

Desolate 1421

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 5: Out of Seclusion

The white-robed Ji Ning was as still as a statue, his eyes closed. He had been seated there for countless years now.

Finally, Ning opened his eyes. His gaze was filled with the boundless power of space and time, containing all the cosmos within them.

“Truesoul Everlasting...” Ning murmured softly. He had the insights of Autarch Awakener and the [], as well as 15,000 chaos cycles worth of meditation. By now, he had reached a level of understanding with regards to the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ that vastly surpassed Autarch Awakener’s.

“It has been over 15,000 chaos cycles. I only have 1000 chaos cycles left. Time for me to resolve my various affairs.” Ning rose to his feet.

His original body’s lifespan had been rapidly depleted due to the battles which it had fought, but this body had never fought a single time since failing the Daomerge. The Water Sword Dao, Space Sword Dao, Illusion Sword Dao, and other Daos had all strengthened his truesoul considerably, dramatically slowing down the crumbling rate and extending his lifespan considerably.

However, he had spent over 15,000 chaos cycles in training. He didn’t have much time left, and he had some things he wanted to resolve before he could finally, fully devote himself while holding nothing back at all.

“Daolord Darknorth.” The elderly white-haired estate-spirit immediately came over to him.

“I’m going to make a short trip. The next time I come back, I’ll be entering terminal seclusion.”

“Terminal seclusion?” The white-haired elder was shocked. He could sense the firm resolve within Ning’s words.

Terminal seclusion... it represented abandoning everything else and entering seclusion for the final time. Either one would succeed in one’s goal, or one would die in seclusion, never to return!

Ning departed from the Azureflower Estate and made his way over to the Three Realms.

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Ning arrived at Brightheart Island in Serpentwing Lake. This was where Ning’s family resided, and Ning’s three major retainers Azurefiend, Su Youji, and Pillsaint lived here as well, as did Ning’s eighth disciple ‘Stonepool’.

Everyone was seated, happily enjoying a meal together.

“Ji Ning, each time you go into seclusion you disappear for a few thousand chaos cycles. We hardly see you these days,” Ji Yichuan said with a smile. He was in a wonderful mood today. Whenever Ning reached a bottleneck, he would leave seclusion and spend some time with his family. During the past 15,000 chaos cycles, he had exited seclusion a total of six times.

“Our son is busy with something that’s very important to him. He needs to stay in seclusion to do his best, rather than stay with us and let you bother him all the time.” Yuchi Snow immediately leapt to Ning’s defense, then turned and smiled at him: “Ning, son... let me make the introductions. Dawnjade, come over here.”

The adorable child who had been waiting nearby for quite some time immediately ran over. Yuchi Snow happily took the child’s hand, then said towards Ning, “Dawnjade is the most intelligent child our Ji clan has produced in aeons. He’s an absolutely unparalleled genius who has embarked upon the path of the Omega Dao. He is currently a Daolord of the Second Step.”

“Oh?” Ning glanced at the ‘child’ in astonishment.

“Greetings, Patriarch Darknorth,” Ji Dawnjade said respectfully.

“Father, I have to admit that Dawnjade is very talented. He’s much more talented than me,” the nearby Brightmoon said happily. “He’s only been cultivating for a very brief amount of time, and we didn’t dare to disturb you when you were in seclusion. That’s why we didn’t inform you when he became a Daolord.”

Ning had long ago instructed that he was only to be disturbed if someone was in mortal danger. Otherwise, his seclusion was not to be interrupted.

Ning looked the child over, his eyes lighting up.

He had long ago instructed his daughter, Brightmoon, to take his place in teaching his eighth disciple, ‘Stonepool’. After spending many years training together, the two of them had actually ended up becoming Dao-companions! Both of them had actually been emotionally hurt when they were young. Brightmoon had been single her entire life, while Stonepool had poured all of his efforts on cultivation. Still... after spending many years together, they began to grow extremely fond of each other.

The two had ended up having a child... and Stonepool had voluntarily suggested that the child have the surname ‘Ji’ in order to show respect to his master and father-in-law, Ji Ning! If they had a second child, that child would take his family name. And so, Ning’s lineage began to grow.

Time had passed on, and Ji Ning’s line had flourished. All of them were born with tremendous blessings of karmic luck, but none of them were comparable to the most impressive geniuses of this realmverse... until, that is, Dawnjade was born. He was incredibly intelligent and sailed through his path of cultivation, rapidly advancing to the World level with her clan’s aid. He had then gone out adventuring... and the end result was that he had also embarked upon the path of the Omega Sword Dao!

In truth, the Autarchs had already begun to ensure that quite a number of geniuses scattered throughout the vast Chaosverse had begun to train in the path of the Omega Dao. There was now one or two in virtually every single realmverse who trained in an Omega Dao... and after over ten thousand chaos cycles, the Ji clan had finally given birth to a second such genius. Yichuan and Snow naturally doted on him heavily.

“Mm.” Ning stared at Dawnjade, scanning his past as he did so. Ning could even get a vague sense of what the future held in store for the child, and what he saw was a truly extraordinary destiny. The boy

would probably surpass even Ning's eight disciples... but in the end, the Daomerge would remain a huge obstacle.

"Good. Good!" Ning actually praised the boy twice. "Dawnjade, from this day forth, you shall stay by my side. If you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to ask me."

"Yes, Patriarch!" Dawnjade said excitedly. He all but worshipped the ground 'Patriarch Ji' walked on; the Patriarch was a man who treated with Autarchs as an equal! Dawnjade had also heard many boasting stories from Hegemon Azurefiend, including the story of how the Patriarch had captured nearly four thousand Emperors with ease. He knew that the Patriarch was inconceivably powerful and was the most supreme expert of the Dao of the Sword their Chaosverse had ever seen.

The more Ning saw of Dawnjade, the more he liked the boy. Ning felt almost as though he was seeing a reflection of himself in many ways. If Ning himself failed in his terminal seclusion but Dawnjade succeeded in his Daomerge... that wouldn't be too bad an outcome.

"Sit next to me," Ning ordered. He didn't disguise his fondness for Dawnjade in the slightest.

"Brightmoon." Ning turned and smiled. "Has anything important happened lately?" Each time Ning left his secluded meditation, he would ask her this question.

Both Brightmoon and Stonepool were Daolords of the Fourth Step. The former was Ning's daughter, while the latter was Ning's disciple. They often wandered the outside world, and they were well-versed in what was happening lately.

"Yes, actually. Something very important happened," Brightmoon said. "I actually considered asking you to leave seclusion, but in the end I decided not to disturb you. For you to find out a bit later doesn't make much of a difference."

"Something very important? What?" Ning asked curiously.

"Second brother 'Green Bamboo' succeeded in the Daomerge and became a Hegemon!" Brightmoon said happily. "He was the first in our group to attempt the Daomerge. To this very day, I'm still afraid to make the attempt!"

"Quding succeeded in the Daomerge?" Ning was delighted to hear this. He immediately began inspect the karmic threads binding him to his disciple.

His second disciple, 'Green Bamboo' Yang Quding. When Ning was at the World level, Ning had met him by accident when he had entered Annihilation's otherverse. Back then Yang Quding had been an ordinary mortal, but his Dao-heart had impressed Ning. Ning had taken a liking to him and had accepted him as his second disciple.

Ning always had the feeling that his second disciple would probably become an extremely accomplished figure... but Ning never would've expected him to become a Hegemon so quickly!

"After he succeeded in the Daomerge he came here in person, wanting to pay his respects to you, Father. I didn't want to disturb you, so after discussing the matter with Patriarch Subhuti I decided to give him three Sithe treasures as a celebratory gift," Brightmoon said.

“You did well.” Ning nodded. He had acquired many Sithe treasures from that hidden dimension, but he had given them over to Nuwa, Subhuti, and Brightmoon to hand out as they saw fit. He wouldn’t hand over treasures of such power to even his disciples without a good reason. Giving his second disciple a few of them to celebrate his Hegemony, however, was fine.

“I’m not finished. Not too long ago, second brother received an otherverse and became an Otherverse Lord!” Brightmoon said happily. “He didn’t acquire it in battle, he was given it by an Autarch.”

“By an Autarch?” Ning was startled. Ning knew the Autarchs very well; they wouldn’t casually hand over otherverses to juniors, no matter how much they liked them. They acted impartially in all things.

“So here’s the story. Second brother is incredibly talented in the Dao of the Sword and has a perfect Dao-heart. He had an accidental meeting with the Autarch of Annihilation, who tested him. He passed the test, and the Autarch viewed him so favorably that the Autarch bestowed an otherverse upon him,” Brightmoon said.

“A perfect Dao-heart?” Ning was astonished. A perfect Dao-heart was a prerequisite for becoming an Autarch, and also a prerequisite for succeeding in the Daomerge for an Omega Dao. Everyone who had a perfect Dao-heart was without a doubt an extraordinary character.

“No wonder Ekong showed him such favor.” Ning had felt long ago that Green Bamboo had an extraordinary heart and was highly suited for cultivating in the Dao. Ning had ‘released him into the wild’ and allowed him to make his own way in the world as a mortal cultivator with just a few techniques. Ning hadn’t spent too much time teaching or taking care of this second disciple; the man had to rely on himself for everything.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 6: Old Friends (part 1)

Ji Ning was in an excellent mood today. “Tell me about how all my other disciples are doing, one by one.”

“Very well.” Brightmoon was rather surprised at her father inquiring in such detail, but she began to narrate without giving it much thought.

Ning had left his secluded meditations to wrap up all his worldly affairs. Of course he needed to get a good idea as to how his personal disciples were doing! While listening to his daughter speak, he also carefully inspected how they were doing through his karmic ties to them.

His first disciple, ‘Bluecliff Xiaoyu’, was even less talented than Brightmoon. To this very day, she remained just a World-level cultivator! Still, her life was a carefree one. Perhaps Xiaoyu preferred this sort of peaceful, quiet life.

His second disciple, ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding, had become a Hegemon.

His third disciple, Skywind, had become a resoundingly famous figure within the Flamedragon Realmverse. He had caused quite a deal of trouble, and was stubborn to an extreme. He made many enemies, and for the sake of a female Immortal he had actually assaulted a major sect and slain two of

its Emperors! He was now publicly acclaimed as the number one Daolord of the Flamedragon Realmverse. Ning, of course, had long ago transcended such silly rankings.

“Oh, Skywind... I was able to sense long ago that your future would be fraught with troubles. You’ve always been the one I’ve been the most worried about.” Ning shook his head, then decided, “I have to visit him one final time, it seems.”

The position of ‘fourth disciple’ remained vacant.

His fifth and sixth disciples, ‘Boundless’ and ‘Muse’, lived a romantic, heavenly life together as a pair of Immortal lovers. They remained happily in love, and together they wandered the various territories of the Flamedragon Realmverse. This pleased Ning greatly.

His seventh disciple, ‘Great Immortal Almonder’, had a childlike disposition and loved to wander about. His current whereabouts were unknown.

His eighth disciple, ‘Stonepool’, was a solid and reliable figure who had ended up together with Ning’s daughter Brightmoon.

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After spending two years in the Three Realms, Ning departed with Azurefiend, Youji, Pillsaint, and his favored descendant Dawnjade. They left the Three Realms and began to wander through the world outside. They were going to visit his friends and disciples.

The very first person Ning went to visit was Ninedust, whom he had shared so many life-and-death adventures with.

Vast, billowing waves could be seen sweeping through this entire world. At the very center of the waves was a towering, silver-robed god who was 540,000 meters tall. He stood atop the endless waves, practicing a set of fist-arts. Every single punch and strike caused the waves around him to rumble and roil about.

A ship appeared far off in the distance, but it quickly came to a halt and did not interrupt.

Roughly an hour later, the training appeared to come to an end. Only then did the white-robed Ning call from next to the hovering realmship, “Ninedust!”

The Ninedust Sectlord turned to stare at Ning, a delighted look instantly appearing on his face: “Hah! Darknorth, my big shot Daolord friend! You surely are a sight for sore eyes. You actually came to visit me?”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry! I know I didn’t visit you a single time in many years. I’ve been in secluded meditation the entire time.” Ning strolled over, with Su Youji and the others staying behind.

