

Resonance 271

Chapter 0271: Commander

Chaos greeted Jiang Qing'e's implied accusation, and suddenly the students were looking at each other with doubt and fear in their eyes.

The students started to edge away from each other, and soon enough there was good distance between each squad, and even among squadmates.

Although they did not know if the Heavenly Disaster Class Other Jiang Qing'e kept talking about was real, it couldn't hurt to be safe, right?

The seniors knew how horrifying the Umbra Cave could be.

Nightmares beyond imagination.

"Senior Jiang, you're just causing chaos!" Song Qiuyu accused her.

Jiang Qing'e ignored this. She instead turned to the students and smiled.

A bright and radiant smile that took their breath away.

Many eyes widened in surprise. And then, infected by her charm, they smiled too.

They quickly suppressed their smiles—it was embarrassing after all.

But...

Not everyone could stop smiling.

A few among the crowd smiled wider and wider, until their jaw muscles strained and tore under the pressure.

Maniacal grins on bloody faces.

Splash! "Roar!"

Teammates turned on teammates, struck dumb by the sudden changes. Screams sounded out.

Amidst the screaming, mad laughter, and suddenly resonant power was flying back and forth as the maddened students started to attack everything in range.

The entire scene dissolved into chaos.

"Don't panic! Work together! Subdue them!" Li Luo shouted above the din.

To their credit, the Astral Sage College students recovered quite quickly. They rallied promptly, and soon, concerted attacks were being put together to take down the corrupted students.

A few brief but bloody moments later, those students were lying on the ground, heavily wounded.

The students were still reeling in shock. They had not suspected that their own friends had already been corrupted, so stealthily and on such a large scale.

Li Luo hopped down from the raised platform they had been standing on, sauntering up to Song Qiuyu, who was gaping like a fish out of water, her hand pressed hard over her mouth.

"Put your hand down. And give me a smile," Li Luo told her.

Song Qiuyu glared at him. This bastard was taunting her.

"If you don't dare to smile, I'll have to suspect you're corrupted. Then I'll have to attack," Li Luo said, casually unsheathing his shortswords and giving them a few test swings.

Song Qiuyu looked around to her friends for help, but they were more leery now. In such strange times, they didn't think Li Luo was joking around.

She removed her hand and bared her teeth in close resemblance to a smile. "Happy?"

"According to our findings, smiling might help expose the seed of corruption within a person. You are a prime suspect because of how opposed you have been to us so far. I would like you to smile for a full hour to be sure," Li Luo said gravely.

Song Qiuyu froze. An hour?

She glared angrily at him. He had to be kidding.

Li Luo ignored her and turned to the other squads. "Are you convinced now? Ordinary corrupting illusion realms are not this dangerous."

They muttered in agreement.

"Now is not the time to panic," Tian Tian called loudly. "We should secure this purified spot and see to our own defenses. We might be able to stand against it. Our mission here is to buy time for the school to get word and send us reinforcements."

Everyone nodded, heartened by the plan.

"Senior Jiang, we'll do anything you say!" one student called.

"That's right. Senior Jiang, you're the leader in the Three Star Hall, and according to the school rules, you can assume the mantle of overall commander in emergencies. All of us will obey you."

More and more voices called out in support of her leadership, convinced by her reputation.

Jiang Qing'e had no interest in titles, but there was coordination of forces to be done, and she could do it.

She shared a quick look with Li Luo and then stepped forward. "Place the corrupted students near the stone tower. The purified light will cleanse them.

"Place mirrors at all the entrances to the purified spot. All entering students must maintain a one-minute smile before they can enter."

The thought of students smiling into mirrors for a full minute would usually be a pretty comical thought, but not when the sight of bloody cheeks and lop-sided mania was fresh in their minds.

They shuddered instead.

"Li Luo was right—smiles might well be the trigger for the seeds of corruption. Still, I suspect it is only a superficial trigger for those not seriously corrupted. In any case, it's a good first pass," Jiang Qing'e warned.

They nodded seriously. Seeds of corruption could indeed be buried deep. The Heavenly Disaster Class Other was going to be troublesome enough. They had to make sure their own teammates were at least on their side.

Next, Jiang Qing'e divided them into sections and allocated work to bolster their defenses. She was relieved to see them hurrying off to fulfill their tasks. Things were finally moving in a good direction.

They had done all they could now. All that remained was to hope that the Heavenly Disaster Class was going to spend more time roaming outside.

Given how Others usually worked, it would probably lead an entire horde of Others to attack them all at once.

Tower defense in real life.

Now Jiang Qing'e was the overall commander, and that changed the dynamic here. They were preparing for war now.

At the entrances, squads were still streaming in, and naturally there were some arguments over the strange new security measures. But after the first corrupted student was exposed, there were no more arguments.

Gradually, the student numbers swelled to a respectable size, and all of them had cleared the smiling test and were now put to work.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were standing on top of a tall tower, surveying the horizon. In the half a month since the purging mission had begun, much of the black mist had cleared away.

But the blackness in the distance still left them uneasy.

"Qing'e," Li Luo suddenly said, "why do you think a Heavenly Disaster Class Other has made its way here?"

She looked at him in surprise. "What do you suspect?"

He shrugged. "Just a feeling... Heavenly Disaster Class means Heavenly Dipper General, right? Not even the Seven Astral Pillars could deal with it safely."

"Afraid?" she asked, reaching out to put a comforting hand on the top of his head.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you."

Li Luo huffed. "One day I'll be able to do that back to you."

Amusement arose in her eyes.

"Do your best. I'll be waiting."

She pulled out the map to study it as part of her routine, but Li Luo saw her eyes widen in alarm.

"What's wrong?"

She pointed to an area on the map.

"A level two purification tower we reactivated before. It's been corrupted again."

Li Luo looked to see where she pointed. Indeed, one of the glowing towers from before had gone dark again.

Chapter 0272: Rescue

A previously reactivated level two purification tower was now corrupted again.

Li Luo knew what that meant.

Clearly no ordinary Other could have done it. Perhaps not even an Earthly Disaster Class Other could do it.

It had to be the grinning son of a—what was it a son of, exactly?

In any case, it was clearly on the move, and by the looks of it, it was heading towards the purified zone...

Not good.

It was moving faster than they expected.

"I think it was Duze Honglian's group that reactivated it," Li Luo said.

Jiang Qing'e nodded.

"That's not good. They're not back yet, right?"

He wasn't too fond of the Duze siblings, but they would be a strong addition to the team.

