

Desolate 1401

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 6: Putting On a Show

Exalt Bowenya's face tightened. He murmured softly to himself, "Is he actually exhausted, or was he just pretending?"

He was beginning to feel some suspicions. The battle had progressed far too smoothly, causing him to feel a hint of unease deep inside. Each time, however, he had reassured himself that he was simply overthinking things! Upon hearing the remaining Hegemons cry that they had been counter-trapped? Exalt Bowenya's intuition, tempered by countless years of adventuring and battle, screamed that something was seriously wrong with this battle.

"Are all of you trapped?" Exalt Bowenya asked.

"We're all trapped. This entire place is filled with black fog. I can't see the other Hegemons and Emperors."

"We've been trapped as well."

"We're trapped." The various avatars of the Hegemons and Emperors all spoke out frantically, causing Exalt Bowenya to feel increasingly uneasy about this.

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Within the sealed spacetime continuum of a hundred billion kilometers.

Ning stood there in midair, relaxed and at his ease. Hundreds of millions of kilometers away, some magic treasures and formations continued to rain down attacks upon a second white-robed Daolord Darknorth. This second Daolord Darknorth was doing his best to dodge and evade while using his Water Sword Dao, Storm Sword Dao, and other techniques, with his truesoul at the brink of collapse.

"What is real is false. What is false is real." Ning murmured softly, "None of these Hegemons are able to see through my Illusion Sword Dao. I'm able to toy with them with ease." Ever since he had been trapped within this sealed continuum, his 'frenzied fighting' and his 'crumbling truesoul' had all been falsified by his Illusion Sword Dao!

Ning's Sword Dao Domain was able to spread out to a distance of one billion kilometers! With but a thought, he caused this entire region to be transformed into an illusory realm. At Ning's current level of insight, the illusory beings within his domain had gained a basic level of sentience, emotions, and intelligence! This was an absolutely terrifying concept. In comparison, simply faking a battle scene within this domain was incredibly simple. The Hegemons and Emperors only saw what Ning wished for them to see!

If Ning was able to use his Omega Sword Dao to become an Autarch, his illusory domain would reach the level of being able to manifest reality itself. By then, his 'illusions' would be real on both the surface and inside. He could create an 'illusion' of a Universe treasure, and it would become a genuine Universe

treasure. If he created the illusion of an expert, they would become real experts! But of course, this would require him to constantly consume a large amount of power.

Even now, the beings created by his illusions possessed intelligence, emotions, and sentience. Ning's 'Illusion Sword Dao' had become one of his killer techniques. In a battle against an Autarch, it would be somewhat effective but wouldn't necessarily be the determining factor... but against mere Hegemons and Emperors? The Illusion Sword Dao could toy with them with ease! However, it took Ning time to capture those Hegemons and break their formations, which is why he had continued to put on a show and buy more time.

"Master. We've already taken control of this formation," Azurefiend's avatar reported.

"Good." Ning revealed a delighted look, then waved his hand. A formation-base which was ten million kilometers long suddenly appeared next to him. Azurefiend's avatar, the Paragon of Pills, Lord Annihilation, Hegemon Tia, and Hegemon Flameleft were jointly controlling this grand formation, which was one of the many formations which Ning had taken away. He had let his team choose from the available formations and find one which they could use.

"Assemble the formation and use it to cover everything within a hundred billion kilometers," Ning immediately ordered. "Trap them all. Let none escape!"

"Alright."

"Leave it to us." Azurefiend, Lord Annihilation, and the others were all quite excited. Capture two thousand Hegemons at one blow? They had never done or even seen anything like this before! All of them felt both eagerness and nervousness.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. A large amount of black fog spread out from within the formation. It almost instantly covered the entire sealed continuum, spreading out to a distance of a hundred billion kilometers. This formation had been meant to deal with Ning. It only had a minor effect on him, but it was perfect for dealing with these Hegemons and Emperors.

"I can't see anything!"

"What a terrifying aura of darkness. I've been suppressed!"

"I can't see anything either."

"I can't resist it."

"We've been completely trapped."

"We've been trapped as well!" The two thousand remaining Hegemons and Emperors were all beginning to panic, because Ning had already dealt with the most powerful formations earlier. The remaining Hegemons had just a single powerful formation left, but it was an attack-type formation that couldn't affect this grand darkness formation at all!

Once the darkness spread out, almost 99% of the Hegemons and Emperors were completely paralyzed. The rest were able to fight back a bit thanks to the treasures they possessed, but there were only around ten or so in total. They wouldn't be able to make much of a difference.

“Time to bring it to an end.” Ning immediately began to fly towards those remaining Hegemons. His Sword Dao Domain quickly spread out to cover them, completely suppressing them and making it impossible for them to move. With but a thought, Ning drew all the Hegemons into his estate-world and imprisoned them in separate parts of it!

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Soon, all of the Hegemons and Emperors within the sealed continuum had been drawn away.

“Impressive, Darknorth. I never would’ve dared to imagine a result like this.” The Paragon of Pills was incomparably excited, while the nearby Azurefiend, Lord Annihilation, Tia, and Flameleft were stunned as well.

“Now that I’ve taken part in such a great undertaking, I can die with no regrets. I imagine my old friends wouldn’t even believe me when I tell them about this,” Hegemon Flameleft sighed with shock.

“More than two thousand Hegemons and Emperors!” Azurefiend sighed as well.

Ning nodded. “More than two thousand eight hundred, to be precise. However, it was all thanks to you helping out. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been able to activate that formation on my own.”

“All we did was use that formation in a very simple manner, nothing else.” Lord Annihilation said hurriedly, “In the end, it was all thanks to your unearthly power, Daolord Darknorth. You dealt with the biggest problems, allowing us to sweep up the scattered remnants.”

“Stop flattering me,” Ning said with a laugh. “Go ahead and enter my estate-world. This was merely our first battle in the Sacred Realm. It is far too early to be celebrating.”

“With you by our side, Daolord, we’ll definitely make it out alive.” Lord Annihilation continued his flattery.

“Be careful, Darknorth.” The Paragon of Pills looked at him.

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The sealed spacetime continuum was now completely empty. The only person left within this region of a hundred billion kilometers was Ji Ning!

“Now that was a fine show we put on.” Ning couldn’t help but grin when he thought about what had happened just now. In order to make the performance seem as realistic as possible, he even used up a few of his Sithe treasures, allowing them to take blows meant for him and then explode in dramatic fashion. He actually made use of them as well, as the fragments would clearly be real even after flying out of the range of his Sword Dao Domain.

Illusions... reality... Ning was now an absolute grandmaster in blending the two together, and so all of the Hegemons and Emperors fell into his grasp.

“I’ll scan their memories first.” He had captured most of them alive, sparing even the many true Sithe he had captured, all for the sake of finding those nine special techniques. This was something which would have an impact on his own chances of survival!

He waved his hand, causing a true Sithe Hegemon to appear before him.

“Daolord Darknorth?” The Sithe Hegemon stared at Ning, shocked. He then gritted his teeth and said, “W-what do you want?”

Ning continued to maintain his Illusion Sword Dao Domain. To the Sithe, it looked as though Ning’s truesoul was crumbling away rapidly. It looked as though Ning was at the very verge of death.

“Do you want to live, or do you want to die?” Ning asked.

“Live? Die?” The Sithe Hegemon was stunned. Who would choose death if life was an option? But as he hesitated, Ning secretly lured his mind into the illusory realm, causing a dazed look to appear in his eyes. Ning then began to flip through the memories of this Sithe Hegemon.

“He also swore a lifeblood oath not to reveal anything?” Ning’s face tightened. “The Sithe truly are cautious. Even the true Sithe were forced to swear lifeblood oaths.”

He wasn’t able to find the nine techniques, and so he turned his attention to the Hegemon’s other memories, carefully viewing them in the hopes of finding something useful.

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Within the brightest Elder Hall. Exalt Dowenya stood silently on his feet, with the avatars of his servants by his side. All of their true bodies had been captured alive! Clearly, they had already lost the first battle. All the Hegemons and Emperors had been captured, with a tiny fraction having been killed.

“Exalt.” Two figures appeared next to him. It was the incarnations of Hawkfang and Jonnbech.

It was fairly easy for such high-level cultivators to use divine power to manifest incarnations. So long as the incarnations remained fairly close to their true bodies, the incarnations could be maintained with ease! Hawkfang and Jonnbech’s true bodies were both located in the other two Elder Halls, which were quite close. As a result, it was easy for them to maintain incarnations here.

However, incarnations formed via divine power were all extremely weak, negligibly weak when compared to their true bodies! In contrast, avatars were different. Avatars could come close to true bodies in power, with some able to reach 70% or even 80%.

“What should we do next?” Jonnbech’s incarnation asked.

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Exalt Bowenya instructed, “Go ahead and cancel the formations.”

“Understood,” Hawkfang said. The formation which sealed the spacetime continuum around Ji Ning was under the control of his Flameland Elder Hall. The sealed continuum quickly dissipated, allowing the region at the base of the distant Sacred Mountains to go back to normal and reveal Daolord Darknorth at its center.

“Ahahaha! Sithe Exalt, do you have any other tricks up your sleeve?” Ning called out loudly from the base of the Sacred Mountains.

From afar, it looked as though his truesoul was crumbling quite quickly.

“His truesoul has crumbled to the point where he is on the verge of death. I’m amazed at how calm he is.” Jonnbech stared downwards from his Elder Hall to the base of the Sacred Mountains, then let out a sigh: “Truly impressive.”

“If I was in his position, I’d probably have gone completely berserk by now,” Hawkfang’s incarnation agreed.

Exalt Bowenya stared from afar, his forehead creased in a frown. “Do you think Daolord Darknorth’s truesoul is truly crumbling that fast? Or is it perhaps a deception?”

“A deception?” The avatars of the Hegemons, Hawkfang, and Jonnbech all stared at him in surprise. They had all reached incredibly high levels of insight. To deceive them would be nearly impossible! They had never encountered something like this after becoming Hegemons and Emperors.

“You haven’t experienced enough. The things you see, the things you sense... it can all be a lie. Even your own intuition can be deceived.” Exalt Bowenya looked at the distant Ning. “We’ve lost the first battle, just like that. I can’t help but feel that something is wrong. If Daolord Darknorth was extremely skilled in the Dao of Illusions, he would be able to put on a show which none of you could see through.”

