

Desolate 921

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 14: The Eternal Emperor Closest to the Hegemons

“Hrm?” The almighty Hegemon sat amongst the thirteen thrones, and both his face and the faces of the twelve golden-armored powers around him tightened. The almighty Hegemon actually once more took control over the flows of time to cause the earlier scene to replay once more. Ji Ning once more flicked out his finger...

“No mistaking it. That’s the [Heartsword] sword-art.” The almighty Hegemon nodded slowly.

“Darknorth actually trains in the [Heartsword]?” Daolord Thousand Waves was somewhat speechless.

“Impressive.”

“I thought he must’ve created a new sword-stance that received the acknowledgement of the pagodas. I didn’t expect that it was actually due to him executing the [Heartsword].” The golden-armored major powers present were all rather surprised. It must be understood that there was a difference between using your own sword-arts and using someone else’s. A self-created sword-art would generally be a bit more powerful.

When Ji Ning had mastered the Reincarnation stance of the [Heartseal], he could’ve chosen to develop a sword-stance of his own that would also be acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas. However, he was in no rush to do so. Instead, he had decided to meditate on the even more difficult and profound [Nameless] sword-art. The seventh stance of the [Nameless] sword-art had an extremely powerful sword-intent, and so when Ning executed it his burst of sword-intent was acknowledged by the pagodas.

“He has merely learned the sword-arts of another.” The almighty Hegemon shook his head slightly.

“Only if he reaches this level through his own power and own skills would he be considered a truly dazzling figure.”

“Agreed.”

“Right.”

The golden-armored powers all nodded. Long ago, a person had been able to use the [Heartsword] to reach the apex of power and become an Eternal Emperor, but that didn’t mean that Ji Ning would be able to walk the same path. In addition, Ji Ning had only gained an elementary understanding of this sword-art.

“Woodflower.” The almighty Hegemon looked at the nearby Lord Woodflower.

“Hegemon.” Lord Woodflower nodded respectfully.

“Go give that young fellow a gentle reminder,” the almighty Hegemon instructed. “In the future, when he finds his own Dao and his own path, he should merge his heartforce and his sword-arts together and pour them both into his Dao! But of course, that’s just a suggestion. His own path will of course be up to him to choose.”

“Understood.” Lord Woodflower nodded.

A distant look appeared in the Hegemon’s eyes, and he murmured softly, “When Emperor Heartsword suddenly descended upon the world, he challenged all three of us Hegemons, then wandered off into parts unknown...”

The twelve golden-armored figures all listened attentively.

Emperor Heartsword was indeed a legendary figure. He was a legend who was roughly comparable in power to the three mighty Hegemons! However, his rise to prominence was just as sudden as his disappearance. Prior to him becoming a Verge-level Daolord, he didn’t really have much of a reputation. He was a very low-key figure, and it was said that he lived the life of an ordinary commoner in a distant chaosworld.

However, once he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, a feud resulted in him slaying more than twenty Daolords in a row, and he even completely crushed and wiped out a large enemy sect. This action had shocked the Endless Territories, resulting in his rise to fame. Shortly afterwards, he succeeded in his Daomerge and gained eternity.

After gaining eternity, he immediately went and challenged each of the other Eternal Emperors. He won every single battle! However, he didn’t kill a single one of them.

After that, he challenged the three ancient Hegemons.

Ever since the most ancient of days, the three ancient Hegemons had stood at the very apex of the Endless Territories. No one had ever been able to shake their positions. No one knew what the results of those duels had been. When asked, Emperor Heartsword simply said one thing: “I lost.”

However, one of the three ancient Hegemons, the one belonging to the Ancient cultivators, had said something else: “His power is comparable to ours.”

This phrase guaranteed that Emperor Heartsword would become a legend! However, despite his quick rise to prominence and the many waves he had caused, he disappeared just as quickly. Despite that, most later cultivators acclaimed him as being the Eternal Emperor who was closest to the level of the three Hegemons, and his [Hear sword] style was venerated by many. Alas, he had never transmitted his [Hear sword] sword-art to any disciples. The only thing he did was leave behind a complete copy of the [Hear sword] sword-art to the Dao Alliance before he disappeared on his journey.

The [Hear sword] tome became a precious treasure of the Dao Alliance. All the copies of this tome circulating in the outside world were all fragmentary, with only the tome in the possession of the Dao Alliance being genuine. Other organizations such as the Brightshore Kingdom would never be given access to a complete [Hear sword] manual, no matter what price they offered to pay.

“His sword-arts... although he reached an extremely high level of proficiency in the Dao of the Sword, some of the most freakishly talented Daolords, the ones capable of slaying Eternal Emperors, were superior to him in that regard.” The almighty Hegemon sighed. “His strength lay in the fact that he was actually able to almost perfectly merge his power as a Heartforce Cultivator and as a Fiendgod Body Refiner. That is why he had such tremendous power.”

“Right.” The twelve golden-armored figures all nodded.

Logically speaking, Heartforce Cultivation, Fiendgod Body Refining, and Ki Refining were three completely separate paths that couldn't merge together.

Take Bertulu as an example. In battle, he could use some illusions or use his heartworld to pressure his foes. In short, he would use heartforce as a supportive skill as he engaged in close combat!

However...

Emperor Heartsword was different. When he used his divine abilities and struck out with his sword, he was able to unleash tremendous power. As for his heartforce, he was able to use its illusions to affect reality itself. Most importantly, he was somehow able to cause his heartforce to naturally join together with his sword. This made it so that he was able to perfectly meld his power as a Heartforce Cultivator and as a Fiendgod Refiner, causing his power to skyrocket to a terrifying level. This was why he was acclaimed by so many as the Eternal Emperor who was closest to the three Hegemons in power.

.....

The Sword Palace.

"Congratulations, senior apprentice-brother Darknorth."

"Senior apprentice-brother Darknorth, now that you've been acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas, you are the seventh Swordlord of our palace."

Ning was in a superb mood as he entertained his fellow disciples. Suddenly, he saw a figure appear at the margins of the Forest of Sword Pagodas.

"Senior apprentice-brother Woodflower?" Ning immediately recognized him.

"Follow me, Darknorth." Lord Woodflower sent him a mental message.

"Everyone, the Palace Lord has summoned me. Pardon me." Ning said a few words of farewell to the cultivators nearby. They, too, had seen Lord Woodflower appear.

A short while later, Ning and Lord Woodflower were walking side by side through a mountainous forest.

"Darknorth, you have received the acknowledgement of the Sword Pagodas and become a Swordlord. Per our rules, you are permitted to go to Armaments Gorge and choose a single treasure that doesn't cost more than a million cubes of chaos nectar," Lord Woodflower said. "This is a special rule the Sword Palace created for the benefit of our Swordlords. Only Swordlords are given this benefit."

Ning's eyes lit up. No more than a million cubes? What an enormously generous offer!

It made sense. Swordlords were capable of becoming Daolords at any time, and they would be extraordinary Daolords once they made their breakthrough. They were worth the cost.

"Oh, right. Now that you are a Swordlord, there is something I must tell you." Lord Woodflower smiled.

"All of the World-level cultivators in the Twelve Palaces who have been acknowledged by their respective pagodas are preparing for a very special opportunity which has come before you."

"A special opportunity?" Ning was puzzled.

“Right. In the end, only four World-level cultivators in the Twelve Palaces will be given this special opportunity.” Lord Woodflower looked at Ning. “This truly is a stroke of tremendous fortune for you. None of the Twelve Palaces have access to this. In all the Endless Territories, most likely only the exalted Hegemon is capable of bringing this opportunity before you. If it wasn’t for the sake of a newcomer who recently joined his clan, the almighty Hegemon definitely wouldn’t give us this chance.”

Lord Woodflower knew very well that in the Hegemon’s heart, what mattered the most was his imperial clan.

Only for the sake of his Brightshore Imperials was the almighty Hegemon willing to make use of this opportunity! The reason why he was giving the Twelve Palaces four of the medallions was partially because they were subordinates, but also for the sake of giving that young Imperial four assistants! Although the chance to enter the Archaeus region of the alternate universe was an incredible opportunity, it was also extremely dangerous. Tremendous opportunity always came with tremendous danger.

“There should be many in the Twelve Palaces who have been acknowledged by their pagodas. Only four will have a chance?” Ning was puzzled.

“Just four.” Lord Woodflower sighed. “I’m worried that our Sword Palace won’t be able to get so much as a single slot.”

“You’ve just recently been acknowledged and haven’t spent much time in our Sword Palace, so it wouldn’t really matter if you fail. However, you should still do your best. According to what the Hegemon said, the strongest four shall be given this tremendous opportunity,” Lord Woodflower said. Frankly speaking, he really didn’t have much faith in Ning. Although Ning had been acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas, so had the other six Swordlords.

“In roughly one century, the almighty Hegemon will select the four strongest candidates,” Lord Woodflower finished.

“A century?” Ning nodded secretly. It seemed as though it was indeed time for him to make some preparations.

“Oh, right. Do you know the name of the sword-art you used to gain acknowledgement from the Sword Pagodas?” Lord Woodflower looked at Ning.

Ning shook his head. “I do not. I obtained this sword-art by accident. Because I don’t know what its true name was, I’ve been calling it the [Nameless] sword-art this entire time. Do you know its true name, senior apprentice-brother Woodflower?” Ning’s eyes became filled with an eager blaze. When Ning had executed the seventh stance, the Cosmic Heart stance, he had noticed that although it was harder to use than Emperor Mirrorsnow’s Reincarnation stance, the two were actually on the same level when it came to the profundity of their insights into the Dao of the Sword. The tough part of the Cosmic Heart stance lay in how ephemeral and unpredictable it was. One had to follow one’s own heart, allowing one’s heartforce to perfectly merge into one’s sword-stances.

Ning was quite talented in heartforce. Although his heartforce wasn’t at a very strong level, he was still able to execute the stance.

If he had been more skilled in heartforce, the power of this stance would've been much greater. This would have been especially true if he had reached the sixth stage of heartforce and established his own Heartworld.

"This is a sword-art which perfectly combines Heartforce Cultivation with the Dao of the Sword." After executing this stance, Ning immediately understood what made this sword-art so valuable. He instantly grew eager to learn more.

"I do indeed know its name." Lord Woodflower nodded. "This sword-art was created and passed down by a powerful Eternal Emperor who was nearly as strong as the Hegemon."

The Desolate Era

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 15: Preparations

Ji Ning was delighted to hear this. Finally, he was going to learn about the history of the [Nameless] sword-art.

Lord Woodflower continued, "This Eternal Emperor was known as Emperor Heartsword. His rise to power was sudden, and for a brief period of time he was the most dazzling, celebrated figure of the Endless Territories. However, shortly after he revealed his brilliance he elected to disappear as he adventured through parts unknown. He was so strong that he was most likely the Eternal Emperor who was closest to the three Hegemons in power."

"Ah." Ning nodded.

After mastering the seventh stance of the [Nameless] sword-art, he realized that although the sword-art itself was on the same level of profundity as Emperor Mirrorsnow's, Emperor Heartsword's strength lay in the fact that he was able to perfectly fuse his heartforce into his sword-arts. It made the power of his sword-arts increase dramatically to a point where he was unquestionably much more powerful than Emperor Mirrorsnow had been. It made sense for him to be comparable to the three almighty Hegemons.

It wasn't that Emperor Mirrorsnow was weak. He had developed the Reincarnation stance at the World level and used it to break through to become a Daolord. If he had been at the Forest of Sword Pagodas, his self-created Reincarnation stance would've been acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas! Someone who relied on this sword-art as the base of his breakthrough to Daolord would be able to immediately battle ordinary Daolords of the Second Step.

But of course, Bertulu and Eastcult were even more freakishly talented. Once they broke through, they would be able to match Daolords of the Third Step! However, the harder one's path was, the more difficult it would be for one to become an Eternal Emperor! The more freakishly talented you were, the harder it would be for you to become an Eternal Emperor. This was why, despite the passage of countless years, there were only three Hegemons.

"What were his sword-arts named?" Ning asked.

"Prior to disappearing, he left behind a complete copy of his sword-arts with the Dao Alliance. He named it the [Heartsword]." Lord Woodflower continued, "Only the Dao Alliance has a complete copy of this sword-art."

“Only the Dao Alliance?” Ning was rather disappointed.

“Yes, because this is the one and only sword-art which allows Heartforce Cultivators to completely merge their power with Fiendgod Body Refiners and Ki Refiners and then gain eternity,” Lord Woodflower said.

Fiendgod Refiners would be able to perfectly merge the heartforce into their sword-arts and then enter close combat.

Ki Refiners would be able to perfectly merge the heartforce into their flying swords as well.

