

## Desolate 1051

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 26: The Battle in the World's Core

"Prophet." Daolord Inkmind's true body had been here this entire time, attending to their needs. Upon seeing Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord halt their cultivation, he hurriedly spoke out to them.

"Fellow Daoist Inkmind." Ning smiled. "The time has now come for me and Ninedust to enter this place and search for worldsplitter stones. Sorry for making you go to the trouble of watching over us."

"It was no trouble at all. Are the two of you truly unwilling to wait any longer?" Daolord Inkmind couldn't help but try to dissuade them: "If you want a few hundred thousand years, the density of the earth devils might drop by a half, and the danger will drop to roughly 10% of what it is right now..."

The Ninedust Sectlord said calmly, "No need to wait any further. Darknorth, let's go."

"Let's go."

The Ninedust Sectlord and Ning simultaneously transformed into streaks of light, flying towards that enormous rainbow-lit region that led deeper underground. There were a number of those humanoid figures flying through that rainbow region. Each of them had tall, muscular bodies, wore black armor, and had faces that were dark yellow in color. They looked like towering mountains, and they emanated an aura of the world's ponderance. This was a type of strange creature that possessed the power of the vast earth itself.

They were different from the flame demons. The flame demons were more violent and had more powerful attacks, while the earth devils always stayed within their own domain without proactively leaving to launch attacks on the world at large. However, anyone who dared to trespass into their homeland would suffer their merciless reprisals.

"Eh?" As Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord flew into the home of the earth devils, the creatures suddenly turned alert. Moments ago, they had been quite relaxed; now, they all turned to glare towards the two intruders.

"Kill them!"

"Annihilate the intruders!"

Virtually all the earth devils in the area began to move in unison, transforming into streaks of light that shot towards the two of them.

"We can't waste any time.. Let's shake them off as soon as possible," the Ninedust Sectlord suggested.

"Agreed." As soon as the two entered, they had both sensed the dense and heavy earth energy which permeated this entire region and which applied enormous pressure to them. However, both were able to resist the pressure with ease! They also saw that there were many different stone passageways that led from this region to other places. The core of the world seemed almost like a spiderweb lattice of tunnels with countless short passageways that could be taken.

The passageways were so short that there was no way Ning could rely on his black vessel to flee. In this place, it wasn't speed which mattered; it was agility! The countless short tunnels forced them to repeatedly change directions.

Boom! Ning didn't hesitate at all, immediately unleashing his nine novessence arts and letting them crush outwards towards the encroaching earth devils.

"We Ancient cultivators also have certain secret arts of tremendous power, but the more powerful they are the harder it is to cultivate them." The Ninedust Sectlord couldn't help but feel a bit jealous when he saw Ning use the nine novessence arts. Both the Dao Alliance and the Ancient cultivators had many secret arts of incredible power. As for the terrifying secret arts Ning had acquired from the deceased Sword Hegemon, they were far more powerful than these nine novessence arts. However, the more powerful a secret art was, the higher its requirements were!

These secret arts would all require incredibly rare and valuable magic treasures which were almost never sold to outsiders. The bloodfruit which Ning had acquired was a good example; there was no way Skywood City would ever sell sacred bloodfruit. After slaying Daolord Kongsan, Ning had become much wealthier than he had been... but alas, he hadn't been able to use that wealth to purchase any of the rare treasures he needed to train in the Hegemon's secret art.

Just gaining a basic level of skill in the Hegemon's secret art required three exceedingly valuable treasures. To master it, twelve were needed. Thus far, Ning hadn't found even one!

The same was true for the Ninedust Sectlord. Although he had been alive for far longer than Ning had and knew more secret arts, he hadn't been able to master even one secret art of tremendous power.

In truth, Daolord Allgod's nine novessence arts didn't rely that much on rare treasures; Dao lightning and Dao water were fairly weak and cheap. The true ingenuity of the nine arts lay in the way Daolord Allgod had mixed them together in an alchemical fashion, allowing him to perfectly control the [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water]. This was a type of secret art which possessed tremendous power while having fairly low material requirements... but actually training in it was incredibly difficult. Not only did it require one to be fairly proficient in those nine different types of Dao, it also required you to have reached the grandmaster level in alchemy.

"Break!" Ning manifested three heads and six arms, taking his six Northbow swords into his hands. He seemed to completely transform into a black hole, making it very difficult for the attacking earth devils to do anything to him.

Slash! Sword-light sliced through the chest of one of the earth devils. Moments later, the earth devil's body suddenly exploded with a giant boom. The shattered bits of its body were quickly ground into dust by the power of the nine novessence arts.

"Darknorth, your sword-arts have actually improved." The distant Ninedust Sectlord still had the presence of mind to jest with Ning. This was mainly because they had been through far more dangerous situations when they had been fighting against the countless flame demons in the outlands.

"Just a little bit," Ning said. Ning had used his temporal acceleration treasure for the past twelve thousand years, which he had spent almost exclusively in cultivation. However, aside from the Blood Drop sword-intent which he had broken through in quite some time ago, his other four types of sword-

intent hadn't improved in the slightest. As a result, he wasn't much stronger than he had been in the past, even though his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop was now twice as powerful as before. If he wanted to improve overall, he would need for all five sword-intents to make breakthroughs, then merge together into his third-stage Omega Sword Dao.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The earth devils utilized heavy weapons like greataxes, warhammers, and heavy poles. They struck out with brutish power, and although Ning held the upper hand he still found each clash quite difficult to endure.

“Let's run.”

“Agreed.”

After getting a basic understanding of how the earth devils fought, the two felt their hearts grow heavy. They were able to temporarily destroy the earth devils, but just like the flame demons they had invulnerable forms! Fighting them head-on would severely slow down the two cultivators, and these creatures were even more dangerous than the flame demons when massed together. Fortunately, they were comparatively fewer in number.

Whooosh. The two used agility techniques to flee while blocking, and they quickly darted through the countless web-like tunnels. Both of them were faster than the flame demons, and so they were significantly faster than the slower earth devils.

“Kill!” As they continued to flee, more earth devils were attracted by the sounds of combat and came charging straight towards them. Each time, the two cultivators had no choice but to end the battle as soon as possible as they delved deeper and deeper into the earth's core.

The two were very experienced and very powerful, and they were working in concert. They were able to ‘wander’ through the underground lattice of tunnels for roughly an hour with ease.

“Over there.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord immediately saw the slick black stone that was hovering in the air off in the distance. It looked extremely smooth and glossy, and seemed to be filled with endless power, almost as though it held an entire massive world within it. Although this was the first time they had seen this stone, they immediately recognized it as a worldsplitter stone based on the descriptions Daolord Inkmind had given them.

“A worldsplitter stone.” The Ninedust Sectlord was closer to it, and so he immediately waved his arm to collect it. He then grinned at Ning. “I'll hold onto this one for now. Let's keep exploring until we find a second one.”

“Fine.” Ning didn't really mind. The two had sworn lifeblood oaths long ago and thus both trusted each other quite a bit by now.

The worldsplitter stones had been birthed from the core of this planet. Although some could be found hovering around in outer regions like this place, most were located far deeper and closer to the heart of the world. Thus, the farther down they went the better their chances would be... but the more dangerous it would be as well, of course. It would also be a longer way back.

More time passed. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord continued to battle and charge their way closer and closer to the planet's core.

“That’s...” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord’s faces both turned pale. Off in the distance, they saw streaks of light flying about happily. There were a total of four streaks, and they each possessed strange vitality and life energy. All four were of different colors, and their auras were completely different as well. However, they flew together in unison and ‘chased’ after each other.

“Four of the five types of Dragonfish Ki?” Ning immediately recognized those four streaks of light. They were incredibly famous treasures that were absolutely priceless, far more valuable than Dao lightning or Dao water. They were incredibly rare and simply couldn’t be bought on any market. Even if a major power was lucky enough to encounter them, he’d generally only trade it for other treasures of similar value rather than sell them. A single stream of Dragonfish Ki would be worth roughly eighty million cubes of chaos nectar; these things were even more valuable than sacred bloodfruit! One could imagine how rare they were.

“Darknorth, I only need one of those four.” The Ninedust Sectlord was so excited his entire body was shaking. If he acquired the Dragonfish Ki, then even if he found nothing else from this ancestral site he would still be completely satisfied. “This thing is extremely important to me. Brother Darknorth, please assist me. I can promise that the other three will be yours.”

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 27: The Core**

“Which one do you want?” Ji Ning asked.

“The water-attribute Dragonfish Ki.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. Although the two were working together, they were equal partners; the Ninedust Sectlord didn’t have the right to unilaterally choose which treasures he wanted. If Ning also deeply desired the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki, then it would end up going to whoever moved the fastest. The Ninedust Sectlord truly wasn’t confident in his chances, as the power of Ning’s nine novessence arts was truly great; if Ning was to apply all nine of them in chasing after treasures, his chances would probably be greater.

“To tell you the truth, I truly wish to acquire the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki as well.” Ning grinned when he saw the worried look on the Ninedust Sectlord’s face. “But... even if I did get it, it wouldn’t be of much use to me for now. Fine, fine; the water-attribute one is yours, but the other three are mine. I suppose I technically come out slightly ahead in this.”

“Thank you.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a sigh of relief. Sometimes, quantity wasn’t the most important thing when it came to procuring treasures, nor was the superficial ‘market price’. When you encountered a precious treasure that you were in desperate need of, you would easily be willing to pay five to ten times the ‘normal’ price! The real question was, how badly did you need it?

“Let’s move.”

“Don’t let the Dragonfish Ki escape.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord instantly began to make their moves.

The five types of Dragonfish Ki were aligned to the Five Elements, and four of those five types were before them – metal, wood, water, and fire. Ning’s greatest strength lay in his Sword Dao, with water

and thunder in second position. Thus, Ning really did care more about the water-attribute Dragonfish Ki. However, even if he acquired it he would simply store it away for now, because he didn't really need it for training in any secret arts at present. Perhaps in the future he would obtain a secret art which required such a treasure, but Ning's focus was on the deceased Sword Hegemon's secret art. That was a truly powerful secret art! It was quite unlikely that he'd be able to obtain anything more powerful than it.

Soon, the two of them fought through more than ten earth devils and acquired the four types of Dragonfish Ki.

"Hahaha!" The Ninedust Sectlord roared with laughter. "Finally, I'll be able to make yet another breakthrough in my secret art. The water-attribute Dragonfish Ki... I once offered a bounty of three hundred million cubes of chaos nectar for it, but no one was willing to accept it. Daolord Curveclaw of the Aberrants actually offered it to me for one billion! I was so angry I really wanted to just kill him."

"Treasures like this can only be hoped for, not counted on." Ning smiled.

"Thank you, Darknorth. Haha, you know? I'm starting to take a liking to you." The Ninedust Sectlord laughed merrily. "After we leave this ancestral site, if there's anything you need me to do I'll do it, so long as it isn't anything suicidal."

Ning immediately felt much more friendly towards the Ninedust Sectlord. Ninedust was the type of person who would do anything to achieve his goals, but he wasn't truly an evil man. The Ninedust Sect's evil reputation was primarily due to the evil deeds of the previous sectlord. The current Ninedust Sectlord was an Ancient cultivator and thus rather arrogant and aloof, and he was willing to do anything for the sake of his cultivation, but he would remember even the slightest of kindnesses or debts that he owed.