“A show?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech spoke out at the same time. Both were shocked.

“That’s just one possibility. It’s also possible that he really is at the verge of death.” Exalt Bowenya narrowed his eyes. Unlike these Hegemons and Emperors, when he lived in his own Chaosverse he was an actual Autarch, and his opponents were also Autarchs! In fact, he had even met someone who was even more powerful than the Autarchs. He was much more experienced and knew just how terrifying the Dao of Illusions could be.

Exalt Bowenya said calmly, “I’m just saying that this is a possibility. You have to be wary of it during our upcoming battles.”

“What should we do next?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech looked at Exalt Bowenya.

“What can we do? Use our Daoguard Towers to fight back against him as best we can,” Exalt Bowenya said.

Their Daoguard Towers had already used up virtually all of their many long-distance offensive treasures in the first battle. Exalt Bowenya’s goal had been to focus-fire everything on Ning and destroy him in their first engagement. However, they had already lost that critical battle. As a result, they now had far fewer resources available to them. The only things left were the Daoguard Towers themselves!

Boom! Ning suddenly soared into the skies, then landed down upon the peak of a distant mountain. He then sat down in the lotus position, establishing a Sword Dao Domain that completely separated him from the world beyond. A region of one billion kilometers transformed into a blurry field of light, preventing Exalt Bowenya and the others from seeing anything else.

“He’s started to train again?”

“He’s about to die. He’s still training?”

Everyone, even Exalt Bowenya, felt their hearts clench. When Ning had first entered Purgatory, he had done the same thing. He sat down in the lotus position and meditated until he mastered his Wind Sword

Dao. After defeating the first castle, he had then entered another lengthy training session which had concluded with his mastery of the Storm Sword Dao! And after breaking through the spacetime formation, he had trained for over a hundred chaos cycles before mastering the Illusion Sword Dao.

Each time Ning concluded a battle, he would begin a training session... and each time, the training session would be quite long. Now that Ning had finished his first big battle in the Sacred Realm, he actually started to train once again. Exalt Bowenya and the others had no idea as to how they should respond!

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Ning sat there in the lotus position at a peak below the Sacred Mountains, his Sword Dao Domain severing this peak from the world around him.

“Time to continue.” Ning summoned another Sithe Hegemon and began to flip through his memories. Time continued to flow on. Each Hegemon consumed quite a bit of time, ranging from four hours to as long as five days!

Whoosh. Ning willed a Sithe descendant to appear before him. This one was fairly handsome but quite skinny. When he saw Ning, a shocked look appeared on his face. “Daolord Darknorth!” Next, a maddened and hateful look appeared in his eyes.

“Not good.” Ning sensed a bit of danger. He hurriedly retreated while taking out a large astral treasure and placing it before him.

BOOM! The skinny Emperor suddenly exploded, causing a terrifying surge of power to blast outwards. This explosion was on par with the might of the Blazesun Ruler, and it smashed directly onto the astral treasure in front of Ning. The treasure was smashed backwards and sent flying more than ten million kilometers before Ning managed to regain control over it and bring it back.

“He actually detonated a treasure he was carrying on him to launch one final attack. He knew that his chances of killing me were slim, but he was still willing to sacrifice his life?” Ning shook his head, murmuring softly to himself. He had clearly seen the maddened, hateful look in that Sithe man’s eyes; the man had truly viewed him as a hated foe! Ning, however, didn’t feel any enmity towards them. Strictly speaking, the ‘Sithe descendants’ were actually natives to this Chaosverse who had been born and bred here, just like Ning himself.

Another half-month went by. Ning continued to summon Sithe descendants and flip through their memories. On this day, he summoned a female Emperor. She was similarly startled when she saw Ning appear before her, then moved to self-detonate without hesitate.

“Freeze.” This time, Ning moved much more decisively. Previously, he would chat a bit with his prisoners to shake their willpower. This time, he instantly sent a tendril of the sword-intent from his Illusion Sword Dao into her body.

The maddened look quickly disappeared from the crazed female Emperor eyes and was replaced by a lost look. Ning shook his head, his mood poor. He began to scan the female Emperor’s memories.

This woman was known as Empress Gracevoid. Her path of cultivation had been one filled with setbacks. She had originally been a mortal physician, but a stroke of karmic luck had set her upon the path of

cultivation. Her heart was filled with kindness and benevolence, and she chose the Daoist title 'Gracevoid' because her clan's apothecary shop had been named the 'Gracevoid Hall'. The title 'Fairy Gracevoid' or 'Daoist Gracevoid' had accompanied her as she had progressed up the path of cultivation.

She bore love for all life, including even the grass and the plants. Her heart was filled with love for everyone, but most of all she loved the homeland where she had been born and bred.

However... this battle against Ning was a battle which could not be avoided. One side had to die! The Sithe viewed the cultivators as their mortal enemies, and Exalt Bowenya himself had stated that if they lost, this dimension would still end up being annihilated by that cultivator Daolord! Her homeland would be completely destroyed. Empress Gracevoid couldn't accept this, and so she swore she would kill this demon known as 'Daolord Darknorth'! She would be willing to pay any price needed to accomplish this.

"The greater the love, the deeper the hate." Ning let out a sigh. "Hand over all of your treasures," Ning said, and the illusion-trapped Empress obediently handed over all of her treasures.

Ning didn't really care about the treasures themselves, of course. His worry was that this Empress would once more attempt to commit suicide! "Now wake up," Ning said softly.

The Empress trembled slightly, regaining her clarity of mind. When she saw Ning, she once more prepared to launch a desperate assault... but then, she realized she had no treasures on her at all. If she simply tried to self-detonate herself, the resulting blast wouldn't be enough to threaten even a mere Hegemon, to say nothing of this terrifying Daolord.

"Why must you act like this upon seeing me?" Ning shook his head. "Another Emperor tried to do the same earlier. I was a bit slower and wasn't able to save him."

"There's no need to shed crocodile tears," the Empress said angrily. "You cultivators are our mortal enemies. Once we lose the war, our home will be finished!"

"I, Daolord Darknorth, swear on my very life itself that even if I do gain victory in the Sacred Realm, I'll leave without harming any of the six mortal realms here," Ning swore.

The Empress was stunned. There was no way to falsify a lifeblood oath.

"I never wanted to destroy your world," Ning said. "And you aren't even true Sithe. Technically speaking, you belong to the same 'race' as me. The Sithe are the outsiders, not us."

"Huh?!" The Empress couldn't believe it.

"N-no... I'm a Sithe descendant. There's no question about that!" the Empress argued.

"Even so, you are fundamentally different from them on an intrinsic level. Haven't you noticed yet? They treat you as nothing more than a pawn." Ning felt pity for these Sithe progeny. He held both Empress Gracevoid and the man who had self-detonated in high regard, even though they all wanted him dead.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 8: Battle to the Death

“Different?” The Empress fell silent. As an Eternal Empress, she was no fool; she had realized long ago that there were some differences between the Sithe descendants and the true Sithe! Over the course of many years, the Hegemons and Emperors within this hidden dimension had slowly diverged into two main camps. The first was led by the true Sithe, while the second was led by the Sithe descendants. There were indeed some true Sithe who held their descendants in contempt. Exalt Bowenya ensured that they didn’t go too far and that conflict didn’t erupt, but everyone could sense the tension.

Still other Sithe managed to hide their contempt, but the more powerful descendants could still sense it. This infuriated them all the more, which was why they ended up following Hawkfang and setting up their own camp.

“We train in divine power and Immortal energy, but they train in a completely different type of energy,” the Empress said softly. “We might both be ‘Hegemons’, but our side completely surpasses them in power. When we strike, the mighty power of the Dao flows through us... but they are dramatically weakened and don’t have the power of the Dao behind them.”

“We descendants know all these things, and we have many suspicions, but... but without a doubt, they are our ancestors.” An anxious look appeared in the Empress’ eyes. “Hawkfang, for example. His father was one of the Exalts. We might have some quarrels with them, but we are definitely their children and grandchildren. There’s no question about this at all... and so without a doubt, we are Sithe.”

“Wrong.” Ning shook his head. “The power of the Dao comes from the power of the primordial chaos, which is omnipresent. They have been rejected by it, which is why they are unable to summon the power of the Dao... and only the true Sithe will be rejected!”

“You, however, are part of our Chaosverse. You are completely different types of lifeforms from them. In this battle... ugh. I have to admit, you Sithe progeny are placed in a rather awkward situation.” Ning shook his head. “You’ll only be truly free once this war comes to an end.”

The female Empress had the vague feeling that Daolord Darknorth was not lying to her. “I understand.” This was her only response. She said nothing further.

“Go then.” Ning waved his hand, sending her back into his estate-world.

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Ning continued to rifle through the memories of the Hegemons and Emperors. None of the true Sithe attempted to self-detonate, because they all knew the truth! This was an invasion, while they were the invaders and had lost. They did, however, feel some degree of resentment towards Ning. They were unhappy that Ning had come here and disturbed their tranquil lives, embroiling them into a deadly war once more.

As for the Sithe progeny? Nearly 10% of them attempted to self-detonate or launch some other type of attack! They were willing to sacrifice anything for their homes. As a result, Ning immediately captured them with his illusions when he summoned them, then rifled through their memories to know what they were intending. That way, they didn’t have a chance to attack Ning.

“Poor bastards. They’ll be in a rather awkward position until the day that this war ends.” Even if they wanted to join the cultivators... could the cultivators trust them? Of course not! The mighty cultivator

civilizations didn't need a few extra Hegemons or Emperors. They would probably first put them in internment camps somewhere else, not letting them take part in the war to come!

"Once our Chaosverse gains a controller, there will be no more invaders. Only then would our Chaosverse be strong and confident enough to welcome the Sithe descendants without needing to worry about them." Although Ning felt mixed emotions about them, his decisions would not be impacted by those emotions. He knew that this was just one of many sad stories that came as a result of this clash of civilizations.

If they lost this war, all cultivator civilizations in this Chaosverse would be brought to an end. That would be a true apocalypse! Thus, Ning wouldn't show any mercy at all to the true Sithe. He killed almost all of them after flipping through their memories, sparingly only those few who Ning felt were quite benevolent in nature and had been forced to take part in this war against their will.

