

Desolate 1061

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Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 36: Heartforce Cultivator

Within the cave.

Ji Ning turned and left, quickly pulling away from the white-robed Hegemon's corpse.

"Master?" Su Youji spoke out.

"Master, what happened just now?" Pillsaint was very curious. Both of them had sensed that unusual aura rippling out just now.

Ning nodded at them. "I just established my heartworld."

"Heartworld?" Both Su Youji and Pillsaint revealed shocked looks.

"Heartworld?" Daolord Naia and Daolord Bruteflame had been startled by the aura as well, and they were also stunned when they heard Ning say these things.

One only became a true Heartforce Cultivator upon being able to establish a heartworld. Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly rare! A powerful Daolord who also trained as a Heartforce Cultivator? He would definitely be dreaded by the vast majority of other Daolords.

"Yes." Ning didn't hide it from them, because they were his retainers. In the future, they'd be able to notice when he used his Heartforce Cultivator abilities to kill his foes.

"Do not disturb me." Ning waved his hand, causing the temporal acceleration cottage to appear. He then stepped into the cottage.

"A Heartforce Cultivator. Master has become a Heartforce Cultivator." Su Youji was rather stunned.

"T-this is incredible." Pillsaint, Daolord Bruteflame, and Daolord Naia could scarcely believe it. What none of them knew was that in the Three Realms, Ning had actually been even more formidable in heartforce than he had been in the Dao of the Sword. Even Subhuti had suspected for a time that he had misjudged his disciple. Was it possible, Subhuti had wondered, that his disciple was actually more suited to the path of heartforce?

And now, he had finally established his own heartworld.

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Within the thatched temporal cottage. Ning sat down in the lotus position. The task before him was for him to fully construct the heartworld. The larger the heartworld, the more powerful his heartforce would be.

The creation of a heartworld was an extremely intricate task. When he had been next to the white-robed Hegemon's corpse, he had been constantly assaulted by the illusions and so naturally chose to move away from its area of influence before beginning this task.

“My own heartworld.” With a thought, Ning began to visualize the heartworld inside himself. Although it looked like nothing more than a tiny dot on his forehead, it contained an entire world within itself. The amount of space that could be held within that dot was theoretically limitless; it was entirely possible for it to grow to become greater than even the Badlands Territory. Ordinary Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators would generally have heartworlds that were on par with an ordinary territory in size.

If you wanted to know how powerful a heartforce cultivator was, you could find out by looking at his heartworld. The heartworld of a master-class World-level cultivator would merely be roughly comparable to a chaosworld in size! However, Ning’s Dao was that of a Samsara Daolord’s, and thus he was able to break through and make it far larger.

Right now, his heartworld was a blurry, foggy region.

“Arise.” A voice rang out within the world, causing the mists to begin to vanish. A continent began to emerge and spread out within the void, and a sky began to appear above it which grew higher and higher...

At the same time, his heartworld began to continuously draw in more and more chaos energy. Ning’s chaos jewels continuously replenished his supply of power. Relying on chaos energy from the outside world would be too slow, and he had more than enough chaos jewels. The amount of chaos energy needed to make this breakthrough was nothing to him.

Soon, the world halted its expansion. It was now over ten billion kilometers wide, covering an absolutely enormous amount of space that was comparable to a chaosworld. This entire world brimmed with sword-ki, as this was a world of the sword.

“Grow further.” Ning poured his first-stage Omega Sword Dago into the heart of this heartworld, using it to try and further expand his heartworld.

Rumble... the world seemed to change in color and darken. The land mass at the very center of the heartworld began to bulge upwards as the tallest mountain within this world climbed ever-higher, stabbing like a sword into the skies from within the very center. This enormous sword emanated the aura of the Omega Sword Dao, and it was also the physical representation of this Dao. It was now more than ten billion kilometers tall, and the might of its aura washed out throughout the heartworld.

The heartworld continued to expand at a furious pace, growing to be a hundred... a thousand... ten thousand times larger than before. The rate at which it was growing was truly staggering.

“It seems as though my Omega Sword Dao is quite well-suited for the creation of this heartworld.” A figure suddenly appeared at the top of the enormous sword-mountain. It was a white-robed Ning, formed by the manifestation of his will. “A world created using the Omega Sword Dao as the core is extremely stable, making it much easier for it to grow and expand.”

“Mm. It finally hit the limit.” Ning halted the expansion. This vast, endless world was so great in size that Ning couldn’t even see to the end of it.

“Again.” Ning began the final expansion, pouring his second-stage Omega Sword Dago into the core of this world. The heartworld had already been terrifyingly large in size, and now it grew even larger. The heavens grew vaster, while the earth grew deeper. The world stretched outwards unto infinity as the

enormous sword-mountain increased in height as well. It rumbled as it stretched upwards until it finally reached a height of more than ten billion kilometers in size.

Ning's chaos jewels were being depleted at a furious pace as they provided sustenance for his heartworld's expansion. Thankfully, this wasn't a real world, and so the amount of chaos jewels used up was still fairly negligible to Ning. If he had to create an enormous real world of this size, even a hundred million cubes of chaos jewels would be far from enough.

After another period of time passed, everything fell still once more.

"T-this is c-crazy big..." Ning himself was shocked as his mental projection stood there atop the giant sword-mountain, staring at this seemingly infinitely large world. Thankfully, he was the creator of this heartworld and knew everything within it... which was why he knew that the heartworld was roughly comparable to a full territory in size!

How vast was a normal territory? You'd generally have to traverse it through relying on spacetime transfer arrays. A single territory was far larger than the entire Brightshore Kingdom! The Badlands Territory had roughly a hundred thousand chaosworlds within it, but the chaosworlds were all extremely distant from each other. As a result, the size of a territory was truly staggering.

"Arise." Ning pointed off into the horizon, where a heavenly pillar suddenly began to take form. "Arise." Ning pointed to the other direction, with yet another heavenly pillar taking shape.

Here, Ning was able to create anything at all with his will alone. Soon, five celestial pillars had appeared at the ends of this vast world, and they embodied his Blood Drop sword-intent, his Shadowless sword-art, his Yin-Yang sword-intent, his Soleheart sword-intent, and his Heavenbreaker sword-intent.

"Come forth." Ning smiled as he stared off into the distance. The earth rumbled as chaos nectar began to appear, quickly pooling together into a lake.

Ning just laughed. He knew that all of this was imaginary, not actual chaos nectar. "According to the legends, when Heartforce Cultivators reach the true apex, their heartworlds shall transform into true worlds. When that happens, the treasures within their heartworld will become actual treasures. If you form a heartforce Eternal weapon, that Eternal weapon can be taken out from your heartworld and used in combat. You could even create precious ingredients and make them real," Ning murmured softly.

This was the goal of every Heartforce Cultivator... however, thus far no one had ever been able to accomplish it! In truth, the goal was absolutely ridiculous and unbelievable.

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This heartworld formed by his second-stage Omega Sword Dao was actually the size of an entire territory. In truth, this stunned and delighted Ning considerably, as only Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators were supposed to be able to accomplish this.

Still, it made sense. The heartworld didn't really require a powerful Dao, it required a stable one! The more stable the Dao, the better. The more stable the Dao, the larger the heartworld!

There were many powerful Daolords who had incredibly powerful and fierce Daos, but those Daos wouldn't be a good fit for establishing a heartworld. The toughness of a chain depended on the strength of the weakest link! If a heartworld was to be stable, it couldn't afford to have any weak links at all.

Many Heartforce Cultivators often wandered the universe, seeking ways to further stabilize and perfect their Daos. When Ning had come up with five Supreme Daos and linked them together, he had already formed an extremely stable Dao. Now that he had truly fused them into a single Dao, the Omega Sword Dao, he had created the most perfect and stable Dao possible!

The Omega Sword Dao was not only a truly ultimate Dao, it was also the most stable of Daos! It represented the absolute limit with regards to the Dao of the Sword, and it had no flaws whatsoever. A mere second-stage Omega Sword Dao was already comparable in stability to the Daos of many Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators. The third stage of this Omega Dao would most likely put Ning at a level comparable to the most supreme Heartforce Cultivator Daolords in existence.

"There are differences in power even amongst Verge-level Heartforce Cultivators. Daolord Soleman, for example, is much weaker than the Palace Lord of the Heartforce Palace," Ning mused to himself. "Daolord Featherdress, for example, was known as the most powerful Daolord of the Endless Territories during his time."

When Ning had first been captured and sent to the Astral Islands, he had learned of the ninety-nine legacies it held. The top-ranked legacy was the heartforce legacy of Daolord Featherdress. Daolord Soleman couldn't compare to Daolord Featherdress in power; the later was once known as the number one Daolord of the Endless Territories! It must be remembered that not even the current Palace Lord of the Palace of the Heart was ranked number one in all the Endless Territories.

Clearly, there could be great differences in power amongst Heartforce Cultivators.

"My Omega Sword Dao is virtually flawless. The third stage might put me close to Daolord Featherdress' level." Ning was delighted. In the past, Daolord Featherdress' legacy was useless to him... but now, he could make use of those heartforce secret arts.

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As a Heartforce Cultivator, he was on roughly the same level as Daolord Soleman. Even if he was a bit weaker, he wouldn't be that much weaker. He could be considered a second-tier Heartforce Cultivator Daolord.

In close combat, his sword-arts and his Northbow swords ensured that he stood at the very peak of power amongst second-tier Daolords.

When you combined the two...

Ning knew very well that there were now very, very few Daolords who could match a freak like him.

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Time continued to flow on. After Ning became a Heartforce Cultivator, he began to train in the terrifyingly powerful heartforce arts which Daolord Featherdress had left behind. His heartworld was built around his Omega Sword Dao, making his heartforce incredibly pure and possess strong offensive

powers. Daolord Featherdress' legacy was a bit softer and more subtle by comparison, and so Ning used the information he gained from it to create some heartforce arts of his own.

In the blink of an eye, more than sixty thousand additional years went past.

"Hahaha..." A loud laugh rang out as the Ninedust Sectlord emerged, appearing to be in an excellent mood.

Ning had been meditating silently within his temporal acceleration cottage. He now opened his eyes.

"Haha, Darknorth, were you in training? I'm really sorry that the ancestor left no legacies behind for you. You waited for me all this time for nothing." The Ninedust Sectlord smirked.

"It seems you had a fruitful experience." Ning walked out of his cottage.

"The ancestor's path was that of the Dao of Water, and he also used staff-arts. I benefited greatly." The Ninedust Sectlord was extremely smug. "Jealous, Darknorth?"

"Maybe just a bit." Ning nodded. "This Patriarch of the Dao Alliance left something for me as well."

"The Dao Alliance?" The Ninedust Sectlord turned his head, puzzled, to look towards the white-robed Hegemon's corpse. "That one over there? He left something for you?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"But our Ancient Hegemon took all of his treasures. There shouldn't have been anything left for you." The Ninedust Sectlord was confused.

Ning just shook his head. If it hadn't been for the white-robed Hegemon, it would've taken Ning much, much longer to become a Heartforce Cultivator. Although he had been at the cusp for some time, it was quite normal for someone to remain on the cusp for a full chaos cycle or even longer.

"Time to leave, Ninedust." Ning waved his hand, collecting the distant Su Youji, Pillsaint, Daolord Naia, and Daolord Bruteflame.