“A sword-art which can rival Hegemons, with only one complete copy... its only natural that the Dao Alliance would never transmit it to outsiders. No matter what price our Brightshore Kingdom offered to pay, they refused to let us have a copy. Something like this sword-art isn't something which mere treasures can be used to trade for. A sword-art like that is one of the fundamental pillars on which entire organizations rest.” Lord Woodflower continued, “The outside world only has incomplete, fragmentary records. How many stances do you have?”

“Just seven,” Ning said.

Lord Woodflower looked rather disappointed. “The first seven stances were created by Eternal Emperor Heartsword before he was a Daolord, and they are the seven most commonly known stances. I was hoping that you might've encountered something special. Oh, right. Have you gone to the Ancient Library? The library holds a fragmentary record that includes the first ten stances of the [Hear sword] manual.”

“The Ancient Library has it?” Ning was instantly delighted. The Ancient Library simply had far too many sword-arts within it, including tens of millions of fragmentary sword-arts. Each one could only be read through the usage of godsense. Even if you could fully review a thousand scrolls a day, it would still take over a hundred years for you to go through everything.

“Our Brightshore Kingdom had to pay a hefty price in order to purchase these ten stances, and we're allowed to teach them to others,” Lord Woodflower said. “You are a cultivator, after all. I'm sure you'll have some connections to the Dao Alliance and eventually be able to gain entry into it. At that point in time, if you spent a bit of chaos nectar you'll be able to purchase the complete [Hear sword] sutra.”

Ning nodded. He was a member of Vastheaven Palace, which meant that he actually had quite a deep connection to the Dao Alliance.

“Make your preparations. You have a hundred years, at which point the Twelve Palaces will choose select just the four strongest World-level experts for this opportunity.” Lord Woodflower smiled as he delivered this message.

.....

After parting with Lord Woodflower, Ning immediately headed towards the Ancient Library. The Ancient Library was filled with tens of millions of sword-arts. Ning scanned the place with his godsense and was quickly able to discover a jade slip that had the words 'Hear sword Sutra' atop it. In the past, Ning didn't realize what it was, but now he realized that this [Hear sword] tome contained the 'nameless' sword-art he trained in.

“It really is the same.” As Ning picked up the jade slip and sent his godsense into it, a large amount of information flooded into his memories. This really did contain the first ten stances, as well as some explanations regarding this sword-art.

The complete version of this sword-art contained fifteen stances. The first seven stances had been created by Emperor Heartsword prior to becoming a Daolord, and he used the seventh stance to reach the Samsara Daolord level. Afterwards, he used his fifteenth stance to become an Eternal Emperor.

“It is even more profound than I believed it to be.” After Ning viewed the ‘final’ three stances, he couldn’t help but sigh. Actually, anyone could tell that they were the same technique. The very first stance of this sword-art was named the Heartsword stance, after all!

The Heartsword stance had exceedingly high requirements with regard’s to one’s mind and heart. The user had to make his mind one with both the sword and the world around it, gaining absolute mastery over the sword.

The various later stances also had very high requirements with regards to both the sword and the heart.

The sixth stance, ‘Unicorn’s Heart’, was even more profound and abstruse than the Heartsword stance. One had to find that ephemeral feeling which was so difficult to grasp.

The seventh stance was even better. The Cosmic Heart allowed for one to perfectly activate and infuse one’s heartforce into the sword-art. When the sword struck out, it was like a tear shed for a person you loved.

“His sword-arts actually aren’t that profound, compared to the most supreme major powers of the Dao of the Sword.” Ning had seen many things in the Forest of Sword Pagodas, and his horizons had been correspondingly expanded. “However, the mysteries of how he merged his heartforce with his sword-arts are worthy of further exploration.”

.....

The Twelve Palaces. The Palace of Fire.

“Have you heard? Just today, a World God in the Sword Palace named Ji Ning was acknowledged by the pagodas.”

“Ah? A World-level cultivator was acknowledged? What a freak.”

“He would be the seventh Swordlord of the Sword Palace, right?”

Some of the black-armored Daolords who were on patrol were chatting with each other. News spread throughout the Twelve Palaces quite quickly. It must be understood that there were only around sixty World-level cultivators who had been acknowledged by the ancient pagodas. Generally speaking, only one such cultivator would appear every trillion years. Anyone acknowledged by the pagodas was destined to be a truly extraordinary Daolord.

“What a freak. I can’t even get into the Fire Palace, but those freaks are actually able to receive the acknowledgment of the ancient pagodas.” Some of the World-level cultivators in front of the Fire Palace began to discuss this matter as well, and many of them sighed with frustration and envy.

“Fellow Daoist, what do you mean by ‘acknowledgment of the pagodas?’” A tall, skinny, jade-haired youth spoke out.

“Let me explain. Joining the Twelve Palaces isn’t that impressive, as some of their members aren’t even able to become Daolords! Even if your insights into the Dao are so profound that you can become a Daolord whenever you wish, you still aren’t that impressive! Only those who reach truly incredible heights are acknowledged by the resonance of the pagodas. From what I’ve heard, those World-level cultivators who are acknowledged by the pagodas can not only break through whenever they wish, once they do so they will immediately be comparable to Daolords of the Second Step in power.”

“What? They are able to break through whenever they wish, and will immediately be comparable to Daolords of the Second Step?” Quite a few World-level cultivators were stunned by this, and they all began to chat amongst themselves.

“Eh?”

“Darknorth?”

Outside the Fire Palace was a large group of cultivators who wished to take the trials to join the Fire Palace, and two of them were individuals who Ning was quite familiar with. One was Su Youji the Flamefairy while the other was World God Pillsaint. They had tried many times in recent years but were still unable to enter the Palace of Fire.

“Master was acknowledged by the ancient pagodas?” Su Youji was instantly overjoyed to hear this. “Incredible. Master is simply incredible.” All other thoughts flew out of Su Youji’s mind as she immediately turned and ran towards the Fire Palace’s spacetime transfer array. She was going to go back to the Sword Palace. Her master had achieved such a great thing. How could she, his retainer, not be there to congratulate him?

“Is that brother Darknorth?” The chubby World God Pillsaint was stunned. “The Sword Palace? It has to be the Darknorth that I know. He once told me that he is going to join the Sword Palace. The Sword Palace doesn’t have that many World-level cultivators in it. There’s no way someone else will have the same Daoist title as him. Ugh, I’ve been training for years but still am not able to enter the Fire Palace. I might as well join brother Darknorth instead.”

World God Pillsaint quickly made up his mind, then turned and began to hasten towards the spacetime transfer array. Even assuming he didn’t wish to become Ji Ning’s retainer, he still would’ve gone to congratulate Ning on his success. Ning had shown him kindness, after all.

.....

Whoosh. A few hours later Su Youji and World God Pillsaint, along with a few other cultivators, rode the spacetime transfer array from the Fire Palace to the Sword Palace.

Su Youji rushed straight into the Sword Palace. As Ji Ning’s retainer, she was permitted to go straight into the Sword Palace.

As for World God Pillsaint, he informed the black-armored Daolord who sought to bar his path, “Senior, I wish to meet with Swordlord Darknorth. I am his good friend.”

“He wishes to meet Swordlord Darknorth?” Su Youji, who had rushed on ahead, couldn’t help but turn back and glance at the chubby World God Pillsaint.

.....

A short while later.

Within an Immortal estate located at the peak of a mountain. Ji Ning, Su Youji, and Pillsaint were all seated facing each other.

“Youji, this gentleman is the World God Pillsaint who I mentioned to you before.” Ning laughed. “In the Astral Islands, he was my very first competitor.”

World God Pillsaint looked rather embarrassed. He hurriedly said, “I really didn’t know my own limits. Thankfully, you showed mercy to me, Daoist brother Darknorth. Otherwise, I’d be dead.”

Ning chuckled. “It was a sign that destiny binds the two of us.”

“Right, right. Bound by destiny!” World God Pillsaint grinned at Ning. “Daoist brother Darknorth, I have nowhere to go in the Brightshore Kingdom. I’ve tried a few times to enter the Palace of Fire, but I’ve failed each time. And so, I’m planning to give up and join you instead. Am I lucky enough to be accepted?”

“Follow me?” Ning was startled, but he then said with a laugh, “If you don’t mind joining me, I’d naturally be willing to welcome you. Others would beg for the chance to take such a master alchemist as a retainer.”

“Then it is settled!” World God Pillsaint immediately and straightforwardly swore a lifeblood oath. His oath was one of the fairly common retainer oaths that were sworn in the Endless Territories. Generally speaking, retainer oaths were fairly relaxed. Ning was able to break through to become a Daolord whenever he wished, and would be an extraordinary Daolord at that. Someone like him was definitely qualified to take on World God Pillsaint as a retainer.

“Pillsaint greets you, Master.” World God Pillsaint bowed respectfully.

“Enough, enough. There’s no need for the two of you to go through these pointless courtesies.” Ning smiled. The very first time he saw World God Pillsaint, he had a good feeling about the man. Now, the chubby-cheeked, rosy-faced youth who wore all his feelings on his sleeve had become his retainer. Quite frankly, World-level cultivators who were so genuine and guileless were quite rare.

“Whew. I finally have a backer now. Life in the Brightshore Kingdom really has pissed me off lately.” World God Pillsaint let out a sigh.

“Flamefairy, we didn’t know each other when we first met, but now we follow and serve the same master.” World God Pillsaint glanced towards the nearby Su Youji as he spoke.

“Uh huh.” The Flamefairy nodded.

“Can’t you be a bit more talkative?” World God Pillsaint felt speechless. The Flamefairy glanced at him and chuckled, but she didn’t say anything else.

As for Ning, he said, "Right. There's something I need you two to do for me."

"Please instruct us, Master." World God Pillsaint and Su Youji both spoke out at the same time. Su Youji felt rather excited. It was quite rare for Ning to assign her any tasks.

"A great opportunity is coming, and I have a small shot at getting it. I have to do everything I can to prepare for it," Ning said. "I'm planning to sell a treasure known as the Bloodfire Cloudfruit. It'll be up to you to help me sell it."

The Bloodfire Cloudfruit was the most valuable treasure he had on him.

The Desolate Era

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 16: Treasure Selling

"Bloodfire Cloudfruit?" Su Youji was puzzled.

"Bloodfire Cloudfruit!" World God Pillsaint's eyes bulged out as he called out in shock.

"You know of it?" Su Youji turned to look at World God Pillsaint.

World God Pillsaint hurriedly nodded, too excited to act smug. "That's one hell of a treasure. It is a unique fruit which can only be formed under very special conditions. It has marvelous properties, and cultivators who walk the Dao of Fire all dream of possessing something like it. But of course, it wouldn't work for you. You Ki Refiners are too physically weak; there's no way your bodies could possibly withstand the enormous amounts of energy the Bloodfire Cloudfruit contains. Only Fiendgod Body Refiners are able to endure its energy, which they can then use to forcibly convert their bodies into fire-attribute bodies. By then, they would be able to easily take control over Chaos fire and ride it to escape. Most likely, even Daolords would not be able to catch up to them."

"It's that amazing?" Su Youji was rather shocked. Not even Daolords would be able to catch up?

"If I sold it to Armaments Gorge, I'd be able to sell it for a million cubes of chaos nectar," Ning said.

"However, I'm hoping for a higher price. That's why I'd like for you to help me spread the news of this treasure to the black-armored Daolords. They'll definitely discuss it amongst themselves and with many others. Soon, everyone in the Twelve Palaces will know, and I'm sure there will be some who would be willing to pay a high price for the Bloodfire Cloudfruit."

"Selling for a high price? Easy! Leave it to me." Pillsaint was quite confident.

"Just spread the news as widely as you can. Even if a Daolord wishes to speak to me personally, just have them give you the bid," Ning said. "A hundred years from now, I will leave the Forest of Sword Pagodas and choose the highest bidder, giving the Bloodfire Cloudfruit to him or her."

"Alright."

"Understood."

Pillsaint and Su Youji were both a bit excited. Although this was a simple task, it was still a task that involved a million cubes of chaos nectar. They couldn't help but be filled with enthusiasm.

"Alright. I'm heading to the Forest of Sword Pagodas." Ning rose to his feet.

“Am I now allowed to enter and exit the Sword Palace freely?” Pillsaint was a bit worried about this. Just now, Ning had personally guided him through the palace, which was why the Sword Palace’s defenses had not automatically attacked him.

“Don’t worry. The spirit of the Sword Palace was able to see you becoming my retainer,” Ning said. The rules of the Sword Palace were that each formal disciple was permitted to grant two retainers free entry to and from the Sword Palace. Su Youji and Pillsaint were now both able to enter and leave freely, but Ning wouldn’t be able to grant this permission to a third retainer.

