

Desolate 1431

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 15: The Engine of Destruction

Within Autarch Titanos' residence. Nine strange parts were hovering in the air within his private study, and Autarch Titanos was frowning thoughtfully as he analyzed them. Even the two fleshy antennae on top of his head were drooping in a pensive manner.

Autarch Titanos had spent more time studying and understanding Sithe treasures than anyone else in this entire Chaosverse! He knew more than any other cultivator, and he had created quite a few weapons based off of those treasures, some of which were suitable for cultivators to use. Autarch Titanos was eagerly anticipating the creation of even more. "Harrumph! We are no longer the cultivators of old. We have many unique weapons of our own now, and even our ordinary Emperors are far more difficult to deal with than the ones of the past."

Each Autarch followed a different, separate path. Autarch Titanos was the master of the Karma Daobirth Essence, which was arguably the most difficult Dao aside from the Omega Daos. As a result, he was the best-suited for ruminating on difficult, complex mechanisms. He spent his time creating many unusual weapons, allowing their Hegemons and Emperors to unleash tremendous power in battle. This would make it much more difficult for the Sithe to slay the Emperors of this Chaosverse.

If he could raise the overall power of their forces, they would have a greater chance at gaining victory in the upcoming war... and the countless aeons he had spent in research had resulted in many splendid achievements indeed!

"Eh?" The two fleshy antennae on top of Autarch Titanos' head suddenly shot up straight, and a sharp look flickered through his eyes. "This is..." Autarch Titanos could vaguely sense that the entire Quintessence was somehow in grave danger. An invisible, destructive force had suddenly cast a shadow over the entire Chaosverse.

"Destruction... the destruction of the entire Chaosverse?" Autarch Titanos turned slightly pale. "The source of this destruction is coming from that direction!"

Long ago, the Quintessence had sent a similar warning to all of the Autarchs, ensuring that they knew how dangerous the 'Sithe' were. Now, for the second time, they had received this warning!

"Could we be facing a new threat, something aside from the Sithe?" Autarch Titanos was slightly panicked. There was no way the Quintessence's warning could possibly be in error, and so he abandoned all of his experiments and immediately exited his laboratory, then tore a tunnel through spacetime towards the source of the danger.

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The handsome but sorrowful-looking white-haired Autarch Bolin was standing in a wild, untamed land. He stared at the earthen dwelling before him and the mortals inside of it. There were a total of three children within.

“Now these kids are rather interesting. Are you ready? Ready to transcend life and death and become a brand new, powerful type of creature?” Autarch Bolin looked at the oldest child, the nine-year-old, with a hint of anticipation in his eyes. He had just prepared a new... experiment.

Autarch Bolin had spent many aeons treading the line between life and death, scrying the mysteries of this great cycle. He hadn't come close to mastering the Samsara Daobirth Essence, but he had other plans he was focused on.

He wanted to create a truly perfect lifeform! The Aeonians had been one of his many experiments, but they weren't truly perfect. He wanted to create perfect beings which were on par with Sourcewalkers and Chaos Primordials in might. If the cultivators could produce a large number of 'perfect' beings and allowed them to propagate, they would have gained a powerful new army which made battling against the Sithe easier.

Suddenly, Autarch Bolin's face turned pale. “Danger?” He immediately abandoned his new experiment. He could sense on a subconscious level that the entire Quintessence was shivering in terror, as though a terrifying destructive force had just appeared in front of it which could tear it apart.

The prime essences of the Chaosverse were awesome and powerful, but they were also quite weak. This was because they weren't truly sentient, nor were they able to defend themselves. Thus, they had to rely upon the Autarchs and the cultivators to protect them against the Sithe. Once the cultivators were defeated, the Quintessence would be like meat on the chopping block for the Sithe to butcher as they pleased.

Whoosh. Autarch Bolin immediately tore through spacetime and departed.

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Within the Three Realms. Brightheart Island. Ning was seated facing Autumn Leaf. The two were playing chess, while Brightmoon was watching from nearby.

“Hm.” Autumn Leaf pondered her next move.

Ning held a small black gourd in his hand. Every so often, he would take a swig from it. After Autumn Leaf finally made her move, he casually made his own move as well. After mastering the Numerancy Sword Dao, Ning was arguably the number one master of Numerancy and divinations in the entire Chaosverse. Perhaps Autarch Titanos, who was the master of the Karma Daobirth Essence, might be on par with him, but no one else! Chess? Of course Ning couldn't play too seriously. If he did, it'd ruin the whole game.

“Aunt Autumn Leaf, that's not right! If you do that, you are going to be in serious trouble.” Brightmoon shook her head, reaching out to prevent Autumn Leaf from making the move she wanted to make.

“Then what should I do next?” Autumn Leaf immediately pulled her chess piece back.

“Ahem! For a bystander to remain silent is the way of gentlemen.” Ning glanced sideways at Brightmoon, then looked at Autumn Leaf. “And since when did we allow take-backs in chess?”

“I didn't put my piece down yet. It doesn't count as a take-back,” Autumn Leaf said immediately.

“And I'm not a gentleman, I'm a woman!” Brightmoon rebutted.

Speechless, Ning chose to continue drinking his wine instead of arguing. The two of them would wrack their brains over every move while he just played casually, but he'd still win nine out of ten games. This was on purpose, of course. If you won every time, who would be willing to play with you?

"Brightmoon, when are you planning to begin your Daomerge?" Ning asked.

"Not anytime soon," Brightmoon said. "It'll definitely be after Patriarch Subhuti."

"After we finish this game of chess, I need to talk to you about something," Ning said. He was planning to transmit the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique to her. Right now, they were extremely cautious and careful in transmitting this technique, generally only teaching it to the most incredibly talented Daolords of the Fourth Step. In each case, they would require the Daolord to swear a lifeblood oath which would cover many things.

For example, the Daolord could only attempt the Daomerge in a place where his or her aura would be completely hidden. That way, in the event that the Daolord failed the Daomerge and had to use the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique to repair his truesoul, no one would be the wiser. In fact, no one would even know that he had attempted the Daomerge! This was the best way to keep things secret.

In short, they did everything they could to keep this hidden from the Sithe. They'd hide it for as long as they could! They knew that once the Sithe spies found out that the cultivators possessed the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique, they would immediately be able to guess that Ning was still alive.

There was really nothing they could do about this. They couldn't keep the 'Truesoul Everlasting' technique hidden from all cultivators just to ensure that Ning's continued survival remained a secret, right? This was a technique which would strengthen civilization as a whole.

"Eh?" Ning suddenly frowned midway through his next move. Given the power of his godsense and his connection to the prime essences of the Chaosverse, he was naturally able to sense a terrifying danger suddenly manifest... a danger which could very well destroy the entire Quintessence itself.

"What's going on? Has another civilization aside from the Sithe invaded us as well?" Ning turned pale.

Whoosh! The golden-robed Ning which had been roving the outside realm almost instantly tore through spacetime and hurried towards the source of the danger. The golden-robed avatar now had only 80% of the true Ning's power, but it must be remembered that when compared, Ning was now at least 60% stronger than he was back when his truesoul was crumbling! This was because he had first gained Emperor-class energy, then transformed it into mana! After another six million chaos cycles of cultivation, he had infused many new Daos into his Sword Dao. As a result, the avatar-Ning was now much more powerful than 'Daolord Ning' had been.

In terms of raw power, Ning was ranked at the top of the list amongst the Autarchs. Even Autarch Titanos was slightly inferior to him, as Titanos wasn't as well-rounded as Ning was! Ning's avatar was terrifyingly strong.

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The weaker cultivators felt nothing at all; the only people in the Chaosverse who sensed the danger were Ning and the six Autarchs, and all of them arrived. Autarch Mogg sent his avatar as he needed to

stand guard over the Sithelands. The other five Autarchs all left their avatars in the Sithelands and came in person. Ning was extremely confident in his own power, and so he sent his avatar as well.

In truth, Autarchs would generally send their avatars to deal with any dangerous situations. This was because if the avatar died, they could easily remake a new one! If their true bodies died, the Autarchs would be dead for good.

Riiiiip. Ning tore through spacetime and arrived in a place within the Great Dark. He immediately saw Autarch Ekong.

“Darknorth.” The muscular Autarch Ekong was dressed in his usual loose robes. He had been the first to arrive, as he had been the closest to this location. Ning was the second to arrive.

“What’s going on?” Ning strode through the void towards him.

“There’s no one here save us.” Autarch Ekong pointed off into the distance. “The danger is coming from over there.”

Ning could sense it as well. Far off in the distance, there was an enormous silver vortex that was slowly swiveling in place. This silver vortex was so gigantic that it was vastly greater than an ordinary realmverse in size. Ning was able to see through to the very center of the silver vortex, where he saw a giant, ancient sphere-shaped object that was the size of a realmverse. It was riddled with countless holes, but Ning was unable to see through them to the insides of this sphere. All he could sense was that it was filled with boundless danger.

The giant sphere simply sat there in the darkness, furiously devouring the primordial chaos around it. The silver vortex around it represented all of the energy which it was draining from the surrounding area. Even the endless darkness itself was being swallowed up by it.

Just looking at the thing caused Ning and Autarch Ekong to feel a sense of dread.

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 16: Going Inside

“Where did this thing come from?” Ji Ning stared at the titanic sphere located at the very center of that giant silver vortex. At his level, he was able to see at a glance that this terrifying celestial object was the source of the threat to the entire Chaosverse.

Everything within the Chaosverse, be it the emptiness of space, the endless Great Dark, or the countless living beings, were all part of the Chaosverse. In life and in death, they remained parts of the Chaosverse. Their deaths would not weaken the Chaosverse.

However... if their energies were somehow swallowed away, this would in fact harm the prime essences! The Sithe, for example, wanted to kill as many Autarchs and Hegemons as possible, then draw away their truesoul fragments and cause the prime essences to weaken. After the Chaosverse was weakened to a sufficient extent, the Sithe would have a chance at binding and controlling the entire Chaosverse.

All things were part of the Chaosverse. Destroying and devouring the souls of ordinary mortals would also weaken the Chaosverse, but doing this would be too slow and inefficient! The Sithe soul-eater technique could only be used to swallow truesouls that had been destroyed in extremely close proximity. It would probably take the Sithe tens of millions of chaos cycles to slowly do this to the countless living beings in a single realmverse!

This was why they had chosen to act against the Autarchs and the Hegemons instead. And now? This hole-riddled, realmverse-sized sphere was swallowing away even the darkness of the Great Dark! It was somehow devouring the darkness in a way that completely destroyed it, causing the Chaosverse to forever lose its energy.

This wasn't an issue in the short term, but given enough time it would cause the Chaosverse to suffer grave injuries, and possibly even weaken the prime essences enough for the Sithe to bind them.

"Where the hell did this terrifying celestial object come from? Who made it?" Ning was puzzled.

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Eventually, the other Autarchs began to arrive as well. All of them stared at the behemoth sphere for a long period of time.

"Its enormous and riddled with holes, almost like a beehive," Autarch Titanos said. "Its powerful aura reminds me of the aura of the Sithe heartlands! It was that very aura of danger which made us hesitate to go inside and instead opt to seal it away. This thing reminds me of it."

