

Starlit Path 161

Chapter 161: The Overlord Leads His Army, South Command Crumbles

Beiluo Lake

The lake's surface was a mirror, reflecting figures in the misty spiritual energy. Lu sat in his Thousand-Blade Chair, hovering above, gazing at a nail-sized glow deep in the lake—a seed of hope, the world's origin. To craft a transcendent fantasy world, this origin was essential, breaking the power limits of the Five Phoenixes. Currently, the continent's ceiling was Body Treasury with fully tempered organs, unable to manifest elemental spiritual energy. While Lu was unbound, the natives faced this barrier, keeping the world low-martial.

To ascend to mid-martial, the origin was vital. With his strength, Lu could nurture one in centuries, but that was too slow. The lake's origin, linked to another world's, pulsed with growing power. Looking up, Lu pierced the clouds, seeing countless stars—worlds of varying sizes. He didn't know if the Five Phoenixes would clash with them, but his goal was clear: elevate the continent from low to mid, then high-martial.

Returning to the island, Lu found Nie Changqing waiting, saber at his side. "Young Master," Nie greeted.

"Finished tempering one organ?" Lu asked, eyebrow raised. Nie nodded. The island's spiritual richness and spirit stones from the secret realm sped his progress. "Something to say?" Lu asked, leaning back, enjoying the breeze.

Nie hesitated, then nodded. "The corrupted souls we released from the Dragon Gate, you said they'd influence creatures, forming demons. They might bring disaster, so..." He took a breath. "I want to leave the island to slay them and seek inspiration for my cultivation bottleneck."

Lu wasn't surprised. The world's origin prototype limited progress, making later tempering harder. "Baiyujing is free," Lu said. "I won't restrict you. Just focus on growing stronger."

Nie, stunned, vowed, "I won't fail you." Lu smiled. "Spend time with your family. You'll have less of it roaming the world." Nie bowed, saber gleaming under the moonlight, and left.

Lu gazed at the lake, lost in thought.

Rainy Night

Tang Xiansheng, soaked and shivering, his vitality waning with age, clung to Tang Yimo, who was pale, feverish, and coughing blood from forcing his second meridian. Outside the capital's roads, Tang Yimo had dragged Tang Xiansheng, but now the old man supported his son, urging him to stay conscious. Looking back at the capital's faint outline, Tang Xiansheng's face streamed with rain. His South Command cultivators, embedded in the capital, died to secure his escape. Only Tang Yimo's half-life sacrifice saved him.

His eyes burned, jaw clenched. Next time, he'd enter the capital openly, not flee like a dog. Hooves echoed—pursuers. Tang Xiansheng, pale, helped Tang Yimo forward until a carriage, arranged as backup, whisked them away. Inside, he wiped Tang Yimo's face, silent. In his son, he saw his own past—stubborn defiance against fate. A sigh escaped him.

Valley Outskirts

Tang Baiyun, in silver armor, vibrated with excitement. Jiang Li's five thousand remnants had charged his ten thousand, provoked by the barbarians' witchcraft. Though disguised, their identity was exposed, spurring Jiang Li's desperate assault. Waving a flag, Tang Baiyun sent elite South Command cavalry into the valley, where shouts of battle rang.

Jiang Li, on a blood-soaked boulder, snapped his bowstring shooting at barbarians, killing two before South Command's cavalry intervened. Brandishing General Bai's short sword, he leapt into the fray, severing horse legs and heads, his silver armor now blood-red. His fervor ignited his men. If their commander fought so fearlessly, why should they fear? Great Zhou's soldiers erupted with unprecedented will, the Black Dragon Guards' eyes blazing with rage at the barbarians' vile tactics. They cleaved cavalry in half, fighting with raw strength when spiritual energy ran dry.

Corpses piled, blood flowing like rivers. Chi Lian, blood-drenched, followed Jiang Li, vowing to kill enough to join him in death. Jiang Li, unyielding, pointed his sword forward. No retreat—only battle. Tang Baiyun's face fell. The Black Dragon Guards' line broke, yet Jiang Li held. Would he need the South Command Army?

