

## Starlit Path 128

Chapter 128: Where to Find Dragon Blood?

\*Daoist Sect, Bamboo Grove\*

Xie Yunling coughed blood, staining his white whiskers. His turbid eyes stared at the bamboo leaves sliced in half, scattered across the ground. "A cultivator..." he muttered, shaking his head. The world had changed.

The Daoist Sect's outcast, returning after five years, had shattered their pride with one stroke. Xie Yunling had believed his spiritual-energy-based, heaven-drawn array could challenge Young Master Lu. Now, he saw his folly. A mere disciple of White Jade Capital had obliterated his technique. Against Lu himself, he'd likely die without knowing how.

"How strong is Lu Ping'an of White Jade Capital?" Xie Yunling asked, gasping, his gaze flickering toward Nie Changqing's white robe.

Nie sheathed his butcher's knife, his face calm, as if entering the Hidden Body Realm was trivial. The question, however, gave him pause. He recalled meeting Lu on a stormy night, the young man in a wheelchair, a maid holding an umbrella, subduing Han Lianxiao with a single glance, pressing him into the rain-soaked ground. Lu's strength? Nie couldn't fathom it, his depths unplumbed.

"Young Master is... very strong," Nie said earnestly.

Xie Yunling, sitting amid fallen leaves, pressed, "How strong?"

Nie adjusted his wife on his back, her fingers playing with his hair. His gaze grew distant. “Strong enough to defeat the entire world combined.”

Li Sansui, nearby, gaped. Such boldness! Was Lu truly that formidable?

Xie Yunling’s weathered face twisted with a bitter, self-mocking smile. “I’ve delivered Young Master’s message,” Nie said, glancing at him. “Farewell.” Carrying his wife, who giggled vacantly, he smiled softly and descended Tianhuang Mountain under the crimson sunset, his knife at his waist. His ties to the Daoist Sect were severed.

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\*South County, Great Marsh\*

Outside the Dragon Gate, Tang Xiansheng paced anxiously. Finally, familiar figures emerged—not fleeing soldiers, but Tang Baiyun and Tang Yimo. His face lit up. “Yun’er!”

Tang Baiyun, blue spiritual energy swirling around him, grinned. “Father, from today, I’m a cultivator!” He was elated. With Tang Yimo already a cultivator, he’d feared losing his heir status. Now, as a cultivator himself, the South County governorship was secure for the legitimate son, not the servant’s child.

Tang Yimo, drenched in sweat, glanced at the excited Tang Baiyun, smirked, and bowed to Tang Xiansheng before leaving to join his mother and sister. Tang Baiyun eagerly described the realm’s clay

statues, their spiritual energy yield sparking Tang Xiansheng's eyes. "With these statues, can South County build a cultivator army? Even White Jade Capital wouldn't stand a chance!" he laughed.

Tang Baiyun, stunned, realized the stakes. "Those who hold a Dragonland hold the key to the world," Tang Xiansheng said, patting his shoulder. "You think I lack ambition because South County hasn't joined the chaos? Wrong. We have the richest lands, elite soldiers, and wealth to rival nations. Why shouldn't we vie for supremacy?"

He gazed at the mud dragon in the marsh. "But Kong Xiu's cunning, and Jiang Li's a soldier's disciple. Great Zhou may seem weak, but it was once a tiger. North and West Counties fight, yet neither has toppled Zhou. I've bided my time, but no longer. The eight Dragonlands change everything. Kong Xiu will use Zhou's to build an army, and North Luo's White Jade Capital, led by that enigmatic Lu, is the greatest variable."

Tang Baiyun trembled at his father's foresight. "What should we do?"

Tang Xiansheng's eyes glinted, glancing at Tang Yimo's retreating figure. "The emperor fears North and West Counties' armies most. We'll cater to his needs." Stroking his beard, he smiled. "Yun'er, explore the realm, build a cultivator army—call it the South Manor Army. Yimo will assist you. I'll visit the emperor in the capital."

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\*East Yan River, Dragon Gate Realm\*

The Overlord withdrew from the floating island. Beyond the three pills, the palace held nothing more. To gain further, he'd need to enter the central palace linking the eight gates, but its oppressive aura shook him. Like Wolong Ridge's ancient cultivator, something formidable slept within. Without Hidden Body strength, he wasn't ready.

Tempered by past failures, his arrogance had waned. He'd challenge it later, with allies. Glancing at the other seven islands, connected by chains to the central palace, he believed others would join him. Exiting the realm, he leaped from the river.

West Liang soldiers cheered. "Report," he demanded.

"Lord, we've sent soldiers to slay statues for spiritual energy. Eighteen have condensed qi," a master martial artist replied.

"Only eighteen?" The Overlord frowned.

"It's good, Lord. The statues are strong—ordinary masters can't win. It takes a hundred men to break one, and they need time to reform. Not everyone can condense qi; poor talent lets it slip away."

Satisfied, the Overlord nodded. "Form these eighteen into a new army, the West Liang Xiang Family Army, under my command. Send Xu Chu to try condensing qi too."

The martial artist's face flushed with excitement. "Yes!" A cultivator army would be unstoppable.

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**\*Imperial Capital\***

Emperor Yuwen Xiu watched bloodied soldiers emerge from the Dragon Gate, spiritual energy swirling within them. He clapped, thrilled. The National Teacher, seated in a grand chair, expression unreadable, watched silently. Yuwen Xiu summoned Jiang Li.

“General Jiang, despite heavy losses, we’ve gained much. Thirty soldiers have condensed qi. You’ll lead them as the Black Dragon Guard, protecting the capital and blessing Great Zhou,” he declared from the throne.

Jiang Li hesitated. The National Teacher’s eyes flickered. A cultivator army?

“I won’t fail,” Jiang Li vowed, bowing.

Yuwen Xiu clapped. “Pity you won’t enter the realm to condense qi. Without it, leading the Black Dragon Guard may be tough.”

Jiang Li’s brows furrowed. The National Teacher spoke, “Fear not, Your Majesty. Jiang’s leadership is unmatched. He’ll manage the Guard.”

“South Fei,” the National Teacher called. Kong Nanfei, standing behind, responded, “Yes, Master?”

“Let Kong Nanfei, a true cultivator, assist Jiang,” the National Teacher suggested.

Yuwen Xiu brightened. “Teacher, your generosity solves my worries!”

Turning to the old eunuch, he said, “Old thing, try the realm. You’ve served me long; I won’t let you be left behind.”

The eunuch knelt, trembling. “Your Majesty...”

“Go. If you can’t condense qi, don’t return,” Yuwen Xiu ordered.

“Yes,” the eunuch replied, forehead to the ground.

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That day, every major faction resolved to build cultivator armies, reshaping the world’s balance. Meanwhile, Lu Ping’an, the catalyst of this upheaval, rubbed his temples, troubled by his new pill recipe.

“Dragon Blood Pill requires a pound of dragon blood,” he mused. “Where do I get that?”

