

## Desolate 401

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### Book 13: Tristar Crescent Abode Chapter 34: When The Arrow Flies...

Ji Ning stood there in an empty field within the mountain forest, holding the bow in front of him as he stared towards the distance.

Ten thousand kilometers away, at another part of Mount Innerheart's forest, there was a black-robed Ning. He waved his hand, and next to him appeared an archery target.

"I need to hit the archery target dead center from ten thousand kilometers away." The black-robed Ning shook his head slightly.

This was the trial for [Houyi's Archery]; without the usage of divine sense and without using elemental ki or divine power to actively control the trajectory of the arrow, using just raw, primal physical force...one had to hit an archery target dead center from ten thousand kilometers away. The center of the target was just one inch in size. One had to hit it ten times in a row!

This was an extremely difficult trial.

Without the usage of divine sense...even most Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals could just barely see ten thousand kilometers away. As for the heart of the archery target? There was no way to see that clearly at all. In addition, because there was a separation of ten thousand kilometers, there would generally be some mist, trees, and other things impeding one's vision, causing one to be unable to see clearly.

In other words, one of the prerequisites for passing this trial was the possession of a divine ability akin to the [Farseer Eye].

This divine ability, when trained to the peak, could allow one to clearly see past a distance of a million kilometers or even more!

Naturally, Ning had never trained in the [Farseer Eye], but he had trained in the even more formidable [Torch Dragon's Eye]. Ning had learned the first part of the [Torch Dragon's Eye] in the imperial treasury of the Grand Xia, which was suited for Fiendgods up to the Void-level. Over the course of the many years he had spent here at Mount Innerheart, when Ning was relaxing, he would harvest some of the Polaris light from the Nine Heavens and refine it within his eyes, forming it into the 'innate torch-light'!

Although the training process was quite difficult, Ning had still managed to reach the second stage of the innate torch-light.

Upon using this divine ability, Ning could use his naked eye to clearly see an ant that was a hundred thousand kilometers away.

"I'll give it a try."

Ning stood there within the mountain forest. He executed the [Torch Dragon's Eye]; instantly, both of Ning's eyes began to shine with the light of a torch. If an ordinary Immortal cultivator were to exchange glances with Ning right now, while Ning was intentionally releasing his power...that cultivator would first

feel as though his vision had just turned completely white, followed by the entire world turning dark and pitch-black.

Temporary blindness...and some weaker individuals would become permanently blind!

Whoosh whoosh whoosh....as Ning executed this divine ability, countless rays of light came from far away, gathering within Ning's eyes. Countless rays of light reflecting off of countless objects were all being gathered.

The trees, the creek, the pool, the mountain path...everything was within Ning's vision now.

This included the archery target that was ten thousand kilometers away, as well as the black-robed Primaltwin Ning that stood next to it.

"Can't use divine power or elemental ki to control the arrow." Ning waved his hand, and a black arrow appeared in front of him. He nocked it onto his bow, then pulled the bowstring.

Swish!

Ning's raw physical power was utterly astonishing; he was fully capable of tossing around an entire massive mountain as a toy by now. He instantly pulled this violet Heaven-ranked greatbow to a perfect full draw.

Ning sensed the wind...

The wind was blowing...

For archery, being able to sense the wind was very important. The wind would have a tremendous impact on the arrow. When Ning was a child, he had spent a tremendous amount of effort training in archery. However, after embarking on his Immortal path, he had stopped training in it; after all, his current level of archery was already sufficient, and when truly necessary he could use his elemental ki to control his arrows, causing it to curve and arc in small degrees. That way, even if he missed his shot due to the distance simply being too great, he could adjust the arrow mid-flight!

But now Ning was forbidden from using elemental ki to control the arrow. He couldn't even use divine power!

"The speed of the wind...its changes..."

"Right about...now..."

"Go."

Ning's eyes blazed with innate torch-light as he stared fixedly towards the distance. The fingers of his right hand suddenly relaxed.

Twang!

The arrow instantly transformed into a streak of light, piercing through the heavens.

The trees in its path were pierced through, and the stones in its path were shattered. However, due to these impediments as well as the changes of the wind...these seemingly minor factors caused an

astonishing amount of impact over the course of ten thousand kilometers. Swish! The arrow missed the target by nearly three kilometers.

“Uh...” Ning’s eyes were blazing with innate torch-light; he could clearly see what had just happened. He couldn’t help but feel flabbergasted. “I was off by that much?”

Three full kilometers?

This was ridiculous!

“I’ll give it another try.” Ning once more nocked his violet greatbow, then sent out yet another arrow.

Twang!

The sound of the bowshot rang out once more, and the arrow itself transformed into a streak of light that flew into the distance. This time, the arrow missed the target by more than five kilometers.

“Mm.” Ning frowned.

“Let’s do that again.”

One arrow after another flew out. Some were off by three, four, five kilometers. Sometimes, when Ning was lucky, the arrow would make it to one kilometer. One time, when Ning was extremely lucky, the arrow passed the target by a few dozen meters.

Ning shot off more than ten thousand arrows at one go before coming to a halt. For an early Void-level Fiendgod like Ning, whose body was comparable to an Immortal-ranked magic treasure, shooting arrows was a very simple matter on a physical level. His mental energy, however, had been used up!

“I knew it would be hard, but I didn’t expect there would be so many problems.” Ning had tried more than ten thousand times, and in doing so discovered many of the problems.

To simply rely on raw physical force in shooting an arrow ten thousand kilometers and hitting the center of a target...

The first problem was that the trees and stones between him and the target served as forms of obstruction. When the arrow passed through them, it would be impacted, albeit by a tiny, minute amount. Although Ning’s raw power was so great that his arrows would only be impacted slightly...all of the accumulated obstructions over ten thousand kilometers would still cause tiny deviation in the flight path. A tiny deviation magnified over ten thousand kilometers would result in a huge deviation.

The second problem was the wind!

Ning had mastered the Dao of the Gale during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, and his heart had long ago become one with the wind. His wind-sense was extremely accurate by now. However...the wind that Ning could sense was only the wind during the instant the arrow was released! In addition, it was only the wind around Ning himself!

As the arrow flew forward, the wind would change!

In addition, the wind around Ning might be very weak, but five thousand kilometers away there might be a storm.

Even though he could still get a vague sense for how the wind was off in the distance, and even though Ning's arrow was very fast...it would still be affected by it.

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These were the two major problems that made it so that hitting the target dead center from ten thousand kilometers away was very difficult.

"What should I do? Right...I have the spirit of a Protocosmic spirit-bow. He must have seen divine archers of the Primordial Era train before." Ning instantly willed the spirit of the Rahu Bow to be summoned forth.

Whoosh. The black-robed youth appeared next to Ning.

"What do you need from me?" The black-robed youth looked at the bow in Ning's hands. "Oh, training archery?"

"Rahu Bow, I wish to train in [Houyi's Archery]," Ning said directly. "However, I have to pass a trial before I can do so. This trial forbids the usage of divine sense, and it also forbids me from using divine power or elemental ki to control my arrows. Just by using raw physical strength, I need to hit the center of a target from ten thousand kilometers away. The center is only one inch in size. I have to hit it ten times in a row to succeed."

"[Houyi's Archery]?" The black-robed youth called out in amazement, "Master, you have a chance to learn [Houyi's Archery]?"

Ning nodded. "But, I have to pass this trial first."

"This trial is pretty hard. Shoot a hundred arrows and let me take a look first," the black-robed youth said.

"Alright."

Ning immediately shot out another hundred arrows. Although he knew where the problems lay...there was nothing he could do about it. He failed every time by an enormous margin.

The black-robed youth watched from afar. Through using his invisible senses, he could naturally see the target that was more than ten thousand kilometers away.

"How was it?" Ning looked towards the black-robed youth.

"It seems you have a bit of a foundation. I thought you'd be off by at least a hundred kilometers." The black-robed youth nodded. "The art of archery...the most important part of it lies in 'accuracy'. The more formidable an archery technique, the more powerful the arrows it unleashes, but as for accuracy? For powerful archery arts, it is very difficult to use divine power to improve the accuracy of a shot, and so accuracy is extremely important."

Ning nodded.

"Start from the basics. First shoot from a hundred kilometers," the black-robed youth said.

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Under the guidance of the Rahu Bow, Ning once more began to train in archery. Although the Rahu Bow had never trained personally, he had seen many of his successive masters train in archery. Those were the divine archers of the Primordial Era!

First, a hundred kilometers.

Then two hundred. Then three...

Ning spent nearly three years training in accordance with the guidance from the Rahu Bow, but was still only able to hit the center of targets from 1200 kilometers away when using just raw force. 1200 was a limit for him; no matter how hard Ning tried, he was still unable to improve at all.

“What’s going on? Generally speaking, this is how one trains in archery; one needs to master one’s wind-sense and one’s sense of Qiankun. You’ve accomplished both, and the speed of your arrow isn’t bad. But why is it that I keep on feeling as though you are missing something?” The black-robed youth was extremely puzzled.

He had only watched others shoot arrows, after all; he himself wasn’t a divine archer.

Over the past three years, Ning had even gone to the Divinities Palace to pick out some archery techniques from the eighth floor. He had ruminated over them alongside the Rahu Bow, which was why he had improved this much over the past three years.

“What’s going on?” Ning sat down on the ground, feeling perplexed.

“Junior apprentice-brother, still training archery?” A laugh rang out as the woodcutter came walking over, hatchet over one shoulder and firewood over the other.

“Eldest apprentice-brother.” Ning hurriedly rose to his feet, then said with embarrassment, “I’ve trained bitterly for three years, but I’m still unable to pass the trial for [Houyi’s Archery].”

“[Houyi’s Archery] is indeed extremely difficult, and the trial is quite difficult as well. Shoot a few arrows for me to see,” the woodcutter said with a smile.

“Alright.” Ning was instantly overjoyed.

The eldest apprentice-brother was the absolute number one expert amongst the Old Patriarch’s disciples. Even the second apprentice-brother, Crazy Ji, admitted his inferiority, as did all of the other disciples. In fact, when Ning was chatting with Silvermoon, Silvermoon had secretly told him that their eldest apprentice-brother was definitely at the Daofather level of power. Given his incredible power and given how long he had lived here in seclusion, he had almost assuredly analyzed a technique like [Houyi’s Archery], one of the top ten divine abilities of the Three Realms.

Although there were quite a few disciples of the Old Patriarch who trained in [Houyi’s Archery], none of them were that formidable in it. Given their eldest apprentice-brother’s power, however...he surely was.

Twang! Twang! Twang! Twang! Twang! Twang!

One arrow after another shot out. Ning used all of his power while attuning to both the wind and to the Qiankun. In this instant, the world and the wind were all one with his heart. It was as though he himself was the master of the entire world, as though he was the master of countless winds. In fact, even some

of the distant transformations of the wind were held within his heart, as though his subconscious was whispering to him of what would happen. This state was the state known as the Dao Domain of the Dao of Archery. Given what a high level of comprehension Ning was at, and given that the Dao of Archery was heavily related to both 'wind' and 'Qiankun', Ning had advanced fairly quickly along this Dao.

One arrow after another flew out, striking towards the distant target, more than ten thousand kilometers away.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Each of the arrows howled past the target by more than ten meters. In fact, purely thanks to luck, one of the arrows actually struck the target. However...it only hit the target, not the center of the target.

"Alright. You can stop now," the woodcutter said.

"Please guide me, senior apprentice-brother." After halting, Ning respectfully asked for advice.

The woodcutter laughed. "Your fundamentals are quite solid. However...you are lacking in the most important aspect."

"The most important aspect?" Ning was puzzled.

"Right." The woodcutter nodded. "Remember this: When the arrow flies, the heart flies with it. Once you reach this level, you'll be able to hit the center of the target from ten thousand kilometers away." After speaking, the woodcutter turned and leisurely departed, still carrying his hatchet and his firewood.

Ning stood there unmoving. He murmured to himself, "When the arrow flies, the heart flies with it?"

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#### **Book 13: Tristar Crescent Abode Chapter 35: ...The Heart Flies With It**

As he watched the woodcutter depart, Ji Ning grew increasingly puzzled. "When the arrow flies...this part I understand. But 'the heart flies with it'...what does that mean?"

Twang! Twang! Twang!

Ning pulled his bow, testing out a few more arrows, growing increasingly puzzled as he did.

"Little master." The black-robed man appeared once more, face full of excitement. "Your eldest apprentice-brother said, 'When the arrow flies, the heart flies with it.' I think I somewhat understand."

"Oh?" Ning revealed an expectant look on his face.

The black-robed youth immediately explained, "I've gone through many masters and watched many of them train in archery, as well as watched them train their successors and descendants in archery. I remember often hearing them say something; 'You need to put your heart into it. Put your heart into the arrow.' When I was guiding you, I didn't think of these words, because I thought they were just casual words of encouragement, but now...it seems those words must have some special meaning."

Ning was an extremely intelligent person. This guidance from the black-robed youth didn't clearly point at what was necessary, but Ning now already had his own ideas.

To use the heart?

To put the heart into the arrow?

When the arrow flies? The heart flies with it?

“My guess is that ‘the heart flies with it’ means exactly that; having your heart and mind fly along with the arrow,” the black-robed youth said. “This ‘heart’ is most likely a reference to a sort of invisible force.”

Ning listened to the black-robed youth, thinking to himself at the same time. He had shot out tens of thousands of arrows every day for nearly a year; thus, he was familiar with all the technical tricks to it. Actually, Ning had already vaguely touched upon the level of having the heart fly with the arrow, but no one had been able to guide him to actually breaking through to it.

Ning once more nocked an arrow to his bow.

“The air...”

“The wind...”

In this instant, his heart became one with the Heavens and the Earth...and his will began to fill the arrow.

Soon, Ning managed to brush against the level of ‘forgetting the self’; although his heart had become one with the Heavens and the Earth, everything around him seemed vague and blurry, as his heart and will were focused completely on his arrow.

Twang!

A thunderous twanging sound. The arrow shot through the air, and Ning’s invisible will was fused into it. In fact, he had an extremely strange feeling; he felt as though he himself had transformed into an arrow! As the arrow shot through the skies, as it pierced through the trees, Ning felt as though it was he himself who was shooting through the trees. This sort of feeling, where his mind and heart were one with the arrow, was quite strange and marvelous...

However, after the arrow flew for a hundred kilometers, that sort of invisible connection between his heart and the arrow dissipated; Ning was no longer able to maintain the wondrous feeling of him having transformed into an arrow.

Swish!

The arrow finally plunged deep into the target that was ten thousand kilometers away...but of course, it was still quite a bit off from the heart of the target.

“That’s the feeling! Right. That’s the feeling.” Ning began to laugh loudly out of excitement as he jubilantly lifted the bow up with energy. “Right. When the arrow flies, the heart flies with it. I felt as though I had transformed into an arrow myself...this was a wondrous feeling, and in that state, I felt as though I was able to control the direction of the arrow.”

