

Resonance 41

Chapter 0041: The President's Position

On the second day, after the Golden Dragon Bank had finished signing a long-term agreement, Li Luo used his position as the Young Lord to convene a meeting of the senior management of the Sun creek Villa.

In the discussion hall, Vice President Zhuang Yi was late and even indifferently grumbled on his way in. "My third-grade refining workshop is currently busy refining third-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. Time is tight! We even have to make up for the gap left by the first-grade refining workshop..."

Upon sitting down, he immediately looked at Li Luo with a smile. "I seek your understanding, Young Lord."

"It must have been hard on you," Li Luo replied courteously upon seeing that fake smile of his. The smile on his own handsome face never lessened. After all, the problem in the Sun creek Villa would be finally solved today, and it would then continue to churn out endless profits for him! That way, he could buy even more spirit liquids and purifying lights... Why would he not be excited?

Zhuang Yi felt a little uneasy upon seeing Li Luo's wide smile. However, he did not take this feeling to heart. Although Li Luo was the Young Lord, he wasn't in charge of anything, and technically Zhuang Yi was someone from Pei Hao's side. Li Luo could not easily get rid of him without rhyme or reason.

Elder Zheng Ping was also in attendance as he was equally curious about why Li Luo would want to convene a meeting. As almost everyone was here, he started to speak. "Young Lord, please kindly enlighten us as to why you have gathered everyone here."

Li Luo smiled. "It's not about something frivolous. Elder, you did mention previously that the lack of a president posed a problem for the Sun creek Villa."

Zheng Ping was a little startled at how things were proceeding, and he immediately frowned. "Did we not come to an agreement before? We will compare the results of the ones in charge of the refining workshops to decide the victor. Unfortunately, Vice President Yan seems to be at a significant disadvantage."

"Does the Young Lord want to change the rules for selection? These are the ironclad rules of the Sun creek Villa. Even though you're the Young Lord, you cannot change these rules on a whim! That's improper," Zhuang Yi said.

The rest of the management did not speak a single word. However, the expressions on their faces seemed to say that they were siding with Zhuang Yi.

Faced with everyone's doubtful glares, Li Luo waved his hands. "The rule is wonderful. There is no need to change it. I just want to say that the results are now out for everyone to see."

The confusion in the eyes of everyone present continued to deepen. Even Zhuang Yi was a little taken aback before he gave an excited smile. "Does the Young Lord want to crown me as the victor? Or did Vice President Yan take the initiative to give up?"

Upon hearing these words, the group of senior resonance artificers seemed to suddenly understand something. It was true that based on the rules, Zhuang Yi's third-grade refining workshop vastly outperformed the first and second-grade refining workshops. With such a huge difference, it was possible that Vice President Yan would have chosen to give up.

"Give up? In your dreams!" Yan Lingqing's eyebrows arched in contempt as she gave a cold smile.

Cai Wei lightly chuckled at this point. She took the agreement out and directly passed it to Elder Zheng Ping. "Our Suncreek Villa has signed an official contract with the Golden Dragon Bank. We will produce Azure Jade Spirit Liquid for them on a long-term basis."

After glancing through the document, Elder Zheng Ping's expression suddenly changed. "Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength? Are you messing around? How can the Suncreek Villa supply Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength?!"

Elder Zheng Ping's face turned green and he slammed his palm against the table. He stared at Li Luo as he said in a heartbroken tone, "Young Lord, how could you possibly have signed such an agreement? You're practically destroying the Suncreek Villa's reputation by agreeing to this!" Everyone in the discussion hall looked at the trio in shock after they heard the words spoken by Elder Zheng Ping. They would never have expected them to come up with such an unbelievable contract! This was not a joke! The Suncreek Villa's first-grade resonance artificers could not refine such a spirit liquid!

Even Zhuang Yi was flabbergasted, but internally he was jumping for joy. He didn't even have to act, as Li Luo had just dealt the death blow to Yan Lingqing himself.

Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength was simply impossible for the first-grade resonance artificers!

"Hai..." Zhuang Yi heavily sighed as he raised his voice towards Cai Wei. "The Young Lord might not be knowledgeable, but how could the General Manager make the same mistake?" He then turned his gaze to Elder Zheng Ping and the rest and emotionally said, "Are they possibly hoping for our third-grade refining workshop to take on the task of refining all these Azure Jade Spirit Liquids? This is clearly a ploy to destroy the Suncreek Villa! I will never agree to this! Elder Zheng Ping, you've seen for yourself what these people want to do. The Suncreek Villa has to quickly select a president. Otherwise, if things proceed this way, we will no longer be welcome in the Tianshu Province!"

Li Luo silently looked at the passionately speaking Zhuang Yi, not putting a halt to his words. After Zhuang Yi finished his outburst, he turned over to look at Elder Zheng Ping with a steely, green complexion. "This contract will not require the help of any of the Suncreek Villa's third-grade resonance artificers. It will be completely fulfilled by the first-grade refining workshop."

Elder Zheng Ping frowned as he said with a grave voice, "Young Lord, our Suncreek Villa's first-grade refining workshop simply does not possess this capability."

"That was in the past." Li Luo gave an indifferent smile as he picked up a box that was sitting by his feet. Upon opening it, he revealed dozens of bottles of enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid.

"Elder Zheng Ping, this will be the enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid produced by our Suncreek Villa. The tempering strength will be at least 60%, and 40 bottles have already been provided to the Golden

Dragon Bank. The remaining ten are here for you to see. In the future, we will be producing a greater quantity of this enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid, up to a total of 300 a month. Based on their market value, the first-grade refining workshop will outperform the third-grade refining workshop." Each of Li Luo's words directly reverberated around the discussion hall, shocking everyone into silence.

Everyone looked at him in complete stupefaction. It was as if they were enthralled by a bunch of fantastical tales.

"Enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid? What is that? I've never heard of this! Our Suncreek Villa's first-grade refining workshop can produce Azure Jade Spirit Liquid with 60% tempering strength? What kind of crap are you spouting!?" Zhuang Yi resentfully shouted, his tone impolite.

Perhaps he was feeling restless at the change of events.

However, Li Luo's calm and collected demeanor didn't make him seem like someone who was spouting crazy words.

The rest stared at each other blankly, while Elder Zheng Ping remained deep in thought. He immediately took out a tempering measurement needle and directly pierced it into one of the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid bottles.

The result was clearly at the 60% mark.

Everyone's eyes widened at the sight of the mind-boggling results.

"The enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid was not refined by Vice President Yan. The first-grade refining workshop has been sealed for the last few days, but it will be open to everyone later, for you to see for yourself if you wish. Nothing that the Young Lord has said is false. All of the Azure Jade Spirit Liquid produced by the Suncreek Villa in the future will reliably be at 60% tempering strength." Cai Wei's soft and gentle words seemed to echo in the huge chamber.

Even Elder Zheng Ping was left in a daze. He could not imagine how this was possible. However, the facts in front of him spoke for themselves. This was not a farce, and Li Luo had no need to come up with an elaborate lie to trick them.

Elder Zheng Ping finally recovered a while later, heavily sighing with a bitter smile. "If what you say is true, the first-grade refining workshop will outperform the third-grade workshop. In this case, I hereby proclaim that Yan Lingqing will lead the Suncreek Villa branch in the Tianshu Province as the..."

"I DISAGREE!" a visibly frustrated Zhuang Yi screamed as he angrily slammed the table.

"There is definitely something strange going on. How can the first-grade refining workshop reliably produce 60% tempering strength Azure Jade Spirit Liquid?"

Elder Zheng Ping's expression turned solemn. "It doesn't matter if you disagree. At the very least, there is a contract with the Golden Dragon Bank proving their point."

Zhuang Yi's expression turned green. "I don't believe this! It's impossible! How can they reliably produce this enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid!?"

Li Luo immediately stood up and lifted the curtain at the front of the discussion hall. From where they stood, they could observe what was happening in the first-grade refining workshop. At the moment, there were first-grade resonance artificers busily refining spirit liquids. At the same time, someone collected the recently refined Azure Jade Spirit Liquid and brought it over to the discussion hall.

When the box of enhanced Azure Jade Spirit Liquid was displayed in front of the group, no one doubted Li Luo's words any longer. How could they when the evidence was right in front of them?

Zhuang Yi's face turned incomparably pale as he plonked onto his seat, continuously murmuring to himself.

Everyone knew that Zhuang Yi had been on the cusp of victory. Yet the unimaginable had happened and his fall from grace was just too quick...

That stubborn old man Elder Zheng Ping, on the other hand, had a face full of smiles. He stood up to make an announcement.

"From here on, Yan Lingqing will become the president of the Suncreek Villa in the Tianshu Province!"

Applause rang out in the discussion hall. Li Luo heaved a sigh of relief whilst leaning against a chair.

This entire fiasco hadn't been easy. On the bright side, at least his money bag was safe for the time being...

Chapter 0042: Governor's Mansion

In order to celebrate Yan Lingqing's promotion to president, an extremely elated Yan Lingqing invited Li Luo and Cai Wei to join her in the evening. This was when Li Luo saw the true extent of her drinking stamina.

Even more terrifying was Cai Wei matching her cup for cup heroically. The two were flushed from their relentless drinking, and Li Luo was left cowering in fear like a little quail.

"Li Luo, as long as you can increase that secret art watersource support, I will definitely be able to make the Suncreek Villa's spirit liquids and purifying lights the best in the whole Tianshu Province!" Red-faced and pumped full of liquid courage, Yan Lingqing turned a fiery and beautiful eye to Li Luo.

"Of course. I will do my best." Li Luo smiled and nodded. He was only at the Seventh Seal Stage. If he could reach the Resonant Master Stage, the quality of his resonant power would rise correspondingly. At that time, he would be able to provide even better watersource.

If the Suncreek Villa could dominate the spirit liquids and purifying lights market in the Tianshu Province, then House Luolan's annual profits would soar, allowing Li Luo to rise.

