

## Starlit Path 63

### Chapter 63: The Cruel Board of Fate

Within the immortal palace, emerald candle flames flickered softly.

A chilling breeze whispered through the air, barely perceptible.

His gaze sharp as a blade, the young warrior radiated a terrifying aura, his vital energy surging like a raging tide.

The swordsman gripped his wooden sword tightly.

The group's nerves were taut, their senses on edge.

Immortal destiny, they called it... but only those with the strength to claim it could call it fate.

In an instant, the candlelight shifted to an eerie green, as if unseen eyes watched them from the shadows.

The atmosphere in the palace was... unsettling.

“I’ve got a bad feeling about this. We’ve been played,” the scholar muttered.

The stoic man spoke up. “This isn’t some sacred ground of destiny. It’s a tomb, probably crawling with ghosts and ghouls.”

The sinister wind, paired with the ghostly green glow of the candles, painted a scene of otherworldly dread.

The bookish man pulled a bamboo scroll from his case, glancing at the stoic one. “Who says a tomb can’t also be a place of destiny?”

The swordsman ignored the bickering between the stoic man and the bookish one.

His eyes lifted, peering into the depths of the palace.

Rows of ghostly green candles stretched into the distance, their light fading into an endless abyss.

Gripping his wooden sword, the swordsman stepped forward slowly.

“Based on the layout of ancient tombs, once you pass the entrance, there’s a long, narrow passage. Beyond that, you’ll find the antechamber, the middle chamber, and the rear chamber...” he mused. “This palace is far more intricate. A tomb of this scale suggests its occupant was no ordinary figure. We’d better stay sharp.”

The swordsman had little interest in so-called immortal destinies. If not for the orders of the sect leader, he wouldn't have bothered coming. But now, faced with this eerie spectacle, a spark of curiosity ignited within him.

"Whether or not there's a destiny to be found, exploring a grand palace like this makes the trip worthwhile."

He gave a carefree smile, exuding a relaxed confidence.

"Foolish. If this were a mere trap, would it bring the likes of us to our knees?" the young warrior snapped, his piercing gaze sweeping over the stoic man.

The stoic man fell silent, swallowing his retort.

The group quieted, moving deeper into the palace together.

"We entered this place with our spirit tokens, as did others. Yet, this passage holds only the four of us. That means this tomb has more than one path," the swordsman observed, his eyes scanning the shadowy corridor.

"Keep going. I can feel it... the destiny is ahead," the young warrior declared.

The group pressed forward, the green candle flames trembling as they passed.

Suddenly, the young warrior halted.

The swordsman, the stoic man, and the bookish man stopped in their tracks.

“Listen,” the young warrior said, his face grave. The palace was far too strange.

Fortunately, they were prodigies of the Great Zhou, their spirits unyielding. Ordinary men would have crumbled under this nameless dread.

The four stood still, straining their ears.

The rows of candles on either side quivered, their green flames dancing wildly.

A cold wind swept through, carrying faint sobs and rustling sounds.

“Something’s coming,” the young warrior said, exhaling sharply.

No sooner had he spoken than the axe on his back swung into his hands.

Rustle, rustle, rustle...

One by one, the green candles along the passage walls snuffed out.

As the darkness closed in, emaciated, humanoid creatures—ghastly and unnatural—crawled swiftly along the walls, their numbers overwhelming.

The candles extinguished in rows, and the darkness swallowed the passage.

Without hesitation, the group unleashed their vital energy.

The roar of their master-level power echoed through the corridor.

A guttural howl erupted.

The young warrior's eyes blazed as he swung his axe, his vital energy surging. A single strike cleaved a small fiend in two.

His terrifying force continued, cutting down several more fiends in rapid succession.

The stoic man, the swordsman, and the bookish man gasped in awe.

These creatures exerted a pressure comparable to a first-tier master.

Yet, in the young warrior's hands, slaying them was as easy as slicing through vegetables.

The fiends, split in half, dissolved into streams of pale blue spiritual energy, swirling through the passage.

The young warrior's eyes lit up with realization.

"This... this is the destiny!" he exclaimed. "Fascinating. To claim this destiny, you need strength. Without it, even stepping into this place means death!"

"Destiny belongs to the strong!"

He laughed heartily, his voice booming. "This immortal's game... I respect it!"

Boom!

His vital energy surged, his grandmaster-level power dominating the passage.

The fiends fell, transforming into pale blue streams of energy that illuminated the corridor.

The energy swirled around the young warrior, drawn into his qi core.

The swordsman, the stoic man, and the bookish man watched, their eyes gleaming with understanding.

They weren't fools. They quickly grasped the nature of this so-called destiny.

Kill the fiends, gain spiritual energy!

In the passage, the young warrior wielded his axe like a war god, pale blue energy coiling around him in a dreamlike haze.

The swordsman thrust his wooden sword lightly, piercing a fiend's head. A wisp of pale blue energy emerged, wrapping around him.

