

Starlit Path 145

Chapter 145: The Chicken's Chuckle

On Lakeheart Island in Beiluo, the clouds hung heavy. The island's occupants, still reeling from the terrifying spiritual pressure, dared not make a sound.

Lu sat in his wheelchair, brow furrowed, gazing at the sky. A wisp of spiritual sense stood taut, ready. Having accepted the World Tier Upgrade Assessment, he braced for formidable foes. Truth be told, since his debut, no worthy opponent had crossed his path. The Yin-Yang School's master had come closest, forcing Lu to stand from his wheelchair—only to fall in a single move, his body cold before it hit the ground. Lu had been disappointed then. No one could match him.

Since that encounter, his power had grown, leaving few rivals. Now, the system hinted at a Mid-Martial World's Plane Lord descending as a spiritual sense clone. Lu felt a spark of anticipation. Could this foe make him stand again?

To show respect, he felt a sense of urgency. He waited, the breeze stirring the island's chrysanthemums, the lake rippling softly. Yet, nothing happened. The world was silent, the clouds parting to reveal dazzling sunlight.

"Hm?" Lu frowned. "No immediate arrival? Or perhaps they descended elsewhere?"

The task specified the four Wanderers would arrive in three months, but the Plane Lord's clone had no such timeline. Lu had expected an immediate threat. After half a day of waiting with no sign, he lost interest. Deep down, he wasn't overly worried. At the third layer of Qi Refining, his combat strength surpassed the Body Zang realm, edging into mid-martial territory. What fear could a Mid-Martial Plane Lord's clone inspire?

The Wanderers intrigued him more. Per the system, they were fallen Plane Lords from shattered worlds, drifting in the void, yearning to seize a new world to reclaim their glory. Their desperation might pose a greater threat than the Plane Lord.

Leaning back in his wheelchair, Lu's frown deepened. He could no longer coast. The chair rolled itself down from the pavilion's second floor. Below, the spiritual energy storm had faded, peach blossoms bloomed vibrantly, and chrysanthemums swayed—a scene like an immortal realm.

“Young Master,” Ning Zhao said, opening her eyes after refining her energy, standing gracefully and bowing.

Ni Yu, clutching her black wok, face flushed, stood as well. Xie Yunling, Gongshu Yu, and Hua Dongliu, masters of their schools, stared at Lu in awe, seeing him up close for the first time. The legendary Young Master sat in a silver wheelchair, a chessboard on one armrest, a fiery red guard—likely the Phoenix Feather sword—on the other. His white robes gleamed, his features refined, like a scholar steeped in poetry.

Hua Dongliu, stunned, hadn't imagined the wielder of that peerless sword as such a youthful figure. “Young Master Lu,” the three bowed.

Lu glanced at them, nodding slightly. “The matter's settled. You may leave.”

The trio hesitated. “Young Master Lu, you're not taking us under your wing? Why send us away?” Xie Yunling asked, puzzled.

Lu paused, glancing at Xie. “Fair point.” He tapped the armrest. “From today, the Daoist Sect, Sword Sect, and Mechanism School are under White Jade Capital’s banner. They’ll be renamed Dao Pavilion, Sword Pavilion, and Mechanism Pavilion. Unlike the Tianji Pavilion, White Jade Capital won’t restrict your growth. Compete as you wish, so long as you don’t destroy each other. Every two years, an assessment will determine rewards—spirit stones, cultivation techniques, or spiritual artifacts.”

His voice echoed over the pavilion, shifting the masters’ expressions. Lu’s intent was clear: White Jade Capital would let them vie freely. Xie hadn’t expected this outcome, but it was the best for the Daoist Sect—a rare opportunity. With their Dragon Gate, they held a massive advantage, their disciples honing strength far beyond the Sword or Mechanism Schools.

“Thank you, Young Master!” Xie, Hua, and Gongshu bowed, saying little.

“Call me ‘Young Master’ like Old Lü,” Lu said, nodding. “Also, a warning: great changes are coming. Prepare early.”

The three paused, unsure of his meaning. A shift in the world’s conflicts? Were the regional lords finally moving against Great Zhou? The cycle of division and unity was inevitable. The Hundred Schools, save for the Confucianists and Mohists, rarely meddled in court affairs. Still, they took Lu’s words to heart. “Thank you, Young Master,” they said.

