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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 28: Taken Away

“Bring Little Yun back here!” An unfathomably old and reclusive patriarch of the Dongyan clan gave the order personally.

“Yes, Forefather.” A Loose Immortal, ‘Immortal Norshok’, responded with great respect. That very day, he led a group of Loose Immortals in an awe-inspiring display as they left the Dongyan Mountains of the Highwater Commandery.

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The warm spring had come, and the flowers had bloomed. A leaf-shaped boat was lazily floating about on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. Atop the boat were only two people; Ji Ning and Ninelotus. In the past, the two had never made their feelings clear to each other, but upon both of them acknowledging each other as Dao-Companions, upon acknowledging that they would continue to accompany each other as companions for the rest of their long life on the Immortal path...their hearts only grew closer.

The two sat there, facing each other atop the boat. In front of them was a table, and on the table was some Immortal wine. This Immortal wine had naturally been provided by Ninelotus. Ninelotus had an extraordinary background, and the cups, wine, and various other items she carried with her were all things which Ning had never seen before.

“What sort of wine is this?” Ning held an exquisite jade wine cup in his hand, lightly tasting the wine. Instantly, his entire body became filled with a pleasurable feeling, while his heartrate began to quicken.

“This is known as ‘Immortal Dong’s Wine’.” Ninelotus held a cup of her own. “This wine actually has quite a history to it. In another one of the major worlds, one which is comparable in size and scope to this world of ours which is under the control of the Grand Xia Dynasty, an Immortal maiden from the Heaven Realm descended upon it. By a chance encounter, she met with an ordinary Immortal cultivator of that world, ‘Dong You’...the two entered into a secret relationship, wishing to accompany each other forever. Unfortunately, that Immortal maiden had an extremely exalted status in the Heaven Realm; the elders behind her would absolutely not permit her, an exalted Celestial Immortal, to become Dao-Companions with an ordinary Immortal cultivator. Thus, they forced them apart.”

Ning immediately let out a moved sigh. An Immortal maiden of the Heaven Realm? A cultivator of the mortal realm?

“Afterwards, this Dong You swore an oath that he would ascend to the Heaven Realm and take back his Dao-Companion.” Ninelotus said softly, “A mortal cultivator actually dared to claim he would go to the Heaven Realm and take his Dao-Companion back...this was simply inconceivable. But Dong You actually managed to overcome all of his difficulties, conquer the Heavenly tribulation, and become a carefree, eternal Celestial Immortal. He even became one of the leading figures of his major world, and then...he led the many Immortals of his major world to charge towards and attack the Heaven Realm. In the end...the powers behind the Immortal maiden lowered their heads. He took her back...and their legend became known throughout the Three Realms.”

Ning sighed in amazement. He had become a Celestial Immortal, then led a group of Immortals from his major world to assault the Heavens themselves?

“Dong You is also known as Immortal Eastroam, and has become an awe-inspiringly famous figure in the Three Realms. Even I, as a child, heard stories of him.” Ninelotus sighed with emotion, “And this Immortal wine was the wine concocted by Immortal Eastroam, Dong You. Many Immortals of many major worlds love this wine, and my Dongyan clan managed to acquire a bit. I carry three canteens of it with me, but have never tasted it before.” After speaking, Ninelotus cast Ning a glance.

There was something she left out; the reason she had never tasted it was because she had always planned to one day enjoy it with her own Dao-Companion. This Immortal Dong’s Wine was a sort of testament to fidelity in love, and so maidens of the royal Xia clan, the Dongyan clan, and other supreme clans liked to collect this wine and enjoy it with their Dao-Companions.

Ning, in turn, understood what Ninelotus was thinking. He took another small sip of this Immortal wine. The rousing feeling in his heart brought by the wine did indeed feel similar to the feeling one might have upon seeing one’s beloved woman.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly frowned, raising his head. Ninelotus did the same.

In the formerly completely empty sky, an enormous, completely black warship had appeared. The warship was extremely wide, and it was covered with fluttering flags with two characters atop it; ‘Dong’ and ‘Yan’. The warship emanated an aura of might, as though it were capable of battling the heavens and the earth.

Rows of armored Dao-soldiers stood atop the deck of the warship, and the eyes of these Immortal cultivators were both cold and dominating. Each of them was at least at the Wanxiang Adept level, and they were trained to a high level.

Waves of wind crushed outward from the warship as it soared towards Serpentwing Lake. The invisible ripples of wind caused the surface of the distant Serpentwing Lake to generate massive waves, and the little boat Ning and Ninelotus were seated on were lifted up as well.

“In you go.” Ning immediately collected the little boat. He and Ninelotus stood on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. The lakewater around them immediately grew calm. Although awe-inspiringly massive waves crashed down nearby, the area immediately next to them was completely calm and placid.

“What’s going on?” Ning sent to the nearby Ninelotus, “Senior apprentice-sister, this is a warship of your Dongyan clan, but it seems they come with ill intentions.”

“It must be that the clan has learned of our affairs. But...very few know about you and me. Luo Qing knew more than a year ago; if she notified the clan, the clan would’ve come long ago...for them to only come today means that it was most likely Chen Jin who told them.” A hint of worry appeared on Ninelotus’ face. “The day I worried the most about has finally come...”

Ning looked at Ninelotus. “Senior apprentice-sister,” he said softly.

“I’m the next leader of the Dongyan clan. I refuse to believe that I won’t even be permitted to decide upon my own Dao-Companion.” Ninelotus looked at Ning. “Don’t worry.”

Ning, however, suddenly felt an invisible pressure descend upon him. In this moment, he finally, suddenly understood the meaning of Ninelotus preparing Immortal Dong's Wine for them. "So she was telling me to be steadfast..."

The enormous warship slowly descended, landing atop the surface of Serpentwing Lake. It came to a halt directly in front of Ning and Ninelotus. In the face of this massive, three thousand meter long warship, Ning and Ninelotus seemed so small, so puny.

"Whoosh!"

An opening appeared at the head of the warship, and a wide plank automatically descended, landing on the surface of the lake. A man dressed in golden Daoist robes walked out, and behind him were nine Primal Daoists whose auras filled the skies. Behind the nine were a group of armored Wanxiang Adepts. This group of Immortal cultivators caused both the heavens and the earth to shudder; a martial force like this would be able to annihilate a sect like Snowdragon Mountain without any problems at all.

"The leader is Immortal Norshok of our Dongyan clan. Behind him are his nine Primal Daoist disciples, and behind them is the Darkane Guard of our Dongyan clan; all of them are at the Wanxiang Adept level," Ninelotus sent to him. Right at this moment, she saw that Ning's face had turned rather white. "Ji Ning, what's wrong?"

"I'm fine," Ning said softly.

Surges of terrifyingly powerful divine will were crashing against his soul.

Immortal Norshok and the nine Primal Daoists behind him had simultaneously launched divine will attacks against him; even Ning felt it incredibly hard to endure against an attack like this. His mind was focused on silently visualizing the painting of Maiden Nuwa, and as it did, an image of Maiden Nuwa appeared in his skull, emanating golden light and causing Ning's soul to grow calm and steady, allowing him to endure the repeatedly clashes.

"Eh?" The golden-robed Immortal Norshok's forehead creased slightly. He had led such a large group over for the express purpose of shocking and awing this kid from a backwater clan, and this divine will clash was meant to teach him a long-lasting lesson. However, this young man named Ji Ning, who was just barely twenty years of age, had actually been able to withstand the divine will attacks of himself and his nine mighty disciples.

"Master, this Ji Ning's soul is quite powerful...can it be that he's a reincarnated Immortal?"

"Even if he is a reincarnated Immortal, of what use is he to our Dongyan clan?" Immortal Noshok sent a calm message back mentally.

Even the Black-White College had quite a few reincarnated Immortals within it. What were reincarnated Immortals? They were individuals who, at the Earth Immortal or Loose Immortal stage, had despaired of making any further advancements and thus had chosen to reincarnate! After reincarnating, although it would be fairly easy for them to once more train to become Earth Immortals...if they didn't succeed in becoming Celestial Immortals in their past life, it was very possible that they also wouldn't be successful in this life!

After withstanding the divine will clash and sending the enemy divine wills off, Ning understood that these people had definitely come with ill intentions!

“Little Yun.” Immortal Norshok didn’t even look at Ning, just looking at Ninelotus. “It’s time to go back.”

“Wasn’t I only supposed to go back after becoming a Primal Daoist?” Ninelotus frowned. “Why must I go back so early? On whose authority?” Her status in the clan was very high; even Immortals didn’t have the authority to order her around.

“The Forefather personally gave the order for me to bring you back,” Immortal Norshok said solemnly.

“The Forefather?” Ninelotus was stunned.

In some clans, on occasion, an extremely powerful person would appear, whose status was far more exalted than even that of the clan leader. Ning’s status in the Ji clan was one such example! His status surpassed the Patriarch’s; although he wasn’t the titular clan leader, he was the true leader of the clan.

And for the Dongyan clan...the Forefather of the Dongyan clan was the true leader of the clan. He was an ancient presence that had existed for an unfathomably long period of time; his lifespan was measured in hundreds of millions of years. Anyone capable of living this long was, very naturally, not a Loose Immortal! The high level members of the Dongyan clan were all certain that the Forefather was a Celestial Immortal, but the Forefather himself had never admitted to it or publicized his status.

His true power was also a mystery; however, those few times he did display it, those so-called Loose Immortals were completely unable to even try and resist his might.

No one in the clan could go against his decrees. He was always in seclusion, and almost never interfered in clan matters, but once he gave an order, everyone would obey. Removing a clan leader from power, for the Forefather of the Dongyan clan, took nothing more than a single sentence. From this, one could see how exalted his status was!

“The Forefather? I, I...” Ninelotus gritted her teeth. One of the reasons why she had been selected as the next clan leader was because of the Forefather; the Forefather loved her and doted on her dearly.

“I’ll go back with you,” Ninelotus said.

Immortal Norshok nodded gently. He had never even thought about Ninelotus resisting; in the Dongyan clan, there was no one who would dare to disobey the Forefather’s orders! Unless, that is, they were truly about to betray the clan.

Ninelotus looked at the nearby Ning. She sent mentally to him, “Wait for me.”

Ning nodded gently. “Right.”

“Let’s go,” Immortal Norshok urged. Ninelotus immediately walked towards Immortal Norshok; those nine Primal Daoists and the Darkane Guard all clustered around her, escorting her onto the warship.

Immortal Norshok turned his head, giving Ning a glance. He sent a direct mental message. “Your name is Ji Ning? I think you had best wake up and understand that Little Yun is not an ordinary disciple of an ordinary clan. If she was an ordinary woman of the Dongyan clan, becoming Dao-Companions with her

would be fine, but she has been chosen to be the next leader of our Dongyan clan. And you...you aren't worthy of her." After speaking, he gave Ning a cold glance, then followed Ninelotus into the warship.

Ninelotus looked down from the warship.

Ning looked up from the lake.

Their gazes intersected in the air.

"Rumble..." The air around them began to roil about, then the enormous warship vanished into thin air.

Ning watched Ninelotus and the warship disappear. For a moment, he felt empty inside.

"Not worthy?" Ning murmured these words to himself. The resolve in his eyes only grew stronger.

"Young master."

"Ning, son."

From afar, a green leaf-type magic treasure flew over. Atop it was Autumn Leaf, the Whitewater Hound, and Qingqing; they had seen these events occur from far away, but due to the distance, they hadn't been able to overhear what had been said. Still, they clearly saw that Ninelotus had been taken away.

"Young master, are you alright?" Autumn Leaf was extremely nervous.

"It's fine. The elders of her clan miss her and want to see her, that's all," Ning said.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 29: The Forefather of the Dongyan Clan

Highwater Commandery. The Dongyan Mountains.

This was the headquarters of the Dongyan clan. Outsiders were completely forbidden from entering. An enormous, awe-inspiring warship was in the azure skies of the mountains, flying through them.

"I'm back." Ninelotus looked at the distant, familiar mountains. This was her homeland.

"Little Yun, let's go. Go meet the Forefather," Immortal Norshok said. Ninelotus nodded obediently.

Immediately, a cloud suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Immortal Norshok, controlling and riding upon the cloud, took Ninelotus directly into the forbidden lands of the Dongyan Mountains.

"Is the Forefather truly going to stop me?" Ninelotus mused silently to herself. Even when she was a child, the Forefather had doted on her; in turn, she absolutely worshipped the Forefather, and was extremely obedient towards him.

Whoosh.

They continued to fly forward through one forbidden region after another of the Dongyan clan. The guards of these locations, upon seeing Immortal Norshok and Ninelotus, did not move to stop them.

After flying for a period of time, they arrived at a secluded, ordinary-looking gorge. Within the gorge, a small river was flowing, and by the sides of the river, there was a man dressed in plain blue clothes. The man sat there, fishing calmly.

“Forefather.” Immortal Norshok landed, then called out to him respect. Ninelotus looked towards the blue-robed man, veneration in her eyes as she, too, called out gently, “Forefather.”

“Norshok, you can go for now. Little Yun, stay with me.” The blue-robed continued to fish, not even turning to look at them.

“Yes.” Immortal Norshok respectfully departed.

Only the blue-robed man and Ninelotus were left within the gorge. Ninelotus was very familiar with this gorge, because she had spent her childhood here. Because of the Forefather’s support...she had been selected as the next clan leader without any disputes or struggles at all.

“Little Yun.” The blue-robed man turned to look at her, the faintest hint of a smile on his face. It made him look very friendly and amiable. He sat there, fishing, as though he were an ordinary commoner; he didn’t have the aura of a cultivator at all. But in front of this man, the entire Dongyan clan would be respectful and subservient, not daring to offend him at all.

“Forefather.” Ninelotus instantly grew nervous.

“I hear you chose a Dao-Companion,” the blue-robed man said with a laugh. “Named Ji Ning?”

“Yes.” Ninelotus nodded.

“For now, you should forget about him,” the blue-robe man instructed.

Ninelotus grew frantic. “Forefather, you chose me to be the next leader of the clan; can it be that I can’t even choose a Dao-Companion for myself? I know that our Dongyan clan needs to grow stronger, and that my choice for a Dao-Companion would ideally be a member of the royal Xia clan or one of the main lineage descendents of a marquidom, but...even if I do choose one of them to be my Dao-Companion, the benefit it would bring to our Dongyan clan would be limited. Are you truly going to force me, Forefather?”