“I’ll try again.”

Ning once again nocked an arrow and drew his bow. Twang! The arrow shot through the skies, and Ning once more felt as though he were an arrow, with his heart focused upon the arrow.

Change directions! Change directions!

While flying through the air, the arrow suddenly began to change directions. Although the magnitude of the change was very small, as Ning repeatedly strove to influence it, the arrow began to arc outwards and fly even farther, before finally overshooting the target by thousands of kilometers.

“When the arrow flies, the heart flies with it...”

“This is the feeling. However, I’m only able to maintain this state for a hundred kilometers; any farther, and my will dissipates and becomes unable to maintain contact with the arrow.” Ning nodded to himself. This sort of invisible, formless feeling of his will being one with the arrow was a strange, subtle thing. However...there was indeed such a thing as a power forged from heart, from will.

That ancient Fiendgod corpse of the previous owner of the Rahu Bow was proof of it. Despite having died so long ago, the remnant, vestigial will of death and killing still was enough to cause Ning’s heart to quiver.

Strictly speaking, the ancient Fiendgod’s soul had been destroyed long ago...so where did that invisible will and intent come from?

This was what ‘heart’ was all about.

It was an invisible force! The power of the heart! It was different from divine power, elemental ki, and soul power. It was an extremely illusory, difficult-to-detect sort of power, but it did indeed exist. A truly divine archer would have to be able to master this power, the power of heart; only by mastering it could one become one of the formidable divine archers of the three realms. And this was just one of the prerequisites!

“Use the heart.”

“The heart!”

“The heart flies with the arrow!”

Ning began to train.

He knew very well that given how firm his Dao-heart was, the power of his heart should logically be quite formidable. However, he was still only able to keep his heart merged with the arrow for a distance of a hundred kilometers. The reason for this was...his heart was not sincere enough! His heart was supremely sincere towards the Dao of the Sword, but it was not yet sincere enough to the Dao of Archery.

Only with sincerity would the power of the heart grow!

Fortunately, thanks to his three years of painstaking training, Ning had established a solid foundation, and as Ning’s attitude towards the bow had changed and as his feelings towards the Dao of Archery grew increasingly resolute, the power of his heart had grown increasingly strong. In the legends, there were some truly formidable figures who, no matter what they trained in, were able to maintain a



supremely loyal heart to whatever they focused on. By doing so, they were able to improve at a truly astonishing rate.

The power of the heart was sometimes even more important than raw talent or comprehension.

A thousand kilometers.

Two thousand kilometers.

Three thousand kilometers.

As the days passed, the connection between Ning's heart and his arrow became increasingly strong.

"Wow! Little master, when you draw the bow, you now have a certain aura...an aura that only the divine archers of the Primordial Era used to have!" The black-robed man watched excitedly from one side.

When one had a heart that was supremely loyal to the bow, there would be a difference that would be very hard for most to detect, even if the difference was magnified ten thousand-fold. However, that innate charisma really did make an impact. The Rahu Bow, which had passed through the hands of quite a few divine archers, was definitely able to tell the difference.

Twang!

Swish!

The arrow plunged straight into the heart of the target.

Ning, however, maintained his calm as he continued to shoot arrows. Ning was now able to hit the target dead-center every so often, and even when he didn't, he was still definitely able to hit the target. To be able to occasionally hit the target dead-center from a distance of ten thousand kilometers, with trees and boulders blocking the way, while using nothing but raw physical strength was already a truly astounding feat...but unfortunately, passing the trial required one to accomplish this feat ten times in a row.

Five thousand kilometers. Six thousand kilometers...

Ning's heart was able to ride with the arrow for increasingly long periods of time. Under this sort of training, Ning's Dao-heart was actually beginning to grow even more powerful, and his eyes were beginning to grow increasingly bright! When he drew his bow...anything he stared at would feel as though a God of Death was staring at them from afar, causing a sort of inexplicable, nameless terror!

This was the sort of mental, psychological sensation of threat which only a true divine archer was able to impose upon the minds of his foes.

Ning's own heart was like an arrow, seeking to stab itself into the enemy's own heart. The enemy would subconsciously sense this and feel terrified!

Eight thousand kilometers. Nine thousand kilometers...

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

An arrow struck straight into the heart of the target. So did a second arrow. A third. A fourth...Ning shot out a hundred arrows, and each and every one of them struck the target dead-center. The inch-thick heart of the target was completely filled with a tight cluster of arrows now.

“Whew.” From ten thousand kilometers away, Ning let out a sigh.

This sort of state, where his heart rode with the arrow, consumed a tremendous amount of mental stamina with each arrow. Shooting out a hundred arrows in a row in this state caused an extremely nauseous feeling of exhaustion! If Ning was simply shooting out arrows without using the power of his heart, he wouldn’t feel the slightest bit tired after shooting out even ten thousand. But it was very, very exhausting to be in the state where ‘when the arrow flies, the heart flies with it!’

However...the power of the arrows in this state was truly tremendous, and the arrows were also much more accurate!

“Little master, you succeeded. You succeeded!” The black-robed youth was very excited.

“Thank you, Rahu Bow.” Ning smiled in gratitude. Over the past three years, although he did study some of the secret archery manuals of the Divinities Palace, what truly made the distance was the guidance of the Rahu Bow! The Rahu Bow had watched many divine archers grow up; although he himself was not a divine archer, he had still been able to provide Ning with a shockingly significant amount of help.

If it hadn’t been for the Rahu Bow, even ten years probably wouldn’t have been enough for Ning to complete this trial.

“Heh heh, little master, only after you become a true divine archer can I, the Rahu Bow, truly show off my own illustriousness.” The black-robed youth was extremely excited. “If you, little master, truly wish to show your gratitude towards me, then just procure a good bowstring for me.”

“Right.” Ning nodded and smiled. “Of course.”

He had a number of poorer-quality bowstrings. After all, he could remove the bowstring from the violet greatbow he was currently using and use it for the Rahu Bow. However...this bow was far too weak. The Rahu Bow was a top-grade Protocosmic spirit-treasure; Ning really did have to procure a good bowstring for it!

Mount Innerheart. The Tristar Crescent Abode. Outside the fairly small Three Divinities Palace. Crazy Ji continued to snore there as he always did.

“Second senior apprentice-brother.” Ning walked over.

Crazy Ji didn’t even open his eyes as he mumbled, “The complete copy of [Houyi’s Archery] is on the table. Go take it yourself.”

“Thank you, second senior apprentice-brother.”

Ning immediately stepped inside. Floating above the abridged versions was a very eye-catching furled bamboo book. It was indeed the complete copy of [Houyi’s Archery]. Ning walked over, immediately filling it with his divine sense.

Rumble...

A large amount of information instantly began to flood into Ning's soul.

A long, long time later. The sun had both risen and fallen. By the time the dawn was just arriving, as half of the distant Golden Crow could be seen peeking out from the distant horizon, Ning woke up.

"What a powerful archery technique," Ning murmured to himself.

He was stunned. Truly, completely stunned.

According to the description of [Houyi's Archery], if it was truly trained to the limit, to the level of the mighty primordial divinity Houyi who had created this divine ability...the power of the arrows would be truly terrifying, to the point of being above even the Sixth Cycle of the [Starseizing Hand]!

If a True God were to reach the peak of this divine ability, then with a single arrow, the True God would be able to heavily injure or even kill other True Gods!

But there was a reason why the complete mastery of [Houyi's Archery] was so ridiculously powerful.

Number one: The amount of mental energy this supreme archery technique used up was simply enormous. At the level of perfect mastery, even a True God would probably only be able to fire three, four, or five arrows before becoming utterly mentally drained and unable to fire off another arrow. Ning's [Starseizing Hand], however, could be used continuously without worry of using up any mental power.

Number two: This archery technique had extremely high requirements with regards to both the bow and the arrow. Especially the arrow! It must be understood that at full power, [Houyi's Archery] was mighty enough to annihilate a True God with a single arrow; to be able to compress this much power into a single arrow, the arrow had to be of tremendous quality, as it would otherwise collapse and break apart.

Thus, in order to execute this technique, one not only needed a good bow, one also needed some specially-prepared arrows that were incredibly powerful!

A superb bow. Superb arrows. And just a few shots before utter exhaustion!

Slightly poorer archery arts could allow for a hundred shots, while even poorer archery arts could easily allow for ten thousand shots. This was a testament to how truly draining this supreme archery technique was when it came to the power of the heart.

"The power of this archery art...although the number of times it can be used in succession is low, it truly is without question one of the top ten divine abilities created since Pangu established the universe!" Ning felt endless admiration towards this divine ability, as well as the number one God of the Bow of the Three Realms, Houyi.

Ning then stepped forward and picked up the abridged copy of the [Torch Dragon's Eye].

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### **Book 13: Tristar Crescent Abode Chapter 36: Leaving the Master's Tutelage**

Early dawn.

“Uncle-master.”

“Uncle-master.”

“Patriarch.”

Escorted by a chorus of respectful calls, Ji Ning arrived at the entrance to the Tristar Crescent Abode. Holding a broom in his hands, he began to personally sweep the mountain paths.

Sweep. Sweep. The fallen leaves on the ground were all being swept away.

“That’s odd.”

“The Patriarch is personally sweeping the mountain paths? Isn’t that the trial for the first level of the Divinities Palace?”

“The Patriarch can enter even the ninth level whenever he pleases, to say nothing of the first. He defeats the ninth golem with utter ease.”

“But the Patriarch truly is sweeping the paths personally. Are we seeing things?”

“Maybe...maybe the Patriarch is meditating on something.”

The two Dao-novitiates who were guarding the entrance stared in amazement as they watched Ning personally sweep the mountain roads. They stealthily sent mental messages to each other regarding this. News quickly began to spread, and soon all of the disciples of Mount Innerheart came to know of it.

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Ning was very calm. He kept his head lowered, focusing on his broom. Each sweep of the broom felt like a cleansing sweep against his soul as well.

He swept each of the mountain steps, one at a time. His sweeping speed wasn’t too fast; he seemed to be enjoying this sweeping process.

He only finished his labors late in the afternoon.

“Oh, I’m done?” Only now did Ning come back to his senses. He straightened his back, then murmured softly to himself, “It seems as though when Master set trials such as sweeping the path and weeding the mountain, he had certain other things in mind as well.”

“Apprentice.” A voice suddenly rang out by Ning’s ears.

Ning was momentarily startled, but then hurriedly responded, “Master!”

Despite having been on the mountain for so many years, Ning had never before received a direct mental message from his master like this.

“After you learn the [Torch Dragon’s Eye], come to my place,” the voice rang out again.

“Yes, master,” Ning replied respectfully.

Ning quickly moved up the mountain, heart filled with questions. Why was his master summoning him? This was extremely rare. Could it be...that he was going to leave his master’s tutelage soon?

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Ning went to the Three Realms Palace and acquired the full copy of the [Torch Dragon's Eye].

To date, the three major techniques which Ning had learned from the Three Realms Palace were the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], [Houyi's Archery], and [Torch Dragon's Eye].

The process of being transmitted the information regarding the [Torch Dragon's Eye] took a full day. The next day, Ning regained his faculty of mind. Only then did he head towards the Daoist monastery of Patriarch Subhuti.

"Uncle-master."

The two Dao-novitiates at the entrance to the monastery both called out respectfully. One of the two, Clearwater, also added, "Uncle-master, the Patriarch has sent word that you are to be allowed direct entry."

Ning nodded, smiled, then passed in.

Within the Daoist monastery.

There was a prayer mat within an open region with a skinny old man dressed in loose Daoist robes seated atop it. The old man's hair was completely white, but he didn't seem decrepit at all; rather, Ning felt as though this person had reached the level of infinite eternity. In addition, he also could sense a boundless life-force coming from this person. Ning couldn't help but feel his own spirit completely calming down, thanks to his master's simple presence.

"Master." Ning walked in, then called out respectfully.

"Sit," the Old Patriarch said.

Ning immediately sat down on a prayer mat in the lotus position, awaiting instruction.

The Old Patriarch looked at Ning, then said slowly, "How long have you spent on Mount Innerheart?"

"It has already been more than thirty years and five...this year shall be the thirty-sixth," Ning said respectfully.

"Which abilities have you learned?" The Old Patriarch asked.

"Your disciple has learned the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] and reached the Third Cycle! I've just reached a basic level of skill in [Houyi's Archery]. I have also trained in the [Torch Dragon's Eye] and reached the second stage of innate torch-light! In the past thirty-plus years, your disciple has primarily focused on swordplay; I've already mastered the ninth stance of the [Three-Foot Sword], and have learned other, more powerful sword-arts as well," Ning said respectfully.

The Old Patriarch nodded. "You have many abilities now; it can be said that you are a completely different person compared to when you first came up the mountain. At your current level...remaining on Mount Innerheart will no longer help you as much as before. What you need to do now is go temper yourself within the real world, so as to prepare for your upcoming Celestial Tribulation. Given your

abilities, and given that you have the legacy of brother Threelives...your Celestial Tribulation will surely be extraordinary. It will be very, very difficult.”

“Your disciple shall remember to be cautious.” Ning was enlightened. So indeed, it was as he had expected...it was time for him to leave his master’s tutelage.

“It is time for you to leave now.” The Old Patriarch looked at Ning. “I once said that when you left my tutelage, I would give you two great gifts.”

Ning instantly felt intrigued.

“After you entered my tutelage, I often watched you, appraising your comprehension ability, your talent, your habits...all for the sake of developing a completely unique evasion divine ability for you, known as the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens],” the Old Patriarch said.

Ning was overjoyed. This had been created just for him?!

Ning was badly in need of an evasive ability right now. He had been preparing to ‘settle’ for an evasive technique from the Divinities Palace if he couldn’t find a good one, but unexpectedly his master had been preparing this for him the entire time, developing an evasive divine ability that was completely suited for Ning.

“You are a human, after all; if you are to train in any other evasive abilities, it will be hard for you to reach the peak in them. Even if I gave you the [Wings of the Garuda], from which your Windwing Evasion ability originates, you will never be able to reach the level which the great Roc did,” the Old Patriarch explained. “The ‘best’ skill is the one most-suited to you. This technique, the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens], when trained to the utmost peak...although it might not be as good as perfect mastery over [Wings of the Garuda], it isn’t that far off. You will be able to move 90,000 kilometers in a single movement.” [1. Alas, this isn’t quite as fast as Sun Wukong’s ‘somersault cloud’, which allowed him to move 108,000 kilometers in a single somersault.]

“90,000 kilometers in a single movement?” Ning was extremely delighted. 90,000 kilometers...this was an astonishing speed!

“This is the evasive divine ability I prepared for you. In the future, when you have your own insights, perhaps you’ll be able to further perfect it, allowing you to move even faster. That, however, shall be up to you,” the Old Patriarch said.