"Yes, but there are some differences between it and the Sithe heartlands," Autarch Stonerule said. "The Sithe heartlands hold an energy generator which powers many of their Daoguard Towers. This mysterious hive, however, is continuously swallowing and destroying the energy of the surrounding area! The more it swallows, the more our Chaosverse loses and the weaker our Chaosverse becomes."

"Why did it suddenly appear here? There's no way our Chaosverse would've naturally given birth to such a terrifying thing," Autarch Skyfeeder said.

"This is a Sithe trump card," Autarch Titanos said.

"The Sithe?" Ning and the others all turned to look at Autarch Titanos.

"Are you absolutely certain?" Ning asked. "Can it possibly be from another civilization?"

"It is Sithe," Autarch Titanos said with absolute certainty. "I've spent countless aeons analyzing Sithe weaponry. As soon as I took a close look at it, I could tell that this behemoth hive is actually a single vast weapon! It was created for the express purpose of devouring and destroying the energy of the Chaosverse, which would cause the Chaosverse to weaken."

"How can anyone create such a gigantic, powerful weapon?" Autarch Bolin asked.

"It is overwhelming. I can feel that it is on a completely different level from Exalt-class Daoguard Towers. Not even the strongest Sithe weapons we faced during the Dawn War could even come close to comparing with this thing." Autarch Mogg found it just as hard to believe that this realmverse-sized object was a manufactured weapon.

“The Sithe heartlands contain an energy generator which powers their Daoguard Towers,” Autarch Titanos said solemnly, “While this titanic, terrifying weapon also holds an energy generator within it, which is what allows it to function and forcibly tear away energy from the Chaosverse and devour it. That’s why I said it reminded me of the Sithe heartlands.”

Ning and the others were all rather shocked. The Sithe heartlands had been created at incredible cost. This thing before them was apparently on the same level of power?

“The Sithe have been biding their time for countless aeons. We should’ve expected their first move to be an extraordinary one,” Autarch Bolin said with a grim smile.

“We’ve been making preparations ever since the last war concluded. It seems the Sithe have kept themselves busy as well,” Autarch Stonerule agreed.

“Let them come. We’ll handle anything they can dish out.” A murderous look flickered through Autarch Mogg’s eyes. The danger which had just manifested before them had stirred all of the Autarchs, awakening their combative instincts which had lain dormant for so long.

The final war against the Sithe had yet to truly begin, but the Sithe had already made an absolutely terrifying opening gambit!

“We have to destroy it, and we need to move fast,” the golden-robed Ning said. “But... how? I can vaguely sense that this behemoth hive is filled with tremendous danger. Even if all seven of us go, we still wouldn’t necessarily be able to successfully deal with it.”

“The behemoth hive is definitely dangerous.” Autarch Titanos glanced at the other six. “And what if the Sithe suddenly launch the war after our avatars go inside and then are somehow trapped? Only half of our total combat power would be available to fight in the war, and we could very well be defeated.”

“Right.”

“We can’t all go inside! We need to be ready for the war to breakout.”

“How many of us should go inside?” The Autarchs and Ning began to discuss this matter.

Adding in their avatars, they had a total of fourteen Autarch-class combatants! Based on their previous experiences, they had to have at least ten Autarch-class combatants in order to keep a handle on the situation and not be caught flat-footed. However, given how long the Sithe had been biding their time, it was entirely possible that they would unleash something completely unexpected. Even ten Autarch-class combatants wouldn’t necessarily be enough.

“Let’s send in two to take a look,” Autarch Titanos said. “That way, we can still be at close to peak power if the war breaks out.”

“Who should go inside?”

“I’ll go inside!” Ning was the first to volunteer.

“You, Darknorth?” Autarch, Titanos, Bolin, and the others all looked towards Ning.

Ning stared at the enormous silver vortex and the behemoth hive at its heart. “We don’t know anything about what this thing holds or what dangers might be present. We’ll probably have to destroy the entire thing in order to stop it! Of the seven of us, I am the most well-rounded and am the best at dealing with unknown dangers. I have some skill in every single Dao.”

Titanos and the others all nodded in agreement. Ning was very well-rounded and was quite skilled in every Dao. He had mastered even the Karma Sword Dao and the Numerancy Sword Dao. He was indeed the best of them in dealing with unexpected dangers.

“Very well.” They all nodded in agreement. Without question, Darknorth was going to be one of the two to go inside. He would be given the primary responsibilities for destroying this behemoth hive.

“I’ll go as well.” Autarch Mogg smiled. “I’m the master of the Space Daobirth Essence and have the keenest understanding of how space works. I’m the best at scouting out nearby dangers.”

None of the other five Autarchs disputed this. They all agreed once more. Everyone knew where their respective skills lay and who would be most effective in dealing with this behemoth hive.

“The other Autarchs should all return to their respective stations and prepare for war to break out at any time,” Autarch Titanos said. “Darknorth and Mogg, send in your avatars! I’ll stay here to stand guard and keep a watch on things, to prevent anything unexpected from happening.”

“Very well.”

“It is settled.”

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Ning and Mogg had both sent their avatars to this place, and so all they had to do was make some minor preparations before flying together towards that silver vortex. As for the other five Autarchs, they watched from afar as Ning and Mogg flew off into the distance. The five only departed after seeing the two safely enter the vortex.

“I hope they can destroy that thing,” Bolin said.

“Even if they cannot, they have to stop it from functioning,” Autarch Titanos chuckled. “I’m confident in Darknorth’s skills. Even if he fails, he should be able to get a clear sense of what lies within that behemoth hive and how it operates.”

“Right.” Ekong, Skyfeeder, and Stonerule all nodded. They could all vaguely sense that after 6 million chaos cycles of training, Darknorth was now most likely the strongest of them all... and he was also the most well-rounded!

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Space twisted around the golden-robed Ning and the tall, thin, azure-robed, scale-faced Mogg as they continued to fly forwards through a dimensional tunnel that led into the silver vortex.

The gigantic silver vortex was filled with apocalyptic power. Only Exalt-class beings would be able to just barely be capable of surviving this place. However, Mogg’s dimensional tunnel was quite stable and it brushed aside all the power which clashed against it.

“Almost there.” They continued to fly through the silver vortex, the behemoth hive slowly growing in size as they moved closer and closer towards it.

The countless tunnels covering the hive were dark and unfathomably deep. All forms of energy which entered those tunnels vanished without a trace, never to be seen again within this Chaosverse.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Ning and Mogg both descended towards the surface of the behemoth hive. The hive was protected by layers of frenzied, semi-translucent energy which furiously assaulted the two of them, but they were brushed away before they even got close. Ning and Mogg landed on the icy surface simultaneously.

This enormous weapon, the size of an entire realmverse, was so vast that ordinary Hegemons and Emperors couldn't even see it in its entirety. Ning's gaze transcended spacetime, and so he was able to see it clearly.

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 17: Autarch-Class Creatures

Ji Ning and Mogg were in no hurry to immediately rush inside the behemoth hive. Instead, they flew across its surface and began to inspect it.

Ning and Mogg were able to cross hundreds of billions of kilometers almost instantly, and they continued to fly for a full hour as they reviewed the hive up close. The hive's surface was a mixture of dark black mixed with silvery white. Black was the main color, but some strands of silvery-white energy had crystallized in certain regions. As for the tunnels, they ranged from being a hundred kilometers wide to a trillion kilometers wide.

Ning and Mogg came to a halt and descended upon the surface once more.

“We can't see anything from outside,” Ning said. “It seems we'll still have to go inside to take a look.”

“My senses are telling me that the interior isn't uniform in nature. We can't simply blink in and out of it,” Mogg said. “Our only choice is to accept the risk of flying inside.”

The two knew that the insides of this behemoth hive were undoubtedly very dangerous. The gloomy darkness was capable of swallowing all forms of energy. Any godsense or heartworld projection energies would be swallowed as well, making it impossible to scry what was inside. They had been hoping to first learn what they would be facing, but they still knew nothing after that long inspection of the surface.

“Let's go inside.” They chose an ordinary-looking tunnel that was a hundred million kilometers in diameter. There were countless tunnels like this across the surface of the behemoth hive.

Ning and Mogg stood at the edges of the tunnel, staring downwards. It was still furiously swallowing energy at an astounding pace. Ning and Mogg exchanged a glance, then flew downwards.

Whoosh! They quickly began to descend into the dark depths.

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The golden-robed Ning held two Northmoon swords at the ready as he began to rapidly descend into the abyss, while Autarch Mogg wielded a pair of long sabers.

“No wonder we couldn’t just blink inside.” Ning glanced at the walls of the abyss. Sphere-shaped spacetime bubbles dotted the walls, each of them ranging from ten thousand kilometers to over a hundred million kilometers in size. These spacetime bubbles simply hung there, connected to each other while channeling an enormous amount of power.

“Why are there so many spacetime bubbles here?” Autarch Mogg was puzzled. “Let me see what happens when I destroy one of them.”

“Be careful.” They had come here to destroy this thing. Ning naturally wouldn’t object to Mogg’s suggestion.

“Break!” Autarch Mogg let out a loud shout, sending out a mighty surge of energy that transformed into waves of folded dimensional attacks that could be seen with the naked eye. The attacks slammed against a distant spacetime bubble, causing the bubble to tremble for a few moments before bursting apart. However, nothing was held within it.

Rumble... nearby, a new spacetime bubble appeared out of nowhere. This one was exactly the same size as the previous one, roughly ten million kilometers in diameter.

“I broke one, so this thing made a new one.” Autarch Mogg frowned. “I can see at least a million of these bubbles. I can’t imagine how many the entire behemoth hive holds! I can sense how all these spacetime bubbles are linked to each other, channeling a powerful force which is used to furiously swallow everything within the outside world.”

“Let’s attack at full power and see if we can wreck them,” Ning said.

“Alright.” Mogg nodded.

Both of them were searching for clues for dealing with the hive. They could easily tell that the countless spacetime bubbles were important tools in allowing the hive to devour energy from the outside world.

The golden-robed Ning manifested three heads and six arms. Six Northmoon swords in hand, Ning began to furiously attack the surrounding spacetime bubbles with abandon via his Spacetime Sword Dao. Sword-light flashed everywhere, causing the various bubbles to be instantly destroyed on contact.

Ning also expanded his Sword Dao Domain to cover a large radius, reinforcing it with the power of his heartworld projection! Alas, the spacetime bubbles were so tough that Ning had to attack with his Spacetime Sword Dao if he wished to break them apart quickly.

Autarch Mogg manifested six arms as well. He used his Space Daobirth Essence with his six sabers, furiously destroying spacetime around him.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The two worked together to crush everything before them, almost instantly destroying over ten thousand spacetime bubbles. But... it was like they were swimming through a vast ocean, with each wave producing countless new bubbles.

They were able to destroy ten thousand spacetime bubbles in a flash, but the gloomy, dark walls of the abyss simply rippled slightly before manifesting ten thousand new bubbles. It would create as many as were destroyed!

“Halt,” Ning said.

“Why should we halt?” Autarch Mogg glanced at Ning, puzzled. “Even if we can’t destroy the spacetime bubbles faster than they are being created, at least we are forcing this thing to use up more energy. If we continue, we might be able to eventually run it dry.”