“As it should be. You are working on something important.” Ninedust looked at Ning. He could sense how Ning’s truesoul was crumbling at a very fast pace, and he couldn’t help but feel sorrow for his old friend. He knew that Ning wouldn’t last for much longer. “Darknorth... have you come to bid me a final farewell?”

“Perhaps.” Ning smiled. “I’m about to go into terminal seclusion and make one final push. If I succeed, I’ll be able to reverse my truesoul’s decay. If I fail... then yes, this will be the last time we two brothers have a chance to meet.”

“Reverse your truesoul’s decay?” Ninedust instantly became filled with hope.

“Death has always been the only outcome for anyone who fails the Daomerge,” Ning said. “No cultivators in our Chaosverse have ever been able to change this! The Sithe are able to do so, but they are different from us on a fundamental level. Not even Autarchs are able to reverse a truesoul’s decay. All I can do is try my best and then pray.”

Ninedust patted Ning on the shoulder. “I’m sure you can do it.”

“Enough about me. How have you been?” Ning smiled. “When are you planning to attempt the Daomerge? I can tell that you’ve reached an incredibly high level in the Dao of Water. From what I can see, you should be the one ranked at the top of the Daolord listings for the Flamedragon Realmverse. How did my disciple end up taking the position instead?”

Ning had passed on both the Incense Spirit-Fruit and several water-related techniques to Ninedust to help him out. Ninedust had trained assiduously and had reached an extremely high level of insight into the Dao of Water. It could be said that his defensive prowess surpassed that of all other Daolords in the Flamedragon Realmverse, save for Ning himself. He was absolutely strong enough to be ranked number one, but his actual ranking was fairly low.

“Who cares about those stupid lists? Look at you, Darknorth; you transcended that very concept long ago!” Ninedust chuckled. “Besides... as your brother, Skywind should be considered one of my juniors. How could I compete with him over something like this?”

“Skywind... he’s a bit too much of a showoff.” Ning shook his head slowly.

“But he has plenty to show off. I once sparred with him when he first became a Daolord of the Fourth Step. He truly did amaze me.” Ninedust let out a sigh.

“Excessive hardness leads to brittleness. He’s too extreme... but perhaps that’s also what made him so special.” Ning shook his head. Of his many disciples, his third disciple had been given the hardest path. The man had experienced numerous difficulties as a mortal, and hadn’t ended after becoming a Daolord.

“When are you planning to begin your Daomerge?” Ning asked.

“Soon. Thanks to the techniques you gave me, I can sense that my Dao is growing even more perfect than before.” Ninedust smiled. “Once I feel it has reached full perfection, I’ll use the Incense Spirit-Fruit and begin the Daomerge. It’ll be anywhere between 10,000 chaos cycles and 50,000 chaos cycles from now.”

“I’ll have to come to offer my congratulations once you succeed,” Ning said with a laugh.

“You must,” Ninedust agreed.

Both had their own tribulations to overcome. Ninedust had to deal with the tribulation known as the Daomerge, while Ning had to deal with the crumbling of his truesoul. Both of these two brothers had to succeed if they wished to meet again.

By comparison, Ninedust stood a very good chance; he had already used a Voidsea Jadeseal and been given both techniques and an Incense Spirit-Fruit by Ning. Ning's chances were much lower.

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After spending quite some time chatting with his old friend Ninedust, Ning finally bade the Ancient cultivator farewell.

A short while later, Ning headed off to an ordinary chaosworld within the Flamedragon Realmverse. He had come here to meet his third disciple, Skywind.

Ning found Skywind in the corner of an alehouse. Skywind was dressed in ordinary gray robes. The robes were not magic in any manner; these truly were cheap hemp robes which mortal peasants might wear. He was caked in filth, and his hair was disheveled. He sat there in the corner, drinking wine by himself. He was never able to get drunk, but he still came here to drink quite often.

No one in the alehouse dared to bother him... because half a year ago, this filthy-looking man had killed the governor of this city with a pair of chopsticks.

"Drinking by yourself?" a voice rang out.

Startled, Skywind looked up. Someone had actually been able to approach him without him even noticing it? And this person clearly hadn't hidden his aura either; Skywind could clearly sense the aura of the sword about him. How did I not notice him approaching? This was so strange that Skywind could hardly believe it.

When he turned around, he saw a white-robed Ning seated at a nearby bench. Ning poured himself a cup of wine.

"Master!" When Skywind saw Ning, he immediately fell to his knees and kowtowed. He respected and revered his master more than anyone else.

Ning simply watched as his disciple kowtowed, not moving to stop him.

"You can get up," Ning said a moment later.

"Alright." Skywind rose to his feet.

Ning picked up his wine cup. "Come. Let the two of us, master and disciple, share a cup of wine."

Skywind immediately lifted up his own wine cup and offered Ning a respectful toast. None of the ordinary mortals within this alehouse were able to notice or sense Ning's presence.

After finishing the wine, Skywind said in a guilty manner: "I've disappointed you, Master."

"There's nothing to be disappointed about. Cultivation can lead to countless different paths," Ning said. "A shadow was cast over your heart back in your homeland, long before you ever entered the

Flamedragon Realmverse. For you to end up in your current situation... I blame myself as your master for not having helped you more.”

“It isn’t your fault, Master. This is the path I chose for myself,” Skywind said hastily. He himself knew that he had gone too far in his murderous actions. If it hadn’t been for the fact that his master was Daolord Darknorth, the Archons of the Sacred Cities probably would’ve wiped him out long ago.

“So are you planning to just spend your final years here?” Ning asked.

“I’m tired,” Skywind said softly. “I don’t want to run around any longer, and I don’t want to go back home either. I suppose I’ll just keep living here in this mortal world.”

“You might as well.” Ning didn’t try to dissuade him. “This will most likely be our final meeting. Let’s just share some wine with each other. I’ll only give you one final piece of advice – In cultivation, you must always follow your heart. The only thing you need to do is stay true to yourself. If you can do that, then there will be no need to feel any fear, nor will you need to feel guilt.”

Skywind’s eyes reddened. He could sense how quickly his master’s truesoul was disintegrating. His master probably wouldn’t be able to survive for much longer.

“Now, enough of all that. Let’s drink.” Ning smiled as he lifted up his wine cup once more.

After a lengthy drinking session with his disciple, Ning departed. He could not interfere in someone else’s path of cultivation; he couldn’t even interfere in his own daughter’s Daomerge, save to provide her with as many resources as he could. The only thing he could do was to try and guide Skywind in following, strengthening, and perfecting his own Dao-heart. As for what Skywind would do afterwards? That would be up to him.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 7: Old Friends (part 2)

Ji Ning next led Su Youji and the others to visit his fifth disciple, his sixth disciple, and his seventh disciple.

Swoosh. The realmship continued to fly through the skies. “Dawnjade,” Ning said, “You are significantly more talented than all eight of my disciples.” By now, Ning had encountered many geniuses in his life. Mother Nuwa, for example, was so incredibly talented that she had reached Hegemony within an extremely short period of time. As Ning saw it, Dawnjade was extremely close to himself and Mother Nuwa in talent.

“However... you have an obvious weakness,” Ning said. “Due to the fact that you’ve always lived within the Ji clan, you’ve experienced almost no setbacks in your life. During your early years in particular, you were always given the best treatment by the clan. As a result, your Dao-heart is lacking and needs tempering.”

“I understand,” Dawnjade said obediently.

‘Favored son’: this phrase described Dawnjade perfectly. Ning had been forced to scour the world for techniques, fighting and clawing for every scrap of karmic luck he could find before stumbling upon the path of the Omega Dao. Dawnjade was different. The Ji clan had poured its resources into rearing him,

and had also arranged for him to undergo many different ‘tempering exercises’, but in the end all of those exercises were artificial. Dawnjade had a decent Dao-heart, but it wasn’t even close to the perfect Dao-heart one needed to succeed in the Daomerge for an Omega Dao.

“If you wish to succeed in the Daomerge for the Omega Dao, you must have a perfect Dao-heart,” Ning said. “In the Flamedragon Realmverse, there was an Emperor known as Emperor Heartsword. If you can fully master his [Hartsword] art, you’ll have a perfect Dao-heart. There are multiple legacies within the annals of the Ji clan pertaining to perfecting one’s Dao-heart.”

“I understand.” Dawnjade nodded.

“Just ‘understanding’ is meaningless. You have to act,” Ning instructed. “From this day forth, you shall begin training in the [Daoheart Illusion Sword].”

“The [Daoheart Illusion Sword]?” Dawnjade was puzzled. “Patriarch, I’ve never even heard of this technique.”

“This is a Dao-heart technique which I just finished creating. I’d be shocked if you had heard of it,” Ning said with a chuckle. “It should be a technique which suits you very well... but in the end, you have to temper your Dao-heart yourself. Techniques can only serve as a guide.” Ning waved his hand, producing a jade slip which he handed over to Dawnjade, who respectfully accepted it.

Emperor Heartsword, God Emperor Helong, ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding... all of them had perfect Dao-hearts, and all of them were incredible figures. However, it would be extremely difficult for anyone else to gain perfect Dao-hearts by training in the techniques they left behind! This was because every cultivator had to find his own spiritual path to perfecting his Dao-heart.

If Ning had tried to perfectly emulate the [Hartsword] art, he wouldn’t have been able to perfect his Dao-heart either. In the end, he had only been able to take that final step during the Daomerge, using three years of time in that hyper-stimulated environment to succeed. Alas... all that wasted time had resulted in Ning failing the Daomerge!

“Although my technique will help you temper your Dao-heart,” Ning said seriously, “You must remember... your Dao-heart is your own. Not someone else’s! Thus in seeking the Dao, you must seek your own true self. If you want a perfect Dao-heart, you’ll need to do it your own way.”

“Understood.” Dawnjade firmly engraved these words into his heart.

Ning said nothing further. He had scried Dawnjade’s future, and he knew that Dawnjade had to suffer many setbacks if the child wished to have a chance at perfecting his Dao-heart. If everything in his life was completely smooth and troublefree, he might become a Daolord of the Fourth Step but he would never be able to perfect his Dao-heart, much less succeed in the Daomerge.

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Within a secret realm hidden within a region of empty space. The insides of this secret realm had been half-demolished; clearly, a great battle had been fought here.

“Brother Greatjoy.” Ning stared at the palace ruins before him, his gaze piercing through spacetime and showing him what had occurred here in the past.

During the time Ning spent in seclusion, Daolord Greatjoy had perished in battle here! Greatjoy had been an incredible figure, but in the end his dying enemy had destroyed the entire realm around them in a final suicide attack. The two had died together.

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Skyfire Brightshore had a very relaxed life. Ning ate and drank and made merry with him for two days, then parted paths.

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Rumble... tens of thousands of chaos planets were being moved about like chess pieces. They slowly orbited a vast region of empty space, controlled by a great formation.

At the center of that region was a temple, and before that temple sat a skinny, bald, red-robed youth. An invisible surge of power swirled around him, encompassing the tens of thousands of chaos planets around him.

“Mortal-rank, class one mission – complete!”

“This was your first time embarking upon the path of cultivation. You survived, while all of your experienced teammates died. You are worth spending a bit of extra effort on. Do not disappoint me, Qin An.”

“Evaluation – 6.0!”

“Reward: 3000 Mortal-ranked gemstones.”

A spectacled youth stared, puzzled, at the illusory globe of light before him. This globe of light was filled with an enormous amount of information regarding cultivation, pill-making, and even how to transform the body. One was even able to trade for mighty Fiendgod bodies that could be used to uproot the mountains themselves! But of course, the price would be high.

“I can even trade for a golem-body that would allow me to easily destroy a vast world with a wave of my hand? If all this is real... this is absolutely terrifying.” The spectacled youth’s eyes were shining as he continued to review the information. “I can bring the dead back to life and even travel to other worlds. Anything and everything is possible! This type of world is much more interesting than my old one. I love this world!”

