

Resonance 561

Chapter 0561: Lan Lan's Team, Retreat!

The awe-inspiring battle had ground to a halt with this development. The avatar behind Lan Lan began to pause. The technique was not released and the offensive was unceremoniously brought to a stop.

All because Jing Taixu was a hostage in Li Luo's hands.

If Jing Taixu were to be eliminated, the rules dictated that their team would lose a portion of their points, an amount greater than what could have been earned from conquering this level three city.

The path to victory would be an uphill climb, and recouping the lost points would be no easy feat.

All of these considerations raced through Lan Lan's mind as he felt incomparably irritated. These arbitrary rules were frustrating to no end.

Whoosh.

Even the ever cool Lan Lan heaved a heavy sigh at this situation. Calming himself down, he glared icily at the party pooper Li Luo.

It was mind-boggling that Jing Taixu could have been crushed so quickly.

He would not have been surprised if Lu Jinci had been the unfortunate one. All of this seemed preposterous. The difference in strength should not have been so large.

"Good job, Li Luo!" the First Princess praised. An expression of joy could be seen on her beautiful face, and she had similarly never expected this result.

She had resolved herself of the heavy price necessary to resist the Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage. Luckily, Li Luo had become the harbinger of fortune, turning the situation on its head.

The situation had changed, and now that Jing Taixu was in their hands, so was the initiative. Lan Lan's hands were tied as he had to consider his decision carefully.

"It looks like we've got the upper hand in this clash, Lan Lan." The First Princess beamed radiantly.

"You must understand that we are only fighting for the sake of points. If we truly were to put everything on the line, there wouldn't be much difference between us." She continued speaking with the intent to provide Lan Lan a way to back down. There was no need to tear up all pretenses of cordiality over something so minor.

Lan Lan calmly retorted, "It seems that Sister Gong's team is truly my greatest opponent. If we were to eliminate you here and now... that might actually be a good thing." Coupled with the provocative words, he remained battle-ready, the avatar behind him fully primed. It was clear that he truly was considering the situation extremely carefully.

Unsurprisingly, the response he received was a cold snort and a frigid expression from the First Princess. She grasped the jade scepter tightly, similarly unwilling to relent if this was the case. "Then go ahead and kowtow. Let's see what happens then. I'm not afraid. Try me! If I don't make you pay a heavy price, then why am I even here?"

Lan Lan's gaze narrowed as his fingertips moved together in the shape of a hand seal. **Ve/1b-1n**

Simultaneously, the avatar behind him began to radiate frightening pressure.

Boom!

Just as the situation reached an explosive climax, a loud explosion could be heard. A pitiful shadow had been sent flying by a blast of resonant energy, leaving behind a hundred-meter ditch upon landing.

The originally spacious road was now cleanly cleaved into two.

This sight gave Lan Lan another unpleasant surprise. There was a fleshy lump of meat that went by the name of Lu Jinci lying within the muddy debris.

Swoosh!

At the same time, a radiant Demonbane Nail began to descend once more, directly penetrating his arm, resulting in pitiful cries and a miserable expression. "Senior Lan, please make your decision quickly. Fight if you want to or run if you don't! The quicker, the better!"

A certain Jiang Qing'e then landed by his side, her heavy sword pressed right atop his head, instantly causing him to zip his mouth shut.

His courage had truly been beaten out of him.

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He had the misfortune of being soundly beaten twice in a single Holy Grail Meet. Furthermore, Jiang Qing'e loathed his very presence, never pulling her punches. On top of that, the Demonbane Nails could not be resisted by mightier individuals, much less him!

Another sigh escaped from Lan Lan's mouth.

Both of his teammates had been captured, and if they were eliminated, he'd lose a good half of his points. That would truly be a penalty he could not afford to pay. Attaining first place would be impossible then.

Sacrificing so much for a mere level three city was not a smart move. It would make even less sense to continue his attack on the First Princess.

Thus, he made his decision. He immediately released the avatar, and the horrific encompassing pressure it exuded upon the surroundings immediately receded.

"Well, fellow student Gong, you've won. You truly have two great teammates," Lan Lan helplessly replied.

"Oh? Do you finally agree? As I said, this doesn't mean much. The real competition only really starts at the Russet Rock City. Who knows, we might even have to work together then." Russet Rock City supposedly possessed a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other, a Heavenly Resonance Stage opponent. Unfortunately, it was likely that none of the teams in the competition would be able to take it on alone. Plus, with the intel from Thunderpeal Mountain, the crimson knight-general was also going to be there, and thus there was definitely a need to remain on cordial terms.

"Perhaps." Shaking his head, Lan Lan glanced towards Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e. "My two friends, could you kindly release my teammates?" Jiang Qing'e sheathed her sword and flicked her finger, dissipating the Demonbane Nail that had been stabbing into Lu Jinci. The pitiful soul quickly scrambled to his feet with a face full of tears. "Sister Qing'e, I beg of you! Please stop using that resonant art on me!"

Jiang Qing'e glared at him momentarily before coolly replying, "We're enemies. Why should I be lenient?"

He continued pleading with a bitter smile. "Sister Qing'e, that's not true! You don't need to vent your anger on me! All those bad rumors came from that bastard Jing Taixu! Yes, that scummy guy! Not me! If you really are angry, why don't you find a chance to beat him halfway to the pearly gates instead?"

Jiang Qing'e shook her head. "He's not worth my attention." After which, she turned away from Lu Jinci, calmly walking away.

On the other side, Li Luo was also smiling happily as he put away his Onyx-Elephant Blade whilst staring at the seemingly soulless Jing Taixu. It seemed as though he had been traumatized from the lightning-fast confrontation. Or perhaps he simply did not want to face reality.

Before this fight, Jing Taixu firmly believed that Li Luo's previous victory was a fluke! Mere luck. However, Li Luo had metamorphosed into a monster easily capable of dealing with him. Just how could the arrogant Jing Taixu take it lying down?

"You don't need to worry... To be honest, that last blow wasn't even me at my peak! The gap between us is actually muuuuuuuuch larger than this," Li Luo continued to console.

Hearing such vicious words caused Jing Taixu's eyelids to flutter, seemingly awakened as he gritted his teeth. "I simply did not expect you to have strengthened by so much in such a small amount of time! I won't let you off so easily next time!"

"Mhm. Work harder, young one. Your efforts will definitely pay off in the future," Li Luo sagely said as he grinned widely. No longer paying attention to him, he turned to walk towards the First Princess.

This once epic nemesis had now fallen into the annals of history. He had been completely surpassed.

Jing Taixu had a heart full of grievance, but his only option was to snort in retort, slinking back towards Lan Lan.

On the other hand, Lan Lan did not blame his teammates. After cupping his fist towards the First Princess respectfully, he turned to leave and gave up on the struggle for the level three city.

The First Princess watched Lan Lan fade away in the distance before heaving a sigh of relief. That great opponent had finally been repelled.

Despite the victory, she did not directly enter the level three city, instead turning to face the rabble within the forest, whose presence had long been felt.

Now that her hands were not tied up in dealing with the troublesome Lan Lan, she was free to investigate these third parties' intentions.

If they were looking to snatch the level three city, she'd be more than happy to give them the welcome they deserved.

Yet with the sight of Lan Lan retreating, the rest of the opportunists lost the confidence to go against the First Princess' team. They quietly dispersed too.

Gong Shenjun did not choose to appear either, taking his team away to another city that had not been purified. Although it was not of a similar level, it was better than nothing.

Furthermore, these cities would open the path towards Russet Rock City, where everyone would congregate.

Everything would be decided there and then.

Chapter 0562: Empty City

After the prying eyes retreated, the First Princess retracted her gaze and praised Li Luo with a smile. "You've contributed a lot to the success of this fight once again. If not for your timely capture of Jing Taixu, I would have had to struggle against Lan Lan, and who knows how that would have turned out. An unpleasant outcome would be more likely than not."

Li Luo shrugged. "Dear Princess, you must be exaggerating! We could have simply ran with our tails tucked between our legs in the worst case! If you had gotten crippled here, our odds of victory would be nonexistent."

Frankly speaking, the First Princess had planned to resist the Three Kowtows of the Enlightened Sage headfirst from the start. Of course, doing that was no child's play, and any mistake on their part would have led to elimination.

If the group leader was eliminated, the remaining points wouldn't amount to much.

Upon hearing those words, she glared at Li Luo. "So what if he started kowtowing? Do you think this princess here is a simple punching bag? Psh. If this damned Lan Lan dares to try it, then I'll take him on for a couple of rounds and we will see who wins!" Faced with the self-confident and arrogant princess, Li Luo was left speechless.

"Let's go. Into the city!" Jiang Qing'e casually mentioned.

The First Princess' gaze turned to face the decrepit and derelict level three city. "Once this city has been purified, the only real problem left to deal with in the entirety of the Red Clay Province will be the Russet Rock City. The victor will be determined there."

Li Luo sighed wistfully. Despite them having a lead of tens of thousands of points, the purification of Russet Rock City provided almost five hundred thousand points! Whichever team managed to get the largest slice of the pie would definitely be able to directly ascend to the top position.

However, this also demonstrated the absolute peril it contained. No single group would be able to monopolize the points.

Compartmentalizing away their own lamentations, the squad made their way into the ruined city rife with corruption.

