

Resonance 671

Chapter 0671: The Frustrated Regent

Astral Sage College, within a pavilion of the Gilded Palace at night.

Vice Principal Su Xin was sitting cross-legged, looking at the wryly smiling Shen Jinxiao. At the moment, he was very leisurely pouring a cup of tea.

"Mentor Shen Jinxiao, regarding the situation earlier, House Luolan's Pei Hao suddenly burst forth with massive strength, even reaching the quasi-Duke Stage! Might you happen to know how this was done?" Vice Principal Su Xin curiously observed Shen Jinxiao, not beating around the bush but asking directly.

A look of surprise surfaced when Shen Jinxiao heard those words. "Quasi-Duke Stage? Pei Hao is actually that talented?"

"The one you speak of has quite ordinary potential. He borrowed the usage of certain opportunities to breakthrough into the Heavenly Pearl Stage. That should have been his limit. From a normal perspective, it would be exceedingly difficult to reach the quasi-Duke Stage even with the aid of secret arts. Yet he achieved it. I feel that a Duke expert interfered with the situation," Vice Principal Su Xin calmly explained.

Shen Jinxiao smiled. "Since you're asking me, Vice Principal, could it be that you suspect it was me?"

"Although you and Pei Hao don't seem to have any sort of relationship, you've constantly targeted Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo for the past year. Frankly speaking, I am suspicious," Vice Principal Su Xin enunciated.

Shen Jinxiao shook his head. "It might be true that I made Li Luo's life difficult because of Jiang Qing'e. However, I won't conceal anything either. I truly admire Jiang Qing'e greatly from the depths of my heart, and she used to be my student. Unfortunately, I inadvertently chased her away with my passionate actions. As a man, I simply don't like Li Luo as a result. Isn't that reasonable?"

Vice Principal Su Xin frowned as she glared at Shen Jinxiao. "Is that really the case?"

"Still, I have to admit that my intentions were not pure, but a teacher liking a student... is that so hard to believe? This would put me under the spotlight and I would be criticized by all. Thus, why would I casually speak of this?" Shen Jinxiao helplessly answered.

Vice Principal Su Xin continued slowly, "Wasn't your second resonance a rarely seen Heart Beast resonance?"

The Heart Beast resonance belonged to the family of beast resonances. It was a strange spirit beast that was rumored to have the ability to manipulate one's spirit and heart.

Shen Jinxiao smiled as he nodded in response. With a thought, an illusory manifestation appeared behind him. It looked like a massive rat with a body of snow-white fur. It had no mouth or nose, and atop its head was just a single large eyeball, constantly looking around.

Vice Principal Su Xin glanced at it. The Heart Beast resonance seemed to emit a rather welcoming aura as she nodded. "It's rare to see you utilize your second resonance."

"Vice Principal Su Xin, you keep interrogating me, but I think that you should spend time contemplating the problem with Mentor Chi Chan. The news of her facing off against House Lanling will inevitably spread, and all of the Xia Kingdom's peak powers will seek an explanation from our college. After all, our neutrality is sacred and should not be violated." Shen Jinxiao grinned.

In response, Su Xin merely calmly nodded in acknowledgment.

After which, the two exchanged a few more words before Shen Jinxiao took the opportunity to leave.

As he left, Vice Principal Su Xin removed a compass from her robes. The compass was spinning, constantly swallowing wisps of air. Half a moment later, she frowned slightly as she muttered to herself, "It detected no abnormalities with Shen Jinxiao's second resonance. Its fluctuations are peaceful and stable and there seems to be no trace of killing intent... could it be that it wasn't him?"

Meanwhile, as Vice Principal Su Xin was lost in thought, Shen Jinxiao was currently sauntering along a small road within the college. As he passed through a patch of shadows, the space behind him warped slightly and the Heart Beast resonance's manifestation reappeared. Its snow-white fur quickly darkened into an inky-black color, radiating cold and strange undulations.

Once he walked out of the patch of shadows, the manifestation disappeared as though it had never been there.

A grin could be seen on Shen Jinxiao's face.

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Xia City, which had been engulfed with activity, finally returned to peaceful silence.

Within the Regent's palace.

The Regent Gong Yuan was currently standing by a lake, emotionlessly watching the night sky.

Behind him, the dual-pupil youth had strutted over with a smile. "Who would have expected that Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had left behind such a trump card?"

"How could they have become so powerful?" the Regent dryly asked.

When he had exchanged brief blows with Tan Tailan, his opponent's might had far surpassed even his greatest expectations.

"There's no need to ponder so much over this. Their projections probably used the might of the divine matter to strengthen themselves. Thus, it should be the last means at their disposal. I'm afraid they won't be able to do that again," the youth explained.

"Just once is enough. Li Taixuan has repaired the defensive ward of House Luolan, so it will be impossible to gain another opportunity any time soon." The Regent coldly snorted.

"The coronation ceremony will take place in three days' time. I can't afford to wait for a second opportunity to steal the divine matter."

The youth grinned and nodded. "Plus, you've completely offended Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan this time! Once they return from the Nobles' Battlefield, I feel that the situation will become a little stickyyyyyy..."

A hint of gloom could be seen within the Regent's eyes. Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's survival was something that left him both worried and troubled. The two already had exceptional means at their disposal. Who knew how powerful they would be by the time they left the Nobles' Battlefield?

The two of them truly struck fear into the depths of his heart.

"Phew."

The Regent exhaled deeply. "There's no point in talking about this further. Now that I don't possess the divine matter, then I will have to use other means. I will need to take control of the Kingdom Protecting Formation. With that in hand, even a King Stage expert will be unable to kill me in Xia City."

The youth nodded. "The Kingdom Protecting Formation can only be completely controlled by the one who completes the coronation ceremony. This is also the First Princess' hope. Once the Little Emperor completes the ceremony, she will no longer live in fear."

The Regent indifferently replied, "How can it be so easy? My plan was to use the divine matter to forcefully control the Kingdom Protecting Formation. Now that this is no longer an option, there are other methods. The only problem is that Pang Qianyuan is the biggest issue here. I cannot let him out of the Umbra Cave and participate in the ceremony."

The Regent's gaze turned towards the youth. "Since I don't have the divine matter, I believe I can only rely on you now. You guys should also have the same aim as me. If Pang Qianyuan is released, it would do no good for either of us." The youth grinned warmly as he nodded slightly.

"Relax. We've planned for so many years. How can we let Pang Qianyuan escape from the palm of our hand? You can just focus on your plan. We'll deal with him."

Chapter 0672: A Different Choice

When the night scattered and the rising sun bathed Xia City in morning light, the most prosperous city of the Xia Kingdom began to bustle with excitement.

The difference was that even though everything seemed the same on the surface, the events of last night had changed everything forever.

House Luolan's headquarters' gate was thrown open.

A single carriage rolled out with Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo within. They leisurely made their way down the street before countless individuals.

Everyone could see that the guards of House Luolan were a little different from the day before. They seemed to possess a certain strength of spirit now. This led to countless sighs from the people around. Yesterday's House Luolan might have seemed stable, but no one knew if they would continue to exist when the sun arose. On the other hand, even the rank and file were exuding confidence, not a single worry in sight.

Thus, the battle had truly caused a qualitative change amongst them.

It was clear that House Luolan had not been devastated. Internally, the two future heirs' presence would stabilize internal affairs. Meanwhile, Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's descent had confirmed their continued survival, and no one knew just when they would return. Thus, one would not simply strike at them.

The current House Luolan was brimming with hope.

"Who could have expected that House Duze's House Lord would actually choose to help House Luolan out?" Within the carriage, Li Luo, who had digested all of the news from the night before, sighed. Duze Yan's assistance was unexpected as House Luolan had a terribly adverse relationship with House Duze, constantly struggling openly. The two sides were full of enmity, and thus Li Luo had always prepared for Duze Yan's inevitable interference during the Housemeet.

In the end, Duze Yan had not chosen to stone them while they were down, instead even rendering aid and restraining Si Qing.

Jiang Qing'e slightly nodded. Duze Yan was an anomaly that no one had expected. Even though his assistance would not have changed the end result, they definitely owed him a favor.

"I have already dispatched people to prepare a gift for House Duze. Although it's not huge, it will represent our intentions," she explained.

Li Luo nodded as he fell into thought. "Moving forward, we will choose to break off our relationship with House Jinque. Since Si Qing has made his decision, then there is no need for us to continue with these idle pretenses."

"You are the House Lord. Whatever you say, goes." Jiang Qing'e smiled. House Luolan had once needed House Jinque as an ally as their internal situation was unstable. Now that things were resolved, that relationship was dispensable.

There was no need for a false friendship that had crumbled in the face of personal interests.

Li Luo nodded as he glanced out of the carriage window. He was currently making his way towards the Golden Dragon Bank. No one from the bank had interfered with yesterday's situation, which naturally meant that Yu Hongxi had done something. Thus, he had to express his gratitude.

While Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were on their way, their present had already been delivered to House Duze.

