

Starlit Path 251

Chapter 251: Zhu Long's Divine Ability, Little Yinglong Gets Beaten

Beneath White Jade Capital, the Heavenly Secrets Pavilion issued another Heavenly Secrets Decree.

It announced to the world that White Jade Capital had opened a Scripture Tower with ten thousand cultivation volumes—accessible for one month only.

The world erupted.

Cultivators abandoned their territories, rushing to Beiluo.

In a blessed grotto in South Prefecture, a small tower stood.

A blue-robed man rolled sleeves, painting. Strokes birthed lifelike images—a inked tiger, infused with spiritual energy.

He flicked the brush; the tiger leaped from paper, roaring across the clearing.

A red-cloaked girl painted elsewhere, seated on bamboo, fine brush hooking delicate lines—mountains, rivers; faint water sounds.

Sunset ended their practice.

"Young Lord Lu opened the tower with myriad texts. To Beiluo—for curiosity."

Sima Qingshan washed hands, to An Miaoyu finishing her final stroke.

She puffed cheeks, drying ink.

"Cultivation in books?"

"Cultivation is knowledge—recordable, like philosophers' treatises."

An Miaoyu half-understood.

"Perfect. Miaoyu, Qi Core peak—enter trial tower, consolidate, attempt Body Storage."

She nodded gravely.

Flowers bloomed.

Blue-robe with book box, girl red-cloaked with parasol—tower folded into scroll.

Down mountain to dragon gate.

Not just them—Tang Yimo and others at forbidden zone sensed gravity.

Young Lord Lu's open tower—one month.

No hesitation—rushed Beiluo.

No trap fears—Lu needed no schemes to kill.

Cultivators converged.

World expanded—journeys longer.

Dragon gate holders faster; others trekked.

Beiluo peak base.

Mo Beike in hat, wooden staff.

Heavy bags twitched.

Visited factions, invited instructors for Great Xuan Academy.

Target: Beiluo, White Jade Capital.

One instructor—profound for academy.

Caught tower opening—came.

Beiluo White Jade Capital—world focus.

Countless arrived; dragon gates spewed experts.

...

Little Yinglong lunged.

At vines—body swelled to hill, wings eclipsing sky.

Not Heavenly Lock—lazy—but dragon species, cross-realm no issue.

Claw smashed—vines snapped.

More erupted from forests.

Zhu Long moved.

Mini-Lu stopped.

"Little guy's experience lacking—perfect training."

Zhu Long lashes trembled, nodded.

Little Yinglong thrilled, golden scales noble—claw exploded air.

Vines fell.

Huge but agile—dodged piercing vines, twisting mid-air.

Water spiritual energy gathered—arrows sharpened to ice blades, pinning vines.

Proud, wings flapped—charged valley.

Boom!

Vines formed fist—smashed him flying, ball-like, skidding far.

Zhu Long lashes trembled.

Mini-Lu brow raised.

Valley shrieked—sound waves exploded walls, rocks detonating.

Little Yinglong rose, bared teeth—aura surged.

Angry!

Tail whipped—charged again.

Fist—flew, same spot, same way.

Zhu Long speechless; mini-Lu forehead-palmed.

Little Yinglong realized—spat torrent, clashing fist.

Vines scattered, snaked through water—bound him.

Pulled in.

Fierce at first.

Panicked.

Whimpered to Zhu Long, mini-Lu.

"Lesson—motivation. No more water-shooting pigeons?"

Lu smiled at deflation.

Zhu Long leaned, shot forward.

Mini-Lu floated stationary.

Glanced back—big shot approaching.

Normal—commotion unnoticed? Sect leader watered-down.

Mini-Lu drifted, blocked valley.

Training for them.

Back to Beiluo—train Little Yinglong properly, or raise idiot dragon.

Boom!

Zhu Long fast—closed eyes, sensed all.

Vines shot—spun high, shredding.

Landed, pressed down.

Pressure snapped vines.

Bindings exploded; Little Yinglong shrank, flapped behind her.

Vines ocean.

Formed face—Li Sansi.

Dark cave.

Li Sansi incredulous at surrounded Zhu Long.

Female laugh: "Unbelievable—stronger foundations. Earlier her... Nascent, even ascension!"

Joy, regret.

Chose him—can't switch.

Can't have—destroy!

Golden Core now, Nascent later—trouble.

Boom!

Valley shook.

"What?"

Li roared.

"Kill her."

Controlled—vines burst, charged out.

Zhu Long expressionless at vine-Li face.

Bent knees—launched.

Boom!

Vines exploded.

Shriek—figure collided.

Mini-Lu afar brow raised.

"Li Sansi?"

"Possessed..."

Figure: Li Sansi, tattered robes, vine armor—blades clanging.

"Source aura..."

Mini-Lu surprised—woman pre-death Infant Transformation like Du Longyang.

Li Sansi eerie, unrecognizing—swollen, twisted.

Human? Ghost?

Aura stronger.

Little Yinglong on shoulder fierce—can't show cowardice.

Zhu Long calm.

Felt cold hunter gaze.

"Quick battle."

Mini-Lu afar.

Zhu Long nodded—sensed approaching power.

"Arrogant..."

Twisted Li Sansi sharp.

Palms slammed ground.

Earth writhed.

Vines erupted, weaving cage—no escape.

Compressed...

To crush.

"Stop!"

Mind roar—powerless.

Watched.

Suddenly.

Light from cage.

First, second...

Trembled—exploded, energy roaring.

Metal-tough vines—shattered.

Li Sansi pressing ground—smile froze.

Center: girl lashes trembled, lids lifted.

Opened...

One black, one white pupil!

Boom!

Terror pressure—annihilation.

Possessed Li Sansi palms forward.

Ground exploded.

Vines stacked—vine door.

Cracked under gaze.

"Shatter core! Now!"

Shriek in mind.

Li Sansi stunned, mad laugh.

"Shatter your ass!"

Resisted fiercely—woman couldn't fuse.

Boom!

Vine-covered swallowed in light.

Explosions.

Vines gone.

Light faded...

Li Sansi broken body fell.

Zhu Long panted, closed eyes.

Little Yinglong stunned...

Strong!

Mini-Lu awed—stronger Zhu Long, terrifying pupil art.

Divine ability—hers. Grown: eye open, invert black-white, swap sun-moon.

Zhu Long closed, to smoking Li Sansi.

Hand out.

Grabbed head, dragged to Lu.

Mini-Lu floated.

Sensed mind struggle—patted skull.

"Behave."

Woman quiet—felt invasion threat.

Pat—array bound head.

Woman caged; Li Sansi fainted.

"Go."

Mini-Lu glanced out.

Zhu Long nodded—sensed speed—pinched head, raced out.

Suddenly!

Aura exploded!

"Stop!"

"Leave him!"

Roar with blade intent.

Sharp—cut air.

Distant slash—bisect valley.

Zhu Long frowned—pressure.

But...

Chessboard shadows rose.

Piece fell—clack.

Blade qi in board—shattered.

Chapter 252: Don't Be Fooled by the Divination Before You

A massive chessboard phantom materialized from thin air. The moment the terrifying blade qi entered its range, it instantly shattered.

Beyond the board's edge, a figure hovered silently, not stepping in—wary, solemn.

Ye Shoudao's black robes whipped; empty sleeve of his severed arm fluttered. Weathered, rugged face; one hand gripped a broad blade, qi lashing voids like whips.

"Your Excellency, the demoness possesses this youth's body to break her shackles and ascend further. If she escapes or succeeds, endless calamity."

Ye Shoudao said.

He stared across the board—knew who intervened.

The mystery who stole Du Longyang's tribulation.

Who warned Absolute Blade Nascent Souls off.

Now returned.

Ye Shoudao knew not his location.

But words met silence—ignored!

Face chilled.

One-handed slash.

Qi waves surged, overwhelming.

Wave upon wave!

Seven slashes—torrents!

"Stacking Waves!"

Low roar.

Boom!

Spirit Pressure Chessboard phantom trembled, near collapse.

Yet.

Faint laugh within.

Then—piece fall.

Clack!

Ye Shoudao's waves exploded.

Board vanished.

He hovered, staring empty air—trouble.

Never expected the valley-sealed demoness to possess for escape.

Eyes rippled long; retreated, vanished.

...

Beiluo.

Lake Heart Island.

Lu leaned in wheelchair, sipped plum wine, calm.

Collected Spirit Pressure pieces into box.

Sensed bustling Beiluo City.

Pilgrims converged.

Lake: boats queued for Scripture Tower.

First entrant discovered cultivation methods, battle arts—madness.

Methods no secret, but myriad varieties—choices galore.

Sought fits.

Battle skills—for martial-era stuck cultivators, boon.

Tower packed daily.

Some found matches—studied obsessively.

Greedy memorized—to transcribe post-exit.

But leaving: memories wiped clean.

Lü Dongxuan ignored order.

No one dared violate White Jade Capital rules.

Fished idly.

Mo Beike arrived.

Lu Changkong greeted; long talk.

Lu secluded—no disturb.

Entered tower.

New world—immersed, lost.

Boom!

Dragon gate.

Uproar.

Little Yinglong bounced like ball, splashing waves.

Lü Dongxuan readied for fresh grilled fish.

Yellow streak—fish gone.

Fumed—naughty dragon back.

Zhu Long emerged, pinching Li Sansi's head, stepping out.

Lü stunned.

Li Sansi's misery—hiss.

Forbidden zone so perilous?

