

Desolate 101

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 1: The Four Palaces of the Aquatic Manor

The tall, wide, ancient hall was the same as it had been for countless years. Many enormous prayer mats were placed throughout the hall, and an old black ox had appeared, smiling as he looked at the suddenly arrived Ji Ning.

“The main hall.” Ning looked at the great hall.

“Congratulations.” The old black bull walked over, filled with joy. “It’s only been a few years, but you’ve already reached the Zifu level. It was faster than I anticipated.”

Ning was still worrying about the impending arrival of a large group of experts from Snowdragon Mountain, and so he said without too much joy, “I was simply lucky.”

“The fact that you made it through those three trials earlier wasn’t a matter of luck.” The old black bull sighed. “You bound the control talisman...and you are now able to go to the most important places within the Aquatic Manor. With access to these places, you will now have the capital to truly rise to sudden prominence. Ji Ning, I feel as though I can already see into the future, with you as being one of the supreme experts of the Grand Xia Dynasty.”

Ning was stunned. He hadn’t imagined that this old black bull, the spirit of a magic treasure, would be so good at flattery.

“I’m not lying.” The old black bull said. “Immortal Juhua’s decision to accept a disciple caused countless people throughout the Grand Xia Dynasty to go wild. If they knew that Immortal Juhua was merely the third master of this Aquatic Manor, most likely, a true storm would have erupted in the world.”

“What exactly is so special about this Aquatic Manor?” Ning hurriedly asked.

What he cared the most about was if this Aquatic Manor would be able to increase his power or not, and if he would be able to have a greater chance of success in the upcoming battle.

“The Aquatic Manor has many secrets.” The old black bull said. “Immortal Juhua and I stayed here for a very long time. If my predictions are correct...this manor should have been designed for training future generations of Fiendgods.”

“Training future generations of Fiendgods?” Ning was stunned.

“Right.” The old black bull nodded his large head. “The first master of this Aquatic Manor should have been an extremely powerful Fiendgod! Just look at the prayer mats throughout the main hall, and you will understand...originally, quite a few Fiendgods would have sat here, waiting for his command and listening to him expound on the correct way of training.”

Ning stared at the enormous nearby prayer mats, as well as that solitary prayer mat seated at the front of the hall. He nodded gently.

“The first master’s method for accepting disciples was through two corridors; one for Xiantian-level Fiendgod Body Refiners, while the other was for Zifu-level Fiendgod Body Refiners.” The old black bull said. “Ordinary Fiendgod practitioners wouldn’t suffice. Only those whose bodies had transformed and become like the bodies of Fiendgods would qualify. Wouldn’t this be, essentially, true Fiendgods?”

Ning nodded.

His own body had been birthed from fire and water that had descended from the heavens. He did indeed have the body of a Xiantian Fiendgod.

“In addition, clearly the various halls of the Aquatic Manor are meant for cultivating later Fiendgods.” The old black bull said. “Unfortunately, the path of Fiendgods is simply too difficult. Although Immortal Juhua originally started on the path of Fiendgod Body Refining as well, slowly, that path became more and more difficult for him. He advanced more rapidly as a Ki Refiner, but in the end, he failed his tribulation and became a Loose Immortal.”

Ning understood. For example, although he himself focused almost all of his effort on training as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, he had first established his Zifu as a Ki Refiner!

Ki Refining was simple. Body Refining was hard.

Perhaps in the future, he would become an Earth Immortal as a Ki Refiner while he was only at the Primordial Daoist level as a Fiendgod Body Refiner...or even just a Wanxiang Adept! Perhaps he, too, would face the tribulation as a Ki Refiner, and end up failing and becoming a Loose Immortal...it was completely possible that he would end up tracing the path of Immortal Juhua.”

“Let me give you a warning.” The old black bull looked at Ning. “This is what Immortal Juhua once said to his disciple, Rampart.”

“Please speak.” Ning immediately said.

“This Aquatic Manor is meant for cultivating Fiendgods. Thus, do your best to walk the path of the Fiendgods.” The old black bull said. “Even if you are at the very verge of the Void stage and becoming an Earth Immortal, Ji Ning, you should halt your training in Ki. No matter what, do not go face the tribulation! Work hard as a Fiendgod Body Refiner and undergo the tribulation as a Fiendgod first.”

Ning frowned.

“According to the hypotheses of Immortal Juhua, the farther along you go on the path of the Fiendgods, the greater assistance this Aquatic Manor will be for you. Immortal Juhua sensed that this Aquatic Manor had some secrets he still didn’t know! They should have been secrets passed down by the first master...but unfortunately, Immortal Juhua was unable to divine them.” The old black bull said.

“Thank you, senior, for your warning. Ji Ning will remember it.” Ning said hurriedly.

“The first owner possessed incredible, divine powers, and he far eclipsed Immortal Juhua.” The old black bull said. “Wait until you go to the Stellar Hall. Then you will understand.”

“Stellar Hall?” Ning was puzzled.

Suddenly...

An illusion suddenly began to form in empty space. It quickly solidified into a tall, powerful bear. The bear's entire body was covered with yellow fur, and it was staring towards Ning...and as it did, Ning felt as though it was a sort of eternal, ancient existence. This was the same feeling he had when he visualized the painting of Maiden Nuwa in his mind.

No matter how much time passed, it would be eternally present! This was the feeling that the giant bear gave Ning; only, the feeling was murkier, not as powerful as the one which the Nuwa Painting gave him.

"Elder Brother." The old black bull hurriedly lowered his face and called out. Ning could sense the bull's mouth trembling, and the old black bull hurriedly said to Ning, "This is the spirit of the aquatic manor."

"The spirit of the manor?" Ning sensed how the head of this enormous bear before him...seemed very similar to the giant illusion of a bear head which transported him here.

"Ji Ning greets you, senior." Ning said respectfully.

The giant yellow bear glanced at him. "Yet another who reached the Zifu level as a Ki Refiner first. You train in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens], the number one Fiendgod Body Refining technique in the world. You possess a strong Fiendgod lineage. Work hard as a Fiendgod Body Refiner. Don't waste your natural talent and potential."

"Yes." Ning could feel the invisible aura emanating forward from the giant yellow bear.

That ancient, eternal presence alone...made Ning feel as though this wasn't something which ordinary practitioners would be capable of. The fact that the spirit of the manor was capable of teleporting people was, in an of itself, incredible and mysterious.

Immortal Juhua was an expert during the latter stages of the Fiendgod Era.

And the spirit of the manor? It had followed the very first master. How ancient was it? How powerful was it? It was best to be humble when facing it.

"Follow me." The giant yellow bear walked in front.

"Hurry, follow." The old black bull urged, hurriedly following as well.

Ning followed from behind as the giant yellow bear led the way, into a corridor on the right side of the main hall that was three thousand meters tall.

The giant yellow bear said while walking, "After having bound the control talisman, you can be considered a master-in-training. Aside from the main hall, you can also enter this corridor, which had four major secondary halls. These four major secondary halls are open to you...but of course, right now, you are limited to them. If you want to enter more halls, you'll have to become a Primordial Daoist."

Ning understood.

Becoming a Zifu Disciple and binding the control talisman was only the first step.

Becoming a Primordial Daoist and binding the entire estate was just the second step.

Most likely, even the second step would be just a simple binding, allowing one to carry it with him at all times. Most likely, the Aquatic Manor still would not be under complete control, as otherwise, Immortal Juhua wouldn't have said that he suspected there were more mysteries within.

"Look." The giant yellow bear pointed into the distance. An ancient, azure bronze gate was there, which was open.

Ning hurriedly walked over, looking through the bronze gate....

Wow.

Ning's eyes were round. He saw an enormous hall past the gate, in the middle of which floated one magic treasure after another, each of them emanating a powerful, ancient aura. Ning saw a large warhammer which glittered with tricolored light that made Ning's heart pound frantically just staring at it, as though it were about to explode.

There were also four formation flags of different colors. When he looked at it, he felt as though he was being drawn into a boundless separate world.

"This is the Treasure Hall, one of the four major secondary halls you can currently enter." The giant yellow bear said. "The Treasure Hall is the place where Master stored his countless treasures, ranging from unique mortal items to items from the time of Primordial Chaos, when Pangu split the heavens and created the universe. Master set down a rule for all of these treasures; as long as you can satisfy the requirements the Master set down, you can acquire them."

Ning held his breath.

Items of Primordial Chaos, from when Pangu split the heavens? What were they? But Ning knew that Fiendgods were naturally birthed from the heavens, and that after Pang split the heavens, there were many Fiendgods.

Now, it seemed as though this Aquatic Manor truly had been left behind by an extremely ancient, powerful Fiendgod.

"What do I need to do to acquire these treasures? What are the requirements?" Ning asked.

"After you enter the Treasure Hall and slowly look through it, you'll see the rules which Master left behind." The giant yellow bear said.

Ning nodded slightly.

The first master had created the two corridors that had to be traversed for future disciples to be accepted. The rules of the Treasure Hall were also set by the first master...clearly, the first master had the greatest influence on the Aquatic Manor, while Immortal Juhua was just a passerby.

"Continue walking." The giant yellow bear said while walking. "The next secondary hall...is the Divine Abilities Hall that you are now able to enter."

"Divine Abilities Hall?" Ning was stunned.

Divine abilities?

He had only acquired a single divine ability, the [Windwing Evasion]. Ning knew exactly how precious divine abilities were. They weren't things which just anyone could acquire.

"Here we are." After having walked momentarily, the giant yellow bear pointed to another nearby giant bronze door. That ancient bronze door had a single bronze palm above it, and the palm emanated boundless might, carrying the power to seal the heavens and block out the sun.

"This is the Divine Abilities Hall." The giant yellow bear said. "Only Fiendgods who fulfill two requirements are allowed to enter. The first is that the Fiendgod Body Refiner reaches the level of Blood-Drop Rebirth. The second is that it must be done within ten years; at most, ten years."

Ning was stunned.

Blood-Drop Rebirth? That meant being at the Zifu-level as a Fiendgod Body Refiner. He hadn't reached that yet.

Ten years?

He was already more than ten years old.

"In the past, Immortal Juhua was more than ten years old, so he wasn't permitted to enter the Divine Abilities Hall." The giant yellow bear said. "If he had been able to enter it, Immortal Juhua probably would've been able to walk a longer path and his power should have been even greater. Perhaps...he wouldn't have ended up becoming a Loose Immortal." The giant yellow bear was clearly rather sentimental towards Immortal Juhua, who had controlled the estate for millions of years, after all.

The old black bull sighed as well. "My master always felt regret for the fact that he wasn't able to enter the Divine Abilities Hall. Every single one of these four secondary halls are important. Master was able to enter the other three, but he wasn't able to enter this Divine Abilities Hall, and when he passed through the challenge corridors, he was more than ten years old."

Ning felt bitterness in his heart.

No matter how you calculated it, he was more than ten years old! Could it be that he, too, had lost the chance to enter the Divine Abilities Hall?

"Fortunately, you are lucky. You are only five years old." The giant yellow bear glanced at Ning.

"Five years old?" Ning stared.

The old black bull understood what Ning was thinking. "Fiendgods are born at the Xiantian level. You are indeed only five years old."

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 2: Treasures

The age referred to age as Fiendgods reckoned it; true Fiendgods were nurtured by the natural world and born as Xiantian lifeforms. As for Ning, when he was eleven years old, celestial fire and water had descended, nurturing his body and transforming it into a Fiendgod's body, just like a normal Fiendgod who had just been birthed. And now he was sixteen...as Fiendgods reckoned it, Ning was indeed only five.

“To be able to establish a Zifu within ten years will be proof of your potential.” The giant yellow bear looked at the towering bronze gate, a complicated look in his eyes. “Only then will you be able to enter the Divine Abilities Hall...within the Divine Abilities Hall is a test which Master left behind. If you pass, you will be able to acquire an extremely powerful divine ability which Master left behind.”

“Remember; you only have a single chance to enter the Divine Abilities Hall.” The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning. “Thus, the more powerful you are, the greater your chance will be. It is best if you enter it at ten years of age; otherwise, if you fail, you won’t be able to acquire a divine ability. After all, it is a trial; it does hold some danger, and if you aren’t careful, you’ll lose even your own life.”

Ning asked with curiosity, “What divine abilities are held within the Divine Abilities Hall?”

The giant yellow bear looked towards Ning, then said calmly, “After having passed the trials, you’ll know. And if you don’t make it through? You won’t be qualified to know.”

“Come. Let’s go to the next hall.” The giant yellow bear continued forward.

Ning looked at the single palm above the giant bronze door, radiating that inexhaustible, majestic presence.

Divine Abilities Hall?

His Fiendgod body had yet to reach the Zifu level. There was no point thinking about it for now.

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The giant yellow bear was in front of them, in this ancient corridor, with the old black bull by his side and Ning walking behind them.

“This secondary hall.” The giant yellow bear looked towards a towering bronze door that was shut. This bronze door had an axe and a spear carved onto it, and a killing aura emanated from it. The bronze door itself had a bloody red light glowing from it, causing Ning to unconsciously feel fear in his heart.

“This is the Wargod Hall.” The giant yellow bear said. “This is the most dangerous place in the entire Aquatic Manor, but a place filled with opportunity.”

The most dangerous? Filled with opportunity?

Ning was curious.

“Continue looking.” The giant yellow bear didn’t waste words, immediately walking forward.

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From far away, the distant sound of flowing water could faintly be heard. Ning looked with curiosity towards the already opened wooden door. The wooden door was open, and through it, flowing water could be seen, along with some boulders as well as some lonely straw huts.

“This is the Stellar Hall.” The giant yellow bear stood in front of the hall, staring into the vast, boundless space within. “Everything within the Stellar Hall was personally laid out by Master. When living within the Stellar Hall, one can even sense the wondrous mysteries of the Dao.”

The nearby old black bull also said excitedly, "Ji Ning, Immortal Juhua had a lifespan of millions of years, precisely because of this Stellar Hall. The wondrous mysteries of the Dao fill every single part of this Stellar Hall, and it even has multiple complete 'Daos'...Immortal Juhua had the Stellar Hall, which is why he was at such a high level of understanding, allowing him to withstand so many tribulations and living millions of years.

"Multiple complete Daos?" Ning was rather puzzled.

"I've told you everything already." The giant yellow bear looked at Ning. "The places you are now granted entrance into are the main hall, this corridor, and these four major secondary halls. You are not permitted entry into the other parts, nor would you be able to enter if you wanted to. Act appropriately. I hope you'll be able to live to become a Primordial Daoist."

