

## Resonance 281

### Chapter 0281: Execution

Jiang Qing'e took off like a blazing meteor, and heads tracked her movement across the entire battlefield.

They were in awe of her unusual burst of power, and that she was also facing the grinning demon head-on.

A Heavenly Disaster Class, as strong as a powerful Heavenly Dipper General!

Surely not even a ninth-grade light resonance was a match for this!

And if she didn't succeed in one blow, the grinning demon would surely tear her to bits. One could only imagine what the loss of their champion would do for the defenders' morale and firepower.

Still, there was no second thought in the mind of the heroine. She shot forth like an arrow leaving the bow, eyes locked on to her target.

No one knew how this would turn out. But the fact that she dared to try roused courage in all of them.

Li Luo's heart was in his throat as well. A firework of hope, blazing into the darkness that loomed ahead. His firework.

Trailing the navy-blue shawl behind her like a piece of the night sky.

Shing!

An iridescent shimmer started to sparkle on her skin, and the black dust that hung over the battlefield slid off her.

Duze Honglian, Qiu Bai, and the others gasped.

"The glassy Fiend Body... Her Fiend Body's complete..."

"Her cultivation speed's incredible!"

The other students might not know what the glassy body meant, but to Earth Fiends like themselves, it held great meaning.

Her Earth Fiend qi was close to completion now.

She was but a step away from Heavenly Dipper General.

No wonder Jiang Qing'e was rumored to challenge the Seven Astral Pillars at the end of the year. She was already close to Heavenly Dipper General, whereas the rest of them were only at the early stage of Earth Fiend.

Even though they always assumed that Jiang Qing'e was stronger than them, still she was ahead of their guesses.

How would they ever catch up? Was her ninth-grade light resonance really that overpowered?

Weng!

Her sword blazed with the heat of the sun, burning a deep gouge in the ground as it trailed behind her, hissing with blue smoke.

She brought it up effortlessly, a quick twist to set the point forward. Golden light flickered against the crimson eyes of the demon, and its grin only grew wider.

“Ffft!”

A spluttering laugh burbled out from the demon.

It seemed completely unsurprised by Jiang Qing'e's attack.

Jiang Qing'e noted its readiness with a flicker of uncertainty. Had it left this opening on purpose to bait her in?

It was entirely possible for it to be that cunning.

It could overcome the primal instinct that usually ruled the Others. It might even be a better thinker than some humans.

She did not panic. The light on her sword's edge redoubled in intensity as she committed.

Whoosh!

The grinning demon opened its maw and took a deep, sucking breath.

Rumble!

The mud figurines vibrated and then released black smoke that the grinning demon inhaled back in.

The energy that it had previously dispersed was now being regathered.

At the same time, the corrupted students in the purified spot were weakening in strength.

Some were even returned to themselves fully.

“Quick! Suppress and tie up all the corrupted students!” Li Luo shouted. A hard-won window had been bought by Jiang Qing'e.

Morale lifted and the students rallied together, quickly subduing the corrupted students.

Outside, the grinning demon made a brief, keening sound as if testing its power. The ground reverberated in response.

It raised a giant, clawed hand that seemed to suck in what little light remained in the world.

A darkness that would destroy all.

The world under that palm was without light, save for one blazing sword of hope that slashed defiantly against it.

Claw against sword.

Boom!

The impact was colossal, the aftershock rippling outwards as it tore away at the topsoil.

The other Others were bowled away backwards back into the mist.

Within the purified spot, they despaired as they saw their champion of light gradually losing, wounds chipping away at her.

Jiang Qing'e was not strong enough to beat the grinning demon.

"Tsk tsk! Chi chi!"

The grinning demon garbled its strange laughter again as it brought its claw down again with a vengeance, smothering the light from the sword.

"Leader, get out of there!" Qiu Bai and Tian Tian screamed.

Li Luo watched with horrified fascination. His knuckles were white from his death grip on his hilts, but he stood his ground. He knew that he would only be a burden to Jiang Qing'e if he rushed in.

Panicked screams came from the students.

Jiang Qing'e did not retreat. She was calm, as though her attack being broken was also within her calculations.

That attack was not enough to harm a Heavenly Disaster Class.

She stepped forward.

As she did, she tenderly moved a palm over the edge of her sword, as if caressing it.

A small spray of blood landed on the broad blade.

The fragmented sword light started to knit itself back together, now radiating with a new divine power that brought a sudden halt to the grinning demon's laughter.

It turned its palm back against its foe.

Evil energies gathered until it formed a large, swirling vortex, ready to swallow any attack.

Jiang Qing'e took a deep breath. Reaching into the glowing sword light, she pulled out a flaming sword.

"Sword of saintly fire, cleanser of all, burn all that is unholy."

Light turned to fire now, and she seemed to become an angel, an avatar against evil.

The sword swept up even as she made a long dart sideways to dodge the black vortex attack.

Fire lanced towards the grinning face.

A savage thrust, as deadly for the demon as it was perilous for him.

Between protecting herself and killing the enemy, Jiang Qing'e had chosen the latter.

The grinning demon was not prepared for such a reckless move, but it was too late to defend itself. The flaming sword struck down, cleaving its face.

At that moment, time seemed to stop.

### **Chapter 0282: Dead End**

Boom!

Outside the purified spot, a violent tornado of energy raged on, ripping up the ground with gouges.

Jiang Qing'e's slight frame was sent flying, and her sword sailed through the air to plunge blade-first in the ground nearby.

She coughed once, and a mouthful of fresh blood bubbled forth. The light resonant energy around her started to fizzle.

A sign of heavy injuries.

The grinning demon's claw had connected hard.

Ignoring her own broken body, she desperately looked behind her, wanting to see the damage she had inflicted in return.

That had been her strongest attack ever.

The grinning demon had divided up its own strength to lure her out, and Jiang Qing'e had read it perfectly and responded in turn. It was a game of chess, but her pieces were weaker.

Even so, she had chosen that risk because it was her best chance.

Her best chance to break their slow slip into defeat.

If she could just beat it, then they would not be left praying for reinforcements like damsels in distress.