"Agreed." The Ninedust Sectlord didn't ask Ning about what he had gained. He instead turned to look at the Universe treasure, that dark-red longstaff, then said respectfully: "Senior, please send us away."

Whoosh. A streak of light flew out from the dark-red longstaff and transformed into the bald, black-robed youth.

The youth gave Ning a long look. The Ninedust Sectlord had been undergoing the trials and so did not know what had happened, but the youth knew exactly what Ning had been up to. Darknorth of the Dao Alliance had actually established his heartworld. The Universe weapon couldn't help but sigh. The Dao Alliance truly did have countless geniuses within its ranks.

"I'll send you off," the youth said. He waved his hand, causing a wave of power to surround Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 1: Terror Starsea

Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord instantly disappeared from the cave. Only then did the bald, black-robed youth slowly shake his head. "Although Redwater and Master had very similar Daos and both specialized in staff-arts, Redwater is just a bit too vicious and cruel. I don't like him. In fact, he hadn't even become a Daolord of the Fourth Step yet. Forget it. I'll just wait for a while longer."

Universe treasures possessed tremendous patience. They truly were eternal and undying, and so they were able and willing to wait extremely long periods of time before accepting a new master. They would rather go without than choose someone who wasn't a perfect fit.

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Whoosh. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord felt the world around them blur. Moments later, they found themselves within a dark, empty region of space.

"We're out." Both of them revealed looks of delight. They could now both sense the locations of their avatars.

"I can finally sense my avatar and my Primaltwin again." Ning relaxed slightly. So long as he could sense them, he would be able to orient himself. Moments later, he frowned. "Why do I feel as though they are very, very far away?"

He was separated from his avatar by an incalculable amount of distance. He had previously travelled to Eastroad Territory, one of the border territories of the Endless Territories, and that was already very far away from Vastheaven Territory. However, compared to his current distance that was absolutely nothing.

"I can sense that the distance between myself and my avatar is greater than the size of the entire Endless Territories." The distance was so great that his senses were rather foggy, but Ning was certain that the distance was definitely vaster than the Endless Territories themselves.

"We..." The Ninedust Sectlord's face turned pale.

"Ninedust?" Ning looked at him.

"We are in the Terror Starsea." The Ninedust Sectlord's face was ugly to behold. "And we are very, very deep inside of it. Extremely deep."

"Extremely deep?" Ning's face turned pale as well. Deep inside the Terror Starsea? The Terror Starsea was the most dangerous place that they knew of. In size alone, the explored parts of it already surpassed the size of the Endless Territories! In addition, Ning had learned while in the 'cave' that the Terror Starsea was actually the battlefield of the Dawn War, with numerous Hegemon-level figures having died there. The place was filled with countless wards and dangers that were originally meant to kill Hegemons, making them incredibly dangerous.

"Are you sure we are deep inside the Terror Starsea?" Ning immediately asked. He quickly scanned his surroundings. They were in the dark emptiness of space, with a few glimmers of light off in the distance.

"I'm certain, because I've been to the border worlds near the Terror Starsea," the Ninedust Sectlord said. "I've travelled and adventured through its outer regions, and we are very, very far away from those

outer regions. Based on the distance from my avatar... my best judgment is that we are more than half the size of the entire Endless Territories away from the outer regions. We're definitely deep inside."

Ning's heart turned cold. The Terror Starsea was deadly even for Eternal Emperors, while even Hegemons would tread carefully here for fear of dying. Generally speaking, even the most powerful of Daolords wouldn't dare to venture too deep inside this place. As for their current location? This place definitely qualified as not just deep, but 'incredibly deep'.

The two stood there within the endless darkness of space, both rather nervous. It would be impossibly difficult to escape the Terror Starsea and go home.

"We still have hope." The Ninedust Sectlord knew more about the Terror Starsea than Ning. He said seriously, "Darknorth, your sword-arts have transcended space itself. You can easily use it to tear open a dimensional gate and escape incredibly far distances."

"Yes." Ning nodded. He could indeed slice open dimensional passageways, then travel tremendous distances through them. It wouldn't be difficult for him to create a dimensional passageway that could traverse more than ten territories. This was far faster than even using spacetime transfer arrays!

In truth, it made sense. Given Ning's current sword-arts, so long as he was able to lock onto an enemy he would be able to slay that enemy from over a territory away! Spacetime transfer arrays would normally be needed to merely traverse such a great distance, a testament to how terrifying and important the Dao was.

The Brightshore Kingdom's Hegemon was another good example. He was able to easily appear anywhere within the Endless Territories, an ability that was far superior to Ning's.

"The explored regions of the Terror Starsea are vaster than the Endless Territories themselves! Since we are only over halfway in, that means that some Hegemons or ancient Eternal Emperors might've been here before," the Ninedust Sectlord said.

"Would you be able to ask one of those ancient powers to come guide us out?" Ning asked.

"None of them would care about Daolords like us," the Ninedust Sectlord said. "At most they would give us a star map."

"Agreed. At most, we'd get star maps." Ning was worried as well. "We'd know what was around us, but we'd still have to face any danger on our own. The two of us would only be considered second-tier even amongst Daolords. To travel such a great distance and escape the Terror Starsea... even though my sword-art transcends space, it'll be far too difficult."

"Yes, yes it will." The Ninedust Sectlord felt an enormous sense of pressure as well. He then muttered, "Why did the Universe treasure send us here?"

"You can't blame him for that." Ning shook his head. "The Dawn War was carried out in the Terror Starsea; that cave we were in is probably located deep within the Terror Starsea as well. It might be somewhere right next to us, in fact. The treasure was only able to send us here. No matter what, we can't just give up and lay down to die. We have to fight our best. Right now, we should first acquire star maps. Perhaps a good star map will be able to guide us through a fairly safe path."

The Ninedust Sectlord laughed. "Right. Patriarch Vulturax, one of the oldest members of my race, probably came here once as well. He obviously was able to return. I'll send my avatar to find a star map first, while you should acquire one from the Dao Alliance. The Dao Alliance has the most complete star maps."

"Look over there!" The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly pointed off into the distance, a complicated look on his face. "I think I already know where we are in the Terror Starsea."

"What is it?" Ning followed the Ninedust Sectlord's finger with his gaze. Off in the distance, there was a circle of green light.

"Let's go over there," the Ninedust Sectlord said softly. "Darknorth, this part is up to you."

"Alright." Ning drew his Northbow sword, then with a flicker of sword-light created a dimensional passageway before them. The Ninedust Sectlord and Ning both entered the beautiful rainbow dimensional passageway.

They flew side-by-side through this different spatial continuum, advancing rapidly towards their target.

"Time to exit." The two flew out from the glowing dimensional passageway, having arrived at another patch of empty, blank dark space. They were already more than ten territories away from their previous location.

"Eh?" Ning stared forwards in astonishment. Up ahead was an enormous green whirlpool that was surrounded by layers of green light. The green light was filled with boundless vitality, and the rocks and boulders that flew close to it quickly turned white in color, then disappeared into nothingness. Next to the green whirlpool there was a similarly sized black whirlpool which was devouring everything nearby it, sucking all stones, shattered corpses, and various items that flew nearby into itself.

A green whirlpool and a black whirlpool. The former was filled with life energy, but it sucked all the life from the surrounding area and destroyed it. The latter was filled with death energy and devoured everything around it.

The two seemed to be parts of a whole. Although they were diametrically different, neither interfered with the other at all.

"What are those?" Ning could hardly believe it. He could sense that they were still very far away, but the two whirlpools looked absolutely enormous. Ning's best guess was that these two whirlpools were each roughly the size of a hundred territories.

"This is the one thing in the Terror Starsea which terrifies all six organizations... the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels," the Ninedust Sectlord said softly. "Do you know? Long, long ago, the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels was smaller than a single territory."

Ning's face turned pale. "Are you saying that it is growing?"

"Yes. It is growing." The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. "The Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels... the life wheel draws away all vital energy, while the death wheel devours and destroys all. They are stealing and devouring all the life and matter from the area around them, and as they do so they continuously grow larger and larger. The rate at which they are growing is only increasing. In the future, they will grow to

encompass the entire Terror Starsea. In fact, they'll swallow the entirety of the Endless Territories and destroy all within it. It is destined for the Endless Territories to be destroyed one day."

"What?!" Ning could hardly believe it. The Endless Territories were doomed to destruction?

"When the six powers originally discovered the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, they immediately began to panic. All three Hegemons sought to work together to destroy it." The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. "Unfortunately, any attacks launched against it were all swallowed. The energy of the attacks just made it grow bigger. There was simply no way to harm it in the slightest."

"The most supreme Emperor-class cultivators and a few of the most powerful Daolords all know of this." The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning. "Given your power, I imagine the Dao Alliance would soon inform you of this."

Ning stared at the distant Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels.

They'd continuously grow until the day they wiped out the Endless Territories?

"This is something which was naturally born from the endless primordial chaos. There is no way cultivators can possibly resist something like this," the Ninedust Sectlord said. "However, there's no need for us to worry too much. Based on our current predictions, it'll be more than a million chaos cycles before it starts to destroy the Endless Territories. As Daolords, if we fail our Daomerge we'll definitely die within 108,000 chaos cycles. Let the Hegemons and Emperors deal with this problem."

Ning stared at the distant Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, still unable to believe what he was hearing. "The Endless Territories... are doomed to be destroyed?"

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 2: Travelling

Those two enormous whirlpools continued to slowly spin in the darkness of space, continuously absorbing and devouring all things around them.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Even the empty void of space around them was being continuously shattered and devoured as the power of chaos and all other prime essence ripples were drawn into the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels.

"Nothing can stop them at all?" Ji Ning stared at them, murmuring softly to himself.

"Yes. Nothing can stop them." The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head.

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As Ning's true body was staring, stunned, at the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels, his avatar in the incredibly distant Vastheaven Palace of the Endless Territories was off to visit Daolord Solesky.

Within a private courtyard. Daolord Solesky's avatar was relaxing with some wine while staring at the darkened horizons.

"Big brother Solesky," the golden-robed Ning called out.

“Ji Ning.” Solesky turned to look at him, then suddenly started to laugh. “This is rather diverting.”

“Why are you laughing, big brother?” The golden-robed Ning was rather surprised.

Solesky smiled. “I’m laughing because both of us are avatars! Two avatars are holding a meeting with each other... haha...”

The golden-robed Ning was briefly startled before letting out a chuckle as well. Both of their true bodies were outside, adventuring. Avatars were much weaker, but they’d be strong enough to stand guard over a school or clan.

“Ever since you created an avatar, you’ve been spending your time strengthening it. Aside from the Kongsan matter, you haven’t come to see me at all.” Daolord Solesky asked, “Why is it that you’ve suddenly come to seek me out?”

“There is indeed something I need help with.” The golden-robed Ning nodded. “I’m currently trapped in the Terror Starsea.”

“Trapped in the Terror Starsea?” Daolord Solesky leapt to his feet, no longer relaxed in the slightest. He said solemnly, “Where in the Terror Starsea?”

“Close to the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels,” Ning said.

Daolord Solesky’s face immediately turned ugly to behold. “W-why the hell did you go there? Even I have only heard of that thing from an old friend of mine. Supposedly, they are the most terrifying things within the Terror Starsea. Even the almighty Hegemons are helpless against them; if they tried to charge into those wheels, they would instantly be obliterated by them! They are still continuing to slowly grow larger. Supposedly, in the distant future they might even sweep over the entire Terror Starsea, then devour all of the Endless Territories and wipe it out completely.”

