

Starlit Path 201

Chapter 201: The Painter's Path, Spiritual Essence, and Phoenix Feather Swords

Sima Qingshan left Beiluo City, carrying his book box on his back, heading south all the way, intending to return to Nanjun.

Tang Yimo could be considered his guide on the path of cultivation, but their relationship was that of friends.

Tang Yimo had few friends, and Sima Qingshan was one of them.

Traveling south, Sima Qingshan took in all the sights along the official roads.

Due to the war, refugees were migrating in droves.

Most of these refugees had fled from the imperial capital, searching for a place of stability.

Blending into the crowds of refugees, Sima Qingshan witnessed many succumbing to hunger and cold, dying of starvation or freezing to death by the roadside.

Faced with such scenes of life and death, Sima Qingshan felt utterly helpless.

He could paint, but his paintings were, after all, illusions.

What was known as "splashing ink to manifest reality" was merely form without substance.

For instance, if he painted a steamed bun, it couldn't satisfy hunger. Thus, he could only watch helplessly as the refugees starved by the roadside.

Dressed in his patched blue robe, he painted along the way, capturing the myriad expressions of the refugees. Among them were bullies, cunning schemers, and kind-hearted souls.

Many refugee children watched Sima Qingshan paint, but their faces showed little emotion—they cared only about filling their bellies and staying warm; poetry and artistry meant nothing to them.

With simple strokes, the ink shifting from thick to faint, lifelike refugees emerged on the paper amid the snowy official road.

Subtly, an aura of sorrow and bitterness seemed to permeate the air.

Sima Qingshan set down his brush, his entire presence seeming to condense slightly within this painting.

"Let this painting be called Refugee Scroll."

Sima Qingshan took a deep breath.

He recalled the scene on Beiluo Lake when he had asked Lu about it.

That day, he stood on an ink-black boat, his blue robe fluttering, gazing at Young Master Lu leaning on the railing listening to the snow, requesting to join Baiyujing and seeking guidance on how to cultivate the Path of Painting.

However...

Young Master Lu had simply waved his hand, refusing his entry.

"Baiyujing has no place for you."

"The world is vast; go out and explore. You might gain something, some insight."

"The Path of Painting is not like the Path of Sword or Blade—it lacks overwhelming destructive power or lethality. But if mastered, its might is no less than that of sword or blade."

Lu had said.

Beneath the falling snow, Sima Qingshan pondered deeply.

Afterward, he left Beiluo City, heading south.

Today, creating Refugee Scroll, a breath that had been pent up in Sima Qingshan's chest burst forth.

Originally just entering the Body Storage realm, he unexpectedly completed the tempering of one storage.

"The Path of Painting lies within this heaven and earth."

A faint smile tugged at Sima Qingshan's lips.

He looked at the refugees along the road.

Rolling up the painting, he stepped into a nearby small city.

Snowflakes swirled through the small city.

The streets bustled with vendors' cries. Though small, the city had everything it needed, and compared to grand cities like Beiluo or Nanjiang, it felt far more warm and human.

Sima Qingshan brushed the snow from his clothes, found an empty spot by the street, set down his book box, and took out the freshly painted Refugee Scroll.

He was going to sell his painting.

A poor painter could only make a living by selling art.

He displayed it for a full day, but no one showed interest. Though many gathered around, praising how excellent the painting was, they couldn't articulate why—just pointing and saying, "This painting is beautiful."

Sima Qingshan wasn't annoyed or impatient.

If he couldn't sell it in this city, he'd move to the next.

A wealthy young lady in a red cape, accompanied by her little maid holding a paper umbrella, pushed through the crowd.

The girl's eyes sparkled like stars, her lashes fluttering lightly as she gazed at the scroll, her red lips pressing together.

"This painting has a rare charm..."

"Sir, how much for this painting?"

The girl in the red cape looked at Sima Qingshan and asked.

"One hundred taels."

Sima Qingshan smiled at her.

"One hundred taels? You penniless painter, you think your work is worth a hundred taels? Who do you think you are?"

Before the girl could speak, her maid exclaimed in shock.

The surrounding onlookers gasped in unison.

A hundred taels... This painter must be out of his mind with greed.

Did he even know what a hundred taels meant?

This painter probably hadn't seen that much silver in his life.

"Little Red, mind your manners."

The girl grew anxious and scolded her.

The maid fumed indignantly, "Miss, don't let this shabby painter fool you!"

But the girl in the red cape ignored her maid, turning to Sima Qingshan. Her delicate face flushed slightly from the wind and snow. "Sir, is it really a hundred taels?"

Sima Qingshan glanced at her, faintly sensing a thread of spiritual energy stirring in her energy core.

Clearly, this girl was a cultivator.

One born from the world's transformation.

"No."

Sima Qingshan shook his head.

The girl was stunned.

"This painting is one thousand taels."

Sima Qingshan smiled again.

The maid nearly exploded with rage. Had this ragged painter never seen silver in his life?

Daring to jack up the price of a worthless painting to a thousand taels?

Did he think their miss was an easy mark?!

"Little Red, go home and have Father prepare the silver. This painting... we're buying it."

The girl bit her plump red lip, saying seriously.

"Miss..."

The maid couldn't believe it.

Yet the girl's determined gaze made the maid's heart skip a beat. She hurried off toward the mansion.

Sima Qingshan looked at the girl in surprise.

He chuckled.

"Young lady, that was just a joke earlier. Since you fancy this painting, I'll sell it to you for ten taels."

Sima Qingshan stood, shaking the snow from his body, revealing his patched blue robe.

The girl in the red cape blinked, then broke into a smile.

"Really?"

As if afraid he'd change his mind, she quickly took ten taels of broken silver from her maid and handed it to Sima Qingshan.

Then she looked up expectantly at him.

Sima Qingshan rolled up the scroll and passed it to her.

As he did, he leaned in slightly, whispering, "View the painting with spiritual energy, but remember, do not look for more than an hour... or the gains won't outweigh the losses."

Sima Qingshan warned.

The girl was astonished.

But when she looked up, Sima Qingshan had already shouldered his book box and vanished into the snow and the street crowd.

He came to a steamed bun stall.

"Ten taels of silver for a thousand steamed buns—deal?"

Sima Qingshan asked.

The stall owner was dumbfounded. Ten taels? A thousand buns?

This guy must be a fool.

He nodded eagerly.

Sima Qingshan handed over the broken silver.

"Thank you."

"Tomorrow outside the city gates, distribute them to the refugees—one per person."

Sima Qingshan said.

With that, he pinched a falling snowflake and brushed it through the air.

He painted a pair of icy eyes hovering in the void, staring at the owner, making him shudder in terror.

This man...

When the owner snapped out of it, Sima Qingshan was gone.

The hovering eyes melted into snow water and dripped away.

Sima Qingshan had known poverty; he understood how ten taels could tempt the heart. He couldn't fully trust the owner's conscience, so he intimidated him a bit.

The next day.

Outside the city gates.

The stall owner indeed set up, cage after cage of steaming hot buns handed out, stirring up quite a commotion in the quiet little city.

Refugees who had suffered hunger and cold for days gathered at the gates, some weeping with joy.

From afar, Sima Qingshan smiled.

He turned, his patched blue robe swaying in the snow, book box on his back, vanishing down the official road.

Below the city tower, the girl in the red cape clutched the scroll. Unnoticed by anyone, she watched Sima Qingshan's retreating figure, her lashes trembling faintly.

Sima Qingshan continued south toward Nanjiang City.

In every city he passed, he painted a new work and tried to sell it.

But he had no such luck as the first day.

For three straight days, not a single painting sold; people thought he was mad.

In this chaotic world, could paintings fill your stomach?

Obviously not.

Though Sima Qingshan only asked ten taels per painting, that price was still beyond most people's means.

On the fourth day.

Sima Qingshan was about to pack up.

Suddenly.

A familiar voice rang out behind him.

"Sir, are you still selling this painting?"

Her soft, warm voice carried a gentle lilt. Sima Qingshan froze, turning to see the familiar girl in the red cape, lips pressed together, gazing at him.

"You...?"

The girl's face flushed as she held up Refugee Scroll. "I told my father I'm going out to study under a master and will return once I've learned something."

"I really love your paintings, sir. Will you take me as your disciple?"

The girl asked.

Sima Qingshan was taken aback but shook his head.

This girl... had probably snuck out.

In these turbulent times, what family would let their lovely daughter wander freely?

"Hurry home; your father must be worried." Sima Qingshan said.

The girl felt a pang of regret but didn't press. She bought the painting and left.

With the ten taels earned, Sima Qingshan again aided the refugees— not much, but it was what he could do.

Day after day.

Whenever Sima Qingshan set up to sell, the girl would appear in her red cape, stubbornly asking if he'd take her as a disciple.

Sima Qingshan always refused.

"I'm just a poor painter who only knows how to create scrolls. What qualifications do I have to take you as a student?"

Each time, she didn't insist, bought the painting, and departed.

Time and again, as Sima Qingshan entered new cities, the girl was there.

This day.

Sima Qingshan was selling as usual.

Suddenly, the thunder of hooves exploded outside the city, mingled with shouts of killing.

Sima Qingshan frowned, rolled up his painting, and stepped out of the gates. He saw bandits on horseback charging through the refugees, while the girl in the red cape stood with furrowed brows, spiritual energy circulating, her cape fluttering as she faced them down.

Sima Qingshan couldn't help but smile.

This girl had real guts.

He pulled out a brush.

The bandits trampled forward, hooves kicking up piles of snow like grains of rice scattering.

The girl's pretty face paled with tension.

She told herself silently: She was a cultivator; cultivators could hold off a hundred. She could do this.

The bandit leader let out a cruel laugh, swinging his heavy blade down to cleave the girl in two.

Suddenly.

The girl heard a warm voice behind her.

"Young lady, buying a painting?"

Her body trembled.

The blade sliced through, cutting a lock of her hair. As the strands floated away, the blade—and the bandits—vanished as if erased from a canvas.

All that remained were a dozen bewildered horses milling in the snow.

The girl's eyes widened.

She whipped around to see Sima Qingshan holding his brush, smiling at her.

He handed over a scroll.

Instinctively, she took it and unrolled it. Inside was a girl with graceful charm, eyes like paintings, smile like peach blossoms.

The girl pressed her red lips, her brow arching slightly.

"Painting Sect, Sima Qingshan."

He smiled. "Young lady, would you join my sect?"

...

The founding of the Painting Sect was unknown to Lu.

He sat on the second floor of Baiyujing's pavilion, a gentle breeze blowing, the endless snowflakes long scattered.

Before his eyes, system prompts scrolled endlessly.

"From humble beginnings rise towering structures. Congratulations, Host, for advancing to Qi Refining Layer 4. Spiritual energy storage reaches 10,000 strands. Rewards: Phoenix Feather Sword ×2, ten random spiritual energy herb seeds."

"Host advances to Qi Refining Layer 4: Spiritual energy deployment range expanded, autonomous recovery enhanced (spiritual energy, soul strength, physical strength). Obtained movement technique: Thunder Surge Art."

"Note: With 10,000 strands of spiritual energy, qualification to condense spiritual liquid unlocked. 10,000 strands can condense 1 drop of spiritual liquid."

The system prompts flashed before Lu's eyes, leaving him somewhat stunned.

This change was massive—at least, in Lu's view, it was huge.

"10,000 strands of spiritual energy can condense one drop of spiritual liquid?"

Lu murmured.

What was spiritual liquid?

As the name suggested, liquefied spiritual energy, but different from spirit stones. When Lu broke through to Qi Refining Layer 3, he gained the method to create spirit stones, but...

Those were merely infusing spiritual energy into jade or minerals that could hold it.

A decent-quality stone might hold about ten strands.

But one drop of spiritual liquid contained ten thousand strands.

Lu smacked his lips. Without a doubt, spiritual liquid was an unparalleled resource for cultivators.

With it, nurturing top-tier cultivators would be far faster.

And it wasn't just Lu's storage shifting from strands to liquid.

He could even condense ambient spiritual energy into liquid!

This would save him a tremendous amount.

His spiritual sense surged. Lu raised his hand, grasping at the void.

Spiritual energy formed a massive vortex in his palm, compressing relentlessly.

Finally...

It became a round, crystal-clear, deep blue drop—like a teardrop of spiritual liquid.

The liquid held immense power; with his spiritual sense, Lu could even detonate it!

From the extreme concentration of spiritual energy?

Lu smiled.

Beyond the liquid, he gained other rewards.

What shocked him most...

The familiar "Phoenix Feather Sword ×2."

This flashy move left Lu dumbfounded.

His mind stirred.

Profound fluctuations spread, the Great Dao thundered, the void tore open.

Two pitch-black rifts exuded terrifying pressure, accompanied by resounding phoenix cries.

