

Resonance 641

Chapter 0641: Tempting The Three-tail

In the dimly lit space where the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf was contained, the beast leered furiously at Li Luo. The final two conditions had led it to restrain itself.

To be fair, they were extraordinarily wonderful for it.

For a year's worth of humiliation, this human brat would not only return its freedom, but allow it to break into the Duke Stage?

How could such generosity exist in this world? What was the catch?

A year was not much time to a long-lived spirit beast—it would pass as quickly as one snapped their fingers. This transaction was undoubtedly good enough to make it shed tears of joy.

Without even mentioning how precious freedom alone was, there was the additional alluring condition of being able to break into the Duke Stage.

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf had reached the peak of the Heavenly Resonance Stage, comparable to being at the Greater Heavenly Resonance Stage. Strictly speaking, it was already at the crux of breaking into the Duke Stage, which meant that it was even stronger than the average peak Greater Heavenly Resonance Stage cultivator by multiple times. However, it had been trapped at the gates, unable to break through despite countless years of trying.

That final step had often eluded it, and it was difficult to break through the shackles that kept it in the Heavenly Resonance Stage.

And right now, a tiny human said he'd assist it in doing so?

Preposterous! Ludicrous!

There was a suppressed, low roar that rumbled from the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf between gritted fangs. What was fascinating was that despite it being in disbelief over those words, it did not express the humiliation it felt the first time Li Luo spoke out. Instead, there was a questioning look in its eyes.

Clearly, it had been slightly swayed by the sight of Li Luo's triple resonances, reducing its contempt for him.

On the other hand, Li Luo remained cool as a cucumber. "Do you feel that I can't live up to my words?"

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf snorted, and a fishy stench wafted out from its breath, its actions speaking louder than its growls.

"It looks like I have to enlighten and broaden your view of the world, so that you no longer remain an ignorant wolf in a well." Li Luo grinned. Listening to Li Luo's mocking words, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf felt anger. Damned Fiend Palace human. You dare to make fun of a spirit beast at the peak of the Heavenly Dipper General Stage? Without this seal, a casual swat would turn him into meat paste! Li Luo could sense the beast's anger, but he continued, "You piddly spirit beast. You don't understand who stands behind me, so I won't blame you. Plus, you've spent so much time trapped in dark spaces... I'll

just let you know that my backing is so amazing that even that King Stage expert you saw is fearful! That is why he directly made a request of me! Hmph!"

These words were enunciated calmly and confidently. This was the natural air a thick-skinned fellow possessed, able to master both heart and body in acting to perform a masterpiece.

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf felt a little taken aback right now. A King Stage powerhouse whom it couldn't even muster the courage to despise was actually fearful of the mysterious backer of this brat?

What sort of background did he have?

"Alas, I am now far away from my homeland... and because of certain reasons, I've been restricted in many ways. Thus, I have no choice but to discuss terms with you personally. Frankly speaking... if you ever follow me back to my home, a spirit beast that has yet to break into the Duke Stage wouldn't even have the right to carry my shoes, I'm afraid!" Li Luo continued placidly. The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf bared its fangs and its scarlet pupils scowled at Li Luo. Was this brat just a flowery liar or did he truly have a terrifying background?

Logically speaking, this brat clearly liked to brag. However, the fact that he had triple resonances and a King Stage expert had placed it in this seal for him was an action that spoke volumes about their relationship. As a result, it felt an indescribable apprehension.

"You don't need to be angry. This is just the hard truth, and reality is cruel." As Li Luo continued to banter, he suddenly stretched his hand out, and a blob of blood essence slowly floated into the air. It flew directly towards the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf.

When the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf focused upon the drop of blood essence, it could instinctively feel that it contained some sort of frightening presence, an aura of sheer terror. The fear it struck into its heart was even greater than that of the King Stage expert...

This threw its thoughts into a frenzy, and the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf trembled. At the same time, a boundless desire for this drop of blood essence was born within its heart. A scarlet tongue licked the corner of its lips as it glanced at Li Luo once again. Seeing that the brat did not stop, it gulped the drop of blood essence down.

Bang!

When the drop of blood essence entered its stomach, its entire body began to shudder uncontrollably. At the same time, it could feel a terrifying pressure radiate from within its body, and a draconic roar resounded within its mind. Boundless suppression that transcended space and time descended down upon him.

The suppression itself was not too intense, especially if one was a human. Perhaps it might not even have been noticeable. Unfortunately, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf could distinctly feel the suppression bearing down upon it with regal majesty. It was the pressure one felt when they were in the presence of a higher life form, something ingrained into every living creature's blood. An absolute suppression towards an inferior being.

With that, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf knelt.

Its eyes didn't hide its shock as it stared at Li Luo with a blank expression.

It finally believed Li Luo's words.

Just a mere droplet of blood essence was able to subdue it in spirit and body. This unimpressive brat undoubtedly possessed a background he could not afford to offend.

Being able to restrain even a King did not seem too far fetched as a result.

If this brat had such a background, relying on him might not be too bad, especially if it could enter the Duke Stage.

Unknowingly, the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf pulled back its presence, and the fiendish energy emitting from it reduced drastically. The thought struck it as it projected a thought towards Li Luo.

"How can I trust you?"

This brat looked like a treacherous individual after all. What if he didn't return its freedom nor fulfill his promise after a year? Wouldn't it have labored for nothing?

A radiant smile burst forth from Li Luo's face. He knew that the creature had been moved.

This was to be expected. The temptation of the Duke Stage and freedom was a honey too sweet to be refused. Li Luo believed that no man or beast would ever refuse this proposition.

Li Luo raised his hand and spoke seriously for once. "I can swear it upon my bloodline. Although I don't know if there's any use in that, I feel that you don't have much of a choice either way."

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf glared at Li Luo for a moment more before sinking into deep thought. It was as Li Luo had said, it didn't have much choice, and if it didn't agree, it may very well be stuck within this space for the rest of eternity.

A King's seal was not something a spirit beast like itself could overcome.

Since it was a desperate situation, it would be better to fight instead.

If the brat in front of him had the background he bragged of, this temporary submission would not be completely unpalatable.

With that, it lied down, indicating that it had chosen to abide by Li Luo's conditions.

This sight was a ripple of joy in Li Luo's still heart. Convincing the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf was easier than he had expected. The triple resonances and his supposed background provided the necessary push.

The Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf would now be his strongest ace below the power of a Duke. It even had a chance to break into the Duke Stage. The willing assistance of the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf far surpassed the strength he could draw out with the Heavenly Libation Chant.

If the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf wasn't so much stronger than him that he would have trouble controlling it, he would have very well just released the spirit beast directly, adding a top tier combatant to tip the scales in his favor.

"Little Three, we will be battle buddies now." Li Luo enthusiastically walked up and patted the massive paws of the wolf. "Why don't you try calling me 'Boss?' If you follow me, you'll get anything your heart desires. If you are loyal, then the Duke Stage will be nothing to you! You'll be crowned the Heavenly Wolf King!"

Listening to Li Luo's fantastical bragging did not move it—it completely ignored him. Instead, its eyes swept past Li Luo before closing as if to take a nap.

If he truly wanted its loyalty, this brat would first have to surpass it. It was only for the sake of its freedom and future that it was willing to feign a sense of civility.

"Idiot brat."

Chapter 0642: Housemeet's Eve

It was the eve of the Housemeet.

During this period of time, the headquarters of House Luolan had increased their defenses and vigilance. The pavilion masters who had thrown their lot in with Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo had also arrived at Xia City, bringing their most elite forces with them.

Manager Cai Wei had also allocated a significant amount of funds to hire external aid. Most of these individuals were at the Earth Fiend General Stage, while a few were at the Heavenly Dipper General Stage. Unfortunately, they were all at the Heavenly Pearl Stage as anyone stronger than that would likely have built a reputation of their own within the Xia Kingdom, and they would have an understanding of the terrifying maelstrom that was the House Luolan Housemeet. Even with excellent conditions, they would not willingly involve themselves.

Regardless, House Luolan was the strongest it had ever been since the two House Lords had left.

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Within House Luolan's Discussion Hall.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were sitting at the head as fevered discussions took place. The usually spread-out higher echelons of House Luolan had all gathered within this very location, greeting the duo and also reporting upon the situation over the past year.

Li Luo was full of smiles, and he treated everyone with the warmth of spring air. Jiang Qing'e, on the other hand, remained serene without expression. However, everyone knew that this was her personality and did not take it personally, instead only demonstrating their complete respect for her.

In fact, the entire group of House Luolan's upper ranks also treated Li Luo with sincere respect as well.

This was a complete change from the mentality they had towards him when they were at the old manor in the City of Southwind.

They might have been respectful towards Li Luo on the surface, but that was because of his stature and Qing'e's backing. No matter what, it was indeed a difficult thing to sincerely respect a blank palace Li Luo when the law of the jungle reigned supreme, even though he was the son of the two House Lords.

However, in the short span of a year, Li Luo's power and influence had undergone heaven-shaking transformations.

He had not only shed his blank palaces but turned into a dual resonance user. At the same time, he entered Astral Sage College, becoming a figure of repute within. In fact, during the recent Holy Grail Meet, he had even managed to achieve the title of the strongest One Star Hall student, the significance of which was not lost upon them. It demonstrated that Li Luo did possess overwhelming power and potential amongst his peers. Furthermore, they had found out just yesterday, their young lord had even reached the Fiend Palace Tier.

A single year of time was all he had needed to go from a blank palace to the Earth Fiend General Stage.

This exceptionally swift cultivation speed shocked anyone who heard of it. It was even quicker than the likes of Jiang Qing'e's. It seemed his dual resonances weren't famous for nothing!