Otherwise, if they sat there and let the Heavenly Disaster Class Other play out its entire arsenal of tricks, she wasn't confident that the purified barrier would hold out for many more days.

Sometimes, the best defense was a good offense.

The grinning demon's face was split by a long scar that still glowed gold at the seams, running down the entire length from brow to chin.

Small, golden flames flickered at the edges of the scar.

The grinning demon reached up to touch its face gingerly. A mere Earth Fiend had caused this much damage? It hadn't seen this coming.

Light resonant energy was truly a powerful weapon against it.

Many students cheered when they saw the wound.

Had the grinning demon been severely injured as well?

An eye for an eye?

The scar was still expanding, the golden flames eating away at more and more of its face. It seemed like its head would eventually split into two.

But now the grinning demon bellowed, low rumbling roars devoid of the mad glee that was its signature.

A black vortex bloomed out of its body.

A short pause later, Others began to charge towards it, running in without hesitation.

Each disappeared within the grinning demon's body, and the golden scar started to fade away.

Dismay greeted this sight. The Heavenly Disaster Class' devouring ability was terrifying.

Roar!

It bellowed in anger again. This wound was serious enough to impede its future growth.

It had set the trap for Jiang Qing'e, but now it had been bitten in turn.

If it had known that this would be the outcome, it would not have made the trade.

Still, regret was useless for it now. It turned its attention back to its ultimate goal of breaking the purified spot. Once down, all that fresh meat within would be more than enough to replenish the energy that it had spent.

With another unearthly scream, it summoned more Others that leaped towards the wounded Jiang Qing'e.

She was the strongest defender here. If she could be killed, they would be severely weakened.

Now that she was injured, it was the best time to finish her off.

Li Luo ran to her as fast as his legs could carry him, praying that he would make it in time.

"Leader!" Bai Mengmeng shouted after him. This was suicide for Li Luo.

He couldn't care less. He could not afford to sit by and watch Jiang Qing'e be torn apart before his very eyes.

Before he could get there, a figure in red beat him to it. A dark-red whip snaked out to coil itself around Jiang Qing'e's waist like a lasso, and it pulled her back through the barrier with a tremendous yank.

Duze Honglian caught her up on the high wall.

"Saved you back. Now we're even."

Jiang Qing'e didn't reply, still looking regretfully at the rapidly fading scar she had left behind. It had been a powerful blow, but not enough to finish it off as she had hoped.

The crisis was delayed, but not averted.

Li Luo appeared by her side. "How are you?" he asked worriedly.

She examined her injuries. The grinning demon's attack had shaken up her resonant palace, and her resonant power flow was completely awry.

Serious injuries.

"Not good."

She had expected injuries, but she had hoped that she could defeat the demon in exchange. In her current state, she would pose no more threat to it.

The situation was not looking good.

"You did very well," Li Luo said, holding her hand tenderly.

"Less of the lover cooing, for goodness' sake. The grinning demon's on the warpath now," Duze Honglian snapped at them.

They looked up to see the Other furious at Jiang Qing'e's escape. It screeched in fury.

Although it had avoided death after devouring many Others, it was still wounded. It knew that those in the purified spot were waiting for reinforcements. When those arrived, its chances would be gone.

It barely hesitated before it leaped into action again, its body swelling as it flexed its power.

The Other began to eat itself. The sharp teeth turned downwards to feast on its corpulent body, freshly gorged from its eating spree through the black vortex.

Soon, all that was left was the grinning face, a disembodied head dozens of meters in size, hovering in the sky.

It cackled again, then it opened its mouth to spray a sticky, black rain of sludge down on the barrier.

The rain droplets were putrid and corrosive, eating away at everything they touched like an acid rain.

Phish!

As each drop landed on the barrier, they evaporated with a hissing sound. However, the purification power of the barrier weakened ever so slightly with each drop it repelled.

There was way too much black rain. Its power would not last.

"Surely that's its original plan..."

Duze Honglian watched the black rain, aghast. "It probably won't stop until the barrier breaks."

The students started to panic again. Clearly, this was an extremely powerful move by the grinning demon.

They could only watch helplessly as the final barrier above them broke.

Bai Mengmeng, Xin Fu, and the other first years came to stand with them, seeking comfort and advice.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e stared at the black rain above them, both leaders at a loss for words.

"Umbra Cave, eh. To think that we all might fall here." Li Luo sighed deeply.

Jiang Qing'e shook him by the shoulder. "Don't worry," she said softly, "I won't let you die here."

Li Luo recognized the resolve in her voice all too well. At the last moment, she would probably send him away with all her power.

Perhaps even giving her own life in the process.

He would not have that. He looked up at the barrier again. "How long do you think it'll last?"

"Probably another three days," Jiang Qing'e answered doubtfully.

"Three days..."

There was a gleam in Li Luo's eye. "I might just make it in time."

Jiang Qing'e's eyebrows shot up. "What are you thinking?"

Li Luo smiled brightly at her.

"I'm thinking of going to get help."

### **Chapter 0283: Li Luo's Plan**

"Help?"

Even Jiang Qing'e was confused by Li Luo's words. The students were the only ones in this area. Anyone else would be deeper in—the Four Star Hall students and the Gold Gleam mentors.

Even so, they were too far away.

Who else was going to come to their rescue here?

Duze Honglian glared at him. If there was help to be had, they would have gathered them long ago. As if Li Luo had anything to offer at this moment.

"When two tigers fight," Li Luo offered tentatively, "they wound each other."

Confusion greeted his enigmatic statement.

"You mean..." Jiang Qing'e's eyes widened in realization. "The spirit beast in the forbidden zone?"

Was that his idea of help?!

"Li Luo, you're insane," Duze Honglian said witheringly. The suggestion was so ludicrous, it insulted their intelligence.

"Let's not even get into whether the spirit beast will just destroy us all when it arrives. How are you even going to get to the forbidden zone and lure it over? Impossible tasks, one after another!"

"Or," she said, "are you using this as an excuse to run away?"

Bam!

Jiang Qing'e slammed her sword into the ground. "Duze Honglian. Don't think I can't finish you off even when I'm injured."

