

Resonance 511

Chapter 0511: Jing Taixu's Dragon-General Resonance Art

Boom!

The weathered sword hitting the green plantain fan raised a thick spray of sparks.

The rebounding shock pushed both Li Luo and Jing Taixu backwards. There was a half-finger-deep footprint in the ground after the impact.

Bang.

Jing Taixu gritted his teeth and tensed himself to stop the backsliding. He was no longer calm and smiling like he was before. There was a wild look in his eyes now.

He was fired up.

Li Luo's tenacity had surpassed his expectations.

Both of them had revealed the majority of their arsenals by now, and they had fought without holding back their energy. Their brutality had scored wounds against each other, but nothing serious enough to decide the battle.

Jing Taixu understood that he would have to do more to break the stalemate.

But as time wore on, his resonant power was depleting. Eventually, he would not have enough to muster his killing blow.

"Li Luo, you're very good," Jing Taixu said coolly, adjusting his grip on his plantain fan. His hand was bleeding. "But this battle will be mine."

Li Luo ignored him, because battles were not won with mere words.

Still, he could feel that there was a new frenzy in Jing Taixu's energy flow. A trump card was coming.

He gripped his Onyx-Elephant Blade tighter, leaning into its comforting reliability as he tensed up and prepared for whatever was coming.

Jing Taixu stretched out a finger to the wind and cut it with a perfectly controlled burst of wind energy.

Not flinching from the pain, he moved the finger smoothly across his green plantain fan, activating a crimson network of power that spread across the fan.

Uuuuu!

The winds howled with a new, eerie frequency.

Under their feet, the gravel rattled.

The wind spirit avatar that had been hovering behind him came to rest on the green plantain fan as well.

Immediately after, the weapon turned from a leafy green to a much more lustrous hue, as though it had turned to jade.

His hand shivered and shook as if he were trying to fight some immense power.

But in the end, he managed to bring the plantain fan smashing down.

Who!

A tremendous gust of wind energy burst out from the fan and then hovered in the air, consolidating into a jade-green cloud of power that grew brighter as more and more energy entered it.

A dozen breaths of time later, it shot up into the sky, preceded by the faint sound of a dragon's roar.

Li Luo's eyes narrowed.

"That dragon's roar... could it be a dragon-general resonance art?"

"Is Jing Taixu that strong?"

A flash of concern arose in Li Luo's eyes. Dragon-general resonance arts were the domain of those at the General Stage. The energy demands were beyond that of a Resonant Master Stage cultivator.

Jing Taixu was truly a genius.

Although he had only accomplished it with the help of his wind spirit avatar, this was shocking nevertheless.

Weng!

It rocked and swayed in the air.

Within the nimbus of light was a weighty spear, floating in the air. Each time the cloud of energy rocked around it in mid-air, it wrapped the spear in yet another fold of energy. Looking at the impending attack, Li Luo finally understood why Jing Taixu was hailed as the Spear of Enlightened Sage. It had to be because of this ultimate killing move. To be able to produce General Stage power—a dragon-general resonance art—while only a Resonant Master was impressive. Even though it was a low-tier dragon-general resonance art, it was still far beyond what a tiger-general resonance art could accomplish.

Li Luo himself was highly talented at resonance arts, but even he could not fully execute a dragon-general resonance art.

Jing Taixu had him beat in this regard.

Sun Dasheng's hacked version of a Duke Art was far from the Duke Art's true power—an insignificant fraction of the true destructive power.

"Li Luo! Sun Dasheng lost to this move of mine. If you can endure it, the golden resonant tree brooch can be yours!" Jing Taixu shouted proudly, then he brought his fan down.

"Low-tier dragon-general resonance art, Wind Demon's Wrath!"

"Go!"

Jing Taixu's shout sent the spear streaking out like a thunderbolt from the sky, accompanied by a hissing scream as it tore through the air.

Li Luo watched the green arch fly towards him.

He studied it with serious concentration, sensing the danger of this attack.

He wouldn't be able to stop it with ordinary moves for sure.

Fortunately, he had some extraordinary moves as well.

Li Luo channeled all his energy into his sword and backed away to buy himself a bit more time.

"Golden-Jade Onyx-Elephant Blade, Level Two Divine Elephant Power!"

His Onyx-Elephant Blade had three levels of power. At the first level, the skin on his arm would be torn because he could not contain the power fully.

If the first level hurt him that much already, what about the second level?

Li Luo had never tried it before, but he was ready to.

Boom!

An ancient elephant's roar thundered out from within his body, and his face seized up.

He could feel the enormous power coursing through his arm.

And a terrible pain splitting him down the middle.

It was as though a massive elephant was charging up across his arm, pulverizing it into bits as it rampaged forward.

Li Luo lowered his head and watched both of his arms crumble before his very eyes.

Fresh blood rained out in thick streams.

This was the barbaric power of Level Two Divine Elephant Power. Li Luo's body was too weak to contain it at all. If this continued for too long, both his arms would be juiced into pulp.

Li Luo did not panic.

This was within his calculations.

He had no way to strengthen his body in a short amount of time, but he did have something else to help deal with this.

Ssss.

He inhaled deeply through his nostrils, the thick smell of blood coming to him. He immediately unleashed the resonance arts that he had prepared.

"Wood resonance art, Spirit Vine Threads.

"Light resonance art, Healing Sprites.

"Water resonance art, Spirit Water Art."

None of the above resonance arts were particularly advanced, but they played the same role of recovery.

That was how Li Luo was planning to counteract the drawbacks of Level Two Divine Elephant Power.

If he couldn't avoid damage, he would just patch damage back up as fast as he could.

A network of green vines spread out across his arms, holding the broken flesh together firmly.

At the same time, Healing Sprites and Spirit Water helped repair the damage.

Combined, their effect far exceeded their individual functions, and Li Luo's bleeding arms were actually stabilized.

It still looked gruesome., like a pair of roughly stitched zombie hands.

This was as good as Li Luo could manage.

It was enough for him to swing his sword.

Looking up at the epic, green spear barreling down on him, he lifted his sword with conviction.

A dragon-general resonance art against Divine Elephant Power. Let's see who has the better animal!

Chapter 0512: With Tail Between Legs

Boom!

The constant energy clashes let out shockwaves of energy at regular pulses, thundering against the mountain walls and shaking loose soil and earth.

At the center of it all were Li Luo and Jing Taixu.

The two were locked in a reckless collision of strength, and their resonant power ran out at the same time. With a final, epic explosion, both were sent flying back until they crashed into the cliffs on opposite sides. They both spat out mouthfuls of blood.

The Onyx-Elephant Blade and green plantain fan were sent clattering across the earth.

All eyes were watching the two fighters. Now that their two final trump cards had been completely expended, both had ended up badly injured and exhausted.

Now who could muster enough energy to finish the other off?

The cloud of dust faded slowly.

Jing Taixu was on shaky legs as he stumbled forward, reaching out to clutch at boulders along the way to steady himself. His clothes were tattered, his body was badly scarred at places, and his composure was completely gone.

But his mind was not on his image at all. He was staring grimly ahead.

“Li Luo... surely that guy has no more strength to get up, right?”

Truly a legendary opponent, to actually force mutual injuries even against his strongest move.

Jing Taixu's eyes followed the gash on the floor that ran for several dozen meters. The impact of Li Luo's counterattack was fearsome to behold.

That had to be Li Luo's trump card as well.

But in the end, he was the one left standing.

His lip curled upwards in a tired but triumphant smile.