"Well then, a pre-emptive toast. To the Suncreek Villa's monopoly in the Tianshu Province."

Cai Wei gave a coy smile. The alcohol had relaxed her already pretty features, giving them a different but equally alluring look.

The three touched their cups together with smiles.

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After helping Yan Lingqing settle the Suncreek Villa's internal dispute, Li Luo felt a weight lift from his chest. In the following days, he was seen less often at the Suncreek Villa.

As the holidays were soon ending, Li Luo had another important matter to consider: the College Final Examinations.

The College Final Examinations would determine who would be nominated to enter the Astral Sage College. As the most elite college in the Xia Kingdom, it was the holy grail for many young men and women.

No power in the Xia Kingdom dared to look down upon the ability and status of the Astral Sage College. Before the Xia Kingdom had been founded, there had been other dynasties. These dynasties had come and gone, and still the Astral Sage College endured, a testament to its deep-rooted power.

There were also rumors that there were King Stage experts in the Astral Sage College.

That was why even being the Young Lord of House Luolan was nothing compared to being an Astral Sage student. For Li Luo, there was no other option to secure a brighter future.

Besides, there was that promise with Jiang Qing'e.

The College Final Examinations would encompass all of the middle and high schools, and each would be able to send their 20 finest students to compete for places at Astral Sage.

The number of places varied year on year, but generally speaking, the top 10 were more or less guaranteed to make it in, while things were less certain for the remaining.

Therefore, Li Luo's target was to make it into that secure top 10.

"Reaching the top 10... won't be easy."

Li Luo's face was creased with worry as he sat in the skygold room, having just finished his training. Although Southwind Academy was the best school in the Tianshu Province, that was no reason to dismiss the other schools. Although most of the other schools' candidates were indeed largely not worthy of consideration, there would be a few capable ones amongst them, and those would add up to a considerable number indeed.

Besides, there was also Southwind Academy's greatest threat and rival, Eastpool Academy.

One could only imagine how hard it would be to break free from the cutthroat competition.

Li Luo was at the Seventh Seal Stage, and his waterlight resonance should reach the sixth-grade before the examinations. Still, it made him restless with worry.

He was improving, but so were the others.

Li Luo could not afford to take these examinations lightly.

He focused seriously on his own abilities and techniques, and discovered a shortcoming.

His most glaring weakness was the lack of a powerful offensive technique. Previously, against Song Yunfeng, he had managed to run rings around him and used his Water Mirror Art to fight him to a draw.

Impressive as it was, all the more did it declare Li Luo's lack of an offense. He did not pose a threat to Song Yunfeng in their fight.

But this was not a problem limited to Li Luo, rather it was a challenge that all water resonance users faced. It lacked the destructive punch of the fire, metal, and lightning resonances.

Of course, the water resonance held the edge in drawn-out battles, but that was too passive a style for Li Luo's taste. He had to think of a way to improve his offense.

Other water resonance users might be stumped, but not Li Luo. He was not just a pure water resonance user, he was the ultra-rare waterlight resonance user!

Coming out of his musings, Li Luo got up and left the skygold room, heading for his private library.

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Governor's Mansion, City of Southwind.

Every citizen of the Xia Kingdom fell under the purview of the governors - the Governor's Mansions were therefore the centers of power and influence.

"Keke, my old friend Song, I have been wanting to invite you to the Governor's Mansion for some time now. A pity that I was just too busy recently and couldn't make time until today."

From within the guest hall of Governor's Mansion, bright laughter. Its source was a gaunt middle-aged man. Although he was smiling, he had an authoritative bearing about him.

This was the governor of the Tianshu Province, Shi Qing. He was a Heavenly Dipper General, the second sub stage of the General Stage.

In a lower position near him sat the head of the Song family, Song Shan.

"The esteemed Governor is always busy, of course you would not have time like us idle peasants," Song Shan replied laughingly.

"Brother Song, you mock me." Shi Qing smiled in response. He lifted up his teacup and looked at the leaves floating on the surface. He remarked casually, "The Song family's movements have not been discreet lately. You must have enjoyed much at the expense of House Luolan."

Song Shan replied, "All thanks to the great Governor."

"A pity, House Luolan. If those two had not disappeared, House Luolan might well have led the five Great Houses in the future." Shi Qing smiled humorlessly.

"Well, the brightest candles burn quickest. If not..." He suddenly paused.

"House Luolan is floundering to keep its head above water. May the Song family treasure every opportunity," he said while looking at Song Shan.

"Many thanks to the governor for his instruction. Our Song family will definitely remember your grace."

Shi Qing smiled and then changed the topic.

From the nearby lake outside the guest hall, Song Yunfeng listened to the faint murmur of voices within and then cast his eyes towards the water.

There was a white-clothed youth there, his hair trimmed short, save for a long ponytail at the back. His hands were full of fish food, and he was busy feeding the fish.

After he was done, he dusted off his hands, then a maid respectfully offered a cloth. He casually wiped his hands and then came walking towards Song Yunfeng.

As he neared, his features came into view - an ordinary-looking face, with a ghost of a smile hanging on his lips.

But looking at this unremarkable-looking youth, a slight tingle of trepidation shot through Song Yunfeng.

This was the governor's son, Shi Huang.

He was also the top student at Eastpool Academy.

"Yunfeng, my father has said that in this year's College Final Examinations, I have to help Eastpool Academy take the title of best school in the Tianshu Province," Shi Huang said with a smile.

"With senior brother Shi Huang's abilities, it seems entirely probable," Song Yunfeng replied.

"Not at all. Your Southwind Academy's Lu Qing'er is no slouch. She will make a formidable opponent," Shi Huang said.

Song Yunfeng nodded in agreement. He knew of Lu Qing'er's strength.

"Although I do not fear her, I dislike unknown factors. Therefore, I might need your cooperation on some matters regarding the College Final Examinations," Shi Huang stated mildly.

Song Yunfeng's face changed, and he frowned, troubled. "Senior Brother Shi Huang, are you asking me to betray Southwind Academy?"

"Sheesh, you make it sound so ugly. Do you really think of Southwind Academy as your own family? It is but a stepping stone in our journey of cultivation. As long as you clinch a top 10 spot, you'll naturally be able to advance to the Astral Sage College. At that time, will you even care about Southwind Academy?" Shi Huang chortled.

"Anyway, don't worry. I won't ask you to do anything too noticeable."

He sketched a casual gesture in the air. "It is also my father's will. The dean of Southwind Academy had a feud with my father in the past. He tried to stop my father's rise at every turn. Therefore, the golden title of best school in the Tianshu Province must be taken away from him."

Song Yunfeng thought about this for a long time, and finally nodded in a pained way.

Only then did a warm smile fill Shi Huang's face. He reached out and gently patted Song Yunfeng's shoulder. "Oh, and I hear Li Luo has a resonance now? And you two fought to a draw?"

Song Yunfeng's eyes clouded upon hearing those words, and he said stiffly, "He pulled a fast one on me, that's all. If we meet in the exams, he has no chance of even a draw."

"I see..."

Shi Huang pondered for a moment. "A pity. I wanted to test the young lord during the examinations. But hearing that from you has dulled my interest considerably."

"There is no need for Senior Brother Shi Huang to trouble himself with such a brat. If the opportunity presents itself, I will clean him up," Song Yunfeng said.

"Just as well."

"This person... I haven't met him many times, but I have quite the dislike for him," Shi Huang snorted.

Hearing that raised Song Yunfeng's suspicions.

Seeing his reaction, Shi Huang laughed, and he said resentfully, "An ugly matter. Back then, my father went to House Luolan, seeking Jiang Qing'e's hand for me..."

"Haha, in the end, the two House Lords rejected him."

"How dare they... They wanted to keep her for their son..."

"A pity their son grew up so useless. How can he hold on to such a fine woman?"

Song Yunfeng was taken aback when he heard these words. Now he finally understood why the governor's family had moved in secret to support the revolution and help them devour House Luolan. So this was why...

Chapter 0043: Sixth Grade Waterlight Resonance

When Li Luo was left with his last three bottles of fifth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, his waterlight resonance finally evolved, reaching the sixth grade. *noVELnExt.com*

In his bedroom, Li Luo sprawled on the carpet, a wild look of triumph on his face.

Less than a month before, Li Luo had been written off with his blank palaces, his future bleak. And now, his unique waterlight resonance had reached the sixth grade.

Resonances had nine grades, and a sixth-grade resonance was above average, no matter how you looked at it.

One more upgrade and he would be well and truly in the high-quality resonance tier.

Besides, the waterlight resonance's unique nature meant that its sixth-grade power was comparable to that of some seventh-grade resonances. Therefore, just in terms of resonant power, Li Luo had already caught up to many of his excellent peers.

As far as he knew, only Lu Qing'er and Song Yunfeng had seventh-grade resonances in the whole of Southwind Academy. And even within their generation in the Tianshu Province, the number of seventh-grade resonance users could be counted on one hand.

Even with a ninth-grade resonance monster like Jiang Qing'e eclipsing his achievement, Li Luo knew that a seventh-grade one still had its own noteworthy shine.

Ninth-grade resonances were extremely rare. Why else would the Astral Sage College open a special recruitment for Jiang Qing'e?

The Astral Sage College's requirements were very strict. They had seen more geniuses than carp in the Yangtze River, so even an ordinary genius would not move them to open their doors so readily.

Li Luo raised his palm. A blue resonant power condensed on his fingertip. The resonant power was pure, and the refreshing sound of waves came floating forth.

He could feel that his resonant power had become more solid and pure after advancing his waterlight resonance.

He was not far from the Eighth Seal now.

The blue resonant power finally coalesced into a ball of water about the size of a fist. He flicked his finger, and the waterball shot forth. It smashed into the wall with startling ferocity and created an explosive flash of light, dazzling an unprepared Li Luo momentarily.

He chuckled. This resonance art was not at all unusual. It was a very common mid-tier art. When hit, the water resonance power would enter the target's body and then their speed would take a hit. However, this move lacked offensive power, and did not deal much damage.