Two crimson Phoenix Feather Swords floated beside Lu, handle-less like phoenix tail feathers, radiating heat and sharpness.

Lu stared at his three Phoenix Feather Swords, speechless.

Was this gearing up to swap his Thousand Blades Chair for a Phoenix Feather one?

But he recalled the earlier Phoenix Feather Sword had a "(damaged)" suffix. How many were there in total? It piqued his curiosity.

One damaged sword was already top-grade Xuan tier; he couldn't imagine the rank if all were collected.

It oddly felt like collecting trading cards.

Just as Lu finished reviewing the rewards.

The crowd, startled by the thunder tribulation, finally crossed Beiluo Lake, rushing toward Baiyujing's pavilion with concern.

Chapter 202: Echoes of Pipa Melodies by the Ear

Thunder crashed from the heavens, striking the Baiyujing pavilion.

This stunned many cultivators. Lu Changkong and others rushed from outside the island, too urgent to find boats—they simply strode across the waves, crude and direct, ascending the lake-heart isle.

They arrived beneath the Baiyujing pavilion and saw Lu seated in his wheelchair, leaning on the railing, listening to the snow while sipping plum wine. Only then did their hearts settle.

They had truly feared Lu might be struck by lightning and come to harm.

"Good, you're safe."

Lu Changkong exhaled in relief.

The might of heaven and earth carried an indescribable oppression and terror for mortals.

Though Lu Changkong knew Lu's strength was immense, a mortal defying the heavens' wrath... it felt unreal no matter how he thought about it.

"I'm fine; no need to worry."

Lu's calm voice suddenly echoed in everyone's ears.

Atop the Baiyujing pavilion.

With a thought, another reward surfaced in Lu's mind: the movement technique Thunder Surge Art.

"Thunder Surge Art, mid-grade Xuan tier movement skill—swift as thunder, fleeting as wind."

The system's description was brief, but a movement technique was essentially an advanced form of qinggong.

Activating Thunder Surge Art, Lu felt ten strands of spiritual energy drain in an instant.

Brilliant light burst from his eyes.

Faintly, thunder rumbled and cracked.

Azure lightning left sizzling trails in the air.

Lu's figure vanished from the pavilion, reappearing below wrapped in blue bolts—like a phantom, thundering like a deity.

Everyone jolted. Nie Changqing and Ning Zhao, both at perfected Body Storage, felt their scalps tingle in shock.

They couldn't even track how Lu had moved.

"The Young Master's strength... has advanced again!"

Ning Zhao drew a deep breath, her eyes gleaming.

Even someone as powerful as the Young Master never stopped cultivating, always pushing to grow stronger—how could she slack off?

Nie Changqing and the others shared the thought.

Most were awed by the thunder Lu unleashed in motion—had he harnessed the heavens' might itself?

"I'm alright."

Lu smiled at Lu Changkong's worried expression.

He leaned back in his wheelchair, white robes fluttering. The thunder tribulation had scattered the snow clouds.

Now, with the tribulation gone, the clouds slowly regathered.

"Father, this is called 'spiritual liquid'—spiritual energy compressed to its utmost, far purer than strands, with superior cultivation effects."

Lu raised his hand.

A crystal-tear-like drop of spiritual liquid hovered in his palm.

With a gentle flick, it floated toward Lu Changkong.

En route...

Lu beckoned toward a distant peach tree.

A petal fluttered over.

The drop landed on it like dew, glistening translucently.

One peach petal bearing spiritual liquid.

Lu Changkong reached out and caught it.

Just sensing it revealed the overwhelming purity of spiritual energy rushing forth.

In Body Storage, this liquid would drastically shorten the time to temper all five storages.

Ning Zhao, Nie Changqing, and the others watched with envy.

Lu's gaze shifted to them.

"Spiritual liquid is limited. Among you, whoever first derives attributed spiritual energy—I'll gift one drop. So, work hard."

Lu said.

Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing straightened, knowing this was directed at them.

Spiritual liquid... undoubtedly a treasure.

Compressed spiritual energy—cultivation would be far more efficient.

Ni Yu, backpacking her black pot, stared at the peach petal in Lu Changkong's hands and the azure drop atop it, swallowing hard.

It looked... delicious.

She remembered a bet with Lu.

If she reached the third level, maybe swap the special pill formula reward for this liquid?

It shimmered like nectar—must taste amazing.

The thought ignited her motivation.

Lu waved them off; everyone bowed and withdrew, leaving the isle for Beiluo's western mountains.

On the island.

Once alone, Lu opened his palm—ten spiritual energy herb seeds.

He was familiar with these: first chrysanthemums, then peaches...

What would the third be?

With a thought, he inspected.

[Bamboo Nodes Thirty-Two]. Lu raised a brow—this seemed more interesting than Skyward Chrysanthemums or Biluo Peaches.

Ten needle-like seeds, faintly fragrant.

"Bamboo rice?"

Bamboos bore seeds—the essence of groves. After flowering, rice formed, then groves died in swathes.

Holding the ten grains, Lu didn't plant near the chrysanthemums or peaches. He wheeled around the isle to the rear, scattering them around the Master's tomb.

Sloppy scholar Kong Nanfei watched warily.

Meng Haoran was curious.

Mo Tianyu stayed silent, fingering three copper coins.

Planting done, Lu sat in his wheelchair. Soul strength at 608—not yet 1000 for transformation—but enough for six spiritual senses (100 soul strength per sense).

100 physical strength condensed one drop of demonic blood.

Its use? Lu hadn't explored yet.

Spiritual sense mobilized; energy vortexed to him.

He grasped the void bare-handed.

Lake water rose as dragons.

One spiritual liquid drop infused, spreading through.

It sprinkled where seeds lay...

Soon.

In midwinter.

Green sprouts pierced snow, growing taller...

Ten tender bamboo stalks, nodes reaching thirty-two—matching [Bamboo Nodes Thirty-Two].

As they matured, from light green to deep, then ink, finally tinged purple.

Ten bamboo clusters drooped with leaves, rustling, purple hues swaying, exhaling dense spiritual energy.

Meng Haoran gaped.

One thought: Look at this bamboo—tall and straight!

...

Wangtian City.

Heavy snow fell like leaden skies, oppressive, suffocating.

Inside, tension peaked. Great Zhou elite soldiers leaned on walls, gripping weapons tight.

Snow blinded them to Xiliang forces beyond.

But compared to Tong'an City, Wangtian bore far greater pressure—facing Xiliang's lord, Overlord Xiang Shaoyun.

A peerless cultivator of the age, once charging unrivaled through Tantai Xuan's northern army on a single horse.

Even pre-cultivation era, few matched that.

Overlord deserved "strongest of the era."

Wangtian's strain was imaginable.

Among Great Zhou's defenses, it wasn't top-tier, yet it had held before.

Now, against Xiliang amid the anti-Zhou fervor, pressure multiplied.

On the battlements.

Wangtian City's lord looked decades older.

He eyed five black-light-armored Black Dragon Guards afar, silent.

Black Dragon Thirteen—infamous in the capital.

Five at once showed Great Zhou's regard for Overlord.

Air thick with cold and killing intent.

The lord in banner armor still shivered.

He suddenly missed teahouse days—sipping tea, hearing pipa melodies.

Alas, gone forever. Red Dust Teahouse disbanded; Lü Dongxuan took even the signboard, leaving no memento.

Exhaling steam, the lord didn't flee.

Great Zhou was tyrannical; the young emperor fed humans to Black Dragons. He'd considered deserting.

But duty as decades-long lord of a key defense won out.

No retiring to fields, no retreat.

Fight.

Gaze piercing snow, at distant Xiliang forces.

The lord smiled faintly.

Clashing with a warrior like Overlord? No loss. At life's end, tales to tell.

If he survived, bragging rights over tea with old cronies.

He lifted a hand; a snowflake melted to water.

Walls shuddered.

Ground quaked; air reeked of ice and slaughter.

Xiliang cavalry attacked.

No nocturnal clamor, no shattering silence—just mute oppression, trudging through thick snow, advancing slow.

Air compressed like bricks on every defender's chest.

"Hold the line! Slack off and die!"

A black-armored Black Dragon Guard barked coldly.

Under him...

Archers nocked bows.

Boom boom boom!

War drums thundered, blasting snow to white grains.

Falling flakes shattered in the beat.

Battle cries erupted like thunder from flat ground!

As dawn's light tore snow clouds, gilding walls...

Defenders loosed arrows.

Thousands rained down.

Beneath Wangtian's snowy expanse, Xiliang raised shields overhead, inching forward.

Arrows clanged off, sparking.

All blocked.

Xiang family cultivators led, spiritual energy in cores; axes swung, deflecting volleys.

Target: gates—to smash them.

On battlements.

Black Dragon Guards took positions.

Their refined bows fired piercing spiritual arrows.

Whistling down, piercing shields, pinning soldiers to snow.

Blood splashed faces, igniting Xiliang fury—roars, charging on.

Overlord, Qianqi axe on back, stood on chariot pulled by three massive black-maned horses.

In dawn glow, eyeing Black Dragon Guards atop walls.

Overlord smirked.

Whip cracked reins.

Horses neighed, galloping.

Hooves exploded, churning snow-mud.

Overlord on chariot—a black lightning bolt toward towering walls.

Xiliang parted.

On battlements.

A Black Dragon Guard's eyes flashed.

"Clear!"

He shoved a soldier; regulars hauled a near-man-high bow, string taut.

Guard grinned.

Bow braced on merlon, foot on it.

Arrow nocked, body arched back, pulling full—spiritual energy roaring in core like a beast.

Aimed at chariot's Overlord.

Blood boiling.

Straightened, roared—arrow flew.

Sonic boom; snow shredded!

Terror-speed outstripped others, out-penetrating crossbows, spiritual energy homing on Overlord.

On chariot, Overlord looked up.

Face under helm cold, domineering.

Disdain for the arrow.

No axe, no shield—he reached bare-handed.

Boom!

Snow erupted.

Overlord caught it one-handed; spiritual force blasted snow upward.

Yet his grip ironclad, unmoving.

"Black Dragon Thirteen—trash."

Overlord said flatly.

Pinch—arrowhead shattered.

Chariot at walls.

Overlord leaped; four spiritual vortexes whirled on him.

Roar like maddened beast; wall snow quaked off.

Defenders terrified, collapsing, will broken.

Overlord swung Qianqj; black demonic aura coiled, hair wild like god-demon.

Axe cleaved gates.

Bolts snapped, wailing, exploding.

Kick—gates crashed inward.

Below, axe in hand, Overlord turned, swung.

Xiliang silent, then thundered roars.

Forces surged in.

Bloody melee erupted.

Wangtian defenders low-morale, crumbled under momentum.

Battlements.

Lord bitter-smiled at breached gates.

Glanced at ashen Black Dragon Thirteen fleeing without fight, sneered.

Drew sword, adjusted helm, shook snow from armor.

Step by step down.

Great Zhou tyrannical.

But he was Wangtian lord.

Defenders followed.

Eyeing Overlord's burly frame, raised sword, roared.

"Kill!"

"Defend Wangtian!"

Lord bellowed.

Vital blood surged; sword in hand, charged Overlord.

Even stabbed en route by Xiang cultivators.

Blood-soaked lord rose, locked on Overlord.

Charged on.

Overlord waved; Xiang held back.

Lord staggered, blood trailing, to Overlord.

Wounds everywhere, gushing.

Sword tip on Overlord's chest armor—couldn't pierce.

Lord smiled.

Faintly, as if in teahouse, legs crossed, pipa melodies by ear, tapping rhythm, sipping steaming tea, bantering with old friends...

Helm lost, hair disheveled.

Wangtian lord—city fallen, he never retreated.

Overlord's expression complex.

Hand raised, patted lord's shoulder.

Lord knelt weakly, snow flying.

Eyes dimmed, life gone; head drooped, blood dripping, staining Wangtian's snow red.

One of Great Zhou capital's six defenses.

Wangtian City—fallen.

Chapter 203: Armies at the Gates of the Great Zhou Capital

Dawn's light pierced the night's silence.

Outside Yuanchi City.

Tantai Xuan stood armored and solemn on his chariot, wheels crunching through snow, leaving deep furrows.

Snow fell coldly, blanketing the earth in thick white.

Jiang Li in silver armor led a crimson steed, snorting steam like fire in the snow.

"My King, you need not join us in the assault."

Jiang Li eyed Tantai Xuan on the chariot.

Tantai Xuan shook his head, waving dismissively. "My Daxuan soldiers charge into battle—how could I hide behind?"

"If we fight... we fight together."

Resolute.

Jiang Li inhaled deeply. "If Your Majesty leads personally, the troops' morale will soar."

Tantai Xuan smiled, gazing toward Wangtian City.

