

Starlit Path 221

Chapter 221: Who Breaks the Heaven Lock?

Overlord yanked the black-mane horse's reins; the front hooves reared high, steaming breath neighing into the air, kicking up clusters of snow.

Gazing at Beiluo City's mottled walls.

Overlord's eyes held complexity; he had come to Beiluo City once more.

He remembered his first visit: domineering entry, even treading waves to the isle, only to be slapped by Lu into the lake bottom and thoroughly beaten.

And now, he returned.

Truth be told, he disliked coming to Beiluo City—Lu was too mysterious, too powerful.

That power gave him a sense of helplessness, an insurmountable void.

The city gates opened.

Lu Changkong, cloaked in thick fur, emerged slowly.

Luo Cheng followed behind, knife at his side.

Overlord dismounted, eyeing Lu Changkong; his pupils contracted.

Lu Changkong... had actually fully tempered the Body Storage realm!

Overlord himself was only at this stage; he hadn't expected Lu Changkong's cultivation speed to be so swift.

But considering Beiluo's cultivation environment and Lu Ping'an's unfathomable methods, such rapid breakthrough was hardly surprising.

Boom!

An aura erupted from Overlord's body, like a waking fierce tiger, winds seeming to whip around him.

Lu Changkong remained unflinching, smiling, hands clasped behind, fur cloak billowing.

Luo Cheng's face flushed; knife in hand, he involuntarily retreated two or three steps.

The clash of two fully tempered five-storages Body Storage cultivators brought immense pressure to a Qi Core realm.

Yet after retreating, Luo Cheng's eyes grew grave; he stomped hard, steadying himself.

Overlord led the black-mane horse, which trembled in fear.

Lu Changkong released his aura too—if Overlord's was domineering, his was like drifting mist.

Evenly matched.

The clash didn't last long.

Overlord soon reined in his breath.

"Worthy of City Lord Lu; Xiang concedes."

Overlord said.

Only then did a guard dare trot out from the city.

Overlord handed the reins over, striding boldly inside with Lu Changkong.

"Xiliang King comes this time... for North Xuan King?"

Lu Changkong walked shoulder-to-shoulder, asking.

He dismissed the grave dragon blood army; only Luo Cheng followed.

"Tantai Xuan? If I wanted him dead, would I let him enter Beiluo?"

Overlord laughed, words brimming with confidence.

Indeed, if he sought to kill Tantai Xuan, he could have acted in the imperial city.

Upon entry, Overlord's first sight was the white jade tower—soaring, making him solemn.

"This is Young Master Lu's white jade trial tower? For breaking shackles?"

Overlord asked.

Lu Changkong nodded.

Suddenly.

Lu Changkong's expression shifted; Lu's transmission reached his ear.

He glanced at Overlord, eyes hot on the tower—clearly restless.

"Xiliang King, let us to the isle."

Lu Changkong said.

Overlord paused, then understood—Lu knew of his arrival.

"Good."

He didn't refuse; he had come seeking Lu anyway.

Lu Changkong smacked his lips—now this was interesting.

Tantai Xuan on the lake heart isle; Overlord too...

Two kings vying for the world, gathered.

How could one not anticipate?

The three reached Beiluo lakeside.

No boat; they tread the water, racing to the isle—with their strength, lake-walking was trivial.

After Overlord's entry.

Nie Changqing returned.

He should have been back sooner, but walked slowly—treading snow, reviewing flaws from his black dragon battle.

Losers had no right to dragon gate return.

But the journey baptized his mindset; inflated strength consolidated.

...

Lake heart isle.

Baiyujing pavilion second floor.

Overlord's trio ascended together.

Terrace; faint sandalwood; rich wine aroma.

Lu sat Thousand Blade chair, clipping green plum into boiling wine.

Overlord spotted Lu instantly; heart gripped—no aura sensed...

Yes; before, he felt Lu's oppression.

Now, none.

Only two possibilities: he grew stronger.

Or Lu did.

First unlikely; second—Lu concealed freely, making Overlord face a mundane man.

"Young Master Lu."

Overlord cupped hands, suppressing shock.

"Sit."

Lu smiled.

Overlord, Lu Changkong sat; Luo Cheng knife behind Lu Changkong, grave.

"Cough cough!"

Side Tantai Xuan coughed, asserting presence.

Overlord smiled, cupped.

"North Xuan King."

Tantai Xuan huffed, ignored.

Overlord unbothered—Xu Chu just seized his barely-warm immortal fate; good face? Ghost.

Lu Changkong watched the show, pouring himself green plum wine.

Lu leaned Thousand Blade, calm eyeing both.

Overlord's arrival silenced Tantai.

Lu eyed Overlord; no dodge; produced two gold dragon seals.

"Young Master Lu recognize these dragon seals?"

Overlord said.

Tantai, Lu Changkong glanced seals.

Dragon seals?

"No need to probe; I made the gold dragon seals; your dragon qi too."

Lu lifted bronze cup, sipped warm liquid.

Faintly.

Overlord focused.

Lu no deny?

Truly his work...

"Baiyujing... meddling in court?"

Overlord grave.

Lu use seals to control, dominate world?

Overlord intolerable; even knowing no match, he'd rebel.

Die before puppet.

Baiyujing atmosphere tensed, swords drawn.

Lu Changkong squinted; Tantai focused.

Easiest Lu; cup in hand, sipping warm wine.

"If Baiyujing meddles, can you stop?"

Lu light laugh.

Hand raised; snowflake on fair finger.

Pointed Tantai: "If I now declare North Xuan King emperor, dare you block?"

Lu calm, frank, like stating the ordinary.

Overlord pupils shrank.

Domineering!

Lu more than him.

But admit truth.

Baiyujing too strong; Lu too.

No need for games.

"Of course, no need tense; Baiyujing won't meddle... dragon qi no side effects."

"Dragon qi is your nation fortune."

"Strong qi strong fortune; strong you... each four zhang five chi; total nine zhang; nine extreme, supreme."

Lu said.

"So seizing North Xuan's emperor dragon seal useless; qi insufficient to unite."

Overlord thoughtful.

"Qi boost to cultivation limited; mainly prevent evil tainting authority; nine zhang drink dispels evil demons; no demon chaos nation."

Lu stated.

Tantai and Overlord finally understood dragon qi's role.

Lingering heart puzzle resolved.

Overlord pity; boost limited, near none.

Rib to him.

Sought strength; qi no help; status symbol, but disappointing.

Evil invasion? Unconcerned.

Strong enough; what evil dare?

Overlord disappointed, silent.

Lu smiled, eyed Tantai: "North Xuan King, your confusion?"

Tantai planned wait Overlord leave, private talk.

But asked; no hide.

Daxuan Academy; Overlord would know if wanted.

"Young Master Lu, whim; found academy, cultivate juniors; children early path; enter Beiluo for views."

Tantai said.

Lu Changkong eyes condensed; academy...

Cultivators from cradle?

Bold!

Pioneering!

Overlord stunned; eyed Tantai—such resolve.

Lu smiled, sipped green plum; no answer; eyed Overlord.

"Xiliang King, thoughts?"

Overlord on cushion, shook head.

"Academy unnecessary; army suffices; army-cultivated true power."

Overlord said.

Disagreed.

Academy resources > army; output maybe inferior.

Unneeded.

Tantai condensed; eyed Overlord; silent.

Daxuan Academy deliberate; planned post-Xiliang victory; Xu Chu incident; cultivator vital.

Decided.

Daxuan juniors no suffer like him.

"North Xuan King, persist?"

Lu eyed Tantai.

Tantai firm nod.

Daxuan Academy imperative.

Lu smile faded.

"Build then."

"North Xuan favors academy; Xiliang army... one year term."

Lu laughed.

"Year later Beiluo; contest."

"Winner Baiyujing three months; this young master special reward; how?"

Words fell.

Tantai tensed.

Overlord squinted.

"Young Master Lu, if Daxuan falls in year... how?"

Overlord.

"Bet void."

Lu flat.

"Good."

Overlord agreed gladly.

Tantai sat; lap fists clenched.

"Good!"

He accepted.

Distant Lu Changkong stroked beard; intrigued.

Army vs academy cultivators?

Eyed Lu; discern favor.

"Both agree; contract."

Lu smiled.

Mind stir; hand out; void pen; words pierced void.

Simple; as said.

Finished; words lingered.

Hand beckon.

Two emperor dragon seals flew.

Finger tap.

Both stamped.

"Done."

"Year; Daxuan or Xiliang falls; bet waste; how?"

Lu laughed.

Returned stamped to Overlord.

Overlord Tantai eyed.

Nodded.

"Excellent."

Lu smiled.

Hand beckon.

Tantai Overlord vision swirled.

Clear; Baiyujing below.

Tantai fine.

Overlord shocked by Lu's means.

Lu Ping'an... ever unfathomable.

Pavilion.

Lu Changkong rose; eyed Lu.

"Fan'er, which side?"

Lu smile no word.

Lu Changkong seemed to know; smiled; Luo down.

Just as Lu Changkong descended.

Lu brow raised slight.

Eyed Beiluo west mountain.

Faint strong aura spreading.

"Hm?"

Lu eyes brightened.

Someone breaking Body Storage barrier?

Not just Lu.

Descending Lu Changkong; isle Overlord; heads up grave west mountain.

Powerful aura; breakthrough!

Overlord inhaled deep.

Strong; Body to Heaven Lock?

Who?!

Truly who?

Fast!

Too fast; who?

Nie Changqing? Or Ning Zhao?!

Overlord eyes gleamed; aura surged; rapid west shift.

Lu Changkong surprised brow.

Heaven Lock?

Spectacle; miss?

Steps; snow pulled body; instant west.

Tantai Luo sensed west mountain.

Tantai weak; but watch fun.

Isle quiet again.

Skyward chrysanthemums; vivid peaches; swaying bamboo; silent Master grave; kneeling Mo Tianyu before.

Lu leaned wheelchair; fingers light tap fiery phoenix guard.

Eyes expectant.

Heaven Lock birth at last?

Long awaited.

Heaven Lock; Wuhuang transform begin.

But success uncertain.

Plane limit; Golden Core tribulates; Heaven Lock more.

Lu mind stir; instant crossed myriad mountains waters.

Thousand Blade sat; ninth heaven plane origin before.

Origin set Golden Core tribulation only.

Heaven Lock unset; now breakthrough.

Lu felt need custom thunder celebrate.

Chapter 222: Drinking Wine, Laughing Loudly, Crossing Thunder Tribulation

Western Prefecture, Liangzhou City.

Ding Jiudeng glanced over his shoulder at the empty alley. The stranger in the conical hat was gone, lost somewhere in the maze of backstreets.

The shopkeeper had never been kind to him, but Ding Jiudeng didn't forget favors. Without that miserly old man taking him in, he'd have starved long ago.

What could that stranger possibly want with the boss?

He rubbed his smooth scalp, frowned, then started walking. Whatever it was, the shopkeeper needed to know.

The sky over Liangzhou looked poisoned—heavy, lead-gray clouds pressing down like a lid, making the air hard to breathe.

Ding Jiudeng eyed the darkening heavens and headed for the city outskirts.

He knew exactly where the shopkeeper kept his “goods.” Once, when the guards came poking around, the old man had led them straight there himself.

A few li outside the walls, a crumbling manor appeared through the gloom.

No servants, no guards—the shopkeeper was too cheap to hire anyone to watch a ruin. Cheap enough to withhold Ding Jiudeng’s wages for the next three months, too.

He pushed the sagging gate open and stepped inside.

He never noticed the shadow that slipped in right after him.

The manor was small. Ding Jiudeng knew every corner. He jogged toward the storage wing.

Two strides in, he remembered: showing up uninvited would just give the old skinflint another excuse to dock his pay.

Ah, whatever. Fourth month's wages were already a lost cause.

He sped up.

But the storage room was empty. No shopkeeper. The crates hadn't been touched—thick dust lay undisturbed on every surface.

Ding Jiudeng stopped dead. Didn't the boss say he was coming here to move merchandise?

A black blur streaked past behind him.

He caught it only in the corner of his eye. Two heartbeats later, every hair on his body stood straight up.

He slapped his chest and muttered, "That... was creepy."

The whole place suddenly felt wrong. Cold. Evil. He didn't want to stay another second. Since the shopkeeper wasn't here, he'd head back to Eternal Prosperity Pawnshop.

He turned to leave, but before he'd taken three steps, a storm of sacred chants crashed through his mind—temple bells, wooden fish drums, bronze gongs, endless Buddhist hymns roaring inside his skull.

His thoughts sharpened to crystal clarity. Beneath the chanting he heard wailing, sobbing, desperate cries.

Why am I hearing these voices?

He rubbed his bald head again.

Turning, he saw thick black mist coiling from one corner of the manor, so dense with hatred it seemed alive.

He hesitated, then walked toward it.

Moments after he left, the conical-hatted figure appeared where he had stood.

The stranger's brow creased beneath the shadow of the hat.

“Strange ripples... almost like a cultivator's aura. That errand boy... is a practitioner?”

The words barely left his mouth before he vanished again.

