

Resonance 501

Chapter 0501: Three Star Hall Ambush

"Li Luo's been sucked into Lu Ming's illusion formation."

When Li Luo disappeared into the field of flowers, Qin Zhulu, Bai Doudou, Lu Qing'er, and the other Astral Sage students saw him vanish.

"Lu Ming's not holding back now. This is her true specialty—illusion resonance and lightning resonance together, creating a deadly and disorienting formation," Bai Doudou said tersely.

They all leaned in closer to the screen worriedly. Lu Ming's first move back in the Dragon's Belly had wiped the rest of them out, proving just how troublesome she was as an opponent. And her illusion formation back then had only trapped them, and it had been ridiculously hard to break. Now she would set an even more powerful one, probably one that had offensive capabilities as well.

Was Li Luo going to be okay?

Besides the Astral Sage students, there were other sage colleges present as well, other eliminated students that were still watching the battle.

The Astral Sage students were not only focused on one screen. They were also watching the three other halls fight it out.

No, strictly speaking, it was two other halls.

The Three and Four Star Halls.

The Two Star Hall had already been completely eliminated.

Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding had been tossed out a minute ago.

The Two Star Hall was in the final round now, and neither of them could withstand the heat.

All of the Two Star Hall competitors were standing around with shame on their faces, shuffling their feet in embarrassment. Even though the other Violet Vibrance students were not looking at them with derision, their shame was still apparent.

The other halls were still fighting, and they had been the first to lose.

It was a known fact that in this year, the Two Star Hall was the weakest group in the Astral Sage College.

Although, that had already been made clear in the ticket match.

The One Star Hall's Li Luo, the Three Star Hall's Jiang Qing'e, the Four Star Hall's duo of Gong Shenjun and the First Princess. The Two Star Hall, however...

Their champions were the pale-faced Zhu Xuan and Ye Qiuding, who looked like pathetic, sub-par competitors.

Maybe they should leave this year? They wouldn't be able to lift their heads for the remaining two years in school.

The two of them could feel their teammates staring at them with a mixture of disappointment and anger.

What could they do but pretend to ignore it? They turned their eyes to the One Star Hall's footage.

Li Luo was fighting the dual resonance user, Lu Ming, right?

If he lost too, maybe they wouldn't be in such a tough situation.

It was selfish and mean to think this way, but that was all that they could hope for now.

A gasp came from the other side of the group. "Senior Jiang's walked into a trap! Damn, they're cowardly—it's four on one!" The others rushed over in alarm to watch the Three Star Hall's situation.

Even Vice Principal Su Xin.

The Three Star Hall's competition was in the middle of the final round, held in a forest.

"Attack!"

Lu Jinci roared, sending a barrage of resonant power out towards the beautiful figure standing calmly beside a tree.

Three other blasts of resonant power followed his, warping the air with their energy.

BOOM!

All four had used their strongest attacks. They knew that the person that they had surrounded was a real monster. She had swept through their ranks like an elephant through a wheat field, stomping people left and right from the starting whistle. It was overwhelmingly dominant, and Lu Jinci had no choice but to gather allies in the end.

Their goal was one and the same: eliminate the strongest of them all, Jiang Qing'e.

Everyone knew that as long as she remained in the competition, none of them stood a chance.

They had painstakingly managed to lay down this trap, and they had waited patiently in agony. There were five people at first, but their fifth companion was currently occupied with Duze Honglian.

Each of these students were the cream of the crop in their own schools. They were at least as strong as Zhao Huiyin was during the ticket match. The four of them combined was a real force to be reckoned with.

Four deadly arcs of power filled the air, arching down towards the slim figure.

Boom!

The mountains shook, demolishing trees and rocks alike.

"Did we succeed?!" Lu Jinci peered through the dust eagerly. Surely their attacks had hit, and surely not even Jiang Qing'e could withstand so much damage, right?

The dust faded.

And so did their smiles.

Wings of light were spread, shining brightly through the gritty, gray dust, and illuminating the entire land. One gentle beat of the wings, and worldly natural energy pulsed from them.

Jiang Qing'e rose into the sky, her wings beating gently. She looked down upon them with her heavy sword in hand.

Those golden eyes were far more compelling than ever before.

She looked like an angel of light, ready to bring judgment down upon them.

The four students looked up at her in reverence and fear. They knew they were about to be royally smoked.

Her voice came down to them, elegant, quiet, and deadly. "So the mice are finally coming out to play?"

Chapter 0502: Li Luo's Riposte

Whilst Jiang Qing'e descended upon her ambushers, Li Luo was fully sucked into Lu Ming's illusion formation. In comparison to the heaven-shaking battle taking place on her end, Li Luo's side was calm and quiet.

A gorgeous sea of flowers below, ominous thunderclouds above. Li Luo's brows were furrowed at this fantastical sight. The gray clouds were filled with maniacal amounts of lightning resonance power and might, an actual force of nature looming.

Lu Ming clearly intended for the illusion formation to serve as a supporting tool, awaiting the right moment to strike.

Conversely, Li Luo did not intend to sit there idly. He slashed outwards with the Onyx-Elephant Blade, creating countless sword lights that contained heaven-rending might, directing them towards the clouds.

Swoosh!

Perhaps to no one's surprise, the sword attacks merely passed through the ephemeral clouds to no effect.

"It's an illusion." It seemed that most of the gray clouds that were covering the sky above were illusions. They were designed to obscure and confuse. As a result, he could not locate the actual thundercloud that was the core of the lightning resonant power.

"Ugh, tricky and confounding." Li Luo couldn't help but sigh. Lu Ming had truly perfected the art of utilizing her dual resonances. Her Illusory Thunderbolt would pretty much leave everyone with their hands tied.

When Li Luo paused, the thunder clouds above were not going to sit there idly. They roiled with anticipation, and thunderous booms echoed without pause.

"It's coming." An impending attack could be felt in the air as static crackled across his skin.

BOOM!

As the thought flitted across his mind, a section of the clouds seemed to have come alive, throwing a bolt of lightning that sought to strike Li Luo squarely.

Lightning had flashed across the sky, scorching the air, and an acrid smell arose.

This was no time to underestimate the opponent and Li Luo understood that. He circulated water resonant power throughout his body, forming a layer of water armor to cover him and protect him.

The Heavy Water Toga.

Simultaneously, Water Edge began to circulate rapidly atop the blade as his resonant power blasted out, slashing out a beam of sword energy into the sky, once again confronting the lightning directly.

At the moment of impact, the sword energy effortlessly sliced through the attack.

Li Luo's gaze furrowed. Another dratted illusion. Was Lu Ming planning to drain him of his resonant power through these little tricks?

Boom, boom, boom!

At the same time, three more bolts of lightning struck forth, approaching him ferociously.

Were these all illusions again?

Li Luo was unable to tell and did not dare to shrug them off carelessly. If just one of these bolts were real, it would be a nasty experience.

Lu Ming was truly demonstrating a masterful performance in illusions.

Li Luo flicked his finger, and the Octagold Shield immediately deployed, protecting him from the impending attack.

Boom!

The three bolts struck the shield in succession. The first two did not seem to have had any effect, immediately dissipating on contact, clearly demonstrating that they were illusions. However, the third bolt was not the same. Although the Octagold Shield radiantly dispersed the resonant power, a large, black patch that was sizzling with smoke could be seen on it, finally falling by Li Luo's feet.