Yet as they progressed, they noticed something extremely unsettling and strange.

The entire city seemed to be empty. Not a single Other could be seen.

This led the three to feel taken aback, and they spread out to investigate further. After half an hour later, they regrouped in the center of the city with nothing to show for their efforts.

"Where are the Others?" Li Luo couldn't help but ask. The First Princess and Jiang Qing'e were similarly befuddled. "Could they have been scared away by our battle?"

"No... Even during the fight, I did not sense any movement in here."

Jiang Qing'e furrowed her brow in consternation. "Hmm, the corruption within the city is also extremely pervasive... This suggests that there were numerous Others here. Just looking around, we can see signs of corrosion on both the grounds and building. There was definitely an extremely strong Other here."

"Then where could they all have gone?" Li Luo was similarly confused. Was their difficult faceoff against Lan Lan going to be rewarded with an empty city?

Jiang Qing'e shook her head, indicating that she was completely baffled by the sight before her too.

"Forget about it. So be it. The purification of the city is where we get most of the points from anyway." The First Princess shrugged after she spoke.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e did not have any other comments. There was probably no need to look deeper into this, as their aim was to set up the cleansing barrier. This was perfect—they'd obtain the points for cleansing a level three city!

The three got to work and finished setting up the cleansing orbs throughout the city very quickly. Within two hours, purifying pillars of light arose into the skies.

The beams of light then interwove into an increasingly dense net of light, eventually encompassing the entire city with its cleansing powers.

At the same time, the corruption began to recede, and eventually even the city took on a radiant glow.

The ease of which the situation resolved itself caused the trio to feel a little taken aback.

"Our points just increased. That's it?" Li Luo felt a sense of disbelief as every single level three city before this had been a herculean task to cleanse. Each possessed a Lesser Heavenly Disaster Class Other, and even the First Princess had to engage in an arduous battle before slaying them. She'd even require Jiang Qing'e's assistance from time to time!

On the other hand, this simple endeavor of theirs had netted them fifty thousand points.

"Let's give it another four hours. If nothing strange happens, we will make our way towards Russet Rock City," the First Princess said.

The other two nodded in acceptance of the situation.

Time passed by, and they could gradually feel the corruption consistently dissipate with no sign nor shadow of Others.

After which, the squad no longer hesitated and left the level three city, making their way towards the final trial, Russet Rock City.

Interestingly, what the squad did not know was that this strange situation was also the case in the surrounding cities.

Those cities were all completely empty, without any trace of a living Other found within.

In the end, all the other squads set up their cleansing barriers and chose to leave, directly making their way towards the final destination.

A few days passed.

The three were now perched atop high ground, observing the massive and majestic reddish-brown wall that had appeared before them, their expressions gradually becoming more solemn.

No trace of corruption could be seen emanating from their objective.

It was as though the Other Disaster had never occurred.

But anyone could tell that this was impossible.

In the entirety of the time they had traveled, they could distinctly feel that they were moving towards the source of the corruption, Russet Rock City itself.

There was definitely some devilry at work. The quiet and seemingly uncorrupted Russet Rock City looked even more suspicious as a result.

"This city is extremely dangerous," Jiang Qing'e mused as she stared at the humongous walls before them. Her ninth-grade light resonance granted her exceptional perceptive abilities, indicating the perilous situation that lay ahead.

It was as though a primal beast was coiled up within the depths of the city, its gaping maw ready to swallow any unfortunate fools willing to step in.

"How do I put it? Do we go in?" Li Luo asked curiously.

Even Jiang Qing'e was approaching the situation cautiously, indicating that calamitous dangers likely awaited them. It was better to be honest with their feelings, considering that he was just a mere Resonant Master Stage cultivator.

The First Princess looked at Jiang Qing'e before gravely saying, "Russet Rock City is completely different from the cities we've been to. The level of danger is probably much higher than what we had faced at the Thunderpeal Tree. My suggestion is that we do not enter alone."

"I agree wholeheartedly. Let's wait here for other squads before we deliberate over our decisions. Perhaps some might be willing to work together."

"I can feel that the Other in the core of the city will be no weaker than the grinning demon we had met prior." Li Luo nodded in agreement with Qing'e's musings.

Without being able to clearly identify the risks ahead of them, they would have to remain on their toes. Scrabbling for every last point in this situation would only lead them to early graves.

Since the other two did not have any other opinions, the First Princess took her spirit mirror out and emitted a pillar of light into the sky with the aid of resonant power. Anyone else who held a spirit mirror would also be able to perceive this sign, serving as a beacon for the other squads to congregate around.

After which, the three sat down and quietly waited, a peace that lasted several hours.

Finally, a hint of movement could be sensed as the group looked towards the forest in their surroundings.

Countless silhouettes could be seen emerging from the trees, gradually gathering before Li Luo's squad.

Chapter 0563: Teamwork

Countless shadows had burst out of their surroundings with a whoosh.

Familiar figures could be seen within the group.

Lan Lan's, Gong Shenjun's, and the squads they had grouped up with at Thunderpeal Mountain had appeared.

Even Sun Dasheng's squad was here.

These were the squads with the highest points in the rankings, possessing unparalleled strength. This was why they had reached Russet Rock City not long after the signal was lit.

They had naturally been attracted towards the beacon released by the First Princess like moths to a flame.

"Student Gong, we meet again." Lan Lan's face held a trace of an easy smile before turning to observe the reddish-brown walls of the colossal city, the sight resulting in him squinting suspiciously. "Russet Rock City seems to be exceptionally clean. It's no wonder you've chosen to wait before entering."
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The rest of the groups similarly made their own observations and judgment regarding the final objective. Any squad that was able to make it here could be considered the cream of the crop, their strength without peers. As a result, the sight before them instilled a sense of fear and anxiety instead of surprise.

The First Princess gazed over the group of newfound companions and spoke. "The danger of Russet Rock City far surpasses what we have seen before. I believe no squad can monopolize it and thus we should temporarily set our differences aside and work together."

The rest immediately fell into deep thought, no one outright rejecting her proposal. Everyone understood that this final stop would be extremely perilous! It would be the most difficult objective thus far, possessing a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other with Heavenly Resonance Stage strength. Even the strongest amongst this group, Lan Lan, Gong Shenjun, and Gong Luanyu, were not at that realm yet.

Lan Lan continued to ponder deeply before suddenly voicing out his thoughts. "On our way here, we traveled through a small city and noticed something strange. All of the Others within it had miraculously

vanished into thin air." With this revelation, everyone's expressions began to change into ones of surprise.

"Wait, you mean you too?" the First Princess' face became solemn. "The level three city we had struggled over was similarly an empty city. No signs of Others could be found."

"I encountered the same situation too," Gong Shenjun dryly commented.

All of the other squad leaders similarly agreed and were met with absolute surprise. It seemed as though all the Others in a several hundred kilometer radius of Russet Rock City had disappeared.

"Do you think the Others have all congregated inside Russet Rock City?" Li Luo blurted out.

Everyone paused in silence, giving yet another glance at the seemingly spotless Russet Rock City. A certain chilliness could be felt, and if Li Luo's conjecture was true, the current city before them was a den of doom!

The First Princess solemnly replied. "It's not an impossibility. If things are truly as you say, Russet Rock City possesses an unfathomably strong Other, one with a calling so absolute that all the Others within a few hundred kilometers of the city have been attracted to it."

"That is to say, the Others are aware of our presence, and they have decided to congregate to deal with us better," Jiang Qing'e surmised, her gaze furrowing.

The cunning and prudence this group of Others had was no less than that of a human. The group felt a little frustrated at this revelation.

"Also, I have something else to say. By any chance, has anyone encountered a black knight whilst cleansing the cities in the Red Clay Province?" the First Princess asked.

"A Black Knight? I met one..." The one that had spoken up was a burly youth by the name of Lian Zong from the Sacred Summit Sage College. The three from his squad were all built like massive tanks, imposing and domineering from just their sheer appearance.

The individuals from the Sacred Summit Sage College specialized in beast resonances.

"The black knight was roughly around the Earth Fiend Stage and was able to incite the Others into attacking us. Luckily, we discovered him and crushed his head into a pulp with a single smash," Lian Zong cackled, revealing his pearly-white teeth. Combining those with his meaty complexion, he was the spitting image of a violent street thug.

However, the rest of the squads had not encountered any black knights.

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"When our group was on Thunderpeal Mountain with the First Princess, we indeed also saw the black knight." Zhao Beili also chimed in to verify the First Princess' question.

At this point, Gong Shenjun sighed deeply. "Are you trying to say that there is some mysterious organization operating in the shadows of the Red Clay Province, looking to undermine our efforts?"

The First Princess wryly confirmed it. "The black knights are all at the Earth Fiend Stage and are not considered too much of a threat. However, we stumbled upon some valuable information. There is someone even stronger—a crimson knight-general. It should be the superior of the black knights. Although we have not faced one directly, there's reason to believe that it's a Heavenly Dipper General. As for whether it's a Heavenly Pearl Stage or Heavenly Resonance Stage cultivator... that I do not know,"

"Crimson knight-general?" The expressions of the squads who had just arrived turned even more tense. If the information was true, then Russet Rock City was an objective that no single team could solve alone.

