

Resonance 631

Chapter 0631: Dual Legends

"Fiend Palace Tier?" Faced with the powerful fluctuations of resonant power emanating from Li Luo, even Vice Principal Su Xin was slightly taken aback. However, a mysterious brilliance shone in her eyes, and an uncontrollable and affable smile spread across her compassionate face.

"Li Luo, you and Jiang Qing'e have brought a lot of happy surprises to our college today." Li Luo's breakthrough brought great joy and satisfaction to her. Since the Astral Sage College's inception, no One Star Hall student had ever broken into the Fiend Palace Tier. This was the second record that was broken today.

Normally speaking, such talented geniuses would only appear in the ancient colleges of the inner divine continent, the core of the Academic Federation. As a result, such individuals possessed both superior cultivation circumstances and resources that were incomparable to what the outer divine continents could provide. The extent of the support provided was as different as night and day. The other Violet Vibrance mentor also seemed to have understood this point as he stared dumbstruck at Li Luo. His cultivation speed seemed to far outstrip any normal individual, even considering his dual resonances.

Vice Principal Su Xin was a swift and decisive person when taking action. Upon confirming the truth of the matter, she no longer hesitated, directly removing a jade bottle from the pocket sphere on her wrist. She then passed it to Mentor Chi Chan. "Student Li Luo has performed excellently in his cultivation and set a new record for the college. As a result, he is deserving of a prize. All of the leftover Fiend Origin Pills provided to the Three Star Hall will be his reward. That is a total of ten pills." Mentor Chi Chan immediately received it before turning to pass it to Li Luo.

"Thank you, Vice principal!" Li Luo was jubilant as he hurriedly expressed his thanks.

This was a complete windfall. If ten Fiend Origin Pills ever appeared within the Golden Dragon Bank, they would undoubtedly be snatched away as soon as they appeared, as there were too many monks that craved this gruel. There was simply insufficient supply for the ravenous demand of this item. Even if one managed to get the chance to buy one, it would easily go for millions of skygold. On the other hand, Vice Principal Su Xin had casually gifted ten of them to him. This was stupendous! Li Luo couldn't help but to give a thumbs up in response.

Yet right as Li Luo received the Fiend Origin Pills, he could feel a cold and furious gaze bearing down upon him. Turning around, he unsurprisingly locked eyes with a certain Zhu Xuan, who had a distorted expression and a deathly stare.

"Senior Zhu Xuan, my sincerest apologies. However, I understand that House Jiyan is rich and affluent and wouldn't be concerned over the minor loss of a few Fiend Origin Pills," Li Luo said in his most polite and welcoming tone.

Zhu Xuan's gloomy face twitched in response to Li Luo's pandering words. Ten Fiend Origin Pills wasn't considered expensive, but even he would have to pay a significant cost to obtain them. Alas, they had all been snatched away by the bandit Li Luo in front of his very eyes, losing him both pill and prestige.

"Senior Zhu Xuan wouldn't try to rob me over such pittance, would he? Perhaps we can choose to settle this dispute over a quick battle? The winner takes all, I say!" Li Luo hurriedly tried to smoothen things over.

Zhu Xuan continued to glare fiercely at Li Luo. There was no fear in his eyes when he spoke. Instead, a hint of anticipation could be seen. This only made him feel even more aggrieved. Duel? Yeah, right! He might have had a chance to suppress Li Luo for a brief moment in the past, but the junior before him today was someone completely out of his league.

He couldn't guarantee he would win even when Li Luo was at a lower cultivation level. And now? Wasn't he cruising for a bruising if he accepted? This guy was absolutely despicable!

"Student Zhu Xuan, there's no need to covet these Fiend Origin Pills. If the Three Star Hall students have any remaining, I'll leave a few for you too," Vice Principal Su Xin cajoled.

After hearing those words, Zhu Xuan could only force a bitter smile and nod knowingly.

Next, he forlornly turned towards Li Luo and warned in a low voice, "Young Lord Li Luo, you'd better appreciate this last month of time. Perhaps House Luolan will be no more very soon. You will definitely need those Fiend Origin Pills much more than me. Hmph." With that, he turned with a huff and left.

On the other hand, Li Luo had a wry smile on his face. He was absolutely unconcerned with Zhu Xuan's threats as it was no secret that House Jiyan and House Luolan were mortal enemies. They'd already clashed both openly and in secret, and it wouldn't be a surprise if they interfered once again during the Housemeet.

Well, he wanted to provoke that damn Zhu Xuan into a duel, and that would have been a wonderful opportunity to leave him bedridden for a bit...

Although Zhu Xuan's strength was inconsequential to the overall situation, if Li Luo was able to use him as bait to infuriate House Jiyan, that would have been great. Furious people couldn't act rationally most of the time.

It was a pity that Zhu Xuan was not as dumb as he looked. Knowing that he was not Li Luo's opponent, he never even entertained the thought of scuffling with him.

Zhu Xuan's mentor, on the other hand, could only helplessly shake his head. He didn't hold any strong opinions towards Vice Principal Su Xin's final decision. In any case, Li Luo was already in the Fiend Palace Tier, and he was better than Zhu Xuan in terms of potential and contribution.

Zhu Xuan was simply unlucky.

With that settled, he also turned to leave.

"Li Luo, are you planning to select your Duke Art now?" Vice Principal Su Xin then asked.

Li Luo nodded. "Now that I've broken into the Fiend Palace Tier, the difficulty in cultivating a Duke Art should have decreased." He smiled.

"You shouldn't disregard the difficulty of your task. If you think simply stepping into the Fiend Palace Tier is sufficient, then you're looking down upon the Seven Astral Pillars. They haven't managed to succeed either, despite their cultivation levels."

Li Luo was left a little speechless at Vice Principal Su Xin's reality check.

Looking at his slightly downcast expression, Vice Principal Su Xin then gave a smile. "Of course, that's if we were to use a normal individual as comparison. You have managed to create countless miracles, so you can't be considered normal. I hope you'll continue to surprise us."

"Thank you for the kind words."

"Go on, then. I await your positive results." Vice Principal Su Xin grinned as she sent him off.

Li Luo nodded and no longer tarried, directly following Mentor Chi Chan as they left the massive square. The only thing was that when they had first arrived, everyone had only been focused on Jiang Qing'e. Now that he was leaving, over half of the audience was staring at him like some sort of freak.

Clearly, the news of him breaking into the Fiend Palace Tier had spread in this short span of time.

Frankly speaking, the magnitude of the surprise did not equal that of Jiang Qing'e overcoming a Seven Astral Pillar.

However, Li Luo being able to achieve this while he was still in the One Star Hall was unfathomable. How strong would he be by the time he entered the Three Star Hall? It shouldn't be too difficult to replicate Jiang Qing'e's achievements ahead of schedule, right?

If such a thing came to pass, the duo would become the Astral Sage College's most iconic couple.

Despite being pummeled by the shocked stares of the audience, Li Luo was completely unfazed. Why? He was about to reach the resonance art library, and he was naturally excited by the prospect of learning a Duke Art. This was something he anticipated even more than the Fiend Origin Pills.

He was absolutely thrilled. Ten minutes later, Mentor Chi Chan finally stopped walking as they arrived at their destination.

Raising his head, an ancient pagoda stood before him.

Three large words were engraved on it: Resonant Art Pagoda. Each character shone under the radiant sun.

A humongous grin uncontrollably formed on Li Luo's face. It was time for a Duke Art!

Chapter 0632: Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner

The Resonant Art Pagoda was an important location of the college. Even with Mentor Chi Chan leading the way, Li Luo and the token provided by Vice Principal Su Xin were thoroughly inspected from head to toe before he was allowed access.

The Resonant Art Pagoda, as its name suggested, stored the resonance arts of the college since its inception. As a result, it possessed a far greater foundation compared to any other faction in the Xia Kingdom. House Luolan's library was a pale shadow in comparison to this.

The Resonant Art Pagoda was four stories high. The first level held ordinary resonance arts, the second held tiger-general resonance arts, and the third held dragon-general resonance arts. Students would trade school points to cultivate these arts, and they had to adhere to strict time limits. If the time was exceeded, they would have to compensate with even more school points.

Li Luo's aim was naturally not the third story.

Under the surprised gazes of certain students within the pagoda, Li Luo and Mentor Chi Chan made their way to the fourth and highest level.

Seeing them make their way further up only confounded the students who were studying the resonance arts within. They had never heard of a student being allowed to go to the fourth floor. Apparently, only Violet Vibrance mentors were allowed to do so. Even Gong Shenjun and the like did not have this privilege.

Still, they had an inkling why Li Luo had earned the right to do so. It was likely due to his contributions in retrieving the Dragon Bone Holy Grail. Although they remained envious, they understood the sheer difficulty of this achievement.

It was rumored that the fourth story held the mythical Duke Arts. Perhaps that was Li Luo's aim after all.

Perhaps he was overestimating himself and being overly ambitious. Let alone Li Luo, even a Seven Astral Pillar would have difficulty in successfully cultivating a Duke Art.

Under the envious gazes of the other students, the duo made their way up unobstructed.

Interestingly, the top floor was simply adorned. There was nothing majestic or regal about the place on first impressions. However, Li Luo could vaguely make out some mysterious patterns that squirmed like sentient worms throughout the four dimly lit walls that surrounded them. Things were definitely not as simple as they seemed.

