

## Starlit Path 188

### Chapter 188: The Grand Tutor's Spirit Suppresses Ten Thousand Troops

Clad in scholarly robes, Sima Qingshan carried a wooden book box on his back, from which protruded the ends of several scroll paintings. Riding a fine horse through the heavy snow, he pressed forward with determination. Before long, the towering silhouette of Beiluo City came into view.

As one of the Great Zhou's six fortified cities, Beiluo had gained a significance far beyond its walls since Lu Ping'an of White Jade Capital rose to prominence. With White Jade Capital and Lu Ping'an himself residing there, the city had become a sacred haven in the hearts of cultivators worldwide. While White Jade Capital was renowned, it was through its fame that Beiluo City earned its reverence. Without it, Beiluo's status as merely one of the six fortified cities would not have inspired such awe.

Snowflakes swirled overhead as Sima Qingshan, bundled in a thick fur robe, exhaled clouds of warm breath. Excitement and anticipation stirred within him. Joining the throng of travelers on the official road, he felt a sense of camaraderie that eased the solitude of his journey.

At the city gate, his face reddened from the cold, Sima Qingshan was inspected by the Dragon Blood Army guards. As they scrutinized him, he observed them in return. If the world once revered Beiluo solely for White Jade Capital, the Dragon Blood Army now commanded its own respect. This was a city of unmatched strength, capable of rivaling an entire county. In terms of combat power, the other five fortified cities combined might not stand a chance against Beiluo.

Leading his horse into the city, Sima Qingshan was enveloped by dense spiritual energy, as if stepping into a fairyland. Street vendors called out through the snow, their voices mingling with the aroma of food wafting through the air. Beiluo was a prosperous, orderly city, its tranquility tempting him to settle there.

"What a paradise on earth," he murmured.

But he didn't linger. Asking passersby for directions, he led his horse toward Lake Beiluo. The three days had passed, and Lu Ping'an's lecture on cultivation was imminent. Sima Qingshan couldn't afford to miss this rare opportunity.

Finding Lake Beiluo was easy, as streams of cultivators converged on its shores. Gazing at the lake, where spiritual mist swirled despite the falling snow, he noted the water's uncanny warmth, melting snowflakes on contact. The sight stirred memories of Nanjin City, where Nie Changqing, clad in white, had stood before him, effortlessly repelling barbarian invaders with a wave of his hand, his blade weaving a storm of deadly energy. That moment had left Sima Qingshan in awe, revealing the true power of cultivators and their ability to achieve what he once thought impossible.

Blessed with immortal fate, Sima Qingshan had entered a mystical realm and received the gift of the Painting Path. He felt chosen, bearing a heavy responsibility. Yet, arriving at the lake, he found the shores packed with cultivators, leaving no room to stand. The dock was empty; all boats had been recalled by Lu Changkong's orders. While Lu Ping'an might overlook such details, Lu Changkong ensured they were addressed.

Unable to cross to the island, many cultivators grew anxious. Some cleared snow from the ground and sat cross-legged, while others perched on stone pillars at the dock, gazing toward the island in anticipation.

Sima Qingshan, arriving late, found no space to sit. To join the crowd so far back would mean missing the lecture entirely. "Excuse me, make way," a childish voice called out. Sima Qingshan stepped aside, spotting a young girl in a white dress, carrying a basket and a black wok on her back, weaving through the crowd. Beside her, a sword-bearing man followed, lugging a basket of herbs.

"What? No boats?" Ni Yu exclaimed, staring at the empty dock in confusion.

“Likely because the young master is about to lecture, so they’ve removed the boats,” Jing Yue said with a smile. “No matter. I’ll take you across.”

Dropping his herbs, Jing Yue pressed two fingers to his sword hilt. With a clang, the Jing Tian Sword unsheathed, its sharp aura parting the falling snow. Sword energy sliced through the air, scattering snowflakes. “Let’s go,” he said, grabbing the basket and Ni Yu. Stepping onto the water, he channeled spiritual energy, skimming across the surface before landing on his sword. With a swift glide, they vanished into the lake’s misty depths.

The onlookers gasped in awe. Noble scions flushed with excitement, while common-born cultivators stared in shock. Sima Qingshan’s eyes gleamed. “A disciple of White Jade Capital?” he murmured.