"Father! What were you thinking? How could you assist House Luolan? If you and House Jinque's House Lord joined forces, House Luolan would have been completely destroyed." Within House Duze's main hall, a certain Duze Beixuan was looking at his emotionless father, unable to fathom his intentions and expressing his thoughts angrily. He had already received this piece of news half a night ago, but his head was full of questions.

House Luolan and House Duze were as incompatible as fire and water, constantly warring with each other. In fact, the Housemeet seemed to be the best opportunity to rid them of this nemesis. Instead, his father not only hadn't taken them down, but had assisted them in their time of need?

It was important to note that Duze Beixuan had even thought of the perfect insults and moves to mock Li Luo when they next met!

In the end?

Psh! He received a thank you note from Li Luo which read as follows...

What's up! We really have to thank your dad! Guess we're going to be best friends after this! See you soon!

How the heck was he supposed to reply to this? "You can shut up. If House Duze were to be left in the hands of someone with as little brain power as you, it would probably collapse in less than a year." Duze Honglian icily glared at her silly brother.

Duze Beixuan had a belly full of fire and a furious expression on his face.

"Even the Regent descended in person at the end of House Luolan's Housemeet, and he was sent scurrying away. It is clear that Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's projections have instilled fear within him. If Father had chosen to act against House Luolan and managed to destroy them, what would happen after the two Dukes returned? House Duze would meet a sorry end! Most importantly, even if he chose to act, Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e would likely be able to escape as they are not tied down by the house. They would return to the Astral Sage College and seek protection. With their talent, they will be the second coming of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan in a few years' time!" Duze Honglian calmly explained.

"Thus, Father's decision was the best one! At the very least, we will not have to be worried about Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's return. On the contrary, House Lord Si Qing will no longer have a night of restless sleep."

Duze Yan nodded lightly, looking appreciatively towards Duze Honglian. "Honglian, you have a far-sighted view of things, simply incomparable to your brother's."

Duze Beixuan felt a little indignant, but when faced with his elder sister, who had always oppressed him since young... he did not dare to resist, merely acknowledging her words.

At this point, a female servant announced that House Luolan had sent gifts.

"House Luolan's two brats know how to do things," Duze Yan indifferently commented.

After which, he waved his hand. "Receive the gifts but also leave them this message. House Duze and House Luolan will not become allies because of this. The battle between us will continue and we will not offer any mercy."

Duze Honglian felt slightly helpless upon listening to her father's decree. Although he had chosen to help House Luolan, he was unwilling to lose the last scrap of face he had... or perhaps he was simply unwilling to bow his head towards Li Taixuan.

Regardless, even if the battle continued, Duze Yan's actions the night before had fundamentally changed their relationship.

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"Father, why did you choose to do that? Is House Jinque not a good friend of House Luolan?" Si Tianming and Si Qiuying asked with looks of surprise, fear clearly taking hold of them.

"How could there be any friendship between the Great Houses? We might have had a good relationship with House Luolan, but they were simply using us to draw fire, to split House Jiyan and House Duze's pressure," Si Qing diffidently replied.

Si Tianming, on the other hand, was so anxious that he was sweating buckets. "Even standing by idly would have been better than striking them whilst they were down! Now that things have come to this, no one will respect House Jinque again! We've also completely offended House Luolan! We've basically ruined ourselves and antagonized everyone!"

Si Qing's expression turned steely green as he slammed the desk furiously. "What did you say?!"

Si Qiuying clenched her teeth as she supported her brother. "What Brother says is right. Father, your choice was completely wrong!"

"We've prepared gifts to be sent to House Luolan as a form of apology. Hopefully, we can mend the relationship," Si Tianming explained.

"You ingrate!" Si Qing furiously scolded. "Do you want your father to be the butt of all the jokes in the Xia Kingdom? Although Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan are still alive, this does not mean that they will successfully escape from the Nobles' Battlefield. If there is no further news in a few years, do you really think the Regent will let House Luolan go? Their arrogance is only temporary. Now that Duze Yan has assisted them, he has also attracted the ire of the Regent. If there is an opportunity, he will not let them go either! You want to teach your father a lesson with such bad foresight?"

Si Tianming and Si Qiuying stamped their feet in frustration. They simply could not understand how their usually wise father could have been so stupid.

"Scram!" Si Qing, on the other hand could, not be bothered to argue further, furiously sending them on their way as he flicked his sleeves in frustration.

The siblings then left with depressed looks on their faces.

With his children leaving the room, Si Qing's expression turned gloomy and he furiously slammed a palm against the table before him. The azurestone table was unable to resist his power, fragmenting into dust.

He was melancholic.

"Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan, I don't believe that you will be able to escape the Nobles' Battlefield alive!"

Chapter 0673: Favors, Favors Everywhere!

Golden Dragon Bank

Yu Hongxi brought Lu Qing'er along to receive Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e.

"House Luolan has changed irreversibly. I believe no other factions will blindly target you, and so, congratulations. You've overcome your trial successfully," Yu Hongxi said as she looked at the pair. She did not hold back on her praise as she knew that even with Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's projections, the situation would not have stabilized without the efforts of this duo.

House Luolan had been crumbling apart for these last two years, but Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e had managed to reverse the situation and were critical in the grand scheme of things.

"The Housemeet only turned out this way thanks to your assistance, Aunt Yu," Li Luo stated sincerely.

At the end of the day, no one from the Golden Dragon Bank had turned up to interfere. It was likely that there were people who wanted to fish in muddied waters, but Yu Hongxi had restrained them.

Otherwise, if the situation had deteriorated further, even the intervention of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan would not have changed things.

"I was merely maintaining the rules of the Golden Dragon Bank. Doing business is our motto. Harmony breeds wealth, and we have no intention of being implicated in someone else's fight." Yu Hongxi smiled slightly.

"Aunt Yu, your favor will be deeply etched into my heart," Li Luo honestly replied.

Yu Hongxi gave a smile that was not a smile. "You already owe many favors."

At the same time, she seemingly glanced at Jiang Qing'e before continuing, "You have to know that personal favors are the hardest to repay."

"No matter. Even if I can't repay it now, once I become a Duke or a King, my favor will be worth something then. If you require anything of me, I will be more than happy to oblige at that time," Li Luo proudly stated as he patted his chest.

Yu Hongxi rolled her eyes. "You're a confident one, maybe even arrogant. Do you think the Duke and King Stages are so easily attained? Words are cheap!"

Li Luo pouted with a slight grin before casually replying, "Aunt Yu, even the Regent ended up showing himself. That fellow is very ambitious, so the Golden Dragon Bank should pay more attention to him in the future. I feel like he's narcissistic, ambitious, and ruthless. There's even a chance that he might covet the Golden Dragon Bank one day! After all, you guys are as rich as a nation, and if one wants to compare backgrounds, you probably have a deeper foundation than the royal court!"

Yu Hongxi raised a single brow curiously. "Li Luo, your provocative words are simply too direct."

"I'm just speaking the truth! The Regent definitely has some grand plan in the works if he wanted to seize the divine matter of my house!" Li Luo defended himself.

"The Xia Kingdom's coronation ceremony will take place in two days' time. When the Little Emperor ascends to the throne, the important ministers of the royal court will beseech the Regent to hand over his authority. If he does so, his influence and power will be continuously leached away by the First Princess and the Little Emperor. Thus, if he has ulterior motives, it will likely be targeted towards them," Yu Hongxi nonchalantly explained.

"And more importantly, House Luolan has already been tied to the First Princess' ship."

She had her own sources of intel and had long known that the First Princess had deployed a Duke to assist House Luolan. Unfortunately, it was a pity that another Duke had restrained this helper.

Thus, the First Princess' assistance and grace towards House Luolan could not be doubted. If House Luolan were to not assist her during the coronation ceremony, it would be unjustifiable, considering what the Regent had tried to do to them.

Jiang Qing'e spoke up at this point. "President Yu, the Regent is no saint. If he has a scheme for the coronation ceremony in the works and he usurps the ceremony and becomes the Emperor, I feel that it won't be good news for the Golden Dragon Bank either."

Yu Hongxi gave an insipid smile. "You two little brats. I can't believe you're trying to drag the Golden Dragon Bank into these muddied waters."

She waved her hand. "The Golden Dragon Bank will not change its stance. Thus, we are not concerned about whether the Little Emperor or the Regent ascends to the throne. We will not interfere. If the Regent has the balls to covet the Golden Dragon Bank, we will watch him try."

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e glanced at each other, knowing that their attempts to persuade Yu Hongxi had failed. Still, this was expected as the Golden Dragon Bank was a neutral party much like the Astral Sage College. So long as the Regent did not make any overt moves towards them, there was no reason for the bank to take action.

Thus, Li Luo gave up on this plan, continuing to exchange pleasantries with Yu Hongxi for a while before taking his leave.

Yu Hongxi then informed Lu Qing'er to send them off.

The three left the bank together. At the entrance, Lu Qing'er grabbed Li Luo all of a sudden and curiously asked, "Do you want to know what happened to Mentor Chi Chan?"

Li Luo nodded with a complicated expression. "I have no idea how I can ever repay Mentor Chi Chan's grace."

He had long heard the news around his mentor, and it had shocked him. He had never expected that she would choose to resign and solitarily confront House Lanling, completely holding down all of House Lanling's assassins, House Lord included.