Turning his attention to the middle of the room, Li Luo saw five ancient, mottled stone pillars that were roughly the height of an average individual. Atop each pillar was an intricately carved stone lotus whereby a barrier of light enshrouded them.

It seemed that within these translucent barriers were objects of some sort.

Blinking, Li Luo finally understood what he was seeing.

Mentor Chi Chan walked towards the five stone lotuses and indifferently explained, "Our college has five different Duke Arts that students with exemplary contributions are able to choose from. All of them are here, and they belong to the Communion-grade. Give it a try and see which one has an affinity with you."

Excited, Li Luo strode forward and approached the first of the five lotuses. When he looked more intently, he could see a fiery-red carp swimming around inside the barrier! The carp gave off a mysterious feeling when one looked at it, as though it possessed a life of its own. Upon closer inspection, one could see that countless words were inscribed upon the red scales of the fiery carp.

At the same time, torrential and horrifying amounts of heat radiated from its very presence. Even with the assistance of the light barrier, Li Luo could feel a burning sensation upon his skin.

"This Duke Art is known as the Demonic Infernal Carp. If one is able to cultivate it, they will be able to summon a demonic flame that is unparalleled and tyrannic, capable of incinerating even the heavens. If a Duke casts it, a single wisp can disintegrate an entire mountain range," Mentor Chi Chan explained. "Legend has it that when one cultivates it to completion, the demonic flame will transform into a flaming carp that possesses true sentience. It is able to swim through the skies, turning the world we know into a raging furnace."

Li Luo licked his lips upon hearing this. This was the sheer might of a Duke Art. It was able to give birth to sentience and spirituality, far surpassing dragon-general resonance arts.

However, Li Luo quickly rejected the Demonic Infernal Carp without much contemplation. He simply did not possess fire resonance power. Although it was possible to cultivate it with the aid of treasures with a fire affinity, the difficulty of learning it would only multiply. Considering the fact that his cultivation level was at the limit of learning such an art, coupled with the intense difficulty of learning it, why would he make life difficult for himself?

In conclusion, the answer was a resounding no.

Thus, he moved on to the second lotus.

Within this lotus was a small, palm-sized, azure sword. Although the small sword was stationary, extremely sharp sword energy could be felt from it. At the same time, one could even hear the whispers of the wind. Just looking at it caused one's eyes to feel a sharp, piercing pain, as though tears were about to fall.

One could see lightning flowing through the surface of the small sword, occasionally creating booming thunder that combined with the whistling wind. The entire thing looked mysteriously enchanting.

"This is the Azure Wind Thunder Sword Art. It is most suitable for those who possess wind and thunder resonances. Cultivating it creates a Wind Thunder Sword manifestation. With a single flick of a finger, the sword manifestation can travel thousands of miles in a flash, invincible and unstoppable."

This caused Li Luo to gulp in greed. Despite the fact that he possessed a thunder resonance, he lacked a wind one.

Thus, this too was a no.

He proceeded to inspect the next two Duke Arts.

"This is the Nine Golden Bells Invincible Body. It's a body tempering Duke Art, and one requires metal resonant power for it. Once one cultivates this successfully, their physical body will be protected by nine golden bells. So long as the golden bells remain intact, the user's body will never die.

"Nature's Son's Arboreal World. This is a sealing Duke Art that once successfully cultivated, it will allow the user to raise ten thousand trees to form a mini realm that can be condensed in the palm of one's hand. When facing off against an enemy, one can entrap the opponent into this arboreal world where the trees will suppress and seal them."

Li Luo finally saw a Duke Art that moved him—Nature's Son's Arboreal World. With his wood resonant power, he held a certain affinity towards it. The only issue now was the actual difficulty in cultivating it.

However, Li Luo was not the type of person who was afraid of mere hardship. He wouldn't be here otherwise. As a result, he began to contemplate further, all the while rooted right before the fourth stone lotus.

After another period of consideration, he finally decided to make his decision.

But right at the moment he was about to do so, he felt a strange calling from the depths of his heart, and his gaze turned towards the final stone lotus. He swore he had heard the roar of a dragon coming from it, riling up the dragon resonance within him. Very quickly, he turned and walked towards the last stone lotus, planning to see just what sort of Duke Art it was.

Within was an extremely old and mottled banner. The banner itself was dark red, and it was planted into a black pool of seawater. As the flag swayed and rattled, one could vaguely make out the trace of an enormous, stygian dragon. This massive dragon seemed to be wiggling slowly, as though breathing in a deep sleep. Simultaneously, a terrifying pressure could be felt bearing down on anything surrounding it, rousing stormy waves within the black pool.

As Li Luo remained enraptured by the coiled-up dragon sleeping within the dark-red banner, Mentor Chi Chan's voice rang out once again.

"This is the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner. If we look at it as it is, it can be considered a Communion-grade Duke Art. One requires both water and dragon resonance power, along with the blood essence of a dragon to cultivate it. When cultivated completely, one is able to manifest both the Underworld River and the dragon. The dragon controls the river, able to liquefy anything and everything."

Li Luo nodded, keenly aware that Mentor Chi Chan was not explaining everything fully. "'As it is?' What do you mean?"

She smiled upon hearing this question. "This resonance art was provided by the Academic Federation. Other colleges also similarly possess this in their respective libraries. The truth is that the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner is merely one part of a higher grade Duke Art. This is why I said 'as it is.'"

"A higher level Duke Art? Do you mean it's at the Soul Ascension grade?" A burning fervor ignited within Li Luo's eyes.

Mentor Chi Chan shook her head as she pensively explained, "The complete Duke Art is known as the Three Dragons' Heavenly Banner Canon. It has been split into three parts, and our colleges only possess the first segment to it. The other two have been stashed away within the inner divine continent's ancient colleges. Individually, each segment possesses the strength of a Communion-grade Duke Art. However, when its cultivated to completion and the three parts are one, it belongs to the Destiny-grade of Duke Arts."

Li Luo sucked in a huge breath of air at this revelation.

Communion Ascends the Soul. One's Destiny, Transcendent!

There were the four grades of Duke Arts, and the Three Dragons' Heavenly Banner Canon was actually a Destiny-grade art!

Only a handful of Duke Arts were at this level! Even if one took into consideration the inner divine continent!

Any Duke that knew of this would give up everything just to obtain it.

The Academic Federation was truly a terrifying organization with an unfathomable foundation, able to possess and share such a mighty Duke Art. Li Luo continued to gulp mouthful after mouthful of saliva as his mind went into overdrive trying to make a decision. Not long after, he made his final decision and pointed right at that banner before him.

"Mentor, I choose this Duke Art!"

Chapter 0633: Mentor, Traumatized?

"You want this one?" Mentor Chi Chan couldn't believe what she was hearing when Li Luo made his choice. She looked at her student with a hint of shock. "Don't be enthralled by the complete Duke Art's grade. Let's not even talk about whether you will ever have the opportunity to obtain the other two segments of this art—you only possess a water resonance and lack a dragon resonance. Although you might be able to borrow the aid of dragon blood essence to cultivate it, the difficulty will no doubt skyrocket. This is not suitable for your current situation." She felt that Li Luo had been led astray by the potential Destiny-grade this Duke Art could attain some day. Despite its rarity and preciousness, which even she felt tempted by, the facts remained that one had to be able to cultivate it!

The Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner was not a Duke Art that only the Astral Sage College possessed. The rest of the divine continents also possessed this segment of the art as it was passed down by the Academic Federation. Li Luo was not the first one to have made this choice, and yet she had never heard of anyone successfully cultivating it! Faced with Mentor Chi Chan's questioning gaze, Li Luo attentively replied, "Well, Mentor... I am not choosing it out of lust for a potential Destiny-grade Duke Art, it is a calculated decision!"

This was faced with an inquiring frown. "Li Luo, out of all these Duke Arts, I believe that the one that you hold the strongest affinity with is Nature's Son's Arboreal World. You already possess water and wood resonances, and they are mutually supportive. If you were to cultivate it successfully, the mini realm that you could create in the palm of your hand would be extraordinarily lush and full of vitality, much stronger than those of others who have cultivated this!"

At this point, Mentor Chi Chan continued to lecture Li Luo like a concerned grandmother, not wishing for him to make the wrong decision. After all, he had limited time, so it was not wise to squander this opportunity.

Li Luo helplessly sighed. "Mentor Chi Chan, you have forced me into this... Please keep whatever you see next a secret. I don't wish to let my radiance spread any further and completely outshine every student of the college." These wild words forced Mentor Chi Chan to lightly grit her teeth, resisting the urge to beat some sense into this braggart. However, she crossed her arms quietly and focused upon Li Luo, interested to see what sort of shenanigans he was up to.

With a thought, Li Luo emitted his resonant power. This was a completely different beast compared to the other forms of resonant power he had summoned before as it exuded a unique pressure, eventually condensing outside his body into an illusory, draconic shadow.

Roar!

A low, guttural roar reverberated around the chamber.

The calm, unmoving eyes of Mentor Chi Chan finally widened like saucers.

This was something that even surprised the wizened and well traveled teacher!

"A dragon resonance?" she stammered in confusion.

"H-how could you possess a dragon resonance?" she continued to sputter in disbelief.

Faced with this, Li Luo casually shrugged as he lightly commented, "Well, it just popped up out of nowhere when I broke into the Earth Fiend General Stage."

