovable. Who knew whether Sun Dasheng's Duke Art was stronger than Jing Taixu's quasi ninth-grade resonance?

Still, he was going to be putting up quite the show on his side as well.

Dual resonance user versus dual resonance user.

At least they would be fighting in the same aspect.

Satisfied with the information, Li Luo turned away from Zhao Xingying and moved in deeper.

Back in the Dragon's Belly, Lu Ming had been an accomplice in taking him down. Even though Jing Taixu was the mastermind, he was not going to let her slide so easily.

Lu Ming's parting shot had almost sunk them all.

If not for the Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail, he might not have even made it this far.

His luck had held in the end, but when he thought about all those days spent hunting down anima dew coming to naught, his teeth started to ache.

He knew the cure: pass the ache on to Lu Ming, preferably through a punch to the mouth or something.

It looked like his minor fears that they would not meet were unfounded.

Li Luo did not walk far into the forest ahead before he slowed down and looked around him.

A girl was perched high up on a tree, looking down haughtily at him with beautiful eyes.

Lu Ming.

"Li Luo... I didn't expect you to make it out of Dragon's Belly," Lu Ming said, unable to keep the surprise out of her voice.n))Ov**el**b1n

"Many thanks for your contributions to my safe journey," Li Luo replied dryly. "Oh, yes, my eliminated friends told me to beat you up as revenge."

"I'm afraid they're going to be disappointed, then," Lu Ming said indifferently.

Cool and arrogant.

Li Luo unsheathed his Onyx-Elephant Blade slowly, charging it with resonant power until it began to hum. The blade moved like a stick through water, leaving behind ripples in the air.

Lu Ming sighed inwardly. Her trap in the Dragon's Belly had been executed to near-perfection. Ideally, both the Enlightened Sage College and the Astral Sage College would be completely wiped out, while she would have a strong team at Dragonbone Island. She should have had all the advantages.

Unfortunately, Lady Luck had disagreed with her plans.

Not long after reaching Dragonbone Island, she had met with Sun Dasheng's group, and a cutthroat battle had ensued.

Both sides had been left bleeding badly and retreated.

Her group had limped their way over to the core arena, being attacked by other groups along the way and worn down further. Now she was alone.

But still, her goal had been more or less achieved.

Sun Dasheng going up against Jing Taixu? One of them was going to be eliminated for sure, and the other would be weakened for her to finish off. There was no other major competitor...

Or so she thought before Li Luo had shown up fashionably late.

Which meant that her trap in the Dragon's Belly had caught neither of the big fishes that she had been aiming for.

She adjusted her state of mind quickly enough, sorting through facts and reassessing the situation. Things could still turn out well for her.

Of the three main competitors, she would choose to fight Li Luo if she could. He was a dual resonance user too, but a Second Changing one with resonance grades below hers.

She should have an advantage in every aspect.

There was no reason she would lose this fight.

In other words, she could treat Li Luo as a warmup.

Besides, she was curious to see how another dual resonance user would measure up to her. Perhaps he would make for an amusing exchange.

Reaching behind her, she took out a golden hairpin with a trickle of lightning jumping up and down its length. She activated the little spark of energy, and it grew in length to become a thin, golden sword.

It was even thinner than a rapier; it really just looked like an elongated golden needle.

Freed from the pin's tension, her long hair fell down loosely, dancing in the breeze.

Lu Ming leaped down, graceful as a fox. Her resonant power crackled forth, a sparkling, silver lightning that crackled and popped wildly against her skin. It made her look like a mythical goddess.

It was time to face the famous Illusory Thunderbolt.

Lu Ming showed no mercy. She brought her full power to bear, pouring more and more silver electricity onto her hairpin sword until it glowed like a lightning rod.

Dual resonances, Becoming One.

From the get-go.

A sense of impending doom filled the clearing.

"Come, show me your Becoming One Stage." Lu Ming pointed her sword imperiously at Li Luo. "I have no time to waste with banal preliminaries."

Li Luo brought forth his own dual resonances without a word, and the signature halo of dual resonances was around his wrist.

He lifted his head and smiled, looking behind Lu Ming.

"Jing Taixu. Now!" Lu Ming spun around in fear, her crackling sword sweeping up in defense.

There was nothing behind her, not even a sliver of a shadow of her feared rival.

Weng!

The deadly sound of a crashing wave smashed down towards her from behind.

