

## Desolate 931

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#### Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 24: The First Meeting

The Twelve Palaces were tightly connected to the Brightshore Imperials, and so there were spacetime transfer arrays linking the palaces to the territory of the Imperials.

Rumble...

Spacetime twisted around Ji Ning. Once everything went still, he swept the area with his gaze. "So this is the imperial palace?"

Although all twelve of the palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom were extremely large and covered with many formations, the true center of the kingdom remained the imperial palace! Before Ning was an utterly, breathtakingly large palace that was as white as snow, with gold, black, and blue accents covering parts of it.

Just looking at the imperial palace, Ning sensed an aura of incredible presence and might. He felt as though he was looking up at the stars themselves.

"I heard that the Imperials generally live here in the imperial palace. I wonder how many defenses the almighty Hegemon had placed around his headquarters," Ning mused.

Ning emerged from the array and began to walk towards the palace gates of the enormous imperial palace.

There were no people before the palace at all, just two gray statues. One was of a humanoid wielding a spear, the second was of a dragon-like creature that was coiled around itself.

"Halt." The humanoid statue suddenly spoke out in a grating voice as it stared at Ning.

"Whaaaat?!" Ning was badly startled. "Its alive?!"

He could now be considered a powerful expert. After unleashing his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, he was a match for most Daolords of the Second Step, and thus he had extremely keen senses towards life and the aura of life. He would be able to easily detect the aura of a tiny mosquito from a million kilometers away! However, his senses were clearly telling him that this statue before him was nothing more than an ordinary statue, an inert hunk of rock. How, then, was it speaking?

"Have you come to see the Hegemon?" The gray humanoid statue was almost as tall as the palace gates, and it stared down at Ning.

"Yes." Ning nodded. Although his senses were still telling him that this statue was an inert hunk of rock, he couldn't help but feel an inexplicable hint of fear.

"Enter after all four have arrived," the gray humanoid statue said coldly.

Ning had no choice but to stand there and wait quietly. After enough time passed to brew a kettle of tea, the nearby spacetime transfer array once more lit up. Once the light subsided, a skinny bald youth dressed in loose red robes had appeared within it. The youth's face was covered with strange divine red

tattoos that seemed to extrude an aura of special charm. Ning only had to glance at them to feel that they were exerting an effect upon him.

"I am Solewind." The bald, red-robed youth strolled forwards, then smiled. "Greetings, Swordlord Darknorth."

"Heartlord Solewind." Ning greeted the man. The Heartforce Palace had very few cultivators, and the only World-level cultivator acknowledged by the ancient pagodas was Heartlord Solewind. Ning had heard of this man long ago. This was no dabbler like Bertulu; this was a man who had truly poured all of his effort into being a Heartforce Cultivator, and his abilities were truly unfathomable.

"Swordlord Darknorth, you actually made it farther into the Silvercloud World's great altar than I did." Heartlord Solewind smiled in a gentle, warm fashion. "I heard that you were abducted by the almighty Hegemon to our Brightshore Kingdom roughly two thousand years ago. For you to reach such a level of power in such a short period of time... Solewind truly admires you."

Ning was instantly speechless. The man even knew about him having been abducted by the almighty Hegemon two thousand years ago? News had certainly spread quite fast!

"No need to feel surprised, Swordlord Darknorth. It was one of my elder brothers in the Heartforce Palace who informed me of this," Heartlord Solewind said with a laugh. "The Heartforce Palace has very few cultivators within it, and we all treat each other as we would our actual siblings. We hold nothing back from each other."

Ning suddenly remembered that the entire Heartforce Palace held less than ten Samsara Daolords! Most of those Samsara Daolords were out wandering the primordial chaos, leaving no more than two or three who actually resided within the palace itself. Compared to the other eleven palaces, the Heartforce Palace really did have pitifully few members. Ning could fully understand how this would result in them treating each other as they would actual siblings.

"Swordlord Darknorth, if you wish you can simply address me as Solewind." Heartlord Solewind smiled.

"Then you can address me as Darknorth, brother Solewind," Ning said. In his heart, he couldn't help but feel astonished. Why was it that a simple smile from Solewind caused Ning to have such a good impression of him? His voice alone was enough to make it impossible for others to hate him!

Rumble...

The spacetime transfer array once more lit up, and moments later a youth dressed in deep blue robes emerged. He had a cold, forbidding face, and he emanated an aura of baleful energy. As soon as he emerged he saw Ning and Solewind, and he immediately called out, "Greetings, Heartlord Solewind and Swordlord Darknorth."

"Are you Waterlord Firesurge? No need to stand on such ceremony. You can simply address us as Solewind and Darknorth," Heartlord Solewind said, and Ning nodded.

"I was lucky enough to be ranked number four, but I fear I'll need your help in the future." Although the blue-robed youth had a cold and forboding aura, his words were quite courteous and respectful. Both Solewind and Ning felt quite kindly disposed towards him.

No matter what, they were all members of the Twelve Palaces who had sworn lifeblood oaths not to attack each other. Given that they were ranked in the top four, all of them would clearly be extraordinary figures in the future. So long as they were able to survive, they would all become major powers who would shock the rest of the primordial chaos. It was natural for them to wish to befriend each other.

The three chatted idly for a time, slowly growing more familiar with each other's personalities and traits.

Finally, the last member arrived.

This was a man dressed in black imperial robes who wore a royal crown. His skin was as clear as jade, and his eyes were as deep as the abyss between the stars. Even the likes of Ji Ning, Firesurge, and Solewind couldn't help but mentally sigh in amazement. In terms of appearance and aura, at least, this 'Prince Greatjoy' was definitely number one amongst the four.

"So the three of you have already arrived? Please pardon me for having arrived late. Greatjoy feels quite ashamed at having made you wait." Prince Greatjoy was as courteous as the stories said he was... but of course the stories also said that deep down, he was actually quite a berserk fellow.

"We just arrived a short while ago."

"Brother Greatjoy, you ranked number one in this trial. I imagine that you are probably on par with Bertulu and Eastcult."

The four began to casually chat amongst themselves. Although they were all quite relaxed, none of them dared to underestimate any of the other three, as they were all quite close in power. They belonged to the same general level of strength, even though there were differences with regards to how far they had made it in the Silvercloud World. If they were to get into an actual fight, it was hard to say who would win. In addition, the trial of the Silvercloud World was a trial where many sources of outside help were banned, such as Dao-seals or golems. Given how extraordinary they all were, all of them had clearly experienced tremendous strokes of karmic luck in the past!

"The Hegemon has summoned the four of you. Go on inside." The giant humanoid statue stared down at the four tiny dots below it as it spoke in a cold voice.

"The two statues standing in front of the imperial palace are the two great guardians of the imperial palace," Heartlord Solewind sent mentally. "I heard that long ago, during the era when the almighty Hegemon was first establishing his reputation, he led these two great guardians into battle and slew countless major powers with them."

"Oh?" Ning, Greatjoy, and Firesurge both listened attentively.

The members of the Heartforce Palace shared a particularly close relationship with each other, and so Heartlord Solewind knew many more secrets than most members of the other palaces.

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Although Ning was quite intrigued about the history of these two giant statues, he didn't pay them too much mind as he entered the imperial palace.

Once they stepped past the gates and saw the towering palace, the four of them could sense spacetime twisting around them as they were teleported away once more.

They had been brought to a region filled with empty space with a few chaos stars sprinkled throughout it.

Ning and the others all stared at their surroundings as they appeared in this place.

