

Resonance 351

Chapter 0351: A Show

The addition of the other Xia Kingdom team into the protection alliance made the already-complicated composition even more complicated.

The next day, their journey was marked by a fragmented and tense mood. The protection alliance had dissolved into three fractions.

One was the outsiders: Zhao Ziyang, Gu Ying, and the others not of the Xia Kingdom. One was Li Luo, Lu Qing'er, and Qin Zhulu—the weakest but also the core reason for this alliance. The last was the newcomers: Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo.

Of the three, Zhao Ziyang's faction was clearly the strongest, while Ning Zhao, Zhu Xuan, and Lin Suo were slightly weaker, but close enough to make a fight difficult. Especially when they were beset by other teams lurking about, it was not wise to make a move before being fully prepared.

Which meant that all of them were playing it safe for now.

Of course, safe did not mean civil. They still had bitter arguments, and through it all Li Luo stood in the middle like a venerable old sage, urging peace and unity.

Like a helpless wife wheedling at her husband's sleeve.

Prickling and rubbing against each other, the protection alliance made their way towards the Reservoir.

Each day, the protection alliance continued to be attacked by other squads. They survived the bitter fighting, and with it came considerable rewards.

When night fell, they commenced the much-welcomed gold dividends.

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At the campfire, Li Luo popped a crispy piece of grilled meat into his mouth, crunching down on the golden-brown skin and savoring the burst of meaty oil that flooded his mouth. Bliss.

He carved out another small piece and handed it to Lu Qing'er.

She took it and gave him a beautiful smile before taking a small, elegant bite. Still, the meat was too oily to be eaten with much elegance, and soon her red lips were coated with oil, glistening in the campfire's light.

Beside them, Qin Zhulu was devouring huge hunks of meat as though he had been starved for days. "The Golden Dragon Dao Fields suck," he belched with dissatisfaction. "Not what I wanted at all."

True to his character, what he wanted was nonstop hunting, killing, and death. But somehow now they were being carefully chaperoned by a bunch of super-strong bodyguards.

Although squads had come after them like mad in the last few days, neither he nor Li Luo had needed to lift a finger. Li Luo had told him stoutly that their most important job was to protect Lu Qing'er, and so they would not leave her side.

Qin Zhulu had no comeback for that, not when even Zhao Ziyang and the others were in full agreement. Of course, the latter group had an additional agenda, which was not to let those three out of their sight.

Whatever their reasons, Qin Zhulu had not fought anybody in days. He could only watch from the sides as Zhao Ziyang and the others hurtled into difficult battle after difficult battle, while he could only swat flies on the sidelines. Li Luo rolled his eyes. Qin Zhulu was incorrigible. Did Qin Zhulu know how much trouble he had gone through to get them in this cushy position?! And the guy was complaining about boredom? Talk about first-world problems.

"If you're feeling bored, just eat more. Look at Qing'er's great appetite! She's rounded out a little in the last few days, I feel," Li Luo said.

Lu Qing'er's hands flew to her cheeks in alarm. "Rounded out? Where?!"

Li Luo was startled by her overreaction. "No, no, I'm just kidding," he laughed weakly.

She glared at him, half embarrassed, half upset. She gave him a small punch.

Li Luo took it without complaint. He was more bothered by the fact that the atmosphere had turned bristly again. Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying, and even Zhu Xuan's group were staring over at them.

Li Luo could understand their anger.

They had been out all day defending the alliance, bleeding and suffering for it. Now they just wanted to lick their wounds in peace, not listen to nonsense from these three. If there was a table present, they would have flipped it.

"Ahem..."

Li Luo coughed and changed the topic. "Let's talk about happier things. Such as today's take."

He fished out a cloth bag and upended it on the ground with a flourish. A bunch of trinkets rolled out.

Today's haul of dao-gold.

Everyone stared at it greedily.

In the protection alliance, Li Luo managed the take of dao-gold. Mainly because he was the weakest, everyone knew that he could not run away with it.

"That's all the dao-gold for today. And..."

With all the greedy eyes watching, Li Luo fished out a stick from the campfire's fuel pile and divided it up.

"Thanks for your work, everyone. Come get your rewards."

"Wait," Zhao Ziyang suddenly said. He pointed at the heaps of dao-gold. "There's an extra pile today?" he said testily.

"It's for them, of course," Li Luo said, surprised, pointing at Ning Zhao and Zhu Xuan.

"We didn't agree to give them equal shares," Zhao Ziyang said, the volume of his voice climbing dangerously.

Ning Zhao and Zhu Xuan did not respond well. "What's wrong with you?" they demanded. "Don't try to start a fight. We fought the enemies today too, didn't we? What's undeserved?"

Secretly, they were amazed by the amount that Li Luo had set out. In the few days before they had joined up, the sum total of their profits had not even equaled this.

Only now did they realize how amazing Lu Qing'er's Golden Dragon Qi was. No wonder Zhao Ziyang and the others had been hunted down so relentlessly.

"We can give you a share, but surely you can't get equal shares from the get-go," Gu Ying said. "Perhaps in a few days, when we can judge your performance."

Zhu Xuan flung his hand forth and took the dao-gold that Li Luo had allocated, making sure to leave a trail of fire from his sleeves.

"Enough bullsh*t. This is ours, earned fair and square. Qing'er is from our Xia Kingdom Golden Dragon Bank. The fact that WE let YOU share the profits is already very courteous of us.

"If you're not happy with this, we're happy to match you in whatever you do. Or split."

"Big mouth," Zhao Ziyang hissed, his anger announced loud and clear. "Who do you think you are?" His vermilion resonant power glowed on his arms.

Suddenly, the peaceful atmosphere was gone.

Li Luo hurriedly stood up. "Oh, come on, why must we keep doing this? This is no time for us to be fighting amongst ourselves. We defeated a lot of people today, but there are more out there. In-fighting only gives them chances, right?

"Come on, guys. For me? Let's get along."

He patted the air calmly, then turned to Ning Zhao and Zhu Xuan. "You guys just joined, so perhaps it's right that you put in a little more. How about this: we'll hand tonight's guard duty to you?"

Zhu Xuan glared at Li Luo. He did not want to fight with Zhao Ziyang right here, right now. They were at a numbers disadvantage. He grudgingly nodded.

Rising to his feet, he gestured to Ning Zhao and Lin Suo, then they walked away from the campfire.

Soon, a measure of peaceful silence fell, and they listened to the pops and crackles of the wood for a few moments.

Still, Li Luo could sense simmering anger from Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying.

Well, well. After an entire day of acting, it seemed like tonight was finally going to be his turn to watch a show.

Chapter 0352: A Night of Chaos

The temperature fell as night deepened, and fog condensed in a thin, white haze all about them.

The fire was going strong in the middle, and around it they had erected some simple tentage.

Li Luo sat by the fire, keeping watch on his surroundings. Neither Zhao Ziyang nor Gu Ying were around, although their four teammates were here, both for their protection and as guards.

Li Luo stretched lazily, inhaling deeply. A familiar fragrance clung to the wet, night air, and he turned to see Lu Qing'er approaching. She sat down beside him.

She had just returned from her bath in the mountain spring, and her green tresses hung damp, drying slowly as she held it out towards the fire.

"Not going to rest yet?" Li Luo asked cheerfully.

"Are you plotting something again?" she whispered, ignoring his courtesies.

Li Luo made sure everyone was out of earshot before replying, "Plotting? Who? And against who? You?"

"Stop playing the fool with me," she said with a steely look. "Tell me straight: did you betray Zhu Xuan and the others?"

Li Luo's smile showed that he was impressed. Lu Qing'er had always been a smart one. His actions in the last two days had been enough for her to piece things together.

"Let the dogs bite each other. It does not matter to us," he said softly.