Ning shook his head. “It is useless. I can sense that the power of the destroyed bubbles is being completely absorbed by the hive, which then uses them to recreate new bubbles. The hive isn’t losing a single shred of energy during the destruction/creation process.”

“What?” Autarch Mogg was shocked. The cycle of destruction and rebirth didn’t cost any energy at all? “Then what should we do?”

“These spacetime bubbles are nothing more than a tool this hive uses,” Ning said. “There are other things that matter far more, such as its energy generator! If we can destroy its energy generator, it’ll be finished.”

“But this thing is the size of a realmverse. How are we supposed to find it?” Mogg was worried. Realmverses were enormous in size. If they tried to search without any clues, even ten chaos cycles of time wouldn’t be enough! It must be remembered that this thing was continuously devouring energy from the outside world, causing the Chaosverse to gradually weaken. They couldn’t afford to waste any time.

Ning said, “Give me some time. I can find it.”

Autarch Mogg blinked in surprise and delight. He fell silent, not wanting to disturb Ning.

Ning carefully scrutinized the countless spacetime bubbles around them. It must be remembered that Ning had infused the Dao of Formations into his Sword Dao, and so he was now highly attuned to how formations functioned and operated. These countless spacetime bubbles were clearly part of a single vast formation of incredible complexity! What he needed to do was find the critical points of this formation.

Ning wasn’t strong enough to create or set down a formation of such magnitude, but by inspecting how it functioned he would still have a chance to find its critical points.

He continued inspecting for roughly the time needed to boil a kettle of tea. He then turned to Autarch Mogg and said, “Follow me.” Ning reached out to cover Mogg and himself with his Spacetime Sword Dao, then began to advance at high speed.

“Have you already found the energy generator for the hive?” Mogg was surprised.

“I’m not sure, but I’ve definitely found one of its critical points,” Ning said.

They continuously warped through spacetime, advancing at high speed. Suddenly... whoosh! An enormous, fiery-red tail tore through spacetime, instantly appearing right in front of Ning.

“Huh?” Ning’s face changed as he immediately brandished his Northmoon sword, delivering a crushing blow.

BOOM!!! An enormous explosion rang out.

Ning could sense a surge of tremendous power pass through his Northmoon sword and into his own body. He couldn't help but stumble several steps backwards, and a look of shock appeared on his face. His Sword Dao was the most offensively lethal Dao there was. How was it that he could actually be knocked backwards in a frontal collision?!

"Grr... you finally come!" A deep voice rang out, followed by a towering form appearing and drawing near.

Ning and Mogg both stared at this new creature. It looked humanoid but was so towering as to seem like a mountain! Its entire body was covered with fiery scales, and it had a pair of sharp claws for hands, while its lower legs were reverse-jointed. It also had a long tail! It had a triangular head and a pair of cold, murderous eyes. An aura of flames was blazing across its entire body.

"What a powerful creature!" Autarch Mogg immediately sent mentally, "Darknorth, this has to be an Autarch-class void dweller."

"Autarch class?" Ning was secretly shocked. His own 'Stonefire Pearl' had been acquired from an Autarch-class lifeform the Autarchs had slain. These creatures were incredibly rare, and they were viewed as the kings of the Infinite Void outside the Chaosverses.

"I've been waiting you for a long, long time," the towering monstrosity rumbled.

"Waiting for us for a long time?" Both Ning and Mogg were rather puzzled. But right at this moment...

Boom! Boom! Two more powerful auras warped through spacetime and appeared before them. Ning and Mogg turned slightly pale as they stared at the two similarly massive creatures which had arrived. The first was a furry humanoid who only had a single eye and who radiated a vile, evil aura, while the second was something that looked like a dragon turtle. The dragon turtle was the largest creature of the three.

"You finally made it." The tall, skinny cyclopean creature spoke in a shrill voice. "We've been waiting for ages."

"There's three of us but only two of them. How are we supposed to divide them up?" the dragon turtle complained in a booming voice.

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 18: The First Clash

"I got here first! One of them is mine," the towering creature with fiery scales said as it stared at Ji Ning and Mogg.

"You only got here a half-second before we did, and you've already attacked them. Clearly, however, these two cultivator leaders are completely unharmed. Why the hell should you get a second chance?" the cyclopean creature argued shrilly.

"Are you trying to start a fight, One Eye?" The flames surrounding the fiery-scaled creature suddenly rose higher. Clearly, it was quite offended by this.

“Do you think I’m afraid of you?” the cyclopean creature laughed.

“Heh, you two are already squabbling before the battle has even begun! So far, only two of the local cultivator leaders have arrived. Let’s just kill them first! I bet the cultivators will then send more, at which point we can get rid of a third one, right?” The dragon turtle roared, “Let’s attack and kill these two!”

The three Autarch-class lifeforms spoke in thunderous voices, not disguising their intentions in the slightest. Ning and Mogg exchanged a glance upon hearing all of this.

“It sounds as though they have to kill a total of three cultivators,” Ning sent.

“Autarch-class void dwellers aren’t easily managed. The Sithe probably reached some sort of a deal with them,” Autarch Mogg sent back. “They can be considered the true rulers of the vast Infinite Void which lies beyond our Chaosverse, and they undoubtedly had to slaughter a path through their fellows in order to reach their current heights. They hardly understand the Dao at all, but they have such incredibly powerful bodies that they are very difficult to deal with. Killing three of them will be very hard!”

“I understand.” Ning nodded. All void dwellers possessed bodies that were far stronger than even the bodies of Chaos Primordials... and the Autarch-class ones were even more insanely powerful! What made them truly dangerous was that they had so little understanding of the Dao that the ‘rejection’ they suffered upon entering this Chaosverse was almost meaningless to them, as they could hardly use the Dao to begin with! They still remained terrifying forces to be reckoned with.

“We previously managed to kill two of these Autarch-class void dwellers, but that was when we surrounded and outnumbered them,” Autarch Mogg sent mentally. “There are only two of us right now. This is going to be very difficult.”

“Let’s chat with them first and see if there is a way we can avoid fighting.” Ning could also sense the threat which these three Autarch-class creatures posed.

“Gentlemen!” Ning chuckled. “Why must we fight to the death? This war is a war between us and the Sithe. Why don’t the three of you just leave our Chaosverse and go back to your Infinite Void? Stay far away from the war. I imagine it is unlikely the Sithe would be able to capture you a second time. In fact, I’m surprised they captured you at all!”

“Hmph. We let our guards down,” the cyclopean creature said coldly.

“If we escaped, the Sithe can forget about capturing us again.” The fiery-scaled creature gritted its teeth, then howled furiously, “But what’s the point of saying all this? Do you really think you have a way to let us leave?”

The dragon turtle stared intently at Ning as well.

It was true that the three held no grudges against the local cultivators at all. If they could return home safely, they would be more than willing to do so. They might’ve been captured by the Sithe and forced to accept some tasks, but they weren’t bound by lifeblood oaths! Or, to be precise, there was no way for them to swear lifeblood oaths at all. They were completely different from both the cultivators and the Sithe!

For both the cultivators and the Sithe, both the Dao and the Dao-heart were extremely important. All of them trained from young as cultivators, slowly rising in power thanks to the Dao. These void dwellers, however, were evil, chaotic, and berserk creatures by nature. They didn't even have Dao-hearts per se; the only law they understood was the law of survival. They would fight to the death, and the strong would live while the weak would die! They followed only the most brutish and barbaric of 'laws', the law of strength.

It was much like how weak mortals were completely incapable of swearing 'lifeblood oaths' without the help of something like an oathstone. They could swear until they were blue in the face, but they would never have to face the fear of their truesouls being destroyed. The same was true for these void dwellers! It was impossible for them to swear lifeblood oaths.

Thus, the Sithe generally had two options when dealing with the void dwellers they captured. They could either torture them into insanity, or they could slowly manage to tame them! However, it was virtually impossible to tame an Autarch-class void dweller, and so the only real choice was to either torture them or to negotiate with them as equals and come to an agreement.

"Why don't the three of you just leave this hive?" Ning probed. "After that, you can just leave our Chaosverse. I don't think anyone would or could stop you."

"Leave the hive?" The cyclopean creature let out a cold laugh. "This is a place which can only be entered, not exited! The only way to leave is for the Sithe to voluntarily let you leave. If you don't believe me, try for yourselves! Let's see if the two of you can leave or not."

"There's no way out?" Ning was startled. Neither he nor Mogg had encountered any impediments at all as they flew into the deep abyss.

"Coming in is easy, but leaving is impossible," the cyclopean creature said. "The three of us have tried to leave countless times, but there is no way out!"

Ning had the feeling that the creature wasn't lying. There wasn't a need to lie over something like this.

"Well, that's easily solved," Ning said. "Once we destroy this thing from the inside, we'll be able to leave."

"Destroy it? You two?" the titanic fiery-scaled creature boomed mockingly.

"You should at least let us give it a try. Maybe we'd succeed," Ning said. "Just stand there and watch! You can always attack us later, if we really aren't able to destroy it."

Ning's goal was simple. He wanted for these three Autarch-class void dwellers to not cause him any trouble as he tested out methods for destroying this behemoth hive. It must be remembered that these creatures had tremendous brutish force, but they couldn't compare to the cultivators when it came to understanding the Dao. There was no way they could unlock the mysteries behind such an intricately designed weapon, but that didn't mean Ning and Mogg couldn't do so either.

"Impossible."

"No way." The other two Autarch-class void dwellers instantly rejected Ning's suggestion.

“Cultivator leaders, let me speak plainly with you,” the dragon turtle said coldly. “Long ago, we came to an agreement with the Sithe after our capture. We made them certain promises. The first promise was that we had to each kill at least one of the ‘leaders of the cultivators’, while the second was that we had to protect this place for a full chaos cycle. Once we complete both objectives, we’ll be released and granted freedom.”

“We have to protect this place for a chaos cycle, so there’s no way we’ll let you try and destroy it. If we stand back, we’ll have instantly voided the agreement and the Sithe would never let us leave,” the cyclopean creature said.

“A full chaos cycle?” Ning and Mogg both grew anxious. That was unacceptable. Given how fast this thing was devouring energy, the Chaosverse probably would’ve been reduced to a husk of itself by then! The Sithe would’ve long ago taken control over the Chaosverse after a chaos cycle.

“There are two paths available to us,” the dragon turtle continued. “The first is for us to stand by the side of the Sithe. The second is for us to stand by your side... but if we do so, we’ll have made an irreversible choice! The three of us know just how terrifying this hive is, and we have no reason to believe that you two will be able to deal with it. We can’t just entrust our very lives to the two of you, unless you can somehow prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that you can destroy this hive.”

Ning and Mogg were both speechless. Prove beyond the shadow of a doubt? They didn’t even know how the thing operated yet. How were they supposed to do that?

“Hmph.” The dragon turtle snorted. “And here I thought you cultivators had something really impressive up your sleeves.”

“You disappoint us. KILL THEM!” The cyclopean creature was the first to attack. Whoosh! Its body blurred as it transformed into a strange ripple that instantly appeared before Ning and Mogg. It was so fast that even Ning was rendered speechless! Even when Ning used the Storm Sword Dao, he was still considerably slower than this creature.