This was a massive debt he had incurred.

Yu Hongxi had merely issued the command for all within the bank to stand still, intimidating the plotting rats within the bank. On the other hand, Chi Chan had paid a significant price, abandoning her position within the college. He would remember it forever.

"Do you know where she has gone?" Li Luo asked.

Lu Qing'er shook her head. "After leaving House Lanling, she did not resurface ever again."

Li Luo sighed. "Qing'er, could I kindly trouble you to mobilize the Golden Dragon Bank's information channels to locate Mentor Chi Chan? Now that she has left the college, she must definitely have found a new place to go to."

"You can rest assured that once I hear anything about this, I'll let you know," Lu Qing'er very quickly replied.

He nodded, and after catching up with Lu Qing'er, he left with Jiang Qing'e. Their destination was the royal palace. They had to pay a visit to the First Princess.

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Royal Palace, Side Chamber

The First Princess happily received the guests and warmly entertained them.

As she chatted with Jiang Qing'e, Li Luo made his way to the Little Emperor's chambers to administer his healing and purge the poison.

Atop the bed, the Little Emperor had taken off his robes, revealing his pale and frail frame. The black lotus was once again imprinted before Li Luo's eyes, but something strange had happened. Some of the black petals had turned white and the colors had alternated. A bizarre sight.

The Little Emperor turned his head and asked, "Li Luo, is my poison about to be cured? I can feel that my body is feeling much lighter nowadays."

Li Luo smiled and nodded, looking at the Little Emperor's face. The brat's face was becoming more and more handsome as he recovered. His crystal-like eyes paired with his slender eyebrows gave off a very innocent appeal. However, this thought also caused Li Luo to shudder slightly. How could he fall for the Little Emperor?! Preposterous! In any case, he began to focus himself, placing his palm onto the Little Emperor's back. He then started circulating his resonant power, beginning the treatment.

Chapter 0674: Esteemed Guests Arrive

With Li Luo's rise to the Fiend Palace Tier, the treatment for the Little Emperor also took less of a toll on him. In the short span of 30 minutes, it was complete. At the same time, yet another petal of the black lotus imprint on his back had turned a pristine white.

At the moment, half of the black lotus had been cleansed.

After the treatment, the Little Emperor felt a little fatigued, so he put on his robes with the help of a servant and fell soundly asleep with Li Luo's approval.

Li Luo then exited the inner chamber and found Jiang Qing'e and the First Princess engaged in conversation.

The First Princess also noticed Li Luo's arrival, her voice trilling like a happy lark. "Li Luo, congratulations! You're now the true House Lord of House Luolan!"

"I have to thank you, Your Highness, for your assistance. Your grace will be forever remembered by House Luolan." Li Luo grinned.

The First Princess' bright eyes fluidly glanced past him. "House Luolan's favor will become very valuable in the future. It looks like my investment was a great success."

This was the truth. So long as the two elder House Lords returned safely, House Luolan would very likely turn into a super power in the Xia Kingdom, far surpassing the other four Great Houses. At that point, even the royal court would pay close attention to them.

Li Luo smiled. "Did you already know that the one coveting House Luolan's divine matter from the shadows was the Regent?"

"There were some clues. Additionally, I had received some news from my own sources, but I could never really be certain until now. It looks like my uncle has always lusted for House Luolan's divine matter. I still have no idea what his aims are. He is only at the fifth-grade of the Duke Stage, quite a far cry from even being qualified to break into the King Stage," the First Princess commented as a self-deprecating smile formed on her face. "Honestly speaking, if he could enter the King Stage, everything would be simple. I would naturally let my brother renounce the throne and let the Xia Kingdom be ruled by him."

She then turned to face the two. "House Luolan has overcome its perilous tribulation, and I will undergo my own baptism of fire in two days. I wonder if I will have the same good luck you had?"

"Your Highness, are you referring to the coronation ceremony? Do you suspect that the Regent will kick up a fuss?" Li Luo questioned.

This was met with an aloof reply. "The Regent has a wild and ambitious heart. He has controlled the Xia Kingdom for so many years that I feel it would be unlikely he will relinquish everything so easily. Thus, I believe he has a plan."

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e glanced at each other. House Luolan and the Regent were now on irreconcilable terms. Even calling them "mortal enemies" would not be an exaggeration. Thus, they would naturally not idly sit by as the coronation ceremony was usurped by the Regent. If that happened, House Luolan would also be in a difficult position as they would constantly have to fend off the Regent's tricks.

"How is the situation on Your Highness' side? Do you have a lot of supporters?" Jiang Qing'e asked.

"The Little Emperor is the legitimate heir, so countless elder officials of the Xia Kingdom support him. When their might is aggregated, even my royal uncle would not take them lightly. Thus, from a bigger point of view, we still have some degree of confidence." The First Princess sighed deeply.

"House Luolan will support you, Your Highness. However, we only have a few small fry, including us, that can assist. I'm afraid we won't be of much help." Li Luo clearly expressed his position and willingness to assist. The Regent's actions had already pushed them to this side after all.

"That is a little unfortunate. If the two old House Lords could descend once again, I believe my royal uncle would not dare to hold any ulterior motives." The First Princess covered her mouth as she laughed lightly.

Jiang Qing'e's eyes flashed. "I know that the college's Principal Pang had expressed his support for the previous Emperor. He had also determined the Regent to be too power hungry. I think that if he were to show himself, it would suppress any thoughts of unrest."

Li Luo had a similar train of thought. Principal Pang had been tied down in the Umbra Cave's depths, unable to extricate his main body. Li Luo had obtained the Dragon Bone Holy Grail and even provided some of his blood essence to the Principal. Although he did not know what the Principal was plotting, it should all be part of the plan.

"Principal Pang's appearance is not confirmed. Suppressing the Umbra Cave is of utmost importance, and he will be unable to influence the outside world before being able to resolve that predicament, even if it's the coronation ceremony." The First Princess sighed lightly.

"The Dragon Bone Holy Grail should have already landed in his hands. I think the situation will be resolved soon," Jiang Qing'e consoled her.

"That would be for the best." If Principal Pang could turn up in person for the coronation ceremony, then that would be undoubtedly wonderful news. With the Principal's support, the Little Emperor would safely ascend the throne and take control of the Kingdom Protecting Formation.

That was the most crucial point. With the Kingdom Protecting Formation in hand, the Regent could only sit by idly.

"The coronation ceremony will start in two days. I will send you an invite so make sure you aren't missing." The First Princess grinned at Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e.

The two nodded. The coronation ceremony's outcome far surpassed the implications of House Luolan's Housemeet. It would determine the balance of power within the Xia Kingdom, and as one of its factions, House Luolan would not be insulated from its aftereffects. Even the Astral Sage College and the Golden Dragon Bank would pay close attention to the result.

The two then bade farewell to the First Princess and left the royal palace, returning back to House Luolan.

"There seems to be a stream of climatic events. Can't we get a breather? Now we have a coronation ceremony coming up, and I have a feeling that the entire Xia Kingdom will be upended by this." Li Luo frowned as he massaged his temples, ranting towards Jiang Qing'e.

Jiang Qing'e was left in deep thought. The Regent was extremely powerful, and everyone in the Xia Kingdom knew it. If he wanted to rebel during the coronation ceremony, it would inevitably cause a disastrously terrifying event that would tear apart the fabric of society.

The entire Xia Kingdom would be in turmoil.

Jiang Qing'e stretched out her beautiful hand and tightly grasped Li Luo's. "No matter what, even if House Luolan is destroyed with the Xia Kingdom, I don't care about any of that. So long as you, Master, and Mistress are all fine, that is all that matters."

A warm feeling arose within Li Luo's heart as his five fingers gripped Jiang Qing'e's jade-like hand in response. But before he was about to speak, the carriage suddenly halted and the windows were lifted by a gust of wind. Li Luo saw a slender figure standing right outside House Luolan's headquarters.

Scrutinizing the figure closer, Li Luo felt like he had been struck by a bolt of lightning. He hurriedly got off, excitedly shouting, "Mentor Chi Chan!" The individual who was outside was surprisingly Chi Chan.

At this point, she seemed to have heard Li Luo's voice and turned to face him. A light puff of wind gently blew past the thin veil shrouding her head. Her eyes were in a crescent moon shape, seemingly smiling.

"Li Luo, I have no place to go right now. Is House Luolan accepting new members?"

Chapter 0675: Magnetic

"What? You want to join House Luolan?"

Li Luo was in complete disbelief when he heard Chi Chan's words, rubbing his ears. Had he misheard something? Thus, he had to ask it again.

Chi Chan gave a slight nod. "Now that I've left the college, I realize I have nowhere I want to go. So I want to stay here temporarily. What do you think? Is that appropriate?"

Li Luo was so touched that tears welled up in his eyes as he emotionally glanced at Chi Chan. "Mentor Chi Chan, could it be that you happen to have some sort of secret connection with my father by some chance? You've treated me far too well! I wouldn't be surprised if you were my mother..."