"Oh, as if my reasoning is any less valid! Does he think the spirit beast is some kindly little puppy? Besides, the principal's seal can't be unraveled!"

Li Luo was silent. Duze Honglian was not wrong in her fleshing out of the challenges. He struggled with the same difficulties too.

"Can it get any worse than our current situation?" Jiang Qing'e countered. "The defenses of the purified spot look like they can't hold out until reinforcements arrive. And when it falls, we will die with it. If we're doomed anyway, we might as well let Li Luo try."

Duze Honglian did not listen to a word of it. She was sure that Li Luo had deemed them doomed and was just trying to get out alive.

But so be it. Li Luo was not important to them. If the purified spot fell, where could he run to?

The Others would run rampant all over, the corruption would increase, and a mere second-tier Resonant Master would be dead sooner or later. And even if he did manage to eventually get out alive, the school would investigate him thoroughly.

And then expulsion was sure to follow.

She crossed her arms. "Do as you will. Your lies will be exposed in the end."

The others stood in a more moderate stance, conflicted between hopefulness and doubt.

Ultimately, none of them saw any chance of success in Li Luo's plan, but neither did they fancy arguing with the likes of Jiang Qing'e over that either.

Jiang Qing'e turned to Li Luo. "Do you need any other help for this plan?"

He shook his head. "I've scouted the terrain before. There's a river leading from the back of the purified spot all the way to the forbidden zone. I can move quickest with water resonant power to get there. As for the other problems that she mentioned, I'll find a way."

"More cooks are going to spoil the broth here."

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "Just be careful you're not cooking hot soup and jumping in yourself. Go, then. Bring us hope."

Time was of the essence, so Li Luo did not linger. "Three days. I will find a way to save us all."

"You will succeed... Or we all die here. And for us, House Luolan dies with us. Wouldn't that be a waste after all these years?" Li Luo grinned and nodded, then he left.

Bai Mengmeng and Xin Fu had rushed up as well, but they knew they could offer no help to their leader.

"We trust you," they said simply.

Li Luo was touched. Others had laughed at his plans, and Duze Honglian had probably voiced the thoughts that were on their collective minds. But not his squad.

After all the time that they had spent together, they understood Li Luo quite well.

"I'll be back," he said to them. Then he leaped off the high wall, wending his way through the purified spot towards the back.

Yi Lisha, Qian Ye, and Si Qiuying watched him go as well.

"Do you guys think he's for real? Or is it an excuse?" Qian Ye asked.

Yi Lisha rubbed his chin. "Sounds harebrained as hell, to be honest. I don't see how he's going to overcome all that's needed to make the plan work."

"I don't know if the plan will succeed, but I don't think he intends to run away," Si Qiuying said softly.

While Li Luo might look like an easygoing guy, he was probably just as competitive as Jiang Qing'e deep down.

A proud guy like him would never run away.

"Well, hardly anyone will agree with you once the news spreads." Qian Ye wrung his hands.

"Who cares what they think," Yi Lisha said grumpily. "If the plan fails, we all die. Then there'll be no thinking left."

The sobering statement made his squad fall silent.

They had not expected the Umbra Cave to be this dangerous. It was their first time here, and already it seemed likely that everyone would be wiped out.

Everything was up to fate now.

While they were lost in their own melancholy thoughts, Li Luo had already left by a passage from the back and reached the river he had mapped out.

It would lead him straight to the forbidden zone.

With the river's speed boost, he could save a lot of time.

But getting there was not the hard part. Everything else was.

He rode the river, propelled forward by his water resonant power. He looked like he was skating on it, zipping forward out into the unknown.

### **Chapter 0284: The Seal**

Thanks to the river, Li Luo managed to reach the outskirts of the forbidden zone ahead of schedule.

After just half a day, the familiar mountain range was already in view.

Now it was time for the hard part. One mistake would ruin him.

The next step was actually pretty easy too. He had already lured out the beast once, by accident. Back at the onyx lake, he knew that it coveted the dual resonances in his body.

That was why they had that incident back then.

The mark of a Duke's power, but housed in a frail, little resonant master. The combination was irresistible for the spirit beast.

Surely this time it would come for the bait again.

Which left another problem: the principal's seal...

The seal was placed on a mountain top, and they had witnessed its power for themselves last time.

It was what had stopped the spirit beast from roaming out of the forbidden zone.

If Li Luo couldn't get it cleared, it would be like holding bananas against the glass for the monkeys at the zoo.

If it couldn't come out, the plan was screwed.

To think that their ally's seal would end up as the biggest problem...

However, Li Luo had some ideas that he was planning to try. The best one was... beg!

Beg who? The seal itself, of course!

Jiang Qing'e had mentioned that the principal's seal was sentient. The principal had left a fragment of his will in it, so it was linked to him. If Li Luo could appeal to it directly, it might just work.

This was an iffy idea on paper, but Li Luo felt that a King expert might be incredible enough to do such a thing.

With enough strength, the impossible could become possible.

In any case, he would have to try to find out.

If not...

He would stand outside and taunt the spirit beast until it went berserk and broke the seal.

A very extreme idea. In that state, it might swallow him in one gulp the instant it broke out. Not a good plan.

He oriented himself with the terrain and identified the mountain, then he quickly climbed towards its peak.

Four hours later, Li Luo arrived at the top, out of breath as he gazed upon a green stone.

On it, the character for "seal" was written.

It looked like a scratchy and shallow carving. If Li Luo had not seen its power with his own eyes before, he would never have suspected that a King expert had carved it himself.

Li Luo carefully approached, and he was heartened by the fact that it didn't seem hostile or anything.

"Er...

"Principal, this student is Li Luo, a One Star Hall student. I came here because there's a Heavenly Disaster Class Other that managed to get into purified spot number 13. We're in a really bad situation, so I wanted to release the spirit beast and lure it over to fight the Other."

"It might sound like a crazy plan, but big dreams make big wins, Sir. I'm going to have to just go for it. I hope you can help me out here, wise Principal."

Li Luo bowed to the rock awkwardly.