Therefore, Li Luo had fortified and improved this mid-tier resonance art. He had infused light resonance within it. The resulting water bullet was not only faster, but could also release a blinding light to distract his opponent.

Therefore, he renamed this improved Water Bullet Art to Waterlight Bullet.

In order to prepare for the College Final Examinations, Li Luo had made all kinds of efforts, and refining the Waterlight Bullet was one of them.

Li Luo turned around, and the last three fifth-grade spirit liquids caught his eye. He sighed deeply.

In less than a month, his waterlight resonance had jumped two grades. This was an astonishing speed indeed, but Li Luo knew that the blistering pace was about to grind to a halt.

Unlike the fifth-grade ones, he could not buy sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights by the hundreds.

Considering the price, a fifth-grade spirit liquid cost about 5,000 gold, whereas a sixth-grade spirit liquid might reach 30,000 gold...

Besides, going from the sixth grade to the seventh grade was a milestone leap. It was the cross from a middle-grade resonance to a high-grade one. Therefore, the amount of spirit liquids and purifying lights needed was incredible.

If he assumed that he needed 200 spirit liquids and purifying lights, that totaled to six million gold, which was roughly a year's income for the whole of House Luolan.

And given that House Luolan was rife with problems both internal and external, it was impossible to expect six million gold to be pulled out to support him.

Besides the financial limit, there was also the question of supply. As far as Li Luo knew, perhaps only ten sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights would appear on the market in the Tianshu Province each month. Therefore, he felt that it was simply impossible to bring his resonance to the seventh grade here.

Unless he went to the capital of the Xia Kingdom.

Looking further ahead, if he wanted to bring his acquired resonance to the ninth grade, the capital required would be staggering. Even all of House Luolan's resources would be insignificant in comparison.

It seemed like this acquired resonance was going to be quite troublesome indeed.

Of course, his blank palaces meant that he could also absorb lower grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, although they would be less effective. However, now that he had a sixth-grade one, imbibing the fifth-grade liquids would be several times less effective compared to sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. Therefore, doing so was not going to save him any money in the grand scheme of things, but they could be an emergency replacement.

Li Luo's heart was heavy as he thought through this, but luckily, that was not the only special card he had up his sleeve. When he entered the Resonant Master Stage, he would be able to fill his second resonant palace with a second resonance.

Therefore, even if he was crippled by a lack of funds, the second resonance might well help him move forward nonetheless.

Besides, only when he filled his second resonant palace would Li Luo's unique advantage truly shine through.

"My single sixth or seventh-grade waterlight resonance might lose to your ninth-grade resonance, but what if I had two resonances? Three?

"If I can't beat you with one, I'll just increase the numbers!"

This advantage would probably serve him well against any opponent under the Duke Stage, unless he met some other super genius who had managed to realize their second resonant palace before reaching the Duke Stage. Still, those were probably as rare as his blank palaces, right?

Besides, even if he did meet them, it was still going to be three resonances against two.

His mind in a muddle, Li Luo gave a loud, retching cough to try and quash the scattered thoughts. At the same time, he pulled out a piece of blue jade. On it was written a new energy cultivation art, which Li Luo had personally chosen for himself.

The Black Waterfall Breathing Technique was a high-grade cultivation art, and required the user to have a sixth-grade resonance.

It was more refined than the Azureflood Meditation Diagram that Li Luo had cultivated previously. Besides, with his improved water resonance power, it would allow his resonant power to surge forth even more explosively than when he used the Azureflood Meditation Diagram. This was exactly what Li Luo was looking for.

Li Luo carefully read the Black Waterfall Breathing Technique. When he felt the first glimmers of understanding, he began cultivating it.

For the next two days, Li Luo devoted most of his energy to the cultivation of the Black Waterfall Breathing Technique. The day before the holidays ended, Cai Wei sent someone to inform him that the resonant artifact he had asked them to help forge was finished.

Chapter: 0044: The Examinations Begin

Li Luo excitedly strode into the hall, immediately seeing the well-rounded and soul-stirring Cai Wei. Her egg-shaped face made her seem even prettier than a flower, a wide smile on her face.

However, Li Luo saw her often, so he was completely immune to her charm. He shifted his gaze to what was important: the iron box atop the table nearby.

He vaulted across without hesitation, instantly ripping the cover of the box off. Within the box rested two short blades, both glinting with cold light.

They were roughly a third of a meter in length. One had an azure-colored handle with a wavelike ripple pattern on it, reminding one of the waves of the sea. The other had a dull-white handle which was supposedly crafted from Sunspirit Metal, able to produce piercing light when the sun shone upon it.

These two shortswords were crafted with metals that contained water resonance power and light resonance power respectively. They would serve as effective conduits through which Li Luo could channel his unique resonant power, further amplifying his capabilities in battle!

The hilts of both blades looked like the mouth of a beast, fangs bared, an extremely intimidating appearance.

When looking at these blades as a whole, they possessed a more obtuse arc than usual, looking slightly bent. Yet this didn't take away from the fact that they gave off a feeling of exceptional sharpness, cold light seemingly flowing through the blades themselves.

Li Luo immediately grasped the dual blades, gently engaging in a sword dance in an attempt to get a feel for them. All of a sudden, a wind-rending sound could be heard when Li Luo swapped to a backhanded grip in the blink of an eye. His posture and actions made him seem extraordinarily dashing and elegant.

"Not bad," Li Luo contentedly said while nodding his head. "The azure one will be known as the Ripple Blade, while the other will be known as the Flare Blade," he casually stated.

"These are just standard resonant artifacts. They have not reached the level of treasures." Cai Wei's perspective of things were at a higher level, and she could easily discern the quality of these weapons. Although they possessed a slightly special shape, their true worth was not exceptionally high.

Resonant artifacts also possessed different grades to differentiate their qualities. There were ordinary resonant artifacts, and those that surpassed them in quality were known as treasured artifacts.

There was a stark difference when one compared treasured artifacts to resonant artifacts. Treasured artifacts were significantly more powerful and rarer than resonant artifacts. Additionally, each and every one of them was astronomically expensive.

On the other hand, treasured artifacts required a certain amount of resonant power before they could be utilized. Li Luo was currently at the Seventh Seal Stage, so even if he had one, he would be unable to demonstrate even a fraction of its true might.

"This is good enough. Once I reach the Resonant Master Stage, I will look for a suitable treasured artifact." Li Luo smiled. His two resonant artifacts had been crafted purely for the College Final Examinations.

"Thank you, Elder Sister Cai Wei," Li Luo said with gratitude.

Cai Wei waved her hand. "I believe your final examinations should be starting soon. The City of Southwind seems to have become much more bustling in recent days. The numerous academies within the Tianshu Province have already dispatched their elites here."

The yearly College Final Examinations was a significant event that attracted countless people. The huge battles were an exciting topic and the atmosphere was often lively.

Li Luo nodded. "There are three more days till it begins."

Cai Wei's beautiful gaze held a trace of concern. "Are you confident you will do well?"

Although Li Luo had finally awakened his water resonance, it was relatively late compared to the rest of his competitors. Hence, Cai Wei was unsure if Li Luo would be able to make up for this difference during such a short span of time.

She was extremely clear of the importance of being able to attend the Astral Sage College. If Li Luo was able to qualify, his influence and prestige would soar. At the very least, some of the people within House Luolan would no longer look down upon him, and he would even be able to bear some of Jiang Qing'e's burden.

He sheathed the dual blades by his waist, his palms caressing the handles of both weapons as his face let out a contented smile.

"You can rest assured, Elder Sister Cai Wei. I cannot lose."

If he was unable to accomplish even this step, annulling the marriage would just be a pipe dream!

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The holidays finally ended.

Li Luo returned to the academy, and both him and Zhao Kuo were summoned by Xu Shanyue almost immediately.

"You've reached the Seventh Seal Stage?" Whilst chatting casually, Li Luo discovered that Zhao Kuo had also managed to enter the Seventh Seal Stage during this holiday, eliciting surprise.

Zhao Kuo only had a fifth-grade resonance, which was very average. Being able to reach the Seventh Seal Stage demonstrated his tireless effort and the endless suffering he must have endured to attain this result.

The massive, bear-like Zhao Kuo scratched his head and laughed. "I didn't return home this holiday and stayed in the academy to cultivate. The academy provided me with some special training that allowed my last minute efforts to reap this success, allowing me to break through."

"During these past ten days, Zhao Kuo has been cultivating as though his life depended on it!" Xu Shanyue, who was leading the two, chuckled whilst he heard them banter. He had clearly recognized Zhao Kuo's diligence and hard work during this period of time.

Li Luo immediately gave him a thumbs up. "Amazing."

"How can I compare to you? You're handsome and endowed with such perceptiveness when it comes to resonance arts. Now that you've awakened a water resonance, it's very likely you will become a legend in Southwind Academy, much like Sister Qing'e!" Zhao Kuo said honestly.

"Even when I'm famous, I will still be friends with you! You're truly the most honest person I've met, and you never lie. Even though you're a little uncool..." Li Luo nodded and sighed emotionally.

"Of course! I will need Brother Luo to look out for me during this final examination."

"Easy. Once I'm in the top position, I will directly drag you into the Astral Sage College."

"Wow how tyrannical!"

"..." Hearing their shameless bragging, Xu Shanyue's face turned a little gloomy before turning around to snap at them. "Quiet, you fools. We're here."

Li Luo and Zhao Kuo immediately snapped to attention and stopped spouting their nonsense. Ahead of them was a patio where quite a few individuals were roaming around. These were the top 20 in Southwind Academy.

Li Luo recognized Lu Qing'er, Song Yunfeng, and Difa Qing's familiar silhouettes. *novELnext.cOm*

Currently, the group was staring at the two in amusement. They had clearly heard all of their nonsense while they were bragging proudly...