Golden light glimmered faintly in Ding Jiudeng's eyes. In the deepening dusk his shaved head glowed softly, as if lit from within.

The chanting grew louder, pounding against his skull until it felt ready to split.

He followed the black mist to the kitchen.

Behind the cold stove he found a hidden door. The hatred poured from the crack beneath it like smoke.

At first terror gripped him, but after staring blankly for a while, the fear simply... drained away.

He pressed his ear to the door.

Muffled voices—and the shopkeeper’s oily chuckle.

“After this deal’s done, lie low. The Liangzhou guards are sniffing too close. Source from another city next time.”

“That works, but it’s troublesome. Costs more expensive. The price—”

“You’ll be paid fairly.”

The accent wasn’t local.

Then came the metallic clang of someone slapping an iron cage, followed by terrified whimpers.

The hatred thickened until the air felt like syrup. The chanting in Ding Jiudeng’s head became a hurricane.

The conical-hatted stranger appeared silently behind him. Ding Jiudeng never sensed a thing.

A palm pressed lightly between his shoulder blades.

A gentle push.

CRASH!

The hidden door burst inward. Ding Jiudeng stumbled through, arms flailing.

Dead silence.

The chamber beyond was huge yet suffocating. Torches guttered on the walls, revealing row after row of iron cages filled with ragged children.

The shopkeeper's sharp, rat-like face went slack with horror when he saw that familiar bald head.

"How are you here?!"

Steel hissed—blades drawn.

Ding Jiudeng straightened slowly, taking it all in.

The chanting in his mind became deafening. Soft golden radiance spilled from his scalp.

But he barely noticed.

He stared at the cages and saw himself—small, starving, alone.

The shopkeeper looked ready to explode.

Only now, in the flickering torchlight, did Ding Jiudeng recognize the men surrounding him.

Peacock Kingdom slavers.

They wore Zhou clothing, but their sharp foreign features betrayed them.

So this was the “merchandise” that had made the shopkeeper rich beyond counting.

The children saw him. Hope blazed in their hollow eyes. They began rattling bars, screaming, reaching out with filthy hands.

Something inside Ding Jiudeng snapped.

Golden light erupted across his body.

Invisible torrents of spiritual energy screamed around him, condensing into a towering golden Buddha shadow at his back.

His body shook.

Face still frozen in shock and fury, he instinctively pressed his palms together.

One slaver sneered, raised a curved blade high, aiming for that glowing head—

A shrill whistle split the air.

A pair of silver shears punched straight through the man's chest with a wet crunch.

From the darkness stepped the stranger in the conical hat.

The blood-slick shears hovered obediently at his side.

The shopkeeper turned the color of old ash.

“Most of these kids are war orphans,” the stranger said coldly. “Scum always wears pretty clothes while doing filthy work in the dark.”

He glanced at Ding Jiudeng, curiosity sharpening his gaze.

A pawnshop clerk who’d somehow touched immortality?

Ding Jiudeng’s expression twisted further—grief and rage boiling together.

He knew the agony of losing everything to war.

He had lived it.

And these monsters were selling helpless children like cattle just because no one would come looking?

Light flared brighter from his scalp.

Behind him the golden Buddha grew clearer, solemn and vast.

Ding Jiudeng looked at the slavers, then at the shopkeeper, and suddenly went very calm.

Palms still pressed together, head shining like a lantern, he spoke softly.

“This humble monk urges you... choose kindness.”

...

Beiluo, Western Mountain.

Trial Tower.

Hundreds of cultivators ringed the white jade tower, faces pale as overwhelming pressure leaked from within.

Overlord, Lu Changkong, Nie Changqing, Jiang Li, Chi Lian—every top expert had rushed over.

Even Luo Cheng and Tantai Xuan arrived panting through the snow.

Jiang Li shot Tantai Xuan a strange look—they'd literally just said goodbye.

Tantai Xuan gave an awkward grin. Small world.

Inside the tower, Cong Zhao rose from her cushion, eyes wide.

Jing Yue gripped his sword tighter. Ni Yu, Bai Qingniao, and Nie Shuang stared in stunned awe.

Far across the floor, the disheveled scholar sat cross-legged, tattered robes whipping in a cyclone of spiritual energy, every strand of messy hair standing on end.

Cong Zhao whispered, "He's... trying to break through Body Storage straight into Heaven Lock?"

She couldn't believe it. When Kong Nanfei entered the tower, his Body Storage wasn't even complete.

Could his foundation possibly hold under such a rushed ascension?

Would he even survive stepping into Heaven Lock?

No one had dreamed the first person to challenge Heaven Lock would be the scruffy scholar who'd always ranked middle of the pack.

Yet now he had leapt ahead of everyone.

High above the plane, Lu Fan hovered before the world origin, fingers weaving runes. Chains of order snaked out and wrapped around his hand.

Second-tier thunder punishment—three bolts total.

That was the current limit of Five Phoenixes Continent.

This was the tribulation Lu Fan had crafted exclusively for Heaven Lock realm. Normal golden-core breakthroughs only triggered ordinary lightning.

Finished, he smiled faintly and returned to the second floor of White Jade Capital pavilion.

Having endured tribulation himself, scripting this one had been relatively smooth.

The second-tier was essentially a watered-down version of the third—far less lethal.

When vast righteous qi began gathering between heaven and earth, Lu Fan immediately knew who was breaking through.

Kong Nanfei.

He raised an eyebrow.

He'd bet on Cong Zhao.

"Insights from the fifth floor's Heavenly Dao source plus the Song of Righteousness gave him sudden clarity, so he's riding the wave straight to Heaven Lock?"

Lu Fan tapped his wheelchair armrest.

Can he really succeed?

Even Lu Fan wasn't sure.

It was far too early.

Kong Nanfei hadn't even stabilized his recent Body Storage breakthrough, hadn't adapted to his new power.

Attempting Heaven Lock now felt almost impatient.

But since the man dared, he must have some confidence.

On Lake Heart Island, Mo Tianyu also sensed the shift.

He gazed toward Western Mountain and the surge of righteous qi.

Kong Nanfei?

He pulled out tortoise shell and copper coins, exhaled solemnly, and knelt before the Master's grave.

Coins rattled inside the shell.

Three coins fell and stacked neatly.

Mo Tianyu's pupils shrank.

“Disaster omen...”

...

Western Mountain.

The tower gates swung open.

Cong Zhao led Ni Yu, Bai Qingniao, and the others outside.

Only then did the crowd learn it was Kong Nanfei—the scholar who’d never once left the tower—who was attempting the breakthrough.

“That sloppy scholar?”

“Kong Nanfei, grandson of the great Master Kong Xiu!”

“Is he going to claim his grandfather’s glory?”

Gasps rippled everywhere.

Overlord frowned deeply.

Jiang Li was shaken—he knew Kong Nanfei’s strength well. How had he reached this level so quickly?

Meng Haoran’s face flushed scarlet with excitement. His own master was about to become the world’s first Heaven Lock cultivator!

If Kong Nanfei succeeded, the Haoran Sect would shake the heavens!

“Master, you must succeed!”

He clenched his fists until knuckles cracked.

BOOM!

The sky shattered.

Black clouds boiled in from every direction, pressure so heavy the air itself seemed to solidify.

Lightning swam like dragons inside the thunderclouds.

It was tribulation thunder!

Just like Young Master Lu had once faced!

Kong Nanfei was truly attempting Heaven Lock!

Cong Zhao, Nie Changqing, Overlord—every peak expert felt a storm of emotions.

They wanted him to succeed... and they didn't.

Because every one of them had secretly dreamed of being first.

And now someone else had seized that honor.

Rumble—

The tower's massive doors slammed wide.

Kong Nanfei stepped out, robes ragged, face calm and solemn, each footfall crunching deep into the snow.

In that moment he became the axis of the world.

No one spoke.

Because the true trial had only just begun.

Above, an ocean of lightning churned within the tribulation clouds.

Kong Nanfei's tattered robes flapped wildly. He tilted his grimy face to the sky, heart quaking before heaven's majesty.

Could a mortal truly defy the will of heaven?

But after the awe came burning defiance.

Why the hell shouldn't he?!

Laughter exploded from his chest—wild, fearless—as he strode through the frozen clearing.

Snowflakes hung motionless in the air.

He stood alone beneath the tower.

Suddenly he spun toward the crowd.

“Haoran! Got wine?”

Meng Haoran started.

You're about to face heavenly thunder and you want booze?

But he didn't hesitate—grabbed the jar he'd prepared long ago and tossed it high.

Kong Nanfei's eyes blazed.

Robes billowing like banners, he caught it one-handed, smashed the seal with his palm, and threw his head back.

Wine poured in a silver torrent down his throat.

Laughter and righteous qi shook the mountain together.

Above his head, the first bolt could no longer be contained.

With an earth-splitting roar, a dragon-thick column of violet lightning tore down—straight at the laughing, drinking, disheveled scholar who dared to defy the heavens themselves!

Chapter 223: Why Are There Three Bolts of Thunder?

Beiluo, Heart of the Lake Island.

Second floor of the White Jade Pavilion.

Lu sat motionless in his Thousand Blades Chair as a gentle breeze stirred his white robes and the strands of hair that fell across his forehead.

The entire city of Beiluo lay shrouded beneath heavy, lead-gray clouds. An oppressive weight pressed down on every soul within the walls; ordinary folk shut themselves indoors, hearts pounding with nameless dread.

Children peered fearfully through cracked windows and saw, high above the vault of heaven, a churning thunderpool where countless arcs of lightning roared and boiled like dragons trapped in a cage.

Then the first bolt fell.

For one blinding instant, the darkness that had swallowed the sky was torn apart. Brilliant. Dazzling. Impossible to look at directly.

Western Mountain.

Beneath the White Jade Tower.

Kong Nanfei tilted his head back and drank deeply from a massive wine jar, throat working with every swallow, as though liquid courage might stand against heavenly punishment.

Faced with the descending pillar of lightning, he let out a wild laugh, hurled the jar skyward, and roared a single word of defiance.

One thunderous boom later, the jar exploded into mist. Wine vaporized instantly, filling the air with the thick scent of alcohol.

His scholar's robe billowed though there was no wind.

He opened his mouth, and a profound, resonant sound rang out like the tolling of ancient bells and war drums combined. A small sword forged entirely of pure, milky-white righteous qi shot from his lips and streaked toward the falling thunder.

Before entering Beiluo, Kong Nanfei had been weak, barely stepped into the Body Storage Realm after the great change between heaven and earth. Compared to Overlord or Nie Changqing, he had been nothing special.

Yet once inside the city, he climbed the Trial Tower, received Lu's handwritten Song of Righteousness, and gained sudden enlightenment. He broke through realm after realm until all five viscera were perfected. With the song's guidance, his path of righteous qi became crystal clear; he skipped the long process of deriving an attribute entirely. In the fifth-floor reward, Heavenly Dao Origin Insight, he soared upward in one leap, attempting to shatter the lock and step into the Heavenly Lock Realm.

He had caught up from behind.

Still, facing heavenly tribulation, Kong Nanfei showed no fear.

He was the first person in this era, after Young Master Lu Ping'an himself, to attempt a tribulation crossing, and he remained utterly unafraid.

He was a scholar. A man of letters. And just a little bit mad.

Lu Dongxuan and Gongsun Yu stood at a distance, watching the laughing scholar stare down the lightning. For a moment, their vision blurred.

In him, they glimpsed the ghost of a younger Kong Xiu, reckless, untamed, daring to laugh at the whole world.

The milky-white sword of righteous qi collided with the thunder.

A deafening explosion.

The ground caved as if a meteor had struck; snow erupted in every direction.

Kong Nanfei grunted, blood spraying from his mouth as his body was blasted into the newly formed crater.

The righteous sword shattered.

Everyone watching sucked in a sharp breath.

Nie Changqing's hand instinctively dropped to his knife hilt, face grave.

Overlord and the others stared, unblinking.

From the bottom of the pit, Kong Nanfei staggered to his feet. His scholar's robe was soaked crimson; blood dripped steadily from his nose and the corners of his mouth.

One bolt of tribulation lightning...

...and he had nearly failed to withstand it.

High above in the White Jade Pavilion, Lu rested one hand on the arm of his wheelchair. The outcome of the first clash was exactly as he had expected.

His expression did not change in the slightest; if anything, it grew colder.

"The Heavenly Lock is not the Golden Core. It is a realm I created alone. Anyone bold enough to walk this path must endure tribulation far harsher than the norm and suffer greater pain."

"You chose this. Then you must be ready to pay the price of failure."

Lu spoke softly, almost to himself.

Even he had not expected Kong Nanfei to attempt the breakthrough so quickly.

Reckless?

Underestimating the difficulty of cultivation?

Leaning back in the Thousand Blades Chair, Lu watched with cool detachment, almost indifference.

Even if Kong Nanfei were struck dead by the lightning, Lu would not lift a finger.

This was the path the man had chosen.

Break the rules, and you pay the price.

The tribulation for the Heavenly Lock was a weakened version of the classic three-strike heavenly ordeal, only three bolts, yet still far stronger than ordinary breakthroughs.