"Don't think that Zhu Xuan and his team are here to protect us. It's more likely that they only came because they heard that you have the Golden Dragon Qi. Believe me, only I'm true to you. Qin Zhulu is half a barbarian, so he's only half true. All that I do is for you."

Li Luo looked deep into her eyes. Lu Qing'er smiled, resting her chin on her hands. "Very charming.

"Well, I do believe you. Whatever you decide, I'll support you fully. Even if Ning Zhao or Zhu Xuan make trouble for you when we get back, I'll help you speak to my mother."

Li Luo gave her a big thumbs up. "I love your very rational way of speaking."

Qin Zhulu emerged from the treeline, holding his heavy spear loosely. He was covered in sweat and wood splinters alike. Evidently, he had been taking out his frustrations on the local vegetation again.

Giving Li Luo a disapproving grunt, he put his spear on his shoulder and disappeared into the tentage.

Li Luo didn't know how to react.

He had no idea how to handle this man-child-bear who growled like a kid not allowed to play outside.

He spoke briefly with Lu Qing'er, then watched as she returned to the tents as well.

Li Luo looked further out into the night, to where Zhu Xuan's team was on guard. Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying were probably leading people their way...

Tonight promised to be intense, but it was none of his business. He was just a good boy waiting by the tent.

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In the thin fog.

Zhu Xuan was perched high on a tree trunk, back leaning against it with his arms crossed and an emotionless expression. Slightly ahead of him was Ning Zhao, seated comfortably on a thick branch with his legs dangling off. He was bouncing a tiny spark of lightning resonance between his hands, humming each time it returned to his kunai knife.

Neither spoke, simply watching the forest with an expectant mood.

A chilling breeze blew through the forest.

Zhu Xuan turned his neck and watched the dark shadows between the trees. "Sneaking around so suspiciously... I knew you bunch were dirty."

Two people walked out of the darkness. Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying.

"Zhu Xuan, your squad arrived late. Of course you should play by our rules. Wait a few days, prove yourselves," Zhao Ziyang said coolly.

"We weren't planning to do anything to you, not until you pushed the limits and took our profits. So now we aren't going to play nice either."

"Shameless," Zhu Xuan sneered. "Do you really think the Golden Dragon Qi is yours alone?"

"Without our protection all this time, do you think they could have held on to the Golden Dragon Qi? We're just claiming remuneration that is rightfully ours." Gu Ying giggled. "And don't pretend you're so noble either," she challenged. "Aren't you here for the same greedy reasons? You think we would believe you're saints?"

Zhu Xuan refused to admit it. "The Golden Dragon Qi is with Qing'er. She's from the Xia Kingdom, same as us. We're definitely a hundred times closer than you are."

"Which makes your exploitation all the more heartless," Gu Ying said maliciously.

Zhao Ziyang took another step forward, his vermilion resonant power heating up the space around his arms. "Enough talk. Zhu Xuan, I give you a choice. Will you leave? Or will we make you leave?"

Zhu Xuan's answer was to pull out a flaming, red brass-staff burning with power.

"I've always wanted to know if your lava or my fire resonance was stronger."

Ning Zhao followed his lead, silver kunai crackling and humming with electricity.

"Zhu Xuan, looks like greed has made you stupid," Gu Ying said, shaking her head. "You think a squad like yours can hope to compete?"

She waved a hand.

From the shadows, more people emerged, staring down Zhu Xuan's team.

Zhao Ziyang commanded an alliance of four squads. Although they had left a few to watch Li Luo and the others, they still had an overwhelming advantage in terms of numbers.

Zhu Xuan watched them appear with noted indifference. He had expected it, of course.

"Oh, Zhao Ziyang, do you really think we would remain here without any preparations of our own? You're not the only clever person in the world," he said mildly.

Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying's eyes narrowed with suspicion.

Zhu Xuan's red brass-staff was raised high in the air, and he sent up a column of fire that lit up the night sky.

Soon enough, they heard the familiar sound of whistling wind that announced the arrival of more people.

A few moments later, there were blinking flashes of resonant power seen through the trees.

At least a dozen people.

Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying tensed. "Looks like you're well-prepared!"

Zhu Xuan laughed. "I already knew you wouldn't accept us willingly. Luckily, I found others who would. You've made many enemies along your way here... whereas I've made many friends.

"Zhao Ziyang, since you won't share a sip of the wine, I'll have to take the whole jug away. I'm not even going to leave you the pithy dregs."

"Bold words. Show me, don't tell me!" Shouting, Zhao Ziyang's vermilion power burst forth as he shot towards Zhu Xuan, his arms glowing with deadly power.

Zhu Xuan's own bronze staff was red-hot with his fire resonant power, creating its own heat wave as it distorted the air around it. He met Zhao Ziyang's attack head-on.

Dang!

It was a colossal clash that signaled the start of a larger conflict between the two groups' fighters.

The peace of the night was shattered in a flash.

Chapter 0353: Extraction

The night remained as dark as the mood that hung in the air.

Li Luo peered into the darkness, which was occasionally interrupted by flashes of resonant power. The number of flashes surprised him greatly.

"This Zhu Xuan is a real nasty piece of work himself."

Although he had suspected that Zhu Xuan had not come alone, he had assembled a small army for himself, by the looks of him. He had brought a gun to a gunfight.

Clearly, he had no intention of sharing the Golden Dragon Qi with Zhao Ziyang and his gang.

Not only was he hoping to take Zhao Ziyang's place, he intended to replace the rest of the protection alliance with his own as well.

This guy sure didn't aim low.

Ambitious, and charismatic enough to get all these people to rally for his cause.

If not for Li Luo egging on Zhao Ziyang to spring a fight, Zhu Xuan would probably have taken his time to maneuver his troops into position and then clean them all up at once.

And once Zhao Ziyang was prised away from the prize, then Zhu Xuan could swoop in to "protect" Lu Qing'er. He might even find an excuse to send the rest of her squad away.

After all, Zhu Xuan bore him no good feelings.

"I wonder if Zhao Ziyang's guys can stand up to Zhu Xuan's..." Li Luo idly wondered. If Zhao Ziyang happened to turn the tables, he was going to have to find another opponen- er, protection alliance partner.

However, the present chaos also seemed like a good time for them to make their escape.

Li Luo suddenly realized that the campfire had become rather quiet. The watchers on guard had gone still.

Li Luo's nostrils flared as he detected a strange odor in the air.

His eyes widened.

Dizzying gas!

A heavy stupor crashed over his skull, but in his flash of clarity, Li Luo used his wood resonant power, flushing out his body with the detoxifying resonance. A few moments later, the haziness cleared.

His expression did not. Something serious was going down.

He scrutinized the darkness carefully, then he finally locked on to a certain spot. "Come out."

Nothing.

And then he heard light footsteps as a figure stepped out quietly.

His eyes were locked onto Li Luo.

The campfire's swaying flames cast a flickering mix of illumination and shadow, but the suboptimal light was enough for Li Luo to make out the face. The enigmatic Lin Suo.

From the start, Li Luo had sensed that this guy was trouble.

"You didn't fall to the Gauze Cloud?" Lin Suo asked pleasantly.

"Did Zhu Xuan send you?"

Li Luo frowned. He had clearly underestimated Zhu Xuan. Not only had he assembled an army to take on lava-fist, he had even sent his partner to prevent Li Luo from escaping.

Lin Suo just smiled.

Li Luo was watching him alertly. He was very leery of this guy, and he privately suspected him of being an assassin snuck in by some power that wanted to see House Luolan fall, here to kill him.

Although Yu Hongxi had said that Lin Suo was from Golden Dragon Bank, that had not made Li Luo a single bit less cautious.

If Lin Suo was after him, he would not pass up on such a good chance...

Although Lin Suo was only formally a First Changing, Li Luo felt that this man was not that simple a character.

