

Starlit Path 171

Chapter 171: Buddha and Evil, a Fine Line

The Overlord's breakthrough into the Body Zang Realm posed little threat to the monk. Yet, the Demon Lord's shadowy glance sent a chilling oppression crashing over him, like dark clouds looming overhead. That single look froze him in place, rendering him immobile.

A thousand miles away, the Demon Lord restored a soul. In the heat of battle, the Overlord ascended to Body Zang. The monk's panic surged.

The Overlord's black axe, wreathed in demonic energy, slashed down, striking the ten-zhang golden Buddha. Its mournful visage and clasped hands had once withstood all his efforts, but now, the axe cut through like a sizzling droplet in a hot pan, melting a smooth gash into the Buddha's form.

Roaring, the Overlord's demonic energy soared, veins bulging on his neck as the vortex above his head spun wildly. At Wolong Ridge, he'd lost a soul to the Demon Lord upon embracing the demonic path. That loss had made breaking into Body Zang agonizingly difficult, requiring far greater effort than others. His failures—charging alone against North County's fifty thousand, trading wounds to cross the dragon gate's iron bridge, facing the ancient Body Zang cultivator in the central palace—had all been humbling. Yet, they forged an unmatched foundation.

Now, he was the mightiest chrysalis, breaking free into a butterfly. With a grinding screech, his axe cleaved the golden Buddha in two. The monk inside paled, clapping his hands and chanting sutras. But the Demon Lord's shadow glanced back again—its second look. The monk's technique faltered, his face twisting in agony.

The Overlord's eyes blazed. He recalled his first encounter with the Demon Lord, frozen by the same indescribable dread. His axe tore through the Buddha, severing the monk's head, which spun through the air. The monk's body remained poised, hands clasped.

One axe sundered the golden Buddha. Landing, the Overlord roared, demonic energy coiling around him. Xu Chu, bloodied and battered, clenched his fist in excitement, shouting, "Overlord!" The Xiliang cavalry and Xiang Family Army erupted in fervent cheers. Their invincible Overlord had returned. With him, West County stood unshaken, no matter the Guifang and Peacock Kingdom's alliance.

A deafening blast tore through the air, the ground splitting under a ferocious force. The golden-haired youth could no longer hold back. Wielding a greatsword of radiant white light, he carved a massive trench, flinging debris aside. The Overlord roared, but the Demon Lord's shadow vanished, leaving a pang of loss. Its presence had been a formidable deterrent.

Yet, he wasn't disheartened. The Demon Lord's glance had immobilized the monk, a testament to true power. That day, he'd knelt before the Demon Lord, embracing the demonic path. Now, the Demon Lord's glance allowed him to behead the monk. "Who's stronger—the Demon Lord or Young Master Lu?" he wondered. "Lu's human, but the Demon Lord must be like the mysterious 'Six Paths Immortal.'"

His thoughts were cut short as the golden-haired youth charged, his light sword radiating terrifying power, shredding Peacock Kingdom soldiers in its path. The Overlord raised his blood shield, but the sword's strike made his eyes narrow. The monk's alien power was one thing, but this youth's was equally unfamiliar. These weren't Guifang or Peacock Kingdom natives—such techniques would have overwhelmed the Zhou during the Hundred Schools era. Even the old Overlord couldn't have withstood a single finger from the monk.

Who were these people? The thought flashed through his mind as the sword's force sent him skidding back, his feet carving trenches. The youth's tattered, ornate silver armor glowed. The shield nearly split, its gash widening.

The youth's heart jolted. No wonder the monk couldn't defeat this native, even allowing him to break through to Foundation Establishment. This guy was tough.

The beheaded monk's blood stained his robes, mingling with the kasaya's red. His fallen head snapped open, revealing crimson eyes. His serene face twisted into a snarl. The head flew back, landing askew on his body, the bald back facing the Overlord. The youth glanced at the menacing monk, smirking. "Now it's getting serious. Buddha and evil—just a fine line."

At the Dongyan River's dragon gate, snowflakes fell, yet the river flowed vibrantly, untouched by winter's usual drying. The dragon gate's spiritual energy kept it lush, like spring, with a mirage dragon stirring its waters. Two figures emerged from the gate: Lü Mudui, tapping his bamboo staff, and Mingyue, a veiled girl in yellow clutching a pipa.

