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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 19: Death Over Submission

“My fate is in your hands?” Hegemon Azurefiend stared past the void cage imprisoning him: “If my guess is correct, this is nothing more than an immaterial cage of barriers. It can at most capture me, not kill me. So long as I continually assault it, I’ll be able to deplete its power. I refuse to believe that a single mechanism can give birth to a permanent force-cage of such power.”

Ji Ning nodded slowly. “Impressive deductions, Hegemon. Your words were correct; if you were to fight back, this void cage wouldn’t be sustained for too long. But... didn’t you think that the Sithe would have taken this into consideration?”

“Hrm?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“With but a thought, I can create a void link between this cage and the prison regions,” Ning explained. “I’ll send you off to be imprisoned there! You should know just how deadly the Jedefire Realm’s prison region is.”

Hegemon Azurefiend was a man who had seen many things. He knew that the Sithe wouldn’t be so foolish as to expect such a void cage to perpetually trap their foes; it was entirely possible that there really was a mechanism by which one could be sent through a void link off into the prison regions!

“The prison regions? The prisons are rather damaged, and the entire region as a whole has been breached. It isn’t nearly as dangerous as it once was.” Hegemon Azurefiend laughed coldly, “Given my power, with enough time I should be able to escape. Even if I’m not able to escape immediately, I’ll be able to ask other major powers for succor. You won’t be able to threaten me.”

“You are wrong. There are differences even amongst prisons. There are seven central prisons in particular,” Ning explained, “And although three of them have crumbled apart, four of them remain in perfect shape. I’ll send you into one of those four. Forget about you, not even Otherverse Lords who are trapped within would stand any chance at escape.”

Hegemon Azurefiend’s face tightened. He had read the intelligence reports regarding the Jedefire Realm and knew of the seven central prisons. Given how badly damaged the prison regions were in general, they really wouldn’t necessarily be capable of holding back an Otherverse Lord. Ning claiming otherwise was probably just a boast... but imprisoning a Hegemon was entirely possible.

“Have you decided?” Ning asked. “Being my retainer isn’t exactly embarrassing! Don’t worry, I won’t make this public. I’ll tell everyone else that the two of us are extremely close friends who have known each other forever, which is why you chose to help me.”

“And who do you think would believe that?” Hegemon Azurefiend said coldly, “Who in the world would believe that? Everyone knows I came to the Jedefire Realm because I want your realmship, and everyone knows the type of person I am. Give up the realmship and instead become friends with you, then going so far as to fight to protect you? Do you really think those Hegemons are absolute imbeciles? Even a genuine imbecile would be able to tell that I was forced to become your retainer.”

Seeing this, Ning frowned. "Then what do you propose?"

"Being a retainer for a puny Daolord like yourself would be the greatest humiliation of my life. There's no way I would accept." Hegemon Azurefiend shook his head, his words completely uncompromising.

Ning felt a bit troubled. He didn't expect that the temperamental Hegemon Azurefiend would actually care so much about face that he would discard even his life.

"How about this? Ten thousand chaos cycles!" Ning said.

"Hmph." Hegemon Azurefiend shook his head.

Ning's gaze grew cold. "A thousand chaos cycles. This is my last offer! I only need you to serve me for a thousand chaos cycles. To a Hegemon like yourself, this is an extremely brief period of time. I've already shown mercy to you, considering that you came to try and steal my treasures. If you refuse even my offer of a thousand chaos cycles... hmph."

In truth, a thousand chaos cycles really was the final offer Ning was willing to make. This was because his Primaltwin was consistently using the Autarch's stone dais within the Azureflower Estate while under the effects of 100x temporal acceleration. Thus, a thousand chaos cycles for his true body would become equivalent to over 100,000 chaos cycles for his Primaltwin... or in other words, time for the Daomerge. Regardless of whether he succeeded or failed in his Daomerge, Hegemon Azurefiend would no longer be of much use.

"Give me an answer." Ning looked at him.

Hegemon Azurefiend could sense the killing intentions rise in the Daolord before him, but this only caused him to laugh: "Hahaha! I never thought that I, Azurefiend, would be put in such dire straights by a Daolord."

"I, Azurefiend, have roamed for countless ages and have lived for countless years. I've killed as I pleased and plundered as I pleased. Lower my head before a puny Daolord and become his retainer? I'd rather die!" Hegemon Azurefiend glared at Ning. "Plus... you aren't even capable of killing me. Go ahead and lock me up. Go ahead and send me into the most central prisons within the Jadesun Realm! When the time comes, I'll pay an incredible price to Reamlord Windgrace and have him personally use the Blacksun to attack the prison and break me out."

Ning's face tightened. Reamlord Windgrace? The Blacksun was a truly terrifying weapon the Sithe had left behind from the Dawn War! Normally, it could be used to briefly create spacetime conduit that allowed for instantaneous travel to incredibly distant places, but it also had more savage abilities. It could be used to attack! Once the accumulated energies were unleashed via the Blacksun, the power would be so great that even Otherverse Lords might perish before it.

Reamlord Windgrace was both an Otherverse Lord and in charge of the Blacksun. Thus, he possessed a transcendent status even amongst his peers in the Chaosverse.

The foundation of the Jadesun Realm had already been wrecked, causing it to be dramatically weakened, whereas the Blacksun was undamaged. If Reamlord Windgrace really did come, he'd probably be capable of breaching the core jails and rescuing Hegemon Azurefiend.

"I hear that the price needed to establish a spacetime conduit via the Blacksun is absolutely enormous," Ning said. "None of the Hegemons or Emperors chose to make such a request in order to have a better chance at the realmship! To have Reamlord Windgrace come here in person and use the Blacksun to breach a core prison to rescue you is probably going to cost even more than just creating a spacetime conduit. Are you sure you can pay such a price?"

"I cannot." Hegemon Azurefiend's gaze was cold while his voice was growling: "But I'd be willing to serve him as a servant in recompense!"

"As a servant?" Ning laughed. "You'd rather be a servant to Reamlord Windgrace than be a retainer for a mere thousand chaos cycles to a Daolord like myself. It makes sense. Reamlord Windgrace is an exalted figure, while I'm nothing but a mere Daolord... but Azurefiend, are you sure he even needs a servant like you?"

"If he doesn't want a servant like me, then in the future I'll wander through other dangerous regions to acquire treasures and slowly repay him," Hegemon Azurefiend said. "Based on my understanding of his temperament, he should probably accept such an offer! Even if he really isn't willing to come rescue me, I'd rather remained trapped here within the prisons."

"Once the Yin-Yang Samsara Wheels reach this place, you'll perish," Ning said.

"If I die, I die. I, Azurefiend, have roamed the Chaosverse and have seen everything there is to see. Although I do not welcome death, I welcome humiliation even less! Daolords are as puny as meaningless as ants. How dare one of you even think to have me, Azurefiend, serve you as a retainer?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning mockingly. "Laughable. Laughable!"

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Ning stared at the icy-faced Hegemon Azurefiend from outside the cage. In his heart, he couldn't help but sigh. His greatest worry had never been whether or not he would be able to capture a Hegemon. His greatest worry was... would he be able to convince the Hegemon to submit?

"You called me as a weak as an ant?" Ning said. "Do you really look down on Daolords that much?"

"What, do you think you are strong? All you could do was to trick and trap me thanks to your control over a few mechanisms. If it wasn't for the terrifying traps the Sithe left behind in the Jadefire Realm, do you think you really would have the chance to boast like this before me? I'd crush you into dust with one claw." Hegemon Azurefiend's eyes glowed with savage light. "All you can do is hide outside the cage and brag from a position of safety. How laughable."

Ning shook his head. "You underestimate Daolords too much."

"Oh? I heard you managed to force Archon Silksnow into committing suicide, right? You probably trapped him in another one of these mechanisms." Hegemon Azurefiend truly was filled with rage towards the Daolord before him. This puny Daolord was insulting him from outside the cage! How long had it been since a Daolord had ever dared to behave like this before him?

"How about this, Azurefiend? Let's have a little bet," Ning said.

"A bet?" Azurefiend looked at Ning. "What bet."

“I’ll enter the void cage and have a fight against you,” Ning said. “I’ll rely on my own real power to fight against you, and I’ll give you an hour. If you cannot beat me in that hour, you’ll have lost. You’ll have to accept the results of our wager and become my retainer!”

“You are willing to come inside to spar against me?” Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes lit up. He had been thoroughly infuriated ages ago, but the void cage made it so that he wasn’t able to injure Ning in the slightest. That was the only reason why he had managed to hold onto his temper and waste so much time talking instead. Now, upon hearing that this puny Daolord was being so reckless and foolish as to come on inside, he was instantly delighted.

“Fine, I’ll take that bet! But I don’t need an hour. Just stand in front of me and rely on your own power to survive for ten seconds. Do that, and you’ll have won!” Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes turned red with bloodlust. He truly did not believe that an exalted Hegemon like him, highly-ranked even amongst other Hegemons, would be unable to annihilate a puny Daolord like Darknorth.

“Agreed. No backing out?” Ning said.

“I’d rather die than break my word! Just don’t regret dying by my hands, you brat.” Hegemon Azurefiend licked his lips, his eyes flashing with blood light.

Whoosh. With a flicker, Ning flew past the invisible walls and inside the void cage.

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 20: Ji Ning Battles Hegemon Azurefiend

Hegemon Azurefiend was slightly startled when he saw Ji Ning head straight inside the void cage. His lips parted into a strange smile: “Daolord Darknorth, I originally had rather looked down upon you; you merely caught me thanks to these traps, but you dared to request for me to serve you as your retainer! Now, however, I feel a hint of admiration towards you. At least you have the courage to head straight into this void cage!”

“Thank you for your praise,” Ning said with a laugh. “Soon, Azurefiend, you’ll know that I have power to go with my courage.”

“You might have courage, but it is foolish courage.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face turned icy once more as he said solemnly, “Kid, are you ready? Once you are prepared, I’m going to make my move.” Given his pride, Hegemon Azurefiend felt absolute confidence in his own superiority. There was no way he would lower himself to launch a sneak attack; he was going to crush Daolord Darknorth with overwhelming, straightforward power.

The void cage wasn’t all that large, just three hundred meters or so in diameter. Ning and Azurefiend stood within it, staring at each other in midair.

“You can make your move whenever you please.” Ning’s body flickered as he manifested three heads and six arms, all six Northbow swords flying into his hands.

“Before we begin, we need to make the stakes clear,” Hegemon Azurefiend said. “You have to rely on your own strength to battle against me. If I cannot beat you in ten breaths, I lose. If I lose, I’ll be your retainer and follow you for a thousand chaos cycles! But if I win...”

“If you win, I’ll be dead. Once I die, this mechanism will dissipate,” Ning said.

Hegemon Azurefiend blinked, then smirked. “Good.” At first, he had an extremely poor impression of Ning, but now it began to improve. At least the kid was straightforward!

“Use your most powerful attacks against me. Go ahead. If I attacked first, you probably wouldn’t have a chance to show your abilities off.” Hegemon Azurefiend stood there, his posture stately and his aura reserved.

“Very well.” Ning stared at his opponent. Hegemon Azurefiend was covered with azure scales. He looked like a skinny old man, and his body seemed wizened and weak, but he was in truth a breathtakingly savage Chaos Godbeast who had reached Hegemony! He was probably close to even Hegemon Brightshore in power and was ranked highly even amongst his Hegemonic peers.

Ning stared fixedly at his opponent, while Hegemon Azurefiend kept a close watch on Ning’s movements as well. Although Hegemon Azurefiend was supremely confident in his skills, he couldn’t afford to lose this battle! Thus, he was going to use all his power and not slacken off in the slightest.