"If there's anything you need me to do I'll do it, so long as it isn't suicidal." This was quite a promise. The term 'suicidal' referred to something like Ning asking him to help Ning kill a Hegemon – that would be suicide! But if Ning said to him, "Come, let us venture into the Terror Starsea?" The Ninedust Sectlord would fearlessly accompany Ning into it, despite the many dangers involved.

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As a result of this minor affair, both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord became much more well-disposed towards each other. This often happened when Daolords adventured together. The term 'lifelong friend' often came as a result of friendships being forged through shared adversity in life-and-death situations.

"Why haven't we been able to find a second worldsplitter stone?"

"We've spent another full hour in here." Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord continued to go deeper and deeper into the planet, and the countless passageways continuously twisted downwards.

Although they had taken many twists and turns, both of them knew exactly where they were. They knew that they were moving closer to the core of the planet. Surprisingly enough, they didn't encounter all that many earth devils on the way over; in fact, the closer they were to the core, the fewer in number the devils seemed to become.

“A worldsplitter stone.” They saw a levitating worldsplitter stone off in the distance. Ning instantly revealed a look of delight. They were now very deep inside the planet, but there were no earth devils nearby.

Swoosh. Ning immediately flew over and reached out, grabbing the worldsplitter stone with his hands. Moments later, he stared in front of him in surprise. The Ninedust Sectlord was right behind him, and he also stared in disbelief.

Right in front of them was an enormous globe that was pitch-black in color which emanated minute ripples of power. Ning, however, would just barely sense that these ripples were so powerful as to cause their hearts to quaver. Them listening to these ripples was like a pair of ants listening to the heartbeat of an enormous dragon; the terror they felt was innate and heartfelt.

“This must be the core of the planet,” the Ninedust Sectlord said softly. “This is the core of this entire world. It gave birth to all the earth devils, and also to the worldsplitter stones.”

“And the Dragonfish Ki.” Ning pointed off into the distance. The Ninedust Sectlord followed Ning’s gaze, only to see that there were four types of infant Dragonfish Ki being nurtured upon the outermost surface of the world’s core.

“Let’s go,” Ning said softly.

“Agreed. This isn’t a place for us to do as we please.” The Ninedust Sectlord didn’t have the slightest intention of trying to take away the core.

When adventuring, if you wanted to live a long life you had to know your limits. This planet was capable of suppressing the countless flame demons of the outlands, ensuring that they didn’t dare to enter. A ripple from its core alone was enough to inspire fear in their hearts. The power of this planetary core vastly surpassed that of an ordinary Eternal Emperor. Both of them had the feeling that if they so much as touched the core, they would probably be instantly reduced to dust.

Whoosh. Whoosh. They quickly departed. On the way back, they encountered a number of earth devils but were able to quickly shake them off. Although the battles seemed fierce, in truth both were still distracted by thoughts of that enormous, pitch-black world core. What an utterly terrifying core that was! Ning estimated that only someone with the power of a Hegemon would have a chance at possibly procuring it.

“No wonder the living beings born on this planet all have such incredible talent for cultivation and are able to train so easily. This world is even smaller than the Three Realms, but in this era alone it has already given birth to twenty or thirty Daolords and a terrifying number of World-level cultivators. No wonder.” Ning secretly sighed.

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The Grand Elder’s avatar led a group of sixteen Daolords as they waited next to the tombstones. They stared afar at the rainbow region off in the distance which led to the world’s core.

“Elder, the two Prophets have been in there for too long. Is it possible that they...” A Daolord spoke out.

“It has been quite long.”

“Our Daolords rarely spent that much time in there.”

Generally speaking, if one wasn't able to acquire a worldsplitter stone in a fairly short period of time, one would quickly retreat and wait for another opportunity in the future.

“The Prophets won't die that easily,” the Grand Elder said. “Wait a while longer. They should be returning soon.”

Just a short while later. “There they are,” Daolord Inkmind said hurriedly.

Swoosh! Swosh! Two streaks of light quickly flew towards them from afar, pursued by a large number of earth devils. Ning's nine novessence arts swirled around him like nine dragons. With the Ninedust Sectlord's help, they managed to quickly throw off the pursuit of the earth devils. Even the most rare and powerful of earth devils were merely on par with the two of them, and even then they weren't as fast.

Whoosh. Whoosh. They flew out of the rainbow region, then landed at the entrance of the cave. They watched calmly as the many earth devils within the region issued threatening growls to the two of them. Slowly, the earth devils turned their attention away. So long as one retreated from their home, the creatures would not pursue them.

“Congratulations, Prophets.” The Grand Elder smiled.

“I need to train for a while.” The Ninedust Sectlord didn't waste words on ceremony. He waved his hand, causing a wooden house to descend before him. He then entered the wooden house, which was in truth an Eternal-class estate-treasure with incredibly strong defenses that were hard to breach. He sent mentally to Ning, “Darknorth, I need to train in my secret arts for a while. Two hours should be enough.”

Ning nodded, then turned to glance at the white-robed Grand Elder. He smiled. “Sorry for having troubled you in recent days. Ninedust and I have both acquired worldsplitter stones; this very day, we shall leave this world.”

The Grand Elder and the others all let out secret sighs of relief. It was best if the two left. By now, they were no longer cultivators who need 'Prophets' to transmit techniques to them. They had built up an enormous collection of skills after having embarked on the path of cultivation countless years ago. Although they were a bit weaker than any one of the Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom, they weren't that much weaker.

“I'll have to trouble you to watch over my disciple Skywind after our departure,” Ning said.

“Don't worry. Skywind is a member of our sacred grounds and a member of our race. We'll spare no offense in helping him grow up and become stronger,” the Grand Elder said.

Ning nodded.

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Skywind was seated at the desolate mountain in an area with no life at all. The only thing in front of him was endless sand, which contained tribal lifeforms within it. He just watched silently, his gaze travelling countless kilometers as he watched the various individuals celebrate and lament.

"I still can't let it all go." Skywind shook his head.

"Skywind." A surge of godsense swept towards Skywind, ringing out by his ears. "Your master, Prophet Darknorth, will be leaving our world today. He'll be venturing out into the outlands."

"Master is leaving?" Young master Skywind immediately rose to his feet. He knew very well that everything he had today, he had thanks to Ning's guidance. Many of the cultivators of this planet had once trained in the Dao of the Sword, but none of them had ever reached the level his master had reached. The information his master provided went to the core of the Dao of the Sword, and it seemed as though there were no sword-arts which puzzled his master. It was also thanks to his master's guidance that he had been able to improve so quickly.

"Master." Skywind transformed into a sword-shadow. Thanks to the treasures and divine abilities he had acquired in the sacred grounds, he was already comparable to a Daolord of the First Step. And now, he immediately displayed his sword-arts for all to see as he quickly hid back home.

### The Desolate Era

#### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 28: The Shattered World**

A vast grassland. The Grand Elder was here, leading a group of Daolords and Skywind in bidding Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord farewell.

"Master." Skywind looked at Ning, truly unwilling to part with him. Ning had never asked anything of him and had whole-heartedly helped him this entire time. His father had given many costly gifts to convince Swordmaster Eastvoid to teach him, but the Swordmaster was nothing more than a World-level cultivator... and in the end, he hadn't even accepted Skywind as a disciple. Compared to Ning, Swordmaster Eastvoid was absolutely nothing.

"Haha. Skywind, if destiny wills it, we shall meet again in the future," Ning smiled.

"Right." Skywind nodded heavily.

"Let's go." Ning glanced at the nearby Ninedust Sectlord, who pursed his lips into a smirk. "I didn't take on any disciples. I can leave whenever."

Swoosh! Swoosh! Skywind and the other Daolords watched as they instantly shot into the air, quickly charging into the gaseous barriers in the skies.

Skywind watched as Ning disappeared into the distance, tears appearing in his eyes. Would he ever have the chance to meet his master again?

"Your master Darknorth is very, very powerful." The Grand Elder gently patted Skywind on the shoulders. "Skywind, you have to grow powerful as well if you want to catch up to him. Otherwise, how will you possibly become strong enough to venture into the outlands and search for him?"

"I understand." Skywind nodded.

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Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord passed through the nine gaseous barriers, finally returning to the empty region surrounding the entire planet.



“What a marvelous place.” The Ninedust Sectlord glanced downwards. “This single, tiny little planet has actually given birth to so many cultivators that each era holds twenty to thirty Daolords. This single planet holds a level of power comparable to quite a few territories combined. It lives up to its reputation as an ancestral site of my Ancient race.”

“This planet might not necessarily be connected to your ancestors.” Ning turned to glance towards the outside. “Pick a direction.”

The area around them was vast and empty. Beyond this empty region were countless stone passageways that led off in many different directions. These stone passageways brimmed with flames; one could only imagine how many of those flame demons were present.

“Every direction seems to be the same. We came from this direction over there, so let’s take the opposite route.” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed to the other side of the planet.

“You read my mind.” Ning grinned, then waved his hand and produced a black flying vessel. The two immediately boarded the vessel. Swoosh! It instantly accelerated to move at a hundred times the speed of light, departing the planet. This entire ancestral site, including the planet they had been in, was dimensionally locked, preventing any form of teleportation or blinking.

“Here we go.” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both stared towards the stone passageway as they moved closer and closer to it. Swish! The black vessel dove into one of the stone tunnels and into its roaring flames. When they saw a distant flame demon, both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord instantly used their worldsplitter stones.

Swish! Swish! Their armor and their weaponry all glowed with black light, covered by the effects of the worldsplitter stone.

“Kill!” The distant flame demon bellowed as it charged at them while also sending out an invisible vibration. Soon, many more flame demons appeared in the distance and began to furiously charge towards the two.

“Darknorth, take a look at this secret art of mine,” the Ninedust Sectlord chuckled. His body instantly began to glow with a curtain of watery light that looked almost solid, as though waves had appeared in the area around him. The deep blue waves wildly smashed as the ripples spread beyond him, crashing into the attacking flame demons. The flame demons were all sent stumbling backwards as their speed dropped drastically.

The watery curtain of light surrounded Ning as well. Ning reached into the curtain to touch it with his hand, and as he did he could sense a surge of overwhelming power.

“What do you think?” the Ninedust Sectlord asked smugly.

“It is just as powerful as my secret art,” Ning said with a praising nod.

“Haha. This Ripplewater secret art of mine was created by an Eternal Emperor of my race. I am skilled in the Dao of Water, and so I started training in this secret long ago. Only today have I finally mastered it.” The Ninedust Sectlord was in quite a good mood. “I’m currently a Daolord of the Third Step. Once I become a Daolord of the Fourth Step and reach an even higher level of understanding, my Ripplewater

art will strengthen even further. Haha, when I fight against my peers, I'll start off with this secret art to slow them down. Heh, heh, heh..."

"It seems you really took to heart the way I used my secret arts to suppress you," Ning teased.

"Your secrets arts pissed me the hell off." The Ninedust Sectlord had to chuckle as well. "Are you feeling jealous about my new breakthrough? Haha, even if I have to go back to the Endless Territories right now I would feel no regrets."

