

## Starlit Path 158

Chapter 158: Jiang Li Faces Calamity, Shaking the World

\*Beiluo, Lake Island, Baiyujing Pavilion, Second Floor\*

Lu stretched, his soul strength restored after days of rest from crafting the array. The weather had turned chilly, the lake breeze carrying a bite. At the railing, he gazed at the lake, spotting an old man fishing—Lü Mudui, the same man who once posed as a Beiluo fisherman when they first met. The Thousand-Blade Chair glided silently down from the pavilion as Lu decided to roam the island for a change.

Ning Zhao, meditating on the stone steps, sensed his approach and opened her eyes. “Young Master,” she greeted, rising.

“Body Treasury involves tempering the five organs—heart, liver, spleen, lungs, kidneys—corresponding to fire, wood, earth, metal, and water,” Lu said. “Fully tempered, they form spiritual energy vortexes, creating spiritual armor for enhanced defense and endless energy. But tempering is just the start, Ning. Finding your elemental affinity is key for future growth.”

Ning nodded earnestly. “Thank you, Young Master.” She pushed his wheelchair along the island’s edge, where peach blossoms bloomed vibrantly, their spiritual aura heightened since the Biluo Peach Tree’s arrival, even spurring the Skyward Chrysanthemum to absorb spiritual energy faster.

A splash erupted as Little Yellow Dragon, now a Heavenly Dragon, surfaced, its massive head and quivering gills dwarfing its former self. Lu patted its cold scales, chuckling. “Go play, but don’t scare the boatmen.” With a low roar, it dove back into the lake. “The dragon-rearing ground is miraculous,” Ning marveled. “That little yellow蛟 has become a behemoth.”

“You might not beat it,” Lu teased. Ning smiled, pushing on. They passed Nie Shuang, practicing fists in the water, his punches stirring waves. “Nie Shuang’s progressing well,” Ning noted. “With Dragon Blood and Gathering Qi Pills, he’s among the world’s top cultivators.” Lu nodded, pleased by Nie’s diligence, unlike Ni Yu’s laziness.

Speaking of Ni Yu, Lu glanced at her, hunched over her black cauldron, face smudged with ash, surrounded by herbs and failed pill dregs. Shaking his head, he had Ning fetch a boat to visit Beiluo City, balancing cultivation with leisure. Nie Changqing, already on the boat, rose to greet him. “To Beiluo City,” Lu ordered. Nie poled the boat, ripples spreading through the misty lake.

In Beiluo, Ning pushed Lu through bustling streets, the city thriving under the Dragon Blood Army’s patrols. Its unmatched security drew many to settle there. Soldiers saluted Lu, who nodded back, his heart calming. He preferred Ning’s quiet presence over Ni Yu’s chatter.

Back at the Lu Manor, Lu was surprised not to find Lu Changkong. “Where’s Father?” he asked.

“Young Master, the City Lord is guarding the walls,” Ning replied. “The world’s situation has shifted dramatically.”

“Oh?” Lu raised a brow, intrigued. He’d been focused on chess and soul recovery, neglecting worldly affairs. “Tell me.”

As Ning pushed him through the manor’s garden, she explained: “South Command’s ten thousand troops march north, led by Jiang Li under the emperor’s decree, to attack Tantai Xuan and seize the Tai Ling Dragon Gate. West Command’s Overlord sent troops to aid Tantai Xuan, forming a strategic alliance against South Command and Great Zhou.”

Lu tapped the Phoenix Feather guard. "Tai Ling? Qinglong's dragon-rearing ground? Tantai always encounters the feistiest dragons," he mused, smiling. "But yesterday, news came from the northern march..."

Ning's eyes sharpened. "South and North Commands allied to ambush Jiang Li."

Lu's interest piqued. "Jiang Li's no cultivator. He's in grave danger." Ning added, "The City Lord guards the walls, as is his habit during turmoil, to deter threats to Beiluo."

Lu chuckled. "Even if the world's armies came, Beiluo would stand unshaken." His tone carried quiet dominance.