Thus, Li Luo's transformation had brought about greater relief and joyful surprise to the upper ranks of House Luolan. Li Luo was also the rightful young lord. His massive potential would mean that if House Luolan could overcome the trial of the Housemeet, it would undoubtedly be propelled to new heights in the future. It was possible that they could achieve a greatness that surpassed that of the previous House Lords. As a result, even though the Housemeet loomed overhead, Li Luo's demonstration of talent and might had reassured the skittish and perturbed elders, giving them peace of mind. This was exactly what was expected of the House Lords' lineage!

Li Luo was able to discern the changes in their thoughts, so he knew that his goals had been achieved. With the Housemeet tomorrow, ensuring that his side remained convinced and composed was critical. This would allow them to demonstrate their full prowess. If not for wanting to hide his remaining cards, he might have even shown off his triple resonances.

Although triple resonances didn't mean much in terms of combat strength, they symbolized a rarely seen genius and potential. This would not only incite and inspire his men, but also get them to follow him loyally, with little chance of betrayal.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e continued to spend the better part of the afternoon greeting the endless stream of people, only concluding near lunch.

When the crowd gradually dispersed, Li Luo stretched tiredly. But then he saw a small smile appear on Jiang Qing'e's small, white cheeks, indicating her happiness.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked

"In their minds, you've become the actual young lord of House Luolan. This is the result you have carved with your own hands after a year of painstaking effort. I'm happy for you," Jiang Qing'e replied.

Li Luo smiled. "Let's leave the celebrations for tomorrow."

Jiang Qing'e nodded slightly and then stood up. "Let's go to Uncle Biao. We need to discuss tomorrow's business with him."

Li Luo nodded as well, and as Uncle Biao was House Luolan's only Duke member, he was a critical part of any plan.

The two left the discussion hall and headed to the inner courtyard, arriving at Uncle Biao's kitchen.

Upon entering, they saw Uncle Biao sharpening his pig-butcherer knife, which had been stained with numerous red grooves. The blade glinted in the rays of the sun, reflecting a chilly light that caused one's heart to palpitate in nervousness.

Noticing that the two had arrived, he paused and hefted his knife towards the light with a sigh. "I would never have thought that my blade would see the light of the sun after so many years."

"We will finally be able to see Uncle Biao reveal his true might. It has been a long time waiting." Li Luo grinned.

Uncle Biao shook his head as he replied, sounding a little crestfallen, "It's unfortunate that I'm no longer in my prime."

Jiang Qing'e directly asked, "Uncle Biao, could you let us know just what sort of stage you're at? What sort of strength do you possess and what grade of Duke are you able to handle?"

Li Luo stared attentively at Ox Biaobiao. Since the Housemeet was tomorrow, Dukes from the Xia Kingdom would inevitably intervene, so they would have to deploy their own Duke in response to preserve their side's morale. Otherwise, their side might very well turn tail and run rather than fight an impossible battle.

Ox Biaobiao stroked his chin and smiled. "Dukes have nine grades, and most of those that you have seen in the Xia Kingdom are at the first or second grade at best. I may not have clashed with many of them directly, but from the information your parents provided, the Xia Kingdom's Dukes are merely average. However, that's not unexpected, considering we are in the outer divine continent and are therefore unable to compare with those in the inner divine continent. At the same time, this doesn't mean that they are complete trash. The Golden Dragon Bank's President Yu, the Astral Sage College's Vice Principal Su Xin, House Jiyan's fiery brat, and the royal court's Regent—these are the four your parents have said are the strongest Dukes in the Xia Kingdom. They are all at the fourth-grade. The Regent is the most notable one—he is someone who has concealed himself deeply and possesses an ambitious heart... There is a saying about the nine grades of a Duke: one grade, one layer of heaven. Every grade indicates a massive gap between the next. All are equal below the might of a Duke. A single grade will allow them to massacre all."

At this point, Ox Biaobiao hefted the pig-butcherer knife in his hand once again. "So long as they are within House Luolan's headquarters' vicinity, not even those four I mentioned would be able to do anything with me around."

"Wow, Uncle Biao! You're truly amazing!" Li Luo cheered as he praised him.

This was his first time learning that President Yu and Vice Principal Su Xin were at the fourth-grade. House Jiyan's fiery brat... that should be House Jiyan's House lord, Zhu Qinghuo. That was slightly surprising as well.

"Now that I think about it, my parents were already fourth-grade Dukes when they left, right?" Li Luo asked. Ox Biaobiao smiled and nodded.

"I thought so. They broke the record for being Xia Kingdom's youngest Dukes, but I think their record is going to be surpassed by Sister Qing'e and I in a few years," Li Luo confidently bragged.

Jiang Qing'e helplessly replied, "Cultivation before the Heavenly Resonance Stage can be quick, especially if one's body is particularly talented. However, the Heavenly Resonance Stage is a huge gulf, and many of those who easily rose to that stage were forcefully halted from any further progress. At the Heavenly Resonance Stage, one requires a period of accumulation and opportunity. Breaking into the Fiend Palace Tier from the Resonant Master Stage within a year doesn't mean much."

Ox Biaobiao smiled as well. "Common sense dictates so as well. However, our Young Lord lacks neither potential nor opportunity. Breaking his parents' records is not impossible. However..." He paused, and a smile that was not a smile appeared on his face. "The only problem is that... Young Lord, do you think your parents only broke into the Duke Stage after they arrived at the Xia Kingdom?"

Chapter 0643: Underestimated Parents

That last sentence struck Li Luo like a bolt from the blue, and even Jiang Qing'e was left a little shell shocked. The two stared at Uncle Biao. The implications of his question were earthshaking.

"Uncle Biao, what are you trying to say?" Li Luo asked in astonishment.

Ox Biaobiao continued to smile sweetly. "Wasn't I obvious enough? Just who told you that Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan broke into the Duke Stage in the Xia Kingdom?"

Li Luo piped up. "Well, everyone in the Xia Kingdom said so!"

"And does that mean that they are right?" Ox Biaobiao asked.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e faced each other in a daze, and the two were left in deep thought. At this point, Jiang Qing'e clarified the thoughts in her head. "Uncle Biao, are you saying that the Master and Mistress were already Dukes long before they arrived at the Xia Kingdom? If that is the case, why did they only reveal that they were at the Duke Stage after they had arrived? What were they trying to conceal?"

Ox Biaobiao smiled. "Well, they didn't do so on purpose. In a way, what the people have said isn't wrong either. Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan both reached the Duke Stage in the Xia Kingdom. The difference is that they did not make a new breakthrough, but instead managed to regain their powers. Indeed, they managed to reach the Duke Stage again after they arrived in the Xia Kingdom."

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e looked at each other in surprise. Restoring their strength to that of a Duke compared to breaking through into the Duke Stage meant completely separate things. They were well aware of what this meant.

Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's record of breaking into the Duke Stage had to be brought forward by a few years!

They were maddening geniuses! The entire Xia Kingdom had underestimated his parents.

Li Luo had originally held his parents in high esteem, but it was clear that the reality was even more frightening.

"Uncle Biao, you said that the Master and Mistress recovered their Duke Stage cultivation in the Xia Kingdom... Why did their cultivation stage fall, then?" Jiang Qing'e asked the most important question. Li Luo's gaze also flashed with curiosity.

His parents had come from the inner divine continent, and his dad even possessed the Veins of Heavenly Emperor Li. This must have been an absolutely powerful ability in the inner divine continent, and yet he had to find refuge in this destitute land?

What exactly had happened?

Ox Biaobiao fell silent for a bit. "Something forced them to leave the inner divine continent. I'll tell you more about it after the Housemeet. That is what is important now."

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e demonstrated their agreement as well. Whatever happened tomorrow would determine their future direction.

"Pei Hao honestly isn't much of a threat. What is more concerning are the Dukes that will take action," Li Luo mused.

Jiang Qing'e nodded slightly. "From our intel, of the Five Great Houses, House Jiyan, House Duze, and House Lanling all have shown overt hostility towards us. House Jinque is still treating us with goodwill, but that doesn't mean that they won't turn on us tomorrow. Li Luo has gained the assistance of the First Princess, and she will provide a single Duke to assist us, generous and timely reinforcement. Other than that, we don't have any more allies."

Ox Biaobiao continued to sharpen his knife. "The ones that covet House Luolan may not be limited to the Great Houses. In fact, the ones controlling Pei Hao may not be any of them."

Li Luo's gaze flashed. "Uncle Biao, could you care to explain a bit more?"

"Weren't you asking about who had manipulated the death lottery, forcing Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan into the Noble's Battlefield? Simply put, the Great Houses don't have the clout nor influence to control the death lottery," Ox Biaobiao unenthusiastically murmured.

Li Luo felt his heart sink. The death lottery was organized by the Astral Sage College, the royal court, and the Golden Dragon Bank. Could it be that all three of them had their tendrils in this crisis as well?

Would they be forced to take additional precautions against the three top tier factions of the Xia Kingdom?

That would be a troublesome situation.

"I'm not saying that we have to guard against all three of these factions. The power they can bring to bear is colossal, but their internal politics are also chaotic. It's not impossible to imagine that some of their inner factions have other thoughts despite them being neutral as a whole. We shouldn't treat them as enemies or lessen our vigilance against them," Ox Biaobiao explained.

The duo acknowledged this as well.

"Thus, the number of Dukes that will appear tomorrow will not be small. Young Lord, you should prepare yourself," Ox Biaobiao continued.

This was a catastrophe.