Duze Honglian was very strong, even within the Three Star Hall.

Jiang Qing'e shook her head. "I've been keeping an eye out. No word of them. But if they're smart enough, they should almost be back."

"Hopefully." Li Luo sighed, rubbing his brow worriedly. Why couldn't the Umbra Cave just be a simple point-gathering mission?

One worry after another.

Hopefully, the school would respond soon.

...

Astral Sage College, in a large, underground basement with an unusual layout.

The ground and walls were covered in roots.

People walked back and forth, carrying supplies and other things.

On a few raised platforms of stone, some people were sitting in the lotus position, each one holding a thick root. Light was constantly being sent out through these roots.

One of them opened their eyes suddenly, a bright, green leaf in his hand.

"Emergency!" he called in a hoarse tone.

Everyone turned, and a Violet Vibrance mentor hurried over. He took the leaf and examined the message.

He paled. "Heavenly Disaster Class at purified spot 13?"

"How much longer before the next transport?" he demanded of those beside him.

"Seven days... we just used it today."

He frowned. That was too long. If there was truly a Heavenly Disaster Class, it would swallow all the students in a flash.

The defenses of the purified spot would probably not last.

Once it fell, all of the students there would fall alongside it.

That would be a catastrophe for the school, and it would affect its reputation all over the Xia Kingdom.

Not good at all.

"Damn! How did a Heavenly Disaster Class Other make it into the outer zone? Who's at purified spot 13?"

Someone quickly handed him a name list, which he scanned.

"Jiang Qing'e? Duze Honglian? That's the cream of the third year crop for sure... but not even they would be able to take on a Heavenly Disaster Class..." Jiang Qing'e, Duze Honglian, and Li Luo were all elite students in school, and they were closely watched by the higher-ups. If anything happened to them, there would be trouble.

He made a quick decision.

"Send word to the Four Star Hall students closest to purified spot 13. Get them to support the purified spot with haste."

"Yes, Sir!"

He let out a long, frustrated sigh.

"I hope they make it in time."

...

Deeper in the Umbra Cave, the sweeping zone was where Four Star Hall students and some Gold Gleam mentors usually worked.

There were virtually no white eroders here. The weakest were red eroders, and Disaster Class Others were rather common, although not yet rampant.

They would occasionally find Heavenly Disaster Class Others here, and the battles with those were always perilously close.

All the Four Star Hall students in a certain area suddenly received a message on their greenwood comforters.

An SOS signal, urgent, sent from the school.

Save purified spot 13.

The sudden request left them fumbling, unprepared for the likes of such a big threat appearing in the back line.

But the Umbra Cave was vast beyond belief, and they were the closest. However, it would take ages for them to arrive on the scene.

They might not make it!

At a gathering point in the zone.

The squad here had received the same signal, and they were currently debating it. Were they going to make it in time? If they couldn't, wouldn't it be a wasted journey?

The most striking figure in their midst was the First Princess.

She was clad in a shift of light lavender. Despite its practical and modest cutting, the rich material belied the true worth of its wearer. "Purified spot 13? Where Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e are? That's unlucky..."

She tapped her chin thoughtfully, conflicted.

The other Four Star Hall squads were still arguing around her when she stood up and tapped her staff of white jade against the ground with a low thunk.

The group quietened.

Her usually-smiling face was uncharacteristically stern and stiff.

"Enough," said her icy voice of steel. "Our fellow students are in mortal danger. If we do not go, all of them will die in this barren land.

"If you are no longer students of the Astral Sage College, I can ask nothing of you. But if you are... we have a duty to save them.

"Whether we make it in time or not is a question for later. We will not give up on them."

She turned and headed out of the purified spot.

Immediately, a group of Four Star Hall students followed her.

The others shared resigned looks before finally slouching their way after her. Soon enough, the spot was empty.

The First Princess' commanding presence in the Four Star Hall was undisputed.

She was not surprised to hear their footsteps hurrying after her, but her eyes were staring far away in the direction of purified spot 13.

Mainly because of Li Luo.

The key to her little brother's treatment.

"Li Luo... hold on."

Chapter 0273: A Deep Corruption

By the third day that purified spot 13 had laid in their defenses, roughly 80 percent of the teams had made it back. Their base was swelling with numbers.

Still, there was a worry that hung over them like a dark cloud. This would be their first encounter with a Heavenly Disaster Class.

There were also many students who had their seeds of corruption exposed upon their return. Each time, a wave of panic arose, leaving a sickly and lingering fear in the air even after it was dealt with.

It was a powerful engine of paranoia. One moment, you were laughing with a trusted teammate. The next, their laughter would turn to an evil cackle, and they would be ready to gouge your eyes out.

This Heavenly Disaster Class was far more sinister than any Disaster Class that the third years had come across before.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e kept a close watch on the purification towers, and they saw that they were going dim in a line.

Getting ever closer to the purified spot.

The Heavenly Disaster Class Other was coming.

A terrifying truth to accept.

There was nothing else they could do but fortify the purified spot and pray for reinforcements.

One day, news came that Duze Honglian's squad had shown up outside the purified spot.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e immediately hurried over to the entrance. They had been very interested in their movements. Duze Honglian's squad was the second strongest, right behind Black Swan. Their presence in the purified spot would be a welcome infusion of strength.

And also...

Duze Honglian's group had been pushing in the exact opposite direction as the line of dimmed purification towers.

Which meant that if they had been bold enough, they might have encountered that terror in the flesh. Which was not good news.

Just the traces it had left behind were already enough to cause widespread panic and turn students. A face-to-face encounter? They had best be wary against Duze Honglian's group.

As they drew close to the gate, they heard raised voices between the student guards and Duze Honglian's group.

Both sides ceased when Jiang Qing'e showed up.

"What's going on?" she asked, her quiet voice radiating with power.

"Senior Jiang, they're trying to barge in and not pass the Vile Smile Mirror!" one of the guards protested.

Vile Smile Mirror was the nickname that had emerged among the students. Despite its silly name, everyone respected the importance of the test. If Duze Honglian ignored it, she was risking all of their lives.

Jiang Qing'e turned her cool gaze to the incoming squad. "They want us to waste time grinning here like idiots? What nonsense," they said defensively.

Jiang Qing'e looked closer. Beneath their righteous bluster, there was fear lurking in their eyes.

Ye Qiuding's eyes were hooded as well.

Jiang Qing'e examined each of them carefully, noting that Duze Honglian was being carried by another member. Her face looked pale as death.