Qin An was a nerd who lived in a world of ordinary mortals. He was extremely clever, but his brilliance was only put to good use after he was brought to the ‘Cataclysm Trials’.

He took on one mission after another, forming squads with others to challenge them. He sparred against many powerful martial artists, going so far as to actually embark upon the path of true Immortal cultivation. He was even sent into a world of Fiendgods, where he battled against mighty gods and fiends alike. He was tempered and tested over and over again. In the process, many teammates perished, but they were quickly replaced. The survivors only grew stronger and stronger.

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“Solewind, I have to say, this ‘Cataclysm Trials’ game you came up with is rather interesting.” Ning appeared in the emptiness of space outside the temple.

The skinny, bald, red-robed youth opened his eyes. A delighted look was on his face. “Darknorth, you came! What do you think? My Cataclysm Trials are pretty nice, eh? I used tens of thousands of chaos planets as the foundation for the formation, my many estate-treasures as support beams, and my Dao of Illusions to join them all together into the Cataclysm Trials. I then chose countless mortals to take part in my trials, allowing them to claw their way forwards upon the path of cultivation within it.”

“It’s not bad at all,” Ning praised.

“My heartforce is strengthened and improved by the process,” Solewind said with a smile. “I’m planning to maintain the Cataclysm Trials for ten thousand chaos cycles. Hopefully, by then I’ll be confident enough to attempt the Daomerge. If not, I’ll find another way to train.”

Ning nodded. It was extremely difficult for Heartforce Cultivators to succeed in the Daomerge. They had to try all sorts of strange, unique methods to train and improve themselves.

“Have you come to bid an old friend a final farewell?” Solewind suddenly asked. As powerful Heartforce Cultivators with strong hearts, there was no need for the two of them to mince words.

Ning nodded and smiled. “I’m going into terminal seclusion after this meeting.”

“I’ve made many friends on my path of cultivation, but I admire you above all others,” Solewind said. “You are going to succeed. You have to.” Solewind knew that if Ning was going into terminal seclusion, that meant Ning was most likely trying a last-ditch effort to save himself. If Ning was truly out of options and saw no hope at all, why would he go into seclusion?

“Stop trying to make me feel better,” Ning said with a chuckle. “I don’t need it. By the way, I actually spent a thousand years watching events occur within your Cataclysm Trials.”

“That long?” Solewind was surprised. “I use reality as the foundation, then use illusions to make up for reality’s shortcomings. Now, why would the venerable Daolord Darknorth take an interest in such a simple technique?”

Ning explained, “I was actually watching a young fellow who was training within it. That’s why I watched for a thousand years. Are you willing to let him follow me instead?”

“I might have put countless cultivators into my Cataclysm Trials, but only a few thousand have been able to survive for more than a thousand years. They are priceless treasures to me,” Solewind said in an intentionally sorrowful manner. “Buuuuut... since you’ve made the request, Daolord Darknorth, I suppose I must give you face. Which one have you taken a fancy to?”

“The one called Qin An,” Ning said.

Qin An had come from a world which was extremely similar to the world Ning had lived in during his previous life, ‘Earth’. There were quite a few under-developed worlds like ‘Earth’ in the Chaosverse, and Daolord Solewind had teleported many people from such worlds to the Cataclysm Trials.

“Qin An! That boy was born to be a cultivator.” Solewind sighed dramatically. “You know, he doesn’t view the ‘trials’ of the Cataclysm Trials as dangers to be avoided. He eagerly dives into mission after

mission! I actually prepared a few difficult trials just for him, but he managed to flip the script each time.”

“I’ve taken a liking to the kid as well,” Ning said. “I’m planning to take him on as a disciple.”

“Then he is one lucky kid.” Solewind immediately waved his hand.

Whoosh! A youth suddenly appeared in the emptiness of space by Solewind’s side. The kid was dressed in black robes and had a stately gaze. He looked completely harmless... but when he scanned the area around him and saw Daolord Solewind and Ji Ning, his eyes narrowed. He could sense that his very soul itself was quaking in fear. The auras emanating from the two individuals before him were absolutely terrifying.

Even though just hints of their auras were leaking out, the two were clearly unfathomably more powerful than even the most powerful creature he had ever encountered, an Elder God-class Fiendgod.

“I am the creator of the Cataclysm Trials. You can address me as ‘Solewind’.” Daolord Solewind’s very first words caused the young Qin An to feel completely stunned. The creator of the Cataclysm Trials?!

Solewind smiled. “Next to me is my good friend, Darknorth. Qin An, today is your lucky day. My friend is far more powerful than I am, but he’s actually taken a fancy to you.”

“Qin An, are you willing to become my disciple and take me on as your master?” Ning asked.

He had always followed his own heart in choosing new disciples. His ‘fourth disciple’, for example... Ning had simply tossed a talisman into a hidden location. Whoever was lucky enough to acquire it would become his fourth personal disciple! Thus far, this person had yet to arise. His seventh disciple ‘Almonder’ and his eighth disciple ‘Stonepool’ had all been extremely weak when Ning had first noticed them, while his second disciple ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding had been just an ordinary mortal.

Ning cared more about the Dao-hearts of his potential disciples. And of course, he also chose people whose personalities he liked! He had seen countless beings struggling within the Cataclysm Trials, but the only one he had liked was Qin An! He admired how Qin An was still brimming with confidence and excitement despite having seen so much death and lost so many friends in the Cataclysm Trials. This truly was quite rare!

“I’m willing! Willing!” Qin An had experienced much in recent years, and he was no fool. He immediately knelt down and kowtowed: “Master, your disciple Qin An greets you!”

“Good. From this day forth, you shall be the ninth disciple of myself, Darknorth. You are the last personal disciple I shall ever take,” Ning said.

Solewind glanced at Qin An. How the hell was this kid so lucky? He actually became the final disciple Daolord Darknorth chose before going into terminal seclusion! It must be remembered that even major powers like Lord Houwu of the Blazesun Domain would love for the chance to become Ning’s servant and receive a few occasional pointers from him.

Ning looked at his new disciple, Qin An, then nodded. He now had a ninth disciple, and he had visited everyone he needed to visit. It was time to return to the Three Realms and prepare to enter terminal seclusion.

The Desolate Era

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 8: Terminal Seclusion

Before Ji Ning brought his ninth disciple, Qin An, back to the Three Realms, he first paid a brief visit to the Badlands Territory.

“Halt,” Ning instructed. The realmship came to a halt in midair. Ning turned to glance at Qin An, then reached out to tap Qin An on the middle of his forehead. An enormous amount of information began to pour into Qin An’s mind, followed by three surges of sword-intent being hidden deep within his soul. All three surges of sword-intent were of varying levels of power.

At Qin An’s current level of power, if he had to learn this enormous amount of information from jade slips it would probably take over ten thousand years. Using this method, Ning had accomplished it in the blink of an eye. Most of the information, however, would remain sealed. Qin An was currently too weak; his soul and truesoul simply couldn’t absorb that much information at once.

“Master.” Qin An regained consciousness.

“Of my nine disciples, you are the most talented at dealing with danger,” Ning said. “I’ve left you three surges of sword-intent to protect you and many techniques for you to learn. The rest shall be up to you. This place is known as the Badlands Territories, and it is very vast, far vaster than the ‘Cataclysm Trials’ you were in. You’ll have to rely on yourself in adventuring through this place. Once you reach the World level or become a Daolord, you’ll probably be able to locate your fellow disciples.”

“World level?” This was an incredibly distant concept to Qin An. He hadn’t even become a Celestial Immortal yet!

“Alright, you can leave now. Your path will be your own.” Ning waved his hand. Whoosh! Qin An was teleported through spacetime into an ordinary chaosworld within the Badlands Territory.

“Master... you remain as, uh, succinct as ever in teaching your disciples,” Su Youji said with a snicker.

“The more setbacks they encounter, the farther they’ll make it on their respective paths,” Azurefiend said.

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When Ning returned to the Three Realms, he began to meet with some of his old friends for what was perhaps the final time.

Northmont Baiwei, Mu Northson, his master Immortal Diancai...

It must be remembered that even Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals were able to live for the incredibly long time of 108,000 chaos cycles. When Ning had been very young, he had acquired a prisonworld filled with Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals who had been alive for multiple chaos cycles.

However, Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals generally had very weak Dao-hearts. Very few would be able to live to their maximum lifespans, as most would end up developing mental issues that would result in their energies running wild, resulting in death. Most had to rely on using spirit-pills to nourish

their bodies; only then would they be able to live long enough to hit the 108,000 cycle limit. Northmont Baiwei, for example, was merely a Pure Yang True Immortal, but he was still alive.

Another person Ning went to visit was Ninelotus.

Ninelotus was the first woman Ning had ever romantically loved. Ning's status was so incredibly high that after they broke up, no one else ever dared to pursue Ninelotus! Ninelotus herself set up her own school long ago, and she only accepted female cultivators who swore to be forever single.

Ninelotus had vanished for many years after establishing her sect, but then she had suddenly skyrocketed in power. She had first reached the World level of power, then became a Samsara Daolord during the period of time that Ning was secluded in meditation. This caused many people in the Three Realms to feel quite speechless... and many secretly whispered that Fairy Ninelotus had to have reached this level thanks to Daolord Darknorth's help. Otherwise, how could she have been ordinary for so long, then suddenly risen to power?

Ning himself, however, knew that he hadn't helped Ninelotus at all!

Below a giant tree within a courtyard. Ning and Ninelotus were seated facing each other, with Ninelotus pouring Ning some tea.

"I grew this tea tree myself and personally harvested the leaves," Ninelotus said. "Have a taste."

"Senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus." Ning smiled. "You truly amaze me."

Ning had seen many things. By now, he knew that there were indeed some cultivators who rose to prominence late in life! Common sense dictated that they shouldn't be able to make any further breakthroughs, given how long they had been alive for, but they somehow did. They just slowly advanced at their own pace.

"For a long time, you cast a deep shadow over my heart." Ninelotus looked at Ning. She could sense his truesoul crumbling away, and she felt sorrow for him. He had been an extremely important man in her life, after all. "I eventually set up my own female-only school and strictly forbade my disciples from falling in love... but that's not something a mere rule can prevent. In the end, quite a few of my disciples ended up becoming Dao-companions with men from the outside world. After teaching many of them and seeing many things, the shadow over my heart began to gradually dissipate. I began to get over the past."

"I simply taught my disciples and tended to my garden, planting trees and weeding weeds. Every so often, I'd read a few treatises on the Dao." Ninelotus smiled. "Honestly, it was quite strange. For some reason, cultivation became easier and easier for me, and I began to improve faster and faster."

Ning could sense that Ninelotus' Dao-heart had reached incredible heights after she had managed to dispel the shadow that had bedeviled her heart for so many years. In the end, the Dao-heart was what mattered the most to cultivators!

Long ago, Ning had established a Dao-repository filled with countless techniques which all talented cultivators of the Three Realms were given access to. Many of those techniques had been written down by Hegemons and included a detailed explanation from start to finish. This had allowed the Three Realms to produce more and more major powers.

“Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, the brightest star of the Black-White College... I felt certain that you would continue to dazzle long after I died,” Ninelotus said. “I never thought that I’d still be alive while you...”

“That’s why I had to come visit you, old friend.” Ning smiled.

“Is there hope?” Ninelotus suddenly asked.

Although the love between them had vanished long ago, she still cared deeply about Ning. Many failed Daolords refused to give up hope. Daolord Allgod, for example, had tried all sorts of methods to extend his life! The law of the universe was that the heavens always gave a chance, no matter how slim... and it was true! There was, in fact, a way for those who failed the Daomerge to survive. Alas, to this very day not even the Autarchs had been able to truly grasp it.

“I’ll enter terminal seclusion soon to find out,” Ning said with a smile. “If you ever see me again, you’ll know that I succeeded.”

“Then I’ll wait for you to come back. I’ll make sure to have some more tea ready for you,” Ninelotus said hopefully.

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Ning felt quite happy after leaving Ninelotus’ residence. He could tell from her breakthroughs that she had gotten over her previous issues. This was why he had been willing to visit her. If she was still entangled by the demons of the past, he wouldn’t have disturbed her.

