

STARLIT PATH OF THE MYSTIC FORGE

Chapter 4: Everything Under Control... Or Not

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The first cultivator had been successfully nurtured!

Lu's heart thrummed with excitement as he read and reread the system's notification text. A deep sense of fulfillment washed over him, like planting a seed and watching it finally sprout tender shoots from the soil.

"Transformation reward and [Mission] authority unlocked?"

Lu's eyes lit up with anticipation.

With a thought, he summoned the system panel:

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****Title****: Qi Refiner (Permanent)

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****Host**:** Lu

****Title**:** Qi Refiner (Permanent)

****Qi Refinement Level**:** 1

****Soul Strength**:** 1

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

****Spiritual Energy**:** 9 Wisps

****Transformation Reward**:** *Mystic Qi Creation Manual*

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

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

Scanning the panel, Lu noticed the change immediately. The previously empty reward section now listed the *Mystic Qi Creation Manual*. The name alone sent a surge of adrenaline through him, his heart practically howling with excitement.

A cultivation technique!

A method to enhance his strength through qi refinement!

Lu only had ten wisps of spiritual energy, painstakingly gathered from his paralyzed legs—a finite resource, each wisp used diminishing his stock. He had been wracking his brain over what to do once his spiritual energy ran dry, but this manual's appearance was a timely lifeline. With the *Mystic Qi Creation Manual*, he no longer had to fear depletion.

Though eager to dive into the manual, Lu restrained himself. Ning Zhao and the others were still in the room. Suppressing his excitement, he shifted his focus to the newly activated [Missions] tab.

"Please select a mission," the system prompted in his mind.

Taking a deep breath, Lu focused, and a flood of text appeared:

****Main Mission****: Transform the Five Phoenixes Continent into a Grand Five Phoenixes World (Mission Accepted). Current Progress: Low Martial (Evaluation Not Yet Available).

****Side Mission****: Save the Endangered Beiluo City (Mission Not Accepted. Accept?)

Lu carefully reviewed the mission details. There weren't many tasks—just the main mission and a single side mission. The main mission was self-explanatory: transform the Five Phoenixes Continent from a low-martial world into a grand mystical world, a monumental and long-term endeavor requiring progression through mid-martial and high-martial stages. Lu had no choice in the matter; accepting the system's panel had automatically bound him to this task.

But the side mission caught his attention.

“Save Beiluo City...”

Beiluo City, governed by Lu's father, Lu Changkong, was one of the six remaining cities under the Great Zhou Dynasty's control. Lu's gaze sharpened as he focused on the mission details.

"Accept mission," he decided without hesitation.

Though unaware of the exact crisis threatening Beiluo City, he trusted the system's warning. Opening his eyes, the joy on Lu's face faded.

In the room, the atmosphere was peculiar.

Ning Zhao sat with her eyes closed, sensing the spiritual energy within her.

Yi Yue stared at Lu, clearly stunned by his abilities.

As for Ni Yu, the girl's eyes were wide, her mouth agape as if she could swallow a boiled egg whole. What she had just witnessed shattered her understanding, leaving her young mind reeling.

Lu cleared his throat, breaking the odd silence.

Ning Zhao's graceful figure trembled slightly as she opened her eyes, a fleeting glint of light in her gaze.

"Thank you, Young Master, for granting me this immortal opportunity!" she said earnestly, clasping her hands and bowing deeply.

Spiritual energy! The very existence of such a thing in this world upended years of her martial training.

"You've sensed the spiritual energy, haven't you? Gather it in your dantian... Your cultivation should have broken through," Lu said with a light smile, smoothing the blanket over his legs as he sat in his wheelchair.

"My strength has undergone a profound transformation," Ning Zhao confirmed, her face alight with joy.

Though a single wisp of spiritual energy was modest, for a martial artist in a low-martial world devoid of spiritual energy, it was a groundbreaking milestone.

“I can now call myself a Grandmaster,” Ning Zhao said, her beautiful face glowing with a radiant smile.

Grandmaster—a realm all martial artists dreamed of. Ning Zhao’s talent was exceptional; at twenty-four or twenty-five, she had already reached the level of a first-rate martial artist. But becoming a Grandmaster typically required decades of effort.