"This means that right now, you..."

"Yup, I have three resonances. What did I tell you?" Li Luo nodded and smirked confidently.

This revelation left Mentor Chi Chan dumbstruck for quite some time. When Li Luo had revealed his dual resonances, she had already been slightly taken aback, but it wasn't an unheard of talent. Besides, what Duke didn't already have dual resonances? However, now that a third one had popped out of nowhere, the news came like a bombshell.

A third resonance was something that all Dukes desired!

Although Li Luo had triple resonances and he probably couldn't fuse all three like a King Stage expert, it was still three of them! This meant he could work on fusing all three different resonant powers together, and even the most rudimentary success would bring him great benefits.

This would set the foundation for entering the King Stage.

This was the root of why she seemed completely overwhelmed.

There was nothing to envy about having dual resonances... but triple resonances was something that even she craved!

Shouldn't an abomination who could possess triple resonances at the Earth Fiend Stage only be found in the depths of the ancient colleges in the inner divine continent? How could one have appeared in the outer divine continent sage colleges?

It took a while for her to recompose herself, and she gave Li Luo a complicated look. "I never thought I would take on such an electrifying student. Li Luo, you have the qualifications to become a King."

"Well, Mentor, a teacher for a day is a teacher for a life! Even if I eventually reach the King stage, I will always be your student!" Li Luo cajoled.

"You have a silver tongue indeed." Mentor Chi Chan's beautiful eyes held a trace of amusement at his honeyed words.

"However, my curiosity has been piqued. Now that you have attained three resonances, does this mean that you will possess four resonances at the Duke Stage? And if you become a King, will you possess five resonances?" she queried, an unusual sparkle in her eyes.

Hearing those words caused Li Luo to feel a little taken aback. He had no idea if he would be able to open yet another resonant palace when he reached the Duke Stage. It was hard to tell if his natural resonances were simply being born ahead of time...

Additionally, those new resonances would just possess a singular affinity, without any of the main and supporting affinities his current resonances had. Well, even then, this was more than sufficient.

"Mentor, have you ever encountered anyone with more than three resonances?" Li Luo asked.

Mentor Chi Chan paused to think. "Well, such individuals have definitely existed in the past. Hmm, even in the current inner divine continent, there should be countless hidden experts with more than three resonances. Although people like you might be rare, you shouldn't be the exception."

Li Luo nodded. The world was vast and wide, full of unknown mysteries. If he possessed such a special opportunity at birth, there might be even more individuals who could open up more resonant palaces every time they broke through.

"So... Mentor, can I pick the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner now?" Li Luo asked with a smile.

Mentor Chi Chan lightly nodded. "Well, since you have a dragon resonance, this Duke Art is particularly suitable for you."

One needed to have a water resonance and a dragon resonance after all.

She understood Li Luo's choice. Both the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner and Nature's Son's Arboreal World were well fitted for him. However, the potential of the former outshone the latter, especially if it held the possibility of turning into a Destiny-grade Duke Art.

Thus, Li Luo took out the plaque provided by Vice Principal Su Xin and thrust it into the stone lotus.

As the plaque floated above the stone lotus, it released countless runes that soared into the air, coming into direct contact with the light barrier that shrouded the banner. Immediately after, ripples were seen on the barrier itself before it gradually started to dissipate.

A brief moment later, Li Luo gingerly stretched out his hand and grasped the dark-red banner with the black dragon imprinted upon it.

"Alright... So, now what?" Li Luo asked.

Based on what Vice Principal Su Xin had said, they would utilize a special cultivation method that would increase his odds of cultivating this Duke Art successfully.

Just to take advantage of this benefit, Li Luo had cleanly exhausted his massive pool of school points, probably one of the highest valued exchanges ever made.

"Well then, follow me." Mentor Chi Chan walked into the middle of the room, and atop the floor was an inscription that seemed to act as a formation. Her fingertips touched in the form of a hand seal, and her resonant power turned into a rune that descended upon the inscription.

Immediately after, the inscription on the floor seemed to have come to life, and the numerous lit-up lines intertwined into a door.

Glancing at Li Luo, Mentor Chi Chan directly strode into the door, disappearing into empty air.

Knowing that this was where he had to go, he looked at the black dragon banner in his hand and sucked in a deep breath before grumbling, "I hope these school points weren't squandered in vain..." Then he took a step of faith through the portal.

After the two individuals entered through, the door made of light dissipated and turned back into an inscription on the floor.

Chapter 0634: Golden Nirvana Lotus

When Li Luo stepped through the door, his eyes were temporarily blinded by the influx of light on the other side. With practiced precision, he squinted till his vision was restored, and he realized that the scenery surrounding him had undergone an earthshaking change. What entered his field of view was a massive mountain peak shrouded in mist and clouds... and he was right on top of it.

"Come over here." Mentor Chi Chan's voice resounded in his ear as he was trying to make sense of his surroundings.

When he hurriedly turned, he saw Mentor Chi Chan gesturing with her fingers, causing all of the mist to dissipate and opening up another heart-stirring sight.

There was a pristine lake that emitted a delicate fragrance before him.

There was an eye-catching object right in the middle of it. It was a massive, golden lotus flower with three petals that sat squarely in the center. The petals were enigmatic to say the least. There were countless golden strands engraved onto each one, and faint smoke seemed to be emanating from them. Merely looking at the smoke caused a strange feeling to arise within Li Luo's heart.

"This is the Golden Nirvana Lotus, a cultivation comprehension oddity. A single petal takes ten years to mature, and it has been thirty years since it was last used. If you cultivate within it, your ability to comprehend and perceive things will be greatly enhanced. At the same time, it will guard your heart and ensure that you're protected in the midst of cultivating the Duke Art. On top of that, it will improve your concentration. This will also prevent the concept of the art from corroding your sense of self," Mentor Chi Chan explained.

"Wait... ten years for a petal to mature?" Li Luo mused to himself. This was clearly something good that had been secreted away! It was no wonder he had to pay such a massive price to enjoy this benefit.

In addition, it looked as though the Golden Nirvana Lotus' effects would persist for a significant period of time even after he left.

"Duke Arts are completely different from dragon-general resonance arts. The process of cultivating one requires one to comprehend the concept that underlies it. Only by understanding the true essence of the concept will one be able to indelibly brand the art onto their heart. Do you remember Lan Lan's Enlightened Sage Scripture from the Holy Grail Meet? That was an art created by the Enlightened Sage College's principal. Cultivating it requires one to endure the suppression of being in the presence of a mighty King Stage expert. Although the aura of the expert is greatly held back, it still strikes crippling fear into the heart of a mere Heavenly Pearl Stage cultivator. I've heard that the Enlightened Sage

College has often selected students with extraordinary tenacity to cultivate this art each year, but in the last century, only Lan Lan has managed to succeed, testament to the sheer difficulty of this task."

Li Luo nodded. The King Stage, huh? To be fair, he had never experienced it personally. After all, whenever he met Principal Pang, it was never in the flesh. Even then, he felt fear akin to being stared at by a giant, prehistoric beast!

This was the natural suppression a being of a higher level would instill in others.

"You can attempt to start learning the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner immediately. I have to remind you that Duke Arts are simply too advanced for students of your level. Thus, you must remember to not pursue it at all costs. You must always maintain clarity of thought and purity of heart whilst you cultivate it. Otherwise, if you're not careful, the concepts that underpin this Duke Art will leave a shadow upon your spirit and heart. This is an issue that cannot easily be fixed," she reminded him.

Li Luo attentively nodded in response. Understanding that cultivating it came with significant risk, it was clear that it was a league above dragon-general resonance arts.

However, with risk came rewards. One completely outclassed the other!

Li Luo was not too hung up over this. He quickly readjusted his mental state before vaulting right into the middle of the lake, making his way the Golden Nirvana Lotus, and taking a seat.

At the moment he landed, Li Luo could feel a gentle and warm energy flow into his body, and his state of mind inexplicably became more tranquil. It was like a still pool, serene and without ripples, his stray thoughts filtered away.

Li Luo took a deep breath, then he slowly closed his eyes whilst tightly grasping the dark-red banner.

Mentor Chi Chan continued to watch the meditating Li Luo from afar, making herself comfortable on a piece of flat land before taking out a small tea table along with some fragrant tea. Evidently, she planned to watch over Li Luo for a period of time.

Additionally, since the risk of cultivating a Duke Art was not minor, she would not be complacent even with the protection of the Golden Nirvana Lotus.

This was the first time she had accepted such an outstanding student, and she naturally wanted to nurture and protect him properly. If such a wonderful seedling was ruined by a rampant Duke Art, that would be a truly pitiful tragedy, and his potential would simply be squandered.

After Li Luo shut his eyes, he channeled his resonant power into the black dragon banner. He then heard a roar from an ancient time that had traveled through spacetime to reach him, resounding deafeningly within his heart.

It was as though he had been transported into a completely new space.

Gingerly he "inspected" his surroundings.

At this point, his heart trembled.

He felt as though he was being suffocated in the depths of a giant, blank sea, constantly being dragged deeper into the abyss. The water was black as ink and viscous like a swamp as it pressed down upon him, forcing Li Luo to feel an intense coldness and gloominess. It was terrifying.

He felt endless oppression in this darkness.

