

Resonance 71

Chapter 0071: I'm Afraid Of Jumping

At the foot of Whitespirit Mountain, the light arrow had stunned the entire crowd into silence.

They stared at the screen agog, fear and disbelief plain on their faces.

What had they just seen...

The undisputedly dominant Shi Huang had been shot down by a bow that Li Luo had pulled out of God knows where...

It was like a dream.

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing's rosy lips were parted in surprise as well. They closed their eyes, then opened them again. The screen was still the same—Shi Huang had been shot down.

"What's happening?" Cai Wei asked a little blankly.

An instant ago, she was worrying about Li Luo's elimination, and now Shi Huang was the one squawking on the ground.

It was too much for Cai Wei's ample chest to take.

Yan Lingqing bit her lip. "I think Li Luo has beaten Shi Huang."

Cai Wei slowly leaned back on her chair, a small smile spreading across her lovely features. "From now on, who will dare to call the Young Lord a mere mascot?"

Although only for a month, Cai Wei had been looking after Li Luo, and she was quite fond of him. She treated him like her own brother.

And as the overseer of House Luolan's affairs in the Tianshu Province, Cai Wei knew very well how much Li Luo had struggled with his cultivation.

Besides his endless capacity for spirit liquids and purifying lights, Cai Wei found the Young Lord very likeable despite his shenanigans.

She was filled with joy and relief at his miraculous win.

From now on, those within House Luolan would not disdain him anymore.

Yan Lingqing nodded. Li Luo's performance today was sensational. He must have been hiding it before.

"The Young Lord is so different from his parents," Yan Lingqing remarked.

Those two had dominated their entire generation in the Xia Kingdom. They were stellar, whereas Li Luo was much more restrained. Those that did not know better might even think that Jiang Qing'e was more like their child, and perhaps Li Luo was adopted...

"The issue with the blank palaces affected the Young Lord greatly. Even after he solved it, he opted to stay out of the spotlight. He keeps his secrets up his sleeve, it makes him feel safe. He grows quietly, with less frivolity," Cai Wei observed.

"I think that if not for Song Yunfeng and Shi Huang forcing his hand, the Young Lord would probably have settled for a peaceful top 10," Yan Lingqing said wryly. It was entirely possible, given Li Luo's personality. His goal was to enter the Astral Sage College. First or not, he didn't care.

"I don't think it's a bad thing though," Cai Wei said with a gentle smile.

Yan Lingqing rolled her eyes at her. "You're too soft on him."

"But he's so handsome." Cai Wei smiled.

...

"Hahaha!"

As the two women were enjoying a quiet moment of happy relief, the old dean in the main pavilion was laughing uproariously. He shook the entire tent with his laughter, until even those outside were looking over.

"Oh my, truly the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree!"

His face was flushed with energy, all traces of fatigue and worry gone. He slapped the table hard. "See that?" he demanded of Governor Shi. "The power of my Southwind Academy?"

Governor Shi seemed preoccupied with his tea, although the eyes reflected on the surface of the cup were furious.

A completely unexpected turn of events.

Li Luo had been on the verge of losing. And then a miraculous arrow.

All these years of planning, shot down by one arrow. Governor Shi tried his best to suppress his rage. And failed. "Can you be QUIET!"

"QUIET, you old plank!"

The dean's temper matched his. "You shriveled-up onion, you think you've the right to decide when I talk?" Governor Shi's face was terrible to behold. His terrifying resonant power began to radiate from his body, a large, green python rearing and hissing.

A lower seventh-grade green python resonance!

"Oh, you want to fight? Come on, then, I've had enough too!" the old dean said with a humorless laugh. His own crimson resonant power flared up, a flaming beast with its hooves in magma.

Lower seventh-grade, the Fire Eating Ape.

These two Heavenly Dipper General experts readied themselves. Even though the room was made of stone, it began to crack under the mighty surges of energy.

Mentor Anlie shouted out to them urgently, "Gentlemen! We're in the middle of the examinations. If you cause a fuss here, the Astral Sage College might just reduce the number of entrance slots to the whole Tianshu Province next year!"

These words brought the bickering pair up short. The dean sniffed, retracting his resonant power.

With a dark face, Governor Shi did likewise.

Mentor Anlie shook his head, turning back to the screen. Shi Huang's left arm had been skewered by the arrow, left heavily wounded. He would be severely compromised in battle.

It was more or less wrapped up.

Albeit wrapped up in a way that no one had predicted.

"Word has always been that the Young Lord of House Luolan was useless. It seems that they were false whispers."

...

In the ruins.

Shi Huang was still moaning on the ground, blood spurting from his arm. He could sense many pairs of eyes watching, intimidated now by his downfall.

They were dismayed by this outcome too.

Not far away was Song Yunfeng, still dangling from the spear pinned to the wall. He was stammering to himself, "Impossible. Impossible..."

He could not believe that Li Luo had beaten Shi Huang!

This was completely illogical. Shi Huang was a Ninth Seal with an upper seventh-grade lightning resonance! He was a beast in battle, and Lu Qing'er was the only one in the Tianshu Province who could pose a threat to him.

But now Li Luo had shot him down.

Song Yunfeng felt bitterness rise within. If not for Shi Huang's status, he would have screamed abuse at him and accused him of rigging the fight.

He had not experienced it for himself, so he could not fathom why a simple arrow had undone Shi Huang so easily.

Still, his understanding did not affect reality one way or another.

Li Luo was standing on the vine-covered stone, looking at the bleeding Shi Huang with a neutral expression. He did not move, seemingly luxuriating in Shi Huang's predicament.

He even sprawled in a sitting position, one hand on the bow, the other hanging loose.

He looked like a demon king, and the other students watching from the shadows were petrified. They did not dare to make a sound, for fear of attracting Li Luo's attention.

They all held their breath.

After a few minutes, someone flew in. It was Lu Qing'er speeding over. She was holding a rope in one hand, towing three people who were tied up. Xiang Liang, Zong Fu, Chi Su. n/0V&1&1n

Evidently, she had beaten them.

The first thing she saw was Song Yunfeng nailed to the wall.

Surprised, she continued on past the ruined hamlet, then her footsteps slowed.

Before her, there was a pool of blood, within which Shi Huang lay. He looked barely conscious, pale as a ghost.

Lu Qing'er was truly astonished.

Behind her, her three captives were even more shocked.

She looked up to Li Luo, his face composed. She shuddered at the power he commanded.

She approached him now, feeling as though they were back in their first year, when Li Luo was a giant.

"Are you alright?" she asked softly.

Li Luo looked down at her and then the tension whooshed out of his body, as though a heavy burden had been lifted from him.

"You're finally here..."

"Quick, help me get down. I've run out of resonant power, I'm afraid of jumping down. What if I hurt myself?"

Lu Qing'er stared at him.

It was both exasperating and hilarious. He had posed up there for so long, only because he had run out of resonant power?

Chapter 0072: Why Must You Force Me

Li Luo was on a particularly tall stone pillar, and there were plenty of jagged rocks below. His arrow had taken up all of his strength. Given how many people were watching him, if he jumped down helplessly, they would pounce on his weakness. He was worth too many points to pass up on.

And so Li Luo had casually sprawled on top, his air of casual confidence holding them back.

Lu Qing'er leaped up beside him with a waft of perfume. She stretched out a small hand to him.

"Gloves on?" Li Luo checked. Yes, they were. Otherwise, they might both be screwed.

Lu Qing'er shot him a look. She cut an impressive figure herself, a heroine straight out of a tale. She took hold of Li Luo's hand, then leaped down from the stone pillar.

With both feet firmly on the ground again, Li Luo felt much better. He looked over at the three captives. "Slaughter these three too?"

They looked at him with trepidation, even more so than when they regarded Lu Qing'er.

After all, it was a nightmarish scene that lay before them.

It was Zong Fu who sighed and said, "I said before that you, Li Luo, might well be the greatest unknown factor in these examinations. Guess I was right."

Xiang Liang and Chi Su were silent. They had scoffed at Zong Fu's prediction, and never once had they taken Li Luo seriously as a threat. But now they could see that Zong Fu's prudence was well-founded. If they had planned more carefully and saw his strength properly, they might not be in as bad a state as they currently were.

Li Luo waved it off. He went to drag Song Yunfeng down from the wall, throwing him beside Shi Huang.