---

\*Northern Frontier\*

Jiang Li, in silver armor, stood on a cliff, his face grim under a darkening sky. Heavy clouds loomed, mirroring the oppressive situation. "Tang Xiansheng's up to no good," he muttered, his red cape billowing. "He wants me dead first."

Marching days into North Command, his ten thousand Great Zhou elites merged with South Command's army. Upon entering North Command, they spotted enemy scouts. On the second day, they clashed.

Jiang Li's forces were routed—not by North Command, but by South Command's generals, led by Tang Baiyun, turning on him and his men.

Prepared for betrayal, Jiang Li rallied his troops to break out, but North Command blocked their retreat. Fighting and retreating, his battered forces were trapped in a valley, surrounded. The news shocked the world, rivaling the Four Scholars' challenge to Lu. It reshaped the global order.

Governors and city lords reeled. The capital quaked. In the Purple Gold Palace, Yuwen Xiu leapt from the throne, incredulous. "South Command's ten thousand rebelled, allied with North Command, ambushing Jiang Li, who's trapped with his remnants in a valley?!" His body trembled, his unease confirmed. Pale, he sank back, roaring, "Tang Xiansheng!"

"Seize him now!" he bellowed. Armored boots clanged as guards stormed Tang's quarters. Yuwen Xiu, trusting Tang's presence in the capital, had sent Jiang Li. Yet Tang, ever cautious, dared this bold move.

---

Within a day, Jiang Li's ambush spread, stunning the world. The capital's skies darkened, rain pouring like moths to flame, mist rising. In the study pavilion, the Imperial Preceptor stood by the window, watching rain-soaked banana leaves. Mo Tianyu, drenched, rushed in. "Teacher, disaster!"

The Preceptor, unmoved, sat in his creaking rocking chair, harmonizing with the rain. "What's got you so flustered?"

"Jiang Li's ambushed! South and North Commands allied to kill him!" Mo Tianyu said, shaking off water.

The Preceptor wasn't surprised. "I didn't know—I guessed. The world's in a delicate balance. Great Zhou benefits, regrouping. West Command thrives, with the Overlord growing stronger daily via the Dragon Gate. But for North and South Commands, it's a death knell. They lack figures like the Overlord. The longer the balance holds, the weaker their edge against Great Zhou. Tang Xiansheng seeks to break it."

Mo Tianyu's eyes narrowed. "But Tang's in the capital. Is he trading his life for Jiang Li's?"

"The most cautious man wouldn't," the Preceptor murmured, half-asleep. "He's prepared to escape." The rain intensified. "What could ensure his escape?" Mo Tianyu wondered.

"Not in the past, with the Hundred Schools' era. But now... recall the bloody battle on the capital's streets?" the Preceptor hinted.

Mo Tianyu's eyes widened. "Cultivators?"

---

\*Capital, Tang's Quarters\*

Candlelight silhouetted a tea-drinking figure. Armored soldiers, gripping cold weapons in the rain, kicked open the carved door. A cry echoed. On the roof, the old eunuch, holding an umbrella, saw the figure wasn't Tang. Furious at being outwitted, he shrieked, "Chase! Seal the capital!"

On the capital's long street, a carriage raced through the rain. Tang Yimo, in a straw hat and raincoat, whipped the reins, hooves splashing water. Around it, figures in similar attire, sword cases on their backs, ran alongside. The open city gate loomed.

Tang Yimo's eyes sharpened, urging the horses faster. But a crossbow bolt tore through the rain, embedding in the gate's eaves, splintering wood. "Drop the bolt! Seal the gate!" guards roared, leaping to close the vermilion doors.

Arrows rained down, threatening to engulf the carriage. Tang Yimo pulled the reins, horses rearing, hooves slamming the ground. The gate shut, copper studs dripping. From the street's end, the old eunuch approached, Black Dragon Guards leaping from rooftops, their spiritual energy erupting like stones in a still lake, stirring a massive wave.