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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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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 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 boneséal 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 boneséal, but nearly half still ended up perishing here! It must be understood that there are two dangerous areas here. If you use up the boneséal 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.

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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 Fiendgods in 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.”

[The Desolate Era](#)

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.