"Perhaps the intention of this mixed-level competition is to ensure that the squads all cooperate. After all, there are no rules preventing the squads from entering direct confrontations," Qin Yue explained.

This statement caused numerous individuals to nod in agreement. Other than the previous scuffle over the level three city, the rest of the squads had often opted to collaborate, such as the situation on Thunderpeal Mountain, where squads from three sage colleges had worked together.

If there was an intention for the students to be pitted against each other, there would definitely have been a rule that would allow for the stealing of points between squads. This would inevitably have created hatred and strife.

The fact that this was not the case already demonstrated their intent.

Additionally, the mixed-level competition was not a simple tournament, unlike before. Resolving the Blackwind Empire's calamity was the aim of the game, and the opponents were not mere students, but ferocious Others.

Lan Lan gave a slight smile as he calmly said, "I have no disagreements with working together. Additionally, if we fail to cleanse Russet Rock City, the entire mixed-level competition will be considered a failure."

The other groups fell into a temporary silence before agreeing with him.

Trying to rush into Russet Rock City before truly having a grasp of the danger within was suicidal.

Li Luo heaved a sigh of relief upon hearing this. If all of the best squads could work together, their accumulated firepower would truly be frightening! Even a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other would be something they could take down!

As he swept his gaze across the students, he counted roughly eight squads. Two squads belonged to the Astral Sage College and the Enlightened Sage College each. One was Lu Ming's from the Heavenly Inferno Sage College, and another from the Sacred Summit Sage College, Sun Dasheng and Lian Zong's squad. The strongest of the Two Star Hall, Ao Bai from the North Sea Sage College, was also here with his squad, and lastly was a squad from the Profound Ice Sage College for a grand total of eight. The Profound Ice Sage College had recently risen to prominence in the East Divine Continent and had the potential to be one of the best.

Their squad was made up of individuals who were soft spoken and emanated a chilly air, clearly demonstrating their ice resonances. Rumors said that they possessed an unparalleled combination resonance art, one that demonstrated earth-shattering strength.

These were the best and brightest geniuses the East Divine Continent had to offer from the current generation.

Now that a decision had been made, they no longer waffled around. A loose formation was quickly formed by the squads as they cautiously approached Russet Rock City.

As they moved forward, Lu Ming approached Li Luo and asked with some shock, "Did you really trash Jing Taixu in a single move?"

Being the ever humble hero, Li Luo only gave a faint and reserved smile. "Of course. I'm the strongest amongst the One Star Hall participants. There's nothing surprising about that."

Rolling her eyes at his proclamation, it was obvious that Li Luo's strength had soared after the benefits gained in Thunderpeal Mountain.

Poor Jing Taixu definitely had not heard about this and had thus been taken by surprise, leaving him defeated in a single blow.

Although the two did not speak loudly, the squads were closely gathered and could hear their exchange, leaving Jing Taixu with an extremely gloomy expression.

At this point, Sun Dasheng took the opportunity to catch up to Jing Taixu, and he loudly said, "Jing Taixu! How could you be this useless!? Even Li Luo took you down with one strike. If you're so crappy, then I'll look even worse in comparison since I was being soundly trounced by you!"

Slight infuriated at Sun Dasheng's self-deprecating words, he coldly hissed.

"Scram!"

Chapter 0564: Land of Fantasy

The eight squads traveled in a compact formation, carefully arriving at the gates in front of Russet Rock City.

Right at this moment, the gates opened as though someone were expecting them. The slowly moving dark-red structures gave all those who saw them a feeling of suppression. They formed a gap, revealing a dimly lit path towards the interior.

Yet no one advanced any further. Everyone paused, carefully observing the dark tunnel that led further into the city.

They understood that once they crossed the line, there was the possibility of no return.

Despite the growing fear within them, they were nonetheless the leaders of their respective sage colleges. Their quality was absolute, never letting up even in the face of futility.

Exchanging glances of determination, there was no longer any hint of hesitation. The First Princess, Lan Lan, and Gong Shenjun took the initiative to step forward first, entering with their squads.

Darkness enshrouded them, and the group could feel a chill gradually wreathing around them, slowly leading to an indescribable sort of suffocating pressure.

No one said a thing in the dimly lit corridor, so only the soft thuds of footsteps could be heard.

However, this did not last forever. Eye-splitting light splashed upon the group when they reached the end of the path.

The sight before them heralded a sense of alertness amongst the squads, and terror could be seen within their eyes. They were greeted with the sight of a bustling city.

There was a tidal wave of people, constantly chattering as they strolled along the beaten streets, with countless peddlers hawking their wares along the pavement.

This was a vibrant marketplace full of activity, showcasing the splendor of Russet Rock City.

However, the squads' gazes only became more ruthless upon seeing this.

The sight in front of them seemed to be the city before the Other Disaster.

How could this even be possible?

The entire Red Clay Province had been devastated by the Other Disaster hard. Could it have been possible that Russet Rock City was left untouched?

The First Princess was the first to speak up. She said in a solemn tone, "This is an illusion... right?"

Lu Ming had a grave expression and seemed to be alarmed. She possessed an illusion resonance, and even then, she couldn't tell what sort of unfathomable power was required to produce such a lifelike recreation.

Furthermore, the passersby seemed to possess all forms of emotions and intelligence—they were even able to barter for goods!

It was so utterly realistic that it was unbelievable.

The only thing keeping everyone sane was the fact that deep down, no one had any doubts that this was an illusion. Their path here had proven so.

"It looks like the Other in Russet Rock City will be a handful, probably many handfuls.." Lan Lan said.

"Huh?" Lu Ming suddenly gasped in fright, attracting the squads' attention.

"What happened?" Zhao Beili probed.

"Did you discover something?" Li Luo had also immediately spoken up. Lu Ming was the only one in the group with an illusion resonance, and her gasp likely implied that she had discovered something.

Lu Ming's pleasant beauty was taken over by sheer nervousness at this point. She was pointing at a corner of her sleeve. At first glance, no one discovered anything unusual, but upon closer inspection, they realized that it had turned a little illusory!

It was as though it was magically fading away.

"This illusory formation must have a terrifying assimilative ability. If we remain here for too long, we will become one with the illusion! Although I can't tell what will happen to us in the end, it won't be a pretty sight..." Lu Ming explained.

This revelation resoundingly struck everyone like a booming thunderclap going off within their heads. The Heavenly Pearl Stage cultivators, Gong Shenjun, First Princess and Lan Lan, inspected themselves. But nothing much had changed about them. On the other hand, Jing Taixu, Li Luo, and the other Resonant Master Stage cultivators could see that their robes had turned slightly illusory like Lu Ming's.

"It looks like the weaker individuals are affected more quickly." The First Princess frowned.

This was not good news. The North Sea Sage College's team was the only one with no Resonant Master Stage individuals.

If this group of individuals were adversely affected, the future of their colleges and their points would be in jeopardy, and both could be considered unacceptable losses.

"It looks like we have to break through this formation in the shortest amount of time possible," Gong Shenjun concluded.

"Although the setup of this illusory fantasy is impeccable, there will definitely be a way to break through it. The simplest method is to activate Russet Rock City's cleansing barrier. As the nexus of the Red Clay Province, activating it will form a network with the other barriers that we have set up prior, purifying the entire Red Clay Province," Lan Lan suggested.

"When that's done, breaking the formation should not be an issue."

Everyone else nodded in agreement. This was a fine, and it was an obvious plan that everyone could rally around.

At this point, the First Princess quipped, "Though I don't think the Heavenly Disaster Class Other will just sit back and watch us while we waltz in and set up the cleansing barrier."

"To be fair, we just need to kill it once it pops up, then it will be smooth sailing. If we were to work together, even a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other wouldn't be able to resist. This entire illusory formation might unravel by itself once it's dead." Lan Lan clearly demonstrated the pride and confidence of the strongest student in the hall-level competition, completely disregarding this Other. Or perhaps it could be that he had also come to the realization that fearing the enemy did no favors to anyone here. The Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other was not going to let them off if they begged and pleaded.

A life and death battle was inevitable.

"Brother Lan speaks the truth! Regardless, our mission is to set up the cleansing barrier, and this is in line." Gong Shenjun spoke with a wry smile, expressing his support.

The First Princess nodded in agreement. "Completing the purification is the most important matter. However, the danger of this illusory formation is like a dagger pointed at our hearts in the dark. We can't spread ourselves out too thinly. I'd recommend that we split into two larger groups of four squads each. We can set up the cleansing dew more quickly then."

Li Luo mused over her words before coming to a similar conclusion. This was definitely a more cautious approach. Four squads together would create a formidable lineup, and there were four experts at the Heavenly Pearl Stage leading the charge, ensuring the survivability of both teams.

"Your Highness Gong's suggestion is good. Our squads should not move alone to accomplish our mission. We cannot tolerate the loss of any squad." Qin Yue supported the plan.

The rest naturally agreed, seeing the logic within it. Even the most reckless individuals would not take this situation lightly. After all, the illusory formation seemed to have hidden the presence of the Heavenly Disaster Class Other!

"Let's draw lots to determine which team each squad belongs to. This will be more fair." The First Princess removed eight jade needles from her pocket sphere. "Eight needles, four short and four long ones." Each squad leader stepped up and drew their lots.

Li Luo swept his gaze across and saw that the last needle remaining with the First Princess was a long one. The other three were held by Gong Shenjun, Zhao Beili, and Lian Zong.