Whoosh.

The giant yellow bear disappeared into specks of light, then completely vanished.

Ning let out a sigh of relief. When facing the giant yellow bear, he always felt that it gave him tremendous pressure, as though he were facing an ancient, powerful Fiendgod.

"That's how the spirit of the manor is." The old black bull laughed. "Forget about you; he didn't even care much about Immortal Juhua. He's quite arrogant and solitary. Actually, after so many years have passed, I felt that it was normal for him to be so solitary. After all, even Immortal Juhua didn't truly master this Aquatic Manor."

Ning seemed to understand, and he nodded slightly.

And then he hurriedly asked, "Senior, what should I do right now in these four major secondary halls? Please guide me, senior."

"First, go to the Treasure Hall." The old black bull said. "Follow me. I'm quite familiar with it."

"Fine." Ning felt that the old black bull was much more amiable and genial than the giant yellow bear, the spirit of the manor.

The Treasure Hall.

Ning and the old black bull walked together into it, and as Ning did, he instantly felt as though he entered a different world. In the air hung a vast collection of magic treasures, some of which were so powerful that their aura alone made Ning feel his heart shake. Most likely, even the slightest of ripples from it would cause him to be crushed and ground to dust. The power of it was far beyond what he imagined.

"Treasures..." The old black bull sighed, his eyes shining. "All of them are true treasures. Immortal Juhua drooled when looking at them as well, back in the day. But there was nothing he could do; he couldn't acquire them. If he was able to pick and choose as he pleased from these treasures, Immortal Juhua probably would've overcome the heavenly tribulation and become a Celestial Immortal long ago."

Ning felt his heart be moved, as he stared at them.

He saw that above him was a blood-colored warspear. The warspear looked quite plain, but just hanging there, it caused the surrounding space to crumble and crack, although it then quickly recovered. Crumbling, recovering, crumbling...this continued nonstop.

“These were all left by the first master.” The old black bull said hurriedly. “He left them for the future masters. He wanted to cultivate and provide for them, and so if you want to acquire these treasures, you’ll have to fulfill his requirements. Otherwise, even if you end up like Immortal Juhua, dying due to the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations, you still won’t be able to acquire a single treasure.”

Ning was curious. “What are the rules? What must I do to acquire these treasures?”

“Look over there.” The old black bull’s head nodded towards the side. Ning followed the bull’s gaze to look, only to see a tight cluster of tiny words on the distant wall. These words were all Fiendgod characters.

Ning hurriedly walked over, reading them all at one go.

“So that’s the situation.” Ning frowned.

The treasures of the Treasure Hall...were all obtainable.

There were two methods.

The first was to rise in power as a Fiendgod practitioner.

Once one reached the Zifu level as a Fiendgod practitioner, one would be able to acquire a ‘Mortal-rank magic treasure’, or a precious item of equivalent value.

Upon reaching the Wanxiang level as a Fiendgod practitioner, one would be able to select a single ‘Earth-rank magic treasure’ or equivalent.

Upon reaching the Primordial level as a Fiendgod practitioner, one would be able to select a single ‘Heaven-rank magic treasure’ or equivalent.

Upon reaching the Void level, one would be able to select an ‘Immortal-rank magic treasure’...

After after successfully passing the tribulation and becoming a Celestial Immortal! One would be able to select a ‘Pure Yang magic treasure’ or equivalent.

“So there are actually five ranks of magic treasures.” Ning murmured. “Zifu Disciples are only able to activate Mortal-rank magic treasures, while Wanxiang Adepts are able to use Earth-rank magic treasures. Primordials are able to use Heaven-rank magic treasures...and above that are Immortal-rank magic treasures and Pure Yang magic treasures.”

Ning had never even heard of these things before. All he knew was that there was such a thing as a ‘ranked’ magic treasure.

“There are five ranks of magic treasures.” The old black bull nearby said. “In addition, ranked magic treasures are also divide into ‘top’, ‘high’, ‘average’, and ‘low’ grades. The Zifu Disciples in that Swallow Mountain area of yours might use ranked magic treasures, but the vast majority of them are low-grade

or average grade magic treasures. However, if you were able to choose at will from the Treasure Hall...I trust you would naturally be able to select the best of yourself.”

Ning listened carefully. These were things he had no idea about.

“The further you advance in your training, the harder it will be for you to acquire magic treasures.” The old black bull said. “At the Void level, Earth Immortals will be able to activate Immortal-rank magic treasures, but Immortal-rank magic treasures...can be considered treasures amongst Immortals. How many Void level Earth Immortals will truly be able to acquire treasures of that level? They are incredibly rare. Thus, generally speaking, those Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals will generally use Heaven-rank magic treasures.”

“In the past, Immortal Juhua became bottlenecked at the Primordial Daoist level as a Fiendgod practitioner. No matter what he did, he wasn’t able to break through and reach the Void level. It was pointless for him to break through to the Void level as a Ki Refiner.” The old black bull shook his head. “Thus, he was never able to acquire an Immortal-rank magic treasure.”

“Ah.” Ning was stunned.

Right.

When one rose in power, one could acquire a treasure, but that was only as a Fiendgod. As for Ki Refiners? No matter how far you advanced, you wouldn’t be bestowed any treasures. Thus, one could imagine how much the first master hoped that his future inheritors would focus on training as Fiendgods.

“Afterwards, Immortal Juhua failed in his tribulation and became a Loose Immortal. After countless years, his power grew greater and greater, and then he succeeded in passing through the seventh level of the Wargod Hall, which was when he was bestowed an Immortal-rank magic treasure.” The old black bull said. “Afterwards, Immortal Juhua collected a large amount of materials, over the course of which he defeated the Thousand Swords Immortal. After acquiring the hundreds of flying swords from the Thousand Swords Immortal...he finally forged me.”

Ning said, curious, “Senior, what rank of a magic treasure are you?”

“An Immortal-rank magic treasure, of course.” The old black bull said arrogantly. “I am an Immortal-rank magic treasure. I have already surpassed the levels of Human, Earth, and Heaven; thus, I gained sentience. Immortal Juhua relied on me to establish his awe-inspiring fame!”

“Your Fiendgod body is only at the Xiantian lifeform level. To acquire magic treasures, you’ll have to achieve victory in the Wargod Hall.” The old black bull said.

Ning nodded.

There were two methods to acquiring the treasures of the Treasure Hall. The first was to rise in power as a Fiendgod. The second was to challenge the Wargod Hall, which had ten stages in total.

If one succeeded in overcoming the first or second stage of the Wargod Hall, one was allowed to choose a Mortal-rank magic treasure or another item of equivalent value.

If one succeeded in overcoming the third or fourth stage of the Wargod Hall, one was allowed to choose an Earth-rank magic treasure or another item of equivalent value.

If one succeeded in overcoming the fifth or sixth stage of the Wargod Hall, one was allowed to choose a Heaven-rank magic treasure or another item of equivalent value.

If one succeeded in overcoming the seventh or eighth stage of the Wargod Hall, one was allowed to choose an Immortal-rank magic treasure or another item of equivalent value.

If one succeeded in overcoming the ninth or tenth stage of the Wargod Hall, one was allowed to choose a Pure Yang magic treasure or another item of equivalent value.

The Fiendgod practitioners who had inherited the manor were each given two chances to challenge the Wargod Hall at each level of power. For example, Ning was now a Xiantian lifeform as a Fiendgod. He had two chances to go challenge the Wargod Hall. Once his Fiendgod form reached the Zifu level, he would gain two more chances.

Xiantian, Zifu, Wanxiang, Primordial, Void.

Before becoming an Immortal, he would only have ten chances! Each chance was incomparably precious!

“Challenging the Wargod Hall is too hard.” The old black bull shook his head and sighed. “But this is the second way in which one can acquire a treasure of the Treasure Hall. Even though it is hard, you’ll have to try.”

“It is indeed hard.” Ning nodded. Even Immortal Juhua had only overcome the seventh stage of the Wargod Hall after having become a Loose Immortal and spent countless years training.

The nearby old black bull said, “I watched you training in Serpentwing Lake with your sword. I don’t want to discourage you, but...for you to challenge the first level with your current level of power? You’d have less than a ten percent chance.”

“Less than ten percent?” Ning didn’t dare believe it.

The Wargod Hall had ten levels in total. The first two levels only allowed him to select a Mortal-rank magic treasure. He had trained with the sword at Brightheart Island...which was within the scope of the Aquatic Manor, and so the old black bull knew exactly how strong he had become. But he was now saying that if Ning went to the Wargod Hall, he would have less than ten percent chance of victory?

“Treasure Hall. Divine Abilities Hall. Wargod Hall. Stellar Hall.” The old black bull said. “The Treasure Hall is a place where, for now, you won’t be able to acquire a single treasure. You aren’t able to enter the Divine Abilities Hall yet either. You’ll have to go to one of the other two halls.”

“Wargod Hall...perhaps you can give it a try. If you succeed, you’ll be able to select a magic treasure. It will definitely be far superior to the ranked magic treasures you currently have. But of course, if you lose, that means that you’ll have wasted a chance to challenge the Wargod Hall.”

“The Stellar Hall is filled with countless paths of the Dao, and is an excellent place for gaining insight into it.”

“Which place shall you go to?” The old black bull looked towards Ning.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 3: A Tempest Outside the Straw Hut

“Senior, since you said that I have less than a ten percent chance of passing through the Wargod Hall’s challenge, why should I make the attempt?” Ji Ning said. “In addition, Immortal Juhua gained the greatest benefit from this Stellar Hall. I’m quite curious about it.”

As he spoke, Ning stepped into a room.

As for the treasures of the Treasure Hall? If he couldn’t touch them, what was the point? Immortal Juhua himself had only acquired a single Immortal-rank magic after having become a Loose Immortal.

“Best to take things one step at a time.” Ning knew his own limits.

He left the Treasure Hall and headed out through a corridor.

The Treasure Hall was at the frontmost part of the corridor, while the Stellar Hall was at the rearmost.

The old black bull followed while speaking constantly. “The Stellar Hall contains within it miraculous profundities, and by training within it, it is much easier to gain insights into the Dao. If you aren’t carefully, you’ll easily lose yourself in training...it seems as though in the outside world, you were rather frantic. I imagine you must have important business to attend to. Don’t let yourself become lost in meditating on the Dao within the Stellar Hall and delay your important affairs.

“Ah!” Ning was startled, then hurriedly said with gratitude, “Thank you for the reminder, senior.”

He had nearly caused himself to miss the critical affairs coming up!

Although meditating on the Dao was important, if he lost one or two days meditating on the Dao, by the time he woke up and left...it would all be too late.

“No matter what.” Ning instructed the old black bull. “As soon as the sky grows dark in the outside world, if I’m still in the Stellar Hall meditating on the Dao, then I would like to ask you to immediately disrupt my meditation and awaken me, senior.”

“If the sky grows dark in the outside world? That means only twelve hours are remaining.” The old black bull said.

“Right, twelve hours! If I begin to meditate on the Dao...at most allow me to meditate on it for twelve hours.” Ning said hurriedly. “After twelve hours, immediately awaken me.”

Based on Ning’s calculations, generally speaking, Zifu Disciples who were flying on magic treasures would be able to travel a hundred thousand kilometers in a day. But of course, that was normal flight; if they didn’t rest and didn’t sleep and also didn’t worry about using up their elemental energy, one could fly nearly two hundred thousand kilometers in a day. Swallow Mountain, in turn, was only a few tens of thousands kilometers in size...a roundtrip to see the other disciples of Snowdragon Mountain and return with them would take...

As Ji Ninefire had said, most likely just a day or two!

Ning would only be able to spend twelve hours meditating on the Dao. He absolutely couldn't afford to go over!

"Don't worry at all." The old black bull raised his head, looking like a guard. "Once twelve hours pass, I will immediately awaken you! We spirits of magic treasure...will never forget tasks that are assigned."

"Thank you, senior." Ning laughed, then headed to the main entrance of the Stellar Hall.

It was different from the other three halls, which all had large bronze doors. The gate to the Stellar Hall was seemingly made out of wood, and it emanated an ancient, natural aura. The old black bull, seeing Ning inspect the towering wooden door, murmured to himself, "This is the Ageless Bluefire Wood which only exists in the Nine Hells. It is a precious, spiritual wood which is very useful in making Immortal-rank magic treasures, but it was used to make a large gate."

"Is it possible to dismantle the gate?" Ning was curious.

"If it was, Immortal Juhua would have done so long ago." The old black bull said, resigned. "This gate is part of the entire Aquatic Manor; it is part of the entire magic treasure. There's no way to move it at all."

Ning stroked the wooden gate. The wood was covered with a cold, abyssal light, but when touching it, it felt warm and gave off a comfortable sensation. Ning sighed emotionally...the Ageless Bluefire Wood which only the Nine Hells possessed? Alright, then...these were things which he had never even heard of before the old black bull had introduced it to him. He had experienced too little.

"This really is..." Passing through the corridor and through the wooden gate, Ning felt breathless. The sight in front of him completely stunned him. "This really is utterly inconceivable. The works of a god. The works of a god!"

In front of him, in the distance, was a large mountain. The mountain was filled with life, with a large number of trees and other vegetation growing everywhere. At the base of the mountain, the life suddenly disappeared; it was an area where virtually not a single inch of grass would grow. Only very occasionally, within a patch of strewn rocks, would one see a few strands of grass. At the base of the mountain, there was a straw hut.

In front of the straw hut, there was a creek. The creek flowed down from the mountain, and it wended downwards in a curvy path, constantly flowing. It was only in the area wherever the creek flowed that some wild grass could occasionally be seen. The other places were virtually all covered with wild, desolate stones.

In midair, there was one enormous, brilliant star after another. The starlight filled the world, causing every place to seem rather illusory.

"Can it be that this is an entire world?" Ning couldn't help but say.

"It is its own dimension." The old black bull followed him in and sighed, "This is a dimension which the first master created within the Stellar Hall! This dimension is connected with the gate of the Stellar Hall. Thus, when we stepped through it, we entered the special space. I've heard it said that some great

powers of the ancient past were able to create an entire dimension within a single grain of sand. The first master most likely had this ability as well.

Ning nodded.

Unfathomable! Although when he was young, he had heard of some legends, such as 'Houyi Shooting the Son' and other such legends, when had he ever seen them in person? After all, those things were a long, long distance away from him. As for creating a dimension? Generally speaking, people created a dimension, then an estate within their own dimension.

