

Starlit Path 182

Chapter 182: Dantai Xuan Beheads the Black Dragon in a Dream

In North County, at Tianhan Pass, the battle ended, leaving a field of corpses. Dantai Xuan, clad in blood-crusted armor, stood solemnly before the gate. Mo Ju and Mo Beike stood silently beside him as soldiers, exhaling steamy breaths, carried wrapped bodies inside through the snow.

Dantai Xuan's eyes flickered with emotion, his fists clenched. His generals shared his silence. Heroes die in battle, their names unsung, yet they charge without regret. Mo Ju, used to such scenes, remained stoic, while Mo Beike, new to the border's carnage, sighed at the snowy sky.

"Carefully bring them inside. Ensure their families are well-provided with winter grain," Dantai Xuan ordered a general, who departed. The snow lent a mournful air. Mo Ju noted Dantai Xuan's aged expression. The gate closed, guards resumed their posts, flags fluttering.

Inside the warm hall, Dantai Xuan shed his armor, shaking off snow. Luo Cheng, Jiang Li, Chi Lian, and others gathered. "Thank you for aiding North County," he said, bowing. Without Bai Qingniao and Luo Cheng, the pass might have fallen. The Xirong King's power was terrifying, and the North County cultivator army, formed via Wentiang Peak's dragon gate, suffered heavy losses to fearless Xirong warriors. Dantai Xuan shuddered at the thought of defeat.

"How's Nie Shuang?" he asked, admiring the boy's courage and strength. "Exhausted, with minor organ injuries. He'll recover with rest," Luo Cheng replied. Relieved, Dantai Xuan served hot wine to warm everyone.

A Black Dragon Guard arrived from the capital, delivering a letter. "Emperor's envoy!" a guard announced. Dantai Xuan frowned; Mo Ju and Mo Beike exchanged knowing glances. The armored envoy, without kneeling, handed Dantai Xuan an imperial decree. Reading it, his face darkened.

The hall's mood shifted. Mo Ju ushered Luo Cheng, Bai Qingniao, and others out, sensing the decree's weight. "General Jiang, stay," Dantai Xuan said. Jiang Li, frowning, read the decree and exhaled. It demanded Jiang Li's return to the capital for Black Dragon Guard aid—a transactional ploy during a national crisis.

Furious, Dantai Xuan smashed a pillar. "Exploiting us?! Shameless! North County will fight alone!" he roared. The decree saw the Five Barbarians' chaos as a chance to weaken the three counties. Mo Beike noted West and South Counties' heavy losses, with West County's cavalry decimated by Guifang and Peacock forces. "The emperor gains the most," he said.

Dantai Xuan faced Jiang Li. "Go back. The emperor wants you, but North County cuts ties with Zhou. Next time, we meet as enemies." His words stunned the room. Mo Ju and Mo Beike's eyes gleamed; Jiang Li's narrowed. "I'll resign and retire," Jiang Li said, leaving for the snowy night.

In the capital, Yuwen Xiu stood in the snowy garden, a maid shielding him with an umbrella. An old eunuch reported, "The Imperial Preceptor left the library, heading east." Yuwen Xiu mused, "East Yang County? Ignoring the other three? He thinks them secure?" Ice cracked as a black dragon emerged from a pond. The maid trembled, but Yuwen Xiu stroked its scales, calming it. Their bond deepened, energy flowing between them. Growing stronger, he smiled—his strength meant Zhou's strength.

At Beiluo Lake, Lu studied the Bone幽Fire, its dual hot-cold nature intriguing. The system identified it: Bone幽Fire (Mysterious Heaven Flame): From a high-martial world, fueled by deathly aura, capable of controlling spirits.

Lu valued its rarity. Shaping it into a skull, he extinguished it, analyzing its essence. Unlike normal flames, it held sentience and a seductive evil.

Perfect for a new cultivation system based on fire attributes, using this as a template for pseudo-Mysterious Heaven Flames, Lu thought. He compressed the flame into a white pearl, then turned to the Buddha, golden-haired youth, and Xirong King's souls. "Wanderers, each tied to a fallen world, a brilliant civilization," he said, tapping his armrest. Their remnants could enrich the Five Phoenixes' diversity, preparing it for mid-martial ascension.

The wanderers, and the mid-martial lord's spiritual clone, offered insights into higher realms. Lu half-suspected the system sent them as benefits. Focusing on the Buddha's soul, he sensed its fear. "No... don't come closer!" it pleaded as Lu approached. Ignoring it, his eyes wove with patterns, and a palm shattered the soul into sparkling fragments, condensing into white chess pieces.

On his chessboard, Lu placed a white piece from the Buddha's soul, then a black one. One move, one world.

The Five Barbarians' chaos ended with their retreat, but vigilance remained. In West County, the Overlord guarded Hu Rao Pass. Nie Changqing, Lü Mudui, and Mingyue left for Beiluo via Dongyan River's dragon gate. The Overlord, complex emotions swirling, bid them farewell, noting Mingyue's pivotal role. Mo Liuqi, shedding his disguise, cleaned his silver scissors and vanished into the snow, seeking strength to settle his grudge with the Overlord.

The Overlord watched him go, silent, then pondered the world's transformation. White Jade Capital's doing?

In North County, late at night, Dantai Xuan extinguished a candle, its smoke curling. Exhausted, he slept, haunted by corpse-strewn fields. In a dream, a black dragon coiled around his room, roaring. Gripping his sword, he slashed, severing its head. Dragon blood drenched him.

Gasping, he woke, cursing, heart pounding in the dark.