With that, he gave a hearty smile as he looked towards Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng. "Wow, it's us again! Let's work well together!"

Lu Ming lightly pouted. "Have you considered what sort of perilous situation we are in? How can we Resonant Master Stage cultivators have any part to play here? Being able to retain our little lives is good enough!"

Sun Dasheng snorted loudly. "So what if we are at the Resonant Master Stage? You weak ladies shouldn't just blabber nonsense. If we face danger later, you can just hide in a corner. I'll let you know what a REAL Resonant Master looks like."

"Weak lady?" Lu Ming was bursting with anger as she glared at Sun Dasheng. "You stinky monkey, are you looking for a beating?"

"I don't fight with ladies. Though if it's Li Luo, I wouldn't mind."

"You can't even beat Jing Taixu and you want to challenge him? Why don't you grow a brain first?!" Lu Ming exhorted.

"Well, you don't know until you try..."

As the two continued their bickering, the other squad leaders had completed the division of the teams, organized the groups, and quickly got to work.

"Let's go." Li Luo stared at the two groups going in separate directions before breaking up the fight between Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng. He quickly moved to his assigned position in the middle. It was the safest and also most suitable for someone like him. After which, the two quarreling fools also did the same, following Li Luo.

Once everyone was in place, the First Princess gave a cursory glance at the entire group. Her gorgeous looks were newly laden with a heavy burden at the task that lay ahead.

However, she did not say much more, simply nodding at the other three squad leaders.

"Move out!" Her softly spoken words fell upon everyone's ears with immense weight. The eight squads had been separated into two large groups and made their way in different directions. In a blink, they had disappeared into the bustling crowds.

Chapter 0565: Danger Avenue

A tide of people milled their way across the street.

Li Luo and the rest maintained their tight formation as they moved. Along the way, they continued to observe the "people" all around them with hints of both fear and vigilance in their eyes. After all, no matter how life-like these apparitions seemed, they all knew it was all an illusion. In fact, who knew if Others were hiding within these shells?

The First Princess and Lian Zong took the position of vanguard, whilst Gong Shenjun and Zhao Beili brought up the rear. These were the positions of greatest danger, and they naturally required the strongest to handle.

Li Luo, Lu Ming, Sun Dasheng, and Zhu Xuan, on the other hand, were placed right in the middle as the Resonant Masters to be protected.

"Are these people REALLY fake? I wish I could capture one just to take a closer look..." Sun Dasheng sighed as he hefted his staff around and stared at the people coming and going.

Hearing the words coming from this mischievous monkey threw Li Luo into a fright as he hurriedly shouted, "Don't mess around!"

This guy truly was a knucklehead. Even in a strange situation, he'd still want to kick over a hornets nest...

"If you feel like leaving this world, don't implicate the rest of us," Lu Ming said rudely.

Zhu Xuan, on the other hand, quietly moved further away from Sun Dasheng. No one knew if he even HAD a brain. It was prudent to keep his distance in such a situation to not be dragged down by him...

"Sheesh, I was just throwing some ideas out. What if these phantasms are actually a problem lying in wait? It would be best to get rid of them quickly. With FORCE."

His logic wasn't wrong, and everyone dryly laughed. At the same time, the people around him started to observe him more warily, clearly prepared to pounce on him if he were to do anything funny...

Yet in the midst of their chatter, a thin figure suddenly squeezed out from within the busy streets, falling down right before Jiang Qing'e. It was an emaciated child beggar with rags for clothes. He was also covered in numerous pus-ridden wounds. Anyone would feel pity at the sight of him. Mustering his courage, he raised a half-shattered bowl towards her.

"Older sister, spare food? Please? I'm starving..." He quivered.

The group came to a halt, vigilantly observing the scene before them.

Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes continued to observe the heart-rending scene in front of her. "Are you hungry?"

She raised her jade-like hand, placing it atop the child's head without worry.

At this point, the eyes of the child seemed to widen, and light poured out his eye sockets.

A moment later, bright light bloomed, and one could see Jiang Qing'e form a fist, detonating the light resonant energy and directly punching the beggar's face.

Boom!

The beggar was sent flying through all the vendors and stores along the street, finally smashing into a house that collapsed all over him.

This development was extremely sudden, and the crowd seemed to have been stirred into a frenzy, scrambling in every direction.

The group seemed to be left in deep thought, looking at Jiang Qing'e in utter surprise. Her lightning-quick response made no sense.

She seemed so gentle and caring when she had lightly patted the child. In fact, they even wanted to warn her to not let her guard down in a moment of weakness! Clearly, they had thought too much...

"Li Luo, your fiance is truly a paragon of heroism... She is definitely decisive once she decides to kill, truly ferocious! Good luck!" Sun Dasheng sighed with emotion.

Li Luo ignored him, instead focusing on the pile of rubble that used to be a house. What he saw next caused his eyes to shrink. A piercing scream resounded from within the rubble, and roiling corruption burst out, disintegrating every last trace of the debris.

A figure gradually appeared. The thin beggar child had crawled to his feet, and stifling amounts of corruption seemed to be oozing from every pore of his body. At the same time, his lower body began to contort, and it expanded in a flash, forming a humanoid spider Other!

His mouth had widened to the point that the ends touched his ears. When he grinned, a mouth full of black fangs could be seen, dripping with noxious saliva.

It now shot Jiang Qing'e a venomous look.

Jiang Qing'e was completely unfazed by this change, only dryly taunting. "Have you eaten your fill?"

The beggar's face was twisted with fury and resentment because his lower spider body was still bloodied and injured as a result of that altercation with her. The only response she received was a piercing howl.

Boom!

The streets were suddenly abound with demolition activity as the houses in all four directions were directly flattened. Strong corruption oozed out of the Other like a beacon, attracting one strong Other after another, with countless Lesser Heavenly Disaster Class Others amongst them.

Corruption continued to gather and roil, blanketing the skies and environment.

"It looks like the Others around Russet Rock City have gathered here," the First Princess pointed out with a surly expression on her face. She grabbed her jade scepter and released her mighty resonant power. Seven bright heavenly pearls materialized, floating around her, beginning to devour copious amounts of worldly natural energy.

"Student Lian Zong, can I leave this area to you?" The First Princess quickly assigned different locations for each individual to tackle.

"No problem. Hurry up and go ahead to set up the cleansing dew." Lian Zong grinned. Waving his hands, a massive two handed-hammer appeared in his grasp. Simultaneously, his body began to expand, and boundless resonant power emanated from him until the silhouette of a giant bull could be seen.

With a single stomp, the entire ground shattered due to his horrific strength, giving Li Luo a fright.

Supporting Lian Zong were three others that also directly engaged the Others around them.

With the squad holding back the tide of Others, the First Princess' command rang out. "Leave quickly and let's head to the first anchor point. They will catch up once they're done."

Following which, she took the lead and rushed outwards, breaking through the encirclement with everyone else following suit.

The half-spider beggar glanced venomously towards the retreating Jiang Qing'e. Seeing that she was about to escape, it screamed once again.

Boom!

But before it could catch up, a giant hammer crashed squarely upon its head, cracking it apart like a watermelon. A black slurry leaked out as its body was sent flying a few hundred meters away, smashing into another pristine structure.

"Trashy trifling. Let this old man deal with you!" Lian Zong reached out, and his hammer flew back into his hands. He boomed with laughter as he shook his prized weapon, shaking off all the black slurry that had stained it.

The little beggar screeched in pain as it suddenly opened its mouth to spit out a torrent of black liquid in retaliation. Hissing sounds could be faintly heard from the black river as it rumbled towards Lian Zong.

Summoning his strength, he hefted his hammer and slammed downwards with a force that caused even the void to tremble, completely devastating the surrounding streets.

Absolute chaos ensued.

Li Luo and the rest, on the other hand, followed closely behind the First Princess, quickly arriving at the first anchor point for the cleansing dew.

They could feel resonant energy erupting in different areas of the city, and it was clear that the other group had also encountered Others.

It looked as though the Heavenly Disaster Class Other had made preparations to welcome them warmly, with a cacophony of blood and fire.

At this point, there was also no point in concerning themselves with the other group, as Others consistently poured towards them as they advanced. These Others had both quantity and quality, forcing the members of the squads to be left behind to hold back the impending tide.

In the short span of ten minutes, only the First Princess, Jiang Qing'e, and the four Resonant Master Stage cultivators were remaining.

"Just one more street and we should be there," the First Princess stated seriously after taking note of their current position.

However, things were not going to go as planned. She gradually slowed down and her phoenix-like eyes focused ahead.

At a junction right before them was a slab of bluestone where a single burly man was sitting. Interestingly, his expression was vacant and his gaze was emotionless.

He had noticed the group too, and he raised his head to stare right at the First Princess.

At this point, a line of blood appeared between his eyebrows, then a whole row of countless tiny teeth erupted from the crack, cannibalizing the flesh around it. This resulted in a creepy and terrifying appearance.

After enough flesh and blood had been consumed, the crack tore apart further, and an alabaster, white palm emerged from it, followed by the rest of the body!

It seemed as though two Others had been formed from a single body!

Without fail, corruption spewed out in every direction behind this abomination.