An idea sparked in his mind. Squeezing toward the shore, he drew annoyed glares from the crowd. “Hey, stop pushing! If you’re late, stay in the back!” snapped a noble scion, irritated after Sima Qingshan bumped into him.

Apologizing quickly, Sima Qingshan caught the eye of several common-born scholars waving him over. Smiling, he joined them, exchanging greetings before setting down his book box and retrieving a scroll and a brush.

Curious onlookers watched as he prepared. His patched clothes marked him as one of their own, and the common-born cultivators felt a kinship. “Brother, are you painting to capture this grand event?” one asked.

Sima Qingshan paused, then shook his head with a smile, pointing his brush toward the misty island. “I want to hear Master Lu’s lecture up close.”

The crowd fell silent, stunned. The noble scion who had scolded him burst into laughter, dismissing the idea as fanciful. Without a boat, how could he reach the island?

Sima Qingshan offered no explanation, his eyes sparkling with anticipation. Spiritual energy surged from him, releasing a powerful aura that swept across the shore. The Dragon Blood guards nearby jolted, staring in disbelief as a funnel of spiritual energy swirled above his head.

Unfurling his scroll, which floated in the air, Sima Qingshan dipped his brush in spiritual energy, the tip glowing with ink-like light. With swift, dragon-like strokes, he painted, then flicked his wrist, sending ink splashing outward. “A boat!” he declared with a laugh.

As the spiritual energy pulsed, a small, ink-black boat materialized from the scroll, landing on the lake’s surface. The crowd gasped—his painting had come to life. Stepping lightly, Sima Qingshan leaped onto the boat, which swayed gently before carrying him into the mist.

Silence gripped the shore, followed by an eruption of chatter. “My heavens! That poor painter is a great cultivator!” “What incredible skill—his brush wields divine power!” “The world of cultivators is truly wondrous!”

Jing Yue’s sword-crossing had surprised them, but Sima Qingshan’s ink-to-boat creation was staggering. The noble scion who had mocked him paled, realizing he had underestimated a hidden master. The common-born scholars, mouths agape, soon glowed with excitement, clenching their fists. If a commoner could rise to such heights, so could they!

Aboard the ink boat, Sima Qingshan glided through the mist, the island emerging like a hidden paradise, its beauty surpassing the finest spring day. At the heart of the island, beneath White Jade Capital's pavilion, cultivators sat in wait. Lü Dongxuan and Lü Mu sat cross-legged on a stone, while Ning Zhao, Yi Yue, Lu Changkong, Luo Yue, and Gongshu Yu waited quietly. Xie Yunling, having rushed from the Dao Pavilion, brought Li Sansui, who, in her Taoist robes, marveled at the spiritual energy, gazing at the figure lounging by the pavilion's railing, admiring the snowy lake with carefree grace.

From the Dragon Gate, a stir of activity signaled the arrival of more figures. The world's cultivators had gathered in Beiluo.

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In stark contrast to Beiluo's serene elegance, Dongyang County was a vision of hell on earth. The air reeked of blood, and the dawn's light cut through the sky like a sharp blade.

On the city's battlements, a lone figure stood, seemingly touching the heavens. Despite his frail frame, an awe-inspiring presence radiated from him. It was none other than Grand Tutor Kong Xiu, guarding the nation's gate.

Above his head, righteous energy swirled into a massive vortex. His words, each imbued with divine weight, flowed like a river, igniting the defenders' blood with fervor, banishing exhaustion, and kindling unyielding resolve. They would protect their homeland.

Yang Mu drew his sword, roaring with defiance. As the Dongyi's fearless warriors scaled the walls, the defenders threw themselves into the fray, dragging their foes down with them, bones shattering in the fall to prevent further climbs. It was a brutal war. Though Dongyang's soldiers lacked the strength of a cultivator army, their courage was unmatched, fighting until blood soaked the ground.

Blood sprayed across Kong Xiu's robes, staining them red, yet he stood resolute, his presence growing ever more imposing. Facing the Dongyi army, he struck the battlements' stone with his hand, unleashing a surge of righteous energy that sapped the enemies' will to fight. Even the fearless Dongyi warriors faltered, save for their undying ones, who clashed fiercely with the defenders.