However, the rock remained as silent as... a rock. Li Luo tentatively reached out and placed his palm on the seal.

He felt a cool, stinging sensation, and he flinched a little, but then there was nothing.

He frowned with disappointment. "Oh, come on, Sir," he muttered to himself. "Standing by and watching us die is very unbecoming of a principal."

It seemed like he would have to execute Plan B.

But suddenly, he felt like something was off. Things were too quiet here.

The sound of the wind had vanished completely.

Turning back around, he saw that there was now a figure in the lotus position on the green rock.

He was a middle-aged man clad in a green shift. His eyebrows were completely white, and yet his eyes were profoundly deep and dark.

He sat there quietly, as immovable as a mountain.

Watching Li Luo.

His quiet gaze had Li Luo feeling a bit like some powerful beast was watching him, his instincts screaming that this was danger.

He swallowed hard. This man's identity was all too clear, even without him saying a word. It had to be the mysterious principal.

"Student Li Luo greets the principal." Li Luo bowed deeply. This might well be the strongest person he had ever met in his life.

The man laughed.

"Li Luo..."

"Born with blank palaces, and grew three of his own. Acquiring resonances is a rare art form indeed."

"You're the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan, correct?"

His few simple statements blew Li Luo's mind over and over again, and he staggered back, too shocked to speak. It was the first time anyone had actually guessed his secrets.

Just how terrifying was this guy?

## Chapter 0285: Principal Pang Qianyuan

Gulp.

Li Luo looked at the middle-aged man nervously, feeling somehow more naked than if he had taken off all his clothes.

The man laughed warmly at his discomfort. "Li Luo... I am Pang Qianyuan, the principal of the Astral Sage College."

Li Luo blinked, noting his name.

"Principal, Sir, we hear so much about you in school, and now I can see that you live up to every inch of your god-like reputation." Li Luo didn't know how he should treat this person, who was way beyond him in both status and power.

"Oh? I've not even been around the school in many years. Surely not many have actually seen me,"

"Er..."

Damn, called out for his empty flattery.

"What a sweet mouth you have there, lad. No one really called me god-like back then. God-damned, more like."

Li Luo frowned. "Surely they were jealous of your accomplishments. Don't take it to heart, Sir. Perhaps you should pay them a visit after a few years."

Pang Qianyuan nodded. "That person's name is Li Taixuan."

"Li Tai- my dad?!"

Pang Qianyuan nodded.

Li Luo gaped like a goldfish. "Er- he... well. Brave, er, blunt man, my father."

Who knew his father was so ballsy? Calling a King expert god-damned? He must have really not loved life.

"Li Taixuan... He came from beyond, so naturally he's a wild dragon." Pang Qianyuan laughed.

Li Luo laughed along politely. His father was only a Duke. Perhaps more a worm than a dragon compared to this King.

His thoughts were written too clearly on his face. "King is higher than what your father was," Pang Qianyuan said, "but he didn't come from weak stock either."

Li Luo started. "Surely not stock superior to the Academic Federation?"

"Hmm, the Academic Federation is indeed one of the strongest factions in this world... but it is not invincible. There are a few powers that can equal it in this world."

Li Luo's mind reeled from this information. He had just learned not long ago that the Academic Federation was the great institution protecting their world. There were others who were equally strong?

He hesitated. "And my father came from one of those families?"

Pang Qianyuan fell silent for a moment. "I guess your parents really didn't tell you anything."

"Haha, maybe I was picked up from the garbage dump."

Pang Qianyuan shook his head. "Well, if they didn't say anything, it's not my place to tell you. Perhaps you will learn it all in good time. All I can say is..."

He paused to choose his words carefully. "Heavenly King Li's bloodline runs deeper than you can imagine."

Heavenly King Li? What on earth was that? Was he referring to where his father currently was? And what was a Heavenly King?

Li Luo had never heard of it before.

"The world is wider than you can imagine, sonny. The limit of your horizons here in the Xia Kingdom are paltry in the view of the divine continent, which is, again, minuscule to the world. In fact, our divine continent is known as the outer divine continent. You can imagine how disdained we are."

Outer divine continent... Did that mean that there was an inner divine continent, then? More and more new information.

The principal had given him a lot of information to think on. Who was his father, really?

And why would he have come to the supposedly rural and backward outer divine continent?

His parents had clearly kept all this information from him.

He did not know why, but surely they had good reasons. Perhaps the information did not benefit him at all.

Li Luo's mind was racing with new possibilities and thoughts, but he managed to put them aside for the moment. None of it would be relevant if he was dead, which might well happen soon if he didn't execute a brilliant plan regarding the spirit beast.

"Principal, you know why I'm here, right?" Li Luo got straight to the point.

Pang Qianyuan nodded.

"A Heavenly Disaster Class slipped out, eh? Quite a disaster for the outer periphery indeed."

"Can you help?" Li Luo asked hopefully.

If Pang Qianyuan, with all his mysterious powers, could reach out and wipe the Heavenly Disaster Class Other away, they would all be saved without any trouble.

"This form is only a fragment of my will. My real body is in the deepest part of the Umbra Cave, fighting some truly terrifying abominations. If my real body were here, it would probably far exceed even your imagination."

Li Luo's shoulders slumped.

"I can't solve all your problems, but I know of your plan. Heh. You said your father was ballsy, but you've got a real pair yourself.

"Bait the spirit beast out of the forbidden zone with your own body... That is something most people wouldn't even dream of in a nightmare." Pang Qianyuan chuckled with a gleam of admiration in his eyes.

"I support your plan. I'll remove the seal for you. At the same time, I'll send you a little present as thanks for saving all the students at the purified spot."

Li Luo started, but the man was already fading away.

Whoosh!

The mountain wind's howling returned as suddenly as it had disappeared, and life started up all around him again. Pang Qianyuan was gone.

And so was the rock with the seal on it.

Li Luo opened his hand and saw that the word "seal" was now faintly visible on his palm.

### **Chapter 0286: Beast Baiting**

"The seal's in my hand?"

Li Luo stared at it, puzzled.

He could feel that some information had been planted into his brain as a result of the seal, and his eyes widened.

