

Starlit Path 166

Chapter 166: Seated as an Immortal, Standing as a Demon

A heavy aura ebbed and flowed, enveloping the vast expanse of the World Origin. This was no true world but an ideological space formed by the World Origin, accessible only to those like the Lords of Planes who could touch its essence.

Seated in a wheelchair, clad in a flowing white robe, he gazed calmly at the red-robed man standing atop a gleaming flying sword. The man's delicate features bordered on feminine, his fingers gracefully forming an orchid gesture, his every movement exuding an air of softness.

No words were wasted between them.

The red-robed man harbored deep resentment toward him. After all, a wisp of his spiritual consciousness had been suppressed, a grievance he might have endured. But what truly fueled his hatred was that his adversary had used that suppressed wisp as a medium to absorb the World Origin of his realm—a vital force for a world's growth and ascension. How could the red-robed man not be enraged?

As the saying goes, when enemies meet, their eyes burn with fury.

The red-robed man wasted no time on pleasantries, letting out a sharp cry as he launched his attack. Though a fragment of his spiritual consciousness had been suppressed, he felt no fear. This was his domain now, where he descended with his full spiritual consciousness—a true Golden Core cultivator. That was his confidence. He aimed not only to destroy his foe but to force him to regurgitate the stolen World Origin.

With a thunderous roar, the red-robed man flicked his orchid-shaped fingers, and the flying sword beneath his feet shot toward his opponent. Sword energy crisscrossed the air, multiplying into countless blades, dense and overwhelming, reminiscent of a legendary technique where ten thousand swords converge.

His opponent, however, had no desire to prolong the confrontation. His focus was on comprehending the attributes of this World Origin to refine the essence of the Five Phoenixes Continent, breaking its worldly shackles. Facing the onslaught, he merely waved a hand. The Phoenix Plume Sword soared skyward, its flames incinerating the incoming sword energy.

With a press of his hands against the wheelchair, he rose slowly. The Thousand Blades Chair transformed behind him, sprouting a cascade of countless sword edges. As he stood, the spiritual aura surrounding him shifted dramatically, morphing into a torrent of dark, demonic energy. His white robe turned pitch-black, as inky as the void.

Gripping the Phoenix Plume Sword, now entwined with a streak of dark light, he radiated an otherworldly menace. Seated, he was an immortal; standing, a demon. He stood tall, sword in hand, like a peerless demonic sovereign, his infernal flames twisting the very fabric of space.

The red-robed man's mouth fell open, overwhelmed by the oppressive force. "Who... who are you?" he stammered, unable to fathom how a low-martial world could produce such a terrifying entity—a being capable of rivaling the strongest in high-martial realms.

With a single sweep of his sword, countless dark blades flooded the void. The red-robed man, still poised with his orchid gesture, was obliterated, vanishing like foam in the emptiness. Once again, he was crushed, this time with even greater ruthlessness, caught utterly off guard.

Silence reclaimed the heavens, leaving only the vast World Origin floating in solitude. Returning to his wheelchair, he sheathed the Phoenix Plume Sword, the silver blades reforming into the Thousand Blades Chair. His black robe faded back to white as he sat, gazing quietly at the World Origin. With the red-robed man dispatched, the silence was unbroken, allowing him to resume his contemplation of the Origin's attributes undisturbed.

One hand propped his chin, the other rested on the wheelchair's arm. His eyes traced the shifting patterns within the Origin as time slipped quietly by.

A decree from White Jade Capital had halted all conflict for three months, granting the world a rare moment to catch its breath. Three months—neither long nor short—held the potential for unexpected shifts. Beneath the surface, currents of ambition stirred as factions quietly bolstered their strength.

With dragon gates in their possession, no faction could restrain another, nor did they try. Each understood that, for these three months, peace would hold. Even soldiers at the borders nodded in passing, sharing a drink, bound by White Jade Capital's decree. War was impossible.

But once the three months ended, the tranquil world would erupt like a stormy sea, with towering waves crashing relentlessly. When that time came, only raw power would matter. Thus, cultivating practitioners became every faction's priority.

The Xiang Family Army in the West County, the Nanfu Army in the South County, the Black Dragon Guards in the Imperial Capital—each swelled their ranks with practitioners. The North County, too, had acquired a dragon gate, and while their practitioner army's strength remained a mystery, its existence was undeniable.

Though no wars broke out, spies and informants worked tirelessly, probing for critical intelligence that could tip the scales in the inevitable conflict to come.

Beyond the courts, the martial world stirred with change. The master of the Dao Pavilion, Xie Yunling, emerged from Beiluo City, announcing that the pavilion's leadership would pass to the nun Li Sansui. The martial world gathered to celebrate, though many wondered why the position wasn't given to Li Sansi. The pavilion's disciples, however, remained silent on the matter.

The Dao Pavilion held a dragon gate, but the Sword Pavilion did not, stunting its growth. Thus, the Sword Pavilion's master left Zhongnan Mountain for Beiluo, only to learn that Young Master Lu was in seclusion. Though he didn't meet Lu, he encountered an old friend, Gongshu Yu. Out of friendship, Gongshu Yu crafted two swords for the Sword Pavilion's master using techniques from the Weapon Forging Manual. Named "Morning Chrysanthemum" and "Jade Peach," the swords drew their names from spiritual plants on Lakeheart Island. The Morning Chrysanthemum Sword was forged with petals of a spiritual chrysanthemum, while the Jade Peach Sword incorporated peach blossoms. Hammered thousands of times with refined iron and special methods, their creation caused a surge of spiritual energy across the island.