It did not spread far on his face. He watched Li Luo slowly get to his feet, a blurry figure in the dust ahead.

Li Luo was equally battered, his resonant power frazzled and worn down to a trickle.

Plus both his arms were running slick with blood.

"You're still standing?!" Jing Taixu snarled angrily. He just wouldn't stay down!

Li Luo wiped the blood away from his face, covering his arms in still more blood. "You think... you won?" he wheezed.

Jing Taixu's own voice was hoarse from exhaustion. "You don't even have the strength to take one more step."

"Yeah, well, look in the mirror, buddy."

Li Luo suddenly gave him an odd smile. "We're both burned out. We can't even lift a finger. But, Jing Taixu, I think you're screwed."

Jing Taixu laughed coldly. He turned his own energy inwards for cultivation. He would muster enough resonant power for proper mobility, then go over and stick a sword in Li Luo. His victory was assured.

"Jing Taixu, your quasi ninth-grade wind resonance was really something. Amazing speed, huh? But let me ask you something: now that we're in a race for recovery, do you think your wind resonance is faster, or my water and wood resonances?" Li Luo's laughter spluttered out.

Jing Taixu turned green in the face.

He'd forgotten this!

Water and wood resonances were far slower elements compared to wind, but they had their own advantages. Water resonances granted stamina, and wood resonances granted endurance. Both were excellent elements for regeneration. In terms of recuperation, of course they would surpass him.

Jing Taixu felt a prickle of panic. Surely not? He had gone through brimstone and fire to lose in this way?n)-o-.V/(e-.l//&--1.(n

He focused desperately on his energy cultivation arts, hastening the recovery.

A few minutes passed.

Jing Taixu felt some stirrings of energy return to his paralyzed body. A trickle of resonant power began to flow back into his parched resonant palaces.

He was exultant.

He looked up at Li Luo and saw that his opponent was already starting to stretch and twist his upper body. He had a much bigger range of movement.

Jing Taixu trembled in fear.

"No need to panic! He's not strong enough yet," Jing Taixu thought to himself. "If he dares to spend his energy coming over, I'll use my last bit of resonant power to end him!"

His self-consolation was brought short when Li Luo pulled out a silver bow from his pocket sphere.

"Oh... fuck..."

Jing Taixu swore under his breath.

This was pathetic!

Li Luo cackled weakly to himself. He put a finger on the bowstring and drew back, disregarding the pain in his hands. A thin thread of resonant power formed on the Lambent Hawkeye, creating a needle-thin arrow.

This was all he could manage right now, and his hand on the bow grip was swaying all around.

Swoosh!

He released the arrow at a normal speed. If Jing Taixu had been in peak condition, he could have easily dodged it. But now he could only watch the arrow sail through the air at him. He was a sitting duck.

The arrow flew between his legs, grazing his inner thigh, and Jing Taixu felt his balls shrink at the near miss.

Too close for comfort!

Jing Taixu broke out in a sweat. "Li Luo, what the hell are you doing?! Where the fuck do you think you're aiming?!"

"Ah, a poor shot. Please forgive me, I'm not feeling too good at the moment... you understand." It was already an accomplishment to be able to shoot, let alone care about accuracy at this point.

"You just stand there real still, don't move a muscle, or I can't guarantee what I hit," Li Luo told him kindly. He pulled the bowstring back again.

Shoop! Shoop!

Another two needle-like arrows flew out. They were not particularly deadly, and if Jing Taixu weren't injured, they would not even have passed his defenses. But that bastard Li Luo kept aiming at his genitals.

It was poor aim, but it was exquisite mental torture.

Jing Taixu had a feeling that Li Luo was doing this on purpose.

"That son of a bitch!"

"Just ignore him for a bit longer. My resonant power's slowly coming back," Jing Taixu thought to himself, gritting his teeth.

Swoosh!

Another arrow, this one burying itself in his belly.

He felt a sharp pain in his stomach, and he winced.

Jing Taixu bit down on his tongue to stop himself from howling in pain.

"Oh, oops, almost," Li Luo said with regret. "Alright, last shot," he said seriously. "This one will do it, I promise."

He pulled his bowstring again, and another arrow of light appeared.

This time, before he could shoot, Jing Taixu ripped the anima gourd away from his belt and smashed it.

A pillar of light descended from the sky and caged him within it.

Li Luo watched, surprised, then stowed the Lambent Hawkeye away.

"Ah, Jing Taixu, your mental fortitude could use some work," he said, shaking his head.

Jing Taixu was furious. The finals had completely humiliated him. He had never thought that he would not only lose, but in such an embarrassing fashion.

"I'll remember this, Li Luo!" he yelled as he was beamed up into the sky.

Eliminated.

As Jing Taixu was removed from the field, yet another column of light came down to catch Li Luo. It was filled with the purest worldly natural energy, and it completely healed all of Li Luo's wounds.

Even his dry resonant palaces were completely topped up.

The victor's reward.

Li Luo stretched out his hand, and the Onyx-Elephant Blade flew to him.

He lifted his head up and watched the boulders at the center of the mountain shift into a flight of stairs. At the top was a red throne.

The Dragonbone Throne.

Li Luo smiled.

The first golden resonant tree brooch had been acquired.

Chapter 0513: One Star Hall's Best Boy

The result of the One Star Hall's fight shocked all the spectators.

Who would have thought that such an epic battle would end in such an unremarkable finish?

Jing Taixu had been scared to death by Li Luo and chosen to give up.

Of course, those that understood the battle knew that it was because at that point, Jing Taixu saw no possibility to win.

Both had been completely drained and were at their limit.

But the dual resonances of water and wood meant that Jing Taixu would never catch up to Li Luo in restoring energy if they were at the same starting point.

Jing Taixu understood this well.

Although Li Luo had only shot a couple of arrows before Jing Taixu gave up, his shots would have gained their usual accuracy again.

Under normal circumstances, those attacks would be too weak to harm him, but not when his defenses were completely exhausted.

Jing Taixu did not want to lose in such an undignified manner, so he had chosen to surrender instead.

Meanwhile, roaring laughter rang out from all the various towers.

"Li Luo actually won," Lu Ming repeated to herself in disbelief. Probably nobody had expected this outcome.

After all, Jing Taixu had been the undisputed hot favorite, while Li Luo was a nameless dark horse.

And now the prime stallion had been outraced.

The other students beside Lu Ming looked as though they had just seen a ghost. Previously, they had insisted that Li Luo had only defeated Lu Ming because of his poison tricks. But now even Jing Taixu had lost, and it would be foolish to hold on to their denial.

Lu Ming looked at the youth sprawled lazily across the Dragonbone Throne. This guy was something else.

"Jing Taixu... that guy's senses are even sharper than a woman's instinct," Lu Ming thought with dry humor. He was the one who had come to her first with the plan of eliminating Li Luo, and she was the one who had thought that he was seeing knives in the shadows. But from the result now, Jing Taixu's instincts were clearly on point.

Even so, he had lost to Li Luo when fully prepared.

So perhaps those instincts were in facing the right direction, but still not helpful.

And Li Luo. He had a sick streak in him, shooting those arrows at Jing Taixu's crotch to humiliate him. She did not really believe his shots were badly aimed, no matter how weak he was. She shook her head. She had no interest in the enmity between those two.

In another tower, Sun Dasheng was equally shocked. He was the first one out of the three who had fought Li Luo. Although he had been surprised by Li Luo's power back then, he had not thought too much about it.