Suddenly... whoosh! Ning disappeared without a trace.

“Where’d he go?!” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face changed. He swept the entire void cage with his godsense, but it was as though Daolord Darknorth had completely disappeared. Not even godsense could locate him.

Although stupefied, Hegemon Azurefiend’s pride kept him from immediately attacking. He continued to stand there confidently without moving... because he had already promised to let Ning launch the first attack!

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The calm region of three hundred meters within the void cage was suddenly filled with explosions. Six Northbow swords appeared out of nowhere, as did Ning. The six swords instantly unleashed an utterly shocking amount of power, transforming into sword-tsunamis that simultaneously slammed against Hegemon Azurefiend. One struck him on the head, two struck him on the back of his knees, one struck him on his chest, one struck him on his neck, and one struck him on his face.

Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker!

“How arrogant. My Omega Sword Dao – Heavenbreaker is my most powerful attack, and its power is close to the Hegemonic level. I might not be able to crumble top-grade Eternal treasures into dust with this attack, but I’d at least be able to crack them apart. He dares to use his body alone to endure this attack without even trying to block it? He is being far too overconfident.” Ning was rather irritated and offended by his opponent’s arrogance.

The explosions rang out, followed by a stunned look on Hegemon Azurefiend’s face. He couldn’t help but be sent flying backwards by the attack, smashing into the void cage wall behind him and coming to a halt in midair. His body, however, was completely unharmed. Even his face, which had been hit head-on, didn’t have the slightest scratch on it.

“A Daolord like yourself is actually capable of such power?” Hegemon Azurefiend was born a Chaos Godbeast and thus held tremendous advantages in terms of defensive strength. In this regard, he was actually comparable to an Otherverse Lord. He could stand there without moving and allow other Hegemons to attack him without suffering any injuries at all! His body had long ago been crystalized and refined to the extreme, and his innate abilities gave it a perfect blend of toughness and suppleness. To injure him was extremely, extremely difficult.

However, Hegemon Azurefiend didn't feel the slightest bit smug. All he felt was shock, shock at the power of Ning's sword-stances.

“But... it is now my turn!” With a furious bellow, Hegemon Azurefiend exploded forth as well.

Boom! Rings of dimensional power rippled out from around him, spreading out like waves of water that generated tremendously strong 'pushes' that swept out in every direction. This was Hegemon Azurefiend's secret art, a truly powerful Hegemonic secret art known as the 'Azurefiend Fiefdom'. He had spent countless aeons slowly creating and perfecting this secret art.

The dimensional rings spread out, seeking to encompass the entire void cage.

“Break!” Ning immediately executed his own secret arts. A pair of golden wings appeared in the air, ensconced by countless arcs of sword-light. Together, they formed the Omega Sword Dao – Yin Yang, and they swept towards the enemy secret art with incomparable sharpness.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Faced with those strange dimensional ripples, the golden wings and the countless arcs of sword-light began to crumble and break apart.

“Heartworld, descend!” Ning executed his heartworld projection as well, but he still wasn't able to prevent his secret arts from crumbling. Ning's secret art/heartworld projection combination was fairly strong amongst Emperors, but compared to the fully-mastered secret arts of a Hegemon like Azurefiend, he still wasn't able to keep up.

“A heartworld projection?” Hegemon Azurefiend glanced at the illusory world which had manifested around him. He was beginning to gain a higher opinion of this 'Daolord Darknorth' kid.

“Die!” Hegemon Azurefiend waved his right arm, reaching out with his five fingers. They stretched out like a giant sun-blotting hand, tearing through all opposition and causing space itself to bend and compress before them. Entire world seemed to be born and then instantly destroyed within those fields of compress space. This was a killer technique which Hegemon Azurefiend often favored, the 'End of Days'.

He had no time to waste and thus immediately chose to use his killer attacks. Ten breaths was an extremely long period of time, but Hegemon Azurefiend had to use all his power to maximize his chances of victory.

“How terrifying.” Ning's face completely paled when he saw this giant hand reach for him. He was unable to dodge, nor was there anywhere he could dodge to! Faced with such a dazzling strike, he had only one option – face it head-on!

This was the very first time he actually engaged a Hegemon in a life-and-death battle. Hegemon Azurefiend, based on the reports Ning had acquired, was most likely stronger than even Hegemon

Windrain or Hegemon Netherlily. Only when actually battling a Hegemon, however, would one fully understand how terrifying they were.

All six of Ning's swords moved simultaneously. The sword-tsunamis of water began to spin, transforming into whirlpools of water that then became a black spinning vortices of darkness. Ning himself seemed to have transformed into a terrifying black hole that was devouring everything in the surrounding area. Hegemon Azurefiend himself couldn't help but secretly sigh at how profound Daolord Darknorth's insight into the Dao was. How was it that a Daolord had reached such heights? Was this why he dared to battle Hegemons in solo combat?

Slash! The giant hand struck straight against the black hole, and an extremely soft sound could be heard. It sounded much like a bubble being popped.

The black hole broke asunder, while the three-headed, six-armed Ning was sent flying backwards. He smashed against the walls of the void cage, which trembled slightly and dissipated the force of the attack. However, the counter-force from the collision was enough to cause Ning to stumble a few steps more.

"Eh?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning in astonishment. "He actually blocked it. He wasn't even injured?"

Ning, however, felt as though his blood was in a state of disarray. His entire body felt numb.

"Die for me!" Hegemon Azurefiend exploded with fury. There was no way he was going to admit defeat. Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! One giant claw after another struck out toward Ning, creating illusions that they then destroyed with incredible power and speed.

Ning had no choice but to defend. In just a single breath's worth of time, Hegemon Azurefiend had unleashed hundreds of claw-attacks, each of which was filled with his maximum power.

"Ugh!" Blood finally sprayed out of Ning's mouth, and even his skin was beginning to turn red. He had been defending furiously against the barrage of attacks, but even just one of them had been enough to throw his internals into a state of disarray. Several hundred in a row was just getting to be too much.

"What?! His divine body still hasn't broken apart?" Hegemon Azurefiend began to grow impatient. Whoosh! His body suddenly transformed. He previously had looked like a skinny, azure-scaled old man, but he now transformed into a great beast. This was a hooved beast with four legs which was completely covered in azure scales. His head was triangular-shaped, while his body was sleek and long. The azure scales even covered his long tail, which swayed behind him like a metal whip.

This... this was Hegemon Azurefiend's true form! He was a Chaos Godbeast. Only when he reverted to his true form would he be able to unleash his true, maximum power.

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 21: Retainer

"Die." Hegemon Azurefiend's entire body glowed with black light as a terrifying aura of destruction swept out from him. His eyes were cold and unforgiving. This was a terrifyingly deadly Hegemon! This

was the true face of the mercurial-tempered Hegemon Azurefiend. Hegemon Azurefiend had no intentions of losing, which was why he revealed his true form and unleashed his most powerful, desperation attack.

Whoosh. The beast suddenly flew forwards, pouncing towards Ji Ning with claws outstretched. Ning couldn't help but feel a sense of innate terror when faced with this terrifying pair of claw-strikes. These claws seemed to contain the power to annihilate all things before them, as if they were the source of destruction itself. They were the source, the very essence of space and matter!

This was the most powerful strike Hegemon Azurefiend had at his disposal, the trump card he had infused all the insights he had gained while wandering the countless realmverses! Even when he battled other Hegemons, he rarely displayed this ultimate attack. In battles between Hegemons, it was rare for fights to end up being to the death, which meant there was no need to go all-out like this. This time, however, was different.

This was his most powerful attack, an attack which had fused the Dao of Space and the Dao of Destruction together in a supremely terrifying attack... 'Genesis Annihilation'! It was an attack executed with his true body!

Clang! Although Ning was unable to completely suppress the innate fear which snaked out from his heart, his Dao-heart remained calm and he was able to face this strike with all of his power. First, he used his illusory arts. Only then did he use his defensive sword-arts!

Hegemon Azurefiend's soul and truesoul were both incomparably strong, as was his Dao-heart. Ning's illusions were completely incapable of shaking him.

Boom! A massive explosion rang out. As Ning blocked the attack, he could sense the terrifying force behind the strike and he instantly understood the principles behind it. The power pervaded countless different spatial continuums, seeping through karma itself. Faced with such a strike, even clones and Primaltwins would perish. There was no way to hide or avoid an attack like this.

"I can't block it!" Ning instantly exploded into countless streams of liquid water. Invulnerable form... Shadowless form!

Since he was unable to attack this attack head-on, he would deflect its power instead! As the saying goes, if you cut water with a blade the water will continue to flow. The same was true for an invulnerable body, which was constantly changing and mercurial in shape and nature. This was what allowed it to almost perfectly deflect any force applied to it. Archon Silksnow was able to perfectly deflect the power of even Hegemon Brightshore with his invulnerable form. Only an absolutely overwhelming disparity in power would be enough to breach someone's invulnerable form.

Hegemon Azurefiend was indeed much stronger than Ning, but he clearly wasn't strong enough to wreck Ning's 'invulnerable form'.

Whoosh. Ning transformed into countless streams of water that reformed into a humanoid shape off in the distance. The three-headed, six-armed Ning looked cautiously at his opponent.

"An invulnerable form?" Hegemon Azurefiend, still in his true form, stared blankly from afar. He just stood there, completely unmoving and not pressing the attack.

Ning continued to nervously inspect Hegemon Azurefiend. Upon seeing that his foe wasn't moving, he couldn't help but call out, "Azurefiend?"

The two battled at extreme speeds. Thus far, they had yet to finish the ten breaths of battle.

"I lost." Hegemon Azurefiend's voice suddenly seemed much older than it had been just a while ago, and a rather dispirited look appeared on his formerly ferocious triangular face. He returned to his skinny, elderly human form, a slightly forlorn look on his face as he said softly, "I didn't expect that my full-power strike would only be enough to force you to reveal an invulnerable form. Based on what I know, you've only trained for an extremely short period of time and have focused exclusively on the Dao of the Sword. I never would've thought that a Daolord who focused on the Dao of the Sword would be able to acquire an invulnerable form. I lost. I have nothing more to say."

As soon as Ning had revealed his invulnerable form, Hegemon Azurefiend had realized that it would be impossible for him to slay Ning. Ning had already reached a level of power which was on par with that of the supreme Emperors who were just barely weaker than the Hegemons themselves! Aside from the twelve Hegemons, there had been fourteen supreme Emperors who had come to the Jadedfire Realm. Most of them were on the levels of Emperor Goldisle and the other leaders of the Dao Alliance. They might not be able to defeat Hegemons, but Hegemons were not capable of killing them.

When Hegemon Azurefiend had first seen Ning's power, he hadn't been dispirited. This was because he felt that Ning must've focused on the Dao of the Sword; given how briefly he had trained for, Ning shouldn't have an invulnerable form.

Now, however, Ning had actually revealed an invulnerable form! That meant that there was no chance that he, Hegemon Azurefiend, would be able to actually kill Ning.

"Can you tell me how it is that you, a Daolord, have reached such power? You clearly train in the Dao of the Sword; why is it that you have an invulnerable form?" Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning. "At least let me understand why I lost."

"I am indeed just a Daolord, but my Dao is that of the Omega Sword Dao," Ning explained.

"Omega Sword Dao?" Hegemon Azurefiend was puzzled. He didn't understand.