His mind lost itself in this depressing environment. He could only stare blankly at himself, sinking further and further as he drowned, oblivious to the hidden dangers within.

Although Li Luo had mentally prepared himself for this, an unavoidable sense of abject terror arose.

He did not know how long he had been submerged within as he lost all sense of time. All of a sudden, there was a change in his surroundings, and he could feel a sense of movement around him. His mind attempted to focus upon the distortion in the dark, but what he saw filled him with dread and terror. A pair of dark-red pupils gradually opened before him.

The dark-red eyes were massive, akin to gigantic, crystal-clear gems. Indifference and ruthlessness were the only things Li Luo could see within them.

He could see himself reflected in the titanic pupils, and an expression of panic was on his face.

The dark seawater churned and then a gargantuan body appeared, allowing him to perceive the monstrous, stygian dragon for the first time. It was as though it was one with the black water, quietly coiled up and observing him intently.

A wave of colossal pressure that covered the skies and the earth poured down upon him, directly smashing against Li Luo's inner self.

Crack!

At that very moment, Li Luo felt as though he had heard his mental state shatter into pieces, yet at the very same time, a warmth rushed into his mind, letting him feel an instance of complete clarity. He immediately cut off the connection between his mind and the banner.

Atop the Golden Nirvana Lotus.

Li Luo suddenly opened his eyes, and his face was pale. Lingering terror could be seen within his eyes, and he was covered in cold sweat, constantly huffing and puffing.

After which, he looked down at the black dragon banner within his palm, feeling heightened fright for the first time.

"This is a Duke Art?"

The concept contained within it was incomparably scary! If one's willpower were insufficient, they might drown in terror within their own mind, leaving an indelible mark upon one's psyche.

It was no wonder none of the Seven Astral Pillars had managed to learn a Duke Art. The difficulty and risks involved were simple and mind-boggling.

"Have you finally understood the terror of a Duke Art? Do you still want to continue?" Mentor Chi Chan's indifferent voice drifted over as her gorgeous eyes focused upon her student.

Li Luo gave a bitter smile and did not reply, only quietly readjusting his state of mind. Only after he had composed himself did he once again tightly grasp the black dragon banner, grit and determination evident in his gaze.

He would use his actions to answer.

Mentor Chi Chan's lips twitched upwards slightly when she saw this, showing a hint of satisfaction.

His willpower was commendable. If he had given up upon the first taste of terror, there would be no need to continue cultivating a Duke Art.

"Show me. Show me if you can truly master this and make it your own," Mentor Chi Chan murmured to herself. At this point, she lifted her veil, once again revealing her fair face with the black fish tattoo marring half of it, adding a ghostly charm to her beauty. A tea cup in hand, she imbibed it with a single draught.

Chapter 0635: Black Hand

Li Luo's spirit was repeatedly being shattered apart in the depths of the dark seawater. The massive black dragon constantly struck fear into him, wreaking havoc on his mind. There seemed to be no way to defeat this beast that continued to shatter every layer of Li Luo's mental defenses, bringing him pain that left him bruised all over.

Unknowingly, Li Luo lost track of time and the number of times his mental state had been shattered to pieces. Yet he never gave up. Tenacity coupled with the Golden Nirvana Lotus' protection allowed him to always maintain a sense of clarity within his heart.

Mentor Chi Chan continued to slowly sip her warm tea by the side of the lake. Numerous days had gone by, and she had spent every minute watching over her student. The situation seemed to be stuck at a stalemate as she had expected.

Duke Arts possessed ferocious innate concepts that someone at Li Luo's level would have a hard time merely comprehending. Even if he was confident in himself, he would still have to be subject to significant danger.

This was a battle of wills, one that she could not intervene or assist with.

Only when Li Luo could adapt to the fear to the point where he could bear it fully would he be able to learn the Duke Art. Admittedly, having sufficient mental fortitude was an even more important factor than talent. This could be seen in the case of the Enlightened Sage College's Jing Taixu. The guy had a quasi ninth-grade resonance but was unable to cultivate the Enlightened Sage Scripture. Meanwhile, Lan Lan possessed a resonance that was completely inferior to his, and yet he was able to wield the scripture's horrifying might.

Mentor Chi Chan continued to observe the sitting Li Luo from the corner of her eye. One of the three lotus petals was now shriveled and the glow had faded since Li Luo had started. It was clear that the energy of the Golden Nirvana Lotus was rapidly being depleted whilst it guarded Li Luo's mind.

This also meant that a third of Li Luo's opportunities had been used up. Mentor Chi Chan was planning to awaken Li Luo from his meditation once all three petals withered. In a sense, it would also mean that Li Luo's attempts at cultivating the Duke Art had failed.

However, there was no other choice as without the protection of the Golden Nirvana Lotus, Li Luo would only be placing himself into an arduous and risky situation. The concept within the art could grievously wound him, and considering the timing of the House Luolan Housemeet, his efforts would all be for nought.

"It seems that attempting to successfully cultivate a Duke Art at the Fiend Palace Tier is pushing it a little too much." Mentor Chi Chan lightly sighed. All she could do was hope that Li Luo would make good use of his two final chances.

.....

At the Regent's palace.

The Regent was standing in a pavilion situated in the heart of a small lake, garbed in golden python robes, idly feeding the fishes. Numerous beautiful fishes struggled before him to get a bite of the delicious bait that was thrown into the water. His dignified features did not leak a hint of emotion, only putting his hands back into his sleeves once he was done.

"By my expectations, the Dragon Bone Holy Grail should have already made its way into the hands of Pang Qianyuan," he finally said.

"No one could have predicted that the Astral Sage College would manage to clinch the overall victory during the Holy Grail Meet. House Luolan's two brats are meddlesome and troublesome," the Regent continued emotionlessly. The news of the Holy Grail Meet had spread throughout the Xia Kingdom long ago, and so everyone knew that Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were key contributors to their victory. Without the two of them, the Astral Sage College's result would have been hard to imagine.

This unpredictable result was out of the Regent's expectations. After all, he had even secretly informed Gong Shenjun, their strongest participant, to hold back and sabotage the process. However, the Dragon Bone Holy Grail had still ended up in Astral Sage College's hands, leaving him infuriated.

He knew that it was not Gong Shenjun's fault. In order to not reveal themselves, he could not take overt action and thus was limited in his methods.

Meanwhile, behind the Regent, within the stone pavilion itself, a figure could be seen wriggling within the shadows, and a voice croaked out. "The Dragon Bone Holy Grail falling into Pang Qianyuan's hands is indeed a troublesome development. If he uses it to distract the Ichythian King, he will be able to escape his shackles and reappear in the Xia Kingdom once again. At that point, the entire kingdom will be under his influence and suppression. The years you have spent toiling away will all be meaningless like a flimsy piece of tissue before the might of a King. Pang Qianyuan was a close confidante of the old Emperor, and he didn't seem to warm up to the idea of you being the one in charge of the kingdom. He said that you were overly ambitious! If he were to throw his support behind the Little Emperor... hehehe. In that case, you might very well have to obediently hand over the reins of power to that brat!"

The Regent coldly snorted. "Could such a figurehead really be the master of the Xia Kingdom? Hmph. He would just be a mere dog of Pang Qianyuan, one that caters to his every whim and fancy! The truth is that Pang Qianyuan has the entire Xia Kingdom under his thumb!" the voice continued.

"The King Stage..." A deep yearning appeared in the Regent's eyes. This was a stage he craved to break into. If he could take a step into this realm, the entire Xia Kingdom would reach unprecedented heights! All of the surrounding kingdoms and empires would undoubtedly surrender before him.

The Regent's tone changed as he asked, "Will the thing in House Luolan allow me to become a King?"

"With our assistance, there will not be any issues," the shadow replied coolly.

Then the Regent gloomily asked, "Just where did Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan come from? You seem to be a little afraid of them after all... Otherwise, why would you force me to drum up such a big show, all just to force them into the Nobles' Battlefield?"

"Hmph. The way I see it, that duo are not any weaker than Pang Qianyuan. So long as they remain in the Xia Kingdom, they will be a hidden danger to our grand plan," the shadow explained.

The Regent's gaze flashed. "They are merely Dukes. Even though they are exceptional, how could they possibly compare with Pang Qianyuan?"

The shadow chuckled but did not reply directly. "Since they have so kindly managed to enter the Nobles' Battlefield, there is no longer any need to worry about their interference. House Luolan's Housemeet will arrive in half a month's time. It can be said that your grand schemes have finally come to fruition. So long as you are able to obtain the thing within House Luolan, I will ensure that you will be able to taste the nectar which is the King Stage!"

"It's a pity that I cannot directly take action. Doing so would undoubtedly put the Astral Sage College and the Golden Dragon Bank on alert. Otherwise, things would have been much simpler," the Regent lamented. "Regardless, it doesn't matter. The preparations we've made throughout the years will be sufficient. The two brats from House Luolan are just a few extra wayward melons that we will crack apart. House Luolan's Jiang Qing'e is really an absolute genius—even Shenjun has been smitten by her. I had thought that my own brat was outstanding enough to change her mind and join our palace, but that wench was never even interested in him." The Regent smirked as he shook his head.

"It would be ideal if we could spare her puny life when House Luolan is destroyed. With her talent and potential, it would be possible to give birth to an even stronger bloodline in my family." As he spoke, he raised his head and looked up into the sky, stretching out both hands.