"Jing Taixu lost to him?"

"Seems like there are still many hidden geniuses in the East Divine Continent. I underestimated the competition, but if I can just get to the Fourth Changing, I think my odds against both Jing Taixu and Li Luo will increase by a lot.

"One step at a time. Even if the Hall-level competition's lost, the Holy Grail Meet is not over yet. I can still shine in the mixed-level competition." Sun Dasheng's confidence was shaken but not broken, even though he had lost to Jing Taixu once already. He was still raring to fight.

Over at the Enlightened Sage College, it was as if the sky had fallen down on their heads.

Some buried their heads in their hands, sobbing out of sheer denial. Others wrung their hands vaguely.

On the Enlightened Sage College's team, their One and Four Star Hall students were seen as the best seeds. Jing Taixu had been favored by the school from head to toe.

And now that careful seedling had been uprooted.

Jing Taixu had collapsed before the Dragonbone Throne.

At the feet of the nameless Li Luo!

It was a devastating blow to the morale of the Enlightened Sage College students.

Even the usually composed Vice Principal Guo Jiufeng looked like he had just swallowed a lemon, and he was swallowing more every second he looked at Li Luo's smug posture on the Dragonbone Throne.

"How did Jing Taixu lose?" a Violet Vibrance mentor asked in disbelief.

"That sword..." Guo Jiufeng sighed. "If I'm not mistaken, it used to be Pang Qianyuan's partner weapon. The Golden-Jade Onyx-Elephant Blade... It's only a gold-eye treasured artifact, but there's divine power within it. Still, the power demands a lot from the physical body. Li Luo should not have been able to contain it."

The Violet Vibrance mentor sighed. Well, such speculation was useless now. The battle was over.

A vortex opened, and Jing Taixu fell out of it.

He was pale and weak still, but he could sense that the atmosphere around him was horribly off.

It was the first time in his life that he was being regarded so disparagingly.

He did not shirk away from it, but walked over to Guo Jiufeng. "Vice Principal, I've wasted the trust that the school has put in me," he said hoarsely.

Guo Jiufeng's expression was stiff, but he eventually sighed. "You've done your best," he said, not unkindly. "There is no need to blame yourself. The Holy Grail Meet is not over yet, and I look forward to an even better performance from you in the mixed-level competition."

As the vice principal, he could not berate Jing Taixu publicly at the cost of general morale, even though he was in a dark mood.

Jing Taixu nodded and then walked away, unwilling to stay in this prickly atmosphere a moment longer than he had to.

Guo Jiufeng turned to the Four Star Hall screen.

Their final hope, Lan Lan.

This was a far cry from the initial goal that they had set out to accomplish.

Three golden resonant tree brooches, with the Three Star Hall's one a lucky bid and the One and Four Star Hall ones all but guaranteed.

Enough to prove themselves worthy as the former champions.

That dream was all but shattered now.

Instead, it was the Astral Sage College who had emerged out of the blue and clinched both One and Three Star Hall titles, taking the competition by storm.

Guo Jiufeng finally managed to get his feelings under control.

The battle was not over. They still had a chance.

At least the Four Star Hall golden resonant tree brooch was one he still believed would come home.

Chapter 0514: Creating a Legend

When Li Luo appeared before the Astral Sage College's tower, he was greeted with rapturous applause and cheering.

The One Star Hall students were fired up behind their champion, who was now the strongest One Star Hall student in the East Divine Continent. The title was hard won and weighty, far more than just being the best in any school.

This would definitely also increase the prestige of their class. The number of wins the One Star Hall had taken at the Holy Grail Meet could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

It was definitely going down in the history of the Astral Sage College.

One Star Hall students were all about raw talent, and it was difficult to nurture them much in the short time that they spent in school before the tournament happened.

The other senior students were overjoyed as well, and they now looked at Li Luo with a measure of respect.

It was a performance worthy of acknowledgement.

Perhaps Li Luo was still beneath them because of the difference in cultivation time, but he would become the strongest in the Astral Sage College in due time, and probably set some new records on the way.

He had earned something here, and no one would dare to underestimate him again.

"Li Luo, you did very well." Yu Lang was the first to get a word in, looking at Li Luo like a loving father. "After all I did to get you through the Dragon's Belly, you didn't let me down."

"Rascal." Li Luo rolled his eyes.

"Well done, Li Luo!" Bai Doudou gave him a big thumbs up, straightforward and direct as was her personality.

"Li Luo, you're very strong. I'm so lucky to have met you here in the Astral Sage College. But don't worry, you'll be my target from now on. I'll train like crazy to overtake you." Qin Zhulu's look was more intense and smoldering than that of the girls cooing in the background.

Qin Zhulu was an unyielding character, and even so, he had to defer to Li Luo's skill this time.

His "love" was rather stifling, and Li Luo gave him an uneasy if polite smile. It was not particularly comfortable to have a battle demon watching over his shoulder at all times.

Wang Hejiu and Duze Beixuan hung back awkwardly, unsure of how to express their ambivalence. They were not on good terms with Li Luo, and had only grudgingly cooperated this time because of the super high-level threat that Vice Principal Su Xin had laid down upon them. They weren't happy to see him get ahead, but glad that they had won a championship.

"Leader, congratulations! You're famous in the East Divine Continent now," Bai Mengmeng said happily. Lu Qing'er was standing still, looking at Li Luo with hot tears brimming at the edges of her eyes. Her quivering lips were upturned in a smile. She recalled Li Luo in the early years back at Southwind Academy with his blank palaces. He had used his skill in the resonance arts to forge his own path to become one of the brightest in Southwind Academy even then.

Many thought that he had peaked back then. He was in his element, at the pinnacle of confidence and strength.

Several years later, he was far beyond what he had accomplished then.

She had said it before, and she believed it even now: Li Luo was anyone's equal, even Jiang Qing'e.

"Hey."

Li Luo wagged his fingers before her eyes.

She snapped back out of her reverie with an embarrassed smile. "Oh, er, congratulations."

"It's all thanks to your Nightmarish Eversnow Platemail. If not for you, I'd have been eliminated in the Dragon's Belly too," Li Luo said with a grateful smile.

She had bought him enough time to get to Dragonbone Island. Without it, he might not have made it. And he definitely would not have had enough time to find dragon's bloodfire to fill the dragonpearl.

And without a full dragonpearl, he would not have been able to match Jing Taixu at his Fourth Changing power, and then he would have had no choice but to pull out his emergency trump card, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's power.

Lu Qing'er had played no small part with her supporting resonance art.

She smiled happily at him, her heart almost leaping out of her chest with pleasure. The opportunity to help Li Luo—that was all she could ask for.

Li Luo saw Vice Principal Su Xin waving to him, and hurriedly cut off his other conversations.

"Vice Principal Su Xin, I was lucky enough not to dishonor the school," Li Luo said modestly, cupping his fist in respect.

Su Xin smiled broadly at him, and her kind voice was even brighter than usual. She reached out and tousled his hair.

Very quickly, she retracted her hand, realizing that it could be seen as inappropriate. "Li Luo, you've done very well," she said fondly. "You are the pride and joy of the Astral Sage College."

"As a student of the Astral Sage College, it is my duty to bring honor to the school," Li Luo said properly. She smiled even wider, pleased to hear it.

"The school will remember your contributions well. You will be rewarded in the future."

Li Luo smiled and nodded.

He could feel someone else behind Vice Principal Su Xin also regarding him, and he craned his neck to see who it was.