Despite the ridiculing gazes that the group was giving the two, Li Luo's demeanor was indifferent and unshaken. As long as he didn't feel embarrassed, the ones who would be feeling the heat were the ones that mocked them!

Zhao Kuo, on the other hand, had a simple and honest smile on his face, demonstrating his ineffable and cheerful personality.

In the end, the group only shook their heads and went back to what they were doing.

These two had the thickest skins they had ever seen.

Li Luo was clearly a little in over his head. He had previously barely managed to eke out a draw between him and Song Yunfeng, and now he was claiming he would take first place? He hadn't even asked Lu Qing'er for her opinion!

Within the group was also the old dean. His gaze was filled with mirth as he shot a glance at the duo. Seeing that everyone had arrived, he said, "It looks like everyone is here. Since that is the case, I will now explain the rules of the final examination."

Everyone trembled when they heard those words. They all immediately focused on each and every word the old dean was about to say.

"The College Final Examinations will officially begin in three days' time. The twenty of you will represent Southwind Academy as the representatives. I only have one request, and that is to defend the title of the best academy in the Tianshu Province! Additionally, the Astral Sage College has announced that fifty students from the Tianshu Province will be selected to join them during this round."

The group seemed to have become more tense upon hearing this. Fifty spots meant that there were several fewer positions than the previous year. In this case, the competitors would undoubtedly struggle even harder than before.

"As per the previous round, the top ten in the College Final Examinations will automatically receive the opportunity to join the Astral Sage College. The remaining forty positions will be distributed amongst the top ten academies. The academies in the eighth, ninth, and tenth position will be allocated one slot each. fifth, sixth, and seventh will receive two slots. Third and fourth will receive five slots, with second place receiving six slots. Finally, the top academy will receive fifteen slots!"

When the last sentence was uttered, it instantly caused a hubbub to erupt. No one had thought that the College Final Examinations would allocate such a significant share of slots to the top academy.

Even in previous years, although the top academy would receive more rewards, it had never been as unbalanced as this.

Teacher Lin Feng from the First School had a face full of smiles and encouragement as he looked at Lu Qing'er. "Qing'er, in order for the academy to obtain the position, we require your help to take first place." The old dean nodded as he looked warmly upon her.

Their hopes were pinned on Lu Qing'er. This was also normal as she was the trump card of Southwind Academy.

Under their ardent gazes, Lu Qing'er remained as calm as before, only lightly replying, "I will do my best to fight for victory."

The old dean nodded and then informed her, "However, you must keep an eye out for Shi Huang of Eastpool Academy. He is extremely strong and will be your key rival." Upon hearing that name, Lu Qing'er's expression became slightly grave and she attentively nodded.

"From tomorrow onwards, you will no longer have to come to the academy. Instead, you will head to Whitespirit Garden. That is the location where the numerous academies of the Tianshu Province will gather. In three days, you will enter Whitespirit Mountain. That will be the battleground for the final examinations." After this last series of exhortations, he summarized his parting words.

"Southwind Academy has been led by this old man for dozens of years. Its honor is more important than my life. Hence, I sincerely hope that all of you will do your best during this final examination to preserve the honor and reputation of the academy." The old dean's face was dignified as he gave a final bow.

The twenty students were immediately taken aback by this development, quickly returning one as well.

In the end, the old dean waved his hand to dismiss the group, leaving everyone with mixed emotions.

Li Luo walked out of the patio, staring wistfully into the blue sky, feeling his heart lightly surging.

The College Final Examinations had finally arrived.

It was a pity his parents weren't around to see this...

If they really were... perhaps they would be looking at him disapprovingly and saying something along these lines...

"This son is just too dumb. Completely different from our brilliant Qing'e!"

It was said that when Jiang Qing'e took her final examination, she completely suppressed each and every student from every other academy. She was so dominant that they wouldn't even dare to let out so much as a fart without hiding in fear. No one would dare to infringe upon Southwind Academy's prestige.

Only when she finally entered the Astral Sage College did the numerous academies of the Tianshu Province begin to rile up in celebration, tears filling their eyes.

Compared to Jiang Qing'e's blinding resplendence, Li Luo had encountered all sorts of ups and downs.

In fact, just a month ago, no one even held any hopes of him participating in the final examinations...

Thinking of all this, Li Luo's excitement tampered down a notch, as though someone had dumped a bucket of cold water over him.

"Just what is the meaning to all this?!" he lamented.

Chapter 0045: Whitespirit Garden

The Whitespirit Garden was nestled in the outskirts of the City of Southwind, back against Whitespirit Mountain. It had been the location for many College Final Examinations before this.

On the second day, Li Luo and the others prepared to head to the Whitespirit Garden together, led by Lin Feng and Xu Shanyue.

They were greeted by a huge crowd milling around. Many stalls had organized themselves into long avenues that stretched out endlessly. It was a bustling sight.

However, this was to be expected. A major event such as the College Final Examinations might only formally involve the elite students of each school, but in reality, everyone had an interest in it. Everyone wanted to see which young brave would leap ahead of the pack and become the foremost leader of the new generation in the Tianshu Province.

It was the highest honor.

As they filed into the Whitespirit Garden, the atmosphere heated up a notch, the cacophony of the crowd greeting them from all sides. Their arrival was immediately noticed—the reputation of Southwind Academy in the Tianshu Province was quite something after all.

"These are the top 20 from Southwind Academy?"

"Wow, that long-haired beauty must be Lu Qing'er. I heard she's the best in Southwind Academy."

"She's probably going to get first place in the College Final Examinations this year."

"Maybe not. Eastpool Academy's Shi Huang is also unreasonably strong. I don't think he's any weaker than Lu Qing'er."

"Which is Southwind's Li Luo? I heard Jiang Qing'e is his fiance. Disgusting. How dare he sully my goddess."

"There! The handsome one. That's Li Luo."

"Money, status... he's the Young Lord of House Luolan."

"Hmph. Not impressive, family power. The respectable youths build their own reputation."

"I heard he fought the second-place Song Yunfeng to a draw in the Southwind Academy preliminaries."

"Damn, you're irritating. Shut up, will you?"

"..."

Snatches of speculation occasionally floated across to the ears of the Southwind students. Both Lu Qing'er and Li Luo were featured prominently in the gossip, the former for her ability and the latter for his special reputation.

A ways away, there was a stone pavilion on an elevated ground. Three figures could be seen within, eyes locked onto the Southwind contingent as well.

Two young men, one young woman.

One of the young men was strappingly built, his fiery-red hair especially prominent under the sun. The other was a more scholarly-looking type, and noticeably thin.

The young woman was clad in green, a dainty little thing with picture-perfect features. Her most distinctive characteristics were green, vine-like tattoos on the back of her hands.

These three were not at all no-namers. The red-haired youth was Xiang Liang, from the Tianshu Province's Dawn Academy. He was their first seed, and a power to be reckoned with.

The skinny scholar was Zong Fu, first in Zenith Academy.

The petite girl in green was Chi Su, first in Dusklight Academy.

All three were hot favorites to reach the top ten in the examinations.

"That's Lu Qing'er? Looks strong." Xiang Liang's voice boomed out, the fiery battle will in his eyes trained on Lu Qing'er.

"I sense a dangerous aura from her," Zong Fu said neutrally, frowning.

"The one ranked first in Southwind Academy has never been an easy opponent. But we have to be glad that we're not in the same cohort as Jiang Qing'e; otherwise, we would be flushed out in a trice." Chi Su laughed.

Xiang Liang and Zong Fu nodded with deep feeling. "Jiang Qing'e is a terror. A ninth-grade light resonance is terrifying. I pity those in her batch."

"But in this Southwind batch, only Lu Qing'er and Song Yunfeng need watching. We have nothing to fear from the others," Xiang Liang said confidently.

Although his school could not compare to Southwind, that was precisely why Dawn Academy could concentrate much of its resources on him.

Although there were not many like him in the Tianshu Province, he was definitely not the only one. In order to secure such talented students, each school would go to great lengths.

"What about Li Luo? I heard he fought Song Yunfeng to a draw in the preliminaries," Chi Su said.

Xiang Liang scoffed. "That's because he used some special move to play for time. In the end, his resonant power was completely spent as well. Another second and Song Yunfeng would have done him in."

"A clever trick, but it won't work in these exams."

Chi Su said a little regretfully, "A pity, him being so handsome."

It was the intellectual Zong Fu who reminded, "Arrogance is a flaw. The fact that Li Luo managed to beat Song Yunfeng shows that there is an odd streak to him. To be safe, there is a need to test his true strength. Only then can all unknowns be negated."

"Don't worry about that. I'll think of something."

Xiang Liang made a face. "Whatever."

Chi Su turned. "Have you two received Shi Huang's message? He wants us to meet him tonight to discuss something."

Xiang Liang nodded. He was a little apprehensive about meeting the governor's son, the only one who could stand against Southwind Academy's Lu Qing'er in a straight fight.

"That is a reputation we have to respect."

Zong Fu nodded slightly as well. "His target must be Southwind Academy, coincidentally ours as well. After all, Southwind Academy has relaxed on their best-school laurels for too long. They always get the most entrance placements. If we can beat them down, that would be good news for all the other schools."

Chi Su smiled as well. "If not for such an important person, we would not have been able to join forces."

Although Southwind Academy was the ultimate rival for many other schools, there was a lot of internal competition amongst themselves as well. Without a strong anchor to rally around, such unity was hard to build.

Therefore, Shi Huang's initiative was welcome indeed.

.....

Li Luo and the others followed Lin Feng and Xu Shanyue into the accommodations in the Whitespirit Garden. Li Luo was coincidentally matched with Zhao Kuo.

The two were tidying up their room when there was suddenly a knock on the door. Li Luo opened and saw a hyperactive face pop up close to him. The person had a book in his arms.

"Buy some information, Brother?"

Those words immediately called to mind the sneaky illegal peddlers hanging around furtively at the gates of Southwind Academy, selling dodgy books.