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Ten years later. On this day, Ning finally finished reviewing the memories of the 2800+ Hegemons and Emperors he had captured.

"Nothing!" Ning frowned. He had expected this result, but he still felt quite disappointed. Everyone who had ever learned the nine special techniques had been forced to swear lifeblood oaths not to transmit them to any others. There was no way to review the techniques at all.

"Exalt Bowenya, perhaps?" Ning rose to his feet, staring at the three glowing Daoguard Towers off in the distance. "Judging from the memories I reviewed, he should be the one in control of this entire hidden dimension! He seems to have some sort of connection to the Sithe heartlands, as the orders to the Sithe are sent via him."

"But the heart of the Sithelands have been sealed off long ago. How is it that they are still connected to the outside world?" Ning frowned.

During the Dawn War, the Autarchs had commanded countless cultivators to assault and defeat the Sithe. They had occupied the outer perimeter of the Sithelands, then completely sealed away the heartland regions! But this hidden dimension... not only had the Autarchs been unable to discover it, it was even in contact with the Sithe heartlands.

"I wonder if the experts within the Sithe heartlands have a way to escape or not." Ning was beginning to feel a bit of worry. Being in contact was one thing, but if the Sithe army was somehow able to slip out without anyone noticing... that would be a serious problem!

"Time to go to war." Ning rose to his feet, then turned and stared at the three distant Daoguard Towers. He took a single step forwards, quickly soaring into the skies towards the Daoguard Towers. His Sword Dao Domain continuously expanded, while he maintained the illusion of his truesoul crumbling at incredible speeds. He looked just like a Daolord who was on the verge of death.

"He's coming." Exalt Bowenya and the incarnations of Hawkfang and Jonnbech were gathered together. The other Hegemons and Emperors had retreated; it was now up to the three of them to carry out this battle.

“Bowenya!” Ning’s voice echoed throughout the heavens as he flew towards the Daoguard Tower located at the very rear.

“He’s actually headed straight for my Daoguard tower?” Exalt Bowenya frowned.

“Exalt, what should we do?” Hawkfang and Jonnbech were both rather anxious. Previously, they had been hoping that that Ning would attack their Elder Halls first. The Elder Halls were all Exalt-class Daoguard Towers, and each was filled with countless dangers. They had clung onto the hope that Ning would actually charge inside their Daoguard Towers... but Ning had completely ignored them!

This was because Ning could vaguely sense that the central control mechanisms for this entire hidden dimension were located within the rear Elder Hall.

“If he’s heading straight for me,” Exalt Bowenya said coldly, “Then just go ahead and give him a proper greeting. Hawkfang, you go first. If you fail, Jonnbech will follow you.”

“Understood,” Hawkfang said respectfully.

“Don’t worry. Although I suspect Daolord Darknorth might be feigning weakness, as a Daolord he probably hasn’t been training long enough to reach such a ridiculously high level in the Dao of Illusions! If his injuries are real, then he should be at the verge of death. It’ll be easy for you to kill him,” Exalt Bowenya said.

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By now, Ning was already very close to the Daoguard Tower in the back. Suddenly, a rumbling sound could be heard. The three towering Daoguard Towers were located on the peaks of three separate mountains. The sound of explosions suddenly emanated from one of them, causing the earth to shake as it began to separate from the mountains beneath it.

“What?!” Ning turned to glance at the distant Daoguard Tower, watching in shock as it slowly separated from the mountain beneath it. “Daoguard Towers are incredibly hard to establish. They were actually willing to discard the foundation for that tower?”

Daoguard Towers were extremely stable after being constructed. Daoguard Towers were extremely powerful, partially because of the treasures they held, but also because of the extremely complicated formations governing their foundations. These formations allowed them to draw large amounts of energy through the earth, ensuring that the Daoguard Tower could function indefinitely!

The complex formations also allowed them to maintain control over an extremely wide region, making that region part of their territory. The technique they had used to trap Ning within that sealed spacetime continuum during the previous battle was just one example of that control. Now, however, the three Daoguard Towers had already exhausted all of their long-range attacks. Their only option was to use the towers themselves to fight.

When the situation was truly dire, or when a tower’s owner was determined to battle to the death, some truly berserk actions could be taken. For example, when Ning had rescued the Paragon of Pills, the controller of that tower had actually allowed the tower itself to crumble in order to release the terrifying being trapped beneath it.

Every single Daoguard Tower was the home base for a powerful Sithe expert. If they were truly driven to the brink, they could separate the Daoguard Tower from the foundation, choosing to either flee or battle with the foe to the end.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 9: Dueling Hawkfang

“Once the Daoguard Tower breaks free from its foundation, many of its formations will become unusable, and it’ll no longer be able to draw any more energy into itself. It’ll only be able to use whatever energy it already accumulated prior to breaking free,” Ji Ning mused to himself. “Without the foundation supporting its many formations, the Daoguard Tower will be dramatically weakened and won’t last long in battle.”

“And... I don’t even need to go inside that Daoguard Tower.” Ning was brimming with confidence. “I’ll definitely win this battle!”

The frenzied war outside the Sacred Realm had been dangerous to him because there had been 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors attacking him, reinforced by multiple formations and treasures from the Daoguard Towers! If Ning had chosen to fight them squarely, he probably would’ve died in that battle. Thankfully, he was able to rely on his Illusion Sword Dao to put on a fine show without actually using up much energy. Now, things would be much simpler.

The only thing worrying him was the Daoguard Tower controlled by Exalt Bowenya! The other Daoguard Towers would be comparatively easier to deal with.

“I need to conserve as much energy as I can.” Ning watched as the distant Daoguard Tower flew through the skies in his direction. “Based on the memories I searched, this Daoguard Tower should be the ‘Flameland Elder Hall’ which Hawkfang controls. I hear that he’s an incredibly talented genius who has a chance of becoming an Autarch!”

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After breaking free from its foundation, the Flameland Elder Hall began to fly by itself through the air. This was going to be a battle to the death, a war without quarter. Roughly four hundred Hegemons and Emperors were within the Flameland Elder Hall. The entire Sacred Realm only had a total of around 1,200 Hegemons and Emperors left, and they were divided into three squads controlled by Hawkfang, Jonnbech, and Exalt Bowenya.

The Hegemons and Emperors who followed Hawkfang were all Sithe descendants!

“Hawkfang, Daolord Darknorth is already at the verge of death. There’s no need for you to fight personally. Let us go instead! We’ll exhaust him to death,” a muscular, fiery-armored man said.

“Right! Hawkfang, you have to stay alive. So long as you are alive, the future generations of Hegemons and Emperors here will have someone to protect them and make their lives easier. Let us be the vanguard in this battle. Once we kill that demon, this tribulation will be at an end and we’ll all be able to relax.”

Hawkfang was silent. His heart was filled with many mixed emotions. He didn't feel much hatred towards Daolord Darknorth, because he had seen too much and knew too much. He had long ago learned the truth when his avatar had accompanied his father in that final battle during the Dawn War.

Is there no way out at all? Hawkfang glanced at his comrades. All of them were native to this dimension. They were powerful experts who had arduously arisen from amongst the countless mortal cultivators born within this realm. He had known them for countless aeons, and they were all linked together by deep bonds of love and affection.

There's no way out. We've all sworn oaths long ago to be loyal to Exalt Bowenya and obey his commands. If we flee, we'll all die. For the sake of my friends and brothers... Daolord Darknorth, I suppose you'll have to die in their stead. Cold light flashed through Hawkfang's eyes.

"Hear my orders!" Hawkfang called out loudly. All of the Hegemons and Emperors turned solemn and let out acknowledging shouts.

"Assemble a total of three Ragnorak Formations! We'll need a total of 192 Emperors to control them." Hawkfang swept the area with his gaze, then waved his hand and sent his Immortal energy flying out towards 192 of the figures present. "You shall control these three formations. Hurry up and take control!"

"Understood!"

"Everyone else, focus on offensive formations. We'll split the remaining Hegemons into six squads which will control these formations." Hawkfang divided up the remaining Hegemons into multiple squads. He had more Hegemons and Emperors than he needed to fully staff the Daoguard Tower's formations, and so he assigned them to control other formations instead.

"Hawkfang, what about our avatars?"

"Our avatars will be able to fight as well!" the Sithe descendants said hurriedly.

Hawkfang replied coldly, "Deploy your avatars as you see fit. Prepare all your treasures and get ready for our final battle."

"Alright."

"Let's go!" The Hegemons and Emperors quickly began to take control over the respective formations.

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Ning's Sword Dao Domain was continuously maintaining an illusory field within its reach. To the Sithe, it looked as though Ning was soaring through the skies towards them... but in reality, Ning was more than six hundred million kilometers away from his illusory location!

"The Daoguard Tower. If I refuse to go inside, what can it possibly do to me?" Ning stared as that twelve-storied tower flew towards him from afar. This Daoguard Tower radiated a weighty aura of might, and it did give Ning a vague sense of danger. It continued to move closer to Ning's real location, causing him to frown. He immediately began to retreat, wanting to pull away from it as much as possible.

“Attack!” This cold shout came from the lips of a black-robed man whose eyes were terrifyingly calm. He stood at the entrance to the Daoguard Tower, staring at Ning.

Ning was able to see the opening, but he certainly wasn’t going to charge into it and enter the Daoguard Tower!

“Hawkgang?” Ning immediately recognized this person. He had already ‘met’ Hawkgang numerous times while rifling through the memories of the captured Emperors.

Rumble...

A series of formation-lines suddenly lit up on the ninth floor of the Daoguard Tower, with a large amount of power circulating through it.

Whoosh...

A dimensional wave filled with destructive power swept out towards Ning, moving so fast and covering such a great area that it almost instantly appeared before him.

“Damn! They’ve actually completely boxed me in.” Ning frowned when he saw this. His illusions were still active, but his opponents had launched such a large-scale attack that everything within his Sword Dao Domain was being assaulted, including both the illusory Ning and the real Ning!

There was really nothing Ning could do against such a large-scale area attack. He immediately drew a Northbow sword and lightly sliced the air, causing a dimensional ripple to spread out and surround him. He was going to use his Space Sword Dao to counter these dimensional ripples.