The principal had transferred the seal to him hoping that he could seal away the spirit beast for good.

Of course, he himself was not strong enough, which was why the seal's power was here for him to tap on.

Even so, the seal itself was only strong enough to contain the spirit beast, not completely subdue it.

Which was why he would need to wait for the perfect moment.

Such as... when it was lured away by a brilliant young man and fought a Heavenly Disaster Class Other and managed to win, saving students but also becoming very badly injured in the process.

The stars would have to align for him to succeed. Not even the arrival of Violet Vibrance mentors would make his plan any more likely to succeed. Their presence would likely chase the beast away instead.

But now... perhaps some of the stars were already in place.

Lure the spirit beast to fight the Heavenly Disaster Class. There was no other outcome but for one to fall.

And whichever triumphed would definitely be weakened. With the rest of the defenders, perhaps they could win.

The seal was a secondary bonus mission. The main goal here was to lure it over to fight the Heavenly Disaster Class.

Could he lure it?

Li Luo eyed the wide expanse of forested mountains before him, mist hanging at the highest peaks. He had no idea where the spirit beast was. Neither could he just flail around blindly with his dual resonances. They were puny—it would be like shouting out into the ocean. The spirit beast might not be able to sense him.

Last time, he was in the onyx lake.

Li Luo looked towards its direction. The depths of the lake had to be linked to the place where the spirit beast cultivated.

Which was why it had sensed him so clearly back then and came charging over so quickly.

Li Luo headed straight for the lake.

Currently, it was completely empty, with not a single soul to be seen.

From his perch on a large tree, he had a good view of the energy, still pulsing steadily from the onyx lake.

He pulled out his shortswords, their slight, crescent curves gleaming like pale moons.

Pointing them at the onyx lake, he charged them with resonant power.

Weng!

The powers combined in mid-air, twisting and entangling until they were an inseparable singular, plunging into the onyx lake.

Before exploding.

In a subterranean cave deep in the mountain network of tunnels, a pair of scarlet eyes flared open.

The beast's eyes were flaring with surprise. A faint hint of the dual resonances?

Was it imagining things?

While it hesitated, another wave of dual resonance power hit the waters of the lake. Its hesitation vanished.

The same dual resonances from before!

Was the human kid back?

The beast leaped into action, charging in the direction of the power.

Like before, it charged madly in a direct line, trampling anything in its path and leaving a wide swath of smoke and noise in its wake.

Li Luo spotted it soon enough, and he ran for it immediately. Any headstart was precious, and he had to get to the river as quickly as possible.

There was no way that he was faster than the spirit beast. He would only be safe with the river's current on his side.

Otherwise, he would be the bait that was eaten.

The spirit beast was unaware that the seal had already disappeared. Surely it would hesitate for a while at the outskirts. That would equate to more precious time for Li Luo to run.

He pumped his arms and legs as fast as he could, and the trees were a blur beside him.

He ran as he had never run before, because this time his life truly depended on it.

Behind him, the spirit beast had slowed as it neared the outskirts of its zone.

The smoke trail had faded accordingly, and Li Luo caught a glimpse of a black-armored, three-tailed beast behind him. As it snorted, its breath vaporized a few trees under its nose.

As he predicted, it began to prowl restlessly near the perimeter. It looked fearfully at the mountain peak where the seal had been, and it roared in defiance.

But today the seal's power was gone!

What had changed?

Torn between fear and frustration that its prey was getting away yet again, it lashed out with its tails.

The human pest had foiled it once. Today, he had somehow wandered back into its territory. There was no way it would let the kid get away a second time!

This time, it had to have that double-flavored tidbit!

Muscles bunching, its tails coiled for balance and it leaped, ready to take on the seal.

Leap after leap, clawing forth with its strength.

Soon, it found itself further than it had ever gone before, and still the seal was nowhere to be seen!

Did it mean that the seal had finally expired?!

Thank the heavens!

It was free!

“Roar!”

The trees near Li Luo shook from its roar, and Li Luo could hear savage triumph in the noise. The beast was out of the mountains.

Another roar sounded from ahead, but fortunately, this one announced the river's proximity.

Breaking through the tree line, Li Luo landed in the river and used his water resonant power to propel him forwards.

From the corner of his eye, he saw a three-tailed beast in hot pursuit.

He resisted the strong urge to look behind him. It wasn't going to help. He had to focus, remain calm, and eke out every last iota of speed he could.

Now he just needed to get back to the purified spot, and all would be fine and dandy.

"Please let me succeed" was the prayer on his lips.

### **Chapter 0287: Borrowed Power**

The river wound through the barren plane like a silver snake, the only sign of life in the dreary land. A gentle current rippled its surface like scales.

Tonight, its quiet, flowing gurgle was disrupted.

At one end, a young man was frantically propelling himself along its length with his water resonant power. He had a head of hair as silver as the river, and below it was a handsome face, taut with tension.

Behind him, a rampaging monster was charging at him, splintering the trees in its way like they were matchsticks.

It was never a fun business to be chased down by a Heavenly Dipper General Stage spirit beast.

"Roar!"

The good thing was that the current was with him. The bad thing was that it meant the wind was blowing from behind him, and on it he caught a whiff of blood-scented breath.

Behind him, the three-tailed beast pounded the ground furiously, bounding and loping towards its delicious little treat.

It had thought that getting out of the forbidden zone meant that things were over, but this little mouse was a lot faster than it had expected. Clearly weak—like a mouse—but somehow he flew like the wind across water.

In frustration, it spat out glowing orbs of energy at the fleeing figure, but at that distance, they lacked accuracy, faltering before they reached Li Luo.

They splashed into the water behind him.

Boom!

They exploded underwater, causing giant waves. Li Luo quickly used his water resonance to calm things, and his wood resonance stabilized his internal flow of energy.

Not once did he look back or stop.

He might have escaped its wild attacks, but Li Luo's gut told him that the beast was closing the distance inch by inch.

He had underestimated this General Stage spirit beast after all.

Even with the current and his water resonant power, it wasn't that easy to keep ahead.

