

## Starlit Path 192

### Chapter 192: The Great Zhou Is Unjust, Strike It Down

Snow drifted outside the window, carried by a chilling wind, but within the room, the air burned with unquelled fervor. Tantai Xuan's words stirred Mo Beike and Mo Ju, their hearts surging with emotion, unable to calm. What use is an emperor who does not cherish this land? To establish a new dynasty, named Great Xuan! Tantai Xuan was preparing to declare himself king and overthrow the Great Zhou.

Mo Beike's heavy eye bags trembled. He had long awaited this moment, once believing the Overlord of Western County would be the first to take such a step. Yet, Tantai Xuan had seized the initiative. This was a bold move, crossing the chasm between subject and sovereign. Despite past rebellions by regional governors, few dared to proclaim themselves king.

"My lord, are you truly set on this decision?" Mo Ju asked. "Once made, there's no turning back. You're staking the trust and faith of all Northern County."

Tantai Xuan understood the weight of Mo Ju's words. Sleepless nights had plagued him since the nightmare of slaying the black dragon. The Grand Tutor's death, sparked by the capital's refusal to aid Dongyang, and Jiang Li's imprisonment had ignited a fire within him. "My resolve is firm. In half a month, at Tai Ling's Sky-Asking Peak, I will hold a ceremony to establish the Great Xuan Dynasty!" he declared.

Mo Beike, seated below, offered no dissuasion, only a mix of nostalgia and melancholy. Once, Kong Xiu represented the Great Zhou, while he now stood for Great Xuan. The two could have clashed as equals, but that chance was gone. Rising, Mo Beike dusted his robes, stepped back, and bowed. "I greet Your Majesty."

Mo Ju followed suit, bowing. "Ju greets Your Majesty."

Tantai Xuan stood, lifting them up. These men were his strategists, and he valued talent. “Giant, with Great Xuan newly founded, what should we do?” he asked Mo Beike.

“You’ve chosen well,” Mo Beike replied. “Tai Ling’s Sky-Asking Peak, home to the Azure Dragon Gate, embodies the dragon’s will—a perfect stage to proclaim the dynasty. After, Your Majesty can muster troops to march on the Great Zhou. The Zhou is unjust; toppling it aligns with the times, paving the way for a true empire.” He paused, his expression grave. “You must also send envoys to Beiluo. Great Xuan’s founding would benefit from White Jade Capital’s witness. Though Lu Ping’an likely won’t leave Beiluo, securing Lü Dongxuan from Tianji Pavilion would suffice.”

Tantai Xuan nodded. In this era of cultivators, White Jade Capital, the foremost cultivation force, demanded attention. With Lu Ping’an lecturing the world, acknowledging White Jade Capital was prudent to avoid trouble. “Very well, as the Giant advises.”

Mo Beike bowed. “I’ll write to Lü Dongxuan at once.” Mo Ju added, “I’ll spread word of Great Xuan’s founding across Northern County.”

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\*Beiluo City\*

Mo Tianyu walked deliberately, as if measuring the city with each step. Thick snow fell, blanketing the world, yet none touched him. Luo Yue, under Lu Ping’an’s orders, arrived from the lake island, spotting Mo Tianyu and the figure on his back—the Grand Tutor. Raising a hand, Luo Yue signaled the Dragon Blood Army to stand solemnly, guiding Mo Tianyu toward the island.

At Lake Beiluo's shore, cultivators opened their eyes, reeling from Lu's lecture. The revelation of an ancient cultivation civilization stunned them, and Lu's call for a new era of contending schools resonated deeply. Many agreed that competition spurred progress.

Mo Tianyu's approach, escorted by the Dragon Blood Army, drew attention. Sima Qingshan, on his ink boat, had been listening to Lu's words. Following instructions, he painted another ink boat with spiritual energy, which materialized on the lake. Mo Tianyu, his eyes ashen, climbed aboard, standing at the prow with the Grand Tutor on his back. The boat glided toward the island, drawn by an unseen force.

"Who is that?" "Is that the Confucian Grand Tutor? What happened to him?" "What happened in the world while we listened to Master Lu?" The cultivators were stunned, especially the common-born, for whom the Grand Tutor's Confucianism offered paths to rise. News of his death in Dongyang spread, leaving the lakeside crowd frozen in shock.

Envoys from Northern, Southern, and Western Counties, sent to record Lu's lecture, departed to deliver their bamboo scrolls. As the lake's breeze stirred the mist, Sima Qingshan watched Mo Tianyu's boat pass, offering a gentle smile and nod. Mo Tianyu's eyes flickered in response.

On the island, Lu Changkong awaited. Mo Tianyu, refusing help, carried the Grand Tutor to the base of White Jade Capital's pavilion, looking up at Lu. "Master Lu, may I request a resting place for the Grand Tutor on this island?"

Lu's gaze fell on the Grand Tutor, a contented smile on his face, pure as a child's. "Yes," Lu replied.

Mo Tianyu, surprised by Lu's swift agreement, bowed. "This was my promise to him," Lu said faintly. Mo Tianyu walked the island, finding a spot facing the peninsula's peach and chrysanthemum blossoms—a fitting resting place.

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Lu's lecture caused little stir among political powers, but the revelation of the Golden Core and Heavenly Lock Realms clarified the path for great cultivators. The martial world, however, was ablaze. White Jade Capital's Tianji Pavilion disseminated a simplified cultivation method, sparking a frenzy. Combined with blood-moving techniques, sects crafted tailored methods, accelerating cultivation.

The martial world boomed. First and second-stage Qi Core cultivators were common, post-celestial phenomenon, with spiritual energy abundant. Fourth and fifth-stage cultivators were considered experts, while eighth or ninth-stage, or peak Qi Core, were top-tier. No Body Zang Realm cultivators had yet emerged. Talent was measured by dantian capacity: ordinary cultivators held nine strands of spiritual energy, while those exceeding this were geniuses.

A small sect produced an eighteen-strand prodigy, drawing attention. Refusing to leave his sect out of loyalty, he brought disaster. Rival factions slaughtered his sect overnight, the leader dying to protect him. Alone under the stars, the prodigy wept, recalling Lu's warning: the cultivation world was far crueler than the mortal one.

Pursued for days, he was saved in a snow-covered, dilapidated Taoist temple outside the capital by a ragged, mad scholar. The scholar's shout shattered the pursuers' organs. Stunned, the prodigy watched the scholar laugh maniacally and vanish into the snow. Chasing after, the prodigy joined the scholar's nameless sect, later learning its name from the drunken scholar: Haoran Sect.

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\*Half a Month Later\*

The Great Zhou transformed. The Five Barbarians' chaos ended, their forces decimated and retreating. More shocking was Tantai Xuan's proclamation. At Tai Ling's Sky-Asking Peak, before the Azure Dragon Gate, with Lü Dongxuan witnessing, he founded the Great Xuan Dynasty. Four or five of the thirteen counties joined, and as the Northern Xuan King, Tantai Xuan rallied his Iron Cavalry, sweeping south like a tiger, unstoppable.

The Great Zhou's inaction during the barbarian crisis, the Grand Tutor's death, and the massacre of Confucian scholars fueled the storm. Soon after, the Overlord of Western County declared, "Western County is now Western Liang, a new nation!" Wielding his axe, he aimed for the capital. "The Great Zhou is unjust—strike it down!"

The Western Liang Iron Cavalry thundered across the river, charging toward the imperial capital.