Yi Yue’s face betrayed a flicker of envy. A Grandmaster! It was like leaping over a dragon’s gate with effortless grace.

“The first wisp of spiritual energy is just the beginning,” Lu explained. “The human body is like a great furnace. With that initial wisp as your foundation, you must cultivate thousands more to fill your dantian and further refine your strength. That’s the essence of Qi Core Realm cultivation.”

The term “Qi Core Realm” came from the system’s earlier prompts. Lu wasn’t entirely clear on the specifics of cultivation tiers, but to build a true mystical world, a clear hierarchy of realms was essential. He made a mental note to discuss this with the system when he had time.

Ning Zhao bowed again, her respect for Lu deepening. His mysterious abilities and confident talk of the Qi Core Realm only heightened her awe. Perhaps, as Lu claimed, he had received a divine opportunity—an immortal's touch, infusing him with spiritual energy. Even if that wasn't the case, his mastery of spiritual energy gave him the power to shift the world's tides.

The Young Master was destined for greatness.

"Young... Young Master..." Yi Yue suddenly spoke, biting her full lips.

"What is it?" Lu asked, curious.

"I... I humbly request a wisp of spiritual energy as well," Yi Yue said, abruptly kneeling and pressing her forehead to the floor.

Ning Zhao stood beside Lu, her expression calm. She had expected this. Spiritual energy was an opportunity too rare to pass up, and Yi Yue's request was no surprise.

Lu understood her intent. Yi Yue was quick to seize opportunities, but...

“When you become a first-rate martial artist, come find me,” he said evenly.

Yi Yue’s body trembled, but she replied, “Thank you, Young Master!”

Lu hadn’t outright refused her, which meant she still had a chance. Rising to her feet, her eyes burned with determination. She harbored no resentment; in her mind, Lu’s refusal might be for her own good. A second-rate martial artist receiving spiritual energy without the foundation to become a Grandmaster would only waste such a rare gift.

“Young Master! I want one too!” Ni Yu, leaning against the door, piped up. Her face flushed with excitement, unwilling to be left out after seeing her two “sisters” receive Lu’s favor or promise.

Lu’s lips twitched. He glanced at Ni Yu and rolled his eyes.

“Little girl, don’t stir up trouble. Go play somewhere else,” he said bluntly.

Ning Zhao and Yi Yue stifled their laughter.

Ni Yu froze, as if an invisible arrow had pierced her tender heart. While her sisters shone, she was left in the dust.

Ignoring Ni Yu's dejected expression, Lu turned to Ning Zhao, his gaze sharpening. "Sister Ning, what's the current situation in Beiluo City?"

Ning Zhao blinked, surprised. The Young Master, who typically cared only for Confucian texts and showed little interest in Beiluo City's affairs, was suddenly asking about its state. As a martial artist, she kept herself informed.

Her lips parted as she spoke softly, "The world has fallen into chaos. The Great Zhou Dynasty is mired in turmoil, with twelve feudal lords rising in rebellion, their armies converging on the capital. The Western County Governor, Xiang Shaoyun, leads them, issuing a proclamation that the young emperor is unfit, the National Preceptor is corrupt, and the people are suffering. They claim to march to restore order to the Great Zhou."

Lu tapped his fingers thoughtfully on the armrest of his wheelchair. "So Beiluo City is on the front lines, facing the full force of these twelve lords' armies?"

Ning Zhao shook her head. “Troops are at our gates, but not the combined forces of all twelve lords. If they had united, the City Lord would have abandoned Beiluo and retreated to the capital long ago.”

“Oh?” Lu frowned, puzzled. Though he had inherited the original host’s memories, they were vague on matters of the broader world.

“When the City Lord met with his generals, he remarked on the National Preceptor’s cunning. Using his authority as a Confucian Grandmaster, the Preceptor rallied martial artists to obstruct the rebels, slowing their advance. Currently, only the Northern County Governor, Tantai Xuan, with his fifty thousand troops, besieges Beiluo City,” Ning Zhao explained.

She then smiled reassuringly. “Don’t worry, Young Master. The City Lord said everything is under control.”

Lu fell silent.

Under control?

With the system issuing a mission to save Beiluo City from imminent collapse, that claim rang hollow.

****Everything under control? Hardly.****