She felt a tinge of anger.

Li Luo was handsome like a playboy, and apparently he treated women with as little respect as one too.

He even dared to lie to a girl?

The Onyx-Elephant Blade swept down onto Lu Ming's neck mercilessly.

Chapter 0499: Dual Resonance Users Fight

Weng!

The sword sliced across Lu Ming's slender neck, and then Li Luo's face changed.

The blade passed through without any resistance.

"An illusion?!" Li Luo felt a cold pang of fear as the Lu Ming before him faded away.

"Wily woman."

Boom!

A loud report of thunder exploded behind him, and lightning arced over his scalp from the hairpin-sword. Li Luo barely ducked in time, and he could smell the acidity of singed hair from the top of his head.

Lightning resonances had speedy attacks indeed.

On Li Luo's right side, a golden, octagonal shield had blocked the weapon's direct stab.

Ting!

A clash of metal on metal.

The Octagold Shield had a deep dent on it from the sword thrust, which had almost completely pierced through it.

The Octagold Shield was a white-eye treasured artifact, and a defensive one at that. Li Luo had repaired it after he had gotten it from the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, and now it was already spoiled again. "Lu Ming! My wallet!"

A troublesome woman.

Illusion resonance in one hand and lightning resonance in the other. While not the strongest offensive combination, they still had more attack power than water and wood resonances. If not for his two additional secondary resonances, he would have been completely outclassed.

Li Luo looked up and smiled easily at Lu Ming. "Friend Lu Ming, what a dishonest person you are. An illusion as your first appearance? How discourteous!"

Lu Ming snorted. "Rich, coming from a guy who just pulled off a sneak attack himself."

She did not bother answering, instead choosing to attack again. Lightning lanced out from her sword, splitting into multiple forks that shot out towards Li Luo's weak points.

Li Luo eyed the rapidly approaching electrical web attack with trepidation. Lu Ming moved too quickly—her attack was barely a blur in his eyes.

Ding!

Li Luo raised his Onyx-Elephant Blade. He might not be able to see it coming, but he knew the end-point of the attack: his weak points.

The harsh squeal of electricity against metal rang out.

The ground cracked under him, scorch marks searing it in a lightning pattern.

Overlaid on the electrical web was a wet, shimmering layer of a milky color.

Li Luo grimly held on to his weapon. He could feel the lightning resonant power working its way through his hand, numbing him.

His stance lost strength as well, as the electricity continued through his legs before reaching the ground.*nove-1B*)1n

His feet felt wobbly after the attack, as though he were standing on soft mud.

Lu Ming had the advantage in this raw clash of resonant power, which was to be expected. She was a Third Changing after all.

Li Luo backed away calmly, using his dual resonances to purge the invading energies from his body.

His waterlight resonant power and woodearth resonant power quickly worked to help him recover.

That was his strength—resilience and endurance.

A few moments later, he was completely recovered again.

Shaking out his legs, Li Luo gingerly tested them.

"Hmm?"

Lu Ming made a small noise of surprise. She was surprised that Li Luo had already managed to completely shake off the after-effects. That was much faster than what she was used to.

"Your resonant power... it's strange," she slowly said.

Both of them had dual resonances, and hers were definitely supposed to be stronger. And yet there was something about the quality of his that made her uneasy...

A resilient and tough opponent that came back again and again.

Lu Ming did not expect Li Luo to respond to her remark. She chose to seek out an answer herself, attacking again to see how he would respond.

Li Luo leaped backwards and smacked his hands together.

Splash! Roar!

Muddy hands reached out from the ground to grab at Lu Ming's legs.

She was dangerous when she was fast and unhindered. Time to provide some hindrances.

Lu Ming smirked, twisting her feet into a ready stance and lifting off onto the balls of her feet.

"Tiger-general resonance art, Lightning Walker."

She moved past the hands in a flash, already in front of Li Luo once more. Her sword glinted dangerously, poised to strike.

Hair flying out behind her, flared from the static, she was like a general of lightning.

Again she struck with the signature of lightning attacks—a deadly combination of speed and an offensive punch. "Tiger-general resonance art, Bolt Sword!"

Her thin sword boomed with an unnaturally loud sound, transforming into a fat bolt of golden lightning several meters long. It zapped out at Li Luo's position, leaving blackened furrows in the ground behind it.

