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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 10: Ji Ning's Illusions

"How is this possible? I could clearly sense that I was quite awake. I wasn't..." Daolord Laya's voice slowly trailed off. Moments later, he let out a low sigh. "What a terrifying illusion. It actually was able to seep into my soul without me even realizing it. The things that I thought I saw were actually all illusory. My Dao-heart still isn't strong enough, allowing my soul and truesoul to be infiltrated without me knowing it."

"Haha, it seems you are fairly weak. Let me show you what I have up my sleeves." The Ninedust Sectlord laughed as he walked towards the floating wooden bridge. After taking two steps, he turned to look at Ji Ning. "Darknorth, if I also end up walking astray you need to grab me."

"Of course." Ning nodded.

"But of course, I'm convinced that my Dao-heart will render me invulnerable." Ninedust briskly walked forwards and stepped onto the floating wooden bridge. As soon as he did so, he too suddenly came to a halt and stopped moving.

He stood there for over two hours without moving. "Hmph." A hint of a smile appeared on the Ninedust Sectlord's face. "What a formidable illusion. However, in the end I was able to break it." He began to walk forwards as well, but he actually began to turn and move straight towards the waters of the lake.

Ning was badly startled by his sudden movements. Fortunately, Ning had kept a close eye on him. Ning immediately stretched his arm out by dozens of meters, latching onto the Ninedust Sectlord's silver robes and grabbed him back.

"Why the hell did you grab me? I was perfectly fine." The Ninedust Sectlord looked at Ning.

"Calm down and think it over again." Ning didn't even try to explain.

"I'm sure I didn't..." The Ninedust Sectlord's voice trailed off as well. Clearly, he was just now slowly shaking off the effects of the illusion. Moments later, an astonished look appeared on his face. "That was absolutely terrifying. I've never encountered an illusion like that. I was trapped by the illusion, and I really did shake its effects off, but... it continued to slowly seep into my soul and truesoul, affecting both."

"Right." The nearby Daolord Laya concurred, "This is different from ordinary illusions. It looks dangerous, but all that is just for the sake of allowing it to disguise its soul-seeping abilities."

"Mm. You were able to last for an hour before having your soul infiltrated." Ning then looked towards the Ninedust Sectlord. "Ninedust, you lasted for two hours before being infiltrated. It seems your Dao-heart is slightly tougher than brother Laya's."

"But still not strong enough." The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. "I nearly died."

"I nearly died as well." Laya shivered with fear.

“Darknorth, I want to try it again. The way in which this illusion seeps into the soul and truesoul truly is an excellent way for one to temper one’s Dao-heart,” the Ninedust Sectlord said immediately. “I can’t give up a chance like this. Help keep an eye on me and make sure I don’t walk into the lake.”

“I wish to give it a try as well, Darknorth. Give me a hand.” Daolord Laya also wanted to rely on this opportunity to temper his Dao-heart.

They had a Heartforce Cultivator watching over them. What had they to fear? And so, the two of them both stepped onto the wooden bridge... and once again they eventually began to walk towards the water of the lake like idiots. In the end, Ning had to drag them back again and again.

“This illusion really is something special.” Ning himself walked onto the bridge, then sat down in the lotus position and allowed the illusions to invade his soul as he began to analyze them.

His heartforce was maintained and nurtured by the power of his absolutely enormous heartworld, one which was comparable to an entire territory in size. There was simply no way an illusion on this level could shake such powerful heartforce, giving Ning the opportunity to closely study from it.

During the past three hundred millennia within the Starflow River area, Ning had often spent time analyzing Daolord Featherdress’ [Dreamworld] technique while researching the Dreamdust runes he had encountered in Dreamdust Way. He was still fairly weak in the art of illusions compared to other Heartforce Cultivators at the same level of power, but he could still be considered a grandmaster in this area when compared to others. The illusory power of this wooden bridge was actually close to that of the [Dreamworld] technique, but of course it was far from being a match for the Dreamdust runes. The Dreamdust runes were comparable to Ning’s azureflower seal in profundity, and the illusions of this wooden bridge were far from being a match for it, making it easier for Ning to analyze and study it.

With but a thought, Ning caused time to accelerate a hundred times normal in the area around him. Given his current level of power, it was easy for him to use his heartworld projection to accelerate time around him.

In truth, many powerful Daolords were capable of this, including the likes of Daolord Solesky. Even a number of Immortals and Fiendgodsin the Three Realms were capable of this; for example, the ‘Bridge of Despair’ in the Underworld Kingdom had this function. However, causing time to accelerate a hundred times faster than normal for himself was extremely difficult, simply because he was extremely powerful. Generally speaking, only a powerful Daolord could accelerate time by that much.

Time continued to flow on. After spending more than thirty years, the Ninedust Sectlord finally managed to completely traverse the wooden bridge. Daolord Laya actually took eight hundred years before accomplishing the same.

“I thought that we had already spent quite some time there. Who would’ve thought that Darknorth would spend even more time than us?” The Ninedust Sectlord stood at the other side of the bridge, waiting helplessly as he looked at Ning.

“Let’s just keep waiting,” Daolord Laya laughed. The reason why Ning was staying at the bridge for so long was because he was analyzing and researching its various illusions. It must be remembered that Ning had rescued Ninedust and Laya on multiple occasions already, and so the two of them now waited for him without complaint. In truth, for Daolords even a wait of ten thousand years was nothing.

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After nine thousand years had gone past, Ning finally rose to stand up on the bridge once more. "Interesting." Ning revealed a smile. "The [Dreamworld], the Dreamdust runes, and the illusions of this bridge... in the end, it was the illusions of the bridge that helped me out the most."

The [Dreamworld] really didn't suit him very well at all, as it was primarily tailored for Daolord Featherdress' rather soft and insidious approach. The Dreamdust runes were simply too profound, almost unfathomably so. The bridge illusions were close to the [Dreamworld] illusions in power, but had been created by the master of this palace, the Thundersouth Hegemon. Although the Thundersouth Hegemon's strongest Dao lay in thunder and he wasn't particularly skilled in illusions, he was still close to Daolord Featherdress in ability. More importantly, his style was closer to Ning's own style.

"To use a powerful illusion to attract the enemy's attention while catching them offguard and infiltrating their souls... and to lead them astray just as they are feeling confident about having defeated the illusions. What a nasty technique." Ning laughed. "My own illusions have finally started to take shape, thanks to learning some of the tricks of the wooden bridge."

"Since my illusionary arts have gradually taken form in the Starflow Realm, then let them be called... the [Dreamstar] arts." Ning was quite pleased. Now that he had developed his [Dreamstar] illusions, they would be of great use to him in battle.

The [Heartforce Eradicator] was simply too brutish; either the opponent resisted it or died outright! If the opponent resisted it and was able to maintain mental clarity against it, the [Heartforce Eradicator] would have no effect at all.

The [Dreamstar] art, however, was able to have a constant impact on the enemy in battle. So long as the enemy was slowed down or distracted even slightly, Ning would have the chance to gain victory.

"The [Dreamstar] still needs further perfecting. If I can learn a bit more from the Dreamdust runes, I might become a figure like Daolord Featherdress, capable of using heartforce abilities to become the most powerful Daolord of my generation." Ning knew that he was still far off from this goal; his technique was weaker than even the [Dreamworld] technique, to say nothing of Daolord Featherdress' most powerful technique, the [Featherdress Soulthral Song].

"Darknorth, you finally stood up." The Ninedust Sectlord called out to him from the far end of the bridge, "Hurry up. We wanted to go exploring this place years ago, since we know that there's no more danger inside. The only thing waiting for us is fortune and treasure, but we decided to wait for you instead. Now that's brotherhood for you, eh?"

"Sure, I guess." Ning strode towards them atop the wooden bridge. "But I saved you and grabbed you back from the brink of death more than ten thousand times. Now that's real brotherhood, am I right?"

"Yeah, but did you have to do it in a way where you kept on grabbing me by the neck?" the Ninedust Sectlord groused.

"You sure are picky about how you want your life to be saved," Ning said.

The nearby Daolord Laya watched as Ning and Ninedust bickered and jested. He knew that his relationship with Ning hadn't reached such a level yet; the latter two had experienced multiple life-and-death experiences, after all.

The group departed the wooden bridge area. "Based on my race's records, there shouldn't be much danger left in the following area," Daolord Laya said. "However, that's only assuming we aren't greedy, whatever that means."

Whoosh. Suddenly, the tendrils of Eternal lightning off in the distance all began to gather together off in the distance. Soon, an enormous lightning giant was standing in front of them once more. The lightning guardian stared at them, then revealed a smile. "I didn't expect there would be a Heartforce Cultivator in your ranks. Excellent. Your name is Darknorth, yes?"

"Darknorth greets you, milord Guardian," Ning said respectfully.

"You were able to take my third strike head-on, and the illusions were unable to affect you as well. Mm. You are permitted to choose any one treasure from the Thundersouth Palace. Remember, you are only allowed to take one. As for the two of you, you aren't allowed to take any treasures at all," the lightning guardian said. "Remember, don't be greedy. Greed leads to death!"

Ning raised his eyebrows. So this was what 'don't be greedy' meant.