As they chatted, more and more of the slowed-down flame demons began to gather around them and attack them. In the past, they would never have dared to let the flame demons congregate in such large numbers. Now that they had worldsplitter stones, they wanted to test the stones out for themselves and so they didn't mind.

Even if they faced more than a hundred flame demons, they wouldn't find it too hard to escape even if they didn't have a worldsplitter stone.

"Die." Ning transformed into his three-headed, six-armed form. Six Northbow swords were in his hands, and each one was covered with a layer of the worldsplitter stone's power.

Swish! Sword-light howled through the air and chopped straight through the flame demons, cutting giant wounds into their bodies and stabbing gouging holes into them.

"Ahhh!" All of the flame demons who were stabbed through their armor let out miserable, powerless cries. Their eyes quickly turned dull and blank as their auras rapidly vanished. They were like snow melting in the heat of the summer sun. Some of the flame demons had clearly suffered just tiny wounds, but they vanished and their bodies were dispersed into flames, never to be reborn again.

"They die whenever they are so much as touched by the energy of the worldsplitter stones?" Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were shocked by how powerful the stones were. It seemed as though this was a natural counter for the flame demons; so long as you were able to breach their armor and wound them, they would invariably perish.

"That'll make things easier."

"This'll be a hundred times simpler than I thought."

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were both delight, and they quickly began to advance at high speeds.

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Time passed on, day by day, as the two of them traversed one flaming stone tunnel after another. After finding nothing, they finally opted to enter one of the enormous stone corridors that were a million kilometers wide. In the past, these places were mortally dangerous to them. Now that they had worldsplitter stones, they could give them a try. These corridors had absolutely terrifying numbers of flame demons, with each group clustering in the thousands and some in the tens of thousands.

Even supported by both their secret arts and the worldsplitter stones, they found it incredibly hard to advance.

“These million kilometer tunnels are the main passageways.” Although they were surrounded by danger and often had to fight for their lives, they soon realized the good part of being in these massive tunnels. The smaller tunnels turned and twisted like spiderwebs, making it difficult to progress in any one direction. These main passageways, however, were all linked together in straight fashion, making it so that they didn’t have to twist and turn when trying to advance in a certain direction.

“Careful!”

BOOM. Ning helped the Ninedust Sectlord block a chop but was sent flying as a result. As for the Ninedust Sectlord, he took out a Dao-seal. BANG! A wild wind suddenly erupted, blowing back countless flame demons who found that they were completely unable to control their bodies.

“Let’s move!” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord hurriedly fled aboard their black vessel in a rather bedraggled fashion. Although the worldsplitter stones were banes to the flame demons, they had been surrounded and attacked by over a hundred thousand of the creatures, forcing both of them to go all-out and use some of their special treasures.

Bang! The flying vessel shot out of the enormous stone passageway.

“An empty region! Another empty region!” Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were overjoyed. Although they had merely spent twelve hours in the super-wide passageways, they had nearly died on three occasions. Each time, they had only survived thanks to their Dao-seals. Ning had used one of the Dao-seals left behind by Daolord Kongsan, while Ninedust had used up two seals of similar power. This was primarily because Ninedust’s protective abilities weren’t as formidable as Ning’s suit of Hegemon armor.

“We’ve finally reached an empty region again.” The two stood on the prow of the black vessel and stared off into the distance as the charging flame demons behind them began to slow down, almost as though they were afraid of something up ahead.

Up ahead was a stream of rainbow light that snaked through an empty region that was over a hundred billion kilometers in size. At the very center of this region was the silhouette of a planet.

“Same as before?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged a glance. When they had been in Skywind’s homeland, they had seen something quite similar, a planet hidden within a massive, empty void.

Swoosh. They sent the vessel flying closer. The stream of light filled much of the void and thus covered the planet, making it hard for them to get a close look at it. By the time they were just a few hundred million kilometers away, they were able to see everything clearly. Within the rainbow light, they saw an utterly devastated planet that was covered with countless ‘wounds’. Next to it levitated two enormous fragments of another shattered planet.

“It’s been broken apart?” The two stared in disbelief at the devastated planet.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 29: Golden Sand**

The shattered planet still emanated an aura of exalted might, but it would never be able to pose a threat to anyone ever again.

“How could it have been shattered?” The Ninedust Sectlord was in disbelief. “Not even an Eternal Emperor could’ve destroyed something like that. Only a Hegemon would’ve been able to do it. Could a Hegemon have come here and destroyed this planet?”

“Let’s land on the surface and take a look,” Ji Ning said.

“Alright. Maybe there are some leftover treasures,” the Ninedust Sectlord agreed. Both of them were very curious; what type of power could’ve shattered such a planet? It must be understood that first planet had a similar aura of power and had twenty to third Daolords at any given point in time, as well as a terrifying number of earth devils. There was no way such a powerful planet could be destroyed on a whim.

Swoosh. Swoosh. The two quickly flew closer to the planet.

“Careful.”

“Let’s halt here.” The two of them simultaneously noticed the danger up ahead and issued warnings to each other as they halted.

“The rainbow light...” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both stared at the rainbow light before them. The rainbow light spanned an area of a hundred billion kilometers, including the planet. “It... it actually is the remaining presence and aura of someone else.”

“How terrifying.” Ning felt stunned. They hadn’t noticed anything from far away, but upon moving closer they were able to sense and be shocked by the highly withdrawn and reserved aura of the rainbow light.

“That’s not light at all. Those are waves of energy.” After taking a careful look, Ning realized that this was a stream of diffused energy waves that would never, ever dissipate.

“Some inconceivably powerful figure must’ve struck through space and smashed the planet apart, causing it to shatter and crumble. The remnants of the power left behind by that strike have taken the form of this rainbow light and been here ever since.” The Ninedust Sectlord took a careful look, then pointed towards a certain part of the rainbow light. “The rainbow light is denser over there. Most likely, that major power must’ve launched his attack from that direction.”

Ning nodded in agreement. This was indeed a killing blow from a major power, and it had the scent of eternity about it.

“The major power in question was very possibly a Hegemon, or close to it,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “However... given how much time has passed, there shouldn’t be much power left in the remnants of his strike. Let me try it out first.” As he spoke, he stretched out his right arm, which extended more than a thousand kilometers and passed through the rainbow light.

Crackle, crackle, crackle. The remnant energy within the rainbow light instantly began to crush down towards the Ninedust Sectlord’s arm! This caused his face to tighten slightly.

“How’d it go?” Ning asked.

“Not too bad. It’s just a bit of leftover power, after all; I feel like it is merely on par with our secret arts,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “The two of us can take it.”

Ning let out a sigh of relief, then said with amazement, "The remnant power of a single strike that was launched countless aeons ago is still on par with our secret arts... what power is this?!"

"Let's go take a look at the planet. Although it's been shattered, we might still find something nice here," the Ninedust Sectlord said with a smile.

"Let's go." Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord flew carefully into the rainbow light. The energy within the rainbow light was folded in layers and contained hidden undercurrents to it. Ning activated his nine novessence arts and used them to form the Yin-Yang Sword Domain to protect them, while the Ninedust Sectlord used his own Ripplewater secret art. Together, the two managed to just barely resist the suppressive might of the rainbow light.

"These two shattered halves are both enormous," the Ninedust Sectlord said with a sigh. One of the two halves was eight hundred million kilometers long, while the second half was over five hundred million kilometers long.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord landed upon the tattered planet. It was in absolutely dire shape, with no living creatures on it at all, nor did it have any flame demons or earth devils or other strange creatures.

"How desolate. Let's go underground and take a look at the core." The planet where Skywind lived had a core that could give birth to worldsplitter stones, Dragonfish Ki, and other similar items. The two were naturally quite interested in the core of this planet as well.

Swoosh! Swoosh!

Given that the entire planet had actually had essentially been smashed into two giant pieces, one could imagine what bad shape it was in. As a result, the two were able to fly directly into the core of the planet.

"The planet's core is shattered as well. There's nothing here capable of giving birth to new treasures," Ning said. He swept the area with his gaze, unable to discover any treasures akin to worldsplitter stones or Dragonfish Ki.

"Darknorth, this time you are wrong. The planetary core itself is a treasure. Look!" The Ninedust Sectlord pointed towards a distant rift in the core. "That rift there is leaking a large amount of golden 'sand'. There's no way anything leaking from the core of this planet could possibly be anything but extraordinary."

Ning chuckled, then nodded. The main issue was that there was simply far too much of the golden sand. The entire core was cracked, resulting in much of that golden sand having spilled outside of it. The region of spilled quicksand filled an area of over a hundred million kilometers.

"I still can't tell what this golden quicksand is." The Ninedust Sectlord made a grabbing motion towards a handful of quicksand on the ground. Moments later, his face turned pale. He tugged viciously, causing all of the golden sand within the hundred million kilometer region to tremble slightly... but alas he wasn't able to pull it to him.

"Ninedust, you can't even pick up a handful of this sand?" Ning was startled by what he saw. He then chuckled teasingly, as he himself was beginning to realize how special and unusual the golden sand was.

“Why don’t you test it out yourself.” The Ninedust Sectlord gave Ning a hard look.

Ning reached out as well. It was quite easy for him to insert his fingers into the sand, but when he tried to pull out a handful of it he felt as though the sand was part of a complete whole.

BOOM! Although Ning used all the power he had, he was only able to cause the sand in the area to slightly tremble. He wasn’t able to pull any out at all.

“Can’t do it either, right?” The Ninedust Sectlord smirked.

“It reminds me of the stone passageways,” Ning said. “When we tried to hack the stones apart, we felt a counter-force emanate from the entire passageway.”

“Right.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “When we try to grab a handful of the sand, all of the sand in this entire area is fighting back against us.”

The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly reached out once more. “Let me try a single grain of sand.” These grains of sand were roughly the size of a fingernail, much larger than ordinary ‘sand’. The Ninedust Sectlord let out a grunt as he pulled with all his strength. Boom! He managed to pull a single grain of sand into his hands.

“Now, let me try two.”

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Both the Ninedust Sectlord and Ning were analyzing the sand of the planet’s core with interest. Since this sand had filled the entire core, it had to be the core’s primary element. When undamaged, the planet’s core should’ve possessed enough power to wipe out the two of them with just the slightest of shockwaves. It was almost unbelievable that they managed to find a core of such power that was completely defenseless; there was no way the two would just pass such an opportunity up.

After a period of time, they verified that the more sand they tried to pull out at once, the stronger the resisting power from the rest of the sand would be. The difficulty level would quickly skyrocket.

“If we slowly pick this stuff up one grain at a time, it’ll take us forever. Let me see if I can perhaps hack it apart with my sword.” Ning pulled out a Northbow sword.

“Yes, if you can hack it apart into smaller pieces it’ll be much easier.” The Ninedust Sectlord stood back to watch.

“Chop!” Ning manifested [Three Heads, Six Arms] and gripped a single Northbow sword with all six arms, then unleashed his most powerful attack: Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker. BOOM! The sword slammed into the defenseless sand, but when it moved deeper and sought to sever a piece of it, an invisible source of power suddenly arose to stop it. The power of Ning’s sword seemed to have sunk into a quagmire, having been completely absorbed by the endless sand and causing just a few vibrations.