Li Luo quickly stowed away the exhausted Octagold Shield. Even though it was a white-eye treasured artifact, it could not continuously be used.

This brief exchange had allowed him to clearly understand Lu Ming's strategy. As long as he remained in the Illusory Thunderbolt, nothing was for certain. However, a single moment of carelessness would lead to situations of peril.

At the same time, being perpetually on guard would only serve to drain himself both mentally and physically. If he took too long to resolve his predicament, his condition would worsen and Lu Ming could pick him off whenever she chose to.

Li Luo stared at the gloomy clouds above him, reminiscent of his mood, in deep thought.

This was not an easy situation to get out of.

He would need to possess absolute strength to completely tear the illusion formation to shreds. Yet the only way he could do so was to tap upon the three-tailed heavenly wolf's strength... using it here would mean that he would have less cards to utilize in the remaining battles.

At the same time, he suddenly laughed as he realized something. "When it comes to a battle of stamina, you just might not be my equal."

Lu Ming possessed illusion and lightning resonances, whereas he had water and wood resonances. In terms of offensive capabilities, the combination of water and wood would definitely be worse. However, when it came to certain things, neither lightning nor illusion resonances had the advantage there.

Water resonances, like the waves, were perpetual and continuous, whilst wood resonances were full of life and endless growth.

It was a battle of endurance now. Li Luo immediately sat down in a cross-legged position, circulating his wood resonant power before slamming the ground with his palm.

"Yggdrasil's Shelter."

At this very moment, a tiny sapling burst out from the ground.

With the infusion of wood resonant power, the sapling grew explosively, and it expanded into a massive and lush tree in the span of ten breaths, without any hints of stopping.

Li Luo's actions instilled a sense of wariness within Lu Ming. She immediately activated the illusion formation to strike that strange tree, hoping to extinguish his hopes of a turnaround.

In response, Li Luo raised the Onyx-Elephant Blade above his head and spun it in a continuous circle, receiving the numerous bolts of lightning.

Under constant pressure, the Onyx-Elephant Blade gradually began to run out of resonant power.

Li Luo's expression was unchanging. He channeled all of his waterlight and woodearth resonant power into the tree, stimulating its growth. The water resonant power improved the rate of growth whilst the light resonant power compounded its effects.

A tree also required a strong foundation within the earth to remain unyielding and unafraid of the elements.

The earth resonant power within him was the perfect nutrient to solidify and strengthen the tree itself.

In just the span of a few short minutes, a tree that stretched towards the sky was born. Li Luo was sitting beneath the massive object, sheltered from the elements. If one looked from above, it would seem like a massive umbrella was protecting Li Luo, each and every leaf shining with incomparable amounts of energy.

Lu Ming had now discovered Li Luo's objective and was inevitably slightly taken aback. This guy was truly a troublemaker!

She had wanted to finish things off within the illusion formation, yet this irritant kept coming up with new and strange moves. Now he had parked himself below a massive tree that he was using as shelter, seemingly to counter the bolts of lightning thrown at him. It looked as though she would need a change of plans as the branches and leaves would inevitably nullify the lightning bolts.

Hadn't this fight just turned into a contest of endurance?

Lu Ming had thought of eliminating Li Luo through attrition, never expecting that the opponent was thinking exactly the same.

Perhaps it wasn't surprising. Li Luo possessed a water resonance after all, having an advantage when it came to drawn-out fights.

Her gaze flickered as her expression turned icy.

If this was the case, then she'd no longer bother. It was time to focus all her strength and win in the shortest amount of time possible, burning down Li Luo's hopes and trees.

Both of them were dual resonance users, but she had dual seventh-grade resonances. Her resonant power was also higher by a grade and thus there seemed to be no way that Li Luo could resist her imposing might.

Straightening her thoughts, she no longer felt gloomy, and both of her hands started crackling with lightning.

Boom!

The sky seemed to have gone through another transformation as the thunderclouds receded. The new clouds were even darker, and one could feel that the energy within them was even more berserk, to the point that it was leaking out!

When Li Luo sensed the changes above, he raised his head to look, his eyes squinting at this new development.

"You don't want to play around anymore?" he jested, unafraid of the danger..

"Let's see if your damn thunder can crack my tree apart!"

Chapter 0503: Li Luo Breaks the Stalemate

RUMBLE!

The clouds above maneuvered and milled like armies on a battlefield, marshaling a spectacular ball of electrical energy that roiled wildly before blasting out towards the tree above Li Luo.

Meanwhile, Li Luo was sitting under the tree, watching the lightning ball gather above his head.

His eyes were calm, his body still. But within him, his resonant palaces were in overdrive, sending more and more energy into the tree.

The tree continued to grow, its trunk thickening and lengthening, and more and more branches appearing.

This tree was made from the wood resonance within Li Luo, and it was strengthened with his waterlight resonance and earth resonant power.

It was not just an ordinary tree, but one that was born of four different elements.

Boom!

Finally, the lightning ball reached a crucial point and exploded on the tree.

CRACKLE! POP!

The leaves at the top were incinerated instantly. About a tenth of the entire crown was gone in a blink.

But soon enough, the ethereal attack faded away, energy spent.

The tree was in a miserable state, with more than half its trunk blackened. The entire thing was swaying and rocking slightly in the breeze.

Lu Ming's shoulders relaxed in satisfaction.

But before she could celebrate, she saw the blackened areas of the tree heal rapidly, and a new pulse of vital energy flowed through it. The tree was whole again a moment later, standing tall with new leaves and branches in the same verdant green of before.

Lu Ming's jaw dropped.

This tree was unbelievably strong. It was almost too resilient for her to believe.

She had seen similar moves before, from wood resonance users that she had faced in the past. But those were much weaker—she had blasted through them with a single lightning attack and rendered their regenerative powers ineffective.

Li Luo's tree was different.

"Is it because he's strengthened it with his water resonance?" she wondered. But surely water resonant power alone could not create such restorative power, right?

"Let's see how many waves you can withstand, then!"

It seemed like this was going to be Li Luo's final defense. He was going to make her work for it, and she saw no other way than to pour her blood and sweat into it.

Once this tree was down, the battle would be over.

She stretched out a finger again, injecting lightning resonant energy out into the clouds.

More clouds gathered, layer upon layer, until the sky was all but blotted out.

Boom!

Several moments later, the next attack was ready, and another sizzling ball of lightning flew down.

Ping, ping, ping!

The tree was shaken madly in the storm.

The crown was constantly sheared away and charred by lightning.

It stood silently, accepting the baptism of lightning, wind, and rain. No matter what was thrown at it, the tree stood firm.

Qin Zhulu, Lu Qing'er, and the others all watched, completely engrossed. They had not thought that Li Luo would choose this way to deal with Lu Qing'er.

Both sides were playing to their respective strengths.

Vice Principal Su Xin was full of admiration for Li Luo's rational approach to the problem. Lu Ming's illusion formation was there to confuse. Once you were trapped inside, you were within her control.

Li Luo had not panicked, instead retreating into his own defenses within it. His passivity had nullified the disorientation of the illusion formation.

However, this merely kept Li Luo safe while posing no kind of threat whatsoever to Lu Ming.

As long as this situation did not change, the advantage lay with the latter.

Still, it was hard to think of a better possible outcome. Lu Ming was a dual resonance user as well, and a Third Changing. It was already very good that he was keeping things level.

