

## Desolate 631

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 3: Demanding the Technique

However, Ji Ning didn't slow down in the slightest. With a swish, he moved hundreds of thousands of kilometers away while spreading out his heartforce, taking a close look at the major power who had just arrived.

"No need to panic." A warm, gentle laugh rang out.

As Ning dodged past the man, his heartforce completed the scan. The newcomer was dressed in Daoist robes; it was a very authentic-looking white-bearded Daoist.

"Him?" Ning was secretly surprised. "I knew that my display of the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] would arouse the attention of some major powers. I'm not worried about the Seamless Gate; it's the ones on our side that are more troublesome. So the first one to appear is Daoist Yu Qiu. His nickname 'Ascetic' is quite fitting; he really is quite shameless."

Some True Gods and Daofathers were vile, vicious demons. Others were crafty, unscrupulous, petty figures.

Daoist Yu Qiu was one of the most classic examples of the latter.

His avariciousness and craftiness was legendary, and so the major powers of the Three Realms all referred to him as the 'Ascetic'; clearly, this was a title given to mock him! However, given that he had become a Daofather, his Dao-heart wouldn't possibly be shaken by a bit of mere mockery, and he continued to act as he pleased.

Many of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance had been intrigued after Ning had displayed his [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent], with the evil ones becoming especially greedy for it. However, because so many people were watching, and because Ning was a member of their alliance, everyone continued to hesitate. No one wanted to be the first to act.

And so, Daoist Yu Qiu became the first.

"Greetings, senior Yu Qiu," Ning said respectfully.

"No need for such courtesy. I have quite a close relationship with your master, Subhuti. As for your other master, Daoist Threelives, we were lifelong bosom friends. We were like brothers," Daoist Yu Qiu said with a merry laugh.

Ning instantly became speechless.

Subhuti held Daoist Yu Qiu in disdain; the number of times they had met could probably be counted on one hand. To stretch that into a so-called 'close relationship'? Fine. As for Daoist Threelives, over the course of his battles for supremacy during the Primordial Era, he had made friends with many of the other major powers. He had merely been on courteous terms with Daoist Yu Qiu. For that sort of lukewarm relationship to be described as 'lifelong bosom friends' and 'like brothers' by Daoist Yu Qiu was...

"I heard that old Threelives finally found a successor. I'm delighted for him. Alas..." Daoist Yu Qiu let out a sigh. "A pity that in that battle, my old brother Threelives ended up dying in the fight. I still regret it to this very day."

"Fortunately, he has a disciple like you now." Daoist Yu Qiu laughed and nodded. "Just now, I saw you use an evasion technique that involved riding a Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. Now that the storm has descended upon us, if the major powers of our alliance were to learn this technique, we would have a much better chance of surviving. Ji Ning, would you be willing to let me take a look at this evasion technique?"

Ning had been given orders by his master Subhuti long ago. He immediately said, "Senior, this evasion technique was accidentally acquired by my master, Subhuti. Although he's transmitted it to me, he's strictly ordered me not to teach it to any others. As his disciple, I wouldn't dare to disobey my master's orders. If you wish to learn this evasion technique, senior, you can go and speak to my master about it."

Daoist Yu Qiu frowned slightly. Seek out Subhuti?

Subhuti's status was close to that of the likes of the Human Emperors and the leaders of the Daoist Path and the Buddhist Sangha. His mastery over spacetime was number one in the Three Realms. If he wanted to avoid someone, that person would never be able to find him.

"It's just an evasion technique." Daoist Yu Qiu's face sank. "This matter involves all the major powers of our side, as well as the storm that we are facing. Can it be that Subhuti is trying to hoard it for himself?"

Whoosh!

Yet another aura of power and majesty descended, and the Void began to crackle with bolts of lightning. This aura was a familiar one. Ning's heart clenched. This familiar aura...it belonged to Exalted Celestial Thundergod, who he had once paid a visit to.

The Void split apart, and a muscular, black-armored man came walking out from it. His eyes brimmed with sparks of lightning, and as he walked forward Ning felt as though the entire Void itself was rendered breathless. If Daoist Yu Qiu was merely an ordinary Daofather, Exalted Celestial Thundergod was a top-tier Daofather.

"Thundergod." Daoist Yu Qiu smiled at him.

For once, Thundergod gave him a nod, showing him some face. This time, they were standing on the same side, after all.

"Ji Ning." Thundergod's face was as cold as ever. "Daoist Yu Qiu's words are correct. This matter has an impact on the war and involves the lives of countless living creatures on our side. You had best hurry up and hand this divine ability over."

"Master's orders are..."

As soon as Ning spoke, Thundergod frowned and barked, "If your master has given you orders and you aren't qualified to decide on your own, then have your master come out! You are his disciple; you definitely must have a method that you can use to notify him. Go summon your master right now. Have him come over here."

It was true. Subhuti had indeed given Ning a message-talisman. As for the other major powers? Aside from the few who were on very close terms with Subhuti, they weren't able to simply go meet with him when they wanted to.

Whoosh.

A vortex suddenly appeared in the Void, with a robed elder walking out from it.

Daofather Subhuti had been paying close attention the entire time. He knew very well that sooner or later, a major power would jump out to speak to Ning. He had been quite calm when Daoist Yu Qiu had emerged, but once Exalted Celestial Thundergod also emerged, Subhuti knew that things had become a bit troublesome. This was because Daoist Yu Qiu was weak; he wouldn't really dare to offend Subhuti. Thundergod, however, was an extremely powerful person with an incredibly violent and stubborn temper. He often wouldn't even give face to the two leaders of the Buddhist Sangha and the Daoist Path. He was also the most highly skilled lightning expert in the Three Realms; he definitely would feel deep desire towards the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique.

"Thundergod." Subhuti appeared before them.

"Respectful greetings, Subhuti," the smiling Daoist Yu Qiu hurriedly said.

Thundergod looked at Subhuti. He growled, "Subhuti. This evasion technique...I think you had best hand it over."

"Hmph." Subhuti normally had a calm smile on his face, but his face was calm and cold right now. "I worked hard to acquire that technique. It's my decision as to who I wish to teach it to. What, do you want to try and force it out of me? Is there now a new rule that all the major powers have to offer up all of the techniques they have at their disposal? Why haven't I heard about this rule?"

Thundergod was momentarily speechless. The supreme techniques which each major power used to roam the Three Realms were generally not taught to outsiders. For example, there was no way Daoist Three Purities would teach anyone else his 'Immortal Slaying Sword Formation'. And, in truth, even if he was willing to teach it to someone else, no one else would be able to successfully learn it, as they wouldn't have the four Chaos-level swords.

However, even though no one else could master the technique, once others completely understood it, it would be much easier for them to deal with it.

Similarly, Subhuti's special skills involving spacetime would only be taught to Redsnow. No major powers would say anything about it, nor would they try to force the spacetime technique out of Subhuti or the Immortal Slaying Sword Formation out of Daoist Three Purities. This was because every major power had their own path of Immortal cultivation; they couldn't split their attention and focus on something else. Thus, they didn't feel too much desire for other top-tier techniques.

However, Ji Ning's [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique was different. It was a divine ability; anybody could use it upon learning it!

"This divine ability will be of tremendous use to the other major powers on our side," Thundergod said angrily. "This is a matter which has implications for the lives of countless people on our side. Don't you think you should hand it over?"

“It’s not that I’m unwilling to. Of course I care about this war! That’s why I offered it up long ago.” Subhuti suddenly let out a sigh. “The Buddhist Sangha, the Daoist Path, and the Emperors of Mankind have already acquired copies of this technique. Fuxi, Shennong, Suiren, and the two leaders of Buddhism and Daoism each have a copy, but none of them have been able to master it yet.”

“What?!”

Daoist Yu Qiu, Exalted Celestial Thundergod, and the many major powers who had sent their coresense to watch this location were all shocked.

There were many major powers who were paying attention to this place. Most of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance had sent their coresense to keep watch here, covering the entire region! In fact, they were all prepared to appear at any moment. As for the major powers of the Seamless Gate...they wanted to scan this place as well, but Subhuti, Daoist Three Purities, and the others had long ago joined together to completely seal the area off from the Seamless Gate’s forces, preventing their coresenses from entering it.

This seal allowed their allies in but completely blocked their enemies out.

“If such an unearthly divine ability could be easily learned by all major powers, our side would be guaranteed to win.” Subhuti shook his head and sighed. “Tell me, do you really think that this divine ability is an easy one to learn?”

Thundergod muttered, “Why don’t you transmit copies of it to all the major powers on our side? Perhaps one of us will be able to master it.”

“There’s no rush.” Subhuti shook his head. “It isn’t as though you don’t know how terrifying the spy network of the Seamless Gate is. Over the years, we’ve found quite a few Seamless Gate spies amongst our ranks; in fact, even one of the major powers on our side was revealed to be a spy. It is entirely possible that there are other spies amongst the major powers as well. We have to be careful, be cautious. Otherwise...once the spy procures this technique, the Seamless Gate will have access to it. If the supreme powers on their side learn it, that would be disastrous.”

Thundergod was stunned yet again. Indeed, the Seamless Gate’s network of spies was very formidable. The Emphyrean Gods and True Immortals would never be discovered until they themselves chose to reveal themselves. The only reason why the Nuwa Alliance found out about the likes of Sword Immortal Evergreen was when they suddenly engaged in acts of betrayal at a crucial moment.

Suddenly...

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

One figure after another began to materialize out of nowhere. Some were tall and muscular, some were as ephemeral as the clouds, some were filled with murderous auras, some seemed to be as cold as glaciers. Incarnations of one True God or Daofather after another began to form.

After this group manifested, more and more True Gods and Daofathers began to send their incarnations to this place. Clearly, everyone wanted to discuss this manner.

From Subhuti's words, they understood that their most supreme leaders such as Suiren and Daoist Three Purities were hesitating on what to do, due to their concerns over potential spies.

"Good heavens..." Ning could barely breathe. To see so many True Gods and Daofathers together was an incredibly rare occurrence.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Five supremely powerful auras suddenly descended together.

Shennong. Fuxi. Suiren. Lord Tathagata the Buddha. Daoist Three Purities. They, too, only sent incarnations over.

"Eighty-two True Gods and Daofathers." Ning was secretly shocked. "However...not everyone has arrived. My eldest apprentice-brother and second apprentice-brother have yet to arrive."

"I feel that Subhuti's words are correct." A distant, headless Fiendgod, Xing Tian, spoke out. "This divine ability was discovered by fellow Daoist Subhuti. It is completely his choice as to whether or not he should offer it up, and he's already chosen to act on all of our behalfs. The Three Emperors of Mankind and the two leaders of Daoism and Buddhism cannot possibly be spies. As for other major powers...it is best to be a bit more cautious. Training in a divine ability like this must be incredibly difficult. I don't wish to see all of us fail in learning it, only for it to be acquired by the Seamless Gate and someone on their side mastering it. That would be a nightmare."

"Agreed. We can't be hasty," Lu Dongbin concurred.

There were actually many major powers who were supportive of Subhuti's decision. This was primarily because the five mighty overlords were all standing alongside Subhuti. Their influence and power was simply tremendous.

Thundergod began to grow frantic. Although many of the major powers here wanted this divine ability, most of them would follow the lead of the five mighty overlords. In addition, the chance that they would be able to actually succeed in mastering this divine ability was miniscule. Ninehorn Lightning Serpents weren't so easily tamed, after all. Thundergod, however, felt that he had a much better chance than the rest of them.

"I was born from the primordial chaos as one of the eighty-one original True Gods." Thundergod could no longer hold himself back, and he immediately spoke out in a thunderous voice that echoed within the Void. "There's no way that I could possibly be willing to become a spy for the Seamless Gate. In addition, in terms of control over lightning, I am the number one expert in the entire Three Realms. I'm also extremely familiar with Ninehorn Lightning Serpents. There's a very high chance that I will be able to master this divine ability. Emperors of Mankind, Tathagata, Three Purities...can it be that all of you believe that I, Thundergod, am not able to learn this divine ability?"

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### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 4: Icefire Jindan Smelting**

Daoist Three Purities' eyes had been shut this entire time. Suddenly, they opened up slightly, his sword-like gaze landing upon Exalted Celestial Thundergod. "Thundergod, this isn't just about you. This will have an impact on the lives of countless living beings on ours die. How can we be so blasé about handing

out this divine ability? If we make just a single misstep and the Seamless Gate acquires it...we might very well end up losing this entire war. We'll never be able to recover!"

"I know that...but do you really think that I'm a spy?!" Thundergod was still unwilling to bow his head.

Daoist Three Purities said calmly, "I know that you badly desire to learn this technique, and that you think you have a good chance of succeeding."

"Of course! Even Ji Ning was able to learn it. My mastery over lightning is second to none in the Three Realms. Why wouldn't I be able to?" Thundergod glanced at Ning, who was standing next to Subhuti. A lofty, self-confident look was in his eyes. "I know more about Ninehorn Lightning Serpents than anyone else. All I need is a tiny hint about this technique and I might very well master it at one go."

"Such arrogance." A deep, sonorous voice suddenly rang out.

Thundergod immediately turned his head to look. He discovered that the speaker was the fur-clad Suiren. Suiren's beard flowed like the whiskers of a dragon, and his gaze caused even Thundergod to feel his heart clench. This was the most ancient, most powerful member of the human race. Long ago, he had caused even Elder God Zhurong to bow his head and admit inferiority. In the past, for the sake of protecting the human race, Suiren had challenged all comers to display his power. He had actually beaten Thundergod senseless.

"Most of the major powers present understand that the big picture is what matters. They know what matters and what doesn't." Suiren gave Thundergod a look, then swept his gaze towards the others. "However...I imagine that all of you are quite curious regarding this evasion divine ability. I'll let you all take a look."

"No!"