Ning nodded.

An evasive ability which Patriarch Subhuti had personally developed...most likely it would be hard for Ning to improve on, even after he became an Empyrean God. Improving it...that would be a very, very distant task.

“I can see that in the future, you shall be a Sword Immortal. But any truly formidable Sword Immortal needs a powerful sword-formation,” the Old Patriarch said. “The so-called [Heavenraker] sword formation, in truth, was used by Daofather Heavenrake as something he could teach his disciples. Even I don’t know what his most formidable and profound sword-arts...Daofather Heavenrake keeps them hidden as his secret weapons for keeping himself alive.”

Ning nodded.

“Your [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] relies on using many treasures, relying on superiority of numbers; when combined with an appropriate sword-art, it is indeed capable of unleashing tremendous power. Both the Daoist Path and the Buddhist Sangha have similar types of techniques that rely on overwhelming numbers. Using your [Lesser Thousand Swords Formation] as the foundation, I have distilled the essence of the best Daoist and Buddhist techniques of this nature and developed a new sword-formation technique for you. I have given it the name, [Greater Thousand Swords Formation],” the Old Patriarch said. “If you have enough treasures, the power of this [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] will be absolutely astonishing. It can be described as one of the supreme sword-formations of the Three Realms.”

“Thank you, Master!” Ning was both excited and overjoyed. The [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens] evasive technique, the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] sword-formation technique...his master had personally designed both for him.

What Ning did not realize...

Was that Patriarch Subhuti was truly very diligent in teaching his students. Despite the passage of countless ages, the total number of students he had taken on was quite low, but he whole-heartedly focused on every single one he took on, especially during the early periods when they had first entered his tutelage. Although it seemed as though Ning hadn't had the chance to meet with his master many times, in reality Patriarch Subhuti had been constantly monitoring Ning. Then, based on Ning's own traits and characteristics, the Old Patriarch had tested out and developed these techniques in a completely separate world.

The [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens], for example; Patriarch Subhuti had spent hundreds of thousands of years developing it.

By comparison, the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was easier; after all, this sort of formation simply centered around massive numbers of treasures. Patriarch Subhuti had only spent a thousand years to develop it.

In this other world, the flow of time was different. This was why Patriarch was able to bring out these two techniques now.

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“Step forward,” the Old Patriarch instructed.

Ning hurriedly stepped forward, walking in front of the Old Patriarch. The Old Patriarch tapped Ning on the center of his forehead.

Instantly, a large amount of information flooded into Ning's brain.

By the time Ning recovered, the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens] and the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] had been firmly imprinted into his mind.

“Alright. It is time to leave,” the Old Patriarch said.

“Master,” Ning said respectfully. “Your disciple also wishes to meditate on the secrets of the lotus. I wish to make a trip to the Divinities Palace and acquire a few manuals on lotus techniques.”

The Old Patriarch waved his hand and a bamboo book appeared within it. He handed it to Ning. “This is a set of lotus techniques I acquired by accident. The mysteries within it are unfathomably profound, and will be more than enough for you to meditate on. You can carry it with you.”

“Thank you, Master.” It was one surprise for Ning after another. Ning hurriedly added, “Your disciple has an apprentice, Bluecliff Xiaoyu, who has just arrived on the mountain and only been here a few years. She is still quite weak; your disciple would like to let her remain here at Mount Innerheart for now...”

The Old Patriarch nodded. “Then let her remain here and train quietly on the mountain. When the day comes that she can defeat the ninth golem, I will let her leave and send her to your Grand Xia world.”

Only now did Ning feel completely relaxed. Everything had been arranged for.

“Alright. Time to leave the mountain,” the Old Patriarch instructed. “Remember this: Without my permission, you are not to say that you are my disciple. Otherwise...do not blame your master for showing you no mercy. Only when I summon you back can you return to Mount Innerheart.”

“Yes,” Ning said respectfully.

“The Three Realms are now filled with secret, turbulent undercurrents. Even I, your master, might perish. You must be careful. You are not to be too rash and cause a disaster for yourself,” the Old Patriarch said.

Ning instantly felt his heart shake. What? The Three Realms were filled with secret, turbulent undercurrents? Even his master might perish? Then how was someone like him, a junior fellow who wasn't even a Celestial Immortal, supposed to make it?

The Old Patriarch waved his sleeve. “Be it fortune or calamity...you shall bring it to yourself, and have no one else to blame or to thank. Now, go!”

Ning respectfully fell to his knees, pressing his head down to the ground and kowtowing heavily nine times. “Your disciple is leaving now. Master, take care!”

His master had indeed spent considerable effort on his behalf. Both the [Obscuring Wind of the Nine Heavens] and the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] were truly supreme techniques of the Three Realms. Even Daofathers weren't capable of casually creating techniques on this level. Although his master hadn't spelled it out, Ning could imagine how much enormous effort his master must've gone into in order to develop these techniques.

Ning would naturally engrave his memory of this kindness into his heart.

In addition, the thirty-plus years he had spent on Mount Innerheart had been the most peaceful years of his life, the years when he had truly, firmly established his foundation. After leaving the mountain, it would be as his master said; given how the Three Realms were filled with dangerous undercurrents, it would probably be hard for him to find such peace again.

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After Ning left, another person appeared within the Daoist monastery. It was the second apprentice, Crazy Ji.

“Master.” Crazy Ji watched as Ning walked away, then sighed, “This junior apprentice-brother of mine truly is a man of deep emotions.”

“Unfortunately, he was born at the wrong time.” The Old Patriarch shook his head. “When most of you were growing up, I was able to protect you. But he will be growing up in an era when a great tribulation is descending upon the Three Realms. The Three Realms are already filled with many dangerous undercurrents...and this tribulation may prove to be even more terrifying than the one that shattered Pangu’s World.”

“What?!” Crazy Ji’s face instantly changed.

“Nuwa has left long ago, entering the endless primordial chaos. Despite the passages of countless years, she has never returned,” the Old Patriarch said. “When Nuwa was present, the Three Realms were finally settled down and the Six Paths of Reincarnation were established. The Celestial Court was created to manage the Three Realms, and the Daofathers and True Gods all separated into their respective territories. But with Nuwa gone...with the Six Paths of Reincarnation destroyed...with the Celestial Court only a court in name...with the Three Realms filled by dangerous undercurrents...I fear that this tribulation...”

The Old Patriarch shook his head.

Crazy Ji began to worry.

“But in times of tribulation, a person can bring either fortune or calamity upon himself. If it is calamity, only he himself can save himself,” the Old Patriarch said. “Everyone, including you and the others, all need to be careful. I imagine that a large number of True Gods and Daofathers shall die during this tribulation...and if even half of the Emyrean Gods and True Immortals survive, they should count their blessings. If you are faced with danger, I may not be able to protect you.”

“Your disciple shall remember and be cautious,” Crazy Ji said respectfully.

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Ning led Little Qing and Uncle White out of Mount Innerheart.

On the path to Mount Innerheart. Bluecliff Xiaoyu fell to her knees, pressing her forehead against the ground. “Your disciple shall definitely train hard. After I reach the ninth floor of the Divinities Palace, I will immediately head for the world of the Grand Xia to reunite with you, Master.”

Ning nodded and smiled. He then led Little Qing and Uncle White to fly out of Mount Innerheart.

They arrived in the sky-void, and as they did, a void tunnel appeared. This was a void-tunnel which Patriarch Subhuti had personally opened for them.

Ning, Little Qing, and Uncle White flew directly into it.

Swoosh! They all disappeared, and the void-tunnel closed behind them.

“Master!” Xiaoyu knelt there, tears streaming uncontrollably down her face. “I will definitely go to the Grand Xia world and meet you there.”

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## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 1: Homecoming**

The world of the Grand Xia. Stillwater Commandery.

A spatial ripple appeared in the air above Serpentwing Lake. From within, out strode a plainly dressed youth, a snowy white hound by his side and a little azure serpent around his arm.

“We’re back.”

Ji Ning stared downwards at Serpentwing Lake. He murmured softly, “When I left here, I fled in such a pathetic state. But now...no one should even think about forcing me, Ji Ning, to leave again!”

Ning felt closer to this lake than anything else. If it hadn’t been because the Youngflame clan was so much more powerful than him back then, how could Ning have beared to part from it?

Swoosh. With a single step, Ning arrived within Brightheart Island, at the very center of Serpentwing Lake.

The buildings of Brightheart Island had all been rebuilt. There were quite a few servants and guards present. As Ning strolled forward through the sand, he quietly gazed at everything and everyone. His divine sense had long ago encapsulated the entire island. “When I fled, Brightheart Island had been leveled by the Youngflame clan. I didn’t expect that it would have been rebuilt, and that it would be built to look exactly the way it did in the past. However...it seems as though there is no one here that I recognize.”

“I imagine that elder sister Autumn Leaf is still at the City of Ten Thousand Swords.”

Ning took a walk around Brightheart Island. He visited the place where Autumn Leaf had previously stayed, as well as the place where his father had once lived. The servants and guards didn’t see him at all.

Brightheart Island of Serpentwing Lake was Ning’s home. Coming home was truly a wonderful feeling.

“This time...no one should even think about destroying Brightheart Island again,” Ning murmured softly.

“Uncle White. It’ll be up to you.”

The Whitewater Hound behind Ning spoke out. “I’ve analyzed quite a few grand formations at Mount Innerheart, and within some of the secret tomes on formations there were also some hidden formations of supreme power. Although I haven’t thoroughly comprehended them all...simply setting them up in accordance with the instructions will prove simple. In the future, the entire Swallow Mountain region, all hundred thousand kilometers of it, will be surrounded by hundreds of layers of grand formations! Formations within formations within formations; not even Celestial Immortals will dare barge in here.”

“Good.” Ning nodded.

A powerful school or sect would definitely layer many terrifying formations around its headquarters.

In order to lay down a formation, one would first need to procure a formidable formation technique, and then go buy enough treasures to actually set it up. Thus, the formations of major schools were usually built up by successive generations of disciples of the school. The longer a school's history, the more complicated and powerful its many layered formations would be, to the point of causing any enemy to hesitate!

Although Ning and the Whitewater Hound didn't have that sort of long history and background, they were the disciples of Mount Innerheart!

Formation tomes generally weren't valued that much, and so the formation tomes which Uncle White had acquired on the sixth floor of the Divinities Palace were already some of the supreme formations of the entire Three Realms. Naturally, he had learned an enormous number of formidable formations. Some he had thoroughly mastered, while others he had not, but even those he had not mastered, he could still lay them out according to the instructions.

"Uncle White," Little Qing said, "I heard that some major schools take up hundreds of thousands of kilometers, all of which is completely covered up by formations, some of which are set down by generations of Loose Immortals and Celestial Immortals. You need to make sure that our formations aren't weaker than theirs!"

"We are of Mount Innerheart; our formations are unfathomably more profound than the formations of those so-called major schools," Uncle White said confidently. "With enough magic treasures...I can turn the entire Swallow Mountain into an unbreakable steel dome."

"Right. When the time comes, let's pay a trip to the imperial capital and buy some formations materials. Uncle White, think about what you need and prepare a list," Ning said.

"I will. I'll come up with some of the most supreme killing formations that I've learned from those formation manuals."

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A short while later. Outside the City of Ten Thousand Swords.

The gates to the city were open. Ning led a snowy white hound inside through the city gates. The gateguards couldn't see them at all; naturally, they wouldn't bar their way.

"The changes are so significant." Ning murmured softly, "In the past, the City of Ten Thousand Swords had many ordinary mortals within it, and there were many hawkers lining the streets. Now...everything has changed. There are very few mortals here."

The many former residences of the City of Ten Thousand Swords had all been demolished, and the entire city had been completely renovated in a beautiful manner!

Within the city, there were now far more soldiers! There were also many more men and women that were dressed in absolutely beautiful clothes.

"Even I can barely recognize this place. I feel as though the City of Ten Thousand Swords has been transformed into an enormous private estate," Uncle White sighed in amazement.

Whoosh. Ning swept forward with his divine sense.

Within an estate, there were two powerful Immortal Diremonsters who were leisurely sipping wine – Immortal Duohe and Immortal Witchsui. Their faces suddenly changed; they could sense an incomparably powerful, almost crushingly-strong divine sense sweep past them! Just from this divine sense alone...they could tell that the wielder was above ordinary Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals. It was extremely rare for Loose Immortals to have such a terrifying divine sense.

“Not good.” Immortal Duohe and Immortal Witchsui both were shocked. “An enemy!”

“Wait.”

Puzzled looks quickly appeared on their faces. The divine sense seemed rather familiar...

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning?” They shared a glance of disbelief...but indeed, when they carefully checked again, that surge of divine sense did indeed belong to Ji Ning. However, it was even more powerful and graceful than before.

“Immortal Witchsui, Immortal Duohe, we’ll meet at Darknorth Palace in a bit,” Ning sent mentally.

“Alright,” the two Diremonster Immortals assented.

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Within a secluded courtyard in the City of Ten Thousand Swords. Autumn Leaf was taking care of her flowers. She had lived by herself for the past few decades, quietly focusing on her training. Without planning to, she actually made a breakthrough and reached the early Wanxiang level. Although Ning had previously provided her with some help, and although this was partially due to the fact that the Ji clan now had a prodigious Dao-repository, her own talent clearly was exceptional as well.

“Auntie.” A youth walked in, a look of absolute delight on his face and a look of yearning in his eyes. “Auntie, auntie, my swordplay has reached the ‘one with the world’ level.”

“Oh?” Autumn Leaf turned around, smiling as she looked at the youth. “One with the world?”

“Right right! When I was out adventuring and fighting Diremonsters, I suddenly made a breakthrough and my swordplay reached the ‘one with the world’ level,” the youth said excitedly. “Auntie, you promised me to teach me a powerful sword-art when I reached the ‘one with the world’ level.”

Autumn Leaf smiled. But suddenly...her body trembled. A look of disbelief and delight appeared in her eyes.

The youth was immediately puzzled.

“Little Rocky, hurry up and head back. Auntie has something to do,” Autumn Leaf said.

“But Auntie, you promised to teach me swordplay...” The youth was rather hesitant, unwilling to leave.

“Go back for now,” Autumn Leaf said.

“...fine.” The youth turned and left helplessly.

After the youth left, the courtyard once more became quiet. Autumn Leaf hurriedly stared at the surrounding area with agitation, searching for that familiar figure. And right at this moment, a fur-clad youth suddenly appeared out of nowhere, not too far away in front of her.

“Young master!” A look of excitement was on Autumn Leaf’s face. He looked just the same as he always had; he hadn’t changed at all. “Young master. You came back.”

“Right. I’m back.” Ning nodded slowly.

“Will you be leaving?” Autumn Leaf asked softly.

“Not this time,” Ning said.

Tears appeared in Autumn Leaf’s eyes. She nodded repeatedly. “Autumn Leaf will definitely take good care of you, young master.”

