

## Starlit Path 42

Chapter 42: Is the Outside World This Dangerous?

\*Side Mission 2: Build a Transcendent Faction from Scratch [Current Progress: Transcendent Prototype, Beiluo Hegemon]\*

\*Congratulations, Host, for establishing the prototype of the transcendent faction 'White Jade Capital.' Awarded 10 distributable attribute points.\*

\*Note: Continue striving to elevate 'White Jade Capital' into a true transcendent faction. Expected reward: 1000 distributable attribute points.\*

As Ning Zhao appeared in all her peerless grace, the system's prompt flashed before Lu Ping'an's eyes. His brow lifted, a faint smile forming as he exhaled. The outcome was a pleasant surprise. He'd assumed rewards would come only after creating a faction surpassing the Hundred Schools, but the mission had stages. Building a true transcendent faction was a daunting, long-term goal given his current Qi Refining level.

What truly caught his attention was the system's promise: elevating White Jade Capital to a transcendent faction could yield 1000 attribute points—equivalent to 10,000 strands of spiritual energy, enough to reach the third level of Qi Refining. But the realization sobered him. Advancing through Qi Refining was grueling. One soul strength point converted to just 10 strands of spiritual energy. A thousand points would only get him to the third level—reaching the hundredth would require an astronomical sum. Relying solely on attribute points was unsustainable.

There had to be other methods, like nurturing cultivators through the Preaching Platform

to siphon their refined spiritual energy. Perhaps he could even refine energy himself. Other avenues likely existed, waiting to be discovered.

His thoughts settled as Ning Zhao approached, dragging a figure. Her breath was uneven, her face flushed with excitement. “Young Master, after handling White Jade Capital’s affairs on Lakeheart Island, I rushed to aid you. On the way, I encountered this fleeing Sword Sect grandmaster...”

Lu’s gaze fell on the battered swordsman, and his lips twitched. Nie Changqing, beside him, was equally speechless. They recognized him—Jingyue, the Sword Sect grandmaster who’d fled from them twice without looking back. They’d ignored him, assuming he’d left Beiluo. Yet here he was, caught by Ning Zhao, his bruised face radiating existential doubt.

“Well done,” Lu said, half-laughing, half-exasperated. Ning Zhao’s capture likely triggered the mission’s completion early. “This swordsman, with a four-sword case, is a sixth-rank grandmaster. How did you defeat him?”

Nie Changqing, clutching his knife, was puzzled. He knew Ning Zhao’s strength: a first-rank grandmaster with two strands of spiritual energy in her second-stage Qi Core. Capturing a sixth-rank grandmaster alive seemed implausible.

Lu’s curiosity mirrored Nie’s. Ning Zhao flicked her hair, smiling. “At first, I was no match, barely surviving. But in a moment of life-and-death clarity, I... stumbled upon spiritual pressure. When it manifested, this grandmaster lost his will to fight, intent only on fleeing. I seized the chance, beat him black and blue, and captured him.”

“Spiritual pressure?” Nie Changqing froze.

Lu's eyes brightened, a smile tugging at his lips as he regarded Ning Zhao's proud expression. "Show me."

"Yes, Young Master," she replied, tossing the battered Jingyue aside. Mobilizing her Qi Core's spiritual energy, she unleashed her pressure. Dust swirled, Lu's robes fluttered, and his hair danced. Yi Yue paled, feeling as if a boulder crushed her chest, her legs trembling. Ni Yu, bearing the spiritual pressure chessboard, was unaffected, basking in the breeze.

"Not bad," Lu said, chuckling. "It's weak, but you've grasped the basics. Ning, you learned your blood-moving technique from Father, right?"

Ning Zhao's pressure was a pale shadow of Lu's, but in combat, it was a potent weapon—Jingyue's sorry state proved it. "Yes," she confirmed, blushing slightly and bowing.

"Tomorrow, come to me for a cultivation method," Lu said. "With it, your spiritual pressure could grow stronger."

"Thank you, Young Master!" Ning Zhao beamed.

Lu's gaze shifted to Jingyue, who was attempting to slink away. Fifty strands of spiritual energy surged within Lu's Qi Core. With a boom, Jingyue, poised to flee like a startled rabbit, collapsed face-first, his nose nearly breaking, blood splattering. Too pitiful. Jingyue wanted to cry. After biding his time, his one move had led to this. Was living so hard? Is the outside world this dangerous?

"Still running?" Lu asked, propping his chin and tapping the wool blanket on his lap.

He dispersed the pressure. Jingyue scrambled up, trembling. Ning Zhao took Yi Yue's place, pushing the wheelchair, while Yi Yue stepped back, still shaken. Nie Changqing stared coldly at Jingyue. Under the cooling moonlight, Jingyue wiped his nosebleed, facing the jade-like Lu. He had two choices: death or surrender. As a Sword Sect hero, surrender was an insult to his swordsmanship, a betrayal of his sword heart.

Snap. Jingyue knelt without hesitation. "I... I surrender. No more running."

Lu blinked, stunned. Weren't swordsmen supposed to be unyielding, choosing death over dishonor? This grandmaster had no spine. Yet his pragmatism intrigued Lu, his expression turning meaningful. Jingyue shivered under Lu's gaze, his face paling.

After a long pause, Lu tapped the blanket, speaking coolly. "Surrender is fine. Give me a reason not to kill you."

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Under the night sky, Beiluo stood proud like a lion on the plains. Hooves thundered as three hundred cavalry galloped back. Lu Changkong, whip cracking, led the charge, his horse whinnying. The sparse guards on the walls, spotting him, signaled excitedly. The heavy gates opened, bolts sliding back.

Lu Changkong's face darkened at the dwindled defenses, confirming trouble within. Leading his cavalry and the Preceptor's five-horse carriage, he charged into the city. The air reeked of blood and death, sinking his heart.