Swish.

Ning transformed into a streak of light and flew out the gates of Immortal estate and towards the Forest of Sword Pagodas.

Pillsaint and Su Youji watched as Ning left. Both of them felt a sense of pressure. Although this was a simple task, it still involved a great deal of wealth!

“As his new retainer, I need to make sure I handle this well,” Pillsaint mused silently.

“I’ve never been able to help out Master much. I can’t let him down.” Su Youji felt the same sense of pressure.

.....

The Forest of Sword Pagodas.

Ning set out his temporal acceleration cottage, then sat down in the lotus position and began to cultivate.

“I hope I’ll be able to garner a high price for it. I don’t really have many valuable treasures on me right now,” Ning mused. Although he did have a few Eternal weapons, there was nothing special about them. The only other item he owned which was worth over a hundred thousand cubes of chaos nectar was the spare Mirrorsnow Painting. When Ning left the Astral Islands and headed towards the Sword Palace, he had acquired a spare from the underwater creatures. However, Ning was in no rush to sell it. If he really did need money, he could sell it then. If he waited for a good opportunity, he might be able to sell it for a better price.

Still, the truth was that Ning really didn’t have many items he could sell for a high price.

As for the Bloodfire Cloudfruit...

The Twelve Palaces actually weren’t the best place to sell it, because almost all of its major powers were wandering the outside world. The Sword Palace theoretically had over a hundred Daolords, not including the black-armored ones, but almost all of them were out adventuring. Only ten or so were here at the Sword Palace. This was simply how the Twelve Palaces worked. As a result, there would be less competition resulting in lower prices for Ning.

If this was one of the places where many major powers of the Dao Alliance congregated, the price would probably be much better.

Alas, by the time Ning reached such a place he would probably have already become a Daolord. By then, even if he did sell the Bloodfire Cloudfruit for a high price it wouldn't be of much use to him.

Time flowed on.

Pillsaint and Su Youji spread the word, causing the news that Swordlord Darknorth of the Sword Palace wished to sell a Bloodfire Cloudfruit to spread throughout the Twelve Palaces.

"Bloodfire Cloudfruit?"

The people most excited to hear this naturally all belonged to the World-level cultivators and Daolords of the Palace of Fire, although virtually all of the World-level cultivators could do nothing more dream about it. These individuals all walked the Dao of Fire. If they had fire-attribute bodies, they would be able to cultivate much more quickly. They were thus the most suitable candidates for purchasing this item.

"Bloodfire Cloudfruit?"

The Saber Palace, Heartforce Palace, Sword Palace, Spacetime Palace, and other palaces also held Daolords and World-level cultivators who were interested.

Ning, for example, was a member of the Sword Palace who had a body that was lightning-attribute in nature.

But of course, those who walked the Dao of Water or the Dao of Metal would never procure fire-attribute bodies. That would make it twice as hard to cultivate, with half the effect. The fire-attribute body would disrupt their affinity to those Daos.

"That kid, Swordlord Darknorth, plans to sell it off within a hundred years? He's probably doing this to prepare for the upcoming opportunity. Heh heh... fellow Daoists, there's no need for us to bid up the price too much. He's definitely going to sell it no matter what. Let's keep the price low." Instantly, some Daolords came up with this idea. There were some Daolords in the Twelve Palaces who walked the path of evil. In fact, some had committed tremendous sins and atrocities. Although the lifeblood oath prevented them from acting against Ning, they were still able to do something like lowball him for his treasures.

.....

"The highest bid stands at 1.3 million cubes!" Pillsaint made this claim within an Immortal estate within the Sword Palace.

"What?" The old man frowned, his entire body emanating an aura of explosive, ruinous energy. "Who made such a high bid?"

"I can't reveal that," Pillsaint said placidly. "If your bid isn't any higher than this, there's no point in even bidding."

"You punk." The old man was irritated. He turned away and departed.

"Pillsaint." Su Youji watched the old man walk away, then sent Pillsaint a stealthy mental message. "You lied to him. What if no one ends up bidding a higher price? We'll be in trouble."

“Don’t worry.” Pillsaint was quite confident.

Pillsaint and Su Youji had both noticed that the Daolords were in no rush to place any bids. Ning had given a limit of a hundred years, after all; they didn’t want to get the price too high, too early. In fact, some of the Daolords were colluding in secret to keep the price low.

Half a year later, the old man returned.

“I’m willing to bid 1.31 million cubes,” the old man said.

“The highest price is now 1.33 million cubes,” Pillsaint said, his eyes wide and innocent.

“Ah?!” The old man was stunned.

Pillsaint continued to raise the price. 1.33 million cubes, 1.35 million cubes, 1.36 million cubes, 1.37 million cubes... every half a year or year, the price would rise slightly.

Faced with the continuously rising price, some of the Daolords that were colluding began to grow a bit impatient.

“Who the hell keeps upping their bids?”

“Why are the bids continuing to rise?”

They were able to keep calm when the price was steady, but this constant rise made some of them a bit impatient.

Pillsaint secretly felt quite smug about this. “You have no idea who you are dealing with. I’m a grandmaster alchemist! I’m not just skilled in making pills, I’m also an expert in selling them.” There was a certain art to selling pills and treasures as well, and there was always a bit of artifice built into the prices. Many of the ‘bids’ for the fruit were false, but Pillsaint did manage to lure in a few real bids as well.

A hundred years passed in the blink of an eye.

“The highest price is now 1.46 million cubes! This is the final year,” Pillsaint declared. “My master will return from the Forest of Sword Pagodas anytime now. When he does return, the auction will come to an end. The highest bidder will win the Bloodfire Cloudfruit.”

“What? The auction will end as soon as his master leaves the Forest?”

“This is the final year. Swordlord Darknorth might return at any moment.”

Even the most patient of Daolords were no longer able to hold on. Once Ji Ning returned, they would have missed this opportunity for good. They didn’t believe that Pillsaint was lying, because no one would dare lie to so many Daolords at the closing time of an auction.

“I’m willing to offer 1.47 million cubes.”

“I’ll offer 1.48 million.”

“1.5 million.”

In the final year, the bids increased very rapidly. Some of the Daolords had truly grown impatient. Once they gained this treasure, more than 99% of the other Daolords would be unable to catch up to them in speed. Generally speaking, not even Verge-level Daolords would be able to fly as quickly as Chaos fire or Chaos lightning! Only those who had techniques allowing them to control Chaos fire or Chaos lightning would be the exceptions. Once this opportunity went past, who knew how long it would be before the next opportunity? Even if another opportunity did arise, it was entirely possible that they wouldn't even have a chance to bid on it. The Endless Territories were simply too vast; by the time they heard the news, the thing probably would've been sold already.

Pillsaint went so far as to run over to the Forest of Sword Pagodas to send Ning a secret message. "Master, don't be in a rush to return. Give me another half year. Come back then."

"Alright." Ning trusted them.

Some of the Daolords truly did need this treasure, and time was running out. Once this sort of naturally-occurring treasure was gone, it would be eons before anything one appeared. The bidding process became noticeably fiercer.

Ning finally emerged from the Forest of Sword Pagodas.

"How did it go?" Ning descended from the skies into the Immortal estate where Su Youji and Pillsaint were located.

"1.8 million cubes," Pillsaint said proudly.

"What?!" Ning was quite surprised. If he sold it to a major organization, the price would've been roughly a million cubes. If he was lucky and many Daolords desperately bid against each other, the price could be several times higher. However, there weren't many Daolords in the Twelve Palaces right now. To be able to sell it for 1.8 million cubes already vastly exceeded Ning's expectations. He had thought that a price of 1.5 million cubes would already be quite high.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 17: A Thousand Years

The imperial palace of the Brightshore Kingdom.

The almighty Hegemon stared at the sixty-seven images hovering in the air next to the thirteen thrones. He said softly, "A thousand years has concluded."

The twelve golden-armored powers who had been chatting idly, meditating with eyes closed, or silently drinking wine all came alert.

"Hegemon, how shall you choose the most powerful ones?" The twelve golden-armored powers all looked at the almighty Hegemon.

These World-level cultivators who had been acknowledged by the ancient pagodas were all incredible figures who possessed varied skills. What was the fairest way to choose the 'best' four?

The almighty Hegemon gently stroked his snow-white beard, then smiled. "Let them challenge the Daolord Cloudworld. They will have three days! The four who make it the farthest in the Daolord Cloudworld shall gain this opportunity."

“Challenge the Daolord Cloudworld?” The twelve instantly understood.

.....

Ji Ning was seated in the lotus position within his spacetime acceleration cottage, still located in the ancient Forest of Sword Pagodas within the Sword Palace.

“Darknorth, come to me right away.” A voice rang out in Ning’s mind.

“Eh?” Ning opened his eyes. Dim flickers of sharp light could be seen within them. “A thousand years has concluded. It seems it is time for the actual challenge.”

Ning’s sword-arts were now far more formidable than when he had first developed the Reincarnation stance or the Cosmic Heart stance. His sword-arts were actually still continuing to improve, and he hadn’t encountered any bottlenecks yet. Alas, he simply didn’t have enough time! The almighty Hegemon had only given him a thousand years.

Whoosh. Ning put away his spacetime acceleration treasure, then flew out of the Forest of Sword Pagodas and towards Lord Woodflower’s palace.

.....

Lord Woodflower was seated in the lotus position atop a golden-red prayer mat. In front of him were seven similarly seated cultivators. There was one who looked like a child, one who looked like a youngster, one who looked like a youth, and even an old man. They all had completely different auras of the Sword Dao. A cultivator’s age or mentality couldn’t be judged by their appearances. At this level, there were some cultivators who reached an elderly age before suddenly shining with brilliance and embarking upon the path of cultivation.

“A thousand years has concluded.” Lord Woodflower swept Ning and the others with his gaze. “The seven of you are the only ones within our Sword Palace have been acknowledged by our ancient pagodas. Right now, in the Twelve Palaces there are a total of sixty-seven individuals on your level, yourselves included. All of you will be fighting for this opportunity.

“Sixty-seven challengers, only four spots.

“The almighty Hegemon has already sent word for you to go and challenge the Daolord Cloudworld. You must complete your attempt within three days, and the final four who make it farthest into the Cloudworld shall be the ones to win this opportunity,” Lord Woodflower said.

Ji Ning, Swordlord Wildfire, Swordlord Graceless, and the others all became more alert. They were all going to do their absolute best, and indeed training in the Dao of the Sword itself was training in a path of no return.

“In the Twelve Palaces, the World-level cultivators of the Saber Palace are the strongest, while the Heartforce Palace and the Spacetime Palace also have immeasurably deep roots.” Lord Woodflower’s gaze fell upon the seven Swordlords once more. “I hope that our Sword Palace can gain at least one of the slots. It would be a damn shame if we gained nothing at all from this.”

“Understood.” Ning and the others were all very solemn. They weren’t angered or offended by Lord Woodflower’s words. Given their achievements, all of them were extraordinary figures who knew the

importance of respecting their opponents. The other competitors had all been acknowledged by the ancient pagodas as well. Some were Aberrants, and some had experienced tremendous strokes of karmic luck. None could be belittled or underestimated.

“I can only do my best.” Ning’s heart was firm with the resolve to do battle and test himself against these other acknowledged World-level opponents. Although the battle hadn’t started yet, Ning was already beginning to feel excitement and energy coursing through his veins.

.....

“Palace Lord Dawnstar is the undisputed most powerful Daolord of the Twelve Palaces. Even if we factor in all the other organizations of the Endless Territories, he would be ranked the second most powerful Daolord. He personally tutored all of you for many years. If only one of you gains a slot, even I will feel ashamed on your behalf.” Daolord Yinwind’s voice was filled with icy arrogance. This was his natural, innate disposition.

When he was a young mortal, he had been kidnapped and dragged into an incredibly powerful but evil sect, filled with all sorts of viledoers and evil men. But of course, this was something that happened long ago, and by now a simple breath from him would be enough to wipe out that evil sect. He was now a Deputy Palace Lord of the Saber Palace, and his name and reputation held tremendous influence within the Endless Territories.”

“Don’t worry, Lord Yinwind.”

“Forget two, let’s try for all four!”

The Saberlords of the Saber Palace were brimming with confidence.

.....

The sixty-seven waiting World-level challengers all received word from their respective elders. Some headed for the Daolord Cloudworld immediately, while some calmed themselves and planned on making the challenge on the final day.

The trials of the Daolord Cloudworld could actually be completed quite quickly. Generally speaking, half a day was enough.

.....

The Heartforce Palace.