At the same time, he charitably helped Shi Huang stop the bleeding, so he would not die from blood loss. That would be a troublesome ending.

Shi Huang opened his eyes weakly. "Li Luo, you hid it well," he said resentfully.

Li Luo grinned and then feigned a tortured expression. "Ah, why must you force me so? I just wanted to be in the top 10. Why did you all force me to go this far?"

Behind him, Zong Fu and the others swallowed. This was a little too much.

Indeed, Shi Huang was so worked up that he was quaking. He retched another mouthful of blood.

"Hey, don't be so anxious, you're going to vomit blood."

Li Luo hurriedly calmed him down, then used his crystal medallion to check the scoreboard. He saw that there were only thirteen people left—no, twelve now. There were twelve.

"Phew, all's good. I almost missed it." He smiled with relief.

"Know what I'm going to do next?" Li Luo said, beaming at Shi Huang and Song Yunfeng. There was something chilling about his smile.

"I said that I would ensure you two were eliminated from the top 10."

Shi Huang's face was pale now, and his fear showed. "Li Luo, you're cruel!"

Being eliminated from the top 10 would mean a loss of entrance slots. He might not even be able to go to the Astral Sage College. That would be absolutely devastating to Shi Huang.

Beside him, Song Yunfeng was yelling as well. "Li Luo, you can't do this! You'll incur the wrath of the entire Song family and the Governor's house!"

"Childish."

Li Luo shook his head and said peaceably, "When you do something wrong, you have to pay the price. It's time for you to pay."

He took down their crystal medallions, clearing out Shi Huang's points immediately. He erased Song Yunfeng's points as well, although students from the same school could not obtain each other's points.

Shi Huang and Song Yunfeng's scores were reduced to zero.

Li Luo clapped loudly. "A big hand for Shi Huang and Song Yunfeng, for their achievement of eleventh and twelfth place!"

Their faces were ugly to behold.

Xiang Liang and the others were quaking in their boots. This Li Luo was a real terror.

Lu Qing'er was looking at Li Luo quietly. For some reason, she felt a tinge of fondness grow in her at seeing him like this.

Li Luo had been too unobtrusive for the past few years, an unremarkable, harmless thing. But Lu Qing'er liked to see him in the spotlight, like how he was back when they first entered Southwind Academy. He had scolded her unreservedly while teaching her resonance arts.

"The exams should enter the countdown to the end now," she said happily.

Li Luo turned to the other three with a frown. "You three got off easy."

Since he could only eliminate two from the top 10, he had chosen Shi Huang and Song Yunfeng, who were higher up on the hate list.

Which meant that these three were in the top 10. Even if their points were cleared out, they would simply be at the bottom of the top 10.

Hearing this, the three broke into ingratiating smiles. "Brother Luo, we were forced. The higher-ups in our schools directed us to do what we did. We took so many resources from our schools—we had to obey."

"But don't worry, once we get into the Astral Sage College, you'll be our leader. Your wish, our command!"

Li Luo ignored them, turning to Lu Qing'er. "Clear their points. It irritates me."

Lu Qing'er smiled slightly. "No."

Li Luo started, unsure of how to react.

From the side, Zong Fu helpfully reminded him, "Brother Luo, she means that if she takes our points, she will overtake you and steal first place in the exams."

Xiang Liang and Chi Su's eyes widened, looking between the two. Lu Qing'er had defeated them, so naturally their points belonged to her. She could take first place, fair and square, but she had purposely chosen to place behind Li Luo. What was going on between these two?

What was their relationship?

Even Zong Fu looked at Li Luo in admiration. He was so cool. He was already engaged to a godly beauty like Jiang Qing'e, and he could still play around?

Hearing Zong Fu's reminder, Li Luo belatedly realized that by clearing out Shi Huang's points, he was in first place. He panicked now. "Qing'er, quickly now. I have a bit of a firstplaceophobia, you know?"

"You'll get used to it." A wide smile filled Lu Qing'er's face.

"Lu Qing'er!" Li Luo cried. "Don't do this!! How did I wrong you, why must you hurt me so?"

"Quick, please, I don't want to be first. I'm begging you. PLEEEEEEASE!"

Lu Qing'er sat down on the gravel. The setting sun bathed her in rosy golds and reds, and she propped her chin on her slim hands, smiling happily at the fuming Li Luo, still wringing his hands.

And then a gong echoed across Whitespirit Mountain.

Within Whitespirit Ruins, the survivors heaved sighs of relief, filled with a wild joy.

But not Li Luo, who was looking glum at the ending gong.

Unfortunately, he was in first place.

Chapter 0073: The Exam Finishes

When the final bell rang, there was a congratulatory mood among the audience as they processed the results.

Clearly written, first place.

Li Luo, Southwind Academy.

This win was beyond everyone's expectations. Back when the exam had first started, no one thought that it wouldn't be the hot favorite, Lu Qing'er, or perhaps the only threat she faced, Shi Huang. Definitely not the under-the-radar, no-results-to-speak-of Li Luo!

The young lord of House Luolan was no stranger to the people of the Tianshu Province—after all, House Luolan had begun at the City of Southwind before expanding to the Xia Kingdom. They were once the pride and joy of the Tianshu Province, their bragging fodder to outsiders.

And as the son of those two, Li Luo could not help but receive attention. But when his blank palace came to light, everyone sighed inwardly. Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had burned so brightly all their lives, but their son had inherited none of their talent.

"Like a tiger giving birth to a puppy." Li Luo had heard such remarks all too many times over the years.

Some had even said that perhaps Jiang Qing'e was the true child of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan, and that Li Luo must have been adopted or something. nØve.Ib-In

The nasty remarks went on and on.

And with today's result, their impression of the young lord was renewed. Although this youth might not have the sharp, invincible air of Jiang Qing'e, he was warm and enigmatic. It seemed like you would only know what cards he had to play when crunch time came.

A different look from his parents, and even Jiang Qing'e.

Outside, the Southwind Academy teacher Xu Shanyue looked up at the board, frozen in a thrall. Finally, he broke out of it. "You see that? Li Luo's first!!"

Beside him, Lin Feng's expression was complicated. He did not know if he should be happy or sad.

Although Southwind Academy had maintained their best school title, the glory had not gone to his First School. It was with the Second School, whom he had poured scorn on.

Although Li Luo had shown some promise during the last few weeks, Lin Feng had dismissed it. His read was that no amount of catching up from Li Luo would bring him to Lu Qing'er or Song Yunfeng's level. After all, he had lost so much time.

But now the winner of the entire exam was Li Luo.

He turned to look at Xu Shanyue, features twisted in wild triumph. He felt a strong squeeze of regret grip his chest.

He regretted not letting Li Luo back into the First School when he had shown signs of a comeback.

And now that Li Luo was champion, Lin Feng would be regarded strangely from now on. After all, Southwind Academy had never had a champion that wasn't from the First School before.

He, Lin Feng, would be spurned, while Xu Shanyue would be glorified forever.

So although Southwind Academy had managed to defend its title as best school, Lin Feng felt a sudden urge to wail.

Xu Shanyue had just gotten his emotions under control when he suddenly noticed the expression on Lin Feng's face, bitter as though he had been forced to eat out of the toilet. He shook his head in sympathy, at the same time feeling gratitude.

"Teacher Lin Feng, you're a real brother. I won't argue with you next time!"

Lin Feng gave a smile as though he had been eating lemons whole. His voice wheezed out of him faintly.

"Eh, hehe... wer, we're all brudders... same house... too kind..."

...

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing stared at the first place name for a long time and then exploded with joy.

"What a surprise!" Cai Wei rejoiced.

"Fufu, Li Luo sure plays it quiet. If word of this gets to Qing'e, she'll be completely astounded." Yan Lingqing nodded approvingly.

"If the Young Lord can get into the Astral Sage College, his prestige in House Luolan will rise as well. Perhaps he will take some of the burden away from Qing'e," Cai Wei mused.

Yan Lingqing nodded. Although House Luolan was plagued by problems both internal and external, there would always be those loyal to the king, namely Li Luo. After all, he was the blood kin of the two House Lords, and his right to rule was the most substantiated, even more so than Jiang Qing'e.

However, his blank palace conundrum had cast a dim pallor on his future. Some had given up on him, but if he continued to perform well, he would be able to unite them again. At that time, he should be able to firmly take the House Lord seat, with Jiang Qing'e's support.

At that time, House Luolan would finally return to stability.