Overlord assaulting Wangtian—with Xiliang forces and a peerless Body Storage cultivator—breaching it was no challenge. The battle likely ended; Xiliang prepared to march on the capital.

Jiang Li spoke of racing speed; Mo Ju too.

Yet Tantai Xuan lacked confidence—Overlord's Xiliang was too strong.

Still, he didn't underrate himself. Daxuan forces were no weaklings!

War drums thundered; banners waved.

Muffled horns shattered falling snow.

Jiang Li mounted.

"Protect the King."

He donned his silver helm, addressing two Xuanwu Guards seriously.

Gripping silver spear, heels clamped—hooves exploded, earth splattered.

Neighs echoed heaven and earth.

Crimson horse charged.

Jiang Li rode through Daxuan ranks, shouting orders, arraying troops to drumbeats, advancing slowly on Yuanchi City.

The fight was brutal.

No Overlord-like Body Storage powerhouse.

Breaching Yuanchi wasn't easy, but with Mo Beike's siege strategies and Jiang Li's formations...

Cruel, yet easier than expected.

Yuanchi under Black Dragon Guard control; Black Dragon Thirteen led assaults.

Daxuan suffered heavy losses—cultivator armies were battlefield meat grinders.

Jiang Li gripped silver spear, eyes blazing, leading Xuanwu Guards against Black Dragons.

No war is easy.

Victory stacked on corpses.

Black Dragon and Xuanwu Guards both bled heavily, but Xuanwu outnumbered; fearless charges...

Black Dragons faltered.

Black Dragon Thirteen fled on horseback, baffled by Xuanwu ferocity—suicidal.

Tantai Xuan, eyes red with kill, charged frontline despite kingship.

Black Dragons and Thirteen withdrew.

Yuanchi lord didn't flee—like Wangtian's, these old defenders clung to their cities, wielding weapons against Tantai Xuan, pierced by guarding Xuanwu blades.

Yuanchi battle ended.

For Daxuan, no easy win.

Tantai Xuan's armor dripped blood; he approached the lord's body, sighing.

The old lord could have retreated with Black Dragons.

Unexpectedly... chose death in Yuanchi.

"A true man."

Tantai Xuan inhaled, ordering thick burial.

Daxuan forces entered slowly.

Controlled Yuanchi.

Tantai Xuan knew it well.

Mo Ju swiftly managed, restoring order; scouts rode in.

Yuanchi's war room.

Listening to reports, armored generals grew grave.

"Xiliang breached Wangtian in under an hour..."

"Overlord single-handedly shattered gates, repelled Black Dragon Thirteen and nearly a hundred Guards!"

Scout knelt, delivering.

Jiang Li's silver armor blood-beaded; he gasped.

"Worthy of Overlord... his valor holds off armies!"

"Body Storage cultivator—name well-earned."

Jiang Li sighed.

Mo Ju in crane cloak paced the cold room.

Unlike generals' awe, Mo Ju thought deeper.

"Compared to Xiliang, Daxuan has one glaring weakness."

He eyed Tantai Xuan.

"We lack a matchless Body Storage like Overlord."

Seriously.

"If Daxuan clashes with Xiliang, we'll suffer..."

"No one counters Overlord. If he beheads—like before, charging alone to capture the King—who stops him?"

Mo Ju said.

His warm voice carried gravity.

A grave issue; even Jiang Li headache.

"How many Body Storage in the world? Beyond Baiyujing disciples, Overlord reigns—we're helpless?"

Tantai Xuan smiled.

"Our goal: topple Zhou. Don't fret Overlord yet—strike Great Zhou first!"

War room fell silent.

"Don't mope. I failed immortal encounters multiple times without your gloom. Fear what? Soldiers for generals, earth for floods."

"Overlord strong, but Daxuan troops no dough!"

Tantai Xuan slammed table, booming.

Generals roused, echoing.

Unlike fired-up warriors, strategist Mo Ju stayed calm, glancing deeply at Tantai Xuan.

Tantai Xuan dismissed, but Mo Ju wouldn't allow imbalance.

Thus...

He exited the room.

Left Tantai Xuan a letter, cloaked in crane, rode from Yuanchi.

Alone north.

Vanished in endless snow.

Beyond Baiyujing disciples, one Body Storage could counter Overlord.

...

Capital.

Old eunuch head low, hurried.

Crossed Zijin Palace threshold, entered hall swiftly.

Yuwen Xiu on dragon throne, eyes half-closed, napping.

Eunuch bowed, shrill voice: "Your Majesty... frontline reports."

Hall silent long.

Yuwen Xiu opened eyes. "Speak."

Once, he'd be frantic like ants on hot pan; now, oddly calm.

"Xiliang under King Xiang Shaoyun breached Wangtian in under an hour; lord died in battle..."

"Yuanchi stalemated Daxuan four hours; Black Dragon Guards lost, retreated; lord died, city fallen."

"Tong'an under Xiliang general Xu Chu held three hours; lord opened gates, surrendered to Xiliang..."

Hall quiet.

Only eunuch's shrill tone recounting defeats, atmosphere eerie.

Finished, he 偷瞥 Yuwen Xiu.

Normally, rage.

But...

Yuwen Xiu calm, beyond expectation.

"Your Majesty, of six defenses, three lost..."

Eunuch said.

Yuwen Xiu waved. "I know."

Rubbed temples, to eunuch: "Six defenses, three down; Beiluo nominal, north and west armies can drive straight..."

Squinting, rose from throne.

Hands behind, paced above.

Eyes sharp: "By my decree, Pingnan and Zuilong lords withdraw guards to capital, muster forces against rebels!"

Yuwen Xiu ordered.

Better consolidate five defenses than lose one by one.

He had means.

Squinted, took two letters from throne, patted lightly.

...

Beiluo Lakeside.

Heavy snow, yet lake unfrozen.

Mo Beike paced to shore, eyeing spirit-shrouded waters, heavy bags twitching.

Saw cultivators wave-walking from lake.

Casual strides—Baiyujing disciples.

Saw Lu Changkong.

Body Storage Lu Changkong held peach petal, crossing lake.

Said nothing, pointed opposite shore, departed.

If Lu allowed entry, Mo Beike could; else, no.

Mo Beike found bamboo raft.

Boarded, poled himself, rippling lake toward heart-isle.

Raft drifted; shores' views lost, crashed into lake-mist.

Dense spirit; Mo Beike inhaled deeply.

Saw Dragon Gate, little dragon atop glancing, nostrils flaring steam.

Raft docked; Mo Beike tucked robes, ascended.

Giant chrysanthemums bloomed brilliantly.

Peach blossoms like shy maidens' flushed cheeks.

Mo Beike sighed—Baiyujing like fairyland.

Beneath pavilion.

White-robed figure in silver wheelchair, hair windswept.

Turned slowly to Mo Beike.

Mo Beike felt immense pressure, breathless.

Bags twitched; no retreat, pressed on.

Finally, ten steps from Lu—could advance no more.

"Mohist Giant, you finally dare enter Beiluo."

Lu smiled.

"This old man apologizes to Young Master Lu; past matters my fault..."

Mo Beike bowed thrice.

Lu knew: Yin-Yang scholar Wei Luan impersonated him in Beiluo; though Yin-Yang and Mohist rangers died by Lu's hand, Mo Beike bore the blame.

He'd studied Lu—knew his temperament.

Lu eyed deeply, said nothing.

Smiled.

Felt like meeting the Master.

Mo Beike and Kong Xiu alike—Hundred Schools prodigies.

Lu didn't press.

Sleeve sweep.

Spirit Pressure Board floated before him.

"A game?"

Lu asked.

Pushed gently; white pieces box flew to Mo Beike.

Caught; face twitched.

"Rumors of Young Master's unmatched chess... this old man will embarrass himself."

Mo Beike held white box, placed piece.

Lu sleeved, placed black lightly.

Snowy winds; quiet game.

Snow background, unaffected.

Back and forth; crisp falls endless.

Mo Beike frowned deeper; sweat beaded forehead.

His chess strong, but couldn't match Lu's pace—elusive momentum, eyes on every corner.

Sweat dripped from nose to snow.

Set down piece, shook head.

"This old man loses."

Lu leaned wheelchair, waved; pieces returned to boxes.

"I know why you're here. After this game, you have your answer."

"Trip in vain."

"To spare regrets, I'll answer as I did the Master."

Lu leaned, white robes floating, eyeing Mo Beike.

Stunned—answer to Kong Xiu?

Mo Beike sat straight. "Eager to hear."

Lu smiled, gazed lake. "Daxuan or Xiliang—as long as they don't provoke Beiluo, Beiluo ignores..."

"If not provoke me."

"This court, this world—however it goes... what concern of mine?"

"After all, I Lu Ping'an treat with sincerity."

Mo Beike stunned.

Recalling Baiyujing's emergence—no direct court meddling.

Only when provoked.

Like Beiluo families, capital ministers denouncing Lu...

Baiyujing's purpose: nurture cultivators.

Pure cultivation force?

Beyond initial Heavenly Secret cease-war order—later, Mo Beike knew it anticipated world's change, Five Barbarians chaos, thus issued.

Complex emotions; rose, bowed: "This old man understands."

Now, he saw his obsession—studying Lu trapped him; stepping back, trip meaningless.

Even Jiang Li knew: no provocation, no Beiluo action.

Answer from Lu; no more questions. Lu ignored, set board alone.

Mo Beike saw distant Kong Nanfei.

Approached Master's tomb.

Mo Tianyu and Kong Nanfei complex—Master's lifelong rival, meeting thus.

Mo Beike sat before tomb, spoke much to stone.

Like casual chat.

Lifetime rivals, never peaceful talk; Mo Beike spoke alone, happily.

Finished.

Left, poled raft from Beiluo Lake.

On raft, hunched, eyed tomb.

Under bags, envy.

Master buried in isle fairyland.

His own end—unknown dust.

Mo Beike left Beiluo.

Boarded carriage, whipped to Yuanchi.

...

Under leaden clouds.

Wangtian City.

Overlord on chariot, three horses pulling.

Aimed: capital.

Behind, Xiliang generals waved weapons; drums, horns.

Xiliang vast... marched capital-ward.

Tong'an: Xu Chu checked sky—time with Overlord—ordered unload baggage, rapid capital strike.

Jiang Li saw race; Xu Chu and Overlord too.

For Overlord: no rest, crush through, straight to capital dragon.

...

Yuanchi City.

Tantai Xuan on warhorse; Jiang Li, generals near.

No Mo Ju or Mo Beike; Tantai Xuan decided.

Eyed dim sky, capital.

Behind, Daxuan post-Yuanchi weary, but excited, expectant faces.

No retreat, no fear—topple Zhou, rival Xiliang.

Tantai Xuan laughed.

Clang.

Blade gleam tore lead clouds.

Tip pointed capital.

Horns blared; bare-chested drummers in snow swung mallets—drums like sparks in dry grass, igniting Daxuan blood.

Tantai Xuan blade distant-point.

Jiang Li spear waved; Daxuan from Yuanchi, crushed snow, charged capital.

Chapter 204: Outside the Imperial Capital, Three Armies Converge!

The campaign against Zhou naturally drew eyes from all sides.

Families from every prefecture and major powers watched this war that would decide Great Zhou's fate.

For the martial world, it was equally pivotal.

Though today's jianghu was shifting toward cultivators—Qi Core practitioners sprouting like mushrooms after the world's transformation...

Jianghu was still jianghu, eyeing the court's mood. Even the strongest sects couldn't withstand the court—except transcendent Baiyujing.

Most would be trampled by thousands of troops.

Even Dao Pavilion, Sword Pavilion, or Qi Core-anchored sects.

They awaited the final court outcome to decide the world's ruler and their own paths.

...

Nanjun.

Unlike the north's endless heavy snow.

Southern flakes fell like distinct grains, not chaotic goose feathers.

Sima Qingshan in blue robe, book box on back; behind, a girl in red cape held an oil-paper umbrella, shielding falling snow. Strolling amid flakes, poetic and picturesque.

"Nanjiang City."

"Master, are you from Nanjiang?"

The girl's voice was gentle, curious.

Sima Qingshan smiled. "No, my home is Nanjin—often invaded by barbarians."

"Coming to Nanjiang to meet a friend and help him."

The girl nodded thoughtfully. She'd heard of Nanjin—no wonder Sima Qingshan pitied refugees; he'd grown in hardship.

Girl named An Miaoyu—poetic name.

She followed Sima Qingshan to learn painting, Painting Sect's first disciple—his first.

At Nanjiang's Tang Manor.

Servants and guards knew Sima Qingshan; soon notified Tang Yimo.

Tang Yimo, soaked in training gear, rushed from Dragon Gate.

Saw Sima Qingshan sipping tea in the hall; laughed heartily.

Big strides, bear hug.

"Alive and back—good."

Tang Yimo patted his shoulder.

