

# STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

## Chapter 10: Stay Grounded, Refine Qi Honestly

The siege of Beiluo City ended at nightfall. Despite Tantai Xuan's timely assault, the tide had turned. Ning Zhao's single-handed suppression of four Grandmasters and her severing of Feng Shi's legs before capturing him alive in front of Tantai Xuan crushed the Northern Prefecture's morale. Beiluo's defenders, by contrast, surged with vigor, their war drums pounding as if fueled by adrenaline. The Grandmaster clash had ended in Beiluo's triumph, filling every soldier with pride. With Lu Changkong, an unyielding pillar, holding the walls, the defenders stood resolute. The Northern Prefecture's attack failed, leaving thousands of corpses as they retreated like a receding tide into the night's horizon.

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Across from his room, Ning Zhao sat on the tiled roof, her white dress and flowing hair glowing faintly under the moon, a vision like a poetic painting. Yet her heart was heavy. Through the window, she watched Lu, her eyes tinged with worry. On the walls, he'd remotely granted her another strand of spiritual energy, leaving him pale and listless on the return journey. She feared for his health.

As a Grandmaster, she could sense Lu's frail constitution. If a normal person's vitality was ten, his was barely five. Sighing, she gazed at the moon, her eyes misty. Lu had weakened for her sake—she had to grow stronger to honor his gift.

Sitting cross-legged, guarding Lu, she explored the two strands of spiritual energy in her dantian. Lu had said the human body was a furnace, capable of refining more spiritual energy. She felt it too—each additional strand seemed to elevate her Qi Core Realm by a stage. But her dantian had a limit, holding at most nine strands. Beyond that, she was unsure how to proceed. Perhaps tomorrow she'd ask Lu.

Inside, Lu wasn't lost in thought but studying his system panel. Missions had evaluations, with rewards varying by grade. Beiluo's rescue earned a B-grade, less rewarding than he'd hoped. He'd dreamed of hundreds or thousands of spiritual energy strands, but received only two assignable attribute points and [Preaching Platform] access—no spiritual energy at all. Stingy system.

Spiritual energy was his foundation for transforming the world, yet he wasn't too discouraged. The \*Mystical Qi Refining Manual\* ensured he could generate more. With a thought, he summoned the panel:

**\*\*Host\*\*:** Lu

**\*\*Title\*\*:** Qi Refiner (Permanent)

**\*\*Qi Refinement Level\*\*:** 1

**\*\*Soul Strength\*\***: 0.5

**\*\*Physical Strength\*\***: 0.5

**\*\*Spiritual Energy\*\***: 8 Strands

**\*\*Transformation Reward\*\***: \*Mystical Qi Refining Manual\*

**\*\*World Rating\*\***: Five Phoenixes Continent [Low-Martial]

**\*\*Permissions\*\***: [Missions], [Preaching Platform], [Spiritual Energy Deployment]

**\*\*Assignable Attribute Points\*\***: 2

Lu pondered. Two points demanded careful allocation. After much thought, his eyes lit up. "System, add both points to Qi Refinement Level."

A warning flashed: \*‘‘Host, you’re not handsome enough to dream so big. Stay grounded, refine Qi honestly. Aim for a hundred layers to strengthen all.’’\*

Lu froze. \*This snarky system!\* It crushed his hopes of boosting his Qi Refinement Level with points. Refining Qi required hard work—no shortcuts. Worse, ‘‘a hundred layers’’? In novels, Qi Refinement capped at ten! What was this hundred-layer nonsense? Frustrated, he questioned the system, but it stayed silent.

Resigned, he considered his options. If points couldn’t enhance Qi Refinement, only soul or physical strength remained. Today’s remote spiritual energy deployment had cost 0.5 soul strength, tying it to his [Spiritual Energy Deployment] permission—his key to transforming the world. He couldn’t afford to lose that ability.

After hesitating, Lu allocated both points to soul strength. The panel updated, soul strength rising to 2.5. A surge coursed through him, like a mud-caked body washed clean by jasmine-scented water. His spirit refreshed, the sickly haze lifted, and his eyes gleamed with vitality.

Energized, Lu’s curiosity turned to the \*Mystical Qi Refining Manual\*. His mind delved into it, and a book materialized before him, its cover emblazoned with

“Qi Refining Manual” in gaudy gold, screaming cheap street-stall secret. But as it opened, a resonant voice boomed, golden words dancing to life, imprinting on his mind.

“Consume 1 soul strength to refine 10 strands of spiritual energy. Use with [Preaching Platform].”

Lu’s heart sank. \*This is how you refine Qi?\* Trading soul strength for spiritual energy felt like selling his body for coin. \*I, Lu, won’t stoop so low!\* This manual felt like a scam.

Yet, studying it updated his panel:

**\*\*Host\*\*:** Lu

**\*\*Title\*\*:** Qi Refiner (Permanent)

**\*\*Qi Refinement Level\*\*:** 1 (Progress to Level 2: 10/100 Strands)

**\*\*Soul Strength\*\*:** 2.5

**\*\*Physical Strength\*\***: 0.5

**\*\*Spiritual Energy\*\***: 8 Strands

**\*\*Transformation Reward\*\***: \*Mystical Qi Refining Manual\*

**\*\*World Rating\*\***: Five Phoenixes Continent [Low-Martial]

**\*\*Permissions\*\***: [Missions], [Preaching Platform], [Spiritual Energy Deployment]

The progress bar clarified that reaching Qi Refinement Level 2 required 100 strands. Deploying 100 strands via [Spiritual Energy Deployment] would amplify to 10,000 strands. That sounded impressive, but in practice, it was a mere ripple in the world—like a drop in the ocean, instantly diluted.

This grounded Lu. Transforming a low-martial world into a mystical one required patience, not reckless ambition. He couldn't rush to godhood. As the

system advised, he'd stay grounded and refine Qi honestly, aiming for a hundred layers.

Rubbing his brow, Lu set aside his worries and focused on the newly unlocked [Preaching Platform]. Its stringent activation conditions intrigued him, hinting at its power, especially its link to Qi refining. Taking a deep breath, he murmured, "Activate [Preaching Platform]."

A prompt appeared: \*[Preaching Platform] activated. Automatically deducts 1 soul strength. (Note: If host's soul strength falls below 1, [Preaching Platform] will deactivate.)]\*

Lu's heart clenched. \*A transaction fee?! This system's a swindler!\*