He continued to wander the Three Realms, visiting all of his old friends. Finally, he hosted a family banquet in Brightheart Island. The only ones invited to the banquet included his parents, Brightmoon, Uncle White, Autumn Leaf, and other extremely close friends and family. Youji, Pillsaint, and Azurefiend were also permitted to attend as his retainers. Even the slumbering Flamewing God was awakened by Ning and called over to take part.

After the banquet ended, Ning was going to enter terminal seclusion.

“Flamewing,” Ning instructed, “Stay for a few hundred thousand more chaos cycles in the Flamedragon Realmverse. After that, you can go where you please.”

“You’ll definitely make it back, Master!” Flamewing truly couldn’t bear to part with Ning.

“Haha...” Ning chuckled, then turned to look at everyone else present.

“Ning. Son.” Yuchi Snow’s eyes were filled with worry.

“Young master.” Autumn Leaf looked at Ning as well.

Ji Yichuan and Uncle White looked at Ning. Both were able to remain fairly calm.

“Master.” Su Youji’s eyes were filled with anxiousness.

Ning looked at this gathering of the friends and family who meant the most to him, then smiled. “Relax, everyone. I’m going into terminal seclusion, not certain death. Besides, I’ve already lived a far longer life than ordinary mortals are granted. I’m an old fart by now! Alright. I’m off!”

As he turned to leave, he cast Su Youji a final glance and nodded towards her.

How could he not understand the feelings Su Youji bore him? Su Youji, in turn, knew how Ning felt and so she continued to 'hide' her feelings, never giving voice to them.

Ning had no answer for this, no solution. Mortals might be easily moved to love, but someone like Ning? At most, he could care about her as he would a beloved family member. As far as romantic love went... he truly felt nothing for her at all.

Whoosh. As Ning took a single step forwards, a dimensional tunnel appeared before him. He stepped into the dimensional tunnel, then vanished.

Everyone on Brightheart Island watched as Ning departed, their hearts filled with many emotions.

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"Master. Nuwa. If I truly do fail in my terminal seclusion, the security of the Three Realms will be up to the two of you." Ning's voice suddenly rang out in the minds of Subhuti and Nuwa.

Subhuti had been meditating, while Nuwa had been teaching students. Both were startled by Ning's sudden message.

Ning hadn't met with them before going into secluded meditation. He only sent them this single, simple mental message.

"Disciple," Subhuti murmured softly.

"There is still hope." Nuwa turned to stare into the void beyond the Three Realms.

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The Azureflower Estate was as same as it always was as the white-robed Ning stepped inside.

"Daolord Darknorth." The white-haired elder had been waiting at the gates for quite some time now. He immediately bowed respectfully as Ning entered.

"Haha. You get to be the last one by my side as I enter terminal seclusion," Ning teased.

"To accompany you in this is my honor," the white-haired elder chuckled.

Ning turned to glance at the world behind him. He felt as though he could see the images of those who he cared about appearing outside.

"Close the gates," Ning instructed.

With a rumble, the towering gates to the Azureflower Estate swung shut.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 9: The Only Path: Void Everlasting

Far, far away, in the outer perimeter of the Sithelands. There was a floating island here which had an ancient temple on it. Inside were Autarch Mogg and the avatars of the other Autarchs.

“Autarchs, I wanted to let you know that I, Darknorth, am preparing to enter terminal seclusion. Let our various conversations and sharing of insights be paused for now! But of course, if you gain any extremely important insights, you can still go ahead and share them with me,” Ji Ning sent via the Autarch talisman to the other six Autarchs.

“Terminal seclusion?” Titanos, Ekong, Bolin, Skyfeeder, Stonerule, and Mogg all stiffened. They all felt a mixture of complex emotions in their heart, as well as a sense of sorrow. They knew just how difficult creating a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique would be. The six of them had spent a great deal of time in recent years on this technique, but they actually made much less progress than Ning. There were no important insights they could share with him.

“If we have any important insights, we’ll definitely notify you.” Autarch Bolin was the first to reply.

“Darknorth, you are the first and only master of an Eternal Omega Dao our Chaosverse has produced. I know you can succeed, no matter how hard the task,” Autarch Titanos said.

“There’s always a chance, no matter how slim. I know that you will seize it,” Autarch Skyfeeder said.

“Yes. I’ll definitely find and seize that chance. I’m going into seclusion now.” Ning sent one final reply, then fell silent.

The six Autarchs exchanged glances, then sighed.

“Ugh.”

“Just like that, one of our good friends has...”

“Perhaps a miracle will happen.” All of them felt saddened, and the atmosphere quickly turned heavy. Darknorth had been a dazzling figure, the first master of an Eternal Omega Dao their Chaosverse had produced. He had established a new path for future generations to follow, and now... all by himself... he was preparing to go out in a blaze of glory, fighting a battle which no one had ever won in a bid for survival. He had so many unfinished hopes and dreams... but alas, nothing in life would ever be exactly as one wished it to be.

The six Autarchs could do nothing but wait silently.

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Within a silent hallway. The white-robed Ning first drew all six of his Northbow swords from their sheaths, then placed them atop a nearby table. The elderly white-haired spirit of the estate watched silently from one side.

Ning then walked to the Autarch’s stone dais, sat down in the lotus position, then slowly closed his eyes.

He had already settled as many affairs as he could. There was no point in worrying about the rest. He was now able to truly empty his mind of all extraneous thoughts and focus everything on creating the complete [Truesoul Everlasting] technique!

Creation of this technique was his one and only chance to survive. Of course, successfully becoming an Autarch via the Omega Dao was also possible, but by all rights that would require an enormous amount of work and time. He simply didn’t have that much time left to him!

Rely on an epiphany? Epiphanies could only be hoped for, not counted on. Hoping for an epiphany that would propel him into Omega Autarchy was nothing more than a foolish pipe dream. He at least had a slim chance at surviving with a 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique, but his chances of surviving due to becoming an Omega Autarch were next to nil. If he had a million chaos cycles or more, he might be able to accomplish it with some luck and an epiphany, but as of right now? Forget it!

Besides... when entering terminal seclusion, one had to put everything at stake. The worst thing he could do was to allow himself to be distracted by other possibilities!

Ning knew that becoming an Omega Autarch in such a short period of time was far less likely than successfully developing the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique. Thus, he didn't hesitate at all in choosing the latter option! He had made this choice 15,000 chaos cycles ago, and he didn't hesitate at all as he entered terminal seclusion.

"A 'Truesoul Everlasting'... there are two paths to success which I can take. The first is that of the 'Void Everlasting', while the second is that of the 'Chaos Everlasting'."

Ning began to ponder this most important of questions. "What should I choose? Once I make the decision, I'll have to follow it to the bitter end."

During previous aeons, he had pursued multiple paths at the same time. Autarch Awakener had believed that the two most likely paths were those of 'Void Everlasting' and 'Infinity Everlasting'. The latter followed the most fundamental principles of Daoist cultivation, and was based on the principle of how 'one beget two, two beget three, and three beget all things.' The principle was basic, but actualizing it was difficult. Ning had finally abandoned this approach by chaos cycle 12,000. As for the other paths, he had abandoned them at other intervals as well.

Now, only two paths remained which Ning felt would have the highest chances of success.

"The Void Everlasting... it involves using my will as the core. I would need to be able to maintain my will and consciousness in the emptiness of space itself. Even after my truesoul shatters apart, I would still be able to remain conscious and could then use the empty void of space itself to serve as the medium for remaking my truesoul anew."

"The Chaos Everlasting... it involves trusting my will to the prime essences of the Chaosverse themselves. I would borrow from the power of the Quintessence, asking it to halt its instinctual desire to swallow my truesoul. If I can do that, my truesoul will naturally stop crumbling."

Ning continued to ponder this decision. The 'Void Everlasting' required him to rely on himself, while the 'Chaos Everlasting' involved him swaying the prime essences and convincing them to ease drawing upon his truesoul.

Why did the truesoul continuously shatter and break apart? Because the prime essences would begin pulling at it after the first cracks appeared during the Daomerge.

"The Void Everlasting technique works in theory, but I haven't sensed it actually function in practice," Ning mused. "As for Chaos Everlasting, I can sense its effects. I've tried numerous times to link my will to the prime essences and have been able to use this technique to slow down the rate at which it absorbs

my truesoul... but as soon as I halt the technique, the prime essences will continue to swallow my truesoul at the normal rate once more.”

The first technique seemed ineffective, while the second one did have some effects. Which one should he choose?

Ning gritted his teeth. “To completely prevent the prime essences from devouring my truesoul fragments would be to go against the natural order of the Chaosverse! The only reason why my technique seems to be effective is because right now, this Chaosverse has no Lord governing it.” Ning shook his head. “However, my chances of completely halting this process remain very low.”

He understood this point from the very beginning. To go against the natural order of the Chaosverse was not a wise option. The only reason he had yet to abandon it was because it did seem to at least have some effect.

“I can’t leave things to luck, nor can I try and have ‘backup’ options. Void Everlasting it is!” Ning made his final decision, deciding to focus all of his efforts on embarking upon the path of the Void Everlasting.

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The [Void Everlasting] technique was a completely self-reliant technique. It required him to be able to maintain a ‘void will’. Only then would he have successfully acquired a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’!

What did the phrase ‘void will’ mean? The word ‘will’ referred to his mind, to his consciousness! For ordinary mortals, possessing a soul meant possessing consciousness. Powerful cultivators understood that only possessing a complete truesoul represented having consciousness and the capability for true thought.

As for the most supreme of major powers? Even if their truesouls were fragmented and shattered, they would still be able to maintain consciousness! A major power’s mind and consciousness would only come to a halt when the final fragments of his truesoul completely collapsed. When Ning’s original body had perished, he had experienced this process of his truesoul breaking apart and his consciousness dimming away. The reason that consciousness vanished was because its most fundamental vessel, the ‘truesoul’, had completely broken apart.

To have a ‘void will’ meant that even after your truesoul completely broke apart, you would still be able to maintain consciousness, housing it within the emptiness of the void itself! Imagine what a powerful will one would need in order to be able to accomplish such a thing!

If his will was sufficiently powerful, he would be able to play tug-of-war with his truesoul fragments, forcibly latching onto them even after his truesoul had broken apart and preventing them from dissipating. He would draw them together into a new whole! In order to accomplish this, the power of his will would have to surpass the absorptive power of the Chaosverse itself. Only then would one have a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’!

Chaos Everlasting required one to be able to convince the Chaosverse to temporarily halt the absorption process, while Void Everlasting required one to use one’s will to overpower the energy-sucking strength of the Chaosverse.

“Willpower strong enough to exist independently of body and soul... to accomplish this, I will need to truly perfect the [Void Everlasting] technique,” Ning mused to himself.

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Ning was going all-in on this final gamble, and he completely threw himself into researching this technique.

Time continued to flow on. He continuously tested out new theories, but each time he failed. There was no effect at all on the dissolution of his truesoul, but he didn't let himself grow dispirited. Instead, he drew from these experiences and continued to perfect this technique, pushing in one new model after another.

He failed a billion times. Ten billion times. A trillion times. If he was a mortal, he would've abandoned himself to despair long ago.

Ning, however, remained as calm as a still pond of water. Everything was as he had expected.

A thousand chaos cycles went by in the blink of an eye, and he was getting close to the very end. A million years. A hundred thousand years. Ten thousand years. A hundred years. One year. One month...

He now had very, very little time remaining.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 10: The Final Gamble

One month. Ten days. One day. One hour...

Ji Ning learned from each of his failures, drawing upon those experiences as he worked hard to further perfect the technique. Slowly, the 'Void Everlasting' technique began to take some effect, dramatically strengthening the power of his consciousness. However, he still wasn't even close to being strong enough for his truesoul to resist the siren song of the prime essences of the Chaosverse.

“Northbow.”

Ning was seated next to a table, pouring himself a cup of wine. He had chosen to spend his last hour of life drinking wine and relaxing, releasing all of the tension that had built up over a thousand chaos cycles in one fell swoop.

“Master.” Sad-faced children had appeared on the surfaces of all six Northbow swords. They looked despondently at Ning.