“What is this place?” All four of them were rather puzzled. This region was simply too silent, as still as a pool of water. The primordial chaos should generally be filled with many types of voidstorms and chaos waves, and it would generally be filled with boundless amounts of chaos energy! However, the empty region they were in was utterly enormous and completely devoid of primordial chaos.

Whoosh.

The void before them suddenly parted like a curtain of water as an incomparably massive behemoth suddenly appeared. This behemoth had two enormous eyes that were like blazing stars, but it gazed towards Ning and the other three in a very gentle manner. When it spoke, its voice was similarly gentle, but it echoed throughout every single inch of this region. “Greetings, my four young fellows.”

Greatjoy, Solewind, Firesurge, and Ning were all shocked.

Ning couldn’t help but think back to the scene of him and the other World-level cultivators being swallowed up by the head of an enormous behemoth, then being teleported to the Brightshore Kingdom.

“Greetings, Hegemon.” Ning and the other three all bowed respectfully. There was no need to kneel or kowtow; the Hegemon generally treated the members of the Twelve Palaces quite well.

“You four young fellows have earned a rare opportunity for yourselves,” the towering behemoth said. “You shall head out alongside a member of my Imperials known as Skyfire Brightshore, and then you shall enter the Archaeus region of an alternate universe. This region is one of the most legendary locations of this alternate universe, and it is filled with many dangers. It is also, however, filled with many opportunities. I’ve chosen the four of you because I hope that you will help my young clansman, Skyfire Brightshore, as much as you can and give him a better chance at surviving. But of course, I will reward you heavily for the services you have rendered to myself and Skyfire.”

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#### **Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 25: Following Master**

Ji Ning and the others were all intrigued. In truth, they had all suspected long ago that the reason why the almighty Hegemon had chosen the four of them from the Twelve Palaces was to have them assist Skyfire Brightshore. However, the reason why the Twelve Palaces had been on such good terms with the Brightshore Imperials for so long was precisely because they treated each other as equals. Ning and the others were all extraordinary figures, and they wouldn’t be expected to risk their lives for the Imperials without being compensated at all.

“Once you return from the alternate universe, I’ll speak with Skyfire Brightshore. The more assistance you provided to him, the greater our gratitude shall be,” the towering behemoth said.

“Do not worry, Hegemon. We will definitely do everything we can.”

“Since we are travelling together, we shall definitely do our best to support each other.”

All of them spoke out in unison.

They all knew that since the Hegemon said he would ‘reward them heavily’, the rewards for this mission would definitely be extraordinary. The Hegemon was someone who had stood at the very top of the Endless Territories for countless years, after all. He had existed for even longer than the Brightshore Kingdom itself had existed.

A ‘heavy reward’ from someone like him was indeed more than enough to convince Ning and the others to do their absolute utmost in protecting Skyfire Brightshore in his journey to the alternate universe.

“Good.” The towering behemoth nodded slightly.

Rumble...

Yet another spacetime vortex appeared next to Ning’s group. Moments later, a strange beast bathed in blazing flames suddenly emerged.

“Skyfire.” The towering behemoth nodded.

“Hegemon.” The blazing beast immediately transformed into the shape of a fiery-haired youth who wore a suit of azure armor.

“It shall be the five of you who will travel to the alternate universe,” the towering behemoth said.

The fiery-haired youth swept the four with his gaze, closely scrutinizing them. He then cracked a smile. “My name is Skyfire Brightshore, but you can just call me Skyfire. I heard from the Hegemon that none of the four chosen ones are weaker than I am. Once we go to the alternate universe, I’ll have to trouble you to help me out.”

Although Skyfire Brightshore was an incredibly talented member of the race of Brightshore Imperials, he was still just a new member who had been brought back just a short while ago. Ning and the others had all developed at least one Supreme Dao and were comparable to Daolords of the Second Step. Indeed, all of them were somewhat more powerful than Skyfire Brightshore. But of course, this was only true if they factored in their ‘normal’ combat power. There was no way to calculate the power of any trump cards or single-use items which they were keeping hidden up their sleeves.

“Hegemon, where is this ‘Archaeus region’ and what is this ‘alternate universe’?” Prince Greatjoy asked. He was nothing more than an honorary disciple of the almighty Hegemon, and he wasn’t truly qualified to address the Hegemon as ‘Master’. According to the almighty Hegemon’s rules, only his personal disciples were qualified to call him ‘Master’.

“The alternate universe?” The towering behemoth smiled as it saw the looks of eagerness appear on the faces of Ning and the others. “By now, all of you should have sensed that the Endless Territories have certain prime essences within it. There is a prime essence of fire, a prime essence of water, a prime essence of the sword, a prime essence of space, a prime essence of time...”

Ning and the others nodded. Everyone could sense the prime essences. However, attuning to the prime essences was only able to help one advance to the level of full mastery as a World-level cultivator. As for the more profound mysteries, the prime essences kept them bottled up internally and emanated none of them at all. Supposedly, not even Eternal Emperors could enter the prime essences and train in those mysteries. Thus, Samsara Daolords had to find and develop a Dao which suited themselves, one slow step at a time.

“The vast region which is covered by the power of the prime essences is known as a ‘universe’,” the almighty Hegemon said. “An ‘alternate universe’ naturally refers to a place which has completely different prime essences.”

“What?!” Ning and the others were all stunned. Different prime essences?

The Three Realms, the Badlands Territory, the Brightshore Kingdom... Ning had been able to sense the prime essence of the sword in all these places. The prime essence of the sword was unchanging, and the vast Endless Territories were nothing more than a part of an enormous universe! But now, it seemed as though he was going to head off into a completely different universe?

“Do not worry. The outermost layers of the prime essences of this alternate universe, such as the prime essence of water, the prime essence of time, the prime essence of the sword, etc., are all the same as ours. Only the inner layers differ,” the almighty Hegemon said. “Thus, your power shall not be impacted whatsoever.”

“Has anyone ever been to this place?” Waterlord Firesurge couldn’t help but ask.

“None.” The almighty Hegemon shook his head.

Ning and the others were instantly rendered speechless.

“Long ago, as I attuned myself to the nature of spacetime, I was able to dimly sense the traces of an alternate universe that was quite close to our own universe, and so I opened a transversal conduit between our two universe,” the towering behemoth said. “However, the transversal conduit is rather weak, because it is constantly being disrupted by the differing laws of our two universes. Thus, only those below the Daolord level of power are able to enter it.

“Thus, once you head off into this alternate universe, you absolutely must not allow yourselves to break through to the Daolord level. If you do break through, you will never be able to return. You will have to forever stay within that alternate universe,” the towering behemoth instructed.

Ning and the others nodded. So due to the different laws of the two universes, there was no way for Daolords to pass through this transversal conduit.

“However, World-level cultivators can pass through this conduit with no danger whatsoever,” the towering behemoth said. “Just a few days ago, I sent one of my World-level servants through the dimension conduit to do some exploring, then brought him back safely. Over the course of countless years, I’ve also managed to capture quite a few World-level cultivators of the alternate universe and bring them to ours.”

“Capture?” Ning and the others were secretly speechless. The almighty Hegemon was unable to go personally, but was still able to capture people?

“Thus, this transversal conduit is completely safe,” the towering behemoth said. “Given how strong you are, I trust that you will not encounter much danger when you journey through the territories of the alternate universe. The true trial will begin once you reach their Archaeus region!”

Ning and the other four listened attentively. Not even Skyfire Brightshore knew much about this ‘Archaeus region’.