Ning nodded. “I have heard the same.”

“But that’s something that should only happen a long, long time for now. We probably won’t live long enough to see that.” Daolord Solesky said seriously, “The Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels are extremely deep within the Terror Starsea. Not even the most overwhelmingly powerful Daolords would dare to venture that deep. Why did you go there?”

“It wasn’t my choice.” Ning shook his head. “I had an unexpected encounter, resulting in me being transferred there.”

“Transferred?” Daolord Solesky shook his head and sighed.

“Big brother Solesky, do you have a map of the Terror Starsea?” Ning asked.

“I do.” Daolord Solesky nodded. “I reached the Verge long ago, and so I sought out every opportunity possible for succeeding in my Daomerge. As a result, I prepared star maps of the Terror Starsea for myself, and they include the location of the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels. However, they are too far away. If you wish to exit the Terror Starsea, you’ll have to traverse a distance equivalent to more than half of the Endless Territories.”

“Wait a moment. I’ll prepare a copy for you.” Daolord Solesky waved his hand, sending his Immortal energy out and forming an enormous star map in the air. This star map was filled with many markings and pathways.

It took roughly the amount of time needed to prepare a kettle of tea before Daolord Solesky finished drawing the complete star map. By then, Ning had silently memorized it all.

“This star map of mine came from the Dao Alliance,” Daolord Solesky said. “It won’t be easy to find a more detailed one.”

“This will be enough.” Ning nodded, his heart heavy.

“Be careful.” Daolord Solesky truly was worried. As he saw, Ning’s chances of surviving this were quite slim.

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Deep within the Terror Starsea, close to the titanic Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the darkness of space, staring at the enormous representation of annihilation in front of them.

“I have a star map now,” Ning said.

“My avatar has gone out to beg a meeting with Patriarch Vulturax. I trust I shall acquire a map of my own soon,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “Have you looked at that star map of yours yet? What do you think?”

“This is going to be very hard.” Ning shook his head. “I’ve already taken a look at things. The ‘safest’ route will still require us to go through sixty-two dangerous zones. Given our current power, our chances of surviving will be less than ten percent.”

“Sixty-two?” The Ninedust Sectlord frowned. “Darknorth, your sword-arts transcend space itself. We should be able to avoid many of those dangerous regions, no?”

“I’ve already factored that into my considerations.” Ning said helplessly, “Without it, we would have to go through more than five hundred danger zones! That would be certain death.”

“Damn.” The Ninedust Sectlord stared at his surroundings. “How the hell did we end up this deep inside?”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord really did feel rather aggrieved. They had been teleported all the way from the Eastroad Sect, only to find themselves incredibly deep inside the Terror Starsea.

“Ninedust, perhaps Emperor Vulturax will have a better path than the one I found,” Ning said. “My star map isn’t all that detailed.”

“Right. Wait for now. My avatar is now meeting with Patriarch Vulturax,” the Ninedust Sectlord said expectantly.

Ning waited as instructed. A short while later...

“Haha, I have the star map.” The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly began to chuckle merrily.

“And?” Ning looked at him.

“There’s hope after all.” The Ninedust Sectlord was extremely excited. He waved a finger, sending out his Immortal energy to form an enormous star map in the void of space. “This is the star map which Patriarch Vulturas bestowed upon me. He once exited the same cave we did, and he also came out in this general area. He was much more powerful than us, and so he was able to return home with ease. However, he made repeated trips back to hear in search of the cave again, and so he is actually very familiar with this region and this route.”

“The safest route for us to take is this one.” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed towards a newly created route on the map. “Other powerful Daolords would find this route a difficult one, but your power over space will allow us to take it.”

Ning stared at the star map of energy hanging in the air, an excited look on his face.

“There are four danger zones in total. We must first pass through Dreamdust Way, then enter the Starflow River. After passing through the entire Starflow River, we’ll exit from this point. We will then traverse two fairly short danger zones... and then we’ll be out safely.” The Ninedust Sectlord said excitedly, “There are four danger zones in total. For three of them, we should be able to traverse them safely if we use the protective resources we have at our disposal. The only tougher part will be the Starflow River.”

Ning nodded. Both of them had multiple life-preserving resources. They might not have enough Dao-seals for traversing several dozen or several hundred danger zones, but three? Both felt quite confident in their chances.

“The Starflow River?” Ning said, worried, “We have to pass through the entire thing?”

“Yes.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “That’s the only real obstacle before us. Based on my calculations, we’ll have to spend at least three hundred thousand years traversing it. The other places, all combined, will only require perhaps ten years. Most of our time will be spent going through the entire Starflow River.”

The Starflow River was an enormous area that was like an enormous river of stars flowing through the darkness of the void. To traverse it would take a very long period of time.

To them it wouldn’t be too dangerous, and both stood a good chance of making it out alive. However, they’d still be in there for quite some time. The more time passed, the more variables might appear and the more danger might arise. The entire Terror Starsea was the battlefield for the Dawn War, after all, and the Starflow River was part of it. It wouldn’t be that easy.

“For us, this truly is the safest route we can try.” Ning nodded. “The route I suggested earlier gave us less than a ten percent chance of surviving. This one, I’d say our chances are fifty-fifty.”

“Agreed.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

Fifty-fifty wasn’t bad at all. Given Ning’s ability to transcend space and the incredibly detailed map and route which Patriarch Vulturas had given them, they now stood a very good chance of surviving.

“Thank goodness Patriarch Vulturax has been here many times. Otherwise, there’s no way we could’ve possibly found such a safe route.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “Time to go, Darknorth.”

“Let’s go. I hope both of us will make it back to the Endless Territories alive.” Ning looked at the Ninedust Sectlord.

“We’ll definitely make it back alive, together!” The Ninedust Sectlord added, “I just received the ancestor’s legacy. There’s no way I’m going to die before making it back.”

Ning and Ninedust shared a smile. Both of them understood that this would be a dangerous, life-and-death journey. “Let’s go.”

Ning and Ninedust both stood at the prow of the black vessel. Northbow sword in hand, Ning tore a black passageway with his sword-arts through the darkness of space. Swoosh! The vessel flew into the passageway, which shut behind them.

The two of them, homeward bound, had just embarked on an incredible journey.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 3: Heartforce Eradicator

The two advanced carefully, with Ji Ning only opening the tunnels once they found a fairly safe starting point and stopping point. Every so often, they would have to rely on the black vessel to avoid a few special areas that couldn’t be traversed.

Half a month went past.

Rumble... spacetime was distorted here. Space debris filled the region, and countless dangers lurked hidden. A black vessel was paused within this field of chaotic spacetime, enduring the chaotic waves of shattered space.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both stared towards the front. Up ahead of them, right in the middle of that region of chaotic space, was a bluestone road that was ten million kilometers wide. For an extremely beautiful and peaceful road to suddenly appear within this region of dark, chaotic space... they could sense that this stone path had to be hiding some sort of hidden danger.

“The Dreamdust Way.” The Ninedust Sectlord said heavily, “If we wish to go back, we need to go through four danger zones, with the most dangerous one being the Starflow River! It’s so enormous that it’ll take us roughly three hundred thousand years to traverse it. The second most dangerous location will be Dreamdust Way! The final two danger zones are in the outer reaches of the Terror Starsea. Given how strong we are, the danger level it will pose us should be fairly negligible.”

Ning nodded. Dreamdust Way was located very deep within the Terror Starsea and was extremely dangerous!

“I hope we won’t be so unlucky as to die here.” The Ninedust Sectlord looked towards Ning. “Let’s go.”

“Mm.” Ning nodded. Swoosh! The black vessel immediately flew towards that bluestone pathway.

Only by passing through Dreamdust Way would they be able to reach the Starflow River. Although very dangerous, this was comparatively the ‘safest’ path for them to reach the Starflow River.

The Ninedust Sectlord held his longstaff at the ready, his eyes narrowed as he scanned his surroundings. Clearly, he was quite nervous. He said in a low voice, "Given our vessel's flying speed, we should be able to exit Dreamdust Way in roughly a month. One month. Just one month. We need to stay on our guard this entire month."

Ning wielded a Northbow sword in each of his two hands as he maintained a vigilant watch. He couldn't help but smirk. "Ninedust. You almost seem nervous."

"Can't blame me for being nervous. The slightest miscalculation in this pla-... careful!" The Ninedust Sectlord's face turned pale. An azure scaled beast had suddenly appeared off in the distance. This beast had a pair of armored wings and a pair of protruding golden eyes that seemed to contain a vast world within them. Whoooosh. The azure scaled beast blinked. Moments later, more than ten thousand of similar beasts appeared next to it. All of them let out shrill, ear-piercing screeches.

"Dreamdust lifeforms. Careful!" The Ninedust Sectlord was very dangerous. "Only one of them is real. The rest are all illusory, but it can switch its true body with the illusory ones at will. It could be any of them."

Ning stood there at the prow of his vessel, watching as the thousands of beasts charged towards them. A cold light suddenly flashed through his eyes.

Whoosh! An invisible ripple swept out like a wave towards the thousands of azure beasts. One beast suddenly let out a low, agonized scream. Its body trembled, then its golden eyes quickly grew dim as it silently collapsed.

The other azure scaled beasts all completely vanished in an instant, leaving behind that single fallen corpse. Moments later, the corpse began to automatically separate into countless motes of azure light which then began to flow into the bluestone path in a very natural manner.

"It died?" The Ninedust Sectlord turned to look at Ning, rather amazed. "Darknorth, w-what just happened? How did that Dreamdust creature suddenly die?"

Dreamdust lifeforms were terrifying creatures that were born from the unusual, unique Dreamdust Way environment. They were born with incredible skill over illusions, and were able to manifest many false bodies which they could 'swap' with their true bodies at will. Thus, battling against them was a very tiresome and troublesome task. Even if you were much more powerful than them, you might die to them if you weren't careful.

"Heartforce," Ning said.

"I knew it! I sensed it." The Ninedust Sectlord was rather stunned. "You are a Heartforce Cultivator?" The Ninedust Sectlord had been keeping a careful vigil, wary of more Dreamdust lifeforms appearing. When he suddenly sensed that strange wave blast out, he naturally was able to calculate that it had most likely been heartforce! However, Ning had never before used heartforce techniques, and Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly rare.

"Haha. I told you earlier that the Hegemon of the Dao Alliance left something for me." Ning smiled. "I became a true Heartforce Cultivator within that cave."

“Haha...” The Ninedust Sectlord was overjoyed. “Splendid! My greatest worry with regards to Dreamdust Way was that we might actually be trapped by its illusions! That’s why we have to maintain constant vigilance... but I never imagined that you would’ve become a Heartforce Cultivator. Hahaha! To trap a powerful Heartforce Cultivator with illusions is no easy feat. I can finally relax a little bit and not be as nervous as I was earlier. Just keep an eye out on things.”

“Dreamdust lifeforms are skilled in more than just illusions; they can also create many false bodies and are strong in close combat,” Ning warned. “The legends say that the most powerful lifeforms here are comparable to Eternal Emperors in power. Even though I’ll be able to resist their illusions, I’m probably not going to be a match for them in close combat.”

“Mm.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

“If push comes to shove, we’ll have to rely on our Dao-seals,” Ning said.