Lin Suo showed no inclination to chat. His resonant power shot forth, a hue of red even darker than Zhao Ziyang's vermilion power. There was a rusty smell that Li Luo found all too familiar.

This was... blood resonance?

A rare power indeed.

Lin Suo turned into a rust-red blur as he streaked towards Li Luo.

"What speed!" Li Luo barely took his knives out in time, his own resonant power sputtering to life with ragged speed.

His weapons flashed out in identical, deadly swings, cutting towards the mysterious attacker.

The streak passed his blades easily, evading him as Lin Suo appeared behind Li Luo.

He ignored Li Luo completely, moving towards a tent.

Lu Qing'er's tent!

Lin Suo sprayed a mouthful of bloody resonant power that landed on the tent and dissolved it instantly, revealing a sleeping Lu Qing'er.

He pounced.

The bizarre sequence of events had Li Luo frozen in place, unsettled and unsure. Who had sent this guy? Why hadn't he taken the chance to finish Li Luo off?

Regardless, he could not allow Lin Suo to harm Lu Qing'er.

Lin Suo stretched out a hand to the sleeping girl, but he felt a deadly swath of resonant power blast past him.

It was deadly enough that he had to respect it.

His outstretched hand was flung backwards, delivering a backhand blast of crimson power that deflected Li Luo's swords.

Ding!

Li Luo's ears rang from the attack. He was alarmed to see that the dual resonant powers on his blades had been completely extinguished.

That power was far beyond what a First Changing could use!

He was at least as strong as Zhao Ziyang or Zhu Xuan!

This Lin Suo was indeed hiding his true strength!

"Why did you go to such lengths to hide your power?" he demanded. "Who sent you? And what are you after, if not me?"

"After you?" Lin Suo said with a mocking laugh that was carried away by the wind. ~~0VEB1n~~

"Young Lord of House Luolan, the world does not revolve around you. I have no interest in you. Now, if you know what's good for you, get lost."

Li Luo cringed a little. All this time he had assumed Lin Suo was after his back, but now it seemed like his guesses were wrong.

"If not me, then... Qing'er?"

"Weren't you from the Tiancang branch of the Golden Dragon Bank? Aren't you afraid of President Yu's wrath? What's your intention?"

Lin Suo ignored Li Luo, instead pulling out a shining, black gourd that was about the size of his thumb.

He balanced it carefully in the center of his palm, then he flicked it with a finger towards the sleeping Lu Qing'er's brow.

Some black smoke seeped out of the gourd, hovering over Lu Qing'er's head for a moment before being sucked back in.

To Li Luo's horror, he saw a golden aura begin to rise from Lu Qing'er's forehead, as if it were being sucked into the black gourd.

That mystical, golden mist had to be...

Golden Dragon Qi!

This Lin Suo could extract the Golden Dragon Qi from within Lu Qing'er's body?!

Chapter 0354: Lin Suo, The Mysterious One

Li Luo felt his stomach sink when he saw the golden aura being sucked away into the black gourd. At least now he could finally confirm that Lin Suo's target had been Lu Qing'er from the start, and not him.

Or rather, just the Golden Dragon Qi?

But Lu Qing'er had only gotten the Golden Dragon Qi after entering the Dao Fields. Lin Suo had entered before that. Did he know this whole time?

And why wasn't Lin Suo afraid of Yu Hongxi?

Did he think he could get out of this alive when he got back to the Xia Kingdom?

Li Luo's mind was racing with questions, all while he evaluated the situation. Lin Suo was definitely not an easy person to deal with.

Still, his objective was clear. Ultimately, he had to save Lu Qing'er. That was all. Regardless of Lin Suo's plans.

Two separate streams of resonant power flowed within him—waterlight and woodearth. He channeled them to his blades and kicked away at the ground, launching himself forward.

Li Luo slashed out wildly to cover his advance, his flurry of swordlight attacks leaving deep gouges on the ground.

"Fool." Lin Suo shook his head.

"So what if you have dual resonances? You're just a mere Third Pattern."

He pulled out an iron mace and started swinging the bulky, bludgeoning weapon over his head. Blood-red power flew through the air, becoming crimson plum blossoms in the air that floated towards Li Luo.

The contrast was bizarre enough to make Li Luo blink. He could sense that there was something dark about them. He did not dare to dawdle, immediately combining his resonant powers.

Whoosh!

Swords glowing with a fresh coat of power, he slashed away at the blossoms. Each time one was cut, it dissipated with a dark hiss.

Li Luo was cutting his way through the crimson flowers, slowly and surely approaching Lin Suo.

His four resonant bubbles popped, filling him with fresh strength.

Ding!

The crimson mace moved with surprising dexterity despite its ponderous bulk, deftly deflecting Li Luo's attacks. Through it all, Lin Suo barely moved, his defense impregnable.

Li Luo was getting less and less confident by the moment. Lin Suo seemed even stronger than Zhao Ziyang or Zhu Xuan. Even when fighting against Li Luo's full strength, he seemed to be handling it with ease.

This guy had really hidden himself well!

Ding!

Another clash, and Li Luo was sent staggering back into a clump of bushes. Lin Suo stepped forward to press his advantage, when suddenly a tiger's roar broke into the fray.

Heavy spear sweeping out in a deadly arc, the new attacker leaped at Lin Suo with no hesitation.~~no~~
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Qin Zhulu!

A pang of irritation showed on Lin Suo's face, although he was still not worried. Another twirl of his mace created three hoops of blood that floated around him as a defense, and he turned to deal with the new attacker.

Ding!

The roaring tiger-youth was sent flying with a splendid smash of the mace, his golden stripes battling against the bloody impact of the mace.

Crash!

His body smashed into a tree and broke it.

He sprung up again in a trice and started charging again, his own eyes red with the hunger of battle. He was oblivious to the wounds that the mace had left behind, deep enough to pulp the surface of his flesh.

Each of Qin Zhulu's attacks were incredibly savage. They were reckless, risking his life again and again just to cause a little bit more harm to his opponent. Lin Suo was fighting more cautiously to protect himself. After all, he held the advantage, so there was no need to trade damage with a weaker opponent.

Swoosh!

From where Li Luo had backed away into the trees, a streak of light flew out, headed straight for Lin Suo's throat.

It was an arrow, fashioned with resonant power. Lin Suo's eyes widened at the speed.

He opened his mouth reflexively to spray his corrosive blood at the new attack.

It formed an arrow of blood that flew on course to crash against the arrow of water, but the latter had a core of light energy as well. It changed course mid-air, then it homed in on Lin Suo again.

His defense had missed?

Lin Suo panicked, then he threw his arm up to brace himself. The arrow shot past him.

Turning, he saw that it had buried itself in the black gourd hovering above Lu Qing'er's brow.

Ding!

There was a clear ringing sound as the black gourd was sent flying. It was not broken, but it had been knocked out of position.

The flow of golden mist stopped. Now it hung in the air with the faint roar of a dragon echoing all about them.

Lin Suo's face darkened.

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At the same time, in the forest some distance away.

The messy battle had ground to a sudden halt because of the dragon roars they could hear.

Both Zhao Ziyang's faction and Zhu Xuan's faction paused, looking over with alarm.

"That's... the camp!" Zhao Ziyang exclaimed.

"And is that golden column the Golden Dragon Qi?" Gu Ying hissed.

"Someone's set it free?!"

Zhao Ziyang's group turned on Zhu Xuan furiously. "Your methods are vile. Since you can't win, you'll set the Golden Dragon Qi free?! Lu Qing'er's mother is the president of the Xia Kingdom's Golden Dragon Bank. She won't let you off!"

Zhu Xuan was cringing with horror and fury. "You think I don't know?!" he shouted back indignantly. "Why the hell would I do something like that? Besides, I don't even understand the Golden Dragon Qi well. How could I possibly release it?"

