

Starlit Path 83

Chapter 83: Spear and Shield

Black smoke billowed, carrying a strange, faint fragrance. Ni Yu lifted the wooden lid off the black pot, her soot-smudged face alight with excitement and anticipation. No dazzling rainbow glow or explosive sound followed. She had followed the Qi Gathering Pill Refining Manual precisely, yet inside the pot was only a sticky, blackened lump of indescribable matter.

“Where... where’s the pill?” Ni Yu stammered, dumbfounded.

Lu raised an eyebrow. As expected, her first attempt at alchemy had failed. Failure was fine; his fingers tapped the wheelchair’s armrest as he pondered the cause. “Every herb was infused with spiritual energy, and we added Skyward Chrysanthemum petals. The materials are sound. The issue lies with the pot?”

Ni Yu knelt before the pot, staring at the blackened mess, a pang of despair urging her to pound her chest. As she feared, she was useless at everything but eating.

“Little Ni, bring the pot over,” Lu said.

Sniffing, Ni Yu scooped out the black lump. Gazing at it, she thought it resembled sesame-dusted sticky rice cake. Could it be... edible? She wrapped it in clean cloth and handed the pot to Lu.

Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing, puzzled by their antics, soon returned to their cultivation. Jing Yue, however, watched with keen interest.

“This pot lacks a touch of spirit,” Lu murmured, tapping it with his fingers, eyes narrowing. If it needed spirit, why not infuse it? His mind turned to the system’s Spirit Endowment Technique. It couldn’t animate non-living things, but he didn’t need the pot to gain sentience—just a wisp of spirit to aid alchemy.

Meanwhile, Ni Yu crouched, sniffing the black lump. Jing Yue, his pearwood sword case on his back, leaned in curiously. “What’s that, Ni girl?”

“Young Master says... it’s a ‘pill,’” she replied, pursing her lips.

“A pill? Looks like burnt sticky rice cake,” Jing Yue said, smirking.

“You think it’s sticky rice cake too? Want to try some?” Ni Yu’s eyes lit up, hopeful.

Jing Yue waved her off, fearing poison. Ni Yu wrestled with the urge to taste it, then swiped a bit with her finger and popped it into her mouth. Her eyes widened. She took a huge bite, chewing noisily, then turned away from Jing Yue, devouring the lump faster and faster until it was gone. Patting her belly, she sighed contentedly.

Jing Yue stared, speechless. This girl would eat anything.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed. Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing opened theirs, sensing a shift. The island’s spiritual energy swirled like fish, converging toward Ni Yu, forming a small vortex above her head.

Jing Yue, alarmed, backed away. “Danger—run!” Ning Zhao and Nie Changqing approached, watching as streams of spiritual energy poured into Ni Yu. Her single strand of spiritual energy doubled to two.

“Oh! I... broke through!” Ni Yu exclaimed, belatedly realizing.

Lu, observing, was unsurprised. Though not a proper pill, the “pill dregs” retained much of a qi-gathering pill’s potency. Focusing, he studied the pot, his mind on the Spirit Endowment Technique. His fingers glowed with golden light as he channeled a wisp of soul strength, tapping the pot. A chime rang out, golden ripples spreading across its surface.

His first endowment, given to a pot, left him with mixed feelings.

East Lake, Mohist Mechanism City.

Waterfalls roared, veiling the city in mist. Mohist disciples stood ready. Azhu, in fiery red robes like a mandala flower, gazed across the cliff at the Xi County army. The Mechanism City was the world’s most impregnable fortress, but they faced the Xi Liang army, the realm’s most elite force—a clash of spear and shield. Would the city’s defenses hold, or would the army’s might prevail?

Across the cliff, Xiang Shaoyun stood atop his chariot, a demonic figure with axe and shield, hair whipping in the wind. “Avenge our hundred fallen brothers! For Xi Liang’s glory! Charge!”

He raised his axe, his roar echoing through the cliffs, answered by his army's thunderous cries. Xi Liang warriors surged onto the eighty-one iron chains, fearless despite the abyss below, charging with reckless zeal.

On the city's wooden ramparts, Azhu, her silver mask glinting, raised a small flag. "Crossbow carts! Rotating shooters! Mechanical beasts!" she commanded, waving the flag with each order.

Mohist disciples sprang into action. Intricate machines aligned on the ramparts, targeting the charging warriors. Dark clouds, heavy with rain, burst, and torrential drops fell like a curtain, heightening the tension. Rain shattered on chains, armor, and blades.

"Kill!" Azhu flung her flag, swallowed by rain and waterfall as it plunged into the abyss.

Thud! Thud! Thud! Gears clanked as crossbow carts fired. Massive bolts tore through the rain, ripping arcs in the downpour, followed by a storm of smaller arrows shrieking toward the warriors.

A leading Xi Liang warrior roared, his blood qi surging as he slashed his blade against a bolt. The blade chipped, but before his defiant expression faded, a bolt pierced his chest, blood spraying. The impact sent him and those behind him tumbling into the abyss. Yet, the Xi Liang warriors pressed on, climbing the chains under relentless volleys.

Mo Liuqi, in a bamboo hat, rode his donkey, dangling a carrot on a bamboo pole. The donkey plodded after it. Suddenly, he straightened, gazing toward the Mechanism City. Removing his hat, he held out his hand, catching a raindrop that seemed to reflect Azhu's red-robed, masked figure. It shattered in his palm.

A heavy, suffocating pressure gripped his chest, paling his face. As rain poured, his scissors flew from his chest, severing the carrot's string. He whipped the bamboo pole against the donkey's flank. With a pained bray, it galloped through the mud, hooves splashing.

Atop the Mechanism City, amid swirling mist, Mo Yihen stood, rain soaking him. He drew his sword, its scrape against the sheath shattering raindrops. Donning a smiling mask, water streamed from its edges, pooling at his chin. Unable to smile, he let the mask do it for him.

Through the mask's holes, his gaze pierced the mist, locking onto Xiang Shaoyun across the cliff. This was his final mission: defend the city, assassinate the Warlord.

As Xiang Shaoyun moved, Mo Yihen, mask in place, sprinted along the ramparts, leaping through the rain. His form vanished, but a faint, lethal intent lingered, weaving through the downpour.