

Starlit Path 139

Chapter 139: Masters on the Lake, the Young Master Plays Chess

The chess game concluded, and Lu leaned back in his Thousand Blades Chair, exhaling softly. The second match of Celestial Strategy, the Storm Game, was more challenging than the Mountain and River Game. The board's essence, which tempered the soul's strength, left him drained. But the results were undeniable. Though the game consumed half a day, his soul grew stronger, and with his cultivation technique, his spiritual energy surged.

At the third level of Qi Refining, Lu needed 9,000 strands of spiritual energy to reach the 10,000-strand limit for the fourth level—a daunting task, but not impossible. An uncompleted mission lingered: elevating White Jade City to a transcendent force. Success would grant 1,000 attribute points, enough for a monumental leap in strength, potentially propelling him instantly to the fourth level.

Stretching, he guided the Thousand Blades Chair out of the pavilion to the terrace. The post-rain breeze carried a damp freshness, soothing and relaxed. The vermilion carved railings, soaked by the storm, glistened with water droplets. With a gentle sweep of his hand, Lu evaporated the moisture.

Below, he overheard the conversation between two old men. "Three masters of the Hundred Schools heading to Beiluo?" he murmured, eyes narrowing. The leaders of the Dao Sect, Sword Sect, and Mechanism Sect—figures who once defined an era. His fingers tapped lightly on the railing as realization dawned. Leaning back in his wheelchair, a spark of anticipation flickered. "To leave no regrets before their era fades? Very well, I'll grant you that chance." His voice echoed softly across the terrace.

Beneath the pavilion, one of the old men swallowed hard, struck by the other's words. It hit him: White Jade City had grown so formidable that it was poised to end the era of the Hundred Schools. He recalled a time when Lu faced scorn from Beiluo's scholars on this very lake. Now, that same young man was a symbol of unfathomable power, heralding the dawn of White Jade City's era.

“Spread the word,” the other old man said with a sigh. “Let the world know. These old legends deserve to be remembered.” Once, their names rang across the land. Now, while the Hundred Schools still inspired awe, few recalled the individuals behind them. The first old man rose, grabbed his bamboo staff, and left. He penned a message, tied it to a messenger dove, and released it, white feathers trailing as it soared.

In the Imperial Capital, in a teahouse tucked in an alley, a striking woman received a dove. She read the message, her eyes sharpening. Folding the paper carefully, she ascended to the teahouse’s top floor, wrote a new message, and sent it out to the world. The doves multiplied—one to two, two to three. Soon, the news spread across the Great Zhou, stirring both martial and political circles. The three masters’ journey to Beiluo carried a resolute air, a final defiance against fate. Many sensed something extraordinary brewing. Martial artists and disciples of the Hundred Schools quietly set out for Beiluo to witness the spectacle.

In West County, inside a grand tent, the Overlord received the news, his eyes glinting. “Moths to a flame,” he sighed, crushing the letter to ash. “Even with the Strategist and the Scholar, they can’t win. The era of the Hundred Schools is over.” He shook his head, rose, and stepped into the moonlit night. By the East Yan River, he watched the white foam surge eastward, waves washing away heroes. Clenching his fist, he vowed to grow stronger. Without strength, he too would fade like the masters.

In the Imperial Capital, in a royal chamber, a man studied the message, eyes narrowing, fingers tapping the table. “Beiluo’s Young Master... White Jade City, the world’s premier cultivation force,” he said slowly. “A force to be feared.” He glanced at his son leaning by the door. “I planned to visit White Jade City tomorrow, but leaving the capital invites assassins. You’re a cultivator. Go to Beiluo in my stead and witness this earth-shaking clash.”

His son frowned, reluctant but unable to refuse. "Very well," he said, vanishing into the night. The man's warm smile faded as his son left.

The next day, the sky hung heavy with clouds, brewing a torrential storm. The air felt stifling. On the plains outside Beiluo, three carriages approached, hooves shattering the morning's silence, dust billowing. The drivers, tense, felt an oppressive weight. At five miles from the city, the carriages stopped. Three gazes peered out from the curtains.

"Beiluo..." one sighed. The three elders stepped out, faces etched with age but spirits unyielding. With resolve and anticipation, they abandoned their carriages and walked toward the city.

On Beiluo's walls, a man in armor watched the trio approach under the gloomy sky. Two generals flanked him, one visibly shocked. "The masters of the Dao Sect, Sword Sect, and Mechanism Sect?" The armored man nodded. "Why come to Beiluo like this? They can't challenge the Young Master!" one general protested. "They're strong, but human. The Young Master, blessed by immortality, is beyond that."

The armored man shook his head. "They refuse to let their era fade quietly. They're proving they once stood at the pinnacle." The generals fell silent, understanding the clash: the Hundred Schools' era versus White Jade City's. Ever since the Tianji School pledged allegiance, the masters knew White Jade City would surpass them.

"Open the gates," the armored man ordered. The heavy gates creaked open. The three elders glanced up, smiling faintly at the armored man, who nodded back. "A pity it's just us three," one said. "If the others joined, it'd be a real show." The Strategist refused Beiluo, the Scholar was in seclusion, and

another had long perished. Few remained to make this journey. Looking back, they realized their old companions had vanished into time.

Under the oppressive clouds, the three entered Beiluo. The gates closed with a heavy thud, sealing the moment. Outside, two more carriages arrived, stopping ten miles away. The Strategist, eyes trembling, watched the closed gates, hands shaking behind his back. Another man, fanning himself, leaned against his carriage. In a third, an old scholar lay gazing at the somber sky, lost in thought, while his student swigged from a gourd.

Inside Beiluo, the main street was pristine, sparsely populated. The three elders walked the stone path toward Beiluo Lake. Crowds filled teahouses and taverns along the way. The young cultivator from the capital sat by a tavern window, sipping wine, watching the elders pass. He paid and followed at a distance.

At Beiluo Lake, shrouded in thick mist, the elders felt both pressure and relief. "Scared?" one teased, glancing at the Sword Saint, who stood ramrod straight. "Scared? I was the Sword Saint before that Young Master was born," he snorted. "Keep it down. You know his temper," the third rasped.

A small boat glided through the lake, ripples spreading like parted curtains. An old man in white, a gold chain around his neck, sat grinning aboard. "That old fox," the elders muttered. "His nose sniffed out White Jade City's power early and joined them." The old man stood, nodding to the trio.

One elder laughed, stepped onto the lake, his vitality surging, and walked across the water. The Sword Saint scoffed, flung his sword, and rode it to the boat. The third's shoes transformed, propelling him through the water. Each boarded the boat, which drifted into the mist, vanishing.

The young cultivator stood at the lakeside, his blood still, his spiritual energy frozen. Something terrifying in the lake made his heart pound. "Beiluo... the Young Master!" He'd heard the name before, but only now felt its weight.

The clouds finally broke, rain falling like a curtain, blending sky and lake. On the boat, the four old men sat silently, rain soaking them. The deeper they went, the heavier the world's pressure grew. At last, the mist parted, revealing an island like a celestial haven. On a pavilion's terrace, a young man in white sat in a silver wheelchair, one hand propping his chin, the other placing a chess piece. A maid held an umbrella over him.

The Young Master played chess, a scene like a masterful painting.