

Desolate 651

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 23: A Hundred Years

Demon Icepass was unfathomably long...and with each step Ji Ning took, an unbelievable number of demons fell before him.

At every moment in time, Ning was striking out with his swords using his full power. He would only succeed if he killed enough demons within the allotted timespan. Empyrean God Feiyou had managed to battle for a hundred years, but he wasn't able to kill enough of the demons. Now that the Three Realms had been embroiled in war, it was hard to say when the Endwar would begin. Thus, Ning had to move quickly! Experiencing a hundred-year battle once was enough; he didn't want to fail and have to try a second time or a third time!

In addition, Ning didn't dare to slacken off for even an instant. Every single one of these countless demons had the power of an Empyrean God. Fortunately, they didn't use any formations, and so at any given moment Ning only had to deal with the dozens of demons closest to him.

Time slowly flowed on. In the blink of an eye, nearly a hundred years of frenzied battling had gone past.

Within a gorge that had been completely frozen solid by ice, a white-robed youth was battling frenetically with a pair of twin swords in his hands. His sword-light flickered around as fast and unpredictably as lightning.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Sword-light flashed, and a demon was cleft in twain from the waist.

Sword-light stabbed forward, and a demon's head instantly exploded.

Sword-light curved outwards, causing three nearby demons to collapse.

"His sword-arts are becoming increasingly fast. Of all the Empyrean Gods I've witnessed since the creation of Undermoon Lake, his sword is the fastest." The demon king stood atop one of the two icy canyon walls above the gorge. He stared downwards at the thronging, ant-like horde of demons that were surrounding and attacking Ning.

This sort of battle had already gone on for a century.

"Right. When he first entered the icepass, his sword wasn't this quick." The Purgatory God, body wreathed in flames, spoke out. "He's advancing almost nonstop, and his sword-arts are becoming increasingly powerful. If I were to fight him again, I would probably be effortlessly defeated."

"His sword truly is fast. How did it become so fast? From what I can tell, it must have reached the speed of light, right?" The hideous sea yaksha spoke out as well.

"Yes, very nearly. Even if it isn't at lightspeed, it's not too far from it." Snowfiend agreed.

The guardians of Undermoon Lake spent most of their time together, albeit the Purgatory God, Snowfiend, and the sea yaksha merely kept clones of themselves here at Demon Icepass. They were all quite curious about Ning, and so they naturally wanted to watch him battle through Demon Icepass.”

“His sword’s speed is very close to the limit set by the Heavenly Daos.” The demon king nodded. “My guess is that he must have learned a particularly powerful sword-art. Otherwise, there’s no way he would be able to advance in such a fashion without embarking on any wrong paths of cultivation at all. Normal Empyrean Gods, no matter how powerful they are and no matter what weapons they wield, are quite far from the limits of the Heavenly Daos.”

“Agreed.” Snowfiend, the Purgatory God, and the sea yaksha all nodded in agreement.

The [Golden Sunstreak] and the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] had both reached the limits of the Heavenly Daos, allowing Ning to move 300,000 kilometers in an instant! Normally, even major powers were much slower than this.

However, experts were naturally capable of wielding weapons much more quickly than they moved. Generally speaking, their goal was to do their best to close in on the limits of the Heavenly Daos!

Ning’s sword speed, however, had already come very close to those limits!

But of course...it was also possible to go faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos! Those who mastered the [Five Treasures], for example, would be able to strike with their swords at a speed that was faster than the speed of light. The missing deity Houyi, as well; his arrows were the fastest in the Three Realms, capable of killing that Golden Crow ‘Emperor of Monsters’.

“It’s about time.” The demon king nodded, then shouted loudly, “Withdraw!”

His shout echoed within the frozen gorge. All of the demons heard it, and with a series of whooshing sounds, they all withdrew in unison like the tides. They all parted in two directions, entering the frozen mountain walls.

“Eh?” Ning was a bit surprised. They withdrew?

He had been battling for a hundred years. This was the first time the demons had withdrawn, and he wasn’t quite ready for it.

Whoosh. A figure flew down from the skies. It was the demon king, that golden gourd still on his waist. The demon king landed on the floating wooden bridge. He shook his head, the two enormous curved horns shaking as well.

“Demon king.” Ning looked at the demon king.

“The century has concluded.” The demon king rested his long black staff over his shoulders and said lazily, “You’ve really killed quite a few demons.”

“Am I permitted to pass through Demon Icepass? Can I go to the next island?” Ning asked.

The demon king looked at Ning. Chortling, he said, “Although I really would like to play with you a bit longer...you really have killed quite a few demons. Your sword is too fast.”

Ning blinked, then laughed.

“You may pass through Demon Icepass and reach the fourth island; Kilostar Island,” the demon king said. “But before you do so, I’ll lead you to a place to choose a treasure.”

Ning nodded. Upon reaching the third, fourth, and fifth islands, there would be a chance to choose a treasure.

“And those Empyrean Gods you are carrying with you; since they are going to give up, have them hand their treasures over to me,” the demon king said calmly. “Empyrean Gods who give up are not qualified to obtain any treasures.”

“Alright.” Ning nodded. He knew this all along, and Feiyou, Oddwitch, and the others had long ago handed their treasures over to Ning, letting him hand it over on their behalf.

A day later.

Kilostar Island was also divided into two islands, a small island and a larger island. The small island was the place where the treasures were placed, while the larger island was the place where the Empyrean Gods lived.

“Go ahead. Your talent and your sword-art are both quite impressive; the only thing standing between you and freedom is the final challenge.” The demon king smiled as he looked at Ning. “It’s been countless years, but Jueming was the only one to leave. I hope you will become the second.”

Ning nodded, then turned and walked onto the floating wooden bridge towards the larger island.

Just now, Ning had chosen three treasures and, thanks to his strenuous negotiating, acquired eight of each! However, these three treasures were not of much use to Ning, at least for now. For example, if Ning hadn’t acquired the [Icefire Jindan Smelting] technique, he wouldn’t have known how to use Iceheart Pith and Ninefire Lava. Right now, he didn’t know any techniques that could make use of these three treasures.

“Kilostar Island.”

Ning walked towards the larger island, unable to hide the excitement he felt. This was already the fourth island; he was very close to reaching the exit! Once he reached the fifth island, he would be able to leave.

“Senior apprentice-sister...wait for me.” Ning felt a deep desire to be reunited with her swell up in his heart.

Ning immediately calmed himself down, then proceeded into the island. He chose a random boulder at the borders of the island, then sat down in the lotus position. He began to go through his memories and insights from the hundred years of battle. During that century, he had been constantly fighting; although he had gained some insights into the [Five Treasures], he hadn’t had a chance to systematically examine these insights in depth.

It must be understood that prior to entering Demon Icepass, Ning had only trained for a total of roughly two hundred years! Prior to the war for the Grand Xia, Ning had actually been focused on establishing a

foundation for himself. The Black-White College, Mount Innerheart's Tristar Crescent Abode...those places had all served to help him lay down a formation by teaching him many techniques.

The Nihilum Zone, the war for the Grand Xia, the Realmwar, roaming the Three Realms and challenging swordsmen...it was only during this period of time that he was truly improving on his foundation.

During this century, Ning had advanced at an incredible pace. Soon after entering Undermoon Lake, his swordforce had reached the fourth stage.

This time, however, he had spent a full century battling in Demon Icepass, and every single moment of that century was spent in nonstop combat. For someone like Ji Ning who was skilled in martial combat to begin with, this was a form of tempering that he had never before encountered. In truth, even the likes of Feiyou and the other Emyrean Gods who had lived for countless years all felt that Demon Icepass was tremendously beneficial to them, to say nothing of Ji Ning.

Ning closed his eyes. The [Five Treasures] sword-art constantly flickered through his mind as many different scattered insights began to join together, allowing him to understand it better and better. The [Brightmoon] sword-art was continuously improving as well.

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Kilostar Island.

A gray-robed man was walking alone through the island. He murmured to himself, "When shall I be able to leave this prison? Even if I give up and return those treasures, they still won't let me leave. I have to follow some other Emyrean God, but if that person dies, I'll die as well. Only if that Emyrean God succeeds will I be able to leave."

"But after all these years, Jueming remains the only one who has succeeded. And before Jueming made the attempt, who felt completely confident that he would succeed?"

"Ugh..."

"Dawn. The moon is rising." A powerful desire to leave could be seen in the gray-robed man's eyes. Suddenly, he blinked and turned to stare off into the distance. Far away, atop a boulder covered with gouges and marks, was a white-robed youth seated in the lotus position.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 24: Kilostar Island

The gray-robed figure instantly felt puzzled. "Who is he? I know all the Emyrean Gods on Kilostar Island. Hell, I know most of the Emyrean Gods of the entire Three Realms. But this white-robed youth..." Although quite puzzled, he knew that here in Undermoon Lake, there were only two possible reasons for Emyrean Gods to be here.

The first was they had fought a path through the challenges. The second was that they had followed someone who did.

"He's new. Does this mean...he just made it through Demon Icepass?" The gray-robed man felt shock in his heart. He watched as Ji Ning sat there meditatively, not daring to disturb him.

He waited for a total of twelve days.

Finally, Ning opened his eyes. All of the scattered insights he had gained over the course of a century had been unified, and his understanding of the sword had risen once more. In fact, Ning was able to vaguely sense a bit of what complete mastery of the [Five Treasures] should look like. However, he always felt as though he was a bit off, as though he was searching for flowers within a great fog. He was unable to truly understand and fully master the entire [Five Treasures].

"I'm still a bit off." Ning sighed to himself. "If I could advance a bit more and fully understand the [Five Treasures], thus gaining full mastery over a sword-art that surpasses the limits of the Heavenly Daos...I'd probably be able to leave Undermoon Lake."

The complete [Five Treasures] was something which even True Gods and Daofathers would find desirable. But alas, the price of learning this consummate sword-art was simply too high; learning it meant forgetting all insights into all other Daos. Very, very few major powers were willing to pay such a price...and few of the ones who might be willing had true talent for the Dao of the Sword.

Ning's talent for the sword, however, was indeed quite high. Lu Dongbin and Daofather Subhuti had judged him correctly when they had named him a born Sword Immortal.

"Chunyi greets you, fellow Daoist." The gray-robed man appeared next to him with a smile.

"Empyrean God Chunyi?" Ning laughed. "I am Darknorth. I've heard of your illustrious reputation long ago."

Empyrean God Chunyi's real name was Li Chunyi. He, too, was an Empyrean God who had risen to prominence during the era of the Three Realms. However, he eventually vanished, with no one knowing where he had gone. Ning had memorized all of the 'missing' Empyrean Gods like him, and in his visit to Undermoon Lake he had already seen five of the Empyrean Gods who had gone 'missing' from the Three Realms.

Not every Empyrean God would announce their entry into Undermoon Lake, after all.

"Empyrean God Darknorth," Li Chunyi said, "I've never seen you on Kilostar Island before. Can it be that you just made it past Demon Icepass?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"Admirable, admirable!" Li Chunyi's eyes shone, and he immediately seemed much friendlier. "You need to battle for a hundred years to make it past Demon Icepass, an extremely dangerous affair, especially when that demon king assaults you alongside countless lesser demons. The slightest bit of carelessness can lead to instant death. Even if one is strong enough to survive for a hundred years, it's still hard to gain the demon king's approval. Kilostar Island...over the course of countless years, only a total of nine Empyrean Gods have been able to make it here on their own power, and that's including you, Empyrean God Darknorth."

"Just nine in total?" Ning asked, "How many of them are currently on the island?"

“Previously, there were three. With your arrival, fellow Daoist Darknoth, there are now four,” Li Chunyi said. “It’s been countless years, but only Reverend Jueming was able to leave this island. Four of them have died as well.”

Upon saying the word ‘died’, Li Chunyi hesitated a moment, then said, “Fellow Daoist Darknorth, there’s something I should tell you. Of the four Empyrean Gods who died, three of them died when attempting to advance through the wooden bridge, as they were too weak to succeed. One, however...died here on the island itself.”

“Died on Kilostar Island?” Ning was puzzled. “Prior to this, I chatted with the demon king for a bit. I heard that the forces of Undermoon Lake won’t launch any attacks on Kilostar Island. How could someone have died?”