“No matter what, you being a Heartforce Cultivator means that we’ll have an easier time of it when dealing with illusions.” The Ninedust Sectlord said curiously, “What heartforce art did you use just now? It seemed quite incredible.”

“Heartforce Eradicator,” Ning replied. This was a heartforce art which Ning created himself after studying and modifying the heartforce legacy left behind by Daolord Featherdress. It was highly suited to him and also extremely powerful.

Daolord Featherdress was far more powerful than the current Palace Lord of the Heartforce Palace! Daolord Feather had been the number one Daolord of the Endless Territories in that era and had three supreme heartforce arts.

These arts were known as the [Heartforce Eradicator], [Dreamworld], and [Featherdress Soulthral Song]. Daolord Featherdress had primarily relied on the [Featherdress Soulthral Song] to become the number one Daolord of that era. The song mesmerized the soul, ensuring that even powerful Eternal Emperors would be caught by it if they weren’t careful. Even many of the most supreme of Daolords were unable to resist such a terrifying heartforce art.

Ji Ning, however, was different from Daolord Featherdress. Ning’s Dao was that of the Omega Sword Dao, an offensive Dao. Featherdress was more subtle and more guileful, and also extremely skilled in the musical arts. This was why Featherdress had been able to create the terrifying [Featherdress Soulthral Song].

The two walked different paths and naturally had very different styles. Ning had learned just a tiny bit of the [Featherdress Soulthral Song] and had barely managed to learn 20% of [Dreamworld], but he had mastered the extremely offensive [Heartforce Eradicator] art. He had then modified it to make it better suited to him, resulting in becoming even more powerful.

His heartforce lashed out like a sword, eradicating the opponent’s soul and truesoul. It was an extremely dominating attack!

However, if his foe was able to endure the attack, this heartforce art would be very ineffective. In other words, it was an ‘all-or-nothing’ type of attack. Daolord Featherdress had been skilled in many areas and thus was much more dangerous. In the end, Ning simply hadn’t been training for long enough. He

primarily relied on the power of his Omega Sword Dao. For him to be able to master and then retrofit the [Heartforce Eradicator] was already quite incredible.

“The name makes it sound pretty wild and dominating.” The Ninedust Sectlord said in a resigned fashion, “I had thought that the gifts the ancestor gave me would enable me to beat you. It seems I’m not a match for you anymore.”

“You really aren’t a match for me now.” Ning nodded.

“You little...” The Ninedust Sectlord glared at him. “You don’t know the meaning of ‘modesty’ at all. Just you wait. When I become a Daolord of the Fourth Step... hmph! I’ve already gained many insights during our time in the cave. It won’t take me too long to break through and become a Daolord of the Fourth Step. By then, you’ll know just how awesome I am.”

“It’s quite normal to be stuck at a bottleneck for several chaos cycles. Don’t worry, I won’t abuse you too much in the interim,” Ning teased.

The two bantered back and forth as they advanced on the black vessel. The reason why they were able to relax and banter was because they knew that illusions, at least, would not be a problem! Their only worry would be head-on encounters.

“Outsiders.” An azure beast appeared in the distance, its golden eyes filled with a murderous look.

“Die.” Instantly, more than ten thousand duplicates of it appeared, with all of them charging towards the vessel. Neither Ning nor the Ninedust Sectlord could recognize the real one, as every single body could theoretically be the real one.

“Hmph.” Ning turned and swept his gaze across the beasts, his heartforce surging out like a wave. Instantly, all of the beasts vanished save for a single one that fell down dead. The corpse naturally dissipated and merged back into the bluestone road.

“Impressive, impressive. You looked at it and it died! I’m really jealous now.” The Ninedust Sectlord chortled in praise. “I wonder when and if I’ll ever become a Heartforce Cultivator. I’ll stare at people until they die! What a wonderful life that would be.”

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 4: Heartworld Projection, Descend!

This was the most frightening aspect of supreme Heartforce Cultivators! Their attacks were silent, fast, and incredibly deadly. Worse, not even Universe treasures were useful in defending against heartforce attacks. You could only rely on your Dao-heart, your soul, and your mental fortitude! There was no way to counterfeit any of these things. Even if you were incredibly strong in combat, if you had mental flaws then you would still die at the hands of a Heartforce Cultivator.

Long ago Ji Ning, Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, and Waterlord Firesurge had journeyed to the Genesis Lands of the alternate universe. Together, they had tested themselves against the primessence chains that led to the heart of that universe. Although all four of them were very similar in power, Firesurge was noticeably much weaker than the others mentally.

This was why Heartforce Cultivators had very special statuses. Even when they were slightly weaker than others, they would still be afforded with the utmost of respect by even the most powerful of Daolords!

“Die, outsider!” Yet another azure scaled beast emerged. A second later, many thousands of illusions appeared around it. This was their standard, innate attack. But Ning just glanced at all of them, then swept out with his heartforce like a sword. Whoosh! They all dissipated like smoke as a single corpse fell down.

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The first twelve days in Dreamdust Way were extremely relaxed. Sometimes they encountered ten of those Dreamdust lifeforms at the same time, but in each case Ning was able to wipe them out with a single glance. None of them were able to resist Ning’s [Heartforce Eradicator] at all.

On the thirteenth day, they finally encountered a Dreamdust lifeform that was capable of withstanding the [Heartforce Eradicator] and not perishing. This beast was noticeably larger than the previous ones that they had fought. Although it was able to survive the heartforce attack, it clearly was rather dazed by it, giving Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord a chance to charge forwards and slay it in close combat.

On the sixteenth day, they encountered an extremely tough-to-deal-with beast that was able to ignore the [Heartforce Eradicator]! It was also on the same general level of power as Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord in close combat. In the end the two had to join forces, with Ning finishing it off with a blow from his Omega Sword Dao – Blood Drop.

The two continued to advance on their black vessel, but after the seventeenth day they begin to grow puzzled. “Odd. Why haven’t we seen a single Dreamdust lifeform?” Life had suddenly become quite tranquil, and they didn’t run into any of the beasts at all.

“This is odd. Extremely odd. According to Patriarch Vultur’s notes, Dreamdust Way should only grow in danger as we move deeper into it, with the Dreamdust lifeforms increasing in number and power.” The Ninedust Sectlord frowned. “It should take us roughly a month to traverse the entire Dreamdust Way. We should be at the very center of it right now. Why don’t we see so much as a single one?”

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The eighteenth day. The nineteenth day. The twentieth day...

Everything was very calm. No Dreamdust lifeforms appeared. Twenty-six days had gone by in the blink of an eye, and they were close to exiting Dreamdust way.

Whoosh. The black vessel continued to advance at a hundred time’s the speed of light. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood alongside each other at the prow, staring off into the distance. Neither relaxed in the slightest. It had been ten days since they had encountered any Dreamdust lifeforms. Something was very wrong.

“Not good.” Ning’s face suddenly tightened.

“Stop!” the Ninedust Sectlord immediately called out.

The black vessel came to an immediate halt in the darkness of the void. The two of them stared off into the distance, where an entire host of azure scaled beasts had gathered. These creatures all had stooped figures, scaled wings, and protruding golden eyes. In front of them was the largest Dreamdust beast the

two had seen thus far, a creature that was at least thirty meters tall. The beast at the very back was the smallest, merely fifteen meters tall.

“This looks like trouble.” The Ninedust Sectlord murmured, “Darknorth, the scaled beasts we saw previously were eighteen meters tall at best. This group is led by one that is thirty meters tall, and there are five beasts that are twenty-seven meters tall and twelve that are twenty-four meters tall. Even the weakest one is fifteen meters tall. In total, there are twenty-one of them.”

“Fifteen meters is the cutoff for surviving my [Heartforce Eradicator],” Ning sent mentally. “Clearly, the Dreamdust beasts have come prepared.”

The two sides stared at each other from afar. Off in the distance, more than a hundred more scaled beasts also stared at Ning’s group, their protruding golden eyes seemingly to hold boundless worlds within them.

“Wonderful... absolutely beautiful...” The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly had a sappy, stupid grin on his face.

“Eh?” Ning’s face tightened. He immediately sent out a surge of heartforce smashing outwards like a ripple-wave that blocked all outside sources of power, allowing the Ninedust Sectlord to immediately regain his clarity of mind.

“I-I was actually trapped by an illusion.” The Ninedust Sectlord immediately came back to his senses, a cold thrill of fear going down his spine. He stared at the distant beast leader. “I was caught in an illusion without even realizing it. No wonder the Patriarch said Dreamdust Way was dangerous and that I might die here. He told me to be prepared at all times.”

“Prepared?” Ning glanced at him.

“Yes. My original plan was to engage in a continuous mental conversation with my retainers; whenever I stopped talking, that would be a sign that I had been trapped inside an illusion and my retainer would immediately use a Dao-seal to wake me up!” The Ninedust Sectlord continued, “But since I knew that you were a Heartforce Cultivator, I didn’t go through the trouble.”

Ning couldn’t help but nod upon hearing this. This wasn’t a bad idea at all.

“Cultivators...” An ancient voice rang out from afar. “I’m impressed that you were able to resist my illusions. No wonder you were able to slay so many of my compatriots with ease... but the end result of trespassing onto Dreamdust Way will still be death.”

The largest beast’s aura washed out like a tidal wave as it pointed at the two of them. “Kill.”

“Kill.”

“Kill.”

“Kill!” All of the Dreamdust lifeforms let out enraged howls as tens of thousands of illusions appeared around them. All of a sudden, there over a million of the howling figures, and all of them charged straight towards the two.

“Use your secret art,” Ning sent mentally to the Ninedust Sectlord.

“Agreed.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

BOOM! Nine energy dragons immediately flooded out of Ning’s body. These were his nine novessence arts.

WHOOSH! Curtains of rippling water appeared around the Ninedust Sectlord that quickly surged off into the distance.

It took time for secret arts to attack. Generally speaking, even the most supreme of secret arts would still only be able to fly at a hundred times the speed of light. This was a major bottleneck for cultivators and attacks alike. There were many Eternal Emperors who were unable to breach this limit.

The nine awesome secret arts and the waves of water swirled around each other, forming a perfect whole as they smashed towards the million-plus figures charging towards them.

BOOM!

Instantly, the many figures caught within the secret arts began to move much slower than before. However, all of them appeared completely unharmed. This was what made them so terrifying; there was no way to tell which one was real and which one was false.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord’s decision to join forces with their secret arts caused the fifteen meter beast and the eighteen meter beast to be completely locked in place, unable to move at all. The body of the fifteen meter beast actually began to shudder and slowly crumble apart. These two secret arts were simply too powerful. As for the other Dreamdust beasts, their speed dropped sharply as well.

“Die!” Ning focused his gaze upon them. Suddenly, an absolutely enormous world appeared in the void above the bluestone path. This world held tall mountains, deep canyons, and flowing rivers within it. At the very center of this world, there was an absolutely titanic mountain that was shaped like a giant sword. This enormous world was Ning’s heartworld!

Ning’s heartworld projection descended upon the bluestone road.

Heartworld projections were different from secret arts. Secret arts needed time to fly out and strike foes, but heartworld projections required no time at all. They were illusory projections and thus could descend instantly. Ning’s heartworld was absolutely enormous, on the same level as that of Daolord Soleman’s. His heartworld projection was thus just as powerful as his nine novessence arts.