“Number one, number two, number three, number four, number five... and number six.” Ning called them all by 'name', then smiled: “After I finish this cup of wine, I'll go try one last time. If I fail, it'll all have been for naught. The six of you are, without question, the deadliest swords in all the Chaosverse, the only swords powered by the Eternal Omega Sword Dao. Once I'm gone, you will be ownerless. Go and find owners which suit you.”

“Master.”

“We won't choose anyone else! We only want you, Master.”

“You’ll definitely survive, Master.” All six of the sword-spirits were unwilling to part with Ning.

“You can also choose to take human form and just rove the Chaosverse,” Ning said. Given how powerful the Northbow swords were, they could easily choose to take human form, while their natural power was enough to heavily injure even Hegemons. If they wanted to flee from someone, not even an Otherverse Lord would be able to catch them. Bind them by force? That would be even harder!

“No.”

“You’ll definitely succeed, Master. We want to stay by your side forever.” All six of them were crying.

Ning looked at the six little children, a smile playing on his face. “When I see the six of you, I feel satisfied with what I accomplished in my life.”

Ning lifted up the tankard of wine, drinking it all down in one gulp before rising to his feet.

“Let me congratulate you in advance, Daolord, for you shall surely complete the technique and gain a Truesoul Everlasting.” The white-haired spirit of the estate had been watching silently this entire time. Upon seeing Ning rise, he came forward and bowed respectfully.

“Complete the technique and gain a Truesoul Everlasting!” all six sword-spirits chorused.

“Haha. Yes, a Truesoul Everlasting! I shall indeed.” Ning walked over to the Autarch’s stone dais, then sat down in the lotus position. His truesoul was on its last legs now, and he didn’t have any time to waste. The remaining fragments of his truesoul were so weak that they could very well completely collapse as soon as Ning attempted to use this truesoul technique!

“The final gamble! If I fail, I die. If I succeed... a new world will begin.” Ning closed his eyes and began to ruminate on ways he could further perfect the [Void Everlasting].

Just ten seconds later...

Rumble... Ning’s shuddering truesoul began to come together in a final attempt. Ning’s powerful consciousness reached out, seizing to forcibly pull the dissipating truesoul fragments back into shape... but the call of the prime essences was simply too hard to resist. Alas... this final attempt caused the final shards of his truesoul, which had been just barely able to hold onto a basic framework, to finally and completely break apart!

“I failed?”

“So in the end, I still failed...” Ning opened his eyes, and a peaceful look was in them. His eyes, his skin, his body... every inch of him began to crumble apart and vanish away like sand blown away by the wind.

All the remaining fragments of his truesoul finally and truly broke apart in a complete and utter collapse. Tountless spots of light which began to fly out of Ning could be seen with the naked eye... and then, Ning’s entire body transformed into an enormous, human-shaped mass of light.

“Daolord.” When the white-haired estate-spirit saw this, a look of grief appeared in his eyes. A truly peerless Daolord, the very first Daolord to master an Eternal Omega Dao, had just passed away.

“Master.” The six sword-spirits stared frantically at the humanoid mass of light.

It was like a dazzlingly beautiful flame... but hidden behind its beauty was the sorrow of a peerless Daolord's passing.

Whoosh! Ning's light-body split apart into countless specks of light that quickly began to shoot out in every direction.

"No..." the sword-spirits sobbed.

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Within that ancient temple located in the outer perimeters of the distant Sithelands. Autarch Mogg and the avatars of the other Autarchs remained gathered here as always. Suddenly, all of them fell silent and began to exchange glances with each other.

"Darknorth." The six of them could sense through their message-talismans that the one belonging to Daolord Darknorth had just lost its master.

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The Three Realms. Nuwa was responsible for administering many matters here, while Subhuti spent most of his time training by himself within his Daoist monastery inside Mount Innerheart.

Brush. Brush. Brush. Subhuti was sweeping the floor of his monastery. He was the only person in this entire monastery. Not even the two novices stationed outside would enter without a very good reason.

Subhuti had already trained to an extremely profound level, and he put particular emphasis on training his Dao-heart. In this, he was second only to Ning and Nuwa.

After he finished sweeping the floor, he entered another room and began to wipe down the pillars and the tables. As he did so, he raised his head to glance at a lamp located atop the highest table. The light of the lamp blazed away like a tiny little bead of flame.

This was a heartlamp, Ning's heartlamp! In all the Three Realms, only he and Nuwa had a way to know whether Ning was alive or not. Ning's parents, Brightmoon... their Dao-hearts were too weak. Ning was worried that if they found out that he died, they wouldn't be able to keep it completely secret.

"Mm." When Subhuti saw that the heartlamp was still lit, he couldn't help but smile. He usually cultivated in this very room. That way, he could glance at the heartlamp whenever he wished. Whenever he saw that the heartlamp was still lit, he would feel a sense of relief in his heart.

After wiping down the tables, he turned to sit down upon a nearby prayer mat and began to meditate. But just a short while after he began his meditations...

"Eh?" Subhuti suddenly shuddered. He quickly opened his eyes and turned to look at the highest table, as though he could sense something was amiss. The light coming from that heartlamp was quickly dwindling away... and the sight of it disappearing was like a bolt of thunder that came crashing into Subhuti's mind, completely stunning him.

"Subhuti!" Nuwa's slightly frantic voice echoed within his mind: "Ji Ning, he...!"

"My student..." Subhuti's old eyes began to redden as a hint of tears appeared.

He had accepted many disciples in his time, and some had caused him quite a bit of trouble. Ning had been a fairly unremarkable disciple, one who Subhuti hadn't spent too much effort on. Ning's later accomplishments, however, had truly impressed Subhuti. Subhuti had come to view this disciple as he would his own son. He knew that this disciple of his had worked many miracles in the past, and he had felt so certain that another miracle was in the making...

"Ji Ning," Subhuti murmured softly. The old man shut his eyes as tears began to fall down his face.

But... right at that moment. 'Pop'. The heartlamp had clearly been extinguished... but suddenly, flickers of flame began to appear within it as it lit up once again.

Subhuti was a Daolord of the Fourth Step. He was able naturally able to sense what had just happened, and he immediately opened his eyes, not quite daring to hope that his senses were telling him the truth. That heartlamp... it remained lit, as it had been over the course of countless aeons. It was as though it had never dimmed at all.

"B-b-b-but..." Subhuti was completely stupefied. He had never imagined that a heartlamp could be extinguished, then reignited!

Once the truesoul was destroyed, the heartlamp would no longer be able to sense it, at which point it would become extinguished. Now, however, it had been reignited. This meant that the truesoul was back to normal again, but... how was this possible?

"Subhuti, did your heartlamp suddenly light up again?" Nuwa sent mentally. She was in a state of joy mixed with disbelief as well.

"It is lit! Lit!" Subhuti sent frantically.

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Within the second hall within the Azureflower Estate.

Rumble... countless specks of light began to gather together, coming to form a humanoid shape.

In the instant of his truesoul's destruction, Ning finally felt what true death was like. All of his truesoul fragments had completely dispersed, losing all cohesion.

He felt nothing but emptiness... as though he was drifting within a world with no time, no space, and no color.

The various 'Void Everlasting' techniques he had theorized in the past were not able to allow Ning's truesoul to resist the call of the prime essences, but they had still strengthened Ning's consciousness dramatically. Even as his truesoul broke apart, he didn't immediately lose all consciousness the way an ordinary Daolord might. Instead, his consciousness entered an extremely faint and sluggish state. He couldn't sense either space or time... all he could sense was completely and utter nothingness, the emptiness of the void.

"This is what the void truly is..." Suddenly, Ning's sluggish consciousness was awakened to the truth. In this instant, he truly understood what 'emptiness' meant, what the 'void' truly meant. Only now was he able to understand how to entrust his consciousness to the void, and his [Void Everlasting] technique immediately transformed on its own accord. At the same time, Ning's feeble consciousness immediately

began to pull at his countless dispersing truesoul fragments. As he continued to follow the principles of the [Void Everlasting] technique, his consciousness suddenly began to grow much more powerful, skyrocketing to unprecedented heights.

“VOID... EVERLASTING!” A powerful will suddenly manifested, and it let out a psychic scream of such power that it could actually be heard audibly. It was a cry filled with power, a cry of indomitable resolve.

When this shout rang out within the room, it caused the sorrowful white-haired elder and the six sword-spirits to all stare in astonishment. They watched as the countless specks of light which had been flying every which way to suddenly freeze in midair as a powerful force suddenly pulled at them, connecting them together. The countless specks of light seemed to come alive as they came forward to form a complete whole.

They no longer had a truesoul holding them together in an established framework, but they somehow still remained bound to each other!

“MERGE!” Yet another shout echoed within the room.

Those frozen countless specks of light instantly began to gather together once more. They quickly reformed into a humanoid blob of light, and that blob of light quickly crystallized in appearance.

Once again, the white-robed Ning appeared within the room. He carefully inspected everything around him, then gently reached out to touch the table next of him. The cool, slick touch of the table made him smile.

The white-haired elder and the six sword-spirits were all unspeakably excited. His truesoul was now Everlasting... which meant that ‘Daolord Darknorth’ was about to become ‘Emperor Darknorth’!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 11: Emperor Darknorth

“What’s with those silly looks on your faces?” Ji Ning glanced at the six sword-spirits and the white-haired elder: “Come, let’s drink!”

Ning wasn’t in a rush to connect with the outside world just yet. He wanted to be by himself for a while.

“Alright,” the white-haired elder said excitedly.

“Woohoo!” The six sword-spirits were quite excited as well. Treasure-spirits at their level all possessed keen senses of sight, smell, and taste. It was quite common for powerful treasures to transform themselves into human form and live in the mortal world.

Wine was quickly poured for all. Ning’s smile only broadened as he lifted up his wine cup and gave it a sniff, letting the pleasing aroma of the wine seep into his soul. He glanced at the crystalline liquid within his cup, then murmured softly, “Being alive feels wonderful.”

He looked very calm, but inside he was unspeakably excited. He had succeeded! He had actually succeeded in overcoming the greatest tribulation he faced. Although he had behaved quite placidly before others, he knew just how tiny his chances of successfully creating the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique were. He had mentally prepared himself for death, which was why he had gone to visit so

many of his old friends and even Ninelotus. He wanted to empty his mind of all distractions and leave nothing behind.

“Now that I’ve created the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique, I can make repeated attempts at the Daomerge.” Ning smiled. “However... I personally don’t need to. I can easily succeed in the Daomerge and become an Emperor.”

“An Emperor with an Eternal Omega Dao... I can reach this level whenever I want to. Now, it’ll be much easier for me to deal with the Sithe.”

He had always been extremely strong thanks to his Eternal Omega Dao, but he had never dared to truly launch a wild barrage of attacks! Autarch Mogg and the other autarchs could launch tens of thousands of attacks in a split second, allowing them to overpower and crush everything in their path. The only place which made them a bit nervous was the heart of the Sithelands, but they were able to handle it by pouring a large amount of energy in casting a seal over that place.

Dangerous, eh? Then I’ll seal you inside and make it impossible for you to leave. Just rot there!

Autarchs were unimaginably powerful. The only problem was that there simply were not enough of them. If they had dozens of Autarchs, the Sithe would’ve been defeated long ago!

“Once I become an Omega Autarch, I’ll be able to bring her back to life.” Ning lifted up his wine cup, his gaze distant. He could still remember with absolute clarity the life they had enjoyed together. Having the chance to bring Yu Wei back to life was the greatest source of joy he felt.

He knew that actually becoming an Omega Autarch would be extremely difficult, but at least there wouldn’t be any fatal roadblocks in the way that could derail him. So long as he was given enough time and continued to slowly build up his experiences, with a bit of luck he would sooner or later suddenly gain an epiphany and break through.

“I’m willing to wait as long as it takes. As long as we’re able to meet again, it’ll all have been worth it.” Ning began to blissfully fantasize about their reunion. It had been a long time since he was this happy.