She had remained silent all this while, but she returned Jiang Qing'e's scrutinizing gaze defiantly.

"You're badly hurt." Jiang Qing'e walked around until she was close to Duze Honglian. "You met the Heavenly Disaster Class, didn't you?" There was a knowing look in her golden eyes.

The students around them gasped and took two inadvertent steps backwards.

"None of your damned business!" Duze Honglian hissed.

"Ordinarily, it isn't. But the thing is coming here, and soon. We have to make sure there's no corruption in our ranks," Jiang Qing'e said calmly. "Duze Honglian. Tell me: are you corrupted?"

Duze Honglian looked away.

The golden eyes swept across the incoming members again, calculating, assessing, judging.

"Put her down," Jiang Qing'e suddenly said.

The student hesitated, but they eventually set the girl down gently. She was weak from injuries and pain, and her legs buckled under her. Jiang Qing'e caught her before she hit the floor.

Duze Honglian slumped helplessly against the golden-haired girl. "Jiang Qing'e, what are you doing?!" Jiang Qing'e ignored her, instead running a finger lightly across the girl's back. She sensed a slight, prickling pain in her own finger.

Eyes widening, she ordered female students to form a circle for privacy, with Duze Honglian in the middle.

Ignoring Duze Honglian's protests, Jiang Qing'e ripped her shirt off, and she grimaced at what she saw.

The female students screamed and ran away.

Right in the middle of Duze Honglian's back was a sinister face, grinning and moving.

Jiang Qing'e quickly put the shirt back on Duze Honglian. This was not good. It seemed almost branded on her back, a much deeper mark than the other seeds of corruption they had seen so far.

"Greedy for school points, you wanted to clear the empty purification towers behind the Heavenly Disaster Class. But you ended up tangling with it?" Jiang Qing'e guessed.

Sullen silence.

"The corruption is deep, very deep. Before too long, it will start eating you from the inside out. You will then become a puppet for that Other."

Jiang Qing'e reached out a hand to pat Duze Honglian on the waist. "This beautiful thing will soon be pulp."

Now Duze Honglian's fear showed on her face, mixed with despair and a desperate craving for life.

She reached out to grab Jiang Qing'e's wrist in a vice-like grip, swallowing her pride.

"Jiang- Jiang Qing'e... help me!"

Chapter 0274: Duze Honglian's Squad Returns

The rivalry between Duze Honglian and Jiang Qing'e had started even before their time at the Astral Sage College.

Both of them were personal disciples of their respective house lords, and of the same age. As a result, they had always been compared to each other.

But Jiang Qing'e always came out victorious in every aspect.

For someone as proud as Duze Honglian, it was grating. Years of accumulation had made it a sore spot on her ego, and in her mind, Jiang Qing'e was her greatest rival.

Moreover, their houses were in conflict, and there were many points of friction between their houses, further curdling their relationship.

Nothing changed when they entered the Astral Sage College. Duze Honglian declared war on Jiang Qing'e on day one, but whether she liked it or not, the gap between the two never stopped widening.

That was perhaps the most crushing thing for Duze Honglian.

She was too proud to give up the fight against Jiang Qing'e, but now, faced with her own imminent demise to the corruption, her pride had finally cracked.

She was begging her greatest rival to save her.

It had taken all of her courage, and now the shame within her was burning as strongly as the wounds on her back. She closed her eyes and turned her face away.

Jiang Qing'e showed no emotion at Duze Honglian's admission of defeat. She had personally never seen Duze Honglian as a rival—it had always been one-sided. Her own eyes had always been set higher.

"The corruption is too deep. I'm not sure if I can banish it," Jiang Qing'e said softly. Duze Honglian stiffened in defiance. She made to shrug the other girl off, unwilling to keep begging her rival.

"But.

"I will try. If I don't, you will become a puppet of the madness. Strengthened by it, you would be a great threat to us."

Duze Honglian sank back down in despair.

"Both your squads must maintain your smiles in front of the Vile Smile Mirror. And check yourselves from head to toe for traces of smile marks. Then we will place you under supervision. You will not be allowed to wander, not until all suspicion has been cleared," Jiang Qing'e said to the others, Ye Qiuding included.

The two squads looked rather unhappy about it. Jiang Qing'e was jailing them.

"It's nothing personal. But you've had actual contact with the Heavenly Disaster Class, and Duze Honglian is deeply corrupted. We don't know how clean you are. These are necessary measures that no one is immune from. Comply, or be subdued."

A fierce Jiang Qing'e was a rare sight, and the two squads quickly obeyed.

They stood before the Vile Smile Mirror and smiled. Everyone was relieved when none of them lost control.

Everyone except Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e, who exchanged worried looks.

The mirror test often revealed superficial corruption. Which meant that they were possibly too corrupted to stumble at this test.

Still, that was just a guess. They could not bar them from entering the purified spot on that pessimistic guess alone. Plus, if they were left outside, the grinning demon would take control of them even more quickly.

They were allowed in.

"Qiu Bai, Tian Tian, arrange an escort and make sure they are closely guarded," Jiang Qing'e said in a low voice.

They nodded and stepped forward.

"Can you still walk?" Jiang Qing'e asked the weakened Duze Honglian.

She angrily brushed Jiang Qing'e's hand aside and started forward, but she stumbled after two steps, her body going limp.

Jiang Qing'e's hand snaked out under her buckling knees, sweeping her up into her arms like a baby.

Wow.

It was a miraculous sight, the proudest challenger, Duze Honglian, the prickly flame, now gently cradled by the golden princess.

Drastic. Sensational.

Even Duze Honglian was flustered. "Jiang Qing'e," she spluttered, "put me down right now!"

"Do you think we have time to waste? The grinning demon will arrive soon. When it triggers the seed of corruption within you, no one will be able to save you," Jiang Qing'e snapped at her.

There was no one else Jiang Qing'e trusted to carry Duze Honglian, not when the corruption was so deep. Only her, with her natural resistance to corruption.

She moved wordlessly, carrying Duze Honglian to a stone room in a tower, where she laid Duze Honglian down on a bed of granite.

"On your belly."

Duze Honglian complied, and then she heard a ripping sound as Jiang Qing'e tore her clothes away to reveal her back.

The sinister grin was still there.

Jiang Qing'e regarded it for a moment, then pulled out a bottle of purification dust, which was intended for reactivating purification towers.

She dashed the dust on the grin.

Phish!

Black smoke spurted out like water thrown on bubbling oil.