"As if it's not your lackey doing it right now!" Zhao Ziyang thundered.

Zhu Xuan froze. Indeed, he had sent Lin Suo over, but it was just to hold Lu Qing'er and the others in place. After all, Li Luo was always bad news. He had to stop Li Luo from sneaking Lu Qing'er away under the cover of chaos.

But he had not ordered Lin Suo to release the Golden Dragon Qi from Lu Qing'er. He had spoken the truth—even though he might have agreed to it if he knew, he didn't know it was possible!

Gu Ying took Zhu Xuan's shocked silence as an admission of guilt. "You poisonous toad, we were just trying to get some dao-gold. You've killed the golden goose now!"

Even Zhu Xuan's helpers were turning on him now. "What's going on, Zhu Xuan?! If you release the Golden Dragon Qi, what are we going to do?!" Zhu Xuan was sweating bullets.

Ning Zhao quickly came to his side. "What's going on?" he asked in an urgent whisper. "If the Golden Dragon Qi is destroyed, Qing'er might be safe, but we won't be. President Yu will break every bone in our bodies when we get back!"

"How would I know what's going on!?" Zhu Xuan snapped at him. "That Lin Suo! Something's fishy!"

They were no longer paying attention to him. Zhao Ziyang and all the others were rushing back towards camp at full speed.

Zhu Xuan swore and gnashed his teeth, then he followed, his eyes burning with rage.

"Lin Suo, you bastard, what the f*ck have you done?!"

Chapter 0355: Lin Suo Leaves

When the black gourd was sent flying, Lin Suo's anger was more real than any reaction he had shown before. He immediately rushed over to Lu Qing'er's side.

"Roar!"

The tiger was up again. Qin Zhulu's golden tiger-stripes were as bright as ever, and his body was swelling with a blend of resonant power and raw physical strength. It seemed like a dark tiger silhouette of burnished gold was superimposed over his person.~~novel~~1n

Immediately, his stance grew even more feral and wild.

Qin Zhulu charged, spear in one hand and equally deadly tiger claws flashing on the other. Both were aimed straight at Lin Suo, rending the air with their keen edges.

"Enough!"

Lin Suo had had enough of this tiger, who was more persistent than a fly. A backhand sent a crimson palm print flying out towards Qin Zhulu.

"Blood Print!"

Boom!

The bloody palm print was powerful enough to make Qin Zhulu wince. This attack was far more powerful than what he had used before, because the resonant power had sentience that made it interact in different ways.

This was already a Third Changing level of power!

This was definitely the strongest person they had met since entering the Golden Dragon Dao Fields!

Lin Suo was this powerful?!

Crash!

The simple palm attack wounded Qin Zhulu badly. His heavy spear bent under the pressure of blocking the attack, and it sprung back to send him flying. His golden tiger stripes were wiped out as if by the hand.

"Pffft!"

A spray of fresh blood spurted from his mouth, and he staggered several steps back.

Lin Suo laughed coldly. He moved again to finish off Qin Zhulu for good.

Swoosh!

A volley of light streaks came whistling at him, aimed at his vitals.

Frowning, Lin Suo turned and brandished his mace, smashing the arrows of flowing light into bits. Li Luo was really irritating. Although the light arrows were not very powerful, they were fast enough that he had to be very careful with intercepting them.

He took two seconds to evaluate, then decided to ignore Li Luo's irritations. First, he would finish off Qin Zhulu. Without the attacker in his face, Li Luo was just a nimble mouse who could cause little harm.

Just when he decided to ignore the arrows of light and turned away, he saw a fresh volley sail through the air in the corner of his eye.

Something about them gave him pause. He saw that one of them was tinged with a pea-green pulse.

Something was off.

His crimson power twirled around his fingers, and he raised two of them. "Tiger-general resonance art, Finger of Blood and Bone!"

A compressed burst of crimson resonant power shot from his finger, zinging from arrow to arrow. The rest of the volley vanished, leaving behind the greenwood arrow.

There were some strange markings on the shaft of the arrow, and he could see dual resonances mixed in it.

This arrow alone pierced through his blood finger attack, continuing on its way to him.

A slight chill passed through Lin Suo. A mere Third Pattern could penetrate his counterattack?

This was the power of dual resonances? They were truly something special.

Perhaps he had underestimated that kid.

But no matter what, he still believed that sheer power alone was enough to overwhelm Li Luo.

Lin Suo's finger peeled apart by itself, fingernail cracking backwards and ripping off his flesh like a banana peel. A bone shot out of his finger, also tinged with red power. It flew out towards the greenwood arrow. Ping!

The clash scattered both powers. Where the blood resonance touched, the ground withered. Where the wood resonance touched, the grass flourished.

Finally, the greenwood arrow was spent, snapping in two like a twig. The red and white finger-bone still had energy in it, carrying on its path towards Li Luo.

A mirror of water caught sunlight as it flickered into existence.

At the same time, tendrils wrapped down protectively from the trees to form a wall. With these, the rest of its power was also negated.

In the dim light of the forest, Li Luo saw the finger bone finally come to a rest just mere inches from his body, having penetrated almost all of his defenses. "Evolving Resonance tier, Third Changing, huh..."

Li Luo looked at the finger. This was truly the strongest person in this area. Not even Zhao Ziyang or Zhu Xuan could compete.

Since when had there been such a strong competitor in the Xia Kingdom?

Lin Suo's resonance was probably only a seventh-grade. How had he reached Third Changing at such a young age?

It seemed impossible that someone from a rich family like Zhu Xuan would have less resources or talent than him.

Plus, Lin Suo had come from the Tiancang branch of the Xia Kingdom's Golden Dragon Bank. How had he become so powerful? A mere branch of the Golden Dragon Bank should have much more modest resources. It was Lu Qing'er who was the young mistress of the central headquarters. He quelled his rising suspicions, focusing on the matter at hand.

Lin Suo made no further move. He could see that Zhao Ziyang, Gu Ying, and even Zhu Xuan were all returning now.

It seemed unlikely that he could continue extracting Golden Dragon Qi from Lu Qing'er's body.

He had only managed to extract it halfway.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

The others were all returning.

"What's going on?" Zhao Ziyang demanded, looking furiously around before pausing on the unconscious Lu Qing'er.

Li Luo walked up, looking coldly at Zhu Xuan and Ning Zhao. "Lin Suo extracted half the Golden Dragon Qi from Qing'er. Is this your doing? Have you thought about the consequences?"

Both Zhu Xuan and Ning Zhao scowled at him. "Are you insane? We still plan to go back to the Xia Kingdom after this. What rotten brain would think this is a good idea?"

"And what's your explanation, Lin Suo?"

He did not really suspect that Zhu Xuan or Ning Zhao had a hand in this, because they were rational enough to see that Yu Hongxi would be after their blood in the very near future. And her wrath was something that neither Ning Zhao's vice president of a father nor Zhu Xuan's House Lord of a father could stop.

Zhu Xuan rounded on Lin Suo. "What's the meaning of this?! I asked you to watch them, not extract Qing'er's Golden Dragon Qi!"

Lin Suo snickered. "Zhu Xuan, you and I never walked the same path."

"Forget it, I'm wasting my breath. Well, I'll be leaving."

He shook his head and carelessly stretched out his hand, making the black gourd fly obediently to his grasp.

"Leaving?! Did you think we'll let you?!" Zhao Ziyang shouted.

Lin Suo turned to look him in the eye. Taking a single step forward, he let his blood resonant power flow without any clear direction or intent.

The quality alone was enough to make Zhao Ziyang and Zhu Xuan pale. "Evolving Resonance Tier, Third Changing?" they stammered in disbelief.