The First Princess could sense the horrifying strength of these two Others, frowning in consternation. This was definitely going to be more than a handful.

It was extremely strong.

She turned towards Jiang Qing'e. "Qing'e, I will need your assistance with this."

Jiang Qing'e nodded in agreement and then looked at Li Luo's little group. "You can deploy the cleansing dew at the next street. We have already held back the stronger Others at this point, so you should be relatively unobstructed. Be careful."

Li Luo agreed with a somber expression. The path here had been truly perilous, with countless Lesser Heavenly Disaster Class Others on the way. They were just mere Resonant Masters! Truly pitiful!

However, the situation wouldn't allow for retreat, so they could only clench their teeth and forge forward.

Nodding without disagreement, he waved at the rest of his team.

"Go!" With him in the lead, the now significantly smaller group moved ahead very quickly.

On the other hand, the First Princess and Jiang Qing'e quickly roused their fighting strength and killing intent, charging at the pair of strange Others.

Resonant energy blazed wildly across the ruins of the street, further demolishing other structures in the area.

Li Luo and friends had taken the opportunity to escape, relentlessly rushing towards the crucial anchor point.

Chapter 0566: Sugar Coated Hawthorns

The area they were in was completely unperturbed by the intense battle just a street away. People were still hustling and bustling.

Li Luo, Lu Ming, Sun Dasheng, and Zhu Xuan hurriedly rushed forward.

Behind them, berserk resonant energy continued to buffet the structures in the area they had left behind, but the illusionary people continued to strut around amongst themselves as though nothing had happened. They continued to chatter in excitement and seemed completely at peace.

However, this odd juxtaposition of things only kept Li Luo and his squad on their toes.

Still, there was nothing they could do about it. The anchor point was their objective, and that was their priority.

Once they arrived, they could quickly set up the cleansing dew, which would help purify the area. Although the purification process would not be complete, it would still cover the street they were on and reduce the danger they were in.

"Russet Rock City is truly a land of danger. We had so many people in the beginning, but all that's left are four." Lu Ming frowned. At this moment, a large Other appeared before them, causing her to pause.

Their numbers allowed them to complement and reinforce each other, which gave them the minimum ability needed to traverse these streets.

"The strongest Others are being distracted by the squad leaders. So we should be safe, right?" Zhu Xuan whimpered.

Sun Dasheng waved his steel staff excitedly as his gaze filled with a rising urge to battle. "Perfect! Can't wait for them to pop up so I have a reason to smash them into pulp!"

Li Luo's mouth twitched upon hearing this. Sun Dasheng was just like Qin Zhulu. The only thing on his mind was battle. Were all beast resonance users just like beasts? A slight shudder went down his back when he remembered that his third resonance would likely be a dragon resonance... Would he turn into a degenerate beast as well? Hopefully, he wouldn't turn into a complete meathead.

Ah... that would truly be a problem. Suddenly, he snapped out of his daze and his expression froze at the sight before him.

"Selling sugar-coated hawthorns! Tasty and sweet, a delectable treat!" A shrill voice cried out from within the cacophony of noise. So many things were happening, yet this specific cry seemed to permeate into Li Luo's very bones, as though someone was whispering into his ear.

Glancing around, he also noticed that the other three seemed equally spooked by what they had heard.

"We need to be more cautious," Li Luo reminded them.

They continued to move onwards without hesitation, but the hawking did not stop no matter how far they traveled. A couple minutes later, the crowd in front of them suddenly began to separate, and a stooped figure holding a stick of hawthorns appeared before the four.

Upon closer inspection, it was a pale-looking granny with a mouth full of black teeth... and she was looking right at them. "Sugar-coated hawthorns, sugar-coated hawthorns! Tasty and sweet, it's my delectable treeeeeat!"

The four did not hesitate to muster up resonant power, planning to directly dispose of this nuisance in one go.

At the cusp of launching their attack, the voice of the granny once again repeating her sales pitch caused the four to lose focus. Eventually, even their resonant power dissipated.

In a daze, the four were enticed by the sugar-coated hawthorns in the granny's hand. The allure of the hawthorns was too much, and the group nodded in tandem.

The granny grinned, separating a skewer of hawthorns for each one of them.

Li Luo tentatively reached over to pick up one of the treats. His expression was strange, as though he was struggling internally. Deep down, his heart had this overbearing craving for the sugar-coated hawthorns before him. He really wanted to taste the delectable sweetness brought by this delicious snack.

Yet at the same time, a tiny voice within him started to scream at him, giving birth to a tiny hint of resistance towards this temptation.

As his internal psyche continued to resist, the hawthorns had quietly moved into his mouth.

Right at the moment he was to bite down on the snack, a cold wisp of breath entered his body from his wrist, instantly sobering him up.

The source was the light jewel Jiang Qing'e had very luckily passed to him after the situation at Thunderpeal Mountain.

Unfortunately the jewel shattered immediately after that, transmitting a strand of light resonant energy that allowed him to regain a sense of clarity.

Awakening from his stupor, Li Luo stared at the sugar-coated hawthorn in his hand, and what he saw made his pupils shrink.

How was this a tasty treat? He could finally see it for what it was: a skewer of shriveled eyeballs! In fact, they were covered in a black liquid that excreted a horrifying stench. Li Luo's hand trembled as he hastily disposed of the "snack."

Taking stock of his situation, he hurriedly turned towards Lu Ming and the rest, and a look of panic filled his face. They all held vacant gazes and were all on the cusp of eating the nightmarish nibble...

"Wake up!" Li Luo yelled, resonant power infused into his thunderous cry and traveled straight into his friends' ears. With the aid of resonant power, the rest were jolted awake, and they quickly came to their senses. In similar fashion, they essentially jumped in fright upon seeing the sugar-coated hawthorns for what they really were...

The shriveled eyeballs seemed to be staring into their souls, attempting to influence them with their grievances and resentment.

In fact, the very first eyeball on each stick was just about to be stuffed into their respective mouths!

"Ugh!"

Lu Ming's expression turned a pasty white as she screamed, quickly flinging the skewer away. This close shave had thoroughly frightened and infuriated her, causing her to retch and feel grossed out.

"Damn it! This is the GROSSEST THING EVER." Sun Dasheng exclaimed as he stomped down on the skewer he had thrown onto the ground.

His killing intent surged into the skies as he channeled his wild resonant power into his steel staff. Following which, he smashed it with all his might so fast that even a sonic boom could be heard, right at the old granny's chest!

Bang!

The opponent attempted to retreat, but the staff was too quick, slamming heavily into her. But the strange thing was that the creepy smile on her face could not be concealed.

"Is my snack delicious?" she cried out once again with her toothy, black smile.

Li Luo, Lu Ming, and Sun Dasheng had expressions full of gloom upon hearing those words again. They quickly circulated resonant power throughout their bodies, protecting themselves against any external influences.

Crack!

At this point, they suddenly heard a subtle chewing sound coming from behind them. Quickly reacting to the source, they turned around.

The scene they saw left them dumbfounded.

Just several meters away, Zhu Xuan was calmly stuffing his face with the "hawthorns" with a vacuous look on his face. A trail of black juice leaked out from the side of his mouth as he enjoyed himself... n)-
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Chapter 0567: Bewitching Other

Shudders ran down the trio's backs as they watched Zhu Xuan enjoy the "sugar-coated hawthorns." They were completely disgusted by this development.

"Zhu Xuan!" Li Luo bellowed, trying to awaken him from his disorientated state.

However, Zhu Xuan was clearly unable to respond to such stimuli. The whites of his eyes had disappeared, suffused an inky black.

At this point, thick, roiling waves of corruption started to emit from his body.

He had been corrupted.

"This unlucky child was the Two Star Hall representative for the Astral Sage College. The level of your college is... pretty dismal if I have to say so myself..." Sun Dasheng commented. The situation had only turned more complex, and trouble had truly escalated.

"Senior Zhu Xuan doesn't seem to have much willpower." Lu Ming frowned as she too commented on the situation.

The Other in front of them definitely possessed some sort of bewitching ability. All of them had fallen for its ambush, but due to Li Luo's timely awakening they had managed to break free of this situation. Despite having heard Li Luo's exhortations, Zhu Xuan was unable to extricate himself from the illusion and had been corrupted.

Zhu Xuan possessed Fourth Changing strength and was higher than Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng by a grade, yet he couldn't help but to eat the "delicious treat."

Clearly, this had nothing to do with his resonant power but rather a weak will. As a result, he was now a blathering slob after being bewitched..

Li Luo helplessly sighed. He had never expected that the one to fall prey to these tricks would be the more experienced Two Star Hall representative.

Truly embarrassing!

"Where's the Other?" Lu Ming started to glance around and noticed that the strange granny had disappeared.

"She must have hidden herself again." Li Luo looked slightly depressed. "However, the strength of the Other should not be too high, lower than Heavenly Disaster Class. Otherwise, it could have dealt with us directly."

"Hmm, y'know... I think our troubles are going to come from THAT guy over there. Y'know, that Two Star Hall representative." Sun Dasheng nervously grabbed his staff, staring intently at Zhu Xuan.

Dear Zhu Xuan, on the other hand, seemed to have worms writhing right below his skin, causing his appearance to look even more terrifying as his inky-black eyes glared at the three.

In a flash, a black figure surrounded by fishy-smelling winds pounced towards Lu Ming.