"Human Sovereign, you must not."

"You absolutely must not."

Instantly, quite a few major powers began to cry out in disagreement.

"If we really do have a spy amongst our ranks, that would be disastrous." Exalted Celestial Carefree argued frantically against it.

As for Thundergod, his eyes lit up. If he was able to acquire this technique, it would be a wonderful thing.

"There's no need to worry," Suiren said. "I'll only reveal a very small part of this evasion divine ability. This part is just one of the many difficulties that are inherent in cultivating this technique. I trust that after seeing this part...everyone will understand how difficult it is to learn this technique."

After he spoke, one flame after another began to appear within the Void around him. Every single flame twisted into the form of a character, resulting in a dense cluster of characters appearing within the Void. This was a record of part of this technique. Instantly, all the major powers looked towards it.

"Eh?" The nearby Ning hurriedly turned to look as well. "That's really the Ninehorn Lightning Serp-..."

“Wait. They changed it a bit.”

Ning quickly finished reading through it. He continued to stand there quite calmly, not saying a word...but in his heart, he sighed with utter amazement.

The part of the technique which Suiren had just made public pertained to the taming of the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. Originally, the technique had described three items which one could use to tame the serpents; chaos nectar, Myriad Thunders Godgems, and Thousandrot Godfruits. One of them had to be used! The version which Suiren had publicized, however, had a fourth, additional option...

To ‘use heartforce to commune with the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent, then tame it’.

“Everyone, you can see it for yourself.” Suiren’s sonorous voice boomed out, reverberating within the Void. “This is the final part of the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique, the part which involves the taming of the serpent itself. You can succeed by using either chaos nectar, Myriad Thunders Godgems, or Thousandrot Godfruits. But do any of you have any? Do they exist anywhere within the Three Realms?”

Dead silence.

Everyone was thinking on this matter.

Some of these major powers had previously slain alien Outsiders and had acquired techniques from them, and thus had heard of those three items. Even in the infinite primordial chaos, those three treasures were incredibly rare and precious. They didn’t exist in the Three Realms at all!

“Without those three treasures, the only option remaining is the fourth option, the most clumsy option,” Suiren said. “To use heartforce to commune with a lightning serpent and tame it. Ninehorn Lightning Serpents are sentient, which is why they can be tamed, but to use heartforce to do so is incredibly difficult, and the chances for success are incredibly low. All of us have tried to use heartforce to tame the serpents, but all of us failed.”

Daoist Three Purities shook his head. “I can be considered as quite learned in the art of heartforce, but I was still unable to tame a serpent.”

No one present knew what to say. All five of them, with Subhuti being the sixth, had failed?

It must be understood that almost all of them had reached the fourth stage of heartforce. Daoist Three Purities in particular was particularly skilled in the application of heartforce; his breadth of knowledge in heartforce was not one whit inferior to that of Old Man Yuan’s.

“In the end, it was my young friend Ji Ning who succeeded. He is extremely talented in the application of heartforce.” Suiren looked towards Ning, letting out an approving sigh. “He was able to come up with a heartforce sword technique years ago, after just a few decades of cultivation. Then, during the Realmwar, he came up with his own soul heartforce technique. Now, he’s successfully mastered the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique. I feel tremendous admiration for him.”

Ning could sense that Human Sovereign Suiren was looking towards him with a very gentle, loving look in his eyes. Suiren’s repeated praises to all these other major powers made Ning feel quite embarrassed, as in reality Ning had relied on chaos nectar to succeed.

What he didn't understand was that Suiren, being the oldest human major power, viewed all the talented humans who came after him as he would his own grandchildren. He was extremely protective of humanity. Nuwa had initially only created a few humans, after all; the race had only proliferated after countless generations of procreation. It was actually entirely possible that Ning held the blood of Suiren's lineage within his veins.

In addition, it was Suiren who ended up being the overlord who trained in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique. Thus, Suiren felt as though he owed Ning.

"Training in this technique involves multiple difficulties. I've merely described one of them to you." Suiren stared at Thundergod. "Thundergod, do you still believe that you can master it? As I recall...you've only reached the second stage of heartforce."

Thundergod was silent, not saying a thing.

He was unwilling to accept this! But he also knew full well that if not even Daoist Three Purities was able to use heartforce to tame the serpents, the chances of him succeeding would be even more remote.

"Thus, Thundergod..." Subhuti said calmly, "Don't think that just because Ji Ning was able to learn this technique, that you would be able to learn it as well. To learn this sort of supreme evasion technique...you need strength, skill, and luck. You can't be lacking in any of the criteria!"

"Why would you even compare me to a puny little Empyrean God?" Thundergod snapped, somewhat embarrassed and irritated.

"Houyi was once a 'mere' Empyrean God as well," Subhuti said calmly.

"You...!" Thundergod was infuriated.

"If you continue to have such a poor temper, you'll probably never be able to break through in heartforce." After saying this, Subhuti couldn't be bothered to say anything else.

Exalted Celestial Thundergod and the rest of his fellows were all born at the True God level of power from the primordial chaos! However, there's a flip side to all things. They didn't have the experience of starting weak and slowly growing powerful. They didn't undergo enough mental toughening, and so almost all of these True Gods and Elder Gods of Primordial Chaos had poor talent for heartforce. Even the likes of Daoist Three Purities and Lord Tathagata, who had been iron-willed enough to repeatedly commit suicide and throw themselves into the cycle of reincarnation, had only been able to reach the fourth level of heartforce. As for those who merely had their clones go reincarnate, their heartforce was even weaker.

Thundergod was clearly a classic example. He was born with incredible power and arrogance. Because of his great power, he was naturally able to hold great sway over the lives and deaths of others, resulting in his terrible temper growing even worse.

Deep in his heart, he viewed those weaker than him with disdain.

Those creatures were nothing more than crawling worms! He was a True God of Primordial Chaos. Those weak little fellows were nothing compared to him.



“You can all leave. The six of us will discuss the matter of how to transmit this technique to others without giving the Seamless Gate any chance to steal it,” Daoist Three Purities said.

“Let’s go.”

“Let’s go.”

Instantly, the various incarnations all began to vanish. Daoist Yu Qiu tore a hole through the Void and left as well. As for Thundergod, he gave Ning a hard look, then turned and left. Clearly, in his heart Thundergod had already transferred to Ning all the resentment he felt for having lost so much face in front of so many major powers today. All of this was because of Ji Ning...a puny Empyrean God and True Immortal!

“Disciple, no need to quibble with Thundergod.” Subhuti looked at Ning, then chuckled. “He was born a True God, but that was just a matter of luck. That Dao-heart of his...he’s essentially reached his limit. He can forget about improving even one whit.”

“I wouldn’t dare be angry with him,” Ning said hurriedly.

“Mm.” Subhuti nodded. “You can leave now.”

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The vast prisonworld. The endless ‘skies’ of this world were covered with countless divine runes. They were part of the large, marvelous formation that extracted the essence the primordial chaos, refining it into chaos nectar.

Even as Ning had been negotiating with the Godking and meeting with the True Gods and Daofathers, his two clones within this world continued to sweep through it.

Where did the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] evasion technique come from? The prisonworld!

Ning knew very well that this prisonworld was a tremendous source of karmic luck for him.

He had to make good use of it!

“I, True God Skysplitter, dominated the land for multiple chaos cycles. I’ve killed more than a hundred puny True Immortals like you...who would’ve thought that I’d end up dying in the hands of an ant? What a joke. A joke!” A shackled True God dressed in tattered clothes raised his head, roaring with fury.

**BOOM!!!!!!**

His entire body blasted apart, causing the entire area inside the formation to shudder.

As for the white-robed Ji Ning who was outside the formation, keeping the ‘Eight Fires Qiankun World’ active, he could sense the three divine swords within his body absorb an enormous amount of baleful energy, causing them to rapidly grow. There was no way he was going to let all of this baleful energy go to waste. With the Darknorth swords gone, he had procured three other exquisite swords to use. He had also named them ‘Darknorth swords’, and so he now had a total of six ‘Darknorth swords’. “This time, my luck wasn’t bad. I met a True God who only had a little bit of divine power left. I managed to finish

him off after just a few years. Alas, everyone imprisoned here had extraordinarily high status back in their world. All of them are simply too proud.”

Whoosh.

After briefly inspecting and collecting the relics left behind by True God Skysplitter, Ning flew away.

Just one hour later, he arrived at a vast prairie. A True Immortal dressed in beautiful golden robes was imprisoned here, his shackles stretching off into an empty Void.

“Odd. Most people imprisoned here are conserving their energy, but this True Immortal has kept his clothes in perfect shape.” The white-robed Ning flew towards him through the skies.

“He is...True Immortal Sevenwind?” Ning immediately recognized the person upon seeing his face. Ning had engaged in multiple soulscours, and thus now knew quite a bit regarding the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea. The True Immortal in front of him had maintained his original appearance instead of allowing himself to turn skeletally thin like the others, making him easy to recognize.

Ning quickly flew forward, then descended outside the formation.

“Overseer?” The beautifully dressed True Immortal looked at Ning, then suddenly frowned. “You...”

“The chaos-kingdom of Pangaea has already been destroyed.” Ning chuckled. “This prisonworld has fallen into my hands. I can’t just sit outside such a treasure vault without entering and making use of it, right? Thus, you have two choices right now. One, let me soulscour you and take away your treasures. Two...die. Prior to this, I’ve already encountered and dealt with four True Gods and True Immortals. Here are their treasures.”

Whoosh. One Protocosmic spirit-treasure after another began to appear in front of Ning, hovering in the air and emanating auras of shocking power.

“Empress Jin? Skysplitter...” The formerly tranquil True Immortal Sevenwind’s face instantly changed. Everyone imprisoned here was an influential member of society in Pangaea. The True Immortals that Ning had encountered were all first-tier True Immortals; he hadn’t encountered a single one of the second-tier ones thus far. True Immortal Sevenwind naturally knew how formidable the four slain ones were.”

“Hah.” True Immortal Sevenwind laughed as he looked at Ning. “I’m nothing more than a prisoner now. What’s the point of resisting? In the future, would you be willing to release me?”

“If I have gain the power I need to release you, I will,” Ning said.

True Immortal Sevenwind nodded, then shut his eyes.

Ning was absolutely delighted. This was the fifth True God/True Immortal he had encountered. The previous four had required quite a bit of time and effort on his power to deal with, but this one had been willing to submit right away. Ning immediately stretched out with his hand. His arm stretched out hundreds of kilometers, landing atop True Immortal Sevenwind’s head as Ning began the soulscour.

Time continued to flow onwards, one minute after the next.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly halted.

“[Icefire Jindan Smelting]?”

In True Immortal Sevenwind’s memories, Ning discovered a particular thought-bubble that was unprotected by any life-oaths which contained something called the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique. Ning’s soul quickly began to memorize the contents of the thought-bubble.

Ning’s long arm rapidly began to shrink as he returned to normal. He just stood there, dazed.

“[Icefire Jindan Smelting]...”

“Ninefire Lava...Iceheart Pith...” Ning mumbled to himself.

“Is this...destiny?”

Earlier, when Exalted Celestial Thundergod had shown Ning disdain, Ning hadn’t grown angry. His heartforce had reached the fourth level; he knew very well that he was indeed just an Empyrean God and True Immortal. Although he had a formidable evasion technique, he was still far, far away from the power level of a elite Daofather like Thundergod. Thundergod would be able to kill him ease.

There was no one to blame for it from himself for being weak.

If Ning wanted to prove himself to the Daofathers, he had to train to a level where he was equal in power to them! However, he truly didn’t expect that in such a short period of time after the gathering of Daofathers, he would discover a Jindan upgrade method within his prisonworld.

“Upgrading the Jindan requires outside sources of energy and materials. Chaos ingredients are necessary.” Ning sighed softly to himself, “I had thought that even if I was to obtain such a technique, actually upgrading my Jindan would be incredibly difficult. I’d have to find many Chaos ingredients, and it’s quite possible that I would never find many of them.”

“But...”

“This [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique requires just two types of Chaos ingredients; Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith. Although it’ll be hard, it’s still possible for me.”

Ninefire Lava...

Ning had heard of it long ago. It existed in the Three Realms! The Three Realms was born from the collision of two large chaosworlds, after all, and it had many major powers who often roamed the primordial chaos, collecting quite a few Chaos ingredients. Right at this very moment, the treasure vaults of the Sovereigns of Mankind held Ninefire Lava within it. He absolutely could trade for it using his own treasures!

Thus, the ‘Ninefire Lava’ would be easily acquired. It wasn’t viewed as particularly precious in the Three Realms, because to date the Three Realms had discovered no use for it, aside from using it to forge treasures! For now, the Three Realms had discovered no other uses.

As for Iceheart Pith, it didn’t exist in the Three Realms. But...

“Iceheart Pith can be found in Undermoon Lake!”

Undermoon Lake had Iceheart Leaves...and Iceheart Leaves grew out of Iceheart Pith.

“The Seamless Gate’s Godking is forcing me into Undermoon Lake. Now that I have this Jindan upgrade method, I’m in desperate need of Iceheart Pith. And I just so happen to be heading towards Undermoon Lake...” Ning suddenly felt that fate truly worked in mysterious ways.

“No matter what...I absolutely have to acquire Iceheart Pith! So long as I acquire those two Chaos ingredients, I’ll be able to use this [Icefire Jindan Smelting] method. By then, I’ll be a second-tier True Immortal; I’ll have half-stepped into the Daofather level.” Ning finally began to have the feeling that he was beginning to gain the power he needed to fight back in this war.

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### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 5: The Treasury**

Sword Immortal world. The towering Five Treasured Peaks.