Li Sansi, soon after—thus?

"To island."

Lu's voice.

Zhu Long dragged, hesitant—boarded.

Distant: Little Yinglong gnawed fish, feigning presence.

"Turn you to grilled fish?"

Island cough.

Stiffened—swallowed whole, bones crunched—reluctant to island.

Island.

Comatose Li Sansi wretched—wounds everywhere, tortured.

Zhu Long closed eyes, restrained aside.

Wheelchair rolled.

Lu on Thousand Blades, approached.

Glanced Li Sansi, Zhu Long, finally Little Yinglong.

Wings flapped, innocent grin.

Lu smiled.

Raised hand.

Three spirit rings bound Little Yinglong.

Face changed—struggled.

"Your punishment. Escape daily—play. Fail—stay."

Smiled.

Stunned—rolled like ball.

Rings not strong—push limits to break.

Daily intensify.

Must strengthen—neighbor Tailong's little azure dragon nearly beats him.

Angry—strained, face yellow to purple—failed.

Rage, despair, acceptance...

Gave up, lay, legs up, claws twitched—played joyfully.

Lu: ...

Hopeless dragon.

Sought freedom? Self-amused with paw!

Iron not steel.

Added function.

No escape—rings tighten.

Doubt he'd idle to death.

Ignored.

To Zhu Long.

Lips thin, uneasy.

Pitiful—scolding withheld.

"Li Sansi—no concern."

"Train hard."

Obedient nod.

Relieved—dashed to gate, vanished.

Afraid reversal.

Finally Li Sansi.

Raft.

Lü Dongxuan conical hat, raincoat—boarded.

Saw bound, struggling Little Yinglong—no pity, schadenfreude.

"Your day!"

Humphed.

To Li Sansi.

"Young Master... him?"

"Possessed—resisting soul devour."

Lü stunned. "Possession?"

"Forbidden perilous? Demons?"

Glance. "Not—exception, bad luck."

"Fetch Dao Pavilion Lord..."

"His soul weak—can't intervene; win, soul dies."

"Array aids soul strength. Live or die—fate."

Lü bowed: "Yes."

Left.

Lu raised hand—spiritual energy wove array, bagua runes.

Shrank—finger to brow.

Boom!

Light surged.

Struggle intensified.

Aid qualified resistance—no longer one-sided.

Win? Hard.

Body Storage soul vs. likely peak Nascent/Infant Transformation.

Vast gap.

As said—self-fate.

Waved—body floated under skyward chrysanthemum, soul war.

Lu to pavilion second floor.

Day later.

Li Sansui first via gate—saw alive Li Sansi, relieved.

Situation told—heart sank.

Xie Yunling, Dao disciples arrived—for tower, but saw—mood complex.

No study—took Li Sansi via Cloud Dragon gate to Dao Pavilion.

Star Plucking Peak plaza.

Li Sansi center.

Bloodless, corpse-like.

Xie, disciples circled in rings, meditating.

Knew his ordeal.

Supported thus.

Li Sansui secluded—frantic symbols, arrays in study.

Only kin—refused death.

Young Master said self-rely—but try!

...

Martial Emperor City outskirts.

Cave near Bodhisattva Temple, fire flickered.

Outside: snow.

Nie Changqing by fire, aura swirling.

Mo Tianyu cultivated—three bronze treasures spun.

Suddenly.

Nie opened eyes.

Rose; Mo followed, treasures pocketed.

Exited—sky: massive avian army to city.

"That?"

Nie frowned.

"Great Qian female nation..." Mo, informed from city time.

"Great Qian?"

"Empress rivals Du Longyang!"

Nie inhaled.

Action begins?

Knew plan: god-slay with Young Master.

Success unknown—thrilling.

God-slay...

Immortals lofty—mortals defy?

Exhaled—felt small.

Young Master god-slay; he can't beat inner disciples...

"Old Mo, challenge city inner rank 15."

Mo eyes lit.

"Wait—divine first."

"Good."

Mo pinched treasures, tossed shell—clanged inside.

Spiritual surge—treasures floated, gold flips.

Caught on back—stacked.

Squinted, shook head.

"Old Nie... minor auspicious. Skip—train more."

"Minor good—fear what?"

Hand on Dragon Slayer, smiled.

Stepped to city.

"No."

"Don't fool by divination!"

Pulled.

"Listen."

Serious.

Can't say reverse readings—remind.

Nie smiled—polite.

Mo's divinations? Beiluo none accurate.

Never believed.

Opponent: rank 15, three-revolution Golden Core.

Second Stage Heavenly Lock—confident.

Left.

Mo mouth covered, worried eyes.

Waved—vanished in snow.

Chapter 253: Soul Burning—Let's See Who Fears Death More!

Martial Emperor City.

Du Longyang personally greeted at the gates, ushering Great Qian's entourage.

Opulent sedan, silk tassels swaying, carried by Golden Core cultivators.

Du smiled; city experts welcomed.

Sedan halted; red petals ceased.

Two Golden Core maids lifted curtains—a regal beauty emerged, pinnacle nobility.

No ornate jewels, but aura screamed long-seated ruler.

"Empress."

Du cupped fists.

"City Lord Du, pleasure."

Warm, mature voice in his ear.

Du's eyes flashed desire, smiled.

"This way."

Disciples lined streets, curious at Great Qian's famed beauties—ultimate allure.

But one disciple blinked.

An monk amid the beauties?

Calm, unruffled—out of place yet composed.

"This is?"

Du to Empress.

Tall as him, cascading black hair to waist. Glanced monk, red lips curved: "Void gate infiltrator. Steady monk."

Infiltrator like Nie Changqing.

"Heard Master Yuan Shang here—brought him. Planned kill, but your alliance with white-robed young master... spared to avoid discord."

Smiled.

Street end: Yuan Shang beaming.

Wary of her—ascended, sent armies on Bitter Buddha Temple.

Seductresses in battle—dances, exposures...

Broke Great Brahma Art's no-lust—temple suffered.

Thus caution.

"Master Yuan Shang."

Lips curved.

"Void escapee—yours."

Laughed.

Red-nailed wave.

Golden Core females tossed Ding Jiudeng.

Yuan Shang palm upright—qi wave steadied him.

Ding panicked at first—unknown city.

Then calm—bored even.

Palms together, bowed.

"Amitabha."

Yuan Shang stunned—steady lad!

Entered inner hall.

Empress seated, legs crossed—pale thighs glimpsed under robes.

"That young master—trustworthy?"

"Strength?"

"God-slay mishap—death, oblivion."

Lips parted gravely.

Yuan Shang, Du relayed Lu talks.

"I sense 'immortals' play chess—we pawns, even fodder. This world caps us, dangles ascension—likely slaughter post-flight."

"Post-ascension unknown."

Du inhaled.

"Ancestors warn: ascension lie."

"Ally unknown—like skinning tiger."

Frowned.

"No choice..."

"Escape board, flip it—need external aid."

Du deep.

Yuan Shang joined.

Three debated fiercely.

...

Beiluo, Lake Heart Island.

Lu unaware—leaned railing, wind; bronze cup, plum wine—content.

Little Yinglong strained rings, heaving.

Lake: tower front crowded—silent study.

Rare chance—ravenous learning, especially geniuses reaping more.

Lu scanned.

Methods, arts—inspirational.

Hoped not rote—own paths.

Month end: closed.

Hard re-entry.

Overlord, Bai Qingniao, Jiang Li, Sima Qingshan studied—expected own daos.

"Five Phoenixes mid-martial entry... growth stalled."

Wheelchair ponder.

Mini-Lu in Tianyuan: scouting. Similar—factions, frictions.

Tianyuan richer species, cultivation beings.

Squinted.

Chin rub—danger: Demon Domain.

Demon lands—even city experts avoid deep.

Heavenly Demon Tower.

City, Great Qian etc. crusade to contain.

Fingers tapped.

Inspiration.

Five Phoenixes mid-martial—lost pressure. Overlord, Nie strong—no foes.

"Pressure..."

Tapped Phoenix armrest.

Forbidden zone unsuitable for masses.

Can't flood Great Xuan troops—city, Absolute Blade intervene.

"Native pressure."

Pondered.

"Create... demons?"

Murmured, eyes bright.

No demon experience—no rash creation.

Bestow—but soul points: exhaust for few.

Tianyuan demo.

Viable.

Plan action—mini-Lu there.

Leaned Thousand Blades, eyes rippled.

But first—mind stirred.

Head to South Prefecture Dao Pavilion.

...

Tiandang Mountain, Dao Pavilion.

Vortex clouds swirled.

Star Plucking Peak.

Disciples seated positions—guided qi flows; faint array enveloped.

Xie Yunling beard fluttered, grave.

Center: pained Li Sansi—guided array, surged power.

"Sansi, hold!"

Unsure heard.

Tried—can't let demon devour.

Disciples echoed.

Voices boomed.

Li Sansi mind: fierce battle—one-sided crush.

Body Storage vs. Nascent—boat vs. cruiser.

Near extinction—heard Xie, others...

Voices clarified, empowered.

Painful, excited.

Roared—struggled control.

Wills clashed—lone boat ramming cruiser.

Battered, unyielding.

"Give up—gap vast..."

Seductive.

"Others not abandon me—why self?"

Gnashed.

Waves collided.

"Futile."

Laughed.

Flashed scenes—complex.

Realized reckless entry irresponsible.

Kin: Li Sansui; peers, master...

Felt useless.

Sought strength—drew Zhu Long, worried all.