The Palace of the Heart was extremely quiet. There were pitifully few cultivators at either the World level or the Daolord level, and only one of them had been acknowledged by the Heart Pagodas: Heartlord Solewind.

“I’m the only one taking part in the Heart Palace. How lonely.” A bald, red-vested youth whose face was covered with strange, crimson divine tattoos smiled as he murmured to himself, “Little sister, just watch and see how your big brother takes on the Daolord Cloudworld.”

He strolled forward in a relaxed manner, and with each step he took a fiery divine crow would manifest beneath his feet. The line between reality and illusions was blurred around him. Clearly, he was training

even when he was just walking. He was an incredibly famous figure in the Twelve Palaces, not because he had accomplished any special feats, simply because he was a member of the Palace of the Heart! Although the Heart Palace had pitifully few members, every single member was frighteningly strong.

Bertulu focused on the Dao of Light, using heartforce as a support skill. Heartlord Solewind, however, had truly focused all of his efforts on his skills as a Heartforce Cultivator. His accomplishments in this area vastly outstripped Bertulu's, who had only reached the utter apex of power at the World level in the Dao of Light.

.....

"The almighty Hegemon personally gave me pointers in the past. As for this opportunity he is offering... I, Greatjoy, shall definitely grasp it." This was a youth who was dressed in strange black imperial robes and who wore a crown on his head. He was the most powerful World-level expert in the Palace of Spacetime, and he referred to himself as Prince Greatjoy. Although on the surface he was rather calm and stately when interacting with others, he was actually an extremely wild, berserk man.

"The Daolord Cloudworld, eh? Hmph." Prince Greatjoy flew out of the Spacetime Palace and headed straight towards the Daolord Cloudworld.

.....

More than half of the World-level experts immediately flew towards their Daolord Cloudworld as soon as they received the news. Every single one of the Twelve Palaces had their own Daolord Cloudworld, and the difficulty level in each was identical.

Swoosh!

Ning descended into the Armaments Gorge of the Sword Palace.

"Darknorth." The two guardians of the gorge, Swordfive and Swordsix, both looked at Ning.

"Swordfive. Swordsix." Ning said in a rather humble manner, "I've been acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas. I believe I now have the chance to choose a single treasure from the Armaments Gorge, so long as it doesn't cost more than a million cubes of chaos nectar. Right?"

"Right." Swordfive nodded. "The Sword Palace has always been very generous towards World-level cultivators who are acknowledged by the Sword Pagodas."

"Swordfive, can you follow me inside?" Ning asked.

"I can." Swordfive nodded. He surmised that Ning probably wanted to carry out a major business transaction. There was no other reason for Ning to ask him to go in.

The Armaments Gorge was filled with countless treasures, but Ning went straight towards one of the corners in the far back.

There was a seemingly ordinary black bottle placed atop one of the tables in the back. This black bottle, however, was priced at 1.5 million cubes of chaos nectar! This bottle was a magic treasure known as the 'Godwater Flagon of the Seven Flags', and it contained seven different types of Dao water. These seven

types of Dao water could be used to form an enormous formation known as the Seven Flags Formation which could easily annihilate almost any opponent.

“Can I take this flagon?” Ning asked.

Swordfive slowly shook his head. “You aren’t permitted to choose anything worth more than a million cubes. If you insist on choosing this item, you have to pay an extra five hundred thousand cubes.”

“Done.” Ning nodded.

There were quite a few treasures in the Armaments Gorge which involved Dao water, and most of them were treasures which were forged out of Dao water. The Godwater Flagon of the Seven Flags was the most suitable choice for Ning.

“Need anything else?” Swordfive had heard that Ning had sold off a Bloodfire Cloudfruit for 1.8 million cubes.

“I need some Dao lightning as well.” Ning grinned.

.....

Ning departed from the Armaments Gorge, then transformed into a streak of light that flew back towards his own Immortal estate.

“Master.” Su Youji and World God Pillsaint both came out to greet him.

“No one is allowed to disturb me. No matter who comes, they are not permitted to see me.” Ning gave them some instructions, then went into his private room.

Ning sat down in the lotus position within this private room, then placed a black bottle, an azure cauldron, and a grey gourd next to him.

This time, he had purchased seven types of Dao water and five types of Dao lightning. He had paid 2.1 million cubes of chaos nectar for them! Factoring in the million cubes of credit which the Sword Palace had bestowed upon him, he actually had used up more than three million cubes!

“With these items, I should now be able to make myself much more powerful.” Ning was quite calm as he summoned the technique for creating the [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water] into his mind.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 18: Training

Ji Ning willed the ethereal lightning to fly out of the gray gourd. It seemed unremarkable, but in reality it was terrifyingly powerful. Under Ning’s control, it swirled around Ning’s body and then seeped into it. For someone with a weaker divine body, such an act was akin to suicide. It must be understood that this was Dao lightning! Someone with a weak body would have it instantly reduced to ashes.

Long ago, when Ning was still an Empyrean God, his body was incapable of enduring the power of the Ninehorn Lightning Serpents. In order to tame and control one of them, Ning had to first use Elder-level

lightning serpents to repeatedly enter his body and completely transform it into a lightning-attribute body. Ning died multiple times before being able to successfully complete the transformation process. Only then was he able to survive alongside the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent and draw it into his body, storing it in the divine rune of a lightning serpent egg.

And now?

Ning had completely mastered the [Golden Idol], making his divine body comparable to top-grade Dao treasures! This Dao lightning was completely incapable of harming Ning.

Whoosh.

After the ethereal lightning entered Ning's body, it seemed to be affected by a powerful gravitational force. With a swoosh, it was drawn towards Ning's Jindan chaosworld, towards the location where one of nine lightning essences was located. This lightning essence was similarly ethereal, and the two seemed to have come from the same source. The Dao lightning voluntarily merged into the lightning essence, rapidly surging into it and drawing upon the Chaos lightning energy which had previously been present.

"I've finished absorbing the first Dao lightning." Ning nodded slowly.

The reason why Daolord Allgod had separated the [Novessence Thunder] into the upper part and the lower part, despite the fact that he created the technique as a Daolord who didn't need Chaos lightning, was because he needed to establish the nine lightning essence foundations. The lightning foundations were similar to the 'lightning serpent egg' which Ning once used to store and transform the Ninehorn Lightning Serpent. The lightning foundations were the places where the lightning would stay and 'live'. This was their home!

The lightning foundations which Daolord Allgod had created were countless times more profound than the 'lightning serpent egg'. They were tremendously attractive towards Dao lightning, and Dao lightning naturally 'liked' to live within them.

"Next." Ning willed the next one to enter.

Four streams of Dao lightning instantly began to surge out from the four handles on the azure cauldron in front of Ning. Under Ning's control, the four streams of lightning surged into his body. These four streams of Dao lightning were similarly drawn into four different lightning essence foundations and were quickly swallowed up. They now had their own foundations where they belonged.

"And the Elementum Waterflame Gourd." Finally, Ning produced the gourd which he had been using for quite some time. He used the exact same technique to draw those two streams of Dao lightning into the foundations inside his body.

There were a total of nine lightning essence foundations! These nine foundations were meant to hold nine streaks of Dao lightning or nine streaks of Chaos lightning which belonged to the same 'type'. Right now, Ning had seven of those streaks of Dao lightning! These seven Dao lightnings were the seven cheapest ones he could find, but they had still cost Ning a total of 2.1 million cubes of chaos nectar! As for the seven types of Dao water, they had cost Ning a total of 1.5 million cubes of chaos nectar.

The Dao lightning was more powerful and thus preferred by cultivators, resulting in a slightly higher price than the Dao water.

Ning had purchased nine types of Chaos water shortly after arriving at the Sword Palace. As a result, his body already had nine types of water essence foundations within it, and he used them to absorb those streams of Dao water, completely drawing them inside.

“The transfer is complete.” Ning was a bit excited. “I wonder if I’ll be able to start training in the lower part now.”

To actually absorb the Dao lightning didn’t really signify anything, as Ning could control them regardless of whether they were inside his body or inside a magic treasure! In this sense, the location didn’t matter.

“According to the notes regarding the lower part of the [Novessence Thunder], only a Samsara Daolord can train in the technique because Dao lightning is thousands of times more explosive and unruly than Chaos lightning. The Immortal energy of World-level cultivators simply cannot cope with it, preventing them from training in this technique.” Ning’s eyes were shining. When he had first started on the [Novessence Thunder] using Chaos lightning, he had failed numerous times in his attempts to master it. In the end, he had to rely on his azureflower mist energy to succeed.

Using the azureflower mist energy to control the Chaos lightning had been hundreds of times easier than using his own Immortal energy.

“The reason why only Daolords can train in the lower part is because the Immortal energy of World-level cultivators is too weak. However, I can use the azureflower mist energy instead. That energy should be comparable to the energy of a Daolord of the First Step’s. According to the manual, a Daolord of the First Step has a chance to complete the second stage of the technique. In fact, he even has a shot at the third stage!” Ning felt quite eager.

The second stage referred to the secret art needed to completely merge two of the streaks of Dao lightning together. This would instantly cause the power of the Dao lightning to skyrocket!

Upon reaching the second stage, those two streaks of Dao lightning would probably be even more powerful than seven streaks of Dao lightning and seven streams of Dao water combined! Right now, Ning was relying on superior numbers in order to achieve victory. And yet, all his Dao lightning and Dao water combined was merely on par with the second stage.

“If I can master at least the second stage for the Dao lightning, then do the same for the Dao water, then use them along with the rest of my lightning and water... the power should be quite extraordinary.” Ning was filled with eagerness.

“Time to begin.” Using the azureflower mist energy to reinforce his physical strength in battle was the most basic way of using it. Using it to train in secret arts? That was far more impressive! This was a form of energy comparable to a Daolord’s energy, after all!

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The azureflower mist energy spread out in accordance with the [Novessence Thunder], stretching out like an invisible hand that quickly latched onto the Watersmoke Lightning and the Firecloud Lightning. These were the two types of Dao lightning that were the easiest to control.

“Hahaha... I’m completely able to control them! My suspicions were correct! My azureflower mist energy can be used to control Dao lightning as if it was Daolord energy.” Ning began to grow excited. This meant that he would be able to realize his ambitions! The two streaks of Dao lightning were innately explosive, but the power of the azureflower mist energy was still able to control them.

They followed Ning’s will and began to transform nonstop as the secret art began to take shape.

However, the later parts of this process grew increasingly complicated. The [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water] techniques were techniques that were akin to applying alchemy and pill-forging principles to lightning and water. The lightning would be constantly adjusted and harmonized, causing its power to eventually be completely transformed in nature! Pill-makers needed to have complete control over their pills, and Ning needed to have similarly exquisite control over his lightning.

The process grew more and more difficult.

BOOM!

It had been just the slightest slip-up, but the entire secret art broke apart and the two streaks of Dao lightning instantly split apart, each returning to its own lightning essence foundation.

“My azureflower mist energy is clearly far more powerful than the Immortal energy of a World-level cultivator. I trust that it is no weaker than a Daolord’s, and my soul is also comparable to a Daolord’s soul. I refuse to believe I can’t do this!” Ning tried again.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice...

Ning tried twenty times in a row, only to fail each time.

Ning was stunned.

“Let me try the Dao water. Maybe I’ll be able to succeed with the Dao water.” Ning once more gave it a try, this time using the Dao water. It was clearly much easier to control Dao water than Dao lightning, as water was less explosive and wild, but as the process went on it failed once more at the very end. Multiple, repeated failures resulted in Ning giving up.

“Why do I keep failing?” Ning carefully went through his memories regarding these two techniques.

These two techniques...

The [Novessence Thunder] and the [Novessence Water] were created based on Daolord Allgod’s insights into the process of alchemy and artificing. The process allowed him to take exquisite control over lightning and water, using them to form tremendously powerful secret arts. After one became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, it would be possible for one to master the ninth stage and complete the process.

Daolords of the First Step generally could master the second stage, and they even had a chance at mastering the third stage.

“Why can’t I even master the second stage? Controlling them feels incredibly taxing.”

Ning suddenly stared blankly.

“I understand! Daolord Allgod was a Verge-level Daolord when he mastered the ninth stage for the lightning and water... but who was he? He was a master of alchemy and artificing, a true grandmaster of countless Daos. He was incredibly skilled in this respect! I, however, know nothing about alchemy or artificing whatsoever. I’m completely relying on the strength of the azureflower mist energy to brute-force the lightning and water into cooperating. It only makes sense that this sort of brute-force method will result in repeated failures.” Ning finally understood.