It was not just the Astral Sage College who was watching—all the other competitors in the Holy Grail Meet were all waiting to see as well.

Who would be the victor?

Boom! Rumble!

The lightning storm was relentless.

The rest of the sea of flowers had already been burned to a crisp.

The tree was the only thing standing in the entire illusion formation.

Li Luo lifted his head and closed his eyes. Another pulse of vital energy, and again his tree was renewed, standing strong against the lightning attack.

He could feel his resonant power draining away rapidly.

Surely Lu Ming was the same.
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"Lu Ming," he called out with a laugh, "you didn't expect things to turn out this way, huh?"

"Li Luo," she said coolly, "I'll admit that you're full of surprises, but there's no need to get cocky. You can't break my illusion formation, and you are doomed within it. If you just surrender now, you can keep a little dignity."

"A loss is a loss. No such thing as dignity in a loss," Li Luo called back.

"What's the point of this pointless struggle?" Lu Ming countered.

"Hmm! Wait, you actually think YOU can win this?" Li Luo called out in an astonished tone.

"You can hold out, but the advantage lies with me as long as you are within the illusion formation, since you can't reach me. You can waste time in here, but victory will not be yours."

"Oh really?" Li Luo chuckled. "I disagree." Lu Ming rolled her eyes. It had to be bravado.

Li Luo watched the lightning above him carefully. If he used the power of the three-tailed heavenly wolf, he could definitely break through it with sheer power, but it was not going to be his choice.

He still had other moves.

And they were about to succeed.

"Lu Ming, I think I'm going to win soon." He laughed.

"Li Luo, looks like you've added your own hallucinations to my illusions." Lu Ming snorted.

Li Luo lifted his head again, looking towards the crown of his tree. It had been broken and regenerated countless times.

To be more specific, Li Luo was staring at a black fruit at the top of his tree.

The fruit had been zapped by lightning numerous times, and was releasing a black gas that was slowly spreading throughout the illusion formation. Li Luo gripped the Onyx-Elephant Blade and examined his other arm. The black poison had spread through half his arm, turning it a diseased gray.

Li Luo's sword flashed down.

With a quick twist, he cut out a huge chunk of meat from his arm, deep enough to reveal bone.

Gritting his teeth to resist a groan, he quickly used his resonant power to repair his cut.

"Are you mad?"

Li Luo's self-mutilation shocked Lu Ming.

But at this time she suddenly felt a sharp pain within her body, and her resonant power went haywire.

"What? What's going on?" She paled and checked her body to see black spots spreading across her skin.

"Poison?!" Lu Ming felt a chill run down her spine.

"When was I poisoned?! Is this Li Luo's doing?

"But how?!"

Chapter 0504: Lu Ming's Elimination

Lu Ming's white palm was gradually becoming infested with a black poison, resulting in her massive fright.

She could not comprehend what was happening.

Her entire body was hidden within the illusion formation, and she had never clashed directly with Li Luo. How could this poison have entered her body?

"Bastard!" She recomposed herself very quickly, and her aloof face had an ugly expression upon it. Focusing intently, she channeled her resonant power into the poison, hoping to scatter it and resolve her predicament.

At the same time, the realization that this was hopeless dawned upon her. As she attempted to remove the poison, its toxicity only intensified as it reacted with her resonant power. In fact, she felt as though her entire body's resonant power was gradually being stained by this corrupting malady.

The reaction of the poison made Lu Ming break out in cold sweat. It was truly virulent! Was it able to erode even resonant power?

Lu Ming could only attempt to seal off the poison to prevent it from infecting her body any further. However, as a consequence, she was unable to keep the illusion formation active, helplessly watching her painstaking creation gradually fall to pieces.

The sea of flowers began to recede and so too did the clouds of thunder.

The surroundings gradually morphed back into the desolate forest, and Li Luo was able to see a familiar silhouette not too far from him. "Haha. It looks like your illusion formation fell apart on its own!"

Lu Ming unceremoniously replied, "Hmph. When did you manage to poison me?"

With a smile, Li Luo pointed at the black fruit at the top of the half-destroyed tree. "I turned the poison into a fruit, and whenever the lightning struck it, the toxic air slowly mixed into the worldly natural energy, eventually poisoning you and the formation itself..."

"And whenever I summoned worldly natural energy to attack you, I inevitably absorbed some of the poison..."

"Bingo!"

Unfortunately, Lu Ming was completely displeased to have gotten this right. In fact, she was so incensed that she was on the verge of exploding as she gritted her teeth. "Don't you think this is too dishonorable? That you'd even fiddle with poison!"

"To be fair, if you were just a little more cautious, you would have detected the poison within the worldly natural energy. Plus, I'm not actually a poison expert, and this tactic would hardly qualify as exquisite."

Lu Ming was slightly taken aback at the tart reply. This was completely unexpected as she would never have expected such a move from Li Luo... much less so considering that he didn't possess a poison resonance.

"Ahem... I'd also like to point out that this poison is completely unparalleled and mighty... and I don't have complete control of it either..."

Li Luo stood up and lifted his arm, which was still bleeding. He had sliced off quite a bit of flesh, and he looked a little exasperated as he eyed the cut that he himself had inflicted. "Well, this is just another means to manage the poison, and it's not like I'm not allowed to."

What had poisoned Lu Ming was the dual poison that was stored in a resonant bubble. Using the poison from a single bubble had allowed him to create that dubious-looking black fruit.

What he had failed to mention was also that this toxic tool was not really a part of his strength, and he had no easy way to control it. As a result, he also suffered from its backlash when he attempted to take advantage of it.

This was why he had mercilessly taken rather extreme measures to rid himself of the residual poison.

"Breaking your illusion formation was truly troublesome. I may have other methods, but this was the easiest," Li Luo explained.

Lu Ming pouted upon hearing Li Luo's humble brag. "Keep showing off, you idiot!" What other methods was he babbling about? Anyone who believed his words was a fool.

Perhaps the only saving grace was that she did not retort like the typical antagonist, spewing comments of her invincibility before all this and ruining her reputation further... Li Luo's poison was insidious and his methods were actually sublime. Having been focused on operating the illusion formation, she had not adequately prepared herself and thus fell into his trap.

The winner was king, and she wasn't a sore loser... Well, not outwardly at least.

She stretched out her hand and coldly said, "Give me the antidote."

An awkward look could now be seen on Li Luo's face. He once again waved his bloody arm before her. "Hello! Do you see this? Do you think someone with an antidote would take such extreme measures? You haven't been poisoned that badly yet, so let me help you detoxify your body. I think a chop or two will solve your predicament..." He raised his blade as he walked towards Lu Ming.

Shocked, she stumbled backwards a couple of steps before shouting, "Stay away from me! The further the better. UGH! I don't want your antidote anymore."

What a joke. What was this, the middle ages? What if she was left with a couple of large scars after Li Luo's "treatment?" Her beauty would be tarnished forever! She wasn't some barbarian from the wilderness.

Li Luo paused and helplessly replied, "Well, you should probably admit defeat. Find someone from your college or an adjudicator from the Holy Grail Meet and they should be able to resolve your predicament."

Lu Ming was exceptionally depressed right now. Everything had been in the palm of her hand, but this damned Li Luo had pulled some stinky tree out of his hat full of tricks, and that was only the start of her problems. The tree alone would not have been enough to stop her, and she still seemed invincible at the time, at least within the context of her illusion formation as it would have just been a matter of time before she eeked out a victory. n-.O(-V./E/-ℓ.-b-/l./n

However, who would have expected another trick hidden beneath the surface? The poison had thrown her plan into shambles.