Chi Chan was left completely speechless before she indignantly replied, "Ever since I was assigned to the Astral Sage College, I have not had any contact with the secular world. I am unfamiliar with your father and I have always been single! Stop slandering me with your irresponsible words! Whatever I did was purely because you were an exceptional student. You've done so much for me, and I couldn't bear to see such a wonderful student be extinguished by some extraneous factors. I'm only staying at House Luolan for now as it's convenient and just an interim plan."

Li Luo sheepishly touched his nose. "Oh... so it's like that."

Immediately after, he showed a warm smile as though nothing had happened. "Welcome, welcome! Mentor Chi Chan, so long as you wish for it, House Luolan will forever open its gates for you. You can stay as long as you want!"

Jiang Qing'e had made her way over at this point, and a slight smile surfaced on her beautiful face. "Mentor Chi Chan joining House Luolan is honoring us. We will welcome you wholeheartedly."

In truth, deep down, Jiang Qing'e was completely taken aback by this chain of events. She had never expected that Chi Chan would temporarily reside within House Luolan. Although she did not know how long this period of time would be, it was phenomenal news.

This meant that House Luolan would have yet another Duke before Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's return.

If Ox Biaobiao was also considered, then House Luolan's Headquarters would have two Dukes!

If news of this spread, it would cause a sensation within the Xia Kingdom.

Mentor Chi Chan was simply treating Li Luo too well. She was a Duke after all! With her strength, no matter where she traveled to in the Xia Kingdom, she could even start her own house if she wished to! Then the Xia Kingdom would have six Great Houses!

Thus, saying that she had nowhere else to go was simply a joke.

Jiang Qing'e had not interacted with Chi Chan much in the past, and so the only reason she would have chosen to come to House Luolan was because of Li Luo.

Although Li Luo's opening line was completely ridiculous, the fact was that Mentor Chi Chan did indeed treat him too well!

This had far surpassed the relationship a teacher would have with her student.

However, if she had ulterior motives, then that was a head-scratcher too. There was no reason for anyone to covet Li Luo or House Luolan's possessions... unless her aim was the divine matter? Still, the possibility of that didn't seem very high. After going around in circles, Jiang Qing'e concluded that Li Luo was simply too charismatic.

He was quite handsome after all.

Jiang Qing'e took a step forward and tightly grasped Chi Chan's forearm, a rare form of intimacy as she dragged her into the House Luolan.

Li Luo, on the other hand, haughtily followed suit. He was absolutely exhilarated! House Luolan had managed to attract a Duke, which was something even his parents couldn't achieve in their time. Clearly, he possessed exceptional personal charm.

Yet the moment she walked into House Luolan's headquarters, her footsteps came to a halt. She could distinctly sense a mighty and formless pressure that pervaded the entire area. She could feel her strength reduce massively under the suppression of the pressure.

"This is House Luolan's defensive ward? Its mystical qualities are beyond comparison. Any Duke within its range would find it hard to even bring out their Bergfrieds." Chi Chan sighed.

It was no wonder none of the Dukes dared to intrude when the ward was operating at its prime, despite lusting for all of the treasures within the house.

"Please don't take offense, Mentor Chi Chan. Even we are unable to control the defensive ward of the house. Unfortunately, you will have to tolerate this for now," Jiang Qing'e said. She knew that Dukes rarely liked stepping into their headquarters as the pressure was uncomfortable for them, restricting their power.

Chi Chan waved her hand in response, indicating that it was of no concern.

The three then made their way into the discussion hall.

"Li Luo, my time here will only be temporary. Once this extraordinary situation passes, I will probably be returning to the Astral Sage College," Chi Chan reminded the excitable Li Luo.

"Mentor, you can still return to the college?" Li Luo asked in shock.

Although his words were slightly rude, Mentor Chi Chan had voluntarily resigned and even participated in House Luolan's struggle. She may not have directly taken part in the main battle, but she was still linked to them. This had brought about trouble to the college, so would she even be able to rejoin them in such a situation?

Listening to Li Luo's comment, her clear, starry eyes scowled at him. "So it seems you hope I can't go back?"

He did not agree nor deny it, only "affectionately" replying, "House Luolan simply wants to support you forever."

"To be fair, the only reason I was allowed to act was because of Vice Principal Su Xin. Without her relenting, do you really think I could have joined the battle so easily and then helped you restrain House Lanling?" Mentor Chi Chan helplessly answered.

This answer surprised Li Luo. "Vice Principal Su Xin?"

Mentor Chi Chan nodded, and her voice turned gentle. "Vice Principal Su Xin might have stated that the college was neutral and forbade any of us from internecine combat, but when I submitted my resignation, she did not turn it down, despite it being within her rights to do so. Additionally, when I left for House Lanling, the college naturally knew where I was headed to. If she really wanted to strictly enforce the stance of neutrality... she would definitely have sent the college's experts to restrain me. She obviously knew what I was going to do there, and it would eventually bring about questions regarding the college's stance. Yet in light of all this, she did nothing. This was just a covert way of providing assistance to the two of you. Vice Principal Su Xin has always been fair and impartial. It is the first time I've seen her make any sort of compromise, not only because you and Jiang Qing'e are the best saplings that the college has seen in a century, but also as a form of thanks for obtaining the Dragon Bone Holy Grail. I communicated with her in secret before I resigned. Her answer was simple. After this tempestuous and special period is over, she will find an opportunity to let me re-enter the college, in a way that the opposition to it will be insignificant."

Li Luo groaned. "Vice Principal Su Xin is the best after all." Even the supposedly simple resignation held such a complicated truth to it.

Li Luo was touched by Vice Principal Su Xin's secret assistance. She might have said that the college's neutrality was something absolute and immovable, but at the end of the day, she provided as much help as she could within her means of influence. Him slaving away for the sake of the Dragon Bone Holy Grail was worth it after all!

"Mentor, whenever you wish to leave, just let us know and that's enough. You can rest assured that even though I am tremendously unwilling to let you go, I will not impede you." Li Luo grinned.

Since Mentor Chi Chan seemed to enjoy being in the college more than anything, he would not seek to trap her within House Luolan for the sake of having another Duke expert. This would ruin the pure relationship the two shared.

Chi Chan responded with a slight smile and an approving nod.

After which, Li Luo went to summon Cai Wei, Yuan Qing, and the rest of the elders in the house to inform them of Chi Chan's temporary membership.

This astonishing news left them in a daze, then they erupted with joy.

They were clear of the implications of a Duke joining them. This was terrific for House Luolan.

All of them then glanced at Li Luo with looks of utmost admiration and respect.

The new House Lord was simply too amazing. He had managed to rope in an actual Duke in just the short span of a day. Even the old House Lords couldn't achieve this!

It wasn't that they weren't charismatic, but more likely that there was no need to get another Duke to join them. The two of them were sufficient to dominate everyone else, forcefully.

The House Luolan of today was no longer the same. Although the Housemeet was over, having an actual Duke residing within the headquarters would unquestionably allow their strength and influence to soar. This way, their rebirth and ascent to the top would be much quicker than before.

Thus, Chi Chan's entry was perfect. It was the missing piece of the puzzle.

House Luolan's rise was just a matter of time.

...

In contrast to this piece of excellent news, things were brewing elsewhere.

Some strange movements were seen within the depths of the Umbra Cave.

Chapter 0676: Five Elements Dragon-Elephant Formation

Deep within the Umbra Cave.

The worldly natural energy here had taken on a more chaotic form as the elements roiled within. One moment a boundless sea of fire would sweep across the space, and the next it would transform into a deluge of seawater that smashed through the void. It was a scene that would remind one of primordial entropy.

Thunderous storms like a raging beast buffeting the void in every direction.

Within the chaotic void, a massive tear separated two world spaces.

On the outside of it was a golden lotus fluttering within the chaotic worldly natural energy. Atop the golden lotus was a single figure sitting there cross-legged. The figure exuded a profound aura that reminded one of the deepest pools and the tallest mountains, causing one to feel an incomparable sort of pressure. Although he was physically there, he seemed to exist beyond the reaches of the mortal world.

It was Astral Sage College's Principal, Pang Qianyuan.

He was currently staring aloofly at the massive tear. Within it was a black, raging river that looked like an endlessly long black dragon, saturnine as the depths of night. It gave one a feeling of unrest as the black river water continued to flow. Waves would occasionally surface, and one could see countless hideously distorted human faces emanating all of the most negative emotions inside. Greed, desire, rage, hatred, and so on...

It was a sight that would intimidate all who saw it.

The river suddenly began to toss and turn, and one could see a titanic obsidian fish reveal itself as it incited a storm. The black fish gave off bizarre and horrifying vibes as each and every scale seemed to contain a tortured human face. Each one of these faces seemed to be screaming in despair, and simply looking at it would drive one to the depths of insanity.

Child-like laughter erupted from the mouth of the black fish, and the sound traveled through the world space, entering Pang Qianyuan's ears. There was a peculiar power contained within the sound waves that would have even corrupted a Duke, causing them to lose themselves and become thralls, even for a mere moment.

Pang Qianyuan, however, remained impassive, quietly feeling the fluctuations of the worldly natural energy.

He was awaiting a single opportunity.

This was something he had prepared himself for for countless years.