Alchemy and artificing were not simple tasks. They were arts that required tremendous levels of skill and expertise. World God Pillsaint was an incredibly skilled grandmaster in alchemy, but how many other World-level cultivators were similarly talented in this regard? Alchemy truly was an art filled with countless mysteries, but Ning knew nothing of it at all. All he could do was rely on his azureflower mist energy to brute-force things...

“Ugh...” Ning shook his head.

If he could master the second stage for the lightning and the water, then when he used them as well as his other types of Dao lightning and Dao water in a formation to attack an opponent, he would probably be able to slay an ordinary Daolord of the First Step in one blow! Even if that person didn’t die, he would be heavily injured. A few successive blows would ensure that the Daolord would definitely perish.

This was why the azureflower mist energy was so incredible and special. It gave World-level cultivators a chance to master techniques they simply shouldn’t be able to... but alas, Ning didn’t understand enough about alchemy or artificing.

“Too late to start training in these areas now. There’s no time. I have to try out the Daolord Cloudworld soon,” Ning mused. “But I just so happen to have an expert alchemist by my side. After the challenge is completed, I’ll ask Pillsaint for some advice! If I learn some basic alchemy skills, I’ll probably be able to rely on the experience I gained to make some progress in mastering the second stage of these two techniques.”

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 19: Challenging the Daolord Cloudworld

Ji Ning tested out using the seven types of Dao water and Dao lightning in the privacy of his study, using them to form a Heptastar Duality Formation. Cultivators would often use lightning and water in joint formations. The treasures which Ning had purchased previously all had formations built into them, such as the Godwater Flagon of the Seven Flags which held a Seven Flags Formation.

After familiarizing himself with the formation, Ning calmed himself down and started to think back to the insights regarding the sword which he had gained in recent years. Slowly, his heart grew peaceful, calm, and empty.

A full day passed in the blink of an eye.

Ning opened his eyes, a hint of eagerness in them. "Time to try out the Daolord Cloudworld."

Ning left the study, then glanced at World God Pillsaint and Flamefairy Su Youji. The two were seated outside, drinking some wine, but when they saw Ning they immediately rose to their feet. Su Youji immediately said, "Master, are you going to the Daolord Cloudworld?"

"Yes." Ning nodded.

"Master." Pillsaint hurriedly said, "I've heard that quite a few of the acknowledged World-level cultivators of the Twelve Palaces went to the Daolord Cloudworld on the very first day. It seems the competition will be quite fierce... but I know that you will definitely succeed."

"You both know about it?" Ning was surprised. It seemed as though everyone knew about the Daolord Cloudworld trials.

"Although you didn't tell us about it, even an idiot would be able to figure it out. The Twelve Palaces don't exactly have that many acknowledged World-level cultivators! For so many of them to enter the Daolord Cloudworld on the exact same day is far too bizarre." World God Pillsaint looked towards Ning. "As I see it... you'll definitely succeed, Master. In fact, you might be number one. Those other fellows are nothing more than 'dirt chickens and clay dogs', of no worth whatsoever."

Pillsaint was such an adorable-looking figure that these words didn't seem offensive at all. Instead, he made them sound amusing.

"I hope you are right." Ning laughed. "Alright, time for me to go to the Daolord Cloudworld."

Su Youji and Pillsaint watched as Ning flew into the air towards the distant Daolord Cloudworld.

The Daolord Cloudworld was the tallest building in the entire Palace of the Sword, and its outer surface was that of four enormous layers of clouds.

"I'll do everything I can. Let's see how far I'll be able to make it." Ning craned his neck, staring upwards at the Daolord Cloudworld. Even though he had tried it out several times in recent years, those had all been merely for the sake of testing out some new sword-arts. He had never really gone all out.

Whoosh.

Ning took a single step forwards, moving deep into the layer of black mist and inside the Daolord Cloudworld.

"Swordlord Darknorth just went in."

"Now, all of our qualified Swordlords have entered."

"I wonder what's going on? All of the geniuses of the Twelve Palaces have gone inside recently." The black-armored Daolords patrolling off in the distance were all watching. News spread quite quickly within the Twelve Palaces.

The Daolord Cloudworld was split up into four levels. These levels were known as the Blackcloud World, the Azurecloud World, the Silvercloud World, and the Goldcloud World.

Cultivators of the Sword Palace would have to start from the Blackcloud World each time, because the main point of the Daolord Cloudworld was to help cultivators find suitable opponents.

.....

The Azurecloud World. The white-robed Ji Ning was striding atop a long path formed from azure clouds, wielding a longsword in one hand. Right in front of him was a golem barring a path. The golem was shaped like a strange beast with four legs and was roughly as strong as a Daolord of the First Step.

Boom.

Sword-light swept against the golem's chest in a seemingly casual manner, but the golem was knocked flying backwards off its feet. This was Ning's 'Heavenbreaker stance' of the [Brightmoon] sword-art.

Swish.

Sword-light flashed again in a mysterious manner, causing many sword-shadows to appear in the air. There was no way to tell which attack was real and which attack was illusory. The edge of the sword sheared against the neck of a spider-shaped golem, and it couldn't help but crumple as it was sent flying backwards by Ning's sword-light.

Ning defeated opponent after opponent on the azure cloud path, but the more he defeated the stronger the new opponents became. In fact, even the total number of opponents began to increase as well. Ning, however, continued to merely use a single sword, and the only sword-art he used was his own [Brightmoon] sword-art.

"I've never finished going through the entire second level before." Ning's sword-arts had truly reached a profound level.

Each of the five stances of [Brightmoon] were actually stronger than the seventh stances of the [Heartsword] or the [Heartseal] sword-arts.

"It seems that at my current level of sword-arts, a single sword is enough to easily overcome this level." Ning was already able to see the distant end to this azure cloud path. He had distilled some of the essence of [Heartseal] and [Heartsword] sword-arts, then raised them to a higher level. When he used his own sword-arts, they carried an aura of cyclical reincarnation as well, making the five stances of [Brightmoon] naturally become illusory.

Slash!

A dazzling streak of sword-light split the air.

Ning's sword was like a comet that sped through the skies. It was the most beautiful thing in this world, and it seemed almost dreamlike. Ning's sword had reached an incredible level of speed! With a slash, it cut deep into the body of a golem. Generally speaking, most people would stay far away from golems and fight them from a distance, but this was the final opponent which Ning had to deal with.

Swish! The sword-light stabbed through the golem's throat.

"Eh?" Ning was rather surprised. "It went through? I usually wasn't able to cut or pierce through the other golems."

Whoosh. The stabbed golem quickly retreated backwards, and a strange liquid began to flow out of its throat. The wound quickly disappeared, and the golem left the azure cloud path.

"I've finally reached the end of the path." Ning flew out of the azure cloud path. In front of him was a small island that was only a few square kilometers in size, and there was a suit of azure armor placed on the island.

Ning chuckled when he saw the suit of azure armor.

"Azure armor? It seems as though it is time for me to upgrade my outfit."

The first time one passed the Blackcloud World, a suit of black armor would be awarded. The first time a person overcame the Azurecloud World, a suit of azure cloud would be awarded. Ning had acquired his black armor long ago, which was a top-grade Dao armor. It wasn't even as useful as the aquaflect armor he had purchased during the treasure auction. The azure armor, however, was an Eternal-level treasure.

"C'mere." Ning stepped forward and accepted the azure armor, then sat down in the lotus position and began to slowly bind it while mentally preparing himself for the third level, the Silvercloud World.

The Silvercloud World...

World-level cultivators had absolutely no chance of making it to the end of this level! To make it past this level meant that you had reached the threshold of power of a Daolord of the Third Step. This was completely impossible. Even if Ning reached the third stage in the [Novessence Thunder] and [Novessence Water] and was thus able to slay a Daolord of the First Step, he would merely be equivalent to a fairly formidable Daolord of the Second Step. There was no way he'd be able to overcome the Silvercloud World.

Bertulu... Eastcult... none of them, not even the most talented of geniuses, could accomplish this task!

However, more than 90% of the geniuses acknowledged by the ancient pagodas were able to reach the threshold of Daolords of the Second Step. Ning, for example, was already equivalent to a Daolord of the First Step with his azureflower mist energy alone. Given that his sword-arts were even more profound than the Reincarnation stance and the Cosmic Heart stance, his skill in this area was actually somewhat higher than that of many actual Daolords of the Second Step! This was why he had been able to make it through the Azurecloud World with just a single sword.

"The azure armor is a low-grade Eternal treasure. It has no special properties other than its ability to absorb some degree of energy." Ning couldn't help but shake his head. At least his aquaflect armor was able to reflect damage. "Still, the more powerful my future opponents are, the less useful my current armor will be. As for my opponents on the Silvercloud World, they will all be at least at the threshold of the Daolord of the Second Step level."

Ning switched armors, but he still elected to make it look like a set of white clothes.

Ning then sat down in the lotus position again and began to breathe quietly as he started to work on replenishing the azureflower mist energy he had used up during the first two levels. At the same time, he also thought back to some of the mistakes he had made in his earlier battle. This was the first time in the hundred years he had been trying out in the Cloudworld that he had made it all the way through the second level. He had gained quite a few insights from this.

He thought back to the previous battles he had fought as he pondered on his sword-arts.

“On the final day, I will test myself against the Silvercloud World.” Ning came to a decision.

Ning was actually one of the slowest ones, as most of the World-level cultivators acknowledged by the ancient pagodas had already finished.

.....

The imperial palace. The thirteen thrones levitating within the void of space.

“Ahaha, Heartforce Cultivators truly are impressive. Solewind’s heartforce is becoming more and more frightening.” Daolord Yinwind laughed merrily. “Our Saber Palace won’t say a single begrudging word if he is ranked number one.”

At present, aside from Heartlord Solewind of the Heartforce Palace being ranked as number one, the rest of the top four had been completely dominated by the Palace of the Saber!

“Hmph.” The nearby Lord Woodflower just let out a cold snort.

The Sword Palace and the Saber Palace had always been somewhat at loggerheads, because the Dao of the Sword and the Dao of the Saber had always been the two most offensive, combative Daos in the Endless Territories. Generally speaking, more cultivators trained in the Dao of the Sword! Slightly fewer trained in the Dao of the Saber.

“Woodflower.” Daolord Yinwind glanced sideways at Lord Woodflower, then let out an odd chuckle. “Five members of your Sword Palace have already finished their attempts, yes? The highest ranking member is merely ranked seventh. You have no chance at all.”

“Hmph.” Lord Woodflower had an ugly look on his face. He did not, however, try to argue. The Saber Palace’s performance truly had been dominating, while the Sword Palace’s performance truly had been lackluster.

These Palace Lords and Vice Palace Lords had all reached the end of the line. If they succeeded in their Daomerge, they would gain eternity. If they failed, they would die and their Dao would vanish. At their level, face mattered more than almost anything else.

“We’ll see about that,” Lord Woodflower said flatly.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 20: The Altar

Time passed quickly, and the final day of the three days the almighty Hegemon had allotted the challengers had arrived. Ji Ning and quite a few others had spent the previous day recuperating in the Azurecloud World, so as to be in peak condition when they challenged the Silvercloud World. Only a few people like Ning were able to fight for so long, after all; the majority relied on highly exhausting divine abilities that could allow them to unleash obliterating levels of power for brief moments.

On the third day, all of the remaining geniuses of the Twelve Palaces began to challenge the Silvercloud World.

“Greatjoy has come out.”

“That’s Greatjoy.”

Every person seated on the thirteen thrones, the almighty Hegemon included, was staring at one particular scene. This was the image displaying Prince Greatjoy challenging the Silvercloud World.

“So fast.”

“He’s blowing through them like rotted wood.”

“Hegemon, I feel upset each time I see Greatjoy. I really feel regretful that I wasn’t able to recruit him into our Skymetal Palace.” A handsome youth dressed in beautiful golden robes let out a sigh. “I could tell all those years ago that he had excellent potential, even though he was very weak starting off. In the end, the Spacetime Palace managed to lure him in... and then he somehow became one of your honorary disciples, Hegemon! Judging from how he is blasting through the Silvercloud World, he’s clearly become much more powerful once again.”

“Ahaha, Severtrip, jealousy won’t get you anything. Greatjoy is now a member of our Spacetime Palace.” A jade-eyed man with tousled hair let out a loud laugh.

“It is true that Greatjoy has improved quite rapidly.” The almighty Hegemon stroked his pristine white beard.

The almighty Hegemon’s accomplishments in the Dao of Spacetime allowed him to look down upon all others in the Endless Territories. In the Twelve Palaces, he was particularly close to the Spacetime Palace, and some of its dazzling geniuses would be given a chance to earn one of his legacies and become an honorary disciples! Prince Greatjoy was one of them.