"It's finally time to reap the seeds which I have sowed for many years. The Gong family will truly ascend the throne as the unparalleled Emperor!"

Chapter 0636: Cultivated

By the lakeside.

Mentor Chi Chan was demurely sitting by, her slender back and curvaceous body for none to see. Her jade-like fingers were fiddling with a teacup as her beautiful eyes continued to focus upon the unmoving golden lotus before her. By the looks of things, twenty days had already passed.

Only one of the three golden petals remained, and it continued to emanate radiant light.

Meanwhile, Li Luo was still sitting atop the lotus cross-legged, his eyes tightly shut. His complexion was pale and his body was trembling, an expression of terror scrawled over his face.

Clearly, he was still locked in a stubborn stalemate with the concept within the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner.

Such a terrifying concept was not easily endured.

Mentor Chi Chan understood Li Luo's personality. He was a tenacious one, molded by the sticky situation he had encountered with the blank palaces much earlier in his life. Thus, he was able to endure much more than his fellow peers and was much more resilient to setbacks. Even so, the concept of the Duke Art tormented him to no end.

The very fact that Li Luo could hold on for twenty days without going insane was already an achievement in and of itself. Ultimately, he was still only at the Fiend Palace Tier, and frankly speaking, a Duke Art was out of his league.

"The last petal should allow him to hold on for another five days." Mentor Chi Chan estimated as her willow-like eyebrows shifted into a frown. This was his last chance, and if Li Luo could not overcome the concept's test, this cultivation would be a failure. Alas, his school points would be squandered.

Although he would be able to continue meditating on the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner, the degree of difficulty would skyrocket without the assistance of the Golden Nirvana Lotus.

More importantly, if Li Luo failed to capitalize on the current situation, he would undoubtedly feel endless regret.

After all, the Housemeet would start in ten days or so.

Knock, knock...

Mentor Chi Chan lightly knocked the table with her jade-like fingers as she whispered, "Li Luo, it's all up to you to take advantage of this last opportunity."

...

Within the depths of the murky, black seawater

The gigantic eye of the dragon was like a dark-red mirror emerging from within the darkness, Li Luo's entire body reflected within. Indifference and a trace of savagery was contained within its gaze as a wave of terror washed towards Li Luo's mental state once again.

Li Luo had simply lost count of the number of times he had experienced this.

Every single time, an unspeakable, unexplainable sort of fear would rise from the depths of his heart, crushing his state of mind into mere fragments.

Once again, this was no different.

As the fear surged towards him like a tidal wave, Li Luo felt as though he could hear his mental state disintegrating into pieces. Black seawater surged towards him in every direction, wrapping him in its watery embrace, colliding against his soul repeatedly.

He held on bitterly.

He was like a tiny boat being rocked by the massive waves. He did his best to maintain his state of mind, protecting that last sanctuary of sanity as it was enveloped by the tides.

However, the black seawater also possessed the ability to erode one's willpower. As time passed by, he could feel his mental state splintering apart once again.

"Am I going to fail once more?" Feeling his vision gradually distort, he understood that this was the sign that his mental state could no longer hold on. Li Luo sighed helplessly. During this period of time, he had felt his mental state shatter again and again, allowing him to truly understand the difficulty of cultivating a Duke Art.

At the same time, he realized that time was probably running out as well.

He could distinctly feel that with each failure, the Golden Nirvana Lotus' protective energy would gradually weaken. All good things had to come to an end eventually.

Once the Golden Nirvana Lotus was depleted, his cultivation would have to stop.

Losing the opportunity to cultivate in this miraculous environment would be a pity. It was exceedingly difficult to find something that could match its power, and his dreams of cultivating a Duke Art would have to be shelved until he reached the Heavenly Dipper General Stage.

More importantly, he would lose the opportunity to obtain a trump card before the Housemeet.

Although he still possessed the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf, it was still an external aid, whereas a Duke Art was a strength he could call his own. Additionally, if he could combine this killing move with the power borrowed from the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf, he would be able to bring out nonsensical strength for at least a brief period of time. This indomitable strength was what he had truly hoped to achieve.

Only this level of power could possibly qualify to shift the tides in the Housemeet.

Otherwise, most of the pressure would inevitably fall upon Qing'e.

With her desire to constantly improve and strengthen herself, she had spent several years preparing a killer trump card. The price she had paid was mind-boggling amounts of effort and sacrifice, a weight that Li Luo did not wish to see her shoulder alone.

She had done enough for House Luolan. And for him as well.

It was his turn to bear the burden. Her gorgeous face flashed past his mind when he had these thoughts. Forcing his eyes open, he could see the behemoth staring right at him, entrenched deep within the black sea, a look of mockery and contempt in its eyes.

Mocking him for not understanding his place.

A mere Fiend Palace cultivator trying to set his grubby hands on a regal Duke Art?

The black dragon lifted a claw, and a vortex formed under it, its black scales sparkling beautifully in contrast to the murkiness of the sea. It then slammed it towards Li Luo.

Li Luo could feel his mental state splintering at a significantly quicker rate than before with this unprovoked attack.

As he stared at the inky, black claw, he felt the terror afflicting him recede slightly. Instead, a mysterious sense of indignation and fury surged from the depths of his heart.

"This damn snake.

"It dares to look down upon me?"

Li Luo could feel his blood boiling at this very instant, coursing through his veins violently and with renewed vigor. It was as though he could hear furious waves crashing within him. A sense of majesty descended upon him like an Emperor speaking to his subjects as he icily glared back at the black dragon.

The black claw slammed down without mercy.

However, just as it was about to make contact with the manifestation of Li Luo's spirit, a void was ripped open right behind the dragon. It was the titanic beast's turn to feel a sense of shock and horror. An indescribably monstrous claw stretched out from within the ripped void. The black dragon was already humongous when compared to Li Luo, but before this inscrutable development? It was like an eagle gripping a tiny grass snake!

The enigmatic dragon claw directly parted the black sea with a single swipe before grasping the frightened black dragon that was now mournfully roaring. No time was wasted before the claw clamped down mercilessly.

Bang!

The black sea was torn asunder, ripped into pieces, along with the once-horrifying black dragon.

Mentor Chi Chan, who had been taking a quick nap, opened her eyes all of a sudden. Her beautiful eyes were staring at the golden lotus in the middle of the lake in absolute surprise. At this point, Li Luo was drenched in a crimson liquid, blood pouring out of every orifice, turning him into a literal bloody man.

Despite his completely miserable appearance, he was exuding an inexplicable sense of oppression.

It was so intense that even her heart palpitated in fear.

"What happened?"

She hurriedly stood up, but just when she was about to make a move, Li Luo opened his eyes.

At that very moment, a roiling, black sea seemed to have materialized around his body. A coiled up black dragon could be seen right in the middle of the sea. As its tail gently swayed, black waves rose and fell before it.

Chi Chan's pupils shrank at this sight.

"Is this the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner?"

"Has Li Luo managed to cultivate it successfully?"

Chapter 0637: Grave Tidings

Mentor Chi Chan was completely taken aback when the raging, black sea and dragon materialized around Li Luo. This indicated that Li Luo had managed to overcome the concept's test and was now able to freely utilize the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner, a Communion-grade Duke Art.

A Fiend Palace Tier cultivator had managed to learn a Duke Art?

What did this symbolize?

Although Li Luo was someone who had created many miracles before, what he had just accomplished was on a different level. Complicated thoughts surged through her mind. This kid was a cultivating fiend!

Mentor Chi Chan waved her hand, and the tea table was put away before she directly leaped into the middle of the lake with a single step. Staring at the pale-faced but incomparably excited Li Luo, she beckoned with a finger, and pristine water washed away all of the blood that was staining his body.

"Mentor... I... I've done it!" Li Luo screamed in elation as he looked at his mentor. Mentor Chi Chan nodded slightly and sighed whilst staring at Li Luo. "You've done it again. Another miracle. If this were to be known, your name would once again resound throughout the entire Astral Sage College."

Li Luo smirked confidently. He felt as though he was on cloud nine. Furthermore, cultivating the Underworld River's Black Dragon Banner was an arduous and difficult process. He had been tormented endlessly into a state of limbo. If his willpower wasn't resolute enough, he'd have given up a long time ago. His bloodline had been roused at a critical moment, allowing him to conquer the black dragon's concept.

Li Luo could feel that the mysterious dragon claw had been a manifestation of his bloodline. Perhaps it was a trace of the heavenly dragon's will, feeling offended that this lesser creature had impugned upon its majesty, thus delivering a swift judgment upon it, shattering the concept into pieces.

"Mentor, I would like to trouble you to keep this a secret," Li Luo beseeched.

Mentor Chi Chan glanced at Li Luo but did not speak further, only nodding in agreement. She understood why Li Luo would want to keep this news under wraps. It was to be a veritable hidden ace in the hole, to be brought out for maximum effect at a critical moment.

"You've spent twenty-odd days here, and there's only four days left until the Housemeet," she reminded him.

"Four days, huh." Li Luo's gaze was complicated. There was a sense of anticipation, as well as a trace of apprehension. He had cultivated without pause for over a year in preparation for the Housemeet, and his results were frightening. In the short span of a year, the blank palace young lord of the City of Southwind had become a triple resonance Fiend Palace Tier cultivator.