“Do you think I would force you?” The blue-robed man looked at her. Ninelotus was stunned.

“Even if a prince of the Grand Xia Empire became your Dao-Companion, he would only bring a limited degree of benefit to our Dongyan clan. Would I really force you over something like this?” The blue-robed man shook his head. “Ninelotus, you truly are too young.”

“But Forefather, you, you told me to forget about junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning...” Ninelotus was frantic.

The blue-robed man suddenly asked, “Do you know what it means to be Dao-Companions?”

Ninelotus hesitated for a moment. Dao-Companions?

“Dao-Companions...those who will traverse the pitfalls of the Immortal path together for a thousand years, for ten thousand years, for eternity; companions who will never leave each other. Right?” Ninelotus responded softly.

The blue-robed man let out a sigh. “Anyone can say the words. But Dao-Companions who truly support each other and never leave or abandon each other...this is incomparably rare. In my life, I have seen far

too many 'Dao-Companions' betray each other, kill each other, abandon each other...far, far too many. Nothing in this world is absolute."

Ninelotus was stunned upon hearing this.

"You are too young." The blue-robed man shook his head. "That Ji Ning, he's too young as well. Are the two of you certain...that you truly understand what it means to become Dao-Companions? Do you truly know what becoming Dao-Companions means?"

"Dao-Companions...this means that you are willing to die for him!"

"Dao-Companions...this means that if Immortals or Buddhas were to try and separate you, you would slaughter Immortals and annihilate Buddhas in order to bring your Dao-Companion back."

"Dao-Companions...this means that if he dies, even if an eternity passes, you would still be unable to forget him; you would feel as though he was still alive and right by your side."

"Dao-Companions...your other half in life! Without him, your life is no longer complete!"

The blue-robed man stared at Ninelotus, a look of unfathomable ancientness in his eyes. "Are you certain...that you would be willing to die for him? Are you certain...that for his sake, you would have the courage to slaughter Immortals and annihilate Buddhas?"

Ninelotus's mouth opened and closed a few times.

Die for him?

Battle with all the Immortals and the Buddhas of the heavens for him?

"If you are certain of these things, if you feel no hesitation at all in answering this question, then I won't stop you. I would only support you." The blue-robed man sighed. "But I can see from your eyes that you are hesitating, that you are pausing..."

"If you aren't able to treat him as the other half of your life, if you aren't able to die for him, if you don't have the courage to battle against all the Immortals and Buddhas of heaven for him...then why must you become Dao-Companions?"

"Without that degree of resolve, there's no need for you to choose a Dao-Companion."

"The path of Immortal cultivation...is a path which defies the heavens."

"You can traverse it alone. You can also traverse it with a Dao-Companion. This is an incomparably difficult path, filled with pitfalls. Thus, if you are to choose a Dao-Companion, you absolutely must choose a Dao-Companion who will truly share life and death with him; one you would die for, and one who would die for you. Otherwise...you would be better off traversing this path alone."

The blue-robed man gave Ninelotus a glance. "Ninelotus, what do you think?"

"I, I..." Ninelotus was completely stunned.

Had she been wrong?

“You are too young...and that Ji Ning is even younger than you. The two of you haven’t experienced enough! You two are nowhere near close to the point of selecting Dao-Companions, because your hearts are not yet sufficiently resolved; the two of you simply feel a sort of indistinct longing and affection for each other.” The blue-robed man shook his head. “This sort of indistinct longing and affection...it won’t last.”

“I won’t forcibly prevent you from being together with Ji Ning,” the blue-robed man said.

Upon hearing this, a hint of delight instantly appeared in Ninelotus’ eyes.

“But you must have patience. When you become a Primal Daoist, if you still feel that Ji Ning should be your Dao-Companion, than you can choose him. For now, however...you will have to endure,” the blue-robed man said.

“Wait until I’m a Primal Daoist?” Ninelotus was stunned. “How long is that going to take?”

“I’ve doted on you too much. Your Dao-heart truly is quite ordinary. Go to the Myriad Lotus Cave. I’ll set down a formation; only when you can walk out of the Myriad Lotus Cave will you be permitted to leave the Dongyan Mountains,” the blue-robed man instructed.

Ninelotus said frantically, “The Myriad Lotus Cave? How am I suppose to break through a formation that you set down, Forefather?”

“This will just be a bewildering formation meant to help illuminate your Dao-heart,” the blue-robed man said, shaking his head. “No need to argue about it. Go.”

“I’m going to send someone to notify Ji Ning.” Ninelotus knew that refusal was not an option, and so she hurriedly switched tacts.

“Go,” the blue-robed man said calmly.

Ninelotus immediately boarded a lotus-shaped magic treasure, immediately departing and making arrangements for a notification to be given to Ning.

The blue-robed man watched Ninelotus leave, then gently shook his head. “She truly is too young. Still...Ruyin, she truly does look just like you. How long has it been...do you remember how the two of us fought, shoulder-to-shoulder, in the ‘Skylight’ major world? That battle...no matter how much time passes, I’ll never forget it. Never...”

And then, he quietly went back to his fishing. His fishing hook attracted quite a number of fish to come circling around it, but the ‘hook’ was straight. It would never catch a fish.¹

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 30: Nine Years in the Blink of an Eye

In the air above Serpentwing Lake. A tall, willowy, silver-armored woman appeared, standing atop a giant sword.

“Ji Ning!” The silver-armored woman called out in a high voice. Swoosh! A wind suddenly howled forth from Brightheart Lake, and then Ji Ning appeared in midair.

“You are...?” Ji Ning looked at the silver-armored woman.

“My mistress is your ‘senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus’. Per the orders from my mistress, I have come to notify you of something,” the silver-armored woman said. Ning, actually, had already guessed that this woman had something to do with Ninelotus.

“My mistress said that she needs to remain within her clan for a time and won’t be able to come out in the near future. She asks you to wait for her patiently.” The silver-armored woman said in a cold, clear voice, “Mistress also said that the two of you could take this opportunity to consider if the two of you were perhaps too rash in deciding to become Dao-Companions.”

Ning frowned. Ninelotus had gone back to her clan and would not return? And was asking him to consider if they had decided to become Dao-Companions too rashly? What was this supposed to mean?

“I’ve delivered my message.” The silver-armored woman, after finishing, flew away on her giant sword, quickly disappearing into the horizons.

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Ning returned to Brightheart Island with a belly full of suspicions. Autumn Leaf was there by the beach, quietly waiting for him. “What happened, young master?” Autumn Leaf, seeing the restless look on Ning’s face, couldn’t help but ask him.

“That was senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus’ servant, just now,” Ning said with a frown. “She came on orders to deliver a message. Ninelotus won’t be able to leave the clan for a period of time, and also said that I should calm down and think about if we were perhaps too hasty in choosing to be Dao-Companions. What does this mean? Since we’ve already chosen to become Dao-Companions, what’s this about it being ‘too hasty’?”

In both the previous life and this one, Ning’s romantic history, or lack thereof, was completely blank.

“Young master,” Autumn Leaf said hurriedly, “I think these words don’t come from senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus. She treats you with sincerity. I imagine that the high-level members of the Dongyan clan instructed this maidservant to speak those words, so as to make you nervous. If you were to give up on your own, then they would have successfully separated the two of you.”

“Riiiiight.” Ning’s eyes lit up. “You are right. This is probably their scheme. The Dongyan clan, in truth, doesn’t quite want to see myself with Ninelotus.”

Autumn Leaf, seeing Ning’s spirit rise, couldn’t help but laugh. So long as Ning was happy, she was happy.

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Life went on without Ninelotus for Ning. He continued to live at Serpentwing Lake. He had concluded that the words sent by Ninelotus had come from the Dongyan clan, which was seeking to cause trouble between them! Thus, Ning didn’t question Ninelotus’ dedication at all. Rather, Ning felt absolutely irritated with the Dongyan clan, and truly wanted to find a chance to shock the contemptuous clan. This, Ning was quite industrious in his training at Serpentwing lake.

Every so often, he would go into seclusion to practice his swordplay...

Every so often, he would go to the Raindragon Guard's branch to take on some missions to chase after and kill criminals or problem-causing Diremonsters...

Every two or three years, he would make a trip into the underwater estate to meditate on the Dao in the Stellar Hall...

And oftentimes, he would just lie there on his boat, letting it drift about on the surface of Serpentwing Lake. These moments were the calmest, most peaceful moments for his soul...

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In the blink of an eye, nearly nine years had passed. After having killed many powerful criminals, Ning was now extremely famous.

"It's a new year." Ning stood there on his balcony, which was decorated with red lanterns, illuminating the snow that continued to fall down in this dark night.

"Young master, the dinner banquet is ready." Autumn Leaf walked over. Ning looked sideways towards Autumn Leaf. Although it had been nearly nine years, Autumn Leaf's appearance looked just as it had in the past. But perhaps because of her innate talent, despite using the many spirit-pills and medicines which Ning had provided, Autumn Leaf remained at the peak of the Xiantian level, and was still yet to establish her Zifu. The primary reason was her lack of comprehension into the Dao, and so Ning would often provide her with personal guidance. With his guidance, Autumn Leaf had begun to advance quite a bit, and most likely in a few more years, she would finally step into the Zifu level.

"Bluestone, however, is much less talented than Autumn Leaf," Ning sighed to himself. Bluestone was the little brother of Spring Grass, and Ning had once sworn an oath in front of her grave to provide him with good tutelage. Ning truly had gone all out in his efforts, and Bluestone had managed to, just barely, reach the Xiantian level. However, his rate of improvement in comprehending the Dao was far, far too slow.

Bluestone knew that there wasn't much hope for him, and so he instead asked Ning to take him to Stillwater City. He had always lived at Serpentwing Lake, and had very few life experiences; he wanted to see the legendary Stillwater City.

Ning, taking advantage of a trip to accept a mission for the Raindragon Guard, delivered Bluestone to Northmont Baiwei's residence in Stillwater City, asking Baiwei to help take care of him.

"Let's go." Ning and Autumn Leaf were walking side-by-side in a corridor.

"Young master, the clan has sent another twelve youths over. Including that last time five years ago, as well as that very first time...a total of twenty eight youths have come," Autumn Leaf said softly. "I feel that the clan is going a bit too far. Young master, you need to spend time on your own training as well. How can you possibly have enough time to guide all of these youths?"

Ning laughed. "These youths are quite weak. Your level of insight into the sword is fairly high now; follow my instructions and go provide them with guidance."

"Me?" Autumn Leaf was surprised.

“Don’t underestimate yourself,” Ning instructed. “When they break through to the Xiantian level, bring them to see me. Come, let’s go eat dinner together. Tonight will be the eve of the new year.”

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The eve of the new year was a day of great celebration. But within the Kou clan, one of the six major hegemony of the Swallow Mountain Region, nobody was laughing or smiling.

The new clan leader of the Kou clan, Kou Huai gently stroked the ancient stone walls in front of him. He stared at each tile and each brick, at the courtyards and the grass. “This is the homeland of our Kou clan...” Kou Huai touched the walls and spoke in a hoarse voice, his eyes red.

Tears streamed down the face of a maiden next to him. “Father, let’s go all out against the Ji clan. This is our foundation, the foundation of our clan. They are going to destroy our foundation, so let’s go all out against them. At worst, both of us shall suffer injuries.”

“What do you know?” Kou Huai shook his head, then raised it, staring at the snow falling from the skies. They felt very cold. “Go all out against the Ji clan? With what? For now, let’s not discuss the most powerful member of the Ji clan, Ji Ning; not a single clan in the Swallow Mountain region is capable of blocking either of those two Wanxiang Diremonsters under his command. Both of those Diremonsters are Godbeasts, and are at the peak of the Wanxiang level! They are far more powerful than ordinary peak Wanxiang Adepts. And Ji Ning himself...he is the true face of terror.”

“Ji Ning.” The maiden gritted her teeth. “I will definitely make the Ji clan regret this.”

“Don’t even think about causing the Ji clan trouble.” Kou Huai shook his head. “Those incomparably vile, wicked cultivators and Diremonsters in the Stillwater Commandery region...quite a few of them were killed by him. Amongst them was a particularly notorious and evil practitioner, Adept Poindove. Adept Poindove was someone capable of fighting against a Primal Daoist, then escaping with his life. And yet, he ended up dying to Ji Ning. I imagine that soon afterwards, this Ji Ning will become a Primal Daoist himself.”

“So what if a clan with such power takes over the entire Swallow Mountain region? Our Kou clan is so weak; if we don’t move, we’ll just be constantly suppressed by the Ji clan. In the end, we’ll be wiped out. Moving now, on the other hand, gives us a chance to survive and flourish in another place.

“And in addition!”

“It can be said that the Ji clan has already shown us mercy. They have not, at least, embarked on a slaughter against us. They’ve allowed us to continue to stay here.” Kou Huai let out a sigh.

Although they had been forced to hand over their official writs for their city to the Ji clan, which was tantamount to surrendering their base, Kou Huai didn’t feel hatred in his heart. This was because, after any clan produced a supreme expert, they would rapidly consolidate control over their surrounding territory. The Ji clan had Ji Ning, the Whitewater Hound, and the Azure Skysnake; they had complete, overwhelming power, and could’ve swept everyone away.

The Ji clan, however, had not swept anyone away. Instead, they had ‘negotiated’, allowing the various powers to voluntarily submit and decide to move. The Ji clan even gave them some buffer time, allowing them at least three but no more than ten years to depart from the Swallow Mountain region.

“Tomorrow. Tomorrow, we shall leave.” Kou Huai stroked the walls again. “Remember, child. If you are weak, you will have to lower your head. There’s no one else to blame but ourselves, for not being strong enough.”

The maiden nodded. “Tomorrow, I will go to the Thousand Rivers Sect. Father, I will definitely work hard to bring our Kou clan to prominence once more.”

“Alright.” Kou Huai looked at his daughter, his eyes filled with expectations. His daughter, his pride and joy.

However, compared to a monster like Ji Ning, she was far inferior. If his daughter was capable of becoming a Wanxiang Adept, most likely the entire Kou clan would celebrate.

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The eve of the new year. The City of Ten Thousand Swords.