The Hegemon and the twelve golden-armored lords continued to stare at the many scenes playing out in midair. Prince Greatjoy was moving farther and farther up the stairs to the altar, defeating one golem after another along the way.

Rumble...

Prince Greatjoy’s body shone with golden light as he manifested six arms and began to sweep forward with even greater power.

His palm-arts, fist-arts, finger-arts... they were all unfathomably profound and ridiculously powerful. Sometimes he moved quickly, sometimes he moved slowly, but the region of spacetime surrounding him was in a perpetual state of flux. It was extremely difficult for the golems attacking him to unleash their true power, but every single strike of Prince Greatjoy’s contained tremendous might.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

He devastated his way through the golems, his entire body have transformed into a golden color. He looked like a golden god of war, but a look of absolute, glacial calm was in his eyes.

“He’s already reached six hundred!” Daolord Thousand Waves let out a startled cry. “Given how he’s cruised his way to the six hundredth level, he might have a shot at giving Solewind a run for his money.”

The Silvercloud World was actually one enormous altar that had nine hundred levels that served as the 'steps' to the top of the altar. The farther up you went, the more powerful your foes would be. The distance you were able to travel was a testament to your strength!

Right now, Heartlord Solewind was ranked number one. He had made it to the 692nd step.

Ranked in second place was Saberlord Redsnow of the Saber Palace. He had made it to the 680th step.

Ranked third and fourth were members of the Saber Palace who had made it past the 600th step as well.

600 steps... this represented a certain level of power. Most of the acknowledged cultivators had already completed their attempts, but only eight had made it past the 600th step!

"Given how easy it was for him to make it past the six hundredth level, he does indeed have a shot at matching Solewind." Lord Woodflower nodded slowly as he gave his appraisal.

"Hard to say. He makes it look easy, but he might've already unleashed his full power," the nearby Daolord Yinwind retorted coldly.

"Just keep watching." Lord Woodflower glanced sideways at him.

"Hmph." Daolord Yinwind stared hard at the scene playing out before him. Prince Greatjoy was still steadily advancing. Starting from the six hundredth level, the golems became much more powerful and and much more numerous. In fact, there could be as many as twenty or thirty of them attacking you at the same time. However, Prince Greatjoy's mastery over spacetime allowed him to tower over almost all World-level cultivators of the Twelve Palaces. He was able find unconceivable openings and positions, allowing him to never have to face more than three golems at one time.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Six hundred fifty."

"Six hundred sixty. Six hundred seventy."

Daolord Yinwind's face grew uglier and uglier to behold, because Prince Greatjoy had just caused a member of the Saber Palace to be eliminated from this competition.

"Six hundred eighty! He's still advancing."

"Six hundred ninety!"

Prince Greatjoy's face was starting to turn solemn, but a look of madness was in his eyes. His entire body radiated that blinding golden light, and each of his attacks contained utterly earth-shaking power. The golems were able to land an occasional attack against him, but were completely unable to harm him.

"He must have reached at least the eighth stage in the [Illusory Jade] secret art." The youth dressed in the beautiful golden robes, Daolord Severtrip, let out a sigh when he saw this. "This secret art isn't all that profound, but he still was able to reach the level of near-perfection in it. This is a secret art of our Dao of Metal... he really should've entered our Skymetal Palace."

"He beat him."

“He moved past Solewind.”

The farther one advanced, the more difficult each level became. Prince Greatjoy’s face was extremely solemn now. He was finding it extremely difficult to advance, with the golems doing everything they could to oppose him!

“Six hundred ninety-nine... seven hundred! He made it to level seven hundred.”

“Previously, the only members of the Twelve Palaces who made it past level seven hundred at the World level were Bertulu and Eastcult. Now, Greatjoy has joined their ranks.”

The ancient powers sighed in amazement as they saw this.

As for Prince Greatjoy, he gritted his teeth and fought like a madman. By nature, he wasn’t the type of person to easily admit defeat, and he still stubbornly fought and clawed his way forwards. He had reached exceedingly great heights in both the Dao of Spacetime and the Dao of Metal, and had also received personal guidance from the almighty Hegemon himself. Now, faced with such tremendous pressure, he actually began to slowly grow stronger and stronger.

Rumble...

Alas, with each step he took the golems became increasingly terrifying as well, and even more of them were appearing.

Boom! Boom! BOOM!

One missed strike and he was almost instantly knocked flying. Moments later, ropes tightened around him.

Defeat!

He had been defeated at the 719th step!

The ancient powers seated within the thirteen thrones couldn’t help but sigh in amazement. When they met and spoke with the most talented geniuses like Prince Greatjoy, they virtually treated those geniuses as equals, because once these geniuses made their breakthroughs they would quickly become comparable to Daolords of the Third Step. Once they engaged in a bit of training, they would quickly be able to compare to Daolords of the Fourth Step. It would be very easy for them to become major figures within the Endless Territories.

Right now, Prince Greatjoy was ranked number one after having made it to the 719th level.

Heartlord Solewind was ranked second after having made it to the 692nd level.

Ranked third was Saberlord Redsnow, level 680.

Number four was Saberlord Grief, level 668.

.....

The Azurecloud World of the Daolord Cloudworld.

Ji Ning rose to his feet and walked directly towards the highest position on the island he was in. When he reached it, a spacetime vortex formed around him. Ning disappeared from the Azurecloud World.

Within the Silvercloud World.

This was a world shaped like an utterly enormous altar that had nine hundred steps to it.

“What an enormous altar.” Ning craned his neck as he stared upwards, seeing the many golems roving about. He could also hear faint booms ringing out from far ahead. “There are other cultivators here right now as well? I wonder which member of the Sword Palace is here... or perhaps it is one of the other Swordlords?”

There were so many golems within the altar that ten cultivators could challenge this world at the same time.

“Time to go.”

Ning held a pair of Eternal swords in his hands as he advanced forwards.

“GWAAAAR!” Instantly, a pitch-black golem shaped like a three-headed, four-legged beast let out a roar as it pounced towards Ning like a streak of light, moving roughly three times as fast as the speed of light! This single level was roughly as long as the entire Azurecloud World had been, but it was merely a million kilometers wide. A million kilometers might seem like a long distance, but major powers were able to traverse it with just a single step.

“Hmph.” Ning looked at the golem.

Boom! Instantly, Ning’s body radiated with lightning, water, and many other types of light. Some were dazzling, some were ruinous, some were subdued. The seven types of Dao lightning all had different auras, as did the same types of Dao water. Still, Ning was able to fully control all of them, and with but a thought Ning caused them to join together into a Heptastar Duality Formation. An enormous, dazzling, bizarre formation appeared in the air which completely covered the four-legged beast which was charging towards Ning.

Boom! Although the beast-golem let out a furious howl, it was still forced several steps backwards.

Ning was able to advance to the second level with ease. As he continued his advance, the golems became increasingly powerful. In fact, there were even a few golems that attacked from afar using magic treasures, and the effectiveness of Ning’s Heptastar Duality Formation began to lessen. Ning had to unleash his sword-arts to fight as well.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning’s sword-arts were quite mighty, allowing him to sweep through all obstacles.

Two hundred steps. Three hundred steps.

“Eh?” Ning’s ears suddenly pricked up. “It seems everything went silent.”

There had been another cultivator fighting on the other side of the altar. Moments ago, explosions had been ringing out unabated. Now, nothing could be heard at all.

“Woodflower, your Swordlord Wildfire has been defeated as well. He lost on the 597th step. He almost made it to the 600th!” Daolord Yinwind glanced sideways at Daolord Woodflower. “Right now, the only remaining member in your Sword Palace is that kid who just became a Swordlord a short while ago.”

Daolord Woodflower ignored Daolord Yinwind’s mockery. Instead, he stared at the scene of Ji Ning forging his way ahead.

Right now, Ji Ning was the only member of the Sword Palace who was still taking part in the challenge. All the others had already failed.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 21: Tenacity

Within the Sword Palace’s Silvercloud World.

The rest of the altar was now completely silent. Still, Ning merely made a note of it as he then continued to fight all-out against the golems on each level of the altar.

Rumble...

Boom!

Explosions rang out unabated.

His Dao water and Dao lightning were combined into a formation of tremendous power, but at this point they were having a limited amount of impact on the increasingly powerful golems. Still, for someone at Ning’s level, even a limited impact would make things much simpler.

Level four hundred!

Level five hundred!

Ning continued to advance. His most powerful technique was the [Brightmoon] sword-art, and it was guaranteed that in the long run it would always be his most powerful technique! Once he became a Daolord, he would have his own path and that path would always allow him to unleash the most power possible. By then, the other sword-arts would merely provide him with guidance and experience, helping him enhance his understanding of the Dao of the Sword. However, his greatest power would forever lie within the [Brightmoon] sword-art.

The same was true for other experts of the Dao of the Sword. Their strongest sword-arts would be the ones they created!

“Break!”

Heavenbreaker stance. Shadowless stance. Soleheart stance. Yin-Yang stance. Blood Drop stance.

The five stances of [Brightmoon]! And Ning had now infused them with the sword-intent of reincarnation, making his five stances into a continuous cycle that flowed with no weaknesses or flaws whatsoever, allowing him to unleash even more power in battle.

Of the five [Brightmoon] stances, Ning's strongest stances were the Yin-Yang stance and the Soleheart stance. These two were both defensive techniques. Ning had put a tremendous amount of effort into his Unicorn's Domain, making him somewhat stronger in the area of defense.

"Hey, Woodflower. That's the kid who just became a Swordlord in your palace, right? He actually made it to the 500th level." Daolord Severtrip suddenly called out in surprise.

"Mhmm." Lord Woodflower nodded, revealing a smile as he watched Ning advance nonstop.

"It is pretty impressive for him to have even made it past five hundred. It seems this 'Darknorth' kid has some talent. A pity that he entered the Sword Palace a bit too late," Daolord Yinwind said, attempting to pour some cold water on their excitement.

Daolord Woodflower didn't argue. Even he could tell that although Ning's sword-arts were profound, they also had noticeable flaws compared to the skills of Prince Greatjoy or Saberlord Redsnow! Ji Ning's sword-arts were average amongst the Swordlords who had been acknowledged by the ancient pagodas. It must be understood that he had only been acknowledged a mere century ago. For him to be considered 'average' amongst the sixty-seven most talented World-level cultivators in the kingdom was already quite impressive.

The 500th level was a fairly 'average' level. Many geniuses were unable to make it much farther past this level.

Ning had three heads and six arms, and he wielded a Violetjewel in each of his six arms as he fought with all his might. Lightning and torrents of water exploded through the air unabated, doing their best to slow down and affect the impending golems.

Whooooosh.

A golem suddenly transformed into an enormous wave of water that came crashing down towards Ning. Ning hurriedly used his Dao lightning and Dao water to defend, but they were quickly submerged within the enormous wave, and it continued its crashing assault.

"Yin-Yang stance." Ning's six swords simultaneously struck out. This was a stance meant to deal with group attacks. Ning was often forced to use the Yin-Yang stance in the Silvercloud World, because the golems would often attack in groups.

Whooooosh. Yin and Yang spun as Ning's sword-light flew. The surrounding area seemed to have been transformed into a black hole which completely blocked all the waters of the wave.

"Kill!" After pushing through the wave, Ning continued to advance.

Five hundred fifty. Five hundred sixty. Five hundred seventy...

Ning was incredibly tenacious and durable. There was no way for him to use any divine abilities with his azureflower mist energy, but because of how steady he was he was able to stay at maximum power for a very long period of time. Other Daolord-equivalents, even ones like Prince Greatjoy, had to conserve their divine power and thus would often engage in normal combat while only occasionally exploding forth with their full power. Thus, they even brought spirit-pills, chaos jewels, and chaos nectar to replenish their depleting energy.

Ning, however, was simply too stable!

His sword-arts were similarly stable. The five stances of [Brightmoon] included all aspects of swordplay. Some swordsmen were skilled in one area and weaker in other areas; in short, they had their areas of specialties and their deficiencies. Ning, however, was skilled in every single area. He was slightly stronger in defense, but that was just in comparison. The Reincarnation sword-intent filling his sword-arts made it so that all five stances were merged together perfectly. This naturally made him even stabler.

Emperor Mirrorsnow was legendary for his tenacity. Even those who were stronger than him would find it difficult to defeat him.

“Advance!

“Over the course of countless years, numerous major powers have perished. None of those Daolords who had failed their Daomerge have been able to come back to life! An enormous price must be paid in order to bring back someone whose truesoul has already been extinguished. If I’m not strong enough, I won’t be able to beseech the almighty Hegemon and experts on his level to help me. I won’t be able to convince them that the price will be worth it.

“If I want to accomplish my goals, I have to seize every opportunity I can.”