"Well now, don't be salty. You gave us an underhanded blow in the Dragon's Belly, and now I'm just returning the favor." Li Luo smiled.

Lu Ming snorted loudly. "Well, you might have won with your little tricks now, but what about the final battle? I doubt Sun Dasheng will be able to stop Jing Taixu's ascent. You will undoubtedly engage in a decisive battle against him."

"Well, that would be a good thing." Li Luo truly wanted to challenge Jing Taixu.

"Seems like you're truly the humble sort," Lu Ming coldly replied with furrowed eyebrows. "If you're already having so much trouble with me, how can you even compete against him? You meeting him is as good as delivering the strongest One Star Hall student title on a platter. Maybe you can give up now and I'll fight Jing Taixu on your behalf. Once all has been said and done, I can even let you have half the credit."

Li Luo guffawed. "Lu Ming, you seem to be good at math at least."

"Frankly speaking, my odds of beating Jing Taixu are higher than yours by quite a bit."

Li Luo shook his head and seriously replied, "I disagree. I promised someone that I would deal with him. If I can't, well... I might be subject to some domestic violence..."

Lu Ming didn't pursue this further. She knew that Li Luo would never agree and just wanted to try her luck.

"Regardless, you have won. Thus, you're the one who deserves to participate in the final battle. However, I will be watching you closely and I hope you don't let me down. If you let Jing Taixu win effortlessly, my loss here will be the ultimate humiliation!" After she finished, she shattered her anima gourd, transforming into a beam of light that ascended into the skies, disappearing in a flash.

Lu Ming. Eliminated.

Li Luo stared at the space where she had last been, sighing lightly. It seemed as though he had finally entered the final stages of the competition.

After taking some time to recuperate, he gradually ascended the mountain.

The path was quiet and peaceful, with no obstructions, allowing him to reach the summit rather quickly.

Upon reaching the peak, his steps gradually slowed to a halt. Atop the cloud-shrouded cliffside stood a familiar silhouette with his hands behind his back, overlooking Dragonbone Island.

A person he would not forget.

Jing Taixu. The Duke Art-wielding Sun Dasheng had been eliminated.

Chapter 0505: I'll Show You Mine If You Show Me Yours

Low clouds were hanging around the peak of the mountain in a knee-high carpet that obscured the ground they stood on. Jing Taixu turned, sensing eyes on him.

"Li Luo. So you weren't eliminated in the Dragon's Belly after all," Jing Taixu said lightly, looking not at all surprised.

"But the fact that you are here proves that my instinct was right. You are the most dangerous person to me in the hall-level competition."

Li Luo eyed Jing Taixu carefully. The latter's clothes were torn—clearly the battle with Sun Dasheng had been an epic one.

"Looks like the stone monkey didn't manage to stop you," Li Luo noted.

He had fought Sun Dasheng before, so he knew how strong he was. The Duke Art he practiced was a powerful trump card that Jing Taixu had clearly overcome.

A rather intimidating prospect.

"Don't worry about that Duke Art." Jing Taixu smiled, seemingly reading his mind. "It's not actually a genuine Duke Art, just a hacked version to help inflate his reputation."

"Of course, even an imitation of a Duke Art is strong enough to pose a real threat, even to me. I had to pull out a few tricks of my own; otherwise, he really would have gotten the better of me."

He spoke with a hint of arrogance in his voice.

"And you as well—I'm amazed you could beat Lu Ming. She should have you beat, no matter how you look at it," he said guardedly.

"Just a few tricks of my own." Li Luo brushed it off modestly.

"There's no trickery in a fight like that. You're too modest."

"Well, thank you for that high praise, then," Li Luo said lazily, pulling out his Onyx-Elephant Blade. "Well, I guess it's about time to settle things between us now."

"Is this because of what happened before? That's none of my business." Jing Taixu shrugged. "The school wanted to target Jiang Qing'e, since she's way too strong in the Three Star Hall."

"It's a stupid move to anger her," Li Luo stated. "Your Lu Jinci is going to be buried alive. If it wasn't for the fact that you can't kill people here, I would tell you to save yourself the trouble of digging him up and just light a couple of joss sticks right there and then."

"Perhaps," Jing Taixu said indifferently. "I don't really care either way. I'm just here to take the strongest student title for myself."

"Well, you'll have to ask my friend Blade here," Li Luo said, wagging the Onyx-Elephant Blade.

Jing Taixu laughed softly. "Do you really think you can beat me, Li Luo?"

He stepped forward.

Boom!

A terrifying wave of green wind power roared out like a tempest from a different dimension, leaving scarring furrows across the land.

Li Luo grimaced.

This wasn't Third Changing power!

"You're already a Fourth Changing!" he hissed.

So this was Jing Taixu's trump card! He had another ascension stocked up! And yet somehow, there was a strange hollowness to Jing Taixus resonant power. Perhaps his breakthrough had not come entirely through his own strength.

Regardless, it was a monstrous achievement to get this far while still in the One Star Hall. Although the Holy Grail Meet meant a larger supply of resources from the school, Jing Taixu's potential and strength were indisputable.

Even Jiang Qing'e had only managed to reach the Second Changing when she was in the One Star Hall, although no one had forced her to her limits back then.

Then again, Jiang Qing'e's situation was special. She had actively repressed her own cultivation level, so it was hard to tell.

Jiang Qing'e's power was truly a mystery.

"I wanted to hide it a bit longer, but Sun Dasheng forced me to reveal it with his blasted moves," Jing Taixu said wistfully.

If not for Sun Dasheng, this powerful trump card could have been hidden until a fortuitous moment in the fight with Li Luo. It would have been a powerful advantage.

No matter. Even with it revealed, he was confident that it was enough to beat Li Luo.

"You see the gap between us now, Li Luo. It's not something that you can overcome. If what I see is all you've got, then this final is mine for the taking."

Li Luo stood in silence for a moment. His opponent had a quasi ninth-grade wind resonance and was at the Fourth Changing. Indeed, the gap was large.

Not even dual resonances was enough to close the two-tier difference. Not when his opponent was brilliant enough to fight above his own tier as well.

"Well, a Fourth Changing is indeed a little tiring to fight," Li Luo sighed.

"Not afraid?" Jing Taixu noted. "Looks like you still have more up your sleeve."

Li Luo laughed gaily. "Well, I really didn't hide it... In fact, I gained it. And it's all thanks to you."

"I picked up a little something back at the Dragon's Belly."

He walked forward slowly, gathering energy within him.

Energy that rose and rose, until finally it shattered the invisible barrier within him.

Li Luo reached the Third Changing. This was not as surprising as it sounded. He was already at the peak of the Second Changing when the Holy Grail Meet had started. The dragon's bloodfire absorbed by the black plaque had helped him push his resonant power a notch higher.

Just like with Jing Taixu, he had wanted to hold this back for a more opportune moment.

He had even hidden it against Lu Ming.

But now he was forced to reveal it.

Jing Taixu's newfound strength had to be met with something closer, or he would pay too heavy a price in battle.

"Break in case of emergency," Li Luo said casually. "Isn't that what they tell you to do?"

Jing Taixu was taken aback, but he quickly recovered. "It changes nothing. I still have the advantage in cultivation level."

Li Luo laughed again. "You think that's the end of it?"