Failed.

Worried, frantic Li Sansui—self-blame.

Array or peers—woman noted resistance.

No worry—gap huge.

Aid useless.

"Know?"

"Entered for strength—you killed idea."

"Friend trades life for power—laughed silly. Now understand—not him, me silly."

Words—woman uneasy.

Indeed.

Array-seated Li Sansi eyes snapped— to Xie, resolute whisper: "Lord! Array fire!"

Stunned.

Sharpened eyes—five elements stabilize soul; fire? Give!

Bit finger, blood sprinkled—two positions pressed; fire qi surged!

Simultaneously: soul flames erupted—burned, twisted agony.

Soul burn—worst pain, beyond blades.

"Mad! Stop!"

Cold roar—frenzied.

Flames spread—to fused soul.

Burnout: even stronger, soul-bound—extinction.

Suicide?

Before: no capital.

Now: peers gave.

Burned soul—mutual destruction.

Who fears death more!

"Lunatic!"

Shriek.

No death—by ant.

Unkilled Ye Shoudao—no!

Li Sansi smiled.

Pain fading will.

Sizzle...

Flames touched.

Screeched.

Tore fusion—exited body.

Peak plaza.

Disciples opened eyes.

Xie gleamed—incredulous, shocked.

Out?

Above: lower vine-wriggling woman phantom.

Pressure crushed breathing.

Beyond Golden Core, Heavenly Lock.

Soul alone—irresistible.

Center Li Sansi collapsed.

Resentful shriek chilled.

"You all!"

"Ruined palace... ants die!"

Shrieked.

Translucent vines—spears from sky, piercing disciples.

Beiluo Island.

Lu surprised—soul burn forced out.

Impressive.

Woman...

Humphed.

Dare pluck his peach...

Huff.

Tiandang, peak.

Screaming woman stiffened.

Head up.

Sky: clouds—giant palm overhead!

Chapter 254: Life-and-Death Arena—Minor Auspicious... My Ass!

Tiandang Mountain, Star Plucking Peak.

Dao Pavilion disciples felt hearts gripped.

Terrifying aura!

Li Sansui burst from room at eruption—meant Li Sansi saved!

Demon exited body!

Joy turned horror seeing plaza.

Demon bloomed like flower—countless vines targeting brows.

Fall: corpses everywhere.

Suddenly—heart jolt, skyward.

Clouds giant palm—descending.

Woman horrified—vines shield overhead.

Block heavenly palm.

Pressure immense.

Great terror watched—acted?!

Unwilling.

Shrieked.

Lu's palm fell with wail.

Boom!

Clouds exploded.

Sky: Cloud Dragon danced, roared—clouds boiled, piled peak—spectacular.

Below: blast.

Woman's soul shot substantial, smashed plaza.

Cracked spiderweb layers.

Disciples retreated.

Xie directed.

Air: cloud hand struck again.

Plaza: soul emerged, sky-shaking roar.

"You..."

"Bully too far!"

Vines erupted—plaza vine ocean, stacked vine hand.

Boom!

Cloud palm vs. vine hand.

Vines shattered, littered.

Woman rose vine-stacked—not helpless!

Roared sky, vines uprooted—charged palm.

Palm fell relentlessly.

Vines impacted futile—cloud yet steel-forged.

Finally.

Palm hit peak.

Wail vanished...

Plaza erased—ruined soil.

Palm dispersed—red bead.

Inside: silent roar.

Battle fast.

Disciples stunned.

Even Xie fearful.

Woman beyond Body Storage—massacre: pavilion graveyard.

Fortunately...

Xie cupped fists to fading bead-palm.

"Thanks, Young Master."

"No matter."

Faint from gate.

Young Lord Lu!

Disciples thrilled—some knelt.

Li Sansui stared calm sky—exhaled. So strong...

Despairing.

Remembered Li Sansi—rushed, comatose again.

But better.

Ruthlessness won body.

Disciples complex—excited, helpless.

Alive, changed—less dashing, inhuman.

Face intact, body vine-haired from pores—eerie.

Breath stable.

Future unknown.

Xie sighed.

Death's edge—now monstrous.

...

Beiluo, Lake Heart Island.

Lu energy converged, leaned Thousand Blades.

Bead streaked from gate, hovered.

Inside: struggling soul.

Lu pinched, gazed.

Surprised—palm should've killed...

Soul weaker than strong Golden Cores.

Yet bead.

"What bead?"

Frowned.

Isolated—no talk.

Fingers pressure—fragile, crushable.

Released.

Tossed to lake.

Done—mind to Tianyuan mini-Lu.

...

Demon Domain.

Tianyuan forbidden.

Orthodox: city, Great Qian, temple; unorthodox: Tianxu, Absolute Blade—all wary.

Edges: faction experts.

Heavenly Demon Tower central—seals horrors.

Great Qian road.

Mini-Lu lounged ancient tree, legs dangling—content.

Lu will surged—sat straight, nodded orders.

Later.

Spirit grasped—round hat; floated to domain.

Over mountain, roaring river—excited.

Leapt—liquid, flowed.

Water speed multiplied.

Light in current.

...

Martial Emperor City.

Mo Tianyu conical hat veiled.

But eyes clear.

Gate: Nie Changqing entered knife-slung, unheeding.

Mo sighed.

Good intent—rare advice.

Why ignore?

Helpless—Nie fate.

Entry noted.

Guards opened—no block.

Street empty.

Nie knife, lips curved.

Snow fell cold.

Rubbed Dragon Slayer, stepped snow deeper.

Message spread.

Steps halted.

Ground quaked.

Squinted.

Street end: snow traces, killing intent.

Dense inner disciples queued.

Heavy steps shook.

Black mass—like gang war.

Pressure—gripped knife, feared rush.

Wings useless.

Leader unknown.

Guessed: challenge letter, rank 15.

Oppression.

"You inner 15?"

Nie calm.

"Yes, Yang Kun. "

Cupped fists: "Teach."

But crowd:

"War at will?"

"Killed inners—life-death arena!"

"No spar—stay, arena."

Voices.

Yang arms folded, cold.

"Killers killed. They fail—dead no blame. Brothers—vengeance ours..."

"Future: life-death only."

"Lord bans kill—but arena death, no word."

Neck crack, stared.

"Dare—arena!"

"No coward!"

"Sharpen on us—no retreat! Fight!"

Step per word—momentum, spit near face.

Wind pinned robes.

Inners sneered.

"Life-death?"

Nie neutral.

Beard curved.

"Good."

"Life-death."

Words—street silent.

"Guts!"

"This way."

Yang aside, stared.

Nie knife, fearless.

Rare—deep hatred only.

Arena: life-death, winner lives.

Cruel—rare.

City boiled—innors, outers spread.

Infiltrator accepted!

Rushed arena.

Not usual—first array master, Nascent, set.

Blood key.

Entered: no intervene—even Nascent, half-tea through array.

Live or die.

"Infiltrator filth—void dirty... trash."

Yang mocked.

Nie calm—genuine disdain.

Rank 15 pride—challenge insult.

"Arena decides."

Palms stone—blood seeped.

Gate opened.

Huge round arena, viewing stands.

Nie left.

Yang right.

Faced.

Gates sealed.

Outside.

Disciples excited—roars!

Bloodlust ignited.

Pursuits killed many.

Hatred.

Uproar city-shaking.

Hall: god-slay talk—Du, Empress stunned.

"Noise?"

Empress frowned.

Du sensed.

Squinted—Nie bold.

"Young Master's disciple vs. inner life-death..."

Helpless.

First Martial Emperor rule—unbreakable.

Nie death: explain to Lu?

Ruin god-slay—tears.

Fate—none interfere.

But... intervene for plan, break rule.

Nie sole link.

Plan over arena.

"Oh?"

Empress bright.

"Young Master's?"

Sensed.

Yuan Shang hesitated—watched.

Arena.

Nie drew Dragon Slayer, blade intent.

Yang spear, cold stare.

"Challenge three-revolution?"

"Outdated—four-revolution now!"

"Die!"

Mocked, unleashed—no suppress.

Spear shake—boom, shot.

Nie face changed.

Four...?!

Mo's divination unreliable!

Warned danger.

But...

Minor auspicious... my ass!

Chapter 255: Divination Backlash?

The clamor was deafening, but as the life-and-death arena battle ignited, it gradually hushed.

Martial Emperor City's inner and outer disciples stared fixedly.

Unaware of Du Longyang's god-slay plan, Nie Changqing was just a sheltered infiltrator to them.

Without protection—dead.

Killed many—hatred natural.

City hall.

Empress seated, legs crossed—pale, long; laughed: "Interesting. Solid foundations—Second Stage suited three-revolution foe. Pity breakthrough to four—perfect spar to lethal."

Du speechless—saw Nie's intent to hone.

Breakthrough ruined plans.

"Fine. Near death—save. Can't derail god-slay for one."

Yuan Shang.

Talk brief—focused arena.

Arena.

Nie helpless—unanticipated breakthrough.

No retreat—fight!

Gripped knife, eyes ablaze—charged.

Blade intent surged, Dragon Slayer slashed myriad qi.

Blade compensated gap.

Heavenly Lock, vital blood—fight possible!

Clang!

Sparks endless.

Nie vs. Yang—spear vs. black blade.

Yang's weapon inferior, but suppressed—realm crush.

Nie Second Stage \approx two-revolution, stronger but marginal.

Lu: Heavenly Lock shines late—excavates limits.