"There is no need to be overly worried. House Luolan still has the defensive ward. Even if it is weakened, it's still a force to be reckoned with. Those greedy Dukes may not necessarily dare to barge in openly. I think that their plan is to spur Pei Hao forward, to have him struggle and attain the position of House Lord. With the House Lord succession settled, they will naturally be able to control the defensive ward. With a thought, Pei Hao could simply dissipate it and open the gates for the wolves to enter. However, if he fails in his struggle, the defensive ward will preserve its ability to weaken Duke experts. And if any of them dare to take so much as a step within these grounds, even if there are a significant number of them, my pig-butcher knife will give them a taste of pain."

Ox Biaobiao grinned at Li Luo. "Thus, Young Lord, you need not be overly worried. The battle for the position of House Lord is the pivotal battle. If you can overcome him, our situation will improve. Of course, you shouldn't underestimate Pei Hao. He is a white-eyed wolf that bites the hand that feeds it. The hidden hand behind him must have made ample preparations for this day."

Ox Biaobiao's consoling words helped lift the heavy weight on Li Luo's heart, and he nodded vigorously. "Uncle Biao, you can relax. I've done what needs to be done. I have full confidence I can deal with this damned beast."

Although Li Luo was only at the Fiend Palace Tier, while Pei Hao had long entered the Fiend Finisher Tier and was therefore several tiers above him, neither Ox Biaobiao nor Jiang Qing'e had any doubts in his ability to deal with the traitor. In their hearts, how could some pitiful creature like Pei Hao be comparable to Li Luo?

A smile floated on Jiang Qing'e's face. "I hope to see Pei Hao get completely crushed before the eyes of the entirety of House Luolan. He's all yours."

Li Luo smirked in response. "Well, if something strange crops up, I'm not one to hog the spotlight. Sister Qing'e, please move decisively and destroy him in body and spirit. After all, we are going to get married, so you becoming the House Lord wouldn't change anything."

A trace of happiness could be seen in Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes as she responded lightly, "Relax."

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Night had blanketed Xia City. The previously bustling city had turned silent, and only the whistling of the cool night wind could be heard.

Royal Palace.

Atop a pavilion, the First Princess was staring at the well lit city in front of her, then she turned to face the western part of it specifically, where House Luolan was situated.

"The Housemeet begins tomorrow," she mused to herself.

The atmosphere within Xia City was like a pressure cooker, rising immensely over the past two months, all in preparation for the monumental changes that would come.

House Luolan's Housemeet was just the first of many.

The Housemeet would definitely involve all of the top factions in the city. The end of peace was nigh.

"Li Luo, Qing'e, I've done all that I can... the rest is up to you."

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Golden Dragon Bank

After all of the day's work was completed, Yu Hongxi stretched lazily, showing off her alluring curves. She then stood up and walked towards the window, the numerous lights of the city filling her gaze. After pausing to think briefly, she said to a nearby maid, "Inform everyone of my decision. The Golden Dragon Bank will be closed tomorrow and our monthly meeting will be held. Ensure that every single elder is present and on time. No one can be missing!"

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Astral Sage College

At a specific pavilion...

Mentor Chi Chan was warming a cup of tea. On the table in front of her was a letter. A single word was emblazoned atop it.

Resignation.

Chapter 0644: Housemeet Begins

Badump!

Warm rays of sunlight bathed Xia City in resplendent glory as the sun rose overhead. Sounds of drumming could be heard coming from House Luolan's Headquarters. Right outside the gates hung many festive decorations with lion dances and drumming happening there. The mood was unusually celebratory.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were standing right outside, observing the proceedings calmly.

Endless guests from the numerous forces came to participate in the revelry. However, they were mostly of low cultivation level. The key thing was House Luolan's ward, which suppressed any Duke experts, and thus none of the leaders would come. It was an uncomfortable feeling after all.

At the same time, the two were aware that there should be no shortage of spies and unsavory elements blended into the crowd.

Still, they did not bother to weed out the troublesome individuals. The pointless rabble did not possess the might to change the situation in any way.

"In House Luolan's entire history of Housemeets, this is most likely the most complicated and hair-raising one, huh." Li Luo helplessly smiled at Jiang Qing'e. The usual event was one of celebratory joy in which the high-tiered officials of House Luolan would lead their forces to the headquarters to make their annual reports on the gains of the year. At the same time, the House Lords would reward the worthy and diligent, ensuring that this was a day that everyone anticipated.

Today's Housemeet would not be the same.

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "House Luolan will definitely regain its splendor in the future. We will overcome this trial and use it as a way to strengthen ourselves."

"This tonic seems pretty good after all. Sign me up, I'm convinced," Li Luo joked in response as he raised his head. Meanwhile, his gaze drifted around the towering pavilions that surrounded House Luolan. It was likely that numerous individuals from every faction were on them right now, observing the changes that were occurring here.

"I truly want to see how many hungry wolves hanker for this delicious piece of meat." A cold glint flashed through Li Luo's eyes. Right at this instant, Yuan Qing, Lei Zhang, and the other numerous highly ranked individuals of House Luolan who were loyal to the two had made their way to the front of the gate. They bowed respectfully.

"Greetings, Young lord, Young Mistress!" Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e were all smiles as they waved to them. After which, Cai Wei informed a steward to bring over some hot wine for the guests. This was a customary process.

After receiving the wine, they bowed once again.

At this time, both of them suddenly raised their heads, and their attention was directed to the front. A wave of figures came walking forward, parting the crowd with a turbulent momentum, directly facing the gate of the headquarters.

"Young Lord, would you be able to spare me a cup of that Wine of Appreciation?" At the fore of the group of individuals who had barged in was none other than Pei Hao. He had a face full of smiles as he spoke directly to Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo.

Yuan Qing's expression turned chilly and he waved his hand, summoning his supporting forces. Each of them channeled the resonant power within them, causing blasts of resonant power to burst into the air. The festive mood had turned tense in the blink of an eye.

Similarly, the large group behind Pei Hao began to unsheath their weapons, channeling their own resonant power in response.

"Yuan Qing... are you trying to break the rules set by the House Lords? Or perhaps... you're trying to sow dissent and tear the entire house apart with your reckless actions!" a white-haired male commented as he stared at Yuan Qing emotionlessly.

"Xu Tianling... you still have the cheek to mention the two House Lords?" Yuan Qing thunderously replied.

Another one of the ancestors, Mo Cheng, gave a dry laugh as he looked at Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e. "Young Lord, could it be that you plan to block the entry of all us elders?"

Li Luo glared at the trio before his eyes swept over the group behind them, some of whom even seemed familiar. They indeed were the elders of House Luolan. In his youth, he'd even received presents from some of them.

"Everyone here does seem to be an elder of House Luolan, and all of you have contributed immensely to House Luolan in the past." Li Luo fell into a deep contemplation before turning to face these individuals attentively. "On behalf of your contributions in the past, I will give you one last chance to answer. During this Housemeet, do you plan to side with Pei Hao to the very end?"

The pavilion masters who had been behind Pei Hao had their expressions turn stiff and unnatural.

Pei Hao saw the change in their faces but only smiled. "Young Lord, don't you think you should spare yourself those naive words? Do you really feel that there is any other option left for them?" The individuals behind him silently and glumly agreed.

This was met with a shaking head, and Li Luo did not try again.

"However, Young Lord, if you truly don't want the Housemeet to devolve into an all out brawl, why don't you give some thought to my proposition from before?" Pei Hao gleefully suggested.

This was the proposal where both he and Li Luo would take the role as dual House Lords.

"You white-eyed wolf. Don't you think you should spare yourself those naive words?" Li Luo smiled as he returned the very same words back to him.

The corners of his mouth twitched slightly, but the smile remained hung on his face. Alas, it seemed that much of the warmth in his smile had been replaced with an aloof coldness.

"Ancestor Yuan, please let them through. These visitors may not be our guests, but we will never reject showing them hospitality, as per our rules." Li Luo waved his hand magnanimously. If they had refused Pei Hao entrance into the headquarters for the Housemeet, a myriad of troubles would arise. The black hand behind the curtain would not sit by idly, and the situation would become even more disastrous. After which, Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e turned to enter the headquarters directly.

When Yuan Qing heard the command, he merely snorted in Pei Hao's direction before waving the guards away.

Pei Hao returned Yuan Qing's icy gaze, merely surveying the surroundings before directing his group through.

Both parties' forces milled into the headquarters as the thunderous drumming continued. The only difference was that the previous beat heralded celebration, but this one was laced with killing intent.

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Within a large ground in the headquarters.

Both parties were seated, with Li Luo and Qing'e sitting at the fore of two rows of tables. On the right was Yuan Qing, Lei Zhang, Cai Wei, and the rest in their faction. The left was naturally filled up by Pei Hao, Xu Tianling, Mo Cheng, and their allies.

Within the field, a lively performance was taking center stage, seeking to lighten the atmosphere. This was also something that had occurred in years past.

The only difference was that there were no revelries nor festive chatter. Everyone knew of the dark undercurrents that underlay today's Housemeet. Thus, the usual, boisterous atmosphere had a particularly depressing backdrop, almost akin to the festivities at a funeral wake. Everyone had frigid expressions. They were clear that even if great effort were taken to maintain this facade, it would all be meaningless before the bitter battle that was about to explode.

Today was the date where a calamity would befall House Luolan.

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Otherside the headquarters, atop a pavilion near the lake.

A tall and well-built man garbed in green robes was sitting cross-legged. A small fire was warming a pot of wine in front of him as he gleefully looked at the bustling House Luolan. He poured himself a cup of tea before lightly chuckling.

"Li Taixuan... I dedicate this cup of wine to you as I send off House Luolan."

His robe was emblazoned with the symbol of a flame, the sigil of House Jiyan.

This man was none other than the House Lord of House Jiyan, Zhu Qinghuo.[1]

He sprinkled the cup of hot wine over the ground before he once again turned his attention towards the direction of House Luolan. A flame could be seen flickering within his pupils.