Ning was securely ensconced in a dimensional ‘bubble’ which resisted the all-encompassing attack. Ning could sense exactly how much power was pushing against him, and he made sure that his bubble held just a tiny bit more power. He also continued to maintain the illusions with his Sword Dao Domain, having the illusory Ning also ‘block’ with the Space Sword Dao.

“Attack!” Yet another order rang out. This time, the sixth floor of the Daoguard Tower unleashed a terrifyingly large streak of saber-light that shot out in a fan-shape. This fan of saber-light was composed of countless tiny streaks of saber-light that were densely clustered together. Their power was overwhelming, and they also constitute a vast area attack that completely covered the entire Sword Dao Domain, viciously smashing through everything within it!

There was nothing Ning could do except use his sword-arts to defend once again. Fortunately, it didn’t require too much energy as these untargeted area attacks were much less dangerous to Ning, in that the force exerted against each individual within the area was much lower than in the case of a targeted attack. It was just barely at the Blazesun Ruler level of power, and so Ning was able to block without too much difficulty.

“Attack!” This time, the attack came from the third floor of the Daoguard Tower. It burst forth with the most powerful attack yet, unleashing a stream of golden flames which covered the skies and blazed away at everything within the Sword Dao Domain.

“Have they already guessed that I’m using illusions? Otherwise, why would they exclusively use such large-scale attacks?” Ning frowned. These large-scale attacks weren’t that dangerous, but they still took up some of his energy. Ning couldn’t help but feel worried. “Time to change strategies.”

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Exalt Bowenya and Jonnbech were carefully watching this battle from afar. It was impossible for Hawkfang to fully control the tower while using his godsense to maintain a connection with an incarnation, and so he had dispelled it for now. The only people remaining here were Bowenya and Jonnbech’s incarnation.

“Watch carefully, Jonnbech.” Exalt Bowenya stared at the distant Ning intently. “I hope Hawkfang can win this battle, but if he loses, you are next! You are one of the most impressive Sithe Hegemons to have come here. I don’t care too much if the others die, but I hope you will survive.”

“Don’t worry, Exalt,” Jonnbech said. Jonnbech was the only Hegemon within this entire hidden dimension who had a truly perfect Dao-heart. He was close to becoming an Exalt himself.

True Sithe were only able to become Exalts in this dimension, but their children could become Autarchs! This was why the Sithe had paid so much attention to Hawkfang. In his heart, though, Exalt Bowenya still felt closer to Jonnbech. He couldn’t help it; the two were both true Sithe.

“It doesn’t matter if Daolord Darknorth really is skilled in putting on a show. We’ll find out the truth soon enough.” Jonnbech stared from afar. “If he can endure even this sort of all-out assault from Hawkfang’s Flameland Elder Hall, we can be all but certain that his ‘injuries’ were a false front.”

“Yes. If he truly is at the brink of death, it’s highly unlikely that he will be able to defeat Hawkfang’s Flameland Elder Hall,” Exalt Bowenya agreed.

“Hawkfang’s quite intelligent as well.” Jonnbech continued to watch, then let out a cold smile: “He’s using up all the remaining power of his Daoguard Tower to launch repeated wide-scale attacks. That was the fifteenth wave of attacks!”

Exalt Bowenya just continued to watch silently. So what if Hawkfang died? So what if even Jonnbech died? He cared, but not that much. So long as he himself survived and managed to successfully kill Ning, he would be a happy man.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 10: Utterly Exhausted

The white-robed Ji Ning was continuing to dodge and retreat in midair, while the Flameland Elder Hall was continuing to launch frenzied attacks against him.

Rumble...

The Flameland Elder Hall launched attack after attack, using those massive streams of golden fire, the enormous fans of saber-light, and those giant dimensional waves. On top of these wide-ranging area attacks, they also launched quite a number of single-target attacks against Ning! These single-target attacks were more focused, and as a result they were more powerful!

“We’ve already launched a total of fifteen wide-range attacks, and also launched nineteen waves of attacks with our other formations. How is he still able to keep fighting?” The Hegemons within the Flameland Elder Hall who were in control of the formations were beginning to grow anxious.

“His truesoul is collapsing even more quickly now. He’ll probably be dying soon.”

“He’s so powerful that he far surpasses any other Daolord. His truesoul is probably much stronger as well, allowing him to stay alive for a longer period of time.”

“Let’s give him another blast.”

“He’ll die any moment now.” Under Hawkfang’s direction, the Hegemons and Emperors in the Flameland Elder Hall launched yet another furious wave attacks, while Ning continued to retreat while blocking as best he could.

Time continued to tick away. Hawkfang watched as the rate at which Ning’s truesoul crumbled away continued to increase. He was clearly in increasingly bad shape. Any ordinary Daolord would’ve died long ago! Ning, however, was able to somehow keep fighting.

More time passed. Ning continued to run around the area, blocking and defending. He looked as though he was in his death throes... but he simply wouldn’t die! By now, the Fireland Elder Hall had used up the majority of its energy stores.

“It’s all an illusion!” Hawkfang suddenly said coldly, a frozen look on his face.

“An illusion?” The avatars of the Emperors next to him were all stunned. As the battle had raged on for longer than they had expected, they too had started to grow increasingly uneasy, but they could tell that the white-robed Daolord’s truesoul really was crumbling away faster and faster. It looked as though they were very close to succeeding in their task of slaying this ‘Daolord Darknorth’. They really didn’t want to believe it was all an illusion.

Hawkfang gritted his teeth. “He was already at death’s door before we even started! By now, the Flameland Elder Hall has used up more than half of our energy stores, yet he is somehow still able to keep up the fight? He’s just a Daolord! How strong could his truesoul possibly be?”

“Then w-we...” the Hegemons and Emperors all started to panic.

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“So it really is an illusion.” Exalt Bowenya watched from afar. “He is the first Daolord to master an Eternal Omega Dao in this Chaosverse. He truly cannot be underestimated! Still... while I knew his sword-arts were powerful, I never would’ve imagined that his illusions would be so incredible as well. Even I cannot see any flaws in his illusions.”

Exalt Bowenya remained quite calm. He had been alive for a very long time, and the Sithe Chaosverse was a far more advanced place than this one. Back in his homeland, there had been quite a few who had become Eternal Emperors via an Omega Dao! Thus, Exalt Bowenya was able to accurately judge Ning’s power and abilities. However, he felt that since Ning was a Daolord who had failed the Daomerge, by all rights he should’ve been lacking in areas aside from his primary Dao, as he simply hadn’t been alive long enough. Now, it seemed, Daolord Darknorth had reached incredible heights in the art of illusions.

“Then what should I do, Exalt?” Jonnbech frowned.

“Follow our original plan,” Exalt Bowenya said. “I’ll give you every treasure I can spare! There’s no way Hawkfang can win this fight. His Flameland Elder Hall will run out of energy soon, and once it does it won’t even be able to continue flying! This battle will be up to you.”

“Understood.” Jonnbech nodded.

“What a pity.” Exalt Bowenya stared off into the distance. “We have had innumerable progeny, but Hawkfang was quite arguably the most talented one to have ever arisen within this Chaosverse. He had a good chance of becoming an Autarch! If he succeeded, his status would’ve skyrocketed to a level that was much higher than my own. Unfortunately, his Dao-heart was flawed and he has never been able to perfect it.”

To become an Autarch, one needed a perfect Dao-heart. The same was needed to master an Eternal Omega Dao.

“He’ll probably die here.” Exalt Bowenya let out a sigh. Once the power of the Flameland Elder Hall was used up, it would no longer pose a threat to Daolord Darknorth at all, who would be able to capture Hawkfang with ease. Not even Exalt Bowenya would dare to battle Ning head-on without the backing of his Daoguard Tower.

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Within the Sword Dao Domain. A glowing castle that was merely thirty meters long was stationed here, with Ning and Azurefiend’s avatar located within it. Azurefiend’s avatar was pouring Immortal energy into the castle, keeping it active. As for Ning, he was seated off to one side in front of a table that had a flask of wine and a wine cup on it. Every so often, he would lift up the wine cup and take a sip.

He only needed to spare a bit of attention to maintaining the illusions within the Sword Dao Doman, making the illusory Ning’s performance more convincing! The single-target attacks were powerful and concentrated, with the ones shooting out from this Exalt-class Daoguard Tower being close to Autarch-level attacks in might. However, they all hit the illusory Ning without harming the real one in the slightest.

As for the large-scale attacks, they dispersed their might across an extremely wide area, making it fairly easy to defend against them. However, Ning wasn’t willing to do so and instead took out a Sithe treasure.

It must be remembered that Ning had captured over 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors during the previous battle! They had carried many types of treasures on them, and it could be said that they collectively held roughly over 80% of the total Sithe treasures within this hidden dimension. Now, those treasures were all Ning’s! There were actually over ten items that were on the level of the Blacksun. Ning had pulled out one of them and allowed Azurefiend’s avatar to bind it, then used it to defend against the attacks.

Ning had selected this castle for its sturdiness and defensive strength. It was able to defend against the large-scale attacks that struck it with ease. This castle was on the same level as the Blacksun, and it was specialized in defense. Attacks like this, merely on par with the Blazesun Ruler, were completely unable to breach its thick walls. The only thing they did was to consume Azurefiend’s power.

“Withdraw.” Ning watched the battle proceed while causing his Sword Dao Domain to rapidly retreat and disperse.

“Master, why are you having us retreat?” Azurefiend’s avatar asked. “These Sithe have extremely powerful attacks, but the wide-scale ones are all being blocked by the castle. Why should we withdraw?”

“That’s where you are wrong.” Ning laughed. “Warfare isn’t as simple as attacking and defending. You need to see beyond the clashes to the nature of the battle itself. There’s no need for us to do too much in this battle against the Flameland Elder Hall. Given enough time, they will run out of energy and we will have won.”

Ning’s gaze went through the walls of the castle, allowing him to see the Flameland Elder Hall which continued to pursue and assault them. “Once they broke free from their foundations, they no longer had any chance to retreat. Their only option was to unleash all the power available to them in a final, desperate assault,” Ning explained. “So... why should we actually fight them? I’ll just keep running, while they will keep chasing. It actually takes this Daoguard Tower energy to fly through the air as well.”