“...Empyrean God Greatdream was the killer,” Li Chunyi said in a low voice.

“Empyrean God Greatdream?” Ning’s eyes narrowed.

Empyrean God Greatdream. Of course Ning had heard of this person. One of the Empyrean Gods who had gone ‘missing’ but actually entered Undermoon Lake was Greatdream. The reason why Greatdream had given himself the sobriquet of ‘Greatdream’ was because he was the personal disciple of the Seamless Gate’s Godking! The Godking was extremely harsh and cruel when training disciples, and Greatdream was filled with tremendous ambitions. Upon hearing that Jueming had become a Buddha, he had made up his mind to enter Undermoon Lake.

“Right now, the ones on the island who made it here under their own power are Empyrean God Greatdream, Empyrean God Sealthroat, and Empyrean God Sin,” Li Chunyi said solemnly.

“Empyrean God Greatdream belongs to the Seamless Gate, while Empyrean Gods Sealthroat and Sin belong to our Pangu Chaosworld. Logically speaking, since the Seamless Gate has joined the Three Realms long ago, they should be peaceful to us. And indeed, after Empyrean God Greatdream entered Undermoon Lake, he’s worked to befriend all of the Empyrean Gods here. He constantly worked hard to improve himself, spending ten million years to make it to Kilostar Island.”

Li Chunyi said solemnly, “Back then, there were four who made it to Kilostar Island on their own; Empyrean God Greatdream, Empyrean God Sealthroat, Empyrean God Sin, and Empyrean God Ninedawn. The others here had all given up and been carried here.”

“Empyrean God Greatdream continued to befriend everyone, and he became particularly friendly with Empyrean God Ninedawn. But who would’ve thought that Empyrean God Greatdream was actually such an insidious person...”

“He caught Empyrean God Ninedawn completely offguard with a sudden attack and killed him.”

Li Chunyi shook his head and sighed. “Back then, Empyrean God Ninedawn was actually the strongest of the four, and he had the best chance of making it out. But just like that, he died by the hands of a despicable, petty man like Empyrean God Greatdream. The sneak-attack caused a huge disturbance and we all immediately hastened towards the two, but we were too late...just one step too late. Both Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat were utterly enraged and they sought to slay

Empyrean God Greatdream, but he continually hides within his Immortal palace. In addition, a large number of Empyrean Gods are following and protecting him.”

“He actually attacked his own friend?” Ning found this unbelievable. “But why? Did Empyrean God Ninedawn do something to him?”

Ning was beginning to feel fury in his heart as well...because Empyrean God Ninedawn was actually one of the primordial humans!

The primordial humans numbered a tribe known as the ‘Dawnsun clan’ amongst their ranks. The nine most powerful Empyrean Gods of this clan were named based on age as Onedawn, Twodawn, Threedawn...all the way through Ninedawn. These were humans who had followed Sui in his earliest campaigns, and Ning had always felt tremendous admiration for these primordial human Empyrean Gods.

Who would’ve thought that one would die to Empyrean God Greatdream of the Seamless Gate...and due to a sneak attack at that!

“Others are still willing to follow Empyrean God Greatdream despite what he did?” Ning asked.

“His followers are all members of the Seamless Gate,” Li Chunyi said. “He publicly proclaimed that during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era, many of his beloved friends and brothers had been slain by Ninedawn, and so his heart has always been filled with endless amounts of hatred and rage. Although some of the other members of the Seamless Gate didn’t approve of his actions, they belong to the same side, after all. When Empyrean Gods Sealthroat and Sin led their armies to attack Empyrean God Greatdream, the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate still chose to stand on Greatdream’s side. They couldn’t just stand there and watch him be killed.”

Ning nodded.

“Come. Let me guide you to meet Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat,” Li Chunyi said.

Soon, they arrived at a palace where many Empyrean Gods were gathered. Surrounding this palace was a number of Immortal estates as well.

“Ahaha, it’s quite lively here!”

“So many Empyrean Gods!”

“Seven Dragon Gods! You made it!”

“Elder brother Feiyou.”

More than a hundred Empyrean Gods came out to welcome Ning and his followers. Ning was accompanied by an amazing number of followers, and when Li Chunyi saw all of them emerge, he was badly shocked as well. He had guessed that Ning must’ve brought some followers with him, but he never would’ve thought that Ning would bring this many. Since everyone Ning brought was of the Nuwa Alliance, they were naturally quite welcome in this place, and in fact many of the people in the palace all knew the newcomers. Some were extremely close friends!

A long while later.

At the top of a mountain peak, three figures sat down to drink wine and chat. These three were three of the four primary Emyrean Gods of Kilostar Island...Emyrean God Darknorth, Emyrean God Sealthroat, and Emyrean God Sin.

“Those are all magic treasures the various Emyrean Gods brought with them.” Emyrean God Sealthroat was a callous-looking silver-haired youth, and he pointed at the distant Immortal estates around the palace. “That vile miscreant Greatdream’s murder of Ninedawn caused an enormous outcry throughout all of Kilostar Island. Everyone was worried about being ambushed, and so when they cultivate they will normally retreat into their own Immortal estates. Within those estates, others can’t easily enter, and so things are much safer.”

“Damn that Greatdream.” Emyrean God Sin clenched his winecup, a murderous look in his eyes.

“Darknorth, you must be careful.” Emyrean God Sin said in a low voice, “Sealthroat and I have tussled with Greatdream quite a few times in recent years, and we understand him quite well. Greatdream publicly proclaims that he killed Ninedawn out of hatred, but based on what Sealthroat and I have discovered...he’s simply an incredibly self-centered, narrowminded person. Ninedawn had the best chance of us all of leaving Undermoon Lake, which is why he befriended then murdered him.”

“He’ll kill whoever has a good chance of leaving,” Emyrean God Sealthroat said solemnly. “In fact, he even tried to kill me.”

“That’s because you are a fool.” Emyrean God Sin snickered. “He murdered Ninedawn, but you wanted to give him a second chance?”

“I just wanted to get a clear look at his true nature,” Emyrean God Sealthroat said with a sigh.

“And I imagine you did.” Emyrean God Sin snickered again.

“Darknorth, the demon king said that of those who have come after Reverend Jueming, you stand the highest chance of leaving Undermoon Lake, correct?” Emyrean God Sealthroat looked at Ning.

Ning nodded. When he had ‘released’ the many Emyrean Gods he had been carrying, some of them naturally began to talk about him to their old friends. Feiyou and the others had actually asked Ning for permission to talk about him, and Ning had given it as he had felt that there was nothing to hide. Thus, Feiyou and the others had naturally bragged and boasted quite a bit about Ning, allowing the other Emyrean Gods here to learn a bit more about him.

“You stand a high chance of leaving, and so it is very likely that Greatdream will act against you,” Emyrean God Sealthroat said. “Although he doesn’t know exactly how powerful you are yet, I imagine that he’ll hear of you in time. In fact, as more time passes, he’ll probably get a clear sense of how formidable you.”

“You have to be wary of him. He’s quite insidious and very powerful. He was very close to Ninedawn in power, and is a bit stronger than the two of us. Over the course of all these years, he’s continued to improve in power. Perhaps in the future, it’ll be possible for him to escape Undermoon Lake as well. You have to be on your guard against him,” Emyrean God Sealthroat warned repeatedly.

“Oh?” Ning’s eyes narrowed. “There’s something I haven’t told you yet.”

“What is it?” The two both looked towards Ning.

“A storm has already descended upon the Three Realms...” Ning told the tale to the two Emphyrean Gods, and upon hearing it the two became both furious and frantic.

“I knew that the Seamless Gate was a pack of untamable savages. They all deserve to die!” Emphyrean God Sin roared angrily.

“Is the situation outside really so grim?” Emphyrean God Sealthroat was worried as well.

Ning said calmly, “Emphyrean God Greatdream has slain senior Ninedawn, and there’s a chance that he might be able to escape Undermoon Lake. Once he does, he’ll become a threat to our side. In the future, he might make a breakthrough to become a Daofather.”

The other two nodded.

“I imagine you two also wish him dead, right?” Ning asked.

“I want him dead. Even in my dreams, I want him dead. Ninedawn was my dear brother; we battled together amongst the other primordial humans as our race rose to power. For him to die so unfairly...!” Emphyrean God Sin ground his teeth. “But it’s useless. I know that you want to help us, Darknorth, but Emphyrean God Greatdream is extremely cautious, and he has a large number of Emphyrean Gods by his side as he hides himself within his Immortal estate. How are we supposed to kill him?”

“It’s true. Although you’ve brought a group of new Emphyrean Gods, giving us an absolute advantage in numbers, they are hiding within their Immortal estate and relying on it to defend against us.” Emphyrean God Sealthroat shook his head.

“How will we know if we don’t try?” Ning said calmly.

“You have an idea?” The other two grew excited. They had long ago been filled with the desire to kill the despicable Greatdream, but they didn’t have the chance.

“I’ll give it a try,” Ning said. “We can’t force things, though; we’ll have to use a softer method.”

“Darknorth, Greatdream isn’t easy to deal with. Don’t try to use a ‘soft’ method and end up losing your life to him,” Emphyrean God Sin warned nervously. He was afraid that Ning would deliver himself up for slaughter.

“Don’t worry,” Ning said.

Prior to this conversation, Ning felt detestation towards Greatdream and would’ve killed him without hesitation if the opportunity came. However, he wouldn’t have gone out of his way to hunt Greatdream down! But upon hearing that Greatdream was very powerful and stood a good chance of escaping Undermoon Lake, a killing intent entered Ning’s heart. If Greatdream left and broke through to become a Daofather, he would become yet another powerful general for the Seamless Gate. Although it wasn’t guaranteed that he would become a Daofather after escaping, Ning wasn’t willing to take the risk.

The people trapped within Undermoon Lake were outside the confines of the Three Realms and so couldn’t sense the Heavenly Daos. Thus, their only choice was to work on other types of force, mastering the likes of taiji-force, infiniforce, thunderforce, and more.

However, upon leaving Undermoon Lake they would be able to once more sense the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. There truly was a good chance of breaking through to become a Daofather. Jueming, the only person to escape, had succeeded. Ning wasn't willing to see the Seamless Gate gain a new major power, a 'Daofather Greatdream'.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 25: Infiltration

Half a day later.

A white-robed youth was walking by himself atop a lonely path that was surrounded by a few flowers.

"Eh?" Suddenly, a muscular, golden-armored man appeared. The man said with a laugh, "My name is Dong'e. Who are you?" He was quite curious, as he knew all the Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island.

"Empyrean God Dong'e?" Ji Ning laughed. "My name is Darknorth. I just arrived at Kilostar Island."

"Just arrived? I was wondering! I know all the other Empyrean Gods on Kilostar Island." Empyrean God Dong'e laughed loudly. "I know almost all the Empyrean Gods of the Three Realms as well, but I've never heard of you. It seems you must've broken through in the past few ten million years or so. You are here alone; did you succeed in challenging Demon Icepass?"

"Precisely." Ning nodded.

"Come, come! Let me take you to meet Empyrean God Greatdream." Dong'e was quite excited.

"Empyrean God Greatdream?" Ning was puzzled.

Dong'e laughed, "Greatdream is someone else who relied on his own power to overcome Demon Icepass and make it to this place. He's quite powerful..." He continued to chat with Ning as they walked, while Ning put on a show of knowing nothing at all.

There was a black Immortal estate located halfway up a mountain. A black-robed man emerged from it, staring downwards. A second Empyrean God Dong'e appeared next to him as well. Dong'e had many different clones that were on watch in many areas in order to prevent Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat from launching a sneak attack.

"What is it?" The black-robed man said with a laugh.

"Greatdream," Empyrean God Dong'e said hurriedly, "I ran into an Empyrean God that I've never seen before and do not recognize. After chatting with him, I learned that he just recently became an Empyrean God in the Three Realms. He relied on his own power to pass through Demon Icepass and make it to Kilostar Island. Now, there will be four powerful Empyrean Gods on this island. Most importantly of all, this Empyrean God is a human. We can pull him over to our side...and in fact, he might be an Empyrean God of the Seamless Gate to begin with!"

"Oh?" The black-robed man nodded and said happily, "If we can gain another supporter, that would be a good thing. Bring him over here, I'll prepare an appropriate welcome!"