“It wouldn’t feel right if anyone else was to take care of me,” Ning said with a smile. “Let’s go and see Uncle Truekeep and the others.”

“Alright.” Autumn Leaf immediately followed him.

The City of Ten Thousand Swords. Darknorth Palace.

After the complete overhaul of the City of Ten Thousand Swords, the most important palace of the the entire Ji clan became this place, the Darknorth Palace. It was named ‘Darknorth’ after Ning’s own Daoist title, of course! Ever since news had spread of Ning’s victory in the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, the entire Ji clan had celebrated with wild abandon. This was a glory which the Ji clan had never before even imagined of in all of its history!

Ji Ning had become the absolute most glorious figure in the Ji clan’s entire history!

“Uncle Truekeep, Granny Shadow, Immortal Duohe, Immortal Witchsui.” Ning walked into Darknorth Palace, then called out to them.

Only four people were present within the palace. Clearly, the news of Ning’s return was too shocking and sudden; none of the other formidable figures of the Ji clan had been notified yet. His return was to be kept a secret for now.

“It’s good that you are back. It’s good that you are back!” Granny Shadow looked at Ning, a hint of excitement and delight in her eyes.

“Where’s the former patriarch and the others?” Ning couldn’t help but ask.

“Because they reached the end of their lifespans...my big brother and Ah Xing have both passed on,” Granny Shadow sighed. “After they left, I spent all my time by myself within the Dao-repository, waiting for my end to come as well. Who would’ve thought that after being within it for so long, I’d actually end up making an unexpected breakthrough?”

Ning sighed. The former patriarch, Ji Ninefire, as well as the old servant Ah Xing had both died. Of the older generation, only Granny Shadow remained.

“However, before they died, they learned of the fact that you, Ji Ning, became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny,” Granny Shadow said excitedly. “They were both excited and proud. Our Ji clan actually produced a scion that became one of the most glorious figures of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty. This is an incomparable honor for our entire clan! Right...after you became champion, you suddenly disappeared for thirty years. Did you go follow a Celestial Immortal to study the Dao?”

The nearby Immortal Witchsui said with a laugh, “Only a truly peerless genius could become champion of the Conclave. It is quite normal for such a genius to be taken on by a Celestial Immortal; in fact, even Pure Yang True Immortals and Empyrean Gods would consider accepting such disciples.”

Immortal Witchsui was of Celestial Immortal Witchriver’s lineage; naturally, he knew about True Immortals and Empyrean Gods.

“I did indeed leave to go studying,” Ning said with a nod.

Ning had already prepared his explanation for his thirty-plus years of disappearance. The explanation was...he had left to go studying!

Studying with who? Who was his master? That would be a secret! The more mysterious it seemed, the more caution it would inspire in careful-minded folk.

“If my gaze is correct...fellow Daoist Ji Ning, you are now a Void-level Earth Immortal,” Immortal Duohe said with a laugh.

“Not just that; both of fellow Daoist Ji Ning’s spirit-beasts have become Void-level Earth Immortals,” the nearby Immortal Witchsui added.

“What?!” Granny Shadow, Patriarch Ji Truekeep, and Autumn Leaf all stared towards them in astonishment.

Although they were delighted by the fact that Ning had become a Void-level Earth Immortal, this was as they had expected, because they had heard long ago about Ning’s Primaltwin being capable of killing Loose Immortals. Given that Ning had also gone to study the Dao with a powerful figure, what was so strange about him now having reached the Void-level and become an Earth Immortal? But the two spirit-beasts had also become Void-level Earth Immortals?!

“Right.” Ning smiled and nodded, then said, “I can see that the Ji clan has changed quite a bit.”

“Thanks to the help of Princess Xiyue, the squads which the Youngflame clan had stationed in the Ji clan’s territory left long ago.” Truekeep tamped down the curiosity he felt, then explained, “And given the additional fame and glory you won at the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, Ji Ning, who would dare antagonize our Ji clan now? We haven’t expanded; we’ve just continued to stabilize around Swallow Mountain. Over the past few decades, Swallow Mountain’s defenses have become airtight.”

Ning nodded.

“Our Ji clan hasn’t changed that much; by comparison, Stillwater Commandery has changed much more.” Truekeep let out a sigh. “The entire Stillwater Commandery is now vastly different from what it was like when you left. Even the Marquis of Stillwater has changed.”

“The Marquis of Stillwater has changed?” Ning was surprised. “To who?”

The two principal contenders for the position of Marquis of Stillwater had been Northmont Yin and Northmont Blacktiger.

“The current Marquis of Stillwater...is Northmont Yin,” Truekeep said.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 2: Ji Ning Is Back**

“Northmont Yin?” Ning was startled.

“Then what of Northmont Baiwei and his father, Northmont Blacktiger?” Ning hurriedly asked, “Are they doing alright?”

Internicine struggles within ancient clans could be incredibly devastating; generally, the losers would have dire ends.

“I know about the relationship between you and Northmont Baiwei,” Ji Truekeep said, “So I kept abreast of this matter. Northmont Blacktiger and his son continue to live within Stillwater City and continue to reside within the Northmont Blacktiger Estate. Although their power is not as it was before, they aren’t at risk of dying.”

Ning finally let out a sigh of relief. Still...he was quite surprised.

Based on what he understood, the struggle within the Northmont clan of Stillwater for the position of Marquis would be extremely cruel and savage; the loser would be driven out of their estate and perhaps even expelled out from Stillwater City to some other places. In an extremely serious case, they might even be sent to a completely different minor world with the assignment of subjugating it for the clan. There, they might live out the end of their days. Unexpectedly, after Northmont Yin had become the Marquis, his most powerful foe, Northmont Blacktiger, was still able to reside in Stillwater City.

After the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning finished asking his questions and felt a bit more relaxed. He then said, “I’m going to make a trip; I should be back in ten days or half a month or so.”

“Ji Ning,” Granny Shadow said in her gravelly voice, “The outside world is very chaotic right now. You must be careful.”

“Chaotic?” Ning was puzzled. “Why is it chaotic?”

Truekeep explained, “Our Ji clan is permanently stationed here at Swallow Mountain, and so we don’t know too much about the chaos in the outside world. What we do know, however, is that in the past twenty to thirty years, many tribes and clans within Stillwater Commandery have been wiped out! The entire Stillwater Commandery is in a state of enormous upheaval right now. Of course, the annihilated clans and tribes were all fairly weak tribes that had no Immortals...but there were still a number of annihilated clans that were comparable to Snowdragon Mountain back in its heyday.”

“What?!” Ning felt as though something was off. In Stillwater Commandery, powers comparable to Snowdragon Mountain were already fairly strong.

Powers with Immortals guarding them, by contrast, would be considered truly first-rate.

Above them would be the eight supreme powers; the Black-White College, the Skysplitter Sword Sect, the Hundred Flowers Fairyland, the Heavenly Saint Church, the Blood God Church, the Dragonhunter clan, the Eastriver clan, and the Bluewood clan.

The most supreme powers, of course, were the Northmont clan as well as the local Raindragon Guard.

“Powers comparable to Snowdragon Mountain...they all have extremely deep and stable roots; it’s rare for one of them to be wiped out, even in a thousand years. How is it that a number of them have been wiped out in twenty to thirty short years?” Ning said.

“The Ji clan stays here at Swallow Mountain. We’re not too sure,” Truekeep said.

Ning frowned.

When Ning had left Mount Innerheart, his master had warned him of the dangerous undercurrents within the Three Realms, claiming that even he himself might fall. Now, upon returning to Stillwater Commandery, he discovered that local regions were already beginning to turn chaotic...

“A great secret most likely lies behind the chaos in Stillwater Commandery,” Ning mused silently to himself. “It seems I need to be even more careful than I anticipated. If even Master must be extremely careful...this little bit of power I have is nothing.”

“Granny Shadow. Uncle Truekeep.” Ning immediately said, “Given the state of chaos Stillwater Commandery is in, your actions are correct. It is best for our Ji clan to peacefully remain here at Swallow Mountain. Mm...I’m going to make a trip. I’ll be back in ten days or so. Autumn Leaf, no need to follow me; wait here for my return.”

“Alright.” Autumn Leaf nodded.

“Immortal Duohe, Immortal Witchsui...the safety of my Ji clan will depend on your efforts,” Ning said.

“We are only acting as is proper. Fellow Daoist Ji Ning, you rescued all of us from the Immortal estate; it is right and proper for us to help out,” Immortal Witchsui said hurriedly.

“The monsters of the Immortal estate are living here at Swallow Mountain as well. We shall prosper together or perish together with the Ji clan.” Immortal Duohe spoke out warmly as well. In the past, for the sake of their clan, they had sworn a thousand year oath...but now that Ning had come back as a Void-level Earth Immortal, as had his two spirit-beasts, their attitudes had changed significantly.

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In the air a few thousand kilometers outside of Stillwater City. A spatial ripple appeared, then a fur-clad youth walked out, a snowy white hound by his side.

Around Ning’s arm was a little azure snake. The snake raised its little head, staring into the distance, then said excitedly, “We’re finally at Stillwater City. Hahaha, I, Little Qing, have become a Void-level Earth Immortal. I’d be considered an expert even here in Stillwater City now!”

Swoosh!

Ning rode the wind as he flew towards Stillwater City.



“I’m back. I wonder if Master is at the Black-White College.” Ning quickly saw the distant Black-White College; when Ning had left, Immortal Diancai had gone out adventuring to temper himself. Nearly forty years had passed since then; Ning wondered if he was back yet.

Whoosh. Ning flew directly into the Black-White College.

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Within the marquisate of Stillwater. There were many crystal globes hovering in midair, each being watched over by an Immortal cultivator.

“Someone flew directly into Stillwater city!” A cultivator quickly noticed the scene that just appeared within one of the watched crystal balls. He immediately reported this aloud, and soon had his report verified by someone else.

“A fur-clad youth, an Azure Skysnake, a Whitewater Hound.”

“This person should be the person who became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny more than thirty years ago, then disappeared without a trace – Adept Darknorth, Ji Ning!”

“Intelligence reports regarding Adept Darknorth are classified as top-priority. Quick, go report this!”

Soon, this intelligence report was transferred to higher-ups.

The Northmont clan of Stillwater kept an extremely tight watch over its enfeoffed territory. In Stillwater City at least, anyone who dared to fly about in the open had to be clearly investigated. In fact... whenever there was an especially powerful ripple of elemental energy anywhere in the entire vast commandery of Stillwater, it would be discovered and investigated!

For example, when Immortal Firedragon made his breakthrough in Swallow Mountain, the Northmont clan of Stillwater immediately discovered it.

“Ji Ning?”

“The Ji Ning that disappeared more than thirty years ago after the Conclave of Immortal Destiny?”

“This information needs to be reported to the Patriarch right away!”

“Right.”

The news continued to climb through the ranks. And soon...the news made its way to Celestial Immortal Hunchmont.

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A hunchbacked old man with white hair who held a gnarled wooden staff took a single step forward and appeared in midair, then flew towards the direction of the Black-White College.

“I heard that Sword Immortal Evergreen of the Crimsonbright League had intended to take Ji Ning as his disciple...but it seemed as though Ji Ning didn’t take him on as his master, nor did he apprentice himself to any of the other Immortals or Empyrean Gods affiliated with Daofather Crimsonbright. In fact...the

Immortals of the Crimsonbright League have no idea where Ji Ning is at all.” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont quietly pondered over this.

Ning’s disappearance had briefly caused a stir. It must be understood that even Pure Yang True Immortals like Lu Dongbin had been interested in taking Ning as a disciple...and in fact, Lu Dongbin had been extremely eager to do so. However, the Grand Xia Emperor had resolutely refused to agree, insisting on keeping Ning for the Crimsonbright League.

But in the end...?

Almost everyone who had been in the Skylight Palace for the Conclave had been a Celestial Immortal. The news of this matter had quickly spread. All of those Celestial Immortals were under Daofather Crimsonbright’s command, and so they were all investigating this matter. They all had learned that Sword Immortal Evergreen had sought to take Ning as a disciple, but Ning had refused and disappeared.

However...no matter how they searched, none of the Immortals under Daofather Crimsonbright’s command could find out who had taken Ning on as a disciple. Everyone guessed that Ning had most likely ended up not joining Daofather Crimsonbright’s side.

So where had Ji Ning gone to?

Why didn’t he take Sword Immortal Evergreen as his master?

Who had he taken as his master? Or did he even have a master at all? Was he wandering alone?!

This became a mystery!

“You all seem to be having a happy chat.” The staff-holding Celestial Immortal Hunchmont arrived before the Headmaster’s Hall in the Black-White College. He strode inside, sweeping the people within with his long-browed, deep gaze. There were more than ten Immortals gathered here. Thirty years ago, the Black-White College didn’t have this many Immortals. During the past period of time, however, Stillwater Commandery had simply become too chaotic, and so the Primal Daoists with very deep levels of enlightenment such as Daoist Jadesea, who had previously been taking their time, all decided to make their breakthroughs. They had all reached the Void-level and become Earth Immortals.

“Senior Hunchmont.”

Instantly, all the Immortals of the Black-White College saluted respectfully. Ning saluted as well. “Senior Hunchmont.”

“Ji Ning returned?” Celestial Immortal Hunchmont nodded lightly, his eyes lighting up. “It’s only been thirty years, but both you and your spirit-beasts have reached the Void-level as Earth Immortals. Monsters train much more slowly than we humans do, but your two spirit-beasts have both reached the Void-level...it seems the past thirty-plus years represented a huge stroke of fortune for you.”

The short elder nearby, Immortal Fivecraze, let out an emotional sigh. “We were just discussing this as well. Becoming a Void-level Earth Immortal is no easy task. Ning and both his spirit-beasts...well, our Black-White College now has three more Earth Immortals. Naturally, all of us are extremely happy.”

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont nodded, then said, “Young friend Ji Ning, you disappeared all those years ago, drawing quite a bit of attention. Where did you go for the past period of time?”

Ning smiled. "I went to take on a master and to study."

"Take on a master?" Celestial Immortal Hunchmont was intrigued. He hurriedly asked, "Might I ask who?"

"Forgive me for not being able to tell you," Ning said.

Celestial Immortal Hunchmont laughed. "I won't force it, I won't force it." But in his heart, he secretly mumbled to himself, "It seems one of the powers of the Three Realms must've run off with him, which is why he isn't willing to say his master's name; I imagine he doesn't want to cause trouble. However...for his master to be so daring means that he is most likely a formidable figure."

The question of who Ning had taken on his master was indeed quite an intriguing one. This was because any power who took on Ning as a disciple would have at least somewhat offended Daofather Crimsonbright's side!