When the nine novessence arts and the water curtain joined together, it had to be done in a careful way to prevent them from interfering with each other. The illusory heartworld projection, however, was able to overlap over them perfectly!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The fifteen meter beast was already at the verge of breaking apart, while the eighteen meter beasts had been completely frozen. Both were instantly annihilated when the heartworld projection came crashing down. The twenty-one meter beasts were now completely locked in place, while even the twenty-four meter beasts were dramatically slowed down.

“Let’s flee.” Ning immediately sent the black vessel fleeing at high speeds. There were simply too many of the remaining Dreamdust lifeforms, after all, and there was no way to tell which ones were real. There really was no way for them to kill the creatures.

“Damn. They are forcing me to use some of my own primal essence.” The beast leader had been at the front of its pack. Its tens of thousands of clones all vanished, leaving only it behind. It raised his head, letting out a bellow as a third eye suddenly appeared in its forehead. This was a completely azure light that glowed with blue light, and it stared directly at Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord.

Both of the cultivators immediately sensed that they were in mortal danger.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 5: The Dreamdust Runes

Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were aboard the black vessel, seeking to flee out of the bluestone road. Their secret arts and the heartworld projection had crushed to death quite a few of the weaker beasts, causing the enraged beast leader to open his third eye in his forehead. When he did so, it seemed as though that eye had become the hegemon and ruler of this entire region of space.

A strange alien script appeared directly above that eye, formed by multiple divine runes. Seventy-two of those runes came together to form a single character.

“What type of script is this?” Ning was shocked upon seeing it. “I’ve never seen this script before.” But although it was his first time seeing it, Ning was still able to sense the unfathomable, limitless power which this script contained within it. It seemed as though the only thing comparable to this ancient script was the azureflower seal that was formed by the Nine Chaos Seals.

BOOM!

The entire vast bluestone road suddenly lit up with dazzling azure light that stretched up ten thousand meters, illuminating the entire region.

The nine secret arts, the Ripplewater secret art, and Ning’s heartworld projection were all suppressed by the power of the azure light. It also reached out to grip the fleeing black vessel, causing it to drop down from a hundred times the speed of light to merely sixty-two.

“The beast leader is going all out. It has activated the Dreamdust Eye!” The Ninedust Sectlord was shocked. “Darknorth, the Dreamdust Eye contains an extremely powerful illusory component. If you can’t withstand it, you need to tell me right away.”

“I can handle it.” Ning gritted his teeth, sending out his heartforce in ringed layers to defend against the invisible attack. While doing so, he carefully scrutinized the strange character which had appeared above the beast leader’s third eye.

He had the feeling that this character contained an absolutely terrifying level of power in the realm of illusions. It must be remembered that Heartforce Cultivators were incredibly strong in resisting illusions, far stronger than the majority of Eternal Emperors! For even Ning to find this Dreamdust Eye to be so hard to defend against meant that other Daolords, even ones as powerful as Palace Lord Dawnstar, wouldn’t be able to fight it head-on. They would have to rely on special treasures in order to stay alive and have a chance to escape.

Eternal Emperors would die here as well if they weren’t careful! Thankfully, Ning was a Heartforce Cultivator. This was why he dared to fight the attack head-on. One could imagine how terrifying this Dreamdust Eye attack was!

"I can sense that strange character is filled with boundless mysteries and illusions," Ning mused silently to himself. "If I could fully master it, I would be able to reach an even higher level of mastery over illusions."

Daolord Featherdress' greatest strength lay in those three mighty secret arts. Ning had only reached a high level of skill in one of them, the [Heartforce Eradicator]. Compared to other Heartforce Cultivators, he was fairly weak in illusions.

"Kill!" As the beast leader opened the Dreamdust Eye, it also transformed into a streak of light that charged straight towards them. Whoosh! It instantly moved at a hundred times the speed of light, while the black vessel was merely moving at sixty-two times the speed of light.

"It's chasing after us!" The Ninedust Sectlord was startled.

"At least its by itself." Only the beast leader was able to move at a hundred times the speed of light, with the twenty-seven meter beasts merely able to move at fifty times the speed of light.

Ning stood there at the prow of the ship, Northbow swords in hand. When he stabbed out with his sword, his right arm suddenly expanded to become a million kilometers in size as it pierced through the void. As for the Northbow sword, it expanded to become nearly ten million kilometers long, carrying an aura of overwhelming power as it stabbed towards the attacking beast leader. Ning's sword was very strange; it seemed to carry an aura of overwhelming power, but it also contained some of the mysteries of the Shadowless stance, making it difficult for the opponent to grasp and predict it.

Boom! The beast leader let out a savage bellow as it lashed out with its sharp claws, sending them directly against the edge of the Northbow sword. A terrifying burst of power was sent through the Northbow sword towards Ning. Although Ning's marvelous sword-arts allowed him to divert a great deal of the power, the power remaining was still enough to cause his right arm to go numb. He couldn't help but stumble three steps backwards.

"How'd it go?" the Ninedust Sectlord asked, worried.

"It is too powerful. This thing is far stronger than me in close combat." Ning shook his head. If it hadn't been for the Hegemon armor, he probably would've been heavily injured just now. "It seems we'll be forced to use up one of our treasures."

As he spoke, Ning suddenly produced a golden medallion with his right hand. Daolord Kongsan had left behind a number of protective, life-preserving treasures when he died. Right now, Ning only had two remaining. This golden medallion had been crafted by an unknown Eternal Emperor. One crushed, it would form an enormous golden illusory mountain which would crash down upon the opponent. Ning felt certain that this should be enough to slow down the beast leader and ensure that they could flee.

"No need to waste a Dao-seal just yet," the Ninedust Sectlord said hurriedly. "We only have so many of them. We need to save them up as best we can."

"Do you have any better ideas?" Ning looked at him. It was indeed true that these Dao-seals were very rare and difficult to acquire. Daolord Kongsan had only gotten them over the course of countless years.

Right now, Ning had four life-preserving items left: Kongsan's two items, the Sword Hegemon's Dao-seal, and the spacetime disc the Brightshore Hegemon had given him. That was it.

“Yes. I think I have a decent shot at this.” The Ninedust Sectlord stared intently off into the distance. “Once it gets a bit closer, I’ll make my move.”

“Oh?” Ning nodded and watched off to the side.

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The black vessel was surrounded by the nine novessence arts, the Ripplewater secret art, and the heartworld projection. All three combined were able to just barely ablate the pressuring power of the azure light, allowing the vessel to continue to advance at a speed of sixty-two speeds of light. As for the beast leader, it continued to chase after them and draw closer and closer at a hundred times the speed of light.

“Damn.”

“All of you shall die,” the beast leader bellowed as it closed in. It truly was a terrifyingly strong creature with stunningly fearsome illusions. The Dreamdust Domain it had just summoned was a full level higher and more profound than Ning’s novessence arts, and it was incredibly strong in close combat. It wouldn’t be easy at all for them to rely on their own power to survive this trip through Dreamdust Way. Most would have to rely on Dao-seals or other such treasures.

Whoosh. Whoosh. The distance between the two continued to narrow.

“This is the right moment!” The Ninedust Sectlord’s eyes lit up as he stretched out his right hand, a strange formation-diagram appearing in his palm.

BOOM! The formation-diagram within his palm instantly flew out and expanded dramatically, sweeping out towards the beast leader like the nets of heaven. The beast leader bellowed furiously, but was still completely enveloped by this enormous formation-diagram. The enormous formation-diagram was round inside but square outside, and it was composed of thousands of layers of strange formations that continuously merged into each other.

The beast leader was trapped within the formation. It let out continuous bellows as it furiously assaulted the formation, causing the entire formation-diagram to tremble and layers of formations to break apart, but new layers were quickly born out.

“It can’t break free.” The Ninedust Sectlord revealed a smug look. “If it wants to break through with raw power, it has to be able to destroy 3500 layers of formations at one go! Otherwise, the formations will be continuously regrown. Only when the energy within the formation is used up will it be able to escape.”

“How long will the formation-diagram last?” Ning asked.

“Probably for a short while.” The Ninedust Sectlord hesitated slightly. “This is my first time using it as well.”

Upon hearing this, Ning immediately sent the black vessel fleeing at full speed.

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The beast leader trapped within the formation let out furious roars as the two cultivators fled. The distance between them quickly began to grow greater and greater.

“We should’ve shaken him off by now.” Ning relaxed just slightly after flying for more than two hours. They had been flying at a hundred times the speed of light this entire time; there should be no way their foe could catch up.

“Ninedust, you said this was your first time using that formation-diagram?” Ning asked, “What made you so confident in its power? You also told me not to use my Dao-seals; didn’t the power come from a Dao-seal?”

“No, it came from a very special formation-diagram treasure.” The Ninedust Sectlord smiled as he waved his hand, producing a medallion above his palm that looked like a circle within a square. The medallion was covered with countless dense clusters of formations. “This formation-diagram treasure was bestowed upon me by the ancestor. All I need to do to fully charge it is to fill it with the energy of ten million cubes of chaos jewels, which allows me to use it one time. When I activate it, even Eternal Emperors will be trapped for quite some time.”

Ning’s eyes immediately lit up when he heard this. “What a fine treasure! So you can activate it repeatedly?”

It could be used for the low cost of just ten million cubes of chaos jewels? Sure, that might sound like a lot, but the formation-diagrams it created could be used to trap Eternal Emperors!

“A Hegemon would be able to use it just relying on his own Immortal energy,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. “Mine isn’t pure enough, so I have to rely on chaos jewels to make up the difference. It’ll take three days in order for those ten million cubes of chaos jewels to recharge the treasure. During the Dawn War, this treasure was considered an average one.”

Ning was secretly speechless. The Dawn War truly had been a terrifying one, and all the treasures that came from that time were truly wondrous. Dreamdust Way had been nothing more than an unremarkable relic-site during the Dawn War, but the beasts that it produced, especially the three-eyed leader which manifested that strange script, truly stunned and bedazzled Ning. No wonder so many generations of Daolords had dared to venture into this place to seek their fortunes, with even Eternal Emperors delving deep within.

“That script...” Ning had long ago fully memorized the strange character that had manifested above the third eye of the beast leader. He began to turn his attention to analyzing its mysteries.

Whoosh. The black vessel continued to fly at high speed. Three days later, it finally emerged from Dreamdust Way.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 6: A Three Hundred Millenia Journey

After emerging from Dreamdust Way, it took them two more months of travel before they reached the most important phase of their journey through the Terror Starsea; the Starflow River.

“What an impressive sight.” Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord stood at the prow of the black vessel, staring off into the vast and nigh-endless Starflow River. The place was filled with countless stars and planets of varying sizes, with some being negligible and others being even larger than the Solar Star of the Three Realms. All of the stars emitted absolutely identical auras of golden light, making the entire Starflow River look like an enormous world of flowing golden sand.

It was so vast that they couldn’t see any end to it. Supposedly, there had once been a major power who had been able to just barely make out the overall shape of the Starflow River, and it looked like the flows of a river. This was why it had been named the Starflow River.

“Starflow River is far larger than Dreamdust Way. In comparison, Dreamdust Way was nothing more than a short hallway.” The Ninedust Sectlord sighed. “We’ll be in there for three hundred millennia.”

“But it’ll be three hundred fairly safe millennia,” Ning said.

“If we’re lucky. Who knows, we might be able to ford the entire Starflow River with ease.” The Ninedust Sectlord was filled with hope as well.