"I'm still a long way away from the purified spot, especially at this speed," he thought to himself. Could he keep it up? Staring death in the face was exhilarating.

A slight slip up would probably lead to his death.

Moreover, if he thought that those failed energy balls and a straightforward chase was all the spirit beast had, he would be as naive as a newborn baby.

Still, there was no point in wasting brainpower on what it might come up with. Li Luo was walking a tightrope, and it was best to focus on putting one foot in front of the other until something came up to prevent that.

He racked up his water resonant power a notch, until the river was spraying out from behind him like a motorboat.

Two hours passed in this fashion.

There was no more empty bellowing coming from behind any more. The beast had fallen silent, pouring all its energy into single-minded pursuit.

Both of them settled into a long race.

Li Luo started to feel a prickle of unease creep up the back of his neck. The silence was playing havoc with his imagination, more so than the roaring had.

He tensed and prepared his resonant palaces to burst into action at any time.

"Whoo!"

An eerie howling suddenly picked up behind him, and he started to sweat even more heavily.

He couldn't resist it. He glanced back.

He caught a glimpse of three colossal tails, slowly heating up from cold black to a warm red.

Even at this distance, he could see the heat distortions in the air around them.

He didn't know what was coming, but he knew he wasn't going to like it. Full speed ahead, captain legs.

Weng!

Sure enough, he heard a humming sound from behind him. And then ahead of him.

He froze in his tracks all of a sudden, and his heart seemed to stop beating. Right in front of his eyes, space was warping, and suddenly a huge beast stepped out in front of him.

It stood astride the river, feral eyes surveying the puny human before it.

Through some mystic art, it had managed to teleport and close the distance between them.

Faster than light.

In that instant, Li Luo knew that strong spirit beasts were not to be underestimated.

BOOM!

It stomped one paw, a thunderous smash that sent a black slash of energy at Li Luo.

It was wider even than the river, and the entire section between them was smashed.

It charged right behind the attack.

The beast was closing in on him from the front, and this force was going to be unstoppable.

Hope trickled away.

Too strong.

He couldn't even breathe.

Like prey paralyzed in shock and horror.

But something deep within him awakened. He shook off the fear and faced it grimly.

Not only did he not dodge, he even stepped forward!

The beast bared its teeth in surprise, but its charge did not slow.

Shoop!

"Foul beast, today I seal you for good!" Li Luo cried out, holding his palm out. The seal glowed.

The three-tailed beast skidded to an abrupt halt, sirens of fear wailing within its mind.

That familiar seal! It had been captive under it for all these years!

So the seal hadn't disappeared, it had been transferred to this human!

But why?

A trap. Its hair rose out of instinct.

Uncertainty. Fear. After all these years of being imprisoned, it had grown to fear that seal's power, and the man behind it.

A god-like presence that was well beyond its means.

Could it be that this weak-looking human was all part of the trap?

Lure it out and subdue it?

The human's face was resolute... triumphant, even. There was not a shred of fear to be seen on his face.

With the seal, could the human be stronger?

Survival was the foremost instinct. It leaped out of the river, fleeing.

Escape first, think later!

Even as its legs carried it away, its bestial eyes were still intently watching Li Luo for danger. The human rushed forward to the spot where it had been...

And then kept on rushing forward.

Running away.

The three-tailed beast skidded around in confusion. The seal's energy it had sensed was gone.

Suddenly left in silence, the wind howled gleefully in its ears.

Had it... just been pranked?

### **Chapter 0288: Fighting for Time**

"F\*ck, that was too close!"

Li Luo's hands were still clammy from how close that had been. He could hear his heart thumping loudly.

He had just swaggered out from right under the spirit beast's nose.

It had been a middle finger to death's face. If the three-tailed beast had just been a little less afraid, or even sent a casual attack to cover its retreat, he would likely be dead.

Luckily, it was too afraid of the seal.

Before it confirmed the seal's power, the beast chose caution.

And therefore, Li Luo had hope.

He looked down at the ancient seal. Indeed, it had some strength behind it, but to think that it was enough to kill the three-tailed beast was foolishness.

The principal had said as much. It could be used if the three-tailed beast was injured, but not if it was in peak condition.

Of course, the three-tailed beast didn't know that.

All it knew was that the extremely powerful principal was a force to be feared. Even when only a representation of him was being wielded by someone else.

Borrowed power.

Li Luo glanced back and saw that the path was clear. Still, he was pretty sure his plan was still on track. The beast possessed the right mix of intellect and greed. It would chase on. If Li Luo's seal was strong enough to defeat it, he wouldn't be on the run.

Once it figured that out, it would come.

In the meantime, Li Luo would run.

He calmed his beating heart and sorted out his thoughts. These tricks had been thought of beforehand. Only by staying calm and doing what he could was there a chance for him to pull this off.

There would be no guaranteed safety in this mad situation. He could only choose the path that risked his life the least, with the best odds.

He pounded on, zipping across the river's surface like a streak of silvery-blue light.

Soon enough, he heard movement behind him again, and he could see a dust trail in the distance.

The three-tailed beast was coming again.

Even at this distance, its rage preceded him, a new frenzy to the way it shook the earth.

"Whew."

Li Luo felt simultaneously nervous and relieved. At least it was coming. If it ran away, the plan would be over.

Also, oh sh\*t, it was coming. The chase began again.

This time the three-tailed beast was not as hesitant. It was watching Li Luo's hand while it chased, assessing, calculating.

Li Luo kept his hand firmly shut, not exposing the seal at all. The three-tailed beast grew impatient and began to close the distance.

Just as it prepared to pounce on him, Li Luo suddenly stopped.

"Foul beast, let's die together!" he screamed like a beast himself, turning around to aim the seal's light at the three-tailed beast again.

He looked fully ready to die together.

The utter conviction in his eyes swayed the beast, and again it leaped away in fright.

Did Li Luo really mean to die together with it? It didn't know, but it was afraid to find out.

Which meant that again Li Luo slipped away ahead of it.

Soon enough, the dreadful, thundering chase began again, this time resuming much quicker than before. One could only cry wolf so many times.

