

## Starlit Path 168

### Chapter 168: To Be a Demon, Let the Buddha Subdue It

The Five Barbarians were a perennial threat to the Great Zhou Dynasty, ravenous wolves eyeing its fertile lands. Compared to their harsh territories—even the relatively prosperous Peacock Kingdom—the Great Zhou was a bountiful prize. The barbarians’ brutal nature and unforgiving environments fueled their ancient desire to seize Zhou’s riches. Whenever the dynasty’s border defenses faltered, the barbarians would surge into its heartland, slaughtering men, abducting women, plundering wealth and grain, and burning homes to ash. They thrived on destruction, not creation, earning the deep hatred of the Great Zhou.

As Dantai Xuan once said, “Those not of our kind harbor alien hearts.” To him, the Five Barbarians were not human but beasts—starving wolves. At Hu Rao Pass, where the Overlord stood guard, the ferocious Guifang tribe posed a formidable threat, capable of unleashing explosive bursts of vitality. Only the fierce Xiliang cavalry could withstand their assaults; the armies of South or North County would likely crumble under such pressure. The distinct styles of Zhou’s border forces had been forged specifically to counter these barbarian incursions.

The Overlord did not linger by the Dongyan River. With his generals and the Xiang Family Army, he mounted his steed, hooves thundering as they raced toward Hu Rao Pass. The ironclad cavalry, their armor and weapons glinting coldly, radiated an unyielding chill.

Hu Rao Pass, perched on West County’s edge, was an ancient stronghold. Its weathered walls, scarred with countless blade marks and arrow gashes, bore silent witness to brutal battles steeped in blood and savagery. The Overlord arrived at the base of the pass, his axe and shield slung across his back, his towering frame striding toward the ramparts. His generals followed, their faces grim.

The combined forces of the Guifang tribe and the Peacock Kingdom posed a dire threat to West County. Yet, the defenders showed little fear. With the Xiang Family Army—a force of cultivators—at their command, they were confident they could rout the enemy, leaving none alive.

Atop the ramparts, the Xiliang soldiers stationed at the pass greeted the Overlord with fervent admiration. He nodded slightly, stepping to the edge of the battlements, hands gripping the icy stone as he surveyed the scene below. Beyond Hu Rao Pass, a vast army loomed, their presence oppressive and heart-chilling. The Guifang warriors, with their golden hair, blue eyes, and burly frames, stood alongside the Peacock Kingdom's forces, who wielded superior equipment and commanded tamed beasts—wolves, giant elephants, and other formidable tools of war.

“My lord, with the Xiang Family Army, we fear no barbarians!” Xu Chu declared, his eyes flashing coldly. “We’ll slaughter them until not a single one remains!”

His words sparked roars of agreement from the other generals, their hatred for the barbarians fueled by years of lost comrades and kin at Hu Rao Pass. The Xiang Family Army, a cultivator force, was unmatched by ordinary troops. Yet, the Overlord remained silent. Under normal circumstances, his army was indeed formidable, but the persistent unease gnawing at him these past days left him restless. Why had this feeling surged like a tide the moment White Jade Capital's truce ended? Now, he suspected it stemmed from the alliance of the Guifang and Peacock Kingdom. A mere coalition wouldn't faze him, but something hidden—some unknown force—stirred his apprehension.

Still, retreat was not in the Overlord's vocabulary. Unease or not, he would fight. Hu Rao Pass must hold. His eyes sharpened, scanning the enemy ranks with murderous intent. “Such numbers! The Guifang and Peacock Kingdom have emptied their nests!” he growled. “This time, we'll crush their spirits and wipe them out!”

His roar echoed across the battlements, igniting the generals' fervor. Below, the Guifang army parted to reveal a golden-haired youth in tattered armor, seated on a litter carried by eight warriors. He gazed at the pass with a faint smile. “Interesting... such a powerful aura. Peak Qi Condensation?” His blue eyes locked onto the Overlord's imposing figure. “The Great Zhou is undergoing a spiritual resurgence. The Lord of the Plane must be here. Destroy the Zhou, kill the Lord, and this world is ours.”

Excitement gleamed in the youth's eyes. As a wanderer, his goal was to conquer a world, reclaiming his lost glory and escaping the bleak existence of a drifter. He glanced toward the Peacock Kingdom's forces, knowing he wasn't the only one with such ambitions. The bald monk who had descended upon the Peacock Kingdom shared his goal. "This is a low-martial world. Reaching Foundation Establishment is impressive enough. The Lord of the Plane is likely at that level. With us peak Foundation Establishment wanderers, seizing this world should be straightforward," he mused, already contemplating how to outmaneuver his rivals after eliminating the Lord.

"After half a month, I've grasped the Great Zhou's dynamics," he continued. "White Jade Capital, with its decree halting war for three months, must be the Lord's stronghold. No one else could wield such authority."

His smile widened, though his eyes flickered with cunning. The Lord of the Plane was formidable, and no wanderer dared underestimate them. That's why he and the monk had chosen barbarian tribes as their bases.

Drums thundered, and horns blared, joined by the roars of the Peacock Kingdom's elephants. Light snow fell, blanketing the world in white. Atop Hu Rao Pass, crossbows—both standard and advanced models seized from the Mo Family's mechanism city—stood ready, their bolts gleaming in the snow.