Both women were very much looking forward to that day.

...

In the main tent, Governor Shi was completely silent when the result was declared, but the thunderous aura radiating from him scared everyone off.

The old dean didn't care. He was on his feet, clapping as hard as he could.

"Well done, my lad. Truly the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan. Everyone looked down on you, even this old myopic geezer!" he roared.

Governor Shi gave a short bark of laughter. Without a word of farewell to the dean or Anlie, he rose and left.

Mentor Anlie shrugged and turned to the dean. "Congratulations, Dean Wei Sha. Southwind Academy has clinched the best school title again."

On the scoreboard, Li Luo and Lu Qing'er were in first and second place. This was Southwind Academy's best result in recent years, and the full 21 entrance slots would be swept up by Southwind Academy.

One could only imagine how many families would go through fire and brimstone to send their children to Southwind in the near future. Even if those children could not win slots themselves, the sheer power of the school's reputation might see them into the Astral Sage College.

Dean Wei Sha could not stop grinning.

While all this was going on, the students within the arena were starting to exit as well. The cheers were especially loud when Li Luo and Lu Qing'er appeared.

This was a real bother for Li Luo, who had been thrust into the spotlight. His handsome looks were already troublesome enough, and now adding strength into the mix?

That was way more pressure than a young man could handle!

"Brother Luo, you were so cool!" Zhao Kuo yelled ecstatically. He might have been eliminated from the top 10, but given Li Luo and Lu Qing'er's result, there was a slot in the Astral Sage College with his name on it, considering his rank in Southwind Academy.

The other Southwind Academy students were all smiles too, looking at Li Luo respectfully. Those additional entrance slots had been won for them, almost all of them, thanks to him.

There was a Chinese saying that went: when one ascends to Heaven, even his chickens and dogs rise with him.

Li Luo shared a big smile with Zhao Kuo, clapping him on the back. He turned to search for Yu Lang in the crowd.

He found him fervently clasping the hand of a particularly cute junior, his face serious. "Do you know why Li Luo could beat Shi Huang? It was all thanks to my painstaking efforts to unsettle Shi Huang. That's why Li Luo won. Half the credit is mine, but being such a great brother, I don't begrudge him the glory. I'm not that kind of guy."

The naive little girl stared at him with adoration.

"Rascal."

Li Luo was speechless at the guy. His brain ran on a different wavelength from others.

Lu Qing'er, who had been talking to a bunch of junior girls, turned to him with a faint smile. "They say that today is a great day, and there will be celebrations tonight. They ask if you're attending."

Li Luo sighed. These gatherings didn't mean much one way or another. Everyone would come fawn over him, and the girl fan club would try to make moves on him. Today, they would be more ferocious.

Therefore, he nodded in assent in the end.

Chapter 0074: Song Qiuyu

A cool night breeze blew through the City of Southwind.

It did nothing to cool the heated celebrations going on within, as the crowd started to shuffle out of Whitespirit Mountain in an outpouring of excitement.

Li Luo and the others decided to celebrate at the Tower Qingfeng.

The Tower Qingfeng was built along the Qingfeng River, hence its name. It was a beautiful location, and also the tallest restaurant in the City of Southwind. This gathering was wholly sponsored by the rich lady, Lu Qing'er.

She had booked the entire Tower Qingfeng and invited many young men and women to join in the celebration.

Li Luo was sitting with Lu Qing'er, and they had indulged in a couple of drinks. Her rosy blush was especially clear on her snowy skin. Under the warm lights, she captured the hearts of all present.

One student came to offer a toast. "Brother Luo is truly awesome. You and Sister Qing were the perfect duo, getting first and second. You'll be a legend in Southwind Academy."

Li Luo glared at the guy. It was the sort of stuff you could only say here at the City of Southwind. If it were Xia City, it would be a completely different story!

Beside him, Lu Qing'er twinkled a smile, touching glasses with the student.

"Damn Song Yunfeng, that traitorous vulture. He's from Southwind Academy, but he helped other schools attack Sister Qing! Scumbag!" Some drunken students were beginning to get rowdy.

These curses drew calls of support from the others. After all, this was a classic betrayal, which was hard to stomach.

Difa Qing came looking for Lu Qing'er with her cup, guilt written on her face. "Qing'er, I'm really sorry about what happened. If I hadn't left the marks, you would not have been ambushed."

Lu Qing'er shook her head with a small smile and touched cups with her. It was a consolatory gesture, but Li Luo acutely sensed some stiffness in her gaze. Evidently, there was now a black mark next to Difa

Qing's name in Lu Qing'er's book. Perhaps in her heart, she had already labeled Difa Qing as someone not worth associating with.

After all, whether on purpose or accidental, such a blunder was not one that Lu Qing'er approved of.

Making friends with fools would cause one trouble again and again, and they would bring out the pitiful, innocent face afterwards.

"Li Luo, I was biased against you before. I hope you don't hold it against me. I didn't have foresight. Your performance today marks you well worthy of Sister Jiang," she said to Li Luo in a small voice.

Li Luo waved it off with a smile, but he did not comment further.

Perhaps sensing the coldness from Lu Qing'er, Difa Qing took the hint and left.

Li Luo looked at Lu Qing'er, seeing a hard look on her face after Difa Qing's apology. "What's wrong?" he asked, puzzled.

"Nothing much. Just thinking that fools make me angry," Lu Qing'er said emotionlessly.

Li Luo was quite confused by this answer, but it was best not to guess the minds of young girls. He changed the topic. "Although Song Yunfeng got eliminated outside of the top 10, doesn't it mean he gets a slot too?" noVe)L&(In

In the preliminaries, Song Yunfeng had ranked second. If placements were given out according to that, Song Yunfeng was guaranteed a place.

"Logically, yes."

Lu Qing'er thought about it. "But our dean is known to be a stingy man with a stingy heart. Song Yunfeng tried to take money from both sides. He almost cost Southwind Academy the best school title. I don't think he'll let Song Yunfeng have his way."

Li Luo nodded. That made him feel better.

It would leave a bitter taste in his mouth if he had slogged his butt off just to help Song Yunfeng enter the Astral Sage College.

Now the old dean's pettiness looked like an especially endearing trait.

While Li Luo and Lu Qing'er were heartily celebrating, there was a table higher up in the Tower Qingfeng, where some people were looking down at them with a amused looks.

Among them was a girl in a yellow shirt. Her features were lovely, although her perfectly arched brows were on the thin side, giving her a mean look.

She listened emotionlessly to the curses about Song Yunfeng drifting up from below, some anger flashing across her eyes.

Her name was Song Qiuyu, and she was Song Yunfeng's sister. More importantly, she was currently a student in the Astral Sage College. She had just arrived in the City of Southwind today and was already greeted by some unwelcome news.

"To think the champion in the Tianshu Province's exams would be that trash Young Lord." Two young men were sitting on either side of Song Qiuyu, and the one who had spoken was a short-haired man in green, toying with his wine cup.

"Jingming, he's trash no longer. If he can become the champion, he must be quite competent," Song Qiuyu said.

The one she called Jingming was Difa Jingming, Difa Qing's elder brother.

"Still, the Tianshu Province as a whole is weak. I hear that other stronger provinces had Tenth Seal fighters during their final exams," the other young man pointed out casually.

"Mo Ling, we know your Beiqiu Province has an abundance of talent. It ranks well in the top 10 provinces, doesn't it? The Tianshu Province is only average, so stop comparing us," Song Qiuyu said peevishly.

Mo Ling was from a house in the Beiqiu Province that was blooming with talent as well. Plus, the Beiqiu Province was far larger and had far more talent compared to the Tianshu Province, so it was understandable that he looked at them with a slight sense of superiority.

The youth called Mo Ling chuckled. "I meant no offense. No one would dare to underestimate the Tianshu Province after they produced Jiang Qing'e."

Mo Ling had feelings for Song Qiuyu. He had accompanied her back to the Tianshu Province on the pretext of protecting a beautiful lady.

They were all students at the Astral Sage College.

Mo Ling could tell that Song Qiuyu was not happy about the gathering of juniors below. He gave a slanted smile. "I guess those peeps below could be considered our juniors next time we see them. Shall we go say hi?"

He had already risen to his feet.

"Forget it. They're inconsequential," Song Qiuyu said.

Mo Ling waved her off. "As their future senior, I feel it is necessary to familiarize them with the character of the Astral Sage College."