"There are differences amongst Daos. Some Daolords have chosen the most common of Daos..." Ning didn't hide anything, telling Azurefiend about the truth of the Omega Dao. In truth, Ning wasn't the only person in the vast Chaosverse who had developed an Omega Dao. Despite that, there were very, very few who had reached such heights. Although on occasion a Daolord would be able to accomplish this, they would quickly fail their Daomerges and die. Their lifespans were all extremely short, and so very few even knew about them.

The vast majority of Hegemons had never even heard of 'Omega Daos'.

"So that's how it is. Everyone knows that there are differences amongst Daos, but I never would've imagined that the highest-level Dao is that of the 'Omega Dao'. All this time, I've been puzzled as to why a Daolord of the Fourth Step like yourself would have reached such heights in the Dao of the Sword. You might not be at the Hegemon-level, but you are just half a step beneath that level. Now, I finally

understand. So it is because of your superior Dao, your Omega Sword Dao.” Hegemon Azurefiend laughed, and his laughter caused Ning to feel shocked.

“Something wrong?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“You look a lot nicer when you laugh. Why do you usually keep such an icy look on your face?” Ning asked.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s face instantly turned icy once more. “Don’t get cocky with me, boy. Your Omega Sword Dao isn’t bad, and you are pretty strong. Per our wager, I’ll be your retainer... but only for a thousand chaos cycles!”

“I’ll have to trouble you to help me out in the future, brother Azurefiend.” Ning smiled.

“Hmph.” Hegemon Azurefiend let out a cold snort, then said: “Oh, right. I forgot to tell you. When you trapped me in the void cage and yammered about making me your retainer, I was so pissed off that I immediately told everyone about how you caught me. All of the Hegemons and Emperors from the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance are probably aware that you are in control of the flaming passageways by now! Hmph. That means you won’t be able to use this trap a second time.”

Ning chuckled. “That actually went without saying. A short while ago, all of the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageways stopped moving and no longer dared to enter other ones. I immediately knew that you probably had spread the word to them! But it is of no consequence. For you to become my retainer, brother Azurefiend, means that it was all worth it.”

Hegemon Azurefiend was instantly irritated again. He couldn’t even gain a verbal advantage over Darknorth. This Daolord really was a pain in the ass. Still, Hegemon Azurefiend couldn’t help but secretly chuckle as well. He was no longer feeling quite as upset and stifled as he was earlier. Previously, he had felt enraged primarily because he felt as though he was being insulted. Now that Ning had revealed his true power, Hegemon Azurefiend had lost his wager. There was nothing more for him to complain about. Finding out that Ning walked the path of the Omega Sword Dao had actually resulted in him feeling some admiration towards Ning.

He had lost his bet, and so he would temporarily become the retainer to a Daolord who walked the path of an Omega Dao. This wasn’t so bad. Dazzling Daolords like on this caliber were even rarer than Hegemons, after all.

“Go ahead and give me an oath to swear,” Hegemon Azurefiend said. “Hurry up and set up an oath. After swearing it, I’ll be your retainer for the next thousand chaos cycles.”

“Very well.” Ning felt a surge of joy in his heart.

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“What? Daolord Darknorth is actually in control of the mechanisms and traps inside the flaming passageways of the Jafire Realm? Hegemon Azurefiend fell into one of them?” Hegemon Dawnruler, Hegemon Everworry, Hegemon Oldgem, Hegemon Blackwood, Hegemon Winterflame... all of the Hegemons and the many Emperors were all scared silly by this.

“No wonder we weren’t able to capture him despite spending so much time here.”

“He’s actually secretly in control of the flaming passageways?”

“Is this information real? Is it perhaps a deception?”

The Hegemons and Emperors all had their own responses to this information. The Sixteen Realmverses Alliance, however, was in a state of absolute bedlam. An entire host of Hegemons and Emperors had charged into the Jadedfire Realm to capture Daolord Darknorth. Everyone felt certain that he was nothing more than a fish for the fisherman to catch! Who would’ve thought that he was actually a sea monster in disguise? Now that he revealed his fangs and his claws, he stunned all sixteen of the realmverses.

If he was in control of the flaming passageways, didn’t that mean that the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageways were in serious trouble?

“I know what type of person Hegemon Azurefiend is. Although he’s temperamental, he’s extremely proud. There’s no way he’d make up a lie like this.”

“Be careful, everyone. Stay right where you are and don’t move. So long as we don’t move around, Daolord Darknorth won’t be able to use those mechanisms against us.”

“Are we supposed to just sit here forever without moving?”

The major powers were all connected to the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance in their own ways. They were naturally able to send messages to each other as well.

Suddenly...

“Greetings, Hegemons and Emperors...” a booming voice suddenly rang out through every single one of the countless flaming passageways. Ning’s divine power clone had sent its Immortal energy into the formation-diagram, causing his voice to echo through every part of every passageway.

The faces of the Hegemons and Emperors inside the flaming passageway all tightened when they heard this voice.

“I’m Daolord Darknorth, the person all of you have come here to kill.” Ning’s voice echoed sonorously through every inch of the flaming passageways. “In the past, no feuds or grudges existed between us, and I never wished to be your enemies. However... all of you have travelled all the way here from your respective realmverses, delving into the Jadedfire Realm to kill me and seize my treasures. Am I suppose to just let this slide, gentlemen? Everyone in the outside world would say that I, Daolord Darknorth, am a spineless pushover. Gentlemen... what do you view as being the best solution to this?”

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 22: Price

The Hegemons and Emperors were scattered throughout the various flaming passageways. They were all able to hear what Ji Ning said, but none of them were in a rush to respond. Instead, they began to use their Primaltwins, avatars, retainers, and various communication methods back in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

“I heard Daolord Darknorth’s voice. He seems to be threatening us.”

“I heard it as well.”

“Right, I also heard him.”

“We were all able to hear him. It seems as though Daolord Darknorth’s voice has permeated every single part of the flaming passageways! This is proof that he does indeed exercise control over the flaming passageways.”

“Everyone, what do you think we should do? The flaming passageways are filled with such danger that even Hegemon Azurefiend was trapped. Any of us might fall as well. The only thing we can do seems to be stay where we are and not move at all.”

“Are we supposed to just bend over and admit defeat?”

“Don’t worry. We have so many Hegemons here, while Darknorth is nothing more than a single Daolord. He won’t dare to go too far.” The Hegemons and Emperors continued to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

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Ning’s voice continued to echo through the flaming passageways: “Hegemons and Emperors, by now you should have already verified that I’m telling the truth.”

“Then what do you wish of us?”

“Go ahead and tell us what you want.”

The Hegemons and Emperors were all able to maintain their composure. They were all powerful lords and rulers in their own rights, after all.

“Haha, I, Daolord Darknorth, am not the wild and unbridled sort.” Ning’s laughter rang out within the ears of every single Hegemon and Emperor. “I won’t ask for too much. You’ve come here to kill me and take my treasures, and I hear that you all came via realmship. I imagine you already paid quite a price just to make it here. All you need to do is pay me the same price you paid to travel to the Flamedragon Realmverse, and I’ll permit you all to leave.”

“This bit of price might pain you a bit, but it’s not too excessive. If you are willing to pay the price, I’ll immediately let you leave. If you are unwilling to pay any price whatsoever... well, then there’ll be nothing I can do. I can’t just let you leave like this. I, Daolord Darknorth, am not someone to be abused by others without repercussion.” Ning’s voice echoed throughout every part of the flaming passageways.

This was a request which Ning had put quite a bit of thought into. Hegemon Azurefiend had already publicly revealed Ning’s abilities, making it so that all the Hegemons and Emperors would be on their guard. Some would even be temporarily immobilized, making it impossible for Ning to attack them for now. If pushed too hard, they could simply pay the price needed to ask Realmslord Windgrace to come over and rescue them one-by-one.

“Hmph. Daolord Darknorth... I’m impressed that a trifling Daolord like yourself was able to control the flaming passageways. However... now that we already know what you are capable of, you are no longer a threat to us.” Hegemon Dawnruler stood in the air within a flaming passageway: “If you are wise, you would immediately swear a lifeblood oath not to act against us and let us leave safely. That way, it can

be even be said that we are on friendly terms with each other! Otherwise... if you choose to antagonize all these Hegemons and Emperors, the repercussions shall be far beyond what a trifling Daolord like yourself can endure.”

“Daolord Darknorth, you might be forgetting something.” Hegemon Winterflame said in a cold voice, “Only part of the Hegemons and Emperors are trapped within the flaming passageway! A large number have yet to arrive. Once they do get here, they will travel together and work together. There’s no way the flaming passageways will be able to withstand the combined might of that many Hegemons and Emperors working in concert. They’ll be able to rescue all of us with ease, and you’ll be faced with over twenty Hegemons and many Emperors working together to hunt you down. You won’t even have a place to run. Even the flaming passageways of the Jedefire Realm will probably be rent asunder once more!”

“Daolord Darknorth, you should know your own limits.”

“Trying to threaten all of us Hegemons and Emperors at the same time? You really are quite bold.”

Quite a few of the Hegemons and Emperors began to speak out. Clearly, they were unwilling to bow their heads before a Daolord. If they were on their own and had been captured, they probably would’ve lowered their heads, admitted defeat, and then handed over some treasures. But given how many of them were trapped here together, they felt certain that Daolord Darknorth wouldn’t dare to offend them.

“Gentlemen, you came for me and are now trapped in the flaming passageways that I control. I need but nod and all of you can depart safely... but you aren’t willing to pay any price at all for that? Do you really think that I’m someone you can so easily mistreat? Hmph. Very well, then. I’ll meet you all one-by-one.” Ning fell silent, having nothing further to say.

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Another part of the flaming passageways. Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend were seated together within Ning’s realmship, drinking some wine together.

“Hm? Not bad.” Hegemon Azurefiend took a sniff of the wine in his glass, a relaxed look on his face. He then took a single small sip.

“How’d it go? Didn’t work, did it?” Hegemon Azurefiend smirked.

“They are all tough old bastards. They weren’t willing to pay any price at all.” Ning drank some wine, a cold light flashing through his eyes. “It seems I’ve been too nice to them. They really do think I’m a pushover.”

“So you’ve finally thought it through, eh?” Hegemon Azurefiend lidded his eyes as he continued to drink the wine.

Ning glanced at Azurefiend. The skinny, shriveled old man looked so vulgar and obscene as he enjoyed his wine, but he was actually an incredibly powerful Chaos Godbeast Hegemon who was close to Hegemon Brightshore in power! Still, Ning was in a superb mood. Now that Azurefiend was his retainer, it would be much easier for him to deal with Archon Silksnow’s final act of revenge.

“Let’s go and meet with them. Let’s visit Hegemon Dawnruler first,” Ning said.

Swoosh. The realmship transformed into a streak of light that advanced through the flaming passageways, darting through the winding paths at incredible speeds without encountering any mechanisms at all.

“I never would’ve imagined that one would be able to travel through these flaming passageways in such a smooth, unimpeded fashion. We didn’t run into any problems at all.” Hegemon Azurefiend stared at the outside, then sighed, “When I was chasing after you, it appears you intentionally ‘ran into’ a few traps. I was quite excited when I saw it, back then. It appears you were playing with me the entire time.”

“I had no choice. I wasn’t strong enough to deal with you head-on, and so I had to play a few tricks with my control over the flaming passageways. Now that I’m strong enough, there’s no need for me to continue to play hide-and-seek.” Ning sighed. “With you here, brother Azurefiend, I can finally bring a true end to this matter.”

“Mm.” Hegemon Azurefiend nodded in a self-satisfied manner, showing not one ounce of humility. “Now that I am your retainer... once word spreads, the Hegemons and Emperors will all be dissuaded from even harboring designs on your realmship.”