Suddenly... beep! “Eh?” Ning sensed something happen. He waved his hand, producing a dark-red jade talisman within it. This was the Autarch message-talisman. He was able to sense the location of the other six through it, and even sense their very auras.

“Darknorth, just now we sensed that your talisman suddenly lost its aura... but now, the aura is back. Have you created the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique?” Autarch Titanos asked. All six of them had thought that Ning was dead... but now, Ning’s talisman had suddenly regained its aura. This caused them to feel rather stunned.

It must be remembered that very few of these talismans had ever been made. Only the Autarchs were in possession of them! No one else but Ning would be able to bind the one he had been given, which meant that if the talisman had Ning’s aura about it, the only explanation was that Ning had to have created the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique.

But... they had to ask. Just to be sure.

“I succeeded,” Ning replied.

“Ahahaha! Darknorth, I knew you would succeed!” Autarch Ekong said excitedly.

“Darknorth, from this day forth, you must join the six of us in bearing responsibility for overseeing and safeguarding all cultivator civilizations as well as the very Chaosverse itself.” Autarch Bolin was fairly calm, but his words and his meaning were clear. Now that Ning was no longer in danger of losing his truesoul, there would no longer be any limits on his power. For all intents and purposes, he was now a true peer of the Autarchs.

“Congratulations, Darknorth! Our civilization has finally given birth to an Omega Dao Emperor. You know, I’ve been thinking about this for quite some time. In the past, the most powerful Emperors were always called ‘Hegemons’, but you became an Emperor through an Omega Dao. What should we title you?” Autarch Skyfeeder teased in a relaxed manner. She was in a wonderful mood as well.

Before Ning’s sudden rise to power, she had been planning to follow Autarch Awakener’s path and try to take control over the Quintessence of the Chaosverse, but she knew that her chances were slim and that she was almost guaranteed to perish in the attempt. Now? Now, there was no need for her to take that risk.

“I think we should call him Autarch Darknorth!” Autarch Ekong said immediately.

“But... he’s only an Emperor. If we call him Autarch Darknorth now, what are we supposed to call him once he actually becomes an Autarch?” Autarch Stonerule jested.

“Well, by then he’ll be the Lord of Chaos!” Autarch Ekong laughed loudly. “Hey, Darknorth? Get a move on it! You are the first creator of an Eternal Omega Dao this Chaosverse has ever seen, and you were also the first to create a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique. The rest of us would submit to you if you became the one to bind the Chaosverse, but what if it ends up being someone else? In the future, there will be many juniors who will make use of your experiences in treading the path of the Omega Dao. If one of them ends up becoming an Omega Autarch before you do and then takes control over our Chaosverse, we’ll be annoyed and you’ll be embarrassed! But of course, there’ll be nothing we could do by then.”

Ning was speechless for a moment, then snorted in laughter. The Autarchs were bombarding him with messages. He didn’t even know how he was supposed to respond!

“The title doesn’t really matter. We don’t need to worry about it too much.” Finally, Ning was able to compose a reply. “And... I think it is best if we kept this a secret for now. That way, we can deal the Sithe a nasty, unexpected blow at just the right moment.”

“Right.”

“I agree. Let’s keep this a secret for now.” Autarch Titanos and the others all agreed with this proposal.

“Then that means you have to keep staying in hiding for now, Darknorth. Ugh. You made such a huge breakthrough, but you still have to be so low-key about it. That’s no fun,” Autarch Ekong muttered.

“I wouldn’t say I have to be ‘in hiding’. Given my mastery over the art of illusions, the Sithe Exalts wouldn’t be able to recognize me even if I stood right in front of them,” Ning said. “Later on, I’ll pay a visit to the Quintessence. Let’s chat a bit then.”

“Alright.”

“Let’s meet at Skyfeeder’s place.”

“See you all at Skyfeeder’s.” The six Autarchs were all in a wonderful mood. Their civilization had just gained another protector who could battle by their side as an equal. This meant their entire Chaosverse had just risen considerably in power... and Ning might one day advance to become an Omega Autarch!

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A short while later, Ning re-initiated the Daomerge process. This time, things were completely different. Ning didn’t need to make any preparations at all, he just sat there by his table, drinking his wine as he initiated the Daomerge.

His body was perfect, as were the Jindan chaos region and the Dao-tree inside. Once again, the Flower of Eternity began to bloom.

“The Flower of Eternity.” The aura of the Daomerge began to flood outwards, but the seals protecting the Azureflower Estate were able to mask it all and keep it contained.

The thick, towering Dao-tree was 540,000 meters tall. It gave birth to a dazzlingly beautiful flower bud which glistened with beads of dew formed by countless flashing illusions of sword-stances. This was a Flower of Eternity which was born from the Eternal Omega Sword Dao, a flower which was far more beautiful than the ones which ordinary Emperors and Hegemons could produce.

Rumble... the prime essences of the Chaosverse descended upon Ning, whispering in joy and delight. Ning could sense their happiness, which contrasted with the sorrow they ‘felt’ the last time they descended upon him.

“It seems I’ll have to make a visit to the Quintessence if I wish to make a breakthrough with my heartworld,” Ning mused. His Immortal energy could easily evolve from Daolord-level energy to Emperor-level energy, as the amount of energy needed could be provided by the Azureflower Estate, even though Ning’s Immortal energy was far purer than that of ordinary Hegemon’s. It was on the level of the Autarchs! His heartworld, however, would be another matter.

The next breakthrough he made in heartforce would result in his heartworld becoming incredibly realistic! In addition, it would expand once more to become the size of an entire realmverse.

A realmverse-sized heartworld that was semi-real... to form such a thing would require an absolutely enormous amount of energy. If Ning simply sat here in the Azureflower Estate and tried to draw in enough energy from the surrounding area, it would probably result in destruction on a vast scale that would damage even the Three Realms. In fact, the entire Flamedragon Realmverse would probably be shaken! If that happened, there would be no way he could hide his breakthrough.

His only choice was to go to the Quintessence, where energy was so plentiful as to be nearly limitless. Only then would Ning be able to form his heartworld with ease.

“So this is what it feels like to be an Emperor?” Ning’s godsense had evolved as well, gaining a whiff of eternity about it. His godsense was now as stable and far-reaching as an Autarch’s.

Whoosh. Ning's godsense spread out silently and soundlessly, easily reaching out past the Azureflower Estate and almost instantly reaching out through space and time to cover the entire Flamedragon Realmverse!

He was now able to monitor an entire realmverse with but a thought. The Brightshore Kingdom, the Dao Alliance, Vastheaven Palace, the Three Realms... all of it was under Ning's watchful gaze.

Ning was also able to see his friends, his family, and his disciples.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 12: Reunion

Ji Ning's godsense was omnipresent and all-encompassing. Every single speck of dust within the Flamedragon Realmverse was plainly visible to Ning's gaze. Nothing could escape it.

"Ah, the Sithe gave up?" Ning was able to quickly scan all of the Emperors and Daolords within the entire Flamedragon Realmverse. The only ones present were the ones he knew. Ning worried that the Sithe would use their techniques to disguise themselves as individuals he was familiar with, and so he double-checked through karma just to be safe.

"It seems Autarch Stonerule scared them off when he captured all of their spies." Ning smiled.

This actually was in fact the case. With Autarch Stonerule personally keeping watch over the Flamedragon Realmverse, how could any spy escape? As many spies the Sithe sent, as many spies the Autarch captured. Daolords might be able to confuse him, but they were so weak that they wouldn't really be able to find out anything important. Thus, the Sithe leader Iyerre had chosen to give up and instead prepare his other plans.

"Master. Nuwa." Ning simultaneously reached out via godsense to both his master and Nuwa.

"Disciple." Subhuti was overjoyed.

"Darknorth." Nuwa finally let out a sigh of relief when she heard Ning's voice.

"I've created the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique and succeeded in the Daomerge. I am now an Emperor," Ning sent. "I'll be coming back soon. Don't worry about me."

"Truesoul Everlasting? Emperor? Good, good, good!" Subhuti was unspeakably excited. His student was now an Omega Emperor!

"I can finally relax a bit now," Nuwa said with a laugh. "I've been worried for years that the Sithe might come, and so I kept a vigilant watch without ever relaxing. Now that you've broken through, Darknorth, things will be much simpler. I don't think the Sithe would be able to get anywhere near the Three Realms without you noticing."

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Ning could sense how excited his master and Nuwa were when he sent them word. Not just them – Ning himself remained ecstatic!

“Time to recreate an avatar.” Ning rose to his feet. Now that he was an Emperor, he naturally had to remake his avatars.

At his current level, it would be simple to create even Universe-class treasures. It must be remembered that of the many Universe treasures which lay scattered throughout the Chaosverse, only a tiny portion had been created by actual Hegemons, and mostly through luck at that. The vast majority were created by Autarchs. Autarchs were able to create entire otherverses, after all! All they had to do was infuse a weapon with just a hint of their Daos and a new Universe treasure would have been born.

Ning’s truesoul had been crumbling, and so he didn’t dare to expend his Immortal energy on creating new treasures for himself. Now, however, creating a Universe treasure was simplicity itself. He could create new weapons which were close to the Northbow swords in power, then fill them with the Eternal Omega Sword Dao as well. The Northbow swords, however, would still be stronger because they were Ning’s original Lifeblood weapons. He had nurtured them for many years, and they had grown alongside him. Without question, they shared a higher level of affinity with Ning.

Newly created weapons might have the Eternal Omega Sword Dao within them, but they wouldn’t have as high a level of affinity. Thus, they would only be ‘close’ to the Northbow swords in power... but of course, they would still surpass the vast majority of other Universe treasures. With them in hand, Ning’s avatar would have close to 80% of Ning’s power! This represented another Autarch-class combatant.

Whoosh! Boom!

Within Ning’s estate. Ning had set up a large formation to help him create his avatar, and he had poured a large number of resources into the forging. The wind howled through the formation as thunder came crashing down again and again upon a giant boulder. The left side of the boulder was covered by boiling red lava, while the right side was covered by a freezing blue liquid. One side hot, one side cold; Ning was using a combination of elements for the forging of his avatar.

At Ning’s current level, treasures were ubiquitous and meaningless. Weaker Emperors and even Hegemons would generally start with a weak but flawless avatar, then use time to slowly nurture it and empower it. Ning, however, elected to start off by using the finest ingredients. That way, the avatar would grow more quickly.

Three years went past in the blink of an eye. The boulder was now perfectly round and semi-translucent, and a humanoid figure could be seen seated inside of it.

“Come out,” the white-robed Ning barked from next to the boulder. Boom! The round boulder cracked open, followed by a youth who looked identical to Ning flying out of it. Moments later, a layer of golden robes formed across the youth’s body.

“Greetings, real Ning.” The golden-robed Ning bowed.

“Greetings, avatar Ning.” The white-robed Ning chortled as well.

The two shared the same mind and shared the consciousness. Ning was just playing around by speaking to himself.

Whoosh. Whoosh. The two simultaneously left the estate-world they were in, returning to the private room within the Azureflower Estate. When the white-haired spirit of the estate saw them appear, he immediately realized that one of them was an Avatar.

“Time to go visit Autarch Skyfeeder.” Ning pondered for a moment, then turned to look at the white-haired elder: “I’m planning to bring the Azureflower Estate along with me. Any objections?”

“Emperor, since you were able to create a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique, I’m sure that you’ll be able to create the Tenth Chaos Seal with ease,” the white-haired elder said with a laugh. “My master built this estate because he wanted to produce a dazzlingly talented successor... but you, Emperor, are far more impressive than what my master ever would’ve dared to hope for! You can do whatever you want to this Azureflower Estate.”

Ning nodded.

“Emperor, the Hegemons and Emperors within the Azureflower Estate have been trapped here for countless aeons. They might’ve made some mistakes in the past, but I think it is time to release them,” the white-haired elder said.

Autarch Awakener had long ago promised that when this estate finally gave birth to the mighty successor he hoped for, the bound Hegemons and Emperors would be granted their release. They had been trapped by countless oaths and spells that compelled them into a golem-like existence, but the process was a reversible one that was completely different from what the Sithe used to ‘tame’ their enemies.