"House Luolan's Duke expert... Let us finally have a proper battle!"

Chapter 0645: Both Parties Act

The buildup to the Housemeet was extremely torturous. This was undoubtedly caused by the depressing atmosphere that pervaded the area. The field had been split nicely into two by the two tables that faced each other. Everyone knew that the most critical moment was about to arise, where all pretense of civility would be forcibly torn apart. Years of build-up would lead to a pivotal eruption where all would change. Thus, no one could pay attention nor appreciate the ongoing performances.

Time passed in an agonizing fashion.

The sweltering sun that loomed overhead gradually passed over the apex and began to set.

At the same time, the activities entered their second phase. There would be a competition between pavilion masters. In previous years, the final victor would be rewarded immensely by the House Lords.

However, this very same competition would also ignite the atmosphere and allow everyone to let loose.

But things would be a little different this year.

Once friends, they would now face each other as mortal enemies. This was no sparring contest, it was a battle to the death.

Thus, the pavilion master competition would inevitably have an element of bloodshed.

Dong! Dong!

The drums boomed endlessly within the House Luolan Headquarters, gradually increasing in intensity.

Amidst the bluestone paved square, waves of forceful resonant power were emitted as two silhouettes began to exchange blows. Each strike was infused with the intent to kill, any previous semblance of courtesy replaced with sheer bloodlust.

In past years, such a fight would be accompanied by cheers, but the field was completely silent today. Everyone only watched silently, tightly clutching their weapons.

Once the pavilion masters concluded their battles, the Housemeet would reach its climax and most important phase.

The incense lighting ceremony.

Why? Only the rightful House Lord had the right to light it.

House Luolan currently lacked an official House Lord. Whoever wanted to possess the title would have to go through a series of procedures. One had to be confirmed by the watching members of the entire house.

Li Luo and Pei Hao were thus awaiting this pivotal moment.

Amidst the depressed atmosphere, Li Luo remained calm and serene, silently biding his time.

By the end of the competition, the sun had almost set. The entire sky was blanketed by a gloomy darkness, almost reflective of everyone's moods.

At this point, under the watchful eyes of the audience, Li Luo began to rise from his seat.

"Young Lord, there's no need to hurry. We have to discuss the issue with the incense lighting ceremony." Pei Hao piped up with a smirk.

"Although the Young Lord is the House Lords' flesh and blood and possesses the right to inherit the position of House Lord, as per the House Lords' rules, one also possesses the right to struggle for the position if he is able to obtain the recognition of two ancestors."

"Pei Hao is an elder of House Luolan. He has served House Luolan faithfully over the years and I believe that everyone knows this deep down. As the namesake disciple of the House Lords, I believe he has the right to attain the position of House Lord. Mo Cheng and I, as ancestors of the house, have contemplated this issue for a long time. We plan to nominate Pei Hao, and thus, Young lord, we would invite you to take a step back for the incense lighting ceremony," Xu Tianling coolly spoke.

Mo Cheng expressed his assent with a nod. "We invite the Young Lord to obey the rules set by the House Lords, to engage Pei Hao in a bout. The winner will become the House Lord."

Li Luo, Yuan Qing, Lei Zhang, and the rest were fuming at this declaration. These animals had finally made their malicious intent apparent.

Pei Hao similarly stood up and glanced at Li Luo. "Fighting the Young Lord is no different from bullying the weak. If the Young Lord is willing to let Disciple Jiang fight on his behalf, that is also acceptable."

This concession took Li Luo by surprise, and he sized Pei Hao up. This fool wanted to challenge Jiang Qing'e directly? He was even taking the initiative to do so?

It was clear that he had made targeted preparations.

"I don't want to hear the words 'Disciple Jiang' from your filthy mouth. You and I are different. You're merely a namesake disciple who became one through pity. You have to kneel and plead for three days before the Master and Mistress finally relented. Otherwise, why would you be chosen? You were a stray they picked off the street and given a new identity due to their mercy. Nothing else. Nothing more." Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes glared at Pei Hao as her sharp words cut like knives.

The vicious tirade caused the smile on Pei Hao's face to recede, and his gaze turned cold. "You look down upon me? Based on what!? What right do you have?!"

Li Luo waved his hand, seemingly trying to defuse the situation as he attentively spoke up. "No, no, you got it all wrong. She has never looked down upon you. You've overestimated yourself. She has never put you in her eyes."

The looks of the audience turned a little strange. These two were just taking turns to insult him. Was their plan to infuriate him to the point that he might die of a burst vessel?

"Pei Hao. Relax. Words alone cannot change the situation," Xu Tianling reminded him.

Pei Hao sucked in a deep breath, and a hint of wintry frost could be seen in his eyes. He did not continue to bicker, directly jumping into the middle of the bluestone paved square, challenging Li Luo with a scowl.

"Young Lord, please. Since you want to inherit the Master and Mistress' businesses, you have to show strength that is befitting of it. Otherwise... don't blame your senior for taking away what you cherish."

A chilling smile surfaced on Pei Hao's face. "I'm just doing this for the good of the house after all..."

.....

Royal palace.

The First Princess raised her charming face as she admired the crescent moon hanging in the sky. After estimating that it was time, she fell into deep contemplation before eventually waving her hand.

The void behind her rippled, and a figure dressed in red appeared. It was an elder with a benevolent expression and a slightly feminine temperament. He bowed deeply before the princess.

"Your Highness." The red-robed elder smiled.

"Chief Steward Qin, I'm afraid I have to trouble you with a little excursion. Remember, no one is to enter House Luolan. All you need to do is to stay outside and deter any Dukes from taking a step further," the First Princess ordered.

Any Dukes that wanted to enter House Luolan at this point in time was undoubtedly an enemy that craved for the secrets it held within. One could only imagine the rivers of blood that would run through the lanes outside House Luolan tonight.

Chief Steward Qin smiled and nodded before he disappeared like a puff of smoke, completely vanishing.

Sensing the empty air behind her, the First Princess arched one hand behind her shoulder, the other lightly tapping the icy, hard stone block before her.

The winds of change would descend upon the entire city tonight. None could avoid it.

.....

In the district outside the royal palace.

A smoke-like shadow passed through the spacious corridors, ethereal and almost invisible.

All of a sudden, an ice resonance activated and caused the surrounding temperatures to plummet, creating crystals of ice.

A red-robed elder's silhouette was slowed by the sudden onset of frost, phasing into existence in the middle of the corridor.

The elder was naturally Chief Steward Qin.

He was no longer smiling at this point, his eyebrows knitted into a frown as he glanced around. "What tyrannical ice resonant power. Governor Zhong, you seem to have taken a step forward after all these years. "

The cold air started to condense before his very eyes, and a slightly thin middle-aged man eventually took shape.

He was dressed in blue, his long hair tied into a whip that rested against his back. He held an expression of indifference, laced with arrogance developed from holding a position of importance for numerous years.

This was Zhong Jie. He controlled three counties within the Xia Kingdom, a governor who possessed absolute power and influence. His son, Zhong Taiqiu, was the one that Jiang Qing'e had previously bested.

"The night is long, and so there will be suffering. If I may ask, why have you left the royal palace, Chief Steward Qin? Where are you planning to go?" the governor asked with a face full of smiles and a polite tone.

"Alas, I have been ordered to carry out a quick errand. I wonder, why did you stop this old man, Governor Zhong?" Chief Steward Qin replied with a smile.

Governor Zhong sighed. "I too am restrained by the orders from above."

Chief Steward Qin's eyes shrunk as he slowly enunciated, "Does the Regent plan to interfere with House Luolan's internal affairs?"

Governor Zhong was one that wielded considerable might. In fact, he would not even obey the Young Emperor's orders at times. The only individual that he was willing to obey was the one that had elevated him to the position he had today, the Regent himself.

Governor Zhong smiled and did not reply. "I don't want to exchange blows with you, Chief Steward Qin, so I would like to invite you to remain here till everything is resolved tonight. Would that be acceptable to you?"

"Unfortunately, I will have to have a taste of Governor Zhong's tyrannical Demonic Whale and Ice resonances," Chief Steward Qin glumly replied.

As soon as he finished speaking, a gargantuan column of resonant power rose from the body of Chief Steward Qin, causing even the ground beneath him to tremble. At the same time, an endlessly growing world of nature seemed to have come to life in the void behind Governor Zhong. Countless blades of black grass stretched out like pythons towards him, in all of their fanged glory.

Governor Zhong helplessly smirked.

"So be it. I have always wanted to cross blows with your Earth and Ten Thousand Toothed Spirit Grass resonances. At the same time, a frigid and icy world took form in the space behind him. A massive creature could be seen swimming slowly beneath the layer of ice, releasing a low wail.

The two Dukes began to clash right beside the royal palace.

Chapter 0646: Accidental Meeting

House Jinque.

Singing and dancing could be heard from the courtyard. As the House Lord, Si Qing was currently sitting on a chair watching the performance with great gusto.

After which, a series of hurried footsteps could be heard.

"Father, House Luolan's Housemeet has started. I fear that the other houses have taken action. Are we not going to do anything about it?" The ones who spoke were Si Tianming and Si Qiuying. The two siblings had a trace of urgency in their faces.

"Yes, Father! If House Jiyan and House Duze were to enter the fray and defeat House Luolan, I'm afraid House Jinque would be next!" Si Qiuying hurriedly added.

Interrupted in the middle of his entertainment, Si Qing felt a hint of unhappiness. He replied, "The situation with House Luolan is complicated. Things are not as simple as what you might see on the surface—they are not black and white. House Jinque may be on good terms with House Luolan, but is it really to the extent of assisting them in a full blown conflict?"