“Leave this one to me!” Autarch Mogg held a long saber in each of his six arms, and he similarly transformed into a spatial ripple to fight back. As the master of the Space Daobirth Essence, Autarch Mogg was more or less able to stave off this cyclopean creature.

Slash! Dimensional tears began to appear and disappear in the space around the two. The cyclopean void dweller’s attacks were completely suppressing Autarch Mogg in both speed and ferocity, but the Autarch’s incredibly high level of insight ensured that his six long sabers formed a completely airtight defense. He would probably be able to hold on for quite some time.

“These Autarch-class void dwellers all became kings of their kind through constant slaughter. None of them are easy to deal with.” Ning knew all along that killing these things in sole combat would be extremely difficult; in the past, the Autarchs had only accomplished it through strength in numbers. Still... Ning was confident in his abilities. Six million chaos cycles of training had been completely transformative for him.

“Leave this one to me, you old bastard?” the fiery-scaled void dweller said.

“Fine.” The dragon turtle was very patient and elected to silently watch from afar.

“Hey, One-Eye! Let’s see who kills our opponent first!” The fiery-scaled creature let out a roaring laugh, filled with such power that when it blasted into Ning’s ears, Ning felt as though it was trying to tear his head apart. Next, the vast creature exploded into motion, transforming into a streak of fiery light that rammed straight towards Ning.

“I haven’t had a chance to really have a good fight since mastering the Eternal Omega Sword Dao and spending six million chaos cycles in training.” Ning could feel his blood pumping with excitement. It had been a long time since he got into a really good battle. Previously, it was because his truesoul was collapsing and he didn’t dare to fight with abandon. These days, it was because it was almost impossible for him to find a good opponent.

“I wonder how long it’ll take me to beat him? Will ten seconds be enough, or shall I need as much time as is needed to boil a kettle of tea?” Ning manifested three heads and six arms, his six Northmoon swords at the ready.

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 19: Captured

Ji Ning’s body blurred, transforming to become 540,000 meters tall. However, compared to the titanic fiery-scaled void dweller, he was still a bit smaller.

“Die!” The creature lashed out at Ning with its terrifyingly sharp claws, which its physical prowess ensured were deadlier than even Universe treasures.

Bang! Ning was instantly torn apart into countless pieces.

“Eh?” The fiery-scaled void dweller was shocked. “An illusion!” Everything it could see was nothing more than part of the illusions created by Ning’s Sword Dao!

“Storm Execution!” Six streaks of sword-light howled forth, slashing against the blazing flames covering the scaled creature’s neck. It stumbled backwards, but nothing more than a few white marks were left behind on the scales protecting the neck. However, right as Ning’s swords connected with the creature’s neck, Ning used the Dao of Karma to pour the power of the strike throughout the creature’s body, causing internal destruction with abandon.

“What a powerful cultivator!” The scaled creature lifted its head up, letting out a bellow: “But your illusions are useless against me!”

BOOM! The flames covering its body expanded dramatically, its internal flames pouring out from within to cover an area of a million kilometers. The power of these flames was so great that it actually managed to push back Ning’s Sword Dao Domain and his heartworld projection.

“My six strikes weren’t even able to break its scales! I was able to injure its vital essence through karma, but as an Autarch-class void dweller it has an absolutely prodigious amount of essence.” Ning immediately began to consider what to do next. The flames the void dweller had released were pushing back against the Sword Dao Domain. Once it overtook Ning’s illusions, Ning would be forced to reveal his true location and he would no longer be able to catch the creature offguard.

Kill it through the Karma Sword Dao? That was too time-consuming! The Autarch-class stone lifeform the Autarchs had encountered and slain all those years ago had been indestructibly hard, as it truly was

a stone by nature. Not even the Autarchs were able to injure it, and so their only option had been to exhaust it to death after tens of thousands of years!

However, Ning felt certain that this scaled creature wouldn't be quite as tough to deal with as that stone lifeform had been. There had to be a flaw Ning could exploit.

"Its body is unspeakably powerful, which is why it has Autarch-class power. It has far more vital essence than actual Autarch's; to kill it using the Karma Sword Dao is going to be too slow. I'll have to come up with another idea for breaking through its defenses... but I hit it six times in a row and merely left behind a few white marks on its scales."

Ning pondered for a moment, then came to a conclusion.

"Die, cultivator! Die!" The towering scaled creature charged at Ning with incomparable ferocity, its tail smashing apart anything which got in its way.

Now that Ning had some experience from their first clash, he immediately changed tactics. Whoosh! Ning dodged in a ghostly manner, transforming into the storm itself as he charged towards the scaled void dweller.

"He's fast!" The scaled creature was shocked. "Only One-Eye is his superior in speed."

The wind and the lightning thundered in harmony, with the scaled creature's claws and tail completely unable to stop Ning's attack.

"Kill!" Ning simultaneously chopped out with all six swords at the same time, his swords spinning out like the spokes of a wheel! The edges of each sword was covered in blurry light. A closer look would've shown that the blurry sword-light was actually composed of countless interspersed white and black specks of light that were connected to each other. The specks of light were spinning in blaze, with the white light blazing like fire while the black light hissed with dark corrosive power.

The Dark Sword Dao – it infused corrosive darkness into the Dao of the Sword

The Light Sword Dao – it infused blazing light into the Dao of the Sword.

When joined together, they came to form the Cycle Sword Dao which Ning had developed. Working in harmony, the two were able to support and reinforce each other with tremendous synergy, allowing for blazing strikes of corrosive power that ate through anything in its path! It was like the merciless cycle of life and death itself, chopping through all things in its path.

Whoosh! Six streaks of gray sword-light shot out at the same time, spinning at the scaled creature like the blades of a giant windmill.

Boom! Boom! Boom! The corrosive power of the Cycle Sword Dao was utterly unstoppable. Even the fiery-red scales of the void dweller began to crack. Moments later they broke apart entirely, with a gaping wound appearing below them. Gold blood seeped out, followed by the flesh quickly healing.

"You actually injured me!" The scaled creature went completely berserk. A layer of red light appeared over its entire body, and its power increased dramatically. It began to launch a furious counter-attack while howling, "Hurry up and help me out, you old bastard!" Its scales were its pride and joy. The fact that they had been shattered caused it to feel that it was in danger.

“Coming.” The dragon turtle immediately came flying over.

“Illusion Sword Dao!”

The scaled creature’s flames were only able to cover an area of a million kilometers; beyond that, Ning’s illusions continued to reign supreme. Countless Nings appeared within that area, and all of them began to assault the scaled creature from afar at the same time. The dragon turtle had no idea which one was the real one.

Whoosh! Whoosh! The light of the Cycle Sword Dao continued to spin out like the spokes of a wheel, its strikes screaming through the air from a million kilometers away. A million kilometers might seem to be a very great distance, but it was actually extremely short for someone of Ning’s abilities. All it did was give the scaled void dweller a chance to react to Ning’s attacks, but there was no way the dragon turtle would be able to actually help it.

Ning was completely dominant on a technical level. His Cycle Sword Dao once more tore open a giant gaping wound in the scaled creature’s body.

“Aaaaaaah! Die, die!” The scaled creature launched wild counter-attacks with abandon, but Ning was far too nimble. Each time after he attacked he retreated back into his illusions, making it impossible for them to locate where he truly was.

“Old bastard! Old bastard!” the scaled creature called out furiously.

“I can’t locate the real one! Each time he moves into extremely close range as he attacks, then retreats right away. I don’t have enough time!” the dragon turtle responded anxiously as well.

“During the last war we fought against the Sithe, two Autarch-class void dwellers were on their side. The end result was that both of them died, while all of us were untouched.” Ning’s voice rang out in the air as he continuously launched more attacks, his terrifying Cycle Sword Dao repeatedly ripping huge wounds into the scaled creature’s body.

The scales were so extremely durable that Autarch-class attacks were generally unable to breach them, but Ning’s Cycle Sword Dao was a perfect counter and so Ning was able to breach through them. Given how tough the scales were, they were equally difficult and time-consuming to repair once destroyed.

“All you creatures can do is rely on the natural power of your bodies.”

Slash! Another wave of attacks from the Cycle Sword Dao chopped past the scaled creature.

“Even if we cannot beat you, staying alive is simplicity itself... and once we find your weaknesses, you are dead.”

Slash! Slash! The light of the Cycle Sword Dao left more and more gaping wounds on the scaled creature’s body.

“The Sithe put you here, yes... but did you really think they intending on letting you survive? They simply wanted you to slow us down at the cost of your own lives.”

Riiiiip! The scaled creature’s long tail was actually severed midway through!

“Ahhhhhhhh!” The scaled void dweller’s titanic body was now covered with wounds. Its tail had actually been chopped off, and even its arms were half-severed. Its lacerated flesh was quickly healing, but its scales wouldn’t be able to recover within a short period of time. It grew increasingly frantic, as it could sense how death was impending.

“One-Eye!” the scaled creature roared loudly.

The skinny cyclopean creature was battling Autarch Mogg nearby and had been keeping an eye on the situation. It called out anxiously in its shrill voice, “I can’t find his true body, and he’s too fast! Your flames aren’t able to cover enough area to force him to reveal himself.”

“I can’t expand my domain any further!” the scaled creature said frantically. It had created this flaming domain from its own power, and it wasn’t easy for him to strengthen those flames to a level where it could simultaneously suppress both Ning’s Sword Dao Domain as well as Ning’s heartworld projection! It could only maintain enough power to do both up to a distance of a million kilometers; this was the creature’s maximum limit! Alas, a million kilometers was a short enough distance that neither of the other two Autarch-class void dwellers would be able to interrupt Ning’s incredibly fast attacks.

“Damn.”

“Stop that!” Both the Autarch-class creatures were turning frantic.

Slash! One of the scaled creature’s arms was completely severed off.

“I surrender! I surrender! Spare me!” The scaled creature finally began to panic as those terrifying streaks of sword-light tore through its scales once more. “Spare me and I’ll obey you in all things!”

“Obey me? I wouldn’t dare to place any faith in you.”

There was no way for these Autarch-class void dwellers to swear lifeblood oaths. The only agreements they could make were oral agreements, and they could go back on those agreements whenever they pleased!

“No...!”

Ning’s sword-light continued to chop down mercilessly. Ning only sped up the pace after most of the creature’s scales had been destroyed, and his sword-light flew about with abandon as he completely chopped the scaled creature apart into countless pieces. A red gemstone suddenly appeared, and it was able to survive even Ning’s furious blows of sword-light. The faint outline of the scaled creature could be seen within the red gemstone, and it was still begging Ning: “Don’t kill me!”

Ning had unleashed a total of 3,220 strikes in destroying this Autarch-class void dweller’s body. He immediately grabbed the red gemstone, then cast a seal across it.

“I’ve already captured this one, and I can destroy it with a thought.” Ning turned to glance at the other two Autarch-class void dwellers, his voice echoing within the area: “Are the two of you willing to stand with us now? Or are you still going to stand with the Sithe?”

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 20: Formation

The dragon turtle and the cyclopean creature shared a glance. The two Autarch-class void dwellers were unable to hide their shock. One of their peers had been defeated in just a few short moments, its body destroyed and its life-core taken?