"Kid, before my master went off to take part in the great war, he left four of these palaces behind scattered throughout the Terror Starsea. If you can pass the trials of all four, a truly large fortune will await you." The lightning guardian smiled mysteriously, then dissipated into countless streaks of Eternal lightning that fled off into every direction.

Ning was stunned, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. The four palaces were scattered throughout the Terror Starsea? Perhaps during the Dawn War, the Terror Starsea wasn't very dangerous yet, but it was now a place where even Hegemons wouldn't dare tread. How could he possibly go out and search for the other three palaces?

"You are actually only allowed to choose one treasure? The two of us aren't allowed to choose any?" The Ninedust Sectlord glared at Ning.

"Haha! Remember how you won some treasures in that cave, but I ended up with nothing at all?" Ning smirked. The Ancient ancestor had left nothing for him at all. "What comes around, goes around. This time, it's your turn to leave empty-handed."

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 11: The Stone Censer of Reunion

Ninedust chatted with Ji Ning as the two walked, while Daolord Laya just stared at Ning with a rather complex look on his face.

"What is it, Daolord Laya?" Ning suddenly became aware of Laya's stares.

"Brother Darknorth, you probably do not yet understand what being given a chance to take a treasure away from Thundersouth Palace represents." Daolord Laya hesitated a moment, a complex look on his

face. "The Starflow race cares deeply about one particular treasure inside this place. If you were able to bring it out and then gift it to our race, we would be willing to pay you an enormous price for it."

"The Starflow race would like to trade with me for it?" Ning was stunned. "Has no member of the Starflow Daolords been able to take any treasures away with them when they left?"

"There has." Daolord Laya nodded. "Just one! Receiving the approval of the Eternal lightning is incredibly difficult. There were others in our history who were able to endure the three blows and also endure the illusions, but they still were not acknowledged."

Only now did Ning understand that gaining the lightning giant's approval was no simple task.

"Only a single member of our race was allowed to take a treasure away with him, and he chose a different one," Daolord Laya said. "My race desperately desires a chance to acquire that particular treasure. If you are willing to garner it and trade it with us... don't worry. I promise our race will pay almost any price. My avatar is in our headquarters right now, and I can complete the negotiations for you before you choose it and bring it out. You can choose where the trade will be transacted! Even if you wish to carry it out in the Endless Territories, we can make it happen."

Ning was intrigued. It really did seem as though the Starflow race was in desperate desire of that treasure.

"What treasure is it?" Ning asked.

"The Stone Censer of Reunion," Daolord Laya said.

"An incense burner?" Ning was rather puzzled.

"Can it be the legendary..." A stunned look was on the Ninedust Sectlord's face.

Ning looked at the look on Ninedust's face, then looked at the eager expression on Daolord Laya's. He instantly started to grow curious about this Stone Censer of Reunion.

"Let me go take a look first. Before doing so... brother Laya, please do not tell your race about the fact that I have a chance to select a treasure." Ning said calmly, "Once you do, it's possible that one of your Eternal Emperors would suddenly charge to this place and lie in wait outside. That would be troublesome."

"Don't worry." Daolord Laya nodded repeatedly.

"Mm." Ning decided to first take a look and see just what made this Stone Censer of Reunion so special. If it was also extremely important to him, then he would probably immediately leave this place with it in tow.

It would take time for the Starflow race to travel here. There was no way to use spatial teleportation within the Starflow River; even Ning's ability to transcend dimensions was unable to pierce through the local region, thanks to the omnipresent power of the Starflow River. It would take quite some time for any member of the Starflow race's Eternal Emperors to get here.

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The three of them quickly arrived at a beautiful, crystalline pavilion. The walls of the pavilion were like white jade and semi-translucent, allowing them to be able to see through to the insides.

“How beautiful.” The three of them walked shoulder-to-shoulder through the pavilion. There were five prayer mats located on the ground, with a palm-sized incense burner located at the very center of the pavilion. The incense burner was both white and black, and it faintly emanated an aura of white smoke that was visible to the naked eye. It wafted out to an area of roughly nine meters that perfectly covered the five prayer mats.

There were also a number of paintings hanging from the walls and unfurled on the tables. Other treasures were on the tables as well. There was a bracelet that was engraved with some sort of bird carving, a pair of scissors that gleamed with black light, a pearl that emanated a freezing aura, and more. In total, there were twelve treasures on the dais.

“So these paintings were made by the master of this palace?” Ning raised his head to look at the paintings. All of them were in the same style, and they naturally contained many of the mysteries of the Dao, primarily of the Dao of Lightning. And yet, they actually contained some elements of the Dao of the Sword as well. However, considering that Ning was the master of the Omega Sword Dao, he viewed this person’s Sword Dao as being rather ordinary, perhaps on par with Emperor Mirrorsnow’s.

There was also the Dao of Illusions, and the Dao of Painting infused into each artwork...

“Quite a few treasures here.” Ning’s attention had been focused on the incense burner in the center as soon as he had come in, but he was in no rush to inspect it. Instead, he first looked at the other twelve treasures on the table.

“An umbrella?” A strange golden metal umbrella lay in front of him. The tip of the umbrella was incredibly sharp. Ning reached out to touch it, filling it with his godsense to learn some of its secrets.

This magic treasure was known as the Golden Ambersky Umbrella. It could be used to attack, but when the umbrella was opened it could also serve as a defensive treasure. It also contained a world unto itself that would be unleashed once the umbrella was opened, making it a domain-type treasure as well. The Ambersky World would manifest in the surrounding area, suppressing the foe. The power of the Ambersky World alone was on par with Ning’s nine novessence arts.

It could be used for attack, defense, and suppression... and in suppression alone it was comparable to the nine novessence arts. It must be remembered that Ning was only able to master those nine arts due to a confluence of lucky factors, and in the end had succeeded only because he had learned an incredibly profound alchemy technique! And of course, given his Omega Sword Dao, once he reached the third step as a Daolord he would be able to unleash even greater power when using those nine novessence arts to execute his sword-arts. He would reach a level comparable to Daolord Allgod at that time.

Despite that... the value of the Golden Ambersky Umbrella was truly unfathomable. Ning was stunned by its worth. The twelve treasures of the Hegemon truly were extraordinary.

“And what’s this?” Ning reached out to touch the bracelet engraved with the carving of a flying beast. This was the Sparrow Formation Bracelet. It could be filled with Hegemon-level energy or chaos jewels, then activated to unleash a mighty Sparrow Formation that could trap foes. Hegemons might be able to

burst through the formation through raw force, but any weaker foe would be trapped until the power of the formation was depleted. Ning's eyes lit up. "This is quite similar to the formation-diagram Ninedust holds in the palm of his hands. It's actually a multiple-usage formation treasure."

Treasures like this were incredibly valuable. Even if you encountered the eight lords of the Sacred Cities or the likes of Patriarch Vulturax, you could use this treasure to trap them for a brief period of time, which you could then use to flee! Thus, treasures like this would virtually never be found for sale on the open market. Eternal Emperors cherished them very highly.

Only Hegemons would be willing to bequeath them to later generations. They truly were of incalculable value. "A fine treasure." Ning was deeply intrigued, but he then looked at the next treasure, a black disc that glimmered with a spot of light that roved inside of it.

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Every single treasure Ning saw interested him greatly. These treasures were of limited use to Hegemons, but incredibly valuable to most Eternal Emperors. As for Daolords? They were simply unimaginable. For now, Ning was still the most intrigued by the Sparrow Formation Bracelet.

"Now, let me take a look at the Stone Censer of Reunion." Ning turned his head to look at the palm-sized incense burner located at the very center of the room. He walked over, then casually sat down on one of the prayer mats. Once he did, he sensed a surge of icy energy emanate from the prayer mats and into his entire body, causing his soul to calm down significantly.

Ning wasn't too impressed by the effects of the prayer mat, as there were quite a few treasures with similar functions. But when the scent of the incense coming from the stone censer wafted into his nose...

Rumble...

The entire world turned silent. Ning's mind and soul emptied out in an almost prajna-like state of epiphany, and many of his thoughts and questions pertaining to the Dao of the Sword quickly began to flash through his mind. More and more visualizations came to mind as he saw through one bottleneck after another...

After an undeterminable period of time, Ning opened his eyes. Only then did he realize that he had sat here for two days and a full night.

"I actually was able to fully master the third stage of the Soleheart sword-intent." Ning was shocked. "I've almost even finished mastering the new Heavenbreaker sword-intent."

He had spent three hundred thousand years drifting through the Starflow Realm. His Yin-Yang sword-intent, his Blood Drop sword-intent, and his Shadowless sword-intent had all broken through to the third stage. Now, after just sitting down for two days and a night, he had gained a terrifying number of new insights and breakthroughs.

"This is actually a meditation-type treasure?" Ning stared at the palm-sized incense burner in disbelief. "Although the state it allows you to enter isn't as incredible as the true prajna-state of epiphany, it's fairly close. This treasure would allow me to enter a state of epiphany at all times?"

To cultivators, what mattered the most? Treasures were secondary; insight into the Dao was what truly mattered!

This was a treasure meant for meditating on the Dao. It was truly priceless. He'd never even heard of one of these things being available for sale. The only reason the Thundersouth Hegemon had left it behind was because he wasn't sure if he would survive the Dawn War, and so he had left this treasure behind.