"I don't intend to fight you. You might have the numbers, but if I want to leave, there's nothing you can do to stop me."

"And now that the Golden Dragon Qi is ruined, there's no more bounty to be had. Do you really want to fight me over a useless Golden Dragon Qi?" Lin Suo mocked.

Zhao Ziyang and Zhu Xuan stiffened, weighing their options.

"If you want to fight, I'll see you on Golden Dragon Mountain."

With a deliberate look at Li Luo, he turned and shifted into a crimson streak of light that was soon out of sight.

Li Luo watched him go, letting the killing intent rise and consume him for an instant before suppressing it again.

This was not the time to act.

But his opponent was going nowhere. They would meet again. And when that time came, Li Luo would be fully prepared to give it a go.

Chapter 0356: Torn Up and Fed to the Dogs

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When Lin Suo left, the rest fell into a dejected silence, all the fight having left their slumped shoulders.

They had fought over Lu Qing'er, and now that the Golden Dragon Qi was half gone, there was no real golden goose to speak of.

Their plan to ride her to riches was over now.

Li Luo ignored them all, moving to Lu Qing'er's side. Taking hold of her wrist, he started to impart wood resonant power into her to clear the poison.

A moment later, her lashes fluttered and she stirred.

"Qing'er, are you alright?" Li Luo helped her up with concern.

She winced. "There's a weird hollowness in me... I think the Golden Dragon Qi has been half taken away from me. But otherwise, I'm fine."

Although she had been paralyzed, she had still retained her senses, and so she knew that it was Lin Suo who had attacked her.

Li Luo was just happy that she was fine. Had anything happened to her, Yu Hongxi would be after him.

After he ascertained that she was fine, he turned to Zhao Ziyang and the others. "Now that we have no more gold source to depend on, what are your plans?"

"We're definitely going to look for Lin Suo."

Zhao Ziyang considered Li Luo's declaration. "Lin Suo is a Third Changing. Even three-on-one, you can't beat him. Not even any one of our squads could beat him three-on-one."

"If you're going after Lin Suo, we can't help you. We have our own mission to fulfill."

Now that the Golden Dragon Qi was gone, Lu Qing'er no longer held the same value that they had. Zhao Ziyang had no wish to tangle with a Third Changing over nothing.

Li Luo accepted his reasons. To each their own.

"Well, in that case, let's part ways here." Li Luo shrugged.

Zhao Ziyang nodded. He hesitated, then spoke again. "I suggest you not go find Lin Suo. A Third Changing is more than you can handle."

Li Luo just blinked, unconcerned.

Zhao Ziyang saw that Li Luo had no intention of being dissuaded, and turned away, leading his squad off.

The other squads lingered a little, in denial and regret, but they eventually went their own ways as well.

Gu Ying beckoned to Li Luo before leaving, and spoke quietly to him when he came near. "I won't suggest you not go looking for Lin Suo. On the contrary, I urge that you hunt him down no matter what, and see that the Golden Dragon Qi is returned to Lu Qing'er."

"What do you mean?"

Gu Ying turned to look at the green-haired beauty behind them. "Do you think she is unharmed after half the Golden Dragon Qi was suddenly taken from her? I don't think she's telling you everything. I saw some information in the archives of the Golden Dragon Bank before. The Golden Dragon Qi is a special bequest and a mark. Those marked by it will be richly rewarded when they enter Golden Dragon Mountain.

"Now that Lu Qing'er's Golden Dragon Qi is spoiled, it will affect her future greatly. Perhaps even her fate.

"I don't know what's up with that Lin Suo... but he not only knew about these secrets, he lay low in your Xia Kingdom squad until this chance appeared. I think everything that happens from now on will have grave implications. I suggest you get the Golden Dragon Qi back if possible."

Gu Ying threw her hands up. "How you go about that, I have no idea. Lin Suo is very strong, and not even I can take him on. You three... might have to pray for heavenly intervention.

"I'm telling you all this as thanks for helping me treat my wounds," she said begrudgingly before she left.

Li Luo brooded over her words. Gu Ying had simply confirmed his suspicions that not everything was well with Lu Qing'er.

He turned towards her.

"What did she say?"

"She said it's best we get the Golden Dragon Qi back from Lin Suo," Li Luo said vaguely.

Lu Qing'er's eyes widened even as she averted them. "But we... Actually, there's no need, I think... the Golden Dragon Qi was just a plus—we won't miss it."

"Qing'er, you're looking down on me," Li Luo said sternly.

Lu Qing'er looked up, horrified. "Li Luo, I would never!"

"Hey, you're just worried that I can't take Lin Suo on.

"But I even took on a Heavenly Disaster Class Other. Why would I be scared of that guy? He IS uglier than an Other though, I'll grant you that."

"Li Luo, I'm not looking down on you, I just think there's no need to take such a risk..."

"Childish," Li Luo said dismissively. "Lin Suo is no risk at all. Let me tell you this. If I left things as they were and went back to meet your mom, that would be a real risk!"

"Don't say bad things about my mom," Lu Qing'er sulked.

But she knew the truth of it, and no one knew Yu Hongxi's personality better than she did. If she found out that Li Luo had sat by and done nothing after the Golden Dragon Qi was taken, she would not only be disappointed, her impression of Li Luo would fall as well.

"If it really comes to that, I'll never be able to set foot in the Golden Dragon Bank without fearing that your mother will cut that foot off. We might never meet again."

Lu Qing'er's chest heaved at the thought, her eyes forlorn. She suddenly looked up at him.

"Li Luo."

There was icy fury in her eyes all of a sudden.

"Help me find that Lin Suo... we'll tear him up and feed him to the dogs!"

Chapter 0357: Plans

Li Luo was taken aback by the abrupt shift in Lu Qing'er's attitude. "Er, well, I doubt we can do anything that violent in the Dao Fields. Or find dogs to feed."

"I was just speaking metaphorically." She rolled her eyes.

"But there's one thing I don't understand... If Lin Suo is really from the Xia Kingdom's Golden Dragon Bank, then he'll go back with us when this is all over. Isn't he afraid of your mother?"

Lu Qing'er smiled thinly. "That's why he's going to Golden Dragon Mountain. If I'm guessing right, he's making a shot for a Golden Dragon Mountain Writ.

"If he gets a writ, and gets someone to make the preparations outside ahead of time, he can be sent to the designated place immediately. It might not even be the Golden Dragon Bank headquarters at the Xia Kingdom.

"This Lin Suo has hidden at the Tiancang branch for a long time, plotting... I'm his target this time, and his plot is comprehensive indeed."

"To understand the Golden Dragon Dao Fields so well..." Li Luo said meaningfully.

Lu Qing'er nodded. "He must be from the Golden Dragon Bank, without a doubt. Of course, our organization is more than the Xia Kingdom's headquarters. He might even be planted by the headquarters of another country, or even other divine continents..."

"Why so much effort just to target you? Or is your mother the target here?"

Li Luo did not think that Lu Qing'er wasn't brilliant. But surely she did not warrant a plot of such deep sophistry, right?

"I'm not sure either," Lu Qing'er said doubtfully.

She had her suspicions. Although her mother controlled the Xia Kingdom's Golden Dragon Bank, that was nothing particularly remarkable. Destroying her Golden Dragon Qi was a much more significant action.

Perhaps... it had something to do with the father that she hadn't seen for years.

But that was a long story that had nothing to do with Li Luo. Neither was it a good story.

Li Luo did not press. "Well, in any case, we're getting the Golden Dragon Qi back. I promised your mother to protect you in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields. If we get robbed blind just like that, I'll never be able to face her again."

"And we can't let that guy get his hands on a writ," Lu Qing'er said grimly. "I hope to deliver him in one piece, unharmed, back to the Xia Kingdom headquarters, where we can rectify that unharmed status properly. We might be nice most of the time, but they will learn to fear the anger of the gentle. We have our ways to deal with such things."