It was the First Princess, looking at him with wide-eyed curiosity.

She was evidently taken aback by his win.

"First Princess," Li Luo blurted out, surprised. "Your battle has ended?"

He immediately regretted it. The Four Star Hall battle had not yet ended, so obviously she had been eliminated.

That was unexpected. The Four Star Hall was indeed full of crouching tigers and hidden dragons. Truly the strongest students in their respective sage colleges... and it had to be intense competition for someone of the First Princess' caliber to be eliminated.

But she did not harp on his ill-chosen words. "It can't be helped, I'm not as outstanding as you are, Li Luo," she said graciously. "Congratulations. From this day forth, your name will be known throughout the entire East Divine Continent, let alone the Xia Kingdom. The young lord of House Luolan proves himself worthy to take over his father's legacy.

"No one will call you the tiger's runt again."

After this, the phrase "blank palace young lord" would be purged from the lexicon of every single person in the Xia Kingdom. Li Luo's potential and strength here had proved that he was Jiang Qing'e's equal.

Previously, House Luolan was known for its rising phoenix, but now a hidden dragon had uncoiled itself to stand at the top of the house in its full glory as well. "I pay no attention to the rumors, Your Highness," Li Luo said easily.

Both Su Xin and the First Princess nodded slightly. Li Luo's temperament and character were also an important reason why he was able to make it to the top. Dual resonances were rare, but not unheard of. And they were definitely not invincible, as Lu Ming had proven.

"But Li Luo, it seems like your win has laid down a difficult legend to ever beat even in the future." The First Princess laughed.

"Er, legend?" Li Luo was puzzled. Surely that was exaggerated. It was merely a record that would be replaced in four years' time.

The First Princess smiled mischievously.

"One strongest title is quite something...

"... but an engaged couple winning them together is deserving of being called a legend, you know."

Her remark was perfectly timed as another commotion broke out behind them.

Li Luo turned to the sound of applause to see an energy vortex appearing.

A beautiful girl stepped out calmly. Who else could it be but Jiang Qing'e?

Chapter 0515: Two Golden Resonant Tree Brooches

The response to Li Luo's win had been enough to shake the room, but Jiang Qing'e's entry was greeted so enthusiastically that the tower itself shook.

Their cheers reached the skies, ringing far out beyond the tower walls, going on and on.

They had to express their ecstasy—they were drunk on the feeling of vicarious power.

Jiang Qing'e's win had been so straightforward, it was almost boring.

She could be summed up in a single word... invincible!

There was no one who was worthy of equal praise, not even Li Luo.

He had taken them on a rollercoaster journey, pulling off a spectacular upset against Jing Taixu to take the win in an exhilarating and suspenseful manner. It was satisfying to see him win against an opponent he was closely matched with.

But the Three Star Hall fight was satisfying in a different manner.

Jiang Qing'e had fought against four single-handedly, and each of them were the elites of their respective schools. They were the biggest fish in their own ponds, but before Jiang Qing'e, they were juicy carp going up against a shark. She had completely destroyed them in glorious fashion, with overwhelming power that smashed them into submission.

Even over at the Enlightened Sage College's side, there was little to say about this battle.

Jiang Qing'e's power level was perhaps the strongest that the Three Star Hall competition had ever seen in the history of the East Divine Continent's Holy Grail Meets.

Absolute power. Before it, all tricks and tactics shriveled away into insignificance.

That was why the response to Jiang Qing'e's win was unanimous and respected by every single student at the Holy Grail Meet, regardless of school.

If they could not even beat her four-on-one, there was really nothing more that could be helped. There was no chance of a rejoinder against a win of that magnitude.

Jiang Qing'e strode into thunderous applause, still warm from the battle. Her light resonant energy was still flickering around her, lending her a saintly yet intimidating aura.

The students near her found it difficult to breathe, and they moved backwards hastily and deferentially, with the exception of a few Four Star Hall students.

Her long hair framed her body perfectly, and her light resonance helped to make her skin glow. Her deep, golden eyes were piercing, and they searched the room for one person, and one person only.

Those eyes softened when she spotted him, and she immediately moved over.

"Li Luo, is the One Star Hall competition over?"

Li Luo smiled and nodded.

"And how was it?" she asked, eyes locked on his face.

Li Luo's expression turned grave, and he heaved a bitter sigh.

Jiang Qing'e's stomach dropped with a sick feeling. "He lost?" She felt bad for pressuring him now.

Seeing him dejected, she opened her mouth to console him. nD**Vε)Lb**)1n

"Jing Taixu's strong. I fought him for what felt like forever, but I managed to take the win as the One Star Hall's strongest student," Li Luo said happily.

She stared at him, nonplussed. Managed... to take the win?

She gaped at him, his face now grinning petulantly. The bitter resignation had been wiped clean away.

Pranked.

Her golden eyes seemed to turn a deeper gold as she stood there angry and happy. She looked at his ear, dearly wanting to reach out and pinch it. But they were in public, so she settled for rolling her eyes at him.

"Ridiculous."

But she smiled despite herself, and her lovely face became even more alluring than before.

"Hey, you look even happier about this than about your own win," Li Luo pointed out.

"Of course," she said, puzzled. "Because I was guaranteed to win, so there was no surprise there. But there was uncertainty for you."

Li Luo somehow felt insulted. The plump swan had just said some really arrogant things in a really normal tone.

Still, it wasn't as if he could say anything about it. Four on one was something that no one else could have accomplished. It had taken every last bit of his strength to fight Jing Taixu. If three more people had jumped on him, he would have been screwed.

He had to admit that there was still a big gap in terms of potential and skill between him and Jiang Qing'e for now.

That was the harsh reality he had to face. Such was the power of a ninth-grade resonance.

Still, Li Luo knew that although the potential of his dual resonances might not be on her level, he had one more big thing on the horizon... his third resonance. Once he reached the General Stage, his third resonance would be activated.

If two couldn't beat nine, then surely three could?

The legendary triple resonances... he could almost feel the drool running down his chin. It seemed like he would need a bit more time before he could hold down things for the house properly with his own strength.

While the two were speaking, Vice Principal Su Xin approached.

"Qing'e, you did very well! You really made a reputation for the Astral Sage College," she said, grasping Jiang Qing'e's hands tightly. It had truly been an astounding performance.

She could just imagine how envious the higher-ups of other schools had to be, that she had a student as strong as Jiang Qing'e.

But each school had their own luck in the draw, and Jiang Qing'e was not the first ninth-grade resonance cultivator to be fielded. There had been many before her, from different schools, but not all of them could boast as spectacular a record as Jiang Qing'e.

Her brilliance was not just because of her resonance.

"You praise me too highly, Vice Principal. I have to thank the school for the resources invested in me, and I hope I fulfilled my duty adequately."

Jiang Qing'e had responded with just the right amount of warmth, neither too cool nor too affectionate. She was as unshakable as ever.

"You two have an uncannily similar way of speaking. No wonder you're engaged." The First Princess laughed.

"Qing'e, congratulations on being the strongest lovebird couple. I'm sure you will go down in the East Divine Continent's history together as legends."

Jiang Qing'e turned to her, surprised.

"Did Your Highness slip in battle?" Jiang Qing'e asked directly.

The First Princess sighed. "It can't be helped. I'm not as strong as you are. I'm just not strong enough."

"I wouldn't say that, Your Highness," Jiang Qing'e replied seriously. "Perhaps just not as lucky."