Body Storage unearths treasures; Heavenly Lock pushes extremes.

Boom!

Nie metal-attributed blade qi—destructive.

Slash tore ground.

Yang steady—knew strength, no underestimate.

Survived pursuits, counter-killed—formidable.

Battle perilous—fire ignited.

Nie suppressed, spear holes bled—wretched.

Outcome clear.

"Yang prepping Human List—prepared."

"Four-revolution early for List—tail at best..."

"Kill infiltrator—clarity, breakthrough!"

Viewers relaxed.

Obvious: Nie spent, propping.

No flip—List-aspirant cautious, stable.

Flawless—no chance.

...

City outskirts.

Snow whipped.

Mo Tianyu worried—unease growing.

Sat in snow, hat layered.

Divined minor auspicious—not great.

Sighed.

Tossed treasures—minor auspicious.

Annoyed—swatted.

Suddenly—body shook.

Nosebleed warm.

Strands fell.

Stunned—chest clutched.

Like island... backlash?

More.

Aura surged—vortex overhead.

Body Storage!

Mo dumbfounded.

What?

Backlash... breakthrough?

Last: Qi Core peak.

Now: crossed to Body Storage.

Painful breakthroughs?

...

City.

Nie blood-soaked white, grave unwilling.

Can't die!

Nie Shuang, Ru'er wait; Young Master too.

But Yang's power, stability—frustrating, turtle-shelled.

No strike point.

"Blade Control!"

Eyes condensed—roar.

Dragon Slayer upward—dazzling.

Yang rooted—spear raised, starry points.

Boom!

Qi exploded.

Nie skidded meters.

Dissipated.

Yang charged—spear to brow.

Killing intent endless.

Long-sought chance.

Fatal!

Outside.

Disciples excited—done.

Ye Qianxun bored, rose to leave.

Du sensed—sighed.

Ended.

Arena.

Yang eyes fierce—spear straight to brow, nail dead.

Nie crisis—death chill.

Bone-cold.

Instinct: gripped Dragon Slayer, slashed spear.

Yang ignored hasty blade.

Vs. condensed fatal—how compare?

Outcome: pierced dead.

Clang!

Long fights—spear notched.

Hasty slash hit weak notch.

Crack...

Spear broke.

Yang stunned—momentum stalled, horse legless.

Blood spewed.

Nie stunned...

Instant: seized, killing intent exploded.

Vital blood, spine roar—blade air-burst!

Puchi!

Decisive—awakened beast, cleaved head.

Yang dazed break—thunder slash decapitated!

Dead silence.

Outside.

Leaving disciples froze.

Ye turned—saw head fly.

How?

Yang's fatal—peak power, timing—flipped?

How?

Hall.

Du stunned.

Face ashen.

"Luck..."

"Hasty slash hit vulnerability—broke spear, momentum. Else... dead."

Shocked counter-kill.

Not strength—Nie weaker; momentum backlash—chance, one-strike.

Too fast intervene.

Empress, Yuan Shang odd.

Luck indeed.

Arena.

Nie heaved.

Leaned Dragon Slayer, rose.

No joy.

Too weak—luck broke spear, stalled, backlash.

Else loss...

Luck always?

Wiped blood—bloodman, exited.

Disciples uproar—anger.

Ignored.

Staggered out.

Blockers.

But...

City thunder: "Enough!"

"Shame not enough?!"

Du.

Disciples chilled—no block.

Unwilling.

Ye watched vanish—eyes rippled.

Nie no look back.

Staggered snow—gone gate.

Outskirts.

Mo saw bloody Nie—joy, supported flee—fear pursuit.

"Won?"

Nod.

Mo eyes flickered—backlash?

Won via.

Kong Nanfei survived great auspicious; minor less potent.

Brighter—excited, found path!

"Next?"

"Recover, return."

Trial tower flaws, improve.

Return city.

Win fair next!

"Good!"

Mo nod.

Doubts—consult Young Lord Lu.

Mysterious—only he.

Cave.

Five days immobile.

Nie healed; Mo consolidated.

Finally.

Exited.

Snow to ruined Bodhisattva Temple.

Entered air wall—South Prefecture.

...

Roaring river splashed.

Currents: spirit converged—hatted mini-Lu on leaf, surfing.

Domain near Great Qian.

Five days river—edge.

Leaf: gray sky grave.

River black mist—eerie aura.

"Demon qi?"

"Polluted spirit."

Mumbled.

Leaf boat—dived mist.

Thick.

Wails, roars.

Crystal mini-Lu—out place.

Half day—exited, entered domain.

Tianyuan forbidden, demon lands.

Flat—no peaks, valleys.

Demon qi vortex center.

Tower: tall, ragged—jagged stones.

Heavenly Demon Tower.

Uninterested.

Scanned: creatures stared.

Four-legged beasts—primitive.

Upright demon-formed—demons.

Few, emaciated, wilted—death's edge.

Mini-Lu leaf, chin—gold eyes scanned, collected samples.

Suddenly.

Tower top: demon qi maelstrom.

Mist: black flame eye—contracting devour.

Turned.

Locked mini-Lu.

Shriek.

Black claw spanned void—grabbed!

Scanning mini-Lu blank—snatched into tower.

Beiluo Island.

Lu sipping plum—nearly spat.

Who so enthusiastic?

Chapter 256: I Am the Demon Lord

What is a demon?

Lu pondered this when planning to create demons.

No contact—no conclusion.

Mini-Lu from spirit liquid held a wisp of divine sense—reason for persistence, like clone.

Now... targeted.

Heavenly Demon Tower.

Ages on Tianyuan—demons once ruled, extinguished; horrors sealed.

Demons confined—continent recovered.

Black flame eye sucked mini-Lu in.

Claw demon qi soared.

Clang!

Chains thundered.

Mini-Lu floated inside.

Claw crushed.

Liquid exploded.

Wisp drifted.

Darkness: eye opened—terrifying aura.

"Divine sense! Human expert's!"

Cold, hoarse—killing intent.

Humans: demon food!

Overthrew rule, sealed him.

Excitement in intent.

Chains shook.

Clutched wisp—demon qi flooded, seeking origin!

Humans cautious—no sense in domain, fear control, puppet.

Years no chance—now!

Qi arrayed black flames.

Linked sense.

Flashes before demon.

...

Beiluo.

Lake Heart Island.

Lu leaned Thousand Blades—brow raised.

Powerful aura via sense.

Net-stalk?

Clever.

He sought; it came.

Smiled—meet captor.

Sense surged.

Boom!

Mind moved.

Eyes lines danced.

Island changed—isolated consciousness realm.

Sky: black clouds rolled.

Atop: hunched elder, wrinkled, cane—ordinary yet endless black qi.

"Eh, kid!"

"Dare sense in domain..."

"Top genius—control fun!"

Hoarse smile.

Lu calm.

"Demon?"

"What is demon?"

Question stunned.

"Like asking human... how answer?"

"Demons qi, humans spirit—difference."

Nodded. "Understood."

Qi distinction?

"Humans can't survive dense demon qi; demons can't spirit-dense. Survive—remake environment..."

Pondered.

Elder impatient.

Not for philosophy—control.

Boom!

Qi exploded—sense clash perilous.

Cane smashed—charged.

Strong sense.

"Name?"

Facing brutal.

White Jade second floor: spirit veiled Lu.

"Kid unworthy!"

Next: cane whipped sense.

Lu sealed hands—array diffused wheelchair.

Plucked Phoenix Feather.

Fiery pierced void—clashed cane.

Boom!

Soul storm.

Cane shattered.

Lu calm—fingers plucked, silver blades flew.

Void: blooming lotus—enveloped.

"Stay—study."

Sincere.

Elder shocked—sense strong!

Body shifted—human gone.

Upper: lion—roared.

Shatter sense.

Boom!

Lotus vs. lion—ripples.

Lotus spun, array mystic.

Lion uneasy—withdraw.

Beyond expect—heavy damage risk.

"Human genius!"

"Pity... bride for others! Stronger—worse death!"

Cold laugh.

Lu paused—mistaken Tianyuan expert.

Conspiracy.

Designer of tops.

Plane lord?

Plotting.

No dwell—withdraw—plucked remaining Phoenix.

Spirit Pressure board.

Piece.

Pressure crushed lion sense.

Unease intense—unexpected.

When such figure!

Withdraw.

Late.

Sleeves—three pieces.

Paths sealed.

Finish—trapped.

Deep glance.

Terrifying kid.

Decisive—severed wisp.

Clouds fled.

Beiluo.

Lu opened—clear sky, no clouds.

Lake: tower studiers.

Lü Dongxuan fished boat.

Sense battle—no external.

Glanced bound sleeping Little Yinglong—rings tightening, uncaring.

Leash or die.

Resisted urge.

Black bead fell.

Lion wisp crystal.

Played—board, crushed.

Other end: elder shadow—played, learned demons.

...

Tower roar.

Domain demons cowered—king mad?

Inside.

Lion chained, head low—pain.

Crystal cracked—self-sever!

Kid forced.

"Damn! Human die!"

Demons body strong, sense weak.

Loss.

Escape—devour all, tear kid!

Roars echoed—even out.

Frontline guardians changed—reported.

City hall.

Du, Empress mid-talk—changed.

Du mirror: frontier message.

"Domain change? Sealed king acts?!"

Grave.

Yuan Shang, Empress too.

Unprecedented.

"Immortal sensed?"

"King riot—immortal move?"

Eyes grave.

Demon-immortal foes!

