

Starlit Path 172

Chapter 172: Eight Meridians Armor, Second Meridian Open!

Jing Yue cherished his Jingtian Sword, forged by Young Master Lu himself, a symbol of the expectations placed upon him. He refused to disappoint. Whether eating, drinking, or even visiting the latrine, the sword never left his side. In Beiluo Lake, he trained shirtless, practicing the most fundamental sword technique: the thrust. His goal was to forge his own sword intent, one that could cleave mountains, split lakes, and defy the heavens, as Lu had said. At first, water resistance halted his thrusts at five meters. Undeterred, he persisted, sensing the water's flow and the sword's tremor, seeking its essence. Intent born from the heart, the sword born from intent.

Beneath Nanjin City, Jing Yue stepped through the endless rain, his white robes stark against the gloom. With a thrust, Jingtian Sword split into five, its invisible sword energy tearing through the air like a blue thunderbolt or sunlight piercing a paper window, bringing life to a lifeless room. The strike swept through the Nanman barbarians, leaving screams and blood in its wake. Sweat beaded on Jing Yue's brow as he caught the spinning sword, twirling it before plunging it into the ground, cratering the earth.

Inside the bone spike cage, Tang Yimo's eyes widened, relief washing over him. White Jade Capital's aid had arrived, easing his burden against the barbarians' bizarre tactics, like their earth-spawning spikes. Jing Yue, no longer the fleeing "Jing Runaway," stood resolute, aspiring to be a fearless swordmaster who could slay armies with a single stroke.

At Nanjin's gates, Xie Yunling emerged, his Taoist robes billowing, followed by Dao Pavilion disciples. The sight of corpses and blood unsettled the younger disciples, but their resolve burned hotter than their discomfort. As Zhou natives, they could not retreat from barbarian invaders. This was their homeland.

"Where are the Dao Pavilion disciples?" Xie Yunling's voice echoed across the battlefield.

“Here!” the disciples roared, sitting cross-legged despite the gore. Xie Yunling’s robes fluttered as he formed hand seals, spiritual energy blending with the rain. The black-robed figures among the barbarians noticed, raising their withered staffs and striking the ground. A ripple spread, the earth trembling like a shaken blanket. Spikes surged toward the Daoists like subterranean dragons.

“Form the array,” Xie Yunling commanded, his hands weaving seals. The disciples rose, stepping in star patterns, releasing wisps of Qi. A white glow enveloped them, freezing the rain into ice arrows that rained down, pinning barbarians to the blood-soaked ground. South County’s soldiers, battered but emboldened, roared and charged, knowing retreat meant their homes’ destruction. They fought to the death, each fallen barbarian securing South County’s safety.

The earth spikes targeted Xie Yunling, aiming for his brow, but his seals shifted, summoning a wind barrier that shattered the spikes. He met the black-robed figures’ gazes. “You have your sorcery; I have my Daoist arts. Let’s see whose skill prevails.”

From Nanjin’s ramparts, azure-robed figures with sword cases charged, their blades flashing like silver streaks. “Zhongnan Mountain Sword Pavilion joins the fight!” Sword Saint Hua Dongliu stood atop the wall, his twin swords—Morning Chrysanthemum and Green Peach—at his back. The Sword Pavilion warriors moved swiftly.

Jing Yue glanced back, a mix of relief and joy on his face. Though his ties to the Sword Pavilion were weak, their arrival warmed him. Inside the spike cage, Tang Yimo roared, his skin flushed red, veins bulging. His fists, bloodied and torn, pounded the spikes, shattering them. New spikes rose to kill him, but he crushed them with brute force.

“Break!” he bellowed, slamming his body against the cage. Black demonic energy seeped from him. Despite the aid from Jing Yue, the Dao Pavilion, and the Sword Pavilion, he burned with defiance. Tang Xiansheng had entrusted South County to him, initially to secure a better life for his mother and sister, Tang Guo. But now, he realized his duty extended beyond his small family to the greater one: South County.

“Tang Xiansheng, you bastard!” he cursed, eyes crimson. With a roar, his hair stood on end, a surge of energy breaking his body’s shackles. His heartbeat thundered like a plucked string, echoing across the battlefield. The second meridian of the Eight Meridians Armor opened.