The First Princess laughed at her gracious reply, then changed the topic. "But if both you and Li Luo have won the titles, then we only need one more and the win is ours."

If a school had three strongest student titles, then they had three golden resonant tree brooches in hand. That would put them in an unlosable situation.

Previously, the Enlightened Sage College was chasing the dream situation.

And now the Astral Sage College was more than halfway there.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e nodded thoughtfully. That was indeed the dream.

"The Two Star Hall battle has ended already, won by Ao Bai of the North Sea Sage College...

"The only one left is the Four Star Hall."

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e both turned to the screen to watch.

The battle was nearing its finale.

The Astral Sage College still had a horse in the race.

The strongest of them all, Gong Shenjun.

Chapter 0516: Four Star Hall's Final

Along with Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e, all eyes turned back to the final Four Star Hall battle.

Many schools were watching closely as well. The unremarkable Astral Sage College had suddenly secured two golden resonant tree brooches before anybody had realized.

If they got just one more, weren't they destined to win?

After all, only three golden resonant tree brooches could be won in the second half.

If the Astral Sage College could get three here, they would be in an unassailable position.

"The Astral Sage College is one of the elite schools. They have a solid reserve of resources for sure. We can't underestimate them."

"I thought it was going to be the Enlightened Sage College with the multiple brooches..."

"The Astral Sage College hasn't even been eliminated yet. Their Four Star Hall competitor's a guy called Gong Shenjun, a royalty of the Xia Kingdom. I hear he's quite something as well."

"Oh, he's been undefeated all this time as well. I expect the Four Star Hall finals to be between him and the Enlightened Sage College's Lan Lan."

"If Lan Lan wins, there's hope. Otherwise, none of us will stand a chance against three brooches."

Four Star Hall's arena was a large lake, still as a mirror, circled by a ring of mountains.

This lake was not natural. It was just an ordinary lake an hour ago, but someone had artificially modified it into a gigantic one, many times its original size.

In the middle of it was a person standing upright, his light-blue hair almost blending into the surrounding water's hue. It was tied neatly in a ponytail, and his eyes were narrowed as he watched the horizon with a patient expression.

This was the Enlightened Sage College's Lan Lan.

He had defeated many tough opponents to stand on the arena of the final battle, where he was now waiting for his final opponent.

He did not wait long. From the forest beyond, a figure emerged cautiously from the tree line.

His erect carriage and handsome face spoke of his royal bearing as the son of the Regent of the Xia Kingdom.

And as the strongest student of the Astral Sage College, he was definitely respected.

Gong Shenjun stared out at the massive lake, feeling the intimidating aura of the opponent waiting for him in the center. This was without doubt the strongest opponent he had faced up till now.

"Enlightened Sage College, Lan Lan?" Gong Shenjun enquired with a smile.

The blue-haired man in the middle returned the smile. "Astral Sage College, Gong Shenjun?"

They both recognized each other, really.

"I had guessed Brother Lan would be my greatest challenge. Looks like I guessed right," Gong Shenjun said courteously.

"Brother Gong is too humble," Lan Lan said with a shake of his head and a smile. "Whoever dares to underestimate you is a fool indeed."

Gong Shenjun stared at the monstrous lake before him. "Brother Lan, this is a little excessive in terms of preparing the field, don't you think? You've completely changed the terrain to give yourself a huge advantage."

"I dare not give up even the slightest advantage against someone as excellent as Brother Gong." Lan Lan stretched out his hand, and a wave rose from beside him, bringing a trident within it.

At the same time, the entire lake sank, and a huge body of water rose from within it in the form of a gigantic water serpent.

Lan Lan was a water resonance user.

"If I hadn't sensed the quality of your resonance for myself, I would find it hard to believe that Brother Lan is an upper seventh-grade water resonance user," Gong Shenjun remarked. Upper seventh-grade meant that Lan Lan's resonance might well be the lowest quality ever in the Four Star Hall fights. Usually, an upper seventh-grade was considered neither dauntingly low nor high, but still, it was not commonly seen at the Four Star Hall level, especially as a hot favorite for the finals and an opponent that even Gong Shenjun was wary of.

One could only say that Lan Lan was an exception to the norm. His existence proved that resonance grade was important, but not the most important factor.

Of course, he was perhaps the only one who could push an upper seventh-grade water resonance to this level of performance.

That was why Lan Lan was special.

"I was just lucky, and managed to cultivate my school's treasured scripture... Now, enough words, Brother Gong. I know your strength, so there's no need to test it."

Lan Lan stretched out both hands and made a complex gesture. The water underneath him rose in a wave that stretched in a concave arch around him. It refracted the sunlight above into watery lines of light that covered him in a web of power.

Water resonant power exploded forth from his body, stretching out from horizon to horizon. Lan Lan's narrow eyes were suddenly large and round, and his irises had turned into a cobalt shade that was devoid of all emotion.

Dark-blue power rose from his body.

Gong Shenjun dashed forward at the first instance, intent on breaking his opponent's build-up, but his eyes suddenly narrowed.

He saw a giant figure step out from the void behind Lan Lan.

The figure was cloaked, and its head reached into the clouds and could not be seen clearly. Gong Shenjun immediately sensed the threat from it.

The pressure was so monstrous that it made heaven and earth tremble.

The patch of space where Lan Lan was at was crumbling around him, warping and twisting from the sheer power that he was shaping.

Gong Shenjun did not even blink once as he stared and watched for a clue of how to best react. He saw that his opponent's hair was slowly turning white.

With a jolt of understanding, Gong Shenjun realized what was happening.

The Enlightened Sage College's signature resonance art.

Duke Art, Enlightened Sage Scripture.

Ordinarily, even those at the Heavenly Resonance Stage could not pull it off, let alone those who were at the Heavenly Pearl Stage.

The fact that Lan Lan could pull it off with a seventh-grade water resonance was exceptional indeed.

At the same time, he would be paying a heavy price to pull this off.

As seen from his hair turning white.

"An ultimate straight from the get go..." Gong Shenjun thought to himself. Lan Lan was evidently holding nothing back. If he wanted to survive this move, he was going to have to be prepared to risk it all.

If this resonance art connected, he would be severely injured if not dead.

Gong Shenjun's concentration was absolute. Despite his reservations, the strongest champion of the Astral Sage College put his best foot forward to face the unknown.

Chapter 0517: Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage

When the mysterious figure appeared behind Lan Lan, it was not just Gong Shenjun who was stunned, but all the spectators as well.

Even through the screens, they could sense the terrible pressure from that thing.

"This is a real Duke Art," Sun Dasheng thought admiringly. The one he used was an incomplete version, plus he was only a Resonant Master. The difference in strength between him and a Heavenly Dipper General like Lan Lan was as wide as heaven and earth.

But Sun Dasheng was not at all discouraged. He knew that Lan Lan simply had a headstart in cultivation. When he reached the Heavenly Dipper General Stage himself, he might well be Lan Lan's equal.

"The Enlightened Sage Scripture in the hands of someone as strong as Lan Lan could take down even a Heavenly Resonance Stage cultivator," the First Princess said seriously. "Back when I encountered him, his Enlightened Sage Phantom was not this well-defined yet."

Li Luo was closely scrutinizing the figure behind Lan Lan as well. A fight between Heavenly Dipper Generals was a rare sight indeed. There were not many of them in the Xia Kingdom.

For example, House Luolan only had the three ancestors at that level.

"The Enlightened Sage Scripture was created by the principal of the Enlightened Sage College. That phantom is none other than an echo of the principal himself, and it contains a fragment of his power," Vice Principal Su Xin suddenly told them.