He looked at Si Tianming. "You've chased Jiang Qing'e's skirt for so long that you've neglected your own cultivation. No wonder everyone looks down upon you. If you truly were able to win her hand, and Jiang Qing'e were to be a member of House Jinque, how could I not step in and assist them?"

Si Tianming helplessly shrugged. "Qing'e has the bearing of a goddess. Unfortunately, I'm simply not worthy of her."

"Tsk. Childish." Si Qing disdainfully shook his head and shifted his gaze towards another direction of Xia City. His unfathomable thoughts were reflected in his deep gaze as he pondered briefly. Afterwards, he waved his hand. "You guys can leave now. I will decide what to do as I have my own plans. These

matters are beyond you. You're not allowed to leave House Jinque tonight for your own good." Hearing their father's command, the siblings could only leave with looks of worry.

As he watched the two leave, the shadow of the tree branch covered Si Qing's face and his eye's flickered.

"Li Taixuan..."

.....

House Duze.

Duze Yan was also currently sitting atop a pavilion within his territory, admiring the beautifully lit-up Xia City.

"Father, House Luolan could be considered to have been grievously poisoned! When are we going to take action? The way I see it, will that brat Li Luo still dare to act unbridled within the college once House Luolan has been exterminated?!" Duze Beixuan said with glee.

On the other hand, Duze Honglian's lips were tightly pursed. Her expression seemed a little complicated as she hesitated.

Duze Yan placed his hands behind his back. No one was able to guess whether he was happy or frustrated at this sight.

Duze Beixuan, on the other hand, continued his tirade. "Father! House Luolan and House Duze are mortal enemies. You cannot let this chance go by! Once we swallow up House Luolan, our strength and influence will undoubtedly rise by another level! You've waited so long for this day!"

Duze Yan turned to face Duze Honglian. "What do you think, Honglian?"

She paused, clearly unable to sort out the countless thoughts in her mind. In the end, she blurted out, "I don't know."

Duze Beixuan shot her an unsatisfactory glance. "Sis! Jiang Qing'e has trampled over you for so many years. This is our best chance to finally repay our debts!"

"Quiet," Duze Yan commanded in an irritated voice.

Duze Yan waved his hand at this point. "Neither of you will leave the house tonight, and we will enact martial law. I will deal with any issues or repercussions. Some things will come to an end tonight."

When he finished speaking, he took a step out and vanished.

Seeing this, Duze Beixuan excitedly said, "Father is finally going to show his hand! That damned House Luolan doesn't even have a Duke. I'll see how that brat Li Luo escapes this time!"

Duze Honglian did not say a single word, and she turned to leave.

.....

On a street not too far away from House Luolan.

The entire area surrounding House Luolan's Headquarters had been cleared out in advance. All of the shops had closed and the streets were barren of any activity. No one was around.

Si Qing appeared on this street at this time.

He walked forward with slow, steady steps before suddenly coming to a halt. His gaze shifted to the top of a stone platform by the side of a shop. An individual was currently sitting there, holding a gourd of wine.

Si Qing was a little taken aback, but he smiled as he walked over. "House Lord Duzé, what a coincidence!"

He took a seat by Duzé Yan to observe and make a decision over this new development.

Duzé Yan had taken out a cup, which he filled full of wine before passing it to Si Qing. "Isn't it a little strange that House Lord Si Qing has turned up here? Aren't you the ones with the best relationship with House Luolan? Are you planning to enter their headquarters?"

Si Qing gave a wry smile. "Can one simply say that the relationship between two Great Houses is the best?"

Duzé Yan quaffed a large mouthful of wine as he leered at Si Qing. "It looks like you are interested in House Luolan's secrets, House Lord Si Qing. I believe that the two brats of House Luolan might find this quite unexpected... After all, they have always thought that House Jinque was a friend of theirs. Your houses have become much closer over the past few years, but could it be that you feel that this is pointless moving forward? Perhaps it's time to change the path you take?"

Si Qing smiled at these incisive questions. "It seems like House Lord Duzé is mocking me for my choices. To be fair, our aim is the same. There's nothing strange about it. If there's anyone to blame, it should be Li Taixuan for leaving behind an object that can move even the most stalwart of hearts. Which Duke wouldn't be tempted by the prospect of being able to understand the King Stage? How could one not feel a sense of greed for that heavenly treasure? Since we had the fortune of meeting here, why don't we take a walk together?"

Duzé Yan gulped down his wine and nodded.

Si Qing chuckled at the sight of this. But right at the moment the chortle left his lips, thunder could be heard booming in the sky. Immediately after, the vicinity began to rapidly rise in temperature, and a steel fist imbued with fire and thunder ripped through the void with tyrannical and vicious force, punching right towards Si Qing.

Golden light quickly shrouded Si Qing's body, and the manifestation of a Golden Sparrow appeared behind him. The bird's wings slashed downwards, imbued with an inscrutable sharpness, colliding directly with the fist.

Bang!

Terrifying amounts of resonant power washed across their surroundings when the attacks collided. Interestingly, the streets and houses were untouched by this raw display of force. Instead, only the

constantly rippling and distortion of space that remained was testament to the alarming strength each party had displayed.

Si Qing's smile seemed to have receded slightly at this point. "House Lord Duze, why have you acted against me?"

Duze Yan's expression remained cold and silent.

"Are you so greedy that you want to monopolize all of House Luolan's treasures for yourself?" Si Qing's voice also gradually turned frosty.

This finally elicited a response. "If I were to tell you that my aim is to prevent you from dealing with House Luolan, would you believe me?"

Si Qing was taken aback by this statement, and he sarcastically replied, "Have you gone mad, sir? House Duze and House Luolan are mortal enemies! It's a common fact known to everyone! And now you tell me that you want to protect House Luolan? Were all those years of strife and battle just a farce?"

Duze Yan emotionlessly replied, "It was not an act. We were actually fighting."

"Then did you knock your head somewhere and go mad?" Si Qing felt that this situation was incongruous with his expectations. Their houses had often fought bitterly, and now he was being stopped by this damned House Lord after he had decided to act? He had to be a lunatic!

"I'm not crazy." Duze Yan's expression was a little dour as he icily scowled. "It's a promise I had with Li Taixuan."

Si Qing felt that he was the one going crazy now, and fury raged within his eyes. "You and Li Taixuan had a secret agreement? Didn't you despise him with every fiber of your being? He'd fly over to give you a beating whenever he was free. Has there been any Duke in the history of the Xia Kingdom who has been battered more times than you in open combat? Damn it, don't tell me that he pummeled the friendship into you?!" Even an esteemed House Lord was reduced to crude language at this outrageous sight.

"You talk a lot of crap. Do you know what our agreement was? I told him that if he, Li Taixuan, could trounce me twenty times in battle, I'd promise him a single favor," Duze Yan icily explained. This left Si Qing completely speechless. The reason he had been thumped so soundly in the past was because of this challenge?

"Duze Yan, do you really think that holding me back here can protect House Luolan? You should know better than me who is behind all this," Si Qing continued.

Duze Yan took a step forward, and the void behind him rippled. A world of fire and thunder manifested behind his back. Right in the middle of the realm was a massive Duke Bergfried.

"I don't care about anything else. My agreement was that I'd do something about it. Whether House Luolan can be protected is not my problem anymore."

Chapter 0647: Beat to the Punch

House Luolan's Headquarters, great square.

Under the watchful eyes of the audience, Li Luo lithely vaulted into the middle of the square like a spirited monkey, directly facing off against Pei Hao.

The frenzied beating of drums rang out once again with his arrival.

Yuan Qing, Cai Wei, Lei Zhang, Yan Lingqing, and all those on the side of Li Luo had their expressions turn heavy. They felt worried for him. There was a significant disparity in strength and cultivation between the two.

Although Li Luo's progress had been swift, the chasm between the two was not so easily bridged. Even though Li Luo had entered the Fiend Palace Tier, that was a stage that Pei Hao had reached many years ago!

This battle was not one that was fair to begin with.

However, they knew that this was not a time to quibble over such things. This was a life and death struggle for the position of House Lord, so no one would be concerned about decorum or impartiality at this point in time. These were childish thoughts reserved for the weak.

The good thing, of course, was that Jiang Qing'e could step in.

Even if Li Luo lost to Pei Hao, Jiang Qing'e could still turn the tide. As a result, they all felt that Li Luo's actions were just the start of a show, which restored some degree of relief.

It might be a loss of face if Jiang Qing'e stepped in, but it was still better than letting Pei Hao have the last laugh.

"Young Lord, I'm surprised to see such bravery coming from you." Pei Hao leered at Li Luo, his cocky smile appearing once again.

"You think you've already got the cat in the bag, huh?" Li Luo retorted.

"You have managed to enter the Fiend Palace Tier in the short span of a year, Young Lord. Your cultivation speed truly leaves me in the dust. If you had another two years of time, I would have undoubtedly been surpassed by you. Alas, that is a huge if." Pei Hao shook his head.

Li Luo smiled.

"What? You don't believe me?" Pei Hao's grin became larger. "Li Luo, do you truly think that my strength has stagnated all these years? That I have not made any progress? Since you know how to hide and bide your strength, can I not do the same?" After he finished speaking, Pei Hao executed a single hand seal. His resonant power flooded out from him, causing a tempestuous wind to sweep across all in the square. His resonant power was golden in color and possessed an incomparable sharpness to it. It was as if it was a peerless sword, capable of rending the skies and the earth with but a single swing.

Furthermore, what surprised the audience the most was that they could see two heavenly pearls condensing behind him, frantically sucking in the worldly natural energy around him like a vortex.

Forceful resonant power swept forth from him that caused everyone to feel a sense of pressure.