Still...the Crimsonbright League wouldn't hold anything against Ning personally. This was because if one was to take on a disciple, the disciple had to be willing! True Immortals, Emphyrean Gods, Daofathers...anyone taking on a disciple had to ask if the disciple was willing to accept him as a master! If Ning was unwilling, nobody could force him. For Ning to willingly run off with someone else and take him or her as his master only meant that the Grand Xia Emperor would have to suffer this loss in silence.

"If you are free, young friend Ji Ning, you can pay a visit to the marquise of Stillwater," Celestial Immortal Hunchmont said with a chortle.

"Definitely," Ning said.

"Right. I won't interrupt your reunion with your comrades any longer." Celestial Immortal Hunchmont immediately turned, still-leaning on his gnarled staff, and gracefully departed.

Within the hall.

"Ji Ning, Stillwater Commandery is a bit chaotic right now. You need to be careful. Although our Black-White College stands on the side of the Northmont clan of Stillwater...we can't just stupidly offer ourselves up and die for them for no reason," Immortal Fivecraze said in a low voice. All the other Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals present all nodded and looked towards Ning.

Ji Ning and the Sloppy Daoist were the two mighty future pillars of their Black-White College! They didn't wish for Ning to be taken advantage of.

Ning nodded. "I understand. Right...has my master returned to the Black-White College?"

"Your master came back just a few days ago. He's in closed-door meditation right now; most likely, he is going to attempt his Celestial Tribulation soon," Immortal Fivecraze said.

"Tribulation?" Ning was surprised.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 3: Blood God Church**

Soon, Ji Ning met with Immortal Diancai.

Within a quiet, secluded courtyard. There was a gourd of Immortal wine, two wine cups, a master, and a disciple. The two were drinking wine and chatting with each other.

“Master, I didn’t disturb your meditations, did I?” Ning asked.

“I was just engaging in ordinary meditation; I wasn’t in a prajna-state of sudden enlightenment. What’s there to disturb?” Immortal Diancai looked at Ning, then nodded with satisfaction. “Ji Ning, you are far more powerful than you were in the past. When you first entered my tutelage, you were a piece of unpolished jade; you were quite young. But now, your divine sense is a bit more powerful than even mine; you truly are the peerless genius who became the champion of the Conclave after having trained for merely thirty or so years.”

“If you keep praising me this much, Master, I’m going to start wiggling with delight,” Ning joked with a laugh.

“You little punk...” Immortal Diancai laughed, then shook his head.

Ning said seriously, “Master, are you truly planning to take on your Celestial Tribulation soon? This is something that you need to be extremely cautious about; you can’t be the slightest bit over-confident in handling it.”

“I know that. Of course I know that. There are countless Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals, but it’s rare for the entire Grand Xia world to produce a single Celestial Immortal in a million years.” Immortal Diancai continued, “But times are changing. In the past twenty, thirty years, there were multiple Earth Immortals who successfully overcame their Celestial Tribulation and became Celestial Immortals in the Grand Xia world.”

“Multiple?!” Ning was surprised.

“Right.” Immortal Diancai nodded. “The greater a storm, the more experts are born from within! And during my previous period of training, my subconscious was telling me...that a great storm is coming. If I want to overcome my tribulation and become a Celestial Immortal, I have to do so before this storm comes. Only then will I have a chance. If I delay...I’ll probably die within it.”

Ning was secretly shocked.

An Immortal’s subconscious senses were usually very accurate. In truth, ever since he had returned to the Grand Xia world, Ning himself had subconsciously felt as though a terrifying tempest was about to erupt. However...he didn’t sense that he needed to make his breakthrough before it. Clearly, with his success in training the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], Ning’s chances of survival were much greater than Immortal Diancai’s.

“Master.” Ning suddenly waved his hand, and a man-high pile of books suddenly appeared.

“What’s this?” Immortal Diancai said, puzzled.

“A Dao-Repository,” Ning said. “You can look at these three books, Master.”

Ning pulled out three thick tomes from the pile.

Immortal Diancai immediately accepted the three books, then began to flip through them. These had been acquired by Ning in the Crescent world after killing the monster kings and the evil Patriarch! It must be understood that these powerful figures were generally extremely self-confident; in order to prevent other powers from destroying their Dao-Repositories, they would generally carry a copy with them at all times. When the Flamewing King had destroyed the Qi Empire, he had acquired a portion of the Qi Empire's Dao-Repository, which Ning now naturally had as well.

"A fine sword-art. A fine sword-art!" Immortal Diancai's eyes were shining as he flipped through a second book. He said excitedly, "This directly guides one through the Grand Dao!"

Ning laughed.

It must be understood that the Qi Empire needed only a few tens of thousands of years to establish an Empire that spanned a million kilometers. How incredible had its Dao-Repository been? The Twelve Monster Kings of the Eastern Flows and the evil Patriarch were all comparable to Celestial Immortals; the Dao-Repositories they had built up were similarly astonishing. Although there was no way they could come close to comparing to Mount Innerheart's, their repositories were ten times superior to the Black-White College's!

"Ji Ning, these Dao-Repositories...?" Immortal Diancai looked towards Ning.

"Don't worry, Master. Your disciple acquired them with his own power; they don't come with any strings attached. I prepared them for you, Master, and for the Black-White College," Ning said. Because of the rules of the Old Patriarch, the supreme arts of Mount Innerheart were absolutely not to be taught to any outsiders. There were no such restrictions, however, on the techniques Ning had acquired from the monster kings and the evil Patriarch.

The Black-White College had ten-plus Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals, all of which were extraordinary. With these Dao-Repositories, their level of power would rise once again.

As for the Ji clan?

Ning had used an ink technique to duplicate copies for the Ji clan. In addition...Ning believed that as he grew increasingly powerful, the Dao-Repositories he would acquire would also become increasingly formidable. For the dreams of his father, for the dreams of the deceased Patriarch Ninefire and the others, and for the sake of himself as a descendant of the Ji clan, he would naturally do everything he could to make the Ji clan flourish.

"Good, good, good. These Dao-Repositories are all quite incredible." Immortal Diancai was truly excited. "The three sword-arts manuals you picked out are all of great help to me and have given me insight. I need to immediately go into closed-door meditation and ponder on them. My chances of overcoming the tribulation are now a bit greater."

Ning nodded.

These three sword-arts manuals were all comparable to the complete [Three-Foot Sword]; they were truly superb tomes on the Dao of the Sword! In the current Black-White College, there were only two Sword Immortals at the Void level; Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai. No one would fight with Immortal Diancai over these tomes.

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“Wonderful.”

All of the Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals of the Black-White College were now gathered at Immortal Diancai’s place. Upon seeing the piles of Dao-Repositories, they were instantly all overjoyed.

“Divine ability, [Nine Melodies of Virtue].”

“Divine ability, [Bloodshadow Evasion].”

“Secret art, [Thousandstar Soulscur].”

“A Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Technique. Our Black-White College has no Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Techniques!”

“This one is a Pure Yang-level Ki Refining Technique as well.”

“A formation here.”

“Is this a technique for creating constructs?”

All sorts of tomes on the Dao were present. The Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals could feel the blood boiling in their veins as they read.

Ning just quietly sighed to himself. At Mount Innerheart, there were quite a few Ki Refining Techniques that were at the Daofather level! There were many sword-arts created by Daofathers, but unfortunately Mount Innerheart techniques could not be taught to others. Thus, he could only give the repositories of the monster kings and the vile Patriarch to his school...and yet, this was already enough to make them go wild with joy.

The Earth Immortals and Loose Immortals of the Black-White College were all extraordinary figures.

In the past, they didn’t have a truly top-tier Dao-Repository. Now that Ning had given them one, it was guaranteed that all of them would once more increase in power. Even Immortal Fivecraze was laughing loudly right now. “With this Dao-Repository, the fortunes of our Black-White College have improved tenfold! Back during the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, when little Sloppy entered the top six and Ji Ning became champion, I knew that our Black-White College was in for an era of tremendous luck...and today, I’ve finally seen the fruits of that luck. With this Dao-Repository, haha...even I myself can live for at least another ten thousand years.”

Immortal Fivecraze had expected that after roughly nine centuries or so, he would no longer be able to withstand the next trial from the Three Calamities and Nine Tribulations, but with these new Dao-Repositories, his insights would deepen and his strength would grow; naturally, he would now be able to live longer.

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Night.

Ji Ning and Immortal Diancai were walking within a path inside the Black-White College.

“Ji Ning, a Dao-Repository is a school’s foundation. With these new ones, the Black-White College will grow more powerful, and will become comparable to some of the supreme schools of the entire Grand Xia Dynasty.” Immortal Diancai looked at Ning. “This is all because of you. The contribution you have made this time is too, too great.”

Some disciples preferred to give powerful Dao-Repositories to their own tribes instead. It was very rare for them to give so much to their school.

“It really was nothing.” Ning shook his head.

“Currently, it isn’t just Stillwater Commandery that is in a state of chaos; there are dangerous undercurrents within the entire Grand Xia world, causing all sorts of trouble. With these Dao-Repositories, the supreme Loose Immortals and Earth Immortals of our Black-White College will rise to a new level of power. As a result, more members of the Black-White College will be able to survive this storm.” Immortal Diancai looked at Ning. “The arrival of a Dao-Repository at such a critical moment is worth more than ten Dao-Repositories that come after the storm passes.”

Ning was puzzled. “Master, how exactly is our Stillwater Commandery in a state of chaos?”

“You don’t know?” Immortal Diancai didn’t understand.

“I just returned to the Grand Xia, and I didn’t have a chance to chat too much with old brother Fivecraze before you left your meditations, Master,” Ning said.

Immortal Diancai nodded. “Then I’ll give you a rough idea. Stillwater Commandery...right, roughly ten years ago, that friend of yours named Northmont Baiwei suffered an assassination attempt and nearly died. The assassination attempt was here in Stillwater City!”

“What?!” Ning was shocked. “Within Stillwater City? But...but this is a direct challenge to the Grand Xia Dynasty!”

Violence was forbidden within the commandery cities of the Grand Xia. This was the law! When the likes of the Youngflame clan sent out the likes of Immortal Floatcloud, they were sending out Deathsworn who were willing to die!

“How is Northmont Baiwei doing now?” Ning asked.

“He was lucky enough to survive, and so he’s naturally doing fine,” Immortal Diancai said. “During the past twenty, thirty years...there have been more than a hundred assassination’s within Stillwater Commandery. Although we all suspect that it was the Blood God Church behind them, that’s just our suspicion; we have no proof. Without proof, it isn’t appropriate for the Grand Xia Dynasty to intervene.”

Ning said, puzzled, “The Blood God Church...one of the eight great powers of Stillwater Commandery? They have this sort of audacity?”

More than a hundred assassinations within Stillwater City...this was too crazy.

“Why wouldn’t they? They have more audacity than you can imagine.” Immortal Diancai shook his head. “The Blood God Church has always been an association of madmen...and in recent days, they have exploded forth with astonishing power. They butted heads with the Northmont clan multiple times recently, and it was actually the Northmont clan that was at a disadvantage each time.”

“What?!” Ning could hardly believe it. The Northmont clan of Stillwater held the marquisate for this entire region! The Blood God Church was merely one of the eight strongest powers here. Logically speaking, if the Northmont clan wanted to deal with the Blood God Church, it wouldn’t be too hard for them to completely wipe it out.

“The Blood God Church’s power is far greater than it appeared in the past,” Immortal Diancai said. “The leader of the Blood God Church battled against Celestial Immortal Hunchmont...and even Celestial Immortal Hunchmont was unable to do anything to him. Quite a few bases and cultivator armies of the Northmont clan have been forcibly wiped out and uprooted by the Blood God Church. In battles at the Loose Immortal level or at lower levels, the Northmont clan has never been able to seize the upper hand. All that can be said is that both sides are fighting a tight battle against each other.”

Ning could scarcely believe what he was hearing. An exalted marquisate was actually unable to wipe out just one of eight major powers within its demesnes?

“The leader of the Blood God Church wasn’t this powerful in the past.” Immortal Diancai shook his head. “I even fought with him, the ‘Son of the Blood God’, in the past. In such a short period of time...he’s actually raised his power to the Celestial Immortal level.”

Ning nodded.

“The Northmont clan of Stillwater is feeling some pain now. They want to pull in the other powers to deal with the Blood God Church together,” Immortal Diancai said. “But not just our own Stillwater Commandery is in a state of chaos; the entire Grand Xia Dynasty is in a state of chaos. How could the various tribes and schools dare act rashly?”

“How could things have ended up this way?” Ning frowned.

The entire Grand Xia was in a state of chaos; it seemed as though the previous order had already been torn apart. It was as though there was an incomparably terrifying invisible hand moving behind the scenes, guiding everything.

“The storm sweeping the entire Grand Xia world, the sudden increase in power of the Blood God School...these things have caused us to guess that there should be a tremendous secret behind the rise of the Blood God School. Ji Ning, you must not be a fool and charge blindly forward into it. This is something for the Northmont clan to worry about,” Immortal Diancai instructed. “During a storm, during a tribulation...you need to be extremely careful.”

“Right.” Ning nodded. “Master, go rest for now. I’m going to go meet with my fellow disciples.”

“Your fellow disciples? Do you know where your junior apprentice-brother, Mu Northson, has gone?” Immortal Diancai asked.

“No idea. We haven’t met for thirty-plus years; I was planning to go see him.” Puzzled, Ning asked, “What, where is he?”

Immortal Diancai shook his head. “More than twenty years ago, Mu Northson and his Dao-companion both disappeared!”



## The Desolate Era

### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 4: Those Retainers From Back Then**

“Missing?” Ji Ning’s heart trembled. He hurriedly asked, “Since when did he get a Dao-companion? Who is his Dao-companion? And this ‘disappearing’ that happened twenty-plus years ago; are there no clues about it at all? Can’t we ask the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to help out?”

Upon seeing how nervous Ning was, Immortal Diancai immediately explained, “After you became the champion of the Conclave, some of the disciples of the Black-White College that were outside returned here. Mu Northson returned to Stillwater City as well, spending most of his time training in his art of constructs. Occasionally, he would gather with Northmont Baiwei as well as some of the other members of the younger generation here in Stillwater City. During one of these gatherings, he met with a female disciple of the Thousand Rivers School, ‘Adept Yuxia’. Soon after they met, they grew to be quite close and ended up becoming Dao-companions.”

“These two Dao-companions had very deep feelings for each other, and quite a few members of the younger generation here in Stillwater City envied them. They were a celebrated couple.”

“But after a period of time, both he and his Dao-companion vanished. Generally speaking, when disciples of the Black-White College go out adventuring, they will inform people within the College, or leave behind a message of some sort. But neither Mu Northson nor Adept Yuxia left any messages; they just vanished.”

“The Black-White College looked into this matter; we even asked the Northmont clan of Stillwater to help out, as well as the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. However, we were still unable to find any traces of them.”

“They seemed to have completely vanished from this world!”

Hearing his master’s words, Ning grew even more panicked. He said hurriedly, “Can it be that there have been traces of them in the past twenty-plus years?”

