

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 12: Lu, the Mysterious Immortal

Amid the swirling spiritual energy at the center of the Preaching Platform, three humanoid figures slowly coalesced, their forms blurred and faceless. Lu observed them with curiosity. The [Preaching Platform] had randomly pulled the consciousnesses of three individuals—lucky recipients of its selection. The permission was growing more intriguing by the moment.

His mind stirred, recalling the *Mystical Qi Refining Manual*. It stated that, beyond consuming soul strength, spiritual energy could be gained through the [Preaching Platform]. These three might be the key to that process. Two choices emerged: pretend to be a fellow “victim” pulled into the platform, or leverage his control to project an enigmatic, godlike image and guide them to yield spiritual energy.

The first option was pointless—he held the platform’s reins. Opting for the second, Lu sat calmly at the center of the yin-yang diagram, spiritual energy swirling around him, enhancing his mysterious aura. “Great Zhou Emperor, Western Prefecture Governor...” The platform’s prompts quirked his expression. If he was right, the emperor was the newly crowned, eleven-year-old ruler doubted by the realm’s lords, while the Western Prefecture Governor was the rebel leader sparking chaos against Great Zhou.

An emperor and a rebel, fated to clash in a grand showdown, now met in this bizarre setting. Coincidence, or the platform's design?

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"Where is this place?" Yuwen Xiu frowned, scanning the eerie, spiritual-energy-filled realm. It unnerved him, but as emperor, he maintained his dignity. His voice, however, shocked him—his youthful tone had turned aged and rough. Two blurred figures stood nearby, their identities unclear, heightening his caution. He'd been reading in the imperial study—how had someone spirited him away from the heavily guarded palace?

The other two were also surveying their surroundings. A faint laugh echoed from nowhere, growing clear. "Awake, are you?" Lu rose slowly from the platform's center, spiritual energy spiraling around him, painting a mythical image of an immortal descending.

"Where is this?" Yuwen Xiu hadn't spoken before another figure, gruff and impatient, demanded answers.

“Silence,” Lu said, waving a hand. A surge of spiritual energy formed a massive face above the speaker, gazing down like a divine judge. Xiang Shaoyun froze, his words choking in his throat.

Lu’s face remained impassive, his gaze profound, cultivating an air of mystery. “This is the Preaching Secret Realm, the Land of Immortality. You’ve been graced with immortal fate. Heed this: in this realm, conceal your true identities, lest you provoke the wrath of the Heavenly Dao and fall into the Nine Nether Hells.”

His words stunned Yuwen Xiu and Xiang Shaoyun. *Preaching Secret Realm? Land of Immortality?* Nie Changqing, the butcher, scoffed. “Immortals? Just trickery.” Lu glanced at him. A mere butcher chosen by the platform? He was no ordinary man. Nie squinted back. “Immortal or not, I’ve got twelve pigs to slaughter. No time for your nonsense.”

Yuwen Xiu and Xiang Shaoyun were speechless. Lu raised an eyebrow but maintained his elegant mystique. “Since the Heavenly Dao collapsed, the path to immortality has been sealed. Your presence heralds its reopening, a revival of spiritual energy. You are no ordinary souls to enter this path.”

His slow, deliberate words, paired with the swirling energy, lent him an immortal’s aura. Yuwen Xiu and Xiang Shaoyun felt his gaze pierce them, as if he knew their identities. As emperor and rebel leader, they stood at mortal

pinnacles—exceptional indeed. Even Nie Changqing, the butcher, fell silent, perhaps reflecting on his unmatched skill as Beiluo’s top pig-slayer.

Lu smiled, pleased with the effect. A cloud-built pavilion would perfect his act, he thought. As the idea formed, the platform’s eight-trigram runes danced, aligning to his will. The void transformed—darkness gave way to ethereal pavilions rising from clouds, stunning the trio.

“Heavenly White Jade Capital, twelve towers, five cities. Immortals touch your crown, granting eternal life,” Lu intoned, seizing the fleeting chance to amplify his mystique. His voice echoed ethereally, adding layers of enigma.

Three cushions materialized, and Yuwen Xiu, Xiang Shaoyun, and Nie Changqing sat, dazed by the surreal scene. *Cloud pavilions? An immortal? Am I dreaming?*

Lu’s smile widened. *This must be the thrill of playing the god.* “To enter the Land of Immortality, you must have been lame-legged celestials in past lives,” he said.

The trio, seated like obedient students, exchanged glances. *Lame-legged celestials? That’s... bold.* Lu coughed, reining in his flair. “You are chosen by

immortal fate. As the heavens revive, I, as a formality, grant you this opportunity.”

Though the platform’s energy couldn’t be absorbed, Lu could manipulate it freely, godlike in this realm. He waved, shaping the energy into a soaring dragon, then a phoenix, mesmerizing the trio. *Playing the immortal? I’m all in.*

Xiang Shaoyun, voice low and altered, spoke hoarsely. “Great Immortal, what fate do you offer, and what must we give?” Suspicious, he added, “Or is this a trick, like the Yin-Yang School’s illusions?” As a Grandmaster, he trusted only vital energy, not fairy tales.

Lu replied calmly, “The world’s spiritual energy hasn’t fully revived. Immortality techniques are useless now.” Recalling the platform’s ability to craft techniques, he squinted. “Share your cultivation methods, and I’ll refine them to harness spiritual energy.”

Xiang Shaoyun smirked. Yuwen Xiu shook his head. “Cultivation methods are a martial artist’s lifeblood. Revealing them risks fatal flaws in battle. Are you trying to scam us?”

Xiang Shaoyun nodded, saluting Yuwen Xiu. "Brother, we think alike." Yuwen Xiu returned the gesture, smiling warmly, feeling a kinship despite their hidden identities.

Lu's lips twitched. *An emperor and a rebel, bonding? If they knew each other's identities, they'd be at each other's throats.* He anticipated their reactions with amusement, then a thought struck. "System, if these three refine spiritual energy, does it benefit me?"

To his surprise, a prompt answered: *"Those chosen by the Preaching Platform can cultivate spiritual energy, which can be transferred to the host through exchanges of treasures or techniques."*

Lu's eyes lit up. *This is the secret to refining Qi!* Granting immortal fate was like a long-term investment. His heart raced, though he maintained his aloof, immortal demeanor—poise was everything.

Watching Yuwen Xiu and Xiang Shaoyun's mutual admiration, Lu vanished from his spot. In reality, he was weak, but here, he was a god. Reappearing before them, he raised both hands, middle fingers poised against thumbs, hovering near their foreheads.

"A true immortal fate was before you, yet you failed to seize it," he said coolly. "So be it. I grant you a lesser fate. Don't regret it later."

With a flick—*snap!*—he activated [Spiritual Energy Deployment].

Targets: Xiang Shaoyun, Yuwen Xiu.