“The Archaeus region is the most mysterious region in this alternate universe. It takes up an extremely vast region of space, so vast that I imagine there are very few cultivators who even know how large it truly is. Supposedly, there are many Daolords and even Eternal Emperors who seclude themselves throughout the Archaeus region.” The towering behemoth laughed. “This Archaeus region is so vast that it is most likely as large as our entire Endless Territories.”

“What?!” Ning and the others were all speechless.

They had originally thought that this Archaeus region would be some sort of secret world or location. Now, it seemed, it was a place that was almost as vast as their entire Endless Territories.

“That place is the core of that entire alternate universe, the place where the alternate universe sprang from. Countless cultivators in that universe dream of entering the Archaeus region, because everyone who manages to survive their journey through it will return completely transformed,” the towering behemoth said. “However... if you barge into the Archaeus region, you will immediately be assaulted and annihilated by the full force of the entire Archaeus region itself. You’ll be instantly reduced to dust and your truesoul vaporized.”

Ning and the others were truly at a loss for words. If the entire region was the size of the Endless Territories... how terrifying would an attack launched with the full might of that region be?

“That place is the core of the entire alternate universe, after all.” The towering behemoth continued, “Everyone who wishes to enter the place has to first bind an Archaeus medallion. After doing so, you’ll be able to enter it safely and won’t be expelled by the power of the region.”

“Archaeus medallions are extremely rare. I sent my will into the alternate universe and spread it across an extremely wide area, then kidnapped the World-level cultivators who passed through the area. It took me countless years to accumulate just a few Archaeus medallions,” the towering behemoth said. “Here are the five Archaeus medallions. Take them and bind them.”

Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh.

Five streaks of light appeared out of nowhere and flew towards Ning and the other four.

The Archaeus medallions were dark-red disc-shaped medallions that were covered with ancient, complicated runes. Ning and the others didn’t understand the runes, but could sense that they came from a long time ago, in a universe that was far, far away. They all bound the medallions.

“Hegemon.” Ning spoke out. “Will we be permitted to bring our retainers and servants into the alternate universe? Are they allowed to enter the Archaeus region?”

The others all looked at the Hegemon, because they all had retainers and servants as well.

“Anyone below the Daolord level can make use of the transversal conduit,” the almighty Hegemon said. “As for the Archaeus region... they will have to perpetually hide within your estate-world treasures, and they can’t let any of their auras leak out at all. If they reveal themselves within the Archaeus region, they’ll suffer an immediate attack from the power of the region. However, if they continuously hide without coming out they will be safe.”

Ning and the others now understood. They would not be able to leave the estate-worlds or even sent out their aura or godsense. If that was the case, there was no real point to bringing them.

“But of course, if you were able to acquire more Archaeus medallions, you could gift them to your retainers and servants. They would then be qualified to enter the Archaeus region as well,” the almighty Hegemon suddenly said. “Still, I urge you to be more low-key when you enter the Archaeus region, as it holds quite a few truly powerful Daolords.”

“Here is a star map of the alternate universe. It includes all the markers you need to travel from the transversal conduit’s exit to the Archaeus region, as well as some information regarding this universe. Remember, you are not to reveal this to others.” As the almighty Hegemon spoke, he bestowed five sets of star maps upon them.

“Understood.” Ning and the other four accepted the maps.

“Make your preparations. Three days from now, we shall meet again outside the imperial palace,” the almighty Hegemon instructed.

Ning returned to the Sword Palace, then met with World God Pillsaint and Su Youji.

“A tremendous opportunity has been made available to me. I’ll be heading to an extremely dangerous place. If you follow me, there’s a slim chance that you’ll gain some karmic fortune from it as well. But of course, when I die you will die as well,” Ning said. “Shall you follow me or will you remain here in the Sword Palace?”

“I’ll follow you, Master.” Su Youji didn’t hesitate at all.

“I’m not allowed to learn any of the techniques or secret arts of the Twelve Palaces. Of course I’ll follow you, Master!” Pillsaint agreed.

Ning nodded slowly upon seeing this. He couldn’t promise them anything. He hadn’t even visited this alternate universe before, after all.

Three days later, Ji Ning, Solewind, Firesurge, Greatjoy, and Skyfire Brightjoy all gathered together before the gates of the imperial palace.

“Everyone.” The gray humanoid statue suddenly walked towards Ning and the other four. “I shall escort the five of you to the transversal conduit.”

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### **Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 26: Entering the Alternate Universe**

The grayish humanoid statue first made some slight alterations to the spacetime transfer array in front of the imperial palace, then activated it.



Ji Ning, Solewind, Firesurge, Greatjoy, and Skyfire could sense spacetime twisting around them. Soon, everything went silent.

“Eh?” Ning and the others stared at their new surroundings.

They were at the peak of a towering mountain that was levitating in empty space. At the very apex of the mountain peak sat a white-bearded old man dressed in snowy robes who had six curved horns on his head. Ning and the others had seen the almighty Hegemon’s true form before, and they immediately recognized the old man’s aura as that of the Hegemon’s. They immediately bowed respectfully.

“Hegemon.”

“This place here is the transversal conduit.” The white-bearded old man pointed at a place halfway up the mountain. At first glance it seemed quite ordinary, but a more careful examination revealed a series of faint, concentric spacetime ripples emanating an aura of incredible power. If the transversal conduit was to collapse with them inside, they would probably all perish.

“Once you enter the alternate universe, even items like ‘truesoul towers’ and ‘heart lamps’ will no longer be able to detect whether or not you are still alive, to say nothing of ordinary life tablets,” the white-bearded elder said. “These are two completely separate universes, after all. But of course, if you have trained in some sort of cloning technique, you can leave a clone behind in this universe. If the other clones all perish, you can rebuild them with your backup clone. That’s one way to tell if you are alive or not.”

“Alright.” Ning and the others all nodded.

Heart lamps and truesoul towers were attuned directly to one’s truesoul. Even if one entered the most deadly of locations, they would still be able to sense the presence of your truesoul. Alas, if you entered an alternate universe they would be useless.

Life tablets were the most simple and common items used to determine if someone was alive or not. Many special locations were able to completely block the effect of life tablets. In fact, a sufficiently great distance would also be enough to make it impossible for a life tablet to function.

“No one will be able to assist you on this journey to this alternate universe. Everything will all be up to yourselves,” the white-bearded elder said. “Go in. After you enter the conduit, make sure you remember to only go forwards and follow the flow.”

“Understood,” Ning and the other four acknowledged. They then all turned to walk towards those the seemingly ordinary, concentric spacetime ripples. As the five moved closer to the ripples, they quickly began to feel as though they had been dragged into a powerful spacetime whirlpool.

The journey through the transversal conduit started off quite calm and peaceful. Soon, however, Ning and the others could sense how space and time were twisting and distorting around them, as were many of the laws they had taken for granted. This was quite a miserable feeling; even their truesouls felt stifled and choked.

“Let’s move faster,” Prince Greatjoy growled.

“Forwards!” Ning urged.

They all suppressed the nauseous feelings they had as they hurriedly flew forwards. In front of them was a dark tunnel which had been formed by rings of spacetime vortices. The black tunnel seemingly had no exit, and the laws of both universes were in force throughout the tunnel. Thankfully, Ning and the others had not yet reached the Daolord level, and so the disturbance they created was fairly minor. If a true Daolord had dared to make use of this transversal conduit, it was very likely that the two differing laws of the two universes would've crushed him to death.