In the snow-filled crater on Western Mountain, Kong Nanfei stood bleeding but alive.

He had blocked the first bolt.

He was not dead.

The onlookers let out the breath they had been holding. Many cultivators even began cheering under their breath.

Kong Nanfei's fearless laughter in the face of heaven's wrath felt like defiance against fate itself; it resonated deeply with everyone watching.

"Does that mean he succeeded?"

"As expected of the Master's grandson, always the first to dare!"

"Is the world about to see its first Heavenly Lock cultivator?"

Yet while ordinary cultivators celebrated, the true Body Storage experts, Nie Changqing, Ning Zhao, and others, did not relax at all.

Their souls were stronger; they could feel the thunderpool above the Ninth Heaven had not dispersed. If anything, its pressure was growing heavier.

This tribulation... was not finished.

Ning Zhao's eyes flickered. When the Young Master crossed his tribulation, hadn't it ended after just one bolt?

Why did Kong Nanfei face more than one?

Was Kong Nanfei stronger than the Young Master?

Impossible. The Young Master was leagues above him.

Then she understood.

Back then, the Young Master had scattered the tribulation clouds with a single strike.

No clouds, no more lightning.

Kong Nanfei wiped the blood from his lips, expression turning grim.

So this was tribulation lightning...

So strong!

He flung his sleeves, threw his head back, and stared fearlessly at the roiling clouds.

“Come on!”

His roar echoed across the mountain.

The second bolt formed and fell, faster than the eye could follow.

The air itself smelled scorched. Kong Nanfei opened his mouth again; righteous qi gathered thick around him like armor. He pointed at the heavens and began reciting ancient verses aloud.

Layers of righteous qi stacked before him like an impenetrable shield.

Yet when the thunder struck, the shield exploded outward.

His entire body shook violently.

Crackling currents raced through his flesh, searing organs and meridians.

Had he not tempered his Body Storage Realm to near perfection, that single bolt would have shattered his heart channels and killed him instantly.

The cheering crowd fell deathly silent.

They watched in horror as the lightning illuminated Kong Nanfei's body from within, turning skin translucent, revealing white bone beneath.

When the light faded, the snow around him had melted into black sludge.

His hair smoked. His legs gave out, and he dropped to one knee.

Spiritual energy from his Qi Core surged, trying desperately to heal him.

He had survived the second bolt, but there was no joy on his face.

Only dread.

The tribulation clouds still churned.

A third bolt was coming.

What the hell... why is there a third one?!

Kong Nanfei swallowed hard, skin charred black, face ashen.

He had been careless.

He had assumed there would only be one bolt.

Lu had warned that the Heavenly Lock was stronger than the Golden Core, but he had never imagined the difference would reveal itself so brutally from the very first tribulation.

Far away, Lu Dongxuan idly fingered the thick gold chain around his neck while the shorter Gongsun Yu stood with hands clasped behind his back.

They watched the battered scholar and shook their heads with faint regret.

“This kid’s putting too much pressure on himself.”

“After Old Kong died, it feels like the entire future of Confucianism landed on his shoulders. That’s why he’s so impatient...”

“But cultivation can’t be rushed.”

Lu Dongxuan sighed.

They were survivors of the Hundred Schools of old; in Kong Nanfei they saw the shadow of Kong Xiu, and the same stubborn fire.

The two old men exchanged a glance, then turned toward the lake island.

“The Young Master must have noticed...”

“Will he intervene?” Gongsun Yu asked.

Lu Dongxuan chuckled, wrinkles bunching like mountain ranges.

“Intervene? I’d bet my life he won’t lift a finger.”

Gongsun Yu raised an eyebrow. “Why not? The Young Master may seem cold, but he has a warm heart. He wouldn’t just watch a peak Body Storage genius get fried right in front of the Trial Tower, would he? What would the world think of White Jade City then?”

Lu Dongxuan shook his head, gazing at the half-dead scholar in the distance.

“Everything happening now, he brought on himself.”

“And old friend... do you really think the Young Master is the kind of man who cares what the world thinks?”

“He carries the world in his heart, but he will never be swayed by it. That is what makes him truly great.”

Gongsun Yu twitched. “Old Lu, you’re laying it on a bit thick.”

Lu Dongxuan shot him a cold side-eye.

The Young Master's spiritual sense covered all of Beiluo. One wrong word, and he would know.

Dare to gossip?

Dare you?

Gongsun Yu's face stiffened; he understood perfectly.

He gave an awkward laugh.

"Are you saying the Young Master cares for the world just to insult him?"

"That heart of his is broader than an old fart like you could ever comprehend."

After that, the two old men tacitly shut up and turned their attention back to the tribulation.

Kong Nanfei coughed up flecks of blood that stained his robe darker. He stared at the sky without taking a single step back.

Farther off, Meng Haoran was panicking.

His master... might actually die out there.

And the lightning just kept coming. How many bolts were there? Was his master going to be cooked alive?

What should he do?

Overlord stood like a statue, breathing hard, eyes shining with excitement.

“What terrifying tribulation!”

“But if it were me... I could take it!”

He clenched his fists until veins bulged along his arms.

He trusted his defense more than anyone. The beatings he had endured in his life outnumbered the grains of rice Kong Nanfei had ever eaten.

He had experience.

Tantai Xuan was already dumbstruck. Was this heavenly majesty? Did every powerful cultivator have to withstand the wrath of the heavens just to break through?

As countless thoughts raced through countless minds, the third and final bolt descended.

A heaven-shaking roar.

For an instant it felt as though the mighty city walls themselves might collapse.

A perfectly straight column of lightning tore downward, unleashing invisible shockwaves that rippled outward in visible rings.

Boom. Boom. Boom.

Every hair on Kong Nanfei's body stood on end. An icy premonition of death wrapped around him.

"No!"

Meng Haoran's pupils shrank to pinpricks as he screamed.

Bai Qingniao's three little chicks burrowed deeper into her clothes, trembling.

Ni Yu clutched her black wok, suddenly very afraid.

The entire world fell silent except for the ragged breathing of the onlookers.

Deep in the crater, Kong Nanfei lifted his head and suddenly laughed, bitter and self-mocking.

He had overestimated himself.

He had been too eager, too desperate to become the first Heavenly Lock besides the Young Master of White Jade City.

Too desperate to raise the Haoran Sect until it stood shoulder-to-shoulder with White Jade City.

Too desperate to restore the glory Confucianism had known when his grandfather still lived.

His vision blurred.

Memories rose unbidden.

He was small again, in the book pavilion after dark, stubbornly swaying as he recited by candlelight.

His grandfather returned, and little Kong Nanfei looked up eagerly for praise.

But there was no praise, only a gentle rub on the head and soft words:

“Eat your meals one bite at a time. Read your books one volume at a time. Don’t rush.”

Don’t rush.

Clarity returned to Kong Nanfei’s eyes.

He gave a helpless, self-deprecating shake of the head, then sat down hard in the snow, tilted his face to the sky, and began to recite, slowly, deliberately, every word perfectly enunciated.

“In heaven and earth, there exists righteous qi...”

As the words left his mouth, radiant righteous qi gathered above his head, bright and majestic, coalescing from nothingness into tangible form.

It flowed like a gentle stream that grew into a rushing river.

The Long River of Righteous Qi!

This was the technique he had comprehended after deriving his attribute, speaking with the force of suspended rivers, manifesting the river of righteous qi itself.

Under his steady recitation, everyone present felt an overwhelming, noble power spreading through the air.

The final bolt of lightning smashed into the Long River.

Kong Nanfei’s body shook violently.

The ground beneath him sank deeper; countless tons of snow flashed into steam.

Yet he stubbornly kept his head raised, reciting without hurry or pause.

Through the dazzling radiance of the Long River, he seemed to see a familiar face smiling gently down at him.

He stared back, stunned.

When the blinding light finally faded and eyes adjusted once more...

The tribulation clouds were gone.

Only Kong Nanfei remained, slumped on the ground, body charred black, steam rising from his skin.

His aura was frail as a candle in the wind, as though the slightest breeze might snuff him out forever.

Everyone stood frozen, breathless.

The clouds had vanished.

Did that mean... he had survived the tribulation?

Had Kong Nanfei become a Heavenly Lock cultivator?

Every heart raced with the same burning question.

Chapter 224: From Now On, Divine Boldly

Beiluo, Lake Heart Isle.

Lu's brows furrowed involuntarily.

The tribulation had ended.

Heaven and earth regained calm; no anomalies—as if all returned to original, vibrant, beautiful, harmonious.

But...

This was the strangest part.

Lu raised his head; forelocks flew; gazed vault—as if piercing sky to ninth heaven plane origin.

"Failed?"

"If succeeded... plane origin should change; source feedback fall."

Crossing tribulation not vain; Martial Emperor City; world first spear king; last bolt diverted; madness—reward lost.

Lu thoughtful.

Key: if Kong Nanfei crossed; Heaven Lock.

Lu impossible no sense.

System none.

Wuhuang low martial extreme; mid martial one line away.

That line: Heaven Lock cultivator.

One birth; system prompt feedback.

Wuhuang low to mid!

Thus; clearly Kong failed.

Failed.

Yet lived.

This puzzled Lu greatly.

"Someone protected?"

Lu frowned.

Kong alive; Lu relieved.

Master died; Kong thunder-dead.

Confucianism truly nominal.

Sudden.

Lu thought; gaze shifted distant; expression playful odd...

Found reason Kong lived.

...

Beiluo, West Mountain.

Tribulation end instant; Overlord first recovered.

Then Nie Changqing.

Feet snow bloomed; forms ghostly shot; Kong side.

Melted charred snow; thunder remnant palpitation.

"Not dead."

Near; Overlord sensed heartbeat.

"But no Heaven Lock; no metamorphosis."

Overlord again.

Regret; then excited; eyes war intent.

Still chance first Heaven Lock!

Meng Haoran sped; charred steaming thread breath Kong; face panic.

"Master!"

Meng fearful cry; helpless.

Lu Changkong arrived; frowned: "Injuries severe; qi pill near empty; organs collapse anytime..."

"Alive... miracle."

Lu Changkong grave.

Onlookers shocked.

Heaven Lock... stronger harder than Golden Core; not words.

Strong Kong; mouth river; righteous river vs heaven might; nearly dead.

Others; death certain.

"Heaven Lock... dangerous!"

Cultivator grave.

Some arrogant Heaven Lock planners; fear spread; waver.

Else... Golden Core fine.

Ning Zhao Nie Overlord no waver.

Kong strong; time master power consolidate; success.

Pity...

Kong rushed.

Prove self.

"Failed; but Kong shock unforgettable; fearless thunder courage; we learn advocate."

Side Lü Dongxuan.

Onlookers thoughtful.

Ni Yu sack Qi Gathering Pill; to Meng.

Feed Kong.

Maybe no save; but qi aid self-heal.

All cultivators self-heal; Body Storage.

Qi not extinguish; heal.

Limbs no.

Meng fed; carried Kong lake heart.

Knew only Lu save.

Lu Changkong watched Meng Kong vanish; sighed.

Unexpected.

"Heaven Lock... truly hard?"

Lu Changkong dazed.

Recalled third bolt.

Swap; block?

No.

Not...

Not just Lu Changkong; Ning Zhao Nie Overlord pondered.

Swap; no block.

Even beaten-habituated Overlord; no.

Third destroy organs; five storages collapse!

"But now no; but attribute qi derived; block!"

Overlord eyes firm.

Must first Heaven Lock!

Overlord inhaled; gaze trial tower.

Wanted enter; train; break shackles.

But...

Lu bet; important matters.

Overlord head up; around.

Tantai gone.

Worried Overlord leave first; harm; left early.

Overlord mouth twitch.

Eyed Beiluo lake; tower; bold stride; hulking down west mountain.

...

Beiluo outer.

Driver whipped steeds; carriage sped; wheels snow grooves.

Tantai carriage; uneasy.

"Faster..."

To driver.

"Yes."

Driver nod; hard whip.

Sides Xuanwu Guards horse protect; out Beiluo; rapid Yuan Chi.

Carriage; Tantai grave.

Thought overestimated cultivators; but Kong mortal; mouth river; righteous vs heaven; underestimated.

Firm Daxuan Academy belief.

Rumble!

Sudden.

Hooves exploded.

Tantai face change.

Steeds neigh; Xuanwu qi blood; drew blades.

Carriage stopped.

Tantai hand; lifted curtain; saw outer; tall black-mane block; hulking sat.

"Overlord!"

Tantai pupils shrank.

Left early; Overlord chased!

What?

Tantai crisis strong.

Panic; must calm.

Tantai curtain; slow out; stood carriage; bamboo scroll; calm eyed blocking Overlord.

"Xiliang King... block king carriage; kill here?"

Tantai deep eyed.

"Forget; just Ping'an witness; bet."

Tantai.

Invoked Lu; deter.

Overlord black-mane; Xuanwu blades aimed.

Unconcerned.

Xuanwu mere Qi Core; solve easy.

Kill Tantai; no block.

"No worry; kill; openly destroy Daxuan then you."