The Ninedust Sectlord and Daolord Laya had been in on a rush to sit down. They had instead simply watched Ning.

Daolord Laya said quite urgently, "Brother Darknorth, are you willing to choose this incense burner and trade it to the Starflow race?"

"Darknorth, if you are willing to trade it to us Ancient cultivators, we would similarly be willing to pay an incredible price for it," the Ninedust Sectlord said.

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 12: Daomerge

Daolord Laya and the Ninedust Sectlord both looked at Ji Ning. Ning just continued to sit there, but he reached out with his right hand to gently stroke the stone incense burner in front of him. This censer truly was quite odd; it had a white half and a black half, almost as though two different incense burners, one white and one black, had somehow been merged together. The black side felt as cold as ice, while the white side filled his palm with warmth. It was this strange union of these two marvelous properties that produced that faint white fragrance.

Whoosh. Ning filled his finger with his Immortal energy, beginning the process of binding the Stone Censer of Reunion to him.

"So that's how it is." Ning now understood. The Stone Censer of Reunion was able to produce a fragrant scent that would cause cultivators around it to enter a state of constant epiphany. However, the fragrance would eventually be used up... but so long as you could continue to pour more Immortal energy into it, more of the fragrance would continue to be generated. In addition, the amount of Immortal energy it consumed was fairly low. However, the amount of fragrance it produced was only enough for a single cultivator to constantly use.

"No wonder my two days of cultivation caused the surrounding mist to shrink from nine meters to merely six meters." Ning couldn't help but sigh. This was merely the fragrance which was remaining and unused that was stored within the stone censer.

"Darknorth, are you sure that you will choose this censer?" the Ninedust Sectlord asked.

"Of course I'm certain." Ning nodded. "A Dao-cultivating treasure like this is incredibly rare and unquestionably priceless."

"Darknorth..." the nearby Daolord Laya looked anxiously at Ning. "Are you willing to trade it to my Starflow race? The Ancient cultivators have extremely deep roots and won't care that much about the Stone Censer of Reunion, and so the price that we are willing to pay will definitely exceed that of the Ancient cultivators."

“You haven’t even offered a price, but you are already claiming that your race will be able to offer more than mine?” The Ninedust Sectlord smirked.

“Gentlemen.” Ning shook his head. “For now, I have no intention of trading this away.”

Ninedust and Laya were both startled.

“It is extremely important to me as well. When the day comes that it is of no further use to me, I might be willing to trade it,” Ning said.

The Daomerge was incredibly difficult. The likes of Bertulu, Daolord Skyaxe, Ninedust, and Palace Lord Dawnstar had joined multiple Supreme Daos together; if they ever succeeded in the Daomerge, they would become Hegemons! However, Hegemons were incredibly rare. Ever since the Dawn War ended in the Terror Starsea, the Endless Territories had only had three Hegemons; no more, no less.

As for Ning and his Omega Sword Dao? It would be even more difficult for him! If he succeeded in his Daomerge, he would probably be even more powerful than a Hegemon... but were there any Eternal Emperors that were above the Hegemon level of power?

Thus far, at least, Ning had never discovered such a thing! In the alternate universe he had been in, the Hegemons were still the most powerful figures. Even the leader of the Church of Annihilation in that universe had once been inferior to the Paragon of Pills. It was only thanks to the enormous gains and good luck he had reaped in the Genesis Lands that he had skyrocketed in power to become the most powerful figure in that universe. However, the ‘Dao’ this superlative lord of the church had used to complete his Daomerge and gain eternity for himself was clearly not that powerful.

Thus far, Ning had already discovered the corpses of several Hegemons. He had never, however, discovered anyone above the Hegemon level!

Ning fully understood that if he wished to become an Eternal Emperor who was superior to even Hegemons, his path would be an incredibly difficult one. To complete the Daomerge with his Omega Sword Dao was virtually impossible.

“In the past, I had no faith at all in my abilities to complete the Daomerge. In fact, I wouldn’t even have dared claim that I felt I had even the slightest chance.” Ning stared at the stone censer in his hand. “But now that I have this Dao-cultivating treasure, my chances of completing the Daomerge have been increased significantly.”

The Northbow swords were very important to him, but the Stone Censer of Reunion... it was even more important!

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Within the empty crystalline pavilion. The three Daolords all had many thoughts in their minds. Ning was filled with excitement, while Daolord Laya and the Ninedust Sectlord were filled with both regret and envy.

“Ninedust. Laya.” Ning looked at the two of them. “Have you told anyone else that I have acquired the Stone Censer of Reunion? If you have, my only option would be to leave this place immediately.”

“I have not.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “I would never do such a thing. Although the stone censer is important, it isn’t something that we Ancient cultivators would stop at nothing to acquire. Our clan already has other similar Dao-cultivating treasures. Unfortunately, I won’t have a chance to use them for quite some time. When I become a Daolord of the Fourth Step, I might be able to return to the clan and borrow it for a chaos cycle at best.”

For major clans and organizations, Dao-cultivating treasures were at a level which could be described as paramount to the entire organization. If an extremely powerful Daolord was about to attempt the Daomerge, they might loan it out for a single chaos cycle at most. Both supreme Daolords and Eternal Emperors all had need of Dao-cultivating treasures, and so it would be up to the highest-level members of an organization or a race to decide who would be able to use it.

The decision would generally be based on how to improve the strength of a race as a whole. However, these treasures would generally end up in the hands of Eternal Emperors, because Eternal Emperors were also able to slowly increase their level of strength. The Paragon of Pills herself was an example of an Eternal Emperor who managed to slowly train to the Hegemon level. In the alternate universe, another good example of an Eternal Emperor who slowly became more powerful was Emperor Maniseal; it was only after he became an Eternal Emperor that he slowly reached ever-greater heights in the Dao of Seals.

As for Daolords? Even if they were given Dao-cultivating treasures, the vast majority of them would still fail their Daomerge. In the end, Eternal Emperors made up the foundation of any race or clan! The only ones who didn’t really care about Dao-cultivating treasures were Hegemons.

“Laya?” Ninedust glanced sideways at Daolord Laya. “The Starflow race is rather lacking compared to mine. I don’t think they would necessarily have a Dao-cultivating treasure. I’ll wager that they are in desperate need of one. He might’ve already leaked the information. Hell, one of their Eternal Emperors might be on the way right now.”

“I did not.” Daolord Lay immediately shook his head. “I’m not that type of person, brother Darknorth. Don’t worry.”

“Gentlemen.” Ning looked at them. “Both of you know how tempting a target this Dao-cultivating treasure makes me. Once word spreads, I’ll never know another day of peace; in fact, I might very well die. Thus... brother Ninedust and brother Laya, I’d like to ask the two of you to swear lifeblood oaths that you will never divulge the fact that I have a Dao-cultivating treasure in my possession. You can’t even tell anyone about me having acquired a treasure from Thundersouth Palace. I know that insisting on you two swearing this lifeblood oath is a bit overbearing, but I hope you can understand the difficult straits I am in.”

Ning continued somberly, “What I can promise is that here in Thundersouth Palace, the three of us will share the usage of this stone censer. Consider this a form of compensation from me to the two of you.”

“Given how bluntly you’ve put it, Darknorth, how can I refuse?” The Ninedust Sectlord immediately swore the oath.

“This fortune belongs to you, Darknorth. In the end, it was not meant to be for our Starflow race.” Daolord Laya shook his head, then swore a lifeblood oath as well.

In truth, both of them knew that if they didn't swear the oath, Ning would probably immediately depart from this place and might even hide this Dao-cultivating treasure somewhere. No matter what, it would be extremely difficult for the Starflow race to ever acquire it.

"Thank you." Ning let out a sigh of relief, then came to a decision. "This stone censer is now the most important treasure I possess, far more important than even my Northbow swords! I cannot risk it being lost. Since my main body could perish at any time while out adventuring... mm. Once I get back to the Endless Territories, I'll leave it with my Primaltwin."

The Primaltwin was permanently stationed in the Three Realms and did not go out adventuring. It was indeed far safer to leave it there. In addition, the Primaltwin had also established its own heartworld and was now incredibly powerful. For it to use the stone censer to train in the Dao was the same as the true body using it, as their souls and truesouls were inextricably linked.

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After this, the three of them began to take turns using the Stone Censer of Reunion. Every thousand years, they would alternate!

One special property of the stone censer was that there was no way to use it under the effects of accelerated time! Or, to be precise, the fragrance emitted by the censer was simply too mysterious and profound. If you used temporal acceleration, you would need the fragrance to also be increased at a much faster pace, but this would cause the power of the temporal acceleration treasure to be depleted at an enormous pace. Even if one merely tried to train at double speed, the amount of Immortal energy which would be used up would be more than one could bear.

"This Dao-cultivating treasure truly is special." Ning and the others spent all their time slowly and honestly training in the Dao without using any temporal acceleration treasures at all. Despite that, they still trained far more quickly than they normally did.

When you were stuck at a bottleneck, you would sometimes come to a complete halt no matter how much time you spent training. When you were in a praja-state, however, you would improve far more quickly, allowing you to quickly bypass many bottlenecks.