If a Hegemon held a realmship, the other Hegemons wouldn’t think to try and take it. This was because killing a Hegemon was simply far too difficult. Generally speaking, it would take either an Otherverse Lord or an entire host of Hegemons working together to accomplish such a feat. Kill a Hegemon who had a realmship? That would be even more difficult.

“Here we are.” Ning stared towards the front.

“Ah, that’s Dawnruler.” Azurefiend grinned as he glanced towards the front as well. “That old fellow has always been quite proud.”

Ning relaxed a bit upon seeing this. He was worried that Hegemon Azurefiend would care so much about his face that he wouldn’t cooperate. Ning’s worry was that even after becoming his retainer, Hegemon Azurefiend would feel embarrassed upon encountering other Hegemons that he would feel a bit uncomfortable and out-of-sorts. This was something Ning didn’t wish to see! In truth, however, as a Hegemon Azurefiend had an incredibly powerful Dao-heart. Since he had already come to a decision, he was going to accept it with a calm heart.

“Come, let us go out,” Azurefiend said.

“Let’s go.” Ning rose to his feet as well. Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw simultaneously flew out of the realmship.

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A golden-robed elder with three eyes was standing there, a solemn look on his face as he stared at the halted realmship. Hegemon Dawnruler was an extremely inflexible, grim, and dominating Hegemon. This was why he had immediately led the other Hegemons in immediately refusing Ning’s request for a price to be paid.

“Eh?” Hegemon Dawnruler frowned slightly when he saw three figures fly towards him from afar.

Ning and Azurefiend were shoulder-to-shoulder, while Whitethaw was slightly behind Ning.

“Azurefiend?” Hegemon Dawnruler frowned as he spoke.

“Dawnruler.” Hegemon Azurefiend said, “You already know the request which Darknorth has made. I urge you to be a good boy and accept it. That way, you’ll be able to leave safely and without any problems.”

“You are speaking on his behalf?” Hegemon Dawnruler frowned, completely mystified. “Is this the price he demanded of you? Based on my understanding of you, there’s no way you would’ve agreed to the demands of a Daolord.”

“I’ve already sworn a lifeblood oath to become Daolord Darknorth’s retainer,” Hegemon Azurefiend said. “As his retainer, I naturally must assist him whole-heartedly.”

“Y-you...” Hegemon Dawnruler’s third eye bulged out in disbelief. He had been alive for countless aeons, but he had never even heard of such a thing. He stared at Hegemon Azurefiend in disbelief. “Azurefiend, you are a Hegemon... but you’ve become a retainer to a trifling Daolord?”

Once word of this spread, it would undoubtedly cause an enormous stir in all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. In fact, word might spread to even more distant realmverses and otherverses!

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 23: Word Spreads

This was completely and utterly unheard of!

Hegemons stood at the very apex of every realmverse and every otherverse. An exalted Hegemon... serve as a retainer to a Daolord? What sort of a joke was this? Everyone felt as though this was an absolute joke which simply wasn’t conceivable.

“Your third eye is about to pop out from all the bulging,” Hegemon Azurefiend said with a frown. “What’s there to be surprised about? Darknorth is extremely strong, second only to Hegemons in power! I had a wager with him, and I lost. I, Azurefiend, am not the sort to welch on my bets. I lost and so I will pay my debt. I have willingly joined Darknorth as his retainer.”

“Y-you...” Hegemon Dawnruler was completely stunned by Hegemon Azurefiend’s words.

“Any other questions?” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Dawnruler.

“Impressive. Quite impressive.” Hegemon Dawnruler shook his head. “Brother Azurefiend, I’m impressed by your tolerance levels.”

“Cut the crap. Now that I am Daolord Darknorth’s retainer, none of the Hegemons or Emperors heading this way will have any chance of taking the realmship from him. They probably won’t even come,” Azurefiend said. “Darknorth didn’t ask for all that much from you, and he hasn’t put any of you in any actual life-threatening danger at all. Even if you went to ask Realmslord Windgrace to help out... given his personality, he probably wouldn’t intervene over such a minor matter and come help you out.”

“So... just go ahead and pay the price for freedom. Otherwise, you can just keep sitting here.” Azurefiend looked at Dawnruler, who was silent. Dawnruler knew that Azurefiend’s words made a lot of sense.

Azurefiend himself was a Hegemon; he understood Hegemonic thought-processes quite clearly. Realmslord Windgrace was such a transcendental figure that he didn’t get involved in any power squabbles at all. He would only intervene in situations which were truly lethal for the local Hegemons! There was no way he would come here just because Ji Ning was asking these Hegemons and Emperors for a few treasures!

“Darknorth isn’t asking for that much either. The combined amount from all of you Hegemons and Emperors is probably comparable to just the networth of one or two Hegemons,” Hegemon Azurefiend said calmly. “There’s no way Realmslord Windgrace would be so shameless as to come here for such a small amount of treasure.”

“Ugh. Enough, Azurefiend. I’ll accept the conditions.” Hegemon Dawnruler looked at Hegemon Azurefiend, then shook his head. “The price we are paying is nothing. You, however, are the unluckiest bastard out of all of us. If there’s anything you need me to help you out with, just say the word.”

“Don’t even start.” Hegemon Azurefiend’s eyes flashed with cold light. He was an incredibly proud figure who had wandered through countless places. Hegemon Dawnruler’s intentional show of ‘pity’ had rather angered Azurefiend.

“Alright, alright! Calm down. My mistake,” Hegemon Dawnruler said hurriedly. But when he looked at Azurefiend, he couldn’t help but continue to sigh secretly.

An exalted Hegemon serve as a retainer for a Daolord? Word of this would quickly spread with wildfire speed! The Hegemons would all spread this shocking information to their peers, which would then spread even farther away.

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Hegemon Dawnruler obediently handed over the requisite treasures. Hegemon Wuye and Hegemon Fogsun had long ago publicized within the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance as to what they would need in order to ferry Hegemons via their realmships. Thus, Ning knew what the price had been.

Ning swore a lifeblood oath as well, ensuring that Hegemon Dawnruler would feel at ease. Hegemon Dawnruler’s greatest worry was that once he began to move, Ning would suddenly activate a mechanism to trap him.

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A short while later, Hegemon Oldgem and the Paragon of Swords were staring in astonishment at Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw.

“Brother Azurefiend, you’ve become Daolord Darknorth’s retainer?” As the conversation progressed, the two Hegemons turned to stare at Hegemon Azurefiend in absolute astonishment.

“What’s with all the fuss? Go ask Dawnruler for the details,” Azurefiend barked with a frown. “Hurry up! You two are pretty strong, but with me here it’ll be quite hard for you to defeat all of the mechanisms and traps present.”

“Fine, fine. We’ll pay.” Hegemon Oldgem nodded.

“Impressive, Daolord Darknorth.” The Paragon of Swords glanced at Ning. The two truly were stunned by this. They also understood that with Azurefiend supporting Ning, there was no way they’d be able to fight through the flaming passageways by themselves.

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Word quickly spread, causing an utter storm of amazement to sweep through the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance. Many learned the rough details of what had happened; Hegemon Azurefiend had been trapped within the flaming passageways, then had lost a bet to Daolord Darknorth and was thus his retainer for a time.

Whoosh.

A realmship had been accumulating power as it was preparing to tear through the Great Dark, but it suddenly came to a halt.

“Gentlemen.” Within the realmship, Hegemon Fogsun turned to stare at the other five Hegemons and the other six Emperors. “You should’ve received word as well that Daolord Darknorth is in control of the flaming passageways of the Jadefire Realm! Hegemon Azurefiend was trapped by him and has now become his retainer. There’s no chance that you’ll be able to win the realmship from him. What are you planning to do next? Shall you still go and try your luck?”

“How could something like this have happened?”

“Hegemon Azurefiend really is a disgrace of a Hegemon. He was so afraid of dying that he chose to go serve a Daolord? How preposterous!”

“I feel rather ‘impressed’ by Azurefiend. I never would’ve been able to force myself to bow my head like that. I would’ve rather died than to swallow such a disgrace.” This was what the Hegemons and Emperors were all saying amongst themselves.

Although they had all paid a price in treasures to board the realmship, and although it had all come to naught, they didn’t feel too disappointed. This had been a free-for-all amongst many Hegemons and Emperors, after all; only one would succeed while the rest would fail. They had long ago mentally prepared themselves for failure. Thus, it didn’t really matter now that they really had ended up empty-handed.

However, they couldn’t help but sigh with commiseration. Hegemon Azurefiend was an extremely powerful Hegemon, far more powerful than the vast majority of them... and yet, he had lowered his head to serve a Daolord as retainer?

Quite a few of them actually began to view Azurefiend with contempt, feeling that he truly was a shameless craven.

“Gentlemen, we need to decide what the next plan of action is,” Hegemon Fogsun said.

“What else can we do? We’ve already paid upfront. Are you going to refund us our treasures?”

“I agree. Brother Fogsun, you should refund us half. We haven’t gotten anything out of this visit,” the five Hegemons and six Emperors all chorused.

“Cut the jokes,” Hegemon Fogsun said hurriedly. “You were all lucky! If you made it in there, you’d probably be threatened and extorted by Daolord Darknorth as well. You’d probably end up paying even more!”

“Haha, enough, enough. Brother Fogsun, we’re already quite close to the Flamedragon Realmverse, while you need to take the other Hegemons and Emperors back from the Flamedragon Realmverse. How about this? Let’s just all head there together and see if there’s a chance for us to meet Daolord Darknorth. All of us are quite curious about him.”

“Hmph. Curious? A Daolord who was actually able to convince a Hegemon to be his retainer... what an audacious fellow.”

“He succeeded, didn’t he?”

“Only because Azurefiend is a coward who fears death! Hmph!” The Hegemons and Emperors continued to discuss this amongst themselves.

“Very well, then, I’ll continue to head towards the Flamedragon Realmverse.” Hegemon Fogsun shook his head and sighed. “What a pity! This was just my second delivery. There were Hegemons and Emperors in two other realmverses who should’ve been in the third delivery. There’s no way they are going to pay me now. Jeeze, Daolord Darknorth... why did you have to be so hasty? Why couldn’t you have waited until all the Hegemons and Emperors arrived before making your move?”

“This time, the only ones to come out a winner were yourself, Wuye, and Daolord Darknorth.”

“Yes, all the rest of us suffered huge losses.” The Hegemons and Emperors continued to drink, chat, and merrymake amongst themselves.

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Word quickly spread. None of the Hegemons and Emperors in the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance harbored any further desires on the realmship. When they had merely found out that Ning was in charge of the flaming passageways, they had still felt hope. After all, Ning would have to hide within the flaming passageways, but a sufficient number of Hegemons working together while backed by powerful Numerancy would be able to calculate his location and then capture him safely.

As they saw it, all they had to do was to stop him in his tracks. An entire host of Hegemons and Emperors would be able to kill this Daolord with ease. Now, however, Hegemon Azurefiend stood by Daolord Darknorth’s side as his retainer. This meant there was now no chance at all for them to win the realmship.

“Azurefiend actually became a Daolord’s retainer.”

“No matter how impressive a Daolord is, he’s still just a Daolord. Azurefiend is a Hegemon!”

“I can’t believe what a coward Azurefiend is.”

“He’s willing to do anything so long as he can stay alive.” This was what everyone was saying.

Emperors felt an intrinsic sort of superiority towards Daolords. Daolords simply didn’t live long enough, and there was a limit to how strong they could become! Hegemons were supreme amongst Emperors... but now, one of them had become a retainer to a Daolord.