"Ambush; Xiang Shaoyun disdains."

Overlord.

Tantai relieved.

No doubt truth.

Believed Overlord; no kill; safe.

"Then Xiliang block carriage why?"

Tantai squinted.

Overlord spurred; black-mane neigh; Xuanwu tense.

Legend Overlord; how not.

Overlord pocket half emperor dragon seal; threw Tantai.

Tantai caught subconscious.

"Hold; yours; but not long; seize your four zhang five dragon qi bit by bit!"

Overlord laughed.

Next; yanked reins; steed neigh; snow raised; black-mane Overlord black ray; distant shot.

Xuanwu no relax.

Tantai carriage; eyed seal; slow exhale.

"Seize king dragon qi bit by bit?"

"Today spare... lifetime worst decision."

"Next; kill Tantai Xuan; not easy!"

Tantai clenched seal; oath.

"Go; Yuan Chi!"

Tantai back carriage; voice joy anger unknown.

...

Overlord black-mane; spurred gallop; imperial capital.

Hair wind shook.

"One year."

Overlord eyes gleam.

"You Lu Ping'an... favor Daxuan Academy? Else no bet."

Overlord clear.

Lu favor; one year bet; pressure Tantai.

"Academy cultivators; vs battle-hardened army... you favor academy; I disbelieve!"

"But academy; Tantai life build!"

Black-mane Overlord; black lightning; snow plain end vanish.

...

Beiluo.

Lake heart isle.

Purple bamboo; Master grave front.

Mo Tianyu pale; nostrils blood; supine snow; head faint.

Sky goose snow; face cool.

Mo dazed; unknown.

Hard hand; grabbed proud mad hair; clump fell.

Mo paler...

Body what?!

Why sudden nosebleed?

Nosebleed ok; why hair loss?

Gaze snow three coins.

This divination?

Only change.

Mo pale flush.

Divination... wrong again?!

Now; Beiluo lake.

Meng Haoran pole; dying Kong isle.

"Young Master Lu!"

Meng cry voice.

Baiyujing second.

Lu leaned Thousand Blade; white snow; white cloak; forelocks snow light.

Saw Master grave supine Mo; odd.

"One 'great ominous'; pulled Kong from death..."

Lu never cared Mo divinations; but heaven recover; plane origin; Mo "divination" awakened power.

Last moment aided Kong; shared tribulation pressure.

Twofold; great ominous; dead ominous... alive great auspicious.

Lu speechless.

Mo excellent.

But "fate defy" divination; cost.

Mo felt.

Mo path... crooked?

Lu unclear.

No excellent cultivator; but divination path extraordinary.

Misfortune blessing.

Lu smiled.

Hand; slender fingers snowflake.

Next.

Thousand Blade faint arc.

Form vanished.

Reappear Baiyujing below; finger flick.

Qi strand Kong body.

Led; Kong chaotic qi order; meridians flow; heal.

But time.

"Qi self-heal; fine."

"Mind surge coma."

"Wake; find me."

Lu to panicked Meng.

Then wheelchair snow slow; purple bamboo.

Mo sat snow; pale...

Stared three coins; lost.

Sudden snow crush "creak".

Mo head up; Thousand Blade Lu.

Lu eyed; hand beckon.

Three coins hand.

Cracked near shatter.

But clenched; release; restored; even different; faint qi fluctuation.

Three coins... spirit tools!

Mo stunned.

Lu threw back.

"Hold..."

"Like divine?"

"From now..."

"Divine boldly."

Chapter 225: The Overlord's Verdict – Storming Great Xuan

Mo Tianyu stood frozen, his mind reeling.

He stared at the figure who had just appeared before him—Lu—then down at the three copper treasures in his hand, their aura now surging with newfound power. For a moment... he was utterly speechless.

How long had it been?

How long since anyone had dared him to divine boldly?

The Master had forbidden him from divining. Kong Nanfei had done the same...

Yet now, the one urging him to keep pushing the boundaries of his divination was the very youth who once planted him in the soil like a scallion.

A storm of emotions churned within Mo Tianyu. His lips trembled.

"All paths of cultivation lead to eternity..."

“Walk your own road. What do others’ words matter?”

Lu smiled.

Mo Tianyu’s divination path truly astonished Lu, revealing an unimaginable potential in the man.

“But divination defies the heavens. Altering fate demands a price. Remember that.”

Lu continued.

He yearned for a hundred schools of thought to flourish among cultivators, and Mo Tianyu’s divination path was a delightful surprise.

At those words, Mo Tianyu recalled the blood trickling from his nose, the strands of hair falling away. His eyes hardened.

So his wretched state stemmed from that one divination?

He had read Kong Nanfei’s fate as great peril.

Could it... truly have been great peril?

“How is Nanfei?” Mo Tianyu asked.

Leaning back in his wheelchair, Lu plucked a bamboo leaf. Hearing the question, he chuckled. “Not dead yet.”

Mo Tianyu exhaled in relief.

Not dead—that meant great fortune. So... his divination had been wrong after all?

His thoughts grew tangled. Reflecting on recent days, not a single reading had proven accurate.

If he couldn't divine correctly, what right did he have to continue?

Why had Lu restored his three copper treasures?

“My divinations are inaccurate,” Mo Tianyu shook his head, his spirit dimming.

Lu merely smiled, twirling the purple bamboo leaf between his fingers, glancing at him.

“Don’t you know in your heart whether they’re accurate or not?”

Without another word, Lu turned. His wheelchair crunched through the snow as he glided across the island.

Mo Tianyu watched Lu’s retreating back, stunned, his emotions a tangled mess.

Had Lu come solely to tell him to keep divining boldly?

...

Western Prefecture.

Liangzhou City.

In an ancient manor.

Rustling sounds mingled with children’s cries.

Moments later, a figure in a woven hat emerged. Ding Jiudeng's clothes were stained with blood, yet his demeanor remained eerily calm—a calmness that pleased the hatted man.

From a pawnshop clerk to a cultivator with genuine power, yet still unshaken. What formidable resolve.

This one was steady.

“As a cultivator, do what cultivators should. Don't abuse your power for vile deeds.”

The hatted man fixed his gaze on Ding Jiudeng.

“If I learn otherwise, I will kill you.”

Silence hung in the air for several seconds.

Ding Jiudeng's expression remained impassive. He nodded. “Understood.”

Slowly, the hatted man removed his hat.

A weathered face emerged, framed by unkempt stubble that spoke of a life rich with stories.

“I am Mo Liuqi...”

No longer concealing his identity, Mo Liuqi regarded Ding Jiudeng.

The man’s composure felt odd, yet... worthy of revealing his name.

Ding Jiudeng was silent for a long while, savoring the name.

“This humble monk is Ding Jiudeng.”

He pressed his palms together and bowed slightly.

“These children are now in your care...”

Mo Liuqi replaced his hat and nodded to Ding Jiudeng.

With a wave, his figure vanished into the snowy night.

Ding Jiudeng stood before the dilapidated manor. The night's events had cleansed his soul.

"A true 侠客," he murmured long after Mo Liuqi had gone.

He patted his bald head. The chanting and bell tolls in his mind faded.

Yet suddenly, his mind brimmed with new knowledge.

Returning inside, he found the rescued children huddled in the snow, shivering, their eyes wide with innocent wonder—like brilliant stars in a clear night sky, pure and untouched.

Ding Jiudeng smiled, rubbing his smooth scalp.

Looking at them, he knew there was no going back.

The shopkeeper was dead.

And the shopkeeper's filthy deeds would soon come to light.

Yongcheng Pawnshop had no place for Ding Jiudeng anymore.

Pressing his palms together, an idea formed. He beckoned, leading the children into the swirling snow.

Back at the pawnshop, he found the shopkeeper's hidden stash.

He took only one silver ingot—wages long withheld over the years.

With that, Ding Jiudeng led dozens of children away from Yongcheng Pawnshop.

Following memories now etched in his mind, he found a cheap dwelling in Liangzhou City and bought it.

A home for the children.

He carved a plaque as the memories guided him.

Hanging it above the worn door, it read: Yongcheng Temple.

He could never return to Yongcheng Pawnshop, but it had once sheltered him. Naming the temple thus honored his past.

The children stared up at him with wide eyes.

Ding Jiudeng pressed his palms together.

A few mimicked him.

He froze, then burst into laughter.

Soon after...

Black locks fell to the ground, mingling with dust.

Behind the temple's great bald head sprouted several smaller ones.

...

Imperial Capital.

Zijin Palace.

The Overlord rode his black-maned horse, returning from Beiluo City to Zijin Palace.

Xu Chu, clad in armor, had been waiting at the palace gates since learning of the Overlord's arrival.

His face was grave.

The Overlord dismounted, glancing at Xu Chu. "Summon all Xiliang generals to Zijin Palace..."

Xu Chu faltered, his expression shifting. He bowed swiftly. "Yes, my lord."

Then he strode away.

The Overlord had gone to Beiluo City—Xu Chu knew that much. But what transpired there? He had no idea.

Judging by the immediate summons upon return, something extraordinary must have happened in Beiluo.

Entering Zijin Palace, the Overlord removed his black armor and slung the Ganqi shield across his back.

He beckoned a servant.

“How has Mingsang been these past days?”

His tone was heavy.

The servant bowed low. “She visited the Masterunuch’s library and has stayed there since... in low spirits.”

“My lord, will you not see her?”

This servant was bold, overstepping his station to speak so.

He quickly lowered his head, falling silent.

“The library?”

The Overlord stood before Zijin Palace and shook his head.

He had ignored Luo Mingsang for days, never seeking her out.

He simply hoped she would confess certain matters on her own.

Within Zijin Palace.

Soon, Xiliang's generals converged through the snow.

They entered and stood silently below, their keen instincts sensing an unusual tension.

Clad in armor, iron-willed and brimming with vigor, they were a pack of tigers and wolves.

The Overlord stood above, sweeping his gaze over them.

Suddenly, his eyes blazed.

“Prepare the troops. We march on Yuanchi.”

His voice rang like struck iron.

Below, the generals froze, bewildered. Why, upon returning, did the Overlord order an immediate assault on Yuanchi City?

It was too sudden!

Even Xu Chu was stunned. The Overlord had shown no intent to attack Great Xuan before. What changed?

The Overlord offered no concealment.

Hands clasped behind his back, he recounted the wager made in Beiluo City to Xiliang's generals.

Xiliang's warriors were battle-hardened, forged in military camps.

They followed the Overlord's vision without question.

Even Xu Chu sneered. "Build an academy for cultivators? The North Xuan King is naive. Without blood and battle, what are cultivators? Still weaklings..."

“Only iron-forged cultivators from the army are truly strong. Any practitioner from my Xiang family army could crush an academy graduate.”

Xu Chu laughed.

The hall echoed with similar confidence—not arrogance, but earned certainty.

The Overlord said little more.

“Let the North Xuan King build his academy... if Great Xuan survives Xiliang’s onslaught.”

His words fell, and the hall erupted.

“War!”

Orders flew. Xiliang generals mobilized. Elite forces clanked into motion, their armor ringing as if to shatter the falling snow.

The moment Xiliang’s imperial army stirred, every faction sensed it. Great families and powers adopted a wait-and-see stance.

...

Yuanchi City.

Atop the city walls under a hazy night sky.

Mo Beike, wrapped in a thick cloak, stood watch. Spotting the Xuanwu Guards and Tantai Xuan's carriage racing back on the horizon, he ordered the gates opened at once.

Tantai Xuan entered, leapt from the carriage, and Great Xuan's generals gathered. He immediately found Mo Beike and relayed the wager with the Overlord in Beiluo.

Listening silently, Mo Beike's heavy eye bags twitched.

"A one-year wager?"

"Great Xuan's academy against Xiliang's army..."

Mo Beike drew a deep breath.

With his sharp instincts, he grasped the wager's gravity.

“Young Master Lu backs the King's academy...”

Mo Beike said.

“I can see it. The Overlord may too. If he realizes Young Master Lu favors the King's academy, what then?”

“If you and the Overlord swapped places, what would you do?”

He turned to Tantai Xuan.

“I'd be furious. The Overlord has been proud his whole life...”

Tantai Xuan replied.

But Mo Beike shook his head.

“The Overlord isn’t that simple. He’d mobilize immediately, storm Yuanchi, crush Great Xuan’s main force, and aim to annihilate the kingdom.”

“He’s suffered too many setbacks from Young Master Lu.”

Mo Beike knew the Overlord’s mind intimately.

Tantai Xuan’s face paled.

Xiliang’s army under the Overlord was beyond Great Xuan’s current strength.

“What should we do?”

Tantai Xuan frowned.

Mo Beike gazed into the swirling snow beyond the walls and inhaled deeply.

“Abandon Yuanchi. Withdraw to the North Prefecture tonight...”

Tantai Xuan's eyes narrowed. Though reluctant, he knew Mo Beike was right. Hesitate now, and escape might become impossible.

He issued orders without wavering.

The entire city sprang into action.

Troops donned armor, and under cover of night and snow, the gates opened. A long column snaked northward.