There was another unspoken reason why Ning had them continuously retreat. This was because he wanted to stay as far away from the other two Elder Halls as possible! That way, once he captured all the Hegemons and Emperors in the Flameland Elder Hall, he would be able to review their memories without being disturbed. If he was too close to the other two Elder Halls, they’d probably launch attacks at him and disrupt him. If he stayed farther away, it would be harder for them to bother him.

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Explosions of ruinous power continued to ring out unabated, with Ning continuing to fight while fleeing. Every so often, a streak of Autarch-level golden light would shoot out, tearing through the earth and gouging unfathomably deep tunnels in the ground. As for the wide-scale attacks that covered as much as ten billion kilometers, they would terrify even most Hegemons.

Any other cultivator would’ve perished long ago from a battle like this. Only the Autarchs and Ning were equipped to handle it.

“The Flameland Elder Hall has nearly been utterly exhausted of all its power. It only has enough to keep flying.” Hawkgang gritted his teeth after saying these words. His voice echoed throughout the entire Elder Hall, with every single Emperor and Hegemon inside hearing them. “We have lost this battle. The only thing we have left is a final charge.”

Hawkgang felt pain and sorrow in his heart, because he knew that this final charge would result in his comrades throwing their lives away. The cultivators... the Sithe... Hawkgang wasn’t sure who he truly belonged to, but he knew that the people he cared the most about were his comrades, the other Sithe descendants. And yet, his care alone wouldn’t be of any use. He couldn’t disobey Exalt Bowenya’s orders. Every single Hegemon and Emperor had long ago sworn oaths to obey Exalt Bowenya.

“The final charge.”

“Attack! Even as we die, let’s use up more of Daolord Darknorth’s power. Exhaust him!”

“Kill him, and we’ll bring hope to our homeland. Once we die, it’ll all be for nothing.”

“Kill!”

“Hawkfang, you stay back. So long as you are alive, the others will still have a leader!” The Hegemons and Emperors began to charge out of the Flameland Elder Hall, moving like streaks of light towards Ning as they tried to dissuade Hawkfang from joining the battle.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 11: A Wonderful Surprise

Streaks of light flew out from the Flameland Elder Hall. The Sithe descendants were absolutely fearless, and they charged out with a mixture of both frenzy and despair.

Hawkfang silently watched from afar. He suddenly had the feeling that those streaks of light were utterly beautiful... yet at the same time, they stabbed against his heart like daggers. In truth, the torment he had felt in his heart over the course of many aeons had been utterly excruciating. This was why he had never been able to perfect his Dao-heart!

“Death is a form of release. My friends... if all of you die, what would be the point of me surviving by myself? To continue being a disposable pawn to the Sithe?” A calm look appeared in Hawkfang’s eyes, and he began to release the two monsters trapped within the Flameland Elder Hall. Clack clack clack clack... the prison cells located within the deepest depths of the Elder Hall began to swing open, awakening two mighty creatures that had existed since antiquity.

Boom. Boom. Boom. The entire Flameland Elder Hall began to shake. After awakening, the two strange creatures instantly entered a berserk state. It was extremely hard to control these creatures, but somewhat easier to drive them so berserk that they would attack all foes before them.

The Sithe generally treated these creatures as their final trump cards. The creatures were sent out to fight only when the Sithe were on their last legs.

“They’ve all gone.” Hawkfang watched those hundreds of streaks of light shot from the Flameland Elder Hall towards the distant region covered by the Sword Dao Domain... but those who entered it disappeared without a trace.

“I’ll go as well.” Hawkfang could sense those two creatures beginning to awaken and cause destruction. The power within his Daoguard Tower had finally been used up. Without any energy to power its artifacts and formations, the Daoguard Tower was completely incapable of restraining these two mighty beasts any further. The two were beginning to tear it apart... and in truth, Hawkfang didn’t care.

He had already committed himself irrevocably to this path once he had split the Elder Hall away from its foundation. Even if the depleted tower wasn’t destroyed, it would be of little use; at most, he could detach a few weapons and use them.

“Attack!” Hawkfang shot out like a streak of light, charging with determination towards the distant Ning. He was the last of the Hegemons and Emperors in his group to attack.

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Exalt Bowenya and Jonnbech all watched as those hundreds of streaks of light shot out towards Daolord Darknorth, followed by the final streak of light which represented Hawkfang. Both of them were silent.

As for Ning, he was absolutely delighted. He had long ago put away his castle and was actively manipulating his Sword Dao Domain instead. He flew through the air, moving towards those attacking Emperors as his domain moved with him as well. As soon as the Emperors entered his reach, they were trapped by illusions and captured with ease.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The Hegemons and Emperors continued to launch frenzied attacks, but none of them landed on Ning at all. At most, Ning would have to exert a tiny bit of power to use evasion-arts to dodge. And so... all of the Hegemons and Emperors, Hawkfang included, were captured in one fell swoop. He drew all of them into his estate-world.

“Now that is that?” Just as Ning was feeling quite satisfied with himself and preparing to review the memories of these Hegemons, he suddenly turned to stare at the crumbling Flameland Elder Hall with a slightly tense look on his face.

BOOM! A giant hole appeared in the side of the Flameland Elder Hall, followed by a creature that looked like a giant fish flying out of the opening. The giant fish quickly expanded in size when it flew out, expanding to become thirty thousand kilometers long. It had long whiskers around its mouth, and those whiskers were all ten thousand kilometers as well. It also had a total of eighteen sets of claws located alongside its flank. As for its tail, the tip of its tail was connected to a series of slender threads which chopped through space with terrifying power as they swished back and forth.

“What an incredible beast.” Ning felt a sense of threat. “I have the feeling that it is even tougher to deal with than the last beast I encountered.”

Squish. Squish. Squish. Right at this moment, another strange creature that looked something like an earthworm began to slowly ooze its way out of the main gates of the Flameland Elder Hall. The creature emanated a halo of golden light, and when Ning saw it he immediately had the feeling that its body was incredibly tough. Even if Ning chopped it into ten pieces, it probably still wouldn't die. Killing it would be no easy task.

“I need to find their essence cores before I can kill them,” Ning mused. “But both are extremely hard to deal with. It'll probably take me ten or twenty strikes to kill them... but why should I have to?”

Ning exert his will as he landed upon the ground beneath him. He had already flown out of the Sacred Mountains and into an empty plains, and when he landed on the plains he exerted the power of his Illusion Sword Dao, vanishing without a trace. He was using his illusions to blend into his surroundings, completely masking his aura and revealing no traces of his presence at all.

“Kill... kill... kill...” These two creatures came from outside the Chaosverse, and they were born with incredibly powerful bodies. Their eyes were filled with savagery as they scanned the area, searching for living beings to kill. And yet... after doing so, they ended up turning and charging towards the two remaining Elder Halls instead! Both of those Elder Halls were easily locatable, and they could sense that both held living beings within them.

“Damn! It really was all an illusion. Daolord Darknorth's illusions are truly...” Exalt Bowenya turned pale when he saw this. These were clearly HIS beasts, but upon being unable to find Ning they chose to charge towards him instead!

They had captured these beasts and driven them berserk. For these beasts to now attack them was a form of karma.

Boom! Squish! The two creatures parted ways, separating as they moved towards the two Elder Halls. They began to launch a frenzied barrage of attacks upon their respective Elder Halls. Their mighty bodies contained an even more massive amount of energy than Flamewing! It gave them all the power they needed to furiously assault the towers to give vent to their hate. They even opened their giant mouths to bite down at the towers... but the two Elder Halls would not be so easily shaken by the likes of them!

Boom! Boom! Boom! The two Elder Halls began to counter-attack with near-Autarch levels of might. The attacks left gaping wounds on the bodies of the two creatures. The earthworm creature was able to endure nearly a hundred blows before finally being blasted apart, at which point its essence core was destroyed and it perished. As for the giant fish, when it was on the verge of dying it actually came back to its senses and bored into the earth to flee.

“It regained its mind?” Exalt Bowenya was quite shocked. “We had driven it completely insane, but it somehow managed to come back to its senses. Near-death experiences truly can give birth to miracles.”

He didn't worry about that giant fish-creature too much, because the Sacred Realm was so stable that there was no way the creature would be able to break free and escape from it. After he dealt with the biggest problem, 'Daolord Darknorth', he would have plenty of time to handle the fish and recapture it.

“Daolord Darknorth.” Exalt Bowenya stared off into the distance, his gaze focused upon the plains where Ning had vanished. Daolord Darknorth was a thousand times more dangerous than that giant fish!

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Ning had hidden himself via his power over illusions. And upon doing so he had immediately summoned Hawkfang.

Hawkfang had been someone whom the Sithe had held great hopes for. He had a chance of becoming an Autarch, and was the son of a Sithe Exalt. Ning had searched the memories of over 2,800 Sithe Emperors to no avail. By now, he felt certain that his chances of finding those nine techniques in the memories of ordinary Emperors were extremely slim. Hawkfang, however, was special. Perhaps he might have something.

Whoosh. The black-robed Hawkfang appeared before Ning. His gaze was calm, and he even smiled slightly when he saw Ning appear before him. “Daolord Darknorth.”

Ning didn't say anything, immediately drawing Hawkfang into an illusion. He was afraid that Hawkfang would try to commit suicide in the hopes of killing him. If that happened, Ning wouldn't have a chance to search his memories. They would have plenty of time to chat later. The nine techniques, however, were absolutely critical to him and his hopes of proceeding further along the path of cultivation. He wouldn't take any risks with that.

“This is certainly a great deal of memories.” Ning began to review Hawkfang's memories. Hawkfang's Dao-heart was flawed, and so he wasn't able to resist Ning's illusions.

Ning couldn't help but sigh as he flipped through Hawkfang's memories. Hawkfang was a rather tragic figure. If he had been born amongst the cultivators, he probably would've already become an Autarch.

"What?! He also swore a lifeblood oath not to transmit the nine techniques to anyone?" Ning felt rather speechless when he saw the thought-bubbles surrounding those nine techniques. He had expected this, but he had still been hoping that Hawkfang would be different. In truth, however... every single Sithe given access to these techniques had been forced to swear lifeblood oaths. Hawkfang was no exception.

"Ugh." Ning felt rather disappointed after being unable to access the nine techniques, but he continued to flip through Hawkfang's other memories.

Time slowly flowed on. Two hours. Four hours...