“Good.” Dong’e nodded and immediately left.

The black-robed man grew pensive. Humans...the strongest race of the Three Realms. Monsters were a close second. When the Lord of All Fiends brought the many experts of the Seamless Gate back to the Three Realms, the two sides had made peace and had even joined together to become one big family. There were many experts of the Seamless Gate who roamed the Three Realms, copulating with humans and monsters and leaving behind their lineage.

This was why many humans and monsters had ‘Fiendgod blood’ in them. God blood represented the lineage of the Gods of the Pangu Chaosworld, while Fiend blood represented the mighty Fiends of the Seamless Gate.

Fiendgod blood was in the veins of many humans and monsters because of so many years of interbreeding. In truth, it was impossible for the humans of Ji Ning’s era to not have at least some of the blood of the major powers of the Seamless Gate in their veins. But of course, humans had closer blood ties to the major powers of the Pangu Chaosworld.

Given that the Three Sovereigns of Mankind were firmly on the Nuwa Alliance’s side, humans were generally members of the Nuwa Alliance as well. However, humans were incredibly numerous. With so many of them also having the blood of the Seamless Gate in their veins, most humans didn’t view the Seamless Gate with much enmity, and so many ended up being recruited into the Seamless Gate. In the Grand Xia, for example, quite a few Celestial Immortals had been drawn into their orbit.

Humans...monsters...many of both races had been recruited. This was why Dong’e thought that it was entirely possible for them to recruit Ji Ning. In fact, it was even possible that Ji Ning was already a member of the Seamless Gate!

“Hmph.” A cold look flashed through the black-robed man’s eyes. “I don’t care if you are a member of the Seamless Gate or not. Anyone who poses a threat to me must be killed. Undermoon Lake...I’m the only person that needs to be able to survive it. As for the others? Hmph. The ideal outcome is for you all to die.”

When Empyrean God Greatdream had entered Undermoon Lake, the storm had yet to begin within the Three Realms. The Seamless Gate and the Nuwa Alliance hadn’t yet separated into enemy camps, and many on both sides were close to one another. Keeper Everwood, for example, was on extremely good terms with Patriarch Subhuti and Daoist Three Purities.

This was why Empyrean God Greatdream actually didn’t care too much about whether or not Ning was a member of the Seamless Gate.

All he needed right now was an excuse!

When he killed Empyrean God Ninedawn, he had to come up with the excuse of ‘taking revenge for his slain brothers and friends’. Otherwise, even if the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate still chose to stand with him, they wouldn’t put their hearts into it.

An hour later, Ning reached Greatdream.

“Very, very few Empyrean Gods can make it to Kilostar Island under their own power. Over the course of endless years, only nine of us have succeeded.” Empyrean God Greatdream acted in a very friendly manner, taking Ning by the hand. “Come, come! Let’s have a good chat!”

Ning laughed and nodded. As they walked together, shoulder-to-shoulder, the other Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate all behaved towards Ning in a very friendly manner.

“Sit.” Empyrean God Greatdream laughed.

Ning and Greatdream sat down in the lotus position next to a main pillar on the second floor of the palace. The two had a jade table between them, covered with winecups and two canteens of Immortal wine.

“It’s been so long since any new Empyrean Gods have arrived,” Greatdream said with a sigh. “Life in Undermoon Lake is far too lonely. For a new Empyrean God to arrive is one of the happiest things in my life here.”

“I wonder how many people here on Kilostar Island made it through their own power?” Ning lifted up a winecup as he spoke.

“Before you came, three.” Greatdream laughed, “I’m one, Sin is another, and Sealthroat is the third. Those two belong to the Pangu Chaosworld, while we belong to the Seamless Gate. That’s why we generally don’t live together in the same place.”

Ning said with surprise, “Why’s that? The Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld were both destroyed long ago. This is now the era of the Three Realms, and both sides are members of the Three Realms. Why must there be a need for conflict?”

“There are blood feuds, I suppose.” Greatdream shook his head. “Both sides have seen many loved ones die during the war that destroyed the Primordial Era. The hatred between us...it’s ensured that neither side has truly been able or willing to view the other as part of the same family. The experts of the Primordial Era in particular; many of them harbor hatred in their heart. The only reason there is peace is because both sides are very powerful. If one side was to weaken, the other side would soon move to destroy them.”

Ning nodded. Greatdream’s words made some sense.

“Don’t be fooled by the long peace. The number of major powers on both sides who have truly become close friends, lifelong friends, can be counted on one hand. Only the likes of the Keeper of the Everwood is capable of becoming extremely good friends with the major powers of the Pangu Chaosworld.” Greatdream shook his head. “A gulf continues to remain amongst most of the major powers.”

“Things aren’t so bad for you. You made your breakthrough in recent years, after all. Both the Seamless Gate and the Pangu Chaosworld would view you as their progeny,” Greatdream said with a laugh.

In the eyes of the Nuwa Alliance, the denizens of the Three Realms were the progeny of the Pangu Chaosworld.

But in the eyes of the Seamless Gate, the denizens of the Three Realms were also the progeny of the Seamless Chaosworld.

Both sides felt themselves to be the masters of the Three Realms!

And in truth, neither side was wrong per sé. The Three Realms had been created, after all, when the two mighty chaosworlds had collided and clashed against each other!

“There are some grudges between myself, Sin, and Sealthroat. There’s no need for you to get mixed into it.” Greatdream chatted with Ning for quite some time.

Ning couldn’t help but secretly sigh.

No wonder...

No wonder Emyrean God Sealthroat had intentionally given Greatdream a chance to attack him, so as to authenticate Greatdream’s true nature. Greatdream truly was far too formidable; even though Ning had come to kill him, after chatting with him for so long, Ning couldn’t help but feel that he really was quite a decent person and someone worth befriending.

“He lives up to his reputation as the personal disciple of the Godking. His powers over the human heart are quite formidable,” Ning mused silently to himself.

After chatting for a long while, Greatdream suddenly let out a laugh. “Haha, we’ve chatted for quite some time. It seems the two of us really are born friends! Still, I imagine you need some rest. Have you brought any Immortal estates with you?”

“I have.” Ning nodded.

“You can set it up within the surrounding area, then rest inside,” Greatdream said. “It’ll be safer inside.”

“Inside the Immortal estate? Are there hidden dangers within Kilostar Island?” Ning was surprised.

“Ugh. The hatred stemming from the Primordial Era...but enough of that. Enough of that. Just be careful.” Greatdream smiled, then led Ning out from the palace. Just as they reached the palace stairway...suddenly, and without any warning signs, he sent a streak of light to stab towards Ning’s waist, seeking to slay Ning by chopping him in half.

Emyrean God Greatdream no longer appeared friendly or amiable. The only thing within his eyes was an icy, murderous intent.

“Anyone capable of posing a threat to me must die!” The murderous intent he had kept suppressed in his heart exploded forth.

Screech. When the blade slashed across Ning’s chest, it screeched as though it was scraping against a magic treasure. In fact, some sparks flew outward...but ning wasn’t harmed at all.

Ning turned his head to look at Greatdream. Ning’s eyes had turned cold as well, and his right hand transformed into a blurry streak of sword-light that chopped towards the man.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 26: Destruction

It was true that Ji Ning had made this trip with the intent of killing Empyrean God Greatdream, but in his heart he didn't have absolute faith in what Empyrean Gods Sin and Sealthroat had told him. Based on the reports he had seen prior to entering Undermoon Lake, those two were unlikely to be petty, vindictive liars, but Undermoon Lake had a way of changing people. In addition, Ning had become extremely to Empyrean God Zhenbu and other Seamless Gate members on Myriad Mountains Island, and so he wouldn't act against the Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate in a casual manner.

This was why he gave Greatdream a chance to sneak attack him!

He wanted to see for himself exactly what type of a person Greatdream was. Perhaps ordinary Empyrean Gods wouldn't dare to allow others to sneak attack them, but Ning had the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] protecting him; he held no fear of Greatdream at all.

And in the end...Greatdream really had launched a sneak attack!

Whoooosh. Ning used the [Starseizing Hand], using his fingers as swords and filling them fourth-stage swordforce, causing a blurry black light to appear at his fingertips. In almost the same instant that Greatdream attacked him, Ning launched a counter-attack. They were very close to each other...and this attack of Ning's was simply far too fast!

It was a sword-strike that had absolutely reached the speed of light! In addition, to save time, Ning didn't even pull out any magic treasures, instead simply striking with his sword-fingers. This was because he wanted to strike as fast as possible!

"Not good." Greatdream hurriedly tried to dodge, but the distance between them was too short, and this sword was too fast.

Slash!

A huge, gaping wound appeared on Greatdream's flank. Blood poured out of the wound, but Greatdream transformed into a bloody streak of light and began to flee, having no desire to fight whatsoever. "This Empyrean God Darknorth...I gave him a full-power strike, but I wasn't able to harm his body at all. What sort of protective divine ability has he trained in? Could it be the legendary [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]?"

Attempting a sneak attack against an Empyrean God practitioner of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]...poor bastard!

There were very few practitioners of the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art] in the Three Realms to begin with. The number of Empyrean Gods that had reached the Ninth Cycle were even fewer and could be counted on one hand...but Ning was one of them!

Whoosh. Ning's right hand explosively increased in size to become many hundreds of meters long as he chased after Greatdream.

Greatdream's evasion abilities, however, were quite astonishing. He managed to escape Ning's attack. Although Ning's sword was very fast, the rate at which his right hand could increase in size was, comparatively speaking, much slower. With a boom, Greatdream evaded Ning's attack as Ning's sword-fingers slashed past the pillars and walls of the palace. Instantly, a pillar collapsed, the walls shattered, and half of the entire palace began to collapse.

“What’s going on?!” A group of Seamless Gate members were outside the palace in small groups. All of them turned their heads to stare.

They saw Empyrean God Greatdream fleeing from the palace, soaked in blood. Filling his voice with divine power, he shouted out frantically, “Darknorth ambushed me! He came to kill me! Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat sent him here to kill me!” He had decided to first shift the blame to Ning, then worry about the rest later.

“Ambush? Kill?”

These Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate all knew that their side had been tussling against the other side for quite some time now. The enemy side had always wanted to slay Greatdream, and so none of them questioned his claims now.

And in truth, technically speaking, Greatdream’s words were true. Ji Ning really had come to kill him! Except...it was Greatdream who ambushed Ning first.

“Assemble the formation.”

“Kill Darknorth.”

Instantly, the twenty-plus Empyrean Gods began to join together into formations, joining together to form a trio of Seven Planets Gods and a single Three-Eyed Demon.

The white-robed Ning stared at the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon before him.

“Darknorth, you actually came to ambush Empyrean God Greatdream?”

“You really are seeking out your own death.”

“Damn you.”

They all glared at Ning.

Ning said calmly, “If I said that it was Greatdream who ambushed me, would you believe it?”

“If I ambushed you, why is it that you are completely unharmed while I am deeply injured?” One of the Seven Planets Gods roared furiously. This one had a face quite similar to that of Greatdream’s. “You actually swindled your way into our ranks to ambush me. Quite bold! Everyone, attack! Wipe him out and let Sin and the others know that anyone who dares to attack us will be killed. If one comes, one will die; if ten come, ten will fall!”

Because these Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate stood alongside Greatdream, they had been fighting against the forces of Sin and Sealthroat for many years now. They had always been at a disadvantage due to their lower numbers and thus nursed deep grudges.

“If you were to join together and hide within the Immortal estate...I might not be able to do anything to you.” Ning mentally shook his head.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Instantly, more than seven hundred Pure Yang swords appeared around him. The pure energy from Ning's Jindan flowed into the swords, then was transformed and manifested as an incomparably sharp jade sword that appeared before him. Ning just glanced at the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon before him, and the jade sword instantly launched an attack.

"Kill."

"Kill!" The enemy forces came charging straight towards Ning.

In terms of raw power, none of the Seven Planets Gods were comparable to the one which Redsnow commanded.

As for the Three-Eyed Demon, it was the weakest of the four, and by a wide margin at that.