“Won’t work.” Ning shook his head. “I can’t cut it apart. I’m not even close to being strong enough.”

“Master!”

“Master!”

“Hey, Master!”

One clear, child-like voice rang out after another as six adorable children appeared. All of them stared wide-eyed at Ning.

“Why have the six of you come out?” Ning chuckled. These six were the sword-spirits of the six Northbow swords. They were Lifeblood weapons, and so they were connected to Ning’s spirit and essence. Ning almost viewed himself as their father.

“Master, the golden sand...” The first Northbow sword, ‘Boss Northbow’, hurriedly pointed to the flows of golden sand. “That golden sand is very important to us. We can sense it! Can you give it to us?”

“Very important to you?” Ning immediately understood. Lifeblood weapons needed to grow, but ordinary materials would be of no use to them. Clearly, the golden sand had attracted their interest.

“Yes.” The six children nodded simultaneously.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord watched with amusement. “You actually have SIX of those Lifeblood swords? Not bad, Darknorth.”

Ning couldn’t be bothered to banter with him for now. He said to the six children, “But there’s no way for me to harvest or mine the golden sand.”

“No need. Master, just insert us into it.”

“Yes, insert us into it. Let us absorb it into us.” All six of the children continued to stare at Ning.

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 30: The Growing Northbow Swords**

Ji Ning was delighted when he heard this. He waved his hand, causing all six black swords to fly out from the sheath on his back and into the sea of flowing sand.

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! They all plunged deep into the sand.

“Haha!”

“Here we go!”

“Oh, this is lovely.”

“Mm...”

The six children let out excited cries as they flew back into their respective swords. The six Northbow swords began to glow with a layer of golden light as the sand around them began to lose its luster, quickly changing to become a grayish-white color before then completely disappearing without a trace.

“In the future, if you encounter anything you like you can just let me know,” Ning sent mentally to his six sword-spirits.

“We don’t know what we like either. We can only sense something we want from a close distance.”

“Right! Master, if you find anything powerful in the future, give it a few whacks with us first and we’ll get a good sense of it,” the six sword-spirits replied in chorus.

Ning laughed, a smile on his face as he watched the six Northbow swords furiously devour the essence of the golden sands around them. A large amount of golden sand was being rapidly converted into white dust and then vanish. In the twinkling of an eye, more than half the golden sand in a thirty meter area had completely vanished.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord was rather jealous when he saw this. He hurriedly lifted up his longstaff, then plunged it into the golden sand.

“Ugh.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head, putting away his longstaff. He glanced at Ning. “Congratulations, Darknorth. It seems your Lifeblood weapons are able to absorb the golden sand quite rapidly. Why is it that my own Lifeblood weapon can make no use of it?”

“I guess they aren’t a good fit for each other,” Ning laughed.

The Endless Territories were filled with countless marvelous curios, but only a few of them would be suitable for each person. Ning’s six Northbow swords had been personally forged to perfection by Emperor Gonflame, as perfection was needed in order to match Ning’s own Dao. They were already nigh-flawless and thus very picky; thus far, they had shown no interest in anything Ning had encountered.

Whoooooosh. Entire swathes of golden dust turned white and then vanished.

“This golden sand can be considered a type of treasure. Actually harvesting it, however, is a pain.” The Ninedust Sectlord laboriously gathered the golden sand to himself, two grains at a time. After more than two hours, he had only managed to gather roughly a washing basin’s worth of sand. By the time he turned to look at Ning, he realized that virtually all of the golden sand around them had been sucked away. He could do nothing but shake his head and sigh. “Compared to how fast your Lifeblood weapons are harvesting these things, I’m moving at a snail’s pace. Mm. Well, I’ll keep harvesting. In the future I’ll ask and find out what type of treasure this is.”

Ning smiled as he watched, his mood excellent. He could sense that his six Northbow swords were slowly growing in power as they themselves began to transform and evolve. They had originally been black in color but now they were starting to be tinged with gold, almost as though their abyssal darkness was now brimming with faint golden light. They were beginning to look like dark gold.

Four hours. Twelve hours. One day. Two days. One month. Two months...

The six Northbow swords remained plunged into the golden sands that had leaked out of the shattered planet, furiously sucking away at the sand’s essence. Not only were they changing in color, they were even changing in shape. They were now even slimmer than before, but their tips and edges were much sharper. Just looking at them, one could sense a terrifying aura of power from them.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord had been fairly relaxed at first, but as time passed both of them grew increasingly astonished. As the Northbow swords had continuously drawn in more of the golden sands and evolved, the rate at which they drew in the sand began to dramatically increase as well.

Rumble...



The entire sea of golden sand was rumbling and rolling about, because the golden sands at its deepest depths were being continuously wiped out. As a result, 'waves' were sweeping through the sea unceasingly and flowing towards the six Northbow swords that had been inserted into the heart of the shattered planet's core.

"Your Lifeblood weapons aren't going to suck up all of the golden sand of this planet's core, are they? When in perfect condition, the planet's core possessed such power that neither of us would even dare to approach it. If your weapons somehow managed to absorb all of that power... how strong would they become?" The Ninedust Sectlord stared in slack-jawed amazement. It must be understood that the outer layer of the hundred-million-kilometer sea of golden sand had already completely vanished. The swords were now primarily drawing from the sands deep within the sea.

"The more powerful, the better." Ning smiled. "This is an ancestral site of you Ancient cultivators; I imagine there won't be any legacies for me here. I need to get what I can out of this place."

The Northbow swords had completely transformed by now. They were now extremely thin, completely golden in color, and glowed with a layer of light. If other cultivators saw these new Northbow swords, they never would've believed that they were the same swords as Ning had been wielding just a short while ago.

Ning continued to watch eagerly. The planet's core was truly an incalculably valuable treasure; most likely, its value was comparable to that mountain of darkspace flamestone in the alternate universe. His swords had already absorbed so much of that precious golden sand that they had undergone a fundamental transformation.

Boom. Boom. Boom. A series of booms rang out, followed by the six Northbow swords flying into the skies and towards Ning.

"Master, I'm full."

"I can't eat another bite."

"I feel wonderfully stuffed."

The six children appeared once more on the blades of the Northbow swords, incredibly excited. With but a thought, Ning sent all six swords flying into the sheath on his back.

"Look! Look over there!" The Ninedust Sectlord pointed at the planet's core. "Your six swords must've drained roughly twenty to thirty percent of the golden sand. I daresay that in material quality, they have a shot of becoming Universe treasures."

Ning waved his hand, pulling out one of the Northbow swords. "Let me test one out first." Ning felt extremely comfortable when holding that Northbow sword, and its entire body glowed with that golden light.

Swish. Swish. Ning began to display his sword-arts. He first started with his defensive sword-arts, because judging from how thin, slender, and sharp the sword was he felt certain that its offensive properties would have been strengthened. He wanted to savor this and save the best for last, and so he decided to test out his defensive sword-arts first. Upon doing so, Ning discovered to his joy that his

sword-arts came out even faster and more fluid than ever before. They were also significantly more powerful as well; most likely, his defensive prowess had increased by fifty to sixty percent.

“Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker!” Ning unleashed a furious chop. BOOM! A stream of sword-light visible to the naked eye flew out from the tip of the sword, slamming down through the rainbow light for several kilometers before finally dissipating.

“It’s merely twice as strong as before.” Ning shook his head slightly; this would be of limited use to him.

“Omega Sword Dao – Shadowless!” Next, Ning chose to test out the Shadowless stance. This instantly caused a look of joy to appear on Ning’s face, as the new Northbow sword was perfect for the Shadowless stance; it was now faster, sharper, more ethereal, and more unpredictable.

“This one is four times stronger than before,” Ning estimated.

“Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop!” Ning struck out with a seemingly casual stab, but in the final instant of the strike the sword-light twisted slightly. It destroyed the local power of the Dao-aura unleashed by the prime essences of the universe, forming a true void.

“What?!” The nearby Ninedust Sectlord cried out in shock, “Y-you... your sword has actually transcended space itself?”

“It’s actually transcended space.” Ning revealed a delight look as well.

The technique which Emperor Mirrorsnow had mastered and used to gain eternity for himself was a sword-art that transcended both space and time, allowing him to pierce through his enemies even from countless kilometers away. Neither space nor time could constrain his sword-arts, and his enemies would be dead before they even had a chance to react. The power of this attack was simply incredible.

To surpass the limits of time was to be inconceivably fast. As soon as Emperor Mirrorsnow struck, his sword would slay his foe; there would be no ‘attack time’ at all, as the attack would be instantaneous. This was what made transcending time so terrifying.

As for transcending space, it meant that distance was no longer an obstacle. Emperor Mirrorsnow was capable of using his sword to slay an enemy who wasn’t even in the same territory as him!

Transcending space was comparatively easier. Transcending time was extremely difficult! Ning had originally thought that when he became a Daolord of the Third Step, his sword-arts would be able to transcend space. Who would’ve thought that he’d accomplish it at the second step! But still, when he thought about it in detail, it made sense to him. The essence the Northbow swords had absorbed had caused them to be extremely ‘skewed’ in one area, whereas they had previously been balanced. They were now much sharper and thus better-suited to the Blood Drop stance! The Shadowless stance wasn’t improved as much, while the berserk Heavenbreaker stance was barely improved. As for his defensive sword-arts, they were improved the least of all.

In addition to his swords now being more suited to the Blood Drop stance, Ning had improved the most in the Blood Drop sword-intent to begin with. The Blood Drop sword-intent was highly destructive and thus suited for tearing through the bonds of space and time; it naturally became the first technique he could use to succeed in transcending space.

“Now that you’ve transcended space, ordinary dimensional bindings will no longer have an effect on you. Even if an Eternal Emperor wished to kill you, you would be able to easily pierce through the dimensions and then flee through a dimensional tunnel. Only an Eternal Emperor who is incredibly skilled in the Dao of Space would have a chance of tying you down, with the vast majority of them being helpless against you.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning, then let out a sigh. “Darknorth, from this day forth, you now have a true life-saving measure that you can use when you please. Very, very few people are now capable of slaying you. You’ve transcended the bounds of space... I have to admit, I truly envy you now.”

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 31: The Ancient Ancestor**

Ji Ning laughed. When he had been at Skywood City and encountered Daolord Kongsan, the latter had dimensionally locked the area with a formation, making it impossible Ning to escape; his only option would’ve been to use his vessel to slowly fly around inside! But now? His sword-arts surpassed the limits of space and were able to forcibly rip out dimensional passageways, allowing him to easily escape. Only someone who had reached an extremely high level in the Dao of Space would be able to restrict Ning’s movements.

The vast majority of Eternal Emperors would not be able to bar Ning’s path. This was a true life-preserving method he now had!

Kongsan was able to transform into darkness incarnate, a virtually invulnerable form. This was his own life-preserving method which ensured that even the likes of Palace Lord Dawnstar would be unable to do anything to him.

Ji Ning would be able to use his swords to transcend space, making it so that dimensional shackling would be unable to bind him. He would also be able to tear through space and flee at a moment’s notice. This was a life-preserving method that was every bit a match for Kongsan’s.

There were very few figures even amongst exceptionally powerful second-tier Daolords like Ning and Kongsan who had such incredible life-preserving methods. The Ninedust Sectlord, for example, didn’t have any such technique.