He headed down.

Song Qiuyu smiled, but she called out after him with a hint of impatience. "Don't overdo it. Don't scare them."

Difa Jingming downed his cup in one gulp. "The night is long. Some entertainment sounds good."

Neither were worried about Mo Ling. After all, he was at the second Resonant Master Stage, Pattern Genesis Tier. The students celebrating below, who were not even Tenth Seals, were like newly-hatched baby chicks compared to him.

Precisely how big was the difference between the Ten Seals Stage and the Resonant Master Stage? They were about to be given a thrilling lesson on that just before entering the Astral Sage College.

Chapter 0075: You Want to Assassinate Me?

A few rounds of drinks later, Li Luo judged that it was about time and suggested they call it a night. After all, everyone was probably tired after the exams, so perhaps they should all head back for a good night's rest.

The others were a little reluctant, but they still nodded agreement.

Pa!

Just at that moment, a crisp slap was heard outside the curtain. "Watch where you're going, eh?"

Pulling aside the curtain, a Southwind student was clutching his face, staggering to the floor, dazed.

Behind, a young man walked in, greeting them with a smile. "Sorry for disturbing your celebration."

"This guy wasn't watching where he was going and bumped into me." He pointed at the youth on the floor.

"And so you hit him?" Lu Qing'er said, raising an eyebrow coldly.

Spotting her, a gleam entered his eyes. He had already identified this girl as something special while observing from upstairs. Up close, she was truly a delight. Those features, that bearing—she was definitely a prize even in the Astral Sage College.

He smiled apologetically at Lu Qing'er. "Sorry. Reacted too quickly."

"You must be Southwind Academy students. Seems like you did well this year. I'm an Astral Sage College student. I'll probably be your senior in the future." Mo Ling grinned.

Hearing this, the Southwind students looked at him in surprise. This person was from the Astral Sage College?

Li Luo fixed him with a look. "Seems like a hostile presence."

"I just wanted to meet the champion of the Tianshu Province's exams."

Mo Ling said, looking back at him with a lopsided smile, "But truly, an Eighth Seal taking first place? The Tianshu Province must have many troubles."

A surge of angry glares.

"He's here to make trouble," Lu Qing'er said softly to Li Luo.

He nodded almost imperceptibly, then stepped forwards to Mo Ling. "Friend, we do not know each other," he said in a hushed voice. "No need to cause trouble, right?"

Feigning surprise, Mo Ling said, "What are you talking about? I'm just here to say hi as your future senior."

"You WHAT?! You want to assassinate me?!" Li Luo shouted out hysterically.

Mo Ling jumped. "What—assassinate?"

Was this guy wrong in the head? Since when had he ever said "assassinate?" He was just here to exact some petty revenge on Song Qiuyu's behalf.

"Protect the Young Lord!"

While he was still confused, a few figures appeared, resonant power at the ready. They were all at the Resonant Master Stage.

These were Li Luo's bodyguards.

Although House Luolan was not in a good situation, the Young Lord would still be accompanied by bodyguards. That was just common sense, wasn't it?

Although these bodyguards rarely made their presence known, hearing the word "assassinate" brought them all ready to spring into action. n-(o-/V.)e)-l--b()l)(n

They immediately rushed over without hesitation, crowding Mo Ling.

His face changed. "I didn't! I was just going to greet him!" he cried.

He was caught completely off guard. Before he had even started anything, this guy had already sicced his bodyguards on him.

They ignored his protest and started to pummel him with resonant power-charged punches and kicks. Mo Ling hurriedly brought forth his own resonant power in defense.

However, he was perhaps only as strong as one of the bodyguards. With so many of them around, he was soon yelping on the ground, enjoying knuckle sandwiches by the dozen.

The Southwind Academy students were watching, astounded. This young lord was a real enigma. He had called the teacher last time, and this time it was bodyguards in action. It seemed like it was impossible to ever face him in a fair fight...

Still, this time the guerilla tactics left them feeling extremely satisfied.

Above, Song Qiuyu and Difa Jingming were shocked at the turn of events as well. Throwing down their cups, they hurried over.

"What are you doing?!" the two shouted.

They immediately called forth their own resonant power, ready to intervene.

With a wave of his hand, Li Luo's bodyguards retreated, leaving Mo Ling on the floor, cradling his bruised face.

"Young Lord Li Luo, you're a tyrant. Why did you order your bodyguards to attack him?" Song Qiuyu demanded.

"Brother." Difa Qing gasped at seeing Difa Jingming.

"That's Song Qiuyu, Song Yunfeng's elder sister. And Difa Jingming," Lu Qing'er said to Li Luo. "This guy must be here to cause trouble on their behalf."

Li Luo looked at the two and smiled. "Are you with him? He tried to assassinate me. Could you two be the masterminds?"

Damn, flipping the metaphorical table right from the get go.

"Assassinate? Don't slander us! He's our friend, and he's just here to greet you as your senior." Song Qiuyu burst.

Mo Ling crawled up from the floor as well, his face badly bruised. He glared angrily at Li Luo. "When did I say that I was going to assassinate you?"

He was boiling with anger and humiliation. Damn, he hadn't even put his plan to motion before he was wrongly accused and jumped on.

Shameless!

Li Luo said in a hushed voice, "I heard you say..."

Mo Ling shouted, "I said I was here to say hi as your senior!"

"Oh, is that what it was..."

Li Luo clapped his hands together. "I've ruined things for many people today, so I was worried that there would be a few resentful ones who would try to kill me. I've been high-strung all day. I must have heard wrongly."

Mo Ling shook in anger.

"How about this? I'll pay your tab today, as an apology," Li Luo said with a bright smile.

Song Qiuyu's face was like ice. Given who they were, who would care about a table's tab? Li Luo had done this on purpose. Before Mo Ling could cause any trouble, he had decided to get the jump on him.

"Do I look like I need your paltry coins?" Mo Ling spat at him.

Li Luo smiled thinly at him. "What else can I do?"

Song Qiuyu fell silent. They had intended to let Mo Ling come here and cause some trouble and anger Li Luo. He would probably lose his cool and challenge Mo Ling to a fight, then they could let him taste pain. But this Young Lord had none of that youthful hotheadedness, not even with a beautiful girl by his side.

He was not a reckless one.

And now that things had come to a head, they realized that they could not actually do anything to Li Luo, unless they wanted to jump him together and beat him up. But with so many bodyguards around, it would get really sticky.

So finally, Song Qiuyu cast one more dark look at Li Luo, then she helped Mo Ling to his feet before leaving without a word.

Difa Jingming was still regarding Li Luo. With a final smile, he turned to nod at Difa Qing, then he left with the others.

Although they had left, the mood had been ruined, and the party broke up soon after.

Li Luo and Lu Qing'er were standing at the foot of the Tower Qingfeng.

"Song Qiuyu is studying at the Resonance Tempering Hall in the Astral Sage College. She might have returned to challenge your Sunreek Villa," Lu Qing'er said.

The Sunreek Villa had seen its production quality rise sharply thanks to Li Luo's spirit liquids. Their sales were booming, whereas Pine Nut Villa was gasping for air.

"Because of the Tianshu Province's Festival of Purifying Spirits next month?" Li Luo murmured.

Each year, the Tianshu Province would hold a festival related to spirit liquids and purifying lights. All of the brewers would take part, and there would be many games for them to win and vie for a larger share of the market.

Li Luo also knew about it. The Sunreek Villa was currently busy with preparations.

As for Song Qiuyu, she was probably back for the festival as well.

Li Luo frowned slightly. The Sunreek Villa was blooming under his support. Sales were rising by the day, and skygold was flowing in like a river, all to help him secure the funds to buy more sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights.

How could he let Song Qiuyu interfere with his greatest source of capital?

Chapter 0076: Aid for the Song Family

Late night, Song family residence.

Song Qiuyu was sitting in the living room with Mo Ling, channeling water resonance power from her slim hands to wipe away his bruises.

Walking by, Song Shan noticed this and gasped slightly. "What happened to Mo Ling?"

"We were at the Tower Qingfeng. He wanted to greet the Southwind Academy students and talk about the Astral Sage College with them. Li Luo accused Mo Ling of trying to assassinate him and set his bodyguards on him," Song Qiuyu said irately.

"Hngh! Li Luo again!"