Jing Taixu's eyes narrowed.

Li Luo produced a garnet-colored dragonpearl in his hand, weighing the heavy sphere for a moment.
Overall

He put it into his mouth, and a dragon's roar rang out within his cranium. He felt a surge of energy fill him.

His resonant power grew even stronger than before. Jing Taixu was looking graver and graver by the second.

Li Luo's resonant power was on par with his now.

He knew that he had been right about Li Luo. This silver-haired boy was the greatest threat to him in the competition.

But Jing Taixu did not panic. He smiled, ready to accept the challenge. His green plantain fan fluttered like a flag of war.

Beating an opponent like this would make his strongest student title all the more real!

Chapter 0506: Ninth-grade Spirit Avatar

"Wow, damn, Li Luo's crazy! Is he a Fourth Changing now as well?!" Yu Lang's eyes were popping out of their sockets in the Astral Sage College tower. He might not be present to feel the power for himself, but the size of the power indicated that he was level with Jing Taixu's strength.

"No, you crazy hype-man," Bai Doudou said, also peering in closely. "Li Luo's still, strictly speaking, a Third Changing. It must have something to do with that pearl he swallowed. The increase is probably temporary, but it'll likely last for this battle."

"This is going to be good. A real battle of the East Divine Continent, fitting of the best of the One Star Hall." Qin Zhulu's laughter boomed out. Such battles were what he lived for, although he had to admit that he had been left in the dust by the likes of Li Luo and Jing Taixu.

Still, he believed this was temporary. After the Holy Grail Meet, he would apply for a permit to go to the Umbra Cave. Only in those harrowing moments would a person's true potential shine through.

He needed more brutal training.

"I still don't know if Li Luo can beat Jing Taixu," Yi Lisha said doubtfully. "This is the last step though. If he beats this final boss, we'll have the strongest One Star Hall student title."

Lu Qing'er was craning eagerly to see the screen, her dewy eyes glowing. "Li Luo will definitely win."

"Have you guys forgotten how strong Jing Taixu is?" Wang Hejiu asked sourly.

"And have you forgotten how you asserted Li Luo would never be the strongest in the Astral Sage College's One Star Hall?" Lu Qing'er countered testily.

Wang Hejiu flinched. "You're just blinded. Jing Taixu is not on a level we can compare with."

"Jing Taixu's not a god. He just has a quasi ninth-grade resonance, that's all. He's not the strongest that Li Luo will meet, and he'll be a huge stepping stone once Li Luo beats him."

"And don't forget," Lu Qing'er added, "I saw him climb from his time with blank palaces. Jing Taixu might be strong, but has he ever risen above the hopelessness of blank palaces? If Li Luo can overcome that, he can overcome anything, even Jing Taixu." She finished assertively, her voice radiating with conviction and trust in Li Luo.

Indeed, her trust in him was not unfounded. She had watched him grow from nothing—the way he was back in Southwind Academy, to the leader of their generation that he now was.

He was more than those born with a silver spoon in their mouth.

The others fell silent now, even the naysayers Wang Hejiu and Duze Beixuan. Lu Qing'er was right. Li Luo had tasted despair before, and still his spirit had not been broken.

Perhaps that was what made him resilient enough to break away from the rest of them.

He showed an easy smile and a lackadaisical attitude to both friends and enemies, but he reserved an unyielding, unforgiving drive for himself.

...

Li Luo was reveling in his newfound power, thrumming fiery energy that pounded away inside him.

He had ascended to the Third Changing.

The dragonpearl's boost was something that Li Luo had derived as possible after careful inspection. However, it was a temporary borrowing of energy, and it would fade when he removed the dragonpearl.

In any case, he was now able to take on the Fourth Changing Jing Taixu.

Now they were at the same starting line.

It was a fitting start to the finals.

Weng.n.(Over&bin

Li Luo gave the Onyx-Elephant Blade a test slash. It sang out gloriously, always craving for more power in its wielder. Li Luo obliged. His halo of Becoming One dual resonance power materialized.

Li Luo had no intention of testing the waters against such a strong enemy.

Whoosh.

Sparkling water moved across his blade in a flowing dance, turning the blade smooth as a mirror. The glistening coat of water on metal was beautiful to behold. Li Luo's Water Edge Art had been honed to a ridiculous level by now.

Its cutting and penetration power were substantial indeed.

Li Luo turned to face his opponent.

Boom!

He slashed out with his blinding, glittering sword, killing intent roaring to life as he aimed for Jing Taixu's head.

His foot left a deep impression on the ground as he violently propelled himself forward.

Jing Taixu watched with a small smile of disdain. He stood his ground, hand wrapped around his green plantain fan, dotted with the pale-golden eye that marked it as a gold-eye treasured artifact.

In truth, this thing had Li Luo scratching his head. Wasn't this guy supposed to be the Spear of Enlightened Sage? What the hell was he doing with a leaf? Was he now the Pear of Enlightened Sage or something?

"I've seen your dual resonance powers before, Li Luo. It's time for you to see my ninth-grade-level power." Jing Taixu closed his wind resonant power around him until it swirled in a protective cyclone.

A faint phantom appeared as Jing Taixu's shadow, shimmering green with pure wind resonant power.

Li Luo had never seen wind resonant power this pure before.

And the phantom behind Jing Taixu made his wind resonant energy even stronger than before.

"That's... the special ability of ninth-grade resonance users! Wind spirit avatar!" Li Luo thought to himself.

Being at the pinnacle of resonance quality, ninth-grade cultivators were privy to a new type of power that enabled them to handle worldly natural energy with ease.

With the wind spirit avatar augmenting his powers, Jing Taixu's strength reached a new height.

That was why these were also known as ninth-grade spirit avatars, the sole domain of those at that privileged level—just like the dual resonance users.

Li Luo was not unfamiliar with such a phenomenon. The swan he had grown up with had a light resonance spirit avatar, and hers was far brighter than this one.

Still, Li Luo had thought only a true ninth-grade resonance user could produce a ninth-grade spirit avatar. But this guy had done it with a quasi?

Things were getting interesting now. A face-off between dual resonant powers and ninth-grade spirit avatar power.

Chapter 0507: Clash of Styles

When the legendary wind spirit avatar appeared behind Jing Taixu, there was a sudden increase in the speed of worldly natural energy that gathered towards him, as if he had turned into a vacuum with a stronger setting.

His green plantain fan swept out at Li Luo.

Splash! Roar!

This fan attack raised dust and pebbles along into its wind blast, sweeping up debris that further augmented its offense.

Weng!

Li Luo cut through the wind with a slice from his sword, parrying the debris with deft bladework.

The two clashed with blasts of resonant power that shook the mountains.

They fought on grimly, matching each other blow for blow.

Jing Taixu had a half smile on his face as he swept his fan out again.

"Windfinch."

Chirp, chirp.

Small green blurs shot out at Li Luo—they were little birds made out of pure wind resonant power. Their beaks were especially sharp, even though the points were minuscule.

Their sheer number blotted out the sky, and the chirping reached a frightful volume. They gathered in the sky like a gigantic, green cloud.

And then they rained down on Li Luo.

The Astral Sage champion's eyes were locked onto the opponent in front of him, and he planted his feet.

Resonant power flooded into him from beneath.

"Water Wall!"

A solid barrier of clear water rose up, then another. And then another. Each layer rose beautifully into the air, a sturdy impediment against the incoming attack.