The Aquatic Manor was itself a separate dimension...but the secondary halls actually were able to once again merge with another dimension. Although Ning didn't understand it too well, he understood that accomplishing something like this was an incredible feat.

"I really wonder who the first owner of this Aquatic Manor was." Ning said to himself.

"Come, come, come. The 'treasure' is within the straw hut." The old black bull urged.

"The straw hut?" Ning strode forward by a few dozen paces, quickly arriving at the straw hut. The straw hut was at the base of the mountain, a seemingly very ordinary straw hat, and with stone furniture inside.

After entering the straw room...Ning was stunned. He saw that on the table of the straw room, there were multiple tomes, all of which were black. Ning couldn't recognize any of them, and so he opened one. On the surface of the books, there were some beautiful Fiendgod characters: [Stellar Scroll] [Stellar Scroll 2] [Stellar Scroll 3]...there were forty three scrolls in total.

"This is...?" Ning stared at these books.

The old black bull explained, "These are the manuals left behind by the first owner. The name of it is the 'Stellar Hall' and there are a total of forty three parts.

Ning lifted up the Stellar Scroll and flipped through it. The pages were black, while the words were in golden Fiendgod script. The contents were rather puzzling as well...it felt like hastily scribbled notes! There were like casual recordings which described personal feelings! Ning originally had taken them to be profound books and was rather surprised.

"If you want to read!" The old black bull said hurriedly. "At a simple glance, there are no mysteries and nothing mysterious to the contents. But if you fully read everything...you will discover how extraordinary it is."

"Oh?"

Ning, startled, picked up the [Stellar Scrolls].

"Go outside the room to read. Sit on that stone bench over there." The old black bull said. "Read aloud!"

"But I don't recognize Fiendgod characters." Ning asked. Although he could recognize Fiendgod characters at first glance, and understood which human words matched each Fiendgod word, the two were different languages after all.

“Just use your own race’s language to read. That is what Immortal Juhua did in the past.” The old black bull said.

“Right.” Ning held the tome in his hand and walked out of the straw hut. He seated himself at the stone table, where the first master might have sat countless years ago and where Immortal Juhua might have sat as well.

Ning flipped open the book and began to read.

“Today, Chang came to pay his respects to me...” Ning began to read, puzzlement in his heart regarding these casual personal recordings.

His voice rang out.

Every single sound was very ordinary, but once the words were read out, the sound of the large number of words connected...in a manner that was like a song, capable of moving a person’s heart, causing pain, amazement, sorrow, and more. The sounds of these words were unfathomable; just by reading them out, the sound of these words seemed to contain a ringing, miraculous power...

Slowly, they drew Ning into a unique world.

When he became absorbed with seeing this world, Ning forgot that he was holding the [Stellar Scroll] in his hands. He stared at the countless stones of the desolate region, at the creek filled with life energy, as though seeing a pair of ‘Daos’. Daos filled with boundless profundities. Even the small grass which was growing out carried another sort of Dao within it.

Ning raised his head.

The stars in the sky were brilliant. Each of them were incomparably bright, and they each gave Ning a different feeling. Suddenly...Ning stared at one particular star, one which caused Ning to feel familiar and intoxicated by it.

“Longing, warmth...”

Ning seemed to be once more lying on that little boat of his, drifting atop Serpentwing Lake.

He also seemed to be in his mother’s arms...

That longing, that warmth...it filled his entire heart.

.....

The old black bull stared wide-eyed as it watched. “Truly inconceivable. This this this this...he actually completely read nearly the entire first scroll before halting? This Ji Ning really is at quite a high level of understanding. He was actually able to read so many characters. Most likely, he’s become emeshed on an extremely deep layer.”

The old black bull understood this very well.

This book was nothing more than a sort of ‘guide’, guiding the consciousness of practitioners on an extremely deep level to gain certain insights. The more words one read, the deeper a level of insight gaining one would reach! But of course...how much one would gain from it would depend on how many

experiences that person had built up normally in life. Good preparation was the key to success; only by normally accumulating experiences would one have sudden insights.

“Which star is he looking at?” The old black bull saw Ning raise his head to stare at the sky. He couldn’t help but feel curious “According to what Juhua said, every single star contains a different Dao.”

A calm smile was on Ning’s face, as though he were by the side of his mother.

That smile contained an inexhaustible charisma...when the old black bull saw Ning’s smile, he seemed to feel even his own heart grow warm.

This was a form of longing.

A mental warmth.

“Sword.” The old black bull stared.

Ning rose to his feet, leaving the stone table. He pressed his forefinger and middle finger together into the shape of a ‘sword’, then began to brandish them about in training swordplay within the Stellar Hall. This was a type of swordplay that contained inexhaustible, endless longing...Ning didn’t release any rays of sword-light, nor did he use any elemental energy; this was seemingly a very ordinary display of swordplay.

But it made the old black bull sense the boundless longing contained within it.

The old black bull was able to sense the surrounding Serpentwing Lake area. He knew that over the past few years, Ning had gained insights into many hints regarding the True Meaning of the Dao, the majority of which belonged to a longing-type sword intention.

“It changed.” The old black bull instantly saw how Ning’s swordplay had become purer.

“Rustle...”

In the area around Ning, who wasn’t using any elemental energy at all in executing this swordplay with just his fingers, suddenly appeared drops of rain. One drop of rain after another came to form, and they constantly fell. The rain fell nonstop, landing atop the scattered stones...and Ning, in the center of the rainstorm, was like the favored son of the rain, which surrounded him and protected him.

“This this this...” The old black bull stared. “Accumulated effort which results in sudden rewards!”

The accumulated hints of insight into the True Meaning of the Dao which Ning had gained over the past five years, at this moment...finally made a qualitative breakthrough!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 4: Rainwater Sword Domain

The raindrops were sprinkling downwards. Ji Ning, amidst the rain, was completely absorbed in his swordplay. His sword-fingers alone were able to execute a sword technique that activated the ‘Dao’.

How comfortable.

Ning felt as though, in this moment, he himself had become a drop of rainwater! He was swirling about, playing and jesting with the other droplets of rain, and joining with them to form a single strand of it. That sort of interconnected-ness and mutual affection...caused the countless drops of rain to all join together.

“Rustle....” The sprinkling rain surrounding Ning transformed into countless drops of rain which transformed into a drizzling rain. The countless crystalline strands of rain appeared all the more mesmerizing.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

Every single strand of rain seemed to secretly be like a knife.

“Rumble...” The rain grew heavier and heavier, transforming into a tempest. The tempest seemed incomparably ferocious, and Ning’s swordplay carried a ferocious, unstoppable power as well.

.....

The old black bull stared, stupefied. Rain drops, rain drizzle, tempest...and in the end, the rainwater once more transformed into that sprinkling, drizzling rain.

One line of rain after another...they seemed like incomparably precious, crystalline jade sculptures that were carved into thin lines. They were also like the hands of a mother, gently stroking down.

Finally, Ning came to a halt.

“This...is Dao?” Ning murmured to himself.

“Congratulations, Ji Ning.” The old black bull’s mouth was hanging wide open, and he was incomparably excited. “You have already truly immersed yourself into the Dao, truly and complete. The feeling of becoming part of the Dao itself is very marvelous, isn’t it?”

Ning nodded gently.

Just now, that feeling had indeed been incredible. He was like a pearl of water, a droplet of rain! In that instant, he felt incomparably familiar to and close with the rainwater. Ning understood...that he had developed his own Dao. The Dao of Rainwater!

“Over the past five years, you have gained insights into many strands of the True Meaning of the Dao. Your accumulated insights have allowed you to break through to a new threshold, with the final result being that you have gained a ‘Dao Domain’.” The old black bull sighed in praise.

“Dao Domain?” Ning looked puzzled. “What is that?”

The old black bull said, astonished, “You don’t even know this?”

“No idea.” Ning said honestly.

The old black bull sighed, shaking his head. “Your clan really is an ordinary one. You don’t even have a basic understanding of the different levels of insight. I’ll tell you, then. In training, one aspect is improving on a technical level; be it sword, saber, spear, or even painting and music and other artistic endeavors, technique matters. The first level is the ‘foundation’! Which is to say, becoming familiar with

the basic techniques of an art. The second level is the 'advanced' level; it represents that you have all but perfected your mastery of the techniques. The third level is 'one with the world'; this represents that you are already getting close to the 'Dao', and have begun to attune to heaven's will."

Ning listened. Naturally, he knew about these first three levels.

"After 'one with the world', the next step is in attuning with the intricacies of the natural world, and slowly discovering one of the 'Daos'. Once you discover it! You will have gained a hint of the 'True Meaning of the Dao'. That is the fourth level; 'True Meaning of the Dao'." The old black bull shook his head. "It is very hard to gain insight into a 'True Meaning of the Dao'. Even some Zifu Disciples aren't capable of doing it."

When Ning had been meditating on the Dao by the side of the pool that year, he gained his first insight into a 'True Meaning of the Dao'.

"Afterwards, when you continue to gain insight and continuously accumulate many more hints of the 'True Meaning of the Dao', your insights into the Dao will grow greater and greater. There will then come a day when the many hints of the 'True Meaning of the Dao' will coalesce and then transform qualitatively. Only then will you truly be able to become one with the Dao itself, to the point where, with but a thought, you can summon the power of the Dao in your surroundings, to form it into your own Domain. This is the fifth level; 'Dao Domain'. This is the level you are currently at. Formidable, formidable." The old black bull sighed. "Only very few Wanxiang Adepts are capable of reaching this level; generally speaking, only people at the Primordial Daoist level are capable of reaching this level of insight into the Dao."

"Oh? I'm that amazing?" Ning said with a laugh.

"Your innate talents are extremely high, especially your talents as pertain to the sword. You are an absolute monster! With the assistance of the Stellar Hall, at the young age of 16, you've actually reached this level!" The old black bull said.

Ning understood as well.

He possessed the [Nuwa Painting] and was incomparably hard-working. He also had an innately high comprehension ability, and also the Aquatic Estate...there were many variables which contributed to him being able to achieve what he had.

"And above the Dao Domain?" Ning asked.

"Above it..." The old black bull looked at Ning. "Reaching the 'Dao Domain' level, after all, just means that you are able to completely immerse yourself into the Dao. What you need to do is to gain greater insights into this Dao of yours, with the end result being that one day, you will have completely understood and mastered this entire Dao Path! That is the sixth level; completely understanding an entire Dao Path!"

Ning now began to understand.

Indeed, just now, he had completely immersed himself with the rainwater, but that was nothing more than immersion; he was still far off from being able to completely control the 'Dao of Rainwater'.

“The first level is the ‘basic’ level. The second is ‘advanced’. The third is ‘one with the world’. The fourth is ‘True Meaning of the Dao’. The fifth is ‘Dao Domain’. The sixth is a complete ‘Dao Path!’” The old black bull said solemnly. “The level of comprehension and enlightenment one possesses is very important. Only by having sufficient comprehension will one’s power increase. Otherwise, there is no way you’ll be able to withstand and control great power.”

“To become a Celestial Immortal, you have to completely control a Dao Path!” The old black bull looked at Ning. “For example, Immortal Juhua had been a Loose Immortal for millions of years, and had completely mastered nine full Dao Paths. But so what if he did? The increasingly powerful Three Calamities, Nine Tribulations still caused him to fall in the end. Anyone who becomes a Loose Immortal is guaranteed to fall.”

Ning sighed as well.

“You train in the sword, and have reached the level of ‘Dao Domain’. Generally speaking, your Domain will be referred to as a ‘Sword Domain.’” The old black bull reminded. “Just based on the fact that you have a Sword Domain, countless major sects will swing open their doors for you to join.”

“Sword Domain?” Ning said softly. “This Dao is the Dao of Rainwater. Let my Sword Domain therefore be known as the ‘Rainwater Sword Domain’, then.”

Ning looked at his surroundings.

Rustle...

Rainwater appeared out of nowhere, sprinkling downwards and swirling about him. Every single line of rain also seemed like an incomparably sharp arrow, enough to slice apart hard mountain stones or steel.

“Let me warn you. Just now, when you immersed yourself into the Sword Domain, eight hours went past in the outside world.” The old black bull said.

“Eight hours?” Ning was startled. “I really didn’t have any sense of time passing when I was immersed in the Dao. Right, Elder. Now that I have my Rainwater Sword Domain...if I were to challenge the first level of the Wargod Hall, do I have a chance?”

The old black bull was stunned. “The first level of the Wargod Hall? Right, you can give it a try!”

Ning laughed.

Even if the old black bull hadn’t said anything, Ning would have still gone and given it a try, because a Fiendgod practitioner only had two chances at each level of power to challenge the Wargod Hall. He had already reached the peak of power as a Xiantian Fiendgod, and would most likely soon break through to the Zifu level. If he didn’t use the two options he had at the Xiantian level, they would go to waste once he reached the Zifu level.

“Let’s go. I want to see how formidable this Wargod Hall is.” Ning was extremely eager and deeply desired to successfully make it through, so as to be able to go to the Treasure Hall to select a treasure!

The treasures of the Treasure Hall were all left behind by the first master.

Even the Mortal-ranked magic treasures were most likely extraordinary, and might be of great benefit for the Ji clan's battle against Snowdragon Mountain.

"Snowdragon Mountain." Ning murmured in his heart...

It was already dark, and Zifu Disciple 'Muse' of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain had flown without stopping at all for tens of thousands of kilometers to arrive at this place. Like a ray of light, he charged downwards to an estate below.

Below was a large, towering mountain. The name of the mountain was Landwyrn Mountain.

"Human practitioner, immediately depart."

"Human practitioner, you actually dare invade our Landwyrn Mountain? Are you looking to die?"

As Muse descended towards Landwyrn Mountain on his flying treasure, some of the Diremonsters of Landwyrn Mountain began to curse angrily. Landwyrn Mountain was a powerful force, and the top of the mountain was an ancient Zifu-level monster who had trained for a thousand years, 'Landwyrn'. Landwyrn was a Godbeast, and as a Zifu-level Godbeast, one could imagine how powerful this old monster was.

Naturally, he commanded a large group of Diremonsters, and this was forbidden grounds for humans.

A Zifu-level ancient monster, and with the lineage of a Godbeast. These two things guaranteed that many Zifu Disciples would be frightened of him.

"Senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, your junior apprentice-brother Muse requests a meeting." Muse didn't pay any attention to those Diremonsters, flying straight to the top of Landwyrn Mountain before speaking.

"Groooooowl."