"Yu Lang, when did you transfer here?" Li Luo laughed.

It was none other than Yu Lang, who had vomited blood in exaggerated fashion after losing to Li Luo.

He grumbled, "This is firsthand information about all the top students from the famous schools. Plus, the top 10 predictions are featured."

"Oh?" Li Luo's brow creased. Quite some foresight on this guy, to know that such information would fetch a pretty penny. And it seemed like he had worked on it for a long time.

"Quite a talent for money-making."

Li Luo praised him. He bought one out of support.

"Of course. I've put blood and sweat into the information. I guarantee it's useful," Yu Lang vowed.

Li Luo flipped it at random. The smile on his face froze at seeing his own name.

Li Luo, Southwind Academy. Young Lord, House Luolan. Once trash, now a genius on the comeback, seems to have a fifth-grade water resonance. Specialties: Very handsome, but good looks never won anyone placements. Low chance of entering the top 10.

Li Luo roared with angry laughter. He was about to unleash his fury on Yu Lang, but the wily merchant was already gone like the wind. A voice came from far away.

"I'm just protecting your information!"

Li Luo gritted his teeth. "As if, you little rascal. Don't let me catch you again."

Chapter 0046: Road Less Traveled

After chasing away the irritant known as Yu Lang, Li Luo took the information and went back to his room, carefully pouring over its contents.

However, the more he read, the more attentive he became. He realized that a lot of the information was useful and legitimate.

It seemed as though Yu Lang had indeed put in quite the effort. This was not a casual attempt to swindle the naive, but a true repository of knowledge!

Of course, with regards to the information on Li Luo, other than him looking handsome, which he begrudgingly admitted was true, the rest was all false!

His attention was then focused on the information regarding who was speculated to be the top 10 strongest individuals in this competition.

First place, Southwind Academy, Lu Qing'er, upper seventh-grade ice resonance. Suspected to be at the Ninth Seal Stage. Beauty and strength coexist in this female. She has never lost a single battle in Southwind Academy.

Second place, Eastpool Academy, Shi Huang, upper seventh-grade lightning resonance. Suspected to be at the Ninth Seal Stage. Likely the only person able to compete with Lu Qing'er. Has the potential to be number one in the final examinations.

Third place, Dawn Academy, Xiang Liang, lower seventh-grade fire resonance, Eighth Seal Stage. An elite student nurtured with all of the resources at Dawn Academy's disposal. His strength is not to be underestimated.

Fourth Place, Southwind Academy, Song Yunfeng, lower seventh-grade Crimson Eagle resonance, Eighth Seal Stage. During Southwind Academy's preliminary examinations, he was victorious in all rounds save two. One was a loss against Lu Qing'er and the other a draw against Li Luo.

Fifth Place, Dusklight Academy, Chi Su, lower seventh-grade Poison Ivy resonance, Eighth Seal Stage.

Sixth Place, Zenith Academy, Zong Fu, lower seventh-grade water resonance, Eighth Seal Stage.

Seventh Place...

Li Luo continued to scrutinize the entire list before sighing in admiration. If he had not read this, he would've still been in the dark, unaware of the Tianshu Province's numerous crouching tigers and hidden dragons. However, this seemed reasonable in retrospect. The Tianshu Province's numerous academies might not have foundations as deep as Southwind Academy, but they still possessed the ability to nurture an elite student or two. Even a blind cat would eventually catch a mouse, and their efforts might one day bear fruit and they might just obtain the top position if the stars aligned. If that happened, their academy's reputation would soar into the skies and all their efforts would bear fruit.

Additionally, all of those contending for the top 10 positions were minimally at the Eighth Seal Stage. There were no weaklings amongst them!

"It looks like entering the top 10 will be a challenge," Li Luo muttered as he rubbed his chin. He currently had Seventh Seal Stage resonant power and was slightly weaker than those contenders. The bright side was his unique waterlight resonance, which would provide him with certain advantages when push came to shove.

If he had to face Song Yunfeng openly again, he would no longer have to resort to his previous methods of trickery and forcing things into a draw.

In the top 10, Lu Qing'er and Shi Huang were on a separate level of their own as they were potentially at the Ninth Seal Stage. Both were exceptionally proficient in resonance arts and were likely to be the only two able to win first place.

However, Li Luo was also temporarily uninterested in attaining first place. Why? He was simply not strong enough!

He had a sixth-grade waterlight resonance, but those two possessed upper seventh-grade resonances. Their backgrounds were also not to be scoffed at, ensuring that they had received ample resources not inferior to his own. Perhaps if the two of them were inanimate objects, he would be able to leapfrog and beat them!

Furthermore, he wasn't Jiang Qing'e with a ninth-grade light resonance, able to completely suppress them. Others wouldn't even dare to raise a finger against her!

Even when Pei Hao wanted to find trouble, he had to wait till he had reached the late stage of the Earth Fiend Stage. Yet even when faced with the early stage Jiang Qing'e, he found no advantage! From this example alone, one could clearly see how tyrannical a ninth-grade light resonance was.

Thus, Li Luo's current goal was to muddle into the top 10 positions of the final examinations. Securing a slot in the Astral Sage College would suffice. He wasn't too interested in being at the top, as it was firstly impossible, and secondly just too eye-catching! It would draw the ire and lust of his enemies! After experiencing what it was like in the past, he had determined that developing steadily in obscurity was the way to go!

If the conditions were right, Li Luo wanted to achieve his goal quietly. He wanted to enter the Duke Stage and hold on to his dear life!

Furthermore, he only had five years left, and this acquired resonance was like a Sword of Damocles hanging over him, always leaving him in anxiety and unrest.

Whilst Li Luo was engrossed by Yu Lang's compiled information, the sky gradually turned dark. Zhao Kuo wanted to grab a bite with him, but when he saw Li Luo's focused expression, he decided to leave him be. He snuck out by himself and planned to bring some food back for him.

"This information is quite comprehensive, and full of useful insights." Li Luo, who had finally finished assimilating the information, let out a sigh of praise. After screening through this information, he had a better understanding of the numerous elite students from other academies and their abilities.

Additionally, he could sincerely feel that Yu Lang had deliberately left out information on him, to prevent anyone else from making preparations against him. Otherwise, he would have been able to write quite a comprehensive summary on him based on the information that was available, and not just leave that line of rubbish in.

"It seems I've truly made a mistake in thinking badly of Yu Lang..." Li Luo muttered. At the same time, his stomach began to churn out rumbling sounds and he finally realized that the sky was already pitch black.

"Why is that guy Zhao Kuo not back yet? Does he want me to starve to death and then get the entire dormitory for himself?" Li Luo questioned.

At this point, hurried knocks could be heard on the door. Yu Lang's voice could be heard coming from outside. "Li Luo! Your friend Zhao Kuo has been intercepted by some individuals."

Li Luo opened the door with a frown. "What are you talking about?"

Yu Lang shrugged his shoulders. "That brat seems to have gotten into an altercation with people from Zenith Academy. The one leading the group is Zong Fu. If you've read my information, you should know who he is."

"People from Zenith Academy? What are they trying to do?" Li Luo asked in surprise.

"Well, Zong Fu has deliberately shown himself. If I said that they are targeting Zhao Kuo, I don't think you would believe me," Yu Lang grumbled.

"So they are targeting me?" Li Luo asked with a pensive look on his face.

"They probably want to feel you out," Yu Lang explained.

"I've been keeping to myself this whole time! Just why?" Li Luo was a little astonished at this development. This Zong Fu guy was in the top 10. Why would he bother with small fry like him?

"It looks like he's being cautious, which totally seems to fit his character," Yu Lang explained. Li Luo was truly someone who held a low profile. His most outstanding achievement was being able to force a draw against Song Yunfeng.

"Well, since he dares to bully my brother, I don't care who he is! I won't take this lying down!" Li Luo said furiously while walking out of his room.

Yu Lang scratched his head. Judging by what Li Luo was saying, wasn't he simply being played like a fiddle by his enemies?

...

At the Whitespirit Garden's western side, a significantly large group had stopped to watch a commotion that was currently taking place, forming a blockade amidst the bustling crowd.

In the sea of people, numerous Zenith Academy students had surrounded Zhao Kuo, loudly arguing. Everyone else was watching in interest.

"What's going on?"

"I heard someone from Southwind Academy molested a girl from Zenith Academy."

"Was it really that bad? Where is the girl?"

"Where? Hmph. The girl was pretty ordinary... Are the people of Southwind Academy so thirsty that they set their grubby hands on every girl they see?"

"..."

In the midst of the raucous laughter, Zhao Kuo was feeling extremely frustrated. His eyes were ablaze with fury as he physically bashed his way through the encirclement, immediately breaking out into a sprint after that.

However, just as he started running, he could feel vigorous resonant power surging from behind him. A frigid palm was placed directly on his back, and the undulations of resonant power directly forced Zhao Kuo's body to come to a halt, unable to move any further.

He turned his head and saw an elegant and skinny youth. "What are you trying to do?"

Zong Fu replied with a wry smile, "Brother, the situation has not been resolved. You need to get someone from Southwind Academy to give us an explanation about this."

"Are you trying to coerce me?" Zhao Kuo asked gloomily.

Zong Fu smiled. "If Southwind Academy doesn't dispatch someone with enough face to provide an explanation, I will simply have to take matters into my own hands and fix you up. We need to provide an explanation to our fellow disciples after all."

"My ass. She looks even manlier than me, and I look like a bear. Who in the right mind would want to molest her?" Zhao Kuo fumed.

Zong Fu ignored him, simply keeping him in place. The crowd who was watching the scene gradually grew in size.

As the two continued to exchange verbal barbs, some movement could be seen in the crowd. Zong Fu's gaze lit up with excitement when he saw Li Luo stride in heroically.

"He really came." Zong Fu started celebrating internally. Now that Li Luo had appeared in person, he would be able to finally get an idea of how strong he really was. He would be able to determine if he was truly a wolf in sheep's clothing... or someone who was worthless.