Once, he was but a timid rat, hiding in the depths of the City of Southwind. Now he could spread his wings and stand with his head held high during the Housemeet itself, capable of dealing with the other party on equal terms.

"Mentor, I'll leave the college and go home for now. Thank you for your guidance thus far," Li Luo said with sincerity, his heart full of turbulent emotions as he clasped his hands and bowed.

Now that the pivotal Housemeet was about to start, it would change the fate of House Luolan as he knew it. He would no longer have time to tarry in school and cultivate leisurely. Every last scrap of time would be spent preparing for this destined battle.

If he emerged victorious, he would officially become House Luolan's young lord, ushering in a new era of recovery and prosperity. Otherwise, all of it would be scattered into the winds as House Luolan would disintegrate into a puff of smoke. Jiang Qing'e and he would have to pursue a new path altogether then. Perhaps he would have to sequester himself from the public eye within the college, awaiting the day he broke into the Duke Stage. Or perhaps he would have to leave the Xia Kingdom entirely to find another path of survival.

Regardless of the path he took, this event would change their lives forever.

Upon hearing these words, Chi Chan fell into a momentary silence. She knew what lay ahead of him. It was his responsibility as the heir to House Luolan. An inescapable burden.

"You must remember, if the situation spirals out of control, Jiang Qing'e and you can always return to the Astral Sage College. The two of you are highly important seedlings for the college, and so we will protect you. So long as you live, your opponents will not be able to sleep peacefully ever again. The moment you reach the Duke Stage, rebuilding House Luolan will not be a difficult task," Mentor Chi Chan gently reminded him.

Li Luo smiled and nodded. Mentor Chi Chan and Vice Principal Su Xin had repeated these words of goodwill multiple times. They were concerned that he would act impulsively as a youth, but he understood that it all stemmed from genuine concern for them. After all, no one would want such talented saplings withered by the flames of war.

Seeing his acknowledgement, she did not mention anything else, leading Li Luo to the exit and back to the Resonant Art Pagoda.

"Mentor, I plan to return to the dormitory and say my goodbyes to Mengmeng and Xin Fu." Li Luo raised a final request.

"Why are you talking as though you're planning for your last rites?"

Seeing his sheepish expression, she sighed. "Let's go. I'll accompany you."

The two then left the Resonant Art Pagoda and made their way back.

Upon arriving at the dormitory, Li Luo could hear all sorts of bustling noises coming from inside. It seemed as though a party was underway, causing him to feel a little taken aback. Pushing the door open, he saw numerous individuals milling around... Yu Lang, Zhao Kuo, Qin Zhulu, Bai Doudou, Lu Qing'er, Xin Fu, and Bai Mengmeng were all present.

"What sort of illegal gathering is this?" Li Luo asked in surprise.

His sudden appearance had also shocked everyone else before congratulations started flooding forth.

"Brother Luo! You're finally out! We've been waiting for you for a few days now." Zhao Kuo smiled.

Li Luo glanced around and found an empty seat before asking curiously, "Why were you waiting for me?"

When no one chose to reply, Yu Lang guffawed. "Waiting to cheer you on, of course."

Li Luo's mind started spinning. House Luolan's Housemeet was no secret, and everyone in the entire Xia Kingdom was watching the event with utmost interest. Yu Lang and the rest of them had naturally interacted with people of stature within the college and had inevitably found out what was going on.

They knew that Li Luo would engage in a decisive battle in four days' time, and they were awaiting him, hoping to give him some form of encouragement.

Although encouragement wouldn't have any tangible effect on the situation, it was their actions that touched Li Luo's heart and made him feel a sense of warmth and camaraderie.

Li Luo grinned as he replied impishly, "There's no need to worry, everyone. It's a minor situation, and once it's over, I will ascend to become the lord of House Luolan. At that point in time, our statuses will have changed. Don't feel bad about the disparity between us then."

Loud exhales were heard throughout the room.

Such shameless words had caused everyone to exhale deeply, resisting the urge to punch this idiot. However, it was a sigh of relief at the same time. Li Luo's lightheartedness was a good sign, and the atmosphere quickly turned festive.

Li Luo took a seat and began to chat animatedly with his friends, laughing and enjoying himself.

The weeks of bitter cultivation had caused his mind and spirit to become extremely tense. It was only now that he was able to relax, albeit slightly.

After a period of time, he rose to pour himself a glass of water when Bai Mengmeng stealthily approached him. "Leader." Bai Mengmeng piped up as her large, crystal-like eyes admired him with a look of adoration.

"Yes? How can I help you?" Li Luo smiled.

She quickly reached into her robe and drew out a black crystal card imprinted with the Golden Dragon Bank's emblem. Biting her lip softly, she said, "Leader, I'm not strong enough to help you, but I've saved quite the sum in the last few years. This might not be enough to move those in the Duke Stage, but it should let you hire countless Heavenly Dipper Generals to assist you."

This sentence struck him like a bombshell, and he didn't know whether to laugh or to cry upon hearing this. He quickly pushed the card away and solemnly said, "My little rich lady, I know you're incredibly affluent. However, I will not be tempted by the vices of money! Do you think I'm interested in your wealth?"

Bai Mengmeng pouted angrily. "I'm not joking here!"

Li Luo gave a relaxed smile as he gently replied, "I know. Thank you for your goodwill, but I hope you'll believe in me. The situation at headquarters is not as dire as you might think. Additionally, if your sister ever got wind of this... she'd beat me to death." He coughed slightly upon that horrifying thought.

Bai Mengmeng stared at Li Luo for a moment, and upon seeing his resolute expression, she could only retrieve her card and slink back into the party.

After Bai Mengmeng left, Li Luo saw a shadow tremble beside him before he unceremoniously spoke out, "Xin Fu, you truly have used your shadow resonance to its full potential by being an uninvited voyeur." The shadow rippled once more and reformed into Xin Fu.

Unfortunately, Xin Fu's expression was a little downcast as he looked at Li Luo. After a moment of hesitation, he finally spoke the words in his heart. "Leader, I have news to report."

"What is it?" Li Luo carefully observed Xin Fu's gaze and expression.

Xin Fu approached cautiously and secretively channeled his voice into Li Luo's ear, conveying news that caused Li Luo's pupils to shrink. "House Lanling has received a contract for dealing with you and Senior Jiang."

Chapter 0638: House Lanling

"House Lanling?" This revelation caused Li Luo's heart to tremble, his expression turning solemn. House Lanling was one of the five Great Houses, but it was a little different from the rest. They tended to be a little secretive due to the nature of the only business they provided: assassinations.

Simply speaking, they were a group of professional assassins.

Within the Five Great Houses, House Lanling and House Luolan had the least contact with each other. At the same time, Li Luo had never really ignored their existence as they were a hidden threat in the dark. There wasn't any particular reason other than the fact that they were mercenaries.

House Lanling might never have acted against House Luolan, but based on his guesses, it was only because the price wasn't right. As a result, House Lanling had never taken a task on them. However, with the arrival of the Housemeet, the forces circling around House Luolan were beginning to take discrete action, and they had willingly jumped into the mix. This was undoubtedly a crippling blow to the situation.

Any price to be paid was worth it.

Although this had been expected, the delivery of this news from Xin Fu had also caused Li Luo's mood to sink.

House Luolan had another significant enemy to contend with.

This would force them to constantly have to watch their backs.

Li Luo felt his mood turn turbulent as he looked at Xin Fu. "So, how did you hear of it?"

Xin Fu helplessly smiled. "You should have guessed as much."

Li Luo nodded. Xin Fu was from House Lanling after all. His resonance fit their methods, but he just didn't know what sort of position he occupied within. Still, the fact that he had delivered such meaningful intel at this crucial time meant a lot to him. Nothing else was important. "Thank you, Xin Fu. Really." Li Luo patted Xin Fu's shoulder.

Xin Fu then heaved a sigh as he whispered another bombshell revelation. "House Lanling's Lord will be taking action personally during the Housemeet."

Yet Li Luo seemed to not be surprised at this. Since they had accepted the contract, they would use everything at their disposal. The feared house lord would thus make his presence felt.

This was a sticky situation indeed.

A Duke that specialized in assassination was a headscratching opponent to fend off.

"What a catastrophe." Li Luo smiled. However, it didn't matter, as there were too many other pressing matters. The forces that coveted House Luolan were numerous, and having House Lanling thrown into the mix wouldn't change things too much.

"Leader, you must remember to escape back to the college if the situation turns bad," Xin Fu said before he turned to leave.

Staring at Xin Fu's leaving silhouette, he clutched the glass of water in his hand tightly, deep in contemplation.

"Is there anything I can help you out with?" As Li Luo was lost in thought, a light, refreshing voice sounded out. Raising his head, he saw a familiar girl standing before him at the water point. Her enchanting, jade-like figure with crystal-clear eyes were peering at him with a sense of concern.

Li Luo could deeply feel the care she had towards him.

After a moment, he decided that there was no need to feign strength before her, only sighing deeply. "I do have one request, Qing'er. I hope that you can let Aunt Yu know that I do not require any help from the Golden Dragon Bank. However, on the day of the Housemeet, please keep the Golden Dragon Bank tightly controlled and become a true neutral party. She would have my endless gratitude, and I would owe her a favor for this."

There was another great enemy in the form of House Lanling, and so Li Luo had to make further considerations in light of this.