Even the likes of Hegemon Brightshore, Hegemon Windrain, and Hegemon Netherlily were stunned by this, despite being very familiar with Ning. As for the Emperors of the Flamedragon Realmverse, they were completely stupefied by these rumors.

These rumors spread across the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance like wildfire, then reached out to spread to even more realmverses. This was considered a fascinating bit of gossip by major powers. As a result, there were now many major powers in distant realmverses who had never visited the Flamedragon Realmverse but who had heard of a Daolord named Darknorth... as well as a Hegemon named Azurefiend who had actually chosen to be a Daolord’s retainer!

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 24: Meeting Winterflame Again

Ji Ning continued to lead Hegemon Azurefiend and Protector Whitethaw through the flaming passageways via his realmship, entering ‘negotiations’ with one trapped Hegemon and Emperor after another. Each flaming passageway was extremely long, while the Hegemons were all scattered in various places. As a result, it would take months to fully sweep through all of them.

“Hmph. Those fools.” Hegemon Azurefiend sat within the realmship, drinking some wine. A dark look had long ago appeared on his face. “All of them are saying that I’m afraid of death. Ugh...”

Hegemon Azurefiend didn’t even know how he was supposed to refute these rumors. Was he supposed to commit suicide to show that he wasn’t afraid of death? That would be truly idiotic.

“Brother Azurefiend, why bother with them?” Ning smiled. “If a dog bites you, are you really going to bite back? Just let them jabber.”

In truth, Ning felt a bit awkward about all this, because the person Hegemon Azurefiend was serving as himself! There was no way he could simply ‘give up’ a Hegemonic retainer, and so all he could do was just try and console the Hegemon as best he could.

“Yes, they are nothing more than dogs. I shouldn’t waste my time with them.” Hegemon Azurefiend lifted his head up to drink some wine, only to realize that his cup was empty. An awkward look appeared on his face. Clearly, he was so focused on what everyone in the outside world was saying about him that he hadn’t even noticed he was out of wine.

Seeing this, Ning grinned. “Let me fill that up for you.”

Hegemon Azurefiend watched as Ning poured the wine. He couldn’t help but stroke his pointed, ape-like jaw as he murmured, “I’ve been alive for many years. I don’t care about what those weaker cultivators say, but the Hegemons who are on par with me... I can’t help but care! I’ve made a fool of myself in front of you, Darknorth. My Dao-heart still is not strong enough.”

“So long as we are alive, there will be things we care about. Otherwise, we’d be nothing more than zombies.” Ning smiled. “Caring about face is quite normal.”

“Darknorth, there’s something I hope you can do for me.” Hegemon Azurefiend looked at Ning.

“Oh? Tell me what it is. I’ll do my absolute best,” Ning said immediately.

“I hope... that you will succeed in the Daomerge!” Azurefiend looked at Ning, a hint of eagerness in his eyes. Ning couldn’t help but feel slightly stunned by this. “If you succeed in the Daomerge, your Omega Dao will ensure that you vastly surpass the level of Hegemons. You will reach a level which I cannot even imagine. When that happens, I will only feel proud for having served someone like yourself as a retainer.”

Ning finally smiled. “Thank you for your kind words. I’ll absolutely do my best.”

The Daomerge... in truth, Ning was finally daring to feel a bit of optimism regarding it, primarily because the Autarch’s stone dais truly was shockingly effective with regards to meditation. He also had the countless techniques of the Sithe and the cultivator civilizations which the Autarch had left behind, giving him a much deeper foundation and level of understanding. Once he created ten Archon-class techniques, he would then gain another treasure the Autarch had left behind which would be of tremendous assistance to cultivators partaking in the Daomerge.

Thus... although it would be extremely difficult for a Daolord of the Fourth Step to succeed in the Daomerge with an Omega Dao, at least he now had a chance. If he really was able to succeed in the Daomerge, what new heights would he reach?

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The Hegemons and Emperors all obediently handed their treasures over. In the end, even the group of Hegemons led by the Numerancy-focused Hegemon Blackwood chose to bow their heads and hand over the treasures. Hegemon Blackwood’s divinations had told them that it would be impossible for their group to securely leave this place with Hegemon Azurefiend causing trouble for them.

The Hegemons made certain requests of Ning as well. In exchange for handing over their treasures, they all wanted Ning to swear oaths guaranteeing their safety. They wanted to make sure that Ning couldn’t suddenly backstab them as they began to leave. Ning, in turn, asked the fleeing Hegemons and Emperors to swear oaths not to come back in the future for revenge.

Both sides swore the relevant oaths. Only then did each feel faith in the other.

In the blink of an eye, more than two months had gone by.

“Just one Hegemon left,” Ning said.

“There’s one more left? Who?” Azurefiend asked.

“Winterflame.” Ning grinned.

“Hegemon Winterflame?” Azurefiend nodded slowly. “He’s an extremely shameless fellow, but he’s quite strong. He’ll be hard to deal with.”

Ning sent the realmship towards the direction of Hegemon Winterflame. While flying over, Azurefiend suddenly realized that something was wrong: "Darknorth, why are we going backwards? Aren't we going to meet Winterflame?"

"Yes, we're moving straight towards him right now," Ning said. "Winterflame is located at the very end of this passageway, right after that turn in the corridor!"

"What? He's right there? But we went past here earlier. Why didn't we go speak to him and instead moved around him? That was unnecessary." Azurefiend was puzzled. He didn't really care about having 'wasted' a day or two, but this entire time Ning had 'swept' through the Hegemons and Emperors using the most direct paths possible. Why had they wasted a day or two on Hegemon Winterflame?

"Because he's different from the other Hegemons and Emperors," Ning said coldly.

"What, is there a feud between the two of you?" Hegemon Azurefiend could sense a hint of anger emanating from Ning.

Ning nodded. "He once assaulted my avatar and tried to abduct my clan, 'Vastheaven Palace', to use its disciples as hostages against me."

"Hmph. Winterflame lives up to his reputation. As shameless as ever, I see." Hegemon Azurefiend let out a cold snort, then frowned: "If I had a way to help you get rid of him, I would, but he's a Hegemon who can transform into countless flames. So long as his invulnerable flamebody is active, my attacks will be of no use against him."

"We might not be able to kill him, but we can't let him off easily," Ning said.

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The flaming passageways. The handsome, pale-skinned Hegemon Winterflame was frowning slightly, his skin so crystalline that one could see the vessels beneath them. "Damn. Daolord Darknorth actually managed to reverse the situation! Not only did he take control over the mechanisms in the flaming passageways, he even managed to convince that idiot Azurefiend to be his retainer. The Hegemons and Emperors have all given up on fighting for that realmship." Hegemon Winterflame frowned, his heart filled with resentment: "What should I do? What are my options? The flaming passageways are filled with dangers. I can't move at all."

"Forget it. I'll bow my head and just endure it for now. Escape is the most pressing issue," Hegemon Winterflame mused silently. "A pity that Daolord Darknorth is going to profit by it."

Whoosh. An ancient, rather damaged-looking realmship suddenly flew towards him from afar. "Here they are." Hegemon Winterflame raised his head to stare towards the realmship.

The realmship came to a halt, and three figures emerged from it. They were Ji Ning, Hegemon Azurefiend, and Protector Whitethaw.

"Hmph." Hegemon Winterflame suppressed his anger and said coldly, "Daolord Darknorth, you really are quite impressive. All these Hegemons came attacking, but in the end you cleared the board! You even convinced one of them to become your retainer. I have to admit some admiration for you. Here are the treasures you requested. I can give them to you, but I need you to swear an oath not to attack

me while I leave the Jadedfire Realm. I must be allowed to leave in peace.” Hegemon Winterflame held out a bracelet as he looked at Ning.

“Hegemon Winterflame. We meet again.” Ning finally spoke out in a leisurely voice.

“Meet again?” Hegemon Winterflame was briefly startled before his face went blank and hard.

“I told you that we’d meet again here in the Jadedfire Realm.” Ning smiled. “I’ve always been a person who keeps his word. I’ve had you on my mind for quite some time now, ever since you attempted to take away all of Vastheaven Palace to try and threaten me.”

Hegemon Winterflame growled, “What do you want?”

“The other Hegemons only needed to pay a minor figure in treasure, but you are different,” Ning said. “I won’t claim your life. However, if you wish me to let me go then you must give me all the treasures you are currently carrying.”

“You won’t claim my life? As if you could.” Hegemon Winterflame was rather angry. In terms of raw power, most likely only Otherverse Lords had any chance of slaying him.

“You can choose to refuse.” Ning looked at him.

“You...!” Hegemon Winterflame stared hard at Ning. “You ask too much. Half! I’ll give you half of the countless treasures I’ve accumulated over the aeons.” He was legendary for his shamelessness, but it was this very shamelessness that had allowed to build up such a prodigious stockpile of treasures.

“Either accept my offer or decline it,” Ning said coldly.

“You...!” Hegemon Winterflame was so furious, his teeth hurt from all the clenching. Still... when he considered his situation, he realized that all the other Hegemons and Emperors had fled. The Jadedfire Realm was simply too dangerous; the only person in all the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance who would be able to come here to save him was Realmslord Windgrace. But not only did Realmslord Windgrace rarely intervene in matters like this, the Realmslord didn’t even like him. The two weren’t on very good terms.

“Fine! Take them!!!” Hegemon Winterflame had a rather savage look on his face as the bracelet in his hand trembled slightly. Clearly, he had just moved many treasures into that bracelet.

“I already told you... I want ALL of your treasures.” Ning looked at him. “The armor that you are wearing and the Universe weapon you are wielding... give them to me as well.”

“You even want my armor and my weapon?!” Hegemon Winterflame’s eyes bulged out.

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 25: Time Flows Like Water, the Three Realms Perish

To cultivators, their weapons and their armor were their most valuable possessions. Generally speaking, when cultivators spoke of ‘trading treasures’ or ‘handing over treasures’, they were excluding the weapons and armor which they normally used! A Universe weapon which acknowledged you and was a good fit for you... such a treasure was incredibly hard to find. And how much blood and effort would have to be poured into a suit of Lifeblood armor, allowing it to grow over the aeons?

Other treasures might be valuable, but the loss of them would not have too much of an impact on Hegemon Winterflame's actual level of power. It would've hurt, but he would've bit his tongue and accepted. His weapons and his armor? Once those were lost, his power would dramatically drop.

"Yes, I want both." Ning looked at him. "I want all of your treasures! You must hand over every last drop of chaos nectar and every last chaos jewel, to say nothing of your Universe treasures."

"Y-y-you...!" Hegemon Winterflame was absolutely livid.

"Are you handing them over or not?" Ning looked at him.

"Impossible! How could I give you my armaments?" Hegemon Winterflame glared furiously at Ning. "I've already lowered my head before you, but you push me too far. Hmph. Do you really think I'm afraid of you? I can simply sit in this tunnel without moving, and your control over the mechanisms will be of no use to you. There can't be that many which are capable of actually trapping and/or killing Hegemons. I refuse to believe one of them is right next to me."

"There's nothing you can do to me! If push comes to shove, I'll just stay here for 108,000 chaos cycles. Let's see if you'll survive past that date!" Hegemon Winterflame glared at Ning.

"Don't worry. If I fail my Daomerge and perish, I'll pass the control techniques over to others and require them to swear oaths to never release you," Ning said with a laugh.

"Then let us wait and see!" Hegemon Winterflame's face was ruddy with rage.

"Excellent. Honestly, I don't even care about your piddling treasures. Brother Azurefiend, let's go." Ning turned and immediately walked towards his realmship. Azurefiend smirked coldly as he glanced at Winterflame, then joined Whitethaw in walking towards the realmship.