Linked—care.

"God-slay advance..."

...

South Prefecture forbidden.

Air wall rippled.

Nie, Mo emerged—stunned, empty.

Glanced—curious normally, none.

Exit: South Mansion guards.

Tang Yimo's.

Saw—stunned, joy.

Nie alive?!

Li Sansi possessed news spread—terror.

Thought doomed—safe.

Nie wounded but light.

Talked guard—understood.

"Young Master tower myriad texts—free month?"

Lu's move.

No wonder empty.

Nie no linger—back city, link.

Plan delay.

Dragon gate to island.

Emerging: crowds shocked.

Familiar: Overlord, Jiang Li, Tang Yimo—reading.

Overlord sensed—looked, stronger.

Returned!

Others noticed.

Dropped books—surrounded.

Greeted, shared forbidden—curiosity sated.

Boarded—pavilion fogged, secluded.

Prep god-slay.

No disturb—left to West Mountain.

Trial tower.

Many: Ning Zhao, Jing Yue training.

Pu 匍 sat—entered, sought flaws.

...

Game end.

Lu leaned—demon clear.

"Demons crystal—all have, condense qi strengthen..."

"System different, similar."

Chin.

Preach platform.

Build crystal, arrays.

Dozens fails.

Pondered—lion template wrong.

His demons needn't match.

Abandon—dozens more.

Finally...

Runed platform: crystalline tetrahedron floated.

Faint demon qi.

First demon crystal.

Mind.

God-demon blood drop.

Transform: hexa, octa, dodeca...

Tetra \approx Qi Core—evolution strength.

Blood on.

Flesh spread—complete body.

Seated array—Lu's face.

Smiled.

Demon Lord first—he.

Demon Lord first—also he.

Chapter 257: Forging the Demon Race

Beiluo, Lake Heart Island.

Lu opened his eyes, consciousness returning from the Preach Platform.

Raised hand—tetrahedral crystal bloomed, suspended.

His crafted demon crystal.

Faint demon qi entwined.

"Crystal done... but how to birth demons?"

Toyed, pondered.

Mind sank back—simulated on platform, crystal base.

Fused beasts—qi tyrannical, shredded brains, berserk irrational—failed evolution.

Many attempts—Five Phoenixes beasts via simulation.

No rush—time abundant, fused repeatedly.

Finally—success.

Little monkey: qi wrapped, no madness—wisdom gleamed eyes.

Qi bolstered—robust, Qi Core comparable.

Excited—first demon after trials.

Monkey wise—curious yet awed, Lu's terror.

Wiser, fear deeper.

Wiped—simulation vivid, not real.

Manifest reality—energy cost.

Principle grasped.

Opened eyes.

Thousand Blades—breeze rippled lake.

Spirit Pressure board before—eyes lines danced, post-transformation Five Phoenixes map.

Divided endless desert: East (Great Zhou), West (Mardon invasion).

Ignored primitives.

Fingers stroked map—tapped desert.

Isolator—demon drop site.

Via board—transplanted Hanhai island to desert, overlap—oasis.

No humans—species, monkeys stared: sea gone, yellow sands.

Lifelong islanders—desert novel.

Mind—wisp surged.

Oasis sky: demon qi figure hovered, black heavens.

Demon Lord descended!

Lu scanned.

Raised—crystals dense, rain-like.

Touched beasts—merged.

Beast eyes cleared—bestial yet smarter.

Demons: race.

Chose monkey horde.

Tetra merged—qi wrapped, wise.

Knelt pious—Lu god.

Floated—watched.

Competition progress—demons for human urgency, mutual elevation.

His demons—Five Phoenixes; growth feedback, extra qi path.

Humans spirit, demons qi—both for him.

Knelt demon monkeys.

Raised—octahedral.

Races need ruler—demons worship power, instill.

Tossed.

Boom!

Desert pit—meteor.

Qi wrapped—unseen.

"Who fuses pit crystal—Demon King."

Words—monkey clamor, chitters.

Rushed out.

Crystals equal—power matched.

King: rule oasis!

Fought—pitward.

Octa pressure—qi torrents, terror!

Octa ≈ Golden Core/Heavenly Lock.

Qi Core monkeys—supreme.

Lu watched.

Fighting ceased—some knelt pressure.

Some pressed.

Chitters.

Closer—stronger; many quit.

One fearless—grabbed.

Power shed fur, body cracked.

Wretched.

No yield—red eyes, chitters.

Clutched.

Qi strands—wails skyward.

Horde stunned—unknown fear.

Beasts edged watched.

Qi dispersed.

Black robust monkey strode.

Octa fused—flame eyes.

Fisted.

Horde cheered.

Beasts too.

King born—Lord witness!

Air.

Lu smiled satisfied.

Transmitted furnace-refined demon method—to kneeling king.

More.

Forged weapon.

Boom.

Oasis center: stone pillar skyward.

"Qi-conducting weapon—master power, claim..."

Excited—kowitz, chitters speechless.

Scanned oasis, monkeys.

"Here: 'Demon Continent'."

Wave.

Outside: monolith—"Demon Continent".

Infused spirit qi—ignored.

Cultivate: convert to demon qi—process practice.

No linger.

Demon Lord vanished qi.

Demons prostrated—heads thumped.

Farewell Lord.

Lord gone.

Octa monkey king rose upright—sharp eyes pillar.

Excited dash.

Qi from crystal.

Climbed shrieking.

Dozens meters—fell, panting.

Understood: unmastered—no qualify.

Rose—cultivated transmitted.

Qi strands—healed.

Monkeys circled—roars.

Rose—fist sky, roared.

King of Demon Continent!

Octa strongest—undisputed!

Equal challenger—contest!

Excited—led horde oasis.

Sought former bullies: wolves.

Pummeled!

Infected wolf alpha—mount.

Monkeys rampant.

Tigers subdued.

No massacre—realm without subjects?

Monkeys overlords.

...

Beiluo Island.

Lu recalled Demon Lord.

Opened.

Breeze cooled robes.

Ning Zhao ended practice—near, brewed plum wine, tongs dropped plums.

"Done?"

Glanced.

Near Heavenly Lock.

Ice attribute—not five, potent offense.

"Breakthrough near—no rush..."

"Natural."

"Accompany, brew for Young Master."

Smiled.

Nodded.

"Natural best—forcing tight not always good."

Glanced second floor—Little Yinglong rolled eyes, near asphyxiation.

Sighed—waved rings.

Flapped up—tongue out, gasped.

Die leashed than struggle...

Recall pressure-bearing monkey near-collapse vs. dragon—sighed.

Difference vast?

Wings—shoulder lazy.

Ignored.

Suddenly.

System prompt.

"Host forged 'demon race'—diversified Five Phoenixes, reward 1000 free points."

Hm?

No surprise—phoenix rewarded.

Direct demon race—generous.

For Lu: decent, once-only.

"Demons weak—human contact eventual, changes unknown."

Pondered.

Collision sparks?

Monkey king Golden Core—octa incomplete, Nie one-slash; Second Stage crushes.

Even Nie aside—Overlord, Ning etc. suppress.

Others Qi Core ruffraff.

Develop stealthily.

No meddle—extinction only intervene.

Mind—panel.

Host: Lu

Title: Qi Refiner (permanent)

Qi: 4 (20036/100000)

Soul: 610 (521 exch: Sense 5)

Body: 510 (510 exch: Blood 3)

Spirit: 18790

Liquid: 2

World: Mid-Martial

Free: 1083

Scanned—frowned; practitioners up, daily more.

Fourth layer distant.

1000 free—no hoard, used.

50/50.

Soul 500, Body 500—both past 1000.

Sense 10.

Mind boomed.

Body energy surged—jade glow.

Transformed.

Strength up—unclear how.

Leaned.

Observed changes.

Suddenly—brow raised, sensed.

Odd.

Nie back—trial tower secluded days.

Du Longyang frantic searching.

Chapter 258: Remnants of Great Zhou

Nie Changqing left Martial Emperor City after his successful challenge, entering the Bodhisattva Temple and returning to South Prefecture.

Thus, Du Longyang couldn't find him outside the city.

No Nie—no link to Young Master Lu. How could Du not go mad?

God-slay imminent—Lu's aid crucial; such power rare.

Domain anomaly forced advance.

Beiluo Island.

As Du fretted, Lu savored transformation—less than qi layer leap, but still.

Soul and body both breached 1000.

Sense and power surged—no qualitative, yet markedly stronger.

Lu felt it clearly.

...

Imperial Capital.

Night fell; bustling city slept.

Post-Great Zhou fall, near ruin—Xiliang revived it.

Quiet capital.

Narrow alley: two gangs converged.

Spirit fluctuations—cultivators present.

Black Dragon Gang and North Tiger Gang—top underworld powers.

Vast territories.

North Tiger boss: gifted, Qi Core peak short time—rose from thug to leader.

Controlled streets, inns, brothels.

Black Dragon: new rise.

Young boss Liu Yuanhao: few to hundreds.

Tonight: gang war.

Feared Xiliang notice—alley battle.

Hook moon, dim night.

Gangs gripped cold weapons: axes, blades, even hoes.

Liu black-robed, cold gaze opposite.

North Tiger boss sneered back.

Decisive: unify underworld, emperor.

Both ambitious—winner rules hundreds gangs, vast leverage.

Inns, brothels under control.

Not nation-rich, but overlord.

Liu raised hand—flick.

Black Dragon charged, weapons waving, blood hot.

North Tiger roared out.