His upper garments burst, revealing a chiseled physique, veins writhing like snakes. His eyes sharpened, feeling power enough to overturn the earth. “Body Zang?” Jing Yue gasped. Xie Yunling and Hua Dongliu turned, stunned by the aura.

Tang Yimo touched a spike, crushing it with a pinch. His body shot forward, a black blur too fast to track. “So fast!” Jing Yue breathed. The barbarian warriors, fearless and numb, seemed sluggish to Tang Yimo. He struck, their bodies exploding under his blows. Leaping, he landed like a cannonball, cratering the ground.

The black-robed figures chanted, summoning spikes, but they couldn’t match his speed. He smashed through them, elbowing one to pieces, their fragility stark compared to the barbarian warriors. In moments, the robed figures lay dead. Tang Yimo stood, veins pulsing, his oppressive aura chilling the battlefield.

Yet, he felt no relief. A suffocating presence loomed. His gaze pierced the forest, meeting a towering figure’s eyes as it turned toward him.

At White Jade Capital, Lu stood in swirling mists, gazing at the lake’s massive origin, its five elemental energies churning. He infused it with spiritual energy, strengthening its attributes. “Almost there,” he

murmured, sipping warm plum wine, his fingers tapping his phoenix-feather armrest. His eyes, tracing shifting patterns, observed the battles with calm detachment.

No growth came without struggle. To forge a world, both it and its people must evolve. The Overlord's breakthrough under pressure and Tang Yimo's second meridian opening through duty showed this. Lu could erase the wanderers but chose not to. The world needed pressure to grow. Focusing, he began the final transformation of the origin, preparing for a spiritual resurgence that would sweep the land.

Outside Tianhan Pass in North County, snow fell, stained red with blood. Dantai Xuan, clad in cold armor, charged into the Xirong army, spear flashing, blood splashing his face. He wiped it off and fought on. North County's generals, fueled by ancestral grudges, fought fearlessly, vowing to drink Xirong blood.

On the ramparts, Mo Beike, wrapped in furs, and Mo Ju, in a crane cloak, watched the carnage. "This battle may cost North County its hard-won cultivators," Mo Ju said. "Is it worth it?"

Mo Beike coughed, smiling at Dantai Xuan's relentless charge. "If the governor deems it worthy, it is. I'm surprised by him. He's lost at Beiluo, Wolong Ridge, and the capital, yet he never despairs. No immortal fate, yet he presses on. I chose him for his army and family, but now, I see the man himself."

Snow drifted past Mo Ju's eyes, melting in his hand. "He lacks the Overlord's valor, Tang Xiansheng's cunning, or Lu Ping'an's mystery. A bit foolish, but... admirable," he said, laughing with Mo Beike.

In the Xirong ranks, the Xirong King watched Dantai Xuan from his war chariot, frowning. “North County’s governor? A true warrior.” He sighed, recalling his own days of leading charges. But North County lacked great cultivators. With a wave, he sent fearless Xirong warriors charging at Dantai Xuan, their horses kicking up snow, wielding eerie power.

Dantai Xuan’s heart chilled as they approached. North County’s cultivators rushed to intercept, but their blades barely fazed the Xirong, who cut them down without a sound. “Governor, retreat!” the cultivators shouted, sacrificing themselves to shield him. Dantai Xuan’s heart bled as they fell.

On the ramparts, a messenger handed Mo Beike a letter. Reading it, his wrinkled face broke into a smile. As snow swirled, Tianhan’s gates opened. Jiang Li, in silver armor, charged out on horseback, silver spear gleaming. At Buzhou Peak’s dragon gate, Luo Cheng, Bai Qingniao, and Nie Shuang emerged, hearing a flute’s melody. A blind girl sat at the gate, playing.

Luo Cheng bowed, Bai Qingniao and Nie Shuang watching curiously. The girl stopped, her lashes trembling. “You carry my father’s aura. Pass,” she said softly. Luo Cheng wondered who her father was—someone from Beiluo? The thought chilled him. As they left, Zhu Long resumed her flute, its notes echoing. Then, she stopped. “They may pass. You... cannot,” she said, facing the iron bridge’s other end.