Vice Principal Su Xin had once reminded Li Luo to be wary of the Golden Dragon Bank. Yet based on Yu Hongxi's interaction and attitude, it was unlikely that they lusted after House Luolan's belongings. She was a proud individual after all. Still, the warnings did not go unheeded, and Li Luo would not deign to ignore Su Xin's words.

The fact was that even though Yu Hongxi did not crave for House Luolan's belongings, it didn't mean that no one else within the Golden Dragon Bank did not have these wayward thoughts.

The Golden Dragon Bank was a massive organization, and no one knew how deep its depths were. They were mighty, and if someone opted to sneakily trip him up, it would only add insult to injury.

Lu Qing'er listened attentively before her lips pursed tightly. "Do you really feel that someone with the Golden Dragon Bank is out to get House Luolan?"

Li Luo nodded. "There is no harm in being overly cautious. The Golden Dragon Bank is a titanic organization, and just a few black sheep can bring about massive trouble to me."

"I'll relay the news for you," Lu Qing'er replied lightly after pondering over his words.

"Thank you."

At this point, her eyes had a cunning look in them. "Still, my mother is not someone so good-hearted. Whenever she does business, she'll never be at a disadvantage. If you dare to say that you owe her one... Well, be careful if she doesn't take a good bite out of you instead."

Li Luo smiled. "Aunt Yu has hard words but a soft heart. I've remembered every occasion she's helped me, and if she ever needs any help I can provide, even if she wants me to jump into an inferno, I will not reject her."

Lu Qing'er gaily giggled. The two turned to leave and rejoined the gathering.

It was only when night had fallen that they heard someone knocking at the door. Bai Mengmeng opened it only to see Jiang Qing'e standing at the entrance.

She glazed over the group of individuals before looking directly at Li Luo. "I've come to take you home."

Li Luo smiled and nodded, waving to the rest of them. "I'll have to go now and won't be back for the next few days. Don't worry and wait for my good tidings." No one said any superfluous words, and even the usually wanton Yu Lang had suppressed the grin on his face.

"Li Luo, I truly wish that I was in the Four Star Hall right now. Wouldn't that have been great, huh?" Yu Lang bitterly smiled.

At that point, he would be grown up and would have the power to assist Li Luo, even in some small way.

Alas, the reality was not so simple. This was simply an idle dream right now.

They were merely tiny Resonant Master cultivators. In a battle between elite forces, not even their ashes would remain in a clash of resonant power.

"There's no need to say these useless words, much less cry over spilled milk. What challenges have I not seen this year? This is just another stepping stone," Li Luo said unceremoniously before striding out confidently, closing the door behind him with a casual back hand, never looking back.

Standing outside the dormitory, he sighed deeply before smiling at Qing'e. "Let's go, Sister Qing'e."

Her lustrous, golden eyes stared at him quietly before she reached out to him. He was a little astonished, but he very quickly recovered. Then he stretched out his hand and tightly held hers, their fingers interlocking closely.

"Li Luo, no matter what trials and tribulations await us, we'll face them together," Jiang Qing'e lightly said as she continued to gaze at Li Luo intently. Feeling the delicate touch of her palm being cradled by his brought a smirk to Li Luo's face.

The two walked out of the dormitory before pausing. Mentor Chi Chan was leaning against the wall, looking at the duo with her arms folded.

"If you don't mind me interrupting this moment of happiness, I'd be more than content to see you back," Mentor Chi Chan raised.

Li Luo was reminded of Xin Fu's news and thus did not reject her. "You have my thanks, Mentor."

She nodded but did not speak more, turning to lead the way as the duo scrambled behind her.

Night had blanketed the sky and the dim moonlight shone down upon the college like a thin veil.

They did not speak along the way, only passing through numerous familiar routes when Li Luo noticed that Mentor Chi Chan had paused in her steps. Water resonant power immediately surged around her, emanating a strong sense of oppression on anyone in the vicinity.

The duo turned to look and right in front of them. Below a large tree was a bench with a single individual sitting on it.

It was none other than Shen Jinxiao.

Chapter 0639: Li Luo's Plan

When Li Luo noticed that darn Shen Jinxiao before him, his eyes shrunk a little. What was that dog planning to do at this point in time?

Mentor Chi Chan's chilly gaze was focused upon Shen Jinxiao as she asked differently, "Shen Jinxiao, what are you doing here?"

He smiled. "Mentor Chi Chan, don't you think you're overstepping your bounds? The college is so large, why can't I enjoy the shade over here?"

After which, Chi Chan's gaze only became more frosty.

Shen Jinxiao saw the change in her and only laughed in response. "The truth is, I merely wanted to exchange a few words with Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e." With that, he turned to face Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e.

Facing his gaze, Jiang Qing'e remained calm but did not look at him directly, only in his general direction. Seeing this, Li Luo only beamed widely. "Mentor Shen Jinxiao, I don't think we have anything we would like to talk about, don't you think?"

Shen Jinxiao grinned in response. "If Qing'e is able to promise me something, I'm willing to stick my neck out for the Housemeet and render assistance. What do you think?"

The smile on Li Luo's face subsided slightly, and his gaze turned both icy and sharp like a knife.

"Shen Jinxiao, who are you trying to fool? Do you think the college will allow you to intervene?" Mentor Chi Chan frostily spoke up.

"That's my problem. Don't butt in." A toying look appeared on his face. "Whatever I say is the truth. I'll swear on it, so long as Qing'e is able to promise it. I will even be the reinforcement for House Luolan. What do you think?"

"You really are good at fishing in muddled waters," Chi Chan retorted.

Shen Jinxiao did not fall for Chi Chan's aggravations, only staring directly at Qing'e.

On the other hand, Jiang Qing'e completely ignored his existence, only tugging at Li Luo's hand as they continued walking forward. Just as the two parties were about to walk past each other, Li Luo fiercely glared at Shen Jinxiao. "Shen Jinxiao, don't even think of touching something you cannot afford to. Otherwise, I'll chop you up and feed your remains to the dogs in the future."

Shen Jinxiao only wryly smiled in response.

She proceeded to drag Li Luo away. On the other hand, Chi Chan continued to coldly glare at Shen Jinxiao before following.

Shen Jinxiao continued to wistfully stare at their fading silhouettes, the smile on his face finally being wiped off and his gaze turning gloomy.

"It's such a shame... not grasping on to even your final saving grace."

...

"Shen Jinxiao definitely covets Student Qing'e. You have to be wary," Mentor Chi Chan reminded the two when they arrived at House Luolan's carriage.

"Does the college really want to retain such an unscrupulous scrub?" Li Luo frowned.

"He may have a vicious heart, but the fact is that he has never truly taken any action. How could the college get rid of him without rhyme nor reason?" Chi Chan retorted.

This response kept Li Luo silent.

She paused before explaining, "Vice Principal Su Xin warned him to control himself during the last internal college meeting, also asking if he harbored any feelings towards student Qing'e. His response? He was merely someone who admired her, albeit a little too much..."

A cold glint flashed through Li Luo's eyes.

Similarly, Qing'e's countenance turned frosty. Shen Jinxiao's words had caused a sense of revulsion and hatred.

"Although it wouldn't be ideal if the students were to hear of such news, it indeed doesn't break any of the college's rules. Thus, Vice Principal Su Xin was also helpless to act, only able to warn him sternly to not take action... However, I understand that man very well. He's a strange one, and what he desires might not be so simple," Chi Chan continued. "He probably has other thoughts..."

Li Luo frowned deeply. That damned beast of a man was a blight on the earth. If the opportunity arose, he would undoubtedly rid the world of that cancer.

"Regardless of what he thinks, he's still a mentor of the college and is subject to the college's rules. He will not dare to act openly and brazenly," Chi Chan explained.

The duo glanced at each other in response, merely nodding.

Now that House Luolan was at a pivotal crossroad, dealing with Shen Jinxiao would have to be placed on the backburner.

"Mentor Chi Chan, are you escorting us because you're concerned about House Lanling's attacks?" Li Luo jested.

"I already sort of knew what Xin Fu was going to say." She did not deny that was the reason. The probability of the any assassination occurring before the event was unlikely, but it was better to be careful. No one could understand their underhanded ways.

"Thank you, Mentor, for your aid," Li Luo said from the depths of his heart.

Chi Chan waved her hand, not deigning to speak any further. She then closed her eyes and took a nap in the carriage.

The interior of the carriage remained silent as the other two continued to stare out of the windows, idly watching the countless lights of houses that streamed by.

After a period of time, the carriage arrived at the headquarters of House Luolan.

"Mentor Chi Chan, would you like to be our guest and perhaps have a cup of tea?" Li Luo politely offered.

Mentor Chi Chan took a glance at the headquarters before her and gave a smile that wasn't a smile. "House Luolan is not the most inviting place for Dukes. I don't like this sort of suppressive feeling, it doesn't feel safe."

Looking at her expression, Li Luo finally remembered that House Luolan's Headquarters contained a mysterious ward. All Dukes that entered would be greatly suppressed. The only issue was that the day of the Housemeet was the one day it would weaken.

"Li Luo, take care. I hope that I'll see you at school in five days' time. If such a talent was wasted, it would be truly regrettable," Mentor Chi Chan said before she turned to leave. Her lithe figure seemed to tread the rays of moonlight shining down upon them as she disappeared in a flash.

