

Starlit Path 30

Chapter 30: Wielding Twenty Blades, Placing Twenty Pieces

The blade floated—suspended in midair, a feat akin to an immortal’s art. On the twenty-some flower boats, a hundred Confucian scholars stared in disbelief as the butcher’s knife, defying all reason, soared toward them. A flying blade wasn’t entirely unheard of; the Mohists had crafted flying daggers as hidden weapons. But this was different. The butcher’s knife was wreathed in a faint, colossal blade shadow, radiating an oppressive force that choked every scholar’s breath.

Which of the Hundred Schools wielded such power?

The scholars fell silent, sweat beading on their foreheads as they tracked the airborne blade. Nie Changqing stood atop the pole rising from the lake, his robes snapping in the wind. The righteous qi that had suppressed his blood energy surged back to life. With spiritual energy guiding the blade, he unleashed his most dazzling strike as a grandmaster—yet his heart remained calm, as steady as when he slaughtered pigs.

“Compared to the Young Master’s spiritual pressure that pinned Han Lianxiao with a thought, this is nothing,” Nie Changqing murmured. His gaze settled on the flower boats, serene and resolute.

A boom echoed as the misty vortex tightened, the lake’s fog swirling like a crown of three flowers. The scholars’ faces paled. They hadn’t anticipated the young master’s order to attack. They were titled scholars, their status sensitive if not prestigious. Did Lu Ping’an dare kill them? Such an act would draw the scrutiny of the court’s great Confucians, perhaps even the Imperial Preceptor. How would he justify it?

Yet, regardless of their calculations, Nie Changqing’s blade descended. The rippling lake, stirred by the wind, fell mirror-still, its eerie calm sending shivers through the onlookers. On the targeted flower boat, the leading scholars—both Confucians and second-rate martial artists—blanched. The blade’s approach

felt like a plunge into the depths of hell. Their righteous qi collapsed, their composure shattered. One scholar, shoving his peers aside, fled frantically across the deck.

All awaited the blade's fall, but it disappointed them, halting an inch from the flower boat's deck, hovering eerily. The stillness was more terrifying than the strike itself. The other boats' scholars watched, expecting anticlimax, but on the targeted vessel, chaos erupted. Like the first, scholars turned to flee, only to collapse mid-step, blood seeping from waist-level wounds, their bodies severed.

A thunderous roar followed as white foam surged across the lake, a serpentine wake stretching from Nie Changqing's pole to the flower boat. The water parted faintly for hundreds of meters, the blade's aura like that of a dragon-slaying strike. The scholars' righteous qi crumbled utterly before it.

With a crack, the flower boat split, a gash appearing despite the blade's pause. A few swift scholars escaped death, but their robes were bloodied, and they fell screaming onto the deck. Green lake water bubbled into the sinking vessel. Bereft of righteous qi, the scholars were no better than third-rate martial artists. Some shed their robes and leapt into the icy lake, swimming toward other boats or the shore. Those who couldn't swim collapsed, faces ashen.

Nie Changqing raised a hand, palm open as if drawing the blade back. The hovering knife wobbled, then flew back to his grip. Standing on the pole, his plain robes billowing, he had cleaved the lake with a single strike. The Blade Control Technique debuted with stunning brilliance.

The other boats' scholars were dumbfounded, their spirits trembling. A blade that parted the lake, killed, and sank ships—was this truly a martial artist's power? Even the greatest grandmasters or the Hundred Schools couldn't match this.

The lake fell silent. On the fishing boat, Ning Zhao, gripping her Cicada Wing Sword, stared in awe, her lips parted. Even she was stunned. Beside her, the young master barely glanced at the scene, his hair

swaying in the breeze as he smiled and lifted a white chess piece. With a gentle sweep of his hand across the pristine chessboard, he placed the piece on the central star position with a crisp clack.

“Old Nie, keep going,” he said calmly.

The Spiritual Pressure Chessboard shimmered. Black pieces unleashed fivefold spiritual pressure; white restored half a target’s spiritual energy. Nie Changqing’s single strand, halved, was restored fully by the white piece. His eyes reopened, excitement flashing across his face as the exhilarating rush of spiritual energy returned.

The butcher’s knife hummed, wreathed in spiritual energy once more. Still marveling at his previous strike, Nie Changqing slashed again, targeting another flower boat at a different angle. The scholars aboard panicked, far from the serene composure of great Confucians. On the pole, Nie Changqing wielded his blade relentlessly; on the fishing boat, the young master placed pieces with steady rhythm. Their synergy was seamless, almost poetic.

Twenty white pieces fell, and twenty blades struck, each cleaving a flower boat. Nie Changqing’s mastery of the Blade Control Technique deepened with every strike. The lake became a chaos of splashing scholars, their dignity abandoned as they floundered like dumplings in the icy water, faces pale with cold and fear. Corpses of the slain sank, staining the lake with crimson blooms.

The mist shrouding Beiluo Lake dissipated, scattered by the force of Nie Changqing’s twenty strikes. He returned to the fishing boat, dragging the pole, while the young master leisurely collected the chess pieces. “Young Master, the remaining scholars—shall I finish them?” Nie Changqing asked, gripping his knife.

The young master rubbed his slender fingers, propping his chin as he glanced at the floundering scholars. A faint smile curved his lips. “Let them flail. They thought to make their names by trampling me

with tales of 'raging for a beauty.' No cost, no lesson. If they drown, so be it. If they reach shore, the city lord's manor will settle accounts."

He waved a hand. "For now, let's visit Drunken Dust Pavilion."

Miles behind, Chen Beixun's eyes narrowed, his body trembling as he gripped the yellow pearwood sword case on his back. A blade that parted the lake—a Taoist outcast with such power? It was despair-inducing. Beside him, Liu Ye and Zhu Yishan slumped on the deck, their gazes vacant.

"How is this possible?" Liu Ye muttered, almost delirious. "Is he even human? A blade that kills from afar?"

"Don't panic," Chen Beixun said, clenching his fists, his eyes glinting. "The Sword Sect has its grandmaster."

The mist cleared, revealing a lone boat in the distance. Chen Beixun's gaze locked onto a solitary figure seated there, also bearing a yellow pearwood sword case with four swords—a sixth-rank grandmaster swordsman from Zhongnan Tianshan.

Excitement surged in Chen Beixun's eyes. The Sword Sect's champion was rising, robes billowing. But his excitement froze. The swordsman, without hesitation, unleashed his blood energy, struck the pole, and sent the boat shooting across the lake, leaving ripples in its wake. He fled without looking back.