Whoosh. Ning and the others continued to fly forwards at high speed.

"Why is this tunnel so long?"

"How long is this transversal conduit? There seems to be no end to it!"

Ning and the others had been flying for more than two hours by now, but they were still stuck within that tunnel of darkness. They all felt quite nauseous, but at least they weren't at risk of losing their lives. They were all able to resist the uncomfortable feelings.

Heartlord Solewind sent mentally to the others, "The Hegemon told us to just keep pressing onwards after we enter the tunnel. Let's just keep flying like this. Sooner or later, we'll reach the exit."

"Right." Waterlord Firesurge nodded as well.

"A transversal conduit which links two universes. Today, I've finally seen such a thing with my own eyes." Prince Greatjoy laughed loudly.

The five of them chatted as they continued to fly forwards, but they soon ran out of topics to talk about and so just continued to fly in silence.

One day. Two days. Three days...

Ning had never imagined that this transversal conduit would be so long. If this was 'normal' flying, he wouldn't have minded, but this was a place where the laws of two universes were clashing against each other. Every second here felt like an entire miserable year. Why hadn't the almighty Hegemon warned them about this? Most likely, he wanted to use it to temper their hearts and wills.

In the blink of an eye, three full years went by.

"Wait, what's that?"

"Is that the exit?"

"I think that's the exit."

Ning and the others had been flying silently when suddenly, they all revealed looks of great joy. They saw some light sparkling up ahead, breaking up the monotonous darkness of the transversal conduit. It didn't seem as though there was anything past those sparkles of light. It seemed as though they had reached the end.

"Keep flying." They had no other options but to fly straight towards the light.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh. The five of them all flew out of the darkness.

“What is this place?” The five of them found themselves within a region of drifting primordial chaos. In front of them was an enormous chaos star that blazed like a giant ball of fire. Due to its close proximity the surrounding area was illuminated quite brightly by this chaos star.

Ning and the others turned to look behind them, only to see an enormous spatial vortex.

“I imagine there aren’t many who would dare to enter this spatial vortex,” Heartlord Solewind laughed.

Ning nodded.

He himself had arrived in the Badlands Territory by leaving the Three Realms through a spatial vortex. There were quite a few such vortices in the Endless Territories, but because most were naturally formed they often contained unknown dangers. Generally speaking, cultivators wouldn’t dare to risk their lives within one of them.

But of course, there were always those like ‘Old Man Yuan’ or Godfiend Witherspike who would enter the vortices because they were being chased and had nowhere else to flee. They had no choice but to flee into the most dangerous of places.

“Even if they made it through and were lucky enough to survive... on the other side is the Hegemon himself.” Prince Greatjoy sent a mental chuckle as well.

“Can you sense it, everyone?” Skyfire Brightshore’s eyes were closed as he sent out his senses. “It is true. Many of the prime essences in this place are different from ours.”

Ning was attuning himself to the local prime essences as well.

This place was similar to the Endless Territories in that both had a prime essence of the sword, a prime essence of fire, a prime essence of water, a prime essence of lightning, a prime essence of space, and many other types of prime essence. These prime essences were like giant stone pillars that were holding up the entire universe they were in, and the outermost ripples of these prime essences could be sensed and attuned to by cultivators. In this respect, things were exactly the same as they were in the Endless Territories!

Thus, cultivation was a similar process as well. However, ‘inside’ the prime essences things were very different.

“In the Endless Territories, the prime essence of the sword is more all-encompassing and massive. In this alternate universe, the prime essence of the sword seems to be more reserved but also more savage,” Ning mused.

The five of them were all curiously attuning themselves to the local prime essences.

“According to our star maps, our current location is quite a long ways off from the Archaeus region. Let us head off, gentlemen,” Waterlord Firesurge said.

“Yes, time to head off.”

“Our journey is a long one. Our most important mission right now is to reach the Archaeus region safely.”

“Let’s go.”

Although the five were all very confident, and although their chances of reaching the Archaeus region were quite high, they didn’t dare to be reckless. The distance between their location and the Archaeus region truly was quite great, as the Archaeus region was the core of this entire alternate universe and was truly, indescribably vast.

According to their star maps, it would take Ning’s group at least 1500 years to go from the transversal conduit to the Archaeus region. They would have to go through more than three thousand territories! World-level cultivators would almost never be willing to take on a journey of such distances, as it would be simply far too dangerous. Who knew when they would perish?

It took them two months to go to the nearest spacetime transfer array. The spacetime transfer arrays here were quite similar to the ones in the Endless Territories. Clearly, the two universes had very similar systems of cultivation.

Be it by flying, teleporting, or using spacetime transfer arrays, the group advanced through the alternate universe for more than a hundred years. Finally, they reached a specific chaos planet that was the core of a spacetime transfer array they had to pass through.

Deep within a gorge on this planet, there were a series of estates where other World-level cultivators resided.

Crackle. Pop.

A figure was seated in the lotus position by the banks of a lake, his entire body wreathed in flames that didn’t cause any damage to the nearby mud or grass at all.

Swoosh.

A streak of light flew towards him from afar. It was a green-haired World God who was carrying a greataxe on his back and radiated an aura of great strength.

“Five World-level cultivators arrived,” the green-haired World God growled.

“Oh? Five dared to trespass in our territory? Do they have extraordinary backgrounds?” The flaming figure asked.

“They should be outsiders. I’ve never seen them before,” the green-haired World God said.

“Never seen them before? Mm. We should know all of the World-level cultivators in the ten or so territories around us. If we don’t know them... they must have come from very far away.” The flaming figure let out a hoarse chuckle. “Inform the other leaders. Begin our preparations for killing these outsiders. We discovered them, so I insist on getting a full share.”

“Understood,” the green-haired World God said respectfully.

“By now, we’ve killed more than three hundred World-level cultivators. Still... that’s not enough. We aren’t even close to our quota of a thousand,” the flaming figure mused softly.

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### **Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 27: Ambushed**

Ji Ning's squad of five descended upon this chaos planet.

They were able to see the heart of the spacetime transfer array far off in the distance. Here in this alternate universe, cultivators also used chaos nectar and chaos jewels for bartering.

"Halt!"

An Elder God standing in front of a beautiful palace suddenly bellowed at them. Although the five before him were all World-level cultivators, and although he was merely an Elder God, he was a representative of a universe-wide organization which dominated this entire universe, the Church of Annihilation. Every single spacetime transfer array in this alternate universe was governed by the Church of Annihilation.

No major powers would dare to challenge the might and prestige of the Church of Annihilation! In this universe, the Church of Annihilation was an utterly exalted and supreme organization!

"We are going to the star of Cricket," Heartlord Solewind said with a smile. Here in the alternate universe, it was usually Solewind's responsibility to meet and speak with the locals.

"The spacetime transfer array is currently under maintenance. It'll be half a month before it can be activated," the Elder God said.

"Half a month?" Ning and the others looked at each other, feeling quite helpless. Spacetime transfer arrays did indeed require maintenance and repairs. If they were not given the proper maintenance, these ancient devices would slowly begin to break down. Ning's group had no choice but to leave for now. They travelled a few hundred kilometers away and landed within a beautiful mountain valley.

"Let's wait here for half a month," Heartlord solewind said.

"The Church of Annihilation truly is incredible. It was actually able to take complete control over this entire alternate universe. The Endless Territories is just one part of our own universe, but it's still divided up into many different organizations," Prince Greatjoy sent mentally. He couldn't help but sigh. "In the Endless Territories, more than 99% of the people belong to the Dao Alliance, but the Dao Alliance is dispersed into many different locations. Everyone operates independently, with some training and some fighting. As for the spacetime transfer arrays, the local schools and sects are allowed to run them."

