

Starlit Path 143

Chapter 143: A Leap in Soul Strength

The Tianji pigeon, infused with the spiritual energy of Lakeheart Island, flew faster than ever, its white feathers gleaming like carved jade.

In the Imperial Capital, within a teahouse in a quiet alley, a refined woman named Qianqian, who had been pacing anxiously, finally received the pigeon from Beiluo. Holding the snow-white bird, she blinked in surprise, noting its feathers seemed more radiant than those of the pigeons perched on the teahouse roof. Dismissing the thought, she untied the message from its leg.

Unfurling the scroll, a sharp scent of blood hit her. “They failed?” she murmured. “Four masters of the Hundred Schools couldn’t touch Lu Ping’an... Truly, an era has ended.”

Qianqian sighed, her anticipation replaced by a hollow sense of loss. She sat, sipped her tea, then climbed to the top floor, ordering the news to be spread across the land: The era of the Hundred Schools had fallen, giving way to the age of White Jade Capital’s cultivators.

In the Imperial Capital’s Zijin Palace, Yuwen Xiu leaned back on his dragon throne as an elderly eunuch read the report aloud.

“They lost?” Yuwen Xiu said, unsurprised. “It’s expected. Lu Ping’an’s strength is unfathomable—no one has ever plumbed its depths.”

He toyed with a jade dragon carving, crafted in the likeness of a black dragon by skilled artisans, a trinket he fiddled with in idle moments. “An era’s end stirs mixed feelings—regret, sorrow, like a dynasty’s fall. I won’t let the Great Zhou be cast aside like the Hundred Schools. We must cultivate cultivators, for they’ll dominate the future!”

Clenching the jade dragon, Yuwen Xiu took a deep breath. “Order General Jiang to hasten the training of the Black Dragon Guard and send another thousand soldiers to the Dragon Gate Secret Realm.”

The eunuch swept his whisk, bowing. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

In North County, Tantai Xuan read the message in one breath, exhaling heavily. “With a thought, peach blossoms bloom across the peninsula; with a hand, he shatters clouds to bring sunlight... Lu Ping’an’s methods are godlike.”

He marveled at Lu’s power and the eerie prowess of cultivators. The thought of cultivators made him clutch his chest—immortal fate always eluded him, and he’d suffered for it. A sudden urgency gripped him. With the Hundred Schools fading and Dragon Gate Secret Realms emerging, the future belonged to cultivators, yet he had no connection to their world.

What could he do? Was he, Tantai Xuan, doomed to perish in the tides of this new era, like the Hundred Schools?

His fists clenched, eyes burning with defiance as he stared beyond the tent. Suddenly, a North County general in armor rushed in.

“My lord!” the general called, kneeling, his face alight with excitement.

“What is it?” Tantai Xuan frowned.

“We’ve found traces of a new Dragon Gate!”

“What?!” Tantai Xuan’s eyes narrowed, slamming a hand on the table as he stood. “Not the one at Buzhou Peak?”

“No, my lord. It’s at the edge of North County, a place called Tailing Skyward Peak!”

Tantai Xuan’s eyes gleamed. “Last time, Li Sansi of the Daoist Sect disrupted us. This time, we must claim this Dragon Gate. It’s North County’s foothold in the coming era!”

His breathing quickened. Just when despair had set in, a new path opened. He hadn’t lost yet.

Before the East Yan River in West County, the Overlord read the message and shook his head, unfazed. “White Jade Capital’s rise reshaped the Hundred Schools. Stagnation means elimination—an eternal truth.”

Xiang Shaoyun stood, gazing at the river’s rushing waters, sensing the weight of an impending era. With his current strength, he might hold an edge, but it wasn’t enough. “Lu Ping’an...” he muttered, the image of a wheelchair-bound youth reflected in the water.

The pressure was suffocating. He needed to grow stronger.

Shouldering his axe and shield, the Overlord leaped into the river, heading for the Dragon Gate Secret Realm without hesitation.

The news of four Hundred Schools masters challenging Young Master Lu and being crushed spread like wildfire via Tianji pigeons, shaking the martial world. Cultivators’ rise stunned martial artists. Any one of those masters could dominate the martial world, yet they couldn’t withstand a single move from Lu.