An enormous draconic head suddenly emerged from a cave at the top of the mountain. That azure draconic head had a single horn atop it, and its wheel-sized eyes stared towards Muse. The incomparable aura alone the draconic head emanated...caused Muse to feel nervous. He knew very well that he wasn't a match at all for this Landwyrn in front of him."

The Landwyrn before him was a peak Zifu monster, with the lineage of a Godbeast.

"My respects, Daoist friend Landwyrn." Muse bowed.

"Master hates to be disturbed. Can it be that you do not know this?" The Landwyrn growled.

"There's something major happening." Muse said hurriedly. "I have major news to report to senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, news which will be of great benefit to him."

Jadechild...

Out of the many people which the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain were inviting over, he was the most important person. As Dong Ziqi and Muse saw it, as long as they were able to

invite their fellow apprentice, Jadechild, that was enough; he alone could easily annihilate the Ji clan by himself. Actually, just by looking at this spirit-beast, the Landwurm, which Jadechild controlled, one could imagine how powerful Jadechild was.

It must be understood that Zifu-level spirit-beasts were extremely rare.

Although many human experts had some Diremonsters as spirit-beasts, that was because there were a fairly high number of humans with the insights necessary to break through to the Zifu level. But for a spirit-beast to break through to the Zifu level was much rarer! Ancient Zifu-level monsters generally weren't willing to serve, and if they were willing to serve, it was generally only experts. Even if they served a weakling, a powerful expert would soon seize them!

Dong Ziqi. Muse. Ji Ninfire. None of them had a Zifu-level spirit-beast.

"You wish to see me?" A deep, powerful voice rang out, and a muscular man with long, loose azure hair, a pair of tiger-like eyes, and black clothes moved out from one side.

"My respects, senior apprentice-brother." Muse hurriedly bowed respectfully.

"I've seen you before. You are Muse." Jadechild looked at him. "Can it be that you aren't aware that I am in closed door training in an attempt to make a breakthrough?"

Muse felt his heart tremble.

He knew exactly how terrifying this senior apprentice-brother Jadechild of his was. Jadechild was a Fiendgod Body Refiner who had reached the peak of the Zifu level! In addition, Jadechild had also learned the divine ability, 'Heavenly Transformation'. A peak Zifu-level Fiendgod practitioner was already very frightening; being in possession of a divine ability meant they could fight someone at a higher level than themselves.

Dong Ziqi himself was nervous in front of this fellow apprentice, Jadechild. He was the most important person they were inviting on this venture.

"Senior apprentice-brother Jadechild." Muse said hurriedly. "I know that you are in closed door training and don't like to be disturbed. However, not too far from here, at the nearby Swallow Mountain, we've discovered a large-scale elemental ore mine, with very many high quality elemental stones. The mine has a circumference of four thousand kilometers and a depth of three hundred kilometers."

"What!" Jadechild, who had been very calm up to now, suddenly had his eyes explode with two rays of golden light. "Your words are true?"

"If I've deceived you, senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, you can go ahead and kill me with one palm blow."

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 5: A Wooden Stake

"I imagine you wouldn't dare deceive me." Jadechild nodded slightly.

Muse said hurriedly, "Although we have discovered this enormous elemental ore mine, this elemental ore mine is within the territory of the Ji clan. The puny Ji clan wasn't worth fearing, and our Swallow

Mountain branch should have been able to easily exterminate it, but..." Muse explained what had happened afterwards.

Jadechild frowned as he listened. "A bewildering formation?"

"Right. Ji clan's Patriarch, Ji Ninefire, is skilled in formations and poisons." Muse said hurriedly. "This time, we have invited all our colleagues to go deal with the Ji clan. The Ji clan's strength isn't worth fearing. Only, in formations..."

"If they set a great formation..." Jadechild frowned. "Since we are not skilled in formations, they can easily delay for a long period of time. Once enough time passes, the Grand Xia Dynasty's Celestial Envoy will most likely arrive! Of the formation experts close to the Swallow Mountain region...there is a junior apprentice-brother named 'Nongdao'. If we can invite that fellow apprentice, the formations that a small clan like the Ji clan is capable of using will easily be broken!"

Muse nodded hurriedly. "We have invited fellow apprentice Nongdao as well. Now that you, senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, have spoken, I imagine Nongdao will go as well."

"Hurry and go invite junior apprentice-brother Nongdao." Jadechild instructed. "I will go to your Swallow Mountain region right now."

"Thank you, senior apprentice-brother." Muse was overjoyed.

"Mm. Go." Jadechild instructed.

A green leaf-type magic treasure suddenly appeared beneath Muse's feet, and then he transformed into a ray of light, disappearing into the horizon.

Jadechild stared into the distance, silent for some time.

"Landwurm." Jadechild turned and shouted.

"Master." An azure scale covered, horned Landwurm clambered out. This Landwurm had four claws, and was an imposing, majestic sight. Currently, his body was rapidly shrinking, until he was only ten meters long.

"Come, follow me to Swallow Mountain." Jadechild said softly. "If we render major merits this time, perhaps we can use the opportunity to ask the main sect to assist me in making a breakthrough."

Jadechild was something of a rogue practitioner. He had reached the Zifu level as a Ki Refiner long ago, but the technique he had used to train in ki was a fairly superficial one. This made it so that it was almost impossible for him to break through to become a Wanxiang Adept as a Ki Refiner! Afterwards, he slowly trained as a Fiendgod Refiner until he broke through to the Zifu level as well...he could be considered a talented figure, which is why he was accepted into Snowdragon Mountain!

Unfortunately, he was already a late-stage Ki Refiner. There was no way back for him, and it was too late to change to a different technique.

Fortunately, the long amount of time he had spent in training resulted in him developing a fierce, decisive temperament. After accomplishing a major deed, he was viewed upon favorably by the main

sect, and he was given a divine ability, 'Heavenly Transformation'. This caused his status to rise once more.

Nowadays...

He always stayed in closed-door training, because he wanted his Fiendgod body to breakthrough to the Wanxiang level! Only, each major increase in level was too difficult. Although the main sect did indeed have methods by which the chances of breakthroughs could increase, the price was great; why would they be willing to help him?"

"You will definitely succeed, Master." The Landwyrm crawled out.

Jadechild sat on the Landwyrm's back.

Whoosh!

Clouds appeared beneath the feet of the Landwyrm, and it immediately flew into the distant horizons. All dragons were naturally capable of controlling water, and although this one was only at the Zifu level...it was still able to summon the clouds and fly on them.

Within the ancient Aquatic Manor.

Ji Ning and the old black bull were walking shoulder-to-shoulder out of the Stellar Hall.

"It is indeed much faster to train and gain insights in the Stellar Hall." Ning sighed in praise.

"The Stellar Hall is effective in assisting one in comprehension." The old black bull said. "But in the end, it still depends on your normal accumulated experiences. Only after you experience many things will you gain many insights. Normally, you randomly accumulate many different experiences...and you yourself won't even notice it, but once you enter the Stellar Hall and begin to train in gaining further insights, you will improve greatly. But without those normal, everyday experiences...if you stay all the time in the Stellar Hall, it will be pointless."

Ning nodded.

As the saying went, read ten thousand books, then go on an actual journey of ten thousand kilometers. Personal experiences and insights were what mattered most.

"We're at the Wargod Hall." The old black bull stood in front of the Wargod Hall. The bronze gate of the Wargod Hall had the carves of a waraxe and a spear above it, and a martial aura emanated forth from it. In addition, the entire bronze gate was covered with a faint layer of red light, which carried within it an aura of slaughter.

Ning held his breath.

"Senior." Ning hurriedly asked. "In the past, what did Immortal Juhua experience when he passed the first level of the Wargod Hall?"

"No point in asking." The old black bull shook its head. "The dangers of the first level of the Wargod Hall are arranged on the fly. They can change at any time. The spirit of the manor and I learned this long ago."

“Oh.” Ning was resigned.

The old black bull said hurriedly, “Be careful. Although the tests of the Wargod Hall are meant to sharpen your skills and not to kill you, and although you are a Fiendgod practitioner and have a low chance of dying inside, the tests always have an element of danger! Don’t lose your life.”

“Don’t worry.” Ning pushed aside the giant bronze gate and strode inside.

As soon as his hands touched the bronze gate.

“Whoosh!”

The blurry red light on the surface of the bronze gate instantly sucked Ning inside. Ning disappeared into thin air from in front of the bronze gate, and in the instant in which he was drawn within, Ning’s eyes instantly became round and filled with shock.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you that entering the Wargod Hall is a matter of direct teleportation.” The old black bull, seeing the stupefied look on Ning’s face, stared back at him with his own ox-eyes, then began to laugh...

In the blink of an eye, they arrived at a vast, empty land. The ground was covered with ground that seemed to be stained with blood. Up ahead, there was a majestic tower, and the door to the tower glowed with a faint white light.

“Hm?” Ning immediately saw the giant yellow bear standing not too far away.

“Senior.” Ning hurriedly paid his respects.

The giant yellow bear nodded slightly. His formerly uncaring expression seemed to have softened significantly, and his attitude had become much nicer as well. “For you to have reached the level of ‘Dao Domain’ at the age of five is fairly rare, even amongst Fiendgods. Tell me, which level of the Wargod Hall do you intend to challenge?”

“I can choose?” Ning was amazed.

“Of course you can choose! For example, when the Aquatic Manor’s owner is outside adventuring, if he returns at the Primordial Daoist level, and he only has two options to challenge the tower, he naturally won’t choose the first level.” The giant yellow bear said. “You can, if you choose, go directly to the highest level of the Wargod Hall, level ten. But of course, even though the Wargod Hall’s tests aren’t meant to kill the testers, even the slightest energy ripple at that level will cause you to instantly disintegrate, leaving not even your soul.”

Ning rubbed his eyes.

Fine, then.

Level ten?

Even Immortal Juhua only passed level seven after becoming a Loose Immortal! He couldn’t even imagine how difficult the tenth level was. Ning only felt as though the original, ancient Fiendgod who had created this Aquatic Manor was simply too powerful.

"I choose the first level." Ning said honestly. Based on what the old black bull had said, before he had mastered his Rainwater Sword Domain, his chances of succeeding on the first level were less than 10%. One could imagine how difficult the first level was.

"Fine." The giant yellow bear nodded. "At least you are doing things step-by-step. This is your first challenge, and this test will be the easiest of tests."

"Easiest?" Ning was stunned.

The giant yellow bear's furry paws suddenly grabbed Ning by the arm. Whoosh! Instantly, Ning and the giant yellow bear arrived at the majestic tower. The tower gate glowed with blurry white light as Ning and the giant yellow bear stepped inside with a single step.

This was a blurry white space that was three thousand meters high and with a circumference of many thousands of meters. The only thing present was that floating door behind them.

"This is the first level of the Wargod Hall." The giant yellow bear said. Ning immediately looked carefully at his surroundings. The first level of the Wargod Hall? Then where was the dangerous test?

"Look." The giant yellow bear stood there, pointing into the distance.

Ning followed the giant yellow bear's finger with his gaze. He saw that out of nowhere, a black wooden stake had suddenly appeared. The wooden stake was as thick as Ning's legs, and was three meters tall. It just stood there.

"A wooden stake?" Ning was stunned.

"The test that I'll give you is significantly easier than the test which I originally gave Immortal Juhua or Rampart." The giant yellow bear said. "The first test of the Wargod Hall is...in the time it takes for a single incense stick to burn up, split that wooden stake apart!" The giant yellow bear's palm suddenly had an incense stick within it, only roughly one foot long.

"Shatter the wooden stake before the incense stick burns up?" Ning looked at the wooden stake.

No wonder the spirit of the manor said that this was the easiest test. It was even easier than the one which Juhua and Rampart had to undergo! Indeed, it was just a matter of splitting a wooden stake. There wasn't any danger at all. In addition, the wooden stake just stood there, not resisting at all.

"Begin." The giant yellow bear said. That incense stick appeared on the floor not too far away, already lit.

"A single incense stick..."

Ning didn't dare to waste any time.

Ning, with a 'swoosh', scurried before the wooden stake. Although it was only a wooden stake, blindly striking it was just foolishness. It was better to spend some time to first analyze it...and see where the wooden stake would more easily break apart. Only by knowing one's self and one's enemies would one have hope for victory. This wooden stake was completely black, and it had circles of characters covering it.

“Would it be easier to follow the pattern of the runes in striking it?” Ning said to himself.

“Haaargh!”

The Darknorth swords appeared in Ning’s hands, and the divine power in his Zifu completely exploded forth. Whoooooooooosh. Drizzling rain appeared in the surrounding area. The drizzling rain merged into lines of rain which swirled about the area, making it quite comfortable and cool. This also clearly caused Ning’s control over the surrounding ‘Dao’ to become much more powerful.

“Rain Line!” Ning used his most powerful attack at the very start!

Whoosh!

Ning’s swords flashed like lightning, disappearing into thin air as they completely merged into the surrounding, billowing lines of rain. Ning’s sword light transformed into one of the strands of rain, as thin as silk, incomparably sharp, instantly chopping towards the wooden stake.

“Bang!” The only thing which occurred was a white smudge appeared on the wooden stake. As the rainwater fell down, the white smudge disappeared, as though nothing had happened.

Ning himself, because of the powerful counterforce, knocked backwards, and the palm of his hands split open. He took three step backwards, but instantly the wound to his palm was healed.

“Just a white smudge. This wooden stake is indeed incomparably tough. To break it in the time it takes for an incense stick to burn is very hard.” Ning instantly charged forward and gave it another blow.

It, too, was ‘Rain Line’.

The sword merged into the lines of rain...

Bang!

As soon as it touched the wooden stake, a powerful concussive sound once more rang out, but this time, Ning chopped in accordance with the magical runes. Although he was still knocked backwards by the collisive force, Ning found to his surprised delight...that there was a hint of a very small wound on the wooden stake. The wound was very small, almost neglible, but it was still there.

“I imagine that by using this sword strike with my Rainwater Sword Domain...the power is comparable to the ninth level of the Lesser Thousand Swords Formation. But this is all I can accomplish?” Ning was stunned. “Without the Rainwater Sword Domain, I really wouldn’t be able to do anything to it.”

Ning knew very well that within the Rainwater Sword Domain, he was like a tiger who had been given wings; the power of his sword technique had risen by several levels.”

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 6: A Bewildering Selection of Magic Treasures

The distant giant yellow bear nodded slightly and mused to himself, “This Ji Ning’s talent for swordplay is indeed high. That sword blow alone has already just barely reached the Wanxiang Adept level. But if that’s all he has, there is no way he will be able to overcome this first trial. His blows needs to reach the

power of a full-force blow from an early Wanxiang Adept...only then will he be able to break the wooden stake before a single incense stick burns down!"