“Easily done.” Ning immediately exerted his will, binding and taking control over the entire Azureflower Estate. He then sent out the power of his Illusion Sword Dao into the minds of the imprisoned Hegemons and Emperors, wiping out any and all memories pertaining to ‘Ji Ning’!

After the Hegemons and Emperors regained consciousness, the only thing they heard was Ning’s voice echoing within their minds: “Immediately swear lifeblood oaths not to divulge any information at all regarding the Azureflower Estate, and you’ll be granted your freedom.”

The Hegemons and Emperors instantly grew excited. Freedom? Their endless days of imprisonment had finally come to an end? Without hesitating at all, the Hegemons and Emperors instantly swore the required lifeblood oaths.

“You can go now.” Ning dissolved all the other bindings on them, then casually ‘tossed’ them out of his Azureflower Estate through spacetime tunnels, scattering them throughout the Sixteen Realmverses Alliance!

“Get in here.” Ning then drew the entire Azureflower Estate into one of his holding treasures. The most valuable thing within the Azureflower Estate was the Autarch’s stone dais. Even at Ning’s level of power, it would take him an extremely long period of time and many precious materials to create a similar dais. He didn’t have the time to waste on something like that! However, the stone dais was the nexus of the entire Azureflower Estate; if he wanted to ensure its marvelous effects remained active, he would have to take the entire estate along with it.

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Whoosh. After the estate disappeared, the local spacetime continuum went back to normal. The white-robed Ning put his black scabbard on his back, then used his Spacetime Sword Dao to tear a tunnel straight towards the Quintessence of the Chaosverse. He was now able to move far faster than he had in the past; even amongst Autarchs, he ranked close to the top in speed.

“Now, back to the Three Realms.” The golden-robed Ning returned to the Three Realms. This avatar-body was perfectly built; it had been ‘born’ with 50% of Ning’s power, and as time went on it would improve at a fairly fast rate.

The Quintessence. Within the massive sea of prime essences.

Within a wooden cottage which ‘floated’ within this sea. The seven most supremely powerful leaders of the cultivator civilizations were gathered in this cottage – the six Autarchs and Ji Ning. The other five Autarchs and Ning had all come in person, while Autarch Mogg had sent his avatar.

“Ahahaha! I’m in such a good mood right now. Our civilization has finally gained another Autarch-class figure!” Autarch Ekong roared with laughter. “I must say, Omega Daos really are awesome. Darknorth, Titanos told me that your mastery of spacetime is second only to Mogg’s and Skyfeeder’s? And that your prowess in illusions is second only to Stonerule’s?”

“I simply infused the Dao of Spacetime into my Dao of the Sword,” Ning said. “The only reason they are so strong is because my Eternal Omega Sword Dao is fueling them.”

As he infused more and more Daos into his Dao of the Sword, Ning was beginning to become extremely well-rounded. For example, Autarch Stonerule was the master of the ‘Illusion Daobirth Essence’; Ning’s Illusion Sword Dao was naturally inferior to it, but superior to the techniques of the other Autarchs.

Mogg and Skyfeeder had respectively mastered the ‘Space Daobirth Essence’ and the ‘Time Daobirth Essence’. Ning’s mastery of spacetime was second only to the two of them.

As for actual combat prowess? The Dao of the Sword was a Dao meant for combat. Even amongst Autarchs, it stood at close to the apex of power.

“We’re only skilled in one aspect each; it is very, very hard to gain a second Daobirth,” Autarch Bolin sighed. “I have spent countless years ruminating on the nature of life and death, but I’ve only made modest gains in this regard. You, however, are able to continue to improve your mastery of many other Daos. I truly do envy you, Darknorth.”

“Darknorth, you’ve only been training for a short period of time. I imagine there are many areas which you can still improve on, right?” Autarch Titanos asked.

Ning nodded. The Dao of Karma, the Dao of Numerancy, the Dao of Formations... he had yet to infuse any of them into his Dao of the Sword. There was indeed a great deal of room for improvement.

“The reason why I didn’t want to make my status public was partially because I want to keep training, under 100x temporal acceleration, for another 10,000 chaos cycles. That translates into 1,000,000 chaos cycles of training time, and I should be able to improve significantly during that period of time. It would put me in a better position to deal with the Sithe,” Ning said.

“Hm. 100x temporal acceleration? That’s way too slow. Skyfeeder?” Autarch Titanos looked at Autarch Skyfeeder. “We’ll have to ask you to help Darknorth out.”

“Very well. I can grant you 1000x temporal acceleration,” Autarch Skyfeeder said.

Ning was surprised and delighted to hear this. He had reached the Autarch level of power; accelerating time for him was extremely difficult! Ning himself was able to maintain a rate of 100x while keeping his power consumption stable. 1000x? That would be far too difficult.

“We’ll do it here in the Quintessence, where the energy reserves are limitless. It’ll cost me half of my energy reserves, but I’ll be able to maintain a rate of 1000x temporal acceleration for you.” Autarch Skyfeeder looked at Ning, then smiled: “The rest of us have long ago hit our limits. There’s no way for us to grow stronger, but you are a different story. If you can improve, you need to do so as quickly as possible. None of us can be sure when the Sithe will launch the final war.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded. If he was given 1000x temporal acceleration, he would have more than enough time to achieve his goals.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 13: A New Type of Energy

Rumble...

The awesome energy of the prime essences was pooled here in vast, interconnecting lakes. There was a lake filled with the prime essence of lightning, a lake filled with the prime essence of destruction... the different lakes all represented different prime essences, and together they formed the vast sea.

The power here was truly limitless.

A white-robed youth was standing in the center, surrounded by the lake filled with the prime essence of water. Boundless amounts of energy poured towards him and were all absorbed in turn.

“Stonerule, Darknorth’s heartworld is probably on par with yours,” Autarch Ekong chuckled. The six Autarchs were standing next to each other and watching from afar.

“His heartworld was formed using the Eternal Omega Sword Dao as the focus. Of course it is in par with mine!” Autarch Stonerule said. He was the only one of the six who had an Autarch-class heartworld.

“I really envy you guys,” Autarch Titanos sighed.

“You? Envy me? I envy you!” Autarch Stonerule smirked.

“Titanos, at least you once were a Heartforce Emperor! The rest of us weren’t able to truly stabilize our heartworlds at all,” Autarch Skyfeeder said. “And you control the mighty Karma Daobirth Essence; in terms of power, you are the strongest of us six. How can you have the audacity to say you envy us? I’m hurt! Hurry up and bring out your finest food and wine as compensation.”

Autarch Titanos stared at her wide-eyed. “Are you kidding? It took me ages to build up my collection. Don’t even think of touching it.”

Heartforce Cultivators had to follow a different path in making their breakthroughs. Those who followed other Daos would reconstitute their divine power and Immortal energy, but Heartforce Cultivators relied on expanding their heartworlds. The more stable a heartworld was, the larger it could become and the more powerful the Heartforce Cultivator would be.

Once the entire heartworld became large and stable enough to become perpetual, the Heartforce Cultivator would be able to step into the Emperor level! This was why almost all Heartforce Emperors had reached Hegemonic levels of power. Stabilizing a heartworld enough to make it eternal was extremely difficult! The ones who succeeded were almost all Hegemons, with just the tiniest of fractions being at the Archon level of power.

Of course, there were many who dabbled as Heartforce Cultivators. Bertulu, Winesage, Ning... all of them trained both as normal cultivators and as Heartforce Cultivators. This was generally true for all truly talented cultivators!

Early on, Autarch Skyfeeder had trained as a Heartforce Cultivator as well. However, after she completed the Daomerge and gained Hegemony via the Dao of Time, she discovered that her Dao of Time was not a Dao that could produce a stable, perpetual heartworld. She had thus been forced to abandon the path of heartforce, and after 108,000 chaos cycles her unstable heartworld came to a natural end.

Of the living Autarchs, Autarch Titanos was the most powerful. He had reached Hegemony via the Dao of Karma, and his Dao of Karma was capable of allowing his heartworld to become eternal. In other words, he had been both a Karma Hegemon and a Heartforce Hegemon! Alas, when he made the breakthrough which enabled him to become an Autarch, his heartworld wasn't able to expand alongside any further. He too was forced to abandon the path of heartforce as he allowed his Dao of Karma to transform into the Karma Daobirth Essence.

"Omega Daos really are the best," Autarch Titanos sighed. "Only Omega Daos can be considered truly perfect Daos. Even the heartworlds formed by them are the best."

"Yes, only Omega Daos can allow for truly perfect heartworlds," Autarch Stonerule said. His Illusion Daobirth Essence allowed for his heartworld to reach the Autarch level, but his heartworld still couldn't be considered 'perfect'. This was why he remained slightly weaker than Autarch Titanos.

The Azureflower Estate was floating right next to Autarch Skyfeeder's wood cottage within the vast sea of prime essences. Autarch Skyfeeder had begun the process of keeping time accelerated at a rate of 1000x for the entire Azureflower Estate, while Ning trained within the second hall inside.

He had already finished his heartworld breakthrough. Now, it would be a slow process of training.

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Back in the Three Realms.

"Whew. I've finally finished." The golden-robed Ning stared at the six golden swords before him, a pleased smile on his face. He had spent over fifty thousand years to create these swords, and the materials he had used were superior to the ones which had been used to create the original Northbow swords! Back then, Ning had been comparatively weak; how could he possibly acquire as many precious

materials as he had now? The materials he now had were far superior to what was available back then. If Ning wasn't such a perfectionist, he would've been able to complete these six Universe weapons within just a thousand years.

"Unfortunately, they haven't been developing by my side for countless aeons like the Northbow swords. I've done as much as I can, but they are still a teensy bit weaker than the Northbow swords." The golden-robed Ning smiled. "Still, they are more than good enough for killing Sithe. From this day forth, you shall be named... the Northmoon swords."

Swish. Swish. Swish. All six golden swords flew into the sheath on Ning's back. He was now dressed in golden robes, carried golden swords on his back, and had a body formed from so many precious materials that it was comparable to Universe treasures in strength.

"Time to expand my heartworld." The golden-robed Ning took a single step forwards, then departed from the Three Realms and reappeared within the Great Dark just outside the Flamedragon Realmverse.

Although the Great Dark was quite distant from the Three Realms, the golden-robed Ning still released his godsense and kept it spread across the entire Flamedragon Realmverse. The Sithe danger was all-encompassing, and Ning didn't want to let his guard down.

"Let it begin." The golden-robed Ning began to expand its heartworld as well. Here in the Great Dark, he was able to draw upon a large amount of energy from an extremely wide region with impunity. Ning had already scanned this part of the Great Dark to ensure that there were no living creatures here.

"At this rate of absorption, it'll take me roughly thirty billion years to finish expanding my heartworld." The golden-robed Ning sat down within the endless Great Dark, beginning to slowly train as he absorbed power from within it.

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Time flowed on like water. Over 120 chaos cycles went past in the blink of an eye.

"I've finally completed the Tenth Chaos Seal." The white-robed Ning had a smile on his face as he turned to glance at the nearby white-haired elder: "Autarch Awakener would probably be ecstatic, were he still alive."

"Master's final wishes have finally been completed." The white-haired elder was extremely excited.

"Let's start." Ning immediately began to use the perfect, complete technique on himself. The previous azureflower technique he had used was incomplete and flawed. Autarch Awakener had actually fixed those flaws in his private version, but had intentionally released a flawed version in order to separate the gold from the dross.

"Out with the old..." With but a thought, Ning sent his will descending deep into his sea of consciousness, where an azure flower was slowly swaying. When Ning's will descended, the flower suddenly began to decay and break apart. A moment later, the azure flower had completely vanished within the sea of consciousness.

“...and in with the new.” Ning began to redeploy the true, complete, and perfect technique. It was now suitable for even Autarchs to use, although Ning wasn’t completely sure as to whether or not it could convert Autarch-level divine power and Immortal energy.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. The various chaos seals began to manifest within Ning’s sea of consciousness. Ten of them appeared in succession, and they began to interlay atop of each other, solidifying into an azure seed.