Song Shan sat down on the main chair, troubled and angry. Song Yunfeng being eliminated from the top 10 by Li Luo had made the joke of the Song family. And now treating their valued guest this way? It was too much.

"Brazen brat. If this happened in Xia City, he would be left eating through a straw!" Mo Ling burst out angrily as well. He had been badly humiliated today, accused of being a killer before he had even done anything, and then beaten up badly.

"The Sunreek Villa has seen explosive growth since Li Luo took over too. Their first and second grade spirit liquids and purifying lights have improved greatly in quality, and our Pine Nut Villa is barely making

ends meet. We think that he might be using a secret watersource. Perhaps Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan left it for him," Song Shan said tiredly.

"Our Pine Nut Villa's Wondrous Sunshine Light formula was corrected by a tempering master that I consulted in Xia City. It's definitely stronger than the Suncreek Villa's Azure Jade Spirit Liquid. But our tempering strength has fallen behind so much. A special watersource is the only explanation." Song Qiuyu frowned.

"If this continues, the Songs' Pine Nut Villa will be completely ruined by the Suncreek Villa," Song Shan grumbled.

Song Qiuyu nodded with equal worry.

Mo Ling looked at them and laughed. "Qiuyu, why the long face? House Luolan's Suncreek Villa isn't that outstanding when you look at the whole of Xia. They're just big fish in the small pond of the Tianshu Province. Look at Xia City. How mediocre they are there!"

"Those that do not bow when they speak have no back pains to complain of. Your Mo family's Inkwater Villa is among the best in the Xia Kingdom. Of course you can look down on the Suncreek Villa," Song Qiuyu groused.

Mo Ling sighed. "Haven't we talked about this? In the future, all of the third-grade and under spirit liquids and purifying lights from the Inkwater Villa can be sent to the Song family. The Song family will be the Inkwater Villa's retailer in the Tianshu Province.

"Our Inkwater Villa formulas are several cuts above the Suncreek Villa's. With that power, the Song family will definitely beat the Suncreek Villa flat."

Song Shan's face was still doubtful even after such reassurance. "But there are still some conditions yet to be worked out with the Inkwater Villa."

Mo Ling made a grand gesture. "Uncle Song, say no more. I know what you want. Part of the reason for my visit is to hammer out all the details on behalf of my elders. There are some concessions that the Inkwater Villa is willing to make. As long as our Inkwater spirit liquids and purifying lights can dominate the entire Tianshu market, both you and I will be winners.

"Besides, Li Luo is getting really cocky. I'm going to show him what it means to pay!"

"Well..."

Song Shan finally smiled now, then he sighed with relief. "I have much to thank you for. I know that the power of the Inkwater Villa is substantial, far more than what the Songs command. I will not say more, then, but I promise that the Song family will definitely help the Inkwater Villa gain footing here in the Tianshu Province."

Mo Ling assured him it was nothing. After chatting a bit more with Song Qiuyu, he left to rest.

After Mo Ling left, the shy smile on Song Qiuyu's face vanished. "Looks like it was useful to bring him to the Tower Qingfeng today."

"I didn't expect Li Luo to act that way. Otherwise, Mo Ling would not have conceded so quickly. He would have played for more time if not for Li Luo."

Song Shan sipped his tea, his expression cheerless. "Who's to say that letting the Inkwater Villa into the Tianshu won't be akin to letting the proverbial wolf into the house? Although their spirit liquids and purifying lights' formulas will be handed over, I understand that those are unimportant. What is crucial are the secret watersource and lightsource, the Black Swampwater and the White Moonlight."

"It is these sources that make their Inkwater Villa formulas shine with full potential."

"We might be inviting them to wrap their hands around our throats instead."

Song Qiuyu gave a soft laugh. "Still, could it get any worse? Our market share in liquids and lights is paltry. Without strong support, we're just feeding the Sun creek Villa at this point."

Song Shan sighed deeply. "Damned House Luolan. Damned Li Luo. Damn it all."

"Do not worry. I came back home precisely for the Festival of Purifying Spirits. I will represent the Pine Nut Villa as the foremost resonance artificer. With my win and the support of the Inkwater Villa's spirit liquids and purifying lights, we will be able to turn things around," Song Qiuyu said.

"Your rival should be the Sun creek Villa's Yan Lingqing. Are you confident?" Song Shan said.

"Yan Lingqing? Old rivals. We crossed paths countless times in the Astral Sage College."

Song Qiuyu gave a cool smile. "But this time, she will lose for sure."

Song Shan nodded, feeling pleased. n/(o.-v/-e/.L/)&/l.-n

Song Qiuyu changed the topic. "How is Yunfeng?"

"Not badly injured, but devastated," Song Shan replied.

In the preliminaries, Li Luo had managed to beat Song Yunfeng to a marginal draw thanks to the Water Mirror Art. Song Yunfeng had never once considered Li Luo an equal match, but now? In the exams, Li Luo had easily thrashed him, as if he were far below Li Luo in strength.

It had crushed Song Yunfeng with a huge inferiority complex.

"Will he be able to make it into the Astral Sage College?" Song Qiuyu scowled.

Song Shan hesitated. At the behest of the Governor's Mansion, Song Yunfeng had ended up helping Shi Huang against Southwind Academy. It had invited much loathing. However, his position in the preliminaries was clear. One of Southwind Academy's entrance slots should go to him.

However, however. Southwind Academy's old dean was a stubborn rock, hard and petty as could be. He had not even shown courtesy to Governor Shi. Who knew what he would do?

"I hope Wei Sha isn't too unreasonable about this."

Chapter 0077: The Three Tiers of the Resonant Master Stage

The excitement after the exams continued for many days in the City of Southwind. Such was its influence.

After the exams, the students at Southwind Academy would have a week off before they went to school to get their entrance slots and officially end their term at Southwind.

Because he had gotten first place, Li Luo was being given a lot more attention, which was frustrating for him. For these past few days, he had not even gone outside, instead choosing to stay at home, quietly researching resonance arts. In his free time, he studied spirit liquids and purifying lights.

It was an idyllic but fruitful time.

...

Ting!

in a practice room in the old manor.

Li Luo was throwing a barrage of attacks at full power with his shortswords.

His target: a bodyguard in the old manor. He was at the first tier of the Resonant Master stage, the Sprouting Seed Tier, and he was holding back as he sparred with Li Luo.

In resonance cultivation, the Resonant Master Stage came after the Ten Seals Stage.

The Resonant Master Stage was divided into three tiers. The first tier was the Sprouting Seed Tier, where the resonant power in one's palaces would be gathered into a seed-like lump and then be reborn anew.

The second tier was the Pattern Genesis Tier. At this tier, one's resonant power would start to mature and gain depth. This would create pattern marks across one's resonances, which were called resonance patterns, hence the name of the tier.

The third tier was called the Evolving Resonance Tier. At this tier, one's resonances would begin to change, in preparation for the breakthrough to the next tier.

If Ten Seals Stage cultivators were beginners, then it could be said that those at the Resonant Master Stage had finally taken a step into the door to cultivation.

The difference between them was huge.

As for how huge, Li Luo was all too aware as they crossed swords.

Although the bodyguard was holding back his strength to roughly a Tenth Seal's, Li Luo found that none of his attacks could pose any threat to his opponent, unless he combined his swords and used his most powerful arrow.

Ding!

With a blue sheen of Water Edge on his swords, Li Luo chopped against the bodyguard's metal staff, but the rebounding shock sent him staggering back a few paces.

He stopped, irritated. He flicked his hand towards his opponent, calling an end to it.

"Impressive, Young Lord. You're only an Eighth Seal, but I feel the pressure." The bodyguard cupped his fist in respect.

This was not empty praise. After he suppressed his resonant power, he could feel that Li Luo's attacks were indeed posing a threat.

There were other bodyguards watching the practice arena as well. They were nodding to themselves too, and they looked at Li Luo in a new light now—with respect and satisfaction.

His win at the Tianshu Province final examinations had forever banished his image as a useless cultivator with blank palaces.

Even if Li Luo never reached Jiang Qing'e's level, no one would look down on him anymore.

This young lord of House Luolan was gradually beginning to let his light shine.

Li Luo responded with a smile and a nod, then he walked to the side of the training room. He spotted Cai Wei waiting for him there.

Today she was in a red skirt, adorned with peony designs in lace. It was an intricate piece that only further emphasized her spicy bodyline. She was as alluring as a newly bloomed flower.