A lot of time had passed by, but it all seemed like a fleeting moment to him.

Right at this very moment, a glint flashed within his eyes. He could feel that the chaotic and infinite worldly natural energy had begun to shift in a specific direction.

Pop!

At that very moment, a strange fluctuation appeared within the chaotic void. When the sound reverberated around the space, the originally chaotic worldly natural energy unexpectedly came to a halt and began to be reformed anew, as though a set of heavenly laws had appeared to bring order to the entropy.

Pang Qianyuan stood up from his golden lotus and waved his sleeve.

With a single motion, the entire space seemed to tremble and the five elements within the void soared up. The vast amounts of worldly natural energy condensed into five massive, dragon-elephant manifestations that occupied the void.

A frightening pressure descended upon everything.

"I open up the primordial chaos. Five Elements Dragon-Elephant Formation!" Pang Qianyuan announced thunderously. At that same time, ancient, mottled chains appeared atop the five manifestations, stretching out and intersected with each other, seemingly able to seal off the world itself.

The previously disorderly primordial chaos seemed to have been reborn anew as laws came into existence.

Deep within the cracks of the void and inside the river of evil, the massive, black fish was lightly waving its tail, summoning humongous waves as it leisurely said, "Pang Qianyuan, your methods are impressive. So this is what you've been preparing for all these years? Awaiting the moment when the primordial chaos rebirths itself and the ensuing calm to erect this mystical formation to repair this crack in the void? Do you think it will be that easy? Do you really think I'm a harmless herbivore?" The Ichythian King grinned as it faced the spatial tear, opening up its titanic, abyss-like mouth. A moment later, copious amounts of sticky, black water poured forth, radiating with overflowing evil. Even a Greater Heavenly Resonance cultivator would be corrupted by its demonic influence if a single drop of the black water were to fall upon them.

It passed through the void, and at that moment, an ebony arm stretched out from within the black water. It seemed a little weird as it possessed eight fingers and the skin was abnormally mottled.

Numerous dusky runes surfaced upon it as viscous, black water continued to drop continuously from its pores, like the palm of the god of the underworld.

The very moment the ebony arm appeared, it seemed to shatter the void. It smashed towards Pang Qianyuan's Five Elements Dragon-Elephant Formation, intending to dispose of it in a single strike.

Pang Qianyuan took this all in stride, unhurriedly removing an object from within his robes. It was an ancient-looking goblet. Upon closer inspection, it was the Dragon Bone Holy Grail that had been retrieved by Li Luo during the Holy Grail Meet.

This holy grail transformed into a space-piercing beam of light that flew forward before explosively transforming into the size of a gigantic mountain that could touch the heavens.

At the same time, it began to emit countless mysterious rays of light that descended upon the space. Each and every ray seemed to contain a suppressive effect, and wherever the light shone over, the eight-fingered ebony arm would emit copious amounts of black smoke coupled with a miserable scream.

With the holy grail's appearance, the eight-fingered arm was shattered.

"The Dragon Bone Holy Grail?!" the Ichythian King gloomily exclaimed from within the black river. "No wonder you dared to set up this formation in my face. You actually had this treasure in hand!"

The Dragon Bone Holy Grail possessed a special suppressive effect that was very effective on Others. It was no surprise why Pang Qianyuan seemed unfazed and unafraid.

He remained indifferent, completely ignoring the Ichythian King as he focused on the massive formation he had erected. This mystical formation was something he had deduced over many years. As he was located in the intersection between two world spaces, the worldly natural energy here possessed a chaotic nature. This had made it difficult to employ many of his methods. This time, with the aid of the formation and the temporary lull as the chaos reset within the void, he was therefore able to repair the crack in the void and resolve the crisis within the Umbra Cave.

He glimpsed at the four ancient dragon-elephant manifestations, each taking up one of the cardinal directions, before looking at the one in the middle. This was the nexus of his formation.

At this point in time, an indescribable pressure seemed to have descended upon the area with the presence of the dragon-elephant manifestations. The sides of the void crack seemed to tremble, as though it was being pushed by the sheer power of the formation.

Unfortunately, despite all the shaking, it resisted the pressure of the formation.

"It seems that after spending so much time deducing a solution, it was ultimately insufficient! Trying to close up the spatial tear is not such an easy task after all," Pang Qianyuan murmured to himself as his eyes flashed.

"Heh. Pang Qianyuan, you truly overestimate yourself. You actually tried to forcibly seal up the void tear?" The Ichythian King mocked from within the river of evil.

Pang Qianyuan coldly glanced at it, but he no longer paid any more attention to the Other. Although the formation was unable to achieve his goals, it wasn't out of his expectations. If he wanted to achieve such

a colossal task, he would naturally have more methods up his sleeve. Otherwise, why would he have taken action now?

With this in mind, he waved at the giant Dragon Bone Holy Grail. Immediately after, some blood essence shot out, floating before him drop by drop.

The blood essence was round and clear like a gem. Although others may not be able to see the mysteries hidden within, Pang Qianyuan was not any average individual. His gaze was able to discern the special bloodline that was contained within the depths of the blood essence.

This blood essence had been provided by Li Luo.

"Heavenly Dragon Energy..."

Pang Qianyuan focused upon the blood essence with a slight smile. His palms were grasped together at this instant, and vast amounts of energy surged forth. It formed something like a stellar furnace, smelting the blood essence that tumbled madly within. It melted down very quickly, and eventually what was left were a few wisps of golden-yellow energy that could barely be seen by the naked eye. This energy was his true aim.

Adding Heavenly Dragon Energy into the Five Elements Dragon Elephant Formation would provide it with heaven-shattering strength for a brief amount of time. With such strength, there was a possibility he could seal up the gap.

Pang Qianyuan pointed forward, and the energy shot forth, quickly assimilating with the massive dragon elephant manifestations. The manifestations evidently seemed to have gained a boost. Their huge bodies swelled up and even their roars contained a sense of sacred pressure.

Boom!

The ancient dragon elephants then floated up, pulling a piece of the chaos itself like a chariot.

Everything rumbled and the void tear no longer remained stationary. With the vigorous galloping of the dragon elephant manifestations, the huge cracks were slowly being pulled together whilst violently trembling.

Seeing this sight, Pang Qianyuan heaved a sigh of relief internally.

His numerous years of preparation were all for this.

If the void tear could be sealed, then the Astral Sage College's Umbra Cave would be suppressed and they would be able to enjoy a prolonged period of peace.

The void tear continued to rumble violently as tides of energy continued to pour forth from it, but the forceful reparation continued.

More importantly, the black river of evil in the other world space was similarly buffeted by massive waves, and the gigantic black fish was stuck within. Its terrifying, white eyes continued to watch the scene coldly and quietly.

Chapter 0677: Change

Regent's Palace

Just as the Regent was dealing with some bureaucratic affairs in his study, his expression suddenly changed. He saw the shadow beside him distort, and the dual pupil youth walked out. The youth usually had an unhurried expression, but this time it seemed a little grave.

The Regent placed down the folder in his hands as he asked curiously upon seeing this rare sight, "What happened?"

The youth had remained indifferent even when Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had appeared during the Housemeet.

"Pang Qianyuan has made his move. He has used the Dragon Bone Holy Grail to suppress the Ichythian King. At the same time, he's currently repairing the void tear. If he succeeds, the Umbra Cave's danger will be resolved and he will be able to roam freely," the youth explained simply.

The Regent's pupils shrank. Pang Qianyuan was the source of their troubles. There was only one King Stage cultivator in the entire Xia Kingdom, and he was the only one capable of instilling fear into the Regent and the rest.

This situation was of deep concern to the Regent. It wasn't good news as once Pang Qianyuan extricated himself from the thorny Umbra Cave, he would be able to return to the Xia Kingdom, undoubtedly attending the coronation ceremony.

Although the Astral Sage College was a neutral faction, Pang Qianyuan was absolutely unrestrained in whatever he wished to do as the Xia Kingdom's only King cultivator.

In fact, he didn't even need to interfere. He simply had to stand behind the Little Emperor and then all of the Regent's plans would disintegrate naturally.

"What do you plan to do?" the Regent asked the youth. He knew that their aims were the same, and it was to prevent Pang Qianyuan from escaping his predicament.

The youth grinned. "Now, now, there is no need to worry. We have planned for so many years, so how can we let our efforts go to waste by letting Pang Qianyuan escape from his cell? That would be underestimating our methods. This is merely just a single sage college. It's not the first time we have destroyed one after all."

As he spoke, he touched a pocket sphere on his wrist and removed a black, palm-sized clay figurine. The figurine's facial features were blurry, but the black runes on its body were like a living fish constantly squirming atop its surface.

The youth glanced at it before casually crushing it into pieces.

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At the very same moment that happened, in the Astral Sage College.

On top of the Tree of Resonant Power.

A single Violet Vibrance mentor would remain at the highest location atop the Tree of Resonant Power at all times, guarding it. In the center of this location was a wooden platform where a single Violet Vibrance mentor was sitting cross-legged with his eyes closed.

His body suddenly shuddered and his expression showed a trace of internal strife. Then distorted colors surfaced on his face and his skin began to twist uncontrollably as though a fish was swimming inside his body.