Li Luo and the others turned to her in great surprise.

"The principal of the Enlightened Sage College is a King as well?" Li Luo asked curiously.

Su Xin nodded. "There are actually not many principals who have reached the King Stage among the sage colleges in the East Divine Continent, but the Enlightened Sage College's principal is one of them. In terms of experience and power, he is the equal of our own principal, and both of them are considered the finest of the East Divine Continent.

"His Enlightened Sage Scripture is notoriously difficult to cultivate, and extremely dangerous as well. One has to cultivate before the principal himself and withstand the pressure of a King. Only then can one gain a true vision of the Enlightened Sage Phantom.

"In this process, many elite students have been broken. They not only failed to cultivate it successfully, but were also haunted by a shadow on their spirits. They were mentally crushed, and their cultivation journey ground to a permanent halt."

Li Luo stared at her, stunned. The pressure of a King? He could only imagine how tremendous such a thing was.

Truly, it was no walk in the park to obtain a Duke Art.

And the fact that Lan Lan had managed to do so spoke of his grit and quality.

His resonance might not be of a high grade, but his personality was something that other cultivators with better resonances could not compare with. That strength of character had brought him to where he was today.

"Vice Principal, can Senior Gong Shenjun withstand Lan Lan's Enlightened Sage Scripture?" Li Luo asked.

Even Jiang Qing'e and the First Princess sat up straighter at this question. Vice Principal Su Xin was a Duke, and her judgment was far superior in accuracy compared to theirs. Her read of the battle would be highly reliable.

Vice Principal Su Xin was silent for a moment. "What makes the Enlightened Sage Scripture terrifying is the Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage. The Enlightened Sage Phantom will kowtow three times to you."

Li Luo stared at her uncomprehendingly. Kowtow to the enemy? What the hell was that supposed to do? Politely beseech them to surrender?

"Kings and Dukes are superior beings, exalted above all. Their status is higher than others of the land, and it is from this higher status that their control over nature comes. Ordinary beings do not dare cross them for fear of their lives.

"Can you imagine what would happen if one of these nobles paid obeisance before an ordinary mortal?"

Li Luo was still confused, but he tried to follow the thought through. It would probably be uncomfortable, even unbearable. The implications of such a gesture went against every social convention possible.

"Nobles abhor humiliation," Vice Principal Su Xin said with a wry smile. "Without befitting status and power, can you stand up to the kowtow of a King? That is the principle on which the Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage is built.

"When Lan Lan activates the Three Kowtows, it will be an inferior version of the phenomenon which you will witness. An echo of a King will kowtow to you, but nature itself will cry out at the wrongness of it all. It will create a glitch in the fabric of worldly natural energy and crush the target, seeking to test the person as worthy or otherwise.

"If you cannot withstand this, then you will be killed," she said simply.

Li Luo broke out in cold sweat. This was a really insane way of getting nature to do the fighting for you.

"And that is not the end of the Enlightened Sage Scripture. Another horror awaits. If you are unable to withstand that kowtow, then the Enlightened Sage Phantom will appear within you to terrorize your soul. If you cannot banish that phantom, it will affect your cultivation... Although, luckily, it is not permanent and will disappear in half a year or so."

Even Jiang Qing'e frowned at this.

The First Princess was unmoved—this was probably old news to her.

"The Enlightened Sage Scripture is sick. It even leaves an affliction?" Li Luo groaned.

Having one's cultivation speed crippled for half a year was not something to take lightly. One's cultivation level increased most rapidly before the Heavenly Resonance Stage. Having one's progress delayed by half a year in this crucial stage was a heavy price to pay.

Vice Principal Su Xin nodded. "That is why the horror that is the Enlightened Sage Scripture is well known throughout the East Divine Continent. It remains to be seen how Gong Shenjun will choose to deal with this."

"If he takes but one more step forward, it will activate the Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage. Victory and defeat will be decided in the blink of an eye," Su Xin said gravely. "We do not know what his choice will be."

All eyes at the Holy Grail Meet were on Gong Shenjun right now.

.....

At the bank of the lake.

Gong Shenjun's handsome features were arranged in a serious expression. He looked at the figure behind Lan Lan with deep apprehension.

Clearly, he knew the tale of the Enlightened Sage Scripture all too well.

That was why he was hesitating.

This final was a crazy gamble.

Lan Lan had set up the stage and the stakes. It was up to him to decide whether to accept or not.

Gong Shenjun's eyes flashed, and he slowly raised his foot up.

Lan Lan closed his eyes, and the Enlightened Sage Phantom behind him stirred.

Gong Shenjun slowly put his foot back down.

He smiled and shook his head.

"Brother Lan, I choose not to roll the dice with you this time.

"But do not worry. The Holy Grail Meet is not over yet. I think there is a chance that we will meet again in the mixed-level competition."

He pulled out his anima gourd and smashed it calmly.

A column of light descended from the sky.

Gong Shenjun disappeared in a flash, leaving the audience stunned.

Chapter 0518: Gong Shenjun's Choice

The entire crowd was too stunned to speak when Gong Shenjun vanished from the battlefield.

He had actually chosen not to fight, breaking his anima gourd and surrendering.

With his elimination, Lan Lan would be the strongest Four Star Hall student by default.

No one had expected this outcome.

Many were disappointed by this result—they had hoped to see a legendary battle go down between Gong Shenjun and Lan Lan, two of the strongest students that many present had ever seen. Their clash would definitely be at a much higher level compared to the other three halls.

Of course, with the disappointment came taunts, the best way that emotionally awkward youths knew how to deal with it.

"Strongest student of the Astral Sage College, strongest at cowardice."

"He had already made it all the way there. Even if it was a Duke he was facing, he shouldn't have chickened out, damn it."

"What a letdown."

"Well, at least now the Astral Sage College won't have a chance to take three golden resonant tree brooches in one go."

The mood at the Astral Sage College tower was a little subdued. They did not understand why Gong Shenjun had not fought. It was quite out of character for him.

Retreating under such circumstances would make others doubt the Astral Sage College's quality.

After all, he was supposed to be the Astral Sage College's strongest student.

He represented the lion's share of the school's reputation, compared to the other halls.

Li Luo was also surprised, and equally surprised to see that Vice Principal Su Xin looked rather unaffected. He had an odd feeling that she had most expected this outcome.

A vortex appeared, cutting through his thoughts. Gong Shenjun stepped out.

Usually, any appearance by Gong Shenjun would be greeted with cheers and murmurs in a reverent tone, but now the atmosphere was a little chilly.

No one felt good about his cowardice.

Gong Shenjun stepped out with a neutral expression. "Vice Principal Su Xin, I was not sure if I could win. I'm sorry to have let down everyone's expectations."

"Senior Gong Shenjun," Duzhe Honglian burst out, unable to contain her frustration, "why did you not fight? Given your strength, who could say that you were going to lose, even though your opponent had already laid down a formation?!" Her ire was plain to see and hear, especially from someone whose admiration for Gong Shenjun was well-known among those who knew her. And to speak to him thus despite the difference in their status and strength was quite surprising.

Duzhe Honglian secretly had a crush on him, as the most eligible male around.

But perhaps because she had held too high an expectation for Gong Shenjun, she felt doubly betrayed by his sudden backing out.

Gong Shenjun looked at her silently.

"Go on," Vice Principal Su Xin said neutrally. "I'm sure you had your reasons. Let everyone hear them."

All eyes.