Equal numbers—clashed.

Killing intent, clashes heavy.

Blood sprayed—icy night.

North Tiger boss moved.

Qi Core peak erupted—tiger true.

Untouchable even by old masters.

Gang members coughed blood flying.

Brutal—deep night, silent bloodbath, alley red.

Liu robed, cold laugh.

Both rapid rises.

North Tiger saw rival; Liu dismissed.

Grand ambition—North Tiger stepping stone.

"Kill!"

Low roar.

Hands opened—pale flames palms.

Black Dragon: robed shed—cold faces, black scales foreheads, auras burst.

North Tiger boss shocked.

Scales—eyes shrunk.

Seen in weakness.

"Black Dragon Guards?!"

Roar quieted shouts.

Heads turned incredulous.

Black Dragon Guards?

Great Zhou?

Remnants?!

"Black Dragon... Guards..."

Boss retreated.

Old fear spread.

Liu cold smile.

Growth—hidden Guards acknowledged, joined.

For grand goal.

"Surrender... or die."

Eyes icy evil.

Flames danced—cold.

Corpses stirred, staggered up.

Control dead?!

Young boss such power?

Boss heart shrank—chill.

Inferior strength, but means terrified.

Plus Guards—first era cultivators, strong.

Intent lost.

Dropped weapons, knelt heads hugged.

Boss felt tide turn.

Undefeated North Tiger suppressed.

No surrender—but aides knelt.

Heart cold.

Roared.

"Surrender or die?"

Pale flames floated—calm.

Qi Core peak useful—no kill.

Roars faded—knelt Liu.

No death—surrender.

Liu laughed.

Tonight: capital gangs Black Dragon.

Four Guards behind—aura ebbed.

"Hard work, uncles."

Lips curved.

"Overlord not palace..."

"Xiliang main army absent—woman rules."

"Hard-won land to woman? Prepare... summon old Great Zhou troops. Black Dragon Guards restore glory!"

Head up black clouds.

Kneeling boss trembled—incredulous.

Such ambition.

"Today: no thug gang—cultivator force!"

"Inherit Black Dragon will! Great Zhou glory!"

"Today: Black Dragon Gang—Black Dragon Cult!"

Arms spread heroic.

Flames from corpses—into him.

Aura swelled—pale blaze.

Vortex overhead.

Guards, boss eyes shrunk.

"Body... Storage!"

...

North Prefecture, Great Xuan.

Academy: Tantai Xuan inspected.

Long prep—built, bought clan manor, reformed.

Fine facilities—many enrollees.

Yet worried.

Learners: methods, 百家 theories, archery, combat.

Theories easy—protected Great Zhou library.

Methods, combat unsatisfactory.

No unique—Xuanwu Guard clone.

Purpose?

Cultivators vs. army same?

Vs. Overlord: Xiang vs. Xuanwu?

Not wanted.

Mo Ju cloaked, followed.

Tantai to Mo: "Ju, academy not copy Xuanwu. Diverse paths."

"Know White Jade Capital?"

"Young Master Lu visionary—maid alchemizes, path; Tianji to cabinet, deduction; Mechanism Cabinet, forging."

"Rich, not rote."

"No fear Overlord battle—year short. Lose, lose... win proves?"

"Future diverse—shine industries. True cultivation."

Mo fan shook—stunned depth.

"King, Giant wanders collecting 百家 strengths. Tower open—he goes. Return: targeted development."

Mo Beike similar.

Ambitious—cultivation > old百家.

Era ended?

No—people,百家 lives.

Thought eternal.

Tantai nodded.

"Hope."

Fan: "King, invaders' fate?"

Hetero war—straightened, smiled.

"Desert beyond strong, arrays... wrong time."

Proud.

"Xuanwu cultivators—hetero like us vs. White Jade once..."

"Obvious."

"Half captured, rest desert-driven."

"Supplies seized—no water, can't exit."

Cold—no care.

Invaders—death ready.

"Thought beyond Great Zhou only Five Barbarians... without era, disaster."

Shook head.

Nod: "Strengthen—self, posterity. Strong heirs, strong Xuan!"

...

Endless desert.

Dust rolled.

Sparse troops trudged—steps sand, wind erased.

Yali King front.

Once spirited—wretched.

Lips cracked—waterskin tilt, drop.

Throat rolled.

Thud behind.

Mardon soldier dehydrated—fainted.

Numb—no move.

Empty skins—his fate theirs.

Yali unwilling—fist clenched, slumped.

"Cultivators..."

Shook.

Invincible Mardon crushed ancient land.

Despair: stronger nations.

Gods tore unbreakable arrays.

Terrifying!

Defeat just.

Conquests inflated.

Failure crushed.

Supplies gone.

Can't exit alive.

Need water.

No—death.

Original route—no source till out.

Trod—soldiers fell, sand swallowed.

Fewer.

Yali collapsed.

Soldiers propped.

Suddenly.

Distance: Mardon general excited.

"King!"

"Oasis!"

Yali eyes bright—last gasp.

Rose.

Hill: gazed.

Green patch yellow sea—thrilling.

Oasis!

Water!

Yali, soldiers surged strength.

Trod oasis.

Chapter 259: Forging Paths in a Hundred Styles

Beiluo, Western Mountain Trial Tower.

Ni Yu, Nie Shuang, and Jing Yue stared in stunned awe at Nie Changqing, who sat cross-legged on the meditation cushion.

Above his head, the number glowed: “10”!

He had breached the tenth layer of the trial tower.

The trio exchanged glances, shock rippling through their eyes.

Even Jing Yue—who had completed his Body Storage tempering and awakened his personal attribute sword intent—had only scraped through to the seventh layer.

He had tested the eighth. Without stepping into Heavenly Lock, he stood no chance.

The tenth? Beyond imagination.

“Young Master did mention the challenges shift every ten layers,” Jing Yue said. “It piques the curiosity.”

Lu Fan had explained it: the first through tenth layers spawned eerie entities that mirrored the challenger’s combat style, forcing them to confront flaws mid-battle and refine them.

The tenth layer itself, however, remained veiled.

Now Nie Changqing stood within it.

No entities materialized. The moment he entered, reality warped.

Fivefold spiritual pressure—Lu Fan’s signature weight—crushed down, locking every joint. A Heavenly Lock cultivator, immobilized by aura alone.

Yet this might be the layer's true purpose.

Nie Changqing ignited power along his spine, forcing his torso upright against the invisible tide.

He felt the tempering of his Three Poles spine accelerate.

Surprise flickered across his face.

Then the jungle thundered.

Ten mountain-sized monstrosities erupted from the undergrowth, flattening trees, hurling clods of earth, quaking the ground.

Nie Changqing hoisted Dragon Slayer beneath the pressure.

He tried to weave aside.

Too slow. The aura dragged his limbs like lead.

No dodging ten charging behemoths.

A guttural roar tore from his throat. Metallic blade intent flared; he slashed.

One beast split in half. Nine more thundered on.

No retreat. Another swing—blade qi of sharpened steel.

Every cut had to kill. A single falter meant failure, meant being trampled into pulp.

Pressure plus precision demanded flawless attribute control.

Nie Changqing had unlocked the Second Pole, but his mastery was rough.

Here, under duress, it honed to razor finesse.

At last, the final beast fell. The pressure vanished.

Sweat drenched him; his body sagged like wet clay.

He refused to exit.

Pale light coalesced into an ethereal staircase. He climbed to the eleventh layer.

Eleventh: pressure surged to tenfold; beasts swelled to a hundred.

He felled a handful before the stampede swallowed him, grinding him to dust.

Trial tower interior.

Nie Changqing's eyes snapped open, chest heaving.

The higher the layer, the crueler the grind.

Tenfold pressure slowed motion to a crawl; still he needed killing strokes. The control demanded was brutal.

Yet failure carried riches.

This tower run had vaulted his strength.

Face Yang Kun—Fourth Turn Golden Core—again, and he would no longer scramble.

Luck or not, victory lay within reach.

Ni Yu, Nie Shuang, and the others crowded close, eyes bright with questions.

Nie Changqing shared the tenth layer's ordeal without reserve.

Jing Yue's face darkened. Fivefold pressure, ten beasts whose hides shrugged off anything less than a Body Storage peak strike—he'd be paste in seconds.

Still, good news: no more monotonous self-mirroring doppelgängers.

Those entities had felt like sparring your own shadow. Novel at first, stale soon after.

"How long was I inside?" Nie Changqing asked.

“Nearly five days.”

Ni Yu popped a sugar-coated Qi Gathering Pill into her mouth.

Five days...

Nie Changqing raised a brow. Lost in the climb, he had forgotten time.

He rose and left the tower.

Nie Shuang, Ni Yu, and the rest trailed after.

They reached Lake Heart Island.

Lu Fan sat in his wheelchair, rolling leisurely around the island with Ning Zhao at his side.

Her white gauze dress danced in the breeze.

Her cultivation hovered at a bottleneck—one thread from Heavenly Lock. The closer the breakthrough, the calmer she grew.

Ni Yu arrived hugging a massive bundle of herbs.

“Young Master!”

She hadn’t seen Lu Fan in ages, trapped in the tower.

Lu Fan glanced over and nodded. The girl had advanced noticeably. Even compared to the lazy dragon on his shoulder, her diligence shone.

Little Ying Dragon snorted, turned its head, and resumed splashing.

“Little Ni, tempering Body Pills now?”

With her current realm, she could manage it.