“If you keep fighting against us, the only result will be that you both die,” Autarch Mogg said. “Stand with us. Once we deal with this behemoth hive, you’ll gain your freedom.”

“Do you really think you can threaten us just because you captured one of us?” the dragon turtle snorted coldly.

The cyclopean creature smiled coldly as it glanced at Ning and Autarch Mogg. “We’re not like that idiot. I’m fast enough that you two won’t even be able to touch me... and as for that tough old bastard over there? It is even stronger than me! You have no chance of defeating it.”

Mogg frowned. The cyclopean creature was telling the truth; neither Mogg nor Ning was a match for the creature in speed.

“If that’s the case, go ahead and die.” Ning didn’t want to waste any time. This behemoth hive was continuously devouring the power of this Chaosverse with each passing moment! Ning transformed into the storm once more as he charged towards the dragon turtle.

It must be remembered that Ning was extremely well-rounded and was skilled in almost every Dao. Thus, he was capable of seizing upon his opponent’s weaknesses and come up with a perfect counter each time! Ning felt quite certain that he would be able to deal with the seemingly-speedy Cyclops, and so he wanted to try out the dragon turtle and see how strong it was.

“Hmph.” The dragon turtle didn’t move at all. The grayish-white skin covering its neck looked as tough as a rock, and it just watched coldly as Ning approached it. Invisible waves of energy began to manifest in the area around the dragon turtle, pushing back against the Sword Dao Domain and the heartforce projection alike.

“Kill!” An absolutely dazzling streak of light shot out like a flaming meteor that was crashing to earth. This was Ning’s terrifying sword-light, and it was chopping straight at the dragon turtle.

Hiss... the dragon turtle’s draconian head reared up, hissing like a viper and moving with serpentine speed as it chomped upwards, with space being continuously destroyed and recreated within its maw.

Boom! The sharp sword-light came crashing down against the ears of that draconian head.

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Ning and the dragon turtle began a furious battle against each other, with Ning putting the terrifying might of his Sword Dao on full display. He alternated between using overwhelming power to shut down the dragon turtle’s savagery and using unpredictable sword-arts to launch deadly stabs! He launched a thousand ferocious attacks in succession that came crashing down like waves, used the deadly corrosive power of his Cycle Sword Dao, and even use all of the various elemental Daos of his Five Elements Sword Dao.

Ning had completely suppressed the dragon turtle and was raining down blows upon it!

“He’s that powerful?!” the distant cyclopean creature was rather shocked.

“Darknorth really has become the strongest of us seven,” Autarch Mogg mused silently. “I’m only superior to him in the Dao of Space; in all else, he is better. He’s simply skilled into many different Daos!”

“Gwaaaar!” The dragon turtle was enraged by the beating it was taken. It furiously tried to fight back, but it continued to be completely dominated.

In terms of actual power, the dragon turtle was the strongest of the three Autarch-class void dwellers. Its deceptively simple bites were actually strengthened by an incredible innate ability that made those bites more powerful than even Ning’s most powerful strikes! It was all-enveloping and compressed space itself, making it impossible for most enemies to dodge this attack. Alas, Ning was at such a high level of insight that he was able to dissolve the attack with ease.

Ning, however, was feeling quite frustrated as well. “Its body is completely flawless and impregnable.” He had used everything he had and was beating the hell out of this dragon turtle, but he wasn’t able to do any damage! He had even used his sword-light to stab against the dragon turtle’s eyes, but he was unable to pierce through the grayish-white eyelids. As for the rest of the body? None of Ning’s attacks were able to injure it at all.

“Mogg,” Ning sent mentally to Mogg, “Its body is completely flawless and unbreakable. What should we do?” Mogg had been alive for much longer than him, and was much more experienced.

“When we fought the stone lifeform all those years ago, we similarly found it to be indestructible. There’s really no real option aside from slowly exhausting it to death,” Mogg sent mentally. “Use karmic attacks to destroy its vital essence, and just keep on at it until it dies! Last time, we bombarded that stone lifeform for tens of thousands of years before managing to kill it. This dragon turtle seems to have a similarly powerful body, and I’ll wager it has just as much vital essence. Your karmic attacks, however, are inferior to those of Titanos. It’ll probably take you at least a million years to exhaust it, or perhaps even longer!”

Ning instantly felt helpless. This was the clumsiest method available, and apparently the only method available! Karmic attacks ignored all defenses, as they used the power of karma to attack someone at the very core of their essence! Alas, Ning was still significantly weaker than Titanos in this respect.

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“I can’t kill you, but you can’t hurt me either!” The dragon turtle finally abandoned its attempts to counter-attack and instead just allowed Ning to uselessly rain down blows against it.

“How can any physical body be THIS tough?” Ning was secretly speechless. He was so powerful that his attacks would easily cause even Universe treasures or Chaos Primordials to crumble, but this Autarch-class dragon turtle was so tough that Ning wasn’t able to do anything to it at all.

“Let’s finish off the other one first, Mogg,” Ning sent.

“Alright,” Mogg agreed.

Swoosh! Ning instantly transformed back into a storm of wind and lightning as he shot towards the skinny cyclopean creature, which had been watching him from afar this entire time. Thanks to Ning's illusions, the cyclopean creature had no idea that Ning was even moving towards it.

Even so, the cyclopean creature's attunement to space and wind allowed it to realize that something strange was going on. "Eh?" Swish! It suddenly dodged, and as it did so a streak of sword-light stabbed straight through its after-image! The creature reappeared over a hundred million kilometers away. It narrowed its eyes and said in its shrill voice, "You want to sneak-attack me? You won't even touch me!"

"As far as I'm concerned, you are the weakest of the three." Ning stared at the cyclopean creature, then unleashed an awesome wave of mana which he connected to the boundless power of the Dao. The mana manifested in the form of countless swords that filled the illusory region. Countless millions of streaks of sword-light appeared, with each streak of sword-light filled with such power that they could easily slay Otherverse Lords.

When Ning had been a mere Daolord, his Sword Dao Domain was created solely through the power of the Dao itself. Now, however, Ning was using the power of his mana to actively control the Dao, allowing his domain to become even more powerful! The attacks might not be as mighty as physical strikes unleashed with the Northmoon swords, but they were still tens of times more powerful than in the past.

"This sword-light is very weak." The cyclopean creature glanced disdainfully at the countless streams of sword-light, then let out a shrill chuckle: "You won't even be able to scratch me with these things." Although it was physically the weakest of the three Autarch-class void dwellers, it was still far tougher than any Chaos Primordial.

"Formation, assemble!" Ning called out coldly.

Boom! Countless streams of sword-light began to flow together rhythmically within the domain, and moments later the entire scene changed.

"What's going on?!" The cyclopean creature stared in shock at its surroundings, which had become transformed into a fragrant world of grass and flowers. It was standing in the middle of a prairie, and the dragon turtle was nowhere to be seen.

"B-but..." The dragon turtle stared at its own surroundings as well. The world around it had been transformed into a vast sea. The waves of the sea splashed around it, kicking up a few foamy bubbles. It was also unable to see any other creatures around it.

"A formation!" The dragon turtle grew anxious. It instantly flew forwards at high speed, sending its massive bulk hurtling through the air while it furiously tore at the area around it with its four stubby legs. Alas, the waves of the sea seemed to be completely illusory; no matter how it attacked the waves, it remained unable to see anything beyond them.

"You void dwellers do not understand the Dao. You are foolish! You can overpower weaker creatures, but if you encounter a formation set down by someone of equal power to you then you are completely helpless." Ning's voice echoed throughout the illusory realms the two creatures were in. "You will not be able to escape my illusions. I can do with you as I please."

Ning had long ago reached Hegemony in the Dao of Formations. He had then infused it into his Dao of the Sword, creating the Sword Formation Dao. Now, he was using the power of his mana and his insights into the Dao to transform his countless streams of sword-light into formation-bases, which he then used to construct an enormous formation! Even people like Autarch Titanos or Autarch Mogg, who also had a high level of insight into the Dao, would need to spend some time to solve this type of formation. These Autarch-class void dwellers, however, were completely incapable of doing so.

Their advantages were obvious, but their weaknesses were obvious as well.

“Break! BREAK!” The cyclopean creature was growing desperate. It was now holding a long shuttle in its claws, and it was furiously attacking the world around it. Alas, the world remained a fragrant world of grass and flowers.

Riiiiip! A streak of sword-light suddenly appeared right behind the cyclopean creature. It had appeared without any warning, and it instantly tore through the creature’s fur and stabbed into its body. Then... the sword-light began to spin! Slash! An enormous gaping wound instantly appeared, followed by golden blood fountaining outwards. The cyclopean creature frantically pulled back and tried to defend against any new attacks.

“Do you think your speed will be of any use to you within my formations? I can approach you without a sound. A few more attacks and you’ll be as good as dead.” Ning’s voice echoed out within the plains once more: “The other two had tougher bodies to deal with, but you’ll be easy to handle.”

“What should I do? Old bastard? Old bastard!!!” the cyclopean creature screamed frantically.

“Keep screaming. Scream as loud as you want. It won’t hear you.” Ning’s voice rang out once more. The beautiful world of flowers was like a nightmare which had completely enveloped the void dweller.

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 21: Exalt Anitya

“No! This is just a formation. I can break it. I can break it!” The cyclopean creature could sense its doom impending, and the sensation was driving it mad. It brandished the shuttle, furiously striking at all directions with it. Slash! Slash! Space was churned apart into tiny little pieces by his blows, but the overall environment remained that of a fragrant world of grass and flowers. Ji Ning’s formation wouldn’t be so easily defeated!

“Break! Break!!!” the cyclopean creature yelled hoarsely.

In the past, it had never viewed formations as something to be afraid of. This was because it had long ago grown accustomed to bursting through formations with its overwhelming power. Formations which could successfully trap Autarch-class void dwellers were incredibly rare to begin with! This one in particular was ensuring that it was not able to put its speed to good effect at all.

“Poor bastard. He ended up running into you, Darknorth.” Autarch Mogg shook his head as he watched from afar, then sent mentally to Ning, “You can be described as the number one formations expert in all the cultivator civilizations.”

“That’s only because I infused the Dao of Formations into my Sword Dao,” Ning said with a smile. “Just a moment, please. I’m about to capture the creature.”

Swish! A streak of gloomy sword-light appeared in ghostly fashion, instantly piercing through the cyclopean creature's skinny body. One of the creature's legs went flying, with blood spewing everywhere. The cyclopean creature frantically retreated, not paying any attention to the heavy wound which was quickly beginning to heal. The severed leg was regrowing as well.

"You won't be able to last. You Autarch-class creatures have very powerful bodies, but that also makes it extremely hard for you to truly heal."

Sword-light flashed again. Ning's attacks were coming from every single direction. This looked like an extremely beautiful prairie, but it was a death trap which could unleash sword-light from any and every part of it! There was no way to dodge, and each time the cyclopean creature would only detect the sword-light once the light was right in front of it. The creature's tremendous speed was rendered useless here.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Just three seconds later, a total of over sixty attacks had appeared and then vanished without a trace. Finally, the cyclopean creature's entire body crumbled apart. Its healing speed simply wasn't able to keep up with the rate at which Ning was causing damage, and it was now completely incapable of fighting back at all.