The three-tailed beast was no fool. Each time Li Luo pulled off the same stunt, it grew a little bolder, a little surer of the seal's limits.

The seal was not strong enough to kill it.

Still, it chose prudence, biding its time for a good opportunity. It would leave no chance for Li Luo to hurt it in his death throes.

Li Luo gladly welcomed this prudence. If he kept this up, he would reach the purified spot soon.

It was just there, ahead of him.

Hope surged in his chest.

...

"Something's not right."

Duze Honglian was looking at the purification barrier, which was incredibly thin at this point, a pitiful collection of dim gossamer where it had once been a dense and comforting layer.

They had estimated that the barrier would last three days, but now it seemed like it would break before that.

The students looked up in helplessness and fear.

"The grinning demon has increased the corrosive power," Jiang Qing'e said in a voice still soft from her injuries.

She looked towards the back of the purified spot.

"Still holding out hope for him?" Duze Honglian snorted. "Only you would believe his harebrained scheme would succeed. Does he think a General Stage spirit beast can be commanded like a house puppy?"

"How's he going to run from it?"

At this point, Duze Honglian stopped talking. Soon enough, she would be back on the topic of Li Luo having run away.

The plan was just an excuse.

"I wish he had run away," Jiang Qing'e said in response to her unspoken thoughts. "It's a pity that Li Luo is not like that."

Duze Honglian snorted again.

"The purification barrier will be down soon. We have no choice but to try and fight it as best we can. Can you fight?"

Jiang Qing'e did not reply, but curled her fingers around her sword hilt.

That would be the end. It was likely that the entire purified spot would fall to the grinning demon. They had no other choice but to fight for every additional second.

She hoped that when it came to that, Li Luo would stay away. Perhaps he could live.

It was a futile hope. Li Luo would not come back alive unless he had made his plan succeed.

Time ticked on.

The atmosphere grew more and more tense, building up like gas. Stifling. Choking. And ready to explode into full-blown panic with just a spark.

Drip.

A drop of sticky, black sludge landed on the stone wall in front of Jiang Qing'e, eating away at it with relish.

The purification barrier was broken.

**Chapter 0289: Reinforcements Arrive**

When the barrier broke, the black rain stopped. Using it had taken a heavy toll on the grinning demon, and it would not use it again unless it had to. Now that the most troublesome barrier was down, it could turn to less expensive methods.

The cessation of the rain did no favors for the mood of the defenders. The Others were prowling on the edges tentatively, and more emerged from the smoky haze.

The grinning demon stood its ground, its grin stretching wide as the smell of fresh blood filled the air.

A heavy price it had paid, but now the shell was cracked, and the flesh inside was there for the taking.

With another inhuman screech, the Others surged forth as one roiling, black wave.

Some students screamed.

Duze Honglian and the others were pale as well. "Fight!" Jiang Qing'e shouted.

She herself lifted her heavy sword. It took every ounce of her strength to do so despite her injuries, but she was the cornerstone of the defense. She had to raise their morale.

Digging deep, she pulled enough light resonant energy to make her sword shine a light across the entire battlefield.

She took a deep breath.

"May fear be gone!"

"May we live long!"

This was the battle cry of generations of students in the Umbra Cave. It fortified their spirits and gave them new courage.

Intangible yet real, it warmed their souls and put strength back into them.

"May fear be gone!"

"May we live long!"

Their replying roar drowned out the whispers, and the students closed ranks.

"Prepare to meet the enemy!" Jiang Qing'e shouted.

They stood with resonant powers at the ready, weapons gripped tightly as they watched the first wave of Others approach.

They were afraid. But when the alternative was death, they would fight with all they had.

At least they would die with a bit more dignity that way.

BOOM!

Soon enough, the fight with the Others broke out full-scale, and the students were fighting harder than they had ever fought before.

Some were covered with blood, others had already gone berserk. No one tried to preserve energy within their bodies. They would rest when they were dead.

Of course, some students fell as well, buried under piles of enemies. When the Others turned to their next opponent, there was not even a corpse left behind.

The sanctuary was now covered in carnage.

Jiang Qing'e, Duze Honglian, Qiu Bai, and other Three Star Hall students formed an anchor on the front line. They bore the brunt of the attack, wading into where the fighting was deepest, and taking on the most Others. Even so, the purified spot was falling.

Jiang Qing'e's sword bludgeoned into another rank of Others. She was conserving energy now, light resonant energy flashing for only an instant during connection and winking out the moment her enemies were cut down. Her mastery was incredible.

Her golden eyes were fearless as she turned to the grinning demon.

"Duze Honglian."

Duze Honglian's whip of red iron snaked out, and more Others fell in a flash of flame. She turned to her rival.

"The grinning demon is weakened. The two of us will take it down. Qiu Bai, Tian Tian, hold the line with the others!"

Duze Honglian stood wordlessly for a moment. She knew that the two of them were the strongest on the field. But with Jiang Qing'e still injured, even their combined powers would not be enough to take down the grinning demon.

It was going to be a one-way trip forward.

Still, they would eventually lose by attrition otherwise.

"Let's go. Anything that Jiang Qing'e dares to do, Duze Honglian does too," she said harshly.

The two girls stepped forward as one, cutting down the Others in their way as they made their way towards the ultimate enemy.

Qiu Bai, Tian Tian, and the others watched miserably. They knew what the conclusion would be.

But was there any other option?

Gamble it all. That was all they could do.

But just then, there was a new force that began to make the ground tremble.

Boom, boom, BOOM.

The sounds were growing louder and louder.

Mini earthquakes, hitting one after another in a steady rhythm.

Many of the students looked around, fearful that this was another trick of the Heavenly Disaster Class Other.

Both girls halted, then they realized that the new shock was coming from the back of the purified spot.

They whirled around.

BOOM! BOOM!

Louder and louder.

And then they spotted a gigantic figure, looming tall above all of them, charging towards them at speed.

At the same time, a hysterical voice piped up from somewhere in front.

"Out of the way!

"Out of the way!"

Jiang Qing'e recognized the sweet voice immediately. "It's Li Luo!"

"Li Luo?" Duze Honglian repeated in disbelief. The little brat was back?