Gong Shenjun laughed lightly. "Well, there's nothing much to explain. I was not sure I could withstand Lan Lan's Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage. And if I failed, I would be cursed by the Enlightened Sage Phantom, and my strength would be severely limited. If that happened, I would not only lose the hall-level competition, but also not be able to contribute to the mixed-level competition.

"The way I see it, the loss of the Four Star Hall golden resonant tree brooch is bearable, but if we lose the mixed-level competition, then we stand no chance at all. That is why I decided to bank the chips for the mixed-level competition instead."

Many of the students fell into a thoughtful silence.

So Gong Shenjun was thinking of the long term, biding his time for the mixed-level competition? That made sense. After all, the mixed-level competition was three halls in one team, and Gong Shenjun was a crucial piece in that lineup.

Of course, if he had won, then everything would've been fine and dandy, but if he lost, it was not just the one brooch that was at stake, but also Astral Sage's chances in the next round.

There were three golden resonant tree brooches up for grabs in the mixed-level competition. That was where the champion would be decided.

Perhaps Gong Shenjun's choice was the rational one after all. Besides, he had said it himself—he was not sure if he could take on the Enlightened Sage Scripture.

There was an intangible lightening of the atmosphere.

At the same time, Gong Shenjun's staunch supporters spoke out. "Senior, you only had the school's win at heart. You knew that this would be an unpopular choice, but you were noble enough to choose it anyway."

The other students looked a little ashamed as well.

Duze Honglian hesitated but did not speak.

Gong Shenjun smiled. "It's a fact that I surrendered without fighting. Perhaps I do lack some courage, or I would have fought him mano a mano. But I think the chance will come again in the mixed-level competition. Without fear of the after-effects affecting the school's chances, I will see how strong the Enlightened Sage Scripture is."

"Your rational choice cannot be faulted." Vice Principal Su Xin nodded. "But you should know that if you had won there, we would have a huge advantage."

Gong Shenjun looked at her in surprise, then he quickly caught on. "We already have two brooches? Junior Jiang, of course, but one more..."

"Li Luo," Vice Principal Su Xin answered. "He won the One Star Hall competition and took a golden resonant tree brooch for us."

Gong Shenjun looked at Li Luo oddly, then he quickly smiled. "Junior Li Luo, impressive indeed."

Li Luo shook his head modestly.

"Which means that I missed out on a golden opportunity," Gong Shenjun said fretfully.

Vice Principal Su Xin gave him a considerate look. "No matter. Taking three golden resonant tree brooches in the Hall-level competition is ideal, but two still gives us a good advantage. We stand a chance in the mixed-level competition."

Li Luo remained silent. A chance, yes, but because there were three brooches up for grabs in the mixed-level competition, it meant that every other school stood a chance as well.

Besides the personal gain for himself and Jiang Qing'e, two golden resonant tree brooches as a final result didn't do the school any good.

If they lost the mixed-level competition, their victories would not mean anything.

He remained silent because the moment had passed. Smiles were breaking out across other faces as the students were now satisfied that Gong Shenjun had been looking out for the greater good.

In any case, Gong Shenjun was an important member in the Astral Sage College ranks.

"Everyone, rest well. Now that the first half of the Holy Grail Meet is over, you may well need a few days of rest. Await the format of the second half to be announced," Vice Principal Su Xin said kindly.

There was a tired cheer from the competitors, then they returned to their rooms.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e purposely lingered at the back.

"Gong Shenjun did not speak the truth," Jiang Qing'e murmured into Li Luo's ear, her voice further suppressed with resonant power.

Li Luo's eyes widened. "What? Why?"

Jiang Qing'e shook her head.

"I have no proof, but somehow I feel like... he does not want to win."

Chapter 0519: Celebration Dinner

In the respective towers, the students were all headed for their rooms. The hall-level competition had taken a lot out of them, pushing them to their mental and physical limits.

Li Luo returned to his room too, where he crashed hard the moment his head hit the pillow.

When he woke up again, an entire day had passed.

Outside the window, the stars twinkled quietly in the deep blue of night. Even here at the Holy Grail space, it was an entire world of its own.

A soft knock tapped at his door.

Li Luo arranged his clothing so he was proper, then opened the door to see Bai Mengmeng standing there.

She was in a simple, white shift that complemented her fair skin.

"Leader, are you well rested now?" she asked happily, face as fresh as a flower.

"Vice Principal Su Xin was very pleased with our result in the hall-level competition, so she's already awarding all the participants 30,000 school points, regardless of the final result. Everyone's super happy, and we're celebrating on the second floor. As the hero, you have to be there, you know."

"That's super generous," Li Luo said, perking up at the mention of school points. "It's quite a sum."

30,000 school points was a sizable budget for many students, and would sustain them for a long time.

"It's all thanks to Leader and Senior Jiang." Bai Mengmeng beamed admiringly at him.

Li Luo smiled back. "Well, you guys helped to secure the title for me too. It wasn't a one-man effort. Let's go, then. I'm hungry too."

The battle had taken a lot out of him, and he was still tired. Vice Principal Su Xin's feast was likely meant to help them recover spiritually and rouse them for the next round.

After all, an even harder challenge awaited them.

The two chatted casually as they walked together to the second floor.

Pushing past the curtain, they entered a large hall that was lively with student chatter.

All the students were here, gathered in their own small circles, laughing and chatting gaily.

Li Luo's arrival was well noted, and even the senior students smiled and nodded at him, raising their wine cups in a friendly gesture.

Although Li Luo's reputation had been growing rapidly before, it had been limited to the One Star Hall; the Three and Four Star Hall students were hardly impressed, even though he was strong for his level.

Previously, they were more interested in the relationship between Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e.

All of that had changed with the end of the hall-level competition.

Li Luo was now the strongest One Star Hall student in all of the East Divine Continent. That was not a title to take lightly. Even after the Holy Grail Meet ended, Li Luo's reputation would definitely continue to grow outside of the Xia Kingdom.

House Luolan's Jiang Qing'e was famous, a truly talented star. And they had been too blinded by her brilliance to see the young lord of House Luolan come into his own strength from behind her. Even though she was still the stronger of the two, no one would dare to ignore the young lord now.

His future was equally unlimited.

Li Luo nodded back amiably to all the friendly gestures sent his way.

And then he followed Bai Mengmeng over to the One Star Hall side.

"Ah, the breadwinner of our family," Lu Qing'er said mischievously.

Li Luo glanced over at her. All the girls had dressed and done their makeup today with special care, and Lu Qing'er was dressed in her finest. Her classic ice-silk gloves were, of course, present on her snowy-fair skin.

Beneath her skirt, her white, lacy socks clung tightly to her long legs.

Lu Qing'er crossed her arms, wine cup daintily pinched between two elegant fingers as she smiled at him.

She was attracting her fair share of covert glances from the guys in the room. She was a woman of quality, and captivating in her own right.

But seeing the way that she was looking at Li Luo, the other male students shook their heads and muttered to themselves. Some guys had all the luck.

This guy already had an engagement to Senior Jiang, and here he was, grazing in other, greener fields. Why didn't Senior Jiang break his leg already?

Li Luo ignored the haters, easily accepting a glass of fruit liqueur from Lu Qing'er.

"Li Luo, I hear that each school can only send two teams for the mixed-level competition. It's a pity, I don't think we will have a chance to fight anymore," Qin Zhulu groaned, slumping into the chair beside him.

"Only two squads?" Li Luo asked, surprised.

