

## Starlit Path 109

### Chapter 109: Dragons, Divinations, and a Lone Assault

“Dragon seed?” Lü Dongxuan’s heart trembled.

“The immortals designated eight Dragon-Rearing Grounds, tied to the second secret realm. Only those who claim these grounds can enter it,” the Young Lord said, tapping the armrest of his wheelchair. “These grounds are the immortals’ design, but I’ll disrupt their game. Tianji Pavilion will spread the word.”

Lü Dongxuan inhaled deeply. The Young Lord was stirring a grand upheaval, just as he had with Wolong Ridge. That secret realm became a bloodbath because the Young Lord spread news of its immortal fate, drawing countless factions. This time, dragons were involved. In a chaotic world of warring lords, securing a Dragon-Rearing Ground and its dragon seed would grant legitimacy, a claim to rule. The coming conflict would dwarf Wolong Ridge’s, especially as the world now knew the terror of cultivators.

Lü Dongxuan, rubbing his gold chain, felt a thrill. The Tianji School was about to make waves again. The yellow dragonling played briefly before diving back into the lake. “Young Master, if two grounds are known, where are the other six?” he asked.

The Young Lord glanced at him. “The immortals set them—how would I know?” Lü Dongxuan faltered. “Use Tianji pigeons to inform the world: six Dragon-Rearing Grounds remain. Finding one grants entry to the second secret realm, like Wolong Ridge’s Heaven and Earth Qi Token.”

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Lü Dongxuan grinned, yellow teeth flashing. "Leave it to me." He found Lü Mu, who was cultivating, whispered instructions, and Lü Mu bowed to the Young Lord before sailing to the capital. The Young Lord knew all six locations—he'd created them—but kept silent, letting the world search. Leaning back, he gazed at Beiluo Lake, summoning his system panel:

- **Host**: Lu

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

- **Qi Refining Level**: 2 (Progress to Level 3: 550/1000 strands)

- **Soul Strength**: 60 (Exchangeable: 0)

- **Physical Strength**: 6 (Exchangeable: 6)
- **Spiritual Energy**: 500 strands
- **Transformation Rewards**: *Mysterious Qi Refining Manual*, *Transformation Technique*, *Indestructible Demon Body (Beginner)*
- **World Rating**: Wuhuang Continent [Low Martial]
- **Permissions**: [Missions], [Preaching Platform], [Spiritual Energy Deployment]
- **Sub-Permission**: [Ten Thousand Methods Furnace (LV1)]
- **Spiritual Artifact**: Spiritual Pressure Chessboard (Mysterious Grade, Low Tier)
- **Technique**: *Heavenly Strategy* (Mysterious Grade, Low Tier)

Still at Qi Refining Level 2, he narrowed his eyes. This secret realm scheme aimed to elevate White Jade Pavilion into a truly transcendent force, now just a step away.

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At night, a horse galloped into Western Liang's camp. Xu Chu, disguised as the Overlord, greeted Xiang Shaoyun. The Overlord's face was unreadable, like a storm-brewing sky. In the empty tent, candlelight flickered as he sat, staring at the flame, lost in thought. After a long pause, black demonic energy surged, extinguishing the candles. Xu Chu and the generals outside held their breath, exchanging glances. The Overlord had gone to Beiluo—had he suffered a loss? If even he faltered, how strong was Lu Ping'an?

The tent's curtain lifted, and Xiang Shaoyun emerged in black armor, axe on his back. "Prefect!" "My lord!" the generals called. Xu Chu, seeing the armor, felt his blood surge. "Are we marching on the capital?" he asked. "I've heard Zhao Kuo's rebellion failed, and the capital's in chaos—our chance to strike."

Xiang Shaoyun shook his head. "Not yet. Jiang Li's returned, trusted by the emperor, and has taken Zhao Kuo's rebels. The capital, once stagnant, is alive. Attacking now is risky with Northern County watching. Instead..." His voice rasped. The generals leaned in, Xu Chu's hammers trembling. "Tonight, we attack Northern County's army."

Excitement flashed, but his next words chilled them. "I go alone. I need to prove something." The generals froze, doubting their ears. Northern County's army numbered tens of thousands. Was he mad? Xu Chu protested, but Xiang Shaoyun's piercing gaze silenced them. "My mind is set."

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In Northern County's camp, Tantai Xuan, Mo Ju, and Mo Beike studied the shifting situation. Zhao Kuo's failed rebellion had upended their plans. "Jiang Li, worthy of Bai Fengtian's tutelage, used nine imperial decrees to return and seize Zhao Kuo's rebels, bolstering Great Zhou's defenses," Mo Beike said.

"What now?" Tantai Xuan asked, frowning.

"Retake Yuanchi City, one of the six fortress cities," Mo Ju said, fanning himself. "If Lu Ping'an wanted to meddle in worldly affairs, he would have. Since he hasn't, we can't abandon Yuanchi—it's our gateway to the capital."

Mo Beike nodded approvingly. Mo Ju pointed at the sand table. "Western Liang's army is near." A soldier burst in, kneeling. "Report! Enemy attack on the camp!" Tantai Xuan stood. "Xiang Shaoyun struck already? Madman!" Only Western Liang would raid at night. "How many?" he demanded.

The soldier hesitated. "One." The tent's air grew strange. Tantai Xuan drew his sword, pressing it to the soldier's neck. "Speak clearly!" The soldier trembled. "A lone rider from Western Liang, nine feet tall, axe on his back, on a black steed."

Tantai Xuan's face changed. "The Overlord! What's his game, attacking alone? Does he think he's an immortal?" Mo Ju was incredulous, and Mo Beike's heavy eyes twitched, pondering. Having known Xiang Shaoyun, he knew the Overlord wasn't a reckless fool. Why this?

Night winds whipped up sand. Xiang Shaoyun rode his black steed, patting its bony flank—purebreds always showed ribs, the leaner, the swifter. The moon cast a cold glow. In black armor, axe on his back, spear in hand, he resembled a demon from the abyss. Facing Northern County's arrayed army, his eyes drifted, recalling the Young Lord's crushing spiritual pressure and disappointed words: \*"You still don't grasp a cultivator's true meaning... You're a cultivator, blessed by an immortal, enlightened by the Demon Lord... Strength is everything."\*

Anger burned within him. Gripping his spear, he sought to prove himself. Lü Dongxuan's divination flashed in his mind, its outcome unacceptable. "I'm a cultivator... I, Xiang Shaoyun, don't believe in fate!" His eyes snapped open, sharp as lightning. With a roar, he spurred his horse, its hooves thundering, kicking up sand. Alone, bathed in moonlight, he charged Northern County's camp.