Ning chuckled as well. The Dao Alliance was quite relaxed... but that was why Ning liked it. It granted freedom and governed on a principle of non-governance.

"Cultivators, by our very nature, wish for freedom," Solewind said. "The reason why the Brightshore Kingdom is so unified is because the almighty Hegemon is so strong as to completely overpower everyone else! The reason why the Aeonians are so unified is because if they aren't unified, they'll be wiped out as a race! The Dao Alliance is simply too strong, forcing them to be unified if they wish to survive. The reason why those other top-tier organizations are unified is also because they are few in number. They can't not be unified."

"And this alternate universe?" Firesurge asked.

Ning was curious as well. "For this universe to be completely unified is truly inconceivable."

“Absolutely.”

The five of them were all extraordinary figures. In the future, if they worked hard in their cultivation, they would become truly monstrous Daolords. They were all very proud individuals, but they felt the utmost of admiration and awe towards this organization which had dominated and unified an entire universe.

The five of them continued to wait there quietly, drinking while chatting. But of course, when they discussed sensitive matters they sent mental messages to each other.

“Eh?” Their faces tightened at the exact same instant.

Boom!

The world around them changed as countless roaring waves came crashing out towards them in an apocalyptic scene. The waves swept straight towards the five of them, and at the edges of the endless waves there were a number of World-level cultivators who were riding the waves forward. They stared at Ning’s group of five, their eyes filled with murderous intentions.

“We’ve just been waylaid.” Ning’s group knew what was happening.

“Elder brothers, let me handle these waves.” Firesurge was dressed in deep blue robes and his face was grim and cold. He was quite humble when speaking to Ning and the other three, but he was filled with nothing besides icy contempt towards these attacking cultivators. He waved his hand. BOOM! A ring of seemingly ordinary black water began to spread out in every direction around him.

The ring of black water was able to easily defend against the roaring waves.

“What?”

“The ‘Empyrean Divine Water Formation’ we set up using 109 World-level cultivators was blocked with such ease?” The attackers were all horrified and shocked.

“Break!” Firesurge let out a cold snort, and the roaring waves of water suddenly were pushed backwards, causing the entire formation to collapse.

“It was only meant to bind and capture them anyhow. If we can’t capture them, we will just kill them.” A golden-winged World God issued mental orders to the others. Although he could tell that Firesurge wasn’t an easy person to deal with, he was very confident in his group’s abilities. Given their overwhelming advantage in numbers, he truly felt no concern whatsoever.

The awe-inspiring horde of World-level cultivators suddenly switched to a different formation, causing blurry light to spread out amongst their ranks. All of them were now reinforced by the formation they were using, and they charged towards Ning’s group.

“They really are courting death.” Prince Greatjoy let out a cold laugh as he slapped out with his left hand. His left palm instantly expanded to become thirty thousand meters in size, and it emanated an aura of dazzling golden light. This dazzling golden palm moved terrifyingly fast as spacetime twisted and distorted in front of it. It was clearly quite far away from the attackers, but it somehow appeared directly in front of them in an instant.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Every single World-level cultivator touched by the golden palm was reduced to dust.

“Is that a Daolord?!”

“That has to be a Daolord!”

“What the hell is going on? He clearly has the aura of a World God.”

“He’s actually a Daolord pretending to be a World God!” The attackers were instantly scared silly.

Skyfire Brightshore let out a laugh. “There are quite a few attackers. Let me handle them.”

“GWAAAR!” Skyfire opened his mouth and let out a loud, furious roar as flames began to belch forth. The flames instantly covered the entire area and began blasting out in every direction. It must be understood that although Prince Greatjoy was very strong, each of his palm-strikes was only able to kill roughly ten or so World-level cultivators at once. This ring of fire, however, spread out in every direction. There was no way for anyone to run at all.

“Ahhhhh!” Some of the weaker Chaos Immortals were instantly burnt into dust. Even the World Gods with weaker bodies were burnt to ashes.

“Run away immediately!”

“These five World-level cultivators are way too strong.”

“They are probably all transcendent World Gods!”

“Why is our luck such shit?”

Some of the strongest World Gods, along with ones who had access to decent protective divine abilities, were able to endure the roaring flames. Just over twenty of them were able to survive and quickly began to flee in every direction. Although some of them were incredibly strong, they no longer wished to continue this fight against Ning’s group.

Ning nodded as he watched. The flames which Skyfire Brightshore had unleashed seemed to be slightly more powerful than his Chaos-level [Novessence Thunder] technique had been.

“Skyfire, let me give you a hand.” Ning let out a chuckle.

Whoooosh.

Seven streaks of Dao lightning and seven streams of Dao water instantly spread out to cover an area of a million kilometers, catching all of the fleeing World Gods within their area of effect. The Dao lightning and the Dao water were simply too fast; there was no way for them to escape.

The lightning and water all transformed into enormous greatswords that danced through the skies. The entire region of a million kilometers became transformed into an enormous domain of chaotic might. The terrifyingly powerful sword-intent filling this domain tore at the bodies of every single World God, resulting in many of them ground to dust by the clashing and grinding power of the lightning sword-intent and water sword-intent.

It was like an enormous millstone had ground them to bits!

The Yin-Yang Sword Domain, at maximum power, was something which quickly cause even Daolords of the First Step to perish! Even if Ning expanded the zone to cover an area of a million kilometers, Daolords of the First Step would still suffer very heavy injuries, to say nothing of these World-level cultivators.

“Brother Darknorth, your domain truly is formidable. Let me finish the stragglers.” Heartlord Solewind let out a laugh, then turned his gaze to the two World Gods who had made it very far away and were still struggling to flee.

“Why are they this powerful?!”

“Even our transcendent World Gods were wiped out?!”

“B-but...”

“Where the hell did these five come from?!”

The two World Gods who had managed to survive the Yin-Yang Sword Domain were terrified senseless by now. Of the two, one was a transcendent World God while the other was merely a supreme World God. The one thing they shared in common was that both had incredibly powerful protective divine abilities. There was no way for them to actually escape the domain itself, but their bodies were tough enough to let them survive for a moment longer.

“What is going-....”

“I...”

“Ahaha... death, sweet death! Once I die, I’ll have no more worries.”

Boom! Boom!

The two World Gods simultaneously fell to the ground, completely lifeless.

Heartlord Solewind’s lips curved upwards slightly.

“Those two were both elite World Gods, but you were able to make them both commit suicide, Solewind. Admirable, admirable.” Ning nodded.

“They were utterly terrified and driven to the brink of despair by your attacks, my friends. That’s why it was so easy for me to deal with them.” Heartlord Solewind smiled.

Ning and the other three, however, were still shocked by what had happened.

The ability to force a World God to commit suicide? Although the four of them were impressive, none of them were capable of such a thing. True Heartforce Cultivators really were terrifying.

The five of them quickly cleaned up the battlefield, getting rid of the corpses and dividing up the spoils.

“These World-level cultivators weren’t bad. They were fairly strong.” Prince Greatjoy frowned. “There were actually more than ten supreme World Gods and three or four transcendent World Gods! It doesn’t really make sense for there to have been that many transcendent World Gods, does it?”