The reaction was violent, and Duze Honglian tensed from the pain, veins bulging on her hands as her fingers clawed against the stone. She fought for control against the agony.

Stubborn pride alone stopped her from crying out, and she gritted her teeth.

"Roar!"

The grinning face gurgled, and its mouth opened wider. Then it retched the purification dust back out.

Except now the dust was completely black, its purification power completely spent.

Cackling laughter taunted them.

"Purification dust is useless. It will consume my flesh and use it to negate it," Duze Honglian said weakly.

"Which means the face is already joined to your flesh. I have to defeat it first and sever the link with your body before it can be banished. Otherwise, I'll kill you in the process."

"How can you possibly banish a Heavenly Disaster Class mark? Surely it's beyond even your ninth-grade light resonance?"

"Indeed. So I will need an assistant." Jiang Qing'e turned to the door. "Come in."

A figure slipped in, and Duze Honglian raised her head to see that it was Li Luo.

If she had any strength at all, she would have screamed. Or perhaps burned him down to ashes. How could he just saunter in when she was half-naked on the bed?!

Her face reddened.

"Jiang Qing'e, you're just having fun, aren't you?!"

Chapter 0275: Courting Humiliation

"Jiang Qing'e, what's the meaning of this!?" Duze Honglian spat as she remained chest down on the bed, afraid to get up.

"If I were a Heavenly Dipper General, I could cleanse the corruption by myself," Jiang Qing'e said calmly. "But I'm not. So I need a helper."

"There are many qualified female students around, couldn't you get them?! What could a second-tier Resonant Master like Li Luo do?!"

"He has dual resonances. Even though he can't hold it for long, the power he can produce is of a higher level than any of us. It's best suited to take down the corruption."

"Besides, Li Luo was taken in by the grinning demon's corrupting illusion realm once before. He broke out by himself thanks to his dual resonances, and he was completely uncorrupted afterwards."

"Something that none of you managed."

Duze Honglian couldn't believe her ears. A corrupting illusion realm powerful enough to trip up veterans like themselves—a mere second-tier Resonant Master had beaten them?

Then again, Jiang Qing'e had never been one to lie about these things.

Could Li Luo really be the one to help her cleanse the corruption?

She squirmed uneasily at the thought, her naked back exposed to Li Luo. If he was going to put his filthy hands all over her skin, she would probably faint.

"Duze Honglian, I'll say it once again. I have no time to care about your pride or modesty. When the grinning demon appears, it will trigger the corruption in your body, make you its puppet, and force you to turn on us. I will not have that happen," Jiang Qing'e said severely.

"Shelve your pride. Remember how badly it served you when it drove you to get those purification tower points and landed you in this."

Duze Honglian bit back an angry retort, the shame of the truth burning within her. She turned her head to the other side, implying her acceptance of Li Luo's presence.

Li Luo walked forward a little sheepishly. Jiang Qing'e had been pretty harsh.

"Must I really be here?" he whispered. "Seems a little inappropriate."

"Life and death is at hand," Jiang Qing'e said, face unchanging. "Every other detail is minor. Besides, I only need you to help suppress the grinning face for a moment. Nothing else."

"Er, got it. What do you need me to do?"

"Use your dual resonances to scatter the face for a moment, separating the link with her flesh. I'll cleanse it then," Jiang Qing'e said tersely.

Li Luo nodded. A simple enough plan.

He carefully examined the grin on Duze Honglian's back, sizing up the problem.

Her figure was very good, and her skin was lustrous in areas not touched by the grin's marring the complexion... He'd better stop staring, or Jiang Qing'e might kill him.

He called forth water and wood, resonant powers mixing within his palms in a soothing glow.

He pressed his palms against her back, and Duze Honglian stiffened at the contact. A light shiver ran down her spine at the warmth.

Weng!

The dual resonances attacked the grinning face.

A wrenching crack sounded, almost like a bone breaking. The grin was smashed right through the center, and the remnants formed thin, black lines that escaped deeper into the flesh.

Duze Honglian grunted in pain, cold sweat beading on her forehead.

This was even worse than before.

Jiang Qing'e pounced, her light resonant energy shining forth from one hand as she poured the purification dust with the other.

Purification dust infused with light resonant energy. It fell like golden sand, glittering and dancing on Duze Honglian's back.

Phish!

Black steam began to billow from Duze Honglian's back, escaping from every pore at speed.

Li Luo was encouraged by this. It meant the cleansing was working.

This process lasted for an entire hour.

Finally, Duze Honglian's back was no longer a billowing chimney of black smoke. When the last wisp faded away into the air, the grinning face was completely gone.

Jiang Qing'e retched from the exertion. She then wiped the sweat from her brow and squatted down. The cleansing was a straightforward process, but it had demanded clockwork control over her resonant power as she forced each piece of the corruption out of the body.

Duze Honglian looked to be in equally bad shape, fatigued by the various powers fighting within her body.

"What are you waiting for? Get him out of here!" she snarled weakly.

Jiang Qing'e nodded to Li Luo. "Go on first."

Li Luo shrugged. It's me, Li Luo, your tool. Use me and throw me away.

Still, it was always prudent to keep a safe distance from a thorny rose like Duze Honglian. He left quickly.

Duze Honglian's body slumped down further with relief, her expression complex.

"Best not pull the you've-seen-me-naked, now-take-responsibility thing on my fiancée," Jiang Qing'e said mildly. "There are many empty rooms in House Luolan, but you're welcome in none of them for hanky panky business."

Duze Honglian snorted. "You think a lady like me would hanker after your little rascal?"

Then she suddenly smiled. "Say, Jiang Qing'e, at a crook of my finger, I could have Li Luo infatuated over me and divorcing you. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"You?" Jiang Qing'e said with a half-smile.

Duze Honglian felt vaguely humiliated by that. In the privacy of the room, she came to her knees, arching her back sensuously and showing off the full beauty of her curves.

"I what?"

Jiang Qing'e stood up, crossing her arms across her own ample chest.

"Not bad, I guess. But in all these years, when have you ever beaten me in anything? You'll just be courting more humiliation."

Chapter 0276: Heavenly Disaster Arrives

Jiang Qing'e's simple statement was like a slap across Duze Honglian's face.

She quietly sniffed and then dropped the topic. After all, she was the one who taunted Jiang Qing'e first, and now it had backfired.

Besides, she would never do such a thing as seduce Li Luo.

So what if Jiang Qing'e cooed and fawned over his dual resonances like a precious baby? She wasn't so keen.