Body Tempering Pills ranked higher than Qi Gathering; they required spirited herbs.

“Yes, Young Master!”

Her eyes sparkled with confidence—and a desire for variety. Qi pills daily had grown bland as water.

Lu Fan dipped his chin. Ni Yu retreated with her sack, found a spot, set up her cauldron, and lit the fire.

Nie Changqing approached last. Seeing Lu Fan stirred complicated feelings.

They spoke at length. Mostly about the God-Slay Plan—Nie Changqing sensed peril.

“Young Master, beware. It could be their trap. Better safe than sorry.”

Lu Fan only smiled.

After more talk, Nie Changqing took his leave. He needed the forbidden domain’s pressure.

Ning Zhao’s long lashes trembled as she watched him go.

Lu Fan eyed her. “Fancy a run at the forbidden domain too?”

She nodded.

“Wait until you break into Heavenly Lock. Right now, breakthrough is priority.”

She understood. Lu Fan never caged them; strength was freedom.

“What you lack is heart-insight. Heavenly Lock remains risky for you. Condensing a Golden Core is safer.”

“No, Young Master. This servant aims for Heavenly Lock.”

Stubborn resolve. If cultivating, choose the mightiest path.

Lu Fan nodded, saying no more.

“Visit the book tower. Seek inspiration.”

“The cultivation road is yours to walk. I can clear a rough trail, but it’s overgrown with weeds and thorns. Your task: trample the weeds, sever the thorns, carve your own way.”

Ning Zhao pondered, then bowed. White skirts swirling, she leaped, toes skimming the lake, rippling outward, and glided toward the book tower.

Lu Fan watched her vanish inside, then gazed at the unruffled lake, expression distant.

He thought of Yi Yue, gone now.

Her talent ensured a harder road than most.

On the island, Ni Yu focused on her cauldron.

Succeeding at Body Tempering Pills would clarify her spirit, perhaps spark a breakthrough.

Gongsun Yu and Lu Changkong arrived together.

Gongsun Yu had gleaned much from the book tower, scribbling designs for days. Today he emerged.

“Young Master...”

Short in stature, yet power coiled within.

He offered a booklet.

“Young Master, my latest concealed weapon manual—reforged from tower texts. See if these can be crafted.”

Lu Fan accepted without demur.

The cover read: World’s Concealed Weapons Codex.

A glance piqued interest.

“Storm Pear Blossom—ranked tenth?”

Gongsun Yu’s life work, merely tenth. What topped it?

“Phoenix Feather (speculative)—seventh. Ninety thousand poison needles. Detonation forms a flaming phoenix. Toxin rides spirit qi into the heart; the heart explodes.”

Poison weaponry.

“Toxin that flows with spirit qi?”

“Extracted by City Lord Lu from Skyward Chrysanthemum.”

“City Lord Lu hails from the Agrarian School—masters of flora.”

Lu Fan blinked at Lu Changkong beside Gongsun Yu.

His old man could distill poison from flowers?

First he’d heard Skyward Chrysanthemum was toxic.

No wonder the gardens overflowed with blooms.

Agrarian heir.

Lu Fan smiled.

The ancient Hundred Schools still gleamed in this age of cultivators.

He scanned further: Heaven Lotus, Bodhi Tear, Ledger of Life and Death—flights of fancy, yet feasible.

Cultivation turned impossible into reality.

If forged, Gongsun Yu might pioneer the Mechanism School's weapon path.

Lu Fan closed the codex.

“Not bad.”

Gongsun Yu flushed with excitement.

Lu Fan was the artifact master he revered. Approval meant the world.

“Feasible. Craft them, and they'll shine. You may gain insight, leap in cultivation. This is your road.”

Gongsun Yu clutched the codex and hurried off to begin.

Half a lifetime on Storm Pear Blossom; the rest on the codex.

Lu Changkong walked the lakeside with Lu Fan.

Father and son spoke long.

With the world stabilizing, Lu Changkong resumed herb lore.

Spirit qi surge mutated flora—new properties, new potencies, new poisons.

He would study, compile a flora codex.

Lu Fan respected the choice.

Lu Changkong clapped his son's shoulder, eyes deep, said nothing, then boarded a lone boat and vanished into the mist.

Lu Fan watched both men fade.

Ni Yu refined pills.

The book tower thrummed with eager learners.

A gentle breeze tugged his robes.

He laughed softly.

A hundred cultivation styles, all vying.

The cultivators' Hundred Schools contention—perhaps near.

...

Nie Changqing stepped through the dragon gate into South County's forbidden domain.

Mo Tianyu followed, divination banner in hand. "How could the forbidden domain lack me?"

"You'll challenge Martial Emperor City disciples. You'll need my counsel... my divinations never miss."

Nie Changqing said nothing but didn't stop him.

He had noticed the accuracy himself.

They chatted as they ventured deeper.

South Prefecture guards saluted—true daredevils, braving the unknown again.

The air wall rippled.

Both emerged inside the Bodhisattva Temple.

Outside, snow still fell.

Yet the instant they appeared—

A terrifying aura erupted beyond the temple.

Sun-like pressure surged, threatening to shatter the structure.

Snow cascaded from the eaves.

In black robes, Du Longyang approached step by step. Snow melted in his wake.

Nie Changqing and Mo Tianyu felt crushing force; breath came hard.

Chapter 260: First Blood Between Demon and Man

Outside the Bodhisattva Temple, the blizzard seemed frozen in place by an overwhelming presence.

Du Longyang approached step by step through the snow.

Nie Changqing drew a deep breath; the terrifying pressure felt as if it might collapse the entire temple.

Mo Tianyu clutched three copper divination coins, his eyes locked on Du Longyang.

The man's sheer power sent a chill through Mo Tianyu's heart.

"You came back?"

Du Longyang stared at Nie Changqing, his face devoid of any smile, laced instead with icy coldness.

He had searched for days, only to find... Nie Changqing had returned.

No wonder he couldn't locate him, even after turning the area around Martial Emperor City upside down.

"I gained some insight and retreated to cultivate for a few days."

Nie Changqing met Du Longyang's gaze and replied calmly.

Mo Tianyu glanced between them. Was there some shady deal going on here?

Du Longyang's oppressive aura dissipated, a smile creeping onto his face.

"You certainly gave me a hard time finding you..."

"The plan is about to launch. Contact Young Master Lu. We've taken his money, so we eliminate his disasters. Remind him not to forget."

Du Longyang said.

Nie Changqing narrowed his eyes slightly.

Before he could respond, a lazy, rumbling voice echoed from inside the temple.

“Got it.”

“When the plan starts, this young master will show up.”

It was Lu’s voice.

Even Nie Changqing felt a jolt of alarm.

Du Longyang scanned the temple, his expression growing grave. After a long pause, he forced a smile.

“As long as Young Master Lu remembers.”

In the next instant, his figure shot backward out of the temple.

The snow outside exploded into a deep crater, but Du Longyang had already vanished.

“What exactly is the plan between Young Master Lu and them?”

Mo Tianyu frowned slightly, turning to Nie Changqing.

Nie shook his head.

Mo Tianyu knew better than to press further.

The two left the temple, heading toward Martial Emperor City.

Nie Changqing was ready to challenge the inner disciples once more.

...

Inside the grand hall of Martial Emperor City.

Du Longyang returned, and waiting for him—along with many other powerhouses—were figures like the Empress and Master Yuanshang.

These two were righteous masters; their presence in the city wouldn't raise too many eyebrows.

Even if spotted, the world wouldn't bat an eye.

But beyond them stood Young Master Tianxu of the Tianxu Palace and the sect leader of the Absolute Blade Sect.

These were demonic path experts.

Their appearance here, if known, would shake the entire world.

Young Master Tianxu loathed the atmosphere of Martial Emperor City. After clashing with Du Longyang for years, becoming a guest here was the ultimate irony.

The one-armed sect leader of the Absolute Blade Sect, Ye Shoudao, was also present in the hall.

"City Lord Du, has Young Master Lu arrived?"

Master Yuanshang pressed his palms together and asked hurriedly upon Du's return.

“He hasn’t shown. Clearly, Young Master Lu is cautious.”

“He won’t appear lightly, fearing our alliance is a trap.”

Du Longyang said gravely.

“Heh...”

Young Master Tianxu, seated to the side, sneered. “That kid wouldn’t dare show his face. Last time, he hijacked my body. If he dares come, I’ll beat him to death!”

Ye Shoudao frowned; he had his own grudges with Lu.

He hadn’t expected Du Longyang to rope Lu into this alliance.

In Ye’s view, they were making a deal with the devil.

“Cut the crap. If I were you, I’d shut up. Last time, that Lu kid slipped into your body without a trace, and you’ve still got the guts to run your mouth?”

The Empress shot Tianxu a disdainful glance.

Tianxu's eyes bulged, as if struck where it hurt.

"Ni Chunqiu, you think I'm afraid of you? Fight me if you've got the balls!"

He snarled.

The Empress laughed, sizing up the frail Tianxu from head to toe.

"With you in that state?"

Tianxu felt an insult like never before.

He slammed the armrest of his chair, unleashing a surge of terrifying aura that clouded the hall.

The Empress smirked, her pale hand resting on her own armrest, exuding regal poise.

Their auras clashed.

The brewing explosion threatened to shatter the hall.

“Enough!”

Du Longyang roared.

He thrust his spear upward, its cold, razor-sharp tip pointing at Tianxu.

Tianxu’s aura faltered and dispersed.