It must be understood that during the Crimsonbright Realmwar, Evergreen's Daofather golem had been able to suppress the Seven Planets God...but Ning's perfect Heaven Punisher had been able to suppress the Daofather golem! Now that Ning had a Pure Yang Jindan that was similar to that of a weak Daofather's, his sword was incredibly powerful when using the most terrifying stances of the [Brightmoon] sword-art. The past hundred years of battle had only caused his sword-arts to become even deadlier.

The power of this sword-strike he had just launched was actually much more powerful than that of even the perfect Heaven Punisher he once commanded.

"Die!" The Seven Planets God that Greatdream commanded let out a furious roar. He wielded a pair of enormous scimitars in his hands, and he sent them chopping downwards towards Ning.

The jade sword arced through the skies in a solitary, beautiful line.

Swish.

Although Greatdream sought to block it, the jade sword was simply too fast, and he was just a bit too slow. It must be understood that the demon king was just as fast and strong as the Seven Planets God, but even he was unable to block Ning's jade sword. And after a century of battle, the current Ji Ning had improved tremendously compared to the Ji Ning of the past.

Slash. The jade sword slashed downwards across the body of the Seven Planets God.

"Go, go!" Ning stared coldly.

The many Immortal swords around him undulated, allowing his energy to flow through and coalesce into two more jade swords that immediately flew towards the enemy.

"How can this be?"

"Good heavens."

"How can he be this powerful?! How can an Emyrean God be this strong?!"

In almost the blink of an eye, the three Seven Planets Gods and the Three-Eyed Demon were all destroyed. The Emyrean Gods that had been within the formations were terrified. Greatdream, in

particular, found this all impossible to believe; how could this person be so powerful? This was a level of power that caused him to feel despair.

“Spare us!” Greatdream called out hurriedly.

Slash! Slash! Slash!

One of the jade swords was spent, but the other two continued to fly forwards. All the Empyrean Gods they flew past were chopped apart into multiple pieces. These Empyrean Gods immediately began to heal themselves and flee in terror...but alas, they were quickly ground up into tiny slices of meat.

“Die.” Ning stretched out with his two hands, which instantly swelled in size. They seemed to become two enormous black clouds that slammed towards the remnants of the Empyrean Gods.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning’s two gigantic cloud-sized hands clapped together multiple times, with all of the Empyrean Gods trapped within them. He clapped them into dust. Just a few claps later, their divine power was completely used up and they all perished.

More than twenty Empyrean Gods...had died, just like that!

In truth, if all of them had hidden themselves within their Immortal estate and relied on the formations of the estate to protect themselves, there would’ve been nothing that Ning could’ve done. Perhaps Ning’s Rahu Formation was capable of breaching the combined defenses of more than twenty Empyrean Gods who were jointly resisting him within a formation, but Ning didn’t have any other Immortals following and assisting him at present. All he had was the Pure Yang Jindan within his body, and so Ning was ‘only’ as strong as a perfect Heaven Punisher, with his sword-arts being more profound than before.

But they had instead chosen to exchange attacks with Ning?

That was suicide...and so they really had died.

“The person who kill you was me...Ji Ning,” Ning murmured softly to himself.

At his level of heartforce, Ning knew exactly when to kill and when not to kill. He had already made the decision in his mind.

After killing Greatdream and the others, Ning only let out a sigh and shook his head. He remained as calm and collected as ever as he began to return to the others.

.....

“Eh?”

“That’s Empyrean God Darknorth over there!”

“Isn’t Darknorth supposed to be with Sin and the others?” Quite a few of the Empyrean Gods were confused. Ning had only informed Sin and Sealthroat of his decision to attack.

Whoosh. Whoosh.

Soon, two more figures appeared. They were Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat.

"It's good to see you back." The two of them both felt relieved upon seeing him.

"I told you I'd be fine," Ning said. He had the power to defeat all of the enemy's Empyrean Gods at the same time; of course he would've been fine.

"How'd it go?" Sealthroat immediately asked.

"Dead," Ning said.

Sealthroat and Sin both revealed looks of wild joy on their faces. Sin mumbled to himself, "Wonderful. No matter what we tried, we weren't able to do anything to him. He was simply too crafty...but now, he's dead. Wonderful, wonderful!"

"All dead," Ning elaborated.

"All...dead?" Sin and Sealthroat revealed looks of disbelief on their faces.

They really couldn't believe what they had just heard. In fact, that very day the two of them paid a personal visit to the place where the Seamless Gate's forces had gathered. They stared at the collapsed palace, at the shattered ground, at the scars of battle...but there wasn't a single enemy Empyrean God in sight. Only then did they truly believe that Ning had done what he said he had done.

"More than twenty Empyrean Gods. All dead. How?!" Sin was filled with confusion. "There were so many of them. Most were comparatively weak, but they had the absolute advantage in raw numbers. Even if they just joined together into simple Seven Planets Gods, they would become incredibly powerful."

"If you can't understand it, don't bother trying to. Darknorth had his own methods for succeeding. All we know and need to know is that he is very powerful. No wonder the demon king said that he is very likely to succeed in leaving Undermoon Lake." Sealthroat couldn't help but sigh and smile in amazement while praising Ning. "This is perfect. If Greatdream was the only one to die, the other Empyrean Gods of the Seamless Gate would've posed a headache as well, forcing us to constantly be on our guard. Now, however, we have nothing to fear."

"Agreed." Sin nodded as well.

Greatdream had already become a person of the past. What Ji Ning cared about the most right now was the final challenge! He was just one step away from leaving Undermoon Lake.

The third day since his arrival on Kilostar Island.

The dawn moon had risen into the skies.

On the other side of Kilostar Island, Ning was standing with the other two, staring off into the distance.

Sin pointed towards the distance. "Look, over there! That's the Path of Blades. It is the final challenge. If you are able to walk the Path of Blades, you'll make it to the fifth island and be able to leave."

"The Path of Blades?" Ning stared at the distant wooden bridge. The wooden bridge led to a place that was filled with countless enormous knives, swords, and spears that stood upright and erect.

The Desolate Era

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 27: The Final Chapter: The Path of Blades

“How strong is the guardian of this ‘Path of Blades’? Anything special to watch out for?” Ji Ning asked.

This was the final challenge. Ning understood that the guardian definitely had to be a terrifyingly strong figure.

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat exchanged a glance, then they both laughed. Sin then turned to Ning. “The foe you will encounter on the Path of Blades...is yourself!”

“Myself?” Ning was flabbergasted.

“Right.” Sin explained, “When you challenge the Path of Blades, the enemy that appears will look exactly like you and have the exact same divine body, the exact same divine abilities, the exact same Immortal energy...the exact same everything. In fact, if you use sword-arts, he’ll choose to use sword-arts as well. The only difference is...the sword-arts that he uses will be the sword-arts of Undermoon Lake.”

Ning felt shocked. His greatest advantage was that his Pure Yang Jindan had reached the second tier...but on the Path of Blades, this would give him no advantage at all!

“On the Path of Blades, you will strictly be competing in pure combat techniques,” Sealthroat explained with a sigh. “I would compete in spear-arts, while you will be competing in sword-arts! Only if your sword-arts are sufficiently profound will you be able to defeat your foes. In addition, on the Path of Blades, there will be a total of ten such opponents. All of them will have the same divine body and same abilities as you, but the sword-arts they use will be different. The later guardians will have increasingly profound sword-arts.”

“The Path of Blades...it has ten guardians that are akin to ten of you. Only by defeating these ten copies of yourself will you be able to reach the fifth island and leave Undermoon Lake,” Empyrean God Sealthroat said.

Ning nodded slowly. Defeat himself? Ten increasingly powerful versions of himself?

He now understood how difficult it would be to traverse the Path of Blades. Ning no longer felt that confident in his ability to defeat it. The reason why he was much more powerful than the other Empyrean Gods was thanks to his Jindan and his [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], but now both advantages had been stripped for him. If this was purely a competition of sword-arts...

Fortunately, the hundred years he had spent battling in Demon Icpass had resulted in his sword-arts improving dramatically! And after reaching Kilostar Island, he had trained for another ten-plus days, resulting in him getting the vague sense that he was closing in on complete mastery of the [Five Treasures], with his sword-arts reaching the speed of light.

“What level of sword-arts will be necessary to overcome the Path of Blades?” Ning no longer felt confident.

“Brother Darknorth, you are the one who the demon king said has the highest chances of surviving and leaving Undermoon Lake. All of us will be watching you with hope,” Empyrean God Tyranodragon said with a laugh.

“If you can leave, we’ll be able to leave as well.”

“If brother Darknorth wishes to leave, it won’t prove to be too difficult a task!”

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods were here, gathered around a campfire that was currently being used to roast skinned animals. They all looked towards Ning with scorching gazes, because in their heart, this ‘Empyrean God Darknorth’ stood the highest chances of succeeding out of them all. All of them had been trapped here for far, far too long; in their innermost hearts, they deeply desired to be able to leave this place.

“Alright, alright! Don’t give Darknorth too much pressure.” Empyrean God Feiyu boomed out, “Do you really think Undermoon Lake is so easily escaped from? Let Darknorth take things slowly.”

“Right. We won’t rush him. We’ve been waiting for so long already; another ten thousand years or even another million years is nothing.”

“I’m personally in no rush, but the outside world is in a state of chaos. The earlier we can leave, the better. If we take too long, the war might have ended already. If we go out early, at least we’ll be able to help out a bit.”

The commotion continued unabated. As for Sealthroat and Sin, the two Empyrean Gods had reached Ning’s side. Sealthroat said softly, “Darknorth, to tell you the truth, this Path of Blades...Sin and I have been challenging it for many, many years. No matter how hard I try, I’m unable to overcome the seventh opponent, while Sin has been stymied by the sixth opponent. Each of the ten guardians is more powerful than the last, and I have four more remaining before I can leave, while Sin has five! Our chances of improving are quite minute...”

“It’s true.” Sin let out a sigh as well. “I’ve only defeated half of the ten guardians; five more are left! I truly have no confidence in myself anymore. In truth, Ninedawn stood a very good chance. He had already reached the eighth guardian, with only two more to go after beating that one. But alas, he ended up dying in the hands of Greatdream. Greatdream was more formidable than the two of us as well; he had already reached the eighth of the guardians as well.”

Ning nodded. He could sense that Sin and Sealthroat no longer had enough faith in themselves.

“I don’t know how long it would take for the two of us to leave on our own.” Sealthroat looked at Ning. “These two hundred Empyrean Gods have entrusted their hopes to us, but the two of us can’t do it. It’s all up to you.”

“Darknorth, it really is up to you.” Sin looked at Ning as well.

“I can only promise to do my best. I’m not certain that I can succeed either,” Ning said.

“Oh, right...” Sealthroat advised, “Remember, if you are able to defeat the ninth guardian, immediately withdraw and come back to Kilostar Island.”

“Why?” Ning was stunned.

“Because if you can defeat all ten guardians in one go, you’ll immediately be sent towards the fifth island,” Sealthroat said hurriedly. “But what of the two hundred Empyrean Gods over here? They are all

waiting for you to lead them out of this place. If you can defeat the ninth guardian, you should take them all with you when you go challenge the tenth guardian.”

“Right, right, right! It’s said that Jueming gained a sudden insight when challenging the Path of Blades, and so made it all the way past the final three guardians without giving anyone advance notice. He immediately left without being able to take a single Empyrean God with him.” Sin said angrily, “Jueming was too selfish!”

“Perhaps it wasn’t his fault,” Sealthroat said. “It’s possible that he was so excited by his sudden insight that he lost track of how many guardians he had defeated. He just continued to fight until they were all gone...and by then, there was no way back for him!”

“Hmph.” Sin just let out a contemptuous snort. Clearly, he nursed quite the grudge against Jueming.

“There’s no point in saying all these things.” Sealthroat smiled as he looked towards Ning. “Darknorth, the two of us can’t do it. It really is up to you.”

“Tomorrow, give it a good shot. But of course, don’t actually go through all ten stages at once. Hold back a little,” Sin said with a laugh.

“If I can defeat nine of the guardians, I would return and celebrate.” Ning shook his head. He didn’t feel confident.

The next day. More than two hundred Empyrean Gods ushered Ning towards the edge of Kilostar Island.

“Darknorth, be careful.”

“Come back after beaing nine of them.”

“Darknorth, staying alive is wha really matters. Don’t end up losing your life!”