The ground shook, and Tang Baiyun's eyes lit up. "North Command's here?" He sneered. "Tantai Xuan, like a cat smelling blood, attacks now that Jiang's weakening." He envisioned Jiang's death crippling Great Zhou, paving the way for their conquest.

"Take Jiang Li's head for thirty thousand silver!" he roared. His army surged. But a scout scrambled in, pale. "Young Master, disaster! North Command attacks us!" Tang Baiyun froze, seizing the scout. "What?!"

“Tantai Xuan’s army attacks from the north, clashing with ours!” the scout stammered. Tang Baiyun staggered. “That old fool! What’s he thinking?” The scout added, “They shout, ‘Not of our kind, their hearts differ!’”

Tang Baiyun laughed bitterly. His barbarian gambit was exposed, enraging North Command. “Foolish old man! Breaking Jiang Li shifts the world’s balance. What’s a few barbarians?” North Command’s attack disrupted his plans. Mounting his horse, he rode to the front, seeing North Command’s army, dust obscuring the moon. His men fled, armor scattered.

Tantai Xuan, in cold armor, red cape billowing, spotted Tang Baiyun. “Dog!” he cursed. Tang Baiyun, face darkening, retorted, “Tantai, we agreed to kill Jiang Li! We were cooperating!”

“Cooperate, my ass!” Tantai spat. “North Command faces the Rong at Tianhan Pass, losing countless men yearly. Barbarians and Rong are the same, scourges of Great Zhou! You ally with them? I’m here to crush you!”

His soldiers roared, generals bellowing like beasts. Tang Baiyun, pale, saw no reasoning with Tantai. North Command charged, forcing him to engage, even deploying the South Command Army and barbarians. Tantai, seeing the barbarians, slammed his chariot. “Dog!”

In the valley, South Command’s assault paused, giving Jiang Li’s men a breather. Sensing oddity, he sent scouts, who returned with news: “North Command attacks South Command for allying with barbarians.” Jiang Li laughed. “Well done, Tantai Xuan! Tang Xiansheng planned everything but misstepped. Maybe he meant to trick West and North Commands with barbarians, but Tang Baiyun exposed it, igniting North Command’s fury. ‘Not of our kind, their hearts differ’—well said!”

Wiping blood from his sword, Jiang Li rallied his bloodied Black Dragon Guards. "Can you still fight?" "Yes!" they roared. "Follow me to crush South Command's army!" Chi Lian's eyes burned. It was madness—recovery in the valley was wiser—but Jiang Li chose to break out, aiding North Command to devastate South Command.

His men, fearless, charged out, cutting down South Command's guards. Jiang Li beheaded a general, toppling their banner. The clash of North and South Commands was brutal, but South Command's army, like a butcher's blade, tore through North Command's lines, even their proud cavalry.

Tantai, grim, used numbers to overwhelm. He saw the need for a cultivator army. South Command, with barbarians, gained the upper hand. Then, Jiang Li's Black Dragon Guards stormed from the valley, suppressing South Command's army. "Jiang Li!" Tantai laughed. "A true man!"

South Command faltered, and North Command counterattacked. By dawn, Tang Baiyun, bloodied, ordered a retreat southwest. Jiang Li, meeting Tantai, urged restraint, but Tantai smirked, pointing southwest. Jiang Li's face twitched. Had Tantai summoned him?

Tang Baiyun's fleeing army, pursued half a day, heard a terrifying rumble from the southwest horizon. His face paled. Over the horizon, the Overlord Xiang Shaoyun, wielding his axe and shield, rode a black steed, hair wild, eyes fierce. Fifty thousand West Liang soldiers, armored and disciplined, blocked South Command's escape. Their war drums and horns boiled the blood, and Tang Baiyun's face drained of color.