Ning would never give up. He knew that many members of even the Brightshore Imperials had perished over the course of years, with none being brought back to life. Clearly, even if the almighty Hegemon was capable of resurrecting the dead the price would be so terrifying that he wouldn’t be willing to do it lightly.

“I’ve just started. I can’t give up so soon.” Ning’s sword-arts were slowly, subtly improving during this process. He wasn’t at a bottleneck, after all, and this sort of furious, high-pressure combat would naturally result in his sword-arts being perfected nonstop.

“Keep going. I can take at least another step forwards.” Ning could feel that the pressure was growing greater and greater.

“Eh? Is he actually...”

“Is that kid from the Sword Palace actually...”

The ancient powers seated on the thirteen thrones all stared curiously at this scene. Ning was currently battling against six golems, and it was difficult for him to advance. Every single one of the six golems possessed tremendous levels of power, and by now Ning’s Dao lightning and Dao water were of very little help to him.

“Six hundred. He actually made it to level six hundred.”

“His sword-arts actually enabled him to make it to level six hundred?”

The ancient powers were all shocked. Daolord Thousand Waves cried out in surprise, “His sword-arts are clearly quite ordinary compared to the other acknowledged World-level geniuses, but he actually managed to make it to the six hundredth level! Ji Ning already ranks in the top ten.”

As time passed, the total number who made it past level six hundred continued to grow.

On the very first day, only five had made it past that level.

By the time Prince Greatjoy made it past, more than eight had already reached this level.

And now, Ji Ning was the tenth.

It must be understood that this contest was a contest involving all the World-level geniuses of the Twelve Palaces. For Ning to be only the tenth to make it through this level meant that he was one of the elites within his group. In fact, his performance was better than that of any other member of the Sword Palace.

“Six hundred and two. Mm, that should be it.” The white-bearded Hegemon nodded slowly. “Don’t underestimate this Darknorth kid. His sword-arts might seem to be inferior to that of Greatjoy and the others, making him look ordinary, but they are extremely balanced. He’s skilled in every single aspect, and from what I understand he has gained the legacy of Mirrorsnow. Look, you can see the sword-intent of Reincarnation permeating through his sword-arts. He’s managed to link everything together perfectly, making him very strong... and with those seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water supporting him, it makes sense that he can make it past level six hundred.

“Still, he’s at his limit. He’s only persisting out of sheer tenacity and stubbornness.”

The almighty Hegemon watched the scenes being displayed. Ji Ning had made it to the 602nd level, but he was clearly at a complete disadvantage when facing the eight golems on this level. Still, he continued to stubbornly hang on.

“To make it to the 602nd level is not,” the almighty Hegemon evaluated.

“Yes, not bad at all.”

“In the future, this kid just might be a match for Greatjoy.”

They all agreed with the Hegemon’s appraisal. Even Daolord Woodflower nodded in agreement, but he couldn’t help but sigh to himself. Alas, the seven Swordlords of the Sword Palace had all failed.

No one rebutted the almighty Hegemon, because they all knew how astute his vision and judgement was. He was able to completely see and understand how strong Ning was right now. If he said that this level was as far as Ning could go, that would definitely be the case.

.....

The Silvercloud World. Level six hundred and two of the altar.

Tired.

Ning was so tired.

These eight golems launched combined attacks against him. Terrifying flowers of fire and water continuously rained down upon him, and some of the golems repeatedly charged into close combat against him. Every single one was just as strong as Ning, and when the six joined forces they were able

to completely suppress Ning! Ning had indeed only been able to just barely hang on for this long thanks to his extremely balanced sword-arts.

He wouldn't admit defeat lightly. Once he gave up, he would have lost. Only by persevering would there be hope.

Ning strove to learn as much as he could from this very battle, pondering on his sword-arts flaws in real time as he continuously perfected them.

Rumble...

Attacks rained down from every direction, and Ning was like a little boat that was being rocked within a stormy sea that would capsize at any moment.

Ning had no idea that the almighty Hegemon and twelve golden-armored powers were watching him. Although they had a rather good opinion of him, they felt certain that this level was Ning's limit.

"Their attacks really are endless and omnipresent..." Although Ning's sword-arts were slowly improving, he still felt a sense of despair. Defeat would come at any moment.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 22: A Dao Belonging to Ji Ning

"Omnipresent?" Surrounded and exhausted by the endless attacks from these many golems, the light of inspiration suddenly flickered in Ji Ning's mind.

"Right. Their attacks are omnipresent. Some cast spells from afar, others close in on me and attack in melee using claws and palms. I only have six arms after using [Three Heads, Six Arms]; how can I possibly withstand so many attacks?" Ning was mumbling to himself as many different sword-arts went through his mind, with many insights regarding the Yin-Yang stance in particular coming to the forefront.

It was as though a thread was linking many small beads together, forming a true collective whole.

"Omnipresent..."

"The true Yin-Yang stance shouldn't result in me defending in such an exhausting manner. So what if I have six arms? Even if I had ten or eighteen arms, so what? There's still a limit to what I can do!" Ning was beginning to awaken to the truth. "The true Yin-Yang stance should allow me to defend against all oncoming attacks, which means it needs to be omnipresent as well. It should envelope everything in its path, and any attacks that come forth should be blocked by it.

"That means... for the Yin-Yang stance to be truly powerful, it should be a domain! I need to transform this stance into a domain!"

Every single cultivator had a path that was most suited to them. Over the course of countless years, many major powers had chosen many different paths. At their level, there was no way they could imitate others any longer. If they did, it would actually have a negative influence on their own future insights. If you wished to draw a painting, it was best to start with a fresh, blank scroll of paper. The path

of cultivation was best expressed through following one's own heart, through slowly understanding and upgrading one's insights to the point of fundamentally transforming them.

"Let my seven Dao lightnings and my seven Dao waters be my sword," Ning murmured softly.

Rumble...

The Dao water and Dao lightning that had been in the surrounding area constricting the foes suddenly began to rumble. Although they were elemental lightning and water by nature, true experts of the Dao of the Sword could use anything as a sword. Flower petals, water drops, a single water drop... they could all be used as a sword. Now, Ning was using Dao water and Dao lightning as his blade.

"Dao lightning and Dao water, form my Yin-Yang stance and create my Yin-Yang Sword Domain."

In recent years, Ning's greatest achievements lay in the field of defense. All of his insights into the Yin-Yang stance, including some which he had previously felt to be rather unimportant, all came together in this stance as he generated a domain of sword-intent. He infused it with all of his insights, causing the power of this stance to instantly transform.

Rumble...

Every single streak of Dao lightning transformed into a sword! The 'insides' of the swords were made of lightning, but on the outside they had already been shaped and condensed into the form of a sword! The powerful sword-intent controlling the lightning was naturally giving birth to swordforce.

Every single stream of Dao water had also transformed into the shape of a sword.

They began to circle around Ning like an enormous whirlpool, but if one looked closely one would see that some of the streaks were swirling clockwise while others were swirling counter-clockwise. The mighty sword-intent controlling this technique caused parts of it to flow forwards and parts of it to flow backwards, creating an incredibly powerful tearing force!

What made white stand out? Only when the rest of a piece of parchment was completely covered in black ink would a spot of blank whiteness in the center be dazzling to behold.

Ning's sword-intent was strong to begin with. Now that he had formed this technique with forward and reverse flows, the ripping, tearing power of his domain grew exponentially greater.

Yin-Yang Polarity!

The concept of Yin and Yang was reinforcing this technique as well! The Yang-attribute Dao lightning and the Yin-attribute Dao water mutually reinforced each other, resulting in both being strengthened. Every so often, compatible streaks of lightning or water would brush against each other, resulting in even more terrifying force.

Both forwards and backwards, both gentle and violent.

An enormous domain had formed around Ning, covering an area of ten thousand kilometers. This domain was formed of sword-shaped lightning and water, but what made it truly terrifying was the sword-intent which Ning's Yin-Yang stance had manifested.

The sword-intent of the Yin-Yang stance had already undergone a fundamental transformation. Lightning and water flowed together, sometimes calm and sometimes explosive as it blasted at any foes which dared trespass!

“From this day forth, my Yin-Yang stance shall be the Yin-Yang Sword Domain.” Ning smiled. Finally, one of his five stances of [Brightmoon] had truly transformed. In this moment, Ning clearly understood that the Yin-Yang Sword Domain was a path he would absolutely have to take in the region of defense as he became a Samsara Daolord.

“Careful.”

“Quick!”

These golems were sentient. Once Ning formed that enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain, the golems who were fighting within the reach of that domain instantly sensed multiple layers of force appear in the area. Sometimes, the force simply followed their movements; other times, the force exploded against them with great violence. There was even the occasional sensation of being brutally ripped apart by layers of power!

The entire domain was filled with countless attacks that alternated between Yin and Yang. The attacks constantly changed and transformed, making it harder and harder for them to defend. The golems had to use roughly 90% of their power in defending against the Yin-Yang Sword Domain.

Boom! Ning charged forwards, sweeping out with his sword-light and sending a golem flying. The golems were so focused on defending against the domain that they were now extremely vulnerable to Ning. He was able to defeat them all with one strike.

Ning continued to advance.

603. 604. 605...

Ning slowly advanced, wielding six swords while keeping [Three Heads, Six Arms] active. His enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain covered an area of ten thousand kilometers around him, but in truth its size was variable. He could easily expand it to make it a hundred million kilometers in size, but the ten thousand kilometer range was the range at which he could maintain peak levels of power. Beyond that range, the power of the domain would slowly begin to decay.

The Yin-Yang Sword Domain could also be used through flying swords and other magic treasures, or even Dao fire. Anything could be used to generate it. However, Ning had access to incredibly powerful Dao lightning and Dao water, which was why he used them to generate the domain.

A simple tree branch controlled by Ning’s mighty sword-intent was now able to slay a Daolord of the First Step. The Dao lightning and Dao water were extraordinary elemental powers, and when they were used by the Yin-Yang Sword Domain they were able to produce truly enormous amounts of power.

.....

The imperial palace. The almighty Hegemon and the twelve golden-armored powers were seated on their thirteen thrones, staring at this sight.

After Ning's Yin-Yang stance transformed into the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, Ning was able to easily advance through the upcoming stages. However, none of the golden-armored powers cared about the fact that the almighty Hegemon's evaluation had been wrong! Instead, they simply watched in astonishment as Ning unleashed his sword-intent domain because they knew what this portended.

"He... has finally taken that first step," the almighty Hegemon said softly.

"Swordlord Darknorth is guaranteed to become one of the most supreme members of our Twelve Palaces." Daolord Thousand Waves nodded.

"For someone like him to end up in the Sword Palace instead of mine... what a pity, what a pity!" Daolord Yinwind shook his head.

Daolord Woodflower glanced sideways at him, then began to laugh in a very contented manner.

"Although Swordlord Darknorth's sword-intent domain is defensive in nature, every part of it is infused with terrifyingly strong attacks. If any enemies enter his domain, they will suffer attacks nonstop. Even the most powerful of foes will eventually be whittled down, making it so that they will be greatly weakened before even drawing close to him. A domain like this is guaranteed to be a terrifying thing to face. If he can become a Daolord of the Fourth Step... this sword-intent domain is powerful enough to allow him to suppress Eternal Emperors." A golden-armored power whose eyes were like two black vortices of darkness let out a soft sigh.

"Agreed."

The almighty Hegemon nodded. "He'll be able to suppress ordinary Eternal Emperors! For Swordlord Darknorth to take this step forward means that he has already discovered an Supreme Dao of defense for himself!"

"It is guaranteed that he will be a monster of a Daolord." Everyone present nodded.

There were differences in personal Daos. Some Samsara Daolords walked a path of simple Daos and would be very weak. As Daolords of the First Step, they would merely have ordinary levels of power.

Emperor Mirrorsnow's Dao and his seventh stance, the Reincarnation stance, would have been enough for him to be acknowledged by the ancient pagodas. He used this path to become a Samsara Daolord, and his Dao was fairly formidable. As a Daolord of the First Step, he could match Daolords of the Second Step. However, a Dao like this just barely cleared the threshold of the ancient pagodas.

Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Ji Ning... their Daos were on a higher level! Ning had just created his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, but it was a level of power above the Reincarnation stance and much more profound.

"An Supreme Dao of defense." Daolord Thousand Waves let out a sigh. "The Sword Palace really hasn't had many individuals who have ever been able to come up with an Supreme Dao."

"Absolutely true." Lord Woodflower nodded. Every single major power would have an individual Dao that was best suited to them. Ning was able to develop his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, but others might come up with similarly strong sword-arts. So long as they were at the same general level, they would all be classified as an 'Ultimate'-class defensive Dao.