The first level of the Wargod Hall required that a person have the attack power of an early Wanxiang Adept in order to be overcome!

This was already the easiest testing method which the spirit of the manor could select. A true test would also test a person's battle experience, mentality, movement abilities, and many other aspects. After all, in a true battle against a real enemy, would the enemy just stand there like a block of wood, waiting for someone to split it apart?

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"Even by using my Rainwater Sword Domain, my Darknorth swords aren't able to split this wooden stake." Ning immediately retracted his Darknorth swords.

"Lesser Ten Thousand Swords Formation."

Ning retreated by thirty meters, and then out of nowhere, more than seven hundred sword-type magic treasures suddenly appeared. All of the magic swords glowed with a blurry white light, and powerful Zifu-level elemental energy filled each magic sword...after circulating through, the power condensed next to Ning, into the form of an incomparably fierce sword light.

This sword light could faintly be seen to have the form of a flying sword.

"Originally, when I fought against Dong Ziqi, I activated these swords with peak Xiantian-level energy. Now that I use Zifu-level elemental energy to activate them, the power of the Lesser Ten Thousand Swords Formation is clearly much enhanced." Ning could sense the sharpness of this sword light. This sword light's own power was most likely comparable to the earlier, full-strength close-combat blow he delivered.

"Rainwater Sword Domain!"

A drizzling rain suddenly appeared around him as the area within three hundred meters sank into his Rainwater Sword Domain.

"Go." Ning willed it, and the sword light by his side instantly vanished, transforming into a line of rain as well. This line of rain instantly traversed the distance of thirty meters, slicing down in the direction of the runes covering the wooden stake.

Boom!

A wound immediately appeared atop the wooden stake, as the sword light chopped in nearly to the depth of half a finger.

"Good." Ning was overjoyed, and another ray of sword light formed by his side.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

One ray of sword light after another flew into and completely merged with Rainwater Sword Domain, transforming into thin lines of rainwater. The rainwater sliced directly downwards onto the distant

wooden stakes, once more leaving behind wounds.. It must be understood that the wooden stake was harder to cut on the inside than on the outside...the elemental energy within Ning's Zifu was quickly being used up, as the wound on the wooden stake grew greater and greater.

Some time later.

"BANG!" A line of rain sliced across the wooden pillar, and the wooden stake snapped in half. The upper half of the wooden stake fell, descending down to and smashing against the ground.

"Success." Ning rejoiced. He hurriedly turned his head to look at the incense stick behind him. A majority of the incense stick was already gone.

"Congratulations on succeeding." The giant yellow bear walked across. "Do you wish to challenge the second level of the Wargod Hall?"

Ning was swayed.

The second level?

It seemed as though succeeding on the second level of the Wargod Hall only resulted in a Mortal-ranked magic treasure. The benefit was the same as successfully passing the first level. The difficulty level...

"Senior, how hard is the second level, compared to the first level?" Ning asked. "How is the danger level?"

"Of course it is much more dangerous." The giant yellow bear said directly. "You overcame the simplest first level test. But from the second level onwards...it won't be that simple. It won't be like just now, where there was only a block of wood that wouldn't fight back. In addition, I won't give you any advice at all. All you can do is charge in! Fight! If you feel you are in danger of death, you can immediately use the control talisman to teleport out. Once you teleport out, it means you lost!"

"Are you willing to use your second chance to challenge the second level of the Wargod Hall?" The giant yellow bear looked at Ning.

"My second chance?" Ning was stunned.

The giant yellow bear said, "I recommend you to use it. You are already at the peak as a Fiendgod Body Refiner. You might break through at any moment, and if you do...the two chances you have as a Xiantian-level expert will be gone. If you don't use it, it will go to waste."

Ning pondered for a moment.

"Then I will try it." Ning laughed.

"Go then." The giant yellow bear said.

Whoosh!

Ning disappeared from this first level of the Wargod Hall.

But just ten seconds later.

“Bang!” Ning once more appeared at the first level, flying backwards and falling against the the floor. The furs on his body were all torn apart, and there were multiple bloody wounds on him, although some of them healed by the time he landed on the ground.

“You lost.” The giant yellow bear looked at Ning.

“Success in either the first or the second level results in just a single Mortal-ranked magic treasure.” Ning rose to his feet and said angrily. The furs on his body automatically repaired themselves. “Why is the second level so difficult?”

As soon as he had entered, he had instantly been attacked by tens of strange beasts which looked like black panthers. He was caught rather off-guard, and only after he released his power did he realize that every single black panther was comparable to Dong Ziqi! He used everything available to him, but was only able to hold on for ten seconds before being forced to give up. If he didn’t give up, he would have been torn into pieces by that group of black panthers.

“The Wargod Hall has ten levels, each of which is increasingly difficult.” The giant yellow bear growled. “This was decided by Master. There’s no point to you complaining.”

“Is there no difference between passing through the second level and the first level?” Ning asked.

“There is a difference.”

The giant yellow bear said. “As you have passed the first level, I will give you a large number of Mortal-ranked magic treasures and items of comparable value for you to choose from! Some of them are top-grade Mortal-ranked magic treasures.”

“If you succeed in challenging the second level, you can choose from any of the Mortal-ranked magic treasures or items of equivalent value which the Treasure Hall holds. There are some very unusual, very unique items there...although they are only Mortal-ranked, they are comparable to some ordinary Earth-ranked magic treasures, or even more valuable.”

Ning now understood.

“Go, then. Go to the Treasure Hall.” The giant yellow bear stretched out a furry paw, grabbing Ning by the arm.

Whoosh!

The two disappeared into thin air...

The Treasure Hall.

The Treasure Hall was an enormous hall, and high above in the air floated one magic treasure and unique item after another. Surges of tremendous power rippled forth...although these ripples were heart-shaking, they were controlled by the restrictive spells of the first master, and didn’t injure Ning at all as he stood down below, preparing to make his selection.

“There are many magic treasures and unique items.” The giant yellow bear looked down towards Ning. Within the bear’s palms, a golden book suddenly appeared. “This golden book has recorded within it magic treasures of the Mortal-rank. You can choose from them. Choose.”

Ning accepted the golden book.

The book only had two Fiendgod characters atop it: [Precious Treasures]. He opened the book, and atop the pages were diagrams of precious treasures and unique items, as well as descriptions of the items.

“This really is...” Ning was stupefied as he read.

“Compared with the magic treasures up above me, the treasures which the Zifu Disciples of my Swallow Mountain region are just dogshit.” Ning had a feeling of speechlessness. It was as though he was a farmer militia who encountered a formal military. The equipment was on a completely different level.

The magic treasures above him were, at very least, high-grade Mortal-rank! Most were top-grade Mortal-rank!

The Mortal-rank magic treasures the first master was willing to keep naturally were all fine items.

“Whew.”

“These Tri-Poison Flags are too vicious. With them, a peak Zifu Disciple can fight head on against a Wanxiang Adept. The power is most likely no weaker than that of a completed form of the Myriad Wraiths Banner which Bei Zishan was working on. In addition, the Myriad Wraiths Banner needs countless people to be tortured to death, but these Tri-Poison Flags don’t require you to commit such grave sins.” Ning sighed in amazement.

The evil Daos also had their own incredible magic treasures. It wasn’t always necessary for one to commit any sins, yet still allowed items of incredible power to be made.

“This one is formidable as well. The Nine Yang Swords Formation?” Ning’s eyes blazed as he looked at it. The most alluring part of it was that this magic treasure was formed from nine flying swords, each of which was a high-grade Mortal-rank flying sword!

“The Nine Yang Swords Formation is the most suited for you.” The nearby giant yellow bear said.

“Choosing this magic treasure is equivalent to choosing nine flying swords. Although they are only high-grade Mortal-rank flying swords, they come from the same source. If you use these nine flying swords as the a base core for your [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation], the power of it will increase threefold or fivefold! These nine high-grade Mortal-rank flying swords alone are worth more than several dozen of your ordinary Mortal-rank flying swords.”

Ning felt desirous as well.

This was an excellent item.

“Yin Fire Bottle?” Ning raised an eyebrow. “How vicious.”

“Waterflame Mixed Element Staff.” Ning felt his pulse race when looking at this one as well. He controlled fire and water, and was also a Fiendgod Body Refiner. The Waterflame Mixed Element Staff was very suited for Fiendgods.

“Divine Starpoint Needles? Thirty six needles in a set? My soul is powerful, making it very suited for controlling large numbers of items.” Ning desired these as well.

One magic item after another.

Even the ones that weren't suited for him made him feel desirous. These were all top-grade indeed! Top-grade! He had killed Bei Zishan and Ju San and acquired some magic treasures, but compared to these...there was no way to compare! Ning would be willing to trade dozens of magic treasures like those for a single one of these.

What Ning didn't understand was that these items were viewed by the first master as 'top-grade' or 'high-grade', but if they were to be ranked in the modern era, all of them would be viewed as top-grade! Even those nine flying swords of the Nine Yang Sword Formation...according to modern standards, they would be viewed as nine top-grade flying swords.

"Wonderful." Ning felt his heart itch.

He really wanted to grab a pile of them.

Ning began to understand Immortal Juhua a bit better. The poor Immortal Juhua could see all these powerful magic treasures, but couldn't obtain them! If he could pick one as he pleased, he probably would've been able to survive his tribulation and become a Celestial Immortal!

Although the first master wanted to help future generations, he didn't show them any favoritism. Even if the future generations died...his rules were still unbreakable. You want magic treasures? Then follow the first master's rules.

"An ice-sealed Three-Eyed Firebug Larva? It can be used to raise an entire race of Three-Eyed Firebugs. An ordinary adult Three-Eyed Firebug is comparable to a Zifu Disciple? The only flaw is that it requires a large amount of spirit materials as food, and it also takes a long time to grow. However, it can also result in the breeding of incredibly powerful Three-Eyed Firebugs." Ning's heart burned.

"A golem comparable to an ordinary early Wanxiang Adept? An unkillable golem? The only flaw is that it requires a large amount of elemental energy to be used."

Magic treasures. Unique items.

Each of them drove Ning crazy and moved him.

"Don't be dazzled." The giant yellow bear warned. "The Nine Yang Swords Formation is the most suitable for you. Nine excellent swords which come from the same source...it will be very hard for you to find something like them while adventuring outside. Your [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] needs a core, and the stronger the swords of its core, the better."

Ning flipped through another page.

Formation techniques? Ning's eyelids shot up. Right now, the Ji clan was under tremendous threat. The best method for dealing with a large group of Zifu Disciples was using formations! It was formations which could create miracles!

"Netherwurm Heavenlock Formation. A large formation suitable for guarding a clan or a sect. A large formation formed from five component formations..." Ning was moved as soon as he read through this. He hurriedly read through it carefully, and the joy on his face became even greater.

“This is it, this is it!” Ning was howling in his heart. “With this, my power will greatly increase, and the power of the Patriarch and the others will increase as well.”

The Desolate Era

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 7: The Ji Clan Gathers

Seeing this major formation that was could be used to guard an entire clan or sect, Ji Ning managed to suppress his excitement and continue reading, despite the fact that he was mentally howling in excitement.

Perhaps there would be something even better!

Ji Ning continued to flip through this golden book, and one magic treasure after another appeared, causing Ning’s heart to clench repeatedly! It was really...really breathtaking. Unfortunately, he couldn’t acquire them all! He only could choose a single item.

“[Soaring Serpent Formation Loop of the Nine Heavens!]” Ning’s eyes lit up as he carefully inspected the descriptions within. “This formation is even more complicated than the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation, and the power is actually even greater. Still, it seems it needs nine users who are at least be at the Zifu Disciple level.”

Ning shook his head.

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“Whew.” Ning closed the golden book. The item which was most suitable for the current Ji clan was naturally a formation technique! There were several that were comparable to the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation, and two that were even better than it. But from the current situation, the most suitable, realistic choice was still the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation!

The Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation was formed from five component formations, each of which a single Zifu Disciple could control. However, if five Zifu Disciples joined forces...the power of the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation would reach the maximum level!

As for the Ji clan, including Ning’s father, it had six Zifu Disciples! But his father would have to use a forbidden technique to release enough power. Strictly speaking, the Ji clan only had five Zifu Disciples. Given this...the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation was the best choice.

“Have you chosen?” The giant yellow bear said.

“I have.” Ning nodded. “The Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation!”

The giant yellow bear stared at Ning in astonishment. “Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation? Did you make a mistake? That is a grand formation suitable for protecting a clan; once you set it down, you cannot move. Even if you choose to fight...you still have to set the formation up in advance! In the future, you will definitely go adventuring outside. If you suddenly encounter any danger, you won’t have time to set up a formation, and what’s more, the power of this grand formation when a single person is controlling is very ordinary. You need five people working together to reach a high level of power! I urge you to reconsider. You will have very, very few chances to select an item from the Treasure Hall. Once you make the choice, there’s no way to change it!”

“I choose it.” Ning didn’t hesitate at all.

“Fine.” The giant yellow bear said nothing further.

“Come.”

The giant yellow bear pointed at a spot in the air far above them, and in the tightly clustered mass of treasures and artifacts, a ray of light flew out from an unassuming dark corner that couldn’t even be seen with the naked eye. It was like a meteor, quickly passing through all obstructions and landing on the ground.

Ning looked at it. He saw four black scales that surrounded a central black pearl.

“This is a dragon pearl.” The giant yellow bear waved his hand, and the black pearl immediately levitated into the air. The black pearl was covered with a large amount of runes, and the faint image of a dragon’s shadow could be seen swimming within it. The complicated runes atop it seemed to be exceedingly beautiful, completely different from the crude scrawlings atop ordinary Mortal-rank magic treasures.

“The Netherwurm Heavenlock Formation has five parts to it. The core is the dragon pearl! And then, there is the dragon’s head, the dragon’s body, the dragon’s claw, and the dragon’s tail. Four secondary parts!” The giant yellow bear waved his hand again, and those four scales flew over as well. “They are formed from the scales on the dragon’s body, which were forged into four formation disks. One dragon pearl, four formation disks. This forms the complete, five-part Netherwurm Heavenlock Formation. As for the mysteries within, after you bind it and carefully analyze it, you’ll understand.”

Ning nodded.

He stretched his hand out, accepting the dragon pearl and four formation disks.