Boom! The creature's body imploded. Ning reached out with his sword-light to tug free a white and glossy pearl from the 'corpse', and it quickly flew over to Ning. The pearl held an image of the furry cyclopean creature within it, and it was begging Ning for its life: "Please spare me! Spare me! None of this was of my own free will!"

Ning waved his hand, grabbing the pearl and casting a seal over it.

So long as his seal prevented the pearl from absorbing energy from the outside world, the creature would be unable to revive! It could only reconstitute its body if given access to enough energy, but even without its body it would remain alive so long as its truesoul within its life-core remained unharmed. Only when the life-cores were destroyed would these Autarch-class void dwellers be truly 'dead'! However, Ning didn't feel much of an urge to actually kill them. He was going to simply imprison them for now.

And so... two of the three void dwellers had been captured by Ning.

"Congratulations, Darknorth." Mogg flew over, his scaled face split by an amazed smile. "Thank goodness you came with me. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to deal with them so easily."

"Autarch-class void dwellers are indeed very tough to deal with, due to their innate gifts. However, their obvious weakness is that they do not train in the Dao. They have a very low level of insight," Ning said. "I'm only able to attack their weaknesses and defeat them with such ease because I'm fairly well-rounded."

"Any void dwellers capable of reaching the Autarch level of power have very few weaknesses." Autarch Mogg sighed. "These three were all very powerful, with that cyclopean creature possessing unparalleled speed. The only way to handle it is to do what you just did – trap it in a formation, an extremely profound formation which it cannot break through with raw power. However, such formations generally require detailed and intricate preparations as well as for formation-bases to be laid down in advance. Given how crafty the creature is, it would never just watch us set down those formations and then just

step into them. Only you could've done what you did, Darknorth. You created a formation with but a thought, making it impossible for it to escape."

"That scaled void dweller was even more difficult to deal with. It had virtually no weaknesses at all! Thankfully, your sword-arts were able to breach its armor of scales. I'm truly impressed that you were able to capture both of them! As for this last one... it seems to be completely invulnerable," Autarch Mogg said.

Ning sighed. "I really don't have any idea what I'm supposed to do with this last one."

He was very well-rounded, true, but Autarch-class void dwellers were simply too difficult to handle. The cyclopean creature had an obvious weakness, which was why Ning was confident in his ability to deal with it! Ning hadn't been sure if he could handle the other two, and so he had to probe them in battle first. He had discovered that his Cycle Sword Dao was capable of breaking the scaled creature's armor, but there was nothing Ning could do which affected the dragon turtle.

Ning and Mogg both moved to the place where the dragon turtle was located, then stared at it. The dragon turtle simply sat there, silently inspecting its surroundings. It was trapped within an illusory formation, but it showed no signs of fear whatsoever.

"So what should we do?" Ning pondered.

"If we can't kill it in a short period of time, we should just leave it there for now," Autarch Mogg said. "Let's go locate the core mechanisms controlling this behemoth hive first. We need to destroy this hive as soon as possible. If it comes to bother us again, use your formations to trap it. If need be, I'll personally tie it down."

"That's all we can do." Ning nodded. "Let's go."

"Let's go."

Ning quickly led Mogg in advancing to the critical point he had discovered earlier while analyzing the functionings of this behemoth hive. As they left, the illusory formation Ning had established quickly dissipated. There was no way to maintain it from afar! This was a formation which Ning had to use all his power to cast and maintain, a powerful Autarch-class formation which used up an enormous amount of energy. Ning had used his mana to guide the limitless power of the Sword Dao in setting up this formation. Now that Ning was gone, it would be very difficult to use mere formation-base type treasures to supply the necessary amount of energy.

It must be remembered that not even Sithe Apocalypse-class formations were as mighty as this one! Thus, it would take Ning an extremely long period of time and many precious materials to create a physical variant, far longer than Ning would need to simply use his Karma Sword Dao to attrition the dragon turtle to death.

"Two of my old friends are gone, just like that." The dragon turtle sighed to itself. "These Autarchs who train in their 'Dao' really are hard to deal with. Ugh. It is our own fault for being caught by the Sithe. We really were given no choices at all. Who the hell would want to fight against these cultivators anyhow?"

"...eh?" The dragon turtle stared at its surroundings in surprise. The illusory realm around it had vanished, revealing ordinary spacetime

“They left?” The dragon turtle grew anxious. “They’re still heading for the core regions. I have to stop them!”

Swoosh! The dragon turtle immediately warped through spacetime in pursuit.

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This ‘behemoth hive’ was in reality an intricately designed super weapon, and it was filled with many separate spacetime continuums. One of them was merely three hundred meters in size, and it held a man who was seated in the lotus position, his long unbound hair. This man’s hair was black on one side and white on the other. He looked quite strange and mysterious.

His eyes looked like a series of concentric circles, and his gaze was as deep as a bottomless abyss. He quietly stared at the images displayed in front of him. The images shown were of Ning and Autarch Mogg battling against those three Autarch-class void dwellers. However, the images were blurry and indistinct. He was able to scry some of what had happened due to the residue left behind by the various attacks, but wasn’t able to truly ‘watch’ the battle.

“There’s no way for me to truly scry any of these cultivator Autarchs,” the black-white haired man murmured softly. “However... judging from their auras, they should’ve only sent two people.”

Autarchs were incredibly powerful. In their own Chaosverse, they were able to summon nigh-limitless amounts of power, and it was almost impossible to view them if they didn’t want to be viewed. The Sithe would only sense energies blocking their scans; they wouldn’t actually be able to see the Autarchs at all.

“Eh?” The black-white haired man’s face suddenly turned pale. The battle had just come to an end and both Ning and Mogg had vanished, leaving behind just the dragon turtle.

“Only one of those three void dwellers are left?” The black-white haired man was stunned. Ignoring everything else, he immediately activated the formation-base he was seated on.

Rumble... the formation-base slowly began to swivel in place, and a ripple of power began to manifest and take form as a pillar of light. Slowly, the pillar of light resolved into a humanoid figure. It was a balding, barefoot, loose-robed man of great stature and size who had a kind, sympathetic smile on his face. His eyes were absolutely mesmerizing, and those who saw him would feel the unconscious desire to submit to him.

“Almighty Iyerre,” the black-white haired man bowed respectfully.

“How are things, Anitya?” Iyerre asked.

“The cultivators have entered our super weapon, the ‘Annihilation Hive’, but there are only two of them. Their auras are vast, preventing me from seeing them clearly. However, two of the three Autarch-class void dwellers we imprisoned within the Annihilation Hive have already died. Only the defensively impregnable ‘Howler’ beast we captured remains alive,” the black-white haired man said respectfully.

Iyerre frowned slightly. “Only two of them came?” The loss of two void dwellers was a minor matter, but he was very disappointed that only two of the cultivators had entered the Annihilation Hive. If five or six had come in, the Sithe could’ve seized this opportunity to immediately launch the final war!

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Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 22: The Central Nexus

“Just follow the plan,” Iyerre instructed. “If those two void dwellers died, they died. As long as the Howler beast is still alive, our plans remain unaffected.”

“Understood,” the black-white haired man said obediently.

“Feel free to contact me if anything major happens.” Iyerre’s lips crooked upwards in a smile. “I’ve spent countless aeons and paid an enormous price in order to create the Annihilation Hive. It won’t be easy for them to defeat it... and if they just send in two Autarchs, their chances are absolutely nil. If they send in more Autarchs they might be able to eventually figure out a way to destroy it... but in doing so, they’ll have lost the battle to us before it even began.”

The creation of the Annihilation Hive was Iyerre’s greatest accomplishment. He was extremely confident in its prowess.

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This place was filled with countless spacetime bubbles of varying size, and they could be seen everywhere.

Ji Ning continued to examine the inner workings of the entire hive as he advanced, moving closer and closer to the critical point. After roughly an hour, they finally reached the spot.

“The central nexus point for the entire behemoth hive is located right up ahead.” Ning let out a sigh of relief. Ning had been focusing his full attention on inspecting the path before him, which had been rather tiring.

“The central nexus?” Autarch Mogg stared from afar as well.

Both of them carefully inspected the distant, empty region in front of them. At the very center of this empty region was a beautiful vortex of astral clouds. The astral clouds swirled in a vortex-like manner around the very center.

These astral clouds were composed of countless specks of light and seemed almost illusory in nature. Ning and Autarch Mogg had such incredible visual acuity that they were able to see through almost anything, so long as there wasn’t a complete seal that blocked out all sight. The two were able to gaze past the astral clouds and thus see the black tower at the very center. The tower had to be ten thousand kilometers tall!

The vast black tower was covered with swirls of strange power which caused the vortex of astral clouds to appear around it. More than that – it also caused countless ripples of spacetime to rise and fall in the area around it, and it resonated with the entire realmverse-sized hive! It was the source of that terrifying swallowing power which was draining away all forms of energy from the outside world. Not even the prime essences of the Chaosverse were able to recover the energy lost.

It was easy for Autarchs to enter this place, but if they tried to leave they would also suffer from that powerful devouring force. There was no way they could possibly escape!

“This has to be the most central nexus point of the entire behemoth hive.” Ning’s gaze was able to see through the vortex of astral clouds and into the black tower within it.

This tower was shaped like a pyramid, and it was completely pitch-black in color.

“You moved quite fast, cultivator leaders.” A deep, rumbling voice suddenly rang out.

Ning and Mogg turned to stare off into the distance. Within the astral vortex, there was an enormous entity which was lying in wait. It was the dragon turtle! Ning had to slowly find the path to this location, while the dragon turtle already knew the routes and so took the fastest path here. It had arrived long ago.

“In accordance with the agreement I made with the Sithe, I will not allow you to damage this place,” the dragon turtle rumbled. “However... I’ll wager that you aren’t even strong enough to get here.”

“Oh?” Ning and Mogg exchanged a glance. “Attack!” They didn’t hesitate at all. Ning manifested three heads and six arms, while Mogg manifested six arms. Both charged straight towards the dazzlingly beautiful vortex of astral clouds without hesitation.

Boom! The vortex of astral clouds continued to spin in place, causing countless streams of light around it to twist and bend as it crushed all in its path.

“What a powerful obstructive force.” Ning and Mogg were respectively covered by layers of sword-light and dimensional membranes as they continued to fight through the clouds.

Bang! Bang! Bang! They smashed through one layer of astral clouds after another. Ning was able to see that there appeared to be a total of 106 layers of these astral clouds, all assembled in that vortex formation.

“The power here is tremendous. Even Chaos Primordials would be crushed into tiny bits if they came here.” Ning and Mogg began to decelerate as they moved to defend themselves.

“Open!” Ning shot out a streak of sword-light. Slash! It swept out like a wave, tearing a tunnel through the astral clouds and pushing the specks of light aside.

Whoosh! Ning and Mogg flew forwards at high speeds, using their sword-light and saber-light to continuously carve a path forward for themselves. In the blink of an eye, they flew past the thirty-fifth layer.

“The pressure here is ridiculously strong.” Ning’s face was grim. The spinning astral clouds were like millstones grinding away at them; if they didn’t manage to successfully defend themselves, they would be crushed to pieces! Both had avatar-bodies, but this pressure was still enough to crush them to death. They had to use their sword-arts and Daobirth Essence, respectively, to clear a path through the vortex, but both of them could sense how taxing it had become.

