

Starlit Path 132

Chapter 132: Breakthrough to Refining Qi Layer 3!

Lu Changkong took the cloth sack containing fifteen Dragon Blood Pills from a drained Ni Yu. She nodded weakly, heart heavy. Others gained power from pills; she nearly lost her life. The Young Master's warning about the pill's side effects echoed—she should've listened. No wonder Ning Zhao and Yi Yue were spared.

Lu Changkong examined a pill, its blood-red surface shimmering with three snake-like veins. "This pill..." he murmured, sensing its potent energy. "Young Master says it's for foundation-building, strengthening martial artists' bases and boosting their power," Ni Yu explained, listless. "He refined it himself, with minimal side effects."

Lu Changkong raised an eyebrow, glancing at the wilted Ni Yu. Minimal side effects? Seriously? "Let me try one," Luo Yue volunteered, bowing. "If it's the Young Master's work, it's surely harmless."

Lu Changkong handed him a pill. Though not a grandmaster, Luo Yue had lingered at the peak of first-rate martial arts for years. Swallowing it, his body reacted swiftly—sweat beaded, blood boiled, and his pores seemed to erupt with energy. Roaring, he stepped back, eyes blazing as if a dragon churned within. He unleashed a flurry of punches, a dragon-like phantom bursting forth, shattering the stone railing.

Lu Changkong deflected the debris with a surge of energy, his eyes alight with excitement. Luo Yue had broken through—not just any breakthrough, but one rivaling Lu Changkong's own grandmaster-level strikes, enhanced by spiritual energy. "Young Master suggests using these to form a guard unit, North Luo's trump card," Ni Yu said, pouting. Why didn't Luo Yue suffer like she did? Her earth-shaking reaction was unfair.

“Excellent!” Lu Changkong clenched his fist. “With Dragon Blood Pills, we’ll build the Dragon Blood Army, paired with Dragon Gate cultivators. They’ll dominate Great Zhou!” Luo Yue, still burning with energy, matched his enthusiasm. “Old Luo, you and Xiao Cheng will lead this army to protect North Luo and White Jade Capital,” Lu Changkong declared.

Luo Yue knelt, vowing, “I obey!”

North Luo, Lakeheart Island

Night deepened, the air cooling. Lu sat in his Thousand-Blade Chair by the railing, gazing at the starry sky, lost in thought. His mind was on the system panel:

*Host

*: Lu

Title: Refining Qi Practitioner (Permanent)

Refining Qi Level: 3 (Progress to Level 4: 1000/10,000 strands)

Soul Strength: 85 (Convertible: 0)

Physical Strength: 6 (Convertible: 6)

Spiritual Energy: 900 strands

His spiritual energy had hit the 1000-strand cap for Refining Qi Layer 2, qualifying him for Layer 3. He'd anticipated this since Li Sansi's Hidden Body breakthrough earned him 20 attribute points, plus 10 from the candle dragon's ascension. Converting all 30 to soul strength yielded over 800 strands, supplemented by commissions from Li Sansi, Nie Changqing, Ning Zhao, and the many cultivators birthed in the eight Dragon Gates. He'd finally reached the bottleneck.

"Congratulations, Host, for reaching Refining Qi Layer 3, with 1000 strands of spiritual energy. Rewards: Phoenix Plume Sword, 10 random spiritual herb seeds. Spiritual energy deployment range expanded, autonomous recovery enhanced (spiritual energy, soul strength, physical strength), and Spiritual Stone Creation Method unlocked."

The system's prompts thrilled Lu. The expanded deployment range, potentially beyond Great Zhou's borders, intrigued him—he'd test it later. Enhanced recovery was a clear boon. But the Spiritual Stone Creation Method excited him most. Unlike the combat-driven clay statues, spiritual stones offered gentle energy absorption, boosting cultivator production efficiently. More cultivators meant more commissions, accelerating his Refining Qi progress toward the dream of 100 layers.

Suppressing his excitement, Lu opened his eyes to the chilly night. His soul strength at 85 felt clearer, sharper, yet capped. "Soul strength can transform too... 100 might be the threshold," he mused, tapping the armrest. Time to hasten its refinement, perhaps with the second game of Heavenly Strategy.

“Phoenix Plume Sword?” At Layer 2, he’d gained the spiritual pressure board; now, Layer 3 brought this sword. His mind stirred, and a profound, rule-like force rumbled. The void tore open, a phoenix’s cry echoing as a crimson sword materialized before him.

“Sword Name: Phoenix Plume,” the system announced. Lu’s hair fluttered in the spiritual pressure’s gust, his eyes reflecting the blade. Handleless, like a phoenix tail feather, it radiated terrifying power. “Made to complement my Thousand-Blade Chair?” he smirked, eyes sharp.

“Phoenix Plume Sword (Incomplete): Mysterious-rank High-grade Spiritual Tool, forged from phoenix tail plumes.” Incomplete yet Mysterious-rank high-grade? If complete, could it reach Earth-rank? The rewards deepened Lu’s curiosity about the system’s origins. He often jested about “fighting immortals for endless joy,” and the system felt like one.

Waving his hand, the crimson sword settled onto the chair’s right armrest, displacing the low-grade Yellow-rank silver blades. Touching it, Lu felt the chair elevate, the Phoenix Plume Sword commanding the thousand blades. Exhaling, he turned to the herb seeds.

Recalling how ten Dawn Chrysanthemums enriched the island’s energy, he grasped the air, revealing a jade-green seed: Jade Peach Blossom Seed. “Peach blossoms? After wilting half the island’s, now these?” he chuckled. “Chrysanthemums alone are drab. Peach blossoms will add poetic charm.”

Ten seeds floated before him. With a flick, they shot out as streams of light, rooting into the soil. Absorbing spiritual energy, they sprouted, thick roots burrowing, green branches unfurling, and buds forming. The island’s energy grew denser, gentler.

South County

At dawn's first light, Tang Xiansheng, in lavish robes, boarded a luxurious carriage. "Yimo, join me to the capital?" he asked, smiling warmly.

Tang Yimo's expression was neutral. The request was clearly for protection. Last night, Tang Xiansheng had sent silks and jewels to Yimo's mother and sister, even spending the night talking with his mother. Their happiness, seen by Yimo from the rooftop, swayed him. "Fine," he agreed.

Tang Xiansheng beamed. To Tang Baiyun, he said, "Yun'er, build the South Manor Army. When I return, I want a hundred strong." Tang Baiyun bowed. Loading the carriage with wealth, Tang Xiansheng ordered the driver to the capital, Yimo riding a red steed alongside.

News of South County's governor entering the capital spread instantly. Known for his caution, Tang Xiansheng's move puzzled many. Though he'd never openly opposed the National Teacher, he'd aligned with West County. Entering the capital risked imprisonment if the emperor turned harsh. Yet some sensed danger—South County, long neutral in the war against Great Zhou, was finally entering the fray, possibly targeting North and West Counties.