“If he follows this Dao to its conclusion, he definitely will be able to trample over Eternal Emperors once he becomes a Daolord of the Fourth Step.” Daolord Thousand Waves laughed.

“He’s still a bit lacking compared to Palace Lord Dawnstar,” Daolord Yinwind said. “Lord Dawnstar, at the World level, developed three Supreme Daos and then merged them together perfectly! After he became a Daolord of the Fourth Step, he was able to slay an Eternal Emperor with just three strokes of his blade. Although Swordlord Darknorth is impressive, he will only be able to suppress Eternal Emperors. Killing them will be a matter of luck.”

“True.” Everyone present agreed.

“But Bertulu and Eastcult do have a chance of reaching Lord Dawnstar’s level.” The almighty Hegemon agreed with this assessment as well. “Still... given that Darknorth has come up with an Ultimate-class defensive Dao, he’ll still be able to withstand them in an actual battle. He should be classified as someone on the same level as them.”

Eastcult had come up with Supreme Daos for both offense and defense, and had been able to merge them perfectly. This was why he was a match for Bertulu.

“True. Him having taken this step means he is guaranteed to be a monster of a Daolord.” Lord Woodflower was in a splendid mood.

Previously, these golden-armored figures had all referred to Ji Ning as ‘this kid’. Now that Ning had taken this step, they all referred to him as ‘Darknorth’ or ‘Swordlord Darknorth’, because in their hearts they viewed Ning as someone who would be a true equal!

“However... Supreme Daos are also the most difficult Daos for gaining eternity.” The almighty Hegemon let out a soft sigh.

“They are indeed hard, but to choose this path means he will definitely be an extraordinary figure,” Daolord Thousand Waves said.

Daolord Allgod, Daolord Featherdress, Palace Lord Dawnstar... they had all chosen the path of an Ultimate-class Dao. As a result, becoming an Eternal Empero would be incredibly difficult. Still... while they were alive, they were amongst the most illustrious, distinguished figures of all the Endless Territories.

The almighty Hegemon and the others were sighing in amazement over Ning’s prowess, but they had no idea that this was merely the evolution of the Yin-Yang stance, one of five stances in Ning’s [Brightmoon] sword-art. Ning’s plan was to reach the apex with his other four stances as well! He was going to find suitable Daos for his other four stances, then infuse all of their mysteries into his own sword-arts. This was Ning’s true goal.

Right now, he had developed an Supreme Dao of defense, the Yin-Yang Sword Domain... but this was just the beginning!

“Six hundred sixty. Six hundred seventy. Six hundred eighty...” Daolord Woodflower watched as Ning continuously advanced up the steps of the altar, and the smile on his face continued to widen.

The Desolate Era

Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 23: The Dust Settles

As Daolord Yinwind watched Ji Ning advanced past level six hundred and eighty, he couldn't help but feel resigned. Even the best performing member of his Saber Palace, Saberlord Redsnow, had only made it to level 680. "For Heartlord Solewind to give such an impressive performance was expected, but Greatjoy's improvements were truly shocking. He was even better than Solewind! And now, this Darknorth fellow has appeared as well."

Ning continued to advance past multiple floors.

"Kill!"

Boom!

The attacks of the ancient golems were strong enough to sunder Heaven and Earth, and they came at Ning from all directions.

As Ning walked forwards, his Yin-Yang Sword Domain formed a region of wild, dark chaos around him. One could vaguely see the flickering of lightning and water within this region, and the region itself stretched out to be more than ten thousand kilometers wide. All enemies who sought to move close to Ning had to be able to first withstand the assaults of the Yin-Yang Sword Domain.

"Break!"

"Go."

Ning's swords were sometimes ephemeral and unpredictable, sometimes as heavy and weighty as a mountain. However, the speed at which he walked began to slow down. Clearly, the pressure was starting to increase.

"Six hundred ninety. Six hundred ninety-five. Six hundred ninety-six..." Daolord Woodflower had a look of delight on his face.

"He broke through level seven hundred!"

Ning continued to advance, albeit with great difficulty as he began to move slower and slower. Even though the Yin-Yang Sword Domain was helping him out, he was finding it harder and harder to deal with the increasingly powerful golems.

Boom!

Ning's sword-arts were finally breached on level 705. Although they came out in a perfect, flawless cycle, they still crumbled when faced with the overwhelming power that had been brought to bear upon them.

Outside the Daolord Cloudworld. A white-robed, rather bedraggled-looking Ning suddenly appeared, a look of worry in his eyes. "I wonder if I made it into the top four."

"However... I have to say that my performance was better than I expected. I actually ended up developing a defensive Dao." Ning felt both content and worried. His sword-arts had reached an

extremely high level, but his opponents were the greatest World-level geniuses of the Twelve Palaces. He couldn't help but think back to that time when he had sparred against Bertulu. Only now did realize what a truly profound level Bertulu had reached!

This was because... Bertulu was at a level of insight that was most likely one level higher than the current Ji Ning's! Only when Ning himself improved did he truly understand how great the distance had been between the two of them. Back when he had been at the Astral Islands, Ning only had the vague sense that the man had a higher level of understanding than he did. As to how much higher, exactly? He couldn't say for sure. Bertulu hadn't even used his true form, after all; he had merely used his human form to spar against Ning.

"However... now, even if Bertulu was to attack me with all his power, I would not need to be afraid of him," Ning mused.

His Yin-Yang Sword Domain was an extremely defensive skill! Even if Ning faced opponents who were stronger than him, he would still be able to defend against them.

"Darknorth." Suddenly, a voice rang out within Ning's mind.

"Eh?" Ning turned to look towards the direction of Lord Woodflower's estate.

"Come here immediately," Lord Woodflower sent.

"Yes." Ning immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew towards the estate. Soon, he reached Lord Woodflower's estate, and Lord Woodflower himself was standing at the entrance, a smile on his face as he looked at Ning. "Come in, Darknorth."

"What is it, senior apprentice-brother?" Ning was a bit nervous. He didn't know if he had made it into the top four or not.

"Damned impressive. The almighty Hegemon and the others all saw you use that sword-intent domain of yours." Lord Woodflower was in such a delightful mood that he was positively beaming. For his Sword Palace to completely crush the Saber Palace in such a way was absolutely wonderful!

The two palaces had been at loggerheads and competing against each other since time immemorial.

"That was something I just came up with it. I call it the Yin-Yang Sword Domain." Ning laughed. "I was just lucky. I had already prepared seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water, and I was able to use them to create my Yin-Yang Sword Domain. If I had been using any other types of treasures, the power of my domain would've been much weaker."

"The Dao lightning and the Dao water aren't that impressive. It is your sword-intent which truly impresses." Lord Woodflower couldn't help but praise Ning.

Ning chuckled.

Even if he merely used a single, ordinary flying sword, his Yin-Yang Sword Domain would still cause it to naturally emanate an aura of swordforce. The power of the domain would still have twenty to thirty percent of the power of a domain formed through using Dao lightning and Dao water. At this level, even if he merely used his Immortal energy to manifest a sword and swordforce, he would still be able to create an extremely powerful domain with it.

“Without the Dao water and the Dao lightning, I probably wouldn’t have been able to make it much farther past level six hundred and ninety,” Ning said. He couldn’t help but ask, “Senior apprentice-brother, do I have a shot at the top four?”

Only the top four would be granted the ‘opportunity’.

“You do.” Lord Woodflower nodded. “A very good shot, in fact. But of course, the three days haven’t ended and there are still World-level cultivators challenging the Daolord Cloudworld. Nothing is certain until the final cultivator concludes his attempts.”

“Oh.” Ning nodded. “Then how is my ranking?”

“Right now, you are ranked second,” Lord Woodflower said. “Prince Greatjoy is ranked first, and he made it to floor seven hundred and nineteen. Heartlord Solewind is ranked third, and he made it to floor six hundred and ninety-two. Fourth is Saberlord Redsnow, who stopped on floor six hundred and eighty.”

“Redsnow?” Ning stared.

“Something wrong?” Lord Woodflower asked.

“Nothing, nothing.” Ning immediately shook his head. “I just thought of an old friend, that’s all.”

Daoist Threelives’ most powerful general had been Redsnow. Redsnow had eventually chosen to follow Ning as well, then had become apprenticed to Subhuti as well. He shared the exact same Daoist title as this Saberlord Redsnow. Still, it was quite common to encounter cultivators with the same or similar nicknames. There were countless people in every chaosworld who shared the same name, and for a few of the more powerful cultivators to also share the same Daoist title wasn’t that surprising.

“Wasn’t the Saber Palace bragging a lot about how well they would do?” Ning asked.

“Ahaha, their boasting skills were quite profound, yes.” Lord Woodflower let out a laugh, but then he couldn’t help but sigh as well. “To be honest, they were qualified to boast. The fourth, fifth, and sixth-ranked experts all belong to the Saber Palace. We all knew that Heartlord Solewind would be formidable, but you and Prince Greatjoy caught everyone offguard.”

“Prince Greatjoy?” Ning listened attentively. He was quite curious about this man who had made it even farther within the Silvercloud World than he himself had.

“He’s also been improving quite rapidly. He actually managed to come up with two Supreme Daos.” Lord Woodflower let out a sigh. “If he can link his two Supreme Daos, he’ll probably be on par with Eastcult and Bertulu.”

Ning nodded. It was necessary to fuse Supreme Daos together in some manner.

For example, the five stances of Ning’s [Brightmoon] sword-art were all linked together thanks to his Reincarnation sword-intent. If you weren’t able to perfectly join your sword-arts together, you would have flaws when you fought in battle.

True experts had to have powerful defenses. Only then would they be able to survive for a long time. But of course, their attacks had to be strong as well; only then would they be able to slay foes! If Ning’s

attacks had been just a bit stronger, he would've been able to advance quite a bit further up the altar within the Silvercloud World.

"Ah!" A look of shock suddenly appeared on Lord Woodflower's face.

"What's wrong?" Ning looked at Lord Woodflower.

"I'll tell you in a moment." Lord Woodflower didn't explain in detail. Clearly, his incarnation was watching something happen within the imperial palace.

Ning was incredibly curious as to what Lord Woodflower was watching, but he had no choice but to tamp down his curiosity. A long while later, Lord Woodflower suddenly began to laugh. "Aha. Pride really does cometh before a fall."

"Senior apprentice-brother?" Ning was puzzled.

"A World-level cultivator belonging to the Palace of Kindwater, a fellow named Waterlord Firesurge, actually made it all the way to level six hundred and eighty-seven," Lord Woodflower said.

"In other words, even farther than Saberlord Redsnow?" Ning stared.

"Right. The Saber Palace didn't get a single slot in the top four!" Lord Woodflower roared with laughter. "Oh, this is just wonderful! When I saw that ugly look on Yinwind's ugly face... oh, that was simply delightful. Hah! That fellow usually loves to strut about and put on airs in front of me."

Ning felt amazed as well. In the end, the most famous Saber Palace had actually been completely defeated. Then again... the geniuses of the Twelve Palaces couldn't be evaluated using common measures. Greatjoy, Darknorth, and Firesurge... these three had only displayed their true brilliance during this competition.

"He's a member of the Kindwater Palace. Why is his Daoist title 'Firesurge'?" Ning was puzzled.

"He's another person who started off as a mortal cultivator. I heard that he originally was primarily a cultivator in the Dao of Fire. However, due to some trouble he apparently ran into within the sect he was in as a mortal, he ended up choosing the Dao of Water instead. However, by then his Daoist title had already been chosen, and so he simply continued to use it," Lord Woodflower explained. The Twelve Palaces didn't have that many World-level cultivators, and so he obviously was familiar with the vast majority of them.

Ning nodded.

Some cultivators would change their Daoist titles once they reached a certain level of power. Ning was another example of a person who had chosen his Daoist title, 'Darknorth', a long time ago. He had never changed it.

"Let's wait for just another moment. There is one final World-level cultivator attempting the trials," Lord Woodflower said.

A short while later...

“Alright, all done. The results are in. Prince Greatjoy, yourself, Heartlord Solewind, and Waterlord Firesurge will be the ones to partake in this opportunity,” Lord Woodflower said.

“And what opportunity is this, exactly?” Although Ning felt quite excited, he also felt quite curious as to what this was all about. All he knew was that this was an ‘incredible’ opportunity, one which no one seemed to know much about.

“Don’t ask. When you meet the almighty Hegemon, you’ll know,” Lord Woodflower said.

“Meet the almighty Hegemon?” Ning was stunned.

“Right. The almighty Hegemon has already issued a summons to the four of you. Hurry over to the place where the Imperials reside,” Lord Woodflower said.