"Yeah, Vice Principal Su Xin leaked some information," Lu Qing'er confirmed.

Li Luo considered this information. Each iteration of the Holy Grail Meet saw different formats, so he could not be sure what they would face this time. But limiting each school to two squads upped the difficulty significantly.

He would definitely be with Jiang Qing'e.

Of course, given his strength, he was not considered elite compared to a Two Star Hall student, but he should be able to hold his own against most of them.

Which meant that he and Jiang Qing'e needed only one more Four Star Hall student to join them.

There weren't many choices either. They only had two.

Gong Shenjun or the First Princess.

Who should they pick?

While he was still considering this, he heard footsteps approach from behind. He peered behind him to see Gong Shenjun walking over with a cup in hand and a warm smile on his face.

"Junior Li Luo," he said warmly, "your performance in the hall-level competition was truly impressive. All of the Xia Kingdom was taken by storm."

Li Luo smiled back politely. "With Qing'e around, it hardly comes to me to win the glory."

Gong Shenjun laughed, but he did not contradict him. "Junior Li Luo," he said directly, "I've come to extend an invitation. I hope that you can join my team in the mixed-level competition. I believe that together we can get the best result in the next round. What do you think of this proposal?"

Li Luo was surprised by this move.

Was Gong Shenjun here on an open recruitment drive?

In terms of power, of course he was the better choice... but was he really going to work with this guy whom he didn't fully trust?

Li Luo pursed his lips.

Chapter 0520: Gong Shenjun's Invitation

Li Luo was not sure about Gong Shenjun's invitation.

Foremost in his mind was the last conversation he had with Jiang Qing'e. She had said that Gong Shenjun did not seem to want to win.

Why? There was no good reason he could think of. And no one else seemed to have the same suspicions, not even Vice Principal Su Xin.

Li Luo had never considered it before either. Winning the Dragon Bone Holy Grail for the Astral Sage College was all pluses and no minuses. After all, the Umbra Cave was the greatest danger in the Xia Kingdom, and they should all be invested in it.

Moreover, Gong Shenjun was royalty, ruling over the Xia Kingdom itself.

But Jiang Qing'e's instincts were not to be questioned.

Others might laugh at her baseless hunches, but not Li Luo. No smoke without fire, he believed.

Jiang Qing'e had a ninth-grade light resonance, so she could read the hearts of others with acuity.

Perhaps she had sensed something that the others hadn't?

Li Luo really could not decide. On paper, Gong Shenjun was the stronger option, and he had no good reason to refuse. Together with Jiang Qing'e, the three of them made a formidable team indeed.

While Li Luo was still hesitating, a familiar voice came from behind him.

"Senior Gong, perhaps we should wait for Vice Principal Su Xin to release more details about the mixed-level competition before we decide." Jiang Qing'e walked up to stand beside him, her face serene and unreadable as always.

Gong Shenjun's smile broadened further when he saw Jiang Qing'e. "Ah, Junior Jiang, perfect timing. Of course, my invitation is not just to Li Luo. You are also part of the dream team that I have in mind."

"The pipe in my room is spoiled," Jiang Qing'e said abruptly to Li Luo, grabbing him by the hand. "Lend me your room."

She left, taking Li Luo by the hand.

Everyone within earshot thought that Jiang Qing'e had gone mad.

Spoiled pipe? Lend room? Bathing?

Jiang Qing'e was going to bathe in Li Luo's room?!

The air suddenly grew a lot more tense, and suddenly Li Luo's popularity fell among the male students.

"Stop right there, you filthy animal!"

Was what many of them thought, but none of them dared to say.

Lu Qing'er almost choked, and she accidentally flash-froze the wine in her hand as her composure slipped.

Gong Shenjun's eyes narrowed. Not even someone of his bearing could perfectly hide his emotions. He almost made a move to stop the two, but he managed to stop himself.

Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo were engaged. Whatever they did was proper.

If Jiang Qing'e wanted to take a bath in Li Luo's room, not even Vice Principal Su Xin had a reason to stop them.

And so, in the strangely tense silence, they watched Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo leave.

It was a long while before the cheer from other parts of the hall finally reasserted itself in this part.

Gong Shenjun turned away, giving up on his invitations.

The others looked at each other.

"Heh, that's why Senior Jiang is my idol," Bai Doudou cheered. "She always does things with such brutal directness. I love it."

"It doesn't matter what you love, there's no love back," Yu Lang blurted.

Bai Doudou turned to him. "What do you mean?" she asked, puzzled.

Yu Lang almost jumped out of his skin. "Er, nothing. I mean... Senior Jiang doesn't seem to love the idea of joining Senior Gong's team, does she?"

Bai Mengmeng nodded. "I got that same vibe," she said thoughtfully. "But why? Senior Gong is indeed the best choice to form a champion team with. Senior Jiang should have no reason to refuse." She posed the half-question to Lu Qing'er, who was still moodily watching Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e walk away.

"What are you thinking about, Qing'er?"

Lu Qing'er swished her wine-slush, trying to melt it back down again. "Senior Jiang wouldn't do anything to Li Luo, would she?"

Bai Mengmeng blinked innocently. "I don't know about that... I did hear Senior Jiang promise Leader once that she would give him some sort of reward if he became the strongest One Star Hall student."

Lu Qing'er almost fell out of her chair. "Come again? How do you know this?!"

"Oh, I overheard it by accident," Bai Mengmeng said with a smile. "You had best do something quick if you're going to act, Qing'er."

Lu Qing'er stared anew at the sweet-faced baby-doll girl. Somehow, she was looking more sinister by the moment. Perhaps she wasn't as childlike as everyone made her out to be.

She'd have to be careful of this one too.

...

Li Luo was dragged by the hand back to his room.

"Thanks for the save," he said cheerfully, still gripping her hand tightly. "Otherwise, I wouldn't have known how to reply to him."

"It depends on whether you want to win the Holy Grail Meet," Jiang Qing'e replied. "I don't have any stake in this. We can win it or not. One strongest student title is enough to win riches from the school," she said indifferently.

Li Luo frowned. "But I can't wrap my head around why Gong Shenjun wouldn't want to win... If we win, the school will be grateful to him, his reputation in the Xia Kingdom will rise, and he could even crush the First Princess and rise with the Regent, his father."

"I can't wrap my head around it either," Jiang Qing'e admitted. "But my intuition remains unchanged."

"If you want to win the Holy Grail Meet, we have to avoid Gong Shenjun's team at all costs," she continued. "If you do not want to win, then it doesn't matter."

Li Luo paused for a moment. "I want to win it," he finally decided. "I promised Principal Pang."

"Pang Qianyuan?" Jiang Qing'e's eyes widened. She was unaware that the two had spoken of anything, but she was not one to probe too deeply.

"If you want to win, then we'll go look for the First Princess. In any case, we can wait until more details about the format of the mixed-level competition are released tomorrow before we decide."

She smiled.

"And I will help you."

"Thanks, Qing'e," Li Luo said gratefully.

"Now you can show your gratitude by loosening that claw-like hold of yours," she said primly.

Li Luo regretfully let go of her hand. If not for the fact that he had done very well in the hall-level competition, she would have probably held it against him.

She stood up. "Which way's the bathroom?"

Li Luo's jaw dropped as he pointed numbly to the right. "Er... why?"

She shot him a look. "The pipe in my room's really spoiled," she called over her shoulder as she walked into the adjacent room.

Li Luo swallowed as he watched her hourglass figure sashay away. His mouth suddenly felt dry.