Undermoon Lake was an incredibly mysterious place. Once he entered, he would be completely shut off from the outside world. Not even his Primaltwin or his other clones would be able to communicate with the clone that had entered Undermoon Lake! Ever since the Primordial Era, thousands of Empyrean Gods had entered Undermoon Lake, many of whom had Primlatwins or other clones living in the Three Realms. This was the reason why despite that, no one knew exactly what was inside Undermoon Lake.

To this very day, Buddha Jueming was the only person to leave the place after having entered it. He had come back with three treasures, but had only said that the place contained many treasures within it. He had carefully described these three treasures to others, but with regards to the dangers and events which occurred within Undermoon Lake, he was completely close-mouthed.

The only person who had ever left the place was unwilling to say anything about it at all. Undermoon Lake was a complete mystery!

Buddha Jueming had entered when he was merely an Empyrean God. After he became a Buddha, many Empyrean Gods in the Three Realms felt certain that Undermoon Lake must be a place of fortune and tempering. Thus, there were still many who were willing to enter the lake and risk their lives. Alas...no one else had ever left.

“My true body’s clones shall immediately lose contact with the outside world upon entering Undermoon Lake. I’m afraid I’ll spend quite a bit of time within it. If that’s the case, the clone that enters Undermoon Lake will work hard on the [Five Treasures] sword-art with the primary goal of perfecting the ‘Shadowless’ stance of my [Brightmoon] sword-art. As for my other clones and my Primaltwin clones in the Three Realms, they’ll meditate on the [Five Treasures] to improve the other four stances of [Brightmoon].”

There was no way to link the memories together when separated by Undermoon Lake. There was no point in duplicating his efforts in Undermoon Lake and the Three Realms; that would be a waste of time.

The Shadowless stance was the most mysterious stance, and an incredibly fast one. For a single clone to train in it was quite suitable.

After returning from Undermoon Lake, his memories would merge together again. Because they had been training in completely different things, once all those memories merged, his insights might very well increase dramatically.

This was the moment that his clone within the prisonworld had discovered the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique.

“I had been planning to closely read through the [Five Treasures], then head straight to Undermoon Lake. Now, it seems, I need to pay a visit to the Humanworld of Yu the Great first,” Ning mused to himself.

A day later.

After having memorized the [Five Treasures] multiple times, Ning boarded his Voidboat and flew towards the headquarters of the Primordial Imperial Clan, the Humanworld of Yu the Great.

“Fellow Daoist Ji Ning.” A voice rang out as a muscular, fur-clad man appeared out of nowhere.

“Empyrean God Fuqu.” Ning smiled. Last time, it had been Fuqu who had welcomed him as well. This was primarily because one of Fuqu’s primary responsibilities in the Primordial Imperial Clan was to welcome guests.

Fuqu looked at Ning with a gaze that was a bit different than before. This was because, just a day ago, Ning had shown off his [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique and roamed through the Three Realms, slaughtering the Seamless Gate’s forces until the Seamless Gate had bowed their heads. News of this had quickly spread out, and even the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance were often discussing this matter. They all tsked and sighed appreciatively, “Ji Ning truly is talented in heartforce.”

All of the major powers of the Nuwa Alliance truly believed that Ning had relied on heartforce alone to tame a serpent.

In truth, after Suiren had carefully analyzed and researched the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] technique, he had the feeling that there was a tiny chance one could indeed use heartforce to tame a serpent, which was why he inserted the part about heartforce into the technique’s description. This also served the dual purpose of hiding the fact that they had the necessary chaos nectar. Only by deceiving their own would they also be able to deceive the Seamless Gate.

“Might I ask why you have come again, fellow Daoist Ji Ning?” Empyrean God Fuqu asked.

“I wish to pay a visit to the treasury and trade for some treasures,” Ning said.

“Oh. Quite a few fellow Daoists of the Three Realms have come to visit the treasury, but this is your first trip, fellow Daoist Ji Ning. I had thought that our treasures didn’t match up to your expectations.” Fuqu chortled. “Come, come. Follow me in.”

Moments later, two streaks of light shot past the winding clouds that were outside a grouping of ancient palaces. They flew straight into one of the palaces.

“The Primordial Imperial Clan truly is extraordinary.” As Ning flew forward, he paid close attention to his surroundings, and he couldn’t help but feel stunned.

The nominal managing power of the Three Realms, the Celestial Court, was extremely beautiful and filled with lofty jade buildings.

The imperial palace of the Grand Xia had the Skylight Palace, an absolutely dominating fixture that was not one whit inferior to the Celestial Court.

But...

The Palaces of Mankind of the Primordial Imperial Clan was quite simple and plain. And yet, every single palace gave Ning a sensation of tremendous pressure.

“Our human race spent countless years during the Primordial Era to build them,” Fuqu said proudly. “We produced a total of thirty-six top-grade Pure Yang-level magic treasures which could be used as palaces. Over the course of time, they’ve grown more powerful and all of them have become Protocosmic spirit-treasures. These thirty-six supreme Protocosmic spirit-treasures match perfectly with a formation-diagram which Human Emperor Fuxi has created, and their joint power is equal to that of a Chaos treasure.”

“All those years ago, during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era, the Palaces of Mankind played a major role and rendered many merits,” Fuqu said proudly.

Ning nodded, sighing in amazement. The Palaces of Mankind were indeed like an impregnable fort!

“This is the Palace of the Numerous Heavens.” Fuqu led Ning into a large gray palace. “The treasury is right inside. There are a few Immortals inside right now as well. Pick what you want. As long as you have enough treasure, you’ll be allowed to trade for it. I still have other tasks to attend to, so I won’t stay here with you any longer.”

“Thank you, Empyrean God Fuqu,” Ning said with a smile. Fuqu transformed into a streak of light and departed, leaving Ning here. Ning turned and stepped inside the treasury.

Many of the major powers and experts of the Nuwa Palace had placed the treasures they didn’t need into this place. It made for an utterly astonishing sight!

There were piles of powerful Protocosmic spirit-treasures, and the weakest treasures here were at least at the Pure Yang level. There were many Chaos ingredients and materials as well. Virtually everywhere could be found here!

During normal times, the various major powers would probably hide their treasures in other locations, making these items almost impossible to locate and trade for. Now that the storm had descended, everyone took out everything they didn’t need.

“What fine treasures.” Ning knew, however, that only treasures which were a good fit for him were truly ‘good’ treasures.

He first procured five kilograms of the two other types of materials the Seamless Gate had requested. In truth, the Seamless Gate had underestimated Ji Ning. As they saw it, he was still just an Empyrean God and True Immortal; if they demanded too many valuable treasures, there would be no way Ji Ning could produce them. Thus, two of the three treasures the Godking had requested were fairly common.

If they knew that Ning had acquired a prisonworld of the chaos-kingdom of Pangaea, giving him thousands of times as many treasures as they had expected, they would probably feel quite regretful.

“How much of this Ninefire Lava do you have?” Ning asked.

“Senior Darknorth.” Instantly, a Celestial Immortal walked over and said respectfully, “We have quite a bit of this Ninefire Lava, more than a million kilograms. All of it was discovered in the past by Human Emperor Suiren in the primordial chaos. If you need more, senior Darknorth, the Human Emperor should be able to provide you with it.”

Ning nodded. “Give me half a million kilograms of it.”

Chaos materials could differ greatly in value. Chaos goldstone, for example, was available in almost limitless supply. Some of the medicinal herbs that could be found in the primordial chaos were extremely rare and valuable, while others could be produced in enormous batches.

Ninefire Lava and Iceheart Pith were fairly average items as Chaos materials went. Whenever they appeared, they would appear in large quantities. The Iceheart Leaves of Undermoon Lake grew out of large quantities of Iceheart Pith; although the pith was valuable, it was naturally on a lower level of value compared to the leaves.

[Icefire Jindan Smelting]...

There were different levels to the technique. This was much like how the higher levels of Ning’s [Starseizing Hand] required increasingly large amounts and increasingly expensive types of Five Elements treasures!

When smelting a treasure, the more valuable the ingredients you used, the more powerful the flames would have to be to smelt it! In turn, the higher-level the Jindan in the body was, the more materials the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique would require.

A Celestial Immortal’s Jindan needed one level of items, while a True Immortal’s Jindan would require a high level’s worth of items. As for an Ancestral Immortal/Daofather’s Jindan...those were simply far too powerful. To transform them would require even more treasures, none of which would be so easily acquired.

“According to my records, to advance a True Immortal’s Jindan from the third-tier to the second-tier will require 5000 kilograms of Ninefire Lava and 5000 kilograms of Iceheart Pith. I have more than thirty clones; I’ll need more than 150,000 kilograms of each. Alright...the Ninefire Lava was the easy part. Iceheart Pith...I wonder how much of it exists in Undermoon Lake.” Ning boarded the Voidboat, then left the Palaces of Mankind.

Ning only had to hand over six Protocosmic spirit-treasures and three sets of top-grade Pure Yang treasures. The Emphyrean Gods and True Immortals of the Seamless Gate which Ning had slain had provided Ning with dozens of Protocosmic spirit-treasures. It was normal for ordinary Emphyrean Gods and True Immortals to have several Protocosmic spirit-treasures with them, after all.

“Time to go to Undermoon Lake.”

The Voidboat quickly traversed through the great Void, speeding towards and entering the infinite primordial chaos.

### The Desolate Era

#### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 6: The World of Undermoon Lake**

Prisonworld 17.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! A series of white-robed figures flew through the region of primordial chaos, entering the vast prisonworld. A total of sixteen white-robed figures levitated in midair. All eighteen of Ning's clones had entered the prisonworld now.

"Before I go to Undermoon Lake, I need to complete certain careful preparations." Fifteen of the sixteen white-robed youths instantly vanished, leaving behind only the one with the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent.

Whoosh. An enormous black lightning serpent streaked through the skies, rapidly flying off into the distance.

Although Ning had acquired quite a few treasures thanks to his many battles against the Seamless Gate, that amount couldn't come close to comparing to the things he had gained from this prisonworld. Even the prisonworld's Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals had carried extremely rare and valuable treasures with him, thanks to the fact that all of them had extraordinary backgrounds. As for the True Gods and True Immortals, they were equivalent to the Daofathers of the Three Realms, and so their treasures were even more shocking.

"Undermoon Lake is too mysterious a place. To this very day, only Buddha Jueming managed to survive it and emerge from it. It's very possible that this clone of mine will die inside. I need to bring some good treasures with me, but I can't take the very best ones," Ning mused to himself.

Thus far, Ning had already disposed of Empress Jin, True God Skysplitter, and three other True Gods and True Immortals. These were all figures that were comparable to Daofathers! Every single one of them possessed treasures that were far better than Ning's Voidboat and Darknorth swords. Although most weren't a good fit for Ning, there were some that were.

True God Skysplitter, for example. After he self-detonated and died, he had left behind a total of nine divine swords. Each of them were Protocosmic spirit-treasures, and they formed a complete set! This set of swords alone was enough to make the True Gods and Daofathers of the Three Realms turn glaze-eyed with lust.

There was no way Ning would be willing to take them into Undermoon Lake. Even in the prisonworld, only a few True Gods and True Immortals specialized in the sword. It was entirely possible that after sweeping through the entire prisonworld, he still wouldn't be able to find a better set of swords.

"My true body has eighteen clones. I'll send two of them into Undermoon Lake; sending an extra clone will give me an extra chance for success." Ning made up his mind.

The two clones he had sent naturally didn't include the clone that possessed the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent.



Of the eighteen clones, just a single one was in possession of a Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. These serpents were far too hard to come by; if he ended up losing it within Undermoon Lake, he would feel endless regret.

“I’ll take these treasures with me.” Ning finished selecting his treasures.

First, he chose a set of 729 top-grade Pure Yang flying swords which he would use for the [Greater Thousand Swords] formation. He had acquired 720 of these swords from the first Celestial Immortal he had met in the prisonworld, Liangqiu. There weren’t many Empyrean Gods or True Immortals in the Three Realms who could afford to be spend so much on swords. This set would allow him to launch distant attacks.

Next, he chose a set of twelve swords that were well-suited for close combat. All of them were also top-grade Pure Yang swords.

After that, he selected a Protocosmic spirit-treasure meant for fleeing, the ‘Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle’ [1. Ruyi is a very difficult to translate term which basically means, ‘as one wills’; it suggests that it can transform free in size and shape, or that it will allow him to go where he desires.]. Ning actually had several Protocosmic treasures of this type, having acquired three from the True Gods and True Immortals of the prisonworld and a few from the Seamless Gate.

Naturally, he also brought along some Ninefire Lava and other necessary treasures such as spirit pills. No one knew how long he would be trapped there, after all.

Ning brought along fifty thousand kilograms of Ninefire Lava. Supposedly, Undermoon Lake had Iceheart Pith inside; he would absolutely be able to refine and upgrade his golden pellet Jindan with Undermoon Lake.

After completing his preparations, the white-robed Ning boarded his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle and began to travel towards Undermoon Lake.

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The Three Realms. Sword Immortal world. The thatched cottage in front of the Five Treasured Peaks.

The black-robed Ning was seated in the lotus position within the cottage. Since his true bodies were going to hide for now, it was time for the Primaltwin Ning to take the lead. It was now the Primaltwin which carried the Starseizing Manor with it. Given how strong the Primaltwin was, it was also capable of joining together into the Rahu Formation as it pleased.

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An enormous star hung there in the primordial chaos, emanating a gentle aura of light that shone down upon the chaos around it.

This star was very similar to the Lunar Star. Because the Lunar Star was located in the Void outside the Three Realms, there was no chaos blocking its light, allowing it to shine down upon the entire Three Realms. Although the star in front of Ning was very similar to the Lunar Star, it wasn’t particularly famous. The countless ordinary denizens of the Three Realms, at least, had no idea of its existence.

“Undermoon Lake!”

Seated within his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, the white-robed youth stared off into the distance.