Whilst he was still relishing in happiness, he saw Li Luo immediately turning around to shout. "This way, Supervisor. This bastard is clearly violating the rules, trying to start an unapproved fight! Quickly catch him and strip him of his right to participate in the final examinations!"

The smile on Zong Fu's face instantly froze and his joy was quenched by a figurative bucket of cold water. He immediately saw a teacher garbed in a supervisor's uniform standing there emotionlessly.

"F*ck," the originally refined and polished Zong Fu uttered an unimaginable vulgarity. He would never have thought that this Young Lord would act so... lawfully! The past two days were filled with all sorts of scuffles in the Whitespirit Garden as the numerous students competed against each other in secret. Yet no one would actually utilize the rules to solve their problems! Who had ever met someone who would run bawling to a teacher whenever there was conflict?

Wasn't this just too shameless?

This Young Lord was truly one that traveled the road less taken.

Chapter 0047: A Punished Zong Fu

Consternation showed on the faces of many of the students present.

No one would have thought that the gallant rescuer Li Luo would bring a supervisor to the table.

"Damn, this Young Lord is an unreasonable one."

"What a coward. He wouldn't be afraid of Zong Fu, would he?"

"A fight between students, and he actually went crying to the teacher?!"

"Right? Eh... but it does seem like the correct thing, right? Internal fighting is actually against the rules though."

"You... you're right, but... but..." One of the spectators stammered. Of course, the one actually in the right was Li Luo. His decision to call the supervisor was flawless.

But why did it just feel so wrong?

As they stood around glumly, Zong Fu hurriedly let go of Zhao Kuo, whose back he had been clinging firmly to. He then turned smilingly to the supervisor. "Mentor, we weren't fighting. Just playing."

"You were clearly going to beat me up," Zhao Kuo said.

Zong Fu flushed as he retorted, "Impossible! Don't slander me."

Li Luo stepped forth with an inviting smile. "Don't worry. Go ahead and speak your true mind. Bravely now."

Zong Fu forced a smile. "It was nothing. Nothing at all."

The teacher sized up the situation and saw the girl from Zenith Academy, built like a bear. He pursed his lips. "Couldn't find a better one to go for?"

Zong Fu was completely embarrassed. Zenith Academy had always been majority male. Female students were few and far between, and this junior sister was the only girl in their top 20, and she was beloved by all of them.

"You, three hours of standing punishment. One minute less and your dean can come and collect you," the supervisor said coldly.

In truth, student fighting was rampant, and they always shut an eye on the situation. But now that Li Luo had come to report it, they had no choice but to respond, or they would lose their jobs.

The supervisor turned to leave after delivering the punishment.

Low snickers came from the crowd, although it was uncertain who it was directed at.

Zong Fu stood there, frustrated but afraid to move. Li Luo walked up to him and smiled. "Did you think I would be so easy to bully? Going after Zhao Kuo to force me out?"

Zong Fu stared at him and then sighed. "Others said the Young Lord was nothing to fear, but I feel that you were the dark horse of these examinations. I just wanted to test you."

Li Luo was surprised. "You see me that highly?"

Zong Fu nodded. "I know how terrifying Jiang Qing'e is. I don't believe her fiance would be a good-for-nothing."

"You've fought Jiang Qing'e before?" One surprise after another.

Zong Fu's shoulders slumped. "Fought my ass. She stared at me once, and my legs were already numb with fear."

"But Li Luo, seeing you so insistent on hiding your moves has got me very curious about what you are truly hiding. I look forward to your performance in the examinations."

"You'll know it when you see it."

Li Luo smiled and clapped Zong Fu on the shoulder. "Well then, keep up the excellent standing form. I'm off to sleep."

He turned and led Zhao Kuo away, their departure followed by many odd glances from others.

Zong Fu watched them leave, screwing his mouth up with frustration. Something dawned on him.

"Damn, standing punishment means I can't attend Shi Huang's rendezvous. He wouldn't think I'm a traitor and not showing him face, right?"

.....

A room, somewhere in the Whitespirit Garden.

Shi Huang greeted Xiang Liang and Chi Su with a warm smile, even pouring them tea himself as he spoke to them with great courtesy.

The three chatted for a while. Chi Su frowned. "Where's Zong Fu, that fellow!"

Xiang Liang felt like something was off too. Zong Fu did not seem like the kind of guy to show no interest in Shi Huang. He would definitely show up if he could.

Shi Huang's smile did not reach the depths of the dark look in his eyes. Zong Fu would not be slighting him, would he?

Just then, there was a knock on the door, and someone entered to whisper into his ear. A look of surprise flitted across Shi Huang's face.

He waved the person away, then turned back to the other two with a smile. "It seems like Zong Fu won't be able to make it tonight."

"Why not?" Both Xiang Liang and Chi Su were surprised.

"He went to suss out Li Luo and ended up getting reported to the supervisor. His punishment was three hours of standing." There was an odd look on Shi Huang's face as he said this.

"Huh?!" both Xiang Liang and Chi Su blurted simultaneously. They looked at each other, not sure whether to be amused or angry.

"Li Luo seems to play against expectations." Xiang Liang could not help but chuckle.

To even go and tattle to the teacher—was he not afraid of being ridiculed?

"Perhaps he knew he was outclassed by Zong Fu, so it was his only choice." Chi Su supplied.

"I already said, there's no need to test Li Luo. He's not the one to watch here. He doesn't warrant such caution." Xiang Liang clicked his tongue dismissively.

Shi Huang said with good humor, "Zong Fu's caution is commendable. If met in the examinations, Li Luo should be dealt with, of course. Avoid any accidents later on."

But he did not seem too bothered by this, instead turning the conversation to the main topic at hand. "Although Zong Fu is absent, our purpose today will not be delayed."

"We all share the same goal: to dethrone Southwind Academy from its prized seat as the best school in the Tianshu Province."

"And the strongest they have this year is Lu Qing'er. As long as we deal with her, Southwind Academy will lose its first-place title. At that time, the number of entrance slots allocated to them will drop as well."

"My suggestion is simple. In the final stage, we must work together to force Lu Qing'er out."

Xiang Liang and Chi Su looked at each other. They both saw the doubt in the other's eyes. "It is not easy to team up against Lu Qing'er. Given her strength, she should still be able to retreat safely. Besides, the final stage will be full of other strong opponents. If we focus too intensely on her, others may slip in and collect."

Shi Huang smiled slightly. "Everything has been arranged. You need only appear at the time and place that I have determined."

The two were silent for a moment, then finally nodded.

"Then it will be as you say. Southwind Academy has led the Tianshu Province for too long. It is time the crown has a new bearer."

Shi Huang's smile widened as he lifted his teacup.

The three toasted each other.

"Well, then. Nice working with you."

Chapter 0048: An Encounter with Shi Huang

For the next two days, Li Luo was left alone, although he had to bear odd looks whenever he went out.

Did he care? Of course not.

It was nothing compared to what he had experienced over the last two years.

Whitespirit Garden, Wind Restaurant.

Li Luo and Zhao Kuo had come for a meal, but when they went up the stairs, they saw the hall packed to the brim with boisterous young men and women, and the roaring wave of chaos and laughter put them off.

"That's too many people," Zhao Kuo murmured.

Li Luo agreed. He had just turned to leave when he spotted someone in the distance waving to him, from a seat near the window.

He looked more closely. Lu Qing'er.

"Let's go get a free meal out of her."

Li Luo did not hesitate, making a beeline for the table with Zhao Kuo behind. But as he neared, he saw that Lu Qing'er's table was already seated with Difa Qing and Song Yunfeng.

"Feel free to join, if you wish. There's space," Lu Qing'er said, gesturing at the empty seats with her delicately-manicured finger.

Difa Qing shot Li Luo a look, but this time it was not followed with her previous sneering. She sat in silence, drinking her water.

It was Song Yunfeng who felt more up to his usual belligerence. He felt that they should know better.

Instead, Li Luo planted his ass right beside him with a grateful cheer. "All my dear schoolmates, what a sight for tired eyes." Zhao Kuo joined him.

Song Yunfeng's expression turned grim. He said sourly, "Li Luo, I heard you got into trouble again. There are so many other schools here at the Whitespirit Garden now, can you not ruin Southwind Academy's reputation? You're making things difficult for the other Southwind students."

Li Luo matched his grim tone. "If you feel ashamed about any of my actions so far, I suggest you quit school as soon as possible."

This elicited a new wave of anger from Song Yunfeng, and also a slightly upward twitch of Lu Qing'er's lips.

Song Yunfeng scoffed. "Who are you to tell me to leave school, Li Luo? I'm saying this for your own good. Don't think you can go around causing offense to other schools just because of that one draw. You clearly know best how meaningless that was."

However, Li Luo seemed not to hear him, instead turning to Lu Qing'er, who was hailing over a waiter. "Help us order a meal, thanks."

Lu Qing'er did not reply, but she added two decent meals to the order when the waiter came.

This infuriated Song Yunfeng even more, the flames of jealousy burning strongly within him. He had never dared to speak to Lu Qing'er in such a casual fashion before, but this bastard Li Luo had done so while ignoring him?

"The examinations start tomorrow. Are you all prepared?" Lu Qing'er asked, not intending to listen to them sniping at each other anymore.

They all nodded, then the topic was smoothly changed.

Li Luo did not participate much, concentrating on his meal.

But halfway through their meal, he sensed the atmosphere change drastically. He looked in the direction of the change. Someone was approaching.

It was a nondescript-looking youth, but the aura he gave off was tyrannic, a cold, cruel air that juxtaposed jarringly against the warm smile on his face. Everyone took him seriously.

Eastpool Academy, Shi Huang, son of Governor Shi Qing.

After Shi Huang made his way up the stairs, he headed straight for their position, and asked with a smile, "Excuse me, may I draw up a chair?"

Lu Qing'er's eyes flicked up briefly, then she replied coolly, "Sorry, we're full."