“Perhaps it’s not just the Hundred Schools’ era that’s ending... but the era of martial artists too,” a sect master murmured. The age of cultivators had begun.

White Jade Capital’s name, once merely whispered, now thundered across the land. Previously, people knew of it but not its true might. Now, the masters’ defeat clarified its transcendence. White Jade Capital wasn’t just the foremost cultivation force—it was the world’s greatest power.

Martial artists, packs on their backs, rode horses to Beiluo, seeking to join White Jade Capital and learn cultivation.

“Congratulations, Host, on completing Side Quest 2: Fame Across the World. The nascent transcendent force ‘White Jade Capital’ has become the transcendent force ‘White Jade Capital.’ Reward: 1,000 allocatable attribute points.”

The system prompt flickered before Lu, seated in his Thousand Blades Chair. His lips curved upward—the long-awaited message had arrived. “A transcendent force, huh?” he murmured, tapping the armrest, a mix of joy and reflection in his heart.

Gazing at the golden sunlight fracturing into glints on the lake, Lu smiled. The achievement brought satisfaction, but not the wild elation he’d expected—just a calm sense of inevitability. White Jade Capital, surpassing the Hundred Schools, was a milestone.

His mind stirred. A thousand attribute points was a massive reward. Converting them all to soul strength could yield 10,000 strands of spiritual energy, propelling him to the fourth layer of Qi Refining. But he held back. He’d only recently reached the third layer and hadn’t fully mastered its power. Rushing to the fourth would yield no benefit. A skyscraper needs a solid foundation.

Moreover, Lu suspected flooding 1,000 points into soul strength might have dire consequences. “Take it slow, master the power first,” he said. In Great Zhou, who could threaten him? His sights extended beyond the dynasty.

The system panel appeared:

Host: Lu

Title: Qi Refiner (Permanent)

Qi Refining Layer: 3 (Progress to Layer 4: 1020/10,000 strands)

Soul Strength: 87 (Convertible: 0)

*Physical Strength

*: 6 (Convertible: 6)

Spiritual Energy: 900 strands

Allocatable Attributes: 1,000 points

Lu pondered, then allocated 17 points: 13 to soul strength, 4 to physical strength.

Boom!

A deafening buzz, like thousands of bees, roared in his mind, threatening to overwhelm him. The enhanced physical strength eased the swelling sensation. Opening his eyes, he noticed veins bulging on his hand gripping the armrest. "A hundred points in soul strength is a qualitative leap," he muttered, relieved. "Good thing I didn't add all 1,000 at once—I'd have been driven mad."

Soul and physical strength needed a delicate balance.

"Congratulations, Host, on reaching 100 soul strength points. Would you like to condense spiritual sense?"

A new prompt appeared, catching Lu off guard. "Spiritual sense? What's that?"

Spiritual Sense: A product of soul strength's qualitative transformation, capable of communing with the energies of heaven and earth, exerting soul-based pressure, a form of supernatural ability.

Lu's eyes lit up. A supernatural ability? "Condense spiritual sense," he decided.

The panel updated: ***Soul Strength***: 100 (Convertible: 13) [Spiritual Sense: 1]

“A hundred-to-one conversion rate?” Lu was stunned. But crossing the 100-point threshold elevated him—his mind sharpened, his thoughts clearer, his control over objects stronger.

With a wisp of spiritual sense formed, Lu realized its potency. Leaning on his chair, he felt the lake breeze. Guiding the sense, he sent it circling, then directed it into Ni Yu’s body. Through it, he could see her Qi Core and her ethereal soul. With a thought, he could shatter it.

Retracting the sense, Lu took a deep breath. Spiritual sense was a silent, lethal weapon, alien to a low-martial world. But his existence transcended such limits, so he wasn’t shocked.

“Only one wisp,” he mused, smiling. “If I had more, could I form an immortal’s primordial spirit?”

The breakthrough in soul strength and the birth of spiritual sense marked a significant leap. Lu needed time to consolidate this power.

As he savored the gains, his eyes narrowed. The system panel’s task section flickered, surprising him. What shocked him more was that the prompt seemed tied to the long-dormant main quest.