But this alone could not block Jing Taixu's attack completely, not when it was enhanced by his wind spirit avatar in both speed and power.

Still, Li Luo had his own advantages.

Namely, the interactions he could call upon between resonances.

Earth resonant power was also at his behest.

"Crumbling Sands!"

The crystal-clear water barriers clouded over immediately. If one looked closely, one would see that the water barriers were reinforced by sediment within them. They not only fortified the defenses of the water walls, but also bit back at any who sought to tear them down.

Cheep, cheep, cheep!

The cloud of windfinches came at the walls, and they exploded into little puffs of green smoke.

"Eh?"

Jing Taixu's eyes widened. Was Li Luo's water resonance art really combined with a wood resonance art? Why did it look like an earth resonance art instead?

Li Luo did not give him much time to consider. He jumped at Jing Taixu with his blade raised as if for an all-out attack.

Jing Taixu reversed the direction of his wind energy to power his retreat.

"Arboreal Bindings!"

Li Luo was ready. His vines sprang out of the ground to tie Jing Taixu down.

Having a quasi ninth-grade wind resonance meant that Jing Taixu was even faster than Lu Ming's lightning resonance. If he could not even compete with the latter in speed, how could he hope to best the former?

Best to limit his greatest advantage.

Jing Taixu was equally aware of what Li Luo was trying to do. He barely paid the vines any attention, shrugging out a pair of pale, green wings.

The translucent wings looked frail, but each individual feather was as sharp as crystal. They broke apart and flashed out as a flurry of knives, shredding the vines to bits.

His retreat no longer impeded, he backed away to a safe distance and readjusted to an offensive stance.

Jing Taixu did not seek other advantages even though Li Luo was targeting his main one. He made a seal with one hand.

Wind resonant power roared forth again, billowing out his clothes as the power was concentrated within him.

This time, the green energy manifested as a spear that he hurled at Li Luo.

Li Luo immediately activated Level One Divine Elephant Power, the skin on his hand tearing apart as he blocked the attack with utter concentration.

Swish, crack!

The two slashes from his sword split the spear cleanly in half, and it fizzled away into thin air.

Jing Taixu had retreated away already.

The electrifying battle was being watched by many more spectators outside.

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Over at the Heavenly Inferno Sage College's tower, Lu Ming watched with a small frown of concentration, hands crossed in front of her.

"Li Luo's being completely eclipsed by Jing Taixu's speed. How can you threaten your opponent when they're running circles around you?"

"Tsk, Li Luo only beat Senior Lu because of his poison. Seems like he's nothing much after all."

Although poison was ultimately allowed by the rules of the tournament, it was still a sour way to win, and many were using it to insult Li Luo.

"A loss is a loss," Lu Ming said sharply. "No need for excuses. Li Luo's current showing proves that he has enough power to defeat me. He only used poison to save his strength for the finals."

The bootlickers fell into an embarrassed silence.

"Senior Lu, who do you think will win?" One person hastily changed the subject.

Lu Ming considered it. "Jing Taixu has the advantage in speed, and his wind resonance makes him elusive. It will be very difficult for Li Luo to land a deadly blow on him. On top of that, he has all the time in the world. He can wait for a mistake from Li Luo and dish out the damage then. All in all, Jing Taixu has a better chance of winning."

"But Li Luo knows this just as well, which is why he's seeking ways to limit Jing Taixu's speed advantage. It is a difficult challenge."

The others nodded like sheep. "Seems like Jing Taixu's going to win this one, then."

Lu Ming did not reply, her eyes still fixed on Li Luo's image on screen. She stood by what she had said, but Li Luo had a way of making her wonder.

It was not him as a person, but something about his resonant power.

He was a dual resonance user, and yet his resonant power was strange.

The guy was hiding something else.

And before those hidden cards were played, the reality of the field was still unknown.

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At the Sacred Summit Sage College's tower.

Sun Dasheng was squatting ungainly before the screen, his face pale and eyes still twitching with discomfort. He was still feeble and recovering, but watching the battle put the itch back in him to join the fight.

It was a pity that he had been eliminated.

He scratched his face violently, irritated. "Jing Taixu, that bastard, he really pushed this one. Fourth fucking Changing? That's madness.

"If I were just a bit stronger, he might not have been able to withstand my Demon Ape's Will." He had only been able to sustain his skill for a dozen breaths of time, and he could see that Jing Taixu had been visibly forced to the limit already. A while more, and the one eliminated would have been the wind bastard for sure.

Still, it couldn't be helped. A loss was a loss.

Jing Taixu had the wind spirit avatar, and now he was Fourth Changing. He was indeed stronger.

"Come on, Li Luo... as if. No way you're gonna beat Jing Taixu's skills and speed."

...

"Li Luo, you cannot limit my speed." Jing Taixu laughed gaily. Li Luo had tried all sorts of tricks to trap him, and each attempt had been denied.

Meanwhile, his green plantain fan was wearing down on Li Luo with more and more wind attacks.

Li Luo ignored this, simply raising his blade and attacking again. Jing Taixu flew out of the way easily like a bird.

"Li Luo, you're panicking," he taunted.

Li Luo's blade froze mid-attack.

"Am I?" He smiled.

Jing Taixu's eyes narrowed.

Suddenly, he felt a cool sensation plop on his arm.

He looked down to see a little, brown droplet of liquid.

It looked as unremarkable as a drop of muddy water, and yet his body suddenly felt heavier.

Another drop of brown liquid. Then another, and another, until he was drenched in it.

His body felt as heavy as lead.

Li Luo looked at him with a bright smile.

Speed, eh? But what about the speed of your brain? That counted for a lot in a battle.

Water resonance art, Heavy Water Art.

Earth resonance art, Unchanging Mud.

Chapter 0508: Light Spirit Avatar

The brown liquid continued to spray across Jing Taixu's body and even his translucent, green wings, and he soon felt bogged down as though he were in a swamp.

A free mind in an unwilling body.

"Is this... Heavy Water Art?" Jing Taixu, with his wealth of experience, soon figured it out. The Heavy Water Art was an advanced expression of water resonant power, which was often used to lend weight and punch to attacks. This was especially useful for that element, which was not particularly lent to offensive capabilities innately. But Li Luo's creative usage had turned it into a limiter instead.

Still, despite the Heavy Water Art's versatility, being "difficult to dispel" was not one of its many good points.

Jing Taixu mustered his resonant power, preparing to shake it off.

But he realized he could not. His resonant power revved like a tire spinning in mud. It seemed to slough off the droplets, which remained stuck to his body.

"Impossible!" He felt a wave of cold sweat break out.

"This Heavy Water Art is something else! Why is it so hard to remove?!"

Weng!

Li Luo gave Jing Taixu no chance to shake off the trap that he had so painstakingly constructed. He closed the distance, Onyx-Elephant Blade poised at the ready.

A halo of light bloomed around his sword.

Level One Divine Elephant Power!

"Tiger-general resonance art, Thousand Watery Knives Art!"

It was a pity that his resonant bubbles had not yet recovered since he had expended them in the fight against Lu Ming, or this attack would have been stronger still.

But it did not matter. He was a Third Changing, and with the dragonpearl's enhancement, he was already about as strong as Jing Taixu.

His sword sliced out with imperial authority, and the fabric of space parted in submission before it.

Roar!

The faint, signature roar that accompanied tiger-general resonance arts sounded out.