## The Desolate Era

### **Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 28: The Reason**

“The alternate universe is fairly similar to our own.” Ji Ning also felt that something was off. “Logically speaking, less than one in a thousand World Gods would have reached a transcendent level of power. For this group of a hundred World-level cultivators to have so many supreme World Gods and three or four transcendent World Gods doesn’t make sense. Where the hell did they come from?”

Ning and the other four had effortlessly dominated the group, not giving them any chance to fight back before perishing. Thus, Ning’s group was only able to come to a general approximation regarding how strong they were.

“Let me take a look.” Skyfire Brightshore immediately soared into the skies, then cast his gaze down upon the entire chaos planet as his eyes blazed with fire.

“Hm. Let me take a look on the other side of the chaos planet.” The chaos planet was a sphere, and on the other side of the planet they ended up finding a large number of estates.

“They should be residing in that place.” Solewind cast his gaze downwards. “And... I see quite a few restrictive formations. There’s no way to use godsense to scan the place.”

“We killed 126 World-level cultivators, but there are nearly 150 estates there.” Ning frowned. “Are there still others?”

“Even if there are, they would’ve fled,” Prince Greatjoy said.

This guess was correct.

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A group of nineteen World-level cultivators were hiding within an empty part of the primordial chaos. All of them had ugly looks on their faces as they traded glances. In their eyes could be seen both terror and joy.

“Thank goodness we were responsible for keeping watch over the headquarters.”

“That was terrifying.”

“All those life tablets went poof in an instant. None of them survived!”

When they thought back to the sight of all those life tablets shattering at the same instant, they couldn’t help but be seized by terror once more.

The World-level cultivators had all left behind life tablets so that the others would know if they were alive or not. Just now, when this group had been convening in their headquarters, they realized to their astonishment that a total of 126 life tablets had shattered apart in the same instant. Even the life tablets of the terrifyingly strong transcendent World Gods who they had dreaded were quickly shattered.

It had been a complete massacre!

Although they didn't personally witness the battle, the wholesale annihilation of the life tablets was enough for them to guess at what had happened. They had been so terrified that they immediately fled from their headquarters and used a spatial teleportation to escape.

"Some of them had extremely powerful protective divine abilities. Logically speaking, even if they were attacked by Daolords they would've merely been captured and drawn into magic treasures to be slowly ground down. But... all those life tablets shattered in almost the blink of an eye."

"What the hell did they run into?"

"Those five World-level cultivators... was a major power hiding amongst their ranks?"

The lucky survivors speculated wildly, but were unable to go beyond speculation. They would never dare to return to that place.

And so, just like that this formidable local organization disappeared, never to be heard of again.

This group of World-level cultivators truly had been quite powerful. Unfortunately, they had run into Ning's group of five. These five were the most freakishly talented of the freakishly talented. Anyone besides the five of them would've found it extremely difficult to deal with this group.

For fear that this matter might have unexpected repercussions, Ning's group decided to temporarily hide within a vacant region of primordial chaos as Prince Greatjoy stealthily investigated the matter. "Given my abilities, not even Daolords would be able to detect my actions unless they are even stronger than I am in the Dao of Spacetime." In terms of mastery over spacetime, Prince Greatjoy's level of expertise was superior to even that of many Daolords of the Second Step who specialized in the Dao of Spacetime.

As for those who weren't particularly skilled? Not even Daolords of the Fourth Step would be able to discover any traces of him.

This was why the Dao of Spacetime was such a terrifying Dao.

"Nothing seems to be happening whatsoever. It seems as though that was nothing more than an ordinary robbery attempt." Bandits were common in every universe, and there were many within the Brightshore Kingdom as well. Even in the Endless Territories, there were World-level cultivators who delighted in waylaying and robbing others. This was the fastest way of acquiring treasures, a way far faster and safer than adventuring in ruins left behind by Daolords. A sufficiently prepared ambush was far safer than adventuring in unexplored regions.

Time slowly flowed on. Ning's group continued to advance, behaving even more cautiously than before as they moved through one territory after another. Despite that, they still suffered yet another ambush.

Even though they were moving with extreme caution, they had suffered two consecutive ambushes in a row. As for the results were... there were no surprises whatsoever. Anyone who dared to ambush Ning's group was absolutely courting death.

Rumble...

Three World Gods were swept away by an enormous wave of water and smashed violently upon the ground.

The earth shuddered and split apart from the force of the collision. The three World Gods hurriedly rose to their feet, then stared in terror at the five World-level cultivators who were slowly descending upon them from the skies.

“They are terrifyingly strong.”

“W-way too strong.”

“How can World Gods be this strong?”

The eyes of the three World Gods were filled with terror. They would never forget what they had just seen. That terrifying finger-art... every single wave of the finger had caused World-level cultivators to perish. That terrifying wave... it had crushed more than half of them to death in an instant. As for the ones who wanted to flee, they were slain by crashing bolts of lightning. In the end, only the three of them had managed to survive, and only because their foes let them live.

Only now did they realize that it was possible for World-level cultivators to reach such a level of power.

“You can continue to live,” Prince Greatjoy said coldly, “But you have to do as I say.”

“Y-y-yes.” The three World Gods hurriedly nodded.

“Swear a lifeblood oath that you will never divulge what happened today to anyone. In addition, swear that you will honestly answer any questions we ask you,” Prince Greatjoy ordered grimly.

“Yes.” The three World Gods didn’t even think about fighting back or arguing as they all obediently swore the lifeblood oaths. All three of them were dressed in gray armored robes. Normally, these gray-robed cultivators were viewed as nightmares by other cultivators, but today they were filled with the utmost of reverence towards their captors. They put away their gray armored robes and lowered their heads, for fear of offending the five before them.

“Why did you attempt to waylay us?” Prince Greatjoy asked as Ning and the others watched.

“There were only five of you, and all of you were World-level cultivators. We thought you’d be easy to deal with.” A skinny man with a long beard hurried to be the first to respond.

“No other reasons? You were going to kill us just because we were easy targets?” Prince Greatjoy was puzzled, and he swept his gaze across the other two.

“Right.”

“That is the case.”

The three all immediately nodded.

Ning and the others exchanged a glance. This was the third time they had been ambushed in the past month. It must be understood that it would take them roughly a thousand years to travel from the transversal conduit to the Archaeus region. It would make sense for them to be ambushed once every decade, but for them to be ambushed three times in one month made no sense. And yet... apparently this was nothing more than a normal attempt at highway robbery.

“We were ambushed three times in one month.” Prince Greatjoy frowned. “Do you know why?”

“You don’t know?” The skinny, bearded World God looked at him.

“Speak!” Prince Greatjoy’s eyes lit up, as did the eyes of Ning and the others.

“Because of Nine Godstars,” the prisoner said hurriedly. “Nine Godstars has already formally announced its criteria for accepting new disciples.”

Ning and the others exchanged a glance. Nine Godstars was an extremely large organization.

“They only accept World-level cultivators as new members, and you have to have personally slain at least a thousand other World-level cultivators before you are qualified to join them,” the bearded man said. “Once news of this spread, not only did this cause an enormous stir in the eighteen territories next to Nine Godstars, it also caused a stir in hundreds of nearby territories! Many extremely powerful World-level cultivators began to furiously hunt down and kill down other World-level cultivators. It has been an absolute massacre. Weaker cultivators like us have nowhere to hide, and so we have to join together in large numbers to stay safe.”

“What? You have to kill a thousand World-level cultivators in order to become a member of the sect?” Skyfire Brightshore was shocked.

“That’s a bit crazy.” Heartlord Solewind frowned.

