

Starlit Path 71

Chapter 71: The Warlord's Descent into Darkness

Beiluo City.

Clad in black armor, a sword at his side, he stood tall and resolute on the city wall, his posture as unyielding as a spear piercing the heavens. By his side, his companion's face was grim, eyes narrowed as he gazed toward the distant horizon of the plains.

"Old friend, worried about him?" the armored man asked, casting a glance at his companion.

The weathered face of his comrade remained stern. "He rose from a mere foot soldier to where he is now. I trust he knows what he's doing. Besides, to die for Beiluo would be his honor."

The armored man spoke slowly, his voice measured. "The emergence of the Immortal Fate has drawn all factions—scholars, nobles, regional governors, even the emperor and his advisors in the capital have sent their agents. This is a storm sweeping across the entire Great Zhou Dynasty."

His companion frowned, puzzled. "With everyone chasing the Immortal Fate, shouldn't that ease the pressure on Great Zhou?"

The armored man's gaze deepened as he stared at the horizon. "You think the Immortal Fate's appearance will calm the chaos in Great Zhou? You're mistaken. The Immortal Fate is a monumental shift, capable of creating cultivators. As their numbers grow, the nature of warfare itself will change. In the early stages, it's subtle, but the longer this drags on, the more the tides of war will favor the side with more cultivators."

Dust rose in the distance as galloping hooves stirred the earth. He continued, undeterred. “No faction will lay down arms for peace. The only way forward is to decide Great Zhou’s fate swiftly—whether it’s the dynasty’s collapse or the rebels’ defeat. Only then can the victor consolidate control over the world’s cultivators.”

His companion nodded, half-understanding. “But wars don’t end so easily. The capital is guarded by six formidable defenses. Even a united rebel army would struggle to breach them and march on the capital. This war could drag on for five or six years.”

“Five or six years?” The armored man chuckled. “Some won’t allow it. Behind Great Zhou stands the Confucian school, while the Mohist school, their long-standing rival, has spread its disciples among the regional governors. Only by toppling Great Zhou and establishing a new dynasty can the Mohists advance their ideals. The Mohists have woven a vast web, slowly eroding Great Zhou’s foundation. But the Immortal Fate is like a spark landing on that web—if they’re not careful, it’ll burn their plans to ashes.”

He shook his head, watching the distant riders. “Since the fall of the first Mohist leader, the school has declined, their original ideals consumed by ambition. They’ve lost their way.”

The carriage swayed gently.

Inside, he sat under the protection of a small escort, heading back to Xi County. Within the carriage, a woman in a plain white gauze dress tended to his wounds with a delicate handkerchief.

In the Immortal Palace, he had worn the thickest armor and endured the fiercest blows. Now, in the quiet carriage, he closed his eyes, savoring her gentle care while mentally studying the cultivation techniques he had acquired from the palace.

Suddenly, the sharp neigh of horses broke the silence.

His eyes snapped open, sharp as arrows ready to pierce the sky. He placed a firm hand on her shoulder. "Stay in the carriage."

Her beautiful face flickered with worry, but she held her tongue.

"Mere bandits? I, the Warlord, fear nothing," he said with a confident smile before stepping out.

The coachman was dead, an arrow pinning him to the carriage door.

Beyond the ridge, thousands of soldiers swarmed, their generals radiating fierce vitality. He scanned the scene—roughly five or six thousand enemies. After a barrage of arrows, his Xi County cavalry, once formidable, was reduced to fewer than a hundred.

One hundred against five thousand. The enemy boasted master-level warriors and numerous first-rate fighters.

“Governor!” a general cried out, eyes wide with desperation. “We’ve fallen into a trap! These are the forces of Pingyang County’s Governor!”

“We’ll cover your escape, Governor!” His men, fearless in the face of death, were now staring at a hopeless situation.

In the distance, banners fluttered. A figure in silver armor, surrounded by generals, gazed at him. “As expected, the Warlord is gravely wounded from seizing the Immortal Fate. This is a rare chance to eliminate him,” the Pingyang Governor said with a light chuckle.