“None.” Immortal Diancai shook his head.

Ning was really worried now. It didn’t add up. This made no sense at all. Northson wasn’t the unreliable sort. Northson was a true lifelong friend for Ning, and friends with others besides! If he truly did have to leave because of an important reason, he would’ve left a message for Ning at least.

“During the past twenty-plus years, even the number one intelligence organization in the world, the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, wasn’t able to find any trace of him at all,” Immortal Diancai said.

“Northson’s parents died long ago; he had no other kin. Adept Yuxia, however, did have a tribe behind her, with both parents and elders; both of her parents are alive, but they don’t have any news of her either.”

“However...don’t panic,” Immortal Diancai said.

“His life-tablet?” Ning immediately asked. Given how long Northson had been missing for, he was very possibly dead.

“Mu Northson’s life-tablet remains intact...but his Dao-companion’s has shattered,” Immortal Diancai said. “Neither of them left behind any messages before disappearing; they should’ve both met an unusual circumstance. However...Northson has remained alive during the past twenty-plus years. He probably won’t die that easily.”

Ning was worried now.

Northson’s Dao-companion had perished! This meant that their disappearance involved a matter of great danger!

“Since he’s alive, my best guess is that he is trapped in a special area that he can’t leave for now,” Immortal Diancai said.

“Right.” Ning nodded.

No matter what, he had to find out a way to investigate.

“Go and rest for now. I’m going back into my closed-door meditation,” Immortal Diancai said. “The three sword-arts manuals you gave me have inspired me significantly; if there’s nothing important, don’t bother me. I’m going to be in seclusion for an extended period of time. Most likely, once this seclusion ends, I will begin my Celestial Tribulation.”

“That fast?” Ning hadn’t expected his master to be in such a rush even after he had given his master those three sword-arts tomes.

“I believe these three sword-arts tomes will be enough to allow my sword techniques to rise to a higher level in a short period of time. However...the reason I can rise to a higher level in such a short time is because of all of my accumulated experiences over the past years! If I want to rise any further, however, I’ll probably need another century, or perhaps even longer...and I have the feeling that I can’t wait that long!” Immortal Diancai said softly, “That sense of pressure and threat which my subconscious can sense...it is telling me that I cannot afford to waste any time.”

Ning nodded solemnly.

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After separating from his master, Ning returned to the Darknorth Peak, the place within the Black-White College which was reserved for him.

A sumptuous feast had been prepared within a courtyard inside Darknorth Peak.

While Ning had been chatting with Immortal Diancai, he had instructed the Whitewater Hound and Little Qing to go back to Darknorth Peak.

“Senior apprentice-brother.” Three figures within the hall bowed reverently. A short little figure fell to his knees. “I pay my respects to you, elder.”

Ning swept them with his gaze.

One of the three was Meng Roch, who looked as honest as always but now seemed even more muscular than before. Next to him was a tall, skinny youth with a deep gaze; this was Cloudship, who was now far

calmer and more stable than he had been before. Finally, there was a woman dressed in black gauze, whose gaze remained as charismatic and alluring as before; Cloudjade, who had been so young and fresh. She was holding the hand of a child in her own.

“Eh?” Ning’s gaze fell upon the child.

“Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, this is my child, Cloudease,” Cloudjade said nervously.

“We haven’t met for a few decades...to think you have a child now!” Ning laughed, then nodded. “Meng Roch, it seems you are quite talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner; you’ve already trained to the Wanxiang level. Cloudship, you have done well too.”

As he spoke, Ning sat down. “Come, all of you, sit,” Ning said with a laugh. Immediately, all the others sat down as well.

“Years ago, when we heard that you became the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, and that your Primaltwin had killed a Loose Immortal, all of us were filled with veneration and admiration. Now, we’ve finally met you again, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning,” Cloudship laughed.

Ning nodded calmly. “Right. Have you been well, these past years? Weifang, Forgard, Nethersun; where are they?”

He had taken on a total of six retainers. They were Meng Roch, Cloudship, Cloudjade, Weifang, Forgard, and Nethersun.

“Should I...or should...” Cloudship looked towards Roch and Cloudjade.

“Big brother, why don’t you tell him,” Cloudjade said. Roch nodded as well.

Cloudship looked towards Ning, then said, “Senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, you have left Darknorth Peak for nearly forty years. Ever since you left, the six of us trained diligently. Meng Roch is extremely talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and so focused on that, rarely leaving the College. Nethersun, Forgard, Weifang, and myself would often go out and adventure.”

“Forgard was originally very powerful, but his potential was limited, and he improved very slowly. Roughly ten years ago, when adventuring, he was killed by another peak Zifu Disciple,” Cloudship said.

Ning immediately sighed.

Forgard...

He had been a loyal guard of Northmont Baiwei. He had appeared quite simple and honest, and Ning originally had high expectations for him. However...after getting to know him, Ning had realized that Forgard had slowly begun to change after entering the Black-White College, causing Ning to feel rather disappointed. And now, unexpectedly, he had ended up dying.

“Weifang was extremely talented, even more so than the rest of us,” Cloudship said. “However...he became Dao-companions with a female cultivator of the Hundred Flowers Fairyland. There ended up being some disputes between him and that female cultivator, and in the end, a senior apprentice-brother of that female cultivator actually killed him.”

“What?!” Ning was shocked.

He had heard long ago that some Dao-companions would grow to hate each other, betray each other, and even fight against each other. But he really didn’t expect that this would happen to one of his six retainers!

“Nethersun?” Ning asked. “Is he dead too?”

“Nethersun left long ago. He went back to his homeland. Based on what he said to us when he left, he probably won’t come back in the future. He will probably stay back at his homeland and protect it,” Cloudship said.

Ning nodded gently.

“Cloudjade became Dao-companions with a young master of the Eastriver clan, Eastriver Bluecloud,” Cloudship said, and as he did, he instantly grew so angry he began to grind his teeth. “Eastriver Bluecloud was a rare genius, and he even became a member of our Black-White College. Because he also likes to train in the sword, others often flattered him as the ‘second Immortal Darknorth’. However, compared to you, senior apprentice-brother, he is unfathomably inferior.”

Ning drank his wine, listening.

“Both I and my little sister misjudged him. He came from a large clan, after all, and was quite young; after he entered the Black-White College, especially after he started hanging around with some of the other young masters of Stillwater City, he changed. He began to buy quite a few female slaves to play with, and he even started to hit and curse at my little sister. Enraged, she separated from him, then brought little Cloudease back to Darknorth Peak. Eastriver Bluecloud even wanted to cause her some trouble, but thanks to your reputation, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, he didn’t dare to act too rashly,” Cloudship said.

Cloudjade sat there, eyes red. She said softly, “I’ve embarrassed myself before you, senior apprentice-brother.”

Ning sighed.

Cloudjade truly was an extremely alluring beauty. When she had first entered the Black-White College, Ning’s own subordinates including Weifang, Nethersun, and Forgard had all pursued and courted her. There were quite a few ordinary disciples within the Black-White College who had courted her, but she had her sights set higher and had taken an interest in none of them.

Who would’ve thought that in the end, she would end up choosing a talented young master of the Eastriver clan, Eastriver Bluecloud, a formal disciple of the Black-White College?

Unfortunately...

In the end...this had been her aftermath.

“Brother Meng Roch has become the most formidable of us,” Cloudship said. “Brother Meng Roch is extremely talented as a Fiendgod Body Refiner, and in fact Immortal Fivecraze took a liking to him and took him on as a disciple, making him a formal disciple of the Black-White College. He has his own mountain peak now, but he’s always continued to live here, not moving away.”

“Oh?” Ning looked towards Roch with surprise, then laughed. “You’ve become a formal disciple? Old brother Fivecraze has exceptionally astute judgment; since he’s taken a liking to you, it must mean that your future truly is limitless.”

“If it hadn’t been for you, senior apprentice-brother Ji Ning, helping me enter the Black-White College so many years ago...I don’t know where I would be right now,” Roch said honestly.

Ning nodded. Roch didn’t show the slightest bit of arrogance; it seemed as though of his six retainers, Roch was the only one who was particularly impressive.

“That’s the other five. As for me...” Cloudship chortled. “Only after training for many years did I discover that I actually like the art of constructs.”

Ning let out a sigh.

Six retainers.

Two died. One returned home. Cloudship was low-key, while the devilishly alluring Cloudjade was now a single mother. Only Roch, who had originally been the weakest of the six, had suddenly soared in status, becoming a formal disciple of the Black-White College.

Ji Ning had returned to the Black-White College. When he was strolling outside with Immortal Diancai, many disciples of the Black-White College saw him. News of this quickly spread, and the Heavenly Treasures Mountain naturally learned of this as well.

“The champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny, Ji Ning, has once more returned to the Black-White College after a thirty-year disappearance.”

“Quick.”

“Spread the word.”

More than a thousand Immortal cultivators were sending out intelligence reports.

There were many, many people who were paying attention to Ji Ning in the Grand Xia world. Aside from the likes of Ninelotus, Princess Xiyue, and the Youngflame clan, there were also many hidden powers that had long ago turned their attention to Ji Ning, the champion of the Conclave who had so mysteriously vanished! After all...everyone knew how extraordinary that Conclave had been.

That was a Conclave where two participants had been chosen by Daofathers to become personal disciples! Ji Ning had been the champion of that Conclave, but he hadn’t become a member of Daofather Crimsonbright’s league; instead, he had vanished without a trace.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 5: The Number One Assassin’s Guild of the Grand Xia**

At the very peak of a grand mountain, there lay an ancient tower.

A gray-robed figure was advancing towards the tower at high speed, like a streak of light.

The entrance to the tower was guarded by a pair of black-armored guards. These two guards stretched out their arms, barring the entrance. One of them growled, "This is a restricted area. No access permitted."

"I've come per the orders of the clan leader. I have important news to report to the Patriarch." The gray-robed man respectfully handed forward a hidebound scroll.

"Mm." One of the guards accepted the scroll, then entered the tower. As for the gray-robed man, he respectfully, quietly departed.

The first floor of the tower. A tall, skinny elder with long, narrow eyes was seated silently in the lotus position; it was Celestial Immortal Arcanum of the Youngflame clan.

"Patriarch." The black-armored warrior entered, saluted respectfully, then offered the scroll with both hands.

Patriarch Arcanum opened his eyes. Waving his hand, he caused the hidebound scroll to fly to him, then calmly instructed, "Leave me."

"Yes." The black-armored guard hurriedly departed, once more taking up silent guard outside the entrance to the tower. He had been standing outside this tower for more than a hundred million years now; ever since he had been created, he had spent the majority of his life guarding this tower.

Whoosh. Patriarch Arcanum unfurled the scroll, calmly looking at its contents.

"Mm?" Patriarch Arcanum frowned. "That brat, Ji Ning, has returned? And not just him; even his spirit-beasts have returned, and both have actually reached the early Void level."

No one doubted that Ning had the ability to reach the Void level. After all, even before the Conclave had begun, Ning's Primaltwin, at the peak Primal Daoist level, had been able to kill a Loose Immortal. It was very normal for Ning to become an Earth Immortal after thirty years. But for both his spirit-beasts to reach the Void level and become Earth Immortals...this was very abnormal.

This was because humans had a much higher level of comprehension than monsters. For the two spirit-beasts to both become Void-level Earth Immortals clearly meant that they had already surpassed the level of comprehension necessary of Earth Immortals! Even though Whitewater Hounds and Azure Skysnakes were Godbeasts, logically speaking, they shouldn't be able to train at such a pace! Monsters were innately slow at training. For them to train so quickly...they must have encountered some sort of unique fortune!

"It seems that during his thirty-year disappearance, this Ji Ning must have had a stroke of luck." Cold light flashed through Patriarch Arcanum's long, narrow eyes.

"Everyone." Patriarch Arcanum suddenly called out, his voice passing through the void and entering another space.

"Everyone!"

"Everyone!"

"Everyone!"

His voice echoed within this other space.

Whoosh!

A black fog door appeared not too far away from Patriarch Arcanum. Four figures emerged from the black fog door. There was a handsome youth, an ancient elder, a big fellow who carried a large clock with one hand, and a wizened, white-haired elder whose eyes were shut.

The four walked over, then sat down in the lotus position.

“Arcanum, why have you called for us?” The handsome youth asked calmly.

“What important matter has occurred, for you to call the four of us over?” The man holding the golden clock said in a low voice.

The other two were silent.

All of them were Celestial Immortal Patriarchs; they were the true pillars of the Youngflame clan! Because of the dangerous undercurrents currently flowing within the world of the Grand Xia, even Celestial Immortals like them were being very cautious. All five of them, Patriarch Arcanum included, were stationed here and guarding this divine tower.

“Everyone, take a look.” Patriarch Arcanum waved his hand, and the hidebound scroll flew out to levitate in midair.

The four Celestial Immortals all took a look, and the wizened elder with closed eyes swept it within his coresense as well.

“Ji Ning?”

“That Ji Ning is back?”

All of them frowned.

Naturally, they all knew Ji Ning’s name. During the previous Conclave of Immortal Destiny, they weren’t yet aware of how special it was, but after its conclusion...the Grand Xia world began to be filled with dangerous undercurrents. In fact, a storm was about to burst upon the entire Three Realms...and so they understood that a great tribulation was about to come to pass.

As they saw it, an enormous storm like this might be easily overcome by True Gods or Daofathers, but things would be dangerous for Celestial Immortals like them. During every single previous storm, large numbers of Celestial Immortals had perished.

“The Three Realms are in a turbulent state. That previous Conclave will most likely have given birth to future major powers of the Three Realms. Two competitors in that Conclave became disciples of Daofathers!” Patriarch Arcanum growled, “And this Ji Ning; he became the champion of that Conclave. He disappeared in a mysterious fashion for thirty years, but didn’t become apprenticed to any of the Immortals or Fiends of the Crimsonbright League. And now, even his two spirit-beasts have both become Void-level Earth Immortals! Without question...during the past thirty years, this Ji Ning has had a tremendous stroke of luck!”

“Mm.”

“Agreed.”

“He probably became apprenticed to one of the major forces of the Three Realms.”

The other four Patriarchs all nodded in agreement.

“He is a survivor of the Yuchi clan. Our Youngflame clan wiped out their entire lineage. His mother was named Yuchi Snow; all of Yuchi Snow’s kinsmen died in the hands of our Youngflame clansmen. This Ji Ning hates our Youngflame clan, without question,” Patriarch Arcanum said. “What’s more, our Youngflame clan even sent a Loose Immortal Deathsworn to assassinate him. It is most likely going to be very hard to resolve this enmity between us!”