Unsurprisingly, Lu Ming had long made her own preparations. Her lightning resonance blazed with life, and she shot away tens of meters, avoiding the assault.

"Forgive me for being heavy-handed, Senioooooooooor!" Sun Dasheng grunted as he too burst out with resonant power. An ape took form behind him, and he imbued his staff with all of his berserk resonant

power. He smashed downwards viciously towards Zhu Xuan's head without mercy, creating ripples in the void.

Zhu Xuan raised an inky-black palm, and his fingernails turned sharp and ebony in response. Clenching his fist, he delivered a crushing blow directly towards Sun Dasheng's staff strike!

Boom!

A low, resounding boom echoed out. Zhu Xuan was left unfazed, whilst both of Sun Dasheng's arms were trembling and numb, having been knocked backwards dozens of steps.

"Ugh, his physical strength seems to have been augmented significantly..." The corruption had clearly buffed him.

Zhu Xuan continued to give chase, his inky-black eyes focused upon Sun Dasheng. Armed with his sharp fingernails, he began to unleash a flurry of attacks as he pounced towards him!

Swoosh!

Lu Ming took action right at this moment. She split into three illusions, and lightning flashed before all of them, generating three trails of lightning sword strikes that split the very air. They lanced towards Zhu Xuan with murderous intent.

Pssh!

The fierce barrage rained down upon Zhu Xuan, piercing through his skin, but what oozed out was not blood but black liquid instead.

Sun Dasheng took the opportunity to launch a follow up as well.

"Monkey King's Three Strikes: Strike That Moves Mountains!" The two struck with all their might, unleashing a berserk flurry of moves at Zhu Xuan. Although they were at the Third Changing, which was slightly weaker than Zhu Xuan, they weren't ordinary folk. They far exceeded what was expected of someone of their tier. Thus, the duo's combination attack managed to suppress even the corruption-enhanced Zhu Xuan.

Li Luo did not tie himself down with the fight. Instead, he was arduously searching their surroundings. The true opponent was not the corrupted Zhu Xuan, but the bewitching Other! That was the true knife in the dark.

He believed that the Other would reappear soon enough as her lackey, Zhu Xuan, could not beat the combined efforts of Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng.

True to his expectations, a hint of the Other could be seen near the site of Zhu Xuan's battle.

She had appeared amidst the crowd, still clutching the sugar-coated hawthorns and directly observing Li Luo with those black, soulless eyes.

At this point, she removed a skewer of hawthorns and flicked it with her hand.

The hawthorns themselves were flung off the skewer, directly landing amidst the busy road where countless "people" were strolling around. Originally, they were only focused on their own day-to-day activities, completely disregarding Li Luo's squad's fight. Even if they were affected by collateral damage, they continued moving around without a care in the world.

It was as though Li Luo and the rest simply did not exist in the same dimension as they did.

However, when the hawthorn landed right smack in the middle of the road, things took a dive for the worse.

Li Luo could distinctly feel that the pedestrians had halted their steps and were now eyeing the "hawthorns," and a flickering desire to consume it ignited in their eyes.

Immediately after, some of them grabbed the hawthorns and stuffed them into their mouths.

Hurriedly gobbling it down, the pedestrians suddenly began to emit thick wafts of corruption! Their expressions gradually turned twisted, and crunching noises could be heard coming from their bodies as they stared venomously at Li Luo in the midst of their transformations. And then they struck, Li Luo being the apple of their eye.

One figure after another howled and pounced towards Li Luo.

The sight turned Li Luo's face pale as he brandished his Onyx-Elephant Blade. Activating his dual resonances, he struck back with all his might.

The blade arced through the air, creating a curtain of water that splashed and dampened the ground.

Following which, he stomped with the sole of his foot, utilizing earth resonant power to create a muddy quagmire. The feral corrupted pedestrians unknowingly stepped into his trap and were stuck, sinking deep within.

He emotionlessly struck out with his Onyx-Elephant Blade, and a sparkling blade light arced through each and every corrupted, bisecting them cleanly.

However, despite being chopped in half, the corrupted still lived, continuing to struggle. Luckily, this was short lived as eventually, they collapsed and dissipated into wisps of black gas.

Despite Li Luo's rapid dispatch of his foes, the bewitching Other acted equally as fast. Eyeball hawthorns soared through the air in succession, landing into different clumps of pedestrians and corrupting them. As a result, a neverending tide of opponents continued to lunge at Li Luo.

This human wave strategy gave Li Luo a complete headache. The bewitching Other was clearly not very strong, but her methods were endlessly troublesome. If things carried on the way they were, he would be killed through attrition!

On the other hand, Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng were unable to help him. The very act of suppressing Zhu Xuan was already a great contribution.

"To catch a thief, we must first catch the mastermind. This bewitching Other is the source, and as long as I can deal with her, the problem should resolve itself..." Li Luo started to think of ideas as he continued to slaughter the corrupted pedestrians, his eyes darting around to locate her.

Before long, he finally caught a glimpse of the Bewitching Other milling around in the streets nearby.

It was time.

Boom!

The Lightning Forge within his body blazed with life.

Sounds of thunder crackled within him, raising the strength of his body comprehensively.

With a single leap, he directly shattered the ground beneath him, bursting out at full speed like a bolt of lightning, shocking even the corrupted pedestrians that were unable to match up.

He crossed the distance with a few steps and appeared before the bewitching Other.

Full of killing intent, he slashed with his Onyx-Elephant Blade, his body flickering past his target as he struck out.

A clean sword scar was left behind on the street as a result of his strike.

Simultaneously, the head of the bewitching Other was bisected into two.

Chapter 0568: True Body

Li Luo had moved behind the bewitching Other with his single slash, and the Onyx-Elephant Blade was now stained with a black liquid that had corrosive properties. The bright side was that his weapon was an extraordinary item, possessing the ability to disperse this contaminant.

"Wonderful blade!" Sun Dasheng's eyes lit up in excitement as he whooped with a cheer... while still facing off against Zhu Xuan.

That single blow was like a bolt of lightning, imposing and swift, directly cleaving the bewitching Other across the forehead. It should have been enough to destroy it.

Yet despite hearing Sun Dasheng's jubilant cries, Li Luo frowned slightly. His sense of unease did not dissipate, despite slicing the Other apart.

"Hmph, another blow, then!"

Li Luo thought to himself as he turned around and attempted to strike out once again.

But right as he turned, the slightly bisected bewitching Other began to make strange, shrill sounds. At this very moment, black grass-like pieces began to grow from the split halves of the Other, and they soon began to criss-cross and combine into a gross weaving, stitching the Other back together!

The blade injury had disappeared as though it had never happened.

Simultaneously, the sugar hawthorns in the bewitching Other's hand began to start shooting out in every direction, attracting one group of corrupted after another towards Li Luo!

Dozens of corrupted pedestrians swarmed over like an unending tide of doom!

Weng!

However, Li Luo was no sitting duck. A single slash and a beautiful crescent-shaped wave of swordlight arced outwards. Half of the corrupted were instantly bisected.

Using this opportunity to escape the encirclement, Li Luo began to scan his surroundings whilst the bewitching Other continued to summon wave after wave of further corrupted pedestrians. In fact, some even started to pounce towards Sun Dasheng and Lu Ming, giving them a ball of a time having to juggle a greater number of problems.

Li Luo frowned deeply. The bewitching Other was not adept at direct combat, but its capabilities were truly a pain in the neck to deal with.

Wielding his Onyx-Elephant Blade, he decided to once again pursue the bewitching Other, but his body had suddenly stiffened for a brief moment. He thought he had heard a mysterious whisper from the depths of his heart that had caused him to enter a very temporary trance.

In this split second of hesitation, more corrupted pounced upon him.

Remaining calm, he continued to slaughter in every direction.

The corrupted continued to fall one after another, but this looming feeling continued to grow without pause. Li Luo could feel that the murmurings were growing in strength, and his consciousness was getting affected.

At this point, he had vaguely realized what was going on!

"Watch out, you two! The more corrupted you kill, the stronger the corruptive effects on your body!" Li Luo exclaimed with a glum look.

Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng were taken aback by this revelation and immediately changed their tactics, knocking the corrupted away instead.

Unfortunately, Zhu Xuan took this opportunity to strike, leaving the duo in a relatively miserable situation.

"Well then, find a solution! Otherwise, we'll all be left behind as corpses!" Lu Ming hurriedly screamed.

The situation was evolving in unexpected and complicated ways. They had not thought much of these corrupted pedestrians because despite the buff provided by the corruption, they were still weaklings. However, they finally understood why the bewitching Other had continued to utilize these human wave tactics despite it seeming futile.

The more they killed, the more they'd be insidiously affected.

After a period of accumulation, they'd still be similarly controlled even if they avoided eating the "hawthorns!"

He had finally understood the true terror of the bewitching Other. The only way out of the situation was to straight up slaughter the bewitching Other... However, despite being stronger, he was unable to kill it.

Li Luo's mind raced through different thoughts and possibilities. Suddenly, a glint appeared within his eyes. He'd have to first locate the bewitching Other again.

Upon locating her, he used the exact same trick as before, channeling his Thunderpeal Avatar and gaining explosive speed, closing the distance instantly.