"If Lin Suo comes back under us, I think we have ways to prise information out of him, no matter how hard his skull might be."

There was a new iron in Lu Qing'er's voice that Li Luo had not seen before. He was a little unsettled by the callousness that had suddenly appeared in her attitude.

This was his first time seeing the demure little girl turn so cold and ruthless. This had be the side of her inherited from her mother, it was just that she usually kept it hidden.

When Lu Qing'er saw Li Luo's alarmed expression, she quickly recovered. "It was Lin Suo who started this! I... I just want to kill him. That's understandable, right?"

Li Luo swallowed hard and nodded to pacify her. "Oh, er, yes. Very... reasonable."

"But the three of us can't take on Lin Suo, I think?" she said, her thoughts already turning to business.

Li Luo nodded. "Be confident in your judgment. You don't have to say 'I think.'"

Lu Qing'er beat his chest again for the cheeky remark. "So we need reinforcements?"

Li Luo scratched his chin and gestured for Lu Qing'er to look around them. She saw not a soul—the other teams had all left.

They had all come for the Golden Dragon Qi, but it wasn't worthwhile if it wasn't in one piece. Now that it was gone, who would bother to stay? Not even Zhao Ziyang and Gu Ying would cross a Third Changing opponent for no reason, let alone the rest of them.

After all, there was no strong bond or enmity between them, save a little competition.

There was one other person besides the two of them, however, and he was brimming with enthusiasm. Paying no attention to his gruesome wounds, Qin Zhulu leaped to his feet and swung his spear, spraying them with an equal mix of blood and sweat. He seemed to feel no pain as he leaped about unhindered. Instead, there was joy and excitement in his eyes. Li Luo wondered privately if perhaps Lin Suo had accidentally beaten the brains out of this guy.

Could it be that beast resonance users were all a little berserk?

"Ning Zhao and Zhu Xuan have snuck off as well. Looks like they aren't planning to help us against Lin Suo," Qin Zhulu said, wiping off some blood from his jaw.

Li Luo had expected as much. If the two were the responsible kind, they would not have sent Lin Suo to come do the dirty work on them.

"Those two bastards. They started all of this. If they hadn't, Lin Suo wouldn't have had an opportunity to do anything." Lu Qing'er swore, her breath hazy with frost power.

They had been doing fine for themselves, thanks to Li Luo manipulating Zhao Ziyang and the rest of the four squads into being their bodyguards. If not for Zhu Xuan throwing a spanner into the works, not even a Third Changing could have found an opportunity alone against the whole of the protection alliance.

"When we get back, my mom will have something to say to them!" she said vengefully.

"Forget about those two dirtbags," Li Luo said, shaking his head. "They're one short now, so there's little chance of them even getting a writ. They gambled on the unknown factor in their team and now they've lost big."

"What then? Are the three of us really going to find Lin Suo and deal with him alone?" Lu Qing'er asked with concern in her voice.

Li Luo and Qin Zhulu were Third Patterns, while she was a First Pattern. All of them were far from Lin Suo's level. One on one, she couldn't even last one round against him. Li Luo and Qin Zhulu would not last five rounds.

Such was the difference in power.

Lu Qing'er saw no way to win against such a strong opponent.

"It's very difficult," Qin Zhulu reluctantly agreed. He liked battle, but he liked to win as well. Lin Suo was enough of a threat that his battle-crazed brain was cracking the reins for once.

Li Luo was silent for a moment. "Do you trust me?"

Lu Qing'er smiled. "Of course I trust the jewel of a man who can even take down a Heavenly Disaster Class Other."

Qin Zhulu snorted. He just waved a hand wordlessly, then sat down to rest. Women made his scalp crawl. If any girl said such a thing to him, he would probably have punched her in the face.

Poor Li Luo.

It was all his fault for growing up so handsome.

Li Luo looked over almost indignantly at Qin Zhulu. "What kind of look was that?! I'm the one who should be pitying you!"

He shook his head and ignored the musclehead. Although their responses had been honey and grit, they meant the same thing.

Besides, there was no real chance of death here in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, so at most they were squandering a chance, and not their lives.

"I'll need to make some preparations over the next few days."

Li Luo absently touched his wrist, where a red bracelet was marked. If he had any trump cards left up his sleeve, it would be this bracelet with the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power that was literally in his sleeve. However, the power came with many risks, and he had to prepare accordingly first.

"Let's continue heading towards the Reservoir. Ultimately, the treasured artifacts there are very important to making us much stronger. If we can get some good items there, we might stand a better chance against Lin Suo."

Li Luo looked down at the shortswords strapped to his waist. They had served him faithfully for a long time, but now he had outgrown them and was urgently looking for a replacement.

He hoped that he would find something suitable at the Reservoir, something that could carry him well into the next tier of combat.

Chapter 0358: First Encounter

For the next few days, Li Luo, Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu continued heading towards the Reservoir. This time they moved faster than they had before. The reason was simple: word that the Golden Dragon Qi was broken had spread, and they were no longer an attractive target. The other squads were happy to leave them alone.

Also, they were no longer stopping every few minutes to pick up treasures or sacrifice spirit beasts that ran over to them and committed suicide at their feet.

All of this made their journey much faster.

However, the trio did not take things easy, instead speeding up the pace and cultivating with a new frenzy. They were all preparing as best as they could for the big battle that was surely on the horizon.

Although it was impossible to catch up in such a short amount of time, every little bit helped. Perhaps they could inch up the chances of a miracle happening. The sun set on another day, the evening reds

spreading across the warm sky. It was a breathtaking view, but simultaneously, it was a symbolic reminder of the blood resonance user that was just ahead of them.

Li Luo was sitting with his legs dangling over a piece of elevated ground. He was scouting a patch of forest up ahead, where he heard occasional beastly growls and grunts. Trees shook and occasionally fell over, along with stray blasts of resonant power.

Qin Zhulu and Lu Qing'er were teaming up to kill spirit beasts. It would help them earn some dao-gold, and was also a good form of training.

Li Luo noted their efforts over the last few days. Although both had given him their reassurance that they trusted him, they did not intend to just lie down and hand over the burden in entirety to Li Luo.

He might have worked a miracle against the Heavenly Disaster Class Other, but it was hard to believe that he could replicate it. They did not know what he was planning, but as teammates, they had a duty to try and share the burden.

Someone as proud as Qin Zhulu would never consent to being a burden, while Lu Qing'er could not bear to see Li Luo suffer when getting the Golden Dragon Qi back.

After a while, Li Luo had seen enough. He stretched, smiling to himself. He had two very reliable teammates. Still, they were like ants chasing a horse. The gap could not be closed so easily.

Since they could not make up the difference with hard work... then perhaps it was time to cheat.

Li Luo again looked at the red cuff on his wrist. The sinister, red light filled him with dread.

"Heavenly Libation Chant..." he muttered to himself. Ever since he acquired that resonance art from Principal Pang, he had been working on it. However, it was a complex piece of work. Even with his aptitude for resonance arts, this one was a real puzzle. It had taken all of his effort and talent to crack open a modest road into its mastery.

But still, he could not bring the full power of the three-tailed heavenly wolf to bear.

According to the Heavenly Libation Chant, one would firstly need to use the secret art to fashion a Heavenly Libation Mark. This step had frustrated Li Luo for the longest time. He had tried all ways and means, but he had yet to successfully create the mark.

Principal Pang's secret art was no common manual.

Still, just because it was difficult did not mean he was going to give up. This was his strongest ace after all.

Li Luo put all other thoughts aside, then he stretched out his arm and cut a gash with his sword. Immediately, blood flowed down freely in a steady trickle.