“The dragon turtle is right past the fiftieth layer,” Ning sent mentally, his ‘voice’ tinged with helplessness. “I didn’t imagine that he would be spot on. It’ll be very hard for us to reach the fiftieth layer; even if we do manage to somehow fight our way there, we’d be constantly in danger of succumbing to the crushing power of the vortex. There’s no way we’d be able to deal with the dragon turtle as well.”

“Agreed. We can’t advance any further. If we do, we won’t have enough power left to fight against the dragon turtle. We might end up dying there.” Autarch Mogg came to the same conclusion.

Although they found the thirty-fifth layer somewhat taxing, they would still be able to unleash 80% of their full power while reserving the rest to keep the power of the vortex in check. There was no need for them to fear the dragon turtle. But if they actually forced themselves to the fiftieth layer, they probably would have less than 10% of their power available for fighting. The dragon turtle would completely dominate them, and they could very well die.

“The pressure here really is terrifying. I can’t believe the two of us working together aren’t even able to make it to the fiftieth layer.” Autarch Mogg began to feel anxious. “But the black tower at the center of this vortex is the central nexus of this entire hive. That’s over a hundred layers down! We can’t even approach it, much less destroy it. We aren’t even close to being able to succeed. What should we do?”

“I agree.” Ning’s head hurt as well. Their bodies weren’t tough enough to resist the crushing pressure of the vortex; they had to beat the pressure back with their attacks! Although Ning was somewhat stronger than Mogg, the two even when working together would only barely be able to make it to the fiftieth layer. There was no chance of going all the way.

“The power of the vortex rises gradually, not exponentially. I estimate we would need at least five Autarchs working together in order for us to stand a chance of making it past the hundredth layer,” Autarch Mogg said. “The two of us by ourselves won’t be able to go too far.”

“Even if five Autarch avatars came in, they probably would still find it very difficult to damage that black tower. They’d end up trapped inside, while the Sithe would probably seize this opportunity to launch the war.” Ning frowned. “We’d be in serious trouble.”

It took time to build new avatars. Ning would need years just to create a new avatar if his current one was lost, and he would need many more years for the new one to reach peak battle power.

Once the war began, the Autarchs simply wouldn’t have the time needed to create and strengthen new avatars. Wasting even four or five days on this process would result in the situation quickly turning grim.

“Then what should we do?” Autarch Mogg understood the problem as well. “We absolutely have to destroy this hive. If we don’t, then it’ll drain away more energy while becoming more powerful! Given enough time, it’ll weaken the Chaosverse so much that the Sithe will be able to take control over it. We’ll be finished, then!”

Ning felt anxious as well. If nearly half of their Autarch-level combatants were trapped here, they would probably lose the war. But if they didn’t send in more Autarchs, this hive would continue to drain away energy from the Chaosverse... which would still ultimately result in defeat!

“Let’s try and think of another option,” Autarch Mogg said.

“There are no other options.” Ning shook his head. “I’ve been analyzing the formations inside this hive the entire time. It has just a single nexus point – the black tower inside that vortex of astral clouds! If we want to destroy the hive, we’ll either need to destroy its nexus or have enough power to blast the entire thing apart.”

Ning shook his head. "Destroying the entire hive is impossible. It is too powerful. Nothing we can do would even shake it."

Ning and Mogg continued to ponder the question of what they had to do. As for the massive, impregnable dragon turtle, it simply waited within the fiftieth layer. The crushing power of the astral clouds was unable to injure it in the slightest. It lifted up its draconian head, then let out a boom shout: "Haha! I told you, you won't even be able to make it to me, much less wreck the nexus."

It wanted to lure Ning and Mogg closer. They'd have to deal with ever-greater amounts of pressure, giving the void dweller a better chance at killing them.

Ning and Mogg glanced sideways at the dragon turtle, not even bothering to answer it. The two did rather envy its defensive powers, though. They could at most fight to the fiftieth layer, but the dragon turtle was able to reach that layer with ease by completely ignoring the crushing weight of the vortex. Its body was simply ridiculous! No wonder Ning hadn't been able to do anything to the creature at all.

"Let's calm down first and come up with a plan. We'll have Titanos try and help us come up with something as well. Let's figure out a way to charge past the astral clouds," Ning said.

"I agree. Let's calm down and think. We'll definitely think of something." Mogg tamped down his own nervousness as well. They quickly spread word to the other five Autarchs, and all six of them began to try and devise a way of passing through the vortex of astral clouds.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 23: Titanos' Solution

An ancient temple was hovering above an island located within the outer perimeter of the Sithelands. There were six figures seated in the lotus position within this ancient temple. They were Autarch Titanos, Autarch Mogg, Autarch Stonerule, Autarch Skyfeeder, Autarch Bolin, and Autarch Ekong. They were here either in person or in avatar form, and they were all seated meditating. In front of Autarch Mogg, there was an illusory image which displayed what was happening within the Annihilation Hive.

"The insides of the hive are completely filled with countless spacetime bubbles which are linked together in an extremely complicated formation."

Autarch Mogg pointed at the images and explained, "There is a vortex at the very center of the hive, and it holds a total of 106 layers of astral clouds which surround a black tower. The black tower is the energy wellspring for the entire hive. That's essentially what we've managed to discover thus far. Try and help us come up with an idea, everyone."

"Hm."

"Got it." The other five Autarchs all nodded slowly.

Time flowed on. Autarch Skyfeeder's avatar kept time accelerated at a rate of 500x for the Autarchs, buying them time to slave away at this problem! The Annihilation Hive was constantly devouring energy, after all. The more time they took, the more harm would be done to the Chaosverse.

"No, that won't work."

"Anything else?"

“We have to reach the nexus and destroy the black tower if we wish to break the hive apart, but a hundred layers of astral clouds? It’s too hard.”

The Autarchs pondered continuously. Every so often one of them would voice a suggestion, but the others would quickly point out the flaws!

Time passed, one day after another. The Autarchs spent more than three years painstakingly analyzing the problem. Thankfully, the 500x temporal acceleration meant that only two days went past in the outside world.

“What a marvelously constructed weapon.” Autarch Titanos stared at the illusory images in front of him. An illusory black tower took form, followed by a vortex which took control over spacetime to generate an even more powerful sucking effect. This effect resonated across the entire behemoth hive, giving birth to that terrifying force which was devouring everything around the hive.

“I’m far from being a match for the person who was able to create this weapon.” Autarch Titanos shook his head slightly, then murmured: “But if all I have to do is cause some damage, I should be able to do it.”

“Eh?” The other five immediately turned to look at him.

“Titanos, do you have an idea?”

“What did you come up with?” All of them grew excited.

Autarch Titanos had been alive for an extremely long period of time, and he had spent much of it analyzing Sithe weapons. The other five Autarchs held great faith in his abilities in this regard.

“I’m fairly confident in my idea,” Autarch Titanos said, “But I need to enter the hive first and inspect it personally before I can be sure if it would work or not.”

“Titanos, take the route which Darknorth and I used. The two of us will be there to welcome you,” Autarch Mogg said.

.....

Rumble...

The bald Autarch Titanos was staring at the Annihilation Hive from afar, watching as it swallowed and destroyed everything in an extremely wide area around it. Time quickly began to accelerate around him until it reached 100x the rate of normal time. He then waved his finger, causing a black cauldron which was 300 meters long to appear next to him. He then tossed many precious ingredients into the black cauldron.

Just six days later, a streak of light shot out from inside the black cauldron. It was a white-robed avatar of Autarch Titanos.

“Go on.” This freshly created avatar of Autarch Titanos had just 20% of his true body’s strength. It quickly flew towards the distant Annihilation Hive.

For now, he was just going to use this weak new avatar for exploring the Annihilation Hive. As for his first avatar in the Sithelands, it would begin to weaken now that Autarch Titanos was focusing his energies on maintaining the second avatar, but the weakening was a gradual process. If he didn't spend too much time maintaining the second avatar and quickly abandoned it to turn his efforts back to his first avatar, the first avatar would quickly reach peak power once more.

The white-robed Titanos dove into the tunnel which Ning and Mogg had entered, flying into the hive. The tunnel was unfathomably dark and deep.

"Titanos." Two figures hailed him from afar.

"Darknorth. Mogg." The white-robed Titanos revealed a smile.

"This new avatar of yours is really puny," Mogg's avatar said teasingly. "You'd probably get wiped out in an instant if you got into a fight with those Autarch-class void dwellers."

"It's just a temporary body. We're in a rush for time, so I just used a quick and dirty method to get this thing up and running," the white-robed Titanos said.

The three continued to fly forwards as they chatted together. Ning led the way, warping through spacetime and moving them towards the vortex of astral clouds.

"How beautiful." Autarch Titanos stared at the astral clouds from afar, an amazed look on his face. He then turned to look at the countless spacetime bubbles off in the distance. "Impressive. Truly impressive. Now that I had the chance to witness these things operating in person, I feel even more admiration towards the Sithe who set this all up. It had to have been the Sithe Lord of Chaos who personally created this thing. This place's creator is far more talented than I am."

The more accomplished one was in understanding how complicated artifacts and weapons were fashioned, the more one would understand just how incredible this Annihilation Hive was.

"Do you have any ideas?" Ning asked.

"Creation is hard, but destruction is much easier." The white-robed Titanos smiled. "I came up with an idea after quite a long period of pondering, and I'm sure it'll be effective."

"What's the method?" Both Ning and Mogg were excited.

"Don't rush me! I need to make some further improvements." The white-robed Titanos stared intently at the vortex of astral clouds, scrutinizing how it functioned while pondering how to improve his technique further. Of course, it was Autarch Titanos' true body in the outside world which was doing most of the real work.

Six hours went past. Ning and Mogg had been waiting this entire time, and finally they saw a smile appear on the white-robed Titanos' face. "I've finally completed it. Darknorth, I'll teach you the technique. You use it."

"Why don't you teach me instead?" Autarch Mogg's avatar teased.

"You are too weak when it comes to the Dao of Formations. You wouldn't be able to learn it even if I tried to teach you." The white-robed Titanos glanced sideways at Mogg, then looked at Ning:

“Darknorth, you are every bit my equal when it comes to formations. The only reason why you weren’t able to come up with this idea is because you aren’t very experienced in the creation of weapons and artifacts.”

“Take a look at this.” The white-robed Titanos gently waved a finger, causing an illusion of the black tower to appear before him. “This black tower is the nexus of the entire hive, right?”

Ning and Mogg both nodded. This much, they both knew.

“It is also the energy wellspring for the entire hive,” the white-robed Titanos said. “But merely providing power doesn’t mean that much; its real value lies in how it applies that power! This is why the black tower is covered with countless runes. The energy wellspring uses those runes to form the hundred-layered vortex, causing the swallowing power to be increased dramatically.”

Ning understood this principle. It was akin to using ten percent of your full power to achieve a hundred percent of the effect you desired!

“The vortex, in turn, links with those countless spacetime bubbles to form an enormous formation of even greater power. This formation resonates throughout the entire hive, generating that tremendous sucking power towards the outside world around it,” the white-robed Titanos said.

“In other words, the vortex is an amplifier. The formation employing all those spacetime bubbles is a second amplifier. The way in which the formation resonates with the entire hive is the third amplifier!