“This entrance requirement...” Ning shook his head.

To kill a thousand World-level cultivators was an extremely difficult. Even enslaved, oathbound World-level slaves were only willing to serve because it gave them a chance to stay alive! If a master insisted on slaying his slaves, the slave would probably go all-out in fighting back. If the slave was going to die no matter what, he would generally prefer to die fighting. When Daolord Windsour was about to die, his slaves would often curse and berate him as they no longer had anything to fear.

Even if you were an extremely powerful cultivator... after many battles, some unexpected variables might occur. You might’ve worked hard to kill several hundred cultivators, only to end up dead in ditch for some reason.

To actually kill a thousand would be very, very difficult.

“Nine Godstars is the number one sect within hundreds of territories, after all.” Next to the bearded man was an extremely muscular World God dressed in scale armor. He said hurriedly, “Nine Godstars has nine major branches, and each branch is led by a major power who is at the Verge of the Daomerge. As for its most powerful expert, that person is ranked as one of the elite Paladins of the Church of Annihilation.”

Ning’s group knew all this. The Church of Annihilation was in control of this entire alternate universe and was an utterly enormous organization. The ‘Paladins’ of the Church of Annihilation held high positions and were extremely respected.

“Nine Godstars will only be accepting eighteen disciples this time,” the scaled World God said hurriedly. “They’ll stop once the final slot is taken! I hear that the top three will be given Archaeus medallions and be sent to the legendary Archaeus region.”

“Archaeus medallions?” Ning and the others were all intrigued.

Archaeus medallions were extremely valuable. The almighty Hegemon had sent his will through the transversal conduit and used many schemes but had only been able to accumulate a few of those medallions over the course of countless years.

“That’s why everyone in the surrounding territories has gone mad. Not only will they have a chance of becoming a disciple, they’ll even have a chance of gaining a legendary Archaeus medallion. All of the transcendent World-level cultivators in the nearby territories have all hastened over here. There’s nowhere for weaker World Gods like us to run.” The bearded man shook his head. “That’s why you’ll encounter ambushes throughout these territories. Most likely, it’ll only come to an end after Nine Godstars accepts its eighteenth and final disciple.”

Finally, Ning’s group had an answer as to why there was such a high concentration of powerful cultivators. It was because the weaker ones had all been killed!

The ones still alive were fairly strong, and some had actually hastened to this place from other territories.

“If they knew that all five of us each hold an Archaeus medallion... I can’t even imagine how many World Gods would come to surround and attack us. There might even be Daolords coming for us.” Skyfire Brightshore sent an amused mental message to the others.

“Haha, we definitely can’t let them find out.”

Now that they knew the reason behind this... they still felt some pressure, but they also felt much more relaxed.

“It seems as though we will often be attacked over the next century or so,” Prince Greatjoy sent. “Everyone, let’s not be too reckless. The mighty Nine Godstars sect is behind this matter. If we attract the attention of their experts, we will be doomed.”

“Right.” Ning and the others all nodded.

## [The Desolate Era](#)

### **Book 27: Twelve Palaces Chapter 29: Adventures**

Ji Ning and the others were very careful. However, the Nine Godstars sect had sent out dozens of Daolords of the First Step to keep watch over the place, with the goal of preventing some truly dazzlingly talented World-level cultivators from being surrounded, trapped, and killed. These Daolords had all broken through via usage of Pseudo Samsara Pills.

These Daolords of the First Step were scattered across the local territories, keeping a secret look out for particularly dazzling and talented World-level cultivators. If they found one, they would be permitted to return to the sect in advance.

When roaming, they would actively emanate their Samsara Daolord auras, making it so that the World-level cultivators would not dare to act against them. There was a significant difference in power between them and Samsara Daolords, after all! Ji Ning, for example, would probably be merely a match for Daolords of the First Step if he was relying solely on his sword-arts. It was thanks to the azureflower mist energy strengthening his body and making it comparable to a Daolord’s that he was able to rise above them in power.

Firesurge, Greatjoy, and the others had their own divine abilities and secret arts as well.

Generally speaking, it was very difficult to rely on mere divine abilities to defeat those at a completely different level. The [Fogstone Apocalypse] was a very good example of a divine ability that didn't qualify! Only some truly, devastatingly powerful divine abilities would do the trick, such as the [Five Seals Sword Dao] of Emperor Mirrorsnow. Alas, there was no way for Ning to use it.

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Mighty divine abilities, secret arts, powerful innate gifts like Skyfire's, supportive techniques like Ning's azureflower mist energy... this was what was needed, along with ridiculously profound insights into the Dao, for a World-level cultivator to be able to slay a Daolord of the First Step! And of course, not even the likes of Bertulu would be able to slay a Daolord of the Second Step.

Thus, it was generally quite safe for Daolords of the First Step to be used to patrol most territories.

But of course, the Nine Godstars sect naturally would keep this type of mission a secret. Those World-level cultivators all believed that the only way to succeed was by killing a thousand of their peers, which was why they remained as berserk as ever.

"Damn."

Sixteen years after they entered the sphere of influence of the Nine Godstars sect.

Ning and the others were in an empty part of space. They exchanged glances with each other, their faces grim.

"Greatjoy, you were a bit rash this time." Heartlord Solewind had a rather ugly look on his face as he stared at the magic treasures and suits of armor floating in front of them.

"We had no other options! When we refused to follow that Daolord of the First Step, he tried to abduct us by force. You know that we cannot reveal our true identities." Prince Greatjoy had an ugly look on his face as well as he spoke mentally to the other four. "We lied to him and told him that we are members of other sects, but he completely ignored us. We had no choice but to kill him!"

"We killed a Daolord of the Nine Godstars sect. Even though he was merely a Daolord of the First Step... I'm sure that the Nine Godstars sect has already found out and is sending people to investigate." Firesurge was worried as well.

Ning and Skyfire both had solemn looks on their faces as well.

What were they to do?

The actual killing had been quite enjoyable. That Daolord of the First Step had been courting death, acting and speaking in such a dominating manner towards them. Any of the five were capable of slaughtering that Daolord! But in the end, it had been Prince Greatjoy who punched out with a fist and completely crushed him to death!

"We had no other options, but don't worry," Prince Greatjoy sent. "Although the Nine Godstars sect would immediately be notified of his death, it'll take them some time for their investigators to be sent out and to arrive at this place."

“And... they can forget about discovering anything.” Prince Greatjoy’s eyes were as cold as ice. “Give me one hour. I will completely scramble spacetime here and make it impossible for them to invert the flow of time, unless they bring someone who is ten times more skilled than myself in the Dao of Spacetime.”

“Alright.” Ning and the others felt stunned. Right. Greatjoy had reached a tremendously high level of skill in the Dao of Spacetime. If he was to scramble spacetime in the surrounding area, it would be difficult for even the Nine Godstars sect to find out what had happened here. At the very least, it would buy them some time.

Ugh. They had been doing their best to be low-key, but it was impossible for them to completely avoid showing at least part of their true power when they had to deal with so many ambushes. In addition, they had no idea that there were Daolords patrolling about in secret. In the end, one of them actually chased the five of them down. The five didn’t dare to actually go visit the Nine Godstars sect, as once their identities were revealed they would quite possibly face annihilation.

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Ning’s group destroyed all the evidence at the scene and scrambled spacetime, then transformed into different appearances. They even summoned quite a few World-level retainers and servants from their estate-worlds, then continued to venture forth in a nine-cultivator squad.

Things happened just as they had predicted.