An utterly titanic lake of water hung there in the middle of the primordial chaos. It was so vast, even Ning's heartforce couldn't cover it all. The surface of this endless lake of water was extremely calm and tranquil, making it as flat and smooth as a mirror. It reflected the image of the enormous nearby star, which appeared within it like the reflection of the moon. It truly was absolutely mesmerizing.

"Undermoon Lake truly is an odd place. One has to be an Empyrean God to enter it; anyone else, including True Gods and Daofathers, are completely unable to pass through it. If they try to force their way into the lake, the waters of the lake will squeeze and compress around them, preventing them from entering the world within."

Ning didn't hesitate. "Time to go in."

Whoosh.

Ning's Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle swooped into the water. Plop! Water sprayed upwards from the point of impact as Ning and the shuttle both completely disappeared.

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In the instant that he entered Undermoon Lake, Ning felt a strange ripple of energy surround him. And then, spacetime distorted and changed. This was a subtle transformation that was filled with the faint aura of primordial chaos. Given Ning's heartforce abilities, even when Patriarch Subhuti used a spacetime-distorting technique he would still be able to see and potentially evade it, but this spacetime distortion came naturally, not revealing any flaws or traces at all.

Whoosh.

Ning fell down from the skies. As soon as he landed, he saw that he was standing upon a piece of scorched rock that was three hundred meters long.

"This place is...?" Ning put away the shuttle, scanning his surroundings.

He was surrounded by a seemingly endless sea. Its waves continuously washed across the scorched stone.

A bright moon hung high in the sky, its cold and clear moonlight shining down upon the entire sea.

"This..." Ning stared at this in astonishment. Ahead of him was a floating wooden bridge. At one end of the bridge was this scorched stone he was standing upon, while the other end stretched far off into the horizon, where sea met sky. Not even Ning could see to the end of the bridge with his eyes alone.

"How long is this floating bridge?" Ning was speechless. He immediately sent out his heartforce to take a look. Ning had already grown accustomed to using heartforce in dangerous areas, because it was even more unfathomable and mysterious than coresense. True Gods and Daofathers who were weaker than him in heartforce wouldn't even notice him scanning them. But of course, they in turn would be able to scan him with coresense without him noticing.

"Eh? My heartforce...?" Ning's heart clenched. He had clearly spread out his heartforce, but he wasn't able to find anything at all.

“Coresense.” Ning immediately sent out his coresense to investigate as well, but as he had expected, even coresense was unable to detect a thing.

Ning’s face changed. Very, very few in the Three Realms were capable of blocking out coresense and heartforce.

“That bright moon in the skies...where is that moon from?” Ning raised his head to stare at the moon. “Can it be the star outside this world?”

Swoosh! Ning soared into the skies, flying higher and higher. He flew for hundreds of thousands of kilometers before, with a thud, he rammed into an invisible barrier. A series of concentric ripples spread out from the part of the barrier which Ning struck. As for the bright moon, it was still far, far above him in the depths of the sky. There was no way to move any closer to it at all.

Ning pondered carefully for a moment, then elected to once more return to that floating wooden bridge. He advanced rapidly, because he had the feeling that the reason why this bridge existed was to serve as a guide for people to know where to go.

“Thousands of Emyrean Gods have entered Undermoon Lake since ancient times. Why haven’t I encountered any of them?”

Ning stood there atop his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle. The shuttle followed the floating wooden bridge forward, advancing at a rapid pace. It flew for millions of kilometers, but still the only thing to be seen was the endless sea and that lonely little bridge. The only sound that could be heard was that of the water slapping against the sides of the bridge.

This made Ning even more wary.

“Although Buddha Jueming successfully escaped this place, he refused to say anything about it. Even when other major powers asked him, he still refused to say a thing. As for the thousands of other Emyrean Gods...” Ning frowned. “Are all of them dead?”

The thought of how thousands of Emyrean Gods might have perished here made Ning even more nervous.

Whoosh. He continued to fly forward, the shuttle advancing at an astonishing pace. He had flown for more than a hundred million kilometers, but there was still nothing besides the endless bridge.

Suddenly, far off in the distance, an ugly green head suddenly popped out from beneath the surface of the sea. The head stared at the distant white-robed youth aboard the shuttle. Because Ning was only able to see with his eyes, he wasn’t able to discover the appearance of this creature.

“Here comes another one,” the jade-green head mused softly, eyes filled with an excited gleam of bloodlust.

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 7: Yaksha**

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle followed the floating bridge forward, flying at high speed. Ji Ning, however, maintained a vigilant watch. He continued to have the feeling that the seemingly-peaceful world of Undermoon Lake was hiding a terrifyingly lethal danger within it.

Deep within the depths of the sea.

A completely jade-green human-shaped figure, steel warfork in hand, was drawing close to Ning at high speed. Every so often, he would vanish and reappear more than a hundred thousand kilometers away. Soon, he stealthily arrived in an area located in front of Ning. His dark-red gaze pierced through the water, seeing the distant shuttle fly forward at high speed along the bridge's path. His long tongue licked his lower jaw as he murmured to himself, "It's rare for new prey to come. I hope this one is strong. Otherwise, it'll be quite boring."

"Ah, here he comes. Attack!"

The jade-green humanoid suddenly burst out from the surface of the sea, transforming into a green blur that streaked towards Ning.

"Eh?" Although he had been flying for a long period of time, he hadn't relaxed at all. Ning was rather shocked. "He was able to get so close to me without me noticing at all."

Ning's pupils were filled with torchlight, and he used the [Torch Dragon's Eye] to see his foe clearly.

This was an oceanic creature that looked rather like a yaksha-demon. The yaksha had a pair of dark-red eyes that were filled with a baleful, murderous aura, and it was wielding a steel warfork that it stabbed straight towards Ning.

"I need to capture him and take a good look." Ning stretched out with his arm, and it instantly expanded, transforming and becoming enormous enough to cover the skies themselves as his fingers reached out to the jade yaksha. This was Ning's [Star-seizing Hand] divine ability. The yaksha sensed a tremendous amount of danger from this attack, and it immediately roared in a shrill voice, "BREAK!"

"Eh? This jade yaksha speaks in the language of Pangaea?" Ning murmured to himself. However, he showed no mercy at all.

**BOOM!**

Although the steel warfork stabbed into his palm, the enormous star-seizing hand still wrapped itself around the jade yaksha, capturing it. No matter how it struggled, it was unable to escape.

"Tell me, what exactly is going on in this world? And what happened to the thousands of Empyrean Gods who came before?" Ning barked coldly, his hand still wrapped firmly around the creature.

"Heh heh, so you have a bit of talent after all. How unexpected." The captured yaksha actually let out a shrill laugh, dark-red eyes staring weighingly at Ning. "Interesting, quite interesting. It's been a long time since I've encountered a formidable opponent. You were able to capture my clone in just a single exchange...this will be fun. Fun!"

"Clone?" Ning was stunned.

“Kid...this was just the start.” The green-haired yaksha laughed savagely, then suddenly transformed into a stream of liquid that quickly flew out from Ning’s palm.

“Transformed into water?” Ning barked coldly, “Even if you transform into a damn ghost, you still won’t escape!”

Boom! Yet another enormous palm came sweeping over.

Ning’s left and right hands seemed to have transformed into two enormous black stormclouds. They viciously clapped against each other. BOOM!!!! The stream of water that was caught between those two enormous hands was instantly and completely destroyed, leaving behind only a shrill voice reverberating in the empty skies: “Ahahaha...how intriguing...how intriguing!”

After slaying the yaksha, Ning once returned to stand within his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle. The sea wind blew past him, causing his white robes to flutter.

“Judging from what that jade yaksha said, just now I merely battled one of his clones? And he tried to kill me without negotiating or speaking to me at all. I haven’t encountered any Empyrean Gods yet....is it because all of them have been killed?” Ning couldn’t help but shiver. Thousands of Empyrean Gods...perhaps the vast majority were ordinary in power, but some were truly top-tier experts. A few might be even more powerful than Ning!

If Ning didn’t use the Rahu Formation, on Mount Innerheart alone the likes of Redsnow, Silvermoon, and Goldcrow were figures that Ning was no match for. In an actual battle, there were too many deficiencies in Ning’s understanding of the Dao. Only if Ning’s swordforce reached the fourth stage would he become equal to the likes of Redsnow in a frontal battle.

“I have to be even more careful.”

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle continued to fly forward.

“Intriguing. He was actually able to wipe out one of my clones.”

“Ahaha...it’s rare for me to encounter a tough enemy.”

“But the tough ones are fun.”

“Ahahaha.”

“Time to kill.”

One jade yaksha after another began to emerge from the depths of the sea in front of Ning, hastening towards him at high speed. At the same time, their shrill voices echoed within the world. After the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, Ning heard their shrill voices echoing in the skies. Shrill voices and strange laughter seemed to come forth from every corner of the seas. Clearly, there were an enormous number of these creatures.

“Are they all gathering together?” Ning’s eyes blazed with torch-light as he stared at his surroundings. He was able to see past the water and locate the many jade yakshas that had appeared.

“So many?!” Ning was rather stunned. His [Torch Dragon’s Eye] alone was able to see more than a hundred of those yakshas. Although he had slain the first yaksha in a seemingly simple manner, in truth the yaksha had essentially likely reached the Empyrean God level of power. If there were enough of them, they would be able to overwhelm him with raw numbers.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Explosions could be heard throughout the sea. One jade yaksha after another burst through the surface of the sea, standing on the water and completely surrounding Ning. All of them stared at Ning, filled with maliciousness and avarice.

With a thought, Ning put away the shuttle. He had noticed earlier that the speed of the shuttle was actually inferior to that of the jade yakshas. Thus, there was no choice but to fight; escape was not an option.

“519 clones.” A pair of blood-colored swords appeared in Ning’s hands. By now, he had no choice but to rely on his sword-arts.

“I don’t wish to be your enemy.” Ning’s gaze swept past every single one of the many jade yakshas surrounding him.

“Ahaha...but I want to kill you, kid.” The 519 jade yakshas simultaneously spoke out, saying the same words. When their voices merged together, they actually had the power to shake one’s Dao-heart. “Be careful, now. If you end up dying in my hands, don’t claim that I tricked you or plotted against you. I’m battling against you openly and fairly.

Ning, swords in hands, grew even more wary.

“Let’s go.”

Instantly...swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh! ....

Ten of the jade yakshas simultaneously circled around and attacked Ning with their steel warforks.

A killing intent suddenly flashed in the eyes of the white-robed Ning. The blood-colored swords in his hands suddenly transformed into blurs.

Slash. Slash. Slash. Slash...

The bodies of the jade yakshas were each bisected. In a single clash, ten of them had been cut in half.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

The Shadowless stance: This was a very fast stance that was the strangest stance of all. It was meant to attack from an unpredictable angle and chop the enemy in half. Clearly, these jade yakshas were unable to block Ning’s sword-art.

“Eh?” Ning’s face changed slightly. The bodies of the bisected yakshas first transformed into water, then reformed to become ten more jade yakshas. And then...frenzied, bloodlusted looks appeared in the eyes of the 519 jade yakshas.

And then, the 500-plus jade yakshas all simultaneously charged towards Ning.

"[Three Heads, Six Arms]!" Ning's body blurred, then reformed with three heads and six arms. He now wielded six swords as well. Faced with the utterly relentless horde of enemies, Ning didn't dare to use the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] against them.

Ning's six blood-red swords transformed into bloody blurs. They were simply too fast! The bloody blurs swirled around around Ning, completely blocking and halting all of the assaulting jade yakshas. In fact, many of their bodies were chopped apart and knocked flying, but moments later they would reform unharmed.

Although the 'slain' yakshas were able to reform after being bisected, Ning had the feeling that after doing so they would become noticeably weaker.

Still, Ning felt a sense of pressure and danger. The enemies were simply too numerous, and all of them could be said to have reached the Empyrean God level of power. Even against Ning's sword-arts, the yakshas managed to land the occasional blow against his body. However, Ning's body had reached the Ninth Cycle of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]; it wouldn't be easy to damage. If this continued, in the end it was more likely that the enemy would be the first to lose this war of attrition. At present, Ning had only used [Three Heads, Six Arms] after all; this divine ability used up very little divine power. In addition, at the Empyrean God level the body was further perfected, easily capable of battling for months on end. If Ning used the [Starseizing Hand], the amount of time he'd be able to battle would be decreased a hundredfold.

"DAMN!!!!" A furious bellow suddenly shook the heavens.

The 519 jade yakshas simultaneously retreated backwards, levitating up into midair. All of them appeared utterly furious. Then, all of them began to ram against each other, completely merging into each other with each collision. The number of jade yakshas in the skies began to decrease as more and more of them began to fuse together.

The more yakshas fused together, the darker a green they became. Soon, their color became as black as night...but then, they became a dark-gold color. When the two final dark-gold yakshas rammed against each other, they transformed into a golden yaksha that held such power as to cause even Ning amazement.

This golden yaksha was thirty meters tall, and his aura was extremely close to that of a True God's.

"To force me to use my true body in battle...you aren't bad. Over the course of all these years, more than a thousand Empyrean Gods died without even seeing my true body," the golden yaksha growled.

"What?! More than a thousand?!" Ning's heart shook. Most of the thousands of Empyrean Gods who had entered this place belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. Many had entered back during the Primordial Era, after all, and almost all of those belonged to the Nuwa Alliance. Ning had been hoping that he would be able to come up with a way to rescue the thousands of Empyrean Gods trapped here, but...

Apparently, an enormous number had died by the hands of this yaksha. Indeed...surrounded by more than five hundred yakshas, very few would be able to survive.

"However...the number of Empyrean Gods that died to my true body is in excess of two thousand." The golden yaksha stared at Ning. Light suddenly flashed within his hands, and a steel warfork that looked

ancient suddenly appeared within it. The steel warfork looked very plain and simple, but it clearly had an aura of incredible power.

