

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 15: We Martial Artists Don't Believe in Immortals or Buddhas

The sudden mission trigger caught Lu off guard, but he welcomed it. Missions meant rewards, which could accelerate his Qi Refinement progress. Leaning against the carved rosewood window, Lu rubbed his hands, a thrill akin to scratching a lottery ticket bubbling within him. What would this mission entail?

His mind plunged into the [Missions] permission. Light dimmed, and a flurry of prompts appeared. Beyond the familiar main quest, his eyes locked onto the new side missions:

Mission Description: As a great power aiming to forge a mystical world, you must possess vast knowledge and a strong foundation.

- **Side Mission 1**: Refine five blood-circulation techniques or martial skills (Progress: 0/5).

- **Side Mission 2**: Build a transcendent faction from scratch (Progress: Not started).

- **Side Mission 3**: Rescue the “Daoist outcast” Nie Changqing from Daoist assassins and gain his allegiance.

The three missions hit Lu like a hammer, leaving him momentarily dazed. They could be pursued concurrently, but none were simple. The first required refining five distinct blood-circulation techniques, each consuming spiritual energy. With 6.5 soul strength, he could trade for 60 strands of spiritual energy—plenty to work with. The challenge was sourcing the techniques.

The second mission—building a transcendent faction from nothing—was daunting. A transcendent faction implied mystery, supremacy, and unmatched martial might, capable of manipulating the world. Lu understood that crafting a mystical world required a powerful faction to act freely, but in the Five Phoenixes Continent, even as a low-martial world, challenges abounded. The Hundred Schools and Great Zhou’s might dwarfed his current resources, even with Ning Zhao’s Grandmaster strength.

The third mission piqued his interest most. Saving Nie Changqing, the butcher and Daoist outcast, and earning his loyalty seemed the most feasible. Lu felt confident, given Nie’s presence in the [Preaching Platform].

Night deepened. Yawning, Lu stretched and smiled at his maids outside. “Ladies, early to bed, early to rise—good for the skin.” He vanished from the window.

Ning Zhao, meditating on the tiled roof, her lashes fluttering, opened her eyes and smiled faintly at his words. In the distance, Yi Yue sheathed her whip, sweat glistening on her flushed skin. Ni Yu, dozing on her food box, jolted awake as her chin slipped, smacking her lips.

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The next day, sunlight streamed through the carved window. Lu rose, and Ning Zhao entered, followed by Yi Yue and Ni Yu, who carried a copper basin of hot water, her face red from effort. “Young Master’s awake? We’ll assist with your morning routine,” Ning Zhao said softly.

Yi Yue brought a tray with refined salt for washing and porridge with side dishes for breakfast. Everything was impeccably arranged. Lu grinned—this life felt a touch decadent.

After washing and eating, Ning Zhao wheeled Lu out, Ni Yu shading him with her umbrella, Yi Yue trailing gracefully. In the garden, Lu Changkong, now in a

long robe, watered plants, his usual martial aura softened. The creak of Lu's wheelchair drew his attention.

"Father, is the siege resolved?" Lu asked, legs draped with a wool blanket, smiling.

Lu Changkong met his son's gaze. "Thanks to Ning Zhao. Without her, Beiluo might have faced catastrophe." He sighed. Had Tantai Xuan breached the city, it would've opened a path to the imperial capital, with dire consequences.

"Ning Zhao told me her Grandmaster breakthrough was due to 'spiritual energy.' Is there truly such a thing?" Lu Changkong asked, eyes narrowing. He'd pondered this all night but, as a martial artist, doubted immortals.

"Of course. Isn't Ning Zhao's breakthrough proof?" Lu replied, lips curving. "Father, I've gained an immortal fate, allowing me to walk and cultivate. It's a boon."

Lu Changkong smiled, wiping his hands. "An immortal fate is good, but, Fan'er, be cautious. Don't trust easily—protect yourself." He feared Lu's changes were a scheme by the Yin-Yang School or other Hundred Schools factions.

“I understand,” Lu nodded, knowing explanations would only muddy things. His fingers tapped the blanket, then he looked up. “Father, I have a request.”

Lu Changkong raised an eyebrow. “What is it?”

“I want to build my own faction,” Lu said calmly.

Lu Changkong’s eyes flashed. Ning Zhao and Yi Yue, behind the wheelchair, squinted. *The Young Master, wielder of immortal fate, is finally stepping into this chaotic world?*

“The world’s growing turbulent. I need a faction... for self-protection,” Lu added, deeming it a solid excuse. A frail youth like him building a faction for safety made sense.

“Indeed, the world’s in chaos. The Grandmasters’ betrayal hints at a larger force at play,” Lu Changkong said, exhaling. “Isn’t Ning Zhao enough?”

Her strength, though not matching top-tier eight or nine-ring Grandmasters, outshone most one or two-ring ones. Ning Zhao stayed silent, letting Lu and his father converse.

“Not enough. Ning Zhao’s Second-Stage Qi Core Realm is still lacking,” Lu said, shaking his head.

Ning Zhao’s confidence wavered, her pride stung. Her Second-Stage Qi Core Realm could defeat four two-ring Grandmasters—yet Lu deemed it insufficient? Lu Changkong frowned. “Qi Core Realm?”

“It’s the first realm of cultivators. Ning Zhao’s dantian can hold up to nine strands of spiritual energy, each strand advancing her by a stage,” Lu explained.

Lu Changkong fell silent, grappling with this new cultivation system. After a long pause, he exhaled. “Fan’er, spiritual energy is fleeting, like a mirage. Physical strength is the foundation. I built my legacy with vital energy alone. We martial artists don’t believe in immortals or Buddhas—only in our blood and fists.”

Ning Zhao opened her mouth to argue but stopped as Lu raised a hand. Smiling at his father, Lu offered no rebuttal. Instead, he grasped Lu

Changkong's hand. "Activate [Spiritual Energy Deployment]. Target: Lu Changkong."

A breeze swept the garden. Lu Changkong's robe fluttered, his eyes blazing as a strange energy flowed from his arm, merging with his vital force and pooling in his dantian. It shattered his body's limits, his spirit soaring. Flowers and grass shredded in the upheaval.

Ning Zhao stepped forward, shielding Lu. Ni Yu, peeking from behind Yi Yue, gaped in excitement. When Lu Changkong's aura settled, he stood calmly, hands clasped, gazing at Lu with complex emotions.

"Well, Father?" Lu asked from his wheelchair.

Lu Changkong, determined to uphold his martial principles, steeled himself. He'd remain unshaken, rooted like a mountain. But his resolve faltered, words tumbling out. "This spiritual energy... it's incredible! So exhilarating! Son, one more strand?"

Lu's jaw dropped at his father's fervor.