However, the most supreme of Daolords such as Dawnstar or Skyaxe, the ones who stood at the very precipice of power, all had Daos of such incredible power that they had life-preserving abilities similar to that of spatial transcendence.

This was why they were all generally extremely difficult to kill. However, a Hegemon would probably be able to wipe them out with the wave of a hand. Perhaps some of the freakishly powerful ancient figures such as the lords of the eight Sacred Cities, second only to the Hegemons in power and who Hegemons wouldn’t necessarily be able to kill, might be able to slay the supreme Daolords. These figures were far more powerful than even Emperor Mirrorsnow.

However, Hegemons and near-Hegemons were incredibly rare and exalted figures. The three Hegemons belonged to the Brightshore Kingdom, the Aberrant special lifeforms, and the Ancient cultivators. These three were the rulers and sovereigns their entire race. As for the near-Hegemons, they were amongst

the most powerful figures each race or organization had. For now, Ning wasn't at a level where he could get embroiled into fights with them.

"Don't feel jealous of me. Once you become a Daolord of the Fourth Step, I'm sure you'll have access to a formidable protective ability of your own," Ning said. The Ninedust Sectlord had merged two Supreme Daos together, which meant that when he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step he would instantly become one of the most powerful Daolords around. None of those Daolords would be easy to deal with.

"True." The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. "I'm not too far away from breaking through to the fourth step anyhow. With just a few more insights, I'll be able to break through my bottleneck and reach the final step. By then, my mastery over water will easily allow me to gain an 'undying waterform body'.

Ning chuckled and nodded.

An 'undying waterform body' was a fairly common technique amongst those who had reached an extremely high level in the Dao of Water. This was a technique that was much stronger than Kongsan's ability to dissolve into darkness incarnate. Kongsan had only comprehended a single Supreme Dao, after all; his 'darkness incarnate' form was simply not flawless enough.

"By then, I can just stand there and let you hit me without fighting back, but you still won't be able to injure me," the Ninedust Sectlord boasted smugly.

"Oh." Ning mumbled mentally to himself, you know, I'm actually just a Daolord of the Second Step...

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The Ninedust Sectlord had mastered his Ripplewater secret art, while Ning had now evolved his lifeblood weapons. Both had benefited significantly from this adventure.

"Let's go." Ning stood atop the surface of the shattered planet. "The only thing of value here was the core, but harvesting it is too difficult."

"It really is, but you made a killing off of it..." The Ninedust Sectlord chuckled as he scanned his surroundings, then pointed to the source of the rainbow light. "Let's move over there. The rainbow light is denser over there; that should be the direction from which the ancient power launched the strike."

"Yes, let's go take a look."

The two immediately flew off the planet and towards the rainbow light. They flew several hundred kilometers alongside the light stream, moving towards the source. Both of them were quite curious; this was an ancestral site of the Ancient cultivators. Who could've been able to destroy a planet such as this? Most likely, only a Hegemon-level figure or someone close to that level of power.

Swish! They traversed through space and reached the end of the rainbow light.

"What's that?" Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stared in amazement at the cluster of stone passageways ahead of them. The stone passageways were brimming with flame demons, but the streak of rainbow light flew straight through the stone passageways... and the place it flew through was an absolutely enormous straight passageway that was at least two billion kilometers wide! Based on the other nearby tunnels, it could be ascertained that the 'rainbow passageway' was actually once filled with countless stone passageways that had been completely destroyed.

“How terrifying,” the Ninedust Sectlord murmured. “A single strike blasted through countless stone passageways, forming a single enormous one in their stead... and then, after being weakened due to having gone through so many passageways, continued through to blast apart that planet! It had to have been a Hegemon.”

“I agree that only a Hegemon could’ve done such a thing,” Ning concurred.

This level of power was incredible. Both of them had learned for themselves how tough the stone passageways were, but someone had been able to blast through two billion kilometers worth of stone then shatter that planet with a single strike. This level of power was beyond their imagination. As they saw it, only the nigh-omnipotent Hegemons could’ve done such a thing.

“This place must really be that legendary place...” Waves of shock and awe began to fill the Ninedust Sectlord’s heart as he grew certain of his guess.

“Come, Ninedust. Let’s go through and see what lies on the other end of the rainbow passageway,” Ning said.

“Agreed.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. The two then flew into the rainbow passageway.

The rainbow passageway was brimming with remnant power. There was simply no way to avoid it, and so both used their secret arts to resist as best possible. After being ablated by their secret arts, the remnant power no longer posed a threat to them at all when it washed over their divine bodies.

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The rainbow passageway was two billion kilometers wide and so long that they couldn’t see to the end of it. The two followed the rainbow light, forging a pathway forwards. The closer they moved to the source, the stronger the layers of power became. However, they were both able to hold; for now, they had yet to reach their limits.

The Ninedust Sectlord sent mentally, “If we were pulled into a fight, I’d only be able to unleash around 20% of my full power right now. This is absolutely terrifying. The remnant power from a single strike that was unleashed countless aeons ago is still able to suppress me to such an extent!”

“I’ve been whittled down to a fraction of my full power as well,” Ning said. He had the Hegemon’s armor, allowing him to endure the damage, but the fact that the remnant energy was so omnipresent meant that he would at most be able to pull out 30%-40% of his true power when using sword-arts.

They continued to fly forwards.

“Is that an entrance up ahead?” Ning was rather puzzled. The rainbow light lowered visibility, but he could vaguely see that the end was up ahead.

“It does look like that.” The Ninedust Sectlord gripped his longstaff and sent mentally, “Be careful, Darknorth. Let’s not lose our lives at the very end of this journey.”

“Agreed.” Ning manifested three heads and six arms and wielded his six Northbow swords with great caution.

Swoosh! Swoosh! There really was an exit at the end of the rainbow tunnel. When they simultaneously flew through the tunnel, they suddenly felt their bodies expanding dramatically in size. Ten thousand times, a million times, a billion times...

"What's going on?!" Both of them felt perplexed and they simultaneously turned to look backwards. They saw a hole directly behind them; this was the hole they had just flown out of. As they had rapidly increased in size, the hole had shrunk in comparison.

"T-t-that's..." Both of them were stupefied. Behind them they saw a towering, pitch-black humanoid figure lying on the ground. The figure was 540,000 meters tall, and a hole that was just a few meters wide could be seen over his chest. Clearly, the hole had punctured straight through his chest and into his body.

As for Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord, they had just flown out of this humanoid creature's chest wound.

The two landed on the ground. They stared at the fallen, towering giant figure with astonished gazes.

"W-w-we were actually inside its body this entire time?" Ning could hardly believe it.

"Those countless stone passageways we went through were just part of its body? Those flame demons and earth devils, and that powerful planet? They were all just part of its body as well?" The Ninedust Sectlord couldn't believe it either.

A grain of sand, an entire world.

This humanoid creature looked like it was 'merely' 540,000 meters tall, but within its body was an endlessly vast space that gave birth to flame demons, earth devils, and even mortal lifeforms! This was truly unbelievable.

"I don't think it was an actual living being. Actual living beings should have divine power and Immortal energy within their bodies, but it only had those endless stone passageways," the Ninedust Sectlord said.

"It doesn't seem to be a cultivator." Ning nodded in agreement.

They then began to carefully inspect their surroundings. This was an enormous cave they were in, and they were in just one corner of it. The two began to walk through the cave and inspect it.

"Look over there." Ning pointed off into the distance, a stunned look on his face. Far away there were two figures who could be seen. One was a white-robed figure who lay on the ground, completely unmoving. The other was seated in the lotus position, a peaceful look on his face. Both of these enormous figures emanated auras of incredible might, the might of a Hegemon. Ning had seen three Hegemon corpses in the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe, and now he had found two more here in this cave.

"Is that..." The Ninedust Sectlord stared at the two figures, his gaze quickly focusing on the man seated peacefully in the lotus position. The Ninedust Sectlord's body trembled slightly as he murmured, "An ancestor. That's one of the ancestors..."

## The Desolate Era

### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 32: The History of the Terror Starsea**

“Ninedust, so this is an ancestor of the Ancient cultivators?” Upon hearing the Ninedust Sectlord’s mumbles, Ji Ning turned to look curiously at the peaceful-looking man seated in the lotus position. The man seemed to be a world unto himself, and was filled with peace and benevolence. Just looking at him, Ning felt calm and tranquil in his heart. In addition, the ancient figure gave Ning a very strange feeling, a feeling similar to the one which the Ninedust Sectlord gave him.

Perhaps this was due to the fact that members of the same race would all share certain commonalities.

When Ning had first met the Ninedust Sectlord, he had no idea that the man was an Ancient cultivator. Once he met more of them, however, he would probably be able to recognize them at a glance.

“Yes. This is one of our oldest ancestors.” The Ninedust Sectlord walked over in a reverential manner. Ning followed from behind, inspecting the man closely.

There were two deceased Hegemons. The white-robed Hegemon simply lay there on the ground, and just by moving closer to him Ning began to feel as though the world around him was twisting and distorting into hallucinations. Fortunately, his soul and his mind were both very strong, and the effect was nothing more than a natural phenomena caused by the presence of the deceased Hegemon’s body. As a result, Ning was able to endure the effect. By comparison, the Ancient cultivator seated in the lotus position was much more peaceful.

After they moved closer, the Ninedust Sectlord fell to his knees and kowtowed respectfully. “Redwater pays his respects to you, ancestor.”

There was a dark-red longstaff to the side of the Ancient ancestor, and the aura emanating from it shocked Ning. “A Universe treasure?” He had seen the broken sword in the Sword Palace of the Brightshore Kingdom, and had also encountered the deceased Sword Hegemon’s dark blue greatsword in the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe. As a result, he was able to almost instantly ascertain that the dark-red longstaff next to this Ancient ancestor was also a Universe treasure.

Whoosh. A stream of light suddenly flew out from the dark-red longstaff, transforming into a bald, black-robed youth.

“Gentlemen.” The bald, black-robed youth had a calm, peaceful gaze that seemed to hold all the stars in the night sky, and his voice echoed within the cave.

“Senior,” the Ninedust Sectlord immediately called out humbly, a hint of excitement in his eyes. This was a Universe treasure! And a longstaff at that. He himself used longstaffs!

“Senior.” Ning called out with respect as well.

Any and every Universe treasure was worthy of respect, because every single one was born after experiencing endless trials and tribulations. They were utterly supreme amongst treasures, and they would only submit to those whom they truly acknowledged. Otherwise, there was no way to control them whatsoever.

“You are the fifth and the sixth to come to this place,” the bald, black-robed youth said peacefully.

Ning was secretly stunned upon hearing this. The fifth and the sixth? When they had visited Skywind's homeland, they had been the fourth and the fifth. It seemed as though there was another expert who had reached this place without entering Skywind's home.

"Since you have been able to survive and reach this place, it means that you both have had a number of fortuitous encounters in your life. Before dying, Master ordained that all Ancient cultivators would have a chance to earn some rewards from him if they could pass some of his tests. If there is someone capable of passing all the tests, I would be willing to follow that person," the youth said.