"Azurefiend, you aren't worthy of looking down upon me, you craven. No matter how 'shameless' I am, I, Winterflame, would never lower myself to becoming a retainer to a Daolord," Winterflame said mockingly.

"Winterflame... by my decree, you shall be trapped here forever until the day you perish!" Ning came to a halt, turned and said these words, then entered the realmship.

"Let's see if I die first or if you die first!" Hegemon Winterflame roared angrily, watching as the three disappeared into the realmship.

"Darknorth, Winterflame's completely shameless. He's capable of saying anything at all. Don't waste your time with him." Hegemon Azurefiend smiled coldly. "Just enjoy the sight of his perpetual imprisonment."

"Agreed." Ning nodded.

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The storm caused by the news that a Daolord had acquired a realmship gradually became to calm down. However, the news that a Hegemon had actually chosen to serve a Daolord as a retainer was slowly spread to ever more distant realmverses and otherverses.

“The core of this formation-diagram is ridiculously complicated.” Ning’s divine power clone was still above the altar, carefully analyzing it. Ning’s Primaltwin was still on the Autarch’s stone dais in the Azureflower Estate, meditating on the formation-diagram as well.

The core of the formation-diagram... it required one to have reached incredible heights in the Dao of Fire and the Dao of Space, as well as extreme mastery of the Dao of Formations. Only then would you have a chance to solve it.

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The Flamedragon Realmverse returned to its usual calm, and time slowly began to flow on. One chaos cycle, two chaos cycles, three chaos cycles...

Back in Ning’s homeland of the Three Realms.

CRACK!

The golden-robed Ning was by the side of his daughter Brightmoon. The two were aboard a rowboat floating atop Serpentwing Lake. The golden-robed Ning raised his head to stare at the heavens. He saw a bolt of lightning tear through the skies, spanning trillions of kilometers in size. This bolt of lightning didn’t just pierce through the Grand Xia, it also pierced through the majority of the three thousand major worlds.

“The Three Realms are finally about to face the apocalypse,” Ning murmured.

“What?” Brightmoon was stunned. She stared at her father, shock apparent in her bright eyes. “Father, did you just say that the Three Realms are about to be destroyed?”

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “Normal chaosworlds will only last for a single chaos cycle. After being destroyed, they will coalesce into ‘Worldhearts’ that will then give birth to a new world and a new cycle of life. Long ago, Mother Nuwa led our Three Realms to defeat the Seamless Chaosworld. A total of nine chaos cycles have gone by since then. Nine! This represents an absolute limit. It is indeed time for the Three Realms to be destroyed.”

“Then what should we do? Should we move to stop it?” Brightmoon asked.

“Why should we? Destruction and rebirth are all part of a cycle, the natural functioning of the Chaosverse.” Ning smiled. “And the major powers of the Three Realms have long ago established their own chaosworlds. We’ll simply relocate Swallow Mountain to one of them.”

“Alright.” Brightmoon nodded. These days, experts were as common as clouds in the Three Realms. It had a decent number of even Samsara Daolords. Ever since Ning had brought back the three hundred-plus Hegemonic legacies to the Three Realms, it had undergone yet another golden age. Its cultivators had exploded with power, and the rate at which the Three Realms gave birth to experts was even more ridiculously high than for the planet within the Stone Hellephant Wall.

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In the primordial chaos outside the Three Realms. There was a region here that was tens of thousands of times vaster than the Three Realms themselves, and chaosworlds were scattered throughout this region in accordance with an incredibly complicated formation.

There were a total of 3900 chaosworlds here, and they were linked together in a massive formation which Ning had developed based on his insights into the Dao of Formations. The Sithe discs had been emplaced within the formation, becoming part of it! Ever since Ning began to truly analyze the Sithe formations, he finally began to be able to make perfect use of the Sithe discs.

The power of the formations and the Sithe discs was such that it would be extremely hard for even Hegemons to breach the local defenses.

Over the course of countless years, the three thousand-plus chaosworlds had given birth to countless living beings. As a result, the denizens of the Three Realms had truly thrived.

“And there it goes.” Many figures stood there within the void, staring towards the distant Three Realms. The golden-robed Ning, Subhuti, and Windfiend stood at the front of this group. Ning was the number one expert of the Three Realms; that went without saying. Subhuti and Windfiend were incredibly talented as well; after having analyzed over three hundred Hegemonic legacies, they had merged multiple Supreme Daos together and become Samsara Daolords. By now, both Subhuti and Windfiend were both Daolords of the Third Step.

Maitreya, Crazy Ji, Sun Wukong, Jade Cauldron, Kuafu... a total of nineteen had become Samsara Daolords. However, none of them had been able to fuse multiple Supreme Daos together. Maitreya was one of the more impressive ones, having at least mastered a single Supreme Dao.

As for World-level cultivators? They were ridiculously abundant. There were over ten thousand of them by now! Even Brightmoon had been able to train to the World level under her own power. Alas, Ning’s father and mother were much weaker when it came to cultivation. Even though Ning personally guided them, they still weren’t able to reach the World level. In the end, Ning had to rely on using medicines to forcibly uplift both his father and his mother to the World level.

“The Three Realms is in a golden age. We have over ten thousand World-level cultivators, which is just slightly less than the Badlands Territory itself. However, we have far more Samsara Daolords than the Badlands Territory.” Subhuti sighed emotionally. “The more I wander the outside world, the more I feel that the Three Realms are truly incredible.”

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “However, the Chaosverse is a vast place. There are more than a few other locations which have given place to a high density of experts.”

“The techniques which Darknorth brought back were of great help as well. On average, the cultivators of the Three Realms have all risen by a complete level,” Windfiend said. “Otherwise... there’s no way we would have this many Samsara Daolords, while Subhuti and I probably wouldn’t have fused Supreme Daos together.”

Ning agreed with this assessment. A good reservoir of techniques was extremely important, which was why the Aeonians viewed those three hundred-plus Hegemonic legacies as priceless treasures. Alas, Ning was now so powerful that the Aeonians didn’t even dare to voice a word in protest. All they could do was pretend that none of it had ever happened.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

The distant Three Realms was slowly collapsing. One world after another began to crumble as the rivers and the mountains began to break apart.

Ning and the major powers who had been born from the Three Realms all watched from afar, their hearts filled with emotions. However, all of them were at peace, because they had already relocated everyone and everything they cared about away from the Three Realms.

“Quick, look over there! The new Worldheart is beginning to take form.”

“The Worldheart of the Three Realms.” The various Daolords and World-level cultivators were all chatting amongst themselves. Ning watched intently as well.

The vast Three Realms continued to collapse until its very core became an invisible black hole that devoured everything in its path. All of the shattered bits of world-rubble were all drawn into that invisible hole, causing it to slowly stabilize and become solid. An invisible surge of power began to spread out from it, causing even Ning to feel a vague sense of awe.

This was the power of the very essence of the Chaosverse itself.

“It has finally taken form. Is that over there the new Worldheart of the Three Realms?” Ning stared from afar. The Three Realms had already completely vanished, leaving behind a pair of glittering gemstones that were embedded into each other. Normally, Worldhearts were supposed to consist of a single, perfect gem. However, the Worldheart of the Three Realms was very unique, as it was formed from the collision of those two chaosworlds. Both gems had been damaged and lost certain parts, but each just so happened to compensate for the losses of the other, allowing the two to form a perfect whole.

The embedded double-Worldheart was dazzlingly beautiful and absolutely marvelous. Ning had never seen a Worldheart like this before. “How beautiful.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh in praise.

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 26: The Complete Seven Flaming Hells

“So this is the Worldheart of our Three Realms? I’ve never seen one as beautiful as this one,” Subhuti said as he sighed in astonishment, staring intently at the Worldheart.

“It has a special magnetism to it, as though it is filled with infinite vitality and possibilities.” The nearby Windfiend nodded in amazement as well, an intoxicated look flashing through his eyes. “Every single ray of light coming from that gem is absolutely beautiful.”

Ji Ning nodded slowly as well. All three of them were incredibly talented figures. Ning’s experiences went without saying; just think about how much treasure he had forced the Hegemons and Emperors to hand over within the Jadedfire Realm! He had seen all types of treasures by now. Subhuti and Windfiend were now incredibly talented Daolords of the Third Step who were on the same level of power that Ninedust had been when Ning and Ninedust had battled for the first time. All of them were highly experienced figures... and all three of them were truly stunned by how beautiful the Worldheart was. It was completely different from other Worldhearts.

“This should be the reason why our Three Realms has given birth to cultivators of such incredible power,” Ning said.

“Given how extraordinary the Worldheart is, the chaosworld born from it will naturally be extraordinary as well.” Subhuti smiled.

“Let us see what the ‘new Three Realms’ will end up looking like,” Windfiend agreed.

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Time slowly flowed on. Ning, Subhuti, Windfiend, and the other major powers all continued to watch silently as the Worldheart continued its transformation. The Worldheart slowly melted away, its power dispersing into nine thousand different parts, with a much smaller remnant core left behind where the original Worldheart had been. This was the largest of the nine thousand ‘pieces’.

36,000 years went past. 9000 Gods and Fiends of Primordial Chaos were born. These Fiendgods were at different levels of power based on how much of the Worldheart’s power they had each absorbed. The weakest were merely at the Empyrean God level, while the strongest was the Fiendgod born from the remnant core that looked like a miniature Worldheart. This one was born at the World level of power.

This World-level Fiendgod was born with such overwhelming power that the other Fiendgods didn’t dare to approach him. This caused him to feel great loneliness, and on one day he rose to his feet and lifted his hands up, using them to tear through the primordial chaos and establish a vast chaosworld around him. His body began to grow in size as he poured all of his energy into sustaining and strengthening this chaosworld, making it grow as well.

“This Chaos Fiendgod should be even stronger than Pangu once was.” Subhuti stood off in the distance, watching as the new Three Realms were born. This was his evaluation.

“Pangu was once the most powerful of the Chaos Fiendgods of the Pangu Chaosworld, but the Pangu Chaosworld’s Worldheart was merely a single unblemished gem,” Windfiend said. “The new Three Realms are different. Its Worldheart was formed from the collision and merger of the Worldhearts of the Seamless Chaosworld and the Pangu Chaosworld. It only makes sense for it to give birth to a Chaos Fiendgod who is stronger than even Pangu.”

“But once he establishes Heaven and Earth, he shall die.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh when he saw this. That incredibly powerful Chaos Fiendgod was being guided by invisible laws; its very existence was for the sake of establishing this chaosworld.

Finally, the Chaos Fiendgod died of exhaustion... but he had already completely established an incredibly vast new chaosworld! The old Three Realms had been shattered into countless pieces, but the new Three Realms was a perfect whole.

The Fiendgods warred across the new Three Realms for supremacy, and all sorts of new lifeforms were born. More and more mortal lifeforms emerged, and eventually cultivation techniques were invented which allowed them to embark upon the path of cultivation.

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The new Three Realms, as a fairly extraordinary type of chaosworld, was destined to live a fairly long life. Two chaos cycles went past, but it remained extremely stable.

“Odd.”

“Although we haven’t taken too heavy a hand in guiding the new Three Realms, we have left behind many legacies in the void around it. We’ve even accepted some of the most talented cultivators of the new Three Realms into our tutelage, and have transmitted our most precious techniques to them. Why is it that not a single one of them has been able to fuse multiple Supreme Daos together?” Subhuti, Windfiend, and Ning were having another get-together. Subhuti was quite puzzled by the state of the Three Realms.

Ning nodded slowly as well. “I noticed it as well. It seems as though, compared to the old Three Realms, the cultivators of the new Three Realms have on the whole a lower level of potential! However, they are still quite impressive compared to the outside world.”