Swift and decisive, no one faltered.

Great Xuan's soldiers sensed the iron scent of impending battle in the air.

As the army evacuated, citizens lit candles, puzzled by the suddenly empty city.

Yuanchi became a ghost town.

Hooves thundered.

From the imperial capital, a dark tide of troops crushed the snow.

Xiliang scouts swept through Yuanchi, circled once, and reported back.

“Report!”

“Great Xuan’s forces have fully withdrawn from Yuanchi—not a single soldier remains!”

The scout dismounted, kneeling in the snow before the Overlord.

The Overlord reined in, eyes narrowing.

His generals buzzed behind him.

“Feel it?”

The Overlord laughed, lifting his gaze to the distant horizon.

“Pursue!”

He raised a hand and pointed, roaring.

The command rippled through the ranks.

Scouts remounted, galloping ahead, speed building.

Then Xiliang's iron cavalry thundered, the ground quaking as they surged past Yuanchi, following Great Xuan's retreat trail.

As dawn's light tore through the night's clouds...

The earth seemed to awaken, snow gleaming warmly under the sun.

Boom, boom, boom...

Snow trembled; accumulated drifts crashed from trees.

Great Xuan's army heard distant battle cries.

Inside the carriage, Tantai Xuan's face tightened.

He flung back the curtain, stood, and peered afar—where a black sea of troops emerged under dawn's glow, charging with roars.

“Enemy attack!”

Great Xuan generals bellowed.

Xuanwu Guards surged with spirit qi, erupting outward.

Tantai Xuan stood atop the carriage in full armor, madness in his eyes.

“The Giant truly predicted it...”

“The Overlord has guts!”

Teeth gritted, fists clenched, he faced the oncoming Xiliang horde—their bloodlust like a lion rampant on the plains.

“Fight!”

Great Xuan’s army wasn’t dough to be kneaded!

If retreat was impossible, then war it would be!

Great Xuan and Xiliang... a clash was inevitable!

War drums thundered.

Horns blared!

Great Xuan soldiers’ eyes burned with grief and fury, transmuted into battle will.

Driven from Yuanchi only to be hunted—fine, then fight!

The Overlord spurred his horse, black armor gleaming, eyeing the suddenly cohesive Great Xuan forces with a narrowed gaze.

Great Xuan’s troops were indeed elite.

He stared toward their lines.

As if locking eyes with Tantai Xuan atop his war chariot in full regalia.

The Overlord's lips curled.

To kill you, Tantai Xuan, he would do it honorably—shatter Great Xuan's army first, then take your head!

That was the Overlord's way!

He raised his hand.

Behind him, Great Xuan generals and Xiang family troops itched for battle.

“Kill!”

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No hesitation, no mercy. His black armor shone in the dawn as he pointed.

Roar!

Xu Chu bellowed, charging forth, spiked maces whirling.

Xiang family troops and Xiliang cavalry surged.

The snowfield quaked as if struck by an earthquake.

Chapter 226: Li Sansi Enters the Field, Revitalized Situation

Beiluo, West Mountain.

Kong Nanfei's failed tribulation did dampen the cultivators' morale.

Many now understood: cultivation wasn't smooth sailing. Power came with peril—tribulation peril.

Fear and hesitation spread. Heaven Lock had three bolts; even Kong Nanfei, who could manifest a righteous qi river, nearly died.

Ordinary cultivators? Instant death under thunder.

Heaven Lock... perhaps only for geniuses.

They'd settle for Golden Core.

Nie Changqing swept the crowd; said nothing.

To each their path. Heaven Lock's danger visible; not all could choose it.

Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing exchanged glances; stepped into the trial tower.

Continued breakthrough assaults.

Ni Yu shouldered black pot; smacked lips.

Nie Shuang clenched fists; eyes gleamed.

Bai Qingniao's three chicks poked heads; spotted Jiang Li; eyes lit. Earlier saw him but Kong tribulating; no shout.

To Jiang Li; inspected unharmed; stone fell.

Little Phoenix One climbed Bai Qingniao's head; glared Jiang Li.

Jiang Li glanced; mouth twitched.

Never thought glared by chick.

Ni Yu Nie Shuang entered tower.

Ni Yu called Bai Qingniao; ignored; pestered Jiang Li.

Ni Yu pot-top; proud hum; twist entered.

Scene shifted.

Cleared; primitive forest.

Black shadows shot; Ni Yu chin up; grudging eager.

Trial tower third layer.

Shadows halted; masked weird beings Ni Yu knew; mask center hole; cold eyes.

Uniform black pots.

Sat around Ni Yu; she one-hand pot; war intent.

Come!

Death battle!

Posturing.

All sat; herbs appeared Ni Yu; chubby face twitch; fire; alchemy; herbs into pot.

Distant.

Weird beings hand flame; threw pot bottom; blazing.

Alchemy too.

Ni Yu's challenge unique; others kill; hers alchemy rivals.

Win: better pills.

Ordinary Qi Gathering.

Ni Yu gritted.

Failed before; pot-smashed dead.

Swore win; pot-smash back!

Young Master's favored alchemist!

Tower layers talent-based.

Nie Changqing: pig-butcher knife foes; knife intent.

Ning Zhao: cicada-wing sword.

Nie Shuang: bare fists.

Bai Qingniao: chick-rearing.

Tower dug potential; broke shackles.

Beiluo, Lake Heart Isle.

Kong Nanfei woke.

Weak; meridians burning.

Wheelchair snow crush; Lu appeared.

"Regret?"

Lu leaned Thousand Blade; eyed Kong.

"More settling; adapt power; block third bolt..."

Lu.

Kong eyes fluctuated; failed...

Prove self; failed.

Tribulation shattered all; huge blow.

Breakthrough heart risked crush.

Meng Haoran concerned; feared master slump.

Kong lost; no slump.

"Too hasty."

Kong calm.

"Thanks Young Master Lu save..."

Kong cupped hands.

Lu waved: "No thanks me."

"Travel; like Master; tour lands; heart insights; accumulate; Heaven Lock chance."

Lu.

Kong rose; pale; cupped Lu.

Planned.

Pre-leave; found Mo Tianyu; knelt Master grave; solemn bow.

Then Meng left isle; Beiluo.

Post-Kong; Mo knelt grave; pocket three coins; bid Lu.

Carefree; confucian robes hunt; snow vanish.

Isle quiet.

Lu wandered peninsula peach bamboo.

Fingers tap guard.

Kong failed; but instinct: Heaven Lock soon birth.

Beiluo lake.

Little Yinglong mouth ring unopened; supine leaf-like; drifted.

Lu amused.

Hand; dispersed ring.

Little Yinglong mouth flap; eyes bright; flip; wave again!

Ignored lake frolic.

Lu eyed lake bottom.

Faint.

Saw suppressed thunder pearl; inner thunder dragon.

...

Snowy sky.

Steed galloped; crane-cloaked Mo Ju eyed side green-ox Li Sansi.

Li's ox mad run; no slower steed.

Snow slapped Mo Ju face; skin sting.

"Daxuan Xiliang attack capital; Xiliang has Overlord top; Daxuan avoid edge; exit capital; likely Yuan Chi; hurry; Overlord may strike."

Mo Ju horseback analysis.

Li Sansi yawn lazy.

Pocket wood sword; drowsy.

Mo words unclear.

But promised help vs Overlord; no refuse.

Mo Ju sent "Bamboo Leaf Green" Buzhou Peak; favor.

Of course; told only block Overlord; may not beat.

Mo smiled unconcerned; block enough; kill Overlord but Beiluo Young Master...

None.

Sudden.

Ox-back drowsy Li; eyes open.

"Hm?"

"Qi fluctuation; cultivator aura..."

Li.

Mo stunned; cultivation weaker; no sense.

But smart; guessed; thought turn; face change.

"Perhaps..."

Mo ugly.

"Daoist Li; faster."

Mo eyed front; exhale.

...

Snow plain; armies no standoff.

Direct war.

Xiliang cavalry Xiang charged Daxuan.

Tantai Xuan no chariot; hot temper; eyes red.

Drew blade; roar kill.

Led charge enemy.

First Daxuan-Xiliang clash.

First cultivator armies; Xuanwu Xiang; blades qi.

Then cavalries.

War flood; snow mud.

Soon blood dyed; cruel air.

Overlord eyes flicker; Daxuan not weak; border Xirong kills; no less Xiliang; lions biting.

Brutal.

Overlord war chariot; three steeds.

Whip reins; black-manes mad; sped Daxuan.

Demonic qi release; flood destroy; dive.

"War!"

Overlord low.

Overlord move; Xiliang morale soared.

Daxuan pressed.

Tantai red; weak beaten; but bite flesh.

Ruthless.

Today crisis; greatest.

Armies face.

Defeat cascade; stray dogs.

Daxuan withdraw Yuan Chi; no battlefield heart collapse.

Overlord chariot crushed.

None block.

Spirit pressure; chariot pass; common soldiers head low; five full Body Storage unimaginable.

Kong thunder-miserable.

Heaven might.

Kong Body limit; righteous river suppress armies!

Tantai blood armor; eyed chariot speeding Overlord.

"Good Overlord..."

Tantai laughed.

Recall Overlord spare.

Kill openly; armies slay...

Face.

Else earlier; no escape.

Five full vs mortal-strong Tantai; how?

Sudden.

Front.

Xuanwu blocked.

"King! Withdraw!"

Xuanwu roar; lives block; win breath.

Tantai trembled.

Xuanwu front; Overlord slight cheek.

Familiar.

Attacked Mohist city; same.

Now again.

No soft; then no; now less.

Chariot continued.

Overlord sudden roar!

Xuanwu blood mist; flew.

Qi Core no block mighty Overlord.

Chariot.

Mo Beike bags twitch.

Sleeve hand clenched.

Overlord...

Mo powerless; pre-cultivator era; scheme world.

Cultivator era broke cognition.

Now Overlord brute crush.

Tantai die here.

Daxuan done.

Sudden.

Light laugh.

"Overlord... long no see; still... domineering."

Voice battlefield.

Dao robes flew; wood sword horizontal Tantai front.

Qi crisscross; spirit armor front Li Sansi.

Boom!

Chariot Overlord stood.

Three steeds front hooves high; neigh; hot breath.

"Li Sansi."

Overlord unexpected; never thought battlefield Li.

Former Dao Sect first.

First Body Storage.

Tantai saw; not just Overlord; self surprised.

Why here?

Sudden.

Recall Mo Ju; Mo Beike said Mo seek anti-Overlord.

Li Mo found?

World vs Overlord; Li perhaps!

Li aid; Daxuan... match Xiliang!

Daxuan... fight!

Distant.

Mo Ju horse chaos.

Qi surge; no kill; parted; battlefield; Tantai side.

Tantai complex.

Recall torn letter; thought Mo betray flee.

Darkest; Mo sunshine; hope; Daxuan hope.

Mo pant; dismount.

Blood Tantai; exhale.

Good; made.

But complex eyes; Mo stunned; wise; knew identity.

Mo smiled unconcerned.

Know fine.

Much hidden; Master battlefield death; foresaw.

"Lord; post-battle talk."

Mo.

Tantai grabbed hand; solemn pat.

Distant chariot; Overlord frowned.

Never Li here.

"Li Sansi; block king?"

Overlord.

Li wood sword smile: "Owe favor; entrusted..."

Overlord silent.

Said; war.

Gripped Ganqi; chariot leap; black demonic sweep; rush Li.

Li smile; robes flew rush Overlord.

"Long wanted fight; see... first Body breakthrough; how strong!"

Overlord low.

Axe sweep; black edge; ground thick soil!

Li sword ground; bent; qi burst; soil clump.

Collide.

Sudden explode!

Qi waves; blast.

Overlord unmoved.

Li robes hunt.

Cultivators vs same realm...

Tantai true cognition.

Invincible Overlord blocked!

"War!"

Tantai blade; roar.

Daxuan soldiers weapons; violent drink.

Distant; Mo Beike chariot down.

Lifted hem; sped Tantai: "King; desperate unwise..."

Tantai unwilling glance.

"Forget one year; Daxuan Academy."

Mo grave.

Tantai unwilling settled.

Eyed distant Li-entangled Overlord; closed eyes; force calm.

Long.

Exhale; open.

"Good!"

"Withdraw!"

Tantai order.

One year; Mo Ju unclear; but Xiliang fast attack; because.

Daxuan safe withdraw.

No Overlord press; Xiliang strong; hard destroy.

Daxuan withdrew.

Li few moves Overlord; fled; else Overlord Xiang; stay here.

Daxuan ragged retreat.

Overlord no pursue; Li aid unexpected.

Body Storage help; easy Daxuan no.

Overlord sighed.

Heaven intent.

Heaven no Daxuan die; no die.

Overlord back Beiluo; next... train Xiang soldiers.

Lu favor academy.

Overlord disbelieve; train strong army cultivators; crush academy!

Slap Young Master face; expect.

...

Daxuan Xiliang battle; Lu watched.

No intervene.

But Li appear; even Lu slight surprise.

Mo Ju move Li; interesting; how?