Compared to truly stellar men like Gong Shenjun, Li Luo was merely a commoner.

Duze Honglian rose and draped a shirt over her gorgeous body, hiding the curves. Her face was still a little wan, but she was moving with a lot more health now.

"Best use what time we have to recover. The Heavenly Disaster Class Other is coming. I hope that you can be of use when it does. And not a waste of our efforts," Jiang Qing'e said as she headed for the door.

Duze Honglian scowled. The prickliness between them had not faded at all. "Jiang Qing'e," she called out grudgingly, "I owe you two for this."

"But don't think that will change my attitude towards you. We stand at opposites because of our houses. As a House Duze representative, I will continue to move to crush House Luolan without mercy."

Jiang Qing'e paused and tilted her head back. "Don't overthink this. We saved you not because of your status, we just didn't want you to become a problem later."

"As for how you treat House Luolan, it does not matter at all. All these years, none of what you have plotted has mattered at all. So don't overestimate yourself, or underestimate House Luolan."

She pushed open the door and left.

Duze Honglian scowled as the door swung shut. So all that she had done was nothing, was it?

As if House Luolan hadn't been limping for all these years!

If not for Li Luo's resurrection of the Suncreek Villa, House Luolan would still be dirt poor.

Li Luo. Her scowl softened, then it hardened again. The little brat had seen her naked on the bed already.

Damn Jiang Qing'e! She had definitely done it on purpose!

"Ah, shit," Duze Honglian swore before sitting down in the lotus position on the bed to recover her strength.

...

Jiang Qing'e descended the stone tower and saw Li Luo waiting for her at the bottom.

"Is she going to be okay?"

Jiang Qing'e nodded.

"Ah, to think that we would end up helping her..." Li Luo sighed. Duze Honglian had caused House Luolan trouble multiple times in the past. They were as immiscible as oil and water, but now water had saved oil.

"Even without Duze Honglian, House Duze would still continue their war on House Luolan. It's a question of house stance. Besides, we're in an emergency. We're saving her to save ourselves."

Li Luo nodded. Best deal with the small problems underfoot before the big problem came knocking.

"Well, any gratitude, reflection, repentance, and all that?" He grinned.

"She says she intends to seduce you until you're head over heels for her, and then you'll divorce me," Jiang Qing'e said sweetly.

Li Luo's grin froze on his face. "Damn, what a treacherous woman," he said, trying to keep his face indignant. "We saved her, and she's trying to wreck us?!"

"Very vexed, are you?" She cocked an eye at him. "Very vexing figure she has as well, hmm?"

Li Luo hastily shook his head. "The only thing that vexed me in that room was how to deal with the grin."

"The grin on her back, and not your face, I trust?"

"Hey now," Li Luo whined. "That's very unreasonable of you. The one that got me in there was you. And now the one complaining about it is also you??"

Jiang Qing'e relented. "Well, if Duze Honglian wants to do that, you could seduce her right back. Then we could have a spy in House Duze."

Li Luo was speechless. How seductive would he have to be to get her to betray her own father? Then again, he knew Jiang Qing'e was joking, trying to blow off some stress in the midst of a very stressful day.

"Duze Honglian's corruption won't come back, will it?" he asked, trying to bring the conversation back to a straighter track.

"I think she's clean now. Corruption is always weakened the moment it is exposed. In fact, it's Ye Qiuding and the others that I'm worried about now."

Li Luo frowned. These seeds of corruption were a troublesome business. They could be hiding anywhere, and there was nothing they could do against an invisible enemy.

They couldn't very well ignore them either, waiting for these landmines to blow up under their feet. They had to ferret them out.

Jiang Qing'e's face darkened as she checked the map. "The closest purification tower has turned corrupted again now."

Li Luo's eyes widened. The tower was a mere half-day away. Which meant that the Heavenly Disaster Class Other would be here in that time.

Contact imminent.

"Can we really deal with it?" Li Luo asked.

A Heavenly Dipper General, and a very strong one at that. Even Gong Shenjun or the First Princess would have a hard time taking it on alone.

"Who knows? In another half-year, I might be able to take a good crack at it. At that time, I would welcome the challenge."

Li Luo's eyebrows flew up. Which meant that she believed she would make another giant breakthrough in half a year?

Was a ninth-grade light resonance really that awesome?

"Let's go. Get the word out, have people stand ready." Jiang Qing'e cut through his thoughts.

Li Luo swallowed and nodded.

As word spread of the Other's imminent arrival, the atmosphere of fear thickened another notch. Preparations were carried out with stiff hands and whispered words, although they could not explain why they were whispering.

Nervous glances were directed in the northwest direction, where the previously purified air was hazing over with a waxy, grey mist again.

The whispering was back now, and they could hear it pressing up against the barrier.

Half a day later, the grey mist was completely black again. It was like the first day they had entered the Umbra Cave.

An ear-splitting shriek rang out, and they stared in its direction. A black wave was roiling its way through the mist.

It looked like the end of the world, and many students felt a prickling of fear on their scalps.

The Heavenly Disaster Class Other was finally here.

Chapter 0277: The Siege of Others

The bubble of clean air in the purified spot was the last sanctuary left. Pressing against its barriers was black mist, and through the insubstantial border came whispering voices and wraith-like figures, weaving in and out of the mist.

Glowing red eyes stared hungrily into the bubble, eying the fresh meat within.

Li Luo, Jiang Qing'e, and a few others were standing on a tall wall, looking out at their enemy's disposition. As predicted, the Heavenly Disaster Class had brought a whole horde of minions with it.

Castle defense 101.

The light barrier that the tower emitted was keeping them safe for now, and as they stared out at the swirling, smoky mist, many students felt a little safer knowing that their structural defense was still intact.

As for how long this sense of safety would last, no one knew.

Duze Honglian was pacing the wall as well. After half a day, she had more or less recovered. "It's the same one," she whispered hoarsely. "I can sense it.

"It's unbelievably strong. I clashed with it for only a brief moment, and that was enough to succumb to such deep corruption. We don't stand a chance."

Li Luo wasn't too surprised at that result. Even an Earth Fiend like Duze Honglian was nothing in the face of a Heavenly Dipper General.

"It's likely that it even let you go just so you could lead it here," Jiang Qing'e pointed out.

Duze Honglian's jaw dropped in horror. Jiang Qing'e's words were blunt but probably true. Otherwise, she would not even have had the chance to escape.

"So what's the plan?" she asked.

Even though they were not on good terms, they were all grasshoppers on the same rope now. If they lost here, it was over for all of them.