"Two-Pearl Stage?" Yuan Qing stood up with a steely, green expression. "Pei Hao has already broken into the Heavenly Pearl Stage?" Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing glanced at each other, ugly expressions forming on their faces.

Li Luo and Pei Hao originally had a huge difference in power to begin with. Now the gap had widened considerably, to a point where it was basically impossible to bridge the difference.

The atmosphere around Li Luo's faction had turned somber.

Whereas Pei Hao's side was full of smiles.

When Jiang Qing'e saw this, her clear, golden eyes rippled slightly, but no change of expression could be seen on her fair cheeks. Pei Hao having hid his power wasn't really surprising...

In any case, whether Pei Hao was at the Fiend Finisher Tier or the Heavenly Pearl Stage made not much difference to Li Luo.

During the Holy Grail Meet, Li Luo had managed to crush a Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other. This demonstrated that his trump card clearly far surpassed the power of the Heavenly Pearl Stage.

On the square, Li Luo looked as though he was taken aback by Pei Hao's sudden explosion of strength. He nodded and said in praise, "Not bad. I actually believed that you hadn't made any progress. That would have been too humiliating for House Luolan, and tongues might've wagged. How could someone with such pathetic talent have the right to become the House Lord? Would House Luolan have any future left in that case?"

Pei Hao remained expressionless and did not bicker with Li Luo. He waved his palm, and the golden sword that hung on his ear flew into his grasp. A windstorm formed around it and then it transformed into a longsword that he firmly wielded.

"Time to act, Li Luo. Don't waste my time," he said grimly.

"Well, in this case..."

Li Luo's palm brushed over the scarlet-red bracelet as he said within his heart, "Little Three, carry out the Lesser Heavenly Resonance technique."

A roar of dissatisfaction could be heard from the depths of the bracelet. It was completely annoyed with that nickname.

Regardless of its discontent, a ferocious amount of violent resonant power poured forth. With the usage of the Heavenly Libation Chant, it transformed into a power that Li Luo could control.

On the surface, red runes seemed to have appeared on his body, and his pupils gradually turned scarlet.

After he had broken into the Fiend Palace Tier, the amount of energy his body could contain had also significantly increased. Although the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf's energy still possessed a corrupting effect on his mind, his situation felt much better than the time at the Holy Grail Meet.

"Well then. I won't be courteous."

As he uttered that sentence, he lifted a foot before stepping down.

Bang!

The earth trembled and then Li Luo barrelled out like a crimson light, causing the space around him to shatter from sheer speed. A frightening pressure exuded from his body as he no longer bothered to conceal the extent of his power, which erupted from him and stirred the skies.

This startling development caused everyone's expressions to change!

Including Pei Hao's!

The strength that Li Luo had just demonstrated far exceeded the Heavenly Pearl Stage!

"So it turns out that this was Li Luo's trump card?!" Pei Hao screamed within his heart. Rumble!

As the space around him was torn apart, Li Luo approached Pei Hao like a ghostly figure, too fast and too ephemeral to see. He formed a fist that was shrouded with majestic amounts of blood-red energy, looking like an ancient, feral wolf come to life, snarling with fangs and claws outstretched.

Pei Hao did not hesitate either. With his golden sword in hand, sword light and energy coalesced upon his weapon, eventually condensing into a single lethal sword edge that he hacked down with.

The azurestone tiling of the square was suddenly cut into two.

Bang!

The sword light was extremely tyrannical, possessing a berserk spirit that even seemed to surpass the blood-red energy. The two individuals clashed directly, sword light struggling against blood-red energy. The roles had been reversed as with the help of the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf, Li Luo now possessed Lesser Heavenly Resonance Stage power!

Pei Hao with his two-pearl Heavenly Pearl Stage cultivation simply could not compare!

BANG!

In just two breaths of time, the golden sword light was forcibly shattered into tens of thousands of fragments, creating countless holes in the ground where they landed.

Pei Hao's expression changed and he attempted to retreat.

However, the blood-red fist manifestation created by Li Luo had not dissipated! It mercilessly crashed onto Pei Hao!

Bang!

Low gasps resounded throughout the square with countless shocked gazes falling upon Pei Hao, who had been sent flying by a single strike. He miserably crashed into the ground, leaving behind a long furrow along the ground before finally being stopped upon a massive collision against a gigantic, stone pillar. The pillar exploded into pieces, burying him in debris.

The entire square fell silent.

Cai Wei, Yan Lingqing, Yuan Qing, and the rest watched with jaws agape, staring at Li Luo.

Was the Housemeet's final battle over just like this?

.....

Just as House Luolan's battle started.

Golden Dragon Bank, Discussion Hall.

Yu Hongxi was currently seated with Lu Qing'er by her side.

As Yu Hongxi surveyed the room calmly, her gaze swept across the table from Ning Que on the right, passing by each figure one after another. After a moment, she lightly tapped the table before her as she coldly questioned, "Where is Elder Han Long?"

Chapter 0648: The Winds Move

"Where is Elder Han Long? I will not repeat myself again."

Yu Hongxi's chilly voice reverberated around the Discussion Hall. Any whispering had immediately ceased, and the senior officials of the Golden Dragon Bank glanced at each other while seated upright.

"Keke. Could he have forgotten? Elder Han Long went out to deliver some goods to the West Flame branch half a month ago. Looking at the time, he should probably still be rushing back." Someone laughed as the rest were deep in thought.

Yu Hongxi turned to face the source of the laughter, Vice President Ning Que.

She glared at him with a sharp expression before slowly enunciating, "Could it be that he couldn't make it back in time... Or does he have other matters to deal with?"

Vice President Ning Que looked a little stunned. "What other matters could he deal with?"

Yu Hongxi didn't bother to beat around the bush. "Today is House Luolan's Housemeet. I don't wish for anyone in the Golden Dragon Bank to stick their fingers where they don't belong. We are a neutral faction, and if I am to be blunt, if I find out that anyone is trying to fish in troubled waters... then they can get the hell out of the Golden Dragon Bank."

Listening to her icy words caused the hearts of many of the senior executives to turn cold with apprehension, completely speechless.

Yu Hongxi had tightly controlled the Golden Dragon Bank in the Xia Kingdom for many years, her prestige and influence well rooted into the hearts of their members.

Ning Que, on the other hand, remained unflustered, only grinning in response. "Now that the President has made such a declaration, how would anyone here dare to do so? However, President, you must also remember that the Golden Dragon Bank is a neutral party. From your words, I feel like you might be a little biased towards House Luolan."

Hearing the vice president's piercing words caused shock to arise in the hearts of the other executives, but they calmed down. Although Yu Hongxi held significant prestige here, Ning Que was of a similar stature. He was the only one who had the capabilities of contesting her in the past, and he also had similar backing in the headquarters of the Golden Dragon Bank.

Yu Hongxi was unperturbed by this. "If the Vice President feels that my methods are not in line with the bank's code of conduct, you can lodge your complaint with headquarters and get me impeached."

This was met with a laugh. "President, you are too serious. I was merely asking a simple question. Don't mind me."

She declined to bicker further with him.

Lu Qing'er had a trace of worry in her eyes. Elder Han Long's disappearance was too coincidental.

In fact, she had never expected that it would be him. That elder had a low profile within the bank and was considered to be a centrist, never really involving himself in the power struggle between her mother and Ning Que.

Being out for a delivery during such a critical period of time was indeed suspicious.

It seemed as though his neutral stance and low profile was all an intentional act. He had probably aligned himself with Ning Que in secret.

"What a cunning, old fox," Lu Qing'er snorted coldly.

"Mother," she lightly called out.

Yu Hongxi did not reply, merely patting her hand and proceeding with the meeting.

...

In a forest far away from the Xia Kingdom.

A large number of individuals were sitting around campfires, a Golden Dragon Bank banner identifying the group planted in the ground nearby.

Within the group was an emerald-robed old man. He had a genial expression as he joyfully chatted with the people around him, whilst the people treated him with utmost respect.

The festivities went on for a significant amount of time before they started to disperse and rest for the night.

The elder then raised his head and observed the dark sky above. Sensing that it was time, he slowly placed down the piece of roasted meat in his hand, quietly returning to his own tent.

The surroundings gradually turned silent as all went to sleep.

At this moment, a blurry figure soundlessly dashed out of the camp and the forest, rushing towards the direction of the Xia Kingdom with breakneck speed.

Yet right as he moved, he heard the peal of laughter ring out not far from him. "Hehe. Isn't that Elder Han Long? Are you planning to leave on your own? What about the escort?" The blurry figure ground to a halt, and the emerald-robed elder glanced in the direction of the voice. A figure was standing there, chuckling as he stared at him.

"Branch President Lu Cao? Why are you here?" Han Long's face was full of surprise as he looked at that figure. This was the branch president he had met previously to drop off the delivery. Why was he here right now?

"Ah. Well... I received President Yu's order that if I were to encounter Elder Han Long's group, I should follow you back to Xia City to make a report. She even extolled me to ensure that we went together," Branch President Lu Cao explained attentively.

Elder Han Long's complexion turned gloomy. This particular branch president was someone with significant stature within the Golden Dragon Bank and wasn't any weaker than him in terms of strength.

His timely appearance had to be related to Yu Hongxi's prescient arrangements.

She obviously knew of his assignment... and he had even thought that his acting had misled her. Clearly not.

That woman was unfathomable.

"Hehe. Elder Han Long, are you in a rush to return to Xia City? If so, let me accompany you," Branch President Lu Cao offered sincerely.

Han Long's heart and mind were in turmoil before he finally revealed a forced smile. "No, no... I was feeling a little bottled up whilst within my tent. Thus, I wanted to enjoy the gorgeous night scenery..."

"Oh... so that's the case." Lu Cao grinned as he walked over. "Well, the night is long and weary. Why don't we have a chat? It might relieve some of your boredom."