“These three amplifiers are the real reason why the black tower’s power has been increased to such an inconceivable level that it can rip away energy from the Chaosverse itself,” the white-robed Titanos said. “If we can disrupt any of the three amplifiers, the hive won’t be able to function properly. Destroying the hive’s structure would accomplish this, as would destroying the black tower or all the spacetime bubbles inside this place.”

Autarch Mogg immediately said, “But we can’t! This hive is a weapon of terrifying power; we aren’t able to even scratch the thing. As for the spacetime bubbles, we were able to destroy some, but new ones would almost instantly be created. As for the vortex, it’s composed of countless specks of light. There’s nothing to destroy.”

“Hah! You dummy.” The white-robed Titanos glanced at Mogg, then chortled, “It actually isn’t too hard to deal with the hundred-layered vortex. All we need to do is set up an even larger vortex formation around it, one which spins in reverse. My reverse-vortex formation simply needs to weaken the power of the astral clouds vortex. In doing so, it’ll dramatically weaken the effect the hive has on the outside world. Once this happens, it probably won’t be strong enough to plunder energy from the Chaosverse by force.

“A reverse-vortex formation?” Ning began to understand.

“This is the reverse-vortex formation I came up with. Take a look, Darknorth.” The white-robed Titanos waved a finger, causing an illusory reverse-vortex to suddenly appear around the illusory astral vortex in front of him. This was an inwards-focused formation that pushed back against the astral vortex, weakening its power.

“The vortex of astral clouds is an outwards formation which uses the black tower as its energy source.” Ning smiled. “Our reverse-vortex formation will be an inwards formation which uses me as its energy source. My power comes from the Chaosverse itself and is virtually limitless! I don’t need to completely stop the astral vortex; all I need to do is weaken it by 30%, and it’ll most likely be rendered ineffective.”

“Here are the insights I used to create this formation. Take a close look, Darknorth.” The white-robed Titanos immediately began to explain the finer details regarding the reverse-vortex formation to Ning, who listened attentively. Mogg listened as well, but a mystified look was on his face. In the end, he wasn’t even close to being Ning or Titanos’ equal when it came to formations.

The Desolate Era

Book 43: Final Fate Chapter 24: Gaining Entry

The reverse-vortex formation was unspeakably complicated and profound. Ji Ning’s true body in the Three Realms had to spend quite a bit of accelerated time in meditation before truly understanding it.

“Marvelous. Absolutely marvelous!” Ning couldn’t stop praising it.

“Haha!” The white-robed Titanos let out a proud laugh. “I wouldn’t dare boast about other things, but I’m quite confident in myself when it comes to artifacts. Darknorth, are you now able to set the formation up?”

“I am indeed.” Ning nodded.

Mogg’s avatar just chuckled to himself. He had also tried to learn it, but had made very little headway.

The white-robed Titanos said, “Then hurry up and use it!”

“Alright.” Ning immediately flew over, warping through space to appear in the ‘skies’ above the vortex of astral clouds.

“Arise!” Ning’s face was solemn, and an endless wave of mana energy began to flow out from his body. He was using mana to guide the power of the Dao into creating those formations! Waves of energy rippled through the area above the astral vortex as countless streams of sword-light manifested. It was like a vast world of the sword had appeared, and it quickly began to spread outwards to encompass and cover the entire astral vortex.

The white-robed Titanos and Mogg both watched nervously.

“Now what are they up to?” The dragon turtle raised its head, staring puzzledly from its position on the fiftieth level.

“What are these cultivator Autarchs playing at now? Hmph. Do they think saturating the area with an attack will be enough to disrupt my vortex? How laughable! The Annihilation Hive is almighty Iyerre’s proudest creation, and it took him untold years to create it.” The black-white haired Exalt Anitya was responsible from watching over the entire hive from the dark room he was in. He muttered confidently to himself, but he still continued to watch intently.

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The vast world of sword-light covered the entire astral vortex, with Ning using an enormous amount of mana to keep it under control.

“Time for the reverse-vortex formation!” Ning immediately willed the countless streaks of sword-light to become grains of ‘sand’ that began to revolve around him. They first took shape at the outer perimeter, then began to spin inwards! The power of the astral vortex was weakest at the outside, and it was also easiest for the grains of sword-light to infiltrate the outer perimeter. As the enormous vortex of sword-light continued to spin, more grains of sword-light began to take form and seep inwards.

They reached the tenth level... the twentieth level... the thirtieth level...

“Right. That’s the way to do it, to just seep straight through it.” A smile was playing at the corner of Ning’s lips. The reverse-vortex formation didn’t try to overpower the astral vortex; rather, it was overwriting it and disrupting it!

The spokes of a wheel in motion possessed tremendous power, but if you threw a bunch of rubbish into the axel you could gum up the works. The astral vortex seemed to be formless and thus hard to disrupt, but the reverse-vortex formation was similarly formless and simply focused on disruption.

“Success.” Autarch Mogg watched from afar. He could sense the awesome suctioning power around him was beginning to slowly weaken, and he couldn’t help but smile: “We succeeded.”

“It’s too early to celebrate just yet!” The white-robed Autarch Titanos smiled. “Thus far, the influence is negligible. The behemoth hive is continuing to swallow energy away from our Chaosverse.”

Meanwhile, the dragon turtle stared in amazement at the sight above it. “What in the world?” The vortex of sword-light was continuously expanding in size, spreading out in concentric circles that continuously overlapped the astral clouds. By now, they had nearly penetrated all the way to the fiftieth level.

Rumble...

The sword-light continued to gently reach deeper and deeper into the astral clouds, moving past the sixtieth level... the seventieth level...

The grains of sword-light were incorporeal. The power of the astral clouds continually ground away at them and destroyed them, but the reverse-vortex formation created even more! Ning’s mana energy was truly boundless, and he continued to pour it all into the formation. As more and more grains of sword-light poured into the vortex, it caused the power of the vortex to grow weaker and weaker.

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The outside world. The countless tunnels dotting the surface of the realmverse-sized hive were continuing to suck in the energy of the Chaosverse. The prime essences were doing their best to halt the process, but they were unable to do so. This was why that enormous vortex of silver ‘light’ had appeared in the area around it.

But gradually, the sucking power of the hive began to weaken. The weakening continued until it reached the point where the prime essences of the Chaosverse were finally able to completely halt the process.

The silver vortex outside the hive immediately began to dissipate. Everything went back to normal. The Annihilation Hive's countless tunnels continued to strenuously 'pull' at the surrounding world, but it wasn't able to swallow so much as a single scrap of energy no matter how hard it tried.

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Within the hive. Ning was continuing to maintain the reverse-vortex formation.

Whoosh. Whoosh. The avatars of Titanos and Mogg flew to the area above the astral vortex, moving close to Ning.

"Darknorth, the devouring process outside has come to a complete halt." The white-robed Titanos was all smiles. "Although the astral vortex still has 60% of its full power, that's not enough to overpower the prime essences of the Chaosverse. It isn't able to take any more energy away."

"Haha..." Ning started to laugh. "After I've finished infiltrating the entire astral vortex, it'll become even weaker."

Just a short while later, the reverse-vortex formation finally finished seeping through the final layer of the astral vortex. In fact, the grains of sword-light even brushed against the giant black tower. The entire astral vortex was still spinning, but it was now being heavily disrupted and had at most 50% of its original power. This wasn't nearly enough power for it to continue absorbing energy from the outside world.

Swoosh! Ning, Mogg, and Titanos all quickly flew downwards. Now that the power of the vortex had been so dramatically weakened, passage was much easier as well.

"You actually solved the vortex." The dragon turtle continued to wait on the fiftieth level, its booming voice filled with disbelief.

"That's the power of the Dao," the white-robed Titanos said. "You do not train in the Dao. You would never understand."

Ning chuckled. "We've already solved this vortex, which means the sucking power of the entire hive has just been dramatically weakened. I imagine it is no longer powerful enough to prevent you from leaving! I strongly recommend that you leave right away. We'll send you outside our Chaosverse, at which point you can flee and find a hiding place far away from here. Don't let yourself be caught by the Sithe again, and stay away from our war!"

"Leave?" The dragon turtle was startled.

Freedom? Release? Emancipation? It was filled with such joy that it was rather dazed. "Alright!" The dragon turtle finally let out yet another rumble: "And what of my two friends?"

"They'll stay with us for now. We'll release them once this war is over," Ning said. It was unlikely that these Autarch-class void dwellers would be caught a second time, but it wasn't completely out of the question! The only reason why Ning was willing to let the dragon turtle leave their Chaosverse was because he really had no way of killing it. He wanted to reduce the number of variables which could affect the war.

“Fair enough.” The dragon turtle made no further objections. In the end, gaining freedom for itself was already a blessing.

“Once you leave, one of our fellows will come and guide you out,” Ning said.

“Then I’m off.” The dragon turtle shot off eagerly. Now that the astral vortex was nearly 50% weaker than before its remaining amount of power, while still incredible, was unable to steal more energy away from the Chaosverse. As for the dragon turtle, this time it was able to fight past the sucking power and continue to fly outwards.

“I see it! I see it! That’s the exit!” The dragon turtle flew out of the exit, absolutely delighted. It then turned to look at the enormous hive which it had just exited, as well as the mighty cultivator leader who stood far away from it – Autarch Titanos.

“Follow me. I’ll send you outside our Chaosverse,” Autarch Titanos said. Now that the vortex had been dealt with, the Annihilation Hive was no longer a threat and there was no need for him to continue watching over it.

The dragon turtle followed him obediently, and the two quickly warped away.

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Ning, Mogg, and the white-robed Titanos continued to fly downwards, moving closer and closer to the heart of the astral vortex. The astral clouds had been dramatically weakened, but progress was still quite difficult.

“You two stay here. I’ll try it out alone,” Ning said. “The astral vortex is still active, which means I need to keep the reverse-vortex formation active as well. If brought to a halt, the hive will once more begin to swallow energy away from our Chaosverse. In other words, my avatar needs to stay here until we can come up with a way to destroy that energy wellspring permanently. Only then can we destroy the hive, at which point I’ll be free to go.”

“Agreed.” Mogg and Titanos halted their advance. Titanos was here in the form of a newly-created avatar, while Mogg was significantly weaker than Ning.

“Break!” Ning continued to advance while following a path formed by the sword-light generated by his reverse-vortex formation. Although the destructive power of the astral vortex was great, the broken bits of sword-light continuously reformed around Ning, making passage for him slightly.

He continued to advance in three-headed, six-armed form, striking out with all six swords to help carve a path outwards. The deeper he went, the harder it became. In the end, Ning had to use all his power while following the path of sword-light in order to reach the black tower at the very center of the vortex.

Riiiiip! The terrifying crushing power here continuously destroyed the surrounding sword-light, but more grains of sword-light rose in their stead. As for Ning, he also maintained his three-headed, six-armed form to fight back.

“This is the energy wellspring of the entire hive.” Ning stared at the countless runes covering the black tower. The runes were profound beyond all imagination. After analyzing them for a while, Ning suddenly

leapt forward to ram against the black tower. Right as he hit the tower, he used a blinking technique and followed his senses to teleport inside the tower.