"See how the purified spot's defenses hold up. If it can keep the Heavenly Disaster Class at bay until reinforcements come, that would be best," Li Luo answered.

"I hate to be the wet blanket, but don't get your hopes up on that," Duze Honglian said dryly.

Li Luo was quiet for a beat. Duze Honglian didn't seem willing to fight at all. She must have been scared into submission by her first encounter with the thing. But besides fighting against it with their full strength, what other option did they have?

Open the barrier up and surrender?

You'd have to be kidding.

As they spoke, they noticed that the black mist was moving most clearly above them. It parted and shifted, until it formed a large, grinning face in the air.

A grin all too familiar to the students below—it had haunted their every waking moment.

It wavered and flickered in the air, the shadowy eyes staring evilly down at them, inspiring an overwhelming terror in all who gazed upon it.

"Ssshh shhhh!"

Hissing laughter. It was communication, but not with humans. At the signal, Others suddenly started charging out of the black mist to throw themselves against the barrier.

Straight out of a nightmare, they took on all shapes and forms, grotesque amalgamations of human and creature parts.

Phish!

As they threw themselves against the light barrier, the Others fizzled, fading away into black smoke.

Many students breathed sighs of relief. At least the purified spot defenses were holding.

Li Luo, Jiang Qing'e, Duze Honglian, and a few others knew better. The grinning demon was just testing the barrier's strength.

After a wave of testing, the black mist gathered again, and now even more Others charged out.

This second wave was much stronger. They were all Eroding Class, and some were even a pinkish color.

Close to red eroders.

In the wild, many squads would need the power of teamwork to take one down.

Here, they were merely cannon fodder to be thrown against the barrier.

There was no subtlety to this attack. They simply threw bodies against the barrier to weaken it.

This time, the students noted that the barrier was dissolving them much slower. Some of the Others managed to give the barrier a good shake before dying.

Uneasy muttering broke out, but Jiang Qing'e raised a hand to calm them. "Everyone, follow our plan and charge the tower in the center with your strength.

At her command, the first wave of students rushed over to the tower and sat around it cross-legged. Their resonant powers were soon being funneled into it.

The barrier shone with new light, gaining some of its former luster.

The students cheered at this.

"Hiss..."

The grinning demon flew above the center of the purified spot, floating above the barrier.

The dark eyes gradually began to glow a demonic red, giving new life to the grin.

Its unholy power passed through the light barrier without trouble.

As Li Luo looked at the grin above them, he could feel a scrambling of his thoughts, and killing intent welled within him.

He salivated. Blood. He wanted blood. His hand went to wipe his mouth dry, and he found that the corners of his lips were twitching upwards.

"Guard your spirit!"

A powerful light energy flooded through him, and suddenly Li Luo was himself again.

He shuddered. That was too close. Even through the light barrier, the grinning demon could work its influence.

And if even he was susceptible...

He saw that many students were looking up at the grin now, and their own mouths were starting to curl upwards...

The weaker ones had already lost control, their jaws starting to tear. It was a sign that the corruption was taking hold.

Li Luo shivered. This was the power a Heavenly Disaster Class Other had? Just looking at it could spread corruption.

It was mighty beyond belief. Could they really hold out until reinforcements arrived?

Chapter 0278: Corruption Reflection

Within the purified spot, more and more students were looking up at the grin, as if commanded by a higher power.

Once their grins grew to the widest point, they would lose control and fall under the grinning demon's spell.

"We're screwed. The grinning demon's power can penetrate the purified spot. We can't stop it at all," Duze Honglian wailed.

"Shut your yapping mouth." Li Luo scowled, rubbing his chin.

It wasn't as though they hadn't anticipated something like that.

He stepped forward. "All water and light resonance users!" he shouted in a loud voice, "Use your resonant powers to form water and light mirrors!"

He led by example, creating a waterlight mirror a few meters in diameter and aiming its smooth surface upwards.

Weng!

Jiang Qing'e followed suit, creating a light mirror dozens of times larger than Li Luo's and putting it beside his.

The students who still had their wits about them hurried to do the same. Soon enough, light and water mirrors were floating upwards to the sky, tessellating up with each other to form a flawless screen.

The screen was pointed back at the demon.

When it looked down now, all it saw was its own grinning face smiling back at itself.

It screeched, an inhuman sound that made the black mist churn furiously. The crimson eyes began to leak tears of blood that fell on them in a gory shower.

Hurt, it fled back to the safety of the mist.

With the grin retreating, the influenced students slowly came back to their senses. After a brief moment of uncertainty, their spirits were revived and they let out wild cheers. They had actually managed to repel the grinning demon's attack.

So it could be dealt with this way!

"What?" Duzé Honglian exclaimed. "How did you..." Such a powerful demon, driven back? And it seemed like they had managed to hurt it as well?

"Don't just wring your hands. Wring your brain," Li Luo said snootily. "Since everyone who looks at it is affected, it must spread corruption through sight. It makes sense to reflect it back visually."

Duzé Honglian flushed with humiliation, doubly so when she knew that it was justified.

Li Luo's counter had been undeniably effective.

"It's a pity that we couldn't have waited until it had intensified the smile. Perhaps we could have damaged it more then," Jiang Qing'e said wistfully. They had managed to deliver it the equivalent of a sharp sting, but no real lasting damage.

"It couldn't be helped. The price would have been chaos in the purified spot."

If order within their ranks were lost, they might have fallen apart from within even before the barrier fell.

Still, the mirror trick would only work once. The grinning demon would not attack so incautiously again.

Regardless, they had managed to put a stop to one of its stronger moves.

Now they turned their attention to the horde of Others dashing themselves to death against the light barrier outside.

They had won the first round, but the grinning demon held all the advantages. Who knew how much more it had up its sleeve?

Most worrying of all was the fact that its corrupting power could permeate the light barrier to affect those inside.

The purification barrier was their final defense. If the grinning demon's moves could get through it, then they were in much greater danger than before.

Neither Li Luo nor Jiang Qing'e paid attention to the minions charging the barrier. The real threat was the Heavenly Disaster Class Other itself. It was the only one that could ravage their defenses.

Now that they had repelled it once, it was sure to try again.

These few moments of peace were surely the calm before the more deadly and vicious storm that it would bring next.

They watched the black mist intently for signs of movement. Duzhe Honglian, Qiu Bai, and the other elite Three Star Hall students came to stand with them.

Finally, the mist began to stir again.

From its dark folds, a figure walked out.