"What's this?" Ning's eyes slowly began to light up as he began to flip through the memories faster and faster. The more he saw, the more excited he became... and towards the end, he was so excited that his entire body was quivering.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 12: The [Five Truncheon]

"Now this is an unexpected surprise!" Due to his repeated failures, Ji Ning was already at the verge of abandoning all hope of finding the nine special techniques. He was simply rifling through the rest of Hawkfang's memories out of a sense of caution. Who would've thought that such an unexpected surprise would pop out!

After Hawkfang's father had accompanied the Sithe army in their first invasion of the Chaosverse, he began to live here within this hidden dimension. Later on, the supreme Sithe leaders sent orders for the Sithe to begin to propagate within this land. As for Hawkfang's father, he was an Exalt, but the one and only child he had upon reaching this level was Hawkfang. He began to put all of his efforts into rearing his son.

Hawkfang was incredibly talented in every respect, and he skyrocketed in power with no pause at all! However... he was still just a Sithe descendant. The true Sithe couldn't help but feel a sense of caution towards these descendants, and so they weren't willing to pass down any information or guidance regarding Omega Daos! If one of their children managed to reach Autarchy via an Omega Dao, it would be their children who would become the rulers of this Chaosverse... which meant that it would still be suited for the current cultivators, not the Sithe.

The Sithe descendants were much like the local cultivators, after all. They were born and bred under the current conditions.

In addition, if someone reached Autarchy via an Omega Dao, not even a lifeblood oath would be able to restrain or affect him. The Sithe were afraid that they would no longer be able to control such a person, and so they didn't pass down any Omega daos.

Hawkfang was incredibly talented. Guided by the Sithe away from the Omega Daos, he succeeded in the Daomerge and became a mere Hegemon.

In truth, this was perhaps a lucky thing for Hawkfang. Ning didn't have any guidance as he walked the path of the Omega Sword Dao, but the difficulty of the Daomerge resulted in him failing at it.

Becoming a Hegemon... it was hard to say if it was a 'good' thing or a 'bad' thing for Hawkfang. After becoming a Hegemon, he had quickly reached Hegemony in five other Daos. His speed of advancement was so shockingly fast that it had amazed the entire Sithe race! Even the highest ranking members of the Sithe paid close attention to him.

Later on, the Dawn War began! Hawkfang's father, as an Exalt, was required to lead the Sithe forces into battle! Hawkfang insisted on accompanying his father into battle. As one of the most favored Sithe descendants, he had a somewhat special status, and so the highest level Sithe reluctantly agreed to his request. However, they only agreed to let him send his avatar, as they knew the war would be so fierce that Hawkfang could very well die in it.

The entire Sithe race was eagerly awaiting an Autarch arising from within the ranks of their children!

During the war, Hawkfang's avatar accompanied his father in battling against the cultivators. He saw many things... and slowly, he began to realize the truth!

"You imbeciles! Can't you feel it? Can't you sense the difference between you and the Sithe? It was this vast Chaosverse which gave birth to you, nurtured you, supported you! The primordial chaos of this universe accepts you but rejects the Sithe, because the Sithe are foreign invaders and enemies. You are helping your own enemies!

"You are cultivators! Why do you willingly serve the Sithe?!"

Autarch Bolin had charged towards them, roaring with accusation and fury. Hawkfang had long ago suspected the truth... and on that day, he became certain of it.

"Fang, my son." His father had sought him out that day. "We're quite unlucky to have run into one of the cultivator Autarchs so soon. We're going to die today. I'll destroy your avatar to ensure that this Autarch won't be able to kill you. Every single one of his strikes is filled with the binding power of karma. If he kills you, he'll use karma to destroy your true body as well."

"Father... I am a cultivator, not a Sithe. Right?" Hawkfang asked.

Ning was looking through Hawkfang's memories and could see through Hawkfang's eyes. He saw the look on the face of Hawkfang's father... and that look shook even Ning's own heart.

Hawkfang's father had fallen silent for a moment. He then looked at his son, his eyes filled with mixed emotions. Heartache, love, worry, hope...

These were the pure emotions a dying father would feel when gazing at his son.

Hawkfang's father had then said softly, "I might as well tell you. I was bound by oaths not to reveal this to you, but now you already know the truth. I... I didn't have a choice. I had to take part in this war and just hope for the best. You don't have a choice either. The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate."

When Hawkfang's father had said these words, his eyes had become filled with resentment. He had then let out a sigh: "If you can become an Autarch, the Sithe wouldn't dare to mistreat you. You'd be considered one of their important thugs... but if you fail to make that breakthrough and remain a mere Hegemon, you wouldn't even be considered a thug, just a disposable pawn. I was able to protect you,

but I'm going to die soon. I won't be able to protect you any longer. If you ever have the chance... flee. Escape and go to the cultivator civilizations."

Hawkfang had been stunned. He never would have imagined that his father would tell him to go flee to the cultivators.

"Alright. We're out of time." Hawkfang's father had then reached out and pressed his hand against Hawkfang's chest, destroying Hawkfang's avatar with one blow... and that was the last memory Hawkfang had of his father.

The end result of that battle... was Autarch Bolin exterminating the entire squad led by Hawkfang's father.

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Eventually, the Dawn War came to an end. Hawkfang continued to live within the Sacred Realm inside the hidden dimension. At first, the Sithe continued to pay close attention to him... but the shadow that had been cast over his heart made it so that he would be unable to cleanse his Dao-heart of all flaws.

He was a cultivator, but he was also a descendant of the Sithe. If the Sithe had treated him with sincerity, he wouldn't feel so torn... but in reality, he now knew that they were nothing more than cannon fodder and pawns. Even if he worked extremely hard and became an Autarch, he'd be viewed as nothing more than a useful thug.

What was the point of cultivating?

And... he was forever unable to forget his father's final words: "I didn't have a choice. I had to take part in this war and just hope for the best. You don't have a choice either. The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate."

This words tore at his heart. Ever since his mother had died due to her lifespan coming to an end, his father had become the person who he cared about above all others. His father, in turn, had cherished him and loved him.

Only when he heard those words did he realize how miserably unhappy his father had been. His father had the exalted title of 'Exalt', but he had been given no choices either. He had only come to take part in this war because he had to, and his fate had been left up to luck.

"Sithe..."

"SITHE!!!!" Hawkfelt began to feel hatred towards the Sithe race, which treated both himself and his father as disposable pawns. This hatred cast a shadow over his heart, preventing him from perfecting his Dao-heart. He knew that he had to become more powerful and become an Autarch, as it would give him a better chance of escaping and taking revenge upon the Sithe... but he could no longer perfect his Dao-heart. In fact, he couldn't improve at all.

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After no longer being able to progress on the path of cultivation, Hawkfang eventually began to give up on his hopes of Autarchy. However, he then came up with another idea for taking revenge upon the Sithe!

He knew that the Sithe had long ago transmitted nine special techniques to their descendants, wanting to make cultivation easier for them. These techniques allowed divine power and Immortal energy to be merged together, theoretically ensuring that even Daolords would no longer face mortal danger as they took their various steps. Even if you failed in the Daomerge, you would be able to quickly recover and then attempt it again! This was the reason why the Sithe were able to produce so many Hegemons, Emperors, and Exalts.

“The Sithe continuously improved as they created these nine techniques, with the ninth being much better than the first. But in the end? Even the ninth and ultimate technique remained flawed. It only allowed for one to become a Daolord of the First Step, at which point the body would crumble and the truesoul would vanish.

“I can sense that these techniques are somewhat rejected by the natural ‘Dao’ of this Chaosverse. If I can retrofit them, I should be able to produce something better.”

True Sithe were unable to sense or make use of the Dao of this Chaosverse... but Hawkfang could!

It was absolutely incredible that the Sithe Lord of Chaos was able to create a technique which would allow a local cultivator to safely become a Daolord, even though the Lord of Chaos himself was unable to sense the Dao here. Hawkfang had personally viewed all nine of the techniques in the past, and he had watched as the almighty Sithe Lord of Chaos had slowly improved and perfected them. Hawkfang had gained many new insights as he had watched... and so, he had chosen to make use of those insights into creating his own techniques.

He had felt certain that all nine Sithe techniques contained fundamental, foundational errors. The only reason why those errors weren’t apparent early on was because when one was weak, there was a great deal of margin for error.

For example, consider mortal cultivators. ‘Foundation level’, ‘Golden Core level’, ‘Nascent Soul level’... ‘Mortal-ranked’, ‘Earth-ranked’, ‘Heaven-ranked’... ‘Wanxiang Adept’, ‘Primal Daoist’, ‘Void level’... all sorts of techniques and styles could be used, because the weaker you were the less of an impact the Chaosverse’s Dao would have upon you. But the closer to the peak you were, the more demanding the Dao would become.

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 13: Deathless

Hawkfang had created this technique in order to take revenge upon the Sithe. He wanted to take revenge for both his father’s sake and his own sake, and for the sake of the countless deceived Sithe descendants! They were viewed as disposable cannon fodder by the true Sithe, while even his father had been forced to take part in the war.

“The two of us, father and son... we certainly share a sorry fate.” These words continued to stab against Hawkfang’s heart like knives. He would never be able to forget that look on his father’s face. This was why he needed revenge.

He wanted to create this technique, then find a way to deliver it to the cultivators! He felt certain that the cultivators would be able to use it to dramatically increase in power, producing many new Hegemons and even new Autarchs. That way, the Sithe would be defeated.

But of course, if the Sithe found out that he was creating this technique, he would be doomed! Thus, he had carried out all of his experiments upon the beings who resided within his own estate-treasure. As a Hegemon, he had many estate-treasures which were filled with countless living beings. He had these beings test out his cultivation techniques, and many ended up dying due to errors in the technique. He had tested them time and time again, then remade them repeatedly.

Although it was different from the way in which the nine techniques operated, it was successful and had a similar effect to Ning's own azureflower seal technique.

All nine of the Sithe techniques were also focused on recovering from a failed Daomerge.

If the Sithe Lord of Chaos was also able to sense the Dao of this Chaosverse, he probably would've been able to easily create a perfect technique which would allow someone to train all the way to the Autarch level.

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It was like a brand new door had appeared in front of Ning, one which allowed limitless possibilities in a brand new world.

But of course... he would first have to create a new technique which would allow the truesoul to become deathless and everlasting.