“You’ve already entered the Wargod Hall, Treasure Hall, and Stellar Hall. Only the Divine Abilities Hall remains.” The giant yellow bear said. “Work hard to make your breakthrough. At the latest, make your breakthrough at age ten. By then, you can challenge the Divine Abilities Hall.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded.

“Then now...?” The giant yellow bear looked at Ning.

“I’m heading out.” Ning didn’t hesitate.

The giant yellow bear nodded slightly. Whoosh! The bear’s head dramatically increased and became illusory, swallowing Ning within it. Ning disappeared.

Serpentwing Lake. Beneath a courtyard within Brightheart Island. There was a lantern hanging nearby, casting a faint light on the surrounding area. It was already late at night.

“Why hasn’t the young master returned?” Autumn Leaf held a flask of wine, standing behind Ji Yichuan. Yichuan sat down, and behind him was lying a big white dog, the Godbeast, ‘Whitewater Hound’. Autumn Leaf’s eyes had a hint of worry within them as well, because Yichuan had been waiting very long already. “The young master said that others were not permitted to disturb him, and that his room was to be completely sealed.”

There was nothing Autumn Leaf could do. She knew Ning's temper; if he said he was not to be disturbed, others absolutely would not dare disturb him.

The only choice was to wait.

"Don't be impatient. There is enough time." Yichuan held a cup of wine and spoke softly. He was very calm, because the coming battle would be the most glorious moment of his life.

"Rumble..." The ground vibrated faintly from far away, and instantly, Autumn Leaf revealed a look of delight. "The young master should be leaving his closed quarters."

And then, a creaaaak.

From afar, a door to a room opened, and a youth clad in beast furs stepped out.

Yichuan stood up, frowning slightly as he looked at Ning. He had watched Ning grow up, and so he could sense any changes Ning went through. He noticed that the current Ning...seemed to be less 'sharp' than before, but in possession of a hint of the calmness of the water.

"You were training?" Yichuan asked.

Ning nodded slightly. "I had a breakthrough!"

A look of delight and satisfaction appeared in Yichuan's eyes. This was his final battle, and he believed that he would die in it! To be able to, before his death, see his son increase in power yet again...naturally, he was incomparably delighted. For his son to be such a monstrous talent...he could already see the sight of his son's name being spread throughout the vast world.

"Good." Yichuan just said a single word.

"Uncle White is going as well?" Ning looked towards the nearby Whitewater Hound.

The Whitewater Hound nodded towards Ning.

Yichuan glanced a side at the nearby Whitewater Hound. "Your Uncle White and I are lifelong brothers. I am prepared to die in this battle; even if I survive, I will be left a cripple. Before this, I released your Uncle White and Uncle Black, giving them their freedom...your Uncle Black has already returned to his mountain forests, but your Uncle White has chosen to accompany me. Even if he dies, he wishes to die by my side. I am unable to force him to leave. I simply cannot. For me, Yichuan, to have a brother like this...even in death, I will feel proud."

Ning's heart trembled. He saw the tears brimming in his father's eyes, and the steely, unrelenting look of eternal companionship in his Uncle White's eyes.

"Good. Let's go together." Ning walked over, embracing the Whitewater Hound, much like he had always done when he was young and would go out to train archery. "Uncle White, let's go together." The Whitewater Hound looked back at Ning, and deep love could be seen in his eyes. He had watched Ning grow up from an infant into an adult. This was the only son of his lifelong friend, Ji Yichuan. Naturally, he viewed Ning as a younger family member.

Whoosh.

A boat appeared out of nowhere. Hovering there in midair, it quickly expanded until it reached a size of more than thirty meters. Ning, Yichuan, and the Whitewater Hound boarded it.

“Let’s go.” Ning willed it.

The boat quickly began to fly through the skies, rapidly advancing through the dark night towards the north.

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Back at that desolate mountain forest.

Ji Ninefire, Granny Shadow, the old servant Ah Xing, Ji Truekeep. These four had already arrived, and had already set up a bewildering formation nearby. Ning had spent quite a bit of time meditating in the Stellar Hall. The others had taken care of their matters, then returned. Given the speed a Zifu Disciple could move at, they had naturally already taken care of everything.

“Why did you bring your spirit-beast as well?” Granny Shadow said in a hoarse voice.

Truekeep stroked the head of a black eagle. “I didn’t want it to come, but it insisted. It followed me since it was a chick. All these years, it has never left me. This time, it refused to leave no matter what...forget it. We’ve known each other all our lives. The relationship between the two of us is closer and more familiar than even the relationship between myself and my wife and children.

Ninefire and the others just looked at him, then nodded gently.

For a spirit-beast to willingly accompany a person in braving danger; this was rare indeed.

“Yichuan hasn’t returned yet?” Truekeep stroked the eagle while raising his head to look. The bewildering formation hadn’t been activated yet; naturally, his vision was not impacted. Even in the darkness, the faint light of the moon was more than enough to allow Zifu Disciples to see to a great distance with the naked eye.

“Don’t be impatient.” Ninefire said. “We still have quite a bit of time.”

“It’d be best if that kid Ji Ning doesn’t come.” Granny Shadow sighed, speaking in her hoarse voice. “He insists on coming. He is the true hope of our Ji clan. Given his latent talent and potential, it shouldn’t be hard for him to become a Wanxiang Adept, but his temper is too stubborn.”

Ninefire laughed, then said consolingly, “Don’t worry. He has the Traceless Talisman. When true danger comes, even if he doesn’t leave, we will force him to.”

“Right. We will force him.” Granny Shadow nodded. “If he doesn’t leave at the critical moment, I’ll commit suicide right in front of him.”

“Enough. He knows what is important.” Ninefire’s eyes lit up. “They are coming.”

All of them raised their heads to look.

From afar, in the air, they saw a ray of light fly over. Only when it began to slow as it descended could they see clearly what it was; it was a boat. This boat swiftly descended from the skies, and then, roughly

thirty meters away from the ground, vanished. Ning, Yichuan, and the Whitewater Hound all landed on the ground.

“You brought your Whitewater Hound as well?” Truekeep laughed.

Yichuan glanced over in surprise as well. “Your Snow Eagle came as well?”

The two glanced at each other, then both laughed. They both understood why.

“Alright. We are all here.” Ninefire said. “We should prepare to deal with Snowdragon Mountain.”

“Right.” Everyone’s faces grew a hint more solemn.

Ninefire spoke out. “Earlier, I made a special trip to Swallow Mountain City, to pay a visit to General Dong, who is in charge of the forces stationed here!”

“How did it go?” All of them asked with anticipation.

A hint of fury was in Ninefire’s eyes. “Everyone knows General Dong. He is one of the members of that large, far away clan; the Dong clan! That’s the reason why he was able to become the commanding general of the Grand Xia Dynasty’s forces here.”

Ning nodded. They knew these things long ago; becoming a general in the Grand Xia Dynasty’s military...wasn’t something which someone in a small clan like the Ji clan could hope for. After all, that was, without question, a wonderful assignment. Once you put on the ‘tiger garb’ of serving the Grand Xia Dynasty, who would dare offend you?

“I didn’t want to offend this General Dong.” Ninefire said. “Unfortunately, when I wanted to make the report, I was told that General Dong was in closed door meditation and unable to receive visitors. I went to see the Deputy General, but I was told the Deputy General had left Swallow Mountain City and wasn’t here at present.”

“What.”

They all grew frantic.

“Definitely a delaying tactic. They didn’t want to meet with us.”

“Snowdragon Mountain must have done something.” Ning was frantic as well. The point of them setting the formation was to delay until the Grand Xia Dynasty’s Celestial Envoy arrived. But if there was no report filed...how could the Celestial Envoy come?

Ninefire said, “I couldn’t be bothered with anything else. This matter involves the fate of our Ji clan. Thus, I no longer cared about whether or not I was offending General Dong. Thus, I began to shout, sending my voice echoing throughout the entire Swallow Mountain City...I said that my Ji clan was willing to offer to the Grand Xia Dynasty an enormous elemental ore mine! My voice naturally flooded the entire Swallow Mountain City, and everyone within it, along with all of the soldiers, all heard my voice. General Dong thus no longer dared to delay, and so he hurriedly came to see me, his face as black as thunderclouds, and then angrily shooed me away.”

The Desolate Era

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 8: A Wonderful Treasure!

“Well-offended.” Ji Yichuan’s eyes flashed with cold light. “This matter involves the survival of the Ji clan. How can we be bothered by whether or not we are offending a garrison general?”

“Right.” Ji Ning, Ji Truekeep, Granny Shadow, and Ah Xing all nodded.

Garrison generals wielded great power. The six hegemony of the Swallow Mountain region all needed to pay a large amount of tax each year to the Grand Xia Dynasty. They delivered it directly to Swallow Mountain City! Aside from the authority to collect taxes, the garrison general was also responsible for oversight; he was responsible on behalf of the Grand Xia Dynasty for managing this region.

Power over both oversight and tax collection...if they were really to squabble, these things would cause the Ji clan to suffer in the future.

But that was just suffering; compared to the possible perishment of the entire clan, it didn’t matter!

“As long as we sign an agreement with the Grand Xia Dynasty, we would have their protection. He, a garrison general, wouldn’t be able to do anything to us.” Ji Ninefire said. “Since everyone is here, I will let you know that I have already chosen the location for our battle with Snowdragon Mountain. Let’s head out.”

“Where will we battle with Snowdragon Mountain?” Ning asked.

“Oxhorn Mountain, located close to the City of Ten Thousand Swords.” Ninefire said.

“Oxhorn Mountain?”

Ning was naturally extremely familiar with the geographical areas around the Ji clan. Upon hearing what Ninefire said, he immediately understood where they would be. Oxhorn Mountain was roughly eight hundred kilometers away from the City of Ten Thousand Swords. It was a large, desolate mountain. Because the peak of the mountain was split in twain, like the horns of an ox, it was referred to as ‘Oxhorn Mountain’.

“I’ve also sent envoys.” Ninefire said. “They are flying on winged beasts towards Snowdragon City to indirectly inform them that our Ji clan has set a grand formation at the base of Oxhorn Mountain. Given the speed at which my envoys travel at, I imagine that in roughly ten hours, they will arrive at Snowdragon Mountain.”

Ning and the others nodded.

Ten hours?

It would probably be tomorrow at noon, then! It made sense. The winged beasts the envoys flew on were ordinary, trained animals; it was only natural that they would not be able to compare with Xiantian-level flying monsters, or to Zifu Disciples.

“I will collect this bewildering formation, and then we will immediately head out.” Ninefire, afraid of being suddenly attacked, had set up the formation here.

“Whoosh!”

An enormous gourd appeared. Ji Ning and the other five, along with the two spirit-beasts, stood or sat atop the gourd. The gourd flew through the skies at high speed.

Oxhorn Mountain was roughly three hundred or so kilometers away. They arrived within moments.

“Right there.” Ninefire pointed at the split peak of Oxhorn Mountain below them. “Land there onto Oxhorn Mountain. We can see everything from there, and given that the surrounding area is completely desolate...there’s nothing that can block our line of sight. As long as those Snowdragon Mountain disciples come, we will immediately see them from far away.”

Ning, Yichuan, and the others all nodded.

Whoosh!

They landed from the skies, then put the gourd away. Ninefire and the others thus landed atop the mountain.

“I have already prepared six formations. They represent my hundreds of years of painstaking research in analyzing formations.” Ninefire pointed at the surrounding area. “I’ll only need as much time as it takes to boil a kettle of tea before I set these formations down. Even if experts from Snowdragon Mountain who specialize in formations come to break through them, they will probably need to spend quite some time to break through six of them. During that period of time, we can also borrow the power of the formation to launch sneak attacks and ambushes, one after another, disrupting them from breaking through the formations! Our goal is to make them waste as much time as possible. Based on my calculations, the Celestial Envoy of the Grand Xia Dynasty will arrive in three days. If we can hold for three days, then once the Celestial Envoy arrives, we will have won!”

“Right. Once the Celestial Envoy arrives, they will no longer dare to act.” Granny Shadow nodded as well.

“Even if we die, we have to delay them from breaking through our formation.” Truekeep nodded solemnly as well. “Our power, compared to that of a large group of Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain...if we fight them head on, there’s no way for us to compete. We have to rely on the formations! The more time it takes for them to break through our formations, the greater our chances for victory. Ideally, we should get rid of the formation experts which Snowdragon Mountain has invited over.”

Ninefire shook his head. “They will definitely focus on protecting their formation experts; they might even prepare specifically for us launching our most powerful attacks against them. It isn’t too likely that we will be able to kill the formation experts.”

Yichuan nodded as well. “Let’s do our best to delay!”

Six grand formations!

The disruption of each formation represented an increase in the level of danger the Ji clan would face.

“Patriarch.” Ning said solemnly. “I have a grand formation as well. We can be considered to have seven formations in total.”

“Oh?” They all looked at Ning.

“You have a grand formation?” Ninefire was extremely surprised. “Was it Bei Zishan’s? Bei Zishan came from Snowdragon Mountain, and he should have had some formations available to him.” Although this was what he said, in his heart, Ninefire didn’t feel too hopeful, because as he saw it, Bei Zishan was an amateur, while he, Ninefire, had chosen these six formations based on the most exquisite formations available to him and based on the treasures the Ji clan held.

“No.” Ning shook his head. “I once had a special stroke of fortune, and the most valuable item I acquired from it was this grand formation.”

“A special stroke of fortune?” They were all stunned. Yichuan stared at Ning. Yichuan’s first reaction was to think back to how Ning disappeared in Serpentwing Lake. That time, he and his wife had been worried for many days.

Yichuan said, “Ji Ning has indeed had a special stroke of fortune, which he narrowly survived. However, I didn’t know he had acquired a powerful magic treasure from it.”

Ning nodded. “Patriarch, look.”

Ning waved his hand, and instantly, a black light appeared above them, covered with incomparably intricate, wondrous magical runes. It was the dragon pearl and the four black scales. They caused the surrounding space to fill up with a black fog. Just by looking at them, especially considering the majestic presence of the faint draconic shadow within the dragon pearl, Ninefire and the others felt incomparably delighted.

“Dragon pearl?” Ninefire called out in surprise. “There is a dragon soul within?”

“Look at these runes. In my entire life, I’ve never seen runes as beautiful as the ones atop this treasure.” Granny Shadow was scrutinizing the scales.

“What complicated runes.” Ninefire was stunned as well.

Ning said, “Patriarch, once you bind it, you will understand.”