“We’ve secretly guided the new Three Realms for two chaos cycles, allowing it to give birth to more than a hundred World-level cultivators. There are no Samsara Daolords yet, but this is still an impressive haul.” Windfiend smiled. “To be honest, we had to undergo a process of slowly increasing our power as well. Prior to the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld colliding, Subhuti and I weren’t all that strong! It was when faced with the threat of annihilation that I suddenly had an epiphany which allowed my flying speed to surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos. Once the ‘Three Realms Era’ began, Subhuti and I began to grow much more powerful as we spent more time training. His mastery Dao of Spacetime became even more unfathomable, while I learned to more perfectly merge ‘Wind’ and ‘Space’ together. More time had to pass, followed by you bestowing us with those incredible techniques, before we truly rose to power.”

Ning nodded. As his own level of insight increased, he began to gain a better sense of attunement towards the future and towards fate. Ning now had the feeling that the ‘Three Realms Era’ that came about as a result of the collision between the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld would be the most powerful era for the Three Realms. The later generations would all be significantly weaker, and not even the most supreme of legacies would change that.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly revealed a look of delight.

“It seems Darknorth just received some good news.” Windfiend smiled.

“I just found the way to rescue a good friend of mine,” Ning said.

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The Terror Starsea. The Jadedfire Realm. The hidden control room.

Ning’s divine power calm remained seated above the altar, staring downwards at the enormous flower-shaped ‘Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram’.

“After training for over a thousand accelerated chaos cycles, I’ve finally gained mastery over this formation-diagram.” Ning was absolutely delighted.

This had been an extremely difficult task. To fully unlock the formation-diagram, one needed to have reached extremely profound levels of insight into the Dao of Space and the Dao of Fire... and of course, the Dao of Formations.

Thus, Ning had first spent quite a bit of time analyzing the Dao of Fire. Fire and water mutually opposed each other but also reinforced each other. Ning thus chose to spend some time on the Dao of Water as well, so as to more quickly and thoroughly understand the Dao of Fire.

It took Ning a full chaos cycle to reach the Archon-level in the Dao of Water, even with the aid of the Autarch's stone! As for the Dao of Fire, it took three entire chaos cycles.

Next, Ning focused on 'space'. Ning wasn't really talented in this regard, and 'space' was an incredibly difficult Dao to comprehend. While focusing on the Dao of Space, Ning also spent part of his time analyzing the Dao of Thunder, because he discovered that the Dao of Thunder was intimately connected to the Dao of Space.

Ning was quites killed in the Dao of Thunder. It took him only two chaos cycles for him to reach the Archon level in this Dao. Only after finishing his work on the Dao of Thunder did he focus all of his attention on the Dao of Space once more.

It took him more than two hundred accelerated chaos cycles before he was able to create an Archon-level technique pertaining to the Dao of Space!

Now, he had reached sufficient heights in both fire and space. Ning turned all of his attention to the art of formations itself.

The Dao of Formations was an extremely complicated and awesome Dao. Ning spent more than eight hundred chaos cycles in accelerated time before he was finally able to reach a high enough level that he could understand how the Seven Flaming Hells' formation-diagram worked! Thankfully, Ning had access to the many Sithe formation records which Autarch Awakener had left behind. Those techniques had included many descriptions on them, allowing Ning understand their fundamental principles and then take control over the formation-diagram.

"The Dao of Formations truly is insanely difficult." Ning was speechless. "I had the Autarch's stone dais helping me out, but I still spent over eight hundred accelerated chaos cycles working on it! If I didn't have the stone dais, I could've spent a thousand times as much time in training without being able to succeed. In other words, there would've been no chance that I would've been able to finish mastering it during my 108,000."

Ning felt a bit celebratory. Thank goodness he had the Autarch's stone dais! That was why he had 'only' spent eight hundred chaos cycles to solve the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram.

This was proof that it was best for Daolords to focus on their areas of expertise. Ning was skilled in the Dao of the Sword, and so he trained in it quite quickly. He was also skilled in water and thunder, and thus he trained fairly quickly in those two Daos as well. Fire was a bit slower, while space had been ridiculous; it took him two hundred chaos cycles to reach the Archon level in it. As for the Dao of Formations? That went without saying.

“For me to have found the Autarch’s stone dais was a stroke of tremendous luck. Oh, Ninedust... you have no idea how lucky you are as well, to be able to make it out of this place.” Ning chortled. He really was delighted! After spending over a thousand chaos cycles in total, he had finally solved the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram. This sense of excitement and accomplishment truly was joyful.

“Let me see if I can control it all.” Ning’s divine power clone stared downwards, sending out a tendril of its will.

Rumble... the enormous flower-like diagram of the Seven Flaming Hells began to light up. Countless shadow images appeared throughout the hidden control room, and the images represented the entire Jadedfire Realm! Every single flaming passageway and prison appeared, all of them under Ning’s control. He was now able to activate any prison cell with but a thought.

“Eh?” Ning’s divine power clone suddenly narrowed its eyes, turning to stare at the very center of the Jadedfire Realm projection. There was actually another hidden region located directly beneath the prison region.

“There’s ANOTHER secret region?” Ning frowned.

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Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 27: Flamewing God

The hidden control room at the very center of the prison region was meant to control the formation-diagram which governed the entire Jadedfire Realm. What, then, was this second hidden room directly beneath the prisons meant for?

“Turn!” Ji Ning sent out a strand of his will, causing the entire outer layer of the Jadedfire Realm to rumble as it began to turn and swivel. Every single prison cell began to swivel as well as it switched to a new configuration.

“As I thought. This hidden room is actually the energy source for the entire Jadedfire Realm.” Ning revealed a smile. How was it that the many mechanisms of the Jadedfire Realm had been maintained for so long? Where did that energy come from? Although the Jadedfire Realm was able to absorb energy from the outside world, it must be remembered that the Jadedfire Realm was once capable of unleashing unleashing a Decimatus Wave of terrifying power. There was no way that the amount of energy absorbed from the outside world alone would be enough to unleash such an attack; it had to have an internal energy source to do this.

As soon as Ning discovered the second hidden room, he immediately surmised that it had to be the energy source for the Jadedfire Realm. When he tested ‘turning’ the Jadedfire Realm, he immediately discovered that energy began to flow out from that hidden room.

“What sort of energy well is capable of unleashing a ‘Decimatus Wave’?” Ning was rather intrigued and curious about this.

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Ning’s realmship was parked peacefully in the air at the center of the Jadedfire Realm’s prison region. The white-robed Ning was seated atop a prayer mat in the lotus position, silently meditating. As for Azurefiend, in his boredom he was drinking and eating by himself.

“We’re going to make a short trip,” Ning said as he opened his eyes.

“Have other Hegemons come?” Azurefiend asked, puzzled.

“No. We’re going to another part of the prisons,” Ning said. He was going to go check out the hidden room first, then save Ninedust; Ninedust had already waited for quite some time, a few more minutes wouldn’t kill him.

Swish. The realmship quickly began to descend through the prison region. After flying for a full hour, it reached a region of absolute empty darkness at the very bottom of the prison region.

“Open up.” Ning was in control of the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram. With but a thought, he caused the hidden room to open up before him.

Whoosh. A giant red copper gate suddenly appeared in the darkness and slowly began to open. As it did, a surge of blasting heat swept out from the other side, causing the void in the surrounding area to twist and distort like steam.

Ning was able to see the blazing heat and fire on the other side of the red copper gate.

“Ohoho!” Hegemon Azurefiend was quite excited. He said with a laugh, “I thought that the Jadedfire Realm was already quite a hot place, given the many flames which fill its passageways... but there’s no way to compare those flames with this place. Let me out of the ship, I want to go take a look and see just how hot those flames are. They actually have caused space to twist and distort!”

“Alright.” With but a thought, Ning put away the realmship. Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw all stood there in the emptiness of the void. The realmship gone, they could now directly sense the waves of heat which washed across them.

“That’s hot.” Ning felt as though he had been dropped into a cauldron of fire. It was so hot that he couldn’t help but tense up, but his body was naturally capable of enduring this level of heat.

“This heat wave alone would reduce Daolords of the Second Step to dust in a flash.” Hegemon Azurefiend smiled. “Let’s go in and take a look.”

“Master, let me go inside first,” Whitethaw said.

“Alright.” Ning nodded. In terms of survivability, the Sithe Protector was probably superior to even Hegemon Azurefiend.

Swoosh. Whitethaw immediately flew through the giant red copper gate. Once he did, a look of disbelief appeared on his simple face. He then turned his head and called backwards, “Master, you can come inside. It’s very hot in here, but it won’t be of any danger to you.”

“Alright, we’re coming in as well,” Ning said. Azurefiend, however, still took the lead in charging through the gate.

Swoosh. Swoosh. The two passed through the giant red copper gate. With but a thought, Ning closed the gate behind them once more.

“Eh?” As soon as Ning flew in, he was stunned by what he saw before him. The ground was pitch-black in color; Ning immediately recognized it as being deepfire blackstone. Far off in the distance, there was an enormous winged beast that was a hundred kilometers in size which was bathed in flames. The creature’s entire body was fiery red, and it had a pair of dazzling and enormous wings on its back. Its body looked somewhat similar to that of a fiery red bear’s, but it was completely covered with countless flaming scales.

Boom! Whoosh! A deep sound rumbled across the area. It was the sound of this beast snoring in its slumber.

Its four short legs were covered with black chains, while its wings were wrapped in chains as well. These six black chains extended off into the void, while a large amount of flames was being slowly drawn through the chains into the void.

The flames covering its body formed a rhythmic series of heat waves that swept out in every direction.

“The flames it is generating unconsciously while it sleeps is hot enough to cause the temperature in the area to be so high as to instantly wipe out Daolords of the Second Step.” Hegemon Azurefiend was rather stunned. “The actual flames themselves have to be several levels higher in power; they could probably wipe out ordinary Eternal Emperors.”

“Even in slumber, its flames possess such power? What type of beast is this?!” Ning was rather stunned as well. He had thought that the energy well for the Jadesfire Realm would be something akin to a sparrowfiend gem. Who would’ve thought that it would actually be a living creature?

“Can that be a Chaos Primordial?” Hegemon Azurefiend suddenly said.

“A Chaos Primordial?” Ning was stunned. Chaos Primordials were the most terrifying lifeforms of the Chaosverse, birthed from the prime essences of the Chaosverse themselves. They were born with virtually indestructible bodies, and they possessed inconceivable levels of power. However, they were rather unintelligent, perhaps comparable to ordinary mortal children at best. They wandered the Chaosverse alone, and when they occasionally ran into a realmverse they would devour the entire realmverse whole.

As a result, quite a few realmverses had been destroyed by Chaos Primordials over the course of aeons! Alas, there was nothing that could be done; even terrifying Otherverse Lords would only at best be able to stay alive in the face of a Chaos Primordial attack. There was nothing which could stop them save the Autarchs.

Even if a major power like Realmslord Windgrace ran into a Chaos Primordial which was devouring a realmverse, he would have no choice but to just watch powerlessly as it all happened.

“Chaos Primordials love to eat verdant azuresouls.” This thought suddenly came to Ning’s mind. He had acquired a verdant azuresoul from that beastworld, one which Autarch Bolin had transformed into a magic treasure. So long as a Chaos Primordial ate it, it would fall under Ning’s control and become his servant.

“It has to be a Chaos Primordial, right? I can’t think of any other creature that would be this powerful.” Hegemon Azurefiend wasn’t certain either, because he had never encountered a Chaos Primordial before either.