Body Storage; dead-end Daxuan revitalized.

Overlord no destroy today; world situation; stable development.

Sudden.

Lu stunned.

System panel pop.

Long silent [Mission]; flashing.

Chapter 227: Brother Ximen, Challenge Boldly!

A gentle lake breeze stirred.

Lu leaned in his wheelchair, bronze cup in hand; liquor swayed, rich aroma wafting.

Before him, the system panel popped.

The long-silent [Mission] tab flickered faintly, as if prompting.

"New mission?"

Lu's gaze shimmered.

Mind shifted.

Sank into [Mission].

"Main Mission: Transform Wuhuang Continent into Wuhuang Great World (Accepted). Current Progress: Low Martial (Evaluation Pending)."

"Explanation: World at change threshold; cultivator era opens; needs brilliant thought collisions; myriad paths ringing."

"Branch Mission 1: Achieve Hundred Schools Contention among cultivators (Progress: Not Started)."

"Branch Mission 2: Weave Hundred Great Paths into plane origin; establish Heavenly Dao (Progress: Not Started)."

Lines of text danced before Lu.

He narrowed eyes.

Beyond familiar main; long-absent branches—two.

Abstract to Lu; hard start.

First: Hundred Schools Contention; easy say, hard do.

Thought collisions; cultivator same.

Control thoughts? Lu no easy.

Many need self-realization.

But clues.

Second puzzled headache.

"Weave paths into origin; create Heavenly Dao?"

Lu inhaled.

Dominating.

Hundred paths unify Heavenly Dao?

Lu thoughtful; knew origin—condensed it; vast power; Lu no underestimate.

Purpose: weave paths; clear roads in weeds; future cultivators follow; their ways.

Lu eyes bright; recalled suppressed Beiluo lake thunder pearl.

From mid-martial Heavenly tribulation; linked origin.

Perhaps start there; inspiration.

Exited interface.

Lu eyed white snowscape.

Bronze cup liquor iced; near solid.

Hand; white flame burned; cup over; warmed.

Not Bone Netherfire; Lu-derived enhanced man-made profound fire.

Not pure; power no less—stronger.

Bone Netherfire no great.

True profound: spark world-burn.

Order violence stability beyond.

Hand flame unnamed; Lu lazy; for Ni Yu post-five full; alchemy.

Now; warm liquor.

Lu smiled.

Sipped; watched lake Little Yinglong splash; water arrows; sky-machine pigeons "coo" chaos.

Island chrysanthemums swayed; peaches bloomed; bamboo rustled.

Idyllic.

...

Li Sansi fled battlefield.

Back green ox; Mo Ju crane-cloaked waited.

Li leaned ox; clutched chest...

"Daoist Li... well?"

Mo Ju eyed.

Li robes tattered; glared; eyed Mo Ju; patted ox; puffed; fine.

Mo Ju nod slight.

Step back; cupped bow.

"Thanks Daoist aid; Daxuan remembers."

Mo serious.

Serious solemn; vs wine Buzhou; blocking Overlord true great.

Li waved; normal.

"Daoist; Beijun two dragon gates; one Buzhou; one Taili Ask-Heaven Peak."

"North Xuan build Daxuan Academy Taili; interest preside; teach juniors?"

"Of course; no short; Buzhou gate open always; Taili dragon gate anytime."

Mo.

Li puffed; smiled; waved.

Mo stunned; understood: "Ju leaves; await reply."

Mo crane light; bold stride away.

Side-eye Mo gone.

Li mouth open; smack; blood gushed; stained snow.

"Finally..."

Li slumped ground.

Panted hot.

"Overlord stronger... five full; nearly killed."

Li exhaled; never five full; first Body; barely three tempered.

"Must cultivate... else surpassed."

Li rose; ox back.

Vanished woods.

...

Daxuan-Xiliang battle; Daxuan defeat flee end.

Grim; but Daxuan... no loss.

Xiliang Overlord; one vs armies.

No extinction hard.

Battle decided future.

Short; no war; long truce.

Li appear; blocked Overlord; signal.

Daxuan Body Storage too.

Outcome uncertain.

Long-watch families clans decided sides.

No side; post-truce no mercy.

Tantai Overlord family-born; knew influence; no uncontrolled.

Families choose; else enemy.

West North Commanderies; long ridge.

"Huangtian Ridge."

West ridge families Xiliang; north Daxuan.

South Commandery public Daxuan; stalemate.

South aid Daxuan; Xiliang hard bite.

Tang Xiansheng sent South Mansion army Daxuan; war harder.

World rare peace.

Split two.

Daxuan Xiliang control.

South near independent.

But Xiliang Great Zhou capital; legitimate; more families.

World temporary stable; undercurrents.

Time; Daxuan Xiliang South frantic cultivate.

Knew cultivator importance.

...

Ximen Xianzhi left Zhongnan; sword case back; north.

Sword Saint Hua Dongliu advice: challenge strong; condense sword intent; reasonable.

Three years no descend; isolated.

Time world walk.

Xiliang-Daxuan result; peace.

Ximen snow-thick official road; pace steady; sensed sword path.

Hand; light twist; sharp; shredded falling snow.

Sudden.

Head up; distant.

Refugee south team; many met.

Capital chaos; refugees normal.

Hm?

Gaze condensed; team figure.

Familiar.

Ximen move; traceless snow; side.

"One divination knows fate."

Ximen eyed bamboo staff banner; five words; grand aura.

"Brother Mo; three years; divination indeed..."

Ximen eyed.

Mo Tianyu shivered team; blocked; head up; surprised.

"Sword Sect... no; Sword Pavilion; seven heroes chief... Ximen Xianzhi."

Mo laughed.

Old acquaintance.

Followed Master; Sword Sect; dealt Ximen.

Then chief; spirited; no less Overlord Li.

Pity three seclusion; near forgotten.

Now descend.

Era changed.

Ximen down.

"Then Brother Mo liked divination; under Master; heart divination; wish fulfilled."

Ximen smile.

Mo face stiff; dim.

"Master no die battle; Tianyu accompany..."

Mo.

Ximen stunned; lips quivered.

"Brother Mo; sorry..."

World changed much; cultivators; hundred sons end.

Seclusion missed much...

"Brother Ximen go why?"

Mo smiled; dim swept; curious Ximen.

"Bottleneck; north challenge strong..."

Ximen serious.

North?

Challenge?

Mo dazed.

"Hear Beiluo Young Master Lu; world first; challenge."

Ximen.

Body confident surge.

Mo mouth twitch; fake beard near fall; confidence where?

"Then; wish Brother Ximen... early go early back."

Mo cupped sincere.

Ximen smiled; odd poor-dressed Mo.

"Brother Mo plans?"

Ximen laugh.

"Me? Foot tour world mountains lakes; feel; enhance divination."

Mo.

"Oh?"

"Great perseverance." Ximen solemn.

World vast; all want see; who persevere feel?

People ties; ties no carefree tour.

"Brother Mo; rare meet; one divination?"

"Recall then; always divine me; never did."

Ximen reminisce; smile.

Mo eyes bright.

Eyed Ximen.

Hear challenge Lu; lazy divine.

But...

Hard refuse.

Then; barely one.

"Old Mo divine Brother Ximen."

Mo light laugh.

Staff snow thrust.

Three strong aura coins hand; fingers; seals.

Tossed.

Coins air spin; snow fall.

"Congrats Brother Ximen."

"Hexagram: challenge great auspicious! Great!"

Mo pocket coins; loud laugh.

Ximen eyes bright.

"Oh? True?"

"Hear Beiluo Young Master mighty..."

Mo pocket; pat Ximen shoulder: "Trust old Mo; divination... professional!"

"Hexagram great auspicious... assured;惊无险."

"Challenge boldly!"

Mo.

Grab banner staff; heaven laugh.

Brush Ximen; refugee tide; steps fast; far.

Ximen inhale; eyed vanish; gaze admire.

Three years; Mo unfathomable; master style.

Three coins; strong feel.

Such level; no false.

Ximen cupped vanish back.

Turn.

Spirited.

Target: Beiluo, Lu Ping'an!

Chapter 228: Ascension... Could It Be a Scam?

The Daxuan-Xiliang war ended; the world's situation temporarily calmed.

The aggressive Xiliang no longer pressed forward but retracted its claws instead.

Yet no one underestimated Xiliang; there was even a faint dread—the quieter it became, the more terrifying.

Perhaps brewing some great horror.

The bet between Xiliang and Daxuan was known to few, so the world enjoyed rare peace, with little uproar.

But the keen sensed a massive undercurrent surging.

...

Daxuan Nation.

Tianhan Pass.

Snowflakes fluttered over Tianhan Pass, sprinkling down, adding a killing chill to the ancient, mottled walls.

Before the pass lay thick white snow—but who knew how many bones were buried beneath?

When the Xirong tribes attacked under their king, countless Beijun soldiers were buried in yellow sand, corpses strewn everywhere.

Every inch of land under Tianhan held stories, blood, and tears.

Though Daxuan had conquered Zhou, defense at Tianhan never slacked.

Tantai Xuan knew well: even if Xirong was exiled to the world's end by Li Sansi and Nie Changqing, they might return.

Tianhan was the border's vital artery—crucial; no negligence.

Formerly Great Zhou's priority; now even more for Daxuan.

Atop the towering walls.

Armored soldiers stood unmoving despite the cold, eyes sharp as eagles.

Snow couldn't block their sight.

West of Tianhan: vast ice-snow plains, then endless yellow-sand desert.

Xirong exiled into that desert.

Desert winds whipped sand.

Suddenly.

An army in sheepskin, lips cracked, emerged leisurely from the sandstorm.

From far to near, their true forms materialized.

They led horses, finally stepping from desert to ice-snow.

The sheepskin-clad knelt, weeping joy, shouting incomprehensible tongues.

One rose, drew his blade, pointed to the sky.

They had crossed the "boundless desert"—the other side truly a vast, bountiful land, as the invading foreigners claimed.

A challenging discovery.

Their king's iron cavalry had conquered the desert's far side; seven ancient kingdoms submitted; king invincible, cavalry too!

They gazed madly, greedily at the snow; some grabbed handfuls, stuffed mouths.

In boundless desert, every drop precious; now water aplenty!

Excitement over, they remounted.

Originally one horse per man.

But desert thirst killed many; remaining couldn't carry all.

Braving snow forward.

Compared to endless sand burying countless bones, this ice-snow seemed endearing.

Eastward.

Finally...

At dawn's glow, they saw a majestic city!

Snowbound, stunned.

The exiled tribes hadn't lied—cross boundless desert, a glorious nation and civilization.

King sent them to verify.

Now proven.

Towering walls; exquisite-armored soldiers atop.

Huge impact for desert-crossers.

In ice-snow, they chattered, even argued.

Long after, final decision.

Picked strongest horse; piled all supplies; selected one to cross back with provisions, tell king!

Rest: probe the world beyond walls.

One cavalry bolted in dawn light, rushed desert, vanished in yellow sand.

Remaining: blood boiling; drew blades and sheaths, crossed before them in pious glory, slow toward Tianhan.

Atop Tianhan.

A Xuanwu Guard leader patrolled.

Sudden sense; hands on icy parapet, stared out.

Tower high; plain all in view.

Saw crawling shadows...

The foreigners.

"Xirong?"

Xuanwu frowned.

Next, palm slammed parapet stone; roar spread walls.

"Enemy attack!"

Words fell.

Walls instantly heated.

Archers drew full, notched in parapet gaps.

Aimed crawling shadows.

Below shadows sensed; startled; unknown foes so keen.

But supplies to the hope-bearer.

No retreat.

Sneak over walls, enter nation; chance survive ice-snow.

Discovered; all or nothing.

Burst speed; dashed to Tianhan base.

They erupted strong qi-blood; surge scattered snow.

"Fire!"

Walls Xuanwu condensed; ordered.

Arrows rained.

Qi-blood dodge; most failed, pierced, fell snow.

Team leader red-eyed, hot breath, charged through arrow veil.

But walls Xuanwu personally drew longbow; qi-arrow.

Whistled.

Leader roared; snow underfoot melted by qi-blood.

Fist met arrow.

Puchi!

Leader overthought; Xuanwu cultivators; arrow even grandmasters wouldn't bare-hand.

Nailed dead below walls; blood dyed snow.

Xuanwu felt odd.

Sent out gate; dragged bodies back Tianhan.

Eyed faces totally different—even from Xirong; blond, blue-eyed.

Xuanwu pupils shrank; sensed unusual.

Hurried secret letter to North Xuan King.

...

Beiluo.

Lake Heart Isle.

Lu unaware of Beijun Tianhan incident.

Couldn't monitor every corner always.

Now pondering mission completion.

Study left dispirited; long-term; short impossible.

Cultivator Hundred Schools: not Lu decree.

Thought collisions; Lu alone no splash.

But sensed: Paint Sect, Haoran Sect, Dao Pavilion, Sword Pavilion... cultivator forces; contention prototype forming.

Second branch: carve hundred paths into plane origin; form Heavenly Dao.

Arduous far.

Lu felt: likely need Wuhuang mid-martial entry to start.

