

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 14: Could There Truly Be Immortals in This World?

Great Zhou Dynasty, Imperial Capital. Purple Gold Palace, Royal Study.

Yuwen Xiu's eyes snapped open, his chest heaving as he gasped, springing upright from the desk where he'd slumped. His ragged breathing echoed in the study. "Your Majesty!" an elderly eunuch cried, whisking his fly-whisk as he hurried to Yuwen Xiu's side, his pale face etched with worry. The other eunuchs gathered, kneeling with heads bowed, barely daring to breathe.

The eleven-year-old emperor, already carrying an air of authority, waved his sleeve, dismissing the trembling eunuchs. Only the old eunuch remained. Yuwen Xiu's brow furrowed, his mind swirling with confusion. *A dream?* The so-called immortal fate seemed a jest, yet it felt too vivid to be mere fantasy. The mysterious "Six Paths Immortal" and his uncanny methods lingered, unsettling him.

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Murmuring, "Heavenly White Jade Capital, twelve towers, five cities," he touched his forehead, wincing at a faint pain. Suddenly, his eyes widened. A faint blue glow flickered at his brow, and a gust of wind swept the room. A blue stream, like a divine dragon, coiled around him, burrowing from his brow to his dantian.

"What is this...?" Yuwen Xiu's shock was indescribable. The energy felt as if it might burst his body. The old eunuch's vital energy surged, provoked by the spiritual energy radiating from Yuwen Xiu. "Your Majesty! What is this?!" the eunuch exclaimed, his hunched back straightening, eyes blazing. Seven explosive sounds rang from his body—he was a seasoned Grandmaster.

Yuwen Xiu, still a child, panicked. “Summon the Grand Preceptor!” he ordered, unsure if the burrowing energy was harmful. His thoughts were a jumbled mess, recalling the ethereal figure in that mysterious realm. *Could this be the immortal’s doing?*

The eunuch darted out but froze. An elderly man in a wide robe and tall cap approached slowly. The eunuch, face flushed, quelled his vital energy. “Greetings, Grand Preceptor,” he said, bowing deeply with a flick of his whisk.

“I know of His Majesty’s situation. Guard the study—no one enters,” the Grand Preceptor commanded. The eunuch bowed lower, and the Grand Preceptor entered the study without another glance.

Inside, Yuwen Xiu was frantic, his face red as if bleeding, struggling to control his vital energy. Though he trained martial arts for health, his skills were weak. “Teacher, save me!” he cried.

“Calm your mind, heart, and breath,” the Grand Preceptor said gently. “Unify your spirit, energy, and will. The world has its righteous qi, as does the body. Fear not, Your Majesty—learn to harness it.”

Yuwen Xiu steadied, his panic easing. Breathing deeply, he tamed the spiritual energy, which flowed smoothly, invigorating him. "This is..." His heart raced. *Immortal fate... truly immortal fate!*

"What happened, Your Majesty?" the Grand Preceptor asked, his gaze deep and kind.

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Western Liang, Military Camp.

Xiang Shaoyun's eyes flew open, his terrifying vital energy erupting, shaking the tent. Objects swirled in the chaos, his black hair spiking like needles. With a *bang*, he slapped his forehead, where a faint glow flickered. A strange energy struggled against his robust vital force.

Soft, pale hands slid around his broad chest from behind, accompanied by a delicate murmur. "Shaoyun, what's wrong?" The voice was tender, like a nightingale's song. Luo Mingsang, his childhood sweetheart, peered up, her stunning face framed by flowing hair, her flawless skin exposed.

“Mingsang, I woke you,” Xiang Shaoyun said, his fierce expression melting into tenderness. He grasped her delicate hand, stroking her silky hair to soothe her. After coaxing her back to sleep, his warmth vanished, replaced by shock as he sensed the strange energy barely contained by his vital force. “What is this? That trickster... an immortal? Could there truly be immortals?”

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Beiluo City, Lu Manor.

Lu sat in his wheelchair, eyes gleaming under the moonlight streaming through the window, casting a soft glow on his face. “The [Preaching Platform] is intriguing, like a programming tool,” he mused. With a thought, faint blue light coalesced in his palm, forming a faint, palm-sized tripod furnace. “Ten Thousand Methods Furnace,” he murmured. “My Qi Refinement level’s too low to manifest it in reality.”

The furnace could refine techniques, transforming blood-circulation or martial skills into true spiritual-energy-based methods, its value immeasurable. At LV1, it was already potent—higher levels might yield immortal techniques. Lu exhaled, dispersing the furnace, and rose from his wheelchair, moving to the window.

On the rooftop, Ning Zhao sat cross-legged, bathed in moonlight, two strands of spiritual energy swirling around her, radiating a soft glow. Beyond, on a stone plaza, Yi Yue's whip cracked through the night, her vital energy surging as she trained, determined to reach First-Rate status for Lu's immortal blessing. Nearby, Ni Yu dozed, her chubby chin resting on a food box, drool dripping.

Lu smiled warmly at the serene scene. Then, a system prompt shattered the moment: *“Side mission triggered.”*

Startled, Lu hadn't expected a mission to activate unprompted. His panel appeared:

Host: Lu

Title: Qi Refiner (Permanent)

Qi Refinement Level: 1 (Progress to Level 2: 10/100 Strands)

Soul Strength: 6.5

****Physical Strength**:** 0.5

****Spiritual Energy**:** 1 Strand

****Transformation Reward**:** *Mystical Qi Refining Manual*

****World Rating**:** Five Phoenixes Continent [Low-Martial]

****Permissions**:** [Missions], [Preaching Platform], [Spiritual Energy Deployment]

****Sub-Permission**:** [Ten Thousand Methods Furnace (LV1)]

His soul strength had soared to 6.5, a new peak, thanks to the five attribute points he'd allocated there. Just 2.5 more points would reach 9, enough to trade for 90 strands of spiritual energy per the *Mystical Qi Refining Manual*. Combined with the 10 strands he'd already refined, he'd hit the 100 needed for Qi Refinement Level 2.

Scanning the panel, Lu's gaze locked on the [Missions] permission, pulsing with light. He squinted, hesitating briefly before diving in with a thought.