“Yes, that is a Chaos Primordial. It called itself the ‘Flamewing God’,” the nearby Protector Whitethaw suddenly said.

“Flamewing God?” Ning and Azurefiend both turned to look at Whitethaw.

“Yes.” Whitethaw nodded. “Prior to the Dawn War, when the Sithe were in the prime of their power, they discovered this Chaos Primordial. Some of the most terrifying and powerful Sithe experts set off to capture it, then imprisoned it within an enormous Sithe prison that was meant for imprisoning major powers. I once entered that place with my master and saw the ‘Flamewing God’ myself. Back then, one of the prison gaolers introduced it to us and said that it was incredibly strong. Three Sithe Exalts had to work together in order to capture it.”

Ning nodded. Having chatted with Whitethaw in the past, he knew that the most powerful members of the Sithe race had been the ones known as the ‘Exalts’. They were far more powerful than even the Otherverse Lords of the cultivator civilizations! But of course, they still were far from being a match for the Autarchs.

The most powerful experts on the side of the cultivators had been the Autarchs, and it was the Autarchs who had led them to victory in exterminating the Sithe and their Exalts.

“I didn’t expect for the Flamewing God to have been brought here,” Whitethaw said.

Ning sighed in approval. To use a Chaos Primordial as an energy source... no wonder the Jedefire Realm had been so terrifying in its prime! Every single Decimatus Wave was capable of annihilating anything below the Autarch level of power with ease. This was something that was even more terrifying than a Chaos Primordial itself, and it was thanks to the power of the formation that drew from its energies.

“Then the six chains binding it...” Ning stared from afar. The six chains ensured that this powerful Chaos Primordial was unable to fight back, and it also drew energy from it.

“It seems to be some sort of suppressive formation that also has energy absorption effects.” Ning scrutinized the six chains intently, studying the countless runes and patterns that covered them. He was now a grandmaster of the Dao of Formations, but he still found this formation to be quite complicated. This was because Ning’s path was that of the Seven Flaming Hells formation-diagram, while these chains belonged to a completely different school of formations.

“It’ll be a bit tough to break these chains and release this Chaos Primordial... but given my skills in the Dao of Formations as well as the records regarding Sithe formations which Autarch Awakener left behind, I still have a chance to succeed,” Ning mused. “However... prior to releasing this creature, I should first have it eat the verdant azuresoul.”

He only had a single verdant azuresoul. Ning was worried that if he tossed it out, the Flamewing God might just slap it apart into dust. That would be troublesome.

Rumble... the slumbering Flamewing God suddenly stretched its wings, causing the black chains covering it to clatter. It opened its fiery red eyes, staring angrily at the distant trio.

Ning, Azurefiend, and Whitethaw all felt a sense of invisible pressure. They hurriedly retreated, while Whitethaw moved to stand in front of Ning.

“You three keep on babbling on and on in front of me. This is starting to piss me off. How am I supposed to sleep like this?” The Flamewing God’s ursine face was filled with rage.

The Desolate Era

Book 37: Flamewing God Chapter 28: Flames

The Flamewing God’s entire body was rippling with flames, but its gaze was a bit distant, almost as though it hadn’t completely woken up yet.

“Fuck off and don’t bother me,” the Flamewing God barked irritably. But then, its blurry gaze suddenly focused and narrowed as it glared intently at the Sithe Protector, Whitethaw, standing in front of Ji Ning. The scales on the creature’s body seemed to stand up, and its gaze became filled with rage as it ground out the word: “SITHE!”

“Not good.” Azurefiend paled as he hurriedly moved to stand in front of Ning as well.

“Be careful, Master!” Whitethaw had a solemn look on his face.

Boom! The Flamewing God moved to charge forwards, sweeping out with its giant paws. Its massive bear-shaped body was filled with such power that a wave of terrifying pressure was generated by the most basic of movements. All spacetime ripples came to a complete, frozen halt. Ning even felt as though his thinking speed had turned sluggish, and an inexplicable sense of fear filled his heart.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The six black chains around the Flamewing God instantly began to tighten from the strain. The charging Flamewing God was instantly pulled back into its original position by the power of the chains.

“GRWAAAAAH!” The Flamewing God let out a frustrated howl, furiously struggling to break free. Its wings were fluttering, and its entire body was trembling. The six black chains clanked furiously, but no matter how hard the creature tried to struggle the chains didn’t suffer the slightest bit of damage. The Sithe had put quite a bit of effort into building these chains and ensuring that this place would be able to draw from this Chaos Primordial’s energy.

“Damn you, Sithe! Damn you! Damn you! You’ve once more appeared before me, you damned Sithe!” The Flamewing God’s eyes were bloodshot with absolutely berserk rage.

Ning and Azurefiend both let out sighs of relief. “Thank goodness those chains are binding it. Otherwise, we would’ve been in serious danger.” Ning still felt a sense of fear. Chaos Primordials were terrifying creatures that were capable of devouring entire realmverses with ease. Even Otherverses Lords were unable to defeat them; they would at most be able to survive the creatures with difficulty. If Hegemon Azurefiend was to actually attempt to battle one, the end result would be him being smashed to death.

“Too terrifying. A mere wave of its claws caused me to feel as though I was in mortal danger,” Hegemon Azurefiend said with some lingering fear. “In the past, I’ve only heard of these creatures; I’ve never seen one of them in person. Now, I finally understand just how terrifying Chaos Primordials are.”

“Don’t let your guard down, Master.” The Sithe Protector continued to stand protectively in front of Ning.

The furious howls of the still-struggling Flamewing God echoed throughout the entire hidden region. Suddenly, it opened its mouth and spat out a ball of dark-red fire. The fire shot through the air and swept out to encompass all three of them.

“Not good!” Ning instantly felt a sense of nervousness. His subconscious was screaming to him that he was in danger, letting him know that even a supremely talented Daolord like himself would immediately perish if he let that dark-red fire touch him! Not even his invulnerable form would be able to save him.

Whoosh. Whitethaw’s body suddenly expanded dramatically in size as his body seemed to liquefy, allowing him to transform to become a giant metal barrier that completely covered Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend.

Whoooosh! The dark-red flames swept over every inch of the golem, but the barrier-shaped Whitethaw was able to block out every single flame. The fire continued to blaze away against him, but he was able to endure it.

“Whitethaw,” Azurefiend called out, “Are you going to be able to hold on?”

“Don’t worry. These flames cannot harm me.” Whitethaw’s voice echoed inside the protected region.

“Impressive, impressive!” Azurefiend sighed in amazement. “Sithe Protectors truly are incredible. There’s no way we cultivators can compare to you golems in terms of toughness. Although I have a formidable divine body, I wouldn’t dare to make the claim that I could face those flames and be completely unscathed.”

Ning nodded and smiled. “Any halfway-decent golem is comparable to top-grade Eternal treasures, while my own body is currently only comparable to high-grade Eternal treasures at best. As for Whitethaw... he is a Protector golem designed and created by the Sithe, an extraordinary golem that is both tough and flexible. It is very difficult to damage him.”

“Master.” Whitethaw’s voice echoed within the barrier once more. “If the Flamewing God wasn’t chained down, it’d probably be able to rip me apart with ease, given how strong it is. But since it thankfully is chained down... if all it has is these flames, it won’t be able to harm me at all.”

Ning stared through the semi-translucent metallic barrier towards the distant Flamewing God. The Flamewing God was clearly still in a berserk state as it continued to furiously belch out those terrifying flames.

This creature had the power to annihilate entire realmverses with ease, and even its flaming breath was enough to inspire dread in Hegemons. It took three Sithe Exalts, the most powerful members of the Sithe race, working together to capture it.

“What an irritable creature. It seems it truly does hate the Sithe,” Ning mused.

The Flamewing God continued to belch fire for a full hour before coming to a halt after realizing that it wasn’t damaging the barrier in the slightest.

Whoosh. Whitethaw returned to his normal form and reappeared next to Ning.

"I remember you, you Sithe!" The Flamewing God bellowed once more as it glared intently at Whitethaw.

"Wait a moment!" Ning hurriedly called out.

"Eh?" Only then did the Flamewing God turn its attention towards Ning and Hegemon Azurefiend. "A cultivator? A cultivator who serves the Sithe?" The Flamewing God seemed to grow even angrier.

"Flamewing God, the Sithe were wiped out countless aeons ago," Ning said hurriedly. "After the Sithe were defeated, their treasures and relics fell into the hands of our cultivator civilizations. As for this Protector golem, it fell into my hands and is now my servant. I have no connection to the Sithe at all."

"The Sithe? Wiped out?" The Flamewing God was startled, a look of puzzlement within its narrowed eyes.

Once, it had lived a carefree life of freedom... but then a nightmare had descended out of nowhere. Three Sithe experts had appeared, and they were simply far too powerful. The Flamewing God had sought to fight back, but the three worked together to capture it. From that day forth, it had lost its freedom! In the end, it had been imprisoned here and every so often its energy would be extracted. Although it was not very intelligent, it would never forget the hatred it felt towards the Sithe. When it saw Whitethaw, it immediately recognized the golem. Its intelligence level was low, but its memory was perfect.

"Yes, wiped out. The Sithe have already been wiped out," Ning said hurriedly.

"Wiped out ages ago. Haven't you noticed that you've been sleeping for an extremely long period of time without any Sithe bothering you?" Hegemon Azurefiend said.

"Uh..." The Flamewing God blinked. "I really did take a very, very long nap this time."

"It's been a long time since those six chains have drained a significant amount of your flames, right?" Ning said.

"Right!" The Flamewing God's eyes turned round with surprise as it nodded seriously, then gave the black chains binding it a hateful glare. "Long, long ago, these chains would constantly drain large amounts of my flames. Each time, they would drain so much that I would feel extremely miserable. But ever since that last nap I took... it is true that they haven't drained anything from me for quite some time. And now, two cultivators come to visit me... does this mean the Sithe truly have been wiped out?"

"They really have been wiped out," Ning and Azurefiend said simultaneously.

"But the Sithe were really powerful. There's no way they would've been wiped out that easily," the Flamewing God mumbled to itself. Having suffered quite a bit at the hands of the Sithe, it continued to harbor a healthy dread of them.

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Ning and Azurefiend were both cultivators, and so the Flamewing God didn't feel much enmity towards them. Although it had been quite some time since any Sithe had come to visit it, the creature still harbored doubts about whether or not the Sithe truly had been wiped out.

“Let’s sit and chat, Azurefiend.” Ning suddenly waved his hand, causing two wine-laden tables to appear before them. Ning sat down before one of the tables.

Azurefiend was rather puzzled. Why did Ning suddenly want to eat and drink? Still, Azurefiend was a bit of a glutton to begin with, and so he didn’t complain. He immediately sat down in front of his own table and picked up a large haunch of meat with one hand and a goblet of wine in the other.

“Darknorth, why did you suddenly want to feast?” Azurefiend said while munching away.

“I’ve spent chaos cycles meditating on formations. It’s been ages since I’ve had anything nice,” Ning said. He then smiled as he glanced off into the distance: “Flamewing, you need anything to eat or drink?”

His real goal right now wasn’t to eat or drink... it was to tame this Flamewing God! He needed to come up with a way to convince the Flamewing God to eat the verdant azuresoul. He would never be able to forgive himself if he didn’t at least try to tame the Chaos Primordial trapped before him.

“I already have food.” The Flamewing God sat back down, then waved a paw. This paw had a bracelet around it, and the bracelet suddenly lit up.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Basins of delicacies began to fly out, including both meats as well as spirit-fruits.

The Flamewing God gave Ning and Azurefiend a smug glance, then began to chomp down on its own food.