Dreamdust Way was filled with danger at every turn, whereas Starflow River was comparatively much safer. The reason why the two viewed it as the primary source of danger on this trip was because they’d spend three hundred thousand years here. Even though it was ‘fairly safe’, all sorts of bad things could happen over the course of three hundred thousand years. If they were unlucky, they might stumble upon some truly dangerous creatures or places, and there were some places in Starflow River which was even more dangerous than Dreamdust Way.

However, if they were lucky it was also possible that they would avoid all danger and be able to sail through the river with ease.

It was guaranteed that Dreamdust Way would have an element of danger to it. Starflow River, however, was up to luck.

“Let’s go.” The black vessel flew straight into the awesome Starflow River.

Starflow River was filled with countless stars that emanated golden light. These countless stars were all linked together and resonated with each other, and their invisible power stretched out to cover all of Starflow River. This power was far superior to the power that filled Dreamdust Way. So long as this power was present, not even Ning’s sword-arts would allow him to tear through dimensions and teleport through it.

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Things proceeded more smoothly than they anticipated. Although the two encountered a few traces of ancient battle sites as they progressed through Starflow River and ran into a bit of trouble, they didn’t face any true danger at all. They didn’t even encounter anything capable of forcing the Ninedust Sectlord to use the formation-diagram in his palm. Just like that, nearly three hundred thousand years went past.

“Things have gone very smoothly. I estimate that in just a few dozen millennia, we’ll have traversed all of Starflow River.” The Ninedust Sectlord’s face was covered with excitement.

“Right.” Ning felt rather eager as well. He hadn’t exactly been wasting his time during the past three hundred thousand years. He had spent a good period of his time analyzing the mysteries held within the Dreamdust character and then used those insights into creating illusory arts for himself. The rest of the time, he spent on his Sword Dao!

By now, he had reached the third stage in three of his five sword-intents: the Blood Drop sword-intent, the Shadowless sword-intent, and the Yin-Yang sword-intent. As for the Soleheart sword-intent and the Heavenbreaker sword-intent, both of them were still lacking a bit. Clearly, to break through to become a Daolord of the Third Step would be rather difficult.

As for illusions? The Dreamdust character was simply too profound. The Nine Chaos Seals had guided Ning into understanding and training in the azureflower seal, but the Dreamdust character was simply something of incredible power which had been left behind from the Dawn War. It wasn’t an actual legacy! Ning was only able to learn as much as he could from it, and the power of his illusions increased several times over. Still, amongst other Heartforce Cultivators at his level he was still rather weak in this area! The difference, however, had been lessened.

“Eh? Darknorth, take a look.” The Ninedust Sectlord pointed off into the distance.

Ning followed the Ninedust Sectlord’s gaze, only to see signs of ruined buildings on a distant planet. “Looks like traces from the Dawn War.”

“Let’s go take a look,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“Let’s go.” By now, the two were quite familiar with Starflow River. Ever since Ning had learned that the Terror Starsea had been the battlefield of the Dawn War, he had been able to divine how many of the ruins they encountered had been created. For example, Dreamdust Way. Their prediction was that it had been some sort of formation which had been left behind from the Dawn War, meant to trap enemies and make them fight at a severe disadvantage.

It must be remembered that Dreamdust Way had no one in control of it. The beast leader, acting independently, was already able to summon a terrifying amount of power from Dreamdust Way. If the person who had originally set it up was still alive and in control of it... what a horrifying thought! These two would probably have been almost instantly slain.

In truth, as soon as the two of them saw the humanoid creature and the two Hegemon corpses, they had realized that the Dawn War had been on a far greater scale than the two of them could even imagine.

Whoosh. The vessel flew towards the planet in question. As they moved closer, they were able to clearly see that there were indeed many shattered ruins on this planet. Everything here was in terrible shape, with nothing more than a few stone pillars and battered walls remaining.

“My guess is that a major power must have hidden within his estate here, relying on its layers of barriers to stay alive. However, in the end even the estate was smashed into smithereens,” the Ninedust Sectlord said. The flying vessel landed on the planet, allowing Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord to fly out and inspect the stone pillars.

“There’s still a bit of power left in this estate.” Ning looked at the pillar in front of him. The towering pillar was thirty thousand meters tall, and its top was covered with layers of blurry white light. Even though countless years had gone by, the power of the pillar remained.

“It doesn’t seem as though there are any treasures here.” The Ninedust Sectlord walked around as he inspected the place. “Over the course of three hundred thousand years, we’ve run into quite a few ruins here in Starflow River but haven’t found so much as a single treasure.”

“These ruins don’t have much danger either. They probably were discovered and scoured long ago,” Ning said.

“Eh?” Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord simultaneously turned to stare off into the distance. A single figure suddenly emerged from a distant, half-shattered wall. The man had tousled hair, bare feet, and was garbed in tattered yellow robes.

“Gentlemen.” The barefoot yellow-robed man smiled as he walked towards them.

“Are you a cultivator, or...?” Ning was puzzled.

“I belong to the Starflow race. My name is Daolord Laya.” The yellow-robed man smiled.

“The Starflow race?” The Ninedust Sectlord smiled. “I heard long ago that Starflow River has a ‘Starflow’ race within it, but this is our first time actually encountering a Starflow cultivator despite having spent three hundred thousand years here.”

The yellow-robed man laughed. “The Starflow race has many branches that are located deep within Starflow River. Every branch is protected and hidden by formations, making it difficult for outsiders to discover them. Only when we go out adventuring do we interact with the outside world.”

Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord knew a good amount regarding the Starflow race. Both Solesky’s map from the Dao Alliance as well as the map bestowed by Patriarch Vulturax had detailed, thorough notes regarding the Starflow race in the Starflow River. The Starflow race was a branch of cultivators that had drifted to this place from the Great Dark. They were scorned by the other six major powers, and so they elected to make Starflow River their homeland. They found survival difficult despite having been here for countless years, and they usually referred to themselves as members of the Starflow Race due to how long they had lived here.

It must be understood that quite a few cultivator groups had drifted in from the Great Dark. Most were very weak and unable to compete against the local powers. Only the Dark Kingdom possessed significant power, resulting in them becoming one of six major powers. This was also the reason why the Dao Alliance and the others were highly biased and negative towards the Dark Kingdom, resulting in many battles. Weaker races like the Starflow race were still discriminated against, but so long as they played nice and didn’t try to infiltrate the Endless Territories, the various local powers there were all fairly kind towards them.

The Starflow race treated the Endless Territories in a very friendly manner. They lived at the suffrage of the Dao Alliance; how would they dare to not be friendly? Thus, encountering a member of the Starflow race in Starflow River was a good thing, not a bad thing, as the Starflow race member would often provide assistance or guidance.

“Yes. This is our very first time encountering a member of your race, and we’re about to leave Starflow River.” Ning smiled. “If we ran into you earlier, we might’ve had a smoother journey.”

“The two of you are planning to leave Starflow River?” Daolord Laya was curious.

“Yes, we are leaving soon.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

“Starflow River holds many treasure sites within it. Have either of you entered one of them?” Daolord Laya asked.

“Treasure sites?” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “Although we found a few ruins, we didn’t find any treasures.”

“Starflow River is too vast. You’ve spent three hundred millennia here, but you’ve only seen a tiny portion of Starflow River,” Daolord Laya said. “Members of the Starflow race have been in this place for countless eons, and our Daolords and even Eternal Emperors have continuously explored and adventured through it. I’m certain that I know far more about this place than the two of you.”

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 7: Thundersouth Palace

Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both nodded.

“Our race has successive generations worth of experience regarding some of the major ruins and relic sites within the Starflow River,” Daolord Laya said. “I was preparing to head to one of them. I’ve already reached the Verge, but actually succeeding in the Daomerge... I don’t feel confident at all. That’s why I’ve come out to adventure and to temper myself in the hopes that I can increase my Daomerge chances.”

“Daomerge...” The Ninedust Sectlord sighed. “The Daomerge is far too difficult.”

“Yes, far too difficult.” Ning shook his head. Whenever the topic of the Daomerge came up, any and every Daolord would feel a sense of pressure, especially the powerful ones.

Although it was also quite difficult to advance from the first step to the second, third, and fourth steps, with a single mistake resulting in failure, this process was comparatively far more secure! For example, once Ning mastered his second-stage Omega Sword Dao he became a Daolord of the Second Step. Once he mastered the third stage of his Omega Dao, he would be able to become a Daolord of the Third Step.

The Daomerge, however, was different! The Daomerge required one to perfectly integrate and fuse all of the insights you had ever gained into your Dao. Success or failure could only be truly determined during the Daomerge itself! There was no one who could say with certainty that he or she would ‘definitely’ succeed in the Daomerge. For example, Ning only needed to gain sufficient insights into the Dao as he advanced through each step, and his chances were virtually assured in this way. The Daomerge, however... he had no idea as to what his chances of success would be.

Daolord Windsource of the Badlands Territory had in the end failed in his attempts to merge the hundred channels of his Dao together. In the future, Ning would undergo a Daomerge of his Sword Dao as well. Even someone as proud as Ning would only claim that he was sure he could become a Daolord of the Fourth Step. As for the Daomerge? Not even he felt confident in his chances.

“The more overwhelmingly powerful the Dao, the harder the Daomerge will be.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head and sighed. “I don’t know if I’ll be able to succeed in the future. If I chose a weaker Dao, things would’ve been much simpler for me.”

“Are you actually willing to walk the path of a weak Dao?” Ning rebutted. In his heart, however, Ning couldn’t help but sigh. His Omega Sword Dao would be even more difficult! It must be understood that people like Palace Lord Dawnstar and the Ninedust Sectlord had perfectly joined multiple Supreme Daos together; if they gained eternity, they would become Hegemons. Ning’s Omega Sword Dao was even more powerful than their Daos. If he became an Eternal Emperor, he would be more powerful than even the Hegemons, right?

But Ning had never even heard of anyone who was more powerful than the three Hegemons. It was quite apparent how difficult it would be for him to reach such heights! In the future, the difficulty of his Daomerge would vastly outstrip that of Dawnstar or Ninedust.

“Of course not! What’s the point? Even if I succeeded in the Daomerge for a weak Dao, the only thing awaiting me would be a fate of being hunted and killed by others.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head.

“Since the two of you are within Starflow River, it’s obvious that you are both extraordinary Daolords.” Daolord Laya nodded with praise. “I agree with both of you. As cultivators, we should always strive to be as strong as we can. Otherwise, even if we become weak Eternal Emperors we still wouldn’t have the power needed to protect our race.”

Clearly, all three of them shared the same feelings. They had all chosen the path of becoming extremely powerful Daolords.

“Besides, the higher a level of enlightenment you gain and the more profound your understanding of the Dao is, the better your Daomerge chances will be,” Daolord Laya said. “I’m preparing to head to an extremely dangerous relic site known as Thundersouth Palace. In the Starflow River area, it ranks amongst the top ten ancient ruins and supposedly has legacies left behind by Hegemons. I wonder if the two of you would willing to accompany me on that trip?”

“Thundersouth Palace? Hegemon legacies?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged a glance. Both of them were intrigued. What was the entire point of adventuring? It was to seek out precious sites and treasures, right? A palace left behind by a Hegemon would definitely be filled with extraordinary things.

“Is that really a good idea?” The Ninedust Sectlord said, “This place is a place which your race discovered over the course of countless years of exploring; I’m sure that it is a secret which shouldn’t be casually divulged to others. If you bring the two of us inside...”