Returning unscathed from Beiluo was no small feat; Tang Yimo had visited once—terrifying place.

Sima Qingshan coughed; Tang Yimo noticed the quiet girl beside.

Eyes widened—Sima Qingshan 外出一趟, brought back a wife?

Cultured men—smooth.

Guessing thoughts, Sima Qingshan introduced: "An Miaoyu, my disciple—Painting Sect's first."

"Tang Yimo, Nanjun Southern Mansion Army Commander."

Tang Yimo introduced himself first.

Sat, poured tea, downed it.

Glanced—Painting Sect?

Sima Qingshan founding his own?

"Went to Beiluo, got Young Master Lu's guidance. He said wander the world for unique insights. Though cultivation era now, all paths lead to longevity—Hundred Schools contention benefits progress."

"So I founded Painting Sect, to contribute modestly, seek a small boat in chaotic cultivation currents."

Sima Qingshan said.

"Cultivators' Hundred Schools contention?"

Tang Yimo pondered.

"That one in Baiyujing—too unfathomable. Is Baiyujing truly just a pure cultivation force?"

Tang Yimo murmured.

Sima Qingshan to him: "From capital, heard Xiliang and Daxuan campaign against Zhou. Thought Nanjun might act, came to help."

Tang Yimo smiled: "Nanjun long withdrew from this campaign..."

"Nanjun... unqualified."

Words stunned Sima Qingshan; then understood.

"Because allying with Southern Barbarians' 100,000 army annihilation?"

Sima Qingshan asked.

Tang Yimo nodded slightly, shook head.

"Partly."

"Also me. Compared to North Xuan King and Xiliang King, I'm far behind. Though Father trained me these three months... gap with those tyrants huge."

"Barbarian issue lost Nanjun virtue—hard to face new nations."

"Actually, Nanjun strong—Dao and Sword Pavilions here. In emergencies, invite them; top power no less than Xiliang or Daxuan."

"But... lost virtue once."

Tang Yimo sighed.

"So Nanjun awaits this campaign's result."

Sima Qingshan thoughtful.

Admiring glance—Tang Yimo matured from hot-blooded youth.

Tang Yimo strong but disliked fighting; fought to protect what mattered.

Sima Qingshan smiled, joking: "As Nanjun's early cultivators, why not join the Hundred Schools contention?"

"Your body cultivation opposite my painting—different directions, but collision interesting."

"As future Nanjun ruler, don't you want control over cultivation jianghu?"

"Master jianghu, stabilize court."

Joke stunned Tang Yimo.

Eyes brightened progressively.

...

Beiluo, lake-heart isle.

Lu in wheelchair; sloppy scholar Kong Nanfei with disciple Meng Haoran approached.

Bowed to Lu.

"You can check Western Mountain... the 'Trial Tower' may aid your cultivation."

Lu leaned, to Kong Nanfei.

"Western Mountain 'Trial Tower'?"

Kong Nanfei stunned; twisted, saw cloud-piercing tower, inhaled deeply.

"Try it. Your disciple... not yet. Wait for Qi Core ninth stage."

Lu said.

Meng Haoran's young face flushed red.

Outside, envied genius.

Before Lu... trash.

Kong Nanfei's sloppiness—Lu thoughtful; inspired, carved his path. Narrow now, but could widen.

"Reach Trial Tower fifth floor—gift something helpful for your noble spirit."

Lu's words lit Kong Nanfei's eyes.

Only awe for Lu.

Enduring heaven's might, aura bending spines—terrifying.

Believed Lu; no qualification to be deceived.

Meng Haoran flushed, wanted to boast 18-strand Qi Core genius.

But Lu ignored him.

Kong Nanfei left.

Dragging reluctant Meng Haoran, wave-walked to Western Mountain.

Lu smiled.

Thought; Thunder Surge Art activated, thunder arcs flickered—he vanished, reappeared on Baiyujing second-floor terrace.

Snow falling.

Lu held green plum, added peach petal, warmed plum wine.

Eyes lines dancing, watched capital battle. Anti-Zhou war intrigued Lu.

Might be fun.

...

Xiliang and Daxuan armies at imperial capital gates.

Inside, chaos; ministers trembled.

Overlord's fame known.

Mohist mechanism city breached—many died.

If capital fell, Yuwen Xiu wouldn't surrender—ministers dragged down.

Overlord enraged—they'd die.

Capital rioted.

Ministers packed, planned flee with refugees from storm center.

But despair.

Yuwen Xiu sealed gates.

Nobles, officials locked in.

Iron-clad Black Dragon Guards held gates.

Tens of thousands elite Zhou soldiers waited silently behind, crowding main streets.

Storm brewing urgency.

Worse: imperial decree—fleeing ministers traitors, dungeon, family extermination.

Several dragged by masked Black Dragons to cells.

Ministers shivered silent.

Chaos demands iron law; Yuwen Xiu's came.

Oppression thickened; citizens angry but mute, powers held breath.

Leaden clouds, heavy snow.

Tension filled streets.

Teahouse.

Beauty Qianqian worried, angry...

Black Dragon Guards seized able-bodied men for defense.

Many resisted, but blades to necks, families' fearful eyes—yielded.

Donned cold armor, gripped heavy weapons, gathered outside walls.

Forced to fight.

Black Dragons held families hostage—desert or defect, kin suffered.

For families, armored up.

Zijin Palace.

Storm pressure; old eunuch inhaled deeply.

Inevitable.

Looked up; palace dark, no candles.

Yuwen Xiu in war attire, golden armor gleaming in shadows.

Stood before dragon throne, back to eunuch, pondering.

Didn't go to walls.

No oversight; stayed in palace, awaiting...

Outside capital.

Ten li.

Earth quaked, snow-mud churned.

Armies pressed; iron-blood aura like heat waves, whipping snow.

Xiliang cavalry led; infantry, archers behind.

Xu Chu horse-front; two forces flooded from directions, merged into tiger-wolf army, straight to ancient, time-worn capital.

Overlord on chariot, three Xiliang steeds pulling.

Behind, luxurious carriage; faint graceful shadow.

Promised her picturesque empire—breaching capital, she witnessed.

Xu Chu strode with spiked iron balls.

"My King! Mission accomplished!"

Voice like bell.

Overlord laughed, hammered Xu Chu's arm.

Trusted general; strongest cultivator under him.

Xiang army commander, Qi Core peak.

Blind trust.

"Take Great Zhou capital, enter imperial city—Xiliang seizes world momentum."

"Great Zhou tyrannical—topple!"

"Xiliang rises!"

Overlord declared.

Xu Chu eyes flashed, gripped ball, roared like bear.

Echoed through ranks; troops waved weapons, thundered.

Waves crashed capital walls; Zhou elites atop paled.

Xiliang cavalry—fierce tigers!

War intent nearly crushed morale pre-battle.

Overlord cold, eyed towering walls—higher, thicker than defenses, more troops.

Fuller war machines.

Even with him, no easy fight.

Suddenly, senses stirred.

Head turned north—smoke, earth tremor.

Eyes flashed.

Xu Chu warlike, looked north.

"Roar!"

"Roar!"

Daxuan roared; fine armor, every step weapon swing, furious cries.

Daxuan battled Xirong year-round—blood no less than Xiliang.

Xiliang lions, Daxuan tigers.

Encounter—momentum matched.

"Here they come."

Overlord lips curled.

Xu Chu grinned, excited.

"Daxuan—North Xuan King's forces!"

Far.

Jiang Li silver armor, silver spear, crimson steed like fire, led slowly.

Saw Xiliang.

Momentum like tidal waves; even battle-hardened Jiang Li eyes narrowed.

Overlord's aura strong; Xiliang aggressive under it.

Jiang Li inhaled; Soldier School heir, inherited Bai Fengtian's mantle.

Couldn't lag in command.

Soldier School among Hundred—had troop ways.

Raised silver spear, spiritual energy roar—like stone in calm pond, rippled huge.

Daxuan roared under guidance.

Jiang Li rode; every li, spear wave, shout.

Momentum twisted rope—stronger, stronger!

Qi Core energy surged, breakthrough signs.

Soldier path changed unexpectedly post-transformation.

Like gathering myriad troops' power.

Xiliang and Daxuan momentums clashed.

Two new nations, armies met outside capital.

Faint booms; snow slowed.

On Great Zhou walls.

Zhou elites' morale bottomed.

Eyed black masses below, trembled.

Chapter 205: Beneath the Imperial Walls—Who Dares Fight?

Beiluo, Western Mountain.

Snow swirled, blanketing the already pristine White Jade Tower in another layer of goose-down white.

At its base, cultivators sat cross-legged, diligently condensing spiritual energy, striving for the ninth-stage Qi Core—the minimum to enter the Trial Tower.

Young Master Lu of Beiluo imposed no other restrictions, but cultivation had to reach that threshold.

Nie Changqing had sat motionless for ages, snow piling thick on him.

Suddenly, his eyes snapped open—blade aura flashed like sparks, carving light through the air before fading.

He rose, shook off the snow, exhaled steam. Pig-slaughtering knife at his waist, white robes fluttering, he strode toward the tower.

Ning Zhao's long lashes trembled; she opened her eyes.

Glanced at Nie Changqing—each floor allowed only three attempts.

Fail all three, and even if you survived, you lost the chance to proceed.

She cherished every opportunity.

In the distance.

Ni Yu and Nie Shuang flexed eagerly, primed and ready.

Bai Qingniao still recovered from injuries—too soon; failure likely.

Ning Zhao said each floor had three precious shots.

Lü Dongxuan pondered with Lü Mu aside.

Mingyue hugged her pipa, curious about the tower but content to watch first.

Her Western Prefecture battle had skyrocketed her cultivation—near Body Storage, Qi Core saturated.

Lü Mu drooped.

"Another Heavenly Secret Decree?"

Lü Dongxuan chuckled, gold chain quivering.

"No, just spreading word... that Beiluo has a Trial Tower."

Lü Mu gripped bamboo staff, expressionless.

"So..."

Lü Dongxuan squinted.

Lü Mu ignored—not a decree, still coughing blood?

Dream on!

Blood's not free!

Was he a blood-dispensing tool?!

Soon.

Lü Mu clutched chest, pale on the bluestone before the tower, blood at lips.

Aura of tragedy.

Next time... pig blood!

Sworn!

Lü Dongxuan cheerfully penned on yellow paper.

"Heaven and earth first transformed; all cultivate. Young Master Lu, pitying the hardship, built White Jade Trial Tower. Ninth-stage Qi Core may enter—comprehend Dao, break realms, transcend mortal, one thought to longevity."

Flourish, done.

Lü Dongxuan fingered chain, beaming.

Mingyue peeked, inhaled sharply—Pavilion Master indeed extraordinary; words stirred her blood.

"Mingyue, know Young Master's intent with this tower?"

Mingyue shook head.

"Young Master embraces the world—shares this sacred cultivation site. He said cultivators need Hundred Schools contention. I doubted—how easy? But this towering jade... now I believe."

"He's truly devoted to cultivation's prosperity."

Lü Dongxuan sighed.

Glanced at Mingyue, inhaled: "You're not Heavenly Secret Pavilion. Though guided by Young Master, not Baiyujing disciple."

"Stay in Beiluo lifelong, but remember his nurturing."

"Your pipa melody path—unique, can found a school. Once weak girl under Master's care; now strong—wander jianghu, establish sect, contribute to Hundred Schools. Repay his teachings."

Mingyue froze, pipa grip tightened.

Unexpected words—left her lost.

Lü Dongxuan patted her head—she needed growth.

Rolled paper, summoned Heavenly Secret Pigeon, tucked in tube, released. White feathers mingled with snow.

Nie Changqing re-entered tower.

Sat on mat; scene shifted—primeval jungle.

Five early Body Storage masked beings, central hole eyes cold.

Buzz...

Pig knives materialized; charged.

Auras shredded jungle, branches flying.

Nie Changqing wielded knife—slashes afar, blade qi迷茫.

Fierce battle.

Their synergy flawless; individual knife skills mediocre, but united—taxing even for him.

Outside tower.

Ning Zhao rose, inhaled, entered.

Saw Nie Changqing on mat, "four" flashing above.

Suddenly...

She trembled—"four" blurred to smoke, reformed "five".

Nie Changqing passed fourth!

Pressure crushed her—stuck on third, Old Nie on fifth.

Similar strength... such combat gap?

Ning Zhao sat, calmed.

Tower door pushed.

Sloppy Taoist staggered in; Ni Yu, Nie Shuang together; Jing Yue with Jingtian Sword.

Ning Zhao nodded, closed eyes, challenged.

"Three" appeared above.

Kong Nanfei parted forehead hair, excited.

Recall Lu's words—fifth floor gift for noble spirit.

Young Master's reward—no trinket.

Excited.

Followed suit, sat on mat.

Suction—scene changed.

...