He was like a charging bull, knocking up corrupted pedestrians left and right as he dashed forward. Finally appearing before the bewitching Other, he directly sliced at her throat.

Blade light arced past, separating the head from the body. Just before the head hit the ground, both halves of the neck began to grow the same black grass, quickly reattaching the severed head!

It was once again completely unharmed!

Li Luo's pupils shrank as he began to quickly revolve his body, unleashing a flurry of attacks across the entire body of the bewitching Other, attempting to turn it into mincemeat!

In just a flash, the body of the Other was riddled with holes and injuries!

But this was meaningless. The bewitching Other even smiled at Li Luo, revealing her black, toothy grin, seemingly mocking his futile attempts. Simultaneously, black grass began to form all over the body, regenerating all of the previously afflicted damage.

Its lifeforce was as tenacious as a weed, causing Li Luo to feel that his efforts were fruitless.

At the moment Li Luo ceased his assault, the bewitching Other's hand quivered and a skewer of the hawthorn, which was imbued with black light and ominous energy, flew towards Li Luo's forehead, rending space on its way.

He quickly reacted, placing his blade between him and the skewer to block it. A clear, ringing sound was heard when they collided.

The resulting blowback knocked him away countless steps.

Without skipping a beat, the corrupted pedestrians nearby began to lunge at him with their fangs and claws.

The Lightning Forge crackled to action, and his body gave off a boom like a mini thunderclap.

Boom!

The corrupted were once again blasted away.

Taking advantage of the space created, he slunk away without being held back by the corrupted.

"What kind of dogshit Other is this? Why is it so TROUBLESOME TO DEAL WITH!?" Sun Dasheng bellowed in frustration. He had caught Li Luo's battle with the bewitching Other and saw that it had been torn to pieces, yet it regenerated and went back to normal as though nothing had happened.

This thing was clearly too strange!

Lu Ming's expression was frigid as she remained silent, wholeheartedly focusing on suppressing Zhu Xuan. However, a trace of worry could be seen in her eyes.

The situation was taking a turn for the worst.

Li Luo was unable to assuage their worries, instead focusing his attention on brainstorming new ideas. The bewitching Other was too strange. Even an Earthly Disaster Class Other would have been grievously wounded if it had received such a series of attacks. However, this Other was completely unharmed.

Something wasn't adding up.

Perhaps this Other specialized in strong regenerative powers. However, it had not even reached the Disaster Class yet and did not seem to have regeneration as a focus!

On the other hand, his attacks had dealt no discernable damage to the bewitching Other. He might have missed something.

Li Luo continued to closely observe the bewitching Other on the streets when he suddenly realized something. His attack couldn't have possibly been completely ineffective. As there was no discernable harm, perhaps he had not managed to strike its true body?

But he had actually struck the entire creature from head to toe!

Nope.

At this point, Li Luo had a brainwave.

Looking at things normally, he had truly devastated the bewitching Other's body.

But this was an Other, it was a strange creation to begin with. Was the body that he saw an actual body?

If this was the case, what held its true core and essence?

He finally understood!

He gazed at the Other from head to toe, and finally his focus fell upon the hawthorns that were tightly wrapped up in black grass within the Other's hands.

Li Luo fell silent for a moment.

Boom!

Immediately after, he shot forward like an arrow.

His target: the bewitching Other.

This time, the bewitching Other no longer tried to hide, perhaps convinced that Li Luo's attacks were futile and harmless. A mocking smile even surfaced upon her shriveled-up face.

Li Luo was before her in a flash, bathed in tiny ripples of lightning.

Ignoring the derisive eyes of the Other, he emotionlessly channeled all his might, bringing about the full power of his dual resonances.

Sharp blade lights criss-crossed, creating a wondrously sparkling sight.

His storm of strikes seemed to be targeted at the body of the bewitching Other, causing her to smile even more deeply.

Right as the attack was about to land, Li Luo flicked his wrist and changed his vertical slice to a horizontal one, dealing a blow towards the pole containing the hawthorns held by the granny.

The blade light cleaved through space itself.

The expression on the Other seemed to have solidified upon this realization.

It attempted to struggle and escape quickly.

However, Li Luo's strike was even faster!

The blade whistled through the air, the unfeeling chill of cold metal struck.

The hand holding the pole of hawthorns trembled violently, and a portion of the black grass was sliced away, revealing a scarlet eyeball that had finally emerged.

Chapter 00569: Killed

When the red eyeball popped out of the candied stick, Li Luo knew that he had guessed right.

The bewitching Other's true body was not at all the old hag, but the sugar hawthorns that the body was holding.

Weng!

Li Luo chopped down viciously on the sinister, red eyeball.

This time, there was venom on the old hag's face, mixed with a tinge of worry in the lines of blood that traced the eyeball. They flew up off the pulpy surface, forming a bloody hand that clawed at the incoming sword.

Pssh!

The two clashed, but the palm was persistently resilient. Black, snake-like wisps of power emerged from the point of contact as it resisted the sword attack.

He had actually failed to sever it with one strike!

Evidently, the bewitching Other had sensed the danger and was no longer allowing Li Luo to act with impunity.

"I thought you weren't afraid of anything," Li Luo taunted. His fingers flexed once more around the hilt.

"Level One Divine Elephant Power!"

The veins in his arms bulged with power.

"Thunderpeal Avatar!"

It was not yet over. Li Luo activated his Thunderpeal Avatar, unleashing a powerful hum as the electrical power washed over his muscles, tendons, and bones, strengthening them.

"Level Two Divine Elephant Power!"

Li Luo grunted. His skin was stretched tight over his bulging muscles now, and the brutal, raw power of a rampaging elephant filled him.

"And... break!" Li Luo moved all the energy to the sword, unleashing all of it in his next attack.

Crack!

A crisp snapping sound pushed the sword blade onwards, snapping through the black wisps of energy like a hot knife through butter.

A clean and powerful slice, ringing out like a ripple through the air.

The sword moved gracefully through its arc to completion, sending black tendrils of power flying through the air where they dissipated into nothingness.

Pssh!

A harsh, screeching sound grated his ears, and Li Luo winced.

The sound came not from the old hag's mouth, but rather from the candied stick.

As the black tendrils faded away, the candy began to lose its shape, revealing a truer form in its wake.

A pulsating mass of sickening flesh, red, slimy, and glistening. Vague impressions of limbs extended from it, and a crimson eyeball spun furiously in center mass. Pssh!

The old granny with the candy stick melted away into a pool of blackness when the true form of the eyeball was revealed.

This had to be the real true form of the bewitching Other.

From its appearance, Li Luo could immediately tell that the bewitching Other was not particularly strong per se. Once its true form was revealed, it was only a Red Eroder in strength.

Thus exposed, the bewitching Other could do little to harm Li Luo. Throwing him more venomous looks, it hopped off the railing that it had been perched on, then it morphed into a beam of crimson light and shot off across the street.

"Running away?" Li Luo chuckled. Pulling out the Lambent Hawkeye from his back, he notched an arrow in a flash and nailed the quivering lump to the floor with it.

Eeee!

The bewitching Other squealed and struggled to escape.

Li Luo continued to notch arrows and let fly, turning the bewitching Other into a porcupine of light arrows. Finally, the bewitching Other could take no more, exploding into a vile-smelling pile of goo.

When it exploded, the corrupted victims froze immediately mid-action, as if they had suddenly been turned into statues.

Zhu Xuan had frozen up as well.

Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng heaved sighs of relief, looking over at Li Luo.

"How did you know the true form wasn't the old granny, but the sweets instead?" Lu Ming asked curiously.

They had been paying some attention to Li Luo out of the corners of their eyes.

"It's only a Red Eroder, not even a Disaster Class. How could it have taken so many blows and still moved so easily? There was only one possible explanation: we were barking up the wrong candy cane," Li Luo said easily, slinging the Lambent Hawkeye back on his back.

"And the real body couldn't be that far away... and the next suspect on the list was the hawthorn."

Both Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng were duly impressed by Li Luo's analysis. It was simple enough when he explained it, but to be able to puzzle it during the heat of battle, execute the plan to target the weak spot of the bewitching Other, and then win an advantage for the overall battle... It was superb work.

"Candy cunt," Sun Dasheng swore. "It was not even a Disaster Class, but it sure caused us more trouble than some of the lower Earthly Disaster Classes."

Lu Ming nodded in agreement. Although the bewitching Other had been dealt with easily enough once its real body had been found, its unique powers had caused them disproportionate trouble. If not for Li Luo sniffing out its weakness early, they might have been in a dire situation indeed.

"Russet Rock City is full of perils," Lu Ming said empathically. The stronger Others had already been engaged by their stronger teammates, and still they were having trouble. Russet Rock City was truly no place for Resonant Master cultivators to be in.

"Blergh!"

While they were speaking with relief in their voices, the sound of someone relieving himself came from behind them. They turned around to see Zhu Xuan on his knees, retching uncontrollably. A vile-smelling black liquid was being expelled from his mouth.

Li Luo and the others took a few steps back, wrinkling their noses as they prepared their defenses against Zhu Xuan.

Zhu Xuan had puked so hard that his eyes had rolled back in his head. A while later, he looked up at them, face ashen.