The Empyrean Gods all gave him their various instructions and exhortations. In the past, there truly had been a number of Empyrean Gods who had died on the Path of Blades. Ning, however, wasn’t worried. The Empyrean Gods would encounter guardians that were identical to them, which meant that when they fought against their doppelgangers, a single successful blow on either side might destroy the other. Things were different for Ning.

When he faced off against a guardian, both of them would be protected by the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art]. This meant that neither of them would be capable of killing the other. This meant that the Path of Blades was actually the safest challenge of all for him. However, although it was safe, to actually defeat all ten guardians...this would be a very, very hard task.

“I’ll go now.” Ning waved at them, then stepped onto the floating wooden bridge by himself.

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods watched as Ning walked through the wooden bridge and vanished into the distant Path of Blades.

“The Three Realms have been swept into a storm. I really want to get out as soon as possible.”

“It’s all up to Darknorth.”

The Emyrean Gods all began to grow nervous. Prior to this, they had all been joking around loudly with each other, but that was just for the sake of keeping the mood relaxed. Now that Ning had actually gone forward to challenge the Path of Blades, all the Emyrean Gods felt the pressure.

If...

If Ji Ning was only capable of defeating five or six of the guardians, then it would probably be difficult for him to succeed within the next ten million years.

“Darknorth...”

The eyes of the Emyrean Gods were filled with hope, desire, nervousness, and uneasiness.

They weren’t afraid of death, but they simply couldn’t stand knowing that their masters, brothers, loved ones, and family members were facing a terrible war while they were living safe lives here at Kilostar Island. They wanted to leave. They truly wanted to leave!

.....

The long wooden bridge led directly towards the Path of Blades.

The Path of Blades was filled with enormous upright swords, spears, sabres, and other edged weapons. They were planted into the ground and pointed upwards towards the heavens.

A white-robed youth suddenly came to a halt midway through the path...because in front of him had just appeared a golden-robed youth that looked just like him.

“Is that me?” Ning was slightly startled.

“I’m the first guardian. Take a look at that sword over there.” The golden-robed youth pointed towards a nearby sword that was at least thirty thousand meters tall. Phantom illusions actually began to appear on the surface of the sword, illusions of a humanoid that was executing a complete set of profound sword-arts, going from simple to profound, from start to finish.

“The sword-arts that appeared on that sword are the sword-arts that I will use.” The golden-robed youth looked at Ning. “You can view these sword-arts three times. After doing so, the sword-arts will vanish and we shall fight.”

“Oh?” Ning felt delight. This really was an unexpected surprise. He was actually being given a chance to view the opponent’s sword-arts? Sin and Sealthroat hadn’t told him of this. Most likely, the two had wanted to give him a pleasant surprise. There was no point telling him in advance, after all, and letting him find out on the spot would bring a bit of joy.

Ning carefully stared at the enormous sword that had been plunged into the endless ice around them. The sword-arts appearing on the sword were continuously being displayed. Three sessions took nearly twelve full hours, at which point in time it all came to a halt.

“What a curious sword-art.” Although Ning sighed in approval, he didn’t panic in the slightest, because this first guardian’s sword-art posed no threat to him at all.

“Done?” The golden-robed youth asked.

“Yes.” Ning nodded.

“Then receive my attacks.” The golden-robed youth’s body suddenly blurred, manifesting a total of three heads and six arms. Six swords appeared in his hands as well as he pounced towards Ning.

A strange feeling was in Ning’s heart, because this sort of battle tactic was quite similar to his own, and this person looked identical to him.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! His sword-art moved at the speed of light, and it was overwhelming superior. Although Ning’s opponent had increased his power with the [Starseizing Hand], his sword was still knocked flying by Ning’s sword-light chop. However, thanks to the [Eight-Nine Arcane Art], the doppelganger’s body was completely unharmed.

“Your sword-art is far superior to mine.” The golden-robed youth landed on the wooden bridge and nodded. “I am thoroughly convinced by my defeat.”

Whoosh. The golden-robed youth disappeared into thin air.

Ning continued to advance forwards, making his way deeper into the Path of Blades. Each time he encountered a new guardian, a nearby sword would begin to display a set of sword-arts for him to view. Each time after he viewed the sword-arts, Ning would feel somewhat inspired, and he was able to further perfect his [Brightmoon] sword-art. However, his [Brightmoon] sword-art was already incredibly powerful, as it had incorporated the essence of the [Five Treasures] within it. Sword-light that struck at light speed was incredibly formidable. The word ‘fast’, all by itself, could be superior to countless tricks and techniques.

Ning was able to battle all the way to the eighth guardian on his first try.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 28: The Mournful Sword

The golden-robed youth standing before Ji Ning had very gentle eyes.. He looked towards Ning in a very affectionate way, as though he was looking his most beloved lover.

“Eh?”

For some reason, Ning felt vaguely threatened as the eighth guardian stared at him. Still, he didn’t say anything. Instead, he turned to look at the enormous sword that was next to him. Sword-arts had already begun to appear on its surface. As he had battled his way past the guardians, the sword-arts he had encountered had become increasingly formidable and had provided more and more insights to Ning.

In fact, Ning could sense that all of these sets of sword-arts were guiding him towards the limits of the Heavenly Daos, as if they were teaching him how to reach and surpass those limits. Although there were many types of sword-arts in the Three Realms, aside from the [Five Treasures] which had surpassed the Heavenly Daos, no sword-arts had inspired him and helped him as much as these ones had.

“The major power who created Undermoon Lake definitely had an extraordinary background. The sword-arts he has left behind have been tremendously beneficial to me, but he’s also done the same for the other Empyrean Gods, some of whom use spears, staves, scimitars, and other weapons. No matter

what weapon is used, the Path of Blades will produce a different, matching guardian.” Ning was stunned by the implications.

This further reinforced the truth to Ning that the primordial chaos truly was filled with all possibilities. The Three Realms was nothing more than a single little chaosworld within the infinite primordial chaos.

To sit at the bottom of a well and stare at the tiny portion of sky that was visible and believe it to be the entirety of the heavens...that would truly be a joke.

Since he was weak, he had to work hard and train hard to make himself become strong. Ning celebrated the fact that he had been able to come to Undermoon Lake and become more powerful.

“This sword-art is quite marvelous, quite special...” As Ning watched, a look of veneration appeared in his eyes. “Lingering affection? Longing? The name of this sword-art should be the ‘Longing Sword’.”

The sword-arts were displayed on the sword three times, then vanished.

Whoosh.

Two swords appeared in the hands of the golden-robed youth. He lowered his head to look at the swords, his gaze very gentle. In a soft voice, he said, “It’s time to fight.”

“Right.” Ning nodded, a pair of swords appearing in his own hands as well.

The golden-robed youth smiled slightly, a beautiful, intoxicating smile. He then transformed into a gentle breeze, and his sword-light was like a gentle breeze as well. It seemed incomparably soft and harmless, but Ning could sense a tremendous threat emanating from it.

If he hadn’t had the chance to view the complete sword-art three times from start to finish, he probably would’ve been at a huge disadvantage. However, Ning now knew this sword-art, the ‘Longing Sword’, with incomparable clarity, giving him a much better chance of dealing with it. Twin swords in his hands, he sent his own sword-light howling forth at the speed of light, using the ghostly and unpredictable ‘Shadowless’ stance to launch a frenetic series of attacks!

Sometimes, his swords would be tremendously ferocious that they would actually move a bit slower. The fact that his swords alternated being fast and slow made them even more unpredictable.

Clearly, Ning’s sword-arts were far deadlier than they had been when he had first embarked upon the Path of Blades. And indeed, Ning had reaped much from his battles against the seven previous guardians.

“Blood Drop stance.”

His sword-art suddenly transformed into the fastest attack of all, the Blood Drop stance.

However, the enemy’s sword-art was like an endless, bottomless web that completely trapped and tied down Ning’s two swords.

“Longing...” Ning was gaining more and more insights into this set of sword-arts. At the beginning, he had only been able to rely on what he had seen on the giant sword. Now, upon actually fighting against

a person identical to himself in all respects who used this sword-art, his insights were different. Ning gained an even better understanding of how some of the killer blows of this sword-art truly worked.

“Compared to it, my [Brightmoon] sword-art isn’t fluid enough.” Ning’s sword-art began to change as well, becoming even more unpredictable and ephemeral.

Shadowless stance, Blood Drop stance. The two joined together into a more perfect whole, and fewer and fewer flaws appeared when he attacked and withdrew.

“Eh?” The golden-robed youth frowned. Instantly, his body blurred for a moment before he manifested three heads and six arms, beginning to assault Ning with six swords.

Ning immediately used [Three Heads, Six Arms] to engage as well.

Slash!

A streak of sword-light landed upon the golden-robed youth’s neck, knocking his sword aside and forcing him back five steps before he was able to stabilize himself.

The golden-robed youth stared at Ning, then said in a low voice, “Your sword is faster than mine, but the intrinsic essence of your sword-art...it’s a bit inferior to mine. You have passed my challenge, but the ninth guardian’s sword has also reached the limits of the Heavenly Daos, while the essence of his sword-art is also superior to yours.”

“Really? Being stronger than me is a good thing.” Ning grinned.

“Be careful.” The golden-robed youth disappeared into thin air.

Ning let out a sigh of relief. He had finally succeeded.

Not hesitating at all, Ning continued to advance. A short while later, he saw the ninth guardian. Upon seeing him, Ning could sense the essence of utter despair surging towards him.

“That invisible essence and aura is only growing more and more powerful.” Ning couldn’t help but sigh to himself. “I hear that at the fifth stage of swordforce, ‘Sword God’, one doesn’t even have to attack; the invisible sword-intent radiating out from you will be more than enough to force enemies to feel utter despair. The Path of Blades...not only is it guiding me towards a path that surpasses the Heavenly Daos, it’s also guiding me towards the fifth stage of swordforce.”

The eighth guardian’s ‘Longing Sword’ already had a hint of that quality to it.

The ninth guardian, just by standing there, was already radiating a strong aura of despair. Clearly, he was even more formidable.

However, compared to someone who had truly reached the fifth stage of swordforce, ‘Sword God’, the ninth guardian was still far, far inferior.

He was nothing more than a guidepost! His mission was to plant a seed in Ning’s heart, a seed which perhaps would eventually take root and grow in the future.

“Look at the sword-art.” The ninth guardian said these words very calmly.

Ning smiled, then looked at the sword-arts on display upon the giant sword nearby. As he watched, his face slowly began to change. Every single stance, every single stroke...it all caught Ning's full attention, tugging on the deepest, innermost thoughts in his heart. The more he analyzed this sword-art, the more powerfully Ning was affected by it.

"Why?"

In his past life, Ning was tormented by illness. His heart had been filled with resentment. In this life, after being reborn, his father Ji Yichuan and his mother Yuchi Snow had filled Ning's heart with love, warming it.

"Father. Mother."

Serpentwingn Lake. Ning was lying atop that wooden boat, floating atop the lake.

"No..."

That instant when Yu Wei had died. He had felt such despair that he himself had nearly died as well. His parents were gone. Even Yu Wei was gone.

It was thanks to his experiences that this sword-art resonated so deeply with him.

This sword-art caused Ning's heart to be filled with a dark, dreary feeling. Deep in his heart, he was filled with the utmost of despair!

"Senior apprentice-sister isn't dead yet."

"Once I leave this place, I'll be able to save her. Our family can be reunited." Ning mumbled these words to himself.

The sword-arts had already finished their display on the sword. As for the ninth guardian, he stared at Ning in astonishment, because he could sense the intent radiating from Ning.

"What is the name of this sword-art?" Ning asked.

This was the ninth guardian he had encountered, but this was the first time that Ning had asked for the proper name of a sword-art.

"Mourning," the ninth guardian said.

"Mourning...mourning..." Ning suddenly let out a laugh. "How appropriate. I've mourned in the past...but here and now, I'm filled with hope." After finishing his words, Ning turned and walked away.

"You aren't going to fight?" The ninth guardian called out after him in surprise.

"I'm not a match for you right now. Next time I come, I'll defeat you." Ning's figure quickly disappeared into the distant wooden bridge, causing the ninth guardian to gawk in amazement. Still, he didn't chase after Ning, because the two of them had identical bodies and abilities; if Ning was intent on leaving, there was no way he could even catch up.