The azure seed popped open as a sprout emerged from it. The sprout began to grow, resulting in a series of dazzlingly beautiful leaves appearing, with a little closed bud appearing in their midst. The bud slowly grew larger and larger, and it looked as though it was opening up but not quite ready to fully bloom just yet. The beautiful azure flower emanated an aura of ineffable mystery, and it was many times more dazzling than the previous one. It gently swayed there in Ning’s mind, surrounded by countless green leaves.

This was the perfect azureflower technique which arose from the Ten Chaos Seals.

Strands of divine power, Immortal energy, and heartforce all flowed into the azure flower, which was able to easily take them in and then transform them into a new type of energy. As soon as this new type of energy was created, Ning felt extremely comfortable.

Whoosh. Under Ning’s control, this new type of energy quickly filled every inch of his body. Crack! Pop! Ning’s muscles, tendons, and blood began to change and transform.

This was a new form of energy, a perfect form of energy that vastly surpassed divine power and Immortal ki. As a result, it could be used to create a more perfect body as well! It could be used for close combat, could control magic treasures from afar, and was incredibly strong.

Ning’s physical body was quickly remade by this new form of energy. He withdrew his Immortal ki back into his Jindan chaos region, leaving only this new energy pulsing through his veins.

“This is the new type of energy which Autarch Awakener hoped for. I shall call it...” Ning paused for a moment, then smiled. “Mana.” He opened his eyes, his entire body feeling clean, refreshed, and comfortable as the mana flowed through him. This new power, mana, was a thousand times stronger than Emperor-class divine power or Immortal ki. When he used mana to execute his Eternal Omega Sword Dao, the power of his strikes would probably increase by another twenty to thirty percent.

The reason it ‘only’ increased by that amount was because at Ning’s level, the power of one’s attacks was chiefly determined by one’s insights into the Dao. Personal strength only played a fairly minor role. For ‘mana’ to improve an Autarch’s power by 30% was absolutely incredible!

“Mana... so it has finally been completed.” The white-haired elder was very excited. “Master was unable to perfect it, and so he never even came up with a real name for this new type of energy. Now, it has finally been completed.”

From this day forth, ‘mana’ was born. In the future, it would slowly be spread throughout the Chaosverse and supplant divine power and Immortal ki as the most important type of energy a cultivator could train in.

Completing the Ten Chaos Seals had been fairly easy. Now, Ning would need to go into deep meditation to work on his other Daos.

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After 360 chaos cycles in secluded meditation, Ning fused the Dao of Light into his Sword Dao and created the Light Sword Dao.

After 430 chaos cycles in secluded meditation, Ning mastered the Dark Sword Dao.

After 3,200 chaos cycles in secluded meditation, Ning learned how to fuse his Dark Sword Dao together with his Light Sword Dao into a new technique he named the Cycle Sword Dao.

After 11,100 chaos cycles in secluded meditation, Ning fused the Dao of Formations into his Sword Dao and created the Sword Formation Dao.

Ning continued to fuse one Dao after another into his Dao of the Sword. Finally, after 3,900,000 chaos cycles, Ning successfully integrated his Dao of Karma into the Dao of the Sword and created the Karma Sword Dao. This took Ning the most time of all to complete.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 14: The Calm Before the Storm

Ji Ning continued to train, and nearly 6 million chaos cycles went past in the blink of an eye. Autarch Skyfeeder continuously maintained a rate of 1000x temporal acceleration for the Azureflower Estate.

One day, the gates to the estate suddenly swung open. The white-robed Ning walked out, black sheath over his back, and Autarch Skyfeeder halted the temporal acceleration process.

“You’ve finished?” Autarch Skyfeeder left her wooden cabin and walked barefoot through the air towards Ning.

“Thank you for everything, Autarch Skyfeeder,” Ning said gratefully.

“A minor matter. The stronger you become, the better off the entire cultivator civilization shall be,” Autarch Skyfeeder said with a smile. “And besides, it only took me 6,000 chaos cycles of real time. That’s nothing to me.”

“It was 6,000 for you, but to me it was 6 million,” Ning said with a sigh. It truly had been an extremely long period of time for him, and he had experienced it in its entirety. He had completely focused on cultivating, having emptied his mind of all other thoughts.

In the end, he had successfully mastered everything he wanted to master. The most time-consuming had been the Karma Sword Dao, and it had taken him nearly 3 million chaos cycles to complete it. Next was the Numerancy Sword Dao, which should’ve been just as difficult, but since he had already mastered the Karma Sword Dao he had managed to speed up the process a bit and had completed it in roughly 2 million chaos cycles.

Karma and Numerancy... both were extremely difficult to master. All the other Daos were simpler, with some taking a few dozen chaos cycles at most.

“How did your training go?” Skyfeeder asked.

“I’ve advanced as much as I can,” Ning said. “Based on my theories, I should be able to merge all the other Daos into the Autarch-level Omega Dao, but as of right now I still don’t know what that breakthrough would look like.”

“Going from Emperorhood to Autarchy has always been a difficult task,” Skyfeeder said with a smile. “Everything shall be as fate wills it. Based on what I know, the Sithe Chaosverse actually has quite a few Omega Emperors of the Sword, but all of them have remained trapped at that level.”

“Makes sense.” Ning nodded. He had reviewed the memories of many Sithe Emperors, and so he had come to learn quite a few things. All information regarding the Omega Daos themselves had been sealed, but there had been a few memories regarding the Omega Emperors. This was why he had come out of cultivation. It was probably impossible to become an Omega Autarch through secluded meditation. In fact, it was actually more likely that this breakthrough would come naturally as one lived an ordinary life! The Dao could be found in all things, after all, as all things were linked together.

It was true that putting yourself in a life-or-death situation could be even more effective, but then you ran the risk of failing and dying. The Autarch’s generally wouldn’t put themselves in such great danger without a very good reason, because their deaths could destabilize the entire cultivator civilization. In fact, it would impact the entire Chaosverse itself!

“Oh, right. I used Autarch Awakener’s original energy-cultivation technique to create an even more profound one,” Ning said. “Anyone can train in the new [Azureflower] technique and use it to convert divine power, Immortal ki, and heartforce into a new type of energy! This will greatly strengthen both body and soul. Give it a try, Skyfeeder. Let’s see if the technique is capable of transforming Autarch-class divine power and Immortal ki.”

“Autarch-class?” Skyfeeder felt rather excited at the prospect.

“I’m not sure if it’ll work,” Ning admitted with a chuckle, “But it was able to transform mine, so perhaps it’ll be able to transform yours as well.”

“Let me give it a try,” Skyfeeder said eagerly. At their level, it was extremely difficult to become even a tiny bit more powerful than before.

Ning handed over a jade slip. Skyfeeder accepted it, then memorized the information within it. This technique was extremely profound, but it only encompassed ten seals and so the amount of information needed to express it wasn’t too excessive. It was truly a highly refined and distilled technique. The Ten Chaos Seals were capable of transforming into countless other seals, but so long as you memorized the ten basic seals themselves, you would have memorized the entire technique.

Rumble... the awesome energy of the Quintessence suddenly parted, avoiding the area around Autarch Skyfeeder as her aura gradually began to change. Her very skin seemed to flicker with light. Clearly, her body was being reconstituted.

A short while later, she turned to smile at Ning. “It can indeed convert Autarch-level divine power and Immortal ki, purifying both to a great degree!” As she spoke, she waved her hand, causing spacetime around her to twist into knots. She nodded slowly. “When I use this new energy to activate my Time

Daobirth Essence, the power is increased by 30%. I can also sense that my soul and truesoul are more stable as well, while my body is now comparable to Universe treasures.”

Previously, her body had been created through divine power. Now, her body was created by the far more distilled energy known as ‘mana’, making it just as tough as a Universe weapon. The same was true for Ning’s body as well.

“Hurry up and inform Titanos and the others about this amazing technique,” Autarch Skyfeeder said hurriedly.

“I was planning to, I just wanted to let you try it out first, Skyfeeder.” Ning smiled, then immediately notified the other five Autarchs through the message talisman.

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Soon, all the other Autarchs came rushing over. Autarch Mogg, of course, only sent over his avatar. Ning provided them each with a complete set of the [Azureflower] technique, and they all found that after their energies were converted, they were now 30% more powerful than they had been in the past.

“Awakener had slaved away at this technique for so long... and now you, Darknorth, have finally completed it.” Autarch Titanos let out a sigh. “All of us have grown stronger thanks to this technique. Now that we also have a ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique, the cultivator civilizations shall be able to produce far more Emperors and Hegemons in the future. Given enough time, we’ll probably see many new Autarchs as well.”

“Time is exactly what we don’t have,” Autarch Mogg said. “If we had another ten million chaos cycles, sure; we’d probably have a large number of new Hegemons and maybe even ten new Autarchs. But I doubt we’ll be given that chance.”

The ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique would allow some truly talented figures who had failed the Daomerge due to having made the tiniest of errors a second chance at the Daomerge. If they succeeded the second time, they would become Hegemons. The more Hegemons the Chaosverse had, the more Autarchs would eventually be born as well.

“There’s no way the Sithe would just sit idly and watch our Chaosverse grow that much.” Autarch Stonerule frowned.

“Screw them. We’ve locked them all away!” Autarch Ekong said. “Sure, we suspect that they might be able to escape our seal, but even if they have, the fact that they have still been biding their time instead of attacking means that they are planning something else. Let’s start teaching these techniques to as many deserving cultivators as we can. If we can produce more and more powerful experts, the Sithe will grow restless and might end up launching their attacks ahead of schedule, before they are truly ready.”

“I agree. Let’s force their hand,” Autarch Titanos said. “If they really are sealed away, we’ll have nothing to fear and can use this opportunity to grow stronger; if they aren’t, we’ll disrupt their plans. Either way, we win.”

It didn’t matter if the Sithe were truly sealed away or not. They could not delay the teaching of the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique any longer.

“For Daolords who have failed the Daomerge, the sooner they begin using the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique the better,” Ning said. “If they wait until their truesoul actually breaks apart before trying to fuse the pieces together, it’ll be extremely difficult.”

Ning was the creator of the technique and understood it better than anyone else. He also had a perfect Dao-heart. This was why he had been able to reverse even the complete collapse of his truesoul! The vast majority of Daolords, however, had far weaker Dao-hearts than Ning. If their truesouls collapsed, not even the [Truesoul Everlasting] technique would necessarily be able to save them.

“Haha, I don’t think anyone would be dumb enough to actually wait until their truesoul collapsed before using the technique, right?” Autarch Titanos said.

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Ning and the others eventually went their separate ways, returning to their various residences. Ning went back to the Three Realms, living a life of ease and comfort. He didn’t spend too much time analyzing the Dao of the Sword. Instead, he emptied his mind and purified his soul, spending his time on calligraphy, art, and gardening.

After 1,200 chaos cycles... Ninedust attempted the Daomerge. He succeeded on his very first try! He didn’t even need to use the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique Ning had prepared for him. Ninedust had built up an incredibly deep and stable foundation before attempting the Daomerge. Not only had he used a Voidsea Jade Seal, Ning had also given him many techniques and an Incense-Spirit Fruit!

Ning quietly went to visit Ninedust by himself, offering his congratulations. The fact that he was still alive remained a secret! Ning’s success meant that their Chaosverse had just gained two new Autarch-class combatants due to Ning having such a powerful avatar. More importantly, Ning was different from the other Autarchs in that he was skilled in many different areas. He had his Spacetime Sword Dao, his Karma Sword Dao, his Cycle Sword Dao, his Numerancy Sword Dao, and more.

This made Ning practically flawless, able to cope with any situation. Two new Autarch-class combatants who had no flaws at all... once they were unleashed, they would definitely give the Sithe a nice big ‘surprise’.

After congratulating Ninedust, Ning went back to the Three Realms and continued his relaxed life. The Otherverse Lords and Hegemons in every single realmverse were all granted the ‘Truesoul Everlasting’ technique, and they were told to secretly teach the technique to deserving Daolords who had failed the Daomerge. Without exception, they were admonished to try and keep this hidden as best they could. The longer they could hide this from the Sithe, the better!

Time slowly continued