Sword Saint Hua Dongliu, overjoyed, departed with the swords, which became treasures of the Sword Pavilion. Jing Yue, holding his Jingtian Sword, watched Hua Dongliu leave with complex emotions. If a low-grade yellow-tier spiritual weapon thrilled the Sword Saint, what would he think of the treasures crafted by the young master?

In the Great Zhou Dynasty's Imperial Capital, within the royal gardens, Yuwen Xiu stood with hands clasped behind his back, a golden cloak draped over his shoulders. As autumn deepened, the garden's lush trees shed their leaves, leaving bare branches. Beneath the emerald lake, hidden currents stirred.

Standing on the nine-fold bridge, Yuwen Xiu gazed into the water. The surface parted, and a menacing black dragon emerged, its gill-like scales gleaming with ferocity. Its roar carried a soul-shaking power. Yuwen Xiu reached out, gently touching the dragon's snout.

"Three months have nearly passed, and the world has been at peace," he murmured. "What is White Jade Capital planning? What is Lu Ping'an thinking?"

The black dragon sank back into the lake, its form flickering beneath the surface. Yuwen Xiu exhaled, his breath visible in the chilly air.

In Beiluo, on Lakeheart Island, Ning Zhao stood before the White Jade Capital pavilion, clutching her Cicada Wing Sword, silently guarding her master. Ni Yu chased Little Phoenix One around the island, their playful antics adding warmth to the cold landscape.

Jing Yue practiced his swordsmanship by the icy Beiluo Lake, his blade thrusting forward, unleashing sword energy that stretched hundreds of meters, parting the water like a white serpent. His sword intent grew sharper with each strike. Nearby, Nie Shuang trained his fists, the two practicing in harmony—one with a sword, the other with fists.

"Three months have passed, and the young master still hasn't emerged from seclusion?" Yi Yue, dressed in a velvet robe, gazed at the pavilion's second floor, shrouded in mysterious mist and an otherworldly force.

“When immortals enter seclusion, time loses meaning,” Ning Zhao replied, her white skirt fluttering in the wind. “How could we fathom the young master’s level of retreat?”

Yet, as she spoke, Ning Zhao turned to the pavilion, her brow furrowing with concern. The three-month deadline was nearing. If the young master didn’t emerge soon, the world would descend into chaos.

White Jade Capital’s decree had paused the world’s conflicts for three months, but beneath the calm, tensions simmered. As the deadline arrived, the night grew oppressively dark, with black clouds obscuring the stars and moon.

On Lakeheart Island, Lü Dongxuan sat cross-legged on a bluestone, a pot of water boiling before him. He tossed tea leaves into the pot, their fragrance mingling with the steam. Pouring the tea, he noticed ripples in the cup, as if stirred by an unseen force. Sensing something, he looked up at the starless sky, his gold necklace trembling faintly. Brushing his hand over it, the golden cylinders spun rapidly.

“It’s beginning,” he whispered, setting down the cup and glancing at the mist-shrouded White Jade Capital pavilion. “No wonder the omens foretold great danger... The young master is in seclusion.”

In the pitch-black sky, four fiery meteors streaked across, tearing through the heavens.

At Tianhan Pass in the North County, a meteor crashed into the desert, carving a massive crater and melting the sand. As the dust settled, a charred figure emerged, revealing fresh skin beneath. Clad in a black robe, the figure clutched their head in anguish. "I've become the very thing I despised," they murmured, recalling their hatred for world-invading wanderers. Now, they were one of them—such was the cruelty of fate.

Wiping ash from their face, revealing weathered features, they gazed at Tianhan Pass in the distance, then turned and walked away.

In the desolate plains outside West County, another meteor struck, shaking the earth. From the crater emerged a blond youth in tattered armor, who cast an enigmatic smile toward Xiliang's fortifications before retreating.

While the Great Zhou enjoyed this fragile peace, the Five Barbarians beyond its borders grew restless. For the Xirong, winter's approach spurred them to muster forces to breach Tianhan Pass, seeking plunder to survive the cold. But that day, an uninvited guest arrived at their camp—a figure in a tattered black robe, emerging from the sandstorm.

"I am your new king," the figure declared.

The Xirong king, enraged, stepped from his tent and loosed three arrows, aiming to pin the insolent stranger. Yet the arrows halted inches from their target, unable to advance. The black-robed figure's eyes brimmed with sorrow as they stepped forward, their presence forcing the Xirong warriors to their knees. Approaching the king, they drove an arrow into his heart, ending his reign in despair.

Trembling, the figure tore the king's face and placed it over their own. The Xirong warriors, witnessing this, knelt in terror, silent as the figure proclaimed, "From this day, I am your king!" Their voice, laced with an eerie power, echoed through the camp.

Similar upheavals struck the Guifang, Nanman, and Peacock Kingdom. A blond figure seized control of the Guifang by snapping their leader's neck. In the borderlands of Nanman and Dongyi, a towering figure emerged from a meteor's flames, conjuring earth spikes to slay both tribes' leaders, claiming dominion. In the Peacock Kingdom, a meteor struck the palace, and from the wreckage stepped a bald monk, hands pressed together, declaring himself a Buddha.