"Zhu Xuan, have you recovered?" Li Luo called out calmly, Onyx-Elephant Blade in hand. "If you're not yet recovered, we could send you on your way. Y'know... save you from yourself and all that." Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng stared at Li Luo briefly. Clearly, Li Luo and Zhu Xuan were not great friends.

"I'm fine, damn it!" Zhu Xuan said hoarsely, his voice still weak.

Li Luo sighed regretfully.

A vein on Zhu Xuan's temple pulsed. "Li Luo, you swine, do you really want to see me corrupted so you have an excuse to cut me down?!"

"Bad Zhu Xuan, your performance was terrible. D'you know that the candy you ate corrupted you? Do you know how much trouble you caused us?" Li Luo reprimanded him strictly like a parent talking to a child who had stolen candy.

"Oh, and that candy you ate? D'you know that it was actually a dried eyeball? Infused with black water... probably corpse-flavored, fermented and aged with notes of decomposed fluids. How was the taste? A little bitter?"

Zhu Xuan's face turned from green to white, and his head dipped back down to puke some more.

Lu Ming was speechless. Li Luo's impudence knew no bounds.

Sun Dasheng looked pityingly at Zhu Xuan. This incident would probably leave a deep scar on the guy's psyche.

Li Luo grinned shamelessly. Zhu Xuan had always tried to cause trouble for him in school. Given a chance to pay him back, he wasn't going to say no. Still, he kept it within limits, not eager to see Zhu Xuan corrupted again. He turned away from them. "Come on, let's go. We're almost at the place to leave the first drop of cleansing dew."

He sprinted off.

Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng followed closely, while Zhu Xuan staggered a little unsteadily after his three juniors.

The four proceeded through the streets unhindered and reached the designated area a few minutes later.

Li Luo flipped up to the roof nimbly, checking their surroundings. He could see energy disturbances on a gigantic scale some ways away, as if storms were brewing all around them. He knew that they indicated fights way beyond his level.

Li Luo did not hesitate, immediately extracting a drop of cleansing dew and reactivating the ward in that area. A cleansing barrier began to expand across the area, spreading out from their location.

As it began to spread, Li Luo and the others noticed changes happening.

The lively crowd on the street faded away into nothingness.

The pristine buildings and well-paved streets fell away, showing ruins and battered cobblestone.

This was the reality of Russet Rock City.

Chapter 0570: The First Drop of Cleansing Dew

The purification barrier spread roughly two streets away before it stopped expanding. Clearly, this was its limit for now, although perhaps it would expand a little more when neighboring cleansing dew points were reactivated. It was the first step in their mission to take back the entirety of Russet Rock City.

Li Luo looked closely at the edge of the purification barrier. Black mist continued to press up against its borders. It not only restricted the light barrier from expanding further, but was also eating away at it.

"Seems like the purification barrier shrinks as time passes... At this rate, the barrier will be negated by the illusion formation before too long," Lu Ming said with concern.

Li Luo nodded. "A most curious illusion indeed. It almost seems alive. We have constructed a cleansed area within it, and now it is trying to remove the foreign object from its midst. Still, we have only one purification barrier for now. I think that with a few more established, it won't be able to do this too effectively."

"A good start. We've put the first nail into the job!" Sun Dasheng cheered.

"What now?" Zhu Xuan asked, still a little pale.

Li Luo looked out at the raging battle nearby. "We have to wait a while. Once the squad leaders finish off the Others and regroup on us, we can continue to move."

Lu Ming turned to look out deeper into Russet Rock City. In the uncleansed areas, people walked back and forth along the street, and the normalcy was so lifelike that it was hard to doubt. And yet the contrast was all the more eerie when they looked back at the lifeless brick and battered mortar within the barrier. She shivered, afraid of what other horrors were hidden out there in the illusion.

The four of them had barely survived the encounter with the bewitching Other, which was not even a Disaster Class. Would they really be ready to handle whatever else might show up?

This was a dangerous place for Resonant Masters for sure.

That was why they needed other strong helpers to protect them on their way forward to the next anchor point to place the cleansing dew.

The four of them waited on a broken wall, where they were prominently visible to others.

But not all was well. Li Luo sensed a dangerous presence and whirled around to see a pair of Others slowly advancing upon them, oozing corruption.

And from the depth and power of their corruptive auras, they were clearly Disaster Class Others.

These two had tunneled in through the purification barrier without hesitation, though they had paid the price for it. Much of their corruption had been burned off when they entered the area, causing them great agony.

Writhing and cringing, they nevertheless pushed their way through. Each step within the purification barrier caused them great pain, but they continued to move towards the students' location with determination.

"They're coming to destroy the cleansing dew!" Lu Ming cried out.

Sun Dasheng frowned. "The purification barrier should discourage any Others from coming in, because of the incredible disadvantage they'll suffer upon entry. Even Disaster Class Others would be more than happy to stay away."

Li Luo nodded. "Unless they were urged on by an even more undeniable force."

The students' spirits sank. Here in Russet Rock City, there was probably only one suspect—a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class.

Which meant that their first success with the cleansing dew had already been noticed.

"What should we do? Retreat? We can't handle two Disaster Class Others." Zhu Xuan sniveled. There was no fight left in him, although he could not really be faulted for advocating retreat in the face of two Disaster Class Others.

"We went through a ton of shit to get the cleansing dew down. We can't just run away like that! What a waste!" Sun Dasheng scowled.

"They might be Disaster Class Others, but they're both weakened by the barrier. If we work together, we should be able to buy some time until our squad mates arrive to reinforce us," Lu Ming offered. Although she knew that their opponents were very dangerous, she was unwilling to give up their cleansing dew barrier without a fight.

Li Luo considered it silently for a few moments. "Prepare yourselves. We'll not engage directly, but fight a delaying battle backwards. Just don't let them destroy the point."

Lu Ming and Sun Dasheng nodded, approving heartily of his prudent yet shrewd plan.

Zhu Xuan was not very happy with this. He was the Two Star Hall student here, but no one was listening to him. These One Star Hall kids really didn't know how to respect their seniors. But then again, there was not much else that he could do. He couldn't very well break away from them and act on his own. He could only begrudgingly cooperate with their plan.

The four of them charged up their resonant powers and aimed them at the two Disaster Class Others who were hell-bent on the cleansing point.

Li Luo hefted his Onyx-Elephant Blade and drummed up power from his two resonant palaces, combining them together in a powerful blast of dual resonance power.

The two Others continued to approach.

The four students could already clearly see the outlines and details on the Others' bodies. The usual, nightmarish agglomeration of flesh and body parts, with baleful eyes staring out at them evilly.

The four of them tensed in anticipation of battle.

Swish!

The two Disaster Class Others screeched, making inhuman sounds that exuded a latent pressure against the four students. The threat of the power alone was enough to make their movements as sluggish as if they were sinking in a swamp.

Swoosh!

The two creatures increased their speed towards the four defenders.

They were close enough now that the putrid smell of decomposition was clear on the wind.

Just as the four of them were about to jump out of the way of the powerful creatures, a deafening sound came from above. In a flash of light and fire, two blazing nails came down from above, smashing into their bodies and nailing them to the ground.

"Eeee!"

The two Others struggled in vain as the fire spread from the nails to the rest of their bodies, incinerating them into puffs of harmless, black mist.

Barely a few seconds had passed since the intervention, and the Disaster Class Others had been completely eliminated.

The four students stared wide-eyed.

A moment later, a slim figure landed lightly beside them, and they turned to see a saintly girl gently drifting down, her long hair billowing lightly in the wind. Even as a girl herself, Lu Ming was awestruck by her beauty.

"Qing'e!" Li Luo exclaimed happily.

Of course, who else would it be but his guardian angel?

Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes checked him up and down, then she gave him a small smile after confirming that he was not hurt. "Well done."

She was referring to their success in getting the purification barrier up and running.

"It was all thanks to my friends, especially Senior Zhu Xuan," Li Luo said with a sardonic grin. "He decided to show us a real-life example of the dangers of being corrupted."

Zhu Xuan scowled.

"Senior Jiang, how are the other squad leaders doing?" Lu Ming asked.

"Not a problem. They should be here soon," Jiang Qing'e answered.

"If we can continue to push forward at this rate, it might be a bit slower, but I think we can continue to get cleansing points up and running," Li Luo said.

Putting up more cleansing points was their strategy to take down the grand illusion.

Jiang Qing'e inclined her head, although her elegant brow was slightly furrowed. "I'm curious as to why the Heavenly Disaster Class did not use this opportunity to attack us alongside the rest of the Others."

Li Luo nodded. It was a perplexing point. If the Heavenly Disaster Class had appeared a while ago, they would have been in serious trouble.

But in any case, they had accomplished their first bit of the mission.

The five of them continued onwards. With Jiang Qing'e protecting them, they all felt a lot safer, and the few Others that tried to stand in their way were cut down by the Three Star Hall genius in quick fashion.

Half an hour later.

The other squad members also finished off their Other opponents and hurriedly arrived at the gathering spot.

With that, their first step was well and truly complete.

Next, they just had to repeat this many more times...

...

While the group of students was pushing on, there was a crimson figure watching them from high above, unbeknownst to them. He was watching them through the many layers of illusions, and then he turned to look at the heart of Russet Rock City.

He sniggered, then laughed wickedly.

"Oh dear students of the Academic Federation, I've given you such a great opportunity. I hope you don't disappoint me."