Ji Ninefire had already retired; the current Patriarch of the Ji clan was the younger Ji Truekeep!

“The Kou clan and the Blackfire Cult, in the next three days, will depart from their commandery cities,” Truekeep said with a loud laugh. “Once they leave, our Ji clan’s power will have expanded even more.”

“They were quite obedient. They didn’t try to resist.” Ninefire smiled as he spoke.

“The difference in power was too great. They had no desire to fight back at all.” Granny Shadow was very satisfied as well. “Truekeep, once the Kou clan and the Blackfire Cult have left their commandery cities and our Ji clan moves in, then in the Swallow Mountain region...the only remaining powers will be the garrison of the Grand Xia Dynasty and Snowdragon Mountain’s branch, right?”

Truekeep nodded. The Grand Xia Dynasty’s garrison would definitely remain. As for the Snowdragon Mountain branch? Although Dong Ziqi and the others had died, Snowdragon Mountain had quickly sent more Zifu Disciples to enter Swallow Mountain, causing the local branch to once more flourish!

“The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain has the main Snowdragon Mountain sect behind them. Although they aren’t willing to offend our Ji clan, they aren’t so afraid of us as to hand over their territory,” Truekeep said with a sigh. “This will be troublesome. If we were to truly act against the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain, I’m worried that they will send some Wanxiang Adepts over from the main sect.”

Snowdragon Mountain didn’t wish to offend Ji Ning, whose potential was unlimited. But they weren’t actually afraid of him! They didn’t expand their territory in Swallow Mountain, but continued to stubbornly remain within their previous territory. They wouldn’t launch any attacks, but if the Ji clan were to dare to invade, they would show no mercy.

“As soon as we invade, the Swallow Mountain branch will immediately retaliate. The leader of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Xu Ke, has said long ago that if our Ji clan were to dare to attack, then they would dare to kill us.” Truekeep continued, “Although during the past nine years, our Ji clan’s power in terms of our Xiantian experts has swelled, it truly wouldn’t be worth it for us to truly fight head on against Snowdragon Mountain. Their foundation is much deeper than ours, and in terms of supreme experts, behind them are Primal Daoists.”

“Let’s not rush to fight them.” Ninefire shook his head. “I’ll go ask Ji Ning about this.”

The local branch of Snowdragon Mountain was a tough bone to chew on. They were the final obstacle preventing the Ji clan from completely dominating Swallow Mountain.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 31: Ji Ning’s Letter

However, this was the new year celebration; Ninefire and the others didn’t immediately go disturb Ning. They waited until the sixteenth day of the month before heading towards Serpentwing Lake.

Serpentwing Lake. Brightheart Island. Within a study.

Ning was standing in front of a desk, holding a writing brush and writing some characters. Autumn Leaf, by his side, was helping him grind the ink. Brush-calligraphy was something Ning had taken a liking to in recent years, and it was also one of the ways in which Ning trained his heart and also trained his sword.

With every single stroke of the brush, sword-light seemed to flash out in a dominating manner. Ji Ning’s signature...it verily emanated an almighty sword-intent.

“The sword-intent in young master’s signature has become increasingly powerful.” Autumn Leaf secretly sighed in amazement, “The young master personally instructed me in all of my sword training, and I am at the peak of the Xiantian level...but when I look at these words, I feel my heart tremble, as though I’m completely powerless. In recent years, his sword-intent has grown increasingly astonishing.”

Nobody knew exactly how powerful Ning had grown during these past nine years, but when Ning had occasionally taken on missions for the Raindragon Guard and revealed his power a few times, he had completely stunned all onlookers. His most successful battle was definitely his execution of Adept Poisonsdove.

It must be understood that evil cultivators whose bodies were surrounded by sin were usually far stronger in battle than similarly ranked cultivators. In turn, Daoist Poisonsdove was one of the most superb cultivators amongst the ranks of evil cultivators. He was capable of successfully escaping from the attacks of Primal Daoists...but he wasn’t able to escape from Ji Ning! From this, the outside world was able to guess...that Ning’s power must have truly reached a formidable level.

However, only Autumn Leaf, who had the most direct access to Ning, was able to gain a fairly accurate level of insight.

“The sword-intent in the young master’s calligraphy has only grown stronger and stronger, at an astonishing rate. Compared to three years ago...it seems to have changed in a qualitative way. There’s no point to even comparing him to where he was nine years ago.” Autumn Leaf secretly shook her head.

“I’m done.” Ning put down his brush, then said with a laugh, “Autumn Leaf, go ahead and incinerate this.”

“Yes, young master,” Autumn Leaf replied obediently. From the very beginning, Ning had always instructed her to burn his writings. At first, Autumn Leaf had been rather reluctant, and she had even said, “Young master, this is such fine calligraphy...I can even feel the sword-intent surging within the

characters. If you were to leave this set of calligraphy within the clan to allow the juniors to view it, it would be wonderful.”

But Ning had explained, “I’ll be writing every day. After a few years, how many scrolls will I have written on? In addition, these examples of calligraphy are just casual writing samples; they have no keepsake value. Every year, I’ll leave behind one special set of calligraphy, to be stored within the clan. As for the others, burn them all.”

After Ning gave these instructions, Autumn Leaf no longer argued with him.

“Young master, young master.” A voice suddenly rang out from outside. Ning raised his head to look.

Autumn Leaf also walked out, then asked, “What is it?” The messenger maidservant called out hurriedly, “The Patriarch and the others came. They are waiting in the guest hall.”

“Uncle Truekeep?” Laughing, Ning instructed, “Then I’ll come right now.”

“Help me tidy these things.” Ning glanced at Autumn Leaf, who nodded. Autumn Leaf would generally be the one to personally take care of and store Ning’s personal belongings; other maids and servants were forbidden from touching them. In particular, Ning’s calligraphy with sword-intent...mere Houtian warriors might literally be frightened to death by the sword-intent emanating from them!

Even normal Xiantian lifeforms would be terrified to the point of paralysis. Autumn Leaf trained under Ning and had an exceedingly high level of expertise in swordplay, and yet...usually, even she felt her heart quiver.

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In the guest hall.

Ning, dressed in furs, smiled as he walked in. Upon seeing Truekeep, Ninefire, Granny Shadow, and Ah Xing in the living room, he couldn’t help but say with an astonished laugh, “I thought it was just Uncle Truekeep. I didn’t imagine that the Elder Patriarch and the rest of you came as well. For all four of you to come...this must be about something major.”

“Is it indeed,” Truekeep nodded.

“Speak, what is it?” Ning sat down.

Ninefire and Truekeep exchanged a glance, then nodded slightly. Truekeep said, “Ji Ning, you know that with your help, our Ji clan’s power has grown explosively. Naturally, we’ve begun to expand.”

Ning nodded. Any clan, upon growing powerful, would expand! He had gone to the local branch of the Raindragon Guard and traded for some techniques, which he was permitted to transfer to his clan. It must be understood that some Ki Refining techniques were possessed by virtually all large clans, and thus the Raindragon Guard would permit these techniques to be passed down to a Guard’s clan. However, the price in karmic merit points would be much higher. The reason Ning had repeatedly gone to take missions was precisely due to this.

Aside from techniques, Ning had also acquired liquefied elemental essences, spirit-pills, and various other things. With those things and his tutelage, the Ji clan's ranks of Zifu Disciples had swollen to more than ten. Three of them had left Swallow Mountain, and had joined various sects.

"The Kou clan, the Riverbank clan, and the other clans have been friends with our Ji clan for many years," Truekeep said with a sigh. "However, this matter involves the strength and success of our clan; our Ji clan doesn't need to be too merciful. That's why we asked them to voluntarily migrate out of Swallow Mountain."

Ning nodded. He knew about these matters and wasn't surprised by them. The Dongyan clan, for example, took up a mountain range of hundreds of thousands of square kilometers, comparable to more than a hundred Swallow Mountains! Snowdragon Mountain, in turn, had also taken up an extremely large territory as their headquarters! But of course, the Black-White College focused on a small group of elites, and so didn't need a large territory.

However, the Black-White College was a school; it could recruit elites from the outside world. Major tribes and clans, however, felt more trust towards their own descendants. In order for the tribe to flourish, there was naturally a need for increasingly large amounts of space.

"Currently, in the Swallow Mountain region, only that branch of Snowdragon Mountain has refused to leave," Truekeep said. "The other powers have all left. As for Snowdragon Mountain, they have the main sect behind him; clearly, they are prepared to do battle at a moment's notice. If our Ji clan dares to invade, then they will dare to attack. Our Ji clan has accumulated quite a bit of power in recent years, but reinforcements arrive from the main Snowdragon Mountain sect in an unending stream. If we truly were to fight them...the Ji clan would find it quite difficult."

Ning understood. Frowning, he said, "This local branch...are they truly so impertinent as to not know when their time is up?"

"They've correctly calculated that our Ji clan doesn't dare fight with them head on, I imagine. They even sent me an envoy, saying that they won't expand their territory, but that they also wouldn't leave. Their attitude was quite resolute." Truekeep gritted his teeth. "Hmph. Come to think of it, when our Ji clan was weak, Dong Ziqi led the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain to try and force our Ji clan to leave, threatening us with annihilation. Now, however, they see that you, Ji Ning, are not an easy person to deal with...and so they say they won't expand? It isn't that they won't expand, it is that they don't have the strength to!"

For someone who was weak to say they wouldn't expand their territory was nothing more than empty self-praise. When the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain had been powerful, hadn't they been constantly, slowly expanding their territory? They had been an outside force that had shoved their way into Swallow Mountain, becoming the most powerful local organization.

"Ji Ning, what do you think our Ji clan should do in response?" Truekeep looked towards Ning. "Our decision today will impact the entire clan. We can't be the slightest bit negligent."

"The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain truly doesn't know its limits. A puny little branch...dares to act like this?" Ji Ning frowned, then said, "I'll send a letter. Uncle Truekeep, send

someone to deliver it to the Snowdragon Mountain branch. However, after the letter is rolled up, it absolutely must not be opened. I'll set a restrictive spell over it."

"Alright." Truekeep nodded. Ning immediately took out leather parchment and began to write a letter.

Ninefire, Granny Shadow, Truekeep, and the old servant Ah Xing watched from the side. When they saw what Ning wrote, their faces couldn't help but change.

"Is...is this perhaps, going a bit far?" Ninefire said, worried.

"Don't worry," Ning said calmly. "Snowdragon Mountain does not concern me."

Nine years. Ning knew exactly how powerful he had grown in these nine years. In just three years after joining the Black-White College, he had mastered the first two stances of the [Three-Foot Sword]. Nine more years had passed, and in the underwater estate...Ning had successfully challenged and overcome the fourth level of the Wargod Hall, acquiring yet another magic treasure. Ning's power, compared to nine years ago, was unfathomably greater.

"Charge into Snowdragon Mountain? That's their headquarters; I can't imagine how many secrets and spells they have hidden in that place. Even Immortals would be wary of charging in; my power isn't enough for now. But outside Snowdragon Mountain...without the support of the spells and formations located in the mountain, those Primal Daoists of Snowdragon Mountain are not enough to cause me concern," Ning mused to himself.

Snowdragon Mountain had powerful backers, yes; its backer was the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery! Generally speaking, all of the major powers within Stillwater Commandery would ally themselves with the Northmont clan of Stillwater, or with the Raindragon Guard!

But Ning, in turn, had backers of his own! In fact, his relationship with the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery was even closer than Snowdragon Mountain's...and he also had his master, Immortal Diancai!

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That very night. Snowdragon City of Swallow Mountain. This was the only commandery city which the local branch now controlled. As for the other two...the Ji clan had acquired both official writs when Dong Ziqi and the others had died. Now that the Ji clan was so strong, they were easily able to take over those two cities.

Snowdragon City, however, was like a nail, sticking up in the wilderness, firmly fixed into the Swallow Mountain region.

"A messenger from the Ji clan?"

"Hmph, this puny Ji clan...they only relied on that Ji Ning in order to grow strong. How old is Ji Ning? Although his potential is astonishing, it's quite possible that he might die on his Immortal path one day. I don't even know how many so-called 'geniuses' died in such a manner," a silver-haired elder said, an ugly look on his face.

His name was 'Xu Fang'; he was the custodian of Snowdragon City. The Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, in turn, was under the control of Xu Ke. The 'Xu' clan was a fairly powerful clan

which belonged to Snowdragon Mountain; it had quite a few Wanxiang Adepts. However, Adept Xu Li had died in that battle. This had enraged the Xu clan, and when Snowdragon Mountain's main sect had begun to make preparations for sending reinforcements to Snowdragon Mountain, the Xu clan had volunteered its services bravely.

However, Ji Ning's rate of improvement had been simply too shocking. The true leader of the Xu clan, Adept Xu Ke, had been so terrified that he had fled back to the main sect, leaving behind the Zifu Disciple, 'Xu Fang', to control matters here.

After all, for Ji Ning, killing a Wanxiang Adept was as easy as killing a chicken. Naturally, Adept Xu Ke didn't dare take the risk of being present. Xu Fang would only send a message to the main sect and Adept Xu for major matters.

"Xu Fang, this is the letter my young master has written to you." A tall, muscular old man spoke out in a cold voice.

They were in the main hall. Xu Fang was seated on his throne, while next to him was three Zifu Disciples.

"Your young master?" Xu Fang couldn't be bothered to rebuke this man for his lack of courtesy; he was badly frightened by the two words, 'young master'. The 'young master' who was writing to him...was the legendary Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake!

The three Zifu Disciples within the hall were all petrified as well. They could be disdainful in front of Ji Truekeep and the others, but as for the legendary Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake...they felt terror from the bottom of their hearts.

"Catch." The elder of the Ji clan tossed the scroll over towards them. Xu Fang caught it, and the three Zifu Disciples next to him moved towards him as well.

He unfurled the scroll. As he did, the first thing they noticed was the sword-intent which flooded towards them from the characters atop it. It caused their hearts to tremble and their legs to turn weak.

"Xu clan, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain. I give you ten days to get the f*ck out of Swallow Mountain. If after ten days you have yet to move, then don't blame me for showing no mercy with my sword." It was quite a casual letter, but it was filled with an absolutely dominating aura! Normally, the Ji clan and the Snowdragon Mountain branch would tussle back and forth, but they would never get into a real fight. Ji Ning's letter, however, showed no sign of compromise at all.