Baiyujing pavilion.

Lu sat; breeze and snow swayed him.

Eyes lines danced, watched anti-Zhou war at capital.

Full-map view required focus—not constant.

Without Jiang Li, Daxuan momentum a tier below Xiliang.

Overlord's Xiliang could withstand two Five Barbarian forces—elite.

Anti-Zhou no suspense to Lu.

Great Zhou lost Master and Jiang Li—toothless tiger, no threat to united Daxuan-Xiliang.

Curious: who profits—Daxuan or Xiliang?

Sipped plum wine.

Peach fragrance lingered.

Leaned wheelchair, watched on.

...

Outside Great Zhou capital.

Each flake weighed tons.

Pingnan and Zuilong forces mobilized to capital—Great Zhou's all, yet weaker than either foe alone.

World saw no comeback.

Tantai Xuan armored, red cape billowing; Jiang Li, Xuanwu Guards escorted to Xiliang flank.

Overlord on chariot, three horses heavy steps, wheels turning.

Bold Overlord alone approached.

Eyes met; Tantai Xuan laughed.

"Still came to this."

Overlord nodded slightly.

Raced speed—yet both breached defenses simultaneously.

Intriguing.

Both at gates—who enters palace first? No clear winner.

"Didn't expect you before me."

Overlord eyed Tantai Xuan.

"But you're too weak."

"In this era, without world-suppressing power, you can't hold cultivation age."

"Even emperor—floods will topple you one day."

Tantai Xuan silent.

Overlord spoke truth.

Unbelievable he'd reach this—final rival to Xiliang.

His immortal path tortuous; Overlord's smooth.

Jiang Li silver-armored, eyed Tantai Xuan—mustn't falter now.

Kings' standoff—weak momentum huge impact.

"Fear what? Daxuan has Xuanwu Guards, capable generals. They follow me not for heaven-piercing strength—but trust, recognition."

"So, worry?"

Tantai Xuan tugged reins, smiled.

Faced Overlord's mountain aura—held firm. Body Storage peerless.

Jiang Li relieved.

Overlord deep glance, turned horses, charged capital walls.

"Xiang King—truly unmatched dominance."

Tantai Xuan inhaled gravely.

"Hundred Schools era, he overwhelmed; now cultivation age, more so."

Jiang Li said.

Lifted eyes to Overlord kicking snow-mud toward walls—grave.

Three horses accelerated to charge.

Overlord on chariot, Qianqi on back, hair like steel needles in wind-snow.

Eyes torches on ancient walls—bearer of Zhou imperial ages.

Childhood visit—ant beneath.

Now returned.

Tiger!

Roar!

Overlord charged walls.

Xiliang erupted; soldiers slammed halberds—thuds!

Drums like endless thunder.

Reached base.

Yanked reins; eyes lightning, scanned faces.

Masked Black Dragon Guards.

"War!"

Veins bulged, roared.

Beneath Great Zhou capital—Overlord challenged!

"Who dares fight?!"

Thunder voice echoed every corner, fading.

Zhou generals paled.

Overlord called.

None dared.

Who was he?

Peerless cultivator—death to face!

Thus, none.

"Trash!"

Overlord barked.

Black Dragons ugly beneath masks.

Zhou generals ashen.

Disappointed—no challenger. Great Zhou... utter letdown.

A Black Dragon growled.

"Archers ready!"

Flags waved; Zhou elites drew bows.

Cultivator Black Dragons aimed at lone chariot Overlord.

Overlord sneered.

Took chariot longbow.

Drew iron arrow.

"Come!"

Bellow shook walls.

A Black Dragon enraged at solo archer Overlord.

"Fire!"

Flag shook; spiritual roar.

Whoosh!

Whoosh whoosh!

From capital walls.

All loosed—feathered arrows arced from heights, whistling at lone challenger.

Dense like arrow rain.

Overlord laughed.

Laughter battlefield-wide.

Drew bow full.

Released!

Iron arrow screamed.

Above—black cloud arrows; his lone shot faced myriad.

One arrow fearless—tragic beauty.

Scene froze.

But!

Shocking...

Overlord's arrow spun, clashed—shattered several, dragon-roar.

Pierced Black Dragon chest—blood mist.

Nailed to wall.

Myriad fell.

Overlord stood alone.

Gripped axe.

Arrows froze mid-air...

Demonic aura spread, hair wild.

Back to Xiliang; axe swung forward.

Boom!

Myriad exploded to fragments!

Xiliang side.

Warriors blood-boiled at god-demon figure.

Xu Chu swung spiked balls, roared!

"Assault the city!"

Chapter 206: Overlord's Axe Severs a Body Storage

Imperial Capital.

Even the falling snow seemed laden with crushing pressure.

Zijin Palace.

Yuwen Xiu stood in golden armor, war attire gleaming.

At his waist, the Emperor's Sword—forged as if from pure gold.

Below the hall.

The Black Dragon Thirteen stood in formation—thirteen strong. Though one had fallen in Beiluo, another Black Dragon Guard immediately filled the vacancy.

The Thirteen were always thirteen; Black Dragon Guards coveted the position ceaselessly.

Yuwen Xiu had instituted internal competition within the Thirteen. The strongest gained not just wealth and status, but personal guidance from the Black Dragon itself.

Thus, every member cultivated and competed relentlessly.

Only strength brought more wealth and power.

The distant clamor of siege and slaughter reached the palace.

Yuwen Xiu's expression remained unchanged.

The old eunuch kept his head bowed, face complex. The moment had come—Great Zhou's life or death.

The Thirteen below looked grave.

They watched Yuwen Xiu atop the throne, wondering what cards he held.

Under normal circumstances, they couldn't hold...

Against Daxuan alone, they might fight. But with Xiliang and Overlord—they had little confidence.

"Your Majesty..."

Liu Hao, leader of the Thirteen—half-step into Body Storage—looked up, worried.

"Come with me."

After long silence, Yuwen Xiu rose, walking toward the Imperial Garden.

The Thirteen exchanged stunned glances.

The garden? Now?

Shouldn't they be sent to the front?

But none spoke.

They followed.

Imperial Garden.

Cold as ever, thick with snow.

Yuwen Xiu's armored steps crunched.

The Thirteen trailed.

The jade-green pool rippled, blood-scent lingering in the air. Yuwen Xiu was calm—long accustomed.

The water boiled like scalding heat.

A massive vortex formed; the Black Dragon surged forth—cold black armor gleaming with icy brilliance.

Its sharp eyes seemed almost capable of speech.

Yuwen Xiu's gaze softened upon it.

Behind, the Thirteen bowed in awe, frozen by the dragon's oppressive aura.

Sharp claws gripped stone; the dragon hauled itself out.

Four claws now beneath its belly; scales denser. Wounds from Little Phoenix One's feathers—healed completely.

The dragon nuzzled Yuwen Xiu, massive head lowering to touch his.

Kindred spirits.

“My Great Zhou faces annihilation... You are all I have left.”

Yuwen Xiu murmured, cradling the dragon’s head.

Intelligence flickered in its eyes.

It turned to the Thirteen, mouth opening—a black, round pearl slowly floated out.

The dragon shuddered.

Thirteen black scales shed.

They hovered before it; the black dragon pearl spun, viscous fluid dripping onto each scale.

“Black Dragon Saliva.”

Yuwen Xiu’s eyes lit.

He beckoned the Thirteen.

Liu Hao stepped first; a scale flew to his brow, slamming in—

Agonizing pain, as if embedding in flesh and bone.

His eyes bloodshot, crimson.

But exhilaration—

Breakthrough!

From Qi Core peak to Body Storage!

Yuwen Xiu clenched fists, thrilled.

The dragon had grown, transformed... From devouring commoners (limited gains) to cultivators—evil surged, power soared!

The dragon opened wide; phantom souls flickered in the pearl, then swallowed.

It dove back into the pool.

Yuwen Xiu faced the sweat-drenched, transformed Thirteen.

“Great Zhou’s survival rests with you.”

He approached Liu Hao, slipping two letters into his hand.

“Use when necessary. I trust you’ll handle well.”

Yuwen Xiu said.

Eyes sharp.

Had the Master lived, these letters would bind strongly.

But the Master dead, restraint gone—Yuwen Xiu couldn’t rely solely on them.

Yet as morale breakers—perfect.

“Go.”

“I await victory.”

Including Liu Hao, the Thirteen’s eyes blazed. They bowed, exited the garden, raced outside the capital.

Thirteen Body Storage...

Cheated, yes—but enough to overturn the battle!

...

Beiluo, lake-heart isle.

Baiyujing pavilion.

The instant the dragon spat its pearl, Lu frowned.

“Such dense malice...”

Lu murmured.

The dragon strengthened—not slightly. Devouring cultivators amplified evil and power daily.

Condensed an evil dragon pearl; horns nearly sprouting.

Once horns grew—third transformation, rivaling Golden Core.

Evil cultivation—fastest path, but most heaven-defying.

Lu tapped wheelchair.

He craved Golden Core to elevate Five Phoenix Continent from low to mid-martial.

But not the dragon.

“Now... Old Nie might not beat it.”

“Yet if he clears fifth floor—perhaps.”

Lu pondered.

Leaned back, watched on.

And faintly... Emperor Yuwen Xiu plotted something.

...

Outside the capital.

Overlord's domineering opener launched Xiliang's assault.

Roars thundered; black masses charged the plains, storming the walls.

Mohist siege engines from the mechanism city shone.

Capital gates far heavier than defenses.

Overlord chose no brute force.

Xiliang raised ladders, sprinting from afar, planting at walls—soldiers climbed madly.

Daxuan idle no more.

Tantai Xuan raised blade high, pointing capital.

Daxuan charged.

Two elite forces hammered the ancient city.

Breaching capital far harder than defenses.

Once fallen, Great Zhou neared doom.

On walls, Black Dragon Guards raced, rousing Zhou elites.

Fight or die.

Battle turned brutal.

Xiliang climbers faced dozens of Zhou soldiers, Black Dragons mixed in—hacked to death swiftly.

Siege—a tug-of-war of endurance. Deaths mounted; a breach would tear wide.

Unlike Xiliang scaling walls.

Daxuan targeted gates.

Hundreds hugged massive rams, slamming ancient doors.

Boom!

Boom boom!

Corpses rained—Zhou elites, Xiliang warriors.

Stalemate dragged.

Finally, Xu Chu swung iron balls, ascended walls—one smash toppled foes.

Breach.

Xiliang flooded up.

Below.

Daxuan ram shattered soldier-braced gates.

Defenders flew.

Jiang Li led charge through ancient doors.

Silver armor blood-soaked in blinks.

Eyes flashed escape from capital; two old soldiers' heads soaring.

War intent surged.

True carnage erupted.

Battle silent; snow turned crimson.

Capital streets—dense Zhou elites, conscripted militia wielded weapons, joined fray.

Speak not of enfeoffment; one general's success—ten thousand bones wither.

White snow dyed red.

Tantai Xuan on steed, no rear hiding—wielded weapon frontline.

Eyes red—one general's success indeed atop countless corpses.

In capital.

Iron cavalry thundered—near three hundred, oppressive dread.

“Xuanwu Guards—form!”

Jiang Li bellowed.

Pressure trembled his face.

Black clouds rolled; blood qi, wails of wronged souls...

Unease; Jiang Li grave.

“Leading—Black Dragon Thirteen... why different?”

Jiang Li inhaled.

Thirteen he'd faced—transformed, more evil.

Hooves exploded.

Masked, black-armored Thirteen led three hundred Black Dragon Guards.

Capital's strongest defense!

And final card!

“War!”

“Crush rebels—enfeoffment, prime ministership!”

Liu Hao raised black spear, hoarse roar.

Thirteen and Guards charged fanatically.

Zhou elites parted.

Before walls.

Jiang Li arrayed Xuanwu Guards.

Cultivator formations—stronger, momentum linked.

“War!”

Xuanwu roared.

Black Dragons charged like black spear, piercing Xuanwu shield!

“My King—retreat!”

Jiang Li spear in hand, horse before blood-soaked Tantai Xuan, urging back.

Cultivator battles—no place for him.

Tantai Xuan self-aware. Once he’d boast, I can fight!

But beaten by cultivation society—he knew he couldn't.

Retreated wisely.

On walls, Xiang family army descended—soon cultivator war.

Xu Chu swung balls, joined Xuanwu vs Black Dragons.

“Kill!”

Liu Hao muffled.

Thirteen drew back black spears—“Dragon Spines.”

Boom!

Boom boom!

Auras erupted.

One after another...

Thirteen simultaneous Body Storage waves swept streets!

Walls.

Overlord descending step-by-step squinted.

Sudden thirteen Body Storage—how not startling?

Glanced far—saw distant Thirteen.

Under Body Storage leaders.

Xiang and Xuanwu lines shattered instantly.