He opened his eyes again a moment later, but both of his eyeballs had turned inky black, looking extremely bizarre.

He then raised a hand and stripped off his upper robes, revealing his bare body. He swiped a finger across his chest, slicing through his own flesh and blood to reveal his beating heart.

He then forcefully wrenched his heart out, and it continued to beat violently within his grasp.

As the heart started to beat with greater intensity, one could see a single drop of an obsidian substance being squeezed out from inside it.

The substance emanated a foul and evil presence, seemingly condensed from countless wicked thoughts. It was but a mere drop, yet it possessed a corruptive power that even a Duke was unable to resist.

When the single drop of obsidian substance landed atop the tree, it quickly burrowed itself like a drop of ink dripping into a massive lake, instantly disappearing before one's very eyes.

After the act was done, the Violet Vibrance mentor returned his heart to his chest and the wound healed up as though nothing had ever happened.

A cold wind rustled past.

The Violet Vibrance mentor's eyes seemed to contain a hint of confusion as he glanced around him curiously. He seemed to have lost himself for a moment, but he could not remember what he had just done.

In the end, after discovering nothing was amiss, he shook his head and attributed it all to a misunderstanding. He closed his eyes and continued to cultivate.

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In the depths of the Umbra Cave.

The ancient dragon elephant manifestations were gradually shifting the space itself, sealing up the void tear.

At this instant, Pang Qianyuan raised his head and glared at a specific part of the void. He could clearly feel that there was a tiny disturbance in the space itself, which had marginally weakened his connection with the world.

He could feel that the influence of this disturbance had affected and slowed down the sealing of the void tear.

"This feeling of energy being stripped away... could it be the Tree of Resonant Power?"

Pang Qianyuan frowned. The Astral Sage College's Tree of Resonant Power suppressed the Umbra Cave, and as the Principal, he would naturally tap upon its vast reserves of energy. This was one of the reasons why he was able to keep the Ichythian King suppressed here.

However, his connection with the Tree of Resonant Power seemed to have become somewhat blurry and unstable.

"Has an issue arisen with the Tree of Resonant Power?" The thought sent tremors through Pang Qianyuan's heart. The Tree of Resonant Power was having issues at such a critical moment? This could not be a mere coincidence.

It seemed odd as the tree was under the strict surveillance and protection of the college. A Violet Vibrance mentor was always on duty, so how could a problem crop up?

A glint flashed through his eyes as he glanced at the river of evil within the void tear. The Ichythian King was quietly floating atop its surface, glaring at him with its frightening, white eyes and a mocking expression.

"Pang Qianyuan, did you think that you were the only one plotting throughout the years?" The Ichythian King's icy voice transmitted through the void.

Pang Qianyuan coldly stared at the Ichythian King. Only after one confronted a King Stage Other could one fully appreciate the terror and difficulty of dealing with them. He and the Ichythian King had engaged each other in contests of varying degrees over the years. Despite all of his caution, he had almost fallen into its traps multiple times. An Other was basically the manifestation of evil thoughts and emotions, able to clearly discern humanity's weaknesses and to seduce them with honeyed words as well.

In their numerous exchanges, revealing a minor flaw would have resulted in his heart being shaken. That was when the seeds of corruption could be sowed, insidiously corrupting him.

What was happening with the Tree of Resonant Power might not have been due to an outside influence, but rather from someone within the college itself.

Pang Qianyuan seemed a little gloomy as he stated, "It looks like you've secretly planted seeds of corruption throughout the college."

"Pang Qianyuan, you cannot beat me in this battle. Give up. Don't you want to become stronger? Although you're a King Stage expert, you can gain even greater strength if you enter the shadow world!" the Ichythian King offered.

"Your efforts to entice me seem to have become worse." Pang Qianyuan shook his head. "The fact that you had to activate a hidden card to obstruct me means that you've gotten scared. If this is the case, then I have even more reason to continue sealing this void tear. Additionally, this will only delay me for a slight amount of time. What's the point of it? Just what are you trying to do?"

At this very moment, a thought flashed through his mind. "What could happen in the next few days in the outside world? Hmm? Could it be the coronation ceremony? You don't want me to participate in it?"

What does it have to do with you? If I don't personally attend it... the greatest beneficiary would be who? That ambitious brat Gong Yuan?"

His gaze turned even colder at this instant.

"You and Gong Yuan are in cahoots?" When faced with Pang Qianyuan's question, the Ichythian King only chuckled softly. It then submerged itself back into the depths of the river of evil.

Chapter 0678: Ceremony's Eve

Xia City was bustling with excitement and activity. As time went by, more and more officials from the royal court and the leaders of the various provinces began to pour into the city, one after another.

The coronation ceremony was almost here.

Xia City was gaily decorated and the atmosphere was eclectic.

To the common man, the coronation ceremony was a time of great festivities. However, to those who were more astute, they were able to sniff out the dangerous undercurrents that underlay this event. They knew that the result would soon determine the direction the Xia Kingdom would take.

The effects would reverberate around the entire kingdom, and no faction would be free of its influence.

Thus, every faction had gathered here, awaiting the opening of the grand event that would shape the future of the Xia Kingdom.

House Luolan.

The terribly busy Li Luo had managed to snatch a moment for a breather, entertaining his group of friends from the college. Yu Lang, Bai Mengmeng, Bai Doudou, and Zhao Kuo were excited to pay a visit after finding out the result of the Housemeet.

"Congratulations, House Lord Li Luo. May your grand name resound throughout the Xia Kingdom. House Luolan will rise gloriously, and I hope that Brother Luo will remember our relationship from the past and never forget his loyal friends." When that familiar, sloppy voice sounded out, a smile surfaced on Li Luo's face.

Yu Lang swaggered in with a grinning face as he waved at Li Luo.

Yu Lang laughed as he continued, "However, I'm not surprised that Brother Luo is the House Lord. Well, it was your surprising follow-up that truly caused you to become the topic of discussion in the academy. It was shocking indeed."

"What?" Li Luo was a little taken aback by this sudden statement.

Yu Lang winked at him. "Well, it's because ever since the Astral Sage College was founded, it was the first time that a Violet Vibrance mentor was... shall we say... convinced to join her student's house! Your single move has been recorded into the annals of the college's history, an achievement that every student will forever idolize!"

Li Luo didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. So it had to do with Mentor Chi Chan's situation... Despite not actively circulating this piece of news, some resourceful individuals would definitely have caught wind of it, and the younger generation would inevitably have heard of it as soon as possible.

To the students of the college, this was even more shocking and impressive than Li Luo becoming a House Lord!

"Leader, now that you've snatched Mentor Chi Chan away, what's going to happen to our Fairness & Justice Squad?" Bai Mengmeng cried out as her large, innocent eyes glanced at Li Luo with a hint of sadness. She and Xin Fu were dumbstruck when they received the news. They were still in the One Star Hall, but their mentor had vanished! Would the college provide them with a new Violet Vibrance mentor after that? Did they have to rebuild their relationships from scratch?

Li Luo shrugged as he helplessly replied, "There was no choice. She wanted to do so! Who am I to reject her?"

"Hearing your words... makes me want to punch you!" Bai Doudou pouted. She couldn't tell if this brat was simply lucky or acting dumb!

Li Luo then swept his gaze over the group before asking, "Where's Xin Fu?"

He realized that his squadmate was missing.

Bai Mengmeng softly answered, "He didn't want to come. He said that he was a member of House Lanling and that Mentor Chi Chan had even started a fight with them."

Li Luo fell silent for a moment before smiling. "That fool... what is he trying to do? In my eyes, House Lanling is House Lanling. Xin Fu is Xin Fu. He is still a member of our Fairness & Justice Squad! So long as he doesn't deny this fact, it will forever be the case."

He knew that during the Housemeet, Yu Lang, Bai Mengmeng, and Xin Fu had done their best to hold back Ye Chengying, who had received an assignment from the house.

Although her strength could not have changed the overall situation at House Luolan, his friends' intentions was not something he would ever neglect nor forget.

Especially Xin Fu. He was a member of House Lanling and yet he had chosen not to accept the assignment, obstructing Ye Chengying instead. This display of friendship would forever be remembered by Li Luo.

"Qin Zhulu?" Li Luo continued to ask.

"He said his father had arrived in Xia City today and thus he could not make it," Yu Lang explained.

Li Luo's gaze flickered for a moment upon hearing this. Qin Zhulu's father was the general that guarded the borders, the renowned Qin Zhenjiang, right? He was one of the Xia Kingdom's mightiest warriors. The only reason he would rush back to Xia City would be to attend the coronation ceremony.

The only question in this case was: who would the general support? With his position and resources, he would undoubtedly shift the tides in the favor of whomever he chose.

Li Luo continued to entertain his friends before tersely reminding them, "You guys should stay within the college grounds tomorrow. Don't leave its protection casually."

"Is it due to the coronation ceremony?" Bai Mengmeng was quite astute and went straight to the point. The Bai family was also a top clan in the kingdom, so she would naturally be aware of these developments.

Li Luo nodded and his gaze turned profound.