They had to leave in ten days. Otherwise...he would attack!

"This...this..." Xu Fang stared, then said with fury, "This shows no respect for our Snowdragon Mountain at all. Quick, report this to the main sect! Report this to the main sect!!!"

As soon as his words came out...

Whoosh. The restrictive spells on the parchment, summoning natural fire, instantly caused the parchment to begin to blaze, transforming it into gray ash.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 32: Daoist Snowplume

“They aren’t even leaving the words behind?” Xu Fang, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain, and the other three Zifu Disciples were so furious that they gritted their teeth. When they looked at the characters on the leather parchment, they had sensed the sword-intent surge towards them, and had been so frightened that their legs had turned soft. They understood that they were at too low of a level, and that they were unable to comprehend the level of insight the sword-intent within the characters indicated.

However, if the high-level members of Snowdragon Mountain were to see the parchment, they should be capable of deducing Ji Ning’s level of strength. Clearly, Ji Ning was extremely cautious and didn’t plan on giving them that chance.

“The young master’s letter has been delivered. I won’t tarry!” The envoy of the Ji clan turned, openly and unabashedly walking away. As for Xu Fang and the other members of Snowdragon Mountain, they could only watch as the envoy walked away.

“What should we do?”

“Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake has made his threat. What should we do?”

They looked at each other, their gazes filled with fear and unease. Upon seeing the characters on the scroll, they immediately knew...that Ji Ning’s power had reached a level that was vastly beyond their’s. He was most likely capable of annihilating them with one blow. This massive gap in power which they faced made them feel tremendous pressure.

“No matter what...this person isn’t someone the likes of us can deal with. Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake...he is someone who is able to effortlessly kill Wanxiang Adepts. We have to report this to the main sect.”

“Right. We must report this to the main sect.”

“Third Brother, we are simply too far from the main Snowdragon Mountain sect. In ten short days...we won’t even be able to make it back to the sect. There’s no way to report this at all.”

Xu Fang and the other three exchanged glances, their eyes filled with helplessness and bitterness. Right. Ji Ning had only given them ten days, but they were only Zifu Disciples; they wouldn’t be able to make it back to Snowdragon Mountain in just ten days. They wouldn’t be able to alert the main sect of the letter and the threat which Ji Ning had made.

“There’s no other options. I’ll have to use the talisman,” Xu Fang said, shaking his head. “Although there’s no way to let the main sect know of the details, at least we’ll be able to let them know that something happened.”

“Right. Break the talisman.”

“That’s our only choice.”

All four men were in accord.

The leader of the Swallow Mountain branch was Adept Xu Ke, but because Adept Xu Ke was terrified of Ji Ning, he had hidden himself within the main sect. Before leaving, he had left three talismans, then gave these instructions: “These three talismans are different in size. When you break then, I’ll be able to

sense it. If you break the smallest talisman...that means that the Ji clan's attack is imminent! If you break the middle one, that means Ji Ning's attack is imminent! And if you break the largest one, that means that the local branch has already been shattered. Remember – only when a true emergency occurs are you to break these talismans.”

These three talismans represented three different danger levels.

An attack from the Ji clan?

This meant that the situation wasn't that bad; after all, in terms of their relative power bases, the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain truly wasn't afraid of the Ji clan. But if Ji Ning were to attack...then things really would turn grim. There was no way the Swallow Mountain branch could possibly resist the monster-like 'Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake'.

Xu Fang waved his hand, and three talismans of different sizes appeared within it.

“Ji Ning is going to personally attack...there is nothing we can do.”

“We have to hope that the main sect will send experts to come negotiate with Ji Ning.”

In their hearts, they didn't believe that the main sect would truly choose to engage in a battle with Ji Ning. After all, he was a disciple of the Black-White College, and he had an Immortal behind him! Compared with the Black-White College, Snowdragon Mountain was unfathomably weaker. Although it was on good terms with the Northmont clan of Stillwater Commandery, the Black-White College was actually located inside Stillwater City, and its relationship with the Northmont clan was incomparably close.

It could be said that the Northmont clan viewed the Black-White College as its hands and arms, while Snowdragon Mountain was nothing more than a lackey.

“Crack.” Xu Fang shattered the second, pitch-black talisman.

The distant Snowdragon Mountain. This was a place of unending winter, of eternal snow. Peaks of various heights towered here, with Immortal cultivators living with them. Within one such peak, the master was Adept Xu Zhen.

Adept Xu Zhen had pale, beardless face. He appeared quite handsome. He sat in the lotus position on his jade bed. The white-robed Adept Xu Zhen's eyes were closed in relaxation, and he appeared quite rested. Next to him, there were two young apprentices waiting on his instructions and his needs.

“Eh?” Adept Xu Zhen's face suddenly changed slightly. With a wave of his hand, he produced a black talisman. This talisman had already shattered.

This talisman had originally come in a pair. If one was shattered, the other would crumble as well.

“This talisman is...” Adept Xu Zhen thought back to what he had said, and then his face changed. “This is the second talisman. It represents that Ji Ning is going to act against the Swallow Mountain branch!”

“Ji Ning...he has quietly slumbered for nine years. Is he finally going to attack?” Adept Xu Zhen was rather panicked.

When the Xu clan had volunteered to be stationed within the Swallow Mountain region, they had done so for two reasons. First, they had been angered by the fact that Adept Xu Li had died there. Secondly, they wanted to expand the territory of their own clan. But how could they have imagined that soon after they had taken over, news would come...that Ji Ning had joined the Black-White College?! This caused the Xu clan to be filled with boundless regret. This assignment had become a hot potato that they couldn't discard, because...the prestige of Snowdragon Mountain meant that the Xu clan was absolutely not permitted to retreat or fold up.

But as time passed, Ji Ning's fame only grew greater and greater! Adept Xu Ke had been so terrified that he had hidden himself back within the main sect, leaving behind only those four Zifu Disciples. Even if the four of them died, it wouldn't represent too much of a loss for the Xu clan.

"Ji Ning has finally revealed himself. What should we do next? My Xu clan has multiple Wanxiang Adepts, but I'm afraid that even if we join forces, we won't be able to overcome Ji Ning. He's a monster that was capable of killing even Adept Poisdove!" Adept Xu Ke frantically pondered what to do next. "I have no other options...I'll have to go visit Master."

Snowdragon Mountain had a total of three Primal Daoists; they were Daoist Snowplume, Daoist Coldsun, and Daoist Blackdragon. They each took up one of the three highest mountain peaks in the region. The master of Adept Xu Ke, in turn, was Daoist Snowplume.

For a school of elites like the Black-White College, the Primal Daoists of the second generation disciples, when interacting with the Wanxiang Adepts and Zifu Disciples of the third generation disciples, would be fairly courteous. They wouldn't act arrogantly or show off! However, in schools with many disciples, where dragons swam alongside minnows, the more powerful one was, the more high-and-mighty one would behave. In the case of Snowdragon Mountain, to be one of only three Primal Daoists meant that one really would put on a show of grandeur.

"Senior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience."

"Senior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience."

First, the junior disciples guarding the gates to the mountain would make the announcement. Next, one of the 99 male Zifu Disciples or 99 female Zifu Disciples would go to report this to one of the Wanxiang Adepts servants, who would then personally inform Daoist Snowplume.

"Master, junior apprentice-brother Xu Ke requests an audience," a gray-robed man said, standing respectfully outside a private room.

"Granted." A calm voice came out from the private room.

This response was once more passed out in multiple layers, and in the end, Adept Xu Ke was finally allowed to come to the private room. Generally speaking, Daoist Snowplume would only permit disciples which the school valued greatly to remain by his side. For the likes of Adept Xu Ke, who had no chance at all of breaking through to become Primal Daoists, they had all been sent out long ago. They would only be permitted to make an occasional visit if they had something important to discuss.

“Your disciple greets you, Master.” Adept Xu Ke respectfully knelt outside the private room. The outside area was covered in piles of snow. The white-robed Adept Xu Ke, kneeling there within the pristine white snow, actually made for quite a beautiful sight.

Creeaaak.

The door swung open.

A handsome Daoist, dressed in a feathered robe, walked out. He had a head full of long, unbound black hair, and a hint of amusement could be seen in his long, slender eyes.

He was one of the three titans of Snowdragon Mountain; Daoist Snowplume!

Daoist Snowplume’s disciples all shared one commonality; they had to be handsome. He himself was an extremely handsome man, and the same was true for his disciples. The kneeling Xu Ke, the gray-robed man by the door...all of them were exceptionally attractive in their looks.

“What is it?” Daoist Snowplume said calmly.

“Respected master,” Adept Xu Ke said, still kneeling, “Years ago, our Swallow Mountain branch, because of the Ji clan, was nearly annihilated. At that time, I went along with some of my fellow disciples and took up station there, helping to steady and firm up that branch. However, by now, Ji Ning’s level of power has reached unearthly levels. Relying on his prestige, the Ji clan has shown us no consideration at all. This very day, I received word that Ji Ning is about to attack our Swallow Mountain branch in person! I truly am unable to do anything about him, so I have come to request an audience with you, Master. I beseech you, Master, tell me what I should do with regards to this Ji Ning.”

“Ji Ning?” Daoist Snowplume frowned slightly. “He is going to personally attack? How did you receive this news? We are quite far from Swallow Mountain; I imagine that by now, our branch has already been destroyed.”

“It shouldn’t be,” Adept Xu Ke said respectfully. “When I left Swallow Mountain, I left behind three talismans to my clansmen. The destruction of different talismans represented different types of news! The talisman they destroyed...represented that Ji Ning would be attacking personally! As soon as they destroyed it, I became aware of this news, and so I immediately came to visit you, Master.”

Daoist Snowplume nodded. “I have heard of the affairs between Ji Ning and the Swallow Mountain branch. Ji Ning is perhaps too arrogant; our Snowdragon Mountain has always been accommodating and unwilling to create true enmity between our two sides, and we even chose to pretend as though the death of Adept XuLi didn’t happen. After all, in truth, that year, it was our Snowdragon Mountain which suffered a loss, not their Ji clan.”

“But he views this as being insufficient; he even wants to expel our entire Swallow Mountain branch?” A hint of anger had appeared in Daoist Snowplume’s eyes.

How could anyone capable of becoming a Primal Daoist be a pushover?

“Hmph! No matter what, he is merely a Wanxiang Adept; he’s not yet qualified to try and force Snowdragon Mountain into avoiding him!” Daoist Snowplume said coldly, “Let’s go. Accompany me to Swallow Mountain.”

Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man were both greatly shocked. The master was going to go in person? They had originally assumed that an envoy would be sent to negotiate.

“He is a mere Wanxiang Adept,” Adept Snowplume said coldly. Snowplume was a cultivator who had trained for more than a thousand years, and was now at the peak of the Primal stage! Although some truly monstrous Wanxiang Adepts were capable of giving Primal Daoists a good fight, there were differences between early, middle, late, and peak-stage Primal Daoists.

How could he possibly fear Ji Ning?

“The Black-White College has a large number of Wanxiang Adepts; the most monstrous of them are the truly genius disciples such as Holyfire. Every few centuries, they will produce another ‘genius’, but in the end, the Black-White College still only has a few Immortals.” Daoist Snowplume mused to himself that becoming an Immortal was no easy feat! “Even if Ji Ning is a monster, it will still be hard for him to become an Immortal! And even if he does become an Immortal...he will still be under the control of the Marquis of Stillwater. What can he do to us!”

“Come, let’s go take a look at this Ji Ning and see how much of a ‘genius’ he is and how much of a ‘monster’ he is, for him to show such disregard for our Snowdragon Mountain,” Daoist Snowplume said calmly.

“Yes.” Adept Xu Ke and the other all immediately bowed in acknowledgment.

Shortly afterwards, a large warship, under their control, began to soar through the skies, departing from Snowdragon Mountain.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 33: A Primal Daoist and Ji Ning

Within the Swallow Mountain region.

The ancient Immortal vessel, emanating a powerful, crushing aura, was surging towards Serpentwing Lake.

“Our respects to you, Patriarch.”

Xu Fang and the other Zifu Disciples knelt down, extremely nervous. They didn’t even dare to raise their heads to look at him. To the four Zifu Disciples...the Primal Daoist level was unfathomably distant from them. In addition, they hadn’t imagined that after shattering that talisman, one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, would be the one to come.

“Describe the situation to me in detail.” The feather-robed Daoist Snowplume sat there. He gave them a sideways glance, then closed his eyes and calmly gave them their orders.

“Yes.” The leader, Xu Fang, cleared his throat, then said nervously, “Just yesterday, an envoy from the Ji clan came to our Snowdragon City and tossed a scroll written by Ji Ning for us to read. When we saw the scroll...we were immediately frightened by the terrifying sword-intent contained within those characters, to the point of our legs going soft and our hearts quivering.”

“You were so frightened that your hearts quivered and legs went soft?” Daoist Snowplume suddenly opened his eyes wide as he stared at the kneeling Xu Fang.

“Right. Patriarch, you can ask the other three,” Xu Fang said hurriedly. The other three kneeling Zifu Disciples all hurriedly nodded as well. “It is true. We were so frightened that our hearts shook and our legs went weak. The characters on that scroll did truly contain a terrifying sword-intent. We’ve never seen such a terrifying sword-intent before...those characters completely chilled our hearts.”

“We wouldn’t dare to live. This sort of sword-intent...we’ve never even heard of it before.”

“This was the letter written personally by Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake.”

All of them hurriedly responded in unison. This caused Daoist Snowplume to frown and bark, “Give me that letter and let me look at it.”

Xu Fang immediately said, “That scroll was covered by a restrictive spell. When we opened it and read it, it automatically self-destructed and was set aflame.”

Daoist Snowplume’s face instantly turned rather unsightly. This caused Xu Fang and the other three to be utterly terrified at the thought that they might have angered their Patriarch.

“What did his letter say?” Daoist Snowplume barked.

“His letter just had a simple line of words. It said this: Xu clan, of the Swallow Mountain branch of Snowdragon Mountain. I give you ten days to get the f*ck out of Swallow Mountain. If after ten days you have yet to move, then don’t blame me for showing no mercy with my sword。 “

Xu Fang was a cultivator; naturally, his memory was extremely good, and he had completely memorized the words which Ji Ning had written.