“How can I bind it? A treasure like this...our Ji clan has existed for thousands of years without having a treasure like this.” Ninefire shook his head. Although the Ji clan had its important, clan-protecting treasures, those were generally one-use Dao-seals and the like. How could it have an incomparably precious treasure like this, which could be used repeatedly? “This treasure isn’t something which the likes of our clan can use. Normally speaking, we’d be afraid others would come to steal it. However, now that our Ji clan is facing annihilation, I don’t have to be worried, I suppose. Still, Ji Ning, it’s best if you are the one to bind this magic treasure.”

“Patriarch, didn’t you say that once things grew dangerous, I would have to immediately leave?” Ning said helplessly. “If I leave...am I supposed to take the formation with me?”

“Oh...” Ninefire hesitated slightly, then gritted his teeth. “Fine. I will bind it. For now, I’ll use it!”

Given that the annihilation of his clan was at hand, Ninefire wouldn’t hesitate.

However, he could tell, just from the quality of the workmanship, the runes, and the materials used that this magic treasure was extremely precious.

“Whoosh.” Ninefire stretched out his right hand, and a flood of elemental energy flowed into the dragon pearl and the four draconic scales. This treasure didn’t have any remnants of ki within it, and so it naturally was easily bound.

“A wonderful treasure. A wonderful treasure!” As Ninefire bound it, he immediately began to understand the secrets of the treasure, and his eyes turned completely round. “This is too, too...”

Although he knew that it would be an excellent treasure, Ninefire was still stunned.

“Patriarch?”

“Elder brother?”

Granny Shadow, Yichuan, and the others all looked at the Patriarch.

“What a truly fine treasure!!!” Ninefire stared, round-eyed. He said excitedly, “My Ji clan has hope now. It has hope now! We have a chance! A real chance!”

“What sort of treasure is it? Hurry up and tell us! I’m impatient to hear it!” Granny Shadow said hurriedly.

Ninefire said, with incomparable excitement, “This grand formation has five parts. I can control them all by myself, but I need four Zifu Disciples assisting me! The four Zifu Disciples will be assigned to different locations. One Zifu Disciple will become the core of the ‘Dragonhead Formation’, one will be the core of the ‘Dragonbody Formation’, one will be the core of the ‘Dragontail Formation’, while one will be the core of the ‘Dragonclaw Formation’! Naturally, I will stand guard at the center and control the dragon pearl.”

“When the time comes, for the five Zifu Disciples who set up the formation, the most important thing is that, like with Dao-Soldiers, they will be able to share and borrow each other’s elemental energy! Even if one suffers an attack, it will be spread across to everyone in the entire formation and first be weakened by the formation itself, then dividing up amongst the five users.”

Hearing this, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, and the others were all excited.

Being able to combine their elemental energy and defensive strength was already worth them being excited over; it meant all of them had gained in strength.

“But this is just the first benefit.” Ninefire said excitedly. “There are other intricacies within. I’m unable to fully investigate them right now, but the dragon soul alone...when the time comes, we won’t even have to attack ourselves. We can use the dragon soul to launch attacks. This is much like Dong Xiqi’s Eight Trigrams Blood Dragon Formation. Only, this formation of ours is far more exquisite than that one!”

“Hurry, hurry. I’m going to immediately set it up. I need to focus on it and become familiar with the intricacies within.” Ninefire was incomparably excited.

“Good, good, good.” All of them nodded.

Ning nodded as well. He knew very well that this sort of formation required a very high level of comprehension regarding formations by the user. Only a high level of comprehension could result in effective control of the formation. Ninefire, in terms of talent, might not be superior to Ning, but he had been studying formations for centuries, and so in terms of his ability to control formations, he was on a similar level as Ning.

“Right. Ning, what is the name of this formation?” Ninefire couldn’t help but ask. “I’ve never seen such an intricate, exquisite formation. This formation is more powerful than all six of my other formations.”

“Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation.” Ning said.

“Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation.” Ninefire murmured this, then transformed into a ray of light as he began to fly about, setting up the formation. The Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation had to be set up in advance. The dragon pearl could be carried at all times, but the four dragon scales had to be set down in advance.

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Time passed by the minute and by the second. It was now dark at night. The Ji clan set up their formations, here at Oxhorn Mountain, training in them and becoming more familiar with the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation. This caused them all to dance for joy.

“So that’s how it is. How incredible.”

“We can allow the Netherwyrms to attack; the rest of us don’t have to interfere. We can also...transform into the ‘claws’ or the ‘tail’ of the Netherwyrms and actively attack. When we attack personally, the Netherwyrms will be able to unleash even greater power.” Truekeep was incomparably excited. He had never seen such an incredible formation.

“In addition, in the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation, the heavens and the earth are ‘locked’, making everything seem illusory! This is the most miraculous bewildering formation I have ever seen. If we want to attack, we can; if we want to retreat, we can hide behind the illusions, making it so that Snowdragon Mountain wouldn’t be able to find us.” Ninefire laughed loudly.

Ning was excited as well.

Although this was what he had expected, during their tests, he, a mere early Zifu Disciple, was able to use the combined elemental energy of the entire grand formation...and the Patriarch and the others were peak Zifu Disciples! When accessing all of the elemental energy of the formation, Ning had more elemental energy than any peak Zifu Disciple. For him to use so much ki in setting up his [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] meant that the power would be even greater!

“Come, then. Snowdragon Mountain.” Ning was filled with confidence.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 9: Snowdragon Mountain Assembles

Noon. The Golden Crow [the Sun] hung high in the sky.

While Ji Ninefire, Ji Ning, and the others were setting up and familiarizing themselves with this grand formation, Snowdragon City of the Swallow Mountain area had already summoned quite a few Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain. In the air above Snowdragon Mountain, there was a giant carpet, upon which was placed a number of chairs, fruit platters, wine, and more.

All of the cultivators were seated in the lotus position, clinking glasses and exchanging toasts. They were quite at ease.

“Junior apprentice-brother Dong Ziqi really has invited quite a few people this time. He invited all of our fellow apprentices in the areas surrounding Swallow Mountain.” A bearded elder held a beakskull cup of wine in his hands, chatting with a silver-haired cultivator who sat next to him. “It’s only been a short while, but more than ten Zifu Disciples have already arrived.”

“The more Zifu Disciples arrive, the better it will be for us when we use the combination techniques off Snowdragon Mountain!” The silver-haired man laughed. “With so many people, no matter how many tricks that puny little Ji clan have, when we join forces against them...we will sweep them effortlessly.”

“How can we possibly need this many Zifu Disciples to deal with a puny little Ji clan?” The long-bearded elder shook his head. He came just for the purpose of earning some merits; after they captured the elemental ore mine, the main sect would undoubtedly reward those who had played a part in it. Participants like them would be awarded merits, based on the size of their contributions. Unfortunately, with so many cultivators present, each person would have slightly less merits to earn.

While they were discussing this...

Dong Ziqi, as the host, was naturally walking around with a glass of wine in hand, chatting with everyone. Amongst his fellow apprentices, he was considered quite famous and formidable, and could be considered an exceptional character. Everyone would give him face. Still, Dong Ziqi spent most of his time with Jadechild.

Jadechild’s face was glowing with golden light. Seated there in the lotus position, he had his own unique, domineering aura. The nearby Landwyrms shrank to a size of just a few dozen meters and lay there, gorging itself on meat.

Next to Dong Ziqi were three fairly strong fellow disciples.

“Now that senior apprentice-brother Jadechild is here, no matter what tricks the Ji clan uses, it will be useless. Actually, all we have to do is collect some military merits.”

“The last time I saw you, senior apprentice-brother, was more than thirty years ago.”

All of them chatted, beginning to flatter and praise each other.

After all, this person in front of them, Jadechild, in terms of power, was strong enough to fight head on with an ordinary Wanxiang Adept! By relying on his divine ability, he was able to kill Zifu Disciples as easily as chickens. In addition, they had all heard of how Jadechild had secluded himself in the hopes of making a breakthrough. If he didn’t make a breakthrough, that was one thing, but if he did, then he would become a Fiendgod practitioner at the Wanxiang Adept.

By then, Jadechild's status would skyrocket, and he would become a major figure of the main sect. Naturally, they had to befriend him early on.

"Hm?" Dong Ziqi suddenly turned to look into the skies.

From afar, a fur-clad man could be seen, riding on a winged beast. The winged beast was an ordinary one, not a Xiantian-level Diremonster. The fur-clad man called out, "Cultivators of Snowdragon Mountain, I have come to deliver a message on the orders of my Patriarch. The Patriarch of our Ji clan, as well as the other Zifu Disciples, have set down a grand formation at Oxhorn Mountain, eight hundred kilometers outside of the City of Ten Thousand Swords. We are waiting for you, Snowdragon Mountain, to break it!"

After speaking, the fur-clad man flew away atop that winged beast.

"Arrogant little fellow. Watch me deal with him." A Zifu Disciple with triangular pupils immediately said in a cold voice, preparing to act.

"Stay your hand." A calm voice rang out.

The Zifu Disciple turned to look. The speaker was senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, who was seated in the position of honor. He immediately no longer dared to attack.

"We are all people who have embarked on the path of Immortal practitioners, while he, a messenger, is merely a mortal. If you lower yourself to kill him, wouldn't you be tarnishing the reputation of our Snowdragon Mountain?" Jadechild said calmly. "Their puny little Ji clan dares to brazenly set up a grand formation and ask us to go break it? Then our Snowdragon Mountain will display our overwhelming power and smash them all to death in an awe-inspiring display."

"Senior apprentice-brother is correct."

"Senior apprentice-brother's words are reasonable."

"Our power far exceeds the Ji clan's. For us to act openly and above-the-board is the correct path." All of the Zifu Disciples hurriedly said a few words of praise.

Jadechild continued, "However, for the Ji clan to directly notify us means that they definitely have some tricks up their sleeves. These clans have been rooted here for thousands of years...they might have some powerful techniques available to them. Fellow apprentices, don't be careless. Be careful and vigilant...if we are vigilant, then given our power, eradicating the Ji clan will not be an issue at all."

"Right." All of them nodded, as though having been lectured. Actually, who amongst them didn't know this already? Only, since Jadechild was speaking, they had no choice to obediently listen.

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Another four hours or so passed, and another series of Zifu Disciples arrived, three more in total. These three new Zifu Disciples who had rushed here, upon seeing so many fellow apprentices present, and upon seeing senior apprentice-brother Jadechild in particular, naturally also accepted Jadechild as their leader. Although quite a few Zifu Disciples went forward to say a few words to Jadechild, Jadechild just gave a few casual replies.

“Hrm?” Jadechild’s eyes lit up as he looked towards the distant skies. He even put down the beastskull goblet in his hand.

In the distant skies, a white Fairy Crane was descending. There were two Zifu Disciples seated atop it. One was Muse, who had gone out to deliver the invitations to the other apprentices of Snowdragon Mountain; as for the other, this man was dressed in ordinary fur clothes. This practitioner had unbound hair, and his eyes gleamed like the stars. Just looking at him made people unconsciously feel calmer.

“Senior apprentice-brother Zidao has arrived.” Dong Ziqi hurriedly rose.

“Come. Let’s go greet junior apprentice-brother Zidao.” Jadechild rose to his feet.

Jadechild rose to welcome Zidao, naturally causing the surrounding Zifu Disciples to all rise as well. They also behaved in a very warm, welcoming manner.

Nong Zidao...

This was an awe-inspiring figure known throughout the Swallow Mountain region. Jadechild himself was merely a rogue practitioner who eventually joined Snowdragon Mountain! As for Zidao, he had been trained at Snowdragon Mountain as a child, and was a member of the extremely powerful ‘Nong’ lineage of Snowdragon Mountain! Amongst the younger members of Snowdragon Member, he was quite famous for his prowess in formations, and the Ki Refining technique he trained in was an exquisite one as well. In the future, he would have a chance at becoming a Wanxiang Adept.

Logically speaking, it should have been quite hard to invite such a figure to attend.

“I didn’t expect that Dong Ziqi would be able to invite even Nong Zidao to come.” The Zifu Disciples were all quite surprised.

“Junior apprentice-brother Zidao.” Jadechild laughed as he went forward to welcome him. “I thought it would be quite some time, junior apprentice-brother, before you arrived. I didn’t imagine you’d arrive so soon.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Jadechild.” The celestial goose landed on the carpet, and Nong Zidao descended. “After hearing that you were inviting me and giving me a chance of earning some merits, senior apprentice-brother Jadechild, of course I wouldn’t dare be slow. I had Crane leading the way, and so I moved much more quickly than our other fellow apprentices.”

The two of them chatted, paying no attention to anyone else, but the other Zifu Disciples felt that this was only proper.

“Junior apprentice-brother Ziqi.” Nong Zidao looked at the nearby Dong Ziqi. “This time, you’ve accomplished a great deed.”

“With you present, senior apprentice-brother Zidao, I now feel much more confident.” Dong Ziqi said hurriedly. “Prior to this, senior apprentice-brother Jadechild and I were both concerned about those formations...although the Ji clan is a puny little clan, they have a history of thousands of years. For the sake of the survival of their clan, the formations they are setting down will definitely be extraordinary. Before this, I was worried, but with your arrival, senior apprentice-brother Zidao, everything will be simple.”

“With senior apprentice-brother Zidao here, the puny Ji clan’s formations will quickly be broken.”

“Quickly and easily.”

The Zifu Disciples all began to laugh and sigh in praise.

Nong Zidao nodded gently. The main sect actually cared quite deeply about his expertise in formations, but he was still, after all, a mere Zifu Disciple, not yet a Wanxiang Adept...and thus, his status wasn’t able to rise too much. As for Jadechild, however, by relying on his divine ability, he was able to fight with the strength of a Wanxiang Adept. Given that Jadechild wasn’t too old, and was capable of making a breakthrough, of course Zidao wanted to make friends with Jadechild. This mission was absolutely a simple one, but with great potential rewards. Of course he had to come.

“Junior apprentice-brother Zidao, with you being here, we have a total of nineteen Zifu Disciples.” Jadechild glanced at the surrounding people. “If we include my Landwurm and that Fairy Crane of yours, we actually can be said to have twenty one Zifu Disciples.”

They all nodded.

Jadechild then gave another glance at Nong Zidao. Their gazes intersected, and they made the decision simultaneously.

“We have an absolute advantage in power, and for the formation-breaking, we have junior apprentice-brother Zidao.” Jadechild said. “Since this is the case, there is no need for us to delay any further. Let us head out for Oxhorn Mountain now! As for the fellow apprentices who will arrive later, junior apprentice-brother Ziqi, you arrange for someone to welcome them, then tell them that we have already gone to Oxhorn Mountain.”