"I can definitely succeed. I will definitely succeed!" Ning was filled with anticipation.

They were afraid that the nine techniques would be disseminated to the cultivators, accelerating their research efforts into this same field.

"Hawkfang, I truly have to thank you." Ning stared at Hawkfang, who was still in a dazed and illusion-bound state in front of him, then smiled. After completely reviewing Hawkfang's memories, Ning felt that this trip to this hidden dimension had been completely worth it!

"Awaken," Ning murmured softly.

Hawkfang trembled slightly. Moments later, his eyes regained their usual clarity. He looked at Ning, blinked, and then smiled slightly. "Daolord Darknorth, was I in an illusion just now?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"You've already reviewed my memories?" Hawkfang asked.

Ning nodded.

"Thank you," Ning said. "The entire cultivator civilization owes you thanks, and I owe you more than anyone else."

"You?" Hawkfang blinked, then laughed. "Do you thank me because you have failed the Daomerge? But creating a 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique will be extremely difficult. This is the hardest part of the entire set, Daolord Darknorth! You are incredibly talented, but you don't have much time left, while perfecting the technique will be extremely difficult. The Autarchs weren't able to accomplish it, while I was only able to do what I did thanks to having studied those nine unique techniques. Even though

you'll be able to learn from what I created... I'm afraid that it'll still take you a million or even tens of millions of chaos cycles before you are able to succeed."

"At least I can give it a shot before I die." Ning smiled. "If I succeed, I'll be able to keep living."

Hawkfang smiled as well.

"Is there anything you want from me?" Ning asked. "I'll do anything which is within my power."

"I don't need much. If you do win, take away all of the descendants from my homeland and give them a safe, remote location which will be far away from the terrifying clash of civilizations. I'll find a quiet place for myself and live out a peaceful life." Hawkfang smiled. "But of course, that's only if you win. If you lose, all of this talk will have been for nothing."

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 14: Before the Battle

After a full year concluded, Ning once more flew towards the Sacred Mountains...

"He's coming." Exalt Bowenya stared from afar, his gaze ice-cold.

"Daolord Darknorth has already appeared. We cannot shirk back from this fight. Our only options are to win glory for ourselves by killing Daolord Darknorth... or dying in battle." Jonnbach was standing outside the Iceland Elder Hall, radiating the desire to do battle. Behind him were nearly four hundred Hegemons and Emperors, the vast majority of whom were all true Sithe.

"Do you want to die?" Jonnbach's voice was placid, but it echoed throughout the hall. The true Sithe and the Sithe descendants were all silent, but their eyes were filled with berserk looks.

"Good. Let's begin." Accompanying Jonnbach's orders, the towering Iceland Elder Hall began to shake and rumble as it broke free from its own foundation.

The white-robed Ning was soaring through the skies towards them. Now, the vast Iceland Elder Hall was soaring into the air as well.

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"At most, they'll force me to waste a bit of extra time." Thanks to his Illusion Sword Dao, Ning would be able to win this fight quite easily. None of them could see through his illusions.

His Sword Dao Domain was able cover an area of over a billion kilometers, and this entire area would be transformed into an illusory realm! Wide-range attacks could hit him, but they would be weak enough that Ning could just hide inside his treasures and defend against them with ease. Focused attacks were powerful, but there was no way they would be able to locate the true Ning within this region of a billion kilometers.

"If I had already mastered the Illusion Sword Dao while I was fighting in Purgatory, I wouldn't have needed to use my Storm Sword Dao to evade those attacks when fighting that first castle. The Illusion Sword Dao would've been enough to make it impossible for my opponents to locate me, much less stop me. Same with that spacetime formation; I still would've been trapped, but the Illusion Sword Dao would've made it impossible for them to injure me."

Ning couldn't help but sigh. During the battle in the spacetime formation, he had sacrificed many precious treasures and had to strike eighteen times before he was able to escape. What a waste! If he had already mastered the Illusion Sword Dao, he could've relaxed within the confines of that formation. His opponents wouldn't have been able to touch him!

Alas, Ning had no idea back then that the Illusion Sword Dao would prove to be so effective. It was of very little use against other Autarch-level experts, after all... but against hordes of weaker Emperors and Hegemons? It was absolutely crushing! They wouldn't even be able to locate him, much less strike him.

"It is nearly time." Ning sipped from a glass of wine as he stared outside of the star-treasure he was in towards the approaching Iceland Elder Hall.

"Master, it seems as though we stand a good chance at escaping," Azurefiend's avatar said excitedly.

"The Flameland Elder Hall and the Iceland Elder Hall both voluntarily abandoned their foundations in order to attack me. That's why they aren't that dangerous. But the remaining Daoguard Tower which is owned by Exalt Bowenya... now that is a different story." Ning shook his head. "The central control mechanisms for this entire hidden dimension are located within that Daoguard Tower, which means I have to actually go inside it. The danger level inside a Daoguard Tower is completely different."

"You have to be careful, Master," Azurefiend's avatar said. The more time he spent with Ning, the more admiration he felt, especially when he saw how almost nothing could shake Ning's Dao-heart and how calm Ning was in the face of even the greatest of dangers. Azurefiend himself was not capable of this.

"Attack! Kill Daolord Darknorth! Kill him and we'll be rewarded heavily. Even if we die, we'll be revived through spacetime inversion and then be graced with many gifts! If we can't kill him, at least we can tire him out a bit. Next, Exalt Bowenya will personally deal with him! So long as the Exalt succeeds, we'll still be brought back."

"ATTACK!" Jonnbech howled. His only hope was to render enough merits to the Sithe that he would be revived via spacetime inversion... because he knew that they were definitely going to die during this battle against this terrifying Daolord.

"Let's go!"

"Attack!" All the Hegemons and Emperors charged forwards madly, including both the true Sithe and the Sithe descendants. If they charged and attacked, at least they would have a tiny chance at surviving this. Anyone who dared to try and flee would be put to death in accordance to Sithe laws, never to be revived again.

"They clearly know that they have no chance against me. They are like mantises waving their arms in front of a cart and seeking to stop it, but they still show no signs of fear at all." Ning couldn't help but feel a slight sense of trepidation when he gazed upon the hundreds of berserk Hegemons and Emperors. "Hawkefang's memories indicate that even Sithe Exalts like his father were all forced to take part in this war. Life amongst the Sithe certainly is brutal."

Whoosh. Ning used the power of his Illusion Sword Dao against the rampaging Hegemons who were charging towards him as the battle began.

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Within the final Elder Hall, the brightest one of the three. The blue-robed, blue-haired Bowenya was standing there, calmly watching the battle from afar.

He didn't care about the deaths of the Hegemons and the Emperors. He only cared about one thing... success!

"If they die, they die. So long as we can kill Daolord Darknorth and swallow up his truesoul, I'll have rendered the greatest merit anyone has accomplished since our invasion into this Chaosverse! I'll be given true freedom, and many other gifts as well." Exalt Bowenya stared intently at the distant white-robed youth. "This is in accordance with the rules which our leader personally wrote down. There's no way he would go back on his word."

"We have to kill him." Bowenya's eyes were filled with savagery as well. Hawkfang? Jonnbech? Even if they died... even if this entire hidden dimension was destroyed... he wouldn't care one bit! The only thing which mattered was killing Ning and then swallowing up his truesoul.

According to what their leader had said, the higher your status and the more karmic luck you had, the more the Quintessence of the Chaosverse would dote upon you! The person before Bowenya was the first master of an Eternal Omega Sword Dao this Chaosverse had ever seen. Even though he had failed his Daomerge, he would remain beloved by this Chaosverse and would be blessed with tremendous karmic luck and tremendous power.

Similarly, during the era of the Three Realms, its most talented experts such as Nuwa and Ning would all be blessed and reinforced by the power of the Three Realms. The same was true for the Chaosverse as a whole. The most talented denizens of the Chaosverse would be blessed with tremendous karmic luck. This was true for both the Autarchs and Ning! If any of them were slain and their truesouls devoured, it would be a tremendous blow to this Chaosverse as a whole!

If Ning had died under ordinary circumstances, such as his truesoul naturally dissipating, then his truesoul fragments would make their way back into the prime essences of the Chaosverse. But if he was killed by the Sithe, then had his truesoul fragments devoured in accordance with those secret Sithe truesoul-swallowing techniques, there would be no way for his truesoul fragments to go back to this Chaosverse.

This was why Bowenya had to kill Ning, rather than just trap him and let him slowly die a normal death. And... killing Ning would be an even greater accomplishment than killing an ordinary Autarch!

This was because the Sithe leadership knew that while ordinary Autarchs were unable to improve any further, those who were in control of an Eternal Omega Dao could very well take that final step and become an Omega Autarch, resulting in a new Lord of Chaos being born. The Sithe would stop at nothing to kill Ning! Even though he had failed his Daomerge, they would still be worried that someone as brilliant as him might be able to come up with a way to devise a 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique.

The sooner they killed him, the better.

.....

After capturing Jonnbech and the others, Ning inspected all of their memories. However, the only unexpected surprises came from Jonnbech himself. Jonnbech actually had a perfect Dao-heart, and so

the illusions formed from the Sword Dao Domain were not enough to control his mind. Ning was forced to use some of his own power and use a secret art in order to draw Jonnbech into an illusion, then rifle through his memories.

Ning was quite delighted by what he found. Jonnbech, as someone who had a perfect Dao-heart, was a very high-ranking Sithe. He was far more important than the vast majority of Hegemons, and was given the best resources in the hope that he would become an Exalt! As a result, he had viewed many different techniques which were meant to aid Hegemons in breaking through to Autarchy. Some required lifeblood oaths to be sworn not to divulge them to outsiders, while others Jonnbech had found on his own. The latter didn't require any oaths, and so Ning managed to uncover quite a few techniques which not even Autarch Titanos or Autarch Awakener had been able to acquire.

"This is an unexpected surprise. And... it seems that Jonnbech's home truly had many powerful experts within it." Ning found quite a few memories pertaining to the Sithe Chaosverse as well. There, the 'Exalts' were truly Autarchs in power.

But of course, there were differences in power amongst the Autarchs as well. Some reached Autarchy as Heartforce Cultivators, while others reached Autarchy through the Dao of the Sword, the Dao of Spacetime, the Dao of Space, and more. Some reached Autarchy through the Dao of Metal, while others reached Autarchy through the Dao of the Five Elements.