He was a few meters tall, a little giant that resembled a human in every other way, with no strange features.

Save one. An evil smile on his face.

His grin stretched from ear to ear, and the gleaming teeth and crimson eyes were first to be seen through the mist.

The crimson eyes were locked dead on Jiang Qing'e, acknowledging her as the only real threat within the base.

But just a small threat, all things considered.

In this area of the Umbra Cave, the Heavenly Disaster Class was the apex predator.

The only thing in its way was the purified spot's defensive barrier, which was charged with powerful purification magic. It was difficult to take down immediately.

Still, it had its methods.

Reaching into its mouth, the grinning demon began to retch.

A dark, sticky sludge was coughed up, and it began to shape the mud.

Soon enough, it made a black mud figurine.

With the excess black mud, it formed a mini mud platform.

The students watched with enthralled horror. They had no idea what was happening, but it couldn't be good.

They couldn't go out and put a stop to it either.

In the end, they could only watch the grinning demon build an entire fleet of mud platforms and mud figurines.

It looked like it was planning a war model or something.

A cunning, dangerous war.

Finally completed, it stood up. And then, with controlled madness, it began to dance.

Chapter 0279: The Grinning Demon's Plan

Dark clouds, dark mist, dark whispers.

A never-ending stream of Others kept charging the barrier, and all the while, the grinning demon hopped and raved its mad dance in their midst.

It was bizarre and preposterous, but not a single student laughed. Even someone with the brainpower of an ass hair would know that something terrible was incoming.

Yet they couldn't do anything now. They would have to deal with whatever appeared.

"Highest alert!" Jiang Qing'e called. "Be ready for anything!"

Outside the purified spot, the demented howling of the monsters was deafening. Inside, a tense silence.

Finally, the grinning demon was done with its dance, and its grin seemed to deepen even further.

Rows upon rows of gleaming, black fangs.

"Kekeke!"

Dark power dripped off its fangs onto the mud figurines that it had made.

There was a little hiss each time the power dripped onto a mud figurine, and then nothing.

The students waited and waited in trepidation. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the demon's ritual?

"Argh!"

They had hoped too much. Suddenly, a scream came from their midst.

They whirled around to see black smoke billowing out of some students' bodies. Their mouths were being ripped open by some invisible force, and their screams soon turned to giggles of madness.

Waves of corruptive energy washed over them, overwhelming them and taking control of their bodies.

In a few short moments, these students had become puppets, marked by their dull, red eyes. They attacked the students closer to them.

The situation in the purified spot dissolved into chaos.

Li Luo surveyed the situation worriedly.

"The undiscovered corrupted ones..."

"Those black mud figurines must be linked to the seeds of corruption inside their bodies," Jiang Qing'e said. "It has triggered them and turned them into puppets now."

Clearly, they hadn't managed to detect all of the corrupted students. The grinning demon had planted these seeds very deep for this very situation and purpose.

Duze Honglian shuddered. If she hadn't been cleansed by Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo, she would be in the same state now.

"Be careful of Yuan Xiong and Ye Qiuding! They met the grinning demon alongside me as well, there's a high chance they were deeply corrupted!"

Boom!

She spoke not a moment too soon. One stone tower was suddenly crumbling, a girl running like hell out of it.

It was Tian Tian, who had been watching over Ye Qiuding and Yuan Xiong!

She was running pell-mell away from the dust and smoke. Behind her, a few figures emerged, walking slowly.

It was Yuan Xiong, Ye Qiuding, and a few others, the tell-tale sign of blood all over their faces. Their dull, red eyes were locked on Tian Tian.

"Leader, they've grown much stronger after they got corrupted!"

Tian Tian yelled a warning up to Jiang Qing'e and the others.

"No need to panic," Jiang Qing'e called loudly to all of the students. "Work together, suppress them."

"Form a defensive line near the central tower, and don't let them get close. Their goal must be to break the central tower and remove the purification barrier!"

The students rallied around Jiang Qing'e, and a semblance of order was restored. Soon, they were working together to repel the corrupted students.

Now the goal was clear: keep the central tower standing. If the purification barrier fell, they would be overwhelmed by the horde of Others.

Sure death!

The threat of death sharpened their senses, and they fought with redoubled vigor.

Li Luo, Duze Honglian, Qiu Bai, and other key leaders were spaced out to maintain order.

Only Jiang Qing'e remained on the high wall now, watching the situation with a calm and sharp eye. She was also keeping watch on the grinning demon itself.

For now, the situation was manageable without her. She had to be alert to any new changes that their ultimate enemy might wreak.

She knew that she was the only one who might even pose a semblance of a threat to the grinning demon.

But even so, there was an indisputable gap between her strength and the demon's. She had to wait for a good chance.

She stood tall on the wall, blood-scented wind fanning her hair out behind her. Her hand rested gently on the hilt of her giant sword, its blade plunged into the ground.

...

Weng!

Li Luo's shortswords cut out again and again, and he managed to send another corrupted student flying.

He stepped forward to close, but another streak of corrupted energy came at him from the flank.

His swift reflexes threw up a mirror of light that blocked it.

Crash!

The mirror broke, reflecting the attack back to his attacker, who negated it easily and sent another bolt of black lightning his way.

Dang!

Li Luo took the attack on his blades.

Incredible blasts of resonant power followed in quick succession, and Li Luo was forced back, parrying furiously. His hands were throbbing from the sheer impact alone, although the attacks were mostly elemental in nature.

The corruption warped the appearance of the students, but this one was still recognizable.

"Ye Qiuding?"

Li Luo frowned. Even before corruption, Ye Qiuding was a third-tier Resonant Master, far stronger than himself. Now that he had the evil boost, Li Luo was hopelessly outmatched.

Ffft!

Ye Qiuding's crimson eyes glinted maliciously, and he sent another terrific blast of power Li Luo's way.

Li Luo swore and dived away.

Ye Qiuding continued pursuing him relentlessly, sending punishing attacks his way while ignoring everyone else.

"Does he hate me that much?"

Li Luo fled desperately, cursing. Ye Qiuding should have traded his intelligence for corrupted power, but this single-minded dedication to hunting Li Luo down was unusual, to say the least.

Which meant that at the primal level, this guy was still obsessed with Jiang Qing'e.

"Son of a bitch, I can't believe you're still jealous even when corrupted."

Ye Qiuding's speed was too great. Soon, Li Luo was cornered, and he turned to face his attacker.

Even after the onyx lake, he was still only a Third Pattern, whereas Ye Qiuding was already at the Evolving Resonance Tier!