A jolt of vitality coursed through him.

“This is it... the spiritual energy of heaven and earth?” he marveled.

Activating his blood-refining technique, he drew the energy into his body, but it dissipated, unrefined.

“Refining qi in the dantian?” he muttered, glancing at the young warrior’s movements.

He struck again, his wooden sword flashing three times, felling another fiend.

A wisp of spiritual energy sank into his qi core.

Boom!

His hair fluttered as he exhaled a breath of turbid air.

“I feel it!” he shouted, his face flushed with excitement. “This is the destiny!”

The wisp of spiritual energy in his qi core amplified his strength, as if he’d been cleansed by a torrential rain.

The stoic man and the bookish man experienced the same revelation.

After their initial shock, they understood—these terrifying fiends were the key to their opportunity.

Killing them granted the spiritual energy of heaven and earth!

But they were too slow.

The passage had been swarmed by roughly a hundred fiends—each equivalent to a first-tier master.

Yet, they were slaughtered to the last.

At the forefront of the passage, the young warrior stood tall, axe in hand, his body steaming with heat, like a god of war.

Four wisps of spiritual energy coiled around him.

The swordsman had slain ten fiends, absorbing one wisp, stepping into the first stage of qi core cultivation.

The stoic man and the bookish man, having killed five each, gained nothing.

The young warrior, however, had felled nearly eighty fiends, refining two wisps of spiritual energy.

“The conversion rate’s low... no, it’s because we lack immortal cultivation techniques!” he realized, his eyes burning with fervor.

If this was an immortal’s tomb, there might be cultivation techniques among the burial treasures.

With such techniques, his efficiency in refining spiritual energy would soar.

Without hesitation, he shot forward, charging deeper into the palace.

The swordsman’s eyes snapped open, his hair flowing as he tapped his foot, using his lightness skill to follow.

If a true destiny awaited, he would fight for it.

The stoic man and the bookish man hurried after them, their pride refusing to let them lag behind.

Not far from their passage, another corridor echoed with the sounds of battle.

But unlike the ease of the young warrior's group, the fighting here was far bloodier.

Not everyone was a prodigy capable of slaying masters like dogs.

In this passage, blood filled the air.

Of the six destined ones who entered, only three survived, drenched in blood and riddled with wounds.

They sat cross-legged, absorbing the spiritual energy in the passage to bolster their strength.

...

In the middle chamber of the tomb, a low voice resonated from a coffin at the center.

"I am Jiang Chao, an ancient qi refiner, at the peak of the qi core realm."

“I lived for five hundred years, fighting alongside the ancient emperor to quell rebellions, only to fall in battle against the rebel ‘body-hidden’ qi refiners, buried in Wolong Ridge.”

“But... why am I still alive?”

Creak... creak...

From the coffin, a stiff figure slowly sat up.

...

Outside the immortal palace, a commander in full armor stood with an army amassed behind him.

The forces from various regions, totaling fifty thousand, covered the ridges like a dark tide.

A strategist, gently fanning himself, stood behind the commander, sighing.

“My lord, this is unwise,” he cautioned.

The commander waved him off.

“Even if immortals exist, to me, they’re just stronger warriors.”

“Even a peak grandmaster like the young warrior can’t face ten thousand men alone. An immortal, no matter how strong, can be overwhelmed. If ten thousand isn’t enough, we’ll send twenty thousand. If that fails, a hundred thousand!”

“Besides,” the commander continued, his eyes sharp, “the mandate of heaven is tied to immortality. If the young warrior emerges alive from this palace and claims that destiny, he’ll control the narrative. The thirteen feudal lords’ campaign against the Great Zhou will become a joke, and the world will fall into his family’s hands!”

“Am I to accept that?” he growled.

The strategist opened his mouth but found no counterargument.

The commander’s crimson cape billowed as he raised his banner, rallying his army. “Where are my northern warriors?!”

“Storm the immortal gate!”

“The first to breach it will be rewarded with a hundred thousand taels of silver!”

His roar echoed, joined by the commands of other regional lords at Wolong Ridge.

Their motives mirrored his.

Banners waved, and battle cries shook the heavens, startling flocks of birds.

Soldiers and generals surged from all directions, a black tide crashing toward the immortal palace.

...

On an island in the heart of a lake, a figure sipped warmed plum wine from a bronze cup.

Feeling the growing reservoir of spiritual energy within, they smiled with satisfaction.

Suddenly, their brow arched.

Their gaze fell on a chessboard, where countless red dots swarmed toward the immortal gate at Wolong Ridge.

They could almost hear the thunderous war cries echoing across the mountains.

Shaking their head, as if expecting this, they took another sip of wine.

Murmuring softly, they said, "The heavens care not, treating all as pawns."

Their slender fingers picked up a chess piece and placed it firmly on the board, sliding it forward with a flick.

In that moment, the red dots on the chessboard trembled.

And then, they vanished, like ice melting in the sun.