Xu Chu roared; ball pierced by Liu Hao's spine—shoulder exploded, crashed.

Body Storage...

When did Great Zhou gain so many?

Overlord puzzled, but pressed—wielded Qianqi, strode.

Jiang Li stunned.

All Thirteen Body Storage?

Beyond expectation.

Cultivation era, yet Body Storage still mighty.

Thirteen Black Dragon Guards?

“The dragon?”

Jiang Li realized, grave inhale.

Boom!

Under Thirteen.

Black Dragons ferocious, suppressed Xuanwu and Xiang.

Thirteen held—no rush; sensed killing intent locking them.

Liu Hao gripped Dragon Spine, turned—distant, step-by-step, burly figure from snowstorm: Overlord.

Xiliang hegemon.

Xiang Shaoyun!

Liu Hao's eyes warlit.

Gripped status-symbol weapon.

Cautious—sent one armor-bearer.

Brow scale flared, charged Overlord!

“Body Storage?”

Overlord gripped axe, accelerated.

Demonic aura coiled; axe wrapped, swung—axe wave cleaved ground.

Saw brow scale—knew power source.

“False Body Storage—not your own—empty!”

Overlord roared.

Armor-bearer clashed.

Overlord veins bulged, body taller.

Axe met Dragon Spine.

Sparks!

Snow shattered.

Axe force horrified bearer.

True Body Storage far stronger than dragon-borrowed!

Bearer roared; black scales densely armored him.

“Black Dragon Scales?”

Overlord hair wild. Body Storage cost him blood and beatings—these cheats suppress him?

“What are you?!”

Overlord scorned.

Axe demonic surge.

Slashed—

Bearer in scales—still bisected, hot blood splashed snow.

Tantai Xuan afar sighed; Jiang Li dazed—true powerhouse.

Overlord's valor—unmatched!

Horses' neighs ceased.

Liu Hao's eyes contracted.

Palace depths.

Pool dragon roared; water exploded, green splashes.

Claws slammed edge—stone crumbled like tofu, thick black qi spread, withered garden flora...

Capital streets.

Overlord's black axe dripped blood.

Sensed—looked palace depths.

Faintly saw black dragon roaring at him.

Chapter 207: Yuwen Xiu's Desperate End

Overlord felled a Body Storage Black Dragon armor-bearer with one strike—leaving every powerhouse present in awe.

Tantai Xuan even hesitated in that moment, lost.

He realized: in martial prowess, before Overlord, he was far too weak.

Could he truly win the world against such valor?

Tantai Xuan inhaled deeply.

From palace depths, faint furious dragon roars echoed.

Overlord stood in snow, demonic aura dispersing flakes.

He eyed the depths, lips curling.

The little emperor's dragon?

Black Dragon granted scales, elevating the Thirteen to Body Storage—yet false.

"Wait... this king will slay you."

Overlord raised black axe, pointing palace—as if conversing across void.

Far off.

Liu Hao, leader of armor-bearers, face tightened.

"All strike—encircle Overlord!"

"Others—hold Xiang army and Xuanwu Guards!"

Liu Hao barked.

Gripped "Dragon Spine," clamped heels—snow-mud sprayed, dove forth.

Eleven others—brow black scales emerged.

Followed in "人" formation, charging.

Liu Hao's brow scale flashed; dense scales armored him—like dragon mail.

Twelve became black streaks, assaulting Overlord.

Overlord fearless—one hand axe, one shield, chin high, staring down the dive.

Hooves thundered like sudden storm—rain pattering earth everywhere.

Twelve Body Storage—even false—momentum extraordinary.

As Black Dragon Thirteen, dragon-scale breakthrough—they embodied the dragon now.

Charging, faintly a black dragon pouncing Overlord.

Overlord chin lifted, worldly valor, true Body Storage dominance—axe swept horizontally, all directions.

Thunder from flat ground.

Liu Hao and twelve stomped horse backs.

Bodies yanked skyward like suspended strings.

Overlord's sweep—oppressive black axe light turned day to night.

Twelve steeds bisected.

Blood thick, splashed capital streets.

Twelve armor-bearers crouched mid-air.

Gripped Dragon Spines, scales full—like black dragon baring claws.

Dove!

Thud!

Muffled blast—street cratered, shockwaves flung snow, scattered corpses.

Overlord shield thrust—mountain-toppling force, repelled twelve.

Landed, black auras surged, assaulted Overlord.

Streets shadows danced.

Terrifying qi shattered walls, cratered ground.

Falling snow pulverized.

One vs twelve Body Storage—Overlord unfazed, fiercer.

Like battling a black dragon.

Spiritual vortices swirled on him, recovering qi rapidly.

Axe slap—one scaled bearer coughed blood, flew.

Axe hooked back, shield smash—blood pillar, organs ruptured, instant death.

Distant battles equally brutal.

Capital streets now cultivator army battlefield.

Xiang and Xuanwu allied vs Black Dragon Guards.

Fearless, no mercy, no hold.

Opportunity—kill.

Qi blasts tore foes.

Black Dragons fell constantly; Xiang and Xuanwu too.

Zhou elites low morale, but Black Dragons strong.

Yuwen Xiu's final card—potent; dragon-aided cultivation faster than Xiliang or Daxuan.

Thus, allied forces deadlocked.

Xu Chu wounded by one bearer, rose—swung shattered ball, eyes red, blood-coughing rejoined.

Xiliang not just Overlord brave—their warriors fearless!

Spiked ball whirlwind under qi—approaching Black Dragons pulped.

Xiliang's top general Xu Chu—name earned.

Jiang Li silver spear unhesitatingly joined.

Once Black Dragon commander.

But merciless pursuits—he knew no bond.

Old soldiers' deaths aiding escape—blood boiled.

Angrier, calmer.

Silver spear like stars exploding—pierced a Black Dragon through.

Led Xuanwu orderly kills.

Formation crush—Xuanwu momentum like flood, pushing Black Dragons back.

Cultivation era—Soldier School command transformed.

Jiang Li with Xuanwu aura nearly Body Storage—silver armor Black Dragon blood-soaked.

True decider: Overlord's fight.

Alone bombarding twelve—swayed the field.

Tantai Xuan on horse watched—eye-opening, true cultivator war.

Tianhan Pass—Bai Qingniao's fire phoenix vs Xirong King elegant; Overlord's visceral.

Liu Hao anxious.

Shocked—they twelve Body Storage.

Dragon-aided, yes—but shouldn't lose to one Overlord?

Overlord tempered four storages—qi richer; but numbers!

Overlord laughed.

Exhilarating—nearly tempering fifth.

Complete five—Body Storage peak; derive attribute qi—chance at Lu's "Heaven Lock"; Golden Core demonic—no interest.

"Spread!"

"Dragon Spine Array!"

Liu Hao grave—life-death, no slack.

Roared.

Eleven withdrew, circled Overlord, galloped.

Overlord indifferent.

Heart vortex gathered—tempering fifth.

Sonic booms.

Liu Hao raised black spear—hurled, black streak sharp, piercing Overlord.

Others too.

Dense black streaks at Overlord.

Shield slap—repelled all.

Liu Hao etc caught rebounds, qi-hurled again.

Overlord denied chance.

Axe cleaved—shattered one spine.

Breach—ground boomed.

Shot forth, neared scaled bearer—headbutted, blood burst.

Axe sweep—halved!

Liu Hao horrified!

True Body Storage terror?!

Each armor-bearer death—palace depths angry roar.

Finally, Liu Hao broke.

Thought as Thirteen leader, Body Storage—he'd rival Overlord, Baiyujing elites.

Reality struck hard.

Far short.

Eyes brilliant, mad hope.

Drew letter—read en route; knew impact on Overlord.

His chance!

Emperor's gift!

"Overlord! Your valor unmatched! But... ever thought your closest, most beloved, wants you dead?!"

"Heard you seize world for beauty's painted empire! What of this letter?!"

Liu Hao's voice qi-amplified, reached Overlord.

Snow paused.

Letter qi-shot at Overlord.

Overlord ignored words.

Prepared axe to shred letter.

But...

Glanced envelope: "To Luo Mingsang."

Familiar name—halted axe, caught it.

As he did.

Liu Hao ecstatic!

"Now!"

"Kill!"

Gripped spine, qi full burst.

Black streak to Overlord.

Overlord oblivious, unfolded letter, read calmly.

Liu Hao overjoyed.

Flash.

Nearing.

Spine coiled.

"Despair?"

"Overlord... devotion just her ploy..."

"Deep love—her act!"

"Never guessed—your woman Master's planted pawn!"

Liu Hao cold.

Stimulate mind—only chance.

Overlord seemed detached.

Pfft!

Sharp spine pierced ribs, into body.

"Success!"

Liu Hao thrilled.

He slew world's bravest—Xiliang hegemon, Xiang Shaoyun!

"Indeed..."

Overlord desolate voice.

Liu Hao stunned.

Overlord's eyes shifted—black, cold, emotionless—panicked Liu Hao...

"You..."

Liu Hao mouthed.

Overlord raised shield, smashed.

Liu Hao bloodied head, fell.

"What are you to kill me, Xiang Shaoyun?!"

"Mere letter sway me?"

"You don't know how I entered Body Storage."

Overlord emotionless.

Liu Hao ignorant—Xiliang battlefield vs monk, injury trades.

This wound—itch.

Shield smashed again.

Liu Hao coughed blood.

Overlord folded letter carefully.

But oppressive aura terrifying...

Raised axe; struggling Liu Hao under shield.

Overlord no glance—axe sweep.

Head rolled...

Liu Hao dead.

Black Dragon armor-bearers morale collapsed.

Overlord skyward roar.

Eyes recalled lake-heart isle, Lü Dongxuan's divination—great ill.

Plus pipa girl.

Guessed much.

Still furious.

Turned outside capital—gaze pierced walls, carriage shadow.

Recalled past.

Fierce anger faded to sigh.

Promised painted empire—unchanged.

Dense demonic aura; heart vortex solidified.

Body Storage complete!

Remaining armor-bearers fled.

No will—Liu Hao's death shattered confidence.

Overlord undefeatable!

Pfft pfft!

Demonic—no, his path demonic.

Heads flew.

Overlord strode from blood, corpse piles, axe dripping.

Black Dragon Guards vs allied—turned, saw Thirteen dead.

Faces changed, will gone—fled palace.

Cold snow fell.

Tantai Xuan rode to Liu Hao's headless corpse.

Dismounted, saw bloodied fallen letter.

Picked up.

Envelope familiar name.

Tantai Xuan surprised smile.

Folded, tore to shreds, scattered snow.

...

Imperial Garden.

Golden armored Yuwen Xiu on bluestone trembled lightly.

Old eunuch bowed, whisk dangling, eyed snow.

Pool dragon churned, roared.

Yuwen Xiu calm, even smiled—lips curled, rose, faced dragon.

Raging dragon stilled, met golden gaze.

Behind...

Black Dragon Guards retreating cries.

Retreating into garden—Yuwen Xiu back to them.

Eyed dragon, hand on Emperor Sword, other stroked scales.

Light laugh—familiar scene.

Rebels, garden, dragon...

Desperate end.

Snow calm.

Stroked dragon, soft:

"All lost."

"I... rely on you."

"Go."

Words fell.

Gale rose.

Stroked dragon exploded forth, claws ground, pounced retreating... Black Dragon Guards!

Dragon roar echoed ancient imperial city.

Chapter 208: The World Betrays Me, So I Betray the World

Beiluo, Western Mountain.

Trial Tower.

Terrifying blade light swept, shredding primeval jungle below—trees severed with heavy thuds, crashing earth, quaking ground.

Nie Changqing darted between trunks, arms waving, remotely controlling pig-slaughtering knife, slashing sharp qi.

Five Body Storage eerie beings—mask holes cold emotionless eyes.

They too remote-controlled pig knives.

Slashing sharp qi.

Nie Changqing one vs five—knife split one to two, two to three, three to five.

Clashed with five.

Nie fought exhilarated, deeper blade insight—these five weaker individually, yet matched his combat.

Perilous—his knife like night meteor, myriad blades.

He knew strength gap: power control.

"Control issue?"

Nie eyes brighter—mimicked five, no waste, every strand substantive.

Suddenly knife power surged.

Even signature—Blade Control.

Stronger—one slash halved one being with knife!

Breach torn—Nie like eastward torrent, unbound.

Knife sharper, myriad blades over jungle.

Remaining four early Body Storage fell under blades.

Last being died.

Nie blood-soaked, single-handed knife, atop ancient tree.

Blade comprehension ascended.

Faint body aura—cut all.

"Blade intent."

Nie bearded lips curled.

Vaguely sensed before—now truly grasped his.

Like heart boulder cleaved.

Trial Tower...

Nie understood purpose.

As Young Master said—break shackles.