Daoist Snowplume, upon hearing this, immediately started to laugh. “He’s quite arrogant. He truly does hold our Snowdragon Mountain with no regard at all.”

“The rest of you can leave.” Daoist Snowplume waved his arm. Instantly, Xu Fang and the other three quickly departed from the cabin, leaving behind only Daoist Snowplume and his two disciples.

“Master.” Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man both looked towards their master, waiting for his response.

“For the sword-intent within that scroll to terrify Zifu Disciples to the point of their legs going soft...no one within Snowdragon Mountain has been able to produce sword-intent on this level,” Daoist Snowplume said, nodding gently. “I’ve heard that this Ji Ning specializes in using the sword. Now, it seems, this truly is the case. However, no matter how talented he is, he is merely a Wanxiang Adept, and the only magic treasures he can use are top-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures.”

Daoist Snowplume felt absolute confidence. Most of the so-called ‘Primal Daoists’ who were defeated by Wanxiang Adepts were mere early-stage or middle-stage Primal Daoists. He, however, was a peak-stage Primal Daoist!

He had trained for more than a thousand years. As one of the three Patriarchs of his clan, all the magic treasures he used were high quality Heaven-ranked magic treasures. Everything else aside, his foundation of elemental energy and his magic treasures completely surpassed Ji Ning’s. That was without accounting for the ‘primal fire’ his body could produce, or the ‘skywater’ he was cultivating, which was even more formidable than dire-ice...

“Let’s go take a look at this so-called genius of the Dao of the Sword,” Daoist Snowplume said with a calm laugh. “I truly am curious...what makes him think he can abuse our Snowdragon Mountain so? Does he truly think that his reputation as a disciple of the Black-White College is enough to allow him to act in such a lawless manner?”

Brightheart Island. Serpentwing Lake. Within a study.

Ji Ning was currently doing what he did almost every day...writing calligraphy! Next to his side, Autumn Leaf continued to grind ink for him. Ning, brush in hand, wrote one character after another. To him, writing was a form of enjoyment, a way to temper his heart and improve his understanding of the Dao of the Sword.

Rumble...

A surging, crushing wave of divine will instantly swept across nearly the entirety of Serpentwing Lake, including the entire Brightheart Island.

Boom. Ning’s own divine will, however, was like an unmoving boulder, and when the crushing wave of divine will struck against it, the wave.

“Which fellow Daoist is this?” Ning instantly sent through divine will.

“Divine sense? It seems the outside world has underestimated you, Ji Ning. At such a young age, you already possess divine sense...I imagine you are a reincarnated Immortal.” The other surge of divine sense, having realized that it held no advantage at all in terms of the soul, began to chat with Ning. As for Ning, his own divine sense swept out as well.

[Soulshaker Art]!

A raging wave of divine will smashed outwards, crashing towards the soul of Daoist Snowplume, who was in the air above Serpentwing Lake!

BOOM.

Although Daoist Snowplume had trained for more than a thousand years, ten years ago, Ning had already reached the Primal Daoist level in terms of the soul. During the past ten-plus years, he had never slackened off vigilantly training with the [Nuwa Painting]. His soul-improvement had been tremendous, and his divine sense was now capable of stretching to nearly a thousand kilometers. This made it so that even the vast majority of Primal Daoists were unable to compete with him.

Daoist Snowplume, at least, was somewhat weaker in terms of the soul. His divine sense was only capable of stretching to six hundred kilometers!

“Autumn Leaf, tidy things up here. I’ll go and take a look,” Ning said. Autumn Leaf nodded and replied, “Yes, young master.”

There was an ancient, enormous Immortal warship hanging in the air above Serpentwing Lake. The Immortal cultivators aboard this ship included a feather-robed Primal Daoist; it was Daoist Snowplume. At this moment, Daoist Snowplume’s face changed slightly; clearly, he was feeling some discomfort from Ning’s [Soulshaker Art] attack. However, since the difference in soul strength between the two wasn’t that great, the collision wasn’t able to affect him much.

“What a formidable Ji Ning!” Daoist Snowplume, having suffered a slight loss in secret, murmured softly to himself, “No wonder he is such a monster...so he truly is a reincarnated Immortal! But so what if he is? It’ll be even harder to withstand the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations,” Daoist Snowplume smirked.

Every three centuries, a tribulation would descend. Generally speaking, a mental trial would accompany the tribulation, and the more one knew, the more terrifying the mental trial would be. Reincarnated Immortals would have mental trials that were far more powerful than the trials ordinary cultivators would face. Thus, Immortals who chose to reincarnate would initially advance at a breakneck pace, but the further they went, the harder they would find it.

In turn, there were few to no reincarnated Immortals who would successfully pass the Heavenly Tribulation to become Celestial Immortals. Their chance was actually far lower than the chance which most Immortal cultivators faced.

“A reincarnated Immortal?” Adept Xu Zhen and the gray-robed man looked at each other, secretly shocked.

“This Ji clan truly did blunder into tremendous luck; a reincarnated Immortal was actually born into their clan,” Adept Xu Ke mused to himself. “That junior apprentice-brother of mine, Xu Li...poor bastard...he died to a reincarnated Immortal...”

Daoist Snowplume said calmly, “Don’t be frightened by that. So what if he is a reincarnated Immortal? Many reincarnated Immortals fall and perish on their Immortal path, even before becoming Immortals again. This is all too common.”

This was the truth.

The likes of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire all had foundations for becoming Immortals! However, the path of Immortal cultivation was a path which went against the will of the heavens...and so the heavens would send invisible trials and tribulations, causing the vast majority of these geniuses to fall and perish. It was equally possible for reincarnated Immortals to perish at the Wanxiang Adept or Primal Daoist levels.

“Are you Daoist Snowplume of Snowdragon Mountain? A distant voice rang out, a voice which shook the world. Daoist Snowplume walked straight to the helm of the ship, staring into the distance.

Off in the distance, there was a fur-clad youth. He looked like an ordinary youth from a barbarian tribe, and behind him, there was an azure-robed maiden and a large, snowy white dog. They all stood there in midair, staring towards the ship.

“Master, these people from Snowdragon Mountain come with bad intentions,” the nearby Little Qing sent mentally.

“Of course they do. However, I didn’t expect that my intentions to drive out their Swallow Mountain branch caused a Primal Daoist to come in person.” Ning stared towards the distant warship.

Daoist Snowplume, standing at the helm of the Immortal warship, truly did have the elegant aura of an Immortal. He laughed loudly, “I am indeed. I heard that the Black-White College has produced a disciple,

Ji Ning, whose talent is astonishing and whose power is formidable. Upon my first time meeting you...I can tell that your reputation is well-deserved.”

“You praise me too much,” Ning replied. “Might I ask why you have come to my Serpentwing Lake, Daoist Snowplume?”

Daoist Snowplume, aboard his warship, spoke frankly. “I have come because of some matters between you and the local branch of our Snowdragon Mountain. Your Ji clan is expanding its territory here in Snowdragon Mountain...our local branch won’t hinder you in the slightest, but I heard that you sent word ordering the branch to move away within ten days?”

“That did indeed happen,” Ning said, nodding.

“Don’t you feel that you are being a bit too arrogant?” Daoist Snowplume looked towards Ning.

Ning shook his head. “Based on what I know, your Snowdragon Mountain, in establishing your headquarters, have taken over a territory of a hundred thousand kilometers. You have also set up numerous branches throughout Stillwater Commandery, and are constantly infiltrating into new areas and continuing to expand your branches. Can it be that your own Snowdragon Mountain is permitted to frantically expand, while my Ji clan is to be so limited that we cannot even take over the Swallow Mountain region?”

Those who were powerful would naturally expand.

“How can your Ji clan be compared in the same breath to my Snowdragon Mountain!” Daoist Snowplume said with a frown.

“In the past, when our Ji clan was weak, your Swallow Mountain branch dared to constantly invade and push forward, becoming the most powerful force within Swallow Mountain despite not being local to this place. You even dared to try and forcibly take our elemental ore mine!” Ning stared at Daoist Snowplume. “Now that our Ji clan is powerful, can it be that we can’t even expel a single branch of yours? Can it be that only you are allowed to abuse others, while our Ji clan isn’t even allowed to expand?”

A look of anger was on Daoist Snowplume’s face. “You truly are determined to exile our Swallow Mountain branch?”

“Right.” Ning nodded.

“You are holding Snowdragon Mountain in no regard at all!” Daoist Snowplume said with anger.

“Think whatever you wish. The expelling of the Swallow Mountain branch is something I have set my mind on doing,” Ning said, staring at Daoist Snowplume.

Their gazes intersected.

Daoist Snowplume instantly understood that this Ji Ning was not going to lower his head.

“Do you think that your reputation as a disciple of the Black-White College will scare me off?” Daoist Snowplume’s face sank, and his voice began to echo in the skies. “I urge you to know when to cut your

losses. Otherwise...today, I will personally teach you a lesson and let you know...that the words you say need to be matched with an equal amount of strength.”

Ning stared at the distant Daoist Snowplume. He cracked his lips into a smile, and his voice also echoed in the skies. “The words you say need to be matched with an equal amount of strength...well-spoken! I was actually hoping for you to provide me with some pointers, Daoist Snowplume, and see what formidable techniques you have!”

Daoist Snowplume was instantly enraged. “You don’t know your limits,” he howled angrily, his voice echoing out like a thunderclap from an enraged God of Thunder. Instantly, the world around them began to change colors. “I shall grant you your wish.”

“Come!” Ning’s response was cold and calm.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 34: Ji Ning Battles a Primal Daoist

Daoist Snowplume soared onto a cloud, then stood there in midair, staring towards the opposite Ji Ning.

“Little Qing, Uncle White, the two of you, stay farther away,” Ning instructed. This was a competition between himself and Daoist Snowplume; there was no need for Uncle White or Little Qing to interfere.

“Ning, son, be careful,” the Whitewater Hound instructed.

“Master, beat the crap out of that old Daoist!” Little Qing clenched her fists, full of anticipation. Although she didn’t know exactly how strong Ning was, she knew he was unfathomably stronger than he had been when they had met in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains.

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Daoist Snowplume and Ji Ning both stood there in the air, staring at each other.

“They are actually going to fight?!”

Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man both watched with eyes filled with amazement.

“Senior apprentice-brother Lu, how can this Ji Ning be so bold as to dare to fight against Master?” Adept Xu Ke had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagined that Ji Ning would be this arrogant, not even giving Daoist Snowplume any face. “Master is a peak Primal Daoist, and has the full strength and support of our Snowdragon Mountain sect behind him; even amongst Primal Daoists, he would be considered formidable.”

“Madman. A true madman.” The gray-robed man shook his head, also in disbelief. “Can it be that this Ji Ning thinks that he can defeat Master? Master isn’t like some of those newly ascended Primal Daoists; he became a Primal Daoist centuries ago! His foundation is unfathomably deep and stable, and he has gained tremendous fame!”

The two of them, both Wanxiang Adepts, were stunned. And as for the Zifu Disciples on the ship? Their amazement went without saying!

The large group of Zifu Disciples of Snowdragon Mountain were completely shocked and dazed. Ji Ning actually dared to challenge their unfathomably exalted Patriarch, Daoist Snowplume? He was absolutely suicidal!

“I shall grant you your wish!”

“Come!”

Daoist Snowplume and Ji Ning’s words, one after the other, thundered in the skies, filling the air above the entire Brightheart Island. Quite a few denizens of the island had already stood up to stare.

“Ji Ning is going to fight a Primal Daoist?” Ji Ninefire’s face instantly changed.

“How can Ji Ning act so rashly? That’s a Primal Daoist! And a peak Primal Daoist, at that...even if he wanted to fight one, he should choose an early or mid-stage Primal Daoist to test himself against first. How can he immediately challenge a peak Primal Daoist like Daoist Snowplume?” Ji Truekeep was panicking as well.

In fact, he even began to feel regret. He began to regret asking for Ning’s advice as to how they should deal with the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain. He had no idea that Ning would be so ‘unyielding’, and be willing to go head on against the enemy, even when they sent a Primal Daoist!

“Daoist Snowplume...he’s a peak Primal Daoist!” Granny Shadow was beginning to worry as well.

The Ji clan had always been on poor terms with Snowdragon Mountain, which was why Ning had acquired a set of detailed intelligence reports on Snowdragon Mountain. After reading it, he had stored it within the Ji clan’s archives. Naturally, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, and the others had all read through it and had gained an extremely clear understanding of Snowdragon Mountain.

And this was exactly why they were so worried right now.

“Young master...” Autumn Leaf chewed on her lips, holding her breath as she stared at the two figures in midair.

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Everyone on both sides felt that Ning was playing with fire...but Ning himself knew his own level of power clearly. The reason why he dared to write such a letter...was because he truly felt no fear towards Snowdragon Mountain’s Primal Daoists!

There were differences in power amongst Primal Daoists as well.

The Primal Daoists of the Black-White College, for example, were absolute elites amongst elites, who were even capable of giving Immortals a fight! Some of the weaker, early-stage Primal Daoists, in turn, were far, far weaker...even nine years ago, Ning was confident in being able to escape with his life from them. It was precisely figures like Daoist Snowplume who were the most suitable for Ning to test himself against.

“Even if you are a reincarnated Immortal, I imagine that at your current level of power, you haven’t completely awakened all of your former memories,” Daoist Snowplume said, shaking his head and laughing. “I’ll let you know...what the difference is between Primal Daoists and Wanxiang Adepts!”

A fan suddenly appeared within Daoist Snowplume's hand. He gave it a casual wave.

Whoosh!

This fanning motion instantly caused flames to appear out of nowhere. A brilliant golden flame wildly rippled forth, exploding into a sea of flames that swirled towards Ning.

"Primal Fire?" Ning instantly recognized it for what it was. Primal Fire was something which every Primal Daoist possessed. During his adventure in the wild marshes of the Gaol Mountains, the Dragonwhale, upon becoming a Primal Daoist, had relied on this technique to burn Adept Redbud to death. However, at that time, the Dragonwhale had only been an early-stage Primal, and so the power of his Primal Fire wasn't strong enough. It was far weaker than Daoist Snowplume's Primal Fire.