Fingers tapped armrest.

Mind shifted.

Baiyujing pavilion thunder rumbled.

Then Lu on Thousand Blade Chair appeared lake surface.

Bang!

Little Yinglong cannonball-like; wings tucked; shot from water; stream at sky-machine pigeons.

But sensed Lu's gaze; body stiff; wings fanned; stream sucked back.

Dashed; perched dragon gate; posed obedient.

Like drowsy owl.

Lu ignored antics.

Lake parted; Lu sank.

Hovered bottom.

Thunder pearl floated; rune chains bound; array suppressed.

Inside: thunder dragon madly roared.

"This dragon Heavenly tribulation incarnate; represents that mid-martial world's Heavenly Dao—but top-tier mid; far stronger than earliest."

Lu pondered.

Low-key.

Could link top mid origin via tribulation; but absorb to grow Wuhuang difficult.

Attract plane lord notice; Wuhuang at limit; couldn't absorb.

Burst easy.

But top mid origin might inspire: carve hundred paths; form Dao.

Origin: world root; Lu's build root.

Above low martial: every world origin; Lu marveled.

Grade gaps: origin gaps.

Lu curious: high martial, higher origin strength?

Thousand Blade slow.

Hand on pearl.

Dragon angry roar.

Lu calm gaze; eyes lines danced.

Roar weakened; curled ball.

Scene abrupt change.

...

Lu reopened eyes.

Vast pressure; slight pant.

Before: white light wall erect; head up no top; origin huge.

Like Earth round but stand flat all sides.

Lu marveled.

Hand on origin; sudden.

Scene shifted constant; felt veins pulsing.

Each vein: a path.

Thick or thin: walkers' strength!

Origin paths too many...

Dense crisscross.

Sudden sense.

Released hand.

Distant lights burst.

Lu stunned; brows raised; puzzled; familiar auras.

"Why no plane lord?"

Unexpected; his presence should draw lord.

Origin realm: lords only.

"You?"

Du Longyang saw Lu; eyes reddened!

Minds Heavenly-pulled to origin realm; unexpected familiar figure.

Though no Tianxu Prince body; aura, form, wheelchair...

Thief who stole tribulation!

Du Longyang: former Martial Emperor City tribulator.

Lu swept: others.

One-armed elder; short knife back; sharp curious gaze.

Bead-wearing ascetic monk.

Monk side: crowned; graceful stunning; red robe float; white legs faint; noble empress.

Besides: fire-eyed glaring pale thin: former consciousness-occupied Tianxu Prince.

Lu brows: world tops.

Extreme auras.

Lord hidden among?

Or...

Head to huge origin.

Eyes lines.

Origin transparent.

Lu narrowed: inside huge eyeball stared dead at him.

Distant.

Du sudden strike.

Origin vital; thief ill intent.

"Kill!"

Du spear; space shattered.

Side Tianxu mouth; tongue spat 6cm sword; flick; shot Lu.

One-armed grave; swung short; knife qi sky-cleaving blade.

Ascetic palms together; punch.

Gold light; supreme Buddha aura.

"Empress! Waiting for?! Strike!"

Du eyed noble woman like watching play; roared.

Empress smiled.

Odd glance Lu; hand; red robe; silver needles shot.

Five struck; leave Lu.

Origin realm; injury feedback body.

No mercy.

Lu smiled.

Fingers together; dialed Thousand Blade.

Myriad silver bloomed; Phoenix Feather led; round shield.

Boom boom boom!

Five attacks shield.

Shield unmoved; dust rippled.

Lu eyed origin.

Hand; slender pinch seal.

Runes emerged; carved array; flicked into origin.

Next.

Stored Thousand Phoenix; sat.

Smiled at five.

Form translucent water; faded evaporated.

Du grave.

"Who... exactly?"

Ascetic palms: "Come go shadowless... ghostly."

"Perhaps... not our world."

Empress red robe: "Immortal realm?"

"Du martial shattered void; blocked by immortal; ascension... scam?"

One-armed sneered.

"Immortal or man; next appear; leave him!"

...

Beiluo Lake Heart.

Lu opened; mind origin return.

Glance pearl dragon; curled tighter.

Dragon gate Little Yinglong saw cowardice; wings flapped mock.

But...

Lu gaze shifted to him.

Origin return; pressure lingered; Little laugh cut; wings instinctive tucked.

Chapter 229: Young Lord Lu... Dare You Accept My Challenge?

Lu was indeed terrifying at this moment. Fresh from returning from the Origin Realm, he carried an overwhelming, suffocating pressure that made the air itself seem heavy.

Little Yinglong folded its fleshy wings tight against its body, looking unusually docile and well-behaved.

Lu slowly exhaled, his mind replaying the scenes from before.

There was something strange about the origin of this top-tier martial world.

When he had appeared in the Origin Realm, the Plane Lord never showed himself. In the past, that same effeminate man with the orchid finger gesture had sensed Lu's arrival the instant he stepped in.

So why had he stayed hidden this time?

Lu frowned in thought.

Had the Plane Lord failed to detect him?

Impossible. If he hadn't noticed, he wouldn't have sent five powerhouses to deal with Lu.

Clearly, the Plane Lord was either tied up with something... or simply unable to act.

Lu suddenly recalled that enormous eyeball floating in the origin, watching him like a silent predator.

"Could it be... the Plane Lord has fused completely with the origin?"

"Become one with the Heavenly Dao itself?"

That possibility felt all too real.

Shaking off further speculation, Lu figured this trip hadn't been fruitless; at the very least, he now had some new ideas about constructing his own Heavenly Dao.

Leaning back in his wheelchair, he circulated the Thunder Movement Art. Arcs of lightning crackled faintly in the air around him as he returned to the second floor of the White Jade Capital pavilion. He took out the Spirit Pressure Chessboard and began setting up a game, using the mental strain to temper and restore the strength of his soul.

The waters of Beiluo Lake rippled once more, quietly sealing away the thunder pearl beneath its surface.

...

Inside the Purple-Gold Palace.

Overlord rubbed the spot between his brows, staring at the mountain of memorials and secret reports cluttering his desk.

He glanced at them and immediately lost interest.

These things gave him a splitting headache.

Day after day of nothing but paperwork—he was starting to lose his mind.

He had transferred Xu Chu back to the Western Prefecture to guard Xiliang. Recent intelligence suggested that, with the main forces gone, the suppressed Peacock Kingdom and Ghost Tribe were growing restless again. They'd been colluding with opportunistic lowlives, stirring up all kinds of dirty trouble under the table. It infuriated Overlord.

So he sent Xu Chu straight back to crush every last one of them.

The Western Prefecture was the foundation of his Xiliang Kingdom—he would not tolerate any cracks appearing there.

As for the Peacock Kingdom and the Ghost Tribe, the last war had already broken their spines. They were no longer a threat.

Overlord rubbed his temples again.

Suddenly, the crisp sound of footsteps echoed through the hall.

His brow furrowed, a complicated look flashing across his face. With a sigh, he vanished from the spot.

Luo Mingsang swept into the palace in a long dress. Seeing the empty hall, a trace of sorrow flickered in her eyes.

She gathered her skirt and walked to the desk. The cushion still held the faint warmth of the man who had just been sitting there.

“Hiding from me again?” she murmured, her gaze dimming.

Yet soon enough she began tidying the messy papers on the desk, carefully hanging the brush back on its rack.

Outside the palace, Overlord mounted his black-maned horse and galloped straight toward Beiluo City without looking back.

Racing through the wind and snow calmed the irritation burning in his chest.

He was heading to the Trial Tower.

Lu had once said the tower was open to every cultivator under heaven—as long as you reached the ninth stage of Qi Core, you were welcome to try.

That had lit a fire in Overlord's heart.

He'd planned to finish royal affairs first and then challenge the tower, but... the work never ended.

Not long after Overlord entered the city, a lone figure appeared on the endless snowy plain beyond Beiluo City's gates.

He walked unhurriedly—elegant, dashing, a yellow pear-wood sword case slung across his back containing two blades: Morning Chrysanthemum and Blue Peach.

It was none other than Ximen Xianzhi, the young man Mo Tianyu had read fortunes for.

“So this is Beiluo City...”

“Shrouded in drifting spiritual energy, like a blessed land of immortals.”

Ximen Xianzhi sighed in admiration.

In three years, this was his first time leaving the mountain. Traveling all the way from the Southern Prefecture to the north, he had seen refugees, witnessed suffering, and somehow felt a new clarity blooming inside him.

His master had been right—nothing beats walking the world with your own feet.

Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand li.

Thinking of Mo Tianyu’s divination a few days ago, he couldn’t help but smile.

Confidence surged through him.

“My master sent me to challenge the strongest... I hope through these battles I can condense my own Sword Intent.”

“Brother Mo even read my fortune—great auspiciousness.”

“This journey will surely bear fruit.”

Ximen Xianzhi laughed lightly.

He didn't suspect Mo Tianyu of lying. A man like the chief disciple of the Confucian school—wild, unrestrained—would never stoop to deception.

Brushing snow from his robes, he fixed his gaze ahead and strode resolutely toward the city gates.

Amid the swirling snow, two more figures appeared.

One carried a scholar's book chest on his back, several painted scrolls tucked inside. His blue robes flapped fiercely in the wind.

Beside him walked a young woman in a red cloak, an umbrella raised against the snow, another scroll slung across her shoulder as she kept pace.

“Wonderful Words, that’s Beiluo City up ahead.”

Sima Qingshan stood in the blizzard, pointing toward the distant, majestic walls.

An Miaoyu tilted her oil-paper umbrella. Black hair danced around her serene face, eyes bright with longing.

What cultivator in the world didn’t dream of Beiluo? Of White Jade Capital?

The two pressed on and soon vanished into the city as well.

...

Ximen Xianzhi passed the gate guards’ inspection with ease and stepped inside.

The bustling streets and towering structures left him dazzled. Then he looked up—and his breath caught.

The White Jade Tower pierced the clouds, its full splendor hidden from outside by the spiritual mist. Only now, within the city, did its overwhelming presence hit him like a physical blow.

Luo Cheng sensed something extraordinary about the newcomer. Though slender, the faint aura rolling off Ximen Xianzhi made even Luo Cheng's heart skip. Assuming he was here for the tower, Luo Cheng personally escorted him to its base.

From a distance, Lü Dongxuan and Gongsun Yu, who were brewing tea, froze mid-sip.

How could they not recognize Ximen Xianzhi?

The treasured disciple of that old sword freak Hua Dongliu—utterly obsessed with the blade.

Ximen Xianzhi spotted them too and immediately bowed.

“Greetings, seniors.”

“That old coot Hua Dongliu finally let you out of the mountain, eh? Good! Young people need to see the world. Staying holed up like that old fool will get you nowhere—decades of bitter training still can't match a single flash of real genius.”

Lü Dongxuan chuckled and took a loud slurp of tea.

“Thank you for the guidance, senior.”

Ximen Xianzhi's manners were impeccable.

"He actually gave you both swords?"

Gongsun Yu's eyes widened at the twin blades on Ximen Xianzhi's back. Hua Dongliu must truly favor this disciple to hand over two yellow-tier spirit swords.

"My master saw I'd hit a bottleneck and instructed me to come to Beiluo to challenge the strongest, hoping the pressure would force a breakthrough."

Ximen Xianzhi smiled.

"Makes sense. Swordsmen thrive in battle. The more you fight, the more you understand."

Lü Dongxuan toyed with the thick gold chain around his neck.

"You're here for Jing Yue, right?"

"That kid grasped Sword Intent in one go, stepped into the Body Storage Realm, and then tempered himself in the Trial Tower. His combat power now... well, let's just say you'd be at a disadvantage."

Lü Dongxuan assumed the obvious target.

Though Jing Yue used to be the least remarkable of the Seven Sword Champions, things had changed.

“Your swords are fine blades, but they can’t compare to Jing Yue’s Jingtian.”

Gongsun Yu sipped his tea and glanced at the sword case.

Ximen Xianzhi blinked, momentarily speechless, then shook his head.

“No.”

“The one I’ve come to challenge isn’t Jing Yue...”

“I’ve heard the Young Lord Lu of Beiluo is the strongest in the world today. Naturally, I must challenge the strongest.”

The moment the words left his mouth, Lü Dongxuan and Gongsun Yu froze.

Not just them—every cultivator sitting cross-legged around the Trial Tower whipped their heads around, eyes wide with disbelief.

Was this guy insane?

Challenging Young Lord Lu?

Where did he get that kind of confidence?

Even the Hundred Schools of Philosophy had been crushed back then...

True, the cultivation environment was different now, but still—this was beyond bold.

Luo Cheng, who had brought Ximen Xianzhi over, raised an eyebrow.

“You’re serious?”

“The Young Lord isn’t exactly known for holding back. This could end very badly for you.”

He couldn't just watch a polite young man walk to his doom.

Ximen Xianzhi cupped his fists toward Luo Cheng in thanks, but his smile remained confident.

"It's fine. I have faith."

He remembered Mo Tianyu's reading. Though he wouldn't rely on it blindly, those words had kindled real belief.