"The college might not be affected as much, but you should still remain careful. Everything should end after the coronation ceremony concludes tomorrow." Li Luo looked at the immature and green faces before him. They had yet to fully mature and required time to develop themselves. Hopefully, the coronation ceremony would end smoothly.

...

General's Mansion

Qin Zhulu was emotionlessly sitting at the table, looking at the burly middle-aged man before him. The man's bare arms were riddled with countless hideous scars. At the same time, he gave off the aura of a powerful soldier with blood made of steel. It was awe-inspiring, but at the same time, one would also be left breathless before him.

This was Qin Zhulu's father, the Xia Kingdom's great general, Qin Zhenjiang.

The man was voraciously wolfing down his food. A moment later, he patted his stomach and sighed with satisfaction. "Xia City's food is much tastier than the gruel you get at the frontier."

With that, he raised his head and stared at Qin Zhulu, his expression becoming stern. He commanded with a low voice, "Little Lu, now that you've been in the Astral Sage College for a year, I would like to know what you've gained."

Qin Zhulu simply replied, "I have not been wasting my time. I am rushing into the Earth Fiend Stage, but I am not the strongest student in the One Star Hall."

Qin Zhenjiang frowned and emitted a suppressive pressure, slamming his palm fiercely against the table as he bellowed, "WAS MY QUESTION REFERRING TO THAT? What I wanted to know is if you have found any girl to your liking within the college!"

Qin Zhulu froze up like a deer in the headlights.

Upon seeing this, Qin Zhenjiang's face was full of disappointment. "The sole reason I painstakingly sent you to this college was for you to find a girl! The only thing you know is to cultivate! Cultivate my ass! If you continue cultivating this way, the Qin family will be finished!"

Qin Zhulu's eyelid twitched. He couldn't be bothered to continue with this conversation, so he turned to leave.

Qin Zhenjiang stared at his departing figure before grunting with a dissatisfied tone. He then went to search for his housekeeper to question further. "How is Little Lu at college? Did he get to meet any girls?"

The housekeeper duly replied, "The Young Master has two female squadmates. Unfortunately, he has continued to resist their influences. In this entire year, he has only gotten closer to that Li Luo person. In fact, their relationship isn't bad at all."

"Li Luo? You mean House Luolan's Young Lord? Wait. No. He's the House Lord now. I've heard about what happened at the Housemeet." Qin Zhenjiang stroked his bearded chin as he helplessly continued, "That blockhead didn't try to get closer to females but chose to mess around with a guy?"

His expression turned horrified a moment later. "Could it be that Little Lu is interested in men?"

The housekeeper smiled awkwardly. There was no easy answer to this question.

Qin Zhenjiang had a pained expression on his face before he clenched his teeth. "Go and find Little Lu. Let him know that his father is someone with an open mind. If he likes males, it's not like there's no solution to this..."

The housekeeper shrunk backwards. How could he dare to say such words? Even if he wanted to die, there were better ways to do so!

Fortunately, after Qin Zhenjiang muttered to himself for a while longer, he finally dropped the subject.

"Who has sent representatives thus far?"

The housekeeper nodded and then replied, "Both the Regent and the First Princess have dispatched people to invite you to their gatherings, General."

Qin Zhenjiang waved his hand.

"Reject both of them. Why do they persist in such meaningless activity? If they want to fight, just do so. There's no need to beat around the bush. I will not choose. So long as the Xia Kingdom remains peaceful, that's all that matters. This is what my brothers have sacrificed their lives for."

Chapter 0679: Grand Ceremony

Xia City today was riddled with festive lights and decorations, submerged with endless ceremonial festivities. The atmosphere of the city was boiling over like a raging inferno, full of commotion and celebration.

House Luolan.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e had completed their preparations to leave for the coronation ceremony. This was an affair that concerned the entire Xia Kingdom, so they could not miss out on it.

Warm sunlight bathed the tall youth who stood before a flight of steps. His head of grayish-white hair seemed to glisten in the sunlight as a slight smile hung upon his handsome visage with well defined features. Anyone who saw him would naturally be charmed by his charismatic looks, giving rise to good feelings towards him.

Beside him was a female who possessed a slender body and was garbed in a combat dress, her skirt revealing her round thighs which shone like jade under the light. Her facial features were delicate but

pleasing to the eye. But in contrast with the youth beside her, she seemed slightly aloof. Her clear, golden eyes were like the most precious gems known to man, giving one the impression of a divine goddess. When they stood next to each other, it was a treat for the eyes.

This sight caused even the unhurried Mentor Chi Chan to pause for a moment as she made her way towards them.

"House Lord, Old Ox is unable to accompany you. It's lucky that you have Mentor Chi Chan. I feel significantly more relieved with her around." Ox Biaobiao had also rushed over to the duo with a smile before scratching his radiant, bald head. He then turned towards Chi Chan with a grin on his face. "Mentor Chi Chan, I will have to trouble you with the House Lords' safety."

Chi Chan was similarly very courteous towards this hidden Duke expert of House Luolan, and she smiled as well. "Brother Ox, you are too polite. However, the main character is not House Luolan. We are merely spectators, so things should be safe."

Ox Biaobiao sighed. "I hope so too. However, I can feel that today will be rife with danger, nothing less than what happened a few days ago during the Housemeet."

"Brother Ox, do you think there will be some hijinks during the coronation ceremony?" Chi Chan asked curiously with slightly furrowed brows.

"The Regent is not a kind and benevolent man. I don't believe he will willingly cede his power to others. Thus, there will undoubtedly be conflict. And when things escalate, the Xia Kingdom might be torn apart, our peace at an end," Ox Biaobiao replied.

As Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e listened, their expressions turned heavy. As citizens of the Xia Kingdom, the lack of peace would also significantly affect them.

"I understand." Chi Chan nodded.

"Either way, if things don't look good, you should retreat back to the headquarters as soon as possible. We have a defensive ward, so things should be considered safe here," Ox Biaobiao reminded her.

The other three agreed as well.

They did not continue to dawdle after that. They left the house and boarded the carriage, making their way towards the royal palace.

The journey was filled with celebratory festivities as things were in full swing.

Li Luo glanced out of the window and thought of Ox Biaobiao's previous reminder. This was still the place of his birth and he had lived here for over ten years. Although his ancestors were from the Inner Divine Continent and were of Heavenly Emperor Li's bloodline, he had no memory or affection towards that faraway land. Thus, he sincerely hoped that the Xia Kingdom would remain both peaceful and prosperous.

"The Regent is truly a scourge on the earth." Li Luo's eyes turned a little overcast. He and the Regent already possessed an irreconcilable feud just because that greedy bastard had plotted to take his parent's divine matter. He silently cursed that the Regent would simply just die on the spot.

If that man usurped the throne and took control of the entire Xia Kingdom, House Luolan's future days would be bleak.

As Li Luo continued to stew in his thoughts, the carriage arrived at the royal palace and the three got off. They took out the invitation provided by the First Princess and passed it to the guards who then respectfully escorted them in.

Li Luo swept his gaze throughout the royal palace as they stepped in. He could see that the entire location was heavily guarded and there were even numerous presences hidden within the shadows. It was obvious that they were on full alert with every single defense available deployed.

As the group made their way, he also managed to encounter numerous other guests that were all leaders of the Xia Kingdom's numerous factions and forces. The coronation ceremony was the time where the highest echelons of power were passed on, and thus the average individual would not have the right to be present.

After walking through the magnificent and breathtaking corridor for a period of time, the trio finally reached the end of the passage, where their view opened up. What entered their sight was a massive white jade square that was surrounded on all four sides by numerous jade seats. Countless people had already arrived and had made themselves comfortable.

Li Luo then turned his attention to the center of the white jade square, where there was a hundred-meter-high platform. It was almost like a sacrificial altar to the gods. On the platform itself were countless golden carpets that were shaped like dragons.

It was clear that the coronation ceremony would take place atop that platform.

The trio then followed the instructions of a female servant and moved to their assigned jade seats on the right side of the square. Their seats were situated at the very top, and Li Luo noticed some familiar figures.

At the very same time, another trio had just arrived on the opposite end. There was an emotionless middle-aged man followed by a male youth and a female youth. They were none other than House Duze's Duze Yan, Duze Beixuan, and Duze Honglian.

The two groups faced off against each other directly as they made momentary eye contact.

Li Luo gave his most radiant smile before cupping his fist and greeting Duze Yan respectfully. "Greetings, House Duze's lord." At that same time, several curious pairs of eyes shot his way.

Duze Yan shot Li Luo a single look but didn't seem intent on replying, directly making his way to his assigned seat.

Li Luo wasn't really affected by Duze Yan's indifferent attitude. How he treated him on the surface wasn't important when you considered how House Jinque's Si Qing often greeted Li Luo with compliments. The result? Si Qing had lobbed stones down at them when they were stuck in a well, even going as far as to seal off the well itself...

Thus, Li Luo was unconcerned with Duze Yan's insipid reaction. Instead, he turned his attention to Duze Beixuan before giving the warmest smile he could. "My good friend Xuan!"

Duze Beixuan's gaze turned frosty as he angrily glared at Li Luo. "Shut up!"

