

Starlit Path 76

Chapter 76: Heroes Defy Order with Martial Might

The night deepened.

In the Great Zhou Dynasty's capital, the Zijin Palace glowed with lingering lamplight. Emperor Yuwen Xiu, draped in a loose golden dragon robe, pored over the memorials submitted by his ministers. Outside, an old eunuch stood respectfully, holding a whisk, occasionally glancing inside. Seeing the emperor diligently at work, a faint smile of relief crossed his smooth, beardless face.

After a while, Yuwen Xiu set down the memorial, surveying the vast yet desolate hall. A chill of loneliness enveloped him. He descended from the dragon throne, hands clasped behind his back, and walked to the doorway, his long robe trailing behind.

"Your Majesty..." the eunuch began, bowing.

Yuwen Xiu ignored him, gazing into the hazy night, his thoughts heavy. "The emergence of the Immortal Fate at Wolong Ridge has introduced countless variables to the world. The more variables, the greater the crisis for Great Zhou," he murmured.

The eunuch, kneeling, trembled slightly.

"How did my father truly die?" Yuwen Xiu continued, his voice low. "Great Zhou was at its peak, suppressing the five nomadic tribes so thoroughly they dared not breathe. Yet now, every memorial reports their incursions at our borders, with the frontier people suffering..."

His thin lips pressed together, fists clenched. "It's all because of the Hundred Schools. Even after my father's death, Great Zhou wouldn't have descended into such chaos if not for them. They've swayed the governors, plunging the dynasty into civil strife and giving the nomads their chance."

The eunuch held his breath, not daring to speak.

"The Mohist rangers, under the guise of heroism, have wrought chaos upon the world. They're the most detestable of all," Yuwen Xiu said bitterly. "When will the day come to abolish the Hundred Schools?"

Beiluo City.

Beneath the city walls, moonlight cast a cold glow. The city lord stood with a smile, though his soldiers and generals behind him were tense.

"Esteemed Leader, your reputation precedes you," the city lord said, bowing slightly.

Word had already spread that the Mohist Leader had parted ways with Xi County. His subsequent dealings with the North County Governor were no secret either. The Warlord of Xi County had been abandoned—a move that didn't surprise the city lord. The warlord's indomitable spirit was not something the Mohist Leader could control.

“City Lord Lu, Beiluo’s fame has long reached my ears. I hope you’ll forgive this old man for disturbing you so late,” the Mohist Leader replied, his smile warm and disarming.

The city lord glanced at the carriage as the Mohist disciples dismounted. The group entered Beiluo City, the gates closing behind them under the stark moonlight.

The city lord kept their conversation brief, uneasy in the Mohist Leader’s presence. He arranged for the group to stay at an inn, surrounding it with a thousand soldiers to ensure not even a mosquito could slip through. Only by keeping the Mohist Leader under close watch could he feel at ease.

He knew their true target was his son. Though aware of his son’s immortal fate and formidable strength, as a father, he would never allow him to be endangered.

At the Lu Manor, Luo Cheng issued orders, stationing a thousand men in every corner—pavilions, bridges, and walkways all heavily guarded. Luo Cheng himself, sword at his side, sat in the courtyard, moonlight glinting off his armor with an icy sheen. “To reach the young master, they’ll have to step over my corpse,” he declared, his blood qi surging.

In a separate wing of the manor, Ni Yu tossed and turned, unable to sleep. Rubbing her round belly, her chubby face scrunched up. She wasn’t hungry—just craving a snack to help her drift off. The dark, empty room unnerved her. While her companions, Ning Zhao and Yi Yue, trained diligently on Lakeheart Island, she had done little beyond eating and sleeping despite her loud proclamations of wanting to cultivate.

Sighing, she slipped out of bed, tiptoeing out of her quarters and sneaking toward the kitchen. In the dead of night, the courtyard was silent. With her hair tied in a bun, she navigated the darkness with ease, slipping into the kitchen. Her plump nose twitched, eyes lighting up as she lifted the lid of a pot on the stove, revealing a few cold steamed buns.

Munching on a bun, she didn't return to her room—too lonely and scary. Instead, she crept to her young master's courtyard, settling outside his door to eat her bun. Oddly, being near his quarters calmed her nerves.

At the inn.

The Mohist Leader stood with hands behind his back, moonlight deepening the lines of his face. "What hour is it?" he asked softly.

From the shadows, a hoarse voice replied, "The hour of zi."

"The hour of zi... It's time. The other five guardian cities will act at this hour," he said with a faint smile. "Let us begin."

"Yes," the voice responded.

Shadows slipped away. In other rooms of the inn, Mohist disciples pushed open wooden windows, peering at the soldiers below. They drew large, bulging sacks from their waists, slicing them open with daggers. A hissing sound followed as countless fireflies poured out, their eerie glow twinkling like stars in the night, flowing like a river of light.

The city lord frowned, catching a firefly in his palm. Its light flickered, beautiful yet pitiful. “Fireflies... the Yin-Yang School!” he realized, his expression shifting.

Suddenly, the firefly burst, releasing a cloud of mist. The world spun, and he staggered. Beside him, his companion collapsed, unconscious. The soldiers surrounding the inn fell one by one, overtaken by the mist.

A strand of spiritual energy shielded the city lord’s mind, fighting the dizziness as he looked toward the inn. His eyes narrowed. Under the cold moonlight, a massive metal spider perched atop the inn. Several figures in veiled bamboo hats leapt down alongside it, vanishing into the night with agile bounds.

“Mechanism School... mechanical beasts! Yin-Yang School... sorcerers! Mohist disciples...” the city lord gasped, struggling to breathe. “They dare...”

The Hundred Schools had grown utterly brazen, beyond even the National Advisor’s control. “Fan’er...” he muttered, stumbling out to protect his son.

The hour of zi.

A silent upheaval swept through the Great Zhou Dynasty. In the six guardian cities—Beiluo, Drunken Dragon, Tong’an, Pingnan, Yuanchi, and Wangtian—fireflies danced like flowing starlight. As they burst,

mist enveloped the cities, and shadowy figures moved to dismantle the impregnable defenses from within.

Lu Manor, courtyard.

Seated in his wheelchair, he turned it slowly, peering through the carved redwood window at the moonlight shrouded in mist. A faint smirk tugged at his lips.

Outside, a black-robed figure in a veiled bamboo hat stood atop a roof, playing a metal flute. Its haunting melody seemed to summon something.

A deafening crash followed. A massive metal spider plummeted from the sky, landing in the courtyard, four figures standing on its back.

Ni Yu, curled up by the door, froze, her half-eaten bun dropping to the ground. “P-p-piercers!” she stammered.

The carved wooden door behind her swung open on its own. Clad in white, he sat in his wheelchair, a chessboard on his lap, poised to place a piece. Moonlight pierced the mist, bathing him in a radiant glow—elegant and unmatched.

Ni Yu stared, awestruck.

His gaze remained on the chessboard, but his voice echoed through the courtyard. “Heroes who wield martial might to defy order deserve death. Disturbing my sleep, presuming my patience, deserves death. My immortal fate is none of your concern—deserves death.”

Three statements, three pieces placed. Each move rang crisp against the board.

Ni Yu turned, mouth agape in shock. A colossal spiritual pressure blanketed the courtyard. The giant metal spider crumpled into a heap of scrap, the figure hidden within its abdomen screaming as flesh and blood mangled. The figures on its back exploded into clouds of blood mist.

The stench of blood filled the courtyard.