Different Daos would result in different levels of power. Those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of Space, for example, would be a bit weaker than those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of Spacetime. In turn, those who reached Autarchy via the Dao of the Five Elements would be even more powerful.

Alas, all memories pertaining to the secrets of the Omega Daos were sealed by lifeblood oaths. Even so, Ning's horizons were considerably expanded. He actually gained new insights into his own path of cultivation as well.

"I don't have enough time as a cultivator of the Dao of the Sword. Reaching Autarchy via my Omega Sword Dao before my truesoul crumbles is nothing more than a vain dream. I don't have nearly enough time; in fact, I probably won't even be able to finish my Karma Sword Dao! I need to focus all of my efforts on creating the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique."

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Book 42: The Five Truncheon Chapter 15: Deadlock

Crunch. Crunch. Clack!

Within a gorge inside the Sacred Realm. Ji Ning was standing next to the Iceland Elder Hall, using his Sword Dao Domain to break it apart and deconstruct it. The Iceland Elder Hall was devoid of all power, and so he was able to break it apart quite quickly.

"Daolord Darknorth, why are you wasting time breaking apart a useless Daoguard Tower? Is it perhaps because of how pathetically impoverished all you cultivators are? During the last war we fought against you cultivators, your kind did the same thing in frantically scavenging for any scraps you could find." The heavens echoed with a cold, mocking laugh.

"I'm in no rush," Ning murmured calmly.

“Hmph. Then go ahead and keep on breaking it apart,” the icy voice replied coldly.

That was exactly what Ning did. He continued to break the Daoguard Tower apart piece-by-piece, and he carefully scrutinized every inch of it. This was the first time he had a chance to inspect an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower up close! His next action was to enter Exalt Bowenya’s Elder Hall. Given that all Daoguard Towers shared certain commonalities in construction, deconstructing and inspecting this one was a form of preparation for him.

As the saying goes, if you knew yourself and knew your enemies, you would be blessed with victory in all of your battles. The deconstruction of the Iceland Elder Hall was part of Ning efforts to know his enemies.

“A pity that the Flameland Elder Hall was virtually annihilated,” Ning mused to himself.

Twenty-six days went past in the blink of an eye before Ning had finally finished carefully tearing apart the entire Iceland Elder Hall. During this process, he had also discovered a strange beast which had been slumbering deep within a prison inside the tower. Ning had used his Sword Dao Domain to pick up the sleeping beast, toss it far away, and then use illusions to mask his own location.

As for what happened once the beast woke up? Ning really didn’t give a damn.

He had considered drawing it away into his own estate-world, but the creature was too overwhelmingly powerful. Ordinary estate-worlds wouldn’t be able to contain its might! It would probably be able to tear through Ning’s estate-worlds with ease. Yes, some of the Sithe treasures Ning had might be able to contain it, but Ning didn’t want to go through the trouble of doing so. An insane beast was of little value to him.

“Hm.” Ning stood within that empty gorge, the Iceland Elder Hall having been completely deconstructed and then put away within an estate-world.

“Exalt-class Daoguard Towers truly are marvelously built up. They require an utterly inconceivable amount of expertise with regards to manipulating space and time. I wager that the blueprints for Exalt-class Daoguard Towers were created by the Sithe Lord of Chaos.” Ning was secretly shocked by what he had found. The Iceland Elder Hall had been devoid of all power, and so many of its powerful functions had become inert and hidden... and yet, Ning was still able to see how incredibly powerful and complex it was based on how it had been created.

“Now what should I do? Given my current level of power, if I actually tried to barge my way inside one of these things, my chances would be quite low.” Ning was quite worried. He had never entered a Daoguard Tower before! Now, however, if he wanted to leave this place he would have to pass through the center of this hidden dimension... and that center was located within that Daoguard Tower! He had to enter it... but if he did, he would be in incredible danger.

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Ning transformed into a streak of light as he quickly flew towards that final remaining Elder Hall.

Exalt Bowenya stood within that Elder Hall, staring intently at the streak of light flying towards him. He murmured softly, “He’s coming. Good. My only fear was that you wouldn’t come.”

A hint of a cold smile appeared on Bowenya's face. "Get ready, everyone. Once Daolord Darknorth enters the tower, you'll be responsible for manning your stations and killing him."

"Understood." The hundreds of Hegemons and Emperors were all ready for this. Some were berserk, some were filled with hate, and some were filled with desire for glory. They had already sacrificed far too much to kill this terrifying Daolord.

Whoosh. The distant Ning suddenly landed on the peak of a mountain less than a billion kilometers away from the tower. A wine-laden table appeared in front of him as he sat down in the lotus position.

"Eh?" Bowenya was flabbergasted.

"Why isn't he coming?" The Hegemons and Emperors behind him all grew worried.

"Bowenya." Between mouthfuls of food and wine, Ning chuckled: "Did you really take me for a fool? This is an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower which has you, an Exalt, in command. You also have hundreds of Hegemons serving as your deathsworn! I'm not so bored with life as to go barging into your Daoguard Tower."

"So what are you saying?" Bowenya's voice rang out.

"Not much. I'm simply not planning to go inside, that's all," Ning said. "Even if I do end up dying, you can forget about swallowing away my truesoul fragments."

Ning knew that if he died at the hands of the Sithe, his truesoul would be devoured instead of returning to the prime essences of the Chaosverse.

Bowenya blinked, while the Hegemons and Emperors behind him grew anxious. "Exalt, what should we do?" "If he doesn't come in, what can we do? He's too powerful. He managed to deal with both of the previous Elder Halls when they moved to attack him!" "Right, w-what should we do?" They were all panicked.

Exalt Bowenya barked, "Shut up!" Instantly, the Elder Hall fell silent. He then frowned and stared at the distant Ning, then said in a cold voice: "Daolord Darknorth! I admire you for your strength. If I fought you in solo combat, I would probably be defeated by you with ease. I have no chance of defeating you if I exit this tower."

"I failed my Daomerge. My truesoul has been crumbling this entire time." Ning sat at the peak of that distant mountain, sipping his wine and smiling. "You are still a Sithe Exalt, after all. It won't be easy for me to kill you, and my lifespan will be dramatically lessened by battling you. Perhaps my truesoul will crumble to the point of collapsing during our battle, in which case you would have won. If you fight, you stand a chance at winning."

"If I come out and fight you, I have a greater-than 90% chance of dying," Bowenya said. "and you, Daolord Darknorth, must know that although killing me won't be easy due to how tough my body is, capturing me would be much simpler. Hmph. I've encountered Omega Emperors before in my own homeland."

Ning raised an eyebrow. It was true. Killing Bowenya would be fairly difficult, as his body and truesoul were both on the Autarch level! It was only because he was a foreign invader that this Chaosverse

rejected him and suppressed his power to the level of the Blazesun Ruler. To kill him would take many blows... but simply capturing him would be easier. Ning had already mastered the Space Sword Dao; he could use a blow to wrap Exalt Bowenya within layers of space and then imprison him.

Ning had many different Sword Daos. The Space Sword Dao would be the easiest one for capturing Bowenya.

"That's why I won't go out and fight you," Bowenya continued. "Either you come inside, or I'll just watch you die from afar."

"Watch me die? Then you won't have the chance to be rewarded for this." Ning smirked. "You prepared so many plots to kill me, all for the sake of exhausting me and slaying me so you can swallow up my truesoul. If I just die naturally, you won't get my truesoul."

"My life is more valuable than any reward. The rewards for killing you are great enough that I would be willing to risk my life if I felt my chances were good... but given how slim my chances would be, I won't be so foolish as to go out and fight you. You are indeed very powerful; my only chance lies in battling within the Daoguard Tower," Bowenya said. "You were able to use your illusions to defeat the many other traps and treasures I threw your way. Now, only my Daoguard Tower remains. If you come inside, I'll battle you to the death. If you do not, you can just die outside."

Bowenya remained quite calm and focused. He cared intensely about staying alive. He could calmly, emotionlessly watch as over 2,800 Hegemons and Emperors perished, including Hawkfang and Jonnbech, but himself? He wasn't going to throw his life away. He would rather abandon his chance at glory than to risk himself.

Whoosh. Ning transformed into a streak of light and flew towards the Daoguard Tower.

"He's coming." Bowenya and the others began to grow excited. The gates to this Elder Hall were wide open. Ning was on par with the Autarchs in power; to him, whether or not the gates were open was really meaningless. He could simply teleport inside even a completely sealed-off castle.

Ning quickly flew next to the Elder Hall. He stared upwards at the towering, twelve-story tower, then reached out with his right hand and gently pressed it against the surface of the Daoguard Tower. The surface felt rather cool to the touch. Thanks to his mastery over the Metal Sword Dao and the Earth Sword Dao, Ning could sense some of the internal underpinnings of the tower without even having to enter it.

"As I expected, the most dangerous part of an Exalt-class Daoguard Tower lies in the Dao of Spacetime." Ning secretly frowned. When he had torn apart the Iceland Elder Hall, he had come to this conclusion. He was hoping that perhaps Exalt Bowenya's Daoguard Tower was different... but in truth, the situation was essentially the same.

The Daoguard Tower looked like a single entity, but it was actually composed of many different spacetime continuums that were fitted together in extremely marvelous ways. This required an extreme level of mastery of the Dao of Spacetime. If Ning entered, he would need to traverse a veritable maze of spacetime continuums and would probably die midway through.

“If I also managed to master the Time Sword Dao and then merged it together with my Space Sword Dao into the Spacetime Sword Dao, I would be completely confident in my chances,” Ning mused.

“Unfortunately, it took me thousands of chaos cycles just to master the Space Sword Dao. The Time Sword Dao is even more difficult. It will probably take me over ten thousand chaos cycles.”

Ning had spend the majority of his three thousand chaos cycles of wandering on the Space Sword Dao, which was why he had been able to master it after entering the Sithelands.

The Space Sword Dao was more difficult than all five of the Five Elements Sword Daos combined. The Time Sword Dao was even more difficult than that!

“I don’t have enough time, but if I go inside while simply relying on the Space Sword Dao, I’m not sure I’ll make it out again.” Ning hesitated.