

Starlit Path 65

Chapter 65: A Flawed Design, But No Big Deal

“What is that?!”

Mo Shugui’s voice trembled with shock, his disbelief palpable.

A living person?

Could something buried in this immortal palace still be alive?

Xiang Shaoyun’s breath hitched, his axe already in hand, his vital energy coiled tight, ready to strike at a moment’s notice. Whatever was entombed here could be dangerously powerful.

But that wasn’t all. Beyond the gaunt, withered Taoist rising from the central coffin, countless fiends crawled along the walls, floor, and even hung upside down from the ceiling of the middle chamber.

Flanking the coffin stood two towering figures, each nearly seven feet tall, clad in ancient armor, as if they’d stepped out of the underworld. They gripped long-handled broadswords that glinted with a chilling edge.

“Commanders? Or perhaps... the leaders of these fiends!”

Li Sansi, seasoned from years of battling border soldiers, offered his assessment.

“The commander is likely the one rising from the coffin,” Xiang Shaoyun said. “These two are lieutenants. But they’re far stronger than the lesser fiends. Each carries ten wisps of spiritual energy—comparable to a ninth-tier master. They’re formidable.”

For the Overlord of West County to call something “formidable” spoke volumes about the strength of these lieutenant fiends.

“What’s the plan?” Li Sansi asked, his gaze locking onto Xiang Shaoyun.

“I’ll handle the withered Taoist in the coffin,” Xiang Shaoyun said coolly. “You three take on the two lieutenants. Fail, and you know the consequences.”

“Why do you get the scrawny Taoist?” Mo Shugui protested.

Xiang Shaoyun’s eyes narrowed, his towering frame turning slightly to glance at him. “Think you can handle it? Go ahead.”

“You can’t,” he added bluntly.

“Don’t be fooled by that Taoist’s frail appearance,” Kong Nanfei interjected, pulling several bamboo scrolls from his bookcase. “To be laid in the central coffin means they held a revered status in this palace—possibly the immortal who created it. The Overlord might stand a chance, but you, Mo Shugui? No way.”

Mo Shugui opened his mouth but found no retort.

Xiang Shaoyun didn’t bother with further debate.

Brandishing his axe and shield, he charged forward.

“Let’s move!”

Boom!

The Overlord’s movement shook the palace itself.

Li Sansi swept his wooden sword and rushed into the fray.

Kong Nanfei, his expression solemn, unfurled his scrolls, chanting softly. A wave of Confucian righteous energy surged, scattering the lesser fiends.

Mo Shugui, face cold, drew his sword and charged at one of the broadsword-wielding lieutenants.

The battle erupted in an instant.

In the middle chamber, the withered Taoist's skin was dry and lifeless, his eyes reflecting the eerie green glow of the ghostly flames, exuding an unsettling aura.

Yet, confusion flickered in his gaze.

Xiang Shaoyun swung his axe, cleaving through lesser fiends like paper.

Channeling spiritual energy, his vital energy roared, amplifying his strength. He reveled in the sensation of power.

The two lieutenants swung their broadswords, infused with spiritual energy, slicing through the air with a strained whine, aiming for Xiang Shaoyun.

"Li Sansi!" Xiang Shaoyun roared, his hair whipping wildly, his eyes resolute.

A wooden sword descended from above.

Li Sansi, clad in white robes, landed gracefully. Drawing on a single wisp of qi from his core, he moved with the Seven Stars Step, thrusting his sword twice to parry the lieutenants' broadswords.

His face flushed, nearly coughing blood from the effort.

On the other side, Mo Shugui blocked a strike, his heart pounding.

"Ten wisps of spiritual energy... equivalent to a tenth-tier grandmaster!"

With Li Sansi and Mo Shugui holding off the lieutenants, Xiang Shaoyun charged straight for the withered Taoist in the coffin, axe and shield in hand.

"I am Jiang Chao, an ancient qi refiner, at the peak of the qi core realm," the Taoist declared, his voice dry yet resonant, echoing with a grand, hoarse weight.

Xiang Shaoyun's eyes narrowed.

Peak qi core realm?

How could it be the peak qi core realm?!

He wasn't naive—he understood the cultivation hierarchy. The qi core realm was complete when spiritual energy fully saturated the dantian.

But for a palace of this grandeur, a mere peak qi core realm seemed... underwhelming.

“I fought alongside the ancient emperor to quell rebellions, battling the ‘body-hidden’ qi refiners, only to fall and be buried in Wolong Ridge,” the Taoist continued, his voice tinged with confusion.