Li Luo did not let the blood drip away. Using his will, he concentrated on the life force within, holding and gathering it. Slowly, he formed a rough imprint of a dark-red mark.

A bead of sweat rolled down his forehead.

Although creating the mark did not take a great toll on his resonant power, it instead drained his will and spirit. Just a short attempt was enough to leave him drained. And still the mark was not yet complete.

In fact, his will was not even strong enough to form it fully. The half-finished mark started to quiver, his blood starting to fall away as his will over it weakened.

Li Luo was not surprised by this outcome. He had been foiled here many times before. But this time he did not intend to give up. He knew that he had to try and break through his limits. If not, who knew how long he would take to safely pass this step without risk?

He did not have so much time to waste.

His eyes were hard and his jaw set. With a heroic wrench, he drew even more blood, forcing himself to finish the last part of the mark.

Weng!

When the last stroke was drawn, Li Luo could feel something click in place and thrum through his entire body.

Whoosh!

He saw a line of blood extend out of the dark-red mark... all the way to the bracelet on his wrist!

He stared at it as the connection firmed up between mark and bracelet.

Suddenly, Li Luo's consciousness lurched.

His surroundings seemed to change. The mountains disappeared, and darkness stretched on endlessly underneath his feet. Growls and chains clanking could be heard in the darkness ahead, as though some imprisoned beast was struggling to get free.

Three tails writhed and lashed out like large serpents.

The three-tailed heavenly wolf!

It had sensed Li Luo's presence at this moment, and suddenly the red, demonic beast was launching itself at him with all its might, trying to kill Li Luo.

The giant claws rent the air and came to an abrupt, jerking halt a few meters away from Li Luo, held fast by the limits of the chains.

A bead of cold sweat trickled down his face.

At the same time, its blood-red energy came at him, conducted through the chains to extend across the ground.

The three-tailed heavenly wolf suddenly froze, no longer struggling. There was a wily look in its eyes.

The blood-red power came sweeping across the ground, blanketing it and claiming the darkness.

Li Luo sensed that something was not right. It was as though the wild anger of the wolf had suddenly been condensed and focused into one single purpose. Him.

He felt his vision turning red, and an overwhelming urge to destroy and kill welled within him.

The power of the heavenly wolf!

And with it, the will of the three-tailed heavenly wolf.

"What a beast!"

Li Luo had underestimated the influence of its will on him. He was still too weak. Even with the Heavenly Libation Chant to control the wolf's power, the corruption of its will was more than he could handle.

Acting decisively in his time of peril, Li Luo smashed the Heavenly Libation Mark on his wrist, breaking it. Both the power and terrible will evaporated from him in an instant.

"Bleurgh!"

The rush of energy leaving him made Li Luo puke blood. It moved so quickly that it made a small vacuum of energy upon its exit, turning some of the rocks around him to powder.

Li Luo wiped the blood away, his head hanging limply as he looked at his bloody arm. "So that's a spirit beast that almost made it to Duke level. A tiny shred of its will, and I almost lost control."

He heard a rustle nearby, and looked up to see Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu hurrying over. They had detected the disturbance in energies.

"Li Luo, are you alright?" Both looked at the wreckage around him.

Li Luo smiled and shook his head. There was still some red in his eyes.

Lu Qing'er came up close and stared closely at his eyes. "There's something off about you. Is it a cultivation bottleneck?"

She suddenly took off the ice-silk glove on her right hand, then hesitated briefly before placing it in Li Luo's hand, blushing. A wave of icy resonant power joined them.

Li Luo could feel that the icy coolness was stabilizing him. It calmed him and spread like coolant foam over the embers of madness that smoldered within him. Li Luo found that the need to destroy and kill had faded quickly, and now his heart was as cool as ice.

"That..."

"It's Crystal Heart, which calms your spirit and helps you remain cool and unaffected by external pressures. I trained this to help when I was in the Umbra Cave. You must have been too anxious in your cultivation, and your resonant power overwhelmed you."

Li Luo was moved to tears. He clutched tightly at Lu Qing'er's hand with both of his own.

"Qing'er, you're a real darling."

She flushed redder than the evening sky, while Qin Zhulu, who had just arrived, took one look at the mushy scene, swore, then turned and stomped away.

Chapter 0359: The Reservoir

Lu Qing'er's Crystal Heart technique was like a welcome rain on a parched desert for Li Luo. The corruption power of the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power was just as strong as a Heavenly Disaster Class' power.

Although he had finally succeeded in creating the Heavenly Libation Mark, the three-tailed heavenly wolf was too strong for his will. He had been forced to sever the connection too quickly. If not, he would have fallen to its madness and gone on a rampage.

This had been a good test for Li Luo to see the extent of the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power.

No wonder Principal Pang Qianyu had cautioned him about using it.

However, Lu Qing'er had now brought Crystal Heart into the picture. It might just be the game-changer that he was looking for. Although it might not be able to completely nullify the influence of the heavenly wolf's will, it could weaken it significantly. Lu Qing'er reacted very strongly to Li Luo taking her hand, but still she pulled back and changed the topic. "What happened to you? Why were you so worked up? You looked like you were in a dangerous place just now."

Li Luo took a few deep breaths, now fully in control again. "It was just a secret art I was training." He grinned. "If we want to beat Lin Suo, ordinary methods aren't going to cut it."

"Li Luo, if a secret art is making you take such risks with your life, I'd rather not chase the Golden Dragon Qi," Lu Qing'er said, frowning.

She looked him deep in the eyes, then realized that she was not going to be able to change his mind.

"At our current speed, we'll be at the Reservoir in two days' time," Li Luo said, again changing the topic. He turned to look away into the distance.

"Hopefully, I can get something suitable for myself. These two shortwords are almost unusable."

If he could not find something decent for the showdown against Lin Suo, he would be at another severe disadvantage.

"The Reservoir is full of treasures, ones far beyond our imagination. All we need is sufficient dao-gold, and we won't have to worry about choices," Lu Qing'er assured him.

"That would be nice," Li Luo said with a gleam of anticipation in his eye.

...

For the next two days, the trio hurried along without much rest. They were already close to the Reservoir. When they climbed a tall hill, they saw a lake in the distance, sparkling like a mirror in the sun. It was filled with tens of thousands of glinting objects.

A dazzling sight.

"That's the Reservoir? It's... opulent," Li Luo marveled.

Treasured artifacts were expensive, and having that many all thrown into the Reservoir was incredible. If one cashed it all in, there probably wasn't enough skygold in the whole Xia Kingdom to buy it. It was another reminder of the sheer financial power that the Golden Dragon Bank commanded across nations.

Besides, all the treasures within were treasured artifacts, not just resonant artifacts. In terms of refining skill required and durability, they were far more advanced compared to ordinary resonant artifacts. It was said that the final step of creating treasured artifacts was known as the "eye opening." Simply put, the treasured artifacts were connected to the rest of the world through a small opening that resembled a human eye, which was how the name had come about.

Stronger treasures would have more special eyes that made them more attuned and connected with the world.

Treasured artifacts had three different types of eyes.

White eyes, gold eyes, violet eyes.

Each eye was further divided into upper and lower grades.

The most common treasured artifacts were white-eyes. They probably made up the majority of the treasures inside the Reservoir, but their "common-ness" was a misconception. It was only the wealth of the Golden Dragon Dao Fields that made them seem common and cheap. Outside on the market, even a white-eye treasured artifact would fetch millions of skygold.

Gold-eyes were even more expensive, starting at five million and ranging up to close to ten million.

Violet-eye treasured artifacts went without saying. They were items that even Dukes wanted. Their price was hard to imagine.

"It's said that although the Reservoir looks like a lake, it's actually a space that the Golden Dragon Bank made. All of the various Reservoirs that are scattered throughout the Golden Dragon Dao Fields are connected," Qing'er said.