"Pass all the tests?" The Ninedust Sectlord's eyes lit up. If he passed everything, he would gain a Universe treasure? In the past, he never would've even dared to imagine such a thing. It must be remembered that virtually no Eternal Emperors wielded Universe treasures, much less Daolords. Only the most ridiculously lucky of Daolords would ever have a chance to acquire a Universe treasure.

"Emperor Vulturax came to this place before. Did he fail the test?" Ning suddenly asked.

The Ninedust Sectlord was stunned. Oh, right. Patriarch Vulturax had completed his Daomerge in Skywind's homeland. After gaining eternity, he became a major power who was second only to the Hegemons in might. Had he failed to acquire the Universe treasure as well?

"Vulturax did indeed come here. He was the only Eternal Emperor to make it here, and he gained a prize for himself." The youth nodded. "But passing the trials requires not just power; it also requires destiny. Vulturax and I were not destined to be."

"Dare I ask, what are the trials?" The Ninedust Sectlord was rather excited. He was willing to risk everything for this. If he was lucky, he might end up with an Eternal weapon as the prize!

"All you need to do is walk closer to Master. Master set up formations and restrictive spells in the area; once you activate them, the trials will begin," the youth said. "The better you perform, the more gifts you shall win for yourself. I shall be the arbiter of it all."

"Understood." The Ninedust Sectlord immediately walked over, moving towards the peacefully seated Ancient ancestor. Suddenly, he seemed to run into an invisible barrier. A few dimensional fluctuations spread out, and he disappeared without a trace.

The youth then turned to glance at Ning. He said calmly, "You are not an Ancient cultivator. You are not permitted to earn any of my Master's treasures."

Ning nodded helplessly.

"I personally don't have any bias against non-Ancient cultivators," the black-robed youth said.

"However, Master's dying instructions were that if our side won the Dawn War, his treasures were to be left to Ancient cultivators and Ancient cultivators alone. However, if our side lost the Dawn War, then anyone would be able to win his treasures, be they Aberrants, Chaos Godbeasts, or ordinary cultivators like yourself."

Ning was puzzled. "The Dawn War?"

"You do not know of it?" The youth asked.

"I do not." Ning shook his head.



The youth nodded in an uncaring manner. "It was a war that caused the true downfall of the Ancient cultivators as a race. Long, long ago, the Ancient cultivators were born from the primordial chaos as the most perfect of all living beings. They unified the entire universe under their rule! Even the Chaos Godbeasts were enslaved by them, while the Aberrants were all forced to bend the knee."

Ning nodded. He had heard of this before.

"Afterwards, as time flowed on, more and more ordinary mortal beings came to be born. Ordinary mortals expanded and propagated at incredible speeds, and thus they rose to power at an inconceivable rate. They quickly became a race that was second only to the Ancient cultivators in the endless primordial chaos, and towards the end they actually became close to a match for the Ancients."

Ning couldn't help but sigh. The Dao Alliance truly was formidable.

"But then, a disaster happened. This disaster was an extremely large-scale one. Many powerful cultivators in our homeland and even in distant places within the Great Dark were forced to join hands and fight back against this tribulation."

"A tribulation?" Ning was surprised.

"Look." The youth pointed towards the slumped humanoid figure off in the distance. "You just came out of its body. You should've noticed that it is different from ordinary cultivators."

Ning nodded. Ordinary cultivators should've had divine power in their bodies. How could they have stone passageways, flame demons, earth devils, and strange planets?

"It was a member of our enemies, one of the most powerful of their kind," the youth said. "If we lost that war, we would've been annihilated. If they lost, they would've been annihilated as well. This was a war of extermination, a war for survival. Both sides fought like mad, and all of us here joined forces. Back then, our five Hegemons commanded a host of Eternal Emperors to fight back against them! Even experts came from deep within the Great Dark to reinforce us... and in the end, a great battle was fought in the place now known as the Terror Starsea."

"This battle was known as the Dawn War."

"Back then, we Ancients had a total of three Hegemons. The Dao Alliance had one Hegemon, while the Aberrants also had one Hegemon. All of them died." The youth continued, "An incredible number of powerful experts took part in that battle, and a steady stream of reinforcements came from within or beyond the Great Dark. The battle within the Terror Starsea was absolutely terrifying, and in the end I learned that the Dao Alliance, the Ancients, and the others resettled their homeland. This meant that the enemy had been defeated. We had won."

"The Dawn War was a severe blow to the Ancient cultivators. They had lost all three of their Hegemons." The bald, black-robed youth shook his head and sighed. "The Dao Alliance was actually the quickest to recover, and many of their experts eventually drifted into the endless Great Dark in search of adventure. Do not blame Master for being unwilling to share his treasures with you; he knew that you ordinary cultivators would recover far more quickly than his race would. So long as you were not completely wiped out, there would definitely come a day where you surpassed the Ancients. For him to show a bit of selfishness in caring more about his own race is normal."

Ning nodded. It seemed as though the Endless Territories had something of a secret history to it. No wonder the Terror Starsea was such a terrifying place; it had actually been the locale of the great Dawn War.

“So the endless Great Dark also holds many experts?” Ning asked.

“Yes, of course.” The bald, black-robed youth nodded. “There are many who have spent ages drifting through the endless Great Dark, which means it holds many powerful experts indeed. However, they are far too distant from us; even if you spent a hundred thousand chaos cycles travelling, you might not be able to reach them. Generally speaking, only Eternal Emperors would ever be so bored as to embark on such a distant journey. It was only due to how vitally important the Dawn War was that our allies hastened to the Terror Starsea, where the battle was to be held. The battle against our foes was so violent that even now the Terror Starsea is filled with countless dangers. Even Hegemons might perish here, if they aren’t careful.”

“Hah. There’s no need for a Daolord like you to know too much. In short, we wiped our enemies out and all the territories now belong to us once more.” The youth let out a chuckle. “In the end, our side on the Dawn War.”

Ning nodded slowly. It seemed as though in the past, the Ancient cultivators were actually an incredibly powerful force within the Endless Territories. They had three Hegemons! Alas, those three had perished during the war.

The Dawn War represented the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. The era of the Ancients and their unified rule had ended; the era of the Dao Alliance had begun.

“Senior, am I supposed to just stand here and wait?” Ning asked.

“Yes, you can just wait here. There really is nothing here for you. The only reason you were even able to come here was because you were alongside an Ancient cultivator.” The youth nodded.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 33: Within the Cave**

“Nothing whatsoever?” Ji Ning was rather surprised by this. He then turned to glance at the white-robed form. “What about the white-robed Hegemon?”

“He was the Hegemon of the Dao Alliance,” the bald, black-robed youth said. “During that great war, he died in battle but managed to deliver a heavy wound to our enemy. My master managed to follow that up with a lethal blow, but the enemy managed to heavily wound my master before perishing. My master’s wounds were so heavy that he knew he wouldn’t be able to survive, and so he left behind his legacies and his will for future Ancients to inherit. As for the Dao Alliance’s Hegemon, he didn’t have the chance to leave behind any legacies.”

“As for his treasures... well, my master naturally took them all and arranged for them to be given to future Ancients who could pass his trials,” the youth said.

Ning blinked a few times. But those treasures were the treasures of an elder of the Dao Alliance. I’m a member of the Dao Alliance!

Still, Ning could do nothing but grumble mentally. In truth, he understood what the Hegemon must have been thinking. Once the Dawn War ended, the era of the Ancient cultivators would have come to an end as well, and the Dao Alliance would become the new rulers of the Endless Territories. He naturally had to make certain preparations for the Ancient race.

“This place we are in looks like a cave, but it is actually a sealed-off estate-world which Master once used to trap and slay his foes,” the youth said. “There’s no way for you to leave this place on your own. If you wish to leave, I can send you off.”

“No rush just yet,” Ning said. This was a place where two Hegemons had battled an enemy to the death. He naturally had to spend some time inspecting it.

“Oh, right. How long will it be before Ninedust’s trials conclude?” Ning asked.

The youth slowly shook his head. “I don’t know. If he is fast, perhaps a thousand years. If he takes a long time, even ten million years wouldn’t be out of the realm of question. Master truly did make meticulous preparations for his Ancient successors.”

“I have some retainers with me. Can I release them here and let them take a look?” Ning asked. The white-robed Hegemon’s corpse generated a powerful natural field of illusions; it might be of use to Su Youji.

“Yes.” The youth said calmly, “But if they are not Ancient cultivators, none of them will be able to gain any of my master’s legacies! Also, you are not permitted to cause any damage to the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse. He died for the sake of our homeland, and so Master set up spells in the area around him. If any of you try to cause damage to his corpse, you’ll suffer a counter-attack from Master’s spells.”

“Understood.” Ning nodded.

“A final reminder. This cave is filled with quite a few vestigial scars from the battle that was fought here, and they might be of use to you in meditating on the Dao. The others who came here in the past also allowed their servants to come out and inspect the battlefield scars. If and when you are ready to leave, just notify me.” The youth finished his words, then transformed into a stream of light that flew into the dark-red longstaff nearby.

The cave was completely silent once more. Ning scanned his surroundings. This was a place where two Hegemons had died. Ning still felt hopeful that there was perhaps some good fortune waiting for him here.

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Ning was now all alone within the cave. Ninedust had gone off to test himself against the trials, and so Ning had no choice but to slowly search the area for himself and see if there was anything useful for him here.

“I wonder where this enemy came from?” Ning returned to the onyx humanoid corpse that was 540,000 meters tall. “It actually managed to kill two Hegemons. Its entire corpse is probably a priceless treasure,” Ning mused.

A small portion of the 'golden sand' from the shattered planet's core had allowed Ning's six Northbow swords to undergo an earthshaking transformation. Skywind's home planet was similarly extraordinary. Ning surmised that the corpse probably held other unique things within it.

"Come here." Ning waved a finger, attempting to drag the corpse into his estate-world. However, the onyx humanoid corpse just lay there slumped, not moving at all. Clearly, there was no way someone like Ning could possibly move it at all.

"Transform." Ning's body suddenly blurred as he expanded to become 540,000 meters tall as well. He was now the exact same size as the corpse. Ning reached out with his hands to grab the corpse by its elbows. Given that the target had died long ago, there was no way for it to resist him.

"Get over here!" Hands around the corpse's elbows, Ning did his best to lift it upwards... but the corpse didn't even budge in the slightest. Ning felt as though he was an ordinary man who was trying to lift up a massive mountain! There was no way to budge it in the slightest.

"Not even the corpse of a Hegemon should be this heavy. Still, it makes sense. I can't even budge or shake the planets in its body. How can I possibly move the entire corpse?" Ning tried moving the corpse multiple times, but wasn't able to so much as budge the thing. In the end, he had no choice but to give up. He couldn't help but feel even more puzzled; how had this humanoid creature been created? Was it like a golem-type magic treasure, or the Hegemon of some sort of strange, unique race?

Ning spent quite some time pondering over the humanoid corpse. It obviously was an incredibly valuable treasure, but there was nothing he could do at all.

Should he go back inside? But even when he had been fighting alongside the Ninedust Sectlord, they had still been forced to use Dao-seals to escape the corpse. Ning really didn't want to take on the risk of going back inside! In addition, he had the feeling that he probably wouldn't be able to find much within the corpse. The golden sand had only come out of the shattered planet's core because of the fatal strikes delivered by two Hegemons. Otherwise, how would Ning ever had a chance to get his hands on something so valuable?