In the sweaty heat of the training arena, many of the guys did not dare eye her openly, but they still surreptitiously snuck glances.

The admiring gaze that was the nature of guys.

"Sister Cai Wei." Li Luo greeted her with a smile.

"The Young Lord is very diligent, training so hard even after your win," she said fondly.

"First place in the Tianshu Province doesn't hold much weight. I heard that the champions in the stronger provinces were Tenth Seal cultivators." He shook his head.

His words were true. The Tianshu Province hovered around the middle in the Xia Kingdom. There were stronger provinces elsewhere.

"You were looking for me?" Li Luo asked.

"Lingqing came over, so something's probably up," Cai Wei said.

"Let's go, then," he nodded.

They left the training arena together, walking through a long corridor to a living room where they met Yan Lingqing, currently clad in green. She had on a pair of silver rims, which made her look especially strict.

She started speaking the moment they were seated. "Let me give you the update. Recently, the Suncreek Villa's profits have been huge, thanks to the secret watersource you've been providing. If the current profits keep up, this year's revenue could be one million skygold. Subtracting away the capital, we would still have 300,000 skygold in profits."

Li Luo was exuberant. 300,000 skygold was the entire profit of House Luolan in the Tianshu Province each year. This year, the Suncreek Villa alone had achieved that. It was tremendous.

Of course, this was mainly because of the secret watersource that he had been providing. And now that he was an Eighth Seal, he could provide even more than before. Therefore, the watersource's usage had also expanded to their second-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights, contributing to an explosion in their revenue.

He did some rough calculations. 300,000 skygold should be able to get him about ten sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights...

...Too few.

Li Luo was resigned to it. He knew how hard it was to enhance acquired resonances.

Finishing her report, Yan Lingqing continued, "Did you meet Song Qiuyu a few days ago at the Tower Qingfeng? Was there a guy called Mo Ling with them?"

Li Luo nodded, surprised. "That guy was trying to cause trouble. We had an altercation."

"Mo Ling is from the Mo family in the Beiqiu Province. They're one of the major families dealing in spirit liquids and purifying lights. Their Inkwater Villa ranks in the top 10 in the whole Xia Kingdom. Their connections run very deep."

"According to our information, the Song family might choose to work with the Inkwater Villa and bring them into the Tianshu Province to crush the Suncreek Villa," Cai Wei said softly.

Li Luo frowned. The Song family had called for aid.

"It must have been Song Qiuyu who instigated that meeting at the Tower Qingfeng. She must have purposely set up the clash between Mo Ling and you to help ease their alliance." n/(o.-v/-e/.L/)ø/.l.-n

"That woman has a calculative mind. There's nothing she won't stop at to get her way," Yan Lingqing said in a disapproving way.

Li Luo gave a helpless smile. So he had inadvertently helped Song Qiuyu. He had underestimated her.

"Song Qiuyu must be back to take part in the Festival of Purifying Spirits next month. She will probably compete to be the best resonance artificer in the Tianshu Province, lending more strength to the Pine Nut Villa," Yan Lingqing said.

"Sister Yan, you're the representative of the Suncreek Villa. Can you beat her?" Li Luo asked.

"We are old rivals—we clashed many times in the Astral Sage College. We had wins and losses. I don't know how this match will turn out, but I will not underestimate her. I'll do my best to prepare," Yan Lingqing said, her fighting spirit glowing from behind her silver-rimmed spectacles. Song Qiuyu had ignited a spark in her.

"Seems like Sister Lingqing's archenemy," Li Luo joked.

"When you get to the Astral Sage College, you'll know just how sour things were between us." Yan Lingqing pulled a face before turning serious again. "But I'm worried that they will force the Inkwater Villa's liquids and lights into our market."

"How good are the Inkwater Villa's products?" Li Luo asked.

"If they enter the Tianshu Province, they're probably targeting third-grade and below. From what I know, the Inkwater Villa's first-grade product is called the Blackstar spirit liquid, tempering strength of 62%.

"Their second-grade product is called the Blackmoon spirit liquid, tempering strength of 61%."

"And the third-grade product, the Blackglory purifying light, has a tempering strength 60%."

Li Luo's eyebrows shot up. That was truly an established shop in spirit liquids and purifying lights. Such products outclassed anything the Sunreek Villa could offer, and they would be even further behind if not for his watersource.

However, he was not too worried. While their formula might not be as polished, Li Luo was confident they had the advantage in watersource.

The first batch of improved Azure Jade spirit liquid that the Sunreek Villa was currently offering was still based on his fifth-grade waterlight resonance. Therefore, if Li Luo wished, he could create an even purer batch of watersource... by far.

Because it had been sufficient so far, he had not brought it up. But if the Inkwater Villa was going to push the issue, then he was going to bring out the big guns.

The three continued to discuss matters for a while, then Yan Lingqing left hurriedly to prepare for the Festival of Purifying Spirits.

After she left, Cai Wei suddenly retrieved three glass phials from her bosom, setting them gently before Li Luo.

"This..."

Li Luo's gaze was drawn to them. There were faint light patterns on them. They were clearly of a much higher quality than any spirit liquids or purifying lights he had seen before.

And he could sense the powerful flowing within the phials.

"Sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights?" Incredulous joy spread across his face.

He had been using the remaining fifth-grade ones, but he found them sorely lacking in efficacy after his waterlight resonance reached the sixth-grade. He had been agonizing over it for a long time. He wanted to ask Cai Wei to procure some, but the price made him hold his tongue. He eventually decided to purchase them after he made it to Xia City.

But now Cai Wei had given him a wonderful surprise.

"Young Lord, although I don't know why you can use seemingly unlimited amounts of spirit liquids and purifying lights, I'm not too curious. Your recent performance proves that they are worth it."

"Therefore, even though our cash flow is tight, your sister here scrimped and saved to help you secure these three sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. It's not much, but they should prove useful," Cai Wei said, glowing with pride. Her goose-egg face shone with radiance.

Li Luo eagerly took them. He turned to Cai Wei, moved. "If I wasn't afraid of being beaten by Sister Cai Wei, I would have hugged you already."

Cai Wei laughed cutely, fanning herself with her flower fan as she batted her eyelashes at him.

"Save that talk for the girls at your school. To an older woman like myself, those honeyed words hold less power than that pretty face of yours."

She left, her figure swaying in a stirring fashion.

Li Luo watched her sexy figure go. He absently touched his cheek and sighed.

Damned good looks. Even Sister Cai Wei couldn't help herself.

Chapter 0078: The Old Dean's Revenge

Their short holiday came to an end, and Li Luo returned to Southwind Academy. Standing outside the campus, he looked upon the familiar gates with nostalgia.

Today, he would formally end his term at Southwind Academy. All those years of memories, come to a close.

Still, whatever the future brought, Li Luo knew that his cultivation at Southwind Academy had molded him for years to come.

The way that he still held an aversion to being in the spotlight was because of his hubris back when he had first entered Southwind. From his heroic ways to a blank palace cultivator, he had tasted both heaven and hell.

The lesson had nurtured him not to show himself. He would rather hide himself tightly, grow in secret. Perhaps one day, when he was a Duke or King, he could relax a little.

Unfortunately, these exams had undone all of his past anonymity.

"Damned Shi Huang, damned Song Yunfeng..."

Li Luo cursed. He just wanted to breeze into the top 10, but those two bastards had forced his hand into taking first place.

"And that Lu Qing'er as well. It was obviously her win..." Li Luo continued muttering.

"Ungrateful, aren't we? I let you win, and you're muttering behind my back," said a lighthearted girl's voice.

Li Luo turned to see Lu Qing'er, dressed in Southwind Academy's uniform. Her willowy legs extended out beautifully from the short, black skirt, dipping down under her knee-high white socks. The creamy thighs sandwiched between them were riveting.

Li Luo chuckled dryly.

Lu Qing'er did not mind him. She stepped forth to walk by Li Luo's side, a small smile on her face.

They were like the perfect couple, a hunk and a babe. Envious glances came from all around.

Before, some taunting remarks would have made their way in, but now that Li Luo was the champion, his reputation had started to overtake Lu Qing'er's.

As they walked in, many called out greetings, and they nodded appropriately in response.

After passing through a boulevard, they heard shouting up ahead, where a crowd was forming.

"Song Yunfeng, you loser, you dare show your face at Southwind Academy?" And other such remarks were being thrown around.