“Fine! You two lovebirds are ganging up on me!”

“Nobody’s got my back, huh?”

“Old Ye, chop him down!”

Tianxu shrieked.

Ye Shoudao glanced at him, gave a cold smile, and stayed put.

“Great! Everyone’s bullying me! I’m out—this alliance is done!”

Tianxu screeched.

Master Yuanshang pressed his palms together, smiling gently. “Tianxu, don’t throw a tantrum. We’re gathered for the sake of the world, to shatter the lie of immortality. Our enemy is the mighty immortals. We must stand united.”

Tianxu huffed but held his tongue.

He shot glares at everyone else.

Du Longyang lowered his black spear, his expression softening.

“The Demon Realm is in upheaval. The Heavenly Demon Tower is raging, demonic qi soaring to the skies... Legend says the tower was built by immortals. This unrest likely means they’ve caught wind of something and plan to release the great demons inside to derail us.”

“Our plan must move up.”

Du Longyang declared.

Master Yuanshang, the Empress, and the one-armed blade master Ye Shoudao all nodded.

“Hmph... move it up? How? You think summoning heavenly thunder is as easy as snapping your fingers?”

Tianxu snorted.

The Empress rolled her eyes and scoffed.

“Amitabha.”

“This monk has prepared a Minor Restoration Pill. Once the Empress takes it, her power will surge—she can shatter the void and draw down thunder punishment!”

“That will mark the start of the plan.”

Master Yuanshang explained.

Tianxu sneered again. “Who’s to say the thunder won’t get hijacked like last time?”

Boom!

The Empress slammed the table; it splintered into dust.

“You’re insufferable! Want the pill? You take it and draw the thunder. Coward—if you haven’t got the guts, zip it! One more word, and I’ll end you!”

Killing intent boiled from her.

Tianxu jumped, then forced a creepy grin but kept quiet.

Du Longyang was used to Tianxu’s antics and ignored him.

They resumed plotting.

This scheme had been in the works for ages, yet caution ruled them still.

Failure meant doom.

“We’re risking our lives here—what’s that Lu kid contributing? We fight the immortals to a standstill, and he swoops in to claim the prize?”

Tianxu said sinisterly.

“Will you shut up?”

The Empress’s glare made Tianxu’s heart skip.

He clearly feared her.

“Young Master Lu will join the fight and help us slaughter the immortals.”

Du Longyang stated.

Tianxu opened his mouth to argue, but the Empress’s icy stare—promising death for another word—silenced him.

He muttered under his breath: “Women are trouble. Beautiful ones even more so.”

“In three days, the Empress undergoes her tribulation. We... prepare to slay immortals!”

Du Longyang announced.

“Where will she cross it? Back at the Great Qian palace?”

Ye Shoudao frowned.

“No—the ruined Bodhisattva Temple on the old ridge outside Martial Emperor City.”

The Empress shook her head with a smile.

Du Longyang and Master Yuanshang froze.

Why there, of all places?

What was this woman planning?

...

Beiluo, Lake Center Island.

Lu propped his chin with one hand, pinching a chess piece with the other, arranging the board.

Suddenly, the hand holding the piece trembled.

He raised a brow.

“Three days from now?”

Lu smiled, shrugged it off, and placed the piece.

As it fell, his vitality surged, faintly forming a storm.

...

Dongyang Prefecture.

A disheveled scholar staggered along, swigging wine.

Behind him, Meng Haoran followed with quick, small steps, book box on his back.

Master and disciple from the Haoran Sect, Kong Nanfei and Meng Haoran.

After leaving Beiluo, they'd traveled south, then east, wandering the world, visiting famous mountains and rivers, drawing closer to nature and sensing heaven and earth.

Meng Haoran's cultivation had reached the peak of Qi Core.

He'd even mastered righteous qi—one shout could shake snow from a hillock.

"This is Dongyang Prefecture, where the Master fell in battle?"

Meng Haoran asked, curiosity tinged with gravity.

The slovenly Kong Nanfei ahead ignored him.

City guards bowed slightly to the scholars.

They respected Confucians—not for anything else, but for the old man who once stood alone outside Dongyang against invaders.

Meng Haoran noticed Kong Nanfei straighten up upon entering the gates.

Each step was deliberate, as if tracing something.

Meng followed, puzzled.

Beyond the city lay endless desert seas.

Kong Nanfei, robes tattered, hair greasy and curled, trudged through the sand.

He gulped wine, eyes gleaming as if seeing the Master holding off armies alone.

After a long while, he found a spot and sat cross-legged.

The prefect of Dongyang arrived atop the walls, gazing down. Kong's seated form seemed to overlap with the elder's silhouette from that day.

Suddenly.

A low chant echoed through heaven and earth.

Kong Nanfei sat laughing, reciting the "Song of Righteous Qi," each word resounding like iron in every ear.

Guards on the walls felt blood boil, eyes red, killing intent surging.

Fearless in the face of death.

The chant faded.

Kong smiled as righteous qi coalesced above his head into a milky-white orb.

It spun, whipping up a spiritual storm.

Kong beamed.

Meng Haoran watched from afar, book box on back, awestruck.

So strong...

Though Master failed to break the Heavenly Lock, Kong Nanfei was still Kong Nanfei—grand and bold as ever.

Kong sat amid gathering black clouds.

A bolt of lightning arced down, drowned by his laughter.

At the site of the Master's death, Kong chose breakthrough—not pressing the Heavenly Lock, but seizing the moment to cross thunder punishment.

Forming a Golden Core!

The Five Phoenix Continent's first Golden Core cultivator was born!

The instant Kong formed his core...

On Lake Center Island, Lu sensed it—he gained at least 500 strands of spiritual qi as commission.

“He chose the Golden Core path?”

Lu was surprised, admiring Kong’s daring.

But Golden Core didn’t mean weakness.

Nine revolutions, and it could rival anything.

Dongyang Prefecture.

A radiant golden core hovered above Kong, pulsing mysteriously.

Brilliant light poured from the clouds.

Kong sat, comprehending his Dao amid the thunder’s feedback.

Far off, Meng Haoran stood rooted, spiritual qi cycling freely.

In a flash, he broke past Qi Core into Spirit Reservoir.

...

Endless desert.

King Yali and his men ran madly, half-crazed.

The oasis looked close, but they exhausted themselves—still only desert ahead.

Yali's vision swam; even his strength faltered. He collapsed.

Crawling, inching forward, hand outstretched toward the mirage of hope.

His sight blurred, fading.

Then...

Just before darkness took him, “squeak-squeak” sounds reached his ears.

From the eerie oasis poured upright-walking monkeys.

Yali felt he’d slept days.

Cool liquid—he gulped greedily.

Clear water soothed his parched throat and stomach, pores opening in relief.

Yali opened his eyes.

He froze.

Monkeys surrounded him, wielding wooden weapons, intelligent eyes fixed on him.

Yali sprang up, terrified.

Monkeys... in the oasis?!

“Where am I?”

He demanded.

The group parted; a monkey astride a white wolf appeared.

It repeated his words, mimicking speech.

Yali spoke more.

The monkey analyzed, soon managing simple conversation.

Yali relaxed—these creatures meant no harm.

The oasis reeked of strangeness, unsettling him.

But he lived. With water, he could leave, return to the Marton Kingdom.

Heaven never seals all exits.

Yali wept with joy.

Alive, he could regroup, strike east again at that ancient land.

But calmer, he abandoned the thought.

Against god-like foes, armies were fodder.

Yali sagged, then let it go.

He and his men survived—that was fortune enough.

They settled in the oasis.

Wary, the monkeys cordoned an area for them.

Only Yali could communicate.

Later, he learned the oasis was called “Demon Continent,” the energy “demonic qi.”

Observing, Yali saw the monkeys’ power—odd arts like the eastern gods, though weaker. Only the Monkey King rivaled them.

Yali earned the king’s trust with his gift for language, teaching the troop human speech.

He burned to know their cultivation.

But they guarded it closely.

Yali feared angering the king—its aura suffocated him.

Days later, hiding in bushes, he saw a monkey inhale and exhale a four-sided crystal.

Demonic qi wrapped it, tempering it.

This was their method.

Yali watched, entranced.

The crystal seemed the world's greatest treasure.

Greed surged—he could cultivate like gods!

But he feared the king and suppressed it.

He curried favor, teaching weapon-crafting, longbows...

The king delighted, admiring Yali.

Every two days, the king assaulted the soaring central pillar.

Failing, injured a day, healed, tried again.

Yali pondered, hatching a plan.

On healing day, he bid farewell—returning home.

The king reluctantly agreed.

Yali cited the endless desert; he needed three monkeys as guides.

The king hesitated.

But Yali's silver tongue won out.

Three monkeys led the troops away, waterskins full, marching toward Marton.

The king thought nothing of it, resuming pillar assaults.

Soon after leaving the oasis...

Yali's warm smile turned cold. He drew his blade, qi and blood erupting.

One slash decapitated a monkey.

The others roared, demonic qi flaring, slaughtering.

But Yali's soldiers overwhelmed them—both monkeys fell under blades.

Yali wiped blood from his face, dug crystals from skulls.

Hot sand drank the red drops.

Excitement blazed in his eyes.

His men cheered.

In the oasis...

The king tumbled from the pillar, wounded again.

But...

As it prepared to heal, it froze.

Yali's army returned.

The monkeys greeted them...

Then blades flashed—toward the troop!

The first contact between demon and man.

Blood soaked the Demon Continent's soil.