Still, Ye Qiuding was alone, and Li Luo was not.

A burst of starlight resonant power swarmed Ye Qiuding's face with starry butterflies.

A streak of shadow power cut out towards Ye Qiuding.

Although Ye Qiuding managed to shrug off Bai Mengmeng's Fluttering Star easily, it bought Li Luo a precious second to make his getaway.

A sizzling bolt of shadow energy flew out like an arrow, aimed directly at Ye Qiuding's vitals, but he casually plucked it out of the air.

Li Luo lowered his swords. "Any later and all you'd have is my corpse to bring back!" he grumbled to his squad.

"We can't beat him as we are either," Xin Fu grumbled right back.

Even with the three of them together, Ye Qiuding was still stronger. After all, he was one of the elites in the Two Star Hall, and now he was boosted by the corruption as well.

"Well, if we can't beat him, we'll just have to call for backup," Li Luo said cheerfully.

He beckoned to another group, and soon another squad was with them.

Three very familiar figures indeed.

Yi Lisha, Si Qiuying, Qian Ye.

The two squads sandwiched Ye Qiuding in the middle.

Without hesitation, all six attacked as one, ready to take their Two Star Hall senior down.

Chapter 0280: A Chance

The grinning demon had planted seeds of corruption everywhere, and now it was reaping its harvest, tearing apart the purified spot from within.

It was indeed a cunning plan that far outstripped the depths of their preparations.

Although the corrupted students were few in number, the grinning demon had ways to boost their power significantly.

Even with the numbers advantage, the uncorrupted students were hard-pressed to take them down in a short time.

In a crowded alley, Li Luo's squad and Yi Lisha's squad were facing off against a corrupted Ye Qiuding.

Even in a six-on-one, Ye Qiuding still had the advantage.

His Evolving Resonance Tier strength plus the corruption boost had the two squads on the ropes. He just wouldn't stay down, wouldn't die. It was the two squads that were suffering a smattering of injuries here and there.

Tang!

Li Luo's swords hummed through the air, Water Edge refined to its sharpest as they cut towards Ye Qiuding, currently wrestling Yi Lisha.

He channeled water upwards and wood downwards, laying down roots that burst upwards at Ye Qiuding's feet and trussed him up.

The roots withered almost as soon as they touched Ye Qiuding, succumbing to the corruption.

A moment of constriction was enough to at least push Ye Qiuding slightly off balance.

Both Li Luo and Yi Lisha were elites in their year. They both seized the momentary gap, pincering Ye Qiuding between sword and fist.

Crash!

Flesh and metal crunched into him from both directions.

To no avail. A muttered word from Ye Qiuding sent a wave of corrupted power that repulsed them and shook the air with its raw strength.

The pair were thrown away. Li Luo recovered rather quickly since he was stronger, but Yi Lisha could not break the impact before he was slammed into a stone wall. The air was punched out of his lungs, and he coughed up blood on his lips.

They had attacked together, and now had been forced back and taken down.

This was the sheer disparity in their power.

The two squads were leaping to their leaders' rescue now, their faces grim as they watched Ye Qiuding warily, black smoke rising in lazy wisps from his body.

"Li Luo, something's not right. The bugger's getting stronger and stronger!" Yi Lisha said angrily, wiping the blood away from his mouth as he scrambled to his feet.

Li Luo nodded somberly. He felt it too. At first they could squash him with their numbers, but now he could feel their advantage diminishing.

They weren't getting any weaker. Ye Qiuding was somehow getting stronger.

If this kept up, they could forget about taking him down. Hell, they would be lucky to escape alive.

Time to call more backup?

But everyone was occupied as well. Backup might not be available.

Although they had contained one of the big dangers here, Li Luo was keeping an eye on the other fights as well, and they had not concluded. Clearly, the same corrupted strength was boosting them everywhere.

"Is this the grinning demon's doing?"

Li Luo didn't know how long they would continue to keep growing stronger. But if it kept up for too much longer, they would soon be screwed.

And once the central tower fell, their barrier would fall too.

Heavenly Disaster Class. Yikes.

"We have to buy time until reinforcements can join us. Hold him, somehow," Li Luo said calmly.

The situation elsewhere was hovering on a knife's edge as well. If they let Ye Qiuding run free, he would definitely head for the central tower immediately, and he would likely proceed to set off a whole series of unfortunate events.

The others responded with sharp, terse nods, keeping their chins down as they gathered their resonant powers and then charged him in a formation.

While fights were breaking out all over the purified spot, Jiang Qing'e remained in her spot on the high wall, surveying the entire battle.

She noticed that the corrupted students were getting stronger and stronger.

She turned to the grinning demon outside the purified spot, sitting cross-legged in the midst of his mud platforms.

She brought a hand up to her face, drawing a glowing finger across her brow. "Illuminating Eye!"

A thin, golden line appeared across her eyes, and suddenly her vision cleared. She could even see through the black mist, spotting the ranks of Others that stretched out on and on.

She focused on the grinning demon.

Thin lines of black light appeared in her enhanced vision, linking its body to the mud figurines.

"It's greatly weakened. It's siphoning off its own energy into the corrupted, using the figurines as mediums. That's why they're growing stronger..."

The grinning demon was essentially transferring its power into the purified spot.

The line of gold faded from her eyes, and she adjusted her grip on her heavy sword.

She continued to wait calmly, although now she started to gather her energy.

Behind her, the skirmishes raged on, piteous screams punctuating the hubbub of shouts and clashes of weapons.

As the corrupted students grew stronger, the fights turned more and more bloody.

Jiang Qing'e paid it no heed. She continued to stand on the high wall, watching, turning a deaf ear to all cries for reinforcements.

She was waiting for her chance.

The grinning demon was weakening itself to power the corrupted students. It brought chaos at a price, a price that Jiang Qing'e was about to collect.

A chance at its head.

Black vapor rose from the corrupted students, faster than the purification tower could clear. Soon, even the dreaded whispering could be heard within the barrier, further weakening the defenders' resolve.

The noises of battle in the purified spot rose again as the corrupted students grew yet another level stronger!

They were closing in on the central tower now.

It was time. Jiang Qing'e moved.

Like a vengeful angel, she burned with the light of a thousand suns.

Within the nimbus of brilliance, a heavy sword wielded by a slim figure.

She tore through the purification barrier and was on the grinning demon in a flash. She brought her sword down in a fury of metal and light without hesitation.

The execution had begun.