Li Luo knew he had to do something. This attack was so strong that even other Third Changing opponents would not be able to deal with it.

It seemed like Lu Ming had no intention of toying with him. She wanted to finish this quickly and move on to the finals.

"Ah, you underestimate me," Li Luo muttered, shifting his grip on the Onyx-Elephant Blade.

His resonant bubbles popped, save for the two poison ones.

The surge of resonant power flooded him.

This wasn't over.

Level One Divine Elephant Power.

Li Luo's arms bulged, his veins wriggling like little snakes under the surface of his skin. As the energy roared through them, the skin on his arms split apart, beads of blood popping out and forming small rivulets.

Li Luo allowed a mad grin to spread on his face as he savored the power within him. He watched the rapidly approaching golden thunderbolt bearing down on him like a hungry lion, waiting for the timing.

He stepped forward, blade slicing upwards in a violent swing.

Homerun!

Chapter 0500: Lu Ming's Illusion Formation

Bang!

Two extremely berserk resonant powers clashed in a vicious struggle, the shockwaves resonating throughout the forest. The surrounding scarlet-red trees were directly snapped into two by the resounding collateral force, with the remnant pieces splintering into shreds by the sheer force of resonant energy.

Lu Ming retreated through the air, landing atop a massive tree that had survived. Her cold eyes assessed the source of this attack. Along one side of the ground also lay a deep sword scar, a chasm gashed into the earth extending all the way in front of her, ending with a large cloud of dust. The entire area was also scorched black, as though it had been bombarded by some judgment from the heavens.

There was no hesitation behind that last strike of hers.

She had unreservedly mobilized the full brunt of her Becoming One resonant power to summon forth Lightning Walker and was very fully cognizant of its destructive potential. Even a Third Changing would struggle to keep up.

On the other hand, Li Luo had chosen to meet it with force.

In a normal situation, victory would have easily been hers for the taking.

Yet the situation did not seem simple. Lu Ming did not lower her guard as she continued to peer intently at the cloud of dust that had yet to settle from the clash of titans. A brief moment later, her gaze narrowed as a familiar figure strutted out of the dust.

Perhaps to no surprise, Li Luo had walked out.

He was gripping his blade, and his arms had grown in size and musculature. The skin on them was torn and fresh blood was oozing down his forearms, dyeing the blade red. However, this seemed to be the extent of his injuries—there were no lightning or sword scars upon him!

Lu Ming's vicious attack had clearly been deflected completely!

"You really are a strange one," Lu Ming murmured.

The quality of Li Luo's resonant power far surpassed anything she had expected.

An average Second Changing dual resonance user could never summon up such might.

"Did he practice some sort of storage resonance art?" Lu Ming asked herself. Thinking through the clues available, this sort of resonance art was rarely seen and could allow one to increase the amount of resonant power they could bring forth at a crucial moment. The disadvantage was that the amount of power one could store also had limits. At the same time, the sheer amount and quality of resonant power Li Luo could muster was of a completely different class.

Meanwhile, while Lu Ming continued to ponder over the source of Li Luo's strength, Li Luo was not simply going to wait there idly. Raising his palm, he grasped in the direction of Lu Ming's current position.

"Arboreal Bindings!"

The tree beneath Lu Ming began to shudder and the branches seemed to have gained a life of their own as they twisted and rushed towards her, attempting to ensnare.

In response to the multiple branches that were swarming her like wooden snakes, Lu Ming's body flashed with a layer of lightning, gathering onto a point on her foot.

Boom!

Upon making contact with a single tap, the entire tree instantly charred black in an instant and the once lively branches were turned into ashes that rustled with the wind.

Li Luo remained unfazed as he continued to channel his wood resonant power, rousing all of the trees surrounding Lu Ming. At the same time, water resonant power surged from within him, and he executed another resonance art. "Heavy Water Art!" With the casting of this resonance art, the numerous tendrils that lashed towards Lu Ming were now engulfed with a layer of blue water, which simultaneously served to improve their might and also their resilience. The improved bindings then smashed towards Lu Ming with renewed fury!

In response, Lu Ming hopped into the air with the assistance of her lightning resonant power before firing out tens of lightning bolts, attempting to completely disintegrate the irritating wooden branches.

Pssh!

However, the result was not the same as the first time. Some of the bindings had managed to escape destruction, appearing before Lu Ming and attempting to bind her limbs.