It was a sound that hovered between a rumble and a hum, a low, guttural vibration that people likened to a tiger.

Jing Taixu watched the attack descend upon him, and he knew that there was no way to avoid it.

He did not panic, his handsome features calm.

He had previously dodged Li Luo's attacks only because it was efficient, trying to force his opponent to reveal more of what he was hiding.

He did not fear Li Luo in a straight clash.

Whoosh.

Hand gripping his green plantain fan tightly, he made it glow, gathering wind energy to him in preparation.

The wind spirit avatar rested on the leafy weapon, absorbing all the wind energy that came to it.

Evidently, Jing Taixu did not dare underestimate Li Luo's attack too much, and so he was revealing cards of his own.

"Tiger-general resonance art, Windy Palm!"

Hands sluggish, Jing Taixu dragged his fan before him, and a huge, mint-green palm appeared, sucking in everything before it and creating a path of annihilation.

Weng!

Li Luo's watery knives flew straight at the palm.

Boom!

The ground was covered with low-hanging clouds, and the explosion blew them apart.

Hidden in their cottony depths, rocks were exposed and shattered at the same time.

At the center of the explosion was Li Luo. His water resonant power formed a coat around him.

Tiger-general resonance art, Heavy Water Toga.

He absorbed the resonant power that came flying out, and Li Luo moved forward again, not repelled. His sword glinted coldly.

Dang! Dang! In/()o.-v)-E.)I(-b-)I-.n

Jing Taixu could no longer avoid the attacks as easily as he had before. He conserved all his energy and concentrated it into his arms, choosing to parry and chop against Li Luo while holding his ground.

In a few short, intense paces, the two of them exchanged dozens of blows.

Li Luo's Heavy Water Toga was ripped in some places.

Jing Taixu's green wings were equally battered.

Neither showed any mercy or hesitation in their eyes. They met attack with attack, their resonant power bursting out ferociously.

Outside the arena, all eyes were on them.

In terms of resonant power magnitude, neither Li Luo nor Jing Taixu could compare to the other three Halls, and yet their savagery in battle was unparalleled.

This was the final after all. It spoke of Li Luo and Jing Taixu's quality, to have made it this far.

They were some of the greatest talents that the East Divine Continent had produced.

Of course their battle would be legendary.

However, no one knew which way the cauldron of glory would tip towards.

...

Enlightened Sage College's tower.

The white-haired Guo Jiufeng stared at the screen with loathing. "The Astral Sage College's Li Luo is stronger than expected, to force Jing Taixu to this stage."

Behind him were the other Violet Vibrance mentors of the Enlightened Sage College. As the last winners and hosts, they could bring in more people compared to the other schools.

"Li Luo is a dual resonance user too," one Violet Vibrance mentor said. "It's not surprising that he can do this much, but it's not surprising that he can't do more either. This is his limit, and it's highly unlikely that he can beat Jing Taixu."

"After all, not many Fourth Changing cultivators could stand up to him in his current form."

Guo Jiufeng nodded. He too knew Jing Taixu's signature and ultimate move all too well. It was the primary reason why he was not too worried.

He turned over to the Three Star Hall side and sighed. Here, his frustration was real. "Jiang Qing'e... she's really too strong to believe. We thought we had her number, and still she surpassed all calculations."

The other Violet Vibrance mentors all had bitter smiles on their faces too. Compared to the Li Luo-Jing Taixu fight, this one was ridiculously overpowered. They were leveling mountains with their attacks.

The ground was covered in deep scars.

And the source of these disasters was the four-on-one fight in the middle.

Even so, Lu Jinci and the others did not have the upper hand at all.

An angel of war was fighting against the four of them, a glowing specter wielding a heavy sword that brought judgment and pain down upon them.

She was too dazzling to behold.

She alone was worthy of being the highlight of the hall-level competition, the one memory that most would take away from this event.

She was so strong that even the greats of the Four Star Hall were watching enviously.

And behind her was a figure of light, brilliantly clear and shining. It was the image of Jiang Qing'e, save for its four wings. It was absorbing worldly natural energy at supernatural speeds and converting it into light resonant energy, a never-ending source that fueled Jiang Qing'e's attacks.

This four-winged specter was the reason why Jiang Qing'e alone could take on the four of them without breaking a sweat.

Because...

This was a true ninth-grade spirit avatar.

Chapter 0509: Tyranness Jiang Qing'e

The light resonant energy blazed out across the sky, imbued with a holy aura that sent any darkness fleeing.

Light resonant energy had a powerful purging effect.

It purged everything without discrimination.

Boom!

The energy blazed across the sky like a pillar of light, and it was met with four other strong attacks.

The ringing clash of energy shook the earth.

The man-made, localized earthquake caused many of the smaller surrounding mountains to crumble.

The destructive fallout of their battle far exceeded that of Li Luo and Jing Taixu's fight.

Lu Jinci's four haplessly looked at the horizon. It felt like they were fighting the sun itself—overwhelming power in another dimension. They could barely look at it without hurting themselves.

A ninth-grade light resonance was truly a different beast.

The four of them were elites at the Earth Fiend Stage, and still they were being steamrolled.

By the bulldozer that was Jiang Qing'e's light resonant energy.

Of course, all their schools had dug deep for any and all information on Jiang Qing'e, including her performance at the ticket match against Zhao Huiyin. Although she had done well there, it was nothing compared to the power that she was showing here.

Jiang Qing'e had hidden her true strength well.

It was just as the intelligence had concluded—Jiang Qing'e had never once had to show the limits of her power before... because no one could push her that far.

Lu Jinci readjusted the golden rectangular blade in his hand and gritted his teeth. "You three stall her! I have a secret weapon that might just work!"

The other three hesitated for a moment, but they nodded soon enough. In this situation, any help was welcome. If Lu Jinci had a miracle up his sleeve, they were all saved.

Thinking thus, all three doubled their efforts to keep the light resonant energy at bay.

Lu Jinci retreated quickly, his hands moving in a blur through a process of fixed gestures. Then a malevolent red seal rose into the air.

Finally, a wrinkle in the flow of energy. Up till now, energy had relentlessly flowed straight to Jiang Qing'e from all around them, but the seal was now taking energy away from it.

The other three were amazed at the blood seal's power.

Jiang Qing'e sensed it as well. "Dragon-general resonance art." Her clear voice rang out. "World of Light."

Swoosh!

The light filled every corner of the world with a flash of light and an echoing dragon roar.

Lu Jinci and the others looked around blankly.

All the worldly natural energy around them had been converted into light energy.

This meant it would be very difficult for their resonances to absorb any energy.

It was a terrible handicap.

"What a resonance art. It must be a mid-tier dragon-general resonance art, enhanced by her ninth-grade light spirit avatar so that it's as strong as a high-tier dragon-general resonance art."

Dragon-general resonance arts were the strongest General Stage resonance arts. One could start to really access these at the Earth Fiend Stage, although only low-tier ones. The higher, more advanced ones were far more demanding in terms of cultivation skill and the amount of resonant power needed to support them.

The ones fighting were elites at the Earth Fiend Tier, so they naturally had one or two mid-tier dragon-general resonance arts as their trump cards, but now Jiang Qing'e had pulled out something way stronger.

Ninth-grade light resonance. It would make a Buddha greedy. "Watch out, she's going to attack!" Lu Jinci yelled.

Her opponents successfully nerfed, it was time for her to go on the offense.