Lu saw their expressions but said no more. The World Tier Upgrade Assessment wasn’t dire. Though spiritual energy had resurged, ushering in the cultivator era, most hadn’t yet embraced cultivation’s pursuit. They saw it as a tool for worldly power. Lu wanted them to use cultivation resources to break through, not to vie for dominion. No throne could rival a world’s ascension.

“Go,” Lu waved, dismissing them.

Hua Dongliu pulled his old sword from the ground, its blade cracked, on the verge of breaking. He smiled, sheathed it, and bowed to Lu before leaving. The Sword Sect, now Sword Pavilion, carried his regret but no resentment. Survival was fortune enough. A spark of anticipation stirred in him—two years hence, Sword Pavilion would clash with Dao Pavilion in the assessment. The Mechanism Pavilion, with its disciples decimated in the fall of Mechanism City, was no threat. Gongshu Yu's "Storm Pear Blossom," his life's work, was spent and unusable. Hua admitted its power—against anyone but Lu, it would've killed him. Without it, Gongshu was no concern.

Xie bowed and left, joining Hua on a boat, drifting away from the island. "Why stay?" Lu asked Gongshu, who remained.

Lu admired Gongshu. His "Storm Pear Blossom" had elevated the world's combat level with a single weapon. "Young Master..." Gongshu's hoarse voice trembled. He knelt, forehead to the ground. "The Mechanism School is just me now. I've chased the pinnacle of mechanism arts my whole life, but it's come to nothing. I beg to stay on the island, to live out my days in peace."

His voice carried the desolation of age. Lü Dongxuan, touching his gold chain, sighed. The Mechanism School's strict disciple requirements—enduring solitude and innate talent—left it sparse. The Overlord's assault on Mechanism City had killed most, leaving Gongshu alone. Having poured his life into the "Storm Pear Blossom," its use left him purposeless, his age more pronounced.

Lu, calm, looked at the kneeling Gongshu. "Craft another 'Storm Pear Blossom' in one month, and you may stay."

His spiritual sense sent the Artisan's Manual as a golden spark into Gongshu's mind. Ignoring the stunned man, Lu's chair, pushed by Ning Zhao, rolled to the nervous girl with a pipa on the stone steps.

Ming Yue, flushed with excitement and anxiety, faced Lu's undeniable might, feeling like a commoner before an emperor. "I said if you could infuse spiritual energy into your pipa's sound, you could stay. You did it," Lu said.

Ming Yue's face reddened with thrill and nerves. "Y-Young Master, I..." she stammered.

Lu waved. "Play a piece."

She nodded, sitting on the steps, legs crossed, fingers gliding over the strings. Inspired by the masters' battle, her music grew fierce, like a blade's wind, sharp and relentless, embodying their unyielding spirit. Spiritual energy wove into the notes, making stones dance, faintly cutting the air. It fell short, but it was remarkable.

The song ended, her solemnity fading to nervousness. "Not bad. What's it called?" Lu asked, tapping the armrest.

Ming Yue, flustered, said, "Young Master, it has no name. If you don't mind, would you name it?"

Ning Zhao's lips pursed—asking Lu to name something was a bold move. Ni Yu covered her forehead, stifling a laugh. Bai Qingniao's eyes lit up, eager to name things herself, but Little Phoenix, poking from her collar, rolled its eyes.

Meeting Ming Yue's hopeful gaze, Lu felt obliged. He frowned, deep in thought.

On the lake, Nie Changqing, carrying the Taoist nun, waited for Xie to leave before rowing to the island. The breeze stirred his white robes as he took in the island's beauty.

Lu exhaled, meeting Ming Yue's eyes with a smile. "You crafted this from the masters' final brilliance before their era's end. Let's call it 'Sun Never Sets.'"

Ming Yue blinked, stunned. Ning Zhao bit her lip, unsurprised. Ni Yu pursed her mouth, suppressing a laugh—Lu's naming quirks were notorious, and she feared his petty side.

But Ni Yu held it in. Little Phoenix, poking from Bai Qingniao's collar, couldn't, flapping its wings and chirping as if laughing. Ni Yu, glancing at the chick, burst out laughing, her voice echoing across the island.

The laughter faded, leaving silence. "Young Master, if I say I was laughing at the chick... would you believe me?" Ni Yu ventured.

"Young Master... I was wrong!"