“Don’t worry about that.” Daolord Laya laughed. “Amongst our race, the location and existence of this place is indeed a tightly-held secret. I’m already a Verge-level Daolord who is far stronger than many of my peers, which is why the Emperors of our race informed me of the exact location of Thundersouth Palace. However, our standard policy as a race has always been to provide assistance whenever possible to Daolords of the Endless Territories who venture into Starflow River. All I need to request is that the two of you promise never to divulge this secret.”

“If that’s the case...” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded.

“Then we’ll accompany you on this journey,” Ning concurred.

They had heard long ago that the members of the Starflow race had always been extremely friendly towards cultivators of the Endless Territories. If Ning or the Ninedust Sectlord really did become Eternal Emperors, they would immediately gain extremely high statuses within the Endless Territories. They would remember the ‘favor’ which the Starflow race had shown them on this day, and they would naturally take care of the Starflow race when appropriate.

“If we’re going to head there... then as always, let us all swear lifeblood oaths,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“Alright. We’ll swear the lifeblood oath right now. That way, we can all work together and challenge Thundersouth Palace with full confidence in each other.” Daolord Laya agreed.

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Now that lifeblood oaths had been sworn, both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord felt more confidence and faith in Daolord Laya. Even if he really had been plotting against them, now that the lifeblood oath was sworn he would immediately be devoured by it once he actually tried to take any action.

“Haha, I’ve never been so lucky before.” The Ninedust Sectlord laughed. “A random stroke of luck is delivering treasures into my hand.”

“It was destiny that led me to meet with the two of you, Darknorth, Ninedust.” Daolord Laya smiled.

“Very, very few of our Verge-level Daolords go out adventuring to temper themselves. For the three of us to run into each other really is an incredible bit of karmic luck, or as I put it just now, ‘destiny’. In addition, our long-standing rules permit me to take you to certain ruins. No need to thank me, gentlemen. At most, I would ask you to remember this bit of kindness I’ve shown you today. If the two of you are able to gain eternity in the future, please help us out every so often.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both nodded. Their chances of actually gaining eternity were incredibly low; if they truly did succeed, then occasionally helping out the Starflow race would be a minor matter.

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Ning, the Ninedust Sectlord, and Daolord Laya rode the black vessel as it flew through Starflow River.

“Thundersouth Palace isn’t that far away. Given how fast this vessel moves, we should reach it in just over a century,” Daolord Laya said. “Thundersouth Palace is quite dangerous, but I’m very familiar with it. So long as the two of you follow me, I’m confident that we should be able to stay safe.”

“Don’t underestimate Darknorth and myself, brother Laya,” the Ninedust Sectlord said.

“Yes, you might end up needing the two of us to save your behind, brother Laya.” Ning grinned.

“Oh? I look forward to seeing your abilities,” Daolord Laya said.

The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly asked, “Oh, right. Brother Laya, I heard that the Starflow race migrated here from the Great Dark?”

Ning glanced at Daolord Laya as well. Ning himself was also quite curious about this.

“Yes.” Daolord Laya nodded. “Quite a few people know this. Long, long ago our homeland, a place known as the Peacock Lotus Realmverse, suffered an unbelievably massive war. The entire Peacock Lotus Realmverse was completely obliterated, and we were forced to flee for our lives. We drifted for many years through the Great Dark, with the first-generation Daolords of the Peacock Lotus Realmverse eventually all dying. We spent nearly a million chaos cycles drifting through the Great Dark, after all.”

“As we moved through the Great Dark, our Eternal Emperors held members of our race within their estate-worlds, giving them a place to flourish and prosper. The Eternal Emperors spent nearly a million chaos cycles drifting before finally arriving at the Endless Territories. In the end, they chose Starflow River as the place where our race would set down roots once more. Virtually all of the members of my race are now born and live in Starflow River, with only the original Eternal Emperors having actually come from the Peacock Lotus Realmverse. As for us Daolords, we know nothing of that place at all,” Daolord Laya explained.

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord were both rather stunned by this. Nearly a million chaos cycles of drifting? The Great Dark truly was far, far too vast! No wonder only Eternal Emperors would dare explore it. Such an incredibly long journey was enough to bring despair to almost any Daolord. However, even for Eternal Emperors a million chaos cycles of solitude was a terrifying prospect. Only Eternal Emperors such as Mirrorsnow who had long ago grown completely bored of the Endless Territories after having explored most of it would elect to enter the Great Dark and seek out excitement there.”

“Since we have left our homeland, propagating and surviving has been quite difficult.” Daolord Laya sighed. “The Endless Territories is under threat of destruction by the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels. Supposedly, in the distant future even the Starflow River will be destroyed by it. When that happens, our race shall be forced to continue our wandering.”

“The Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels?” Both Ning and Ninedust sighed. Indeed, in the distant future it was almost guaranteed that all of the various organizations within the Endless Territories would be forced to go off wandering. But of course, if they didn’t succeed in their Daomerge then the two of them would never live to witness that day.

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The three continued to relax and chat as they advanced through Starflow River. More than a hundred years went past in the blink of an eye.

“Thundersouth Palace is directly ahead. My race has already set up wards to hide everything in the region. Once I connect to them, we’ll be able to see Thundersouth Palace.” Daolord Laya stood at the prow of the ship as he spoke to Ning and Ninedust.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 8: The Thundersouth Guardian

Ji Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord both let out impressed sighs. The Starflow race truly was crafty; they had actually set up barrier wards to make it impossible for others to locate Thundersouth Palace. However, the two of them both understood this decision; any race or organization would choose to hide such a valuable resource.

Daolord Laya stood at the prow of the vessel. His Immortal energy flooded outwards, condensing into one mysterious rune after another. Soon, a total of nine runes had taken shape. They hung there in the void, emanating waves of blurry white light.

“Open.” Daolord Laya’s voice was cold and sharp. Whoosh! The nine ancient runes all flew towards the void in front of them, and a series of ripples appeared. A void door appeared in the center of the ripples, and through the door one could clearly make out an enormous space palace on the other side.

“Come, let us go in. This void door won’t stay open for long,” Daolord Laya said hurriedly.

“Let’s go.” The three of them transformed into streaks of light that flew towards the void door.

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After passing through the void door, the three were able to clearly see the enormous golden palace which hung in the empty space before them. The golden palace was extremely beautiful, and it was covered with innumerable sculptures and diagrams which made it look quite bewitching.

The palace had an an aura of strength, power, and nobility. Above the front gates hung two giant words – THUNDER SOUTH. These two words crackled with streaks of electricity, and the calligraphy was filled with a lofty spirit. The entire palace emanated an invisible aura of presence and might which was strong enough to cause Ning’s heart to shudder.

They hadn’t even entered yet. Just by staring at it from afar, they already felt a sense of danger. This was a clear warning which the previous master of the Thundersouth Palace had left for future guests!

Daolord Laya smiled. “No need to worry, gentlemen.”

Ning shook his head. “Just by looking at those two characters, I can tell that this should have been a Hegemon’s palace. Even the weakest of traps left behind by someone on that level would be enough to wipe me out a million times over.”

“So long as you avoid being too greedy, you won’t encounter any mortal danger here,” Daolord Laya said.

“Too greedy?” Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord exchanged a glance.

“Are you saying we aren’t allowed to touch any of the treasures we see in there?” Ninedust frowned.

Daolord Laya explained, “Before I left our racial headquarters, the Eternal Emperors told me that there are two major dangers which would be awaiting me here. They told me that if I wasn’t careful, I might die, but if I was able to survive them then even if I did encounter a few other problems, those problems definitely wouldn’t be life-threatening. This is why I only know detailed information regarding the first two dangers, as the Emperors did not speak of the later dangers in detail. The main thing they said to me was that I would be fine, so long as I didn’t get too greedy. I was puzzled by this as well; the entire point of me coming to this place was to find valuable treasures for myself. What would be the point if I couldn’t take anything? But the Emperors simply said that I’d understand everything once I actually entered.”

“So we’ll understand everything once we enter?” Ning laughed. “Hah. Fine, then. If we knew everything before going in, then it wouldn’t prove to be much of a challenge or an empowering experience.”

“Agreed.” Ninedust nodded as well. “Come, let us go inside.”

Both of them trusted Daolord Laya completely... or to be precise, they trusted the lifeblood oath all three had sworn. Since they were all bound by oaths, there was no way for Daolord Laya to lie or deceive to them regarding this place.

The palace gates were enormous. The three stepped through the gates, and as they did Ning couldn't help but raise his head to look up once more at the two words that hung above it, 'THUNDER SOUTH'. He could vaguely sense that it contained certain mysteries within it, but his path was that of the Sword Dao and not that of the Dao of Lightning.

The enormous palace held many rooms, hallways, and even gardens. It truly was graceful and refined... but every single part of it was brimming with that deep azure lightning. Countless tendrils of lightning crackled everywhere, and they were actually quite beautiful to behold.

After they stepped through the gates, they stared somberly towards the front. All of them could sense the power held within those flickers of lightning.

“That is Eternal lightning,” Ning blurted out. Ning had encountered many different types of Dao lightning in his quest to master the [Novessence Thunder], but none of them gave him the sense of power and danger which the lightning tendrils before him did.

“There's actually Eternal lightning within this palace?” The Ninedust Sectlord blurted out, “Eternal lightning... I've never heard of it being naturally birthed from the primordial chaos.”

“Supposedly, only an Eternal Emperor who has reached incredible heights in the Dao of Lightning is capable of creating a streak of Eternal lightning,” Ning said seriously.

“Yes... and this is the first great danger.” Daolord Laya said solemnly, “The lightning fills virtually every inch of this palace, and it is both sentient and intelligent.”

“Sentient and intelligent?” Ning exclaimed with surprise, “Isn't Eternal lightning sentient to begin with?”

“Just watch for yourself.” Daolord Laya grinned. Just a heartbeat later, the countless streams of lightning in front of them began to wriggle about and gather together, transforming into an enormous lightning humanoid. Its entire body was composed of electricity, and it had a pair of deep azure eyes that stared down upon the three from their lofty heights.

It was Eternal lightning, filled with endless vitality and life energy.

“Greetings, milord Guardian,” Daolord Laya said respectfully.

“Master left me in charge of protecting this palace,” the lightning guardian said calmly. “I will strike you with three palms. If you juniors can survive all three palms, you'll be granted entry. If you feel confident in your personal power, you can choose to accept my strikes individually.”

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Within the palace. Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord had their weapons at the ready. Daolord Laya said hurriedly, “According to what the Emperors of my race said, the lightning guardian is reinforced by

the power of the entire Thundersouth Palace and is incredibly powerful! Each of his three palms is more powerful than the last. If you can't take them, come hide behind me."

"No need for that." The Ninedust Sectlord hefted his longstaff.

"Let's see just how tough the lightning guardian is." Ning had two Northbow swords at the ready. He was a very proud man; how could he choose to hide behind another?

The lightning guardian said coldly, "Here comes the first palm." His right arm swept out, transforming to become a mountain in size as it crashed down towards the three of them.