As far as Ning could tell, the only wound on the onyx humanoid body was that wound across the chest. The other parts of its body seemed completely undamaged; it seemed unlikely that Ning would be able to gain much from it.

"What about the stone walls?" Just like the others, Ning ended up deciding to give up trying to move the humanoid corpse and instead began to inspect the walls. Might there be any treasures littered here?

None at all! Even if there had been any, the others probably would've swept them clean long ago.

Ning used his hand to gently trace some of the scars left behind on the walls. Although this cave was actually a top-grade Eternal treasure, it was covered with ancient scars from that long-ago battle. The emanations of the Dao radiating from those scars caused Ning to fall into a state of intoxication.

"These scars can be divided into representing three different types of 'intent'. It seems they pertain to the two Hegemons and the humanoid corpse," Ning mused.

One type of intent was an overwhelming, awe-inspiring, radiant intent.

The second intent was that of a furious, endless flood of water.

The third was that of a baleful metallic will. In terms of aura, the metallic one was actually slightly weaker than the other two intents.

“The intent of radiant light belonged to the white-robed Hegemon. The intent of water belonged to the Ancient ancestor.” Ning was able to quickly verify which belonged to which, as the two Hegemon corpses continued to emanate waves of power and presence as well. “Then that means the onyx humanoid corpse represented that metallic will. So it actually had a Dao of its own, and its own Dao was second to just that of the Hegemons.” Ning was rather amazed by all of these things.

Ning waved his hand, causing four figures to appear by his side. They were Su Youji, Pillsaint, Daolord Naia, and Daolord Bruteflame. After Ning had captured Daolord Bruteflame, the man had naturally submitted and chosen to serve Ning.

“Master.” All four of them hurriedly called out to Ning with respect as they looked curiously at their surroundings. They didn’t really pay much attention to the humanoid corpse, but the two distant Hegemon corpses caused all of them to feel stunned.

“Is that...” The four could scarcely believe it.

“Those are the corpses of a pair of Hegemons,” Ning confirmed. “Don’t just stand there like idiots. I came to this place alongside the Ninedust Sectlord, but I won’t be able to get any legacies from it. There are some battle-scars on the cave walls that you can examine which might be of assistance to you in comprehending the Dao. Youji, the closer you move to the white-robed Hegemon, the more powerful the field of illusions around it becomes. It might be of use to you.”

All four of them were completely stunned, but they quickly calmed down upon hearing Ning’s instructions. Ning trusted all four of them implicitly, because they had all sworn lifeblood oaths to him.

“Go,” Ning instructed.

“Right.”

“Scars of battle left behind by Hegemons?” They all began to explore the cave and inspect the walls. As for Ning, he lifted his head to gaze at the cave walls as well as he sought to better understand the Hegemon’s Dao. Although this wasn’t the Dao of the Sword, all Daos shared certain commonalities. Daolord Allgod, for example, delighted in training in all types of Daos. He had even trained in the Dao of the Sword! This was because all Daos had a chance to stimulate and enlighten you. There was no way Ning would allow himself to miss the chance to analyze the Dao of a Hegemon.

And so, Ning and his four retainers began to train and meditate within the cave. Su Youji trained in the Dao of Fire, while the white-robed Hegemon was a master of the Dao of Light, but both Daos were highly suited to illusions! Mastery over illusions was not exclusive to Heartforce Cultivators.

“Incredible. This is absolutely incredible. Radiance... free will... how can illusions reach such an incredible level?” Su Youji was completely stunned and dazed by what she found. She was the successor of Feixian the Exalted, and was a true master of the art of illusions and charm. However, she wasn’t even close to being a match for this Hegemon. The mere illusory ripples generated by the white-robed Hegemon’s corpse filled her with indescribable awe.

“Master, Master! Come over here, quickly!” After meditating for five months, Su Youji began to call out for Ning.

“Eh?” Ning had been seated in the lotus position, staring at the cave walls. He turned his head to look at Su Youji.

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 34: Allworlds Tribulation**

The cave had been completely silent, with Ji Ning and the other three retainers completely absorbed in the profound mysteries of the Dao contained within the scars on the wall. Su Youji’s sudden shout startled all four of them, and they turned to look at her as she ran towards Ning, her face filled with excitement.

“What is it, Youji?” Ning rose to his feet and began to walk towards her.

“The white-robed Hegemon was absolutely incredible. He’s just... just...” Su Youji was so excited she could barely speak properly. “Master, you have to test it out for yourself.”

“Of course he was incredible. He was a Hegemon!” Ning looked at her. “When I moved towards him, I could sense the field of illusions surrounding him. That’s why I told you to go to him and meditate there.”

“That’s not it!” Su Youji repeatedly shook her head. “Master, you probably didn’t move too close to the Hegemon’s body, right?”

“I did not.” Ning shook his head. As soon as he sensed the field of illusions start to affect him, he immediately elected to keep a safe distance from it.

“Master, if you had moved closer you would’ve found out for yourself.” Su Youji said quickly, “The closer you are, the more marvelous those illusions are. My master, Feixian the Exalted, was skilled in the arts of charm and control, and she was also incredibly skilled in the art of illusions. Do you know what the apex of mastery over illusions is?”

“The apex?” Ning frowned.

“The apex of illusions... is reality!” Su Youji’s eyes were filled with excitement. “With but a thought, you can create illusions that are as real as reality itself. That represents the utmost apex of mastery over illusions, a level at which even most Eternal Emperors wouldn’t be able to tell the illusions apart from reality and thus would easily die within the dream. I feel certain that this white-robed Hegemon’s mastery over illusions must have reached this level.

Ning’s face paled slightly. The apex of illusions was reality? If you couldn’t even tell the illusions apart from reality, then it really would be easy for you to perish.

“The closer I moved towards him, the more real the illusions became,” Su Youji said. “Although this Hegemon died long ago and these illusions are naturally generated by his corpse, I can tell just how terrifying his mastery over illusions must have been when he was alive. I’m fairly weak, and so I wasn’t able to move much closer to him. You are much stronger than me, Master. I’m sure that once you move

close to him, you'll experience for yourself the illusions which are as real as reality itself. Given that the Hegemon has already died, these illusions shouldn't prove to be much of a threat to you."

"Master, you have to go test it out for yourself." Su Youji looked at Ning eagerly.

"Reality, eh?" Ning felt rather intrigued as well.

"After you experience it personally, you have to describe it for me. I have the feeling that my mastery over illusions is already close to that of my own master, Feixian the Exalted. It would be incredible if I could surpass her in this area!" Su Youji let out a sigh. "Thank goodness these illusions cannot attack people."

Generally speaking, experts who relied on illusions used them to mystify and trap their opponents, then delivered a mortal strike to slay them! The white-robed Hegemon, however, was dead. His illusions could mystify and entrap them, but there was no mechanism for actually killing them; the Hegemon himself was dead, after all.

"I'll give it a try." Ning walked towards the white-robed Hegemon.

As Ning moved closer and closer to the white-robed Hegemon, the illusions slowly began to fill his mind. Reality began to gradually dissipate, replaced by illusions which began to seep into Ning's mind. However, Ning's azureflower mist energy had only grown even more pure after he became a Daolord of the Second Step, which meant that his soul was naturally on a higher level than that of most Daolords of the Fourth Step. Given that his heartforce was at the verge of the sixth stage, he really was quite skilled in resisting illusions.

"Impressive." Ning continued his advance. Reality around him was beginning to fade away, while the illusions were becoming increasingly real. Dazzling women appeared by his side, as did rare magic treasures and vile demons...

"I can actually no longer tell apart what is real and what is not." Ning remained clear-minded, but he could no longer see any flaws in the illusions. He was now completely surrounded by illusory images, with a group of seductive beauties carrying platters of wine and food towards him.

"Break!" Ning's Dao-heart could not be shaken by such things, and so he forcibly dispelled the illusions around him. But as he continued to advance towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse, the illusions came sweeping towards him once more. This time, they were even more persistent and pervasive.

"If I was in an actual life-or-death battle, illusions on this level would be able to affect me for a brief period of time... and during that brief moment, I would probably be struck and even killed." Ning was secretly amazed. What terrifying illusions! Thankfully, the white-robed Hegemon was already dead. It didn't matter how long the illusions were able to trap him for; the only thing that mattered was that he could still awaken from them, given enough time.

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"Master is as impressive as always." Su Youji watched as Ning advanced towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. She couldn't help but feel rather excited by his progress. "He really is incredible. He's made it much farther than I did, and is much closer to the Hegemon's corpse. I already reached my limit much earlier; if I tried to proceed, my will and mind would've grown blurry."

Su Youji knew very well that when surrounded by passive illusions, she could allow herself to be trapped by them but her soul and her mind had to maintain a minimum level of clarity. If she couldn't even do that, then she would gradually forget who she even was and would be forever trapped in an illusory world, never to escape.

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Ning was finding it harder and harder to resist the illusions as well.

"Break. Break. Break!" Ning had to spend two full seconds in order to forcibly dispel the illusions this time. A stunned look was in his eyes. This was absolutely terrifying.

Two full seconds? In a fight at his level, he would've died countless times over by now.

"I'm going to keep advancing. I want to see just how powerful these illusions can become." Ning's Dao-heart remained unaffected, and his soul and his mind remained quite clear. Even though he was finding it harder and harder to break free from the illusions, he still knew that he was Ji Ning of the Three Realms. So long as his mind was still intact, he could continue advancing. As soon as he felt his mind begin to slip, he would immediately begin to withdraw!

BOOM!

As Ning took another step forward, the surrounding illusions suddenly seemed to explode and transform. The world he was in was a world of singing birds and fragrant flowers. He was in a village within a beautiful mountain valley. The forests had a few villagers within them, and Ning was an ordinary village youth who made his living as a woodcutter...

"This illusion..." Ning was dressed in rough clothes and had a woodcutter's axe over his shoulders. He stared at his surroundings, puzzled.

Off in the distance was a stream of water that looked clear and refreshing, with a few small fish swimming about in it. He could make out every single scale with perfect clarity.

Next to him was a stalk of bamboo, emanating a fragrant scent. Beneath his feet was a patch of wild grass that was covered in glistening, jewel-like dew.

"Erbao! Erbao!" An old woman's voice rang out from afar.

"Mom's calling to me." This thought suddenly entered Ning's mind.

"This illusion is absolutely terrifying. I feel as though I've been reborn into a new life and a new world." Ning was stunned. "Everything seems so completely real. The smiles of the villagers, the movements of the fish, the aura of the natural world... everything seems perfectly real." This really did seem like an actual, real world.

"Break for me!" Ning's will was roaring loudly. BOOM! The illusory world trembled for a brief moment. The distant woman, the villagers, and even the village dogs all twisted and distorted for a brief instant.

"I said break!" Ning's will bellowed out again. "Break! Break! Break!" Ning's will continued to bellow furiously. He was still clear-minded. Although his will was bound and constrained by this illusory world, Ning still had the power to struggle to break free.



Rumble...

Finally, the illusory world shattered into tiny pieces.