Seeing the determination in his eyes, Luo Cheng said nothing more.

"Xianzhi... did old Hua really tell you to challenge Young Lord Lu?"

Lü Dongxuan's hand trembled around his gold chain.

Gongsun Yu stared at him like he'd grown a second head.

"Yes. My master told me to challenge the strongest!"

Ximen Xianzhi straightened, a surging aura beginning to radiate from him.

...

Southern Prefecture, Mount Zhongnan, Sword Pavilion.

Sword Saint Hua Dongliu sat cross-legged on a slab of bluestone, meditating on sword momentum—when suddenly his eyes snapped open.

The wrinkles on his aged face twitched.

He clutched his chest, an inexplicable pang tightening his heart.

“I only told Xianzhi to challenge Jing Yue and Nie Changqing... there shouldn’t be any real danger, right?”

“Why do I feel so uneasy...?”

...

Inside the Trial Tower.

Jing Yue stormed out, face dark—he'd failed on the fourth floor again.

The moment he stepped outside, he spotted a familiar figure.

“Senior Brother Ximen?”

Shock quickly turned to delight.

Though his relationship with the sword sect was rocky, Ximen Xianzhi had always been the exception. The man lived for the sword and nothing else; Jing Yue had once sought his guidance and earned genuine respect.

“Little Jing.”

Ximen Xianzhi turned, saw Jing Yue, and smiled warmly.

Three years apart—meeting again stirred something in both of them.

His heart trembled. Morning Chrysanthemum slid from its sheath with a ringing hum. Two fingers brushed the blade as he flicked it toward Jing Yue in a streak of light.

Jing Yue's eyes narrowed.

Jingtian remained sheathed on his back.

He raised a sword finger and tapped the air lightly.

Boom!

Sword qi exploded outward in a storm of pressure.

“Senior Brother... you've stepped into Body Storage?!”

Jing Yue was stunned.

Three years in seclusion on the mountain, and Ximen Xianzhi had broken through too? This was genius.

“Jing Yue, talk some sense into him—he came to Beiluo to challenge the Young Lord!”

Lü Dongxuan called out.

Jing Yue, who had been gathering sword intent to show off, nearly choked.

“What?!”

His face darkened further.

Yet Ximen Xianzhi merely waved a hand.

“No need to persuade me. I know what I’m doing.”

He sheathed his sword with a soft laugh.

Jing Yue was strong, but unless Ximen unleashed his Light Sword Art, the pressure wasn’t enough.

“Senior Brother Ximen, think this through...”

That was all Jing Yue could manage.

As the Young Lord's favorite "cub," he knew one thing for certain—Ximen Xianzhi didn't have the slightest clue what he was walking into.

But Ximen Xianzhi only smiled wider, brimming with confidence. He would challenge the strongest—no one else.

Besides, Mo Tianyu had read great auspiciousness. With that man's terrifying cultivation, the divination had to hold weight.

Of course, he wouldn't grow careless just because of a fortune. Losing through arrogance would be unforgivable.

Overlord, who had been about to enter the Trial Tower, overheard and fell silent.

Wasn't this the clueless sword idiot from the Sword Pavilion?

His first trip down the mountain and he picks Lu Ping'an to fight?

The kid's got some guts.

Ximen Xianzhi ignored everyone's warnings. A swordsman must fear no enemy.

He was only one step away from condensing his own Sword Intent...

This earth-shaking battle would be the pressure he needed.

He left the western district and headed straight for Beiluo Lake.

Crowds exchanged helpless glances.

Lü Dongxuan and the others gave up trying to talk sense into him and simply followed at a distance.

Ximen Xianzhi walked alone, sword on his back.

With every step, the budding Sword Intent within him grew sharper.

On the main street, Sima Qingshan, book chest on his back, caught sight of the commotion and paused.

“Master, what’s going on?”

An Miaoyu watched the growing crowd with curiosity.

Sima Qingshan didn't know either, so he joined the flow of people.

Spotting Jing Yue, he pulled him aside for answers.

“Challenging Young Lord Lu?”

“This man... is truly fearless.”

Sima Qingshan sighed in awe.

The name Ximen Xianzhi was unfamiliar to the younger generation, but to the old monsters of the Hundred Schools era, it carried thunderous weight.

Once a heaven-sent genius who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Overlord and Li Sansi.

At the shores of Beiluo Lake, the crowd halted.

Ximen Xianzhi felt it immediately—an immense pressure rolling off the lake like some ancient beast crouched beneath the surface.

Even from this distance, the aura was suffocating.

“So strong!”

“I haven’t even gotten close yet... and it already feels this overwhelming!”

The swords in his case trembled.

With a flick of his finger, one blade shot free and hovered above the water.

Ximen Xianzhi stood tall, hands clasped behind his back, then leaped—landing lightly on the flat of the blade. He rode it across the lake, dashing and carefree, sword surfing deeper into the misty heart of Beiluo Lake.

On the shore, everyone squinted toward the island that seemed to radiate predatory menace.

Jing Yue clutched Jingtian, watching Ximen Xianzhi glide in with effortless grace, and could only sigh helplessly.

“I just hope the Young Lord goes easy on him...”

Ximen Xianzhi laughed atop his flying sword.

Body Storage Realm aura erupted. A vortex of spiritual energy swirled above his head.

His eyes blazed. He raised a hand, and the very light around him bent and twisted.

Condensing rays into a blade of pure radiance!

“I am Ximen Xianzhi of the Sword Pavilion!”

“Young Lord Lu... dare you accept my challenge!”

Chapter 230: Who Was the Last One Planted in the Ground?

Beiluo.

Lake Heart Isle.

Lu sat in his Thousand Blade Chair, arranging a chess game to restore soul strength.

Little Yinglong spouted water, frolicking happily with the sky-machine pigeons.

Suddenly.

Lu's eyes flickered mid-move.

He placed a piece; soft clack against the board.

Head up; calm gaze pierced the spirit qi mist outside the isle.

Saw Ximen Xianzhi gliding on a sword.

"Young Master Lu, dare to fight!"

Ximen hands behind; robes hunting; confident; swordsman arrogance.

Lu knew him well—taught his light sword method.

But challenging on Beiluo Lake...

Lu speechless.

Who gave courage?

Sword Saint Hua Dongliu?

Didn't matter.

"Long since anyone dared challenge me."

Lu leaned back; gaze shimmered; smile half-smile.

Ximen like lost goose; plunged mist; knew Lu's might—world first; none underestimate.

Full power first strike.

Boom!

Sword underfoot shook water; lake near boil.

Ximen soared.

Two fingers together; eyes brilliant; light condensed sword!

Beiluo Lake dimmed; Ximen grasped twisting light sword.

Huge; slashed at Baiyujing pavilion figure.

Fast; lake cleaved.

Body Storage peak strike; power no joke.

Beiluo lakeside.

Onlookers condensed.

Ximen's move unexpected; even Jing Yue, Nie Changqing serious.

Pity...

Jing Yue shook head.

Far short.

Ximen long secluded; unaware Young Master's terror.

Crowd Overlord sneered.

This level; can't breach his defense; challenge monster Lu Ping'an...

Sword fanatic; truly mad.

Isle.

Lu laughed.

Not loud; spread lake; ripples.

"Such strength... challenge this Young Master; insult?"

Flat words; clamor stilled.

Waves; mist; frozen.

Ximen chilled; vast pressure; breathless; body near burst.

Head up; stared pavilion sitter.

Light sword fearless slash.

Pavilion.

Lu two fingers; light clamp.

Ximen light sword exploded; light points.

Ximen pupils shrank.

Lu wheelchair; one finger remote point.

Ximen danger surge.

Low roar.

Foot "Morning Chrysanthemum" sword rose; gripped.

But...

Ant shaking tree.

Crack...

Lu light point.

Morning Chrysanthemum shattered.

Fragments grazed cheek; blood.

Lu finger forward point.

Dong!

Ximen dazed; terrible impact.

Lake exploded; finger shockwave; mist torn.

Hit Ximen.

Ximen gritted; blood cough; back Green Peach sword unsheathed; block.

But...

Shockwave; Green Peach shattered fragments.

Ximen giant force; endless blood.

Head blank...

Bang!

Blast.

Ximen blasted fly; lake out; lakeside saw mist enter 3-4 seconds; fly out; faces odd.

Ximen arced; spun.

Overlord etc eyes flicker; thrill.

Shot chase.

Ximen flew ten li street.

Finally...

Smashed Beiluo wall.

Bang!

Huge sound.

Ximen embedded wall.

Wall top.

Guards stunned.

Down; eyed embedded; odd curious.

Ximen sword heart near collapse; dazed gloomy sky; snow.

Body Storage... top realm?

Why...

Ant-like?

Ximen confused; hard fight loss; no confusion; fought before.

Now... what?

Lu one finger...

Pinned wall; shattered Hua's two swords.

Ximen depressed; urge cry.

Young Master Lu beyond Body Storage!

Absolute gap; despair.

Challenge strong right.

Pressure breakthrough.

But no crush; else mindset shatter.

Recalled Mo Tianyu hexagram.

Unwilling; where "great auspicious"?

Isle.

Lu smiled.

Palm open; void grab.

Wall Ximen pupils shrank; fear.

Not over?

Boom!

Huge suction isle.

Ximen pried wall; ten li street; mist isle.

Too fast; blur.

Clear.

Ximen body stuffed earth...

Tight; breathless despair.

Buried; head out.

Immobile; finger no.

Ximen blank.

Planted like scallion?

Baiyujing.

Lu unconcerned; bronze cup sip; breeze.

Long no scallion plant; skill intact.

Lakeside boat; slow.

Lü Dongxuan Jing Yue lone boat isle.

Saw head-out Ximen; faces twitch.

Jing familiar; lips purse.

Recalled Mo Tianyu planted.

Without daily talk; Mo lose hope.

Now Ximen.

Pitiful.

Jing head shake; back Jing Tian sword to Ximen.

"Brother Ximen... told no challenge Young Master... wouldn't listen."

"Luck Young Master kind; no palm kill; just plant; for Sword Pavilion lord face... lord pull; live."

"Last planted... Master's chief disciple Mo Tianyu; Master came pull."

"To save Mo; heart broken..."

"Brother; accompany? Talk? Say early; else no know."

Jing squatted; chattered.

Missed Ximen lifeless.

Truth; tears.

Lü Dongxuan pity.

Miserable...

"Xianzhi; challenge courage; but Heaven Lock first..."

"Body Storage challenge; nonsense?"

"Hua old unreliable; dislike; send nonsense."

Lü.

Ximen silent.

Lü Jing saw planted; relieved.

Planted: no kill intent.

Else Young Master temper; Ximen no three seconds.

"You idle?"

Sudden.

Lu flat pavilion.

Chattering Jing jumped.

Lü hand rub; full smile.

"Long; no Heaven Lock; disappointed."

Lu tone neutral.

Jing tight.

Not favored child?!

"Young Master; Jing insight; trial tower!"

Jing.

Turn; Jing Tian unsheathed; sword light; over lake.

Lü smiled; boat; drifted vanish.

Isle quiet.

Lu chess; breeze.

Ximen ignore; new scenery.

Morning chrysanthemum green peach under; head out; desolate.

Sudden.

Ximen head heavy.

Something atop.

Tail down; swayed eyes.

Little Yinglong curious circle head play.

Mouth pout; "zi" water arrow face.

Pain; tears near.

He... miserable.

Mo Tianyu... next meet; blades blind; life death no blame!

But buried.

Heart quiet.

Isle breeze; bamboo rustle; restless calm.

Eyed pavilion chess idle lonely; transcendent; immortal; admire.

Ximen challenge Lu; outcome obvious.

No waves.

Curious fate; entered isle; no out; perhaps peaceful.

Sima Qingshan head shake smile.

Side umbrella An Miaoyu lips purse; shock.

"Rumor Young Master bad temper; today... true."

An.

"Miaoyu wrong; today mild."

"Weak challenge strong; authority provoke; death self; besides alive."

Sima.

An stunned: "Alive?"

"Breath remains..." Sima.

"Master; Ximen strong? Vs you...?"

An curious; umbrella; red cloak light.

Sima book box; smile.

"Even; I no kill."

"Go; trial tower; after; visit Young Master."

Sima no more.

Two West Mountain.

West Mountain.

Trial tower base.

Figures gather.

Overlord Jing Yue Sima entered tower.

Isle.

Lu piece board; gaze condensed.

Head; white jade tower; clouds vortex top.

Overlord Nie Changqing Ning Zhao Sima Heaven Lock hopes; tower.

This time; Heaven Lock birth?

Lu thought.

Eyed buried head Ximen; thoughtful.

Weak challenge strong; progress.

Heaven Lock enter; Overlord Nie etc; unless challenge him; no pressure foes.

Today after; few dare.

Need pressure.

Body Storage; wanderers pressure; faster cultivate.

Heaven Lock; pressure where?

Lu rail listen snow.

Ximen challenge; inspiration.

Fingers tap; eyes bright; thought.

Mind; preaching platform.

Pressure; bold idea.