Han Long gritted his teeth and helplessly agreed.

Yu Hongxi had schemes that ran deep. He had left more than half a month in advance, but his ploy was still discovered. She had even employed means to ensure his absolute compliance with her commands...

.....

Astral Sage College.

In the lush shade of a leafy grove, a black shadow passed through swiftly like a civet in its territory. Moonlight pierced through the dense forest and coincidentally shined upon it, revealing an individual tightly cloaked in black from head to toe, and a curvaceous body that would incite the lust of any man.

Her shadow lightly vaulted through the trees to her destination. This individual possessed a beautiful and aloof face and was none other than Ye Chengying of the Seven Astral Pillars.

When she approached the gates of the college, she paused, not advancing any further. Instead, she coldly glanced towards the shadows. "You'd dare to lurk in front of me with your pitiful strength?" At the same time, the shadows coalesced into the figure of a human.

It was Xin Fu.

He looked at Ye Chengying, his pale face leaking out a bitter smile. "Elder Sister Ye, there is no need for you to participate in tonight's proceedings."

"Do you not know that this is the command of the house?" she coldly retorted.

"So what? You don't have to go," Xin Fu continued.

"Psh. Do you think you can hold me back?" Ye Chengying raised the dagger in her hand, and a black light started to coat it. She vanished as quickly as she finished speaking and reappeared by Xin Fu in the blink of an eye, weapon pressed to his throat.

The blade glinted with a chilly light. With a mere push, it would penetrate his neck.

However, Xin Fu remained unmoved, only quietly observing her.

"Hmph. Do you really believe I won't dare to kill you? You have obstructed the House Lord's command. Even if you die, he will not blame me," Ye Chengying declared icily.

"...Li Luo is my friend," Xin Fu finally sputtered out after deep thought.

"The notorious House Lanling actually has an upright young lord?" Ye Chengying sarcastically mocked.

"Well, I'm from the Fairness & Justice Squad after all," he joked before staring at her squarely in her eyes. "You know that I dislike House Lanling. I don't like their emotionless and cruel rules. During that brutal elimination competition that year, I risked being put to death by my impassive father to bring you, who had been destined for death after being eliminated, back from the brink."

A trace of emotion flashed past her merciless gaze riddled with killing intent. She gripped the black dagger even more tightly after hearing those words.

This tense atmosphere lasted for a while before Ye Chengying finally removed her dagger from Xin Fu's throat.

"Bring out all your friends, then. I want to see if a group of One Star Hall students can restrain me. How could you have become so naive to believe these weaklings could handle the situation?" She glanced at the little grove behind Xin Fu.

With that, a series of figures milled out.

Yu Lang, Bai Mengmeng, Qin Zhulu, Bai Mengmeng, Zhao Kuo, and the rest appeared.

Yu Lang grinned. "Xin Fu, couldn't you have told us earlier that Sister Ye is your old acquaintance? Your words gave my little a heart a complete fright!"

Ye Chengying's eyes coldly swept over the group before her expression shifted in shock at the last figure that had appeared from the forest.

"Qiao Yu?" A plainly dressed, long-legged girl with a head of ear-length, silver hair had strode out. She was the one who had caused Ye Chengying to feel a little taken aback. After all, Qiao Yu was also a member of the Seven Astral Pillars. It was inconceivable that she had appeared right here at this time.

"It looks like your preparations have been more than sufficient after all... considering you invited her along." Ye Chengying glared at Xin Fu. If negotiations broke down, he would have violence to back him up.

Qiao Yu's expression was indifferent as she completely ignored Ye Chengying. Instead, she turned to face Bai Mengmeng. "Hey, my job's done. Pay up!"

...

Just as Xin Fu and the rest were obstructing Ye Chengying, there was another development right outside the college. Mentor Chi Chan had changed from her usual robes and was currently making her way down the stone steps of the school.

The frosty, night wind blew past, causing her veil to ripple and reveal her white and delicate chin.

She did not enter Xia City, instead making her way in the southwestern direction.

House Lanling's headquarters was hidden deep within the mountain range there.

Chapter 0649: Conflict Within The Gilded Palace

Astral Sage College, Gilded Palace.

Vice Principal Su Xin was tiredly massaging her eyebrows with one hand and holding a letter of resignation in the other.

"Vice Principal, Mentor Chi Chan's actions have been too rash. Even though she has handed in her resignation, how can that wash away all traces of her association with the Astral Sage College? Once she participates in House Luolan's business, how will the other factions of the Xia Kingdom take us as a neutral party any longer?" An angry voice rang out from one end of the Gilded Palace's long table.

The Violet Vibrance mentors turned to the source and found out it was a stern-faced Shen Jinxiao who had made that comment.

His words quickly elicited approval amongst the mentors, and they nodded deeply. His words had hit the situation right on the nail. Mentor Chi Chan might have given up her faculty position, but her association with the college was not so easily erased.

Additionally, how could she simply resign and immediately go to battle on behalf of House Luolan?

Everyone would require a clear explanation from the college!

Vice Principal Su Xin remained impassive as she replied, her refreshing voice snapping people out of their thoughts, "Then how does Mentor Shen Jinxiao propose we act?"

Shen Jinxiao respectfully replied, "I recommend we dispatch a few Violet Vibrance mentors to capture and return her to the college. If she wants to resign, it will be after House Luolan's Housemeet."

His declaration caused whispers to erupt throughout the Gilded Palace. Some agreed, some objected, and debate raged for a while.

"Bullshit. Once someone resigns, they naturally no longer have any affiliation with the college. What do you think a college is? A den of infamous bandits? One can only join but never leave?" At this point an irritable voice spoke out. It was Mentor Huo Xu who had directly refuted Mentor Shen Jinxiao's point.

Shen Jinxiao frowned. "Mentor Huo Xu, I know that Jiang Qing'e is your student, but the current situation is about maintaining order and calm! Our personal relationships cannot influence the actions we take."

"The college has its own sets of rules. That's to be expected. However, I'm just saying that everyone here has the right to resign. You don't have to use such a nonsensical answer to cover up your true intentions." Mentor Huo Xu coldly snorted as she glared towards Vice Principal Su Xin. At the same time, she tossed a letter of resignation in her direction.

"Vice Principal Su Xin, I QUIT!"

This scene left the other Violet Vibrance mentors completely dumbfounded. Two mentors had chosen to resign on the same day. Even a single resignation was rarely seen in the college.

Shen Jinxiao immediately turned gloomy. "Mentor Huo Xu, the way I see it, you're just an annoying troublemaker!"

"Mind your own business, you craven fool!" Huo Xu immediately thundered.

"Not my business? The way you're acting, you're trampling all over the good name of our college! As an esteemed member of the faculty, how could I not speak out!?" Shen Jinxiao argued back.

"Aren't you just targeting Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e, hoping to watch House Luolan fall into ruin?" Huo Xu retorted.

"You and Chi Chan are only doing this because you value their potential. Perhaps you think they might reach the King Stage and you want to first sow seeds?" Shen Jinxiao continued to pointedly accuse.

Of course, his words were met with a furious comeback. "I do what I WANT!"

The numerous Violet Vibrance mentors seeing the two bicker helplessly shook their heads.

"Enough! Silence!" At this point in time, Vice Principal Su Xin could no longer handle this, slamming her palm onto the table with a gaze cold enough to freeze someone.

Seeing the usually benign vice principal go into a rage caused even the frenzied Huo Xu to quiet down and take a seat.

Shen Jinxiao similarly had an aggrieved expression.

"Mentor Huo Xu, I will not accept your resignation. Although you have the right to do so and I cannot stop you, if news of this were to spread, how will anyone ever believe that our college is neutral," Vice Principal Su Xin asked in a low tone.

Huo Xu listened, but before she could speak her mind, she was dragged back by one of the Violet Vibrance mentors she was on good terms with.

Shen Jinxiao heaved a sigh of relief before asking, "What about the issue with Mentor Chi Chan? How are we dealing with it?"

Vice Principal Su Xin shot him a glance. "Mentor Chi Chan has already left the college and thus we will leave her be. We will not be sending teams to arrest her. Do you know how bad that will reflect upon

us? Regardless, this matter of resignations will cease right now. Such malignant trends will no longer continue!" Shen Jinxiao frowned, clearly displeased at the final decision. However, this was Vice Principal Su Xin's decision to make, and he could only agree.

"Due to the situation in Xia City, no mentor will be allowed to leave the college," Vice Principal Su Xin warned.

Everyone merely nodded nonchalantly. They already knew the college's rules by heart and were not interested in dipping their toes into the murky situation with House Luolan.

Vice Principal Su Xin's gaze eventually landed upon Shen Jinxiao. Regardless, he could only indifferently nod his head.

After reminding everyone once more, she adjourned the meeting.

When the group of Violet Vibrance mentors left the Gilded Palace, Vice Principal Su Xin looked at the letter of resignation in her hand and felt a sense of helplessness and a headache as she sighed deeply and waved her hand. "Secretly survey and monitor Mentor Shen Jinxiao's lodgings. You must absolutely prevent him from leaving the college."

After she spoke, the void behind her rippled and dispersed.

After which, she heaved a sigh and observed the horizon outside of the Gilded Palace, looking in the direction of Xia City.

To be honest, she had already done the most she could within the rules of the college. It was her being partial towards Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e. Otherwise, Chi Chan could not have left the college so easily without a sound.

Chi Chan being able to leave was a tacit agreement on her part.

Hopefully, those two brats could preserve House Luolan.

She had done her best.

...

After Shen Jinxiao left the Gilded Palace, he made his way back to his abode.