"West County," Lü Mudui said calmly, tapping his staff. "Mingyue, follow."

"Yes," she replied, bowing. They stepped out, greeted by startled Xiang Family Army guards, who drew their blades. "From White Jade Capital's Tianji Pavilion," Lü Mudui announced. Mingyue followed closely.

The guards, awed, bowed. No one dared impersonate White Jade Capital, the supreme cultivator force that subdued the Hundred Schools and ushered in a new era. Revered, feared, and admired, it stood unmatched. "West County is in peril. We're here to help," Lü Mudui said.

The guards, overjoyed, knew Hu Rao Pass faced a joint assault. A breach would doom West County's cities and people. "Senior, please!" a guard exclaimed, arranging a carriage to rush them to the pass.

At the Dongyan River's camp, Luo Mingsang emerged from the main tent, her beauty radiant. Sensing something, she looked toward Lü Mudui and Mingyue. Lü Mudui, recognizing her faintly familiar face, smiled, revealing a gap-toothed grin, and nodded before boarding the carriage with Mingyue. Luo Mingsang, leaning against the tent, gazed after them, lost in thought.

In South County, relentless rain brought a piercing chill. At Tianwang Mountain's Dao Pavilion, atop Star-Picking Peak, Jing Yue emerged from the dragon gate, white robes flowing, sword on his back. A Taoist nun, Li Sansui, stood waiting, her robes fluttering. "White Jade Capital disciple," Jing Yue declared, his calm belying inner excitement. As Lu's favored disciple, he carried White Jade Capital's prestige.

Li Sansui nodded, vaguely recalling him. Few dared claim such a title. They left the gate together. On the peak's plaza, Xie Yunling sat, rain soaking the ground as Dao Pavilion disciples studied under him. Jing Yue, clutching his sword protectively, approached. "Senior Xie, Tianji Pavilion's Lü deduced a calamity. I'm here to aid South County."

Xie Yunling smiled. "Good. The Dao Pavilion heads to Nanjin City to fight. Shall we go together?"

"Yes," Jing Yue agreed. Li Sansui, her face grave, returned to the dragon gate, crossing the soldier statue area to the iron bridge. There, Li Sansui leaned against it. "Call me brother," he teased. "Even as pavilion master, I'm still your brother."

"Not going to Nanjin?" she asked.

“No. With White Jade Capital’s disciple and the lord’s formations, Nanjin’s fine,” Li Sansi said, grinning. “I’m heading to North County. Dantai Xuan alone can’t hold it.”

They stood, wind rustling through the gate. Li Sansui waved and left. Li Sansi, smiling, crossed the bridge toward Buzhou Peak’s chain, hesitating as he glimpsed a girl sitting on a stone, facing the rise and fall of the sun.

At Nanjin City, the Nanman army pressed forward, their roars mingling with the trampling of elephants and collapsing trees. Black-robed figures, guarded by barbarians, wielded deadly powers, summoning earth spikes to pierce South County soldiers. The Nanfu Army fought bloodily, but the assault was fierce.

Tang Yimo, leading the charge, unleashed his bloodline, cutting through enemies like a blade. His fists shattered barbarians, but he targeted the robed figures. Their emotionless eyes met his, and fearless barbarian warriors blocked his path, fighting like mindless husks. One’s head exploded under his fist, yet it lunged for mutual destruction.

The robed figures chanted, their staffs striking the ground. The earth trembled, cracking, and eerie patterns swirled. “A trap!” Tang Yimo roared, trying to escape, but spikes rose, forming a cage. Trapped, he was a dire loss for South County. The Nanfu Army faltered, and the Nanman, sensing weakness, roared and charged, pushing South County’s forces toward collapse.

Tang Yimo, eyes crimson, pounded the cage, leaving dents, but the robed figures reinforced it. South County’s army began to crumble.

Atop Nanjin City, a white-robed figure appeared. Jing Yue exhaled, gripping his sword. "Jingtian Sword, unsheathe!" His Qi Core surged, and with a thrust, the sword split into five, propelled by condensed sword intent, tearing toward the enemy like a lake-splitting force.