

## Starlit Path 164

### Chapter 164: I'm Just a Poor Painter

\*The World\*

Baiyujing's decree halted wars, shocking the world. Its influence, surpassing the Hundred Schools, had grown immense. When Baiyujing ushered in a new era, its dominance over Great Zhou was undeniable. No faction dared ignore its might—its disciples, all cultivators, wielded formidable and diverse powers, and Lu Ping'an, the master, was the world's premier cultivator. Even four Hundred Schools leaders combined couldn't withstand him, cementing Baiyujing's terrifying reputation.

Yet, amid awe, a question lingered: why three months? Factions speculated, hoping to seize an opportunity, but none deciphered the decree's intent.

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\*Capital, Book Pavilion\*

Kong Xiu rocked in his chair, well-informed despite his seclusion. Mo Tianyu, puzzled, asked, "Teacher, why does Baiyujing demand a three-month ceasefire? What's special about three months?"

Kong Xiu, gazing at banana leaves outside, shook his head. "Ping'an's thoughts are opaque. His perspective differs from ours—perhaps he sees what we cannot." Mo Tianyu nodded, half-understanding. If even the strategic Kong Xiu couldn't fathom it, Baiyujing's move was truly baffling.

“Stop guessing,” Kong Xiu coughed. “In three months, Ping’an’s purpose will reveal itself. This ceasefire will stir unrest, and when it ends, Great Zhou’s fate may be decided.”

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#### \*The Ceasefire\*

With Baiyujing’s decree, peace settled over the world. Wars ceased, and factions focused on development, particularly cultivating practitioners. North Command, at Tai Ling’s Wentian Peak, sent a squad to breach its Dragon Gate. A massive azure snake coiled around the peak, annihilating them with a flick. Tantai Xuan, furious, sent another, but the snake crushed them too.

“Why?” Tantai trembled. Was he cursed to fail at Dragon Gates? Not Zhou Peak and now Wentian Peak rejected him. When a third squad fell, the snake transformed into a colossal azure dragon, its gaze piercing Tantai. Unlike Wolong Ridge’s immortal, it spared him. Days later, Tantai, alone, faced the dragon daily, even conversing with it. Eventually, it relented, allowing North Command to train cultivators, breaking their practitioner drought.

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#### \*Beiluo, Lake Island\*

Lu, satisfied with the world’s compliance, saw the decree’s impact as proof of Baiyujing’s transcendent authority. Even the Hundred Schools couldn’t achieve such obedience. As factions trained cultivators,

Lu's spiritual energy commissions grew. Preparing to study the plane's origin and craft a new secret realm—key to the world's upgrade—he was interrupted by Nie Changqing.

Nie sought to roam, slaying demons and seeking breakthroughs. Lu approved, advising him to take Qi Gathering Pills from Ni Yu for cultivation. On the island, Jing Yue swung his sword ten thousand times daily, a method from Gongshu Yu, honing his swordsmanship. Gongshu Yu, using the Refining Manual, crafted the "Storm Pear Blossom" in days, stunned by his own progress.

Ni Yu, deep in alchemy with Lu's Qi Gathering Pill Manual, struggled with a new formula, eating failed pill dregs and regretting her path, though Lu forbade her quitting. Lu Changkong, residing on the island, sent North Command's iron-blooded soldiers into the Dragon Gate, becoming cultivators. He himself, nearing Body Treasury, meditated under a chrysanthemum.

On the tenth day, Lu announced his seclusion. Ning Zhao, white dress flowing, guarded the pavilion with her Cicada Wing Sword, barring all entry.

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\*Capital, Royal Gardens\*

Under a dark, windy night, young eunuchs hauled two buckets of raw meat to the Nine-Turn Bridge. "The black dragon's appetite is huge," one trembled. "Yesterday's bucket wasn't enough—it nearly wrecked the garden."

"Two buckets today; it'll be full," another reassured. "You feed it. Its eyes yesterday... like it was eyeing me like the meat." They crossed the bridge to a green pond. One eunuch tossed bloody beef in. The

water exploded, a massive, scale-covered head swallowing it. The eunuch, legs shaking, fed piece after piece, the dragon's chewing eerie in the silence.

After both buckets, the dragon's gaping maw loomed, its stench overwhelming. The eunuch paled, but the dragon sank back. Smirking triumphantly, he turned to leave, unaware of the other eunuch's horrified stare. Water surged, and a foul breath hit his neck. The bridge flooded, leaving only spinning buckets and blood. The hiding eunuch collapsed, terrified.

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\*South Command, Nanjiang City\*

Sima Qingshan, sleep-deprived and red-eyed, lived in fear. Villagers thought him ill, but he waved off concerned students. Mustering courage, he painted a "Chick Pecking Rice" on rice paper, the chick lifelike. His art had grown uncanny—ladies in portraits smiled, rivers in landscapes gurgled, chicks ran. Suspecting ghosts, he showed friends, who praised his skill, urging him to sell.

Tempted, he bundled his paintings, ignoring a winking lady, and headed to the market. In a dense forest outside, black shadows darted, led by an aged Chilian priest, eyes cold with rage. The tribe, furious over their young priest's death, sought vengeance and South Command's riches. That day, endless rain lulled Nanjiang's wall guards. An arrow pierced one's shoulder, its poison rotting flesh, felling him.

Barbarians stormed, their war elephants smashing the gate. Nanjiang's guards fought fiercely but were overwhelmed by the full tribal assault. The city's general evacuated civilians to Nanjiang City, while he battled like a lion, blood-soaked. When a barbarian warrior crushed him, spears piercing his body, Sima Qingshan's heart shook.

Rain soaked his scattered paintings. A surge of energy from his dantian enveloped him. Pointing at the air, he controlled raindrops, painting a blade with his finger. It materialized, slashing a barbarian's throat. As the guards fell, barbarians turned on Sima, crazed. A weapon swung at his head, but a sharp blade aura cleaved the attacker in two.

A white-robed figure, saber at waist, appeared beside Sima. Bearded and casual, he asked, "You're... a cultivator?"

Sima, pale and trembling, shook his head. "I... I'm just a poor painter."