“You should rejoice in the fact that you will die to my true body,” the golden yaksha laughed savagely. “All of you want to acquire the relics which my master left behind...did you really think it would be that easy?”

Ning’s eyes narrowed. Master?

In truth, as soon as he had entered Undermoon Lake, Ning had the feeling that this was a place that was artificially created by a major power of the ancient days. The floating wooden bridge spanned countless kilometers, and neither coresense nor heartforce could be used to scan this place. It all suggested that this was part of a deliberate design by a major power; it didn’t seem like something that would naturally emerge from the primordial chaos.

“If you want the treasures...use your life to trade for them!” The golden yaksha laughed strangely, and then, steel warfork in his hands...suddenly vanished. He left behind just a golden streak of light in the air as he suddenly appeared before Ning. He was simply too fast; Ning only had barely enough time to use his sword to block.

Boom!

Ning transformed into a shooting star as he was knocked flying backwards. From this initial clash, Ning understood that the foe’s power was very close to that of a True God’s. “No wonder more than three thousand Emphyrean Gods died to by hands.”

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 8: A Surviving Emphyrean God**

“You are too weak. Too weak!” The golden yaksha’s frenzied voice echoed throughout the heavens as he once more transformed into a streak of golden light, chasing after Ji Ning and assaulting him repeatedly.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning was knocked flying backwards repeatedly, sometimes being driven into the sea, sometimes somersaulting backwards in rather pathetic fashion. He was at a definite, absolute disadvantage.

“You are really weak...but your body’s pretty tough. My [Seagod Yaksha] is incredibly strong, but you are able to easily absorb this type of punishment.” The golden yaksha continued to attack as he spoke, laughing wildly.

His words were correct; any ordinary Emphyrean God body that wasn’t protected by the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] would’ve long ago been destroyed by now.

But if he didn’t have the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], Ning wouldn’t have dared to choose this style of fighting either!

“He’s very strong and incredibly fast, but his agility is average. His combat techniques are all quite ordinary.” Over the course of this battle, Ning quickly deduced his foe’s strengths and weaknesses. “When fighting against him, I can’t just take him head on. I have to use the intricacies of my sword-arts to deal with him.”



Whoosh.

Ning suddenly burst forth from the surface of the sea, as did the golden yaksha which was in hot pursuit of him.

“Come.” Two swords in his hands, a fierce light flashed through Ning’s eyes. It was time to counterattack.

Instantly, a total of 729 swords appeared out of nowhere. These swords all undulated in different manners as they levitated in the air. In front of Ning’s chest, a jade sword began to take form. The power of this jade sword was terrifyingly great. The only reason why Ning was able to use the ninth stage of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] was entirely because he had fourth-level heartforce and a soul heartforce technique.

This jade sword that was manifested by merging the power of 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords. It’s power was definitely not weaker than Ning’s when using the [Starseizing Hand]!

“Go.” Ning pointed towards the distant Yaksha.

“Ahahaha, he’s actually using an Immortal technique.” The golden yaksha laughed wildly, continuing to crush forward. He didn’t care if Ning was going to use close combat or long-range attacks; with his absolute advantage in power, he was crush Ning with overwhelming force.

Swish.

The jade sword struck out towards the golden yaksha, seeking to avoid the yakshas defenses, but the yaksha was simply too strong. A brandishing block with the steel warfork was able to block in time. With a ‘bang’ sound, the jade sword was instantly destroyed, while the golden yaksha merely paused for a moment in midair.

“Even the ninth stage of the [Greater Thousand Swords Formation] is only able to cause him to pause slightly? It seems I’ll have to use heartforce.” A second jade sword materialized in front of Ji Ning’s body, and his invisible heartforce surged into it. The power of the second jade sword instantly rose, transforming it on a qualitative level.

Fourth stage heartforce, in and of itself, was far more powerful than the ninth-stage [Greater Thousand Swords Formation].

When using fourth stage heartforce, Ning would be able to reach the apex of power possible for Empyrean Gods and True Immortals for a short period of time. The only difference was that the likes of Redsnow would be able to fight at that level for a sustained period of time, whereas Ning would only be able to do so briefly.

“It’s useless. That tiny bit of power you have is usel-...” The golden yaksha was roaring with savage laughter as he pounced towards Ning.

The jade sword transformed into a blur. It seemed identical to the first sword, but once the golden yaksha actually reached jade sword, the speed of the jade sword suddenly increased dramatically. The heartforce within it exploded forth with full power!

The upgraded jade sword became nothing more than a vague blur in front of the golden yaksha. The golden yaksha tried to block it, but his combat techniques were simply too weak.

SLASH!

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

The jade sword sliced through the golden yaksha's body in a bizarre, unpredictable manner. Although this body was very close to that of a True God, it actually wasn't enhanced by any body-protecting divine ability at all. Assaulted by the incredibly sharp jade sword...it was instantly chopped in half.

Ning, however, remained wary and vigilant. He knew very well that the golden yaksha was able to easily dissolve and coalesce his body, or even to completely transform it into liquid. He probably wouldn't die that easily. In addition, Ning could sense that his foe's aura remained incredibly powerful.

The two halves of the bisected golden yaksha's body suddenly transformed into a flood of water. The enormous flood of water spun in midair, then completely detonated, blasting napart into countless smaller streams of water that flew everywhere. Once they touched the surface of the sea, the streams once more transformed into many jade yakshas, a total of 519 of them.

"You were actually able to injure my true body. You are qualified to pass through this section that I guard." The 519 jade yakshas stood atop the sea, staring towards Ning and speaking together in a strange voice. "However, I am merely the weakest of the guardians which Master left behind. Those ancient fellows are all more powerful than me. If you want to survive them and acquire the treasures which Master left behind...I judge that you are lacking in power. Hahaha..."

Laughing in a shrill, ear-piercing manner, the 519 jade yakshas all flew in different directions, quickly disappearing from Ning's field of vision.

Ning just silently stood there in midair for a moment.

"Come back." The 729 top-grade Pure Yang swords all returned to his body.

"Just the weakest guardian, with more to come?" Ning frowned, murmuring softly to himself. He was slowly beginning to understand things here.

"Even the sole person to leave this place, Buddha Jueming, entered during the Primordial Era and was only able to emerge during the era of the Three Realms. It took him countless years," Ning mused to himself. "Clearly, Undermoon Lake isn't so easily traversed. The very first opponent I encountered was able to force me to use heartforce to beat him. The rest will be even harder."

Swoosh!

Ning once more boarded the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle and continued to advance along the path of the floating wooden bridge.

After flying for more than half a day, Ning was vaguely able to make out an extremely beautiful island far off in the distance. The wooden bridge was leading towards this island as well.

"What a lovely island." Ning quickly arrived at the island and took a close look at it. The natural energy surrounding the island had all been manipulated and controlled, causing this island to be perpetually

blanketed in falling snow. The island itself was very beautiful as well, and at the center of it was a beautiful palace that was at least three thousand meters high.

Atop the palace, he could see the statues of three strange beasts that were seated in the lotus position.

“A palace? Why has a palace been built here?” Ning was secretly puzzled. He immediately landed and walked through the island, scanning his surroundings as he moved towards the palace.

Ning stood outside the palace, staring towards the insides. His eyes were filled with torch-light as he did so. He had the feeling that there was a reason this palace was here.

“Eh?” Ning’s [Torch-Dragon’s Eye] suddenly discovered a body flickering about within the deepest parts of the palace.

“It’s coming.”

“It hasn’t been a thousand years yet. Why has it come again?”

“Then let’s fight. Let’s fight!”

The figures within the darkest reaches of the palace had eyes filled with frenzy.

As for Ning, still standing outside the palace, he frowned. “I wasn’t seeing things. There really are living beings inside this place.”

Whoosh. After hesitating for a moment, Ning stepped into the palace. Here at Undermoon Lake, neither coresense nor heartforce could be used to search. Thus, the only choice was for him to investigate in person! Since the wooden bridge led to this place, this eye-catching palace definitely served a specific purpose.

This was the front palace. Two corridors connected to it led deeper into the palace. Ning chose one of them. He walked through it, leading to an enormous courtyard that was filled with many pavilions.

Whoosh! The wind suddenly moved.

Ning was still walking through the corridor. His faced changed, and a sword in his hands instantly chopped backwards. Here in the palace, Ning had naturally kept his swords in his hands.

Clang! A ringing sound could be heard, followed by a figure flashing past him.

“Stay your hands!” Ning’s face changed, and he hurriedly called out, “Stop this! I’m not an enemy!”

Slash! Yet another gust of wind as yet another blurred form appeared.

“Empyrean God Roughpeak, I’m from the Three Realms as well!” Ning said hurriedly. His voice, filled with divine power, echoed outwards as he used his swords to block as he dodged.

“Eh?” The distant blur came to a halt, revealing an ashen-faced youth who was wielding a pair of bladewheels in his hands. He stared at Ning with a berserk look in his eyes. His eyes were vaguely bloodshot; clearly, he wasn’t disguising his murderous intent at all.

“Three Realms?” The ashen-faced youth snickered coldly, then growled, “Snowfiend, we’ve fought countless times by now, and you’ve also disguised yourself as an Empyrean God of the Three Realms on multiple occasions. Do you really think you’ll be able to fool me again?”

“Empyrean God Roughpeak,” Ning said hurriedly, “I really am from the Three Realms. I’m not this ‘Snowfiend’ person. Your master is Exalted Celestial Carefree of the Daoist Path, am I right?”

Ning was naturally able to recognize this person at a single glance.

The Three Realms only had so many Empyrean Gods and True Immortals to begin with, and Ning had actually spent time memorizing all of the thousands who had entered Undermoon Lake. Undermoon Lake’s world was filled with natural energy, and it also contained within it multiple types of stellar energy. Both divine power and ki could be replenished here. Although the density of the energy here couldn’t compare to that of the Three Realms, it was still more than enough to maintain life.

Thus, Empyrean God Roughpeak’s appearance hadn’t changed. His aura, however, had changed dramatically.

Roughpeak: A relaxed, carefree Empyrean God who always had a smile on his face. That’s what the report about him said. But the person Ning saw had an ashen face, bloodshot eyes, and was filled with a surging killing intent. Clearly, he had reached the point where his Dao-heart was unable to control his murderous impulses.

“Master?” The youth stared at Ning, frowning. “And who are you? I’ve never even met you.”

“I only began my training long after you entered Undermoon Lake, Empyrean God Roughpeak,” Ning said. “I am the disciple of Daofather Subhuti.”

Many people in the Three Realms now knew that Ning was Subhuti’s disciple, and so Subhuti no longer forbade Ning from telling it to others.

“Subhuti?” The youth laughed coldly, “I imagine you overheard a few things from many of the other Empyrean Gods who entered this place. Do you really think you’ll be able to fool me so easily?” But despite his words, the youth still didn’t move.

“My master resides within the Crescent world, within the Triscar Crescent Abode of Mount Innerheart,” Ning said hurriedly.

The youth frowned. Although many Empyrean Gods had indeed entered this place, it was true that few of them would have cause to discuss the Tristar Crescent Abode of Mount Innerheart.

“Your master is the Exalted Celestial Carefree. Exalted Celestial Carefree, back when you were still in the outside world, had a total of seventy-three disciples. These days, he has a total of seventy-six,” Ning said. “The eldest disciple of Exalted Celestial Carefree died during the Primordial Era. His name was True Immortal Riverloss. Exalted Celestial Carefree’s second disciple...”

Ning continued to speak, and the face of the youth quickly changed. His body actually began to tremble, and tears began to appear in his eyes.

“Ha...hahaha...” Tears flowed down the youth’s face as he laughed. “Hahaha...hahahaha...”

Ning slowly came to a halt. He stared quietly as Emphyrean God Roughpeak cried and laughed at the same time. He could sense that Roughpeak had endured many things; this wild laughter was nothing more than a way to release some of his feelings.

“What is your name, junior apprentice-brother?” The youth finally came to a halt, and he now looked towards Ning with a warm look in his eyes. Generally speaking, disciples of major powers that all belonged to the Daoist Path would sometimes refer to each other as ‘senior apprentice-brother’ or ‘junior apprentice-brother’; this was a fairly friendly way of referring to each other.

However, although Daofather Subhuti trained in both Buddhism and Daoism, he couldn’t really be considered a member of the Daoist Path. Clearly, Roughpeak felt extremely friendly towards this newcomer Emphyrean God from the Three Realms, which is why he referred to Ning as ‘junior apprentice-brother’.

“My name is Darknorth. Respectful greetings to you, senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak,” Ning said.

“Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth.” The youth smiled, the tears having vanished from his eyes.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 9: Wall Carvings**

Emphyrean God Roughpeak said hurriedly, “I really am ashamed. Just now, I actually took you to be Snowfiend and immediately attacked you! Fortunately, you are very powerful, which is why I didn’t injure you. If I was to have slain you...by the time I felt regret, it would be too late. Alas...I never would have thought that I, Roughpeak, would end up in a state where I would launch killing blows without even trying to ascertain the situation clearly.” A hint of grief flickered in his eyes.

“You cannot be blamed, senior apprentice-brother.” Ning smiled.

“But it truly is my fault. Forget it, enough of that for now.” Roughpeak frowned as he looked at Ning. “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, you should know how dangerous Undermoon Lake is. Many Emphyrean Gods have entered since the Primordial Era, but the only one to actually leave was Buddha Jueming. Why were you so foolish as to enter this place? Back then, I personally watched as Reverend Jueming ascended to become a Buddha. I was so incredibly bored that I ended up deciding to enter Undermoon Lake to try my luck. Countless years have passed since then. At first, other Emphyrean Gods would enter this place, but it has been a long, long time since any have made the attempt. Why have you...”