"Condense." Ning let out a soft chant. Instantly, a lotus flower colored red and green suddenly appeared out of nowhere. The green came from the leaves of the lotus flower, while the red came from the petals. The enormous green leaves swirled around the red petals in the center, which were clustered much more tightly together. They swiveled together naturally, with Ning at the very center, completely protected by this lotus flower.

This was his protective technique, the Waterflame Lotus.

Rumble...

The flames formed from Primal Fire seemed to cover the heavens. They surged towards Ning, but the lotus simply continued to swivel in the middle of that sea of flame. Clearly, the flames were completely unable to penetrate past them.

"What?!" Daoist Snowplume, fan in hand, revealed a look of shock on his face. "This Ji Ning is able to easily deflect my Primal Fire, and without using a sword technique, but some sort of protective technique?"

Previously, upon learning that Ji Ning's calligraphy had terrified the Zifu Disciples so badly that their hearts had trembled and their legs had gone soft, he had guessed that Ji Ning must be at an extremely high level of expertise with the sword. He had thought that Ji Ning would execute his swordplay, using it to strike against all techniques and shatter the sea of Primal Fire. Daoist Snowplume was only intending to use this 'sea of Primal Fire' to test Ning's capabilities, but he hadn't expected that Ning would be able to block it with just a single lotus.

"A lotus flower? This Ji Ning has an exceedingly deep level of comprehension of both fire and water," Daoist Snowplume mused secretly to himself.

Indeed, his words were correct.

Ning had indeed reached an extremely high level of mastery in both the Dao of Rainwater and the Dao of the Inferno. During the past nine years, he had been supported by the underwater estate! His rate of improvement was incomparably astonishing; his past nine years was comparable to ninety years for an ordinary genius! In these two Daos, Ning already felt in a vague way that he had reached a bottleneck. With but a single further step, he would be able to completely comprehend the Daos of Rainwater and the Inferno!

With the added help he had from Ninelotus in discussing the Dao and the secrets of the lotus, Ning had further perfected this Waterflame technique. During the past nine years, Ning's dire-ice and earthfire had both reached the fourth grade as well.

With dire-ice and earth-fire assisting the Divine Solar Tattoo and Divine Lunar Tattoo on his body in activating the natural fire and water of the world, and with his comprehension of the Dao of Rainwater and the Dao of the Inferno, and with his additional prowess in the mysteries of the lotus...the current Waterflame Lotus had been formed, which was now a supremely skillful protective technique.

The petals and the leaves swiveled about each other in layers, possessing incomparable defensive power.

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The two had exchanged their first blows. One had unleashed a sea of Primal Fire, while the other had created a lotus within the sea.

This caused the spectators on both sides to feel incomparably nervous.

"He's fine. Ji Ning is fine."

"Ji Ning is within the lotus." The Ji clan's side let out sighs of relief.

"What technique did this Ji Ning use? The Primal Fire which Master has been cultivating for centuries isn't able to do anything to him?" Snowdragon Mountain began to grow nervous.

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In midair.

"It seems you truly do have a bit of talent," Daoist Snowplume barked coldly. As his words came out, the sea of fire that had filled the skies vanished. "But I want to see how long you can hold on for."

One drop of water after another began to appear in the skies. These 'raindrops', however, were the size of a fist, and there were 108 of them which hovered around Daoist Snowplume's body.

"Skywater?" Ning revealed a look of curiosity and excitement on his face. Earthfire, upon improving to the next level, would transform into skyfire; dire-ice upon improving to the next level, would become skywater. Even amongst Primal Daoists, only a few would have access to skyfire and skywater.

"Go." Daoist Snowplume waved his fan yet again. Instantly, the 108 fist-sized raindrops shot out like meteors, slashing through the skies and smashing towards Ji Ning.

BOOM!

When the first raindrop smashed directly against Ning's protective lotus, it broke straight through the outermost layer of leaves, but was blocked by the red petals within.

"What tremendous power." Ning could feel the terrifying collusive force of those raindrops. His current Waterflame Lotus was capable of completely dominating the vast majority of Wanxiang Adepts, and had even been capable of blocking Primal Fire, but it had been badly damaged by a single drop of

skywater...most likely, that drop of skywater would have been enough to smash an ordinary peak Wanxiang Adept to death.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh...many raindrops of skywater came smashing downward. Ning no longer dared to allow his Waterflame Lotus to take it all head on.

“Spin.” Ning held a Darknorth sword in each hand. Sword-light flashed, and those oncoming drops of skywater, carrying a savage aura that filled the heavens...instantly began to swirl around the sword-light Ning had generated. They had actually been captured and taken control of by Ning’s sword-light.

The sword-light was like water, guiding the drops of skywater in their movements...

“Eh?” The distant Daoist Snowplume was startled. “A seemingly simple sword attack, and yet, it contained so many mysteries...Ji Ning’s sword techniques has already surpassed those of any members of Snowdragon Mountain.”

“It seems I’ll be forced to rely on raw power to crush him.”

Daoist Snowplume didn’t dare to hesitate. With but a thought, he instantly caused the drops of skywater that were wildly spinning around the Darknorth swords to instantly detonate. Boom, boom, boom. The temperature instantly began to fall, and even the air itself began to freeze. Frost appeared on Ning’s face, covering it with a layer of white.

“Very cold.” Even Ning’s Fiendgod-like body felt the cold. “It really is on a higher level than dire-ice; the cold of this skywater...once it is unleashed, it quite astonishing!”

A large amount of frost had condensed in the surrounding area, and a faint mist was beginning to arise. Suddenly, from within the midst, two snowy Flood Dragons appeared.

“Kill!”

The distant Daoist Snowplume had finally unleashed a killing blow, the powerful magic treasure which he used to shock the world...the Binary Diffraction Swords!

The Binary Diffraction Swords were actually two swords; one yin, and one yang. The swords would transform into a pair of Flood Dragons with astonishing power. These were rare magic items, even amongst Heaven-ranked magic items. When used separately, each would be considered high-grade Heaven-ranked magic treasures. When used together...their power would merge, reaching even more shocking levels.

“Master has executed his Binary Diffraction Swords.”

“That’s the Binary Diffraction Swords. This Ji Ning is so incredibly powerful...he’s actually forced Master to use his Binary Diffraction Swords. Even if he loses, he has much to feel proud about.” The two distant spectators, Adept Xu Ke and his senior apprentice-brother, both felt stunned. For their master to have been forced to use the Binary Diffraction Swords...it meant that the other options which their master had would not be enough against Ji Ning.

Suddenly, a loud laugh.

“So these are the Binary Diffraction Swords?” With the loud laughter, Ji Ning, who had been standing in midair unmoving the entire time, suddenly manifested a pair of black wings behind his back. At the same time, his body suddenly grew in size as he transformed into a thirty-meter tall giant. A heroic, terrifying Fiendgod’s aura instantly spread out, causing all of the spectators to feel their hearts freeze.

“A divine ability!”

“The ‘Heavenly Transformation’ divine ability!” Adept Xu Ke and the others, including the Whitewater Hound, Little Qing, and Ninefire, were all speechless.

They all knew of the ‘Heavenly Transformation’ divine ability, but generally speaking, one would only transform to ten meters or so in height, while powerful users might increase to fifteen meters in height. Ning, however, had actually transformed to thirty meters. His Heavenly Transformation...had made him an enormous giant with astonishing power.

BOOM!

The thirty-meter tall Ning had wings on his back, and the Waterflame Lotus around him. With a single ‘step’, he transformed into a gust of wind as the swords in his hands slashed out through the air, leaving behind an eye-catching, dazzling sword-light. With an explosive sound, the Binary Diffraction Swords attack, which had sought to defeat Ning, were knocked flying back.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 35: Moving Out of Swallow Mountain

“Eh?” The distant Daoist Snowplume’s face completely changed. Ning’s power was even greater than he had expected...but as one of the three Patriarchs of the sect, how could he just give up so easily?

Bang! Bang!

The sword-light of the Binary Diffraction Swords, which had been knocked flying back, suddenly increased tremendously in brilliance. One sword completely transformed into a Flood Dragon whose entire body glowed with blue light, while the other transformed into a Flood Dragon whose entire body glowed with golden light. These two Flood Dragons of sword-light were each three hundred meters long, and the scales on their body were clearly visible. The eyes of the double dragons were filled with a killing intent, as though they were alive!

The two Flood Dragons of sword-light, their power having explosively increased, let out earth-shaking draconic roars as they charged straight towards Ning.

Ji Ning, despite being thirty meters tall, felt pressure from this attack. The Darknorth swords in his hands once more sliced out, as though preparing to chop apart the heavens themselves as they once more left that dazzling scar of sword-light in the skies.

BANG!

BANG!

Ning’s entire body trembled. He felt as though he had been struck by two giant mountains; he couldn’t help but be knocked back several steps by the collision.

“What a fellow.” Ning wasn’t shocked; rather, he was delighted! The black wings on his back began to tremble as he used the Windwing Evasion...and for a moment, he seemed to be a ghost as he once more charged forward.

“Yin-Yang, Divide and Transform!”

The distant Daoist Snowplume’s face was extremely solemn as well. He now viewed Ning as a true, worthy opponent.

The azure Flood Dragon and the golden Flood Dragon of sword-light, high in the air, once more let out a series of earthshaking dragon roars as they wildly enveloped Ning with their attacks. As for Ning, the Darknorth swords in his hands, he clashed against them repeatedly...and with each collision, the surrounding air blasted apart and distorted. Even the water of Serpentwing Lake below them began to distort, with troughs of many dozens of meters and massive waves of many hundreds of meters.

Even at a distance of ten kilometers, Ninefire, Truekeep, Granny Shadow, Autumn Leaf, and the others who were on Brightheart Island all felt a savage wind sweep towards them.

“What tremendous power.”

“Ji Ning is actually this powerful.”

Ninefire and the others were all speechless and stupefied.

The distant, thirty meter tall Ji Ning was like an exalted god of the heavens, battling against those two massive Flood Dragons!

“He’s actually able to battle a peak-stage Primal Daoist to a standstill?”

“That’s one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain!”

“Too strong.”

“It’s only been ten-plus years since the battle at Oxhorn Mountain, but Ji Ning has advanced to such a level. If Yichuan were still alive, he would definitely be incomparably delighted.” Ninefire and the others were both stunned and excited; after all, the incomparably dazzling figure before them was the ultimate expert of their Ji clan.

The Ji clan’s side was excited and animated.

Snowdragon Mountain’s side, however, was shocked and enraged.

Ning, who was battling in midair against the two Flood Dragons of sword-light, suddenly began to move in a different way; the extremely forceful and dynamic swordplay suddenly became incomparably reserved and stately.

Bang!

Bang!

The sword-light in the air seemed to have transformed into the light of the moon; it was incomparably soft. It also seemed like the caress of a lover...silently, soundless, the two Flood Dragons of sword-light began to crumble.

“What?!” Daoist Snowplume was shocked. This sword technique, ‘Yin-Yang, Divide and Transform’, was an extremely powerful one. And yet, even this technique was unable to resist Ning? Holding nothing back, he immediately unleashed the most powerful technique available to him: “Binary Commingling!”

Those two Flood Dragons of sword-light, on the verge of collapse, actually began to twist into each other, connecting into each other as though they were two living creatures bound into one body.

The commingling Flood Dragons of sword-light supported each other, reinforcing each other’s deficiencies and completely blocking Ning’s sword technique.

“In terms of profoundness of sword techniques, he is absolutely inferior to me.” Ning knew this quite well. “However, the foundations of Daoist Snowplume are simply too strong...and those two Heaven-ranked swords are also exceptionally powerful.”

The Darknorth swords were Bloodforged weapons; the more one used them to kill, the more death-energy and baleful energy they would absorb and the more powerful they would become. However, during the past nine years, Ning hadn’t killed many people...and so these Darknorth swords continued to be the equivalent of top-grade Earth-ranked magic treasures. Compared to the Binary Diffraction Swords, they were unfathomably weaker.

Ning’s superiority in sword techniques had cancelled out his inferiority in weaponry.

“I have to unleash the advantages of my Fiendgod body.” Ning’s primary goal in this battle was to test his own ability; however, since the opponent’s pair of Binary Diffraction Swords had already unleashed a power which surpassed his most powerful sword techniques, he could no longer just use sword techniques to compete.

Swish!

Swish!

Instantly, the surrounding wind began to howl as Ning himself merged into a gust of wind, moving with ghostly speed as he charged directly towards Daoist Snowplume.

Nine years. Not only had he improved tremendously in using the Heavenly Transformation technique, his Windwing Evasion technique had also improved an astonishing amount. And now, he was unleashing his full power!

Daoist Snowplume was tremendously shocked, and hurriedly controlled the Binary Diffraction Swords to try and block Ning.

Clang! Clang!

Ning’s swordplay became even softer, only defending and not attacking. In the blink of an eye, he managed to charge towards Daoist Snowplume’s side.

“Not good.” Daoist Snowplume was shocked; how could he dare fight against Ning in close combat? If Ning was struck by a sword, by relying on his Fiendgod body, he could almost instantly heal; if he, Daoist Snowplume, was struck by a sword, he would only be heavily wounded if he was lucky. If he wasn’t that lucky, he would truly perish!

Whoosh!

Daoist Snowplume immediately utilized his own evasive technique. A snowy white light flashed, and Daoist Snowplume immediately retreated back onto his warship.

“Master.” Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man stared, astonished, at Daoist Snowplume, who had suddenly appeared in the midst. The two distant streaks of sword-light flew over as well; it was the Binary Diffraction Swords.

Daoist Snowplume’s face was incomparably unsightly to behold. He spoke out, “What a formidable Ji Ning. Sword Immortals live up to their reputation. Admirable, admirable!”

His voice was deep and it shook the heavens.

“Let’s go.”

After Daoist Snowplume finished his words, that gigantic warship instantly soared away, quickly disappearing into the horizons.

Ning stood there in midair, watching Daoist Snowplume and the others depart. “Daoist Snowplume is quite a decisive fellow. He hadn’t even lost, but upon seeing that the current state of affairs was set in stone, he immediately retreated.”

Ning had engaged in this battle, primarily to test his strength. Over the past nine years, his [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] had already reached the eleventh stage, and he had a body that was comparable to a peak Fiendgod Body Refiner. The main issue was that after advancing through one of the major stages, training in the [Crimsonbright Diagram of the Nine Heavens] would become considerably harder; thus, in the past, every two or three years, Ning would advance by a stage. But from the tenth stage to the eleventh stage, Ning had spent six years!