From the Peacock Kingdom's ranks, a monk in a red kasaya sat atop an elephant's back, hands clasped in prayer, eyes gently closed. With a wave of his hand, a dozen bald warriors charged forward, their gazes blank and lifeless, moving like puppets. On the Guifang side, the golden-haired youth grinned wickedly and signaled his own forces. Armored Guifang warriors surged forth, their eyes equally vacant, driven by cold killing intent.

Atop the pass, the Overlord's eyes narrowed as he gave the order. Gears clicked, and a hail of crossbow bolts tore through the snow, shattering flakes in their path. Crafted by the Mo and Mechanism Families, these bolts were devastating. One pierced a Guifang warrior's abdomen, pinning him to the ground. Yet, to the defenders' horror, the warrior, expressionless, yanked out the bolt and hurled it back, resuming

his charge as if pain were foreign to him. The Peacock Kingdom's bald warriors, meanwhile, darted with uncanny agility, dodging every bolt.

The generals on the ramparts gasped in disbelief. "How is this possible?" The Overlord's gaze hardened, sensing a presence beyond the ordinary. Peering into the distance, he spotted the youth on the Guifang litter and the monk atop the elephant. "Cultivators... no, not quite," he murmured, feeling an immense, oppressive force bearing down on him.

"Kill!" he roared, slamming a hand against the battlements. The gates swung open, and Xiliang's fearless cavalry charged out, their armor glinting as they met the enemy on the plains. Blood sprayed, and bodies fell as the armies clashed. The Guifang warriors, infused with spiritual energy, unleashed destructive waves of light, powerful enough to shatter even a grandmaster's body. The Peacock Kingdom's bald warriors were even more sinister, moving like agile monkeys, snapping Xiliang soldiers' necks with ease.

Xu Chu led the Xiang Family Army into the fray, clashing with the Guifang knights and bald warriors. Despite their spiritual enhancements, the cultivators struggled to dominate, locked in a brutal stalemate. The Overlord, watching from above, realized that without the three months of rigorous training, his army might have been overwhelmed by these eerie forces. He grew more certain that White Jade Capital's truce was meant to prepare for this very threat.

The battlefield became a sea of blood, strewn with corpses. In the Guifang ranks, the golden-haired youth squinted. "A cultivator army, huh? Interesting." With a grin, he waved again. "My Light Legion may be hastily assembled, but it's not to be trifled with."

The Guifang parted, revealing women in pristine white robes, holding green branches, their faces blank as they chanted. Their words seemed to empower the Guifang warriors, amplifying their strength. "This is my Light Legion!" the youth declared, laughing. Time constraints had forced him to brainwash these warriors, turning them into tools of conquest. "I am the Lord of Light!"

Across the field, the red-robed monk rose from his elephant, hands clasped, his face radiating compassion as he surveyed the carnage. "This world had no Buddha. I have come, and thus, there is Buddha," he intoned softly. In the Peacock Kingdom's ranks, bald monks in red cloth sat cross-legged, chanting sutras in unison.

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The barbarian onslaught wasn't limited to West County. At Tianhan Pass in North County, Xirong forces pressed forward, met by Dantai Xuan, who led his bloodied army into battle. In South County, Nanman tribes united to assault Nanjin City, where Tang Yimo and the Nanfu Army fought fiercely, staining the ground with blood.

The Great Zhou's factions had expected internal wars to erupt after the truce, but none foresaw this. Instead of civil strife, the Five Barbarians struck simultaneously, a coordinated invasion unseen since two centuries ago, when their iron hooves left the Zhou reeling. Internal rivalries were forgotten as all forces rallied to the borders.

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Facing an army that seemed impervious to death, even the fearless Xiliang cavalry felt a chill. Guifang warriors, their heads cleaved in two, still swung their weapons with lethal precision, striking terror into their foes. The unknown was the true horror. Xu Chu's Xiang Family Army fought with relentless ferocity, their cultivator strength shining through, but their numbers remained limited by the stringent requirements of becoming a practitioner.

Atop the pass, the Overlord finally stirred. Instead of descending the stairs, he leaped from the five-meter ramparts, landing with a thunderous crash. Wielding his axe and shield, he charged, tearing

through the bald monk-soldiers with a sweeping strike, ripping a gap in the enemy lines. The Overlord was still the fearless warrior who dared to brandish his axe against immortals.

He surged forward, roaring, “Where are my Xiliang cavalry? Where is my Xiang Family Army?” Black demonic energy coiled around him, his hair whipping in the wind as his presence dominated the field. His cry drowned out the clamor of battle, reigniting the faltering spirits of his troops. The retreating cavalry and struggling cultivators rallied, roaring as they brandished their weapons.

Without mounting his black steed, the Overlord charged on foot, his speed rivaling a galloping horse. Behind him, the Xiliang cavalry and Xiang Family Army followed, charging anew. Hu Rao Pass was the final bastion against the barbarians—they could not retreat.

In the Guifang ranks, the golden-haired youth rose, his face glowing with white light as he watched the Overlord, wreathed in dark energy, tear through his forces. “A demon, is it?” he said, excitement surging. “Then I, the Lord of Light, shall slay the demon.”

On the Peacock Kingdom’s side, the monk in the red kasaya stood, hands clasped, his compassionate expression radiant. “If he is a demon, then I, as Buddha, shall subdue him.”