Entering his room, he formed a hand sign and a rune lit up on the wall. It then spread to cover the entire room, isolating it from the world and preventing anyone from surveying what was going on.

After which, he glanced out the window in the direction of several shadows, smirking callously.

He could feel a ripple of spatial movement within the shadows, making it clear that someone was observing him. It must have been an arrangement of Vice Principal Su Xin, worrying that he would scurry off and interfere with House Luolan's Housemeet.

"Vice Principal, oh, Vice Principal... it looks like you've severely underestimated me." Shen Jinxiao sinisterly grinned and shook his head. After which, he made his way underground to a secret room.

This secret room was pitch-black and had quite a depressing atmosphere to it.

Shen Jinxiao made his way to a black altar within the room and sat cross-legged atop a stone platform before it. Raising his palm, the altar seamlessly split into two, and a jade case slowly arose from within. Opening it, one could see a beating heart stored securely inside!

No... it wasn't a complete heart, but rather just half of one.

Shen Jinxiao focused upon the beating half heart as he executed yet another hand sign with both his hands. Saturnine rays of light shot out from his fingertips, directly piercing into the organ.

At this point in time, numerous images flashed past his eyes.

What he saw took him by surprise and made him chuckle. "Li Luo is full of surprises. So this turns out to be his trump card, a form of external power that he borrowed? Looking at how fiendish it is, the source ought to be some sort of spirit beast. In fact, it even seems familiar..."

Shen Jinxiao mused over this for a few seconds before his eyebrows jumped. "This is the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf that was locked up in the Umbra Cave! Is this the workings of the Principal?"

The spirit beast's power could not be borrowed without cost. It required a wondrous technique to transform it into something a human could use, and only the Principal possessed this capability.

"Pei Hao, oh, Pei Hao... you are truly useless. If we had to rely on you, you wouldn't even be able to beat Li Luo nor Jiang Qing'e! Lucky for you, you have my assistance from the shadows."

Shen Jinxiao sneered as a drop of blood essence flew out from his fingertip. The blood essence wriggled, transforming into some sort of blood-red curse mark before sinking right into the half-heart before him.

"Now I'll bestow upon you a little bit of my strength..." Within the depths of the strange room, Shen Jinxiao's cold whisper quietly dispersed into the wind.

Chapter 0650: Pei Hao's Backer

House Luolan's Headquarters, the square.

The entire place was silent as shocked looks were shot at the collapsed stone pillar. On the other side was an extremely calm Li Luo, contrasting against the storm in their hearts.

Especially Xu Tianling, whose jaw was agape.

No one had expected that this supposedly unfair battle would end in a blitz-like strike with an unimaginable result.

The two-pearl Heavenly Pearl Pei Hao had been sent flying by a single blow from Li Luo?

Cai Wei was so taken aback that she covered her mouth with her hand as she looked at Yan Lingqing, whose eyes were like saucers. "How did the Young Lord become so ferocious?"

Yan Lingqing paused for a moment. "The resonant power Li Luo's body is emitting seems to have reached the lesser Heavenly Resonance Stage..."

"The characteristic of this resonant power was extremely berserk, a far cry from the Young Lord's usual resonant power... It's most likely some sort of external aid," Yuan Qing commented.

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing didn't feel that Li Luo utilizing some sort of external aid was cheating. In any case, Pei Hao wanted to use his superior cultivation to suppress Li Luo in a supposedly fair battle anyway. Naturally, there were no qualms in utilizing other means to achieve victory. Being able to effectively harness extraneous factors was also a power in and of itself.

This wasn't some sort of friendly debate between students in a college.

This was a battle of life and death. No methods would be spared.

Jiang Qing'e similarly focused upon Li Luo. She could feel the mad power surging out of his body, and it was the first time she had personally seen it.

During the Holy Grail Meet, the reason Li Luo had managed to beat the Greater Heavenly Disaster Class Other was likely due to this ability.

The usage of the power had significant aftereffects and had even caused serious damage to him when he had used it previously. Thus, Li Luo would not lightly tap upon this power. On the other hand, it seemed that he had immediately activated it to deal with the Heavenly Pearl Stage Pei Hao.

It was a move likely born out of necessity as the gap between the two was too large. A Fiend Palace Tier could not hold a candle before a true Heavenly Pearl Stage after all.

Jiang Qing'e turned to face the shattered stone pillar. Li Luo's strike was unexpected, and Pei Hao should have suffered critical damage. Still, thinking that Pei Hao was killed off immediately would be a little far-fetched. He had been preparing all sorts of trump cards for years, and it would be unbelievable that he had no response to this.

Li Luo, on the other hand, continued to observe the situation coolly; however, he did not relax his guard.

BANG!

At this point, the silence was broken. A giant stone fragment shot out from the rubble, flying directly at Li Luo like a missile.

The projectile disintegrated with a single strike from Li Luo, and he continued to focus intently at the heap that Pei Hao was trapped under.

At this moment, the debris of boulders began to slowly fragment and crumble into dust as frightening resonant power surged out.

BANG!

The rubble instantly pulverized into dust, slowly floating in the air, suspended by the sheer density of resonant power being emitted.

A single figure began to walk out slowly.

“Wow!”

Cheers resounded in the square from Pei Hao's supporters. They were instantly delighted at this scene.

On the other hand, Li Luo's faction was much more somber in comparison.

Pei Hao waved his hand before everyone's eyes, and all of the dust surrounding him was blown away, revealing his ragged appearance.

His upper robes were completely torn and the indentation of a fist could be clearly seen on his chest, undoubtedly left behind by Li Luo's feral strike. At the same time, the crowd also discovered that countless black runes had appeared on his chest. Each of these runes was the size of an ant, but they were spread throughout his body like a series of black chains. In the brief span of a few breaths, Pei Hao's body was completely covered in them.

"Young Lord, you have concealed your strength greatly," Pei Hao indifferently commented.

"You're not too bad yourself," Li Luo dryly replied as he carefully inspected the black runes that had spread along Pei Hao's blood vessels. With the appearance of this strange art, Pei Hao's body gave out resonant power undulations that were rising at an extremely terrifying speed.

This was what was giving him so much confidence.

To everyone's surprise, Pei Hao's resonant power stage began to surge, very quickly reaching the Lesser Heavenly Resonance Stage. However, it didn't stop there.

Li Luo frowned as Pei Hao's resonant power underwent explosive strides forward. It had to also be a form of borrowed strength... but where was it coming from? He himself had borrowed strength from the Three-tailed Heavenly Wolf, and that had required Principal Pang's assistance in transforming its energy into a form his body could handle. So where exactly had Pei Hao managed to get such an ability?

As he pondered over these thoughts, Li Luo waved his palm, and the Golden-Jade Onyx-Elephant Blade appeared in his hand.

He took a step forward without hesitation, shattering the azurestone tiling beneath him. His figure vanished as he dashed towards Pei Hao, only leaving behind a stream of red resonant power in his wake. He hacked down at Pei Hao With tyrannical might.

SWOOSH!

Pei Hao retaliated with a single upswing, and the golden sword in his hand emitted countless beams of sword light that directly clashed against Li Luo.

Sounds of metal clashing rang out as violent waves of resonant power collided and raged in the square.

In a short span of time, both parties exchanged tens of blows with no clear victor, but there was a problem. Pei Hao's battle strength was still rising. His strikes increased in both power and cruelty with each exchange. Each time a sword light whistled past, its power was incrementally higher than the one before. With his final blow, the resonant power undulations that he emitted peaked at the limit of the Lesser Heavenly Resonance Stage.

His very breath caused the worldly natural energy around him to roil and move, as though he had become a force of nature. At the same time, the entire sky seemed to have turned golden, with countless sword lights flowing through it, giving form to the world with his very existence.

This scene caused Yuan Qing's expression to warp. He was at the Lesser Heavenly Resonance Stage himself, but he could sense that Pei Hao was stronger than him.

"What sort of method did Pei Hao employ for his strength to increase so much?" Yuan Qing and the rest were completely taken aback, gloomy expressions on all their faces as they clenched their fists tightly.

On the square, Pei Hao pointed his sword towards Li Luo as he distinctly felt the power coursing through him. It was truly amazing! A maddened guffaw erupted from his lips. "Young Lord... It looks like the position of the House Lord will belong to me. Regardless of whether it's you or Jiang Qing'e, neither of you are my match!"

Li Luo pouted slightly. "Sheesh. You're merely borrowing some sort of external aid, and now you're drunk on power already? How miserable can you be, feeling arrogant over some misgained ability. Although I don't know how you did it, I'm sure you have to pay a pound of flesh for it."

Listening to Li Luo's piercing words, Pei Hao's gaze turned forlorn. Indeed, the cost was nothing to scoff at. Feeling only half of a heart was something that constantly reminded him of the immense price he had paid. He simply could not lose this fight today. If he did, he would lose everything he ever had, so even a greater price wouldn't matter.

"I had saved this move to deal with Jiang Qing'e, but who would have expected it would be you who would bear it?" Pei Hao poisonously stared at Li Luo with a look dripping with murderous intent.

"However, don't worry. Whatever price I pay will be repaid tenfold with your body."

"That's funny," Li Luo chortled.

Pei Hao looked sullen as he raised his sword, which had been emitting sword light, pointing it right at Li Luo once again. "Do you really think that this is the move I've spent countless years preparing?"

When he finished speaking, the entire sky blazed with golden light. Piercing sounds of swords crying out could be heard within the light, seemingly sentient. Countless visible streams of sword energy began to roil, and before long, they condensed into a massive, golden eagle that floated behind Pei Hao.

When everyone saw this, they sucked in a deep breath of air and ugly expressions surfaced on their faces.

"Worldly natural energy moving with but a thought... this is the Greater Heavenly Resonance Stage!"