“Alright.” Dong Ziqi hurriedly responded. Since Jadechild and Zidao had made their decisions, most likely the latecomers wouldn’t dare say much.

“Fine, let’s go.”

“With so many colleagues present, we have enough power to annihilate the Ji clan.”

“We even have senior apprentice-brothers Jadechild and Zidao. Everything is set.” The Zifu Disciples all spoke out in praise and approval. The more Zifu Disciples came, the more people would divide the merits earned. If they headed out now, and immediately destroyed the Ji clan, then they would earn the majority of the merits, with the latecomers at most getting a few scraps.

Dong Ziqi directly reached out to his clansmen within Snowdragon City: “Wait here within the city. Once our colleagues arrive, just say...that senior apprentice-brothers Jadechild and Zidao have led the rest of us to Oxhorn Mountain.”

“Yes, Patriarch.” The Xiantian lifeforms within the city began to make their preparations for welcoming the latercomer Zifu Disciples.

“Let’s go.” Dong Ziqi laughed.

Whoosh!

The carpet immediately flew into the distance.

This group of Zifu Disciples remained seated on it, continuing to nurse their drinks. They were quite at ease. To them, this trip to Oxhorn Mountain was nothing more than an excursion tour, incomparably relaxed.

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Oxhorn Mountain.

The sun had already begun to set, having reached the western mountains. The sunlight bathed the world in its glow, causing the desolate wilderness and Oxhorn Mountain to be covered with a layer of red gauze.

The Ji clan's experts had already finished familiarizing themselves with the formation and were now resting. Their eyes were all filled with confidence and anticipation. If before this, they were prepared to fight to the death, or perhaps even had mentally prepared to die...then they now could be said to have confidence in their ability to give Snowdragon Mountain a fight. Ninefire said, "Unless a few dozen of their Zifu Disciples perish, they can forget about breaking this formation." His words were filled with an eagerness for the coming battle.

This powerful formation...it would definitely ensure that a large group of Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain would perish within.

"This bottle of liquefied elemental essence." Ning was holding the jade bottle while speaking to his clansmen. "Prior to this, when training, I only used thirty percent. Quite a bit of it remains. In this battle against Snowdragon Mountain, our Ji clan cannot be the slightest bit careless. This bottle of liquefied elemental essence will be of great use. Patriarch, please accept it."

Just as Ning was speaking, Truekeep suddenly shouted, "Look, look north!"

"Hrm?" All of them turned to look.

Standing at the tip of Oxhorn Mountain, they were able to see that in the distant skies, an enormous carpet was flying over. Atop the carpet was tables and chairs, as well as one Zifu Disciple after another, either seated in the lotus position or reclining while drinking wine, seeming quite relaxed. One of them stood at the very front of the carpet.

From the looks of it, it was Dong Ziqi!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 6: Breaking Through the Cocoon, Becoming a Butterfly Chapter 10: Contact

Dong Ziqi stood there atop the carpet, staring into the distance. The distant Oxhorn Mountain looked the same as always, extremely peaceful.

"Apprentice-brothers Jadechild and Zidao." Dong Ziqi hurriedly called out. "Oxhorn Mountain is up ahead, but at first glance, I don't see anything."

Immediately, a group of Zifu Disciples arose, with Jadechild and Zidao leading the way. They stood at the edges of the carpet, staring into the distance. Nong Zidao began to laugh. "Just a vision-bewildering

formation. Although you can't tell from the outside, once you investigate clearly what's going on, you'll know."

Whoosh!

The giant carpet descended, quickly landing on a desolate patch of land not too far from Oxhorn Mountain. This group of Zifu Disciples all walked off, raising their heads as they looked at the distant Oxhorn Mountain.

"Snowdragon Mountain members, our Ji clan has been here waiting for quite some time." A heroic, forceful voice emanated forth from the distant Oxhorn Mountain.

"So they really are atop the mountain." Dong Ziqi's eyes narrowed, and he said, "This is the voice of Patriarch Ninefire of the Ji clan. This old fellow is very crafty, and he is skilled in formations and poisons."

Jadechild just said calmly, "Nothing more than an old man. Killing him is like killing a chicken."

"It's quite impressive for someone to be this bold though." Nong Zidao laughed as well.

"A grand formation has been set down here at Oxhorn Mountain. There's no way of knowing what dangers and traps are inside." A silver-haired Zifu Disciple said, worried. "What are we to do?"

The practitioner with the triangular pupils snorted coldly. "What can we do? To break the formation, we first have to test it and see what intricacies it holds."

One Zifu Disciple after another began to discuss what they should do to test it.

"No need."

Nong Zidao laughed gently. "This bewildering formation is quite ordinary. Just from reviewing the elemental energy ripples surrounding Oxhorn Mountain, I already know the secrets behind the vision-bewildering formation in front of us. Crane, go break this formation." Nong Zidao, through his spiritual connection, informed the Crane of the secrets of breaking this formation.

The Fairy Crane transformed into a blur, then solidified into a white-robed maiden. The white-robed maiden seemed like an eighteen year old girl, youthful and adorable. "Master, please wait momentarily. I will go break the formation."

The white-robed maiden immediately transformed into a ray of light, flying away towards the base of Oxhorn Mountain. She didn't enter the formation at all, instead wielding a long black whip in her hands. Striking out with the whip...it suddenly extended, penetrating into the formation, and then wrapping up the formation flag with incomparable accuracy. And then, with a tug, she pulled it out.

"Good."

"The spirit-beast of senior apprentice-brother Zidao really is extraordinary."

"Well broken." They all congratulated.

From their side, all they saw was a long whip enter the formation, with that part of the whip disappearing. By the time the whip returned, it returned wrapped around a formation flag! With one of

the formation flags pulled out...instantly, the bewildering formation was broken, and the entire Oxhorn Mountain seemed to change slightly, revealing several figures at the peak of the mountain.

"The Ji clan." Muse immediately saw the six of them, with that youth amongst them. "That genius of the Ji clan, Ji Ning, is here as well."

"Activate!"

Far away at the peak of Oxhorn Mountain, Ninefire suddenly let out a loud shout, and instantly, a large amount of fog arose, surrounding the entire Oxhorn Mountain. There was black fog everywhere...and for a time, nothing could be seen within.

"Master." The white-robed maiden flew back like a streak of light. "I just barely missed. As soon as I pulled away one formation flag, yet another formation was set down...there's no way for me to pull away the other formation flags."

"It's enough for you to be able to pull one out. That bewildering formation has already been broken." Nong Zidao laughed calmly. "It seems this Ji clan has prepared quite a few formations! Unfortunately...it seems as though none of them are particularly high-class formations."

The nearby Jadechild said, "How can the Ji clan possibly compare with you, junior apprentice-brother Zidao, when it comes to meticulously analyzing formations? If they were capable of setting up a formation that even you, junior apprentice-brother Zidao, felt was high class, then that would be quite baffling. The situation before us is quite normal."

"How should we break this next formation, junior apprentice-brother Zidao?"

"It's hard to see anything within this fog formation."

The Zifu Disciples all looked at Nong Zidao.

Nong Zidao shook his head as well. "The previous vision-bewildering formation was easy to break. The one in front of us, however, is a bit harder. In addition, I imagine that the Ji clan has set up layers of formations, formations within formations! How can we break this fog formation just by looking at it from the outside? Most likely, only someone at the Primordial Daoist level would be able to see through the illusions of this formation at a glance."

"Then we...?" Jadechild looked at Nong Zidao.

"Investigate the illusions!" Nong Zidao said. "As I see it, our group of nineteen Zifu Disciples should divide into two squads. We'll first send one group of twelve Zifu Disciples to enter the formation...these twelve fellow apprentices are not to be separated while carrying out their mission, as otherwise, they will be separated and killed. Twelve Zifu Disciples....the Ji clan won't have the strength to fight back, even if they want to.

Nong Zidao looked at Dong Ziqi. "Junior apprentice-brother Ziqi, this time, it was your Swallow Mountain branch which invited everyone to come here, and so you should lead eleven of our colleagues in entering."

"Fine." Dong Ziqi immediately assented.

Nong Zidao immediately began to name names, until finally, twelve Zifu Disciples had been named, with Dong Ziqi being one of them.

“My twelve fellow apprentices, please head out first.” Nong Zidao waved his hand, and three jade talismans flew out towards Dong Ziqi and two others. “These three jade talismans were forged by me personally. As long as you stay close to me, I will be able to sense them. Fellow apprentices, please enter the formation first. Senior apprentice-brother Jadechild and I will follow afterwards...and then, we shall separately test this formation. I will be able to sense everyone’s locations, and so meeting again will be simple.”

“Excellent.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Zidao is meticulous indeed.”

Nobody had any objections.

Because they were all very confident! As disciples of the main sect, they were all skilled in combination attacks! Every six fellow disciples would be able to form one formation. Nine, ten, or twelve disciples were also able to set up formations...if the thousands of powerful Zifu Disciples of the main sect were to join together in one combination formation, they would even be able to give a Primordial Daoist a good fight!

But of course, the prerequisite was that they all had to understand the intricacies of the combination formations. The larger scale a formation, the greater the level of complexity. For thousands of Zifu Disciples to form into one combination formation would require many moons of training and coordination.

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Oxhorn Mountain.

Black fog billowed everywhere, and Ji Ning and the others flew to the edges of the black fog, staring towards the outside.

Everyone had a heavy feeling.

Just now, that Zifu-level Celestial Crane didn’t even enter the formation; all it had done was use a whip from outside, and it was able to effortlessly capture that formation flag. Clearly, it had seen through the illusions of the formation. For it to be able to do so without even entering the formation...this caused every member of the Ji clan to have a heavy feeling in their hearts.

“The bewildering formation I set down outside the perimeter was the weakest one.” Ninefire said.

“First, we will make the enemies believe us to be weak, so as to make them lower their guard.”

“Twelve of their Zifu Disciples have broken off and are moving towards us. It appears they are going to enter.” Truekeep suddenly said.

“They are breaking into two groups?” Ninefire nodded slightly. “I expect that the second group is the more powerful one; judging from the conversation they had earlier, it seems as though those two Zifu Disciples are in charge. However, those two are in the second group and haven’t entered yet.”

“Let us prepare the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation.” Granny Shadow said hurriedly.

Ninefire waved his hand, and two plain, unadorned emblems appeared. The only thing on them was the character for ‘Xia’.

“The official writs?” Ning stared in astonishment at these two emblems. “Two official writs?”

“Previously, when we killed the He siblings, we acquired an official writ. This unbound writ belonged to them.” Ninefire looked at Ning. His eyes filled with hope, he said, “The other official writ belongs to my Ji clan. It is the official writ of the City of Ten Thousand Swords. Ji Ning, for now, we will entrust you with these two writs!”

Ninefire handed them directly to Ning.

“Me?”

Ning was stunned.

“We are facing countless dangers right now. If I am lucky enough to survive, then you can give the official writ for the City of Ten Thousand Swords back to me. If I die, then keep it.” Ninefire said. “No matter what, we absolutely cannot permit Snowdragon Mountain to acquire this official writ. If the situation becomes untenable, immediately use the Traceless Talisman to depart. The official writ will thus go with you as well...and so, even if they break our formation, they will not be able to find the official writ at all. By then, you will represent the Ji clan in signing an agreement with the Grand Xia Dynasty.”

Ning nodded gently, then accepted the two official writs. When he filled them with his elemental energy, he was able to easily bind them both.

At the same time, he could vaguely sense two places ‘calling’ to him. It was the call of those two cities.

“Excellent.”

Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and the others all laughed. Now that they had already arranged everything, they would be able to battle without any other concerns.

“Truekeep.” Ninefire said. “You shall be the core for the ‘Dragonhead Formation’ of the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation. I will fill you with the power of the formation.”

“Yes.” Truekeep immediately nodded.

“Ji Shadow.” Ninefire, for once, called out his little sister by her full name. “You shall be the core of the Dragonbody Formation.”

“Alright.” Granny Shadow’s eyes were filled with anticipation.

“Liu Xing.” Ninefire called out the full name of the old servant, Ah Xing, as well. “You shall be the core of the Dragonclaw Formation.”

The old servant nodded gently.

“Ji Ning.” Ninefire looked towards Ji Ning. “You are the strongest person amongst us. Your elemental energy is somewhat weak, but once you join with the formation...our elemental energy will combine with yours! Your strength will thus rise the most out of all of us! Given this, your power will vastly surpass the power of the rest of us. The Dragontail Formation of the Netherwyrms Heavenlock Formation is the most mysterious and most nimble part; it can support everyone else. You will thus serve as the core for this formation, and you will also be our killing blade.”

Ning nodded.

Once the Netherwyrms Heavenlock formation was set down, of the five formations, the Dragonhead Formation, the Dragonclaw Formation, the Dragonbody Formation, and the Dragon Pearl Formation would not be very nimble. The Dragontail Formation, however, was the nimblest formation, and could easily sweep across to many areas.

“I will stand guard at the core, controlling the formation to support you all.” Ninefire looked at the nearby Yichuan. “Yichuan will be my backup. Once I die, Yichuan will replace me.”

Everyone knew...that Yichuan would only be able to unleash sufficient energy from his Zifu after using a forbidden technique.

“Everyone!” Ninefire looked at them all. “Everything we do, we do for the Ji clan.”

“For the Ji clan.” Granny Shadow, the old servant Ah Xing, Truekeep, Yichuan, and Ning all nodded solemnly.

“Go, then. Prepare each of your formations.” Ninefire gave the order.

Immediately, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, Ah Xing, and Ning moved at high speed in four different directions.

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At the same time.

Dong Ziqi and the other eleven Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain were carefully entering the black fog shrouded Oxhorn Mountain. As the person who had invited them here, Dong Ziqi naturally set up his Eight Trigrams Blood Dragon Formation to protect them! The enormous Eight Trigrams Blood Dragon Formation swirled around the eleven Zifu Disciples, providing an outer layer of protection.

This also guaranteed that the twelve Zifu Disciples wouldn't be easily separated from each other.

“A black fog bewildering formation?” The twelve people who entered the black fog region quickly grew cautious.

“Everyone, beware the ambushes of the Ji clan.” Dong Ziqi called out.

In the black fog, the aura of the region had become heavy and weighty. All of them grew cautious and guarded, for fear that a sudden, terrifying attack might emerge from the black fog. As Immortal practitioners...they all understood that even if they looked down upon their enemies, in a true life and death battle, they couldn't underestimate any enemy Immortal practitioners.