He raised a small flag, and instantly, soldiers on the ridge lifted spears and notched arrows.

“How did you know I was injured? And how did you learn of my altered route?” the Warlord demanded, locking eyes with his foe.

“You’ll find out in the afterlife,” the Pingyang Governor replied with a smirk, then waved his flag. “Kill him! A thousand taels of silver for the Warlord’s head!”

The cry of “Kill!” shook the heavens. Arrows whistled through the air, and the ridge echoed with the roars of master warriors.

His towering figure seemed suddenly forlorn as he closed his eyes. He had already pieced together much of the truth.

“Uncle, from this day forward, my clan severs all ties with the Mohists,” he declared, eyes blazing as he opened them. He seized the great axe from his back, slashing through the incoming arrows, each one splitting in two.

“Where are my Xi County warriors?” he roared, his black hair whipping in the wind, his eyes burning with killing intent. “Who dares to fight by my side?”

His hundred remaining soldiers and generals, eyes bloodshot, answered with a thunderous roar, their weapons raised as they charged with unyielding spirit.

One hundred against five thousand. Fearless, they plunged into battle.

Like a wolf among sheep, he carved through the dense ranks of soldiers. His axe swung like a tempest, snapping spears and sending dozens of men flying.

The Pingyang Governor’s master warriors closed in, joined by nearly ten first-rate fighters, encircling him.

The setting sun bled across the sky, bathing the battlefield in crimson. Blood sprayed meters high, and bodies littered the ground.

On a nearby slope, the Pingyang Governor’s face darkened. He waved his flag repeatedly, shouting “Kill!” until his voice grew hoarse. His advisor tried to reassure him. “No matter how strong he is, he’s only human. Even a grandmaster can’t withstand an army’s onslaught. The Warlord will fall today.”

Around the carriage, corpses piled high, the wood stained red with blood. He wielded his axe relentlessly, keeping the enemy at bay. His breathing grew labored, his arms heavy as lead. Yet the endless tide of soldiers kept coming.

His Xi County cavalry was gone, their horses skewered by spears. His first- and second-rate warriors lay dead, pierced through, their final gazes a mix of fervor and regret as they looked to him.

His eyes burned red. He had once called himself the pinnacle of martial prowess, a born commander. But now, in this desperate moment, he cursed his own weakness. If only he were stronger—strong as an immortal!

He roared, channeling the spiritual energy in his dantian. His axe spun, spraying blood in all directions. The energy burst outward, clearing a space around him. But with only five strands of spiritual energy, it was depleted after cutting down hundreds.

Inside the carriage, she lifted the curtain. Holding a slender sword, her long dress flowing, she leaped out with graceful agility, her hair dancing as she stood before him. Within moments, her dress was soaked in blood.

“Shaoyun...” she whispered, leaning against him.

He looked at her, bloodied and frail, and for the first time, fear gripped his fearless heart. He dreaded the thought of her becoming a cold corpse, her beauty fading like fleeting fireworks.

He swung his axe, his mind racing through the Righteous Spirit Technique he had gained from the Immortal Palace. He needed spiritual energy. He needed to protect her.

“Faster! I need energy!” he growled, cleaving through another soldier, his breathing ragged. He pushed the technique to its limits, squeezing every ounce of potential from his body.

Seeing her overwhelmed by soldiers, his fear turned to desperation. He let out a primal scream.

A thunderous boom shook the air. His body trembled.

Beiluo, Lakeheart Island.

The blood-red sunset spilled over the shimmering Beiluo Lake. Fishermen cast their nets, their hearty songs carried by the breeze. A man in a wheelchair, basking in the serene lake view, raised an eyebrow.

A system prompt appeared before him: “Detected: He has reversed the Spirit Technique, meeting the criteria for ‘Demonic Descent.’ A demonic seed can now be formed. Host, please choose: Cancel ‘Demonic Descent’ or forge the ‘Demonic Path.’”

The sunset glow illuminated his stunned expression. With a thought, his vision shifted, lines flickering as a scene unfolded miles away.

Blood flowed like rivers, and bodies lay strewn across the earth...