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A mere ten thousand years later. Daolord Laya had been seated in the lotus position on the prayer mat, but he suddenly rose to his feet. This puzzled both Ning and Ninedust.

"Laya, you haven't completed your thousand year mark yet. Why have you halted?" Ning asked, puzzled.

"Even before coming to this palace, I had already reached my limit. Thanks to this Dao-cultivating treasure, my Dao has become even more perfect than before. I cannot find any way to improve it in the slightest. Given how perfect and complete it is, and given how my heart and my mind are in peak condition thanks to this Dao-cultivating treasure... I have decided to attempt my Daomerge here in Thundersouth Palace!" Daolord Laya said.

"Daomerge?" Both Ning and Ninedust were shocked. The Daomerge? This was the most terrifying tribulation which each and every Samsara Daolord would ever face.

“I’ve waited for far too long already. It is time for my Daomerge.” Daolord Laya’s voice was soft, but his eyes blazed with fiery eagerness. This would be the most dazzling moment in his long, long life.

The Desolate Era

Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 13: The Flower of Eternity

“When will the Daomerge occur?” Ji Ning asked.

“Right now.” Daolord Laya looked at Ning. “Brother Darknorth, I would like to ask you to loan me the stone censer during the Daomerge process.”

“A minor matter.” Ning immediately nodded in acceptance.

Daolord Laya waved his hand, causing a triangular altar to appear right next to him. The altar had three black bones atop it, and in the center of the bones was a depression. Daolord Laya took out a jade bottle, unplugged the stopper, then poured out a stream of bright silver liquid that quickly flowed into the depression.

Daolord Laya then took one step forward, appearing above the altar. He then sat down in the lotus position at the very center of it.

“I spent quite a bit of effort in preparing this altar as well.” Daolord Laya smiled towards Ning and Ninedust. “Ninedust, I imagine that you Ancient cultivators have even better tools at your disposal.”

“Of course.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “My race has a very suitable Daomerge location, and our Verge-level Daolords will generally return to our homelands for their Daomerge for that reason. Only if some sort of special situation prevents them from coming home would they ever attempt the Daomerge outside.”

“The Ancient cultivators really do live up to their reputation,” Daolord Laya said. “My race does not have the ability to create a special Daomerge location.” As he spoke, he glanced at Ning. “Brother Darknorth, I’d like to ask you to place the stone censer before the altar.”

“Alright.” With but a thought, Ning sent the censer over towards the triangular altar, roughly three meters away from Daolord Laya. This allowed Daolord Laya to be able to absorb and inhale the fragrance which emanated from it.

Daolord Laya waved his hand, causing a second palm-sized jade bottle to appear. After pulling out the stopper, he shook out a single round and smooth pill that emanated faint golden light. What looked like serpents could be seen swimming within the golden light. He opened his mouth and immediately swallowed the pill into his stomach.

“A Nethercold Jadedrake pill? Oho! It seems the Starflow race’s resources are quite ample. Even I don’t have a single such pill,” the Ninedust Sectlord said with praise.

Thanks to having studied the [Seven Leafpill Chapters], Ning knew quite a bit regarding the various pills that could be used to assist in the Daomerge. Nethercold Jadedrake pills allowed one to completely calm and empty out one’s mind and heart, putting both into a state of inconceivable clarity. If used to engage in Numerancy or calculations, one’s mind would be able to move a thousand times faster than normally. The Daomerge was a process that wasn’t exactly short, but no Daolord would describe it as ‘long’. Thus,

the faster they were able to engage in the various calculations they needed to engage in during the time allotted them, the better.

Nethercold Jadedrake pills were recorded within the [Seven Leafpill Chapters]. They were ranked eighth amongst the various types of Daomerge-assisting pills. But of course, there were only a total of twelve such pills even recorded down to begin with, and every single type of Daomerge-assisting pill was incredibly valuable. As for the top five, they truly were shockingly rare. The top five pills... even the Paragon of Pills herself had to use all the power and skill available to her to succeed at making the second through fifth pills, and the process wasn't an easy one. In the end, it was truly a matter of talent. If the Paragon of Pills wished to make the second-ranked pill, she would have to pay an enormous price and spend an extremely long period of time while using up many precious materials.

Ordinary Daolords would kill themselves and still fail to find any of the twelve pills, to say nothing of the top five.

"My race was lucky enough to stumble onto a few. I rendered a few merits and so was rewarded with a pill." Daolord Laya smiled. "Fellow Daoists, I'm going to begin now. I hope that once my Daomerge concludes, I will have gained my eternity."

"Gain eternity." Both Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord quietly looked at him, mentally wishing him luck.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Daolord Laya sat down in the lotus position. He closed his eyes, then took a deep breath. The fragrance in the surrounding area quickly flooded into his body. Slowly, ripples of power began to emanate from within his body, which started to shine with blurry golden light. This was the light of the Dao.

"He has started his Daomerge," Ninedust said.

Ning watched carefully as well. "I wonder if he will succeed." Even as a mere spectator, Ning still felt a sense of pressure weighing down on his heart. The Daomerge... in the end, it was the final end which awaited all Daolords.

"His path is the Dao of Metal," Ninedust murmured softly. "He's slowly beginning a final fusion of all of his Samsara Daolord-level insights into the Dao of Metal. If his fusion is completely perfect, then he'll have created a Dao which shall last unto eternity! However, the slightest of imperfections shall result in failure."

Ning watched silently. His own Omega Sword Dao might be extremely powerful, but it wasn't anywhere close to the 'perfect and eternal' level. This was true for the first stage, the second stage, and even the hypothetical fourth stage.

What did eternity represent? It meant that a particular Dao was completely flawless and perfect. The passage of time would not age that Dao in the slightest; only then could a Dao truly be worth of the title 'eternal'.

Daolord Laya was on par with the likes of Ning, Ninedust, and Kongsan. Most likely, he had only mastered a single Supreme Dao. His Daomerge would be somewhat easier than Ninedust's and Bertulu's, as all he had to do was simply complete the Daomerge on the basis of the Dao foundation he

had already set up. Ning was on an even higher level; for him, reaching true perfection in a Dao was almost impossibly hard.

In Ning's estimation, based on the fact that his first stage Omega Sword Dao was an all-encompassing Dao which had already begun to resonate with the prime essence of the sword, if he did gain eternity with this Dao then it would become on par with the universe's prime essence of the sword itself. One could imagine how hard that would be to achieve!

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Time continued to flow on. Ning and Ninedust both continued to watch. Generally speaking, a Daomerge would take at most a total of nine years! It was difficult to estimate how short the 'shortest' Daomerge would be. It was possible for failure to appear after just two weeks; this was a sign that one's deficiencies were very significant.

"I wonder if he'll be able to crystallize his flower of eternity," Ninedust murmured softly.

"The flower of eternity." An expectant look was in Ning's eyes as well.

When one embarked on the Daomerge, the Dao-tree would once more begin to evolve. Upon reaching the Verge, the Dao-tree within the Jindan chaos region would reach a total of 540,000 meters in height. It must be understood that this was the same height as an Eternal Emperor's Dao-tree! There was no way for the Dao-tree to grow any larger or any taller. When you began to Daomerge, you would need to perfectly merge together all of the insights of the Dao-tree and form a beautiful, eternal flower.

The flowering of the Dao-tree and the blooming of this beautiful flower of eternity was a sign that the Daomerge had been successful. The flower of eternity would contain the gathered and combined insights of every single scrap of Dao the Dao-tree possessed. But if you failed, the flower of eternity would wither just as it started to bloom.

Boom! Boom! Boom! After Daolord Laya had spent two years in the Daomerge process, the golden light around his body suddenly expanded dramatically, becoming dazzling to behold. His aura began to rapidly increase in power and presence, eclipsing the auras of both Ning and Ninedust. The aura continued to climb, rising above the level of any and every Daolord...

He was someone who had mastered a single Supreme Dao and was significantly more powerful than even Emperor Mirrorsnow had been. Once he gained eternity, he would be on the level of the eight lords of the Sacred Cities.

The Daomerge truly could result in a skyrocketing level of power for any Daolord.

"He's at the critical time now," the Ninedust Sectlord muttered softly. "Time to go all out."

"Success or failure will be determined right now." Ning watched nervously as well.

The Daomerge had already gone on for two years. Clearly, Daolord Laya had reached the point where he needed to unleash all of his insights. He had to charge through this final barrier. If he succeeded, then it would be a complete success and he would have gained eternity. But if he was lacking in even the slightest... he would fail.

Boom! Boom! Daolord Laya sat there, an agonized look on his face. Golden light radiated from his entire body in awe-inspiring fashion as the power of the Dao of Metal radiated out from him. His aura continued to grow more powerful, but it also began to shudder.

Whoosh. Suddenly, all of the golden light vanished from him, and his aura quickly began to decay as well.

“Failure.” Both the Ninedust Sectlord and Ning slowly shook their heads.

“No...” Daolord Laya mumbled to himself. He had been able to ‘see’ that a flower of eternity had already begun to take shape atop the Dao-tree in his Jindan chaos region, but the flower had withered away before having a chance to bloom.

He had failed.