“I am indeed the only one to enter in ten million years. As for the reason why I entered...that’s a long and complicated story.” Ning sighed. “I came because I was forced to by circumstances outside my control. I had to come here to procure a certain treasure.”

Roughpeak nodded, then hurriedly asked, “Right, what’s the situation in the Three Realms? Did you say that my master took on new disciples?”

“The Three Realms...” Ning hesitated for a moment. “...Has already been swept into a new storm!” Ning’s voice was heavy, but he still forced the words out.

“Storm?” Roughpeak was surprised.

“One which might be even more brutal than the war which ended the Primordial Era.” Ning nodded.

“How can that be possible? So many people died in the war that ended the Primordial Era...” Roughpeak was shocked and stunned.

“That time, Mother Nuwa broke through to the Pangu level, which is why we managed to avoid disaster. This time...well, listen to me explain in detail.” Ning didn’t hold anything back from this disciple of Exalted Celestial Carefree. If they all managed to survive, they would be on the same side, and so Ning told him almost everything about the storm that had embroiled the Three Realms.

The telling of this tale took a full hour.

Roughpeak stood there in a daze. He muttered to himself, “How could this have happened? After the Seamless Gate re-entered the Three Realms, everything was peaceful. Why is it that all of a sudden...” He paused. “This time, Mother Nuwa isn’t around to keep the peace. Nobody in our Nuwa Alliance is capable of countering the abilities of the Lord of All Fiends. However, the Seamless Gate will find it difficult to counter our leaders as well. The only result would be heavy losses on both sides. In the end, how many of us will possibly survive?”

When he had been in the Three Realms, the Three Realms had been in a state of peace. But now, the storm had descended upon it.

“Either the Seamless Gate dies or we die,” Ning said calmly. “There are no other choices. Although I am weak, I can still sense my subconscious whispering to me that one of our two sides has to be wiped out.”

“Even you can sense it?” Roughpeak was surprised.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Why...why is destiny forcing a tribulation like this?” Roughpeak simply didn’t understand.

Tribulations and storms didn’t descend without a reason. The war that ended the Primordial Era, for example, was caused by two chaosworlds moving towards each other and colliding together. The Lord of the Demonheart wished to take over both worlds, but the Pangu Chaosworld resisted him. Thus, a great war erupted. In addition to that, the Lord of All Things was manipulating things in secret.

The secret workings of fate would only reveal the results. The results in this case were that one side would definitely be wiped out. Only if one side was wiped out would the other side survive.

As for the reason for the storm? That was all left up to conjecture.

The Nuwa Alliance’s guess was that it was very possible that this was all caused by the ‘king’ of the Seamless Gate. That ‘king’ had been very close to the Pangu level. He had merged himself into the Heavenly Daos, but since then he had slowly begun to awaken. Part of his consciousness was already awake. Through its partial control over the Heavenly Daos, it was providing intelligence reports to the Seamless Gate, giving them the power to fight back against the Nuwa Alliance.

This inevitably caused the Three Emperors and the leaders of Daoism and Buddhism to question if the Lord of the Demonheart had managed to escape the restrictions of the Heavenly Daos. Was he seeking to cause yet another storm?

Or was there perhaps yet another alien Outsider causing trouble from the shadows?

Or was there another, even more inscrutable reason?

It was hard to say.

The Lord of the Demonheart, who had merged himself into the Heavenly Daos, most likely knew the most...and his order had been to have the Seamless Gate assault the Nuwa Alliance!

“People on our level can’t possibly learn the real reasons why this storm descended,” Ning said. “In short...the Seamless Gate has already infiltrated the Three Realms and has begun to attack us. We can’t let ourselves just be defeated without fighting back!”

“Right.” Roughpeak nodded as well, a murderous look flashing through his eyes. “The Seamless Gate...only after Mother Nuwa left the Three Realms did the Lord of All Fiends sneak back. The only reason we let them join our Three Realms was because we didn’t want to cause unnecessary death. Who would’ve thought that...ugh. It’s been so many years, but you just can’t teach a dog not to eat shit.”

Upon learning that both sides had begun a war of annihilation, Roughpeak naturally was going to stand on the side of the Nuwa Alliance.

“However, we’re all trapped here at Undermoon Lake. There’s no point in talking endlessly about these things.” Roughpeak shook his head. He then turned his head towards the corridor and began to walk towards it. “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, follow me.”

The two advanced through the corridor. A short while later, they arrived at the innermost courtyard to this palace. It was extremely quiet, as no sounds could be heard at all. Light reflected off the accumulated snow, making every inch of it easily visible.

“All these years, I’ve been living here.” Roughpeak stepped into the courtyard.

Ning followed behind him. This courtyard was very plain and simple...but almost immediately, Ning’s gaze was drawn to the walls of the courtyard.

“What’s this?” Ning walked over, astonished. He couldn’t help but stare at the diagrams and characters engraved onto the walls.

The diagrams were of close-combat techniques, while the characters were detailed descriptions and in the language of the Three Realms.

“These have been left behind since the Primordial Era by bored, trapped, and despairing Emphyrean Gods.” Roughpeak sat down on the ground, leaning against a tree trunk. “Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, do you have any wine?”

“I do.” Ning waved his hand, producing a gourd of wine and tossing it over.

“Excellent.” Roughpeak’s eyes lit up. He caught the gourd of wine, pulled open the stopper, then raised his head and began to guzzle it down. Only after finishing a barrel’s worth all did he let out a long sigh of contentment. He then laughed loudly, “Wonderful. What a wonderful feeling. It’s been forever since I’ve

had wine. I've been trapped here for so long without seeing even the shadow of another person, and I always have to be vigilant of that Snowfiend's attacks. Life really has been worse than death here."

"Junior apprentice-brother Darknorth, don't waste your time looking at that. There's no point." Roughpeak called out to Ning upon seeing Ning stare unblinkingly at the wall carvings. "They were all left behind by the Empyrean Gods that came to this place. In terms of quality, they naturally can't compare to that of the techniques which True Gods and Daofathers pass down. These were all left behind by Empyrean Gods who knew that they were going to die here, and so they left behind a few techniques so that future arrivals would see them and know that they had once lived here."

"Ugh, you just won't listen." Roughpeak, seeing that Ning continued to stare at the wall, no longer said anything. He just raised his head and continued to drink.

To be able to drink wine was already a tremendous blessing.

As for Ning, he just stared quietly at the many carvings on the wall.

"Snowleaf, subordinate of Buddha Maitreya, leaves behind his last words."

"Swordback, subordinate of the Lord of the Everwood, leaves behind his last words."

"Windbrother, subordinate of Wargod Xingtian, leaves behind his last words."

Some of these Empyrean Gods were quite famous, while others were low-key recluses. They had all come here, to the world of Undermoon Lake. Although they had managed to survive the yaksha, they were no unable to advance a single step past this place. They knew that their chances of surviving this palace were very low, and so they had left behind some words on this wall, telling future arrivals that they had once been here!

The techniques they had left behind naturally weren't that impressive, and of course Ning found them useless.

At the Empyrean God level, one would mainly rely on self-developed techniques. Ning, for example, had developed the [Brightmoon] sword-art, and they were quite formidable in his hands. But if he was to leave the [Brightmoon] sword-art on the wall carving, other Empyrean Gods wouldn't really care to learn it, as it was a technique developed by Ning for Ning; it wouldn't be very useful for others.

Even techniques created by True Gods and Daofathers wouldn't be that useful to them, unless the techniques were truly monstrous, unearthly techniques like the [Five Treasures] sword-art.

The reason why Ning was staring at the wall carvings was because he had the feeling that every single stroke and dotted line, every single character, represented a type of entrustment! These were all left behind by powerful Empyrean Gods prior to their deaths. This sort of faith and spiritual entrustment caused Ning's soul to quiver. He could sense that none of these Empyrean Gods wished to die. All of them wished to live! But alas...they didn't have the power to do so.

"I do not wish to leave behind any carvings." At some point in time, Roughpeak had walked to Ning's side, wine gourd in hand. He said calmly, "If I die, I die. I've had enough of this life."

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 10: Snowfiend**



“What’s wrong?” Ji Ning immediately asked.

Immortals and Fiendgods would generally be able to withstand the loneliness of solitude. The prisoners of Prisonworld 17, for example, had been trapped for multiple chaos cycles with only a small number committing suicide in despair. Empyrean God Roughpeak, by comparison, had been trapped here a far shorter period of time.

“Didn’t I tell you how I mistook you for ‘Snowfiend’ earlier?” Roughpeak said.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Undermoon Lake is an exceptionally deadly place. Many years ago, I made my way past the sea yaksha and arrived here at this snowy island. When I first arrived, there were no other Empyrean Gods, and so I continued to advance,” Roughpeak said. “On the other side of this island, there is another floating wooden bridge. If you proceed past it, you’ll encounter Snowfiend.”

“I was unable to defeat Snowfiend. Fortunately, by relying on my agility techniques, I managed to escape and flee back to this snowy island,” Roughpeak said. “Snowfiend pursued me all the way back to this location, but once I fled into the island itself, Snowfiend immediately halted the pursuit.”

“Each time I fought against Snowfiend, I was unable to win. Thus, I have no choice but to remain here on this island.”

“I thought that I would be safe here, but I didn’t expect that after being here for a thousand years, one of Snowfiend’s clones actually attacked the island.” Roughpeak shook his head and sighed. “Every since that day, roughly every thousand years, a clone of Snowfiend would come to the island to attack me. Each time, its power is a little bit greater than it was before. After a million years, the clones will be close to its true body in power.”

Ning asked, puzzled, “Once every thousand years, with a gradual increase in power...is he doing this just to temper you, senior apprentice-brother?”

“This is indeed a form of tempering.” Roughpeak nodded. “At first, the Snowfiend clones were fairly weak, and I was completely capable of withstanding them. After a million years, my agility techniques reached an extremely formidable level; even the clone that was comparable to Snowfiend at full power is unable to kill me.”

“He’s not able to kill me, but I’m not able to go past him either.”

“And so, I’ve been trapped here on this island the entire time. Over the course of many years, other Empyrean Gods have come to this island. Some of them died to Snowfiend, while others made it to the next island. Some were like me, trapped here for long periods of time...but because the Snowfiend clones grew increasingly powerful, they were unable to keep up and ended up dying.”

“I’m the only one left!”

Empyrean God Roughpeak shook his head and laughed. “In terms of power, many of them were actually my equal...but my forte lies in agility. Thanks to Snowfiend’s pressure, I’ve reached a level that I would never have dared imagined I would reach.”

“But what of it? Snowfiend continues to disturb me time and time again. He uses illusions, ambushes, assassination attempts...he continues to try to kill me.” Roughpeak let out a sigh. “I’m here, all by myself, and I’m unable to improve any further at all. I’m also unable to make it past Snowfiend...and I have to be wary of his attacks.”

“Even if I’m not killed, I’ll eventually suffer a mental collapse,” Roughpeak said.

Ning nodded slowly.

“Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak,” Ning said solemnly, “I feel that Undermoon Lake is quite a strange place. Based on what I’ve seen, it should be a world that was created by an ancient major power. After we enter, we will be beset by a number of trials. If we are unable to endure the trials, we will die. If we can endure them, we will be allowed to proceed, eventually acquiring treasures and even being allowed to leave.”

“Is it possible that the major power who created Undermoon Lake did so in order to help cultivate juniors, giving us treasures then letting us leave?” Ning was puzzled.

“He’s not as nice as you think.” Roughpeak shook his head. “The major power who created Undermoon Lake definitely had schemes of his own.”

“Agreed. Nobody is as selfless as that.” Ning agreed as well.

To help train Empyrean Gods, producing top-tier ones that would be gifted with treasures and allowed to leave...that was an act of utter selflessness. Ning didn’t think that anybody would be that selfless. There had to be a reason behind it all!

“Can it be that Buddha Jueming has never said anything at all, despite so many years having passed?” Roughpeak asked.

“Nothing.” Ning shook his head. “I asked my master, and my master also told me that Buddha Jueming sealed his lips, saying nothing about this place. It doesn’t matter who asks. Even Lord Tathagata the Buddha was unable to convince Buddha Jueming to divulge any information about Undermoon Lake.”

Roughpeak frowned. “How odd. Why is Buddha Jueming so completely closemouthed about this place?”

Buddha Jueming refused to speak, but he also refused to prevent other Empyrean Gods from entering this place. Still...no one could force him to speak.

“Snowfiend’s continuously attempted to kill me. In fact, he’s even chatted with me several times. That’s why I’ve learned that there is only one method of surviving Undermoon Lake and leaving with treasures,” Roughpeak said.

Ning immediately listened carefully.

“The method is...to continuously advance through the floating bridges, defeating all guardians. The journey will see you go past a total of five islands. Once you reach the fifth island, you’ll be able to depart in peace. However, to date only Buddha Jueming has succeeded,” Roughpeak said.

“Five islands?” Ning was stunned.

The snow-covered island the two of them were on was merely the very first island. To reach the fifth island would be no easy feat.

“Upon reaching the fifth island, you’d most likely learn what the creator of Undermoon Lake has been scheming,” Roughpeak said.

“Right.” Ning nodded.

In truth, Ning didn’t really care as to what that ancient major power was scheming. What he cared about was Iceheart Pith and Iceheart Leaf.

“Junior apprentice-brother, I’ve battled against Snowfiend for countless years, and I’ve also chatted with him many times.” Roughpeak looked at Ning. “He told me that there’s one other way to survive and leave.”

“Oh?” Ning’s eyes lit up.

“To hide within an extremely powerful Emyrean God’s magic treasure.” Roughpeak continued, “For example...if someone felt tremendous faith in Buddha Jueming, they could’ve chosen to secrete themselves in his treasures, assuming he was willing to let them do so. Upon him successfully leaving the place, they would be able to leave along his side.”