"He actually didn't even fight." The ninth guardian was completely puzzled. "And just by viewing the sword-art, he felt certain that he was no amtch for me. For him to make that claim means that he

should've mastered more than half of that sword-art and discovered the truly formidable aspects to it. But despite all that, he shouldn't have chosen to completely avoid fighting me..."

"Unless...there's only one possibility! After viewing the sword-art, his heart was inspired and so he wanted to go back to calm himself down and meditate on his insights." This was the ninth guardian's guess.

He knew very well that given how formidable Ning's protective divine ability was, even if Ning lost the fight he wouldn't have been in danger of dying. This meant that the only reason Ning would refuse to fight would be if he simply didn't want to! Why wouldn't he want to fight? The only explanation was that he was worried that a battle would disrupt his insights!

The guardian's guess was correct.

This set of sword-arts, the [Mourning] sword-art, had indeed resonated with Ning. In fact, after viewing it three times, Ning had learned most of it! His own heart had been filled with many new insights, and Ning was worried that if the battle became too frenzied, he would lose some of those insights. Thus, he instead decided to give up the fight.

While flying back, Ning continuously reflected on that sword-art.

This was the first set of sword-arts on the Path of Blades that had truly resonated with him. This was because the feelings and emotions the sword-art embodied were feelings that he himself had experienced. He knew those feelings very well, and so he almost instantly understood the nature and the truth of this sword-art! This was a set of sword-arts that was even more perfect than his own [Brightmoon] sword-art.

Kilostar Island. The end of the wooden bridge.

More than two hundred Empyrean Gods were standing there, craning their necks to stare at the bridge while waiting nervously.

"I wonder how many guardians Darknorth made it past."

"If he's able to go through nine of them in one try, or even all ten, that would be wonderful."

"Please don't let him be so impatient as to beat all ten. As soon as he beats nine, he needs to come back and take us all with him as he challenges the tenth. That's the ideal."

All the Empyrean Gods waited eagerly.

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat's chances of succeeding were too low. Right now, their only hope was Ji Ning. All of them chatted amongst themselves about how formidable Ji Ning was and how certain he was to succeed. Right now, their greatest fear was that Ji Ning would only be able to defeat five or six guardians. If that happened, it would be a long, long time before he would be able to successfully challenge the Path of Blades.

"Look!" Suddenly, Empyrean God Roughpeak pointed towards the distance. He had been seated by himself the entire time, quietly staring off into the distance. He had been alone on the snowy island for so long that he had gotten used to being by himself. He still, however, deeply desired to leave this place

and so he had been staring unblinkingly towards the bridge. As soon as Ning's figure had appeared off in the distance, he had been the first to notice.

"He's coming."

"It's Ji Ning."

"Ji Ning's coming back."

All of them grew excited.

As the distant white-robed youth flew across the wooden bridge, all of the Emphyrean Gods rose to their feet to welcome him.

Ning landed. Upon seeing the eager looks on the faces of the many Emphyrean Gods, he felt an enormous, invisible pressure.

"How did it go?" Emphyrean God Sin asked.

"I beat eight of the guardians. For now, I'm not a match for the ninth guardian," Ning said. He knew very well that every single guardian was capable of perfectly executing their respective sword-arts. Since the ninth guardian was able to perfectly control [Mourning], at present Ning truly wasn't a match for him.

"You beat eight of them?"

"Two more remain?"

All of the Emphyrean Gods present were dazed.

To tell the truth, deep in their hearts, the Emphyrean Gods all felt at least slightly disappointed. Beating eight meant that there were still two more to go! Those final two guardians were like a pair of tigers that blocked the road; Ji Ning would probably need quite a bit of time in order to overcome them.

Although they were slightly disappointed, they were still fairly calm. In fact, they all secretly let out sighs of relief. Thank goodness that Ning was more powerful than Greatdream and Ninedawn, at least. Ning's utter domination of the twenty-plus Emphyrean Gods of the Sealmess Gate had stirred all of their imaginations, causing them to fantasize a bit too much about his strength.

"You beat eight of them? Not bad, not bad. Greatdream and Ninedawn only defeated seven of them."

"Only two left. Soon, you'll be able to make it out."

All of the Emphyrean Gods said words of encouragement.

Ning naturally knew what all of the Emphyrean Gods were hoping for. He immediately explained, "I need some time to meditate and train for a period of time. I'm going to head off now." After speaking, he immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew away at high speed. He returned to his living region, set down his Immortal estate, then entered it and began to meditate.

He needed time. Time to meditate and go over his insights.

A large number of ideas began to swell like a mental tidalwave. The insights he had gained on the Path had truly excited him. He didn't have any time at all to waste on chatting with those other Empyrean Gods; what he needed was to meditate and absorb all of these new ideas, nonstop!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 29: Understanding the Sword

Empyrean God Sin and Empyrean God Sealthroat walked forward shoulder-to-shoulder, staring at the beautiful Immortal estate located on the distant mountain peak.

"Darknorth was only able to defeat eight guardians this time, and the last two are even more powerful...I'm afraid that it will be many, many years before we'll be able to leave." Sealthroat let out a sigh. He had challenged the Path of Blades many times, and so he knew very well that although it seemed as though 'only' two were left, a person could easily end up spending a million or ten million years on each of the final two.

For example, Greatdream had defeated five guardians upon reaching Kilostar Island. Countless years had passed, but he was only able to defeat two more during that period of time! As for the final two guardians Ji Ning would be facing...they would be the most powerful guardians of all.

As for Sealthroat and Sin, they had been here for even longer periods of time, but the amount of improvement they were able to make was miniscule. They were only able to defeat one more guardian now compared to when they had first reached Kilostar Island.

"That's not necessarily so." Sin shook his head. "We've been on Kilostar Island for a long period of time and we've only improved a bit, but that's because spent far too much time on the previous islands. Almost all of our potential was already squeezed out of us, and we've pretty much increased as much as we can in power. Of course we would find it very hard to improve any further! Darknorth, however, made it all the way here in one try after entering Undermoon Lake. He still has much potential left, and his potential was always much greater than ours to begin with. Don't forget, Reverend Jueming managed to suddenly defeat the last three guardians all at once, thanks to a sudden insight."

Sealthroat was briefly startled. He nodded. "Your words make sense. Our potential has been squeezed dry and we are almost at our limit, but Darknorth is different."

"Honestly, I've been puzzled this entire time," Sin said with a sigh. "He was able to fight his way to Kilostar Island in one try. This sort of talent and ability...in the Three Realms, he definitely would have been one of the most supreme of Empyrean Gods. In fact, the True Gods and Daofathers should view him as being very important, as he stands a very good chance of joining their ranks. Why is it that he was willing to risk Undermoon Lake?"

"Right." Sealthroat sighed as well. "I was also puzzled."

Ning's talent had been acknowledged even as far back as the Conclave of Immortal Destiny by the likes of Lu Dongbin and Subhuti.

They were both able to tell that Ning was born with tremendous talent for the Dao of the Sword! And indeed, Ning didn't disappoint Subhuti with his rapid rise in power. He had improved at a tremendously fast rate, and the fact that he had reached the fourth stage of heartforce was an unexpected surprise to

Subhuti. By now, the top-tier major powers of the Nuwa Alliance viewed Ning in the exact same way as they had viewed Lu Dongbin during the Primordial Era.

However...the difference was that Lu Dongbin had the luxury of time to slowly build up a powerful foundation, then make his breakthrough to instantly become a top-tier Daofather.

Ji Ning?

In his case, the storm had already descended, and the Emyrean Gods and True Immortals of both sides had already begun battling each other. The battles were becoming larger and larger, and once the final battles for karmic luck were concluded, the Endwar that would determine the destiny of the entire Three Realms would commence. The amount of time Ji Ning had was simply too little. This was one of the greatest regrets which Subhuti and the others had.

Despite their regret, however, they also felt that there was a chance that Ji Ning would gain a sudden flash of insight during one of the many conflicts in this storm and perhaps break through to become a True God or Daofather! Thus, if Ning hadn't trained in the [Taowu Eighteen Fiendgods], Subhuti would not have permitted Ji Ning to enter Undermoon Lake.

However, thanks to the dangers of Undermoon Lake, Ning had gained more and more experience, growing and improving so rapidly that he was now just a step away from complete mastery of the [Five Treasures].

"No matter what the reason is for it, Darknorth's entry into this place was a blessing for us." Sin sighed with emotion as he looked at the distant Immortal estate. "We now have a chance of leaving."

"Right. When Darknorth returned from the Path of Blades, he barely said anything to us. He immediately went into seclusion. As I see it...he probably gained quite a few insights," Sealthroat said.

"Even I reaped great gains from my first attempt at the Path of Blades, to say nothing of Darknorth."

"Right. Hopefully, he'll be able to improve enough that he can complete the Path of Blades."

"Wait and see."

The two Emyrean Gods were both filled with hope.

They truly had no faith in their ability to overcome the Path of Blades. After countless years, they remained trapped at the midway point. They were still far from being able to escape.

.....

"Brother Darknorth is in secluded meditation."

"I hope he'll be able to improve dramatically as a result."

The Seven Dragon Gods stared at the distant Immortal estate as they chatted amongst themselves.

All the Emyrean Gods on Kilostar Island were focused on that Immortal estate and the person meditating within it. These Emyrean Gods had all given up long ago; even Sin and Sealthroat, who were qualified to attempt the Path of Blades, were far from being able to succeed.

All their hopes rested with Ning. They did not, however, dare to give Ning too much overt pressure...and so they simply hoped silently.

They dreamed of returning to the Three Realms and once more seeing those colorful, varied worlds.

They dreamed of seeing and reuniting with their loved ones.

Even though returning meant that they would be in danger of dying...

They felt no fear!

This was because there was something they feared even more than dying; living without hope. To these Emphyrean Gods who had given up, life in Undermoon Lake was almost zombie-like; there was no hope at all.

.....

The beautiful Immortal estate was quite spacious inside. Ning's sword-training pavilion was many kilometers in circumference, and the pavilion was studded with many lustrous gems that gathered in the light and energy of Heaven and Earth, making it dazzling to behold.

The white-robed youth, Ji Ning, was wielding a sword in his hand and executing sword-arts with it.

Whoooooosh!

His sword-light drifted forward gracefully in an ephemeral, unpredictable manner.

As a sword-art that had reached the speed of light, the sword-light created by the art was nothing more than after-images; the sword itself was in front of those blurs.

Although Ning had reached an astonishing level in his sword-arts, his power was extremely measured and reserved. Ning's sword-light scraped past a gourd of wine placed on a nearby table, missing it only by a single inch, but the gourd didn't move in the slightest.

Even an ordinary Houtian-level human who was skilled in the sword would knock the gourd flying at such a close distance with the wind generated by his sword. But the power of Ning's sword was so reserved that it did not!

It must be understood that when Loose Immortals, Earth Immortals, and even Celestial Immortals struck out with their swords, the power of Heaven and Earth would be unleashed, causing a great disturbance. Even for Emphyrean Gods and True Immortals, being able to infuse their sword with tremendous destructive power while keeping it so reserved that it wouldn't injure anything an inch beyond the target was incredibly rare!

Ji Ning, however, had succeeded! His sword-arts had clearly reached the 'grandmaster' level in the Three Realms.

Whooosh.

Sword-light howled forth, filling the area with an aura of melancholy and despair. Ning was currently using [Mourning].

As far as despair went, his greatest moment of despair was when Yu Wei had shattered the bottle of Shennong's medicine, then shattered her own soul and committed suicide! This was because the moment before she had done this, Ning had been filled with joy, delight, and hope. However, disaster had suddenly struck. Yu Wei's actions, followed by her suicide, had completely struck Ning dumb.

His parents had left. Yu Wei had then left as well. In that moment...Ning's heart had indeed been filled with utter despair.

As far as sadness and pain went...

His saddest, most agonizing moment was when he had personally consigned Yu Wei into the Infinity Hells due to his decision. That was the most painful moment of Ning's life.

Ning was a man of deep, powerful emotions. Thus, just by viewing the sword-art he was able to understand more than half of it. Upon actually using it and practicing with it, he gained many new insights and made nonstop breakthroughs, the profound secrets of the sword-arts continuously filling his mind.