Ning, the Ninedust Sectlord, and Daolord Laya simultaneously brandished their own weapons. Ning used swords, the Ninedust Sectlord used his longstaff, and Daolord Laya used a greataxe. All three sent their weapons straight towards the lightning guardian's enormous palm.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The two forces collided with an enormous collision. The three of them had managed to endure this blow head on, but their bodies couldn't help but tremble from the force of the collision. They quickly managed to stabilize themselves. The Ninedust Sectlord's face was ashen, while Daolord Laya's face had a solemn look on it. Only Ning was still fairly relaxed, as his Hegemon armor was able to whittle away the power of any blow until it had only 0.1% of its original force. In terms of defense prowess, Ning was more skilled than Ninedust and Laya to begin with. Although his body trembled from the collision, the shockwave was very little to him and caused his divine body little harm.

"Even if it went up a full level in power, it would be useless against me." Ning felt quite confident. The Hegemon armor truly was powerful. However, Ning also understood that this was also partially because he himself had become much stronger than before. When he had first entered the azureflower estate, he had nearly been knocked unconscious by a single blow. Back then, he was at a disadvantage even when battling against the likes of Patriarch Clearwind.

As for now? Ning was currently stronger than even Kongsan!

"An impressive fellow. Fast and furious." The Ninedust Sectlord let out a growl. "Darknorth, use your secret arts." As he spoke, waves of rippling water began to emanate from his body.

"Agreed." Ning nodded. Although he was able to take these hits head-on, the Ninedust Sectlord didn't have a suit of Hegemon armor, making it rather tough for him. The nine novessence arts flew out of Ning's body in the form of nine energy dragons.

The Ripplewater art and the nine novessence arts merged together, spreading out throughout the palace.

The lightning guardian's mouth crooked upwards slightly, almost as though he was laughing.

"Interesting. Your secret arts aren't bad at all... but I'll use the power of the entire Thundersouth Palace in my third strike. I hope you can survive it."

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! The hallways, gardens, rooms, and surface of the entire palace began to light up with runic script. The runes all seemed to flow and congregate around the lightning guardian. "Get ready for the third palm!"

Whoosh! The lightning guardian's palm struck out like the firmament of heaven itself, enveloping the entire palace within it as he attacked the three. There was nowhere to run or hide from this strike.

"Can't take it head on. Hide behind me!" Daolord Laya barked mentally as he produced a golden bone in his hands.

"I only have one treasure left." The Ninedust Sectlord immediately dodged behind Daolord Laya. Clearly, he would've been forced to use his treasures if he wanted to take this attack head on. If Daolord Laya was going to use his, there was no point in Ninedust wasting one of his own treasures out of sheer pride.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 9: The Second Danger

"Darknorth!" As the Ninedust Sectlord dodged behind Daolord Laya, he discovered to his amazement that Ji Ning wasn't doing the same. He knew very well that Ning was roughly on the same level of power as him. If he didn't dare to take it head-on, how was it that Darknorth did? But there was nothing he could do except worry; the final attack of the lightning guardian was already descending upon them.

BOOM! The enormous hand descended upon them like the firmament of heaven itself. This strike contained the full force the lightning guardian was capable of mustering, and it had been reinforced by the wards of the palace itself.

Rings of white light appeared around Daolord Laya and the Ninedust Sectlord, allowing them to endure and withstand the strike.

Whoosh. The lightning guardian withdrew his palm, then glanced at the three and smiled. "I didn't expect that one of you would be able to endure my palm through his own power. It seems you have quite an impressive protective divine ability, young fellow. One more trial awaits you, set down by my master. I hope you all survive it."

The lightning guardian took a single step, then dispersed into countless streaks of lightning that quickly scattered in each direction. No more was the path in front of them blocked off by any lightning at all.

"Impressive, Darknorth. You actually took it head-on." The Ninedust Sectlord walked over to Ning.

"According to my racial records, only the most supreme of Daolords can endure such a blow head-on. I'm impressed, Darknorth." Daolord Laya truly was amazed. The power of that strike was far beyond what ordinary Eternal Emperors were capable of; that was a full-power strike from the lightning guardian which was reinforced by the palace's formations!

"Eh, I simply have a decent protective divine ability. My entire body is still numb from that strike, though. My legs are about to give out underneath me." Ning's legs really were wobbling, but he laughed. "If that lightning giant launched multiple attacks against me, I wouldn't have been able to endure it."

"Just like that, I used up a boneséal which one of our Emperor's personally made for me." Daolord Laya laughed, "If there were multiple attacks, no number of boneséals would've been able to protect me."

Ning couldn't help but sigh in amazement as well. His divine body was close to but not quite on par with a low-grade Eternal weapon. He had mainly relied on his Hegemon armor to endure this hit. Alas, the

treasures he needed to upgrade his protective divine ability were simply too rare and hard to find. He did acquire Dragonfish Ki, but he needed to find the rest as well. He needed to upgrade his divine body to make it on par with a middle-grade Eternal treasure as quickly as possible.

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Ning, Ninedust, and Daolord Laya followed the winding hallways of the palace. The Thundersouth Palace was extremely large and quite beautiful. Every so often, they would see a few flickers of Eternal lightning swimming about them, but those lightning streaks all kept a long distance away from them. Clearly, now that they had survived the first trial the Eternal lightning would no longer cause any trouble for them.

“Halt!” Daolord Laya suddenly called out.

“Eh?” Ning and Ninedust came to a halt. In front of them was a lake that emanated an aura of freezing energy, and a faint layer of cold mist could be seen on its surface. There was a crooked wooden bridge which passed through the entire lake.

“The wooden bridge up ahead is the second dangerous trial which we will face in Thundersouth Palace, and the last one which could be life-threatening to us,” Daolord Laya said somberly. “This one is even more dangerous than the first one.”

“More dangerous?” Ning and Ninedust were both startled. Ninedust couldn’t help but frown. “You were already forced to use up an Emperor’s boneseal to survive the first one. Now you are telling me that this one is worse?”

“Yes.” Daolord Laya said somberly, “Quite a few of the more powerful Daolords of my race have visited Thundersouth Palace in their time. Each was given a single boneseal, but nearly half still ended up perishing here! It must be understood that there are two dangerous areas here. If you use up the boneseal during the first danger, you’d definitely survive it... and so the ones who didn’t, all perished here.”

Ning and Ninedust felt their hearts clench. Nearly half of the Daolords had perished here?

“Still, I’m confident in my chances.” Daolord Laya smiled. “The Emperor said that I have better than a 70% chance of surviving. Don’t worry at all, gentlemen. I’ll go up there and give the wooden bridge a try. If I really am so unlucky as to die here, then you can simply leave. The invisibility formation my race set up is only directed outwards, not inwards.”

“Brother Laya, what is so dangerous about the wooden bridge?” Ning asked.

“Once you step onto the wooden bridge, you’ll be trapped within an illusory realm,” Daolord Laya said somberly. “A very terrifying one! If you allow yourself to be led astray and accidentally fall into the waters of the lake, then you’ll die without question.”

“I’m planning to use the illusions here to temper my Dao-heart. My chances of making it are extremely high; if I can strengthen my Dao-heart, it’ll be of help to me in my Daomerge in the future.” Daolord Laya had a resolute look in his eyes. He was preparing for the Daomerge. No matter what, he was determined to embark on this path.

"Illusions?" Ninedust blinked.

"A terrifying illusory realm?" Ning stared blankly at Daolord Laya. "And your chances of surviving it are roughly 70%?"

"...What's with the strange looks on your faces?" Daolord Laya immediately said, "The Emperor felt that my chances were high, but there's still a chance that I might fail. I can't give up a chance like this to temper my Dao-heart. Don't worry, so long as I can make it across safely, I'll come back and help you across as well. Otherwise, the two of you would fall into the lake."

Ning and Ninedust blinked again.

"You hear that, Darknorth? The second trial consists of illusions." Ninedust laughed.

"And to think that I was feeling really nervous just now. Jeeze." Ning shook his head and chuckled as well.

"What's with the two of you?" Daolord Laya was puzzled.

The Ninedust Sectlord began to roar with laughter. "Brother Lay, let me give you a formal introduction of our friend Daolord Darknorth."

"A formal introduction? An introduction of what?" Daolord Laya still didn't understand.

"Brother Darknorth is exceedingly skilled in sword-arts, but you know that already. He also trains as a Heartforce Cultivator and is an extremely accomplished one." The Ninedust Sectlord said smugly, "Just now, you were talking about helping a powerful Heartforce Cultivator survive deadly illusions... hah! I laughed so hard my teeth nearly fell out."

Daolord Laya stared blankly. "A Heartforce Cultivator?" Heartforce Cultivators were pitifully rare; the Brightshore Kingdom was one of the six great powers of the Endless Territories, but it still had less than ten of them, and this was after the almighty Brightshore Hegemon had scoured the Endless Territories for talented World-level experts! The Starflow race naturally had even fewer Heartforce Cultivators. They had more than ten powerful Verge-level Daolords in this era, but not a single Heartforce Cultivator!

"Brother Laya..." Ning chuckled as well. With a thought, he summoned his heartworld projection and brought it down upon the area around them.

"A heartworld projection? Darknorth, you..." Moments later, Daolord Laya started to laugh as well. "Haha, I really made a fool of myself just now, didn't I? Illusions really are nothing to brother Darknorth. Even if the master of the Thundersouth Palace personally cast his illusions over him, I suspect he still wouldn't be phased in the slightest."

Ning laughed. This really was the case. Only someone incredibly skilled in illusions would have a chance at affecting him; for example, an Eternal Emperor who was also a Heartforce Cultivator would be able to trap Ning within illusions. As for Hegemons who occasionally trained in illusions? Those illusions wouldn't be able to affect powerful Daolords who were Heartforce Cultivators.

But of course, Hegemons wouldn't need to go to that trouble. The almighty Brightshore Hegemon, for example, could use his mastery over spacetime to wipe out Ning with ease. But if he was to use illusions

instead... Heartforce Cultivators really would have very little to fear. Ning's best guess was that the master of Thundersouth Palace had been primarily focused on the Dao of Lightning.

"Darknorth, I do have one request," Daolord Laya said.

"If there's anything you need, just let me know," Ning said.

"I want to borrow this opportunity to temper my Dao-heart. Supposedly, the illusions are very effective for that," Daolord Laya said. "If I'm in any danger, please lend me a hand and ensure that I don't fall into the lake."

"Easily done." Ning nodded.

Daolord Laya nodded back at him, then walked onto the wooden bridge. He came to an immediate halt after doing so, staying there for a full hour without moving at all.

Ning and Ninedust both waited patiently. Roughly one hour later, Daolord Laya's gaze turned clear. A serious expression on his face, he began to carefully advance. However, without even realizing it he began to walk towards the edges of the wooden bridge. He clearly was walking askew, but he himself didn't realize it. He walked closer and closer towards the lake and its white frozen mist, which seemed ready to reach out and swallow him alive.

"Careful." Ning reached out with his arm, expanding it by dozens of meters. As his arm reached through the illusions, they immediately began to surge through it and attempted to ensorcell his mind. But it was like the waters of a well splashing against the well's stones; they had no effect at all. Ning was completely unmoved, and so he latched onto Daolord Laya by the back, then pulled him straight out.

Daolord Laya was stunned as he was pulled out of the wood bridge. "What's going on?" He was stunned and couldn't believe it. He turned to look at Ning. "My mind was clear. I had completely shaken off the effects of the illusions."

"Shaken off? If it wasn't for Darknorth, you would've walked straight into the lake by now," the Ninedust Sectlord snickered.