“However, there’s one bad part about hiding; you won’t be able to acquire any treasures at all. In addition, your own life will no longer be yours to control.” Roughpeak continued, “For example, if Buddha Jueming was to die, then the Emyrean Gods hiding within his treasures would all die as well. After all, they would all emerge upon his death, and anyone capable of killing Buddha Jueming would also be capable of killing them.”

Ning nodded.

“Right now, I’m trying to decide...if I should follow you.” Roughpeak looked towards Ning.

Ning was startled. “Follow me?”

“Follow you. I’ll go wherever you go, as far as you go. If you manage to escape, I will as well. However, I feel that your chances of making it out alive are quite low.” Roughpeak chuckled. “Still, I want to at least take a look at the other islands. Even making it to just the second island would be enough. I’ve been here all by myself for so long...I’ve had enough of it.”

“Senior apprentice-brother, if you truly were to trust me in such a way, I would definitely do my utmost,” Ning said.

“But I’m worried about something...” Roughpeak said.

“What’s that?”

“I’m worried about whether you are strong enough to go past Snowfiend,” Roughpeak laughed. “If you fail and die, I’ll probably be unable to escape as I’ll be trapped in your treasures. I’ll end up being killed by Snowfiend. If that happens, I won’t be able to see the next island. I’ve been quite curious as to what the rest of the five islands are like, and how terrifying the upcoming dangers are, for so many Emyrean Gods to have failed here.”

Ning hesitated momentarily. "I...can't make any promises."

"I don't need any promises. Follow me." Roughpeak led Ning forward.

The snowy island was quite large, but the two of them moved with incredible speed. Soon, they arrived at the other end of the island, where they saw a floating wooden bridge.

"Eh?" Ning took a good look. This wooden bridge stretched off into the distant horizon, but the endless sea to each side of it was completely frozen.

Countless petals of snow continued to fall down from the skies.

"All you need to do is step on the wooden bridge." Roughpeak gestured towards the bridge. "Once you step onto it, Snowfiend will sense it. There's no need for you to even advance; you can just wait here for him. A short while later, Snowfiend will arrive! The first 'Snowfiend' you encounter will merely be a clone. Fight it. If you can kill it with just a single blow, I'll take the gamble and hide inside your treasures, following you forward."

"Junior apprentice-brother." Roughpeak bowed deeply towards Ning.

"Senior apprentice-brother, don't act like this!" Ning hurriedly moved to stop the bow.

"I'm asking you to help me advance, but I'm first insisting on testing out your power. I honestly am ashamed of my actions," Roughpeak said.

"This is just normal behavior," Ning said hurriedly. "If I can't even dispose of one of Snowfiend's clones, for you to follow me would be suicidal."

Roughpeak no longer said anything else to Ning. He just stared at the vast sea, at the distant horizons. He murmured softly to himself, "I really wonder what the next island is like. I wonder if there are any other surviving Empyrean Gods on that island. I really want to know what's there. Once I see it...even if I die, I'd be happy."

As for Ning, he moved forward, stepping onto the wooden bridge.

Whoosh! As soon as he stepped onto the wooden bridge, the amount of snow falling from the heavens grew noticeably greater.

A pair of blood-red swords appeared in Ning's hands as he began to wait quietly.

.....

Far away in the distant skies, a large amount of snow began to rapidly condense, transforming into a white-furred ape. The ape held a snow-white staff in his hands, and he stood there in midair, his gaze passing through the endless snowfall and falling upon the distant Ji Ning and Roughpeak.

"Yet another youngster has arrived." The ape-like Snowfiend murmured softly to himself, "Judging from their words...that kid Roughpeak is no longer able to endure the solitude of being trapped here for so many words. He plans to take a chance on following the white-robed kid?"

“It’s rare for someone to accompany for so long. If it wasn’t for Master’s orders, I’d be fine with letting you leave. But alas...although Master has left, his orders remain. I must follow them.” The simian Snowfiend shook his head.

Whoosh. Snowfiend disappeared.

.....

Ning’s face changed slightly as he looked towards the front. A large amount of snow had begun to rapidly condense in front of him.

“Be careful, junior apprentice-brother. Snowfiend’s clone has arrived,” Roughpeak warned him from behind.

Ning just watched calmly. As the snow began to condense, a large amount of natural energy began to condense as well. Soon, a white-furred ape wielding a snow-white staff appeared before him. The ape’s eyes were filled with an innate killing intent; it was born for the sole purpose of slaughter.

“Heh heh heh. That kid Roughpeak has quite the agility technique; he’s been able to slip through my hands time and time again. However, nearly a thousand other Emphyrean Gods have died by my hands.” The simian Snowfiend stared at Ning, seeming to weigh Ning with his eyes as a predator would its prey.

Ning didn’t dare to be too reckless. All of the Emphyrean Gods capable of making it past the sea yaksha were extraordinary figures, but a thousand of them still ended up dying by Snowfiend’s hands. Although Ning had sparred for only a brief moment with Roughpeak, he could still tell that in terms of agility, he was far from being Roughpeak’s match.

“Don’t disappoint me.” The ape-like Snowfiend let out a strange, chortling laugh that reverberated in the skies, then charged straight towards Ning with a ‘swoosh’, both hands clutched onto that snow-white staff.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 11: Taiji-force**

As the staff came smashing down, countless snowflakes swirled around it, causing its power to increase explosively!

Ji Ning just stood there quietly as Snowfiend’s blow descended towards him.

Emphyrean God Roughpeak had said it himself; this was merely one of Snowfiend’s clones. If Ning could destroy this clone in one blow, Roughpeak would follow him. In his heart, Ning wished to help out this ‘senior apprentice-brother’ of his. His wife’s master, Patriarch Lu Dongbin, could actually be considered a fellow disciple of Roughpeak’s.

Lu Dongbin had once apprenticed himself to two of the major powers of the Daoist Path. One was Daoist Three Purities; the other was Exalted Celestial Carefree.

For the sake of his connection to Lu Dongbin alone, Ning would’ve been willing to give Roughpeak a hand. But of course, Roughpeak’s status was far lower than Lu Dongbin’s. Even as far back as the Primordial Era, Lu Dongbin was viewed as one of the most peerless of geniuses. But alas, his ambitions in dual-cultivating in Buddhism and Taoism were too great. It wasn’t until the Three Realms was swept

into this current storm that he was finally able to make his breakthrough, but upon doing so he instantly became a top-tier Daofather.

Whoosh. The staff came smashing downwards.

Swish! Ning's sword-light flashed. As soon as he used his sword, he executed the [Starseizing Hand], causing his sword to be filled with tremendous power. "This Snowfiend clone is far too slow." The strange, unfathomable sword-light flashed, and it was about to land against Snowfiend, except...Snowfiend's longstaff suddenly spun around, moving to block Ning's sword.

"Eh?" Ning's face changed slightly, and he sent the longsword forward in a stabbing motion, following the momentum of the blow.

Stab! The tip of the sword pierced straight through the skull of Snowfiend's clone.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Blood Drop stance.

Whoosh. Snowfiend's clone completely dispersed, transforming back into the snow that filled the skies. At the same time, Snowfiend's voice echoed forth throughout the region. "If that's all the power you have...you aren't even close to being strong enough to pass. Haha...I'll be waiting for you on the path ahead."

Empyrean God Roughpeak walked to Ning. "What do you think?"

"I underestimated him," Ning said. "His clone only had an ordinary amount of power and speed; I thought I'd be able to easily kill him with one blow of my sword. Who would've thought that his staff-techniques would be so formidable? I had to spend a little bit of effort on him after all."

Roughpeak nodded. "The clones of the sea yaksha that were all very weak; they could be effortlessly killed. But the clones of Snowfiend are far harder to deal with. As for his true form, it's even more powerful. His greatest strength is that he has almost no weaknesses at all. Or perhaps he does have weaknesses...but I wasn't able to discover any."

"Almost no weaknesses?" Ning frowned.

"Don't worry. You don't have to actually defeat him; so long as you have reached a certain level of power, he'll voluntarily withdraw and let you pass." Roughpeak chuckled, "Just now, you were able to kill Snowfiend's clone in one exchange, and your sword-art appeared quite impressive. I'll follow you."

Ning nodded.

In truth, strictly speaking Ning didn't really just use a single technique; he had first used the 'Shadowless' stance, then transformed it into the 'Blood Drop' stance. The reason why Roughpeak described it all as being 'one exchange' was because he truly could no longer endure the loneliness of being trapped in this place.

"Let's go." Ning waved his hand. Roughpeak didn't resist, allowing himself to be drawn into Ning's Immortal estate.

Ning himself was carrying a Pure Yang Immortal estate that held his other body within it. But of course, as the master of the estate, Ning was able to separate it into many different 'sections'. For now, he

didn't wish to let Roughpeak know of his second body's existence. There were very few in the Three Realms who knew this secret.

Whoosh.

Ning boarded the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, then continued to advance along the path set by the wooden bridge.

Snowflakes drifted downwards, seeming to cover the entire world.

"What a beautiful scene." Ning smiled.

He continuously advanced. After two full hours, the Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle came to a sudden halt, and Ning's face changed slightly as he stared up ahead. Far off in the distance, a golden-furred ape was seated atop the bridge. In front of the golden-furred ape was placed a long staff that emanated a tremendous aura of power as well. Clearly, this was an extremely formidable treasure. At present, the golden-furred ape was seated in the lotus position, resting his jaw against his arms, waiting for Ning in an extremely bored-looking manner.

"You finally came. I waited forever for you." The golden-furred ape rose to his feet, stretching slightly. "That flying treasure of yours is far too slow."

With but a thought, Ning dismissed his Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle, landing atop the wooden bridge. A pair of blood-red swords in his hands, he stared at the distant form of Snowfiend. "Although Snowfiend's true aura is far more powerful than his clone's aura, it feels as though his aura isn't even as strong as the aura of the true body of the sea yaksha."

"Heh heh heh...what's wrong? Are you wondering why my aura seems fairly weak?" Snowfiend laughed mockingly. "Don't compare that sea yaksha to me; that idiot isn't even able to fully control all of his power. All he has is brute force. I, however, am in complete control of every shred of my power. Once I withdraw my aura, I can change my aura, change my appearance, change everything."

"Transform!"

Snowfiend's appearance suddenly transformed into that of Roughpeak's.

"Again!" This time he transformed into Ning. The aura was completely identical.

Ning, seeing this, was quite startled. This was equivalent to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]!

"Thus, kid...you should understand that true experts can't be judged based on their looks," Snowfiend said with a laugh. "The more powerful one is, the more they will generally choose to restrain their auras. In fact, they might appear like an ordinary person, giving off no aura of danger at all."

Ning couldn't help but nod.

It was true. For example, when he had encountered Old Man Yuan, Old Man Yuan had transformed himself into an ordinary-looking old gardener. Ning truly had thought him to be nothing more than an ordinary mortal, and he truly had sensed no aura around him at all.

"Come. Let's see what you've got. Show me what you have," Snowfiend called out.

“Come out.” A fierce light flashed through Ning’s eyes, and a total of 729 Pure Yang swords appeared around him, hovering in the air. A large amount of Immortal energy had been pumped into them, and the energy was cycled through them, transforming into an incomparably sharp jade sword that materialized in front of Ning.

“Oh, it seems you have some skill after all.” Snowfiend hefted his golden staff, chortling merrily.

Ning’s eyelids twitched.

Swish!

The jade sword instantly pierced through the skies, leaving behind a streak of light as it chopped towards Snowfiend in an unfathomable, unpredictable manner.

Boom! Snowfiend gently flicked out his golden staff, smashing it against the jade sword. The jade sword instantly shattered.

“Eh?” Ning’s face changed. “Go, go, go!” One jade sword after another materialized and soared off.

Snowfiend just lazily advanced, his golden staff casually trembling with each blow. The staff transformed into a layer of concentric circles, effortlessly smashing apart each seemingly ‘unfathomable’ jade sword. Boom! Boom! Boom! All three were broken apart in succession.

“Is this the only technique you know?!” Snowfiend stared wide-eyed, seemingly befuddled. “Then this is going to be really boring.”

After speaking, Snowfiend’s golden staff suddenly flew into the air, transforming into a golden streak of light.

“My ‘Shadowless’ stance is inscrutable and mysterious, and it was backed by the power of the ninth-stage [Greater Thousand Swords Formation]. And yet, he was able to effortlessly deflect it. It seems I’ll have to use heartforce.” Ning didn’t expect that he would immediately be forced to use heartforce. Yet another jade sword appeared in front of him, and yet another streak of light flashed out, chopping towards Snowfiend.

Snowfiend leapt forward, and the jade sword stabbed through the air.

The two collided.

“Die!” Ning willed it, and the heartforce within the jade sword instantly burst forth, causing the speed and power of the jade sword to increase dramatically, making it even faster and more unpredictable as it chopped towards Snowfiend.

“Eh?” For the first time, Snowfiend revealed a solemn look on his face. Prior to this, he had been holding the staff with one hand, but now he instantly switched to a two-handed grip.

Whoosh! The staff trembled, causing circles to instantly appear in the skies. Two calm streams of black energy and white energy appeared on the surface of the staff.

Boom!



The staff once more smashed against Ning's jade sword...and despite adding fourth-stage heartforce to the mix, the sword was still completely shattered.

"Interesting." Snowfiend's eyes lit up. "Ahahaha, let's do it again! Agai!"

Snowfiend's body bounded forward at high speed. As he ran forward, his movements became strange and unfathomable. He occasionally moved left and occasionally moved right, advancing nonstop in a zig-zag pattern.

Clearly, Snowfiend was taking things seriously now.

"He was able to stop even fourth-stage heartforce?" Ning felt a hint of surprise. Every time he applied heartforce, he used up a good amount of his energy. He would only be able to unleash a total of ten such swords.