"Congrats clearing fifth floor, gain source comprehension chance..."

Mind voice echoed.

Nie stunned, looked up.

Clouds swirled above.

Great Dao tones descended, enveloping.

Nie fell odd realm.

Sensed Young Master's attributes.

Scorching fire, cool water, hard earth, vital wood, unbreakable metal.

Attributes?

Qi derives attributes—qualify Golden Core, Heaven Lock.

Nie sat—metal wood water fire earth matched five storages... but beyond: wind, ice, light etc.

Less prominent.

Nie sponge-absorbed source info.

Comprehended—nascent intent strengthened.

"What attribute derive?"

Attributes minor for intent blade master.

But boosted power.

Chose metal—unbreakable, fit blade.

Boom!

Gold beam fell—Qi Core qi surged, entwined gold light, endless.

Like gases merging.

Jungle above.

Nie eyes snapped—gold flickered depths.

Raised knife—qi boiled, gold blade slashed.

Earth cleft 500m gorge!

Qi subsided.

Gorge—Nie silent; metal-infused qi far stronger.

No wonder Young Master: derive attributes for Heaven Lock chance.

Five storages foundation—attributes ascension.

Dao tones gone, rainbow light scattered.

Jungle ruin.

Nie blood-white robes fluttering.

Feet white array—mysterious stairs to sixth.

But no further.

Exited tower.

Base.

Above "five" blurred to "six"—eyes opened.

Tower-wounded—now pristine on mat.

Tower wonder—awe for Lu deeper.

Young Master's creations miraculous.

Rose—Ning Zhao, Ni Yu etc challenging; no linger.

Stepped out.

Exit instant—lake-heart isle Lu sensed.

Mind stirred, transmitted.

Nie paused—sought Young Master, but he came first?

Trouble brewing.

...

Imperial city.

Desolate killing streets—snow thick layer.

Imperial Garden front.

Armies neared.

Tantai Xuan no horse—weapon gripped, with silver-armored Jiang Li to garden.

Jiang Li complex.

Familiar to Yuwen Xiu—how not to him?

Last Zhao Kuo rebellion—Yuwen Xiu garden, dragon card, flipped, suppressed.

Jiang Li guarded, witnessed.

Now...

He attacker.

Tantai Xuan red cape billowed, weapon—no retreat, despite infamous Zhou black dragon—stepped in.

Overlord Qianqi back, Xiang army heavy steps followed.

Garden front.

Armies closed.

Black Dragon Guards retreated.

Yuwen Xiu back to all, stroked dragon—stubborn, proud silhouette.

Overlord grave eyed dragon—threatening power.

Strong!

Far beyond Dongyan River dragon.

But fearless—step, demonic qi mad surge, like demon staring dragon.

Dragon pounced—claws ground, stones flew.

But unexpected—not them.

Nearest Black Dragon Guards.

Bit—one swallowed, blood splashed.

Overlord pupils shrank.

Tantai Xuan, Jiang Li trembled.

Heard dragon ate—but scene impacted hugely.

Yuwen Xiu allowed?!

Madman!

Evil dragon!

Black Dragon Guards stunned.

Yuwen Xiu nurtured—allowed devouring? Heart blow.

Guarded what?

Evil thing?

Some forgot resist—swallowed; shocking.

Garden hell.

Roar—dragon gill scales flared, shook blood drops.

Head bulge writhed.

Faint protrusion.

"Dragon breaking through mid-battle!"

Overlord focused, bellowed.

Gripped Qianqi, charged—step ground, leaped, black qi wrapped, demonic coiled.

Pounced dragon.

Dragon roared—sharp claws slapped.

Overlord shield blocked.

Thud!

Force pinned—legs snow-sunk, axe swung claw—sparks!

Dragon defense extreme!

Roar—bulge writhed, tail sweep—Xiang soldiers flew.

Tantai Xuan afar grave.

Recalled dream—bathed dragon blood, slew this dragon!

But dream.

Reality—couldn't near evil surging dragon.

Even Overlord strained.

Yuwen Xiu afar excited.

Dragon his card—only.

Once flipped—hope still dragon.

World—only dragon loyal!

"World betrays me—I betray world!"

Golden armored Yuwen Xiu fists clenched.

Roar!

Dragon mouth blasted waves—Guards devoured clean.

Head bulge burst.

Sharp horn extended—black, cold gleam—aura soared.

Boom!

World qi condensed madly on dragon.

Mouth shot mighty energy—black flame-like, sprayed Overlord!

Dragon... breath!

Garden ground charred.

Overlord shifted—endured beatings, dared not tank breath!

Heat melt him!

"Attribute power!"

Overlord shocked!

More—mouth opened, round black pearl floated.

Surface wailing souls.

Dragon inhaled/exhaled pearl—nascent Golden Core rhythm!

Overlord scalp numb!

Evil dragon refined—breaking to Golden Core now!

Golden Core... above Body Storage.

Dared not allow.

Breakthrough—anti-Zhou fails!

Unless Baiyujing one acts—no match worldwide!

Yuwen Xiu poolside laughed heartily.

Dragon no disappoint!

Eyed Overlord, Tantai Xuan, Jiang Li...

"You all bully me!"

"All think me easy—ascended throne, no good day!"

"Stabilized Zhou, create my era—you destroy!"

"Why?!"

"Why bully me!"

Yuwen Xiu roared.

Overlord ignored—charged dragon, axe raised, terrifying qi axe light cleaved!

Dragon ignored—swallowed pearl, darted afar.

Light hit—clang, white mark.

Overlord face changed.

Tantai Xuan complex eyed Yuwen Xiu.

Yuwen influenced dragon—or dragon him?

"Had Jiang Li, Master top aids—ever think why left? Master died, Jiang Li jailed..."

"World momentum left Zhou."

Tantai Xuan said.

"Shut up! My fault?"

"Master no Dongyang, Jiang Li no resign—I decide thus?"

Yuwen Xiu raised Emperor Sword—gold brilliant, pointed Tantai Xuan.

Jiang Li sighed: "Majesty, no disappoint—why resign?"

Eyed dragon: "Dragon evil—foster it, sins heaven... Zhou fate, squandered by you."

"No qualification accuse me—none."

Yuwen Xiu sword raised.

"Black Dragon! Kill! All!"

"World yours mine!"

"Eight Dragon Gates—my black dragon supreme!"

Yuwen Xiu said.

Sky.

Inhaling pearl dragon heard—horn chilled, mouth opened, sharp teeth cold under light.

Overlord felt mountain pressure.

Suddenly.

Roaring dragon halted.

Scales rippled—twisted head to Dragon Gate.

There...

Figure atop.

White robes fluttering, bearded.

Waist pig knife—calm glance golden Yuwen Xiu, distant pearl dragon—lips curled.

"Supreme black dragon..."

"You jest."

Chapter 209: Black Dragon Forms Pill, Zhulong Subdues Dragon

Beiluo, lake-heart isle.

Lu leaned on Thousand Blade Chair, bronze cup empty of plum wine.

Eyes lines danced.

Suddenly smiled.

"Supreme black dragon?"

Lu inhaled—white robes and hair wild in wind, light snow—perhaps Great Zhou's final fall.

"Who influenced whom—Yuwen Xiu the dragon, or dragon Yuwen Xiu?"

Lu weighed cup.

Evil path, demonic path—cultivation ways; Lu shouldn't interfere. But black dragon deviated—perhaps from first flesh fed.

Or Yuwen Xiu's blood lure...

Doomed outcome.

"From blood, to flesh, to humans, now cultivators..."

Evilization process—mirrored Yuwen Xiu's heart change.

"Devour cultivators—evil path fake pill luck; true Golden Core far."

Lu shook head.

Yuwen Xiu's supreme claim—amusing.

Black dragon fastest evolving among gates.

But strongest? No.

Not top three.

Looked up—Beiluo lake Dragon Gate: little Yinglong sprawled, white Heavenly Secret Pigeon cooed atop.

Yinglong still—wings drooped, "squirting" water arc.

Hit pigeon—soaked, flapped away.

Yinglong grinned, climbed gate, squirted more—chased pigeon.

Joyful.

Lu glanced, withdrew.

Doubted if spoiled silly.

Silly yes—but in fight, black dragon no match.

"Whatever..."

Lu smiled—silly fine; he protected, none bully.

Mind stirred.

Next, consciousness entered gate.

Yinglong playing paused—sensed intrusion, eyes rolled seeking.

None—resumed squirting.

...

Buzhou Peak, Dragon Gate.

Girl sat bluestone, flute long—melody悠悠.

Snow fell—peak evergreen.

Suddenly.

Girl paused, closed lashes trembled, chin lifted excited to void spot.

...

Imperial city, Imperial Garden.

Black dragon head up, eyed pool Dragon Gate—sharp knife eyes.

Gate figure stood quiet.

Garden all shocked.

"Baiyujing disciple?"

"Young Master Lu's driver..."

"Baiyujing... Nie Changqing!"

Many tensed, stunned.

Baiyujing—top cultivation force!

Yuwen Xiu eyed Nie—sudden shock.

Unexpected—meant Lu reclaiming dragon?

Yuwen Xiu unwilling.

Once Bai Qingniao wounded dragon garden.

Now Nie—to capture.

Baiyujing no interference?

Why target him?

Nie leaned gate edge, bearded lips curled—eyed ferocious dragon; aura strong, hairs raised.

Unknowing—little black jiao grown thus?

Pity...

No devouring breakthroughs—Young Master ignore. But lives, cultivators—pure evil.

Nie hand on pig knife—dragon strong, post-Guards half Golden Core.

Pre-fifth floor Nie—no confidence.

But attribute-derived—fight possible.

Nie stepped—robes wild, floated from gate.

Toes rippled pool.

Drew knife sudden.

"Pig knife slays pigs... dragons too."

Nie light laugh.

Top lightness—crossed void, snow steps—knife swung.

Black dragon roared!

Neck gills shook—pool splashed.

Claws ground—snow exploded, four limbs pounced Nie.

Nie stood—robes wild.

Tossed knife—black spun fast front.

Aura soared—five qi vortices armored exquisite...

"Blade Control."

Nie low drink.

Waved—knife whistled, blade shadow clashed dragon.

Air sharp—iron clash rang.

Nie drew hate.

Overlord relieved.

Stood snow—eyed even fight, face condensed.

Nie stronger!

Nie light raised knife—qi crisscross dragon body; unbreakable scales cracked faint.

Nie blade far Overlord axe!

Dragon tail sweep—Nie floated, gripped knife, slashed.

Qi spread garden.

Dragon suppressed.

Xiang, Xuanwu tongue-smacked—shocking.

Dragon mighty—Overlord evaded.

Yet Nie hard-clashed pig knife.

"Nie Changqing!"

"Dragon forming Golden Core—no chance!"

Overlord snow bellowed intense Nie.

Nie nodded slight, "Know."

Eyes sharp.

"Young Master send bring Beiluo—walk yourself, or beat half-dead drag?"

Nie barked.

Dragon eyes flashed—roared angry.

Scales blasted waves.

Faster charged Nie.

Thud thud!

Claws thousand force—ground cracked faint.

Nie eyes changed—aura blade intent burst—body pig knife shadow.

"Metal blade intent!"

Nie low roar.

Gold brilliant—like molten splash.

Gripped knife flung—ground exploded.

Gold qi terrible—snow blasted, pool bombed.

Dragon threatened—Nie blade death sense.

Coiled—mouth opened.

Breath sprayed.

Hot breath vs metal attribute blade!

Attributes clashed!

Tip vs tip!

Faint—dragon breath suppressed.

Gold slashed dragon.

Scale cracks echoed world—with dragon wail.

One blade black dragon.

Dragon blood splashed.

Dragon crashed—body gash neck to tail.

Huge damage.

Nie robes wild, bathed blood—knife hovered head, slow walked.

Heart wary.

Dragon... strongest blade no kill?

Dragon breed—defense human far.

But...

One no—more!

Nie eyes brilliant—intent surged, knife clang.

Metal intent—slashed again.

This—slay dragon!

Afar.

Yuwen Xiu pale.

Unexpected dragon beaten...

Flesh-fed dragon last hope—once hesitated, sleepless.

But power grew, Guards stronger—Yuwen thought deaths worthy.

Intensified.

Thought devoured many—strong; if not Lu, not weaker disciples.

Reality struck.

Baiyujing disciples... dragon inferior!

Afar.

Tantai Xuan, Jiang Li, Daxuan generals trembled.

Great cultivator vs evil dragon.

Earth-shaking—blade qi aftermath no resist Xuanwu.

Tantai Xuan complex: "Cultivators... this."

Jiang Li silver spear torch eyes.

Knew Baiyujing strong—underestimated.

Dragon strong—Baiyujing stronger!

Overlord blood boiled—dragon beat him, Nie beat dragon...