Clearly, the amount of time he had spent was much more.

Still, at least his Fiendgod body was all but perfect, superior to the likes of Bloodshadow. In addition, he also had the divine ability, [Starseizing Hand]; upon using it, his power was no less than that of a peak Primal Daoist’s! And this was with his [Starseizing Hand] being only at the first cycle; if he were to train to the second cycle of the [Starseizing Hand], then the power would be even greater.

The training method of the [Starseizing Hand] was known as the [Six Cycles of the Starseizer].

At the Zifu level, one could train in the first cycle.

At the Wanxiang level, one could train in the second cycle.

And so on and so forth.

However, training in the [Starseizing Hand] required a large amount of precious essences of the Five Elements. A large amount of external support was required. When Ning had trained in the first cycle in the underwater estate, he had used the Five Elements essence left behind by Daoist Threelives. Now, however, to train in the second cycle, Ning would have to go seek out the precious essences by himself. During the past nine years, although Ning had collected quite a few treasures, he was still far from having enough.

“A divine body and divine abilities...with these two, I’m comparable to a peak Primal Daoist Ki Refiner,” Ning sighed to himself. “My swordplay has reached the fifth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword], and is at a level even higher than his! But I’m at a disadvantage in terms of weapons...my Darknorth swords cannot compare to his Binary Diffraction Swords.”

The Binary Diffraction Swords even possessed some rudimentary sentience. Those two transformed Flood Dragons held a degree of sentience in their eyes...but it only made sense. After all, these were high-grade Heaven-ranked treasures. Upon reaching the higher ‘Immortal-ranked’ treasures, then a treasure spirit would emerge, such as the black bull of the underwater estate, which was the spirit of the Immortal-ranked magic treasure which Immortal Juhua had left behind.

“Master.”

“Ji Ning.”

“Young master...”

A distant group of people, riding on a leaf-type magic treasure, were flying towards them. Ninefire and the others were all in a state of delight and excitement.

Good heavens. That had been a peak Primal Daoist! He had actually been forced to retreat by Ji Ning. They could tell...that when fighting against Daoist Snowplume, Ning hadn’t been at the slightest disadvantage.

“My Ji clan is about to truly rise to prominence, to true prominence!” Ninefire roared with laughter. “Haha, I, Ji Ninefire, even at the moment of my death, will be satisfied. How many years...how many years! My Ji clan has finally produced such a figure! Ji Ning, I trust that soon, your name will be known throughout Stillwater Commandery!”

“Your name will be known throughout Stillwater Commandery. All of the major powers will know of you and will spread your fame.” Truekeep was excited as well.

The Ji clan was merely a minor power, located in Swallow Mountain. And yet, it had produced someone like Ji Ning. Someone capable of forcing a Primal Daoist like Daoist Snowplume to voluntarily retreat...this battle could be described as the battle which truly established Ji Ning’s reputation. His fame would be spread throughout the region; after all, he hadn’t battled a mere middle-stage Primal Daoist, or an ordinary, unaffiliated practitioner. Daoist Snowplume was a truly formidable figure!

“It wasn’t bad. I didn’t achieve victory, after all,” Ning said. “That Daoist Snowplume is truly formidable as well; if I were to truly battle him, it’s hard to say who would win.”

This was the truth.

It was true that Daoist Snowplume hadn't really gone all out. Upon realizing that even his supreme technique, the 'Binary Commingling' was unable to do anything to Ning, he had immediately retreated. If this had been a true life-or-death battle, however, Daoist Snowplume wouldn't have been so stingy in his usage of the skywater in his body; he would have wildly filled the skies with it as he attacked Ning, while also controlling flying swords to attack. Ning, in turn, wouldn't have tried to avoid injuries and would have wildly fought back.

As a Fiendgod practitioner, for Ning, injuries were a minor thing. Thus, in a true life-or-death battle, Ning would've had a higher chance of victory! But that was just hypothetical; after all, no one knew what sort of treasures Daoist Snowplume carried with him.

"Master, don't be so humble. You beat him into running away! You are a Fiendgod Body Refiner...I refuse to believe that he would dare fight with you to the death. When two combatants who are on par with each other fight, and when one is a Fiendgod Refiner while the other is a Ki Refiner, it will generally be the Ki Refiner who dies." Little Qing was incomparably excited.

Aboard the distant warship, soaring through the skies.

Daoist Snowplume could still feel his heart trembling. When a Fiendgod practitioner whose power was on par with his had charged straight towards him...that was like death sweeping directly for him. He had been so terrified, he had immediately used an evasive technique.

The nearby Adept Xu Ke and the gray-robed man didn't even dare to make a sound.

"Disciple," Daoist Snowplume said, looking at Adept Xu Ke, "Go and have your Xu clan immediately evacuate from Swallow Mountain. Ideally, avoid any and all trouble with the Ji clan in the future. Although Snowdragon Mountain doesn't fear them, they don't need to fear Snowdragon Mountain either."

"Yes," Adept Xu Ke immediately said.

"Soon, the news of this battle will be spread throughout the entire Stillwater Commandery." Daoist Snowplume shook his head. "I truly didn't expect...that I, Snowplume, would end up becoming a stepping stone for another's rise to fame."

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 36: Famous Throughout Stillwater

Daoist Snowplume, as someone capable of reaching the Primal Daoist level, was no fool. He knew very well...that given Ji Ning's monstrous rate of improvement, this was someone that he absolutely could not be enemies with. Ning had only been alive for thirty short years, but he was already comparable to Daoist Snowplume, who had trained for a thousand years!

"All of you, listen clearly." Daoist Snowplume swept the crowd with his gaze. "You are absolutely not permitted to antagonize Ji Ning! If you do, even my Snowdragon Mountain will find it difficult to protect you!"

All of them assented. Nobody who had witnessed the earlier battle had the courage to go antagonize Ji Ning.

News of this battle spread with astonishing speed. Daoist Snowplume didn't issue an order of silence to his subordinates, because he knew that even if Snowdragon Mountain didn't spread the news, the Ji clan would. Given the situation, it was best for them to pretend to ignore it all and allow the news to spread.

"Given this Ji Ning's rate of improvement, I imagine that very soon, he will become even more illustrious and famous. For me to be the stepping-stone to fame for someone like him...it's not that embarrassing..." This was how Daoist Snowplume tried to console himself.

The news quickly spread to the center of the entire Stillwater Commandery; Stillwater City. Amongst Ning's friends, the first to receive word was, naturally, Northmont Baiwei.

"Hahaha, good, good, good!" Baiwei excitedly slapped his desk, causing the fruit platters and wine bottles atop it to rattle, then tumble to the floor. The nearby musicians were badly startled by this sudden act.

"Piao An." Baiwei looked at the messenger servant, who was kneeling before him. He immediately beamed and said, "You have rendered a great merit by delivering this report. I shall award you ten taels of liquefied elemental essence." He immediately tossed a jade bottle over.

The servant before him, who had just reached the Zifu Disciple level, accepted it with great excitement. This was an intelligence report that came from the spy network of Northmont Blacktiger's estate; he was nothing more than a messenger boy. And yet, just like that, he had acquired ten taels of liquefied elemental essence; clearly, young master Baiwei was exceedingly delighted.

"My brother, Ji Ning, truly is formidable. Formidable. Formidable!" Baiwei excitedly stalked back and forth within his hall. "How long has it been? Just ten years since he entered the Black-White College? He's only a peak Wanxiang Adept, and yet he's already capable of forcing Daoist Snowplume into a retreat and to relocate his local Snowdragon Mountain branch. Clearly, Daoist Snowplume has lowered his head!"

"Amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College, I imagine that only the likes of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire are capable of matching my brother Ji Ning."

"But the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire have all trained for at least two centuries, while Ji Ning has only trained for thirty years." Baiwei was delighted for his friend...and he felt all the more convinced that he had truly hit the jackpot when he had decided to become friends with Ji Ning.

The excited Baiwei suddenly saw, out of the corner of his eye, the pole-axed, stupefied group of musicians. Only now did he remember that he was actually listening to a private concert.

"Out, out, all of you." Baiwei waved his hand. The musicians, including his maidservant, all bowed and departed.

Baiwei's eyes were filled with anticipation. "I hope that Brother Ji Ning isn't going to trip and fall on his Immortal path...given his rate of improvement, which is vastly superior to that of the Sloppy Daoist and Holyfire, and even vastly superior to most reincarnated Immortals...as long as he doesn't die, when he becomes an Immortal, he will definitely become a top-tier Immortal. By then...I'll truly have a powerful supporter by my side."

The news also quickly made its way to the Black-White College. Daoist Flowcloud, also known as Chen Jin, had just returned from a relaxing trip to the Carefree Caverns. He was feeling quite rested and relaxed, and had just flown back into and landed within his own mountain estate.

“Senior apprentice-brother, senior apprentice-brother.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud.”

Two of his ten retainers, both female, immediately came to greet him.

“What is it?” Chen Jin gave these two retainers a glance.

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, you wanted us to keep track of any information regarding senior apprentice-brother Darknorth, right?” One of the female retainers, the slightly skinnier one, hurriedly said, “We just heard...that senior apprentice-brother Darknorth, Ji Ning, engaged in a battle with one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, at Serpentwing Lake. Ji Ning’s power filled the heavens, and in the end, he forced Daoist Snowplume to retreat and even voluntarily relocate the local Snowdragon Mountain branch.

“What?!” Chen Jin’s good mood instantly and completely evaporated. His face was ashen. “Did you perhaps mishear things? Ji Ning was actually able to force Daoist Snowplume into retreating? He has this level of power?”

“We didn’t mishear. This news just made its way to the Black-White College, and it has been spread throughout the College.”

“Right. Everyone is talking about it right now.”

Both of the female retainers answered together.

Chen Jin’s face was utterly pale. Ning had become the shadow over his heart long ago; for Ning to become even more dazzling naturally caused him to feel even more enraged. He barked angrily, “Describe the information you heard in detail.”

“Senior apprentice-brother Flowcloud, this event originated from a dispute between the Ji clan of Swallow Mountain and the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain...” The skinnier female retainer began to speak.

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“Little Sloppy, Ji Ning, by the look of things, seems to have improved quite a bit. He’s already reached the same level as Holyfire and the others, and might even be comparable with you.” Within a spacious, lavish hall, a short old man who was dressed in beggar’s clothes was seated on the ground. In front of him were a number of bowls, filled with various types of meat and other food. He stretched out a grubby, greasy hand and snatched a chunk of meat from a bowl while using his other hand to pour wine into his mouth from a gourd.

In front of him was a fat and similarly sloppy-looking youth. He, too, was using one hand to grab at the food and eating with abandon, while using his other hand to drink from a gourd of wine.

“So what if he is comparable to me?” The fat youth didn’t seem to be concerned at all, continuing to eat and drink.

“Little Sloppy, that means that your reputation as being the number one figure amongst the third generation disciples of the Black-White College might be taken away,” the short elder hurriedly warned.

The fat youth shook his head. “When I first joined the Black-White College, I was completely unremarkable. Back then, there were countless senior fellow disciples who were stronger than me. But in the end, I surpassed them all...and that’s when I became the ‘number one figure’ amongst the third generation disciples. But has that reputation ever done anything for me in terms of helping me improve in power?”

“Nope, not at all!” The fat youth seemed completely unconcerned. “In the Black-White College, I can rank at the very top, but if we look at the entire Grand Xia Dynasty and the major world they have unified...given how there are thousands on thousands of reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang level, I imagine that there are far more people that are more powerful than me!”

“That’s why it doesn’t matter at all what my ranking is within the Black-White College. I only have one opponent; myself. As long as I continue to surpass myself and improve...that’ll be enough.” The fat youth shook his head. “This is also the reason why I won’t go to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia Dynasty.”

“Oh, right. This time, the imperial capital of the Grand Xia has attracted interest from the most powerful geniuses of virtually every commandery city in this boundless world. In fact, even some of the supreme talents who live in the seas beyond are heading towards the capital! This is an event that will only occur every three centuries! Only those who are below the Primal Daoist level are allowed to attend. This is a chance that only comes in three hundred years! Once you defeat the various reincarnated Immortals and geniuses of the other parts of the world, then you’ll truly soar to the heavens!” The short elder said hurriedly.

“I’m afraid of death.” The fat youth shook his head.

“You sloppy bastard!” The short elder was so angry, he began to curse. “How can you be so lazy in pursuing your Immortal path?”

“I’m in no rush. I’m going to train slowly. If there’s good wine, I’ll drink it; if there’s tasty meat, I’ll eat it. I’ll live a wonderfully happy life. Whatever level I’ll end up training to, that’ll be the level I’ll train to. I’m not going to go risk my life.” The fat youth shook his head.

The short elder was completely helpless.

Still..he felt great admiration for this fat youth. In fact, he even began to wonder...if perhaps, in terms of Dao-heart alone, this fat youth might be stronger than all of the Primal Daoists and Immortals of the entire Black-White College! Still...there was no way one could tell from the surface if another had a powerful Dao-heart or not. To this very day, he was the only one who believed that this fat youth had the strongest Dao-heart of anyone in the entire Black-White College.

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“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning truly is formidable. We haven’t seen him in ten years, but he’s grown so powerful.” Mu Northson, who had completely absorbed himself into the art of constructs during recent years, was exceptionally excited upon hearing this news. “It’s been so many years since I’ve seen him...it’s time for me to pay a visit.”

Given how powerful Ning had shown himself to be during this battle, there truly were quite a few who wanted to go pay a visit to him now.

Northson just made some casual inquiries, and soon, a large group of people gathered.

“Let’s go.”

“Let’s go to Serpentwing Lake.”

“It’s been years since we’ve seen junior apprentice-brother Darknorth. He has grown so powerful.” More than ten people had decided to go visit Ning, most of whom were on extremely good terms with him. There were even two reincarnated Immortals amongst them.

Once one’s power reached a certain level, one would naturally be acknowledged by others. Soon, this group of ten-plus fellow disciples left the Black-White College and headed towards Serpentwing Lake.

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The black-robed Immortal Diancai, seated on his jade bed, opened his eyes, revealing a smile within them.