Li Luo, on the other hand, was genuinely taken aback at that malicious outburst...

Jiang Qing'e was looking at Duze Honglian, who had a complicated expression on her face. Although Qing'e did not say anything, she nodded in acknowledgement, basically greeting them as well.

Seeing that subtle action, Duze Honglian's heart started to palpitate nervously. Jiang Qing'e had only ever treated her coolly in the past, turning a complete blind eye to her presence. When had she even acted like she did today, taking the initiative to nod? This sudden change in treatment momentarily overwhelmed Duze Honglian. However, she immediately felt a little annoyed and ashamed at her state of mind, secretly berating herself for overreacting. Jiang Qing'e had merely nodded and she was completely affected...

She forced herself to compose herself and maintain a poker face, merely nodding back slightly before hurriedly catching up with Duze Yan.

With that brief encounter come to a close, the trio from House Luolan made their way to their own seats.

However, just a few steps later, Li Luo halted as he saw the members of House Jinque before him. Si Qing, Si Tianming, and Si Qiuying.

Similarly, their group had spotted Li Luo's group, and all three had different expressions for a brief moment.

Chapter 0680: The Prologue Kicks Off

Li Luo's eyelid twitched slightly as he faced House Jinque's party. Unfazed, he mustered the most genial smile he could as he casually swaggered over and engaged Si Qing in conversation. "House Lord Si Qing, you look more and more energetic as time goes by!"

Looking at Li Luo taking the initiative to walk over, Si Qing similarly beamed at him. "Li Luo, you're truly the outstanding one. Merely at the One Star Hall but already in the Fiend Palace Tier. I think House Luolan will have another Duke in a few years' time."

"No, no, no, you're being too kind. If Sister Qing'e and I can reach the Duke Stage in three years' time and if my parents return, House Luolan will have four Dukes! Wait..." Li Luo paused for a moment and pointed towards Mentor Chi Chan. "Silly me, I forgot! We have Mentor Chi Chan over there as well. She recently joined House Luolan. Oh yeah, I almost forgot about Uncle Biao. He might be a little injured, but his situation is improving! If he recovers in three years..."

Li Luo started to count with his fingers. One, two... before finally waving six fingers before Si Qing as he seriously said, "It looks like House Luolan will have six Dukes then!"

When faced with this sight, even Si Qing's enthusiasm was dampened.

Six Dukes?

That was a monstrous fighting force.

Although he knew that Li Luo's intention was to frighten him, Si Qing naturally felt flustered deep down for a moment. But he gradually calmed himself down. Although Jiang Qing'e had the possibility of reaching the Duke Stage in three years' time, could Li Luo really achieve the same feat? Whether Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan would return was still up in the air as well. Meanwhile, if Ox Biaobiao truly could recover from his injuries so easily, he would not have sequestered himself away from sight within House Luolan's headquarters for all these years.

Thus, logically thinking through the facts allowed Si Qing to recover his composure, and he replied in a measured tone, "Then I do hope that your hopes come true, Nephew Li Luo!"

If the Regent were to gain the throne today, would he allow House Luolan, a house he held great enmity towards, to survive till Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan returned? Unlikely.

Li Luo smiled and nodded. He no longer continued to provoke Si Qing, only glancing at Si Tianming and Si Qiuying, who had complicated expressions on their faces. Si Qing then smiled and nodded before heading to his seat.

Jiang Qing'e, on the other hand, stood aside, her indifferent gaze never even so much as looking in their direction. Clearly, she now treated them as enemies. Her personality was different from Li Luo's. Li Luo would still attempt to put in some effort to maintain a friendly facade, but for her, the next time she greeted them might very well be the last.

This caused Si Tianming and Si Qiuying to look even more despondent.

Some actions were irrevocable, forever irreconcilable.

The two were ultimately members of House Jinque, and Si Qing was their father. There was no way for them to separate themselves from this relationship of blood. Thus, Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo would gradually drift apart from them. In the future, they might very well find themselves on opposite ends of the battlefield.

After walking past the trio from House Jinque, Li Luo finally found House Luolan's assigned seats.

He plonked down upon the cushioned white jade seats and then continued to gaze around curiously. On a row of seats to the rightmost, he noticed Yu Hongxi, Lu Qing'er, and a group of senior officials from the Golden Dragon Bank. The ceremony today had far reaching influence, so even a neutral faction would participate.

As he was in the midst of his thoughts, he suddenly heard Mentor Chi Chan lightly informing him of something. "Vice Principal Su Xin is here."

Li Luo hurriedly turned his head and saw a large group of individuals entering the square. At the head of the group was none other than the vice principal. It seemed the Astral Sage College was attending this as well.

The Astral Sage College had dispatched countless Violet Vibrance mentors, and it was an impressive delegation to behold. All of the numerous heads of the different factions who were nearby similarly stood up and greeted Vice Principal Su Xin, the latter returning them a refreshing smile.

However, when Vice Principal Su Xin arrived at Li Luo's position, her smile receded slightly as she coolly studied him and Chi Chan. "Li Luo, don't you think you have established a few too many records in my college?"

It was evident that she was referring to how he had managed to convince Chi Chan to join House Luolan.

Li Luo, on the other hand, put on an expression of sincerity. "Vice Principal Su Xin, you are too polite. As a member of the college, breaking records is my greatest honor and responsibility!"

This was met with a cold snort. "Don't you dare overdo things. Although you are a promising sprout, the Astral Sage College can do without you. The college has not concluded on how to deal with Chi Chan's situation. If there are any investigations, I hope that you will cooperate fully."

"Of course I will!" Li Luo nodded enthusiastically.

The surrounding factions had taken notice of their little exchange. Mentor Chi Chan had resigned from the Astral Sage College at a critical moment and even had the audacity to tie up House Lanling. This was news that had spread widely, especially since she had opted to join House Luolan after that. This completely startled everyone who knew as it seemed to cast a shadow over the Astral Sage College's perceived neutrality. If they were subtly supporting House Luolan, wouldn't it naturally bring many questions?

But Vice Principal Su Xin's accusatory tone seemed to indicate that the situation was not what it seemed.

Whether this calling of accounts was real or not, on the surface it seemed as though the college disapproved of the actions taken.

After admonishing Li Luo, Su Xin expressionlessly walked away, while the remaining Violet Vibrance mentors looked at Li Luo and Chi Chan with peculiar eyes. This situation had become the hottest topic in the college over the past few days, and there were even rumors that Chi Chan had special feelings towards Li Luo. Still, this rumor was so unbelievable that every logical individual scoffed upon hearing it, but it was still spicy news that people lapped up.

"The mentors looked at me a little strangely..." Li Luo lamented as the Astral Sage College contingent moved away.

"The Vice Principal is merely putting up an act. You don't need to worry about her targeting you." Mentor Chi Chan laughed.

"That I know. She's already done so much to help me. Even if she wanted to beat me up, I would willingly accept it!" Li Luo said stoically.

"Still... you two were also involved in this as much as I was. Why did she choose me to be the scapegoat and give me such an earful?! It's so unfair!" he continued to grumble. His words did not go unnoticed, and the other two rolled their eyes. This brat had already received so many advantages, yet he still pretended to be dumb? Truly hateful and deserving of a good wallop!

As they continued to speak, a slight commotion broke out atop the platform itself as horns blared. One could see two rows of individuals make their way out from the corridor.

One row was led by the Regent, Gong Yuan, while the other was led by the First Princess, Gong Luanyu.

The two rows seemed to be walking closely together, but a sharper eye could discern that they were as immiscible as water and oil, on guard against each other.

With their appearance, everyone's gazes were focused upon them.

The Regent and the First Princess were the main characters of today's play.

Although it was the Little Emperor's coronation ceremony, he was still young and immature. His power would undoubtedly be controlled by the First Princess as she represented his interests.

Despite the dark undercurrents swirling beneath the surface, the Regent and the First Princess continued to banter happily, no different from an uncle meeting his favored niece.

Under the watchful eye of the audience, the Regent and the First Princess finally ascended to the highest platform where there were three golden, stone seats. The two then took their positions on the left and rightmost seats.

Atop the white jade square, a grand and majestic prelude took place before the event officially began. Countless loud drums boomed into the sky, reverberating throughout the royal palace.

Anyone who heard the thunderous booms of the celebratory drums would instinctively be reminded of the heroic vigor of cavalry and battle-hardened soldiers.

Everyone continued to observe the situation atop the platform cautiously, paying attention to every single minute movement. They were awaiting the official beginning of the coronation ceremony.

Time crawled past as the lengthy prelude slowly passed by.

Until the sun reached the zenith.

The drumming had reached a peak, deafening booms ringing throughout the square. Everyone's hearts seemed to skip a beat for an instant before they regained their composure. They were now focusing on a specific corner of the white jade square, where a massive, golden dragon chariot carried by hundreds of people slowly made its way, completely surrounded by the guard of honor.

The frail Little Emperor could be seen atop the golden chariot.

His tense expression seemed to give off an air of solemnity.

This was it. Everyone knew that the coronation ceremony that would change the fate of the Xia Kingdom had finally started.