Vs Nie—ground pounded.

Nie derived attributes—Body Storage peak, half Heaven Lock!

Lagged again?!

Unwilling!

Dragon crisis sensed.

Nie metal intent slash—death feel; beasts sensitive.

No die.

Mouth opened.

Black pearl floated—souls wailed devoured.

Eyes red flash.

Force form dragon pill Golden Core!

Knew untimely... Nie forced.

Roared!

Scales molted—black blood seeped, wrapped pill.

Nie cold—metal intent no mercy.

Allow Golden Core—disaster.

Unless Young Master—who suppress?

Nie no allow.

Blade intent, unbreakable metal qi.

Slashed.

Hit black pill.

Boom!

Black light surged—blood splashed, hot evaporated, black mist wrapped dragon pill.

Oppressive muffled aura garden.

Nie grave—looked black clouds...

"Heaven phenomenon—forming Golden Core?"

Nie inhaled.

Gripped knife horizontal—step snow parted waves, charged black mist.

Knife raised—slashed mist dragon.

Mist faint dim gold.

Golden Core!

Nie heart tight.

Claw shot mist.

Power aura enhanced.

Forced pill—succeeded!

Claw vs knife—surface crisp...

Crack—chip!

Nie pupils shrank.

Knife flew.

Gripped—force spun ground circles, stabilized.

Mist cleared.

Dragon mouth dim gold pearl.

Formed pill, condensed Golden Core!

Eyes mad joy—succeeded!

Gambled win!

Fake pill—time nurture true!

Now vs Nie—fake enough!

Eyes brilliant.

Devour cultivators shortcut!

Locked Nie, Overlord, Xuanwu Xiang armies...

Cultivators!

Devour all—further transform?!

Nie exhaled—knife chipped, raised glance—time change.

Ordinary knife—no spirit tool.

Back isle—seek Gongshu blade.

Dragon greedy Nie.

Now craved devour.

But... heart figure emerged.

Lone boat, calm fishing.

Figure—lost devour thought.

Nie his disciple.

Untouchable.

Shifted—Overlord, cultivator armies.

Roar!

Dragon roared—pill released mighty aura.

Nie sighed—can't beat; Young Master task failed.

First failure—frustrated.

Suddenly.

Flute悠悠 echoed.

From pool gate—melodious floated.

Garden heavy atmosphere.

Nie stunned.

Yuwen Xiu excited dragon paused.

Air roaring dragon scales tight—extreme cold wrapped.

Stared gate—more fear than Nie.

Gate.

Graceful shadow slow.

Closed-eye girl, flute held, played—emerged gate.

"Her?"

Nie heart shock—Buzhou Peak mysterious girl?

Tantai Xuan recognized—face changed.

Immortal path loss—unforgettable!

Why here?

Dragon eyes dead stare girl.

Flute ceased.

Girl lowered flute, chin lifted—long lashes trembled, fair face to dragon.

Dragon body shook uncontrollably.

Low roar—no confidence.

Golden armored Yuwen Xiu eyed dragon—first so weak!

Who girl?

World besides Baiyujing Lu—fear dragon?

"Follow me."

Girl Zhulong said.

"Roar!"

Dragon fear unwilling low.

Swallowed pill—sky black clouds, fled no look back!

Scene stimulated all.

Yuwen Xiu most.

Transformed dragon... fled?!

Girl soft sigh—hair floated, gave chance.

Lashes trembled.

Heavy closed eyes slow opened.

Left black, right white.

Boom!

Garden all vision blurred...

Dark white alternated—extreme discomfort.

Ears dragon terrified roar.

Like shouting...

Don't come.

Finally...

Roar sank.

Vision cleared.

Haze gone—snow quiet fell, white ground.

Ears flute悠悠—gate front, girl white hand dragon tail, flute lips slow play—with melody, dragon claws ground scrape...

Dragon huge body dragged, vanished gate.

World silent.

All bewildered.

Just... what happened?

Chapter 210: Majesty... You Still Have This Old Servant

When the girl opened her eyes, heaven and earth spun—black and white inverted.

In a flash, vision cleared; all saw the black dragon dragged by tail, vanishing into the Dragon Gate.

Black dragon—devoured hundreds of cultivators, reached suspected Golden Core...

Yet subdued effortlessly by flute girl—like dead dog hauled across ground.

World-shaking impact.

Who was she?

Besides Baiyujing's Lu Ping'an—such power?

Black dragon seemed invincible; Heavenly Secret Pavilion realms clear: Golden Core above Body Storage.

Cultivation era nascent—few Body Storage.

Yet black dragon Golden Core... still beaten.

Cultivation world unfathomable—deeper awe.

Think invincible—stronger watches quietly.

Nie Changqing speechless.

Buzhou Peak girl... this strong?

Golden Core?

No...

Not reached—yet power heart-palpitating.

Pre-tower Nie—disbelief.

Post-tower: power control key.

Dragon's realm devoured—control hollow.

Young Master right—path long; his just begun.

Nie eyed chipped pig knife, shook head.

Stepped to return Beiluo via gate.

But...

Bronze gate over pool slammed shut.

Nie burst power—pushed immovable.

Face darkened.

"Young Master... I haven't returned?!"

...

Black dragon dared not move—dragged by girl through terracotta zone, iron chain bridge, floating isle, along chains slow.

Beiluo Dragon Gate.

Dragon Blood Army training vs terracotta—stunned.

Terrifying oppressive aura—new cultivators froze; faced ultimate terror.

Girl unhurried—one hand flute, other huge black dragon.

Aura filled gate—none dared breathe.

Even Dragon Blood sub-leader, ninth Qi Core—mountain pressure.

Until closed-eye girl dragged dragon out—relief.

Backs soaked.

Little Yinglong bored atop gate.

Pigeon squirted away.

Curled tail, bit own playing.

Suddenly.

Yinglong straightened—fierce face, wings spread, bared teeth!

Roar!

Low roar shook Beiluo lake waves.

Vigilant stared gate.

Girl stepped out.

Yinglong fierce froze—pouted, squirted water.

Hit girl's face—lashes trembled, eyes slit.

Yinglong scales inverted—wings flapped, hid behind gate.

Girl no open—chin lifted, seemed toward distant Baiyujing pavilion.

As if saw second floor white-robed figure.

Yinglong peeked—saw tail segment in hand.

Girl stepped out, hovered water.

Gate tail lengthened, thickened in Yinglong daze...

Became ferocious black dragon.

Yinglong mouth agape—fierce again, claw "slap" dragon face—dragon fangs bared.

Yinglong stunned—delighted.

Low roar echoed.

Yinglong wings spread—sky-darkening, body mountain-huge.

Terrifying dragon might—oppressive.

Black dragon roar ceased.

"Don't be naughty."

Suddenly.

Warm voice.

Yinglong roar gone—shrunk instant, squirted water arrow dragon eye.

Thunder crack.

Calm lake—wheelchair white-shirted youth emerged unknown when.

Chair auto—no ripple.

Yinglong hummed dragon, wings rapid—perched Lu shoulder, obedient.

Lu aura terrified black dragon tremble.

Girl Zhulong bowed slight Lu.

Lu smiled—lifted hand, qi flow blue spirit drop.

Plucked isle peach petal—carried drop to Zhulong.

Zhulong sniffed—accepted.

Lips pursed.

Joyful spun—entered gate, back Buzhou Peak.

Zhulong gone.

But...

Black dragon more still.

Gone Zhulong—came worse.

Lu wheelchair sat, faint eyed dragon.

...

Imperial city.

Ruined Imperial Garden.

Atmosphere thawed post-stagnation.

Ended...

Dragon subdued—Golden Core taken by closed-eye girl; overhead pressure vanished.

Tantai Xuan exhaled—girl as terrifying.

Buzhou Peak—army bones no resist; unforgettable domination fear.

Now invincible Golden Core dragon beaten—Tantai comforted.

Not him weak—girl strong.

Overlord eyed vanishing back—eyes grave.

World strong cultivators many!

Lagged far—must stronger!

Nie knife slung—hammered gate, no entry; turned desolate into snow.

Yuwen Xiu body shook.

Snow fell—filled pool; body iced.

Disbelief eyed vanished dragon, closed gate.

Golden armored—fell ground.

"Return my dragon!"

"My dragon!"

Yuwen Xiu lips trembled.

Dragon his hope—all on it; now taken.

Taken dragon—Great Zhou hope!

"Why..."

Yuwen Xiu gritted—unknown girl why powerful.

Only knew dragon gone—flip hope shattered.

Miracle no repeat—despite all.

Gambler—all on dragon.

Lost everything.

Empire.

Yuwen Xiu unwilling—clutched head, roared; world against—even unseen girl crushed last hope!

Garden only Yuwen Xiu low roars.

Despair shattered snowflakes.

Miserable, helpless, desperate.

Hope slag sorrow.

Tantai Xuan silent watched.

Looked snow—pitied Yuwen Xiu; pity pity, positions doomed no mercy.

Snow face melted.

Eyed Yuwen Xiu—momentum thus; mantis vs chariot.

Yuwen Xiu did well.

Courage all-in—no crush under pressure.

Rare.

Jiang Li silver spear lowered slow.

Complex—momentum set.

Great Zhou last hope gone—Yuwen Xiu lost crutch, lost to momentum.

Failed save doom.

Jiang Li heard wails hoarse—sorrow despair silent.

No fight.

Turned silent—silver armor, spear; exited garden.

Tantai Xuan no block.

Overlord eyed Yuwen Xiu—Qianqi back, burly aura.

"Success black dragon, defeat black dragon."

"Dragon innocent—used well treasure; pity one wrong all lost."

"Eight gates—you closest dragon, advantage help; yet Great Zhou weakness."

Overlord said.

Garden wails ceased.

Yuwen Xiu golden armored—shaky rose.

"No victor lecture me."

"Lost heaven will, momentum..."

"Not you!"

Yuwen Xiu head up—unwilling eyes.

Golden Emperor Sword raised—pointed Overlord, Tantai Xuan.

"Fallen king so what?"

"Ascended throne—foresaw today; ministers covet, control emperor; traitors inner outer—I reached!"

"You say tyrannical... forced by you!"

Yuwen low roar.

"Come!"

"Great Zhou me alone—unless die..."

"Empire mine Yuwen Xiu!"

Emperor Sword ground stabbed—hands hilt, fearless stared Overlord Tantai Xuan, dense Xuanwu Xiang armies.

"Majesty... you have this old servant; Great Zhou... has this old servant."

Suddenly.

Sharp voice—Yuwen Xiu sword body shook, eyed old eunuch.

Eunuch head up—whisk light, blocked front.

"Old servant promised late emperor protect Majesty... even die, before Majesty."

Eunuch smiled.

Yuwen Xiu eyed old hunched back—stunned.

Thought betrayed long.

Unexpected...

Last beside—scolded eunuch.

Overlord focused eunuch—no personal.

Light gesture.

Xiang army axes gripped—snow steps, shot out.

Tantai Xuan eyed—light wave.

Xuanwu blades drawn—charged.

Eunuch smiled.

Whisk flung—snow exploded; Qi Core peak charged hundreds cultivator army.

One vs hundred—no fear.

But alone.

Vs no ordinary.

One vs hundred hard—trained cultivator armies harder.

Soon qi exhausted—body blade axe marks...

Blood full ground.

Eunuch hat flown—white hair wild.

Aura faded—instant dragon tiger.

No qi—blood force; body blood explosions vs cultivators.

Cold blades pierced.

Blood splashed snow.

Eunuch mere Qi Core.

No reverse.

But fulfilled promise—died before Yuwen Xiu.

Yuwen Xiu eyed eunuch blade horse—like unshakable peak front.

Moment dazed.

Grew with eunuch—ascended with.

Last...

Buried Great Zhou with.

Yuwen Xiu heart impacted—eyes flashed scenes...

Eunuchs batches changed—old always beside.

Could left long.

But no—accompanied to end.

Sword-propped Yuwen Xiu lips pursed—no wail, stubborn held tears.

Eunuch life gone.

Words to complex sigh shout.

"Majesty..."

Last "Majesty".

Voice faded.

Eunuch body blade horse—ice snow head powerless drooped.

Yuwen Xiu head up—red eyes.

"Success black dragon, defeat black dragon..."

"I remain Great Zhou lord!"

Emperor Sword raised—neck; no words, wiped.

Blood splashed three chi—dyed sky snow.

No pure gold sword fell ground.

Yuwen Xiu golden armored—back into pool; water splashed two chi.

Lay pool—eyed snow sky; world sudden quiet.

Eyes flashed faces.

Blurred father emperor.

Smiling Master.

Bowed old eunuch...

Next life no emperor house.

Body pool swallowed.

Lost temperature—red blood surged water.

Golden armor luster gone.

Body sank, sank...

Hit bone-piled pool bottom.