“I had originally thought that he would become apprenticed to a True Immortal or Empyrean God under the command of Daofather Crimsonbright, but unexpectedly he did not.” Patriarch Arcanum said excitedly, “If he had become apprenticed to Sword Immortal Evergreen, then for the sake of giving the Sword Immortal face, it wouldn’t be appropriate for us to act. Now, however, we have nothing to worry about. Even if he became apprenticed to an expert of the Three Realms...that expert is not a member of the Crimsonbright League! He has no authority over us!”

“Thus, I feel...that we need to eradicate him as soon as possible! While he is merely a Void-level Earth Immortal, we need to eradicate him!” Patriarch Arcanum was extremely forceful in his words.

“That’s reasonable!”

“Agreed.”

“A pity we don’t know who his master is.”

“Who cares who his master is? As long as he isn’t of our Crimsonbright League, what have we to worry about?”

The various major powers of the Three Realms were like local hegemony that dominated a specific region. It was very common for the Fiends and Immortals under their command to fight against and slaughter each other...and generally, the major powers wouldn’t intervene, so long as other major powers also didn’t intervene. The major powers would generally all be quite calm in watching those of the younger generation do battle.

Even when disciples died...the only thing that could be said was that their skills were insufficient.

Struggles and battles within the Three Realms were very common! Thus, as Patriarch Arcanum and the others saw it, Ning joining the Crimsonbright League would actually be much more troublesome; after all, that would mean they were all on the same side, and Ning’s master would be able to easily deal with them.

Since Ning had not joined the Crimsonbright League...things had become much easier for Patriarch Arcanum and the others.

“We have nothing to worry about, but it’s best to be cautious. I feel as though we need to figure out who his master is! The Three Realms have a number of madmen who are extremely protective of their



disciples, and quite a few have even assaulted the Celestial Court in the past. One of them might just be willing to take revenge upon us for killing his disciple,” the handsome youth said.

“Mmm.”

“Sunfish’s words are reasonable.”

“Ji Ning’s master dared to abscond with him, giving our Crimsonbright League no face. I imagine his master...truly is an extremely audacious fellow.”

Patriarch Arcanum, hearing the words of his peers, couldn’t help but frown. “What are you afraid of? First of all, there’s very few madmen who would be truly willing to assault the territory of our Crimsonbright League; I refuse to believe that one of them just so happens to be his master. Secondly...even if one of them is, given the state of chaos the Three Realms are in, who would dare to act rashly in a time like this, even if they would do so normally?”

“Arcanum’s words are reasonable, but as I see it, we should invite the Bloodcloud Hall to do it,” said the wizened elder whose eyes remained closed this entire time.

Instantly, the room fell silent.

“Ask the Bloodcloud Hall?”

“That’s going to cost quite a price.”

“I imagine the Bloodcloud Hall will ask quite a bit.”

Patriarch Arcanum, on the other hand, actually nodded. “Drywood’s words are correct. Since everyone is worried about the mysterious master behind Ji Ning, then let us have the Bloodcloud Hall act instead. When they take on missions, they swear oaths to the Dao of the Heavens not to reveal anything; they won’t let anyone know that it was us who asked them to do it. Spending a bit of treasure to buy some peace of mind...I feel that it is worth it!”

“Fine. I agree.”

“Right. It’s best to invite the Bloodcloud Hall; we can just consider it as us using some treasure to purchase Ji Ning’s life.”

“It’s settled, then.”

“Patriarch, you handle this matter.”

Patriarch Arcanum nodded lightly. Naturally, he wouldn’t decline. That very day, he quietly left this tower and headed to the Bloodcloud Hall.

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Deep within an enormous mountain that stretched hundreds of thousands of kilometers.

Patriarch Arcanum arrived within a mountain gorge, holding an insignia. The mist within the gorge swirled everywhere, but deep within it, a large, tall teleportation tower could be seen.

“This way, please.” There was a member of the Bloodcloud Hall standing there, looking at Patriarch Arcanum.

With a single step, Patriarch Arcanum entered the grand teleportation array. The teleportation tower then lit up, and swoosh! Patriarch Arcanum disappeared.

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“Eh?” Patriarch Arcanum stood atop the clouds. Here, atop the clouds, there was another towering teleportation array.

Patriarch Arcanum stared into the distance. He saw a vast, endless sea of blood-colored clouds, and the faint outlines of a building hidden deep within it.

“That’s the Bloodcloud Hall?” Patriarch Arcanum felt startled.

The Bloodcloud Hall...

This was an extremely mysterious power. It had suddenly appeared thirty years ago, and it had handed these insignias to all of the major powers of the Grand Xia world. Only supreme powers of the likes of the Northmont clan of Stillwater or the Youngflame clan were qualified to receive these insignias. As for powers on the level the Black-White College, they weren’t even qualified to know about the Bloodcloud Hall’s existence.

By relying on the insignia, one could go to some mysterious places, then be teleported to a completely different world. Bloodcloud Hall was within this mysterious world.

No one knew there the Bloodcloud Hall was actually located!

“As long as one is willing to pay the price, any Immortal or Fiend in the world of the Grand Xia aside from the Xia Emperor can be assassinated by our Bloodcloud Hall!” These were the bold words issued forth by the Bloodcloud Hall. And indeed, they truly did have tremendous, terrifying power; during the past thirty short years, they had already assassinated more than ten Celestial Immortal Patriarchs!

Bloodcloud Hall had thus become acknowledged by all the supreme powers as the ‘number one assassin’s guild of the Grand Xia’.

Bloodcloud Hall also protected its customers’ information, to the point of even swearing oaths to the Dao of the Heavens to not leak any of it at all.

Whoosh!

Patriarch Arcanum was quickly led to a quiet flower garden. Although he was led here, Patriarch Arcanum wasn’t sure about the path he had taken. “This Bloodcloud Hall must be an enormous, powerful estate-type magic treasure. Space within it is in a state of flux, and so I cannot determine the true pattern within it.”

Within the flower garden.

A silver-robed maiden was seated opposite of Patriarch Arcanum. Between the two of them lay a stone table, with a scroll placed atop it. The scroll was their contract.

“Kill Ji Ning?” The silver-robed maiden said softly, “He was the champion of the Conclave of Immortal Destiny. He disappeared for thirty years; he was most likely taken by a True Immortal or Empyrean God as a disciple. In fact, there’s a sliver of a chance that it was a Daofather who took on a genius like him for a disciple. His Primaltwin was able to defeat a Loose Immortal all those years ago; I imagine his power must be much, much higher now. He might even be comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for a million years.”

“Are you taking the mission or not?” Patriarch Arcanum growled.

“We are. Of course we are.” The silver-robed woman laughed calmly. “As long as you are willing to pay the price.”

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 6: An Arrival From the Heaven Realm**

“Price? What sort of price?” Patriarch Arcanum’s long, slender eyes narrowed as he looked at the silver-robed maiden.

The silver-robed maiden responded with a calm smile, “For example...three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic items, or items of equivalent value.”

The corners of Patriarch Arcanum’s eyes instantly twitched.

“Top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures? Three of them?” Patriarch Arcanum had heard that the Bloodcloud Hall charged a high price, but he was still stunned by what they requested.

“This Ji Ning has only trained for around seventy years!” Patriarch Arcanum couldn’t help but growl, “Less than a century! He is currently at most comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for five hundred thousand years! The chances of him being comparable to a Loose Immortal who has lived for a million years is virtually negligible. To kill a young fellow like him, you want to charge me three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures?”

“Don’t get angry. This is a business deal; both of us have to be willing to take part in it.” The silver-robed maiden laughed. “Indeed, the chance that Ji Ning has the power of a Loose Immortal who has lived a million years is very low...but the main issue with this mission does not lie with Ji Ning himself; Bloodcloud Hall holds a young fellow like him in no regard at all. The main issue with this mission is the master who stands behind him! He was the champion of the Conclave. His thirty-year disappearance...no one knows who his master is! Perhaps as we assassinate him, he will shatter some sort of talisman and his master will suddenly appear! Bloodcloud Hall estimates his master to be a True Immortal or Empyrean God at the very least; once his master appears, the squad which we sent out will undoubtedly perish! Since we are taking on a major risk, we naturally are going to request a high price!”

A Pure Yang True Immortal or an Empyrean God; either would be considered an expert of the Three Realms. In the world of the Grand Xia, the Xia Emperor was the only Pure Yang True Immortal present!

If the assassins Bloodcloud Hall sent out were to run into True Immortals or Empyrean Gods, they would unquestionably perish.

“Hmph.” Patriarch Arcanum shook his head. “Stop trying to fool me. When experts of the Three Realms train disciples, they all let them go out into the world to experience danger on their own. If their

disciples are killed, those disciples can only blame themselves for being less skilled than their foes! How can experts and major powers of the Three Realms so casually intervene? That would be the same as abusing those of a lower status!”

The silver-robed maiden smiled. “Ji Ning’s background is significant. Three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic items, or treasures of an equivalent value. This is what Bloodcloud Hall requires!”

“You...” Patriarch Arcanum gritted his teeth.

“If you are unwilling, then you can leave, Celestial Immortal Arcanum.” The silver-robed maiden continued to smile at him.

“Fine!”

Patriarch Arcanum gritted his teeth, then pulled out some Immortal pills, spirit-ingredients, Immortal-ranked magic treasures, and an enormous amount of liquefied elemental essence. Although he had come prepared...top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures were very important for Celestial Immortals, and the Youngflame clan wouldn’t easily hand them out. They would rather use other treasures to make up for them.

“This should be enough.” A savage light flashed through Patriarch Arcanum’s eyes. His heart was bleeding at the cost.

“It is enough.” The silver-robed maiden nodded. “Celestial Immortal Arcanum, don’t worry; Bloodcloud Hall definitely won’t inform others of this assignment. I can swear an oath to the Dao of the Heavens regarding this. As for Ji Ning...Bloodcloud Hall will make careful preparations, so as to ensure our success. Within a year’s time, he will die.”

“Good. I’ll await the good word from you, then.” Patriarch Arcanum nodded.

Three top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures. This was a price that was neither high nor low. Celestial Immortals who had lived as long as he had would generally all have several top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures on them. In fact, some truly supreme Celestial Immortal Patriarchs might even have Pure Yang treasures on them! Thus, for the Youngflame clan as a whole, producing three top-grade Immortal-ranked treasures would cause a bit of heartache but not bankrupt them. At a critical time like this, with the Three Realms in a state of turbulence, they were willing to pay this level of price in order to eliminate a threat.

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The imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

Ning was standing atop a cloud, flying through the wide streets of the imperial capital. He had spent a day within the Black-White College of Stillwater, then had visited his good friend Northmont Baiwei before heading to the imperial capital of the Grand Xia. This was a time of turbulence in the Three Realms, after all; the sooner he could purchase materials for setting up formations, the better.

“King Yan’s Estate.” Ning saw a familiar estate from the distance. After having arrived, he was naturally going to first visit his cousin before going to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

Swoosh. Ning led the Whitewater Hound in flying to the estate, Little Qing wrapped around his arm as always.

“You are young master Ji Ning?” The estate guards recognized him right away, and they revealed looks of surprise on their faces. Thirty years was a fairly short period of time for Immortal cultivators; they had begun their services here well over thirty years ago, and so they naturally recognized him.

“I wish to see the princess,” Ning said.

“Young master Ji Ning, please wait a moment. I’ll go make the report right away.” Instantly, a guard flew into the estate to make the report.

Soon, a group of people came out from the estate, the leader being his cousin, Princess Xiyue.

“Ji Ning.” Princess Xiyue looked at Ning, an expression of excitement instantly covering her face. “I just heard last night from the Heavenly Treasures Mountain that you returned. I was planning to go find you after finishing some affairs here.”

“It should be me who comes to visit you, Princess.” Ning noticed that next to her was a tall, handsome man with white skin who appeared to be rather close to her. He couldn’t help but laugh. “This is...?”

“Oh.” An awkward expression appeared on Princess Xiyue’s face. She immediately said, “This is young master Feng Yungu from the Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm.”

“I’ve long heard of your famous name, brother Ji Ning. Today, I see that you truly are extraordinary.” The tall, handsome young master Yungu spoke in a modest manner.

Ning gave him a glance, then nodded in secret; this Feng Yungu acted quite modestly and put on no airs.

“Hurry on in. Why are you standing here in the doorway?” Princess Xiyue said hurriedly while sending a stealthy mental message to Ning. “Cousin, unless something unexpected happens, this young master Yungu will most likely become my husband.”

“Ah?” Ning was mentally stunned. He hurriedly sent back, “Cousin, the two of you...?”

“He will marry into King Yan’s Estate,” Princess Xiyue sent to him. “In the future, I am going to resurrect the Yuchi clan; thus, I can’t marry out into another clan. As for this young master Yungu...because the Grand Xia Dynasty is allied with the Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm, quite a few of the imperial Xia clansmen have become Dao-companions with the disciples of the Windlocked Isles. I could tell that he’s not bad, and he’s also quite obedient; he was even willing to marry into King Yan’s Estate. That’s why I decided to accept him as my Dao-companion.”

Ning now understood.

The Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm?

The Grand Xia Dynasty?

“He’s not only willing to marry into her family, he’s also obedient to her wishes...and I can tell that he seems to be the humble sort.” Ning nodded privately. His cousin was completely focused on vengeance; a husband like this would perhaps be good for her.

“Cousin, you don’t need to pay too much attention to young master Yungu; his status in the Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm isn’t very high, and his power is ordinary, but he’s an extremely good-natured person,” Princess Xiyue sent. “However...another disciple of the Windlocked Isles is currently present within King Yan’s Estate. He, too, is pursuing me; he wants to marry me and take me back to the Windlocked Isles with him. His name is Feng Yunpeng; his status within the Windlocked Isles is extremely high! He is one of the two sons of the master of the Windlocked Isles, and the Grand Xia Emperor long ago instructed the imperial Xia clansmen are not to cause trouble with him. You need to be careful as well.”

“Oh? Don’t worry,” Ning replied.

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They entered the estate.

Yuchi Xiyue prepared a welcoming banquet for Ning. The three of them chatted quite happily with each other. Young master Yungu seemed to have a bit of an innately self-abasing character; in front of Ning, at least, he acted very modestly and self-deprecatingly.

“Hahaha, I heard that the champion of the Grand Xia’s Conclave of Immortal Destiny, the peerless genius Ji Ning, had arrived here at King Yan’s Estate. Xiyue, why didn’t you inform me? You were wrong in not doing so.” Accompanying a loud laughter, a youth dressed in gaudy golden Daoist robes came walking in. The youth’s eyes twinkled like the stars, and his aura was quite extraordinary.

Behind him were two powerful servants. One had the aura of a Fiendgod; he was most likely a Void-level Fiendgod! The other was an extremely powerful Loose Immortal.

“Young master Yunpeng, I didn’t want to disturb you,” Princess Xiyue said with a laugh. “Please sit.”

Feng Yungu hurriedly rose to give up his own seat, sitting down in a lower seat. As for young master Yunpeng, he sat down directly after Princess Xiyue, face to face with Ji Ning.