"I took eighteen full seconds before I was able to escape?" Ning was rather stunned. He was incredibly strong in terms of resisting illusions, even amongst elite Daolords, but he had still been trapped for nearly twenty seconds before breaking free. This Hegemon was simply terrifying.

"Another step." Ning took another step forwards. "Hmm. Have I reached the end?" Ning continued to advance, only to find that the power of the illusions had ceased to increase. No matter how further he advanced, the power did not change in the slightest. By now, Ning was less than three meters away from the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. He was prevented from advancing any further by a formation, but the power of the illusions didn't increase at all.

"Master, you were able to make it to the Hegemon's corpse?" The distant Su Youji was rather excited.

"Yes." Ning nodded. "I'll meditate for a time. No need to disturb me."

"Understood." Su Youji nodded.

Things were actually still quite tough for Ning, because he was being repeatedly swept up into the illusions and forced to repeatedly break free from them. "These illusions were merely created by the Hegemon's corpse. If he was still alive, how terrifying would his illusions be? And these illusions truly are marvelous. I can't see any flaws in them whatsoever; they look just the same as reality itself. Fortunately, my soul is strong enough that I can maintain a modicum of clarity."

Ning sat down in the lotus position, no longer fighting back against the illusions and allowing himself to be swept into that illusory world. "Each time I enter this illusion, I feel as though I've been reborn into a new world. I can't see any flaws in the illusions at all and have to struggle to free myself. This is a good way to temper my Dao-heart and strengthen my mind. Perhaps it will be of assistance to me in breaking through to the sixth stage of heartforce."

What Ning did not realize was that this white-robed Hegemon had used his ultimate mastery of the Dao of Light to develop his own technique, the 'Allworld Tribulation', and then used it to gain eternity for himself! As soon as he broke through to the Eternal level, he became a Hegemon! As a Daolord, he was a terrifyingly strong figure who had merged together two Supreme Daos. After finally mastering his own ultimate Dao, the Allworld Tribulation, he had become a truly terrifying Hegemon.

After he died, his eternal corpse naturally continued to hold some of the power and aura of his Allworld Tribulation within it. When he was still alive, the natural illusions emanating from his body would've completely swept Ning into their grasp. He would've forgotten himself, forever lost within the illusions.

The remaining power in his corpse was nothing more than a tiny fraction of the true power this Hegemon had once wielded.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 35: Heartforce, Stage Six – World**

Ji Ning was completely absorbed by the Allworld Tribulation's illusions.

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Ning became a fisherman's child. When he was young, he would accompany his father in fishing on the sea. He eventually fell in love with a rich man's daughter, but her family looked down upon him. On one seafaring voyage, his father ended up perishing, resulting in Ning braving the oceans by himself. Slowly, the clever Ning learned more and more tricks for catching fish. He gradually accumulated a fortune, then purchased a large ship for himself. As his fishing skills continued to improve, he became a legend amongst fisherman. He eventually had over a hundred sails within his fleet, and the rich girl's family actually came to him to make amends.

This was a world without cultivation. His life was an ordinary one, and it started with him being a youth who slowly grew up, becoming a towering figure by his middle years and the patriarch of an incredibly strong and stable clan in his late years.

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Ning became a peerless swordsman. His sword was the number one sword of the world, and his speed surpassed everyone's imaginations.

The reason why he had returned from his drifting adventures on the oceans was because he wished to find his birth parents. Thanks to a medallion he had carried with him his entire life, he finally discovered his parents. When he was young, they had been pursued by a group of enemies and so they were forced to abandon him in front of a rich family's doorstep. Eventually, his parents had found a place to hide. They had quietly trained until they became incredibly powerful. They killed their foes, then established a mountain villa and had many other children and even grandchildren.

And right at this moment, Ning finally came back to them as well...

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Ning became a physician's apprentice, earnestly following his master in the practice of medicine. He lived a very ordinary life, and the physician's daughter ended up marrying him. His skill in medicine eventually surpassed his master's, and his fame and reputation quickly spread throughout the world. Although he suffered the occasional setback, with other physicians occasionally slandering him, his influence within the world continued to only grow greater and greater...

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Ning was a fiend, a true demon. His only ambition was to rule the entire world and force all of its many denizens to prostrate themselves at his feet. All schools and all sects had to bow before him... and those who refused would perish!

The fiendish Ning set up his own organization, and within its domain he was the master of all. No one dared to violate his command! Slowly, his area of influence began to spread as he wiped out the various other schools and sects nearby. His reputation grew greater and greater, as did his power. He became the undisputed hegemon amongst the countless evil figures of the world, and in the final battle he slew the three grandmasters of the righteous path. From that day forth, the entire world fell under his demonic, despotic might. No one dared to disobey him.

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One life after another. Each time, Ning lived a wonderful life. Even when he became a demonic deposit or a viledoer, he would end up becoming an invincible figure, a leader amongst devils who none could shake.

The righteous path? The evil path? An ordinary mortal? A rural nobleman? A robber baron? A low-key sect farmer who was actually the number one expert in his sect? A brilliant scholar who won the imperial exams and was given the title of 'zhuangyuan'? A down-on-his-luck scholar who encountered a fox-fairy spirit?

Each illusory life was like a form of rebirth. In truth, all of the illusory worlds were created by the Allworld Tribulation based on Ning's own memories. For example, becoming a 'zhuangyuan' was something exclusive to the world of Earth in the Three Realms. Precisely because these worlds were all created based on Ning's own memories, they all seemed very comfortable and familiar to Ning, making it easier for him to be drawn deeper into them.

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It was all so real. Too real. Not only was it comparable to reincarnation, it was dimming his Dao-heart and his will! An ordinary Samsara Daolord's mind would've long ago been fogged over by the endless illusions, and they would've forgotten who they were and been forever trapped by the illusions.

If Ning had come here shortly after leaving the Three Realms, even he wouldn't have been able to withstand it. However, his will and his soul had been tempered and shaped to be even more unshakeable than before. He was always able to maintain at least a modicum of clarity. Although these illusory worlds were very real and held both love and hate, family and ambition and madness... Ning was always able to keep himself at arm's length. He wasn't seduced or led astray by the illusions, and his soul and his will watched in a detached manner as this all proceeded.

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"Flamefairy, Master has spent far too much time in those illusions. It's been nearly a hundred thousand years. You've already become a Daolord of the Third Step, but he's still in the illusions!" Pillsaint and Su Youji were next to each other within the cave, staring towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse and the still-seated Ning.

Su Youji gazed towards Ning. "Master was able to make it all the way to the Hegemon's corpse. Clearly, these illusions aren't able to do anything to him. There's no need for you to worry. Everything will be fine. Let us wait a while longer. If something really does seem to be wrong, I'll go over there and pull him out."

Su Youji had broken through as well. Her path had been that of the Dao of Charm and illusions to begin with, and the white-robed Hegemon's mastery over illusions had indeed given her new insights and epiphanies. She had gained a deeper understanding of the legacy of Feixian the Exalted, and thus her rate of improvement began to accelerate rapidly. Thanks to a temporal acceleration treasure, she finally managed to break through to become a Daolord of the Third Step after nearly ten million accelerated years.

If it hadn't been for the insights she had gained from the white-robed Hegemon's illusions, she probably would've taken ten times as long in order to make this breakthrough.

Pillsaint remained a Daolord of the Second Step. The battle-scars on the cave walls were of very limited benefit to him. He was at a fairly low level of insight, and as such the intent of a Hegemon's Dao was mostly inscrutable to him.

As for Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteflame, they were both Daolords of the Fourth Step. Both of them were continued to ardently study those Hegemonic battle-scars, as they were of tremendous help to them.

"After becoming a Daolord of the Third Step, my soul has continuously increased in power. Given my mastery over the art of illusions, I should be more or less able to resist the remnant energy unleashed by the Hegemon's corpse," Su Youji said.

"Eh?" Pillsaint's eyebrows suddenly lifted upwards.

"Master..." Su Youji was startled as well.

An strange aura suddenly shot out from the distant, seated Ning. It was as though something had just been given birth to.

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One life after another. He threw himself into each life, allowing himself to experience love and hate, life and death. Each life was a wonderful one, as the illusions sought to drag Ning fully into that world and drown him within its lies.

However, each time Ning was always able to extricate himself. In the blink of an eye, thousands of worlds and lifetimes had gone by.

"Master, I've grown weary of the red dust of the mortal world. I wish to dedicate myself to the monastic life. Please accept me." A white-robed youth was kneeling in front of an old monk within a monastery. But right at this moment...

Rumble... the entire world suddenly started to shake. The white-robed youth was briefly startled. He rose to his feet, scanning his surroundings. He looked at the old monk, then looked at the mountains around him. The entire world seemed to be within his gaze.

"It is time to put an end to this unending cycle of reincarnation," the white-robed youth said.

Rumble...

The entire world burst apart, the illusions have completely collapsed. The world in front of Ning became clear once more. He was still seated in the lotus position within the cave, and roughly thirty meters up ahead of him was the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. Although the power of the illusions remained as potent as ever, they were no longer able to affect him in the slightest... because the sea of consciousness within his mind had just undergone a fundamental transformation.

**BOOOM!!!**

A powerful tidal wave of heartforce shot out, drenching reality in its waters. Reality and illusions twisted together, coalescing into a single spot of light. This spot of light was almost like the Worldheart which every single chaosworld was born from.

The spot of light began to grow, and it seemed to contain a thousand planets within it. With a rumbling sound, an entire universe began to manifest inside of it as a new world was established.

This... this was his heartworld!

Heartforce, stage six – World!

Ning's mind and heart had long ago been at the threshold of this level; all he needed was some more experience and insights, and he would have made his breakthrough. If it hadn't been for this event, he probably would've needed to experience many more things and seen more worlds before finally making his breakthrough. However, the endless illusory worlds of the Allworld Tribulation had allowed him to finally see through to the nature of reality. His heartforce vaulted over that final barrier, allowing him to reach the sixth stage. He finally established his own heartworld, a world where illusions and reality intersected.

The heartworld was to Heartforce Cultivators what the Jindan chaos region was to Ki Refiners! Only if you could establish a heartworld would you be considered a true Heartforce Cultivator!

There were incredibly few true Heartforce Cultivators. The experiences Ning had undergone in the Three Realms had given him tremendous mental fortitude, and he had always had an incredibly high level of comprehension... but in the end, he had still needed the Allworld Tribulation in order to make the final breakthrough.

“From this day forth, I am a Heartforce Cultivator.

“Ki Refiners train in Immortal energy. They are skilled in secret arts and magic treasures.

“Fiendgods train in their divine body. They are skilled in divine abilities and in using weapons in close combat.

“Heartforce Cultivators establish heartworlds. They train in heartforce and know many mysterious powers that can strike at an enemy's heart, slaying them with a thought.”

Ning nodded slightly. Ki Refiners and Fiendgods focused on reaching ever-higher levels of mastery in the Dao. Heartforce Cultivators, however, were different.

Heartforce Cultivators did not focus on the strength of their Dao; rather, they focused on the stability of their Dao. They needed extremely stable Daos and extremely stable heartworlds, as only then could those heartworlds continuously expand. The vaster a heartworld was, the more terrifyingly powerful a Heartworld Cultivator would be! A Verge-level Heartforce Cultivator could have a heartworld that was comparable in size to an entire territory!