“But... why am I still alive?”

Xiang Shaoyun, gripping his axe and shield, approached cautiously, his eyes scanning the coffin.

Suddenly, they locked onto something.

Behind the coffin, the entrance to the rear chamber stood open. On a stone shelf lay several tattered sheets of sheepskin parchment.

“Immortal cultivation techniques!”

Xiang Shaoyun's eyes blazed with excitement, his breathing quickening.

What did he need most?

A cultivation technique!

With it, he could properly channel spiritual energy, preventing it from dissipating uselessly.

“But... why am I still alive?!” the Taoist’s voice roared, a soul-deep question.

Boom!

A sudden surge of spiritual pressure forced Xiang Shaoyun back several steps.

“Hm?!”

He squinted.

“This pressure... it’s far weaker than the force outside the palace’s five-mile radius!”

But with the crazed Taoist in his way, slipping past to grab the cultivation techniques was impossible.

“Why are you alive?” Xiang Shaoyun shot back. “You call yourself an ancient qi refiner? Laughable. Do you even know what era this is? You’re not dead because the ‘immortal’ won’t let you die. You’re just a puppet, guarding their cultivation techniques!”

“A mere puppet dares to block the Overlord of West County?!”

His voice thundered like a bell, his vital energy surging, spiritual energy coiling around him as he gripped his shield and axe.

In the distance, Li Sansi and Mo Shugui, battered by the lieutenants, exchanged complicated glances.

“No wonder he’s the Overlord,” Li Sansi remarked. “A few words, and he’s got the undead Taoist all flustered.”

With a deft thrust of his wooden sword, Li Sansi deflected a broadsword strike, standing tall and composed, blood trickling from his lips as he muttered softly.

The Taoist in the coffin seemed dazed, as if Xiang Shaoyun’s words had stunned him.

Seizing the moment, Xiang Shaoyun roared, charging forward with unbridled force.

His axe, fueled by vital and spiritual energy, cleaved through the air with a crackling gust, aiming for the Taoist's head.

North Luo, Lakeheart Island

Lu lounged lazily in his wheelchair, as Ni Yu reached for the bronze wine cup to pour another serving.

He waved her off, stopping her.

Propping his chin with one hand, he rubbed his brow with the other, his gaze deep and intricate, fixed on the spiritual pressure chessboard.

“Well... they found a glitch this quickly,” he mused. “This Xiang Shaoyun, the so-called Overlord of West County... he’s got some substance.”

It was his first time crafting a secret realm, and he’d overlooked some basic details.

This qi refiner boss was modeled after ancient legends of the Wuhuang Continent's emperor, drawn from texts: "The emperor fought rebels in the wilds. The rebels summoned phoenix fire, but the emperor ordered Wu Chao to wield water, quenching the flames and crushing the rebellion."

A qi refiner awakening from slumber wouldn't immediately proclaim their ancient title.

Lu pinched his brow.

Still, it was a minor flaw—nothing serious.

He was easygoing, not one to sweat the small stuff.

"This Overlord's got too much fire in him," Lu reflected. "He hasn't been tempered by the ways of the world. He needs some grinding, or he'll stumble hard later."

Besides, Lu was curious—could these people unleash their potential in the face of such a desperate situation?

Building a world wasn't just about shaping its environment; it was about forging true powerhouses.

And true powerhouses were born from surviving one desperate trial after another.

Lu's eyes narrowed.

A breeze swept by.

Rolling up his sleeve, he picked up a chess piece and placed it lightly on the board.

Immortal Palace, Middle Chamber

Xiang Shaoyun's eyes burned as he seized the moment of the Taoist's stunned silence.

His axe slashed forward, the air crackling with the force of his killing intent.

But just half an inch from the Taoist's head, an invisible force stopped the blade.

One wisp, two, three... twelve wisps of spiritual energy swirled around the Taoist—peak qi core realm!

The figure rose slowly from the coffin, tattered robes fluttering, his withered hair unraveling, glinting in the green candlelight.

His glowing eyes fixed on Xiang Shaoyun.

“I am bound by the emperor’s decree to guard the immortal techniques and protect the immortal path. Trespassers... die.”

Buzz!

With a wave of his hand, a compressed wave of spiritual pressure slammed forward.

Xiang Shaoyun’s eyes widened in shock.

His axe was knocked away, and the immense force struck him. His shield saved him from being crushed, but the impact sent him crashing through the chamber’s stone wall, sliding dozens of meters back.