His soul and truesoul had been in the process of transforming into the Eternal Emperor level. The process had clearly failed, and both began to undergo a final, irreversible crumbling. This crumbling was extremely slow, but there was no way to stop it at all, as the crumbling was occurring at the very center of his being. If he didn’t fight, the crumbling would take an extremely long time to complete, but each time he engaged someone else in battle he would be hastening the end of his own life.

Still seated above the triangle altar, Daolord Laya opened his eyes. He looked at Ning and Ninedust, a hint of grief in his eyes, then let out a pained smile. “Fellow Daoists, the Daomerge truly is harder than all else under the heavens. I had my altar, used spirit-pills, and had the assistance of the Stone Censer of Reunion. I felt extremely good about my chances, but I still failed. The flower of eternity withered away as soon as the bud appeared. It didn’t even have a chance to bloom. Clearly, I wasn’t even close.”

“Laya, failing the Daomerge is normal,” Ninedust said consolingly. “In the end, very few are able to complete the Daomerge, and Daolords on our level of power who can do so are even more rare.”

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Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 14: Daolord Badlands

Ji Ning and Ninedust could both understand how Daolord Laya felt right now. Cultivation was like climbing a mountain; you slowly started at the very bottom of the mountain, overcoming many difficulties before you finally reached the top. The final step you took next would determine if you rose into the heavens or fell into an endless abyss. Daolord Laya had failed his Daomerge; clearly, he had fallen into the endless abyss. His soul and truesoul had already begun to crumble, and he could already see his future death. His path of cultivation was about to come to an end. Even though he had mentally prepared himself long ago, he would still feel great pain.

“I’ve cultivated for many years, but it all ends today.” Daolord Laya shook his head, then let out a hoarse chuckle. “When I was young, I fought hard to climb to the very top. Only then did I learn how tough things were for my race. After becoming a Daolord, my every thought was consumed with taking care of my race...”

“It’s been too long, and I’m far too tired. I’ve spent my entire long life in the Terror Starsea,” Daolord Laya said. “I’ve never even visited the Endless Territories.”

Daolord Laya rose to his feet, then waved his hand and put away the triangle altar.

“Brother Darknorth. Brother Ninedust.” Daolord Laya looked at the two of them. “I’m going to leave now. I plan to pay a visit to the Endless Territories and learn about it! In fact, I might even go off into the Great Dark. Before I die, I want to see as much as of the universe as I can.”

Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord no longer knew what to say.

“No need to send me off.” Daolord Laya strode quickly towards the exit.

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The two watched as Daolord Laya left, both filled with regret. Daolord Laya no longer cared one whit about Thundersouth Palace, electing to leave immediately. Ning and the Ninedust Sectlord, however, still did care, because the various paintings hanging on the walls of the palace represented various techniques that the lord of the palace had left behind for others.

“Thankfully, he didn’t go crazy.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “I’ve seen Verge-level Daolords go absolutely insane after they failed their Daomerge.”

“He trained since he was young and has cultivated his entire life...” Ning continued to stare in the direction Daolord Laya had left. “He trained tens of thousands of chaos cycles... but all of a sudden he failed his Daomerge and brought his cultivation path to an abrupt halt. This would be extremely disheartening for any cultivator. It makes sense for some to be mentally affected by it.”

“Hmph. There are some evil Daolords who normally keep their worst impulses in check and are afraid to act too rashly for fear of being killed by other major powers. After they fail their Daomerge and are guaranteed to perish, they become absolutely fearless and even more detestful than before.” The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. “But of course, they’ll die in their madness.”

“I wonder what we’ll end up like when we fail our Daomerge?” The Ninedust Sectlord suddenly said.

“When we fail our Daomerge?” Ning stared blankly. Would he fail his Daomerge? Right now, there was no way for him to be sure as to how he would react.

“Maybe we’ll both succeed and gain eternity for ourselves.” Ning smiled.

“Haha. Right. We’ll gain eternity for sure.” The Ninedust Sectlord nodded. “I’ll be a Hegemon when that happens. We Ancient cultivators will have two Hegemons! Haha.”

But both of them understood that the path to eternity was an incredibly difficult one. Normally, less than one in a hundred thousand Daolords would be able to gain eternity, and virtually all of them were ordinary Daolords.

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Ning and Ninedust continued to calmly train within the Thundersouth Palace of the Starflow River, and both improved quite rapidly. Finally, after spending thirty thousand years at the Thundersouth Palace, the Ninedust Sectlord made his breakthrough!

Rumble... an aura of awesome power swept out from the Ninedust Sectlord. He opened his eyes, his face wreathed with smiles. "Haha. I, Redwater, have finally broken through! A Daolord of the Fourth Step... I've finally become a Daolord of the Fourth Step! This has been incredibly difficult. Going from the third step to fourth step was a thousand times harder than going from the first step to the third step. Haha... I've finally broken through!"

"Congratulations, brother Ninedust," the nearby Ning said.

"Yes, this is indeed worth celebrating. I was trapped at the third step for far, far too long." The Ninedust Sectlord smiled as he looked at Ning. "It was all thanks to this Stone Censer of Reunion. If it wasn't for it, I would've wasted another chaos cycle or two before making my breakthrough. I had already gained certain insights in the trial the Ancient ancestor left behind, allowing me to vault to a new level on this trip."

"With this step you now stand at the very peak of power amongst Daolords, Ninedust," Ning said.

Ninedust nodded, looking rather pleased. He was someone who had perfectly joined together two Supreme Daos. Now that he had reached the fourth step, he immediately stood amongst the ranks of the absolute most powerful Daolords in the world. He was on the same level as Daolord Skyaxe or Palace Lord Dawnstar. There might be differences in power due to different secret arts and different treasures, but those differences wouldn't be too great; they were all on the same overall level of power.

The more powerful you were, the more difficult it would be to go from the third step to the fourth step. Daolord Badlands, for example, had also been trapped at the third step for a very, very long period of time.

"Darknorth, you are no longer a match for me," Ninedust said quite smugly.

"That's not necessarily true," Ning replied. "Don't forget that I'm a Heartforce Cultivator. I've gained some insight into the illusions of the Thundersouth Hegemon over these past few years as I've studied his paintings. You might not be able to fully resist my illusions now." If he could trap his enemy in illusions for even an instant, it would have an impact on how any fight would result.

"Uh..." Ninedust blinked, then immediately said, "Hmph, I need a bit of time to solidify my foundation, as I've just recently made my breakthrough. Give me some more time to further strengthen my soul and your illusions won't be able to touch me at all."

Ninedust's face suddenly tightened. "My Dao is now strong enough. I've reached the Verge of the Daomerge as soon as I reached the fourth step. I should make more preparations as well... right now, I have no confidence in my Daomerge chances whatsoever."

Ning was startled. Right. Ninedust was now at the Verge as well.

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The distant Badlands Territory. In the Badlands Everworld, there was a legendary place known throughout the Endless Territories... the Waveshift Realm! This was a realm that had been left behind by Emperor Waveshift himself. He was renowned as the number one Numerancy expert of the Endless Territories, and was far more powerful than the current Daolord Badlands. He was a mysterious man

who appeared and disappeared without warning, and even the three Hegemons found it difficult to deal with him as his schemes and calculations were simply too frightening.

Emperor Waveshift had hidden valuable treasures within the Waveshift Realm. This was something he had said publicly before leaving the Endless Territories and venturing off into the endless Great Dark.

Many generations of Daolords had entered this place to try their luck, and Daolord Solesky was one of them.

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The Waveshift Realm was a place that seemed to be covered by an enormous blurry barrier. The dim light of sunset covered this entire realm, and some cultivators could be seen passing by it on occasion. Most kept a very safe distance, as the Waveshift Realm was simply too dangerous.

Rumble... suddenly, a dazzling streak of green light shot out from the Waveshift Realm. This streak of light stretched out countless kilometers, streaking up into the heavens and piercing through the world-barrier protecting the entire Badlands Everworld.

Rumble... a second dazzling streak of bloody light shot out, just as wide and large as the first one. It shot out towards another direction.

Black light, violet light, azure light... a total of nine streaks of light shot out. These nine streaks of light looked almost like a peacock spreading its feathers as they shot towards different directions. They pierced through everything in their path, be it mountains or mist, but they seemed completely illusory. They caused no damage at all to anything they passed through, leaving even the grass completely untouched.

“What’s going on?”

“What is this? Is something happening?”

The Badlands Everworld was the center of the entire Badlands Territory. Countless cultivators were gathered here, and all of them were puzzled, especially the Elder Gods and True Gods. However, when they saw the light shoot out from the Waveshift Realm they all realized that this was something far beyond their level.

“What’s going on in the Waveshift Realm?”

“Is something happening?”

The Badlands Court was the paramount power within the Badlands Everworld, and its disciples all stared off in the distance.

“Husband.” A married couple was standing together in the skies, staring off into the distance. The beautiful wife turned to look at her husband, concerned.

An azure-robed Daolord Badlands was staring towards the light, a complex look on his face. He shook his head slightly. “I was too proud and rash, too certain in my Numerancy skills. Compared to Emperor Waveshift, I’m still lacking by quite a bit. I just caused a bit of a catastrophe. I don’t think there will be any way to hide this. Ugh. I only have my avatar inside, but big brother Solesky will be in trouble.”