Li Luo nodded. He looked out to see that there were many other figures hurrying towards the Reservoir. It was even more lively than the showdown over the Golden Dragon Qi.

There had to be close to 80 percent of the teams gathered here.

"You see that mountain behind the Reservoir?" Lu Qing'er pointed in the distance.

Both Li Luo and Qin Zhulu looked, and their eyes widened. There was indeed a golden mountain range, twisting like a golden dragon. At the head of the dragon was an extremely tall peak, almost like the dragon's horn. It was a majestic sight.

"That is Golden Dragon Mountain, where Golden Dragon Mountain Writs are won. That is the final destination of this training mission," she told them.

Li Luo nodded thoughtfully. That was where they would find Lin Suo. And have their intense showdown.

"Third Changing..."

He grinned at Qin Zhulu. "If we win, we can hold our heads so high, we'll be in danger of spraining our necks. It would be a crazy upset."

Qin Zhulu licked his lips in anticipation.

"But before that, we'll have to arm ourselves. Get as strong as possible," he said, waving them on. "Let's go see how loaded that Reservoir is."

He could not wait. Treasures with prices untold. Although he could not buy them all, nothing in this life came free.

Lu Qing'er and Qin Zhulu were equally excited, and all of them headed down the slope with some new speed. The atmosphere at the Reservoir was already lively.

The Reservoir shone like a mirror, almost too blinding to look at directly. It rippled and sparkled in the sunlight, throwing large sheets of light all around.

They could see squads walking in with great eagerness. They vanished in a flash of white light when they touched the water.

They also saw more flashes of white light bringing teams back out.

Those that came out all had the same delighted grins on their faces as they marveled at the powerful treasured artifacts they had earned within. Each of their weapons sported white eyes.

"We can only enter the Reservoir once. We've split up our dao-gold evenly, so each of us has 930. According to the information I gathered, white-eye treasured artifacts go for about 300 to 700 dao-gold. Which means that we can get one each, and then use the rest for a cultivation breakthrough later. I suggest we don't spend it all," Lu Qing'er told them.

"What about gold-eye treasured artifacts?" Li Luo asked.

"They are very rare in the Reservoir. It would be hard to come across one unless you looked hard for it. Even then, they're often priced at a minimum of 2,000 dao-gold. That's not something that a team of our level could get," Lu Qing'er explained.

Li Luo felt a pang of regret. White-eye treasured artifacts were already very expensive, but of course he was greedy enough to lust for a gold-eye treasured artifact. Then again, he was getting ahead of himself. The Golden Dragon Bank had not become rich by handing out freebies and cheapies to outsiders like him.

"Let's go on in." Li Luo led the way, and they eagerly ran forward to where riches awaited. The white light took them in a flash, and they vanished.

Chapter 0360: Selecting Treasures

The moment Li Luo's foot touched the waters of The Reservoir, the white light blinded him, forcing his eyes shut. When he cautiously opened them a few moments later, the scenery before him was completely different.

He seemed to have been transported to the bottom of the lake, although he found himself within a bubble. Thanks to its protection, he could walk around safely underwater.

"This is the inside of The Reservoir?"

Li Luo looked around in wonder. He saw shimmering shoals of fish swim freely by. He was still admiring their shiny fins when suddenly one swam particularly close, and he realized with a start that the fish was translucent and he could see a mini shortsword within it.

The weapon was pulsing with enormous energy, and there was a small white slit on its hilt - like a white eye.

"That's a treasured artifact?!" "So all of these fishes are made out of treasured artifacts?!" Li Luo was hyped. Suddenly the schools of fish all around him looked like money. He had never been happier to go fishing.

Golden Dragon Bank was truly insane.

Li Luo stood there shaking from the shock of his revelation for a few moments before he roused himself with a sigh. This level of power was incomparable. Not even Astral Sage College could hope to match them, let alone a paltry house like Luolan.

He could not possibly imagine just what sort of power the central headquarters of Golden Dragon Bank wielded.

But Li Luo shook it off soon enough. How deep the Golden Dragon Bank's pockets ran had nothing to do with his current situation. First he had to find himself a suitable treasured artifact.

Thinking thus, Li Luo started forwards, watching the passing fish more closely. But he was not in a hurry to close in on one.

After a period of observation, Li Luo realized that the white light on the fishes differed in strength. If his guess was right, the fish with a stronger light probably held upper white-eye treasured artifacts, while the weaker lights were lower white-eyes.

As for fishes with golden light... not a single one was to be seen.

That too was to be expected. Gold-eye treasured artifacts were probably rare.

Li Luo reached out a hand experimentally to catch a fish that was swimming past. As his hand closed easily around its white nimbus, the fish did not struggle, lying quietly in his hand. There was a miniature green longsword within it.

The faint light from the fish soon formed itself into words before Li Luo's eyes.

"Nine-Essence Sword, lower white-eye. Made from nine-essence wood, strengthens wood resonant power. Price: 380 dao-gold."

Li Luo scanned it briefly, then let the fish go. He was not good with longswords, having grown used to his dual shortswords and bow. They offered him both close and long range offensive options.

A moment later he caught another fish.

"Black Palagonite Armor, upper white-eye. Forged from a hundred layers of black palagonite hardened ninety-nine times in fire. Hardy against metals but weak against water resonant power. Price: 600 dao-gold."

Li Luo's eyes lit up. An upper white-eye defensive treasured artifact this time. With this armor, his defenses would be much stronger, but what he needed right now was not something defensive, nor did he have enough dao-gold on hand to get more than one item. He had to leave some for cultivation after all.

Regretfully, he let this one go as well.

Li Luo browsed a few more white-eye treasured artifacts, but none of them caught his eye, and he let them all go as well.

10 minutes of searching later.

Li Luo finally found something he was excited about.

"Mantis Blades (Dual-hilted), lower white-eye. Made from golden mantis thorns, keen enough to cut stone. The deadly power of a mantis' arms. Price: 510 dao-gold."

Li Luo was immediately sold on it. Dual swords was exactly what he needed, although it was far more expensive than other lower white-eye weapons. Probably because it was two for the price of one.

He stared at this fish for the longest time, then finally gathered his grit and prepared to make the exchange.

But just as he was about to do the deed, another fish swam by with a light so bright that it was unmistakably an upper white-eye grade.

Li Luo reached for it curiously.

However, he was disappointed to see that it was not a treasured artifact weapon. Instead, a milky-white pearl floated inside the fish, pulsing with a peaceful, warm light.

It reached him in soothing waves through the belly of the fish.

"Seraph's Pearl, upper white-eye. Holy light trapped within this pearl can be released as a barrier that protects the spirit and repels corruption. Consumable object. Price: 630 dao-gold.

"Protects the spirit and repels corruption..."

Li Luo's mouth watered. Was this not the perfect answer to the three-tailed heavenly wolf's corrupting will?

Was that not his biggest problem right now?

Even though Lu Qing'er had Crystal Heart, but it was unable to completely purge the wolf's will from him. What if Li Luo lost control in the next few days?

This Seraph's Pearl was an insurance policy.*nove(lb)/In*

A very expensive insurance policy. And if he bought Seraph's Pearl, he would not have enough left over for the Mantis Blades.

And he badly needed a weapon...

Agony! Li Luo wanted to howl his frustration to the skies. Isn't it just some dao-gold?! Can't I take a loan?!

Well, he couldn't. This was the Golden Dragon Dao Fields, not the Golden Dragon Bank where he could work something out with Yu Hongxi...

Li Luo was torn, wrestling with himself for the longest time. Finally, he made a decision.

His eyes closed, as did his fist around Seraph's Pearl. He thrust the Mantis Blades away from him, and left The Reservoir in an impulsive fit.

The blades weren't meant to be! He would just get someone else to forge him another treasured artifact when he got back!