Still smiling, Shi Huang took a chair from the adjacent table, who did not dare to object. They recognized him.

Shi Huang sat on the other side of Song Yunfeng. "Qing'er, our fathers are acquaintances. Surely there's no need to be so frosty."

"And we are rivals. Surely there's no need to fake any amiability. Tiring, isn't it?" Lu Qing'er countered.

Shi Huang gave a tight smile. "Both of us are destined to meet in the Astral Sage College. We'll be peers there. Why the animosity?"

"Isn't that right, Yunfeng?" He directed the question sideways.

Song Yunfeng nodded quietly.

Li Luo was happy with his meal. He put down his bowl and chopsticks, turning to Lu Qing'er. "Done eating? How about a walk for digestion?"

The tension in Lu Qing'er's neck eased slightly. She knew that Li Luo was helping her defuse the situation. She didn't want to hang around fencing with Shi Huang either.

Shi Huang's eyes narrowed. He picked up a broad bean and flicked it with his fingers with a loud crack. It shot forth like lightning, a silver streak aimed straight for Li Luo's face.

But just before it landed, an ice-infused chopstick crashed into the lightning-charged broad bean, sending it flying and burying itself deep within a pillar. A small ring of frost covered it.

Lu Qing'er looked at Shi Huang coldly, and her frosty aura seemed to swell. "Shi Huang, stop picking fights."

The commotion here had stirred up the hall as well. Furtive glances were being thrown their way. When the crowd saw that it was Lu Qing'er and Shi Huang, they were immediately excited. Could it be that the first place hot favorites were going to duke it out here?

Sensing the crowd's attention, Shi Huang smiled. "A slip of the hand... I hope you don't take offense, Young Lord."

Li Luo shook his head, saying exasperatedly, "I'm not angry, but you're wasting food. It seems like you haven't been taught well at home. Has Governor Shi not been teaching you properly? If your house is lacking whips, I can send two over."

Shi Huang's smile did not falter. "The Young Lord is exactly right. I will be more careful next time."

"Recognize your mistakes and change. That's a good boy."

Li Luo nodded approvingly, then left with Zhao Kuo.

Lu Qing'er shot one more frosty look at Shi Huang and then left as well, Difa Qing scurrying in her wake. Song Yunfeng gave Shi Huang a long look and followed.

Shi Huang sat down, unperturbed. He scooped up the few remaining broad beans on the table and threw them into his mouth with quick movements, his eyes cold and calculating.

"This Li Luo. Is he hiding his power? Or is he truly powerless? I really want to find out," He mused to himself, shaking his head with a wry smile.

Forget it. A crippled young lord should pose little threat to him. Lu Qing'er was the key to toppling Southwind Academy from their first place title.

Still, Li Luo was quite a detestable guy indeed.

Seemed like he would have to make some arrangements for his early elimination.

Chapter 0049: The Final Examinations Begin!

Time flew by quickly in the Whitespirit Garden. In the blink of an eye, the final examinations were about to begin.

The entire area was swamped by an ocean of people that was steadily growing in size. People from all corners of the Tianshu Province were rushing here to witness the exciting climatic selection!

At the foot of Whitespirit Mountain was a viewing platform, currently squeezed full of individuals who were trying to get a view.

At the forefront of that area was a spacious and lavish pavilion that was built to house the most influential and respected individuals.

A short moment later, numerous esteemed individuals from the Tianshu Province made their way towards the pavilion, including Wei Sha of Southwind Academy and Shi Qing from the Governor's Mansion, attracting the attention of everyone around.

As the two most influential individuals in the Tianshu Province, they made their way to the middle of the pavilion, where a luxurious reception was prepared for them.

"Keke. The old dean still looks quite feisty and full of spirit. That's not bad at all!" Governor Shi said with a face full of smiles.

Dean Wei similarly responded with a meaningless smile. "I heard Governor Shi has been rather unsatisfied with Southwind Academy being at the top."

"Just baseless rumors." Governor Shi shook his head, unwilling to speak any more about this.

Immediately changing his tone, he continued, "The title of top academy in the Tianshu Province has to be attained with true strength! This is an unchangeable fact. Unless of course... Southwind Academy falters, then there isn't any other choice, is there?"

Hearing his provocation, the old dean replied indifferently, "To be honest, when my Southwind Academy's prestige was being established, no one had ever heard of you nor Eastpool Academy..."

Governor Shi had taken over the reins of the Tianshu Province in recent years, and the two had constantly been at odds with each other. One point of contention was Southwind Academy and its reputation. To the old dean, Southwind Academy's reputation was no different from his own child. He would never tolerate anyone who dared to harm it!

On the other hand, the Xia Kingdom's royal family would often review the performance of their numerous governors. As the old dean led the top academy in the Tianshu Province, he possessed a significant amount of clout during these reviews. With how often the two were at loggerheads, how could he possibly provide any sort of positive comment? This naturally led to Governor Shi being unable to rise any further in the ranks of officials.

As time went by, their enmity deepened, and the verbal sparring today was only an expected result.

This year was especially important for Governor Shi. If his performance evaluation was still not up to par, then he would most likely be dispatched to a lower tier county, one significantly weaker than the Tianshu Province.

This was also one of the key reasons why Shi Huang wanted to usurp Southwind Academy's position as top academy. They had no other choice.

The stark contrast between the icy-cold atmosphere in the center of the pavilion and the surrounding hustle and bustle was jarring. The heads of the Song, Difa, and Bei families were all enjoying the sights and sounds as they chatted gaily.

The Golden Dragon Bank's President Lu was also beaming with happiness as he took his place. This final examination was exceptionally important to him as his prized niece would be participating!

In another part of the pavilion, Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing had also arrived as House Luolan's representatives. They were very interested in observing how their Young Lord would perform during this trial.

As they were also extremely close compatriots of Jiang Qing'e, they treated Li Luo as if he was a younger sibling. With how handsome he was and that growing sense of gravitas, it only added to his charm. Of course, once in a while, he'd be an absolute pain in the ass, just like any younger sibling...

"Do you think the Young Lord will be able to reach the top 10?" Cai Wei asked as she gracefully leaned against the chair. She slowly peeled a banana, savoring it with light bites.

Any male who witnessed this sensuous scene would undoubtedly feel a fire burning inside.

Yan Lingqing's slender, jade-like fingers drummed against the stable. "You vixen! Can't you do things less flamboyantly?!"

"Well, there's no one else here..." Cai Wei said, aggrieved. At the same time, she passed over a slice of cantaloupe from the table.

"Why don't you have a bite? It will aid your development into maturity."

"You are truly unrepentant! Give you an inch and you want a mile!" Yan Lingqing furiously shouted. Did she think that she could do whatever she wanted since she was so well endowed?! Immediately taking revenge, she quickly held Cai Wei down with one hand whilst enthusiastically tickling her with the other.

Cai Wei was completely thrown into disarray as she trembled with uncontrollable laughter, unable to struggle free. In the end, she could only beg for forgiveness. "Forgive me! I'm in the wrong! I'm in the wrongggggg... aghhhh!"

The pitiful expression on Cai Wei's face was the complete opposite of the usual calm and collected demeanor she maintained when settling the numerous affairs of House Luolan.

Yan Lingqing gave a cold snort before finally heading back to her seat. "Li Luo should have reached the Seventh Seal Stage, and looking at how things are going, it should be quite difficult to attain a top 10 position."

"However, if Lu Qing'er is able to attain the top position, Southwind Academy will likely take first place again and obtain 15 extra positions. It is very likely Li Luo will obtain a slot to enter the Astral Sage College. "

Cai Wei gave a light chuckle. "I personally think that it won't be difficult for the Young Lord to enter the top 10."

Yan Lingqing gave Cai Wei a surprised look, her eyebrows arched. She simply could not understand where Cai Wei's confidence in Li Luo stemmed from.

"Don't judge him based on how warm and friendly he seems. Entrenched in his bones is a deep sense of pride. Coupled with the fact that he is the son of those two and also the fiance of Qing'e... With his personality, he might not be obsessed with taking the top spot, but I'm afraid he would never be able to accept charity from others. He won't allow himself to have a free ride into the Astral Sage College. Instead, he will struggle for it with all his might," Cai Wei explained.

"On the other hand, the most crucial thing is that I feel that our Young Lord is not such a simple person. He definitely has hidden his abilities very deeply."

The last sentence left Yan Lingqing in deep thought. It was true that Li Luo would often give others an unfathomable sort of feeling. He had manifested his resonance a mere month ago, yet what he had achieved was monumental!

"I hope he can rely on his own capabilities to enter the top 10 and obtain the right to enter the Astral Sage College. The ones that enter the Astral Sage College through allotted quotas tend to be seen differently. Coupled with the fact that he's the Young Lord of House Luolan and Jiang Qing'e's fiance, things will become more than awkward for him. Keke. Now that I think about it, Li Luo entering the Astral Sage College might not actually be a good thing." Yan Lingqing polished her spectacles at this point, a look of pity appearing on her face.

Cai Wei also gently nodded. She had experienced the trials of Xia City and had a good understanding of the Astral Sage College. At the same time, she was exceptionally clear of how famous Jiang Qing'e truly was. Perhaps saying that she was the center of attention in the college would not be an exaggeration.

Li Luo had spent his time till now sequestered in a corner of the Xia Kingdom, the City of Southwind. It was so distant that even the winds would not reach him. Conversely, once he took the initiative to enter the Astral Sage College, he would finally bear and understand the full brunt of Jiang Qing'e's radiance and glory.

A weak-willed individual would never be able to survive.

As they spoke, the atmosphere in the field seemed to have reached a crescendo. The duo turned to look at the groups of students dispatched by the academies.

As they swept through the crowd, they could easily spot the eye-catching Li Luo with a head of silver-grey hair standing in the group from Southwind Academy.

"The Young Lord truly is a sight for sore eyes. Dying his hair truly did make him look more attractive than before," Cai Wei casually commented.