“Caused a catastrophe?” The beautiful wife asked worriedly, “Will it impact our Badlands Court?”

“The two of us should leave the Badlands Territory for now and hide for a time. For now, let us just leave an avatar behind to watch over things,” Daolord Badlands said.

“Hide?” She had never imagined that things would be so grave that they would have to flee and hide somewhere else.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 15: Voidsea Jadeseal

“Soon, many Daolords will be charging to this sector,” Daolord Badlands said solemnly. “If my true body remains here, I might very well fall. However, so long as I leave and ensure they cannot find my true body, they won’t dare to cause our Badlands Court any trouble. In the end, my Dao of Numerancy is a Dao for divination, not battle. My skills lie in avoiding trouble and finding fortunes.”

“Mm.” The beautiful woman nodded.

“Let’s go. Right away.”

A short while later, Daolord Badlands and his wife silently departed from the Badlands Everworld, leaving only an avatar behind to guard over the Badlands Court.

The Dao of Numerancy was indeed an extremely troublesome Dao for everyone, but it was highly unsuited for actual battle. Daolord Badlands himself almost never went out adventuring or into battle. As a Daolord of the Third Step who had reached an extremely high level in the Dao of Numerancy, he logically should’ve been on the same level as the likes of Ninedust (at the third step) or Kongsan, but in reality he was much weaker in combat. He was just barely on par with the likes of Solesky and Clearwind.

This was his greatest weakness. However, his skills lay in avoiding trouble; when he encountered enemies he was unable to defeat, he’d quickly move to avoid them.

In the end, the Dao of Numerancy was about divination, not omniscience. As a result, he had suffered greatly for his overconfidence alongside Daolord Solesky in the Waveshift Realm. Clearly, even he fell for the traps left behind by Emperor Waveshift, and so he hurriedly slunk away from his own everworld.

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“Nine beams of light have appeared in the skies over the Waveshift Realm?”

“Something big just happened.”

No matter what, the Badlands Everworld was still the core of this territory. The Dao Alliance had stationed a number of cultivators here who were responsible for diplomacy with Daolord Badlands and watching over the various treasure auctions! In addition, some of the supreme organizations within the Endless Territories had inserted scouts to watch over the Waveshift Realm. Although these scouts weren’t that powerful, they were only required to keep a long-term watch over Waveshift City. Waveshift Realm was simply an incredibly famous place of the Endless Territories.

“Hurry up and send a report.”

“Something big has happened in the Waveshift Realm.”

The scouts had been waiting here for far too long with nothing to report. Some had been waiting for tens of thousands of chaos cycles, and it was all for the sake of critical moments like this. Thus, none of them dared to slacken off.

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Soon, the news spread from the Badlands Territory to the rest of the Endless Territories.

A dazzlingly beautiful green planet. This world had countless cultivators living within it. In one corner of this vast world, there was an ordinary wooden house that merely had a single old man seated within it. The old man had curly green hair and a pair of horns on his head, and his eyes were lidded. He had been seated here for more than ten thousand chaos cycles.

He had been alive for far, far too long.

“Patriarch! Patriarch!” A voice rang out from afar. The green-haired elder opened his eyes, and they seemed to contain the boundless vastness of the universe itself within them. His gaze was gentle as he stared outside.

A golden-robed figure was leading a green-haired man who had an exalted aura towards the patriarch. The green-haired man landed, then said respectfully, “Patriarch.” He had become a lord of a Sacred City, and in power he was roughly on par with this particular Patriarch, but he still showed the old man the utmost of respect. The old man had shown him great kindness. Although they weren’t master and disciple, he owed the old man as much as any master. The old man had also done much for their entire homeland, far more than anyone else. Without the Patriarch, their lineage would’ve been wiped out long ago.

“Qixiao, why have you come back to our homeland to meet with me?” The green-haired elder smiled.

“Patriarch.” Emperor Qixiao said seriously, “Do you still remember Emperor Waveshift?”

“Remember him? Of course I remember him.” A nostalgic look appeared on the old man’s ancient face. “After I became an Eternal Emperor, I spent countless years studying the Dao of Numerancy myself. I had once believed myself to be a pre-eminent master of this Dao in the Endless Territories, but after meeting Waveshift and testing myself out I realized that I wasn’t even close to being a match. His skill in Numerancy vastly, vastly surpassed my own.”

“You are being too modest, Patriarch. Emperor Waveshift relied on the Dao of Numerancy to become an Emperor; of course he was skilled in it! You, on the other hand, only started studying it after becoming an Emperor. He’s left the Endless Territories long ago. In the present day, you are number one in this Dao,” Emperor Qixiao said.

“For now, I suppose. There’s a young fellow named ‘Daolord Badlands’ in the Badlands Territory who is even more talented than Emperor Waveshift was in Numerancy. He’s a Daolord of the Third Step but is already incredible at Numerancy. Once he becomes a Daolord of the Fourth Step, he’ll probably surpass me in that Dao and become a king of the Endless Territories.” The old man shook his head. Moments later, his face tightened slightly as the illusion of the cosmos within his eyes suddenly vanished. He

raised his head to look at Emperor Qixiao. "Have you come here because of the Badlands Territory... no. To be precise, you have come because of the Waveshift Realm?"

"Impressive, Patriarch." Emperor Qixiao said hurriedly, "I have indeed come because of the Waveshift Realm! Just now, I received word that something major has happened there. Nine streaks of light shot out from the Waveshift Realm and went through the entire Badlands Everworld."

"That's quite a commotion. Can it be... that the Voidsea Jadeseals have emerged?" The old man was stunned.

"That was my first reaction as well. Before Emperor Waveshift departed, he fashioned multiple Voidsea Jadeseals. However, he only left one of them to the Dao Alliance. He put the other five within his own Waveshift Realm," Emperor Qixiao said.

The old man nodded. "Back then, brother Waveshift told me that if any Eternal Emperor dared to forcibly enter his realm, all five seals would instantly be destroyed. Only Daolords would be permitted to acquire them."

"Patriarch, these seals are supreme Daomerge treasures!" Emperor Qixiao said hurriedly, "If we can acquire those five seals, we might be able to produce one or two formidable Eternal Emperors for our race."

"Yes." The old man nodded. Voidsea Jadeseals... they were described as supreme Daomerge treasures because they were publicly acknowledged as being the best treasures for assisting cultivators in the Daomerge. No treasures surpassed them!

Voidsea Jadeseals were single-use items. After you acquired them and as you prepared for your Daomerge, you could form an illusory body within the seal, then use that illusory body to test out the Daomerge. The process would be identical to that of the actual Daomerge you would undergo! Even if you failed your Daomerge, it wouldn't harm your true body in the slightest! It was equivalent to giving you an additional shot at the Daomerge.

This additional experience was more than enough to drive any Daolord mad with lust.

Why was the Daomerge so terrifying? It was precisely because the Daomerge was a one-time event. If you were even slightly lacking, you would fail and never have another shot at it. If you had multiple shots at it, then obviously your second attempt would benefit from your previous experience and give you a far better chance at succeeding in the Daomerge!

However, given how incredible the Voidsea Jadeseals were, they were naturally incredibly rare as well. They could only be fashioned through the usage of a strange treasure known as voidsea jade, and they could only be fashioned by Emperor Waveshift, who had reached truly inconceivable heights in the Dao of Numerancy. Prior to his departure, he had used up his entire supply of voidsea jade to create these six seals.

He had left one seal with the Dao Alliance and the other five at the Waveshift Realm. This was why so many generations of Daolords had ventured off into the Waveshift Realm, but thus far none of them had been able to find the Voidsea Jadeseals.

“The power of the Voidsea Jadeseals is enough to allow a Daolord who has a single Supreme Dao to undergo a single full Daomerge attempt. However, if that Daolord has perfectly fused multiple Supreme Daos together, he’ll only be able to make it halfway through the Daomerge before the power of the seal is used up.” The old man sighed.

This was the limit to what the Voidsea Jadeseal could accomplish. If someone who had joined together multiple Supreme Daos together succeeded into the Daomerge, that person would become a Hegemon! There was no way a Voidsea Jadeseal could fully divine such a process.

However, a Daolord who had a single Supreme Dao would be able to try out an entire complete Daomerge.

It must be remembered that there were incredibly few figures in the Endless Territories who were capable of comprehending and mastering multiple Supreme Daos. Thus, these seals were more than enough for the vast majority of Daolords. Even the most ungodly powerful of Daolords would be able to at least divine half of the Daomerge process.

“Patriarch, can you verify that the disturbance in the Waveshift Realm was indeed caused by the emergence of the Voidsea Jadeseals?” Emperor Qixiao asked.

“Let me take a look.” The old man closed his eyes and began to engage in Numerancy calculations as strange ripples of power appeared around him.

A long time later, the old man opened his eyes and nodded. “Tell the younger members of our race that the Waveshift Realm truly has unleashed its Voidsea Jadeseals. I imagine that brother Waveshift did this deliberately to draw many Daolords to his realm, which is why he didn’t hide anything and allowed me to calculate it all with ease. Any of the top ten Numerancy experts in the Endless Territories is capable doing the same.