Nine days after his attempt at the Path of Blades.

"Mourning..."

"Although it's despair, it's not utter despair," Ning murmured to himself within the courtyard. His heartforce had reached the fourth stage, and so although he entered a mournful, saddened state whenever he executed this sword-art, he was able to immediately go back to normal upon halting in his training. There was no way he would allow a sword-art to control him and his emotions. But of course, someone whose mental will wasn't strong enough might actually go mad if he trained too excessively in this technique.

"The aura of being mournful...it perfect this sword-art. Although in terms of profoundness, this sword-art actually is inferior to the [Five Treasures], the 'mournful' essence it contains seems to give it a spirit of its own that is linked to it. The sword-art and the essence aura are a perfect whole, as though they were meant to be together." Ning quickly came to this evaluation.

The [Five Treasures] surpassed the Heavenly Daos themselves; in terms of technique, it was naturally far superior.

Although Ning was tremendously talented in the Dao of the Sword, the real reason why he was able to make his sword attack at the speed of light was because he had the mental strength to be willing to sacrifice all other insights for the [Five Treasures], making it the foundation of his techniques. Ning's own sword-art, the [Brightmoon] sword-art, didn't actually have a particularly powerful 'essence' or 'aura' about it, but it was still quite powerful; clearly, this was because it had surpassed the [Mourning] sword-art in many ways, in terms of skill and technique.

However, [Mourning] had its own strengths as well.

It had an essence, an intent of its own that was one with the actual techniques. In fact, the intent of the technique reinforced every single stance, giving it marvelous power. For example, it was clearly inferior to Ning's sword-arts in terms of technique, and yet it too was capable of reaching the speed of light! In fact, in many areas it was superior!

As for intent...if the intent of this sword-art could be further strengthened, it was completely capable of gaining a true 'soul' of its own.

Ordinary humans had three types of energy within them; their 'vital energy', their 'ki', and their 'soul'. For a sword-art to merely have an 'intent' wasn't that impressive; when a sword-art gained a true 'soul', it would truly rise to a new level...the fifth level of swordforce. Upon reaching that level, even without actually drawing the sword, one would be able to cause major powers to feel despair in their hearts and perhaps even flee.

But of course, actually reaching the fifth stage of heartforce was far too difficult. In the entire Three Realms, the number of experts in either camp who had reached this level could be counted on one hand.

"The [Mourning] sword-art...I've mastered it," Ning mused to himself. "If I were to challenge the Path of Blades again, I trust I would be able to defeat the ninth guardian. But the tenth? I'm probably not strong enough yet!"

"The best solution is to merge [Mourning] and [Brightmoon] together, giving my [Brightmoon] sword-art an intent of its own as well," Ning mused to himself.

The [Brightmoon] sword-art was derived from the essence of the [Five Treasures]; even though it didn't have a will or an intent of its own, it was still on the same level as [Mourning]. Once it truly gained an intent of its own, it would vault to a completely new level.

"By then, I'll be able to effortlessly defeat the ninth guardian. As for the tenth guardian...I'll have a chance as well." Ning nodded slowly. "Then let me first perfect [Brightmoon]."

[Brightmoon] was something that Ning had created himself and had been constantly perfecting. Now that he had mastered [Mourning], he was going to infuse the intent and will of [Mourning] into [Brightmoon]. Although this was going to be difficult, it was something he would be able to do.

If [Brightmoon] was a technique which someone else had created, it would have been impossible for Ning to do this.

This was just another example of how creating one's own sword-technique could make a huge difference.

"My heart is in mourning."

"My will is in my sword."

"Let them both become one."

Ning completely understood the profound mysteries of [Mourning]. Using it as his blueprint, Ning began to infuse its intent into [Brightmoon]. Even though he encountered some problematic issues, given enough time he would be able to break through them.

After a year and three months in seclusion, Ji Ning finally walked out of his Immortal estate.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 30: Sword-Art Mastered

One year and three months. More than two hundred Empyrean Gods had been watching Ji Ning's Immortal estate during this period of time, but Ning had remained in seclusion, not emerging. None of them dared to enter and disturb him, but every day there were many Empyrean Gods who were watching his estate. To these Empyrean Gods who had lost almost all hope, Ning was the only hope remaining.

"He came out."

"Darknorth came out"

As soon as Ning emerged from his estate, other Empyrean Gods immediately noticed it.

Ning first waved his hand to collect his Immortal estate, then walked towards the group of Empyrean Gods and used his divine power to say mentally, "Fellow Empyrean Gods, there is something I would discuss with all of you." Instantly, Empyrean God Sin, Empyrean God Sealthroat, and the others all emerged from their own Immortal estates. Soon, all of the Empyrean Gods were gathered here.

"My fellow Empyrean Gods, I gained certain insights during this meditation session and improved significantly," Ning said.

Instantly, all of the two hundred-plus Empyrean Gods grew excited. In fact, some even began to softly mumble to themselves. To them...escaping this place was more important than life and death.

"I am completely confident of being able to defeat the ninth guardian. However...I can't make the same claim when it comes to the tenth guardian," Ning said. "However...I will definitely make it to the tenth guardian on this attempt through the Path of Blades. Are you all willing to join me on this trip?"

"Of course we are."

"Willing, willing!"

"Fellow Daoist Darknorth, you truly are formidable. It's only been a year, but you've improved so dramatically."

"We're all willing."

The Empyrean Gods all hurriedly assented in unison with excitement.

Ning wasn't surprised that all the other Empyrean Gods were going to accompany him. They had chosen to give up long ago, after all! But when Sin and Sealthroat actually spoke out as well, Ning couldn't help but ask, "Sin, Sealthroat, are the two of you sure you want to follow me? You've already made it this far in Kilostar Island; you are only one step away from freedom."

"That step is simply too long a step to take." Sealthroat shook his head.

"Right. Both of us gave up long ago," Sin said with a laugh. "We couldn't even match up to Ninedawn and Greatdream, and it's been a long, long time since we've improved at all. Based on our experiences during the Primordial Era, for us not to improve at all despite the passage of so many years means that we've probably reached our limit. There's no way for us to improve any further. If we don't go with you, we will probably be trapped here forever, unable to escape."

Sealthroat nodded as well. "Darknorth, you said it yourself; nowadays, fewer and fewer people will be willing to enter Undermoon Lake, and the number that can reach Kilostar Island will be smaller still. If we don't go with you, we probably won't see another new Emyrean God here at Kilostar Island for the next trillion years."

Ning nodded, understanding their feelings. "Alright. If that's the case, then let's have everyone follow me. I don't dare to claim complete confidence, but I'll definitely work hard."

These Emyrean Gods hadn't imagined that their opportunity would come so quickly. After initially experiencing excitement and nervousness, they quickly collected their Immortal estates and allowed Ning to collect them without fighting back.

In midair. Ning stared down at Kilostar Island. Previously, it had been extremely bustling and lively, but now it was completely silent. All the Emyrean Gods had departed.

"My [Brightmoon] has advanced by yet another level. This is the perfect time to find someone to test it against." Ning transformed into a streak of light, flying far off towards the horizon. He soon arrived at the borders of Kilostar Island, then flew forward while following the floating wooden bridge.

He advanced forward, through the Path of Blades. He reached the place he retreated from last time, then stared at the ninth guardian who was seated in the lotus position.

"You came." The golden-robed youth looked at Ning, his eyes filled with an aura of despair. "I've waited quite some time. I hope you won't disappoint me."

After speaking, the golden-robed youth rose to his feet, a pair of swords appearing in his hands. He said calmly, "You already had a chance to view the sword-art last time. This time, let's just fight."

Ning also knew that each person was only given a single chance to view each sword-art. If you failed at the Path of Blades, you would be allowed to try again, but you would never be able to view the sword-art again.

"Alright." A pair of twin swords appeared in Ning's hands as well.

Whoosh.

Whoosh.

The two quickly charged towards each other, and sword-light began to howl through the air. The golden-robed youth's sword-arts were incredibly fast. Although they seemed to be filled with endless mourning and despair, they were also incredibly deadly and vicious. As for the two streaks of sword-light in Ning's hands, they transformed into a pair of black holes that completely blocked out the golden-robed youth's attacks. Every so often, Ning was even able to launch a counter-attack or two.

"Is defense the only thing you can do?" While attacking, the golden-robed youth barked at Ning.

"First break through my defense, then talk." Ning was very calm.

To him, the ninth guardian was merely someone he was going to gain further experience from. Ning wanted to see what the differences were between his own mastered [Mourning] and [Mourning] as wielded by the ninth guardian.

This battle went on for a full hour.

The ninth guardian revealed all of his abilities for Ning to see, and as a result Ning was able to discover a few imperfections in his own mastery of [Mourning]. When cultivating in a type of sword-arts, every person would put their own distinctive twists on it, after all.

“Time to finish it.”

Ning’s sword-light suddenly changed as he went from defending to attacking.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Sword-light howled forth with incredible, extraordinary speed, seeming to cover the skies with its might. The ninth guardian was so startled he immediately used [Three Heads, Six Arms]. Ning, however, did the same. An infinite amount of sword-light seemed to blast forward like an inexhaustible, seamless flow of water, carrying an aura and intent of mournfulness within it. In but a single breath’s worth of time, the ninth guardian was knocked flying backwards. He fell onto the ground, rolling over several times before managing to clamber back to his feet.

“You win.” The ninth guardian grinned. “Darknorth, the only one standing between you and escape is the final guardian, the tenth guardian. Be careful.” After speaking, he vanished into thin air.

Ning grinned as well. When he used full power, his opponent had only been able to just barely hold on for a breath’s worth of time. Ning was quite satisfied with this result.

Swoosh! He advanced deeper into the Path of Blades at incredible speed!

The sky was completely dark in this part of the path. The countless titanic spears, blades, and swords that were jutting out from the ice on each side of the wooden bridge were glowing with dim light. Without their light, it would probably be completely pitch-black here.

“How odd,” Ning mused to himself.

Soon, a black-robed youth appeared in the distance. He was seated in the lotus position, and when Ning arrived he opened his eyes to look towards Ning.

Those eyes...

They contained a deathly silence within them. They seemed to have no life within them at all, just utter despair, enough to freeze one’s heart.

“View the sword-art,” the black-robed youth said calmly.

Ning turned his head to look at the sword-art which had appeared on the nearby giant sword. As with before, the entire sword-art was displayed from start to finish, from simple to complex. As Ning watched, he began to feel stunned. Even after watching three times, Ning didn’t recover from his dazed state.

“Enough.” The black-robed youth rose to his feet, a pair of swords appearing in his hands.

Ning came back to his senses.

“What is this sword-art?” Ning immediately asked.

“The name of this sword-art is Seversoul!” The black-robed youth replied.

“Seversoul? Seversoul...? The name is just like the sword-art itself...it really does sever the soul.” Utter agony filled Ning’s heart when he just visualized that sword-art. He knew, however, that there was no way for him to truly master this sword-art, because the essence and intent of this sword-art was the ruination of the soul that would come when one experienced true, absolute, eternal despair.

Ning, however, had no way of forcing himself to feel this sort of absolute despair! The techniques of this sword-art were also far superior to that of the [Mourning] sword-art; in fact, it was no weaker than Ning’s own [Brightmoon] sword-art. It was only surpassed by the [Five Treasures] sword-art itself.”

“Come,” the black-robed youth said calmly.

Ning nodded, swords appearing in his hands as well.

Swish! Swish!

Their two figures became blurred as they started to fight.

Two mighty sword-arts. One was filled with the intent of mourning, its sword-light flowing out in a consecutive stream. It had been created by distilling the essence of [Five Treasures], [Mourning], and many other techniques.

The other was filled with the essence of a ruined soul and utter despair. Its profoundness and marvelousness came from the creator of Undermoon Lake, who had intended it. Although it was different from the [Five Treasures], it was also quite shocking and brilliant.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The two continuously battled, advancing and retreating.

They actually fought to a complete standstill. Both sword-arts had their own strengths; both could be described as having reached the apex of skill possible for the fourth stage of swordforce. If their swords moved any faster, they would have surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos. If the intent of their swords was any deeper and stronger, they would have reached the Sword God stage.