“So many young fellows have gone to visit Ji Ning. It seems my apprentice’s strength has been acknowledged by his fellow disciples. In fact, come to think of it...if he was able to force Daoist Snowplume to retreat, then my apprentice’s [Three-Foot Sword] must have reached an extremely deep level of expertise. Is he at the fourth stance, or the fifth stance? Ugh, this kid...he didn’t visit me a single time in ten years,” Immortal Diancai mused to himself. Because only six stances of the [Three-Foot Sword] were made public within the Black-White College, even Immortal Diancai himself had only learned those first six stances.

But naturally, Immortal Diancai’s most powerful sword technique wasn’t the [Three-Foot Sword]; it was the one he had established for himself.

This battle had truly brought fame to Ji Ning. His name was spread throughout the entire Stillwater Commandery. His friends, his seniors, his elders, and even other large clans and sects began to pay close attention to him. From this day onward, Ji Ning had become one of the notable, well-known figures of the Stillwater Commandery region.

In the distant Highwater Commandery. The Dongyan Mountains. Within a quiet, secluded cave.

A snowy white-robed Ninelotus was seated in the lotus position atop a boulder. She had been trapped within this Myriad Lotuses Cave for nearly nine years now. Almost every day, she came to try and break through the formation, but the formation set down by the Forefather of the Dongyan clan was a reflection of one’s Dao-heart; to break the formation, one had to thoroughly comprehend one’s own Dao-heart and to thoroughly understand one’s self!

Ninelotus had never been successful.

“Mistress, mistress.” A voice rang out from outside.

Ninelotus opened her eyes. “What is it?” Although she couldn’t leave, her servants could still bring her news from the outside world through the most simplest of methods; by standing outside the cave and shouting towards her.

“Mistress, we just received word that the Ji clan of Swallow Mountain has forced the local branch of Snowdragon Mountain to leave. This caused one of the three Patriarchs of Snowdragon Mountain, Daoist Snowplume, to be angered and personally make a trip to Serpentwing Lake. However, that Ji Ning wasn’t willing to lower his head at all, and so he and Daoist Snowplume got into a battle,” the servant said.

Ninelotus was instantly furious, frantic, and concerned. “That idiot! How could he be so forceful about it? That’s a peak Primal Daoist!”

“Daost Snowplume used his supreme techniques with the Binary Diffraction Swords to battle against Ji Ning, but Ji Ning used his divine ability to transform into a thirty meter tall giant. He unleashed an incomparably astonishing sword technique...and was actually able to force Daoist Snowplume to voluntarily retreat, and even lower his head and have the Swallow Mountain branch leave,” the servant said.

“What?!” Ninelotus was astonished.

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Book 9: Ji Ning of Serpentwing Lake Chapter 37: Leaving the Myriad Lotuses Cave

Ninelotus was truly surprised. Although she felt great admiration for Ji Ning, the young, handsome, fragile-looking Ning made her think of her own younger brothers. Ninelotus felt an almost maternally protective instinct towards Ning, and the fact that he loved to lie in his boat and drift above the waters of Serpentwing Lake further stirred the soft feelings inside her.

She knew that Ning was extremely talented, but she hadn’t expected him to be this talented. His level of monstrosity had already surpassed what even she had imagined.

“The Black-White College has three reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang Level. Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei has spent the least amount of time training, while the other two reincarnated Immortals have trained for more than ninety years. Ji Ning has only trained for thirty, but he’s already comparable to the two of them, and perhaps even stronger.” Ninelotus suddenly began to feel a bit of panic in her heart.

It was as though her Ji Ning had surpassed the limits of what she could comprehend and control.

“What’s going on with me?”

“Why am I panicking? Why am I so uneasy?”

Ninelotus immediately realized that her emotions were off. “For Ji Ning to be powerful is a good thing. Why am I so nervous and restless?”

She asked herself this question, over and over. She questioned herself repeatedly.

During the past nine years of her 'imprisonment' within the Myriad Lotus Cave, she had continuously attempted to challenge the Dao-heart illumination formation which the Forefather of the Dongyan clan had left behind. Actually, she was already quite close to 'comprehending her own heart'. Upon feeling uncontrollable nervousness and restlessness when learning that Ji Ning had forced a peak Primal Daoist to lower his head...she finally broke through the final barrier.

"This...is me?" Ninelotus suddenly calmed down. Her eyes no longer appeared lost; the only thing left was the calmness of the vast, endless sea. "So this is who I am."

"I'm used to being in control."

"I like to control everything."

"I want to be in control of everything I am surrounded by. I am going to command the Dongyan clan and lead it to greater heights, to spread my name throughout the entire Grand Xia Dynasty." Ninelotus murmured softly to herself. Ever since she was young, she had been ambitious, but she had never truly understood her own nature as clearly as she did now. In the past, she merely acted in accordance with her subconscious.

She had gone to be a disciple of the Black-White College because she wanted to prove herself, and prove to herself, that even without the assistance of the Forefather of the Dongyan clan, she was still capable of entering the likes of the Black-White College, where only supreme geniuses were admitted.

The reason why she had never been moved by Chen Jin was because there was no way she could control the 'Chen clan' which stood behind him. And thus, she subconsciously rejected his advances.

The reason she was moved by Ji Ning...was precisely because Ji Ning's clan, the Ji clan, was very weak; thus, she was completely capable of controlling and guiding it. Ning himself was extremely talented, but his talent was still within the realm of what she, as the next leader of the Dongyan clan, was capable of controlling. So long as Ning did not become a Celestial Immortal, he would not be out of her sphere of control.

Most importantly of all...Ning's parentage and history had truly moved her inner heart. She wanted to protect him.

"He's even more powerful than I had predicted." Understanding her own nature, Ninelotus now calmed down. "However, even if he truly does become a Celestial Immortal in the future...that'll be something that happens many, many years from now. After so many years together, the affection between the two of us will become incomparably deep and stable."

In her heart, Ninelotus didn't truly believe in 'love at first sight'.

She believed more in...love built up over time.

"The Forefather said that becoming Dao-Companions means being willing to die for each other," Ninelotus murmured to herself. "Perhaps I'm not yet able to do that for him, but in a thousand years, I believe that I will truly, whole-heartedly, be willing to die for him. He'll be willing to die for me too."

Ninelotus no longer hesitated; she immediately walked towards the grand formation. The grand formation of the Dao-heart had impeded Ninelotus for nearly nine years...but this time, it no longer did.

Ninelotus walked out of the Myriad Lotuses Cave.

“Mistress.” The female servant outside, upon seeing Ninelotus walk out, immediately knelt down in surprise and delight. “Congratulations and felicitations, mistress.”

Ninelotus smiled slightly.

That very day.

Ninelotus left the Highwater Commandery and the Dongyan Mountains, heading towards Swallow Mountain of Stillwater Commandery.

The sun was brilliant this day. The Forefather of the Dongyan clan, still leisurely fishing within the gorge, revealed a look of surprise on his face. He murmured softly to himself, “Ruyin, although she physically appears very similar to you, and on the surface has a temperament similar to yours...her true nature is completely opposite to yours. Ninelotus’ heart is far stronger and harder than yours. She truly was born to lead. It seems that when I chose her to be the next leader of the Dongyan clan...it was a choice that will lead the Dongyan clan to great glory.”

Serpentwing Lake. Brightheart Island.

Northmont Baiwei and Ji Ning were seated facing each other, toasting each other and laughing and chatting loudly and happily.

“Right! There’s one thing that you never found out about,” Baiwei suddenly said.

“What is it?” Ning laughed.

“The one who killed Yu Dong and Adept Mooncrescent was you, right?” Baiwei first set up a restrictive spell around them, blocking out all sound, then continued to speak softly. Ning didn’t hesitate; he immediately nodded. He had originally asked Baiwei to help acquire the intelligence reports regarding Yu Dong, Shui Yi, and Dong Seven. It wasn’t strange that Baiwei would be able to guess that he had done the deed.

“Adept Mooncrescent had an extraordinary background,” Baiwei said softly.

“What background?” Ning was startled, although he had guessed at this long ago, which was why he had been so cautious.

“Adept Mooncrescent was a retired Immortal cultivator of one of the secret Immortal armies our Northmont clan controls, the ‘Shadow Army’,” Baiwei said seriously. “You should know that after having experienced life-and-death battles with each other repeatedly, soldiers develop extremely deep ties with each other. Incredibly few manage to survive all the way into retirement. If any retirees are killed, then their old brothers will definitely stand up for them...and in fact the entire Shadow Army will support them, because they have to be able to guarantee that the retirees will have safe, comfortable lives in their final years.”

Ning was shocked. So this was the situation? It really had been a secret Immortal army of the Northmont clan of Stillwater?

“Given the Northmont clan’s intelligence network, they should have already found me out.” Ning frowned.

“If they did, you wouldn’t have been able to spend the past ten years in security and peace.” Baiwei shook his head. Ning’s battle with Chen Jin had been after spending a year back at Serpentwing Lake, and then he had spent nearly nine more years...indeed, he had been back for nearly ten years.

Baiwei said softly, “The Shadow Army’s investigation traced the clues all the way to my estate, the Northmont Blacktiger estate. However, in the end, the Shadow Army is in service to our Northmont clan of Stillwater. They wouldn’t dare do anything to the Northmont Blacktiger estate, and so in the end, our estate stonewalled them. The Shadow Army was forced to just give up; they weren’t able to continue the investigation.”

Ning now understood. So it had been all thanks to the help from the estate of Northmont Blacktiger.

However, what Ning didn’t realize was that the loyalty of an army to its patron was an incredibly important thing. The Northmont clan had to take care of the feelings of their Immortal armies; thus, things couldn’t have been handled as simply as Baiwei had just implied. In truth, Baiwei himself had taken on the blame for this matter, informing the Shadow Army that it was he, Northmont Baiwei, an important young master of the Northmont clan, who had unknowingly killed one of their old retirees. There was no way the Shadow Army could act against such an important young master of the Northmont clan, and thus they had been forced to give up.

Ning, in both his past life and his present life, didn’t understand politics very well. Naturally, he wouldn’t understand that Baiwei had made sacrifices on his behalf.

“Thank you, Brother Baiwei. Please thank Uncle as well,” Ning said hurriedly.

“A minor matter, a minor matter.” Laughing, Baiwei waved his hand in dismissal, then lowered his voice again. “Brother Ji Ning, I heard some stories about you and your senior apprentice-sister Ninelotus.”

“You even know about this?!” Ning was surprised.

Baiwei nodded. “One time, when I was drinking at the Carefree Caverns, I invited Holyfire over. At that time, Chen Jin was present as well. I mentioned you to them, thinking that since you were fellow disciples, by mentioning your name, it would help all of us be better friends. Who would’ve thought that Chen Jin’s face would immediately turn ugly and that he would he quickly leave? Afterwards, I asked Holyfire about this matter, and thus learned about the details of the situation.”

Ning now understood. Shaking his head, Ning laughed, “To be honest, it’s a bit funny. Ninelotus had never felt anything for Chen Jin, but Chen Jin himself, in a hotheaded fit, insisted on dealing with me...but unfortunately, I ended up dealing with him.”

Baiwei shook his head. “I can tell that he feels deep hatred for you. Given how narrow-minded he is...it’ll be hard for him to accomplish any great deeds. Chen Jin is of the impressive Chen clan of Highwater...who would’ve thought that he’d be so narrow-minded? I imagine that the Chen clan must not have provided him with very good tutelage; most likely, he hasn’t been selected to be the next leader of their clan.

Major clans viewed the training and tutelage of their future leaders as something of paramount importance. They had to whole-heartedly strive to provide the proper upbringing for a suitable leader. Clearly, Chen Jin wasn't such a person.

"Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning."

Suddenly, a voice rang out which instantly echoed across the entire Serpentwing Lake.

"Huh?!" Ning instantly rose to his feet, his face covered with delight.

"You look so happy, who is it?" Baiwei was surprised.

"That's my junior apprentice-brother, Northson," Ning said in delight.

Ji Ning and Northmont Baiwei immediately flew into the air to welcome him. A dragon-headed warship was flying towards them, with an entire group of Immortal cultivators aboard it.

"So many people?" Ning was surprised as well.

All of these people were at the Wanxiang level. Even Bloodshadow and Yu Wei had come. In the Black-White College, they were all considered elites. In total, fifteen people had come.

"Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning." Northson was the first to fly over to Ning, and he excitedly pounded his fist against Ning's chest. "Incredible! Even an old fellow at the peak Primal Daoist stage was sent scurrying away by you. In the past, when we met with that Dragonwhale King, we found it so difficult to deal with him!"

"Actually, there wasn't a conclusive end to the fight," Ning said hurriedly.

The white-robed, white-haired Bloodshadow spoke out. "Junior apprentice-brother, no need to be modest; you are a Fiendgod Refiner, while Daoist Snowplume is a Ki Refiner; in a situation where both sides are equally matched, Ki Refiners generally won't dare to fight all out against Fiendgod Refiners. He retreated was because he did indeed fear you, feared dying at your hands."

Ning, seeing this, no longer tried to equivocate.

"Junior apprentice-brother Ji Ning." A beautiful, black-robed maiden looked at Ning.

"Senior apprentice-sister Yu Wei." Ning hurriedly acknowledged her.

During his first Dao Debate, in the end, it had been Yu Wei who defeated Ning. During the past nine years, when Ning had gone to the Raindragon Guard branch to accept missions, he heard some news about Yu Wei; during the past nine years, she had become a brilliant star as well, and had even defeated a middle-stage Primal Daoist. Her reputation was outstanding and no less than his.

"If we were to compete again, even I might not be able to defeat you, junior apprentice-brother," the black-robed maiden said with a laugh.

"Senior apprentice-sister, you are being too modest," Ning said hurriedly.

"Let me make the introductions. You probably don't recognize these people yet." The black-robed maiden pointed to a nearby gray-robed man with deep eyes. "This is senior apprentice-brother

Vastriver. He is often adventuring in the outside world. We just so happened to run into him in the Black-White College, and so he accompanied us to come visit you, junior apprentice-brother.”

Ning was startled. Vastriver? The Black-White College only had three reincarnated Immortals at the Wanxiang level. Yu Wei was one, while Adept Vastriver was another. He had also trained for a very long period of time, and only rarely appeared for brief periods of time. This truly was the first time Ning had met him.