

Starlit Path 155

Chapter 155: Xie Yunling Touches the World's Great Secret

Dark clouds gathered over the sky. Lu, seated in his Thousand-Blade Chair, held the golden light, choosing not to destroy it. He had other plans. Using the Phoenix Feather Sword's threat, he'd extracted much from the consciousness within. "Your world is mid-martial, with cultivators divided into qi condensation—akin to my Qi Core—foundation building, like my Body Treasury, and above that, golden core," Lu mused. The light's master, a golden core cultivator, had come to devour this world's origin to break their own limits, only to fall into Lu's hands.

Despite appearing as a mere qi condensation cultivator, Lu matched a golden core master. He shrugged—after all, he could only refine qi. "Absorbing a world's origin energy..." Lu's lips curved. If this mid-martial world's lord could siphon energy, could Lu reverse it, drawing that world's energy to accelerate his own world's evolution? A bold idea.

With a plan forming, Lu acted. At the railing, lake winds tousled his hair. He waved, parting Beiluo Lake like a curtain, its waters cascading aside. Flicking his fingers, he bound the golden light with spiritual chains and sent it to the lakebed. The mid-martial lord's spiritual clone was sealed, its faint screams echoing. The islanders exchanged glances, awed by Lu's mysterious methods.

Xie Yunling, gazing at the calming lake, realized Lu's strength was unfathomable. When the four scholars challenged him, Lu hadn't even used his full power. As Lu glided down from the pavilion's second floor in his white robe, Xie bowed. "Young Master."

Lu spared him because of restraint; a moment's impatience could've erased him. Lu gazed at the shimmering lake, silent. Xie stood behind, their robes fluttering among peach blossoms and chrysanthemums. A startled crow's cry pierced the air. "Young Master, what was that?" Xie asked. "That barbarian wasn't one—it was controlled, like I was."

Lu nodded. "Indeed, the barbarian was long dead, puppeted." Stroking his blanket, he added, "You were lucky to survive, but your soul's damaged. Stay on the island to recover."

"Yes," Xie agreed, hesitant but compliant.

"You're curious about it, aren't you?" Lu said. "Anyone would be. I could erase your memory, but since you were possessed, there's no need to hide it. As the Daoist Pavilion under Baiyujing, you'll face this eventually."

Xie's heart raced, sensing a profound secret. Lu, staring at the lake as if seeing the ongoing battle in the Dragon Gate's palace, spoke slowly. "You know of Wolong Ridge's secret realm?"

Xie nodded. "Yes, Sansi gained the ancient cultivator's Spirit Transport Sword Manuscript there, reaching Qi Core."

"Ancient cultivators..." Lu's voice held a faint smile. "For nearly a century, Great Zhou had no spiritual energy or cultivators. But since Wolong Ridge opened, cultivators have emerged. This is a spiritual resurgence."

Lu grasped the air, turning invisible spiritual energy into flowing blue streams, weaving through the lake, island, and Dragon Gate—a mesmerizing tapestry. Xie gaped. "The world has spiritual energy, unseen until now. As the resurgence grows, it'll fill every corner, like the ancient era," Lu said.

Xie was entranced. "From Wolong Ridge to the eight Dragon Gates, these are tied to that glorious ancient era, possibly relics of its fall. Back then, Qi Core cultivators were common, Body Treasury ones abundant, yet mere beginners. Great emperors wielded unimaginable power, challenging the heavens."

Lu tapped his wheelchair, choosing his words. “But have you wondered why such a splendid era vanished? Why spiritual energy faded, leaving no cultivators?”

Xie paled, realization dawning. “Young Master... was it the thing that controlled me?”

Lu nodded. “Call them extraterrestrial demons. When spiritual energy resurges, they come like cats to a fish, seeking to devour this world’s energy, burying this era as they did the ancient one.”

Xie trembled, touching a world-shattering secret. He didn’t doubt Lu—there was no reason to deceive him. “This demon is just the start. More will come. The resurgence brings opportunity but also unpredictable crises,” Lu said, leaning back. “I founded Baiyujing not to conquer the world but to lead cultivators against these demons, to protect our home and prevent a repeat of the ancient darkness.”

Xie’s heart shook. The ancient cultivator era, destroyed by these demons? He’d thought Baiyujing aimed to dominate the martial and political worlds, but Lu’s vision was far grander—guarding against cosmic threats. The Hundred Schools, meddling in worldly affairs, seemed petty by comparison. Lu’s words were partly to justify the demon’s arrival, to weave his narrative of spiritual resurgence, and to pressure the world to grow.

Lu raised a hand, summoning runes from his Preaching Platform into reality. He wove an array, mystical symbols dancing across the lake, forming a massive circular formation. Xie watched, stunned, gaining insights as if entering a new realm. The array, draining Lu’s soul strength, sank to the lakebed, netting the golden light. The trapped consciousness writhed, incredulous at Lu’s audacity.

At night, Lu returned to the pavilion, playing chess to restore his soul. Absorbing another world's origin was a long-term endeavor, requiring gradual accumulation to form this world's origin—a heavenly dao. This would hasten the Five Phoenixes' ascent to mid- or high-martial status.

On the vast plain, cavalry thundered, hooves deafening. Jiang Li, in silver armor, gleamed under the moonlight, leading dozens of Black Dragon Guards and ten thousand capital troops—the most he could muster. Ahead, South Command's ten thousand camped in a formidable valley, exuding menace. Jiang Li reined in his horse, dust rising. "South Command's army..." His face grew grave, sensing a dragon's den.

He doubted Tang Xiansheng's motives. Such a force wasn't easily surrendered to Great Zhou. Yuwen Xiu saw it as a prize, but Jiang Li was wary. Glancing at his troops and Chi Lian, he spurred his horse, merging with South Command's army like an arrow in the night.

In North Command, at Tai Ling's Wentian Peak, a perilous region, Tantai Xuan's army camped. In armor, he read a secret letter by torchlight, eyes narrowing. "South Command marches, Great Zhou sends a general to attack us... They want to seize this Dragon Gate before we cultivate an army of cultivators!" He sneered. The Dragon Gate was key to future dominance. Having escaped Buzhou Peak's shadow, he wouldn't relinquish Wentian Peak.

"What's your view, Master?" he asked Mo Beike, sipping tea below.

Mo Beike, aged since Beiluo, smiled faintly. "No need to worry. It's not as dire as it seems." Mo Ju, fanning himself, added, "South Command's march... who are they really targeting?"

Mo Beike set down his cup. "Great Zhou's stability hinges on Jiang Li. His leadership steadies the army. Tang's ten thousand troops seem sincere, and Yuwen Xiu seized the chance to crush North Command or take the Dragon Gate, easing his burden. The young emperor's grown bold, trusting the capital's defenses to send Jiang Li out. It's a sound choice."

"But..." Mo Ju's eyes gleamed. "Tang recommended Jiang Li. That old fox has ulterior motives. Jiang Li's in danger."

Mo Beike clapped softly, approving. The tent crackled with torchlight. Under the cold moon, a lone rider in a black hood entered the camp like a phantom.