Mo Tianyu's eyes blazed. With the Grand Tutor guarding the gate, how could he flee? Casting aside his divination coins, he seized a sword, joining the fight atop the walls. Bolstered by Kong Xiu's righteous energy, the tide turned. The city, on the brink of falling, held firm.

Yang Mu, exhilarated, looked at the Grand Tutor with admiration. Yet Kong Xiu's expression remained grave, his gaze fixed on the distant, towering figure in a black robe, hands elegantly clasped. The figure watched the retreating Dongyi with indifference, his eyes flickering with surprise only when they met Kong Xiu's.

"The power of will..." the figure murmured. "A mortal, wielding such formidable will..."

Unfamiliar with righteous energy, he recognized it as a force of will, and Kong Xiu, its creator, wielded it with unmatched mastery. "Governor Yang, hold the battlements," Kong Xiu said suddenly, turning to descend the stairs, his robes billowing.

Mo Tianyu, bloodied sword in hand, froze before hurrying after him. Yang Mu, though uncertain of Kong Xiu's intent, knew the Grand Tutor fought alongside them. "Kill!" he roared. "No return until the Dongyi are broken!"

The city gates opened, and Kong Xiu stepped out, his frail, elderly frame seemingly on the verge of collapse. Behind him, the army followed, weapons raised, their battle cries shaking the heavens.

The towering figure's eyes locked onto Kong Xiu. "Interesting. A mortal dares challenge a cultivator?" he said with a refined smile, maintaining his elegant demeanor. With a wave of his hand, the Dongyi charged forward.

As Kong Xiu met his gaze, the world seemed to fade, leaving only the two of them. "A cultivator..." Kong Xiu murmured, then laughed. The era of the Hundred Schools had ended at the hands of cultivators. Though he hadn't faced Lu Ping'an, now he stood against one.

At his age, his blood should have cooled, but the sight of soldiers fearlessly defending their homeland reignited a fire within him. In his youth, Kong Xiu had roamed the land with a sword, his scholarly robes challenging the Hundred Schools, leaving them breathless. Facing this cultivator, he smiled.

Reciting poetry and prose, he advanced across the battlefield. The charging Dongyi slowed, their momentum faltering under the weight of his righteous pressure. His words, resonant and powerful, drained their courage and will, leaving them gasping as if their hearts were gripped.

With each step Kong Xiu took, the Dongyi army retreated a step, cowed by his presence. The towering figure narrowed his eyes. "Such formidable will," he muttered, raising a hand. The ground cracked, jagged earth spikes erupting.

Kong Xiu, undaunted, pressed forward, his robes fluttering, his poetry unwavering. The spikes missed him, and the quaking earth couldn't shake his resolve. The figure, incredulous, waved both hands, summoning a dense field of spikes.

Yet, from the chaos, Kong Xiu emerged, bloodied but unbowed, his recitation unbroken. To the cultivator, the gap between mortal and cultivator was a chasm, yet this old man seemed poised to bridge it.

Angered, the figure sneered, "If you seek death, I'll grant it." Raising his hands, he summoned two massive earthen hemispheres. With a clap, they slammed together, the ground quaking as if struck by an earthquake, engulfing Kong Xiu.

"Kill!" the figure commanded, and the Dongyi charged toward the Dongyang army.

Mo Tianyu's eyes burned, staring at the earthen mass. This was a cultivator's power—manipulating stone itself. How could a mortal withstand it?

But the hemispheres shattered, and Kong Xiu stepped forth, his robes tattered, blood staining half his body, yet a smile on his face. His expression shifted as he faced the charging Dongyi. His righteous energy surged, pressing downward.

With a thunderous shout, his robes billowed, and the Dongyi's will collapsed. In a single breath, they turned, abandoning their armor and fleeing. The righteous energy coalesced into a massive hand above the cultivator's head, its pressure palpable.

Kong Xiu, hair and beard flaring, recited poetry with unyielding resolve, staring down the cultivator. "The heavens hold righteous energy!" he bellowed.

In that moment, his spirit suppressed ten thousand troops, and his voice overwhelmed a cultivator.