Li Luo's eyes widened. Song Yunfeng? He dared to come to Southwind Academy?

He quickened his steps, squeezing through the crowd with Lu Qing'er. He saw Song Yunfeng dressed in black, red-faced. He was flanked by two alert bodyguards from the Song family, here to protect him.

In front of Song Yunfeng was a familiar figure, groaning and frothing blood at the mouth.

Li Luo looked closer. Wasn't that Yu Lang?

What was that guy playing at?

"Brother Luo, Sister Qing, thank goodness you're here. This Song Yunfeng is too much. He not only dared to return after betraying Southwind Academy, he even slapped Yu Lang unconscious after he tried to greet him. It's outrageous!" The students clamored upon seeing the duo.

Li Luo was alarmed. Was Song Yunfeng really so boorish? He had to be aware that he had incurred the public wrath. Would he still start fights?

Li Luo rubbed his nose. There was more going on here than there appeared to be.

Especially... whenever it involved the slippery Yu Lang.

He stared at the groaning Yu Lang. His acting was way overboard. He had much to learn from Zhao Kuo.

"You're full of shit. I didn't beat him, I just asked him to leave me alone and shoved him. I didn't even use strength!" Song Yunfeng asserted furiously, a vein throbbing on his temple.

He had not wanted to come to Southwind Academy at all, but the dean had sent a message to the Song family, saying that all who did not come personally to pick up their entrance slots would be automatically forfeited.

Therefore, Song Yunfeng had no choice but to come, knowing the barrage of backlash that was sure to follow.

Li Luo and Lu Qing'er shared a look. They ignored Song Yunfeng, sensing that there were larger factors at play here.

And soon enough, a bunch of campus security was hurrying over, aggressively accosting Song Yunfeng and his bodyguards.

"What are you doing!?" the bodyguards shouted.

"You dare to beat up students on Southwind Academy's school grounds? Are you tired of living?!" the security personnel shouted. With a huge surge of resonant power, they seized the two bodyguards and Song Yunfeng all together. n/(ø.-v/-e/.L/)\ø/.l.-n

From behind, the dean emerged, a whole group of teachers surrounding him.

They were all looking angry, especially the dean. His shouting began from afar. "You brazen dimwit, you've gone too far now. Do you think I'm already in the grave? How dare you disrespect Southwind Academy's rules!"

The old dean's rage had many students cringing in fear.

Song Yunfeng's heart sank, uneasiness flooding through him.

Looking about, the old dean seemed to spot the fallen Yu Lang. "Song Yunfeng," he cried, "you are heartless and cruel! You crippled him!"

Song Yunfeng was seething with rage. This was too much. He had only pushed Yu Lang away. Crippling? That was slander!

The dean paid no attention to his furious gaze. "From now on, I rescind the student status of Song Yunfeng from Southwind Academy!

"Throw them out!"

The security team obliged, casting the three out.

Song Yunfeng still struggled furiously. "I don't accept it! You can't kick me out, I've broken no rules!"

The dean looked at him coldly. "Report me, then, if you don't accept it. Go tell the Astral Sage College. When they send out the order to fire me, you can enter the Astral Sage College."

Song Yunfeng's furious shouting faded away as he was dragged out, finally vanishing from earshot.

"That acting was too dramatic," Li Luo said to Lu Qing'er in a low tone.

"If Song Yunfeng had made it into the top 10, then there would be nothing the dean could do about his entrance slot. But since you ensured he was out of it, the dean has many ways to deny him the placement," Lu Qing'er whispered back.

"Other deans might respect the rules, but our dean is a bit of a small-minded guy. He would throw away his pride to get the last word in an argument."

A hush fell over the crowd as Song Yunfeng was dragged out, and then a smattering of knowing applause.

The old dean put up a smug hand in acknowledgment, then indicated that they should disperse. He prodded the still-moaning Yu Lang with his toe. "Your acting needs work. If not for my lack of shame, we wouldn't have pulled it off."

Yu Lang sprang to his feet, groaning. "Dean, Sir, your sudden mission gave me no time to prepare. Feelings need to be properly calibrated, y'know?"

The old dean harrumphed, but a smile remained on his weathered features.

"I can tolerate students not contributing to Southwind Academy's glory, but not those that betray us knowingly.

"No matter how much trouble it invites, I won't give them an ounce of Southwind's spoils."

Li Luo chuckled. The old dean's pettiness was legendary, but today it seemed quite adorable to many students.

At least it had forced the unlawful expulsion of Song Yunfeng... Perhaps there was some merit to it.

n)o.-v.-e(-l-/b/-l-)n

Chapter 0079: The Holidays Are Here

After Southwind Academy's graduation ceremony today, this cohort of students would be considered to have formally graduated. They would be heading to other college-level institutions all across the Xia Kingdom, continuing their cultivation or turning to other occupations. They might never meet again.

After the ceremony, Li Luo, Lu Qing'er, Yu Lang, and Zhao Kuo received a private summons from the dean to his garden.

"Thanks to you four, Southwind Academy has managed to keep the best school title this year. I guess I owe you thanks," he said, smiling at them over the bush he was pruning.

Zhao Kuo made a non-committal incline with his head. He knew that he had not done much other than ride Li Luo's coattails to glory.

Yu Lang, on the other hand, was smiling as bravely as though he had bled and fought for Southwind Academy.

"Sir, it seems unnecessary to call us here just for thanks," Li Luo said.

"Am I really such a dead plank to you?" the dean replied irritably.

"Dean, Sir!" Yu Lang burst out. "You are my most respected person. I won't let you speak about yourself that way. Take the word 'dead' out!"

The dean brandished his shears threateningly at Yu Lang, who leaped back in alarm.

"Hmph.

"From now on, you're not students of Southwind Academy. In two months, all of you will be headed for the Astral Sage College. That is the place where you young ones can chase your dreams. But regardless of where you eventually land, you will always be my Southwind Academy alumni.

"Although you all did quite well in the exam, that's no basis for arrogance. When you get to the Astral Sage College, you'll learn just how vast the Xia Kingdom is. There are plenty of crouching tigers and hidden dragons.

"Of course... If you can become like Jiang Qing'e, you can ignore what I just said."

They nodded. Besides the more flighty Yu Lang, the other three were solid, grounded characters. Especially Li Luo. If not for this final exam, he would still be happily burrowed in anonymity, his bottomline untested.

After his short parting speech, the dean reached into the folds of his clothes and pulled out pale-yellow pills. Puffs of fragrance came from them.

"These are Bitter Lotus Pills. When your resonant power reaches the Tenth Seal level, you may use one. They will accelerate your resonance consolidation, increasing the chances of success. Take these as an additional reward from the exams."

The four were delighted. Pills were a rare sight, unlike spirit liquids and purifying lights, which were consumed in large quantities. They were more pricey, and it was an extremely generous gesture on the dean's part.

They had heard that Bitter Lotus Pills were distilled from the sap of trees of resonant power. Only large schools could cultivate such things. And for beginners still in the Ten Seals Stage, there was no better medicine than the Bitter Lotus Pill.

Many people failed multiple times when condensing their resonances. This cost them precious cultivation time. The Bitter Lotus Pill could steady their transition.

"Sir, if anyone calls you a plank to my face, I'll be the first to teach them a lesson!" Yu Lang vowed fervently.

The old man shot him a sideways look but decided against replying to this slippery character. He handed over the pills.

"Go, then. I hate to admit it, but the Astral Sage College is truly an elite school, peerless in all of Xia."

"You'll only come in touch with the true reality of this world after you enter the Astral Sage College."

"Your futures are bright. I will be eagerly listening out for news of you here in Southwind Academy."

Hearing the grudging honesty in his voice, the four were a little moved. They bowed to him and turned to leave.

He laughed, calling after Li Luo, "Boy, you've made your parents proud."

Li Luo halted. Looking up to the clouds rolling by above, he felt a lump in his throat. He had thought himself impervious to what others said, but the old dean's words had touched something within him. Perhaps all his hard work had not been for naught.

Deep down, he knew that it was not that he wasn't concerned with the opinions of others, but simply that he cared too much about not letting his parents down.

He loved those seemingly unreliable parents very much.

And they loved him as well.

...

After the Southwind graduation, Li Luo again returned to his previous rhythm. Just as he had said, he did not slack off just because of his victory. In the larger scheme of things, the exam was nothing but a small skirmish.

