

## Starlit Path 118

### Chapter 118: Wearing the Thickest Armor, Taking the Fiercest Blows

A somber sky hung over a silent battlefield. The clay soldiers' eyes snapped open, sending chills down spines. Xiang Shaoyun's elite Western Liang troops tensed, staring at the eerie statues.

The Overlord, seasoned by the Wolong Ridge Secret Realm, was unfazed. These staring clay soldiers were no worse than the wall-crawling imps he'd faced before. With a roar, he threw a punch at a nearby statue, demonic qi swirling. The statue glared, its clay blade drawn with a grating screech, clashing against his fist with a metallic clang. Surprisingly, the crude blade rivaled a master-forged weapon.

His squad, roughly twenty strong, consisted mostly of first-rate martial artists, including two master-level generals. Xu Chu, his trusted lieutenant, stayed behind to guard the perimeter. These clay soldiers outmatched Wolong Ridge's imps, not just in defense but in offense, their razor-sharp blades capable of cleaving men in half.

Xiang Shaoyun threw another punch, cracking a statue. "You, finish it," he ordered a master martial artist. The general, blood surging, slashed the statue's head off and shattered it with three more strikes. Pure spiritual energy burst from the statue, flooding into the general's body.

"Governor... I feel it—spiritual energy!" the general exclaimed, thrilled.

"Good," Xiang Shaoyun said, eyes gleaming. As expected, these statues, like the imps, were sources of immortal opportunity. When the first statue fell, the remaining ones glared, drawing their blades. "Follow me," he growled, demonic qi surging. He smashed a statue, letting his men finish it to absorb the energy.

Soon, most of his twenty soldiers had refined spiritual energy, boosting their strength, though some failed to harness it. In the distance, shattered stones reformed into new statues, never exceeding ninety-nine. Xiang Shaoyun dismissed them—they offered no challenge to push him toward the Hidden Body Realm. But for his men, they were perfect for honing strength, perhaps forging an elite cultivator unit.

“Kill the statues for spiritual energy. The more you destroy, the more you gain. Work together,” he commanded. His men roared, eyes blazing. Nodding, Xiang Shaoyun, axe and shield on his back, strode toward the iron chain bridge. A statue lunged; he shattered it with a single punch.

Across the bridge lay a floating island with a palace, before which stood a massive bronze tripod, faint smoke curling from it.

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\*North Luo, Lakeheart Island\*

A gentle breeze stirred as Lu, one hand propping his chin, studied the spiritual pressure board. His eyes traced flickering lines mapping the Dragon Gate realms. His gaze settled on one, where the Overlord carved an unstoppable path, clay soldiers no match for him.

“He’s grown,” Lu murmured, tapping his cheek with a smile. The Overlord was close to the Hidden Body Realm, perhaps the first to reach it. But he lacked pressure. Recalling a phrase—wearing the thickest armor, taking the fiercest blows—Lu chuckled. “Time to add some challenge.”

Sitting upright, he raised his hand over the board and snapped his fingers.

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The Overlord stepped onto the iron chain bridge. The clash of statues and soldiers behind him fell silent, replaced by an eerie calm. From the tripod, thick purple smoke coiled, forming two ethereal figures—a man and a woman—wielding swords, standing atop the bridge’s chains. A suffocating spiritual pressure rolled forth.

Xiang Shaoyun’s fists clenched, his body trembling—not from fear, but excitement. “Stronger than Wolong Ridge’s ancient cultivators!” he marveled. This was merely the first palace of the Dragon Gate realm—what terrors awaited in the central grand palace?

Undaunted, he advanced, boots thudding on the wooden planks. The smoky figures blurred into purple streaks, charging him. Muscles bulging, demonic qi swirling, the Overlord roared like a beast, swinging his axe at the oncoming shadows.

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\*Tianhuang Mountain\*

The inn clerk, clutching Nie Changqing’s silver ingot, made the trip to the Daoist Sect’s gate. A safe bet—bandits dared not tread near the sect, one of the Hundred Schools. A young Daoist took the letters, scampering up the stone path to Star-Picking Peak. But at the peak, he was stopped, the letters confiscated, and he was sent away.

Curious, the clerk glanced back, catching a glimpse of an ornate, floating gate atop the peak. On the peak's tiled plaza, incense smoke curled from burners. A green-robed Daoist handed the letters to an elder seated under an ancient pine.

The elder, eyes shifting from the Dragon Gate, scanned the letter. His face darkened. "White Jade Capital's disciple... Nie Changqing," he muttered coldly. "A mere outcast dares challenge the Daoist Sect? The Master trained him, and this is how he repays us—a ungrateful cur."

In his view, the sect had given Nie his skills and had every right to reclaim them—or his life. "Sending letters to Star-Picking Peak... a show of defiance? A declaration of war?" He crushed the letter into a ball.

The surrounding Daoists, puzzled, asked, "Elder, what's happened?"

The elder tossed the crumpled letter to one, who read it and paled. "Nie Changqing?! He serves Lu Ping'an of North Luo as a coachman. How dare he return?"

"Before the Master secluded himself, he forbade us from targeting North Luo. Now this cur comes to us!" another fumed, reading the letter.

"Tomorrow, Nie Changqing will storm the sect," the elder said. "He's Lu Ping'an's disciple, a cultivator now. But with our Dragonland's heavenly dragon aiding Sansui and our sect's grand formation, if he dares come, he'll never leave alive. We'll cut him down!"

He slapped the pine, needles falling, his words resolute. Taking Nie's second letter—written to his wife, the Master's granddaughter—he sneered and tore it to shreds.