What mummery had he cooked up now?

"Out of the way, everyone!" Jiang Qing'e echoed his calls.

The students complied, fleeing to the high wall.

BOOM!

With a deafening crack, a building exploded in a cloud of dust.

There was a figure running for his life at the front.

"Li Luo!"

Yi Lisha and Si Qiuying recognized the familiar figure.

"Leader!"

Bai Mengmeng cheered.

He ignored all of them, concentrating all his energy on his feet. Neither of his resonances were suited for speed, but he was making it work. A root appeared on the ground in front of him as he ran. His foot lifted off it, and it sprang him forward for a little boost. He landed smack in the thick of the fighting.

Completely surrounded by Others, and the Heavenly Disaster Class was nearby as well.

Did he have a death wish?

He skidded to a halt and ran his hand through his hair, slick with sweat. He pointed his blade at the grinning demon.

"Hey, dog face, the Astral Sage College's guardian beast is here now. Accept your fate!"

From behind him, a roar answered, and another colossal shaking punctuated by dust clouds followed. A huge figure sailed out of the haze, landing in the middle of the purified spot. It was as big as a hill.

Amid the chaos of the battlefield, there were some clear sections.

In the very middle stood Li Luo, alone. Behind him was the three-tailed beast, its tails swiping from side to side, twitching in anticipation.

A mere Resonant Master had the Others backing away from the titans in the middle.

And furthest from the students was the grinning demon, its grin now fading a little.

This three-tailed beast was a real threat. A true threat.

Had the little human brat brought reinforcements?

### **Chapter 0290: The Lonely Hero**

The chaotic battles ceased while the giants fought, and Others and humans alike regrouped warily.

There was a tacit understanding that bigger threats were afoot.

The three-tailed beast watched them all warily, its glowing, ruby eyes flicking between Li Luo and the grinning demon.

It could sense the corruptive power from the latter. It was strong. Very strong. Since when had there been one that strong in these parts?

And the cunning human. Could he have lured it here to weaken them both?

The grinning demon bared its teeth in distrust. Was this spirit beast some sort of guardian?

Reinforcements.

Just when it was so close to cleaning out the juicy, fresh meat in the purified spot.

It turned to the new threat and hissed in anger. No one would stop it from getting its rewards today!

The three-tailed beast sensed the growing hostility and turned to the demon. It was the undisputed king of the forbidden zone, and it would rise to the challenge.

It let out a warning roar. The situation here was messy, and it wouldn't dive right in from the start.

It had no intention of fighting needlessly. As long as it could have the human kid, it would be happy enough to leave.

But the warning roar made the grinning demon tense up in suspicion. It sounded like a declaration of war.

Both the beast and the demon had some primal intelligence. It served them especially well in survival, but not in higher forms of communication. Their savage spirits clashed against each other, and their warring natures surged forth.

In response to the three-tailed beast's roar, the grinning demon started to gather its own corruptive power, sending it in a towering plume up to the sky as intimidation.

Still, it was not yet using its full strength.

On the wall, Jiang Qing'e and the others anxiously watched on.

Like Li Luo had envisioned, the forbidden zone's spirit beast had been lured here.

But would they fight? What if the spirit beast turned on them?

For sure the three-tailed beast was not any guardian or friend of theirs!

Once it was enraged, it would happily slaughter everyone in the purified spot.

It was clearly pretty smart. So far, it had resisted the urge to attack the grinning demon.

It wouldn't fight a Heavenly Disaster Class Other for no good reason.

If the two were in a stalemate, the only ones to lose out here would be the students.

Had they simply brought an additional problem upon themselves?

Even Duze Honglian was sweating profusely now. This situation was too hot for her blood.

"Why does it feel like this is adding fuel to the fire when we're tied to the stake?" she muttered.

Beside her, the others' legs were turning to jelly.

"Li Luo's not afraid. What are you all afraid of?" Jiang Qing'e said mildly.

That stiffened their backs somewhat.

They were all cowering here and cringing from the pressure. What about Li Luo, who was out there between a demon and a beast?

It was a miracle that he was even on his feet.

"Still, prepare yourselves. We're committed already, and in way over our heads. An extra beast doesn't make much of a difference."

She didn't want to get their hopes up. Things still looked bleak, no matter how you cut it.

If the two titans didn't fight, the purified spot would still be doomed.

It was just that now they would be doubly doomed.

"Leader, we can't just let them keep up this staring," Tian Tian whispered urgently.

Jiang Qing'e nodded. She knew that the two monsters were sizing each other up. Neither was willing to make the opening move, but such a stalemate would be disadvantageous to them.

They had to seize the advantage while things were still in flux.

If Jiang Qing'e attacked now, they might anger the beast to turn on them. And then the grinning demon would know they were not allies after all.

They could not make the first move.

Who then?

A silver-haired man between them.

Li Luo was the best choice to act.

Still, he was in a precarious position. If he advanced, the grinning demon would smash him to a pulp. Retreat, and the three-tailed beast would eat him alive.

It seemed like a stalemate.

What could he do?

They averted their eyes from Jiang Qing'e out of consideration.

And yet, it seemed impossible that she would allow Li Luo to sacrifice himself like that...

But something was moving now.

Li Luo slowly raised a palm towards the air.

He grinned at the people on the wall.

He brought his hand down in a forward motion.

"CHARGE!!" he yelled. His shortswords glittered, and he made his lonely charge towards the horde of Others.

The students had tears in their eyes.

Some of the girls were crying freely.

"Leader," Bai Mengmeng sobbed.

Xin Fu stared silently at his back, committing it to memory.

"That guy..." Yi Lisha sighed. "It's the first time I've had so much respect for a peer."

Si Qiuying quietly thought to herself that perhaps she had finally found someone equally worthy of respect as her brother.

"I'm sorry... Li Luo," she thought in her heart.

Duze Honglian showed no emotion, but in the end she turned to Jiang Qing'e.

The latter was staring at Li Luo, paralyzed in shock. Her knuckles were white around the hilt of her sword.

On the battlefield, the lone hero leaped into the sea of enemies.