Jiang Qing'e stared at the vanished figure before turning to Li Luo. "Mentor Chi Chan treats you very well."

"Of course! Being a heaven-defying and unparalleled genius paired with absolutely amazing looks would do that to anyone. I'm probably the most amazing person Mentor Chi Chan has ever met." Li Luo waved his hand as though this was nothing exceptional.

"Don't forget the fact that you're also the most shameless as well," Jiang Qing'e replied.

"Hey! Being shameless is also a good thing. Sister Qing'e, you're too cold and aloof, so you occupy a high, lonely stature in the hearts of everyone. Otherwise with your ludicrous strength and amazing talent, you might have managed to seduce the hearts of some female Violet Vibrance mentors... they might have even opted to leave the college to join our house!" Li Luo spoke with full conviction.

Jiang Qing'e on the other hand helplessly looked at Li Luo's casual comments, completely ignoring him as she turned to walk into headquarters.

Li Luo grinned as he followed suit.

As they returned, the two had a quick dinner before Li Luo returned to his room. He sat cross-legged atop his bed and started to inspect his three resonant palaces. He had purely focused upon the cultivation of the duke art this entire period of time and had slacked off a little when it came to earth fiend energy refinement. It was fortunate that he had obtained a nice pile of Fiend Origin Pills and with their help, managed to fully refine his second resonant palace within twenty odd days.

The current him only had the Thunder Dragon resonance remaining to temper.

However this was also more or less enough.

He might have only broken through into the Fiend Palace tier just a month ago but both his waterlight resonance and woodearth resonance had been fully tempered. This allowed his resonant power to increase significantly and was comparable to those at the peak of the Lesser Fiend Palace tier.

Feeling the dense viscous resonant power flow through him, he felt a great sense of satisfaction. After which his gaze turned onto the red bangle on his wrist, of which sealed the three-tailed heavenly wolf.

Li Luo fell into deep thought.

A huge battle was inevitable during the housemeet and the three-tailed heavenly wolf was a critical card of his. Through the use of the Heavenly Libation chant, he could borrow the three-tailed heavenly wolf's power... however he now had a new idea.

There was an opportunity for him to fool around with... ahem... an opportunity to deal with the three-tailed heavenly wolf.

Chapter 0640: Li Luo's Aim

A massive wolf was lying within a dimly lit space, its three gargantuan tails swaying slowly as it released overflowing amounts of fiendish energy. However, it was not completely free—all four of its limbs and its body were encumbered by chains, glowing with engraved symbols, completely binding it to the point that free movement was impossible.

All of a sudden, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's eyes blazed open, revealing its scarlet pupils. A whirlwind of killing intent and energy whipped up out of nowhere, causing its surroundings to tremble.

“Roar!”

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf opened its maw and let loose a low, guttural cry.

Its scarlet pupils remained focused on a certain location within the darkness. It was then that a human-shaped silhouette popped up, directly stopping before it.

It recognized this human. This tricky creature had lured it out of its cave and mysteriously provoked a strong Other to fight it. Eventually, it had been sealed after being used.

Even its previous mountain cell was a paradise compared to this lightless spatial location!

And the cause of all this misery was this damned human before it!

Bang!

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf bellowed angrily, and its entire body started to struggle. It wanted to slaughter that tiny creature before him, but at this point in time, the chains wrapped around him started to shrink violently, emitting terrifying amounts of strength and causing him to suffer immensely as they pressed down upon his body.

"Brother Three-Tail, please stop being so agitated!" Li Luo quickly attempted to defuse the situation upon seeing the furious Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf looking as though it wanted to swallow him whole.

However, his words fell on deaf ears as the wolf clearly did not want to deal with him. The chains around the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf continued to hum and shrink as its humongous body tugged against its restraints, all while it continued to glare at Li Luo with its blood-red eyes, causing anyone to feel great fear before it.

"Brother Three-Tail, don't you want to escape this seal and regain your freedom?" Li Luo continued to parley with it, shouting loudly.

These were the magic words required, and the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's body suddenly turned rigid, no longer struggling like before. However, it continued to glare at Li Luo as it released a rumbling roar, allowing Li Luo to feel and understand the intention that it contained.

Simply put, it felt sarcastic, full of rage and doubt.

Li Luo smiled sheepishly. It was said that only when a spirit beast reached the Duke Stage would it obtain the ability to speak in human tongue. The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf had yet to do so, and as a result, it was slightly harder to speak with. On the bright side, it clearly demonstrated significant intellect and could understand him, which would make negotiations slightly easier.

Thus, with a face full of sincerity, Li Luo first apologized. "Brother Three-Tail, it was wrong of me to lure you out of your mountain cave. However, it was all for your own good! You might be sealed now, but at least you left the terrible and debilitating influence of the Umbra Cave! If you were to remain there, you would have been corrupted by it and lost all sense of sanity and rationality, turning into nothing more than a wild, feral beast!"

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's eyes seemed to contain cold amusement within them. This brat had forced it into such a pitiful state and he still was shameless enough to say that it was a good thing? This was a truly despicable human being!

An impatient, low roar was the response Li Luo received, essentially telling him to scram as far away as he could.

Li Luo remained unperturbed and continued to smile. "Brother Three-Tail, haven't you ever dreamed of breaking into the Duke Stage? Do you feel that your chance to do so is good enough?" The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf once again coldly glared at Li Luo, seemingly taunting him. What did this piddly creature know about the majestic Duke stage?

In response, Li Luo continued, "I feel that I can assist you in breaking into the Duke Stage in the future."

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf was uninterested in bickering more with a fool, directly lying down instead. Instead, its gaze changed into one of contempt and derision. An Earth Fiend General Stage human wanted to lecture it about breaking into the Duke Stage? This was probably the biggest joke ever.

"Brother Three-Tail, do you remember how strong I was when you met me? Do you remember how strong I was?" Li Luo asked.

Its scarlet eyes squinted slightly at him as it inspected him out of slight curiosity. The last time it had seen this human, he was only a tiny resonant master. In fact, a single breath could extinguish his very existence.

He had stepped into the Earth Fiend Stage now, which was a little surprising in terms of cultivation speed.

Now that the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf seemed to be slightly more interested and silent, Li Luo continued to smile. "Brother Three-Tail... you being sealed within my bracelet might have been a fortunate encounter for you!"

A look of amusement seemed to appear in its gaze. This human being had really thick skin. A natural clown.

However, Li Luo did not mind. "You must know that the one who sealed you was a King Stage expert. He then gifted this bracelet to me."

The beast's thoughts flashed back to when he had encountered that massive and terrifying shadow. It was completely unable to do anything under his presence, much less muster up some form of courage to hate it. This was the law of the jungle, and he understood the massive disparity between their existences.

A King Stage expert!

Just recollecting the experience caused it to tremble involuntarily.

What sort of connection did that mighty expert have with this brat?

Li Luo dully continued, "That expert gifted you to me, but he did have a request for me."

At this point, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's heart trembled slightly as it stared in surprise at Li Luo. Kings were lofty existences that towered over all. How could someone like that request something of this weak creature. The brat had to be just blabbering his mouth off. How could any of these words make sense?

"You don't believe me?" As though Li Luo could read the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's mind, he smiled. With a thought, resonant power emitted from him.

First, he demonstrated his water resonant power, then his wood resonant power, before finally releasing a draconic roar infused with the power of his dragon resonance. The three distinct types of resonant power had demonstrated the triple resonances Li Luo had!

"Triple resonances?!" The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf could scarcely believe its eyes. This was the biggest blow to his own confidence, and it understood that only King Stage experts could wield this devastating power.

Yet this human brat before him, barely a step into the Earth Fiend Stage, already had three?

This was a heaven-defying fiend!

A wry smile appeared on Li Luo's face. "Now do you believe me?"

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf fell into deep thought before expressing its will. Li Luo could vaguely sense that it was telling him that yes, a triple resonance was rarely seen, but it was insufficient for a King Stage expert to request anything from him.

The spirit beast knew that even though triple resonances demonstrated that he was an exceptional talent, this was still far from the actual triple resonance power that a King Stage controlled.

The bright side from all this was that Li Luo could finally feel that the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf was no longer being as violent nor disregarding him like an ant-like existence.

Revealing his talent had shown its use.

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf left out another low roar. It did not understand why Li Luo was here. Was he trying to intimidate it? Ever since it had been imprisoned, its greatest nemesis was this fellow before him. Thus, understanding how talented this human was only brought about irritation and gloominess.

Feeling that the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf was becoming a little impatient and hostile, Li Luo did not continue to probe and merely sighed deeply before seriously saying, "Well, to be fair, there's only one reason why I'm here to chat with you. I want to form a contract with you. I'll be your master for the period of a year."

Although Li Luo could borrow the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's power with the aid of the Heavenly Libation Chant, it was still a crude way to obtain it. If the wolf was willing to assist him wholeheartedly, then he could wholly tap upon its powers.

"Roar!"

It was instantly incensed upon hearing Li Luo's words, roaring loudly with its massive fangs bared, expressing its utter anger.

This despicable brat actually wanted it to recognise him as its master?

Was he worthy?

Faced with the indignant and furious Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf, Li Luo's expression remained calm. "If you agree, I'll find a solution for you to break into the Duke Stage once I return you your freedom."

The calm, collected voice sliced through the tense atmosphere and reverberated around the tiny, spatial location.

Finally, the roars subsided.