“Ji Ning, this is young master Yunpeng, a genius of the Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm. He, too, is an expert who is a Void-level Earth Immortal,” Princess Xiyue said hurriedly.

“Greetings to you, young master Yunpeng,” Ning said, clasping his hands slightly.

Young master Yunpeng gave Ning a clearly rather indifferent glance, but as he did, his face changed slightly. With a laugh, he said, “Oh, so you’ve become a Void-level Earth Immortal, Ji Ning.”

“Just the early-stage Void-level. Compared to you, young master Yunpeng, I’m a bit lacking,” Ning said modestly.

“Hahaha...” Young master Yunpeng laughed smugly. “I hear that you are on very good terms with Xiyue. You have to help me dissuade her! She’s insisting on marrying that useless thing over there; isn’t that an utter desecration of a heavenly treasure?” As he spoke, he gave the nearby Feng Yungu a disdainful look.

No matter how good of a temper Feng Yungu had, he couldn’t prevent his face from changing...but immediately afterwards, he lowered his head slightly.

Young master Yunpeng's laughter became even more wanton. "Xiyue and I, by contrast, are a perfect match!" As he spoke, he reached his hand out to stroke Princess Xiyue's. Princess Xiyue moved away slightly, her face sinking. "Young master Yunpeng."

"Fine, fine, fine. I won't rush things." Young master Yunpeng laughed.

After all, Princess Xiyue had a Celestial Immortal, King Yan, behind her. Given that the Windlocked Isles were an ally of the Grand Xia Dynasty, he didn't want to cause any problems either.

"Young master Yunpeng." Ning felt an extreme distaste towards this person, but he still changed the subject. "I hear that you come from the Windlocked Isles of the Heaven Realm. I haven't been to the Heaven Realm yet; why don't you tell me about of the Heaven Realm and help broaden my horizons?"

Young master Yunpeng frowned. Introduce the Heaven Realm? Him? Who did Ji Ning think he was? Asking him to introduce the Heaven Realm to him?

Still...he gave Princess Xiyue a sidelong glance, then said with a calm snort, "The Heaven Realm is quite large. The eastern part of the Heaven Realm is managed by the Celestial Court, while the western side is managed by the Buddhists of Mount Ling 1. But of course, there are many asuras and devas who live throughout the Heaven Realm, and they have naturally joined together to form powers. Our Windlocked Isles can be considered one of those powers, I suppose."

"I heard that after you became the champion of the Conclave, Ji Ning, you decided not to take on Sword Immortal Evergreen as your master, and you also didn't take on any of the Immortals or Fiends of Daofather Crimsonbright's league as your master. Instead, you vanished...I wonder, where did you go, brother Ji Ning?" Young master Yunpeng's eyes lit up as he asked this question; clearly, he was quite curious about this.

"Naturally, I went to study with my master," Ning said calmly.

"Who?" Yunpeng asked. "Where did you study?"

"Master has ordered that I cannot tell others." Ning shook his head.

Young master Yunpeng couldn't help but frown.

Ning disliked this young master Yunpeng very much. He immediately said, "Princess Xiyue, I'm going to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to buy some items. I'll leave now."

1. In Chinese mythology, Mount Ling is the place where the Buddha and his bodhisattvas reside.

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 14: Return to the Grand Xia Chapter 7: A Single Arrow**

In truth, Princess Xiyue could tell that this young master Yunpeng wasn't a decent person. Although Ji Ning had endured it for her sake, in his bones, he remained a proud person; if too much time passed, problems would most likely occur. She immediately agreed, "Alright, Ji Ning, you can go to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. We'll meet some other time."

“The Heavenly Treasures Mountain?” Young master Yunpeng raised an eyebrow, glancing sideways at Ning, then immediately said, “Xiyue, it’s been a long time since we’ve gone to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain. Since brother Ji Ning is going, let’s go with him. Yungu, would you agree?”

Feng Yungu had been sitting there quietly this entire time. Upon hearing young master Yunpeng speak, he hurriedly nodded. “Sure, sure.”

Ning, seeing this, couldn’t help but frown. This person his cousin wanted to get married to was a bit too craven.

“Xiyue!” Young master Yunpeng looked towards Princess Xiyue, who could only nod. “Fine, let’s go together then.”

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Ji Ning, Princess Xiyue, young master Yunpeng, and Feng Yungu were naturally accompanied by a host of servants. They all rode aboard an Immortal-ranked flying ship, and in an awe-inspiring manner, they flew out into the imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

“This high-grade Immortal-ranked treasure-vessel of mine has been infused with an ‘Azure Polaris Spirit’; in terms of speed alone, it is comparable to a top-grade Immortal-ranked flying ship,” young master Yunpeng said in an extremely smug manner.

Ning glanced sideways at him.

This young master Yunpeng really did have quite a few treasures; to buy an Immortal-ranked flying ship such as this, even five million kilograms would be far from sufficient.

“Little brother, just endure it for now,” Princess Xiyue sent mentally to Ning. “Although this young master Yunpeng is quite talented in cultivation, he is innately arrogant and overbearing. Still...since his Windlocked Isles and our Grand Xia Dynasty are allied, he wouldn’t dare cause too much trouble. Just ignore the crap he is spewing out, little brother.”

“Cousin, given how arrogant and overbearing he is, why are you letting him remain within the King’s estate?” Ning sent back and asked, “I trust that if King Yan asked him to leave, he definitely wouldn’t stay.”

“Although he’s arrogant and overbearing, he’s trying to woo me; naturally, he often buys some gifts for me,” Princess Xiyue said. “In order to rebuild the Yuchi clan in the future, I naturally need to store up some treasures for it.”

“Cousin, you...” Ning was flabbergasted.

“Are you starting to look down on me, cousin?” Princess Xiyue sent back calmly, “I don’t care about these matters; I swore an oath long ago that I would definitely carry out my father’s wishes. I will rebuild the Yuchi clan! For the sake of the Yuchi clan, I am willing to do anything...including give up my life! All I need to do right now is endure this young master Yunpeng’s nonsense and give him a bit of hope, and he’ll continue to often gift me with treasures.”

Ning truly didn’t know what to say.



“Don’t worry. I won’t let him take any advantage of me whatsoever; the best thing in the world is the thing you cannot get. If I let him take advantage of me, he wouldn’t be pursuing me in such a fervent manner. His treasures? I’ll take them. But him? In the end, he’ll just slink away in disgrace!” Princess Xiyue sent back.

Ning could sense the determination within his cousin’s heart. He couldn’t help but say with worry, “That Feng Yungu...I feel as though the two of you...”

“You feel he isn’t worth of me, right? It is precisely because he is an absolute good-for-nothing coward that I am willing to marry him. Otherwise...how could I be able to completely control him?” Princess Xiyue sent back. “Don’t worry. I have Grandpa’s help; I can take care of small matters like this.”

“Cousin, if there’s anything you need, arrange for a message to be sent to me. Don’t forget that I, too, am of the Yuchi clan,” Ning sent mentally.

“Right. I still have you, little brother,” Princess Xiyue sent back.

The main headquarters of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain.

Within an extremely tall and luxuriously decorated banquet hall, a feast was in procession. The pillars outside this hall were so tall that someone standing atop the pillars could stare down at the entire imperial capital of the Grand Xia.

“Young master Yunpeng, you brought little sister Xiyue again. It seems as though our Heavenly Treasures Mountain is about to have even more business come our way,” the white-robed Fairy Azurewillow said with a smile.

“Hahaha! It pleases me to do this for Xiyue!” Young master Yunpeng laughed loudly, giving Ning a sidelong glance.

On the way over, Ning and Yuchi Xiyue had constantly been sending mental messages to each other. Young master Yunpeng had noticed...that the relationship between them seemed to be clearly much closer than the relationship two ordinary friends would have! This caused him to feel rather displeased inside. “Hmph, he’s merely the champion of the Grand Xia Dynasty’s Conclave! Today, here at the Heavenly Treasures Mountain, I’m going to cause you to lose tremendous face!”

“Brother Ji Ning, what have you come to the Heavenly Treasures Mountain to purchase?” Young master Yunpeng said with a laugh.

Ning said calmly, “Just some materials and raw ingredients.”

Right at this moment, the Whitewater Hound by Ning’s side transformed into human form. Uncle White waved his hand and two hidebound scrolls flew from him to Ning. Uncle White sent mentally, “Ning, child, there’s a list of items here for setting down layers formations that are capable of overawing even Celestial Immortals, making them afraid to trespass within.”

“The second list consists of the items necessary to set down three supremely ferocious formations that I found at Mount Innerheart. In addition, these three supremely ferocious formations can even link with each other...they are so powerful that I imagine even True Immortals and Empyrean Gods would be wary of them. There is no way True Immortals and Empyrean Gods can force their way through these

three formations; only True Immortals and Empyrean Gods who are experts at formations might be able to break them.”

“They are that incredible?!” Ning was shocked.

“However...the treasures needed on the second list are quite precious, even though they aren’t extremely rare,” Uncle White sent. “If you don’t have enough, then just buy the items on the first list; that will be enough.”

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Ning handed over the two hidebound scrolls to Fairy Azurewillow. “Fairy Azurewillow, take a look at the list of ingredients and materials on these two scrolls. Does your Heavenly Treasures Mountain have them?”

“This is the main headquarters of the Heavenly Treasures Mountain; even if Celestial Immortals came here to shop, we’d be able to accommodate them, much less just a few precious materials.” Smiling, Fairy Azurewillow accepted the lists. Upon seeing the first one, however, her face instantly changed. She gave Ning a surprised glance, and then she looked at the second hidebound scroll.

This time, Fairy Azurewillow was truly stunned!

She was just a bit surprised upon seeing the first list, but the second list truly stunned her...because the items requested were simply too shocking!

“I’m not cleared to handle something like this. A moment, please,” Fairy Azurewillow said.

“Fine.” Ning nodded.

“Fairy Azurewillow, even you aren’t cleared?” Young master Yunpeng, watching from the side, smirked. “It’s just a few ingredients and raw materials, not Immortal-ranked magic treasures. Can it be that the items which brother Ji Ning have chosen are extremely strange and rare?”

Whoosh.

A silver-haired man appeared out of nowhere within the hall. The invisible pressure and presence he gave off...everyone present understood that he was a Celestial Immortal!

“Patriarch.” Fairy Azurewillow handed the two hidebound scrolls to him. “These are the lists of ingredients which Ji Ning needs. There are two lists.”

The silver-haired man nodded, accepted the lists, then looked at the first one. He said calmly, “The first list will require 4.3 million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence!”

Yuchi Xiyue, Feng Yungu, and the others all felt a sense of pressure.

More than four million kilograms?

“Pretty pricy,” the nearby young master Yunpeng said in a nonchalant manner.

The silver-haired man then looked at the second hidebound scroll. When he did, even his face couldn't help but change. After staring for a long moment, he lifted his head to look at Ning, a complicated look in his eyes. "Young friend Ji Ning...are you sure you aren't playing a little joke on us?"

"Since I've written a list, I naturally wish to buy the items on it," Ning said calmly.

"How much liquefied elemental essence does the second list cost?" Young master Yunpeng asked. He felt that he was quite wealthy and magnanimous; he would be able to afford even a top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasure.

"Liquefied elemental essence?" The silver-haired man shook his head. "Treasures like this...no amount of liquefied elemental essence is enough for them."

Young master Yunpeng's face changed.

Fairy Azurewillow, Princess Xiye, Feng Yungu, and the others were all stunned. They were all fairly experienced, and so they knew...liquefied elemental essence was fairly useful for those below the Celestial Immortal level, but was of increasingly little use to the true experts of the Three Realms. For example, Ning had to use Immortal pills in order to train in the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art].

True Immortals and Daofathers absorbed prodigious amounts of natural elemental ki; thus, ordinary liquefied elemental essence was like water to them; it was extremely common.

True treasures could only be traded for using other treasures!

"How much at least?" Ning asked.

"At least ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures," the silver-haired man said. "Or a low-grade Pure Yang treasure."

"Pure Yang treasure?"

Everyone present was shocked.

Ning, however, was quite calm. These materials were to be used to set up a series of formations so ferocious that they could block even True Immortals or Emyrean Gods, unless the True Immortals or Emyrean Gods were extremely skilled in the art of formations. To be able to set up formations of such power for the cost of merely a single low-grade Pure Yang magic treasure...that wasn't bad at all.

"At least ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures? Not even ordinary Celestial Immortals have that much. All of my treasures combined would most likely be worth just three or four top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures." Young master Yunpeng felt an enormous pressure bear down upon him. He was proud of how wealthy he was and how many treasures he had, but he was now completely stunned. "There's no way he can afford that. No way." He stared fixedly at Ning.

Everyone was staring at Ning.

"Will this treasure suffice?" Ning waved his hand, and instantly a faint tidal wave of fire burst forth it. Within Ning's palm there was a fiery arrow!

This arrow was the arrow which Ning had acquired from the gorge within the Riverfang Mountains. The most precious treasures the Fiendgod corpse had on it consisted of the high-grade Protocosmic 'Rahu Bow' and the two fiery arrows.

Truly powerful, divine archers all had custom-made arrows, and the price of each arrow was prodigious. Ning had chatted with the Rahu Bow before, and the Rahu Bow had said this: "This type of arrow is known as a 'Firetruth Arrow'; although they are vastly inferior to me in value, each of them are still comparable to a low-grade Pure Yang treasure in value."

Ning had sighed in amazement upon hearing this as well.

Every single arrow would cost him the equivalent of a low-grade Pure Yang treasure. How could he not feel heartache at the cost?

Rumble...with the appearance of the flaming arrow came a powerful aura of might.

"This is...?" The silver-haired man's face changed. He carefully inspected the arrow, even using his coresense on it.

"A single arrow?" Young master Yunpeng actually secretly shook his head.

"Can it be that a single arrow is comparable to ten top-grade Immortal-ranked magic treasures?" Both Princess Xiyue and Fairy Azurewillow were puzzled. Although they were experienced, they knew very little about the truly powerful divine archers of the Three Realms.

After inspecting the arrow for a long time, the silver-haired man looked towards Ning. He said in a low voice, "It suffices!"

"I also need you to add an extra fifteen million kilograms of liquefied elemental essence into the deal!" Ning said calmly.

Princess Xiyue and the others were all stunned.

The silver-haired man hesitated a moment, then nodded seriously. "Fine. Our Heavenly Treasures Mountain can add another fifteen million kilograms into the mix!"

Young master Yunpeng's face changed. He couldn't help but swallow, his earlier arrogance, smugness, and brashness all evaporating. His greatest source of pride was in his wealth, but he suddenly realized that a single arrow from Ning had completely crushed him in this respect. As for backers? Given that Ning had vanished for thirty years, he at least had a True Immortal or Emyrean God as a backer; in this respect as well, Ning was definitely not inferior to him.