“Voidsea Jadeseals?” Emperor Qixiao’s eyes lit up. “If we’re certain, then we have to get them for ourselves.”

The Desolate Era

Book 31: Starflow Realm Chapter 16: Everyone Gathering

Within an region of space that was completely cut off from the rest of the universe. This was a region that was filled with endless blood flames that seemed to form an entire ocean. Every single flame possessed awesome might and was capable of easily incinerating a Daolord of the Fourth Step. At the very center of the flames, there was an imperial throne that seemed to have been carved out of white bone. The enormous white bone throne hung there, and above it stood a silver-haired man whose hands were resting on the armrests. The man stared at the endless flames, and his heart and mind seemed to be completely one with the world.

“Gorsch.” A voice suddenly rang out within the empty region. “Come forth.”

The silver-haired man was startled. Ever since learning that his most talented progeny, Gorho, had been recruited by the Brightshore Kingdom, he had felt much at ease. He had temporarily chosen to enter their racial lands to train; why was it that he was now being ordered to come out?

“Coming,” the silver-haired man said respectfully. Whoosh. He disappeared from atop the throne of white bone, which continued to eternally hang there above the endless sea of blood flames.

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The silver-haired man appeared within a beautiful, ancient palace. The throne of this palace was occupied by an exceedingly handsome youth who was dressed in gaudy black robes and whose eyes seemed to contain the vast cosmos within them.

“Emperor,” the silver-haired man said respectfully.

“Gorsch, I just received word that Voidsea Jadeseals have appeared within the Waveshift Realm of the Dao Alliance’s Badlands Territory.” The icy-faced black-robed youth spoke in an extremely calm voice. Although he looked very young, he was actually the oldest and most venerable Eternal Emperor of the entire Aeonian race. He was perpetually stationed within the core palace of the Aeonian Kingdom, and it was his responsibility to watch over their ancestral lands.

“Voidsea Jadeseals?” The silver-haired man revealed a stunned look.

“You’ve reached the Verge of the Daomerge long ago, and you are fast approaching the great limit,” the black-robed youth said coldly. “You are, at present, the most powerful Daolord of our race! Although the jade seals are not strong enough to allow you to fully experience the complete Daomerge, you’ll at least be able to experience part of it. This is a rare opportunity for you and your Daomerge. However, word of this has already spread and all six of the major powers of the Endless Territories have been informed. I trust that many Verge-level Daolords are already on their way. What’s worse, you are an Aeonian while Emperor Waveshift was of the Dao Alliance. It is entirely possible that he might’ve prepared something nasty for our race there. If you go, you’ll take on a certain degree of risk.”

“You can choose for yourself whether or not you wish to go,” the black-robed youth said.

“Everyone in the outside world refers to me as King Gorsch, but in the end I’m just a king, not an emperor.” The silver-haired man said in a low voice, “My limit approaches, and I have no confidence in my Daomerge chances at all. Although this opportunity is filled with peril, I still have to give it a try. If I can acquire one of those seals, my chances at the Daomerge shall become much greater.”

“Right.” The black-robed youth nodded.

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The Brightshore Kingdom.

A figure suddenly appeared out of nowhere atop an ordinary-looking wasteland. It was a white-bearded old man who was dressed in snowy white robes and who had six horns on his head. He stood there atop the lands, then opened his mouth: “Ninestone.”

Rumble... the vast wilderness began to shake as the earth itself began to bulge upwards. An enormous four-legged stone behemoth that was covered in countless sharp spikes emerged from beneath the ground, leaving behind an enormous crater that was over a hundred million kilometers in circumference. The Brightshore Imperials were all Chaos Godbeasts, and they were legendary for their size.

“Hegemon.” The four-legged stone behemoth stared at the almighty Hegemon.

“You merged yourself into the earth itself to better understand the Dao of Earth. Of the Brightshore Imperials, you are closest to the lifespan limit. Are you confident in your Daomerge chances?” the Brightshore Hegemon asked.

In truth, the almighty Hegemon was quite worried. Although the Brightshore Imperials had many generations of Chaos Godbeasts, thus far only a single one had become a Hegemon – himself. Fortunately, he was powerful enough all by himself to overawe the entire Endless Territories. However, the fact that his race had yet to produce a second emperor meant that he was forced to continuously kidnap some of the geniuses of the other races of the Endless Territories.

Palace Lord Dawnstar, Bertulu, Ji Ning... all of them had been kidnapped. They now belonged to the Twelve Palaces of Brightshore, which were actually more powerful than the Brightshore Imperials themselves. But of course, they were no match for the Hegemon.

“I am not confident,” Ninestone rumbled softly.

“Voidsea Jadeseals have appeared within the Waveshift Realm of the Badlands Territory! You might have a shot at one of them,” the almighty Hegemon said. “However, this will be filled with danger. These seals were fashioned the most skilled Numerancy expert the Endless Territories has ever seen, Emperor Waveseal, and he had to use up his supply of voidsea jade in order to create them. There’s only a few of the seals, and they’ve aroused the attention of quite a few Verge-level Daolords. Many reclusive, normally low-key Daolords have all made their appearances.

“You can choose for yourself whether or not you wish to go.” The almighty Hegemon disappeared into thin air after speaking.

“Waveshift Realm of the Dao Alliance?” Ninestone’s body blurred as he transformed into a human shape. He now looked like an incredibly muscular black-armored man whose eyes were as still as a pool of dead water.

Ninestone was known amongst the Brightshore Imperials as the Ninth King.

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“Voidsea Jadeseals have actually appeared?” Daolord Skyaxe and Daolord Soleman were seated within a flying vessel in the void.

“What’s this?” Daolord Soleman called out with surprise.

“Voidsea Jadeseals have appeared in the Waveshift Realm,” Daolord Skyaxe said. “I just received word of this. I imagine the Brightshore Kingdom should receive word soon as well.”

“Let me ask.” Daolord Soleman nodded, then soon nodded a second time. “The Twelve Palaces have just received word as well. The jade seals really have appeared.”

“Shall we go?” Daolord Skyaxe looked at Soleman.

“Of course!” Soleman nodded. “This is our best shot at the Daomerge.”

“Let’s go.”

The two immediately changed their plans, turning around their flying vessel and sending it towards the Waveshift Realm instead.

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Within an ordinary mortal city. Countless mortals lived in this region for up to a hundred years. They lived ordinary lives and had to work hard for their living.

This city had a famous blacksmith who was very skilled in creating weapons, especially sabers. However, he only smithed when he was in the right mood, and his smithy was only occasionally operational.

“I’ll give you two golden vastluck coins. Help me forge a suitable saber for me.” A youth and his servants were present, and they spoke and acted in a very arrogant manner.

“Two golden vastluck coins?” The ordinary-looking blacksmith, dressed in hemp clothes, called out in astonishment, “Each of these are worth as much as ten thousand ordinary gold coins, right?”

“Precisely,” the youth said proudly.

“What a fortune! But... haven’t you heard? When I don’t want to work, no one in the world can force me.” The blacksmith snickered, “Run along home, kid.”

“Two golden vastluck coins aren’t enough? How many do you want?” The youth was anxious now.

The blacksmith was about to speak when he suddenly paused. “The Hegemon is saying that Voidsea Jadeseals have just appeared? This is probably the best chance that I, Dawnstar, will have to improve my Daomerge odds.” The blacksmith’s eyes became as tranquil as the sea as he glanced at the youth and the others. “Cancel it all.”

Whoosh. The entire city – in fact, the entire world – all vanished into motes of glittering, astral saber-light. All of the living beings had been nothing more than incarnations created by saber-light, not actual living beings. This was nothing more than a training mechanism he engaged in.

“Waveshift Realm, eh?” He sheathed his machete into the scabbard on his back. He had a look in his eyes that was calm but which could bring fear to countless cultivators. Moments later, he vanished into thin air after taking a single step.

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The Dao Alliance, the Aeonians, the Brightshore Kingdom, the Aberrants, the Ancient cultivators... all of them quickly received word. Even the powerful Daolords of the Dark Kingdom were intrigued.

The Aeonians were on rather bad terms with the Dao Alliance, but for the sake of the Daomerge, King Gorsch and several other Verge-level Daolords decided to brave the risk and give it a shot.

The same was true for the Dark Kingdom. Verge-level Daolords, for the sake of completing their Daomerge, were absolutely fearless. They began to stealthily move towards the Badlands Territory as well.

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Even the most powerful of Daolords would feel despair when faced with the Daomerge. When the legendary Voidsea Jadeseals, the most supreme Daomerge treasures, suddenly appeared... countless Daolords were intrigued and agitated. There were many Daolords who were low-key, but that didn't mean they were weak.

Emperor Heartsword was a classic example. He was very low-key, and only fought after becoming a Daolord of the Fourth Step due to an irreconcilable grudge. He gained great fame through that battle, and when he succeeded in his Daomerge he became the most dazzling Eternal Emperor in existence. Even now, people whispered stories about him.

Another example was Daolord Everstarter of the Sword Palace of the Brightshore Kingdom. He had also been a very low-key figure who lived in the Sword Palace and rarely went out adventuring. However, when the Ancient cultivators went too far in their actions and forced his hand, he slew consecutively three of their Verge-level Daolords and then defeated one of their Emperors. He was publicly acclaimed as the most powerful Daolord of the Endless Territories in his time.