After two months of holidays, he would head for the Astral Sage College. There, he would see the true crop of talent that existed in the Xia Kingdom.

But this time, he swore to be even more anonymous at the Astral Sage College.

In these two months, Li Luo set himself a target. He wanted to reach the Tenth Seal. If he could, he might even try consolidating his resonances and entering the Resonant Master Stage!

He had heard of other province winners being Tenth Seals. In another two months, the truly elite students could be at the first tier of the Resonant Master Stage already. Li Luo felt that he could not let up.

Of course, this was not the most important thing... His life was already ticking down from its five-year limit!

Although it was important to keep his head down, it was also important to survive!

...

The holidays slowly rifted by. After about half a month, Li Luo found that he had reached the Ninth Seal, as he expected.

Besides that, his practice with spirit liquids and purifying lights had seen swift improvements. He could already brew second-grade liquids and lights, and he could be considered a qualified second-grade resonance artificer.

All in all, Li Luo was pretty satisfied with the progress that he had made in this half a month.

As his resonant power inched ever closer to the Resonant Master Stage, Li Luo started to leaf through the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art that his parents had left him. There was another important question to consider. After he reached the Resonant Master Stage, what primary and secondary resonance should he fill his second palace with?

Chapter 0080: Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel

Bedroom.

Sunlight filtered in through the window, landing on Li Luo's back. He had a jade-tablet scroll in his hands, held up to his brow. His eyes were closed as he flipped through it.

On the jade-tablet scroll was the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art that his parents had left him.

A long time later, he finally opened his eyes. He massaged his brow lightly. Despite his fatigue, his eyes were full of fire.

Li Luo had been looking forward to his second acquired resonance for a long time.

As he finally started to get familiar with the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art, Li Luo was starting to realize just how hard it was to get acquired resonances.

The Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art was made of many materials imbued with various strands of energies that were forged into the required object. For example, in order to forge an acquired fire resonance, one would need to find all sorts of fire-energy materials and then use a special method to forge and temper them until their varied energies reached harmony. And then one would need to use blood essence from one's own spirit soul to activate it. Finally, you would have produced a passable acquired resonance.

The most tedious part of this process was accumulating the materials, and the repeated calibrations to find a harmony.

In other words, the Godly Forging Art was not just a labor of skill, but also one of hard work.

After reading the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art, Li Luo knew that much of his remaining years would be spent on this.

But the good news was that Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had left some notes at the back of the jade-tablet scroll detailing some of their past attempts. This was valuable experience that could help Li Luo save precious time, something that he barely had.

Most importantly, they had left him a hint. It was a suggestion that perhaps it would be good if the primary attribute of his second acquired resonance was wood.

The reason for this was tied to the blood essence and lifespan that Li Luo had lost in gaining his first acquired resonance. Although the waterlight resonance could help replenish losses, for safety's sake, a wood resonance was a good insurance policy.

This was because a wood resonance would not only have restorative properties, it would also have detoxifying properties. It would further boost his survivability. With water, wood, and light resonances, any damage that Li Luo took would no longer hurt his core.

"Wood resonance, eh..."

Li Luo lapsed into deep thought. He had originally thought to choose an offensive second resonance. But his parents had suggested the wood resonance. He would have to adjust his thinking.

Well, his waterlight resonance had been sufficiently modified, and he was getting by offensively. Perhaps a primary wood resonance would be workable.

Besides, the wood resonance was more about control. He could explore that further. First trap his opponent, then make them a pincushion for his arrows.

Still, that didn't seem very fitting. Maybe he would be seen as a sadist who loved torture...

Regardless, he already had handsome looks. No need to care about how he looked when he fought.

Li Luo made his decision. Channeling resonant power to his palm, he pressed it on the jade-tablet scroll.

Twang!

A beam of light shot out from the scroll, pouring out before expanding. Finally, it took shape as a six-colored wheel of light.

On the wheel of light, there were many holes. 128 of them, to be precise. One side had 86, the other 42.

The one with more holes was the primary, the one with less was the secondary.

And in the center of the wheel was a curious indent with many arcane patterns running out from it.

This was the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel.

This was a support item that was crucial to getting an acquired resonance. It was fairly tricky to make, definitely way beyond Li Luo's current abilities. Luckily, his parents had left him one.

If he wanted to forge his second acquired resonance, he would have to gather all sorts of materials and learn special methods to distill them. Finally, he would have to fill the holes on the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. When both sides were fully complete, he would have to add his own spirit soul and blood essence to finish it.

Li Luo stared at the six-colored light wheel for a long time, then he shook the jade-tablet scroll to stow it away.

If wood was going to be the primary attribute, what about the secondary? How should he choose?

He sat in front of the hearth, deep in thought.

The harsh rays of sunlight gently transitioned into the dull red of evening.

Li Luo finally exhaled deeply and put brush briefly to paper. He wrote two words.

Wood.

Earth.

This was the best he had come up with. Primary wood, secondary earth.

Woodearth resonance!

Since wood's specialty was in control, then it should be honed to the fullest. The best support for a wood resonance was an earth resonance.

Their synergy would further reinforce the control he could bring.

Besides, both water and light would synergize quite well with a wood resonance as well.

And the defenses of an earth resonance would further help his survivability...

For all these reasons, Li Luo made his decision.

Done, he hesitated no longer, leaving the room in search of Cai Wei at the old manor. He told her his request.

"Young Lord, you need materials with wood and earth energies?" Although Cai Wei found this request strange, she accepted.

"There are some leftover things in the old manor's storehouse. I will retrieve them for you. If they are insufficient, I'll send someone to purchase what you need from the market."

Although these materials were not cheap, the Sun creek Villa was swimming in skygold. Much of the financial pressure had been alleviated, so they were no longer forced to pinch pennies like they did at the start.

"Thanks, Sister Cai Wei."

Li Luo gave her a jaunty wave and left her to her business.

Her lovely eyes watched his back, and she smiled as well. She could sense that Li Luo was in a good mood today.

After putting away her account book, she personally went to take care of his errand.

Thanks to her frightful efficiency, she had the first batch of materials delivered to his room within two hours.

In the room.

Li Luo pulled out a green plant from a jade box. It had green, windchime-shaped flowers.

This was a woodbell flower, a rare flower with wood properties.

Mouthing the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art's incantation, Li Luo pressed it with his fingers and pushed his resonant power in.

Weng, weng!

After a moment, a thumb-sized flame appeared on his palm. This flame was special. It had a translucent sheen to it, as though devoid of any element.

"This is the Acquired Resonance Flame?"

Li Luo looked at it curiously. The flame was the core of the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art, and only materials forged within the Acquired Resonance Flame could become acquired resonances.

However, Li Luo's own resonant power was still too weak. That was why the Acquired Resonance Flame he had summoned was only a small one.

"Well, I'll do my best."

Li Luo shook his head exasperatedly. Plucking one woodbell flower, he lit it with the Acquired Resonance Flame.

However, he failed to control the heat properly the first time, reducing it to smoking ash.

No matter, failure was the mother of success.

The second, third, and fourth woodbell flowers all met the same fate.

"Come on! Why's it so hard?" Li Luo was feeling frustrated now. He could only take it as a learning experience. He moved on to another material and tried again.

After burning away several materials, Li Luo finally felt like he was getting the hang of things. He finally managed to forge a rare grass with earth properties.

He formed a dark-brown liquid, which he put into one of the holes on the six-colored light wheel. It immediately lit up, shining with a faint light, and a connection formed to the hole beside it.

Li Luo's heart leaped when he saw this. He forged yet another material, this time putting it into the hole that was connected.

However, the moment he added it, the six-colored light wheel started to quiver, as though trying to expel the material.

A rejection reaction

Li Luo hurriedly pulled it out. This meant that the material was not suited for his acquired resonance.

Next, Li Luo continued to try out various kinds, until he finally found one that was not rejected.

With the second hole filled, another strand of light extended out from it towards a third hole...

Li Luo would have to fill all the holes on the six-colored light wheel, and also achieve a balance between the primary and secondary sides before the acquired resonance was properly forged.

But when night fell, Li Luo had only managed to fill four holes. And he was completely drained.

This was an exhausting process.

However, he was not impatient. After all, he was still some time away from the Resonant Master Stage. Before that, he had time to slowly experiment with materials and piece the six-colored light wheel together.

That would be the time when he would get his second acquired resonance.

He could not wait.