This was met with a snide remark. "Psh, just a himbo. Shallow!" she spat.

Despite that, she had to admit that Li Luo truly was blessed with excellent genes passed down from his good-looking parents. No one could pick out any faults with his looks.

In front of countless gazes, a figure garbed in a robe that sparkled with starlight appeared atop a high platform. The robe he was wearing was extremely eye-catching, constantly twinkling with silver brilliance.

This was the attire worn by the teachers of the Astral Sage College. This esteemed individual was someone dispatched by the Astral Sage College to act as a supervisor for this examination.

"Good day, my students from the Tianshu Province. I am Mentor Anlie, a teacher from the Astral Sage College. Thank you for being here. Without further ado, let me explain how this year's examination rankings will be graded: a point-based system!" The teacher from the Astral Sage College looked to be around thirty years old. Someone of his age becoming a teacher in the Astral Sage College only demonstrated his excellent abilities.

After which, numerous teachers from the different academies began distributing crystal tiles to each and every student.

Li Luo and the rest received one as well. Each of these crystal tiles were about the size of their palms, atop was inscribed their respective academy crests as well as their names.

"When the examination begins, all of you here will go through two rounds of evaluation tests. How well you fare in these two evaluations will determine your basic points. Students are forbidden from mutually assisting each other during these two evaluations, but anything after that is fine. Being able to snatch someone else's crystal tiles and basic points will serve as the great divider! Of course, one cannot take their fellow academy mates' tiles and points. Your destination will be in the southwest side of Whitespirit Mountain. That location contains the ruins of an ancient city, also known as Whitespirit Ruins. When you arrive, you will naturally understand the rules."

After he made the announcement, the faces of all the students gradually turned serious, and the air was filled with a palpable tension.

After the last rule was explained, Anlie glimpsed into the sky briefly before breaking out into a resplendent smile.

"I've said enough nonsense for now! Under the authority vested in me, I hereby announce the beginning of the College Final Examinations!"

The moment these words were spoken, the turbid atmosphere seemed to have boiled to a peak, exploding outwards and enveloping everyone.

The final examination had finally begun!

Chapter 0050: Test Your Mind, Not Your Muscles

BOOM!

As soon as Mentor Anlie declared the start of the examinations, trees began to sprout, cracking the ground as they grew into a long corridor. It was pitch-black within, and it led into the heart of Whitespirit Mountain.

Leading the Southwind contingent were Lin Feng and Xu Shanyue. The two waved to their students behind them.

"Let's go."

As they spoke, the students' silhouettes glowed with an assortment of resonant powers. Finally, they all charged into the corridor.

At the same time, the other schools were stirring as well. The tension was electric.

The silver-robed Mentor Anlie from the Astral Sage College walked into the pavilion. Both Governor Shi and the dean dipped their heads slightly in acknowledgment. "Thank you, Mentor Anlie."

Although Anlie was slightly below them in terms of strength and influence, his title as a teacher and representative of the Astral Sage College demanded some respect from them.

Besides, Anlie was young. Although he was just a Silver Spark teacher, he had the potential to rise to the Gold Gleam rank. Once he was promoted, he would be an influential person within the Xia Kingdom.

The Astral Sage College divided their teachers into three tiers: Silver Spark, Gold Gleam, and Violet Vibrance. The hard requirement for Silver Spark teachers was to reach the Earth Fiend level, while for Gold Gleam teachers the standard was Heavenly Dipper General. The highest ranked teachers, Violet Vibrance ones, had to be at the Duke Stage. But even in the arcane depths of the Astral Sage College, a violet-robed teacher was a rare sight indeed.

Anlie bowed back smilingly in response. He then sat down. "Many crouching tigers and hidden dragons sleep in the Tianshu Province. This year's examinations are especially intense. I wonder if Southwind Academy will continue to hold their lead, or if a dark horse will gallop ahead."

His question was one that neither Governor Shi nor the old Dean could answer. They could only smile politely in response. They then directed their attention to the crystal wall, which was divided into many separate mirrors. When the time came, the photographic rocks embedded in Whitespirit Mountain

would stream information to them. At the same time, they would be recording the ranks and points of all the students, updating them in real time.

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As the students got fired up outside, Li Luo followed the crowd into the tree-enclosed corridor. He realized that the more they advanced, the more forks appeared in their way. It seemed to be separating the crowd up.

With each division, more and more were separated, until those around him were mostly strangers. However, Zhao Kuo was still with him, as well as a few other Southwind students.

This continued for a few dozen minutes, before Li Luo and the others finally came to a dead-end, marked by a wooden door.

In response to their arrival, the gigantic wooden door began to open slowly.

Li Luo and Zhao Kuo shared a look, then they cautiously followed the small party forward.

After the last person entered, the wooden door closed and light bloomed within. They saw that they were in an enormous hall, seemingly made completely out of wood, and with a sturdy feel to it.

All of them looked about warily, hushed.

Li Luo and Zhao Kuo were off to the side, also looking all around them. They had heard from the Astral Sage College teacher that they would first meet two basic challenges to test their foundations. This was probably the first of them.

But what sort of test would it be?

Just as Li Luo thought this, a sound suddenly came from the side. He looked upwards sharply and saw two yawning black holes above.

The voices were coming from within.

The voices steadily grew louder, and soon enough everyone was on their guard against the two holes.

Squeak, squeak!

Suddenly, two streams of black mass gushed out from the holes, the cacophony deafening. It was an unending stream of four-winged bats!

These bats were robust-looking. About the size of a person's face, they had a sinister look to them, sharp teeth and claws as well as red eyes.

Without any pause, they swarmed the students below.

The students scrambled to bring their resonant power to bear, dealing with the four-winged bats in all kinds of manners. It was obvious now that they would have to defend against the four-winged bats for their first test.

Li Luo began to channel his resonant power as well. He did not dare to let them get close, and so employed long-range attacks to snipe them out of the air.

As the bats continued to grow in number, there was suddenly a shout of alarm from one of the students. They had been slashed across the body by a bat, and their point crystal flickered red.

"Don't let the bats hit you, or your basic points will decrease!" someone hollered.

Some began to panic, having already been hit a few times. Clearly, they would not emerge from this first round with a good score.

"I see."

Getting a feel for the battle, Li Luo fought in close coordination with Zhao Kuo, fending off the bat attacks from all directions.

However, the flock seemed limitless, coming on again and again.

Finally, Zhao Kuo roared in frustration, "I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! I'M TOO TIRED!"

Li Luo's gaze swept the field. He saw a wall of four-winged bats, with no gap in between. His eyes flashed. He then seized Zhao Kuo by the hand and dragged him in a retreat to the side.

"Don't move, or my resonance art will dissipate," he said, then he called forth his resonant power. A thin veil of flowing light covered their bodies.

Under the flowing light, both of their silhouettes began to grow fainter and fainter.

"Is this the Water Shadow Art, a mid-grade resonance art?"

Zhao Kuo was amazed. But as the bats swarmed them, he could not help but question, "Brother Luo, this isn't going to help. Shouldn't we cut down the bats?"

Li Luo said nothing. He continued to apply his resonant power until both their bodies were glowing in a pool of light.

With no response from Li Luo, Zhao Kuo could only grit his teeth and resist the urge to strike out at the offending bats.

But just as he braced himself for the attack, the four-winged bats suddenly froze as though they had lost their target. Confused, they finally milled around and turned to attack the others.

"You..."

Zhao Kuo's eyes were bulging. "You can do that?"

He could not believe it. A middle-grade Water Shadow Art could shield them completely?

He looked down and saw that he had turned completely invisible. He marveled, "Brother Luo, your Water Shadow Art is sick! It's like an invisibility cloak!"

"Just a simple trick of the eye. It utilizes refraction through water to hide us within the light rays. A small trick. If someone concentrated hard enough, we would be seen..." Li Luo said without much pride.

"Wow! That's still very impressive. I've never seen anyone use the Water Shadow Art so skilfully before," Zhao Kuo praised.

Li Luo smiled in response. What he had glossed over was the fact that ordinary Water Shadow Art users could not use it this well. Only he, with his light resonance imbued within it, could affect it thus.

"No need to fight now. Just wait here until it ends," Li Luo said calmly.

"Brother Luo, you're not only a handsome face, you're pretty smart behind those pretty looks. The Astral Sage College must be going blind since they didn't extend a special invitation to you." Zhao Kuo whooped with good cheer.

"Ha, please! It's going to be our school soon enough. We're so good, they'll open the door for us! No need to worry now," Li Luo said generously.

"Wew, and a big heart under that fine brain too," Zhao Kuo said. Suddenly with time to kill, he was intending to butter up his dear Brother Luo a little more, when he suddenly spotted a familiar figure being harangued by four-winged bats.

"Brother Luo, that guy looks a little familiar," he said.

Li Luo looked over and winced. Who else would it be but Yu Lang, screaming as he scrambled away from the bats?

"Hmm...? Him again? Nothing to see here, let's go..." Li Luo said dryly.

Yu Lang was a sixth-grade wind resonance user, and swiftness was his specialty. Although he was yelling desperately, he was still managing to keep abreast of the bats.

"Something's not right, Brother Luo. That dog is charging over to where we are. Does he know we're here?" Zhao Kuo asked tensely.

Li Luo looked. Damn, he was right. What a real pain in the ass.

As Yu Lang neared, his ratty little eyes locked onto them. With a terse voice, he called, "Brother Luo, Brother Luo, save your brother."

Li Luo feigned death.

"If you don't save me, I'll attract a whole horde of bats to collide with you." Getting no response, Yu Lang immediately threatened them.

"Damn it, Yu Lang, you bastard! Don't you have any morals? Just you wait... Someday, someone will club you over the head when you least expect it. And I can't promise it won't be me!"

Grumbling, he reached out a hand and seized Yu Lang by the shoulder. With a flash, he hid him within the light as well.

In the direction Yu Lang had come from, the four-winged bats froze again and then headed off in another direction.