“So the sword can actually be used in a way like this.” Ning had viewed this sword-art three times prior to this. Upon seeing how the tenth guardian actually wielded this sword-art, he instantly gained a much deeper understanding of some of its mysteries. New insights regarding the [Seversoul] sword-art began to fill his mind.

There was an intrinsic difference between Ning and the tenth guardian.

The tenth guardian was only capable of unleashing this single sword-art.

Ning, however, was capable of learning from the tenth guardian and fusing what he learned into his own [Brightmoon] sword-art. Although the learning process resulted in him occasionally being put at a disadvantage, Ning’s overall level of power was slowly, steadily beginning to rise. His sword-art became even more unpredictable and ephemeral, and it became faster and more powerful as well.

The battle continued for a day...two days...three days...

Neither side used any divine abilities. They were solely competing in sword-arts.

The insights Ning had gained into this sword-art were merging together nonstop in his mind, then inspiring him further. This sort of feeling, the feeling of nonstop improvement, was quite intoxicating...but he had still essentially reached the limit possible for him at his current level of sword-arts. Any improvements he was now able to make would be minute. He would at most be able to put the tenth guardian at a disadvantage, but the tenth guardian would still be able to launch occasional counterattacks as well.

“Eh?”

Ning was suddenly stunned, and his sword-light turned sluggish for a moment.

Boom! A streak of sword-light crashed against his body, knocking him flying.

“Why did you stop?” The tenth guardian stood there, a frown on his face. Ning’s sword-art was clearly on a slightly higher level than his. If they continued to fight without Ning making any improvements at all, he would’ve permitted Ning to go into the fifth island. However, he could sense that Ning was still slowly improving, and his sword-arts were slowly transforming. Thus, he didn’t stop the fight and instead continued to battle against Ning.

This was because the purpose of Path of Blades was to temper and train Empyrean Gods. If Ji Ning was still improving, then of course the guardian wasn’t going to halt.

But Ning had suddenly come to a halt...this puzzled the tenth guardian.

Ning stood there atop the wooden bridge, a dazed look in his eyes. In his mind, however...there was a disturbance that felt like Pangu cleaving apart Heaven and Earth.

BOOM!!!!

The [Seversoul] sword-art worked in a way that was completely different from the [Five Treasures] sword-art. Ning’s [Brightmoon] was derived from the essence of the [Five Treasures], and so as Ning gained more and more insight into [Seversoul] and began to fuse it with the essence of the [Five Treasures] within [Brightmoon]...with a boom, he suddenly understood. He blew through the last bottleneck preventing him from mastering the [Five Treasures].

Prior to this, it was as though a thin curtain of mist had been preventing him from seeing the final parts of it clearly. But now...Ning broke straight through that final barrier.

Boom.....

“The [Five Treasures]...” Ning shut his eyes, the many profound mysteries within his mind rapidly beginning to join together. All of the insights he had gained into the [Five Treasures] were merging into a perfect whole at high speed.

He had mastered the entire [Five Treasures]!

There was no doubt about it, no questions left in his mind.

“So this...this is what it means to surpass the Heavenly Daos.” Ning opened his eyes to stare at the dark skies surrounding him. He lightly flicked out with a finger, and it seemed to create a ripple as though it had touched something.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 20: Jindan Upgrade Chapter 31: The Fifth Island

In the past, Ji Ning always believed the Heavenly Daos to be the rules by which the Three Realms operated. To surpass the Heavenly Daos would therefore mean breaking through of the control and functioning of the Three Realms!

But now, upon making the actual breakthrough and fully comprehending the [Five Treasures], Ning truly understand what it really meant to surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos.

The Heavenly Daos...

They weren't just the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. They were the Heavenly Daos that existed in all places!

The Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld all had Heavenly Daos that belonged to them. Every single chaosworld had Heavenly Daos that differed from each other! Even within the endless primordial chaos itself, the Heavenly Dao of Primordial Chaos was omnipresent, including places such as Undermoon Lake, Prisonworld 17, or the Void.

An invisible layer of laws permeated and covered the primordial chaos and everything within it.

These laws laid out many restrictions; for example, the fastest speed possible was the speed of light! Time could only go forward, not backwards! The so-called 'temporal inversion' spell was nothing more than a way to view the past; it didn't actually cause time itself to reverse! There were also restrictions on how powerful thunder, fire, wind, water, and other things could be.

These were laws. They were shackles that had been placed on every single creature and being. It was thanks to these shackles that the various chaosworlds could function in a stable, coherent manner. Without them, the likes of the Pangu Chaosworld and the Seamless Chaosworld may well have exploded and been destroyed long before colliding into each other.

But of course...

There were countless living creatures in the universe, and some of the most dazzling figures were capable of shattering these shackles and reaching a higher level.

Now...Ji Ning's sword had broken through the shackle on speed.

“Invisible laws. Invisible shackles. They exist everywhere.” When Ning flicked out with his finger, it actually moved faster than the speed of light, resulting in an interaction with those invisible shackles of law. If he hadn't truly broken through, he wouldn't even be able to sense those shackles at all.

“Even the major powers are under the control of the Heavenly Daos of the Three Realms. Only people like Mother Nuwa have truly ascended beyond the Heavenly Daos.” Ning sighed to himself.

Chaos Immortals and World Gods had all used raw, overwhelming power to burst through those shackles and ascend to a new level.

Ning was very far from that level for now; he was only able to transcend in terms of the speed of his sword.

“In terms of sword speed...I stand at the pinnacle of the entire Three Realms!” Ning mused to himself, “And in sword-arts...I should be ranked amongst the top three.”

Who was the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms?

This was a matter that had always been under contention.

Daofather Fujū had been publicly acknowledged by everyone in the Three Realms as the number one Sword Immortal, but he had died. Right now, many venerated Daofather Holyflame. Daofather Holyflame was actually just like Ning; he had only reached the fourth stage of swordforce, but had mastered the [Five Treasures]!

There were still a few other major powers in the Three Realms who had reached the fifth stage of swordforce. However, although fifth-stage swordforce was capable of unleashing astonishing power and dazzling skill, it was still constrained in speed by the Heavenly Daos to be merely as fast as the speed of light.

If the difference in speed was too great, all the technique in the world would be useless.

Daofather Holyflame clearly had ‘just’ fourth-stage swordforce, but there were still many experts who believed him to be the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms. It was simply that there were some who would still dispute it. As for the likes of incredibly powerful figures such as Swordfather Darklight of the Three Realms, they had reached the fifth level of swordforce, but none would say that he was the number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms.

The essence of the sword lay in the word ‘speed’, after all.

Take the simplest possible motion; a direct stab. If it was launched faster than the speed of light, its power would become ridiculously great. Enemies would find it hard to even block such attack. Speed was where the true essence of the sword lay!

Lu Dongbin had felt that Ning was a born Sword Immortal, while Patriarch Subhuti viewed Ning with tremendous favor, but neither of the two would have ever imagined that in just three hundred short years, Ning’s sword-arts would rise to such a level.

The reason why Ning could advance so rapidly was primarily due to the tempering effect of being within Undermoon Lake. Ning’s other clones in the Three Realms were also working on the [Five Treasures], but they were incredibly far off from being able to master it! Clearly, this special environment and these life-and-death challenges brought results that were completely different from one quietly training on one’s own. In the Three Realms, there were no sword-arts like [Mourning] or [Seversoul] to help guide the way.

“If I can reach the fifth stage of swordforce, I would become the undisputed number one Sword Immortal of the Three Realms.” Ning’s heart was filled with excitement, but he also knew that reaching

the fifth stage of swordforce would probably not be much easier than reaching the fifth stage of heartforce.

The tenth guardian stared at Ji Ning making a gesture with his finger. His face couldn't help but change as he murmured softly to himself, "...Surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos?"

"Sorry to keep you waiting." Ning smiled as he walked over. He was in an excellent mood.

He had increased in power dramatically, which meant that he would be able to better steer his own destiny within this great storm. In addition, he would be bringing out more than two hundred Empyrean Gods with him, and Ning knew exactly how badly they all wanted to leave this place.

"Let's see how powerful you've become." With a swoosh, the tenth guardian transformed into a streak of light and attacked Ning.

Ning continued to amble forward slowly, seeming to feel that he had matters under perfect control. No matter how marvelous his foe's sword-art was, its speed was still constrained by the Heavenly Daos. When the enemy's streak of sword-light closed in on him, Ning simply reached out with his right sword, sending it forward in a viperous strike. This was an extremely simple but incredibly fast stab.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Blood Drop stance!

The tenth guardian attempted to block, but Ning's sword-light still managed to scrape past the defending sword and stab the tenth guardian's forehead. The tenth guardian's head was pushed backwards as he was knocked into the air before stabilizing himself and once more landing on the ground. A very complicated look was on the tenth guardian's face, and he mumbled to himself, "He surpassed the limits. He has indeed surpassed the limits. A sword as fast as this...how are you supposed to block it? There's no way to block it at all."

Once one's swordforce reached the fifth stage, one's sword-arts would also become incredibly marvelous...and yet, compared to fourth-stage swordforce combined with the [Five Treasures], it was still inferior.

This was due to a single word: Speed!

This word was enough to cause countless experts to feel despair, enough to cause even major powers to be willing to abandon all their other Daos to train in the [Five Treasures].

"You've won." The tenth guardian looked at Ning, a hint of anticipation in his dead eyes. "This sword-art...is it the [Five Treasures] of your Three Realms?"

"You've heard of the [Five Treasures] as well?" Ning was surprised.

"Those Empyrean Gods in Undermoon Lake often spoke of it." The tenth guardian looked at Ning.

"Yes, it's the [Five Treasures]." Ning nodded.

The tenth guardian had a very complicated look on his face. Sighing, he said, "I guard the Path of Blades and am a master of many sword-arts, spear-arts, saber-arts, and other combat arts. But not one of them has surpassed the limits of the Heavenly Daos. To lose to you...I willingly acknowledge my defeat."

“You are the guardian for all of the weapons?” Ning was surprised.

“Of course. The other nine guardians you encountered were actually all me as well.” The tenth guardian laughed. “However, each time I’ll only use a single type of sword-art. Enough...you’ve won. You can now go to the fifth island. Once you go there, you’ll be allowed to leave Undermoon Lake.”

“Go.” The tenth guardian smiled, then disappeared without a trace.

The surrounding darkness vanished as well, allowing the bright moon to once more appear in the skies.

As for Ning, he transformed into a streak of light and advanced forward.

After flying for roughly an hour, he was vaguely able to make out an enormous, beautiful island up ahead. This island was studded with miniature lakes that were dazzling to behold. Some of the lakes seemed to be formed from flames, some were filled with golden light, some were filled with red light, and some were jade-green.

All sorts of lights sparkled and flashed, making it truly look like an Immortal realm.

At the end of the wooden bridge stood a gray-robed, silver-haired man who was smiling at Ning.

“Eh?” Upon seeing the distant silver-haired man, Ning was quite puzzled. “He...doesn’t seem to be a living creature.”

“This is the final lake in Undermoon Lake, ‘Moonfall’.” The silver-haired man smiled as he looked at Ning. “Empyrean God Darknorth, you are the second Empyrean God to overcome the Path of Blades and reach this location...and your power is even greater than Jueming’s was. But enough of that...come, follow me. I’ll take you to the treasures. This will be the last place where you can choose a treasure.”

Ning nodded. He was allowed to choose three items from each of the final three islands.

Just a short while later, he finished making his choice.

Ning had already searched the memories of the prisoners of Pangaea, and he knew the value of the treasures before him. He knew which treasures the major powers of the Three Realms would drool over. Ning had no need of them, but he would be able to give them to allied major powers.

“Hand over the treasures of Empyrean Gods Sin and Sealthroat,” the silver-haired man said.

“Here, take.” Ning had already prepared them. He handed them over, then said in a puzzled manner, “Is there no need to hand over the treasures of Empyrean Gods Greatdream and Ninedawn?”

Greatdream had killed Ninedawn, while Ning himself had killed Greatdream. All the treasures were thus in his hands.

“The treasures of those you killed belong to you, of course.” The silver-haired man continued, “Follow me to a place. Afterwards, you’ll be able to leave Undermoon Lake.”