Clearly, the appearance of these seals caused many of the normally low-key but incredibly powerful Daolords to make their appearances.

None of them would hesitate over something which could increase their chances at completing their Daomerge. Not even death could stop them!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 30: Ancient Cultivator Chapter 21: Immortal Slowseal

Nine more days went past before the Dragonwing Governor finally found traces of Immortal Slowseal.

"Master." The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly came running to report to Su Youji, Ji Ning, and the Ninedust Sectlord. "Immortal Slowseal is currently a guest at the Hiddensea Palace, roughly a hundred million kilometers from this place. He's quite some distance away. It'll probably take us some time to get there, and so I've made the arrangements for transport birds and mounts to be prepared for us. We can head out whenever."

"We'll head out right now." Ji Ning rose to his feet, then waved his hand and caused a black flying vessel to appear next to him.

"We'll fly over?" Skywind and the Dragonwing Governor were rather speechless when they saw the vessel. It must be understood that this planet was bound by the edicts of an Eternal Emperor, and the invisible laws made it so that only Samsara Daolords were just barely able to fly. Samsara Daolords, however, were incredibly rare. Neither of the two had ever truly flown in the air before using magic treasures before; at most, they had flown on the backs of giant birds.

"Move it!" Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord were already aboard the vessel, and they barked impatiently to the others.

"Y-y-yes." The Dragonwing Governor excitedly followed after them, and Skywind was similarly unable to disguise his excitement.

Swoosh. The black vessel burst into the skies, then immediately disappeared without a trace.

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Ning and the others had long ago acquired a local map of this planet from the Dragonwing Governor. They knew where the Hiddensea Palace was located, and the planet itself wasn't that large; at most, it was a bit over one billion kilometers in diameter. The ordinary mortals on this planet were fewer in number than even in the Three Realms, but on average they were more impressive as the rate at which they gave birth to Immortals and Fiendgods was far higher.

Swish! Just a few heartbeats later, the black vessel had already left the Dragonwing Governor's estate and arrived directly above the top of a cloud-piercing snowy mountain.

"Here we are," Ning said. "Hiddensea Palace is right below us."

"What? We arrived?" The Dragonwing Governor and Skywind stood at the prow of the ship, staring in astonishment at the scene below them. The mountain peak below them was covered with snow, with an ordinary-looking palace buried below it. This was Hiddensea Palace.

"We made it there in one breath." The Dragonwing Governor and Skywind exchanged glances. Both of them felt stunned. That had been simply too fast! To them, Hiddensea Palace was an extremely distant location that would only be reached through riding birds or mounts. The path was a dangerous, twisty one that needed careful navigation, and it would take them at least half a month to reach it.

The nearby Ninedust Sectlord chuckled. "This ship can move at a hundred times the limits of the Heavenly Daos. A hundred million kilometers is nothing to it. You! Whats-your-face, Dragonwing Governor, right? Hurry on down and lead us to Immortal Slowseal."

"Understood. Skywind, follow me and stay behind me. As for the three of you?" The Dragonwing Governor hesitated.

"We'll go with you," the Ninedust Sectlord said calmly. "No one in this puny little palace can possibly see through our illusions."

"Understood." The Dragonwing Governor acknowledged the order.

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The Dragonwing Governor led the party while the other four temporarily followed behind him as he entered Hiddensea Palace. The former was a World-level cultivator, after all. He was on the same level as the Palace Lady and so was received with great courtesy.

"Dragonwing." The Palace Lady was a black-robed woman who looked quite ordinary but who had an extraordinary demeanor.

"Hiddensea." The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly rose to his feet.

"What suddenly brings you to my place? Dragonwing City is quite distant from my palace. To think that you made the long, hard trek here in person... might I ask, what is the reason behind this?" The Palace Lady smiled. Her gaze just briefly lingered on Ning and the rest of the four behind the Dragonwing Governor. She noticed nothing remarkable about them at all; the difference in power between them was simply too great.

The 'long, hard trek'? The Dragonwing Governor couldn't help but sigh to himself. It had all been done in the twinkling of an eye. However, he didn't expose this. "Hiddensea, I've come to meet with fellow Daoist Slowseal."

"Meet Slowseal?" The Palace Mistress frowned. "Immortal Slowseal is a rather bad-tempered person. If I didn't have something important I needed him for, I would never have invited him over. Why are you causing problems for yourself?"

"I have something important to discuss as well," the Dragonwing Governor said.

The Palace Mistress gave him a hard look, then nodded. "Fine. I'll help you send word, but you know what Slowseal is like."

"I do." The Dragonwing Governor nodded.

A few moments passed as she conversed with Immortal Slowseal. "Let's go. I just checked and Slowseal agreed to meet with you. I'll take you to him." She led the Dragonwing Governor deeper into the palace.

A short while later, they arrived within the most beautiful courtyard within the Hiddensea Palace. A horned, black-haired elder was seated within it, drinking some wine. When the Dragonwing Governor brought Ning and the others in, the black-haired elder's eyes twitched. He glanced sideways at the four, then frowned and barked at the Palace Mistress, "Hiddensea, bringing in Dragonwing is one thing, but why have you brought in a group of juniors?"

"I'm to blame for that." The Dragonwing Governor hurriedly smiled. "It has nothing to do with Palace Mistress Hiddensea."

The Palace Mistress just stood there silently. She knew quite well that Immortal Slowseal was doing this to knock the Dragonwing Governor down a few pegs.

"Hmph." The black-haired elder let out a snort. "Throw these juniors out."

"But..." The Dragonwing Governor was stunned. As for Ning, Su Youji, and the Ninedust Sectlord, they revealed looks of resignation.

"Ugh." The Ninedust Sectlord let out a sigh, and as he did an invisible aura of power blasted out from around him, causing Skywind, the Dragonwind Governor, the Hiddensea Palace Mistress, and Immortal Slowseal to all feel their hearts quiver. The entire world seemed to have turned silent. Heaven and Earth had both vanished, leaving nothing else save his voice.

"I wanted to resolve this peacefully and have a nice chat with Immortal Slowseal's master." The Ninedust Sectlord shook his head. "I didn't imagine him to be such a fool. It seems we'll have to do things the hard way.

Ning and the others had indeed been planning on doing things peacefully. This planet was mysterious and inscrutable; they didn't want to accidentally kick over a hornet's nest. Unfortunately, this Immortal Slowseal was a bit too arrogant.

"What's going on? Why is this happening? W-who are they?!" Immortal Slowseal was panicking, and the Hiddensea Palace Mistress was amazed as well.

“Slowseal actually has a Daolord as his master. It’s fine for him to be proud, but his pride goes too far.” Ning shook his head slightly as well. People truly did act differently once they had a powerful backer. In the Badlands Territory, if you encountered a disciple of the Badlands Court you generally wouldn’t dare to attack even if you were much stronger! As for the likes of the Skywood Sect of Skywood City, one of the eight Sacred Cities? Whenever the weakest members of Skywood Sect so much as mentioned their sect, World-level cultivators and weaker Daolords would be utterly terrified.

This was the good part of having a strong backer. This was why so many World-level cultivators wanted to join major schools, but the Badlands Court and Vastheaven Palace had very high standards. As for the Skywood Sect and other sects on its level, their standards were even more excessive. Thus, the World-level cultivators who weren’t able to join the major sects were forced to hide in one place. When trouble came knocking, they had no choice but to fight head-on... and if they failed, they would die.

If you had a powerful background, even if you couldn’t win the fight you could report your name and thus stay alive in that way.

It was much like what the Paragon of Pills had told Ning: “If you ever find yourself in a life-threatening situation, you can use my name!” Her being his backer would overawe many attackers.

“W-who are you?” Immortal Slowseal was rather panicked. “My Master is Daolord Feng Xian.”

“Kid...” The Ninedust Sectlord’s face was dark, and his voice was cold and grim. Waves suddenly arose in the area around him, swirling around him with torrential voice and filling Immortal Slowseal’s entire field of vision, making him feel as though they were about to drown him. The power held within the waves caused Immortal Slowseal to feel a sense of endless terror. Horrified, Slowseal immediately produced a jade talisman, then crushed it with a cracking sound.

“My master is going to arrive soon! Don’t do anything crazy!” Immortal Slowseal said, terrified.

“Hahaha...” The Ninedust Sectlord started to laugh.

“Haha...” Ning started to laugh as well. “Ninedust, I thought we’d have to threaten him a bit before his master would arrive. I never would’ve thought he’d panic so badly that he’d immediately crush a Dao-seal to summon his master.”

“I was planning to torment him a bit. Now, it seems, he’s quite a clever boy.” The Ninedust Sectlord let out a chuckle as the waves around him all vanished.

Everyone else, including Immortal Slowseal and Palace Mistress Hiddensea, felt their hearts quiver as their legs turned to jelly. Prior to this, Ning’s group had shown them no enmity and had completely masked their auras, making it so that Immortal Slowseal could sense no power at all. Now that they fully released their auras, they felt an instinctive, bone-deep terror in their hearts!

“W-where did all these terrifying figures come from?” Immortal Slowseal felt misery in his heart.