"Go, go, go!" Ning gritted his teeth. Once more, he shot out three jade swords. This time, only one of them was filled with fourth-stage heartforce as he mixed 'real' attacks with 'fake' attacks.

"Ahahaha..." Snowfiend roared with laughter.

Boom! Boom! Boom!!!

Three consecutive explosions. Although one of the jade swords suddenly increased dramatically in power, it was still completely smashed apart.

"What?!" Ning could instantly tell that this would be tough.

By now, Snowfiend had already closed in on Ning. With no time for anything else, Ning immediately put away his Pure Yang swords while manifesting his three-headed, six-armed form. Six swords in his hands, he charged forward to meet Snowfiend in combat.

Clang!!!

The staff was filled with tremendous power. As soon as their attacks clashed, Ning was knocked flying backwards.

"What tremendous strength." Ning flew backwards, his back smashing directly against the frozen sea. With a boom, the frozen sea trembled from the collision, but it remained completely undamaged. As for Ning, he rolled backwards a considerable distance before once more flying forward.

"If I don't use the [Starseizing Hand], I probably can't compete against him in raw strength." Ning could feel a headache coming.

The [Starseizing Hand] used up divine power at a tremendous rate. [Three Heads, Six Arms] allowed him to increase his power significantly; given that he had six swords against the enemy's single golden staff, he thought that he would at least be able to give the ape a run for his money, perhaps even winning. Who would've thought that he would be smashed backwards in their first exchange?

"Although he's not as strong as the true form of the sea yaksha, he's still much stronger than me. His staff-technique is also unfathomably profound, and his movement techniques are shockingly brilliant as well. He truly is virtually flawless. Senior apprentice-brother Roughpeak was actually able to escape

Snowfiend through his evasion techniques...that's quite impressive." Only now did Ning truly understand how impressive Empyrean God Roughpeak's evasive techniques were.

"I have to make use of my advantages."

Ning had no choice but to engage in a bit of scheming now.

"Haha!" Snowfiend roared with laughter, charging forward onto the floating bridge and ramming straight towards Ning, who was still standing atop the frozen sea.

Ning continued to wield six swords in his three-headed, six-armed form. Once Snowfiend reached him, he moved.

Ning completely ignored the oncoming blow, sending all six of his swords smashing downwards towards Snowfiend's body. You want to hit me? Hit all you like. Thanks to my [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], I can completely ignore your attacks. As long as my swords can chop you to death, I'll win.

For the sake of success, Ning even used the [Starseizing Hand], allowing all six of his arms to explode with terrifying power.

"Ahahaha..."

The staff in Snowfiend's hands suddenly twisted about, and the two streams of black energy and white energy once more appeared, forming an enormous vortex that trapped all six of Ning's swords. And then, Snowfiend's staff came smashing viciously towards Ning!

BOOM! The staff smashed away the six swords, then smashed down upon Ning's body. Ning was once more knocked flying backwards, and he once more struck the frozen sea. This time, with a series of shattering sounds, a large number of cracks appeared on the icy surface.

### **The Desolate Era**

#### **Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 12: Swordforce, Stage Four**

"How can he be so fast? My sword-arts are already quite fast, and I used six swords to launch six simultaneous attacks...but he was able to block them all." After slamming into the frozen sea, Ji Ning quickly flew back into the air, his eyes filled with disbelief. Just now, he had used the [Starseizing Hand] with all six of his arms, but he was still easily smashed away by his foe.

The difference in power between the two made Ning feel quite miserable.

"Heartforce. In the end, it's still an ephemeral, invisible form of energy."

"In close combat, strength is just one aspect; combat techniques matters even more." Ning sighed in his heart. He was able to see long ago that this Snowfiend was in control of taiji-force, and his battle-techniques were also incomparably profound. Ning's own swordforce had merely reached the third stage; clearly, his [Brightmoon] sword-art, in terms of technique, was completely outmatched by his enemy's staff-arts.

The difference in combat skill was simply too great. Even with three heads and six arms, Ning was still at a complete disadvantage.

“Ahahaha, come, come, come! Again!” Snowfiend was growing excited, and he twirled the golden staff in his hands, sending it howling forth once more.

As for Ning, he charged forward as well, once more entering the fray.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The two battled wildly over the frozen sea. Every so often, Ning would be bashed backwards, but thanks to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] he was able to continue exchanging blows with his foe. He had to keep the [Starseizing Hand] maintained the entire time, as otherwise his swords would instantly be knocked flying upon contact with the enemy. The difference in raw strength was simply too great; only by using the [Starseizing Hand] was he able to maintain parity.

Every so often, Ning would let his heartforce explode forth as well! This would cause Snowfiend’s body to suffer some wounds as well, but Snowfiend’s body was capable of transforming into countless flakes of snow, then reforming; those light wounds were completely useless.

“Interesting. You are actually capable of suddenly exploding forth with great power in a way which even I cannot detect. Is this the legendary, invisible, formless power of heartforce?” Snowfiend continued his attacks while chatting with Ning, who just gritted his teeth and fought back.

This was the first time that he had found himself completely outclassed by someone who was on his own level of power. In strength, in agility, in technique...he was at a disadvantage in every single aspect.

“Faster. Faster!”

“The [Five Treasures] manual was correct when it said that upon reaching an unstoppable level of speed, one’s attacks will become completely unstoppable.”

“When the Golden Crow ‘Emperor of Monsters’ reached maximum speed, none of the major powers of the Primordial Era were able to do anything to him; in the end, Houyi had to use a special arrow to slay him. If I can make my sword fast enough, he’ll be unable to stop me!” Ning attacked frantically, completely ignore defense and focusing solely on offense. The two stances he used were ‘Shadowless’ and ‘Blood Drop’.

Although there were three attacking stances in the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Heavenbreaker primarily relied on crushing with weight and power. The difference in strength between Ning and Snowfiend was simply too great; Snowfiend’s own primary skill revolved around using overwhelming power in each staff-smash! For Ning to use the Heavenbreaker stance to fight head-on would be a foolish choice; he would be using his weakness to combat the enemy’s strength. He would lose disastrously if he did this.

Shadowless stance. Blood Drop stance.

His attacks were occasionally drifting and bizarre, occasionally rapid and savage. With three heads and six arms, he wildly launched attacks, attacks, and even more attacks!

Faster, faster, faster!

Snowfiend himself continued to twirl that golden staff, the two streams of black and white energy flowing around it in a series of circles that completely shut down all of Ning’s attacks.

“I’m still not fast enough.”

Ning’s six swords emanated a natural, blurry golden light. This light was truly breathtaking and dominating, but no matter how valiantly and savagely Ning fought his attacks continued to be dispersed by the seemingly-ordinary staff techniques.

After fighting for a long period of time, Ning’s divine power was close to being depleted.

“It seems you still aren’t good enough.” Snowfiend chuckled to himself, his staff completely suppressing Ning.

As for Ning, he continued to launch attacks at a frenetic pace. Suddenly...one of the six swords exploded forth with shocking amounts of power.

“Heartforce yet again?” Snowfiend didn’t feel any concern at all. Although this sword-strike of Ning’s was even stranger and more unfathomable than before, and although his sword had managed to draw close to Snowfiend’s body due to the sudden increase in power, Snowfiend was still able to clip the side of Ning’s sword with his staff, knocking it aside. Ning was only able to leave a slash on Snowfiend’s flank.

However, right at this moment, one of Ning’s hands suddenly released a sword. The hand suddenly increased in size as it clawed towards Snowfiend.

This attack was simply too sudden. The heartforce-filled sword had been nothing more than a decoy; Ning’s true goal was to ensure that this hand of his would be able to close in on the enemy! In the same instant that the sword’s attack ‘failed’, Ning released the sword and let his hand become his true weapon.

“Eh?” Shocked, Snowfiend hurriedly moved backwards. His movement techniques were quite marvelous as well, and Ning’s clawing attack was only able to latch onto one of Snowfiend’s arms.

“Sever!” Snowfiend let out an uncaring chortle. He was formed from snow, and his body could manifest or dissipate as he willed it. The loss of an arm was nothing to him.

One of his arms had been seized by Ning, but the other sword continued to wield the long staff and battle against Ning’s other five swords.

**BOOM!**

A bloody sword-tip suddenly pierced out of Snowfiend’s forehead.

Snowfiend revealed a look of shock. He...he had actually been stabbed in the head?

Whoosh.

Moments later, Snowfiend’s body completely dissipated, reforming off to the side a few moments later. He stared in disbelief at the direction from which he had been attacked; a second Ji Ning was standing there!

“Two?” Snowfiend stared at the two white-robed Ji Nings.

“Just now, when you released your sword and grabbed me, it was all for the sake of giving your other clone a chance?” Snowfiend looked at Ning.

“Yes.” Ning nodded. “You are indeed strong enough to outmatch me; I’m not your equal at all. Thus, I had to play a small trick on you.”

“First, you filled your sword with heartforce, then you released the sword to attack me with your hand. That hand of yours is no weaker than your sword,” Snowfiend said.

“Correct. To be precise, my hand is actually a bit more powerful,” Ning said.

Ning’s [Starseizing Hand] had made his hands comparable to supreme Protocosmic spirit-treasures. Although they weren’t sword-shaped, they were still comparable in might to high-grade Protocosmic swords. Naturally, his hands would be a bit more powerful than the swords he was using.

“Although my palms are a bit more powerful, and although my attack came quite suddenly, your agility techniques are simply too impressive; I was only able to grab onto your arm.” Ning shook his head.

“You released the sword so that you could attack with your hand, but even if the hand succeeded, you would still have the option of using your second body, which is just as strong as your first body.” Snowfiend shook his head. “I was tied down by you for a moment; that sudden attack caught me offguard, rendering me unable to dodge. I am thoroughly convinced by my defeat.”

“I wasn’t strong enough, so I had no choice but to use trickery,” Ning said.

If he had started the battle with two clones, the ape would’ve been prepared for it. Given how overwhelmingly powerful Snowfiend was, if that happened the outcome could be summarized in one word: LOSE.

Thus, Ning’s second clone would only appear at a critical moment, unleashing a sudden attack that would gain him victory.

“It was because you have other clones.” Snowfiend shook his head. “You actually have two true bodies, and both are Empyrean God bodies. It seems that you must’ve trained in some sort of special divine ability. Generally speaking, this sort of divine ability should allow you to create quite a few clones, correct?”

Ning chuckled. Indeed; [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods] allowed for a total of eighteen clones.

“You win.” Snowfiend hefted the golden staff onto his shoulders, then turned and left. Snow fluttered around him, and he quickly disappeared into the snow.

Ning let out a sigh of relief. “Good heavens.” Ning felt a spike of fear for what had almost happened.

“Although I knew that Snowfiend had to be powerful...he was way too powerful! I threw everything I had at him, and my first clone used up almost all of its divine power and heartforce. If my final ploy had failed, my only option would’ve been to try and flee back to the island.”

The reason why Ning had battled ineffectively for so long as to make the ape ‘accustomed’ to him. Everything lay in that final attack.

First the sword, then the hand, then the second clone! If he failed, he would’ve fled back to the island. Just like Roughpeak, he would train for a few more years before making any further attempts.

“Success! Finally, I succeeded.”

Although Ning celebrated his victory, he still felt a sense of pressure. This journey involved a total of five islands; his defeat of Snowfiend only allowed him access to the second island. This battle, however, had already forced him to reveal his trump card and use all the tricks he had available. Would he be able to overcome the upcoming challenges?

Whoosh.

The Ruyi Soulsnake Shuttle followed the floating wooden bridge, rapidly advancing towards the horizon.

Now, Ning began to think back to the previous battle and carefully analyze it.

After flying for half a day, another island appeared before Ning. This island had a massive volcano in the center of it. Boom! Boom! Boom! The volcano constantly belched forth lava and ash, sending them flying into the skies and turning the entire island red.

“A volcano island?” Ning no longer pondered his sword-arts. Instead, he rapidly flew forward and landed atop the volcano island.

This was the second of the five islands.

“Eh?”

At the end of the wooden bridge, Ning sat a giant, vertical stone stele, with the stone stele covered by an enormous diagram of a bellowing ape. This ape looked rather similar to Snowfiend, and he was roaring at the heavens.

As soon as Ning saw it, his mind was drawn into the diagram’s depths.

He saw the illusion of an ape, twirling a longstaff in its hands as it trained in a staff technique. The ape started with the simplest techniques, then proceeded to the advanced ones, his staffwork growing increasingly marvelous. A short while ago, Ning had battled against Snowfiend for a long period of time. Now that he was able to carefully see each of the illusory ape’s separate techniques in detail, he instantly felt enlightened regarding his previous experiences. Only after a long period of time did the display of techniques come to an end.

“Eh?” Ning’s consciousness returned to his body.

“What a marvelous staff technique. A pity that my path is the Dao of the Sword.” But suddenly, Ning’s entire body turned stiff as he just stood there blankly.

He had been trapped at a bottleneck in the [Five Treasures] for some time now. Upon viewing that complete staff technique, it was as though a ray of sunlight had suddenly pierced through a covering of dark stormclouds, illuminating a world that had previously been cast in shadow.

Swordforce, stage one – Silver Moon.

Swordforce, stage two – Dazzling Sun.

Swordforce, stage three – Imperial Ruler.

Swordforce, stage four – Sword Heart.

“Sword Heart...” Ning murmured to himself, then flicked out with his finger in a slow arc. A black streak of sword-light appeared, swirling around it.

When he had created the very first stance of the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Ning had already reached the third stage of swordforce. Nearly a century had passed, and over the course of this period of time Ning had completed the [Brightmoon] sword-art, battled against many Empyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals in the prisonworld, and even sparred against True Gods and True Immortals there. However, he had been unable to make that final breakthrough. Only after sparring against Snowfiend and after his consciousness was drawn into the stone stele did he finally break through the last bottleneck and reach the fourth stage of swordforce.