Li Luo's aim was simple: to restrict Lu Ming's movements. Her lightning resonance provided her with just too much speed, which was simply too hard for Li Luo to handle if left unchecked.

"You do have some ability in combining water and wood resonant arts," Lu Ming dryly commented. Lightning resonant power crackled from beneath her heels, allowing her to float in mid air, directly avoiding the range of the tree branches that struggled to ensnare her. Immediately after, her body flickered at the limit of speed, directly appearing in front of Li Luo.

The golden hairpin-sword in her hand crackled with lightning stabbing out before her. And before Li Luo's shocked eyes, the sword moved so quickly that one could only see its afterimage. What added to the problem was that countless illusory sword shadows had appeared simultaneously, attacking every single exposed spot, stabbing at his entire body with pure malice.

The thunderlight sword shadows melded reality with illusions, making this a tough cookie to dodge.

It was a perfect application of Lu Ming's lightning and illusion resonances.

The counterattack was indeed as quick as lightning.

Li Luo was left in a pickle. He couldn't differentiate between what was real and what was not. If that was the case, he would break everything with force! Tightly clutching his Onyx-Elephant Blade, his dual resonances kicked into overdrive as he cleaved downwards.

That single strike was full of immutable power, something so absolute that even the void was rent in its wake. A piercing explosion resounded with the clash.

POOM!

With the blade's strike, the thunderlight sword silhouettes were shattered into pieces one by one before finally clashing with the true attack hidden beneath the rabble. Lightning roiled forth as the two bodies clashed violently.

The next moment, the two broke off and reengaged with a fast flurry of blows.

One could barely follow the explosive and wild blows that constantly rained upon each of them, inevitably matched with parries and deflects. The surrounding environment was destroyed by the remnant clashing of resonant power. Together, they were like a whirlwind of doom. Whatever unfortunate shrubbery that happened to be near them would undoubtedly be devastated.

The two clashed many hundred times in the mere span of a few short minutes.

This was a high intensity battle, and the two gradually began to heave heavily.

Clang!

In the end, the first to let up was Lu Ming. The final clash had caused her delicate body to be knocked away. A sense of grim seriousness could be seen in her eyes as she held her weapon with slightly trembling hands.

Li Luo was a monster.

"Does his strength come from his weapon?" Lu Ming examined the Onyx-Elephant Blade more clearly. Whenever their weapons clashed, she could feel a surging force emit from the weapon. It felt unrestrained and wild, much like a feral beast.

"Li Luo, you have my respect. You are truly impressive," Lu Ming admitted. Li Luo, on the other hand, had a calm expression with all of his hairs zapped upright. Every clash had led to him being occasionally electrocuted by Lu Ming's lightning resonance...

"You have my respect as well, if that means anything..." He laughed, but he stopped immediately as a wisp of black smoke had belched from his mouth. This damned Lu Ming's lightning resonance was truly troublesome—it was going to turn him into a human BBQ at this rate!

Glancing at Li Luo's disheveled appearance, Lu Ming gave a wry smile. "Though this ends here. I won't lose to you."

"Huh? Really?" Li Luo's eyes squinted at this point.

The usually cold and haughty Lu Ming was now giving a large smile that would unsettle anyone who knew her. Danger. That was the only thing Li Luo's senses were telling him.

However, he did not move when Lu Ming took a step back.

What was most surprising was that she had completely vanished upon taking that step!

"Li Luo, congratulations. I was saving this move for Jing Taixu, but it looks like you will be the guinea pig." Lu Ming's voice echoed from all around him. At the same time, Li Luo could see that the environment around him was transforming.

The empty forest started to recede, and in its place was an endless sea of flowers spread as wide as the eye could see. Li Luo, on the other hand, was right smack in the middle.

His expression changed for the worse.

"A damned illusion formation?" This flower sea was definitely an illusion, and he had fallen right for it.

Boom!

Right at this moment, gray clouds started to quickly gather above him, gradually blanketing the entire horizon.

These clouds spat lightning without reserve, accompanied by the rumbling of endless thunder.

Li Luo's expression turned grave.

This was not just an illusion formation—it had been bequeathed with the power of lightning as well...

The combination of the illusion resonance and lightning resonance gave birth to the Illusory Thunderbolt, an illusion formation with no comparison.

Lu Ming had finally shown her cards.