Three comets of fiery light descended from the sky.

Columns of light filled with purifying fire. Once hit, the unfortunate victim's resonant power would be completely purged away.

Afraid of that outcome, all three students turned their full strength to their own defenses.

Weng!

A blade thrust out from between the pillars of light. It was a golden sword that almost blended in with the ambient light—Jiang Qing'e's sword.

She was coming for him! Lu Jinci felt a cold shiver of realization. "Green Abyss Parry!" He summoned his strongest defense a moment before the golden light washed over him.

It was like a blade of grass in the full glory of the morning sun. He stood no chance.

Clang!

His golden rectangular sword was blasted out of his hands and sent sailing through the air.

Lu Jinci's hands were bare and numb, and he clenched them in fear and desperation. Jiang Qing'e was close to a Heavenly Dipper General in terms of fighting strength, right?

That was way too strong!

Swish!

With an elegant flip, Jiang Qing'e was balancing on her blade, and it shot forward at him, freezing a hair's breadth away from his throat.

Lu Jinci's eyes bulged as he resisted the urge to swallow his saliva. The swell of his Adam's apple might well get his throat cut. He looked up into the eyes of his attacker.

"So it was you all who spread the rumors?" Jiang Qing'e asked, her icy gaze boring down on him.

He felt her killing intent rise, and his fingers curled nervously in response.

"Fuck that bastard Jing Taixu. He's going to get me killed!" Lu Jinci thought to himself. Jiang Qing'e clearly did not take kindly to rumors being spread. That was why he had become target number one.

"Jiang Qing'e, I know you're very strong, but do you dare to accept one attack from me?!" Lu Jinci said through gritted teeth.

He scrambled for the blood talisman.

It was clearly his strongest move.

Jiang Qing'e did not so much as bat an eyelid at his taunts. She simply pressed her palm forward.

As her hand moved, a mountain of light appeared.

Dragon-general resonance art, Bright Mountain!

Boom!

When the other three students finished dealing with the fiery comets, they turned only to see the mountain landing on Lu Jinci's head.

A frightful spray of blood spurted as his skull cracked.

She was not finished. Jiang Qing'e raised her hand again, creating two more fiery nails made out of pure light.

Dragon-general resonance art, Demonbane Nails.

They buried themselves deep in Lu Jinci's palms with sickening squelches, pinning him to the ground.

The bright fires burned at him, and Lu Jinci's screams were terrible to behold.

The other three students trembled.

This was only a students' competition, not some life or death fight. Had Jiang Qing'e... gone too far?

Chapter 0510: Three Star Hall's Results

The scene of Lu Jinci getting wrecked was being watched by students from all over.

Many swallowed nervously. Jiang Qing'e's beauty had lulled them into false assumptions about gentleness and kindness, but she was destroying every single one of those false illusions right now.

Luckily, the anima gourds served as protection for the students; otherwise, there would be a legitimate fear of Lu Jinci dying.

But in terms of cruelty, it was perhaps justified in a one-against-four situation. And in any case, the outcome of this battle no longer made a difference for most of the eliminated students, so they'd rather support Jiang Qing'e.

She was a freaking goddess.

What was their other option? Supporting four muscled louts?

Over at the Enlightened Sage College side, Vice Principal Guo Jiufeng was scowling at the screen. He was one of the few that knew Jiang Qing'e was doing this as revenge for the rumors that they had spread earlier.

"That little girl is a wild child," another Violet Vibrance mentor said with a bitter laugh.

"Lu Jinci is done for. He'll be eliminated shortly, and then the other three don't stand a chance in hell against her. Our Three Star Hall's chances are gone."

Guo Jiufeng's face was stony, save for a muscle twitching at his jaw. If the Three Star Hall lost, their grand plan of winning three titles would fall apart.

"Vice Principal, there's no need to be hung up on this," the Violet Vibrance mentor said to him. "This is only the first stage. We still have a chance."

Guo Jiufeng nodded. Of course he understood that, but the second half of the Holy Grail Meet was even more complicated. He was confident that his students had the ability to pull through, but the situation would be fraught with even more unknowns than it was now.

They should seize the opportunity in the relatively straightforward first round, but they had underestimated Jiang Qing'e's strength.

"She might be wiping the floor with Lu Jinci, but we're doing well in two other places. Jing Taixu has a comfortable lead in the One Star Hall, and Lan Lan managed to eliminate the Astral Sage College girl in the Four Star Hall. She was a tough opponent, and the First Princess of the Xia Kingdom."

"I'm not worried about Lan Lan," Guo Jiufeng said. "He's the only student in a hundred years to have successfully learned the Enlightened Sage Scripture. No one is his match in single combat. But Li Luo..."

"He makes me uneasy. Still, at this rate, Jing Taixu will use his final move and take the win. If he can at least eliminate Li Luo, we'll have won some face back."

...

While the atmosphere over at the Enlightened Sage College was brittle as glass, the Astral Sage College side was going nuts.

Everyone was whooping and screaming at the Three Star Hall situation.

"Oh my God. Senior Jiang is too crazy! I'm on my knees here!"

"She's worth a hundred of you dogs! Why'd you only send four? You're 96 short, you doofuses!"

"Seems like Jiang Qing'e will take the strongest student title at Three Star Hall after all."

Beating her competitors in a four-on-one fight was truly unexpected.

Vice Principal Su Xin was all smiles as well. Jiang Qing'e had done their school proud indeed.

They had been wise to seed her and pour resources into her.

In the middle of the uproarious celebrations, a vortex opened and a figure slumped out.

First Princess Gong Luanyu.

Her beautiful face was pale and worn out. She had clearly just been through a grueling battle.

"Luanyu, are you alright?" Su Xin asked with concern.

She shook her head listlessly. "I'm sorry, Vice Principal. I was eliminated."

Su Xin put a comforting arm on her shoulder. "No need to apologize. I watched your battle. You did your best. Lan Lan is the champion of the Enlightened Sage College. The fact that you forced out his final trump card is already an admirable accomplishment."

The First Princess nodded feebly, her phoenix eyes still apologetic. She was a proud person by nature, and so she was uncomfortable with losing.

Still, she was a rational enough person to quickly curb those feelings and join in with the rest.

"Qing'e looks like she's going to win," she thought to herself. "And she still has the advantage in a one-on-four. Could it be that she still has more hidden away?"

Vice Principal Su Xin nodded and smiled at the First Princess' reaction.

"Seems like that's one golden resonant tree brooch secured," the First Princess noted, then she turned to the One Star Hall side.

"Li Luo's in the finals too? I have to admit I'm surprised." The competition for the One Star Hall was very strong this year. Li Luo might have made it to the favorites, but they had considered the finals a bit of a stretch.

"Those two are really the most outstanding talents that the Astral Sage College has." The First Princess smiled. "If Li Luo wins too, then they'll go down in history as a legendary couple."

It was not unheard of that a school would take two golden resonant tree brooches in the first round, but for an engaged couple to do it would be a first.

It was rare for people their age to already be engaged in the first place. And for both to be geniuses at different halls?

Su Xin laughed and shook her head. "Things are not yet decided on this side. Jing Taixu is also one of the favored seeds of the Enlightened Sage College. They have great expectations pinned on him. It's not going to be easy for Li Luo to beat that."

The First Princess nodded. She was just about to speak when she suddenly stopped and sat up straight.

"Jing Taixu...

"Is going to end this."