Roughly two years later, a Daolord of the Third Step from the Nine Godstars sect arrived in the place where they had slain the first Daolord. Given how powerful the Nine Godstars sect was, for them to calculate where their Daolord had died was an easy task! But of course, to actually divine the identity of the killer was virtually impossible. When World God Northrest had died, there had been no way for Vastheaven Palace to divine who had done it. They had to have more variables to work with in order to lower the difficulty of the Numerancy divination.

“Eh?”

“Spacetime has been scrambled here.” When the Daolord of the Third Step sought to reverse the flow of time and see what had happened, all he saw was a field of completely distorted and chaotic spacetime. There was no way to investigate at all.

“Did that servant of mine offend a major power who was skilled in the Dao of Spacetime?” The Daolord murmured to himself, “Perhaps my servant offended him, resulting in my servant being killed... and yet, that major power did not wish to become an enemy of our Nine Godstars sect... and so he scrambled spacetime here?”

Daolords who walked the Dao of Spacetime were notoriously tough to deal with. When this Daolord of the Third Step realized that spacetime had been completely scrambled here, he couldn’t help but feel sour about this matter.

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In the end, the Nine Godstars sect was still the most dominating force in the hundreds of nearby territories. How could they possibly just let this matter come to an end?

However, if they wanted to get to the bottom of this matter they would have to invite a true master of the Dao of Spacetime to head out from their headquarters and investigate in person. The entire sect, however, only had two Daolords who were skilled in the Dao of Spacetime. One was a Daolord of the Second Step, while the other was a venerable figure who had reached the Verge of the Daomerge and was the third most respected figure of the entire sect.

The Daolord of the Second Step wasn't willing to take the risk, whereas there was no one capable of giving orders to the Verge-level Daolord. Thus, more than a hundred years passed before the latter finally decided to head out and take a look.

"What's this?!" When this mighty Daolord unscrambled spacetime, he was immediately shocked and stunned by what he discovered.

"Five World-level cultivators? One of them attacked and slew a Daolord of the First Step with a single blow?" This Daolord was stunned. "Where the hell did these freaks come from? Although I wasn't able to see how strong the other four were, this one is incredibly strong. And... judging from how he scrambled spacetime, he has to be an extremely skilled master of the Dao of Spacetime."

"Where the hell did they come from?"

Not even the entire Nine Godstars sect had a single disciple who was this freakishly talented!

There was no way for him to know, of course, that this man was an honorary disciple of an almighty Hegemon in a different universe and one of the most elite members of the Brightshore Kingdom. The Nine Godstars sect was nothing compared to the Brightshore Kingdom! It must be understood that the Brightshore Kingdom had entire squads of freakishly strong Daolords who were comparable to Eternal Emperors.

"We have to find and recruit this person into our Nine Godstars sect. I'll chase him down!"

He gave the order, and the entire Nine Godstars sect sprang into action. He truly would have loved to take on such a freakishly talented disciple. He himself walked the Dao of Spacetime, and it was incredibly rare for him to encounter someone of such talent who walked his Dao. Alas, by this point in time Ning's group of five had long ago escaped from the Nine Godstars sect's sphere of influence.

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The Nine Godstars sect was extremely influential in their local cluster of several hundred territories, but beyond that their influence and power dropped rapidly.

Aside from their slaying of that Daolord of the First Step, Ning's group encountered another extremely dangerous situation during their journey. Ning's group accidentally ran into a nation of special lifeforms that was wandering the primordial chaos. That nation of special lifeforms was actually established atop the shell of an utterly enormous turtle, and the turtle-like creature was clearly in a state of hibernation, slumbering as it drifted through the void of space.

This part of the journey should've been a safe one. Who would've thought that they'd run into such an unusual nation? Ning's group ran into this nation by accident, and they were immediately attacked by one of those special lifeforms which sought to eat them alive. Ning's group was forced to fight back, which only attracted the attention of even more of those special lifeforms.



Fortunately, that giant slumbering turtle did not wake up. Ning and the others all had the feeling that the turtle's aura was utterly terrifying. Once it woke up, it would be incredibly easy for it to kill all five of them. No matter what they would've tried, they still probably wouldn't have been able to survive the slumbering turtle's attack.

In the end, Ning and the others joined forces and managed to just barely escape. From start to finish, they didn't dare to actually kill so much as a single one of those special lifeforms, for fear of stirring the hornet's nest and waking that giant turtle.

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Aside from the Nine Godstars sect and the titanic turtle, the other problems they encountered were largely irrelevant.

"The Archaeus region. We've finally arrived."

Ning's group of five stood in the air, staring off into the distance. In front of them was a region filled with countless roiling clouds that flickered with violet light. This gigantic region covered by clouds was the Archaeus region! But of course, this was nothing more than the tip of the iceberg, a miniscule part of the massive, actual region. None of them even knew exactly how far off the Archaeus region stretched.

After journeying for 1605 years, Ning's group had finally reached the Archaeus region.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 1: The World Within the Archaeus Region**

The Archaeus region was the core of this entire alternate universe. According to legend, it was the place where this universe itself had originated from, and it was filled with both danger and opportunity. Every single World-level cultivator would be berserk for the chance to enter it, and even Daolords would vie for the chance.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh!

Five streaks of light flew into the cloudy mists at the borders of the Archaeus region, delving deeper and deeper inside.

"Can you sense it?" Skyfire Brightshore sent a rather excited mental message.

"Yes." Firesurge nodded.

"What a unique sensation." Heartlord Solewind nodded as well.

"It truly is quite marvelous." Prince Greatjoy sighed in amazement.

Ning was amazed as well as he carefully attuned himself to these sensations. Ever since he had flown into the Archaeus region, he had been able to sense an invisible aura of power which completely covered the entire region. This power was the power of the Archaeus region itself. If the five of them didn't have access to an Archaeus medallion, they probably would've been instantaneously crushed into dust. They could sense that this mighty power originated from some place at the very heart of the vast Archaeus region.

“That direction, there.” Skyfire Brightshore pointed towards the distance. “That’s the place we need to go to.”

“The heart of the Archaeus region.” Ning and the others all nodded.

The star maps had included a detailed path from the transversal conduit to the Archaeus region. However, after they actually entered the Archaeus region they would have to depend on their own senses to advance towards the heart of the region! The center of the Archaeus region was a place which every cultivator dreamed of entering. Perhaps the journey would result in some adventures that would test them and allow them to grow more powerful and evolve, but the center... that was the place where the true transformation would occur.

“Gentlemen, same rules as always. I’ll be the one to teleport us,” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally.

“Alright.”

“Sorry to trouble you, brother Greatjoy.”

Ning and the others did not decline. It must be understood that the Archaeus region was most likely as large as the entire Endless Territories. To go from the border regions to its heart would probably take trillions of years if one wished to physically fly through it.

It must be remembered that Ning had long ago sworn a lifeblood oath to reach Vastheaven Palace within a single chaos cycle. Chaos cycles, however, were extremely long and were calculated in the trillions of years! Thus, Ning still had plenty of time.

Whoosh.

Whoosh.

Prince Greatjoy produced a flying vessel which Ning and the others then entered. Prince Greatjoy took personal control over the vessel, sending it hurtling through the Archaeus region at high speeds as he teleported again and again. Every single spatial teleportation allowed them to cover an extremely great distance. Given Prince Greatjoy’s mastery over the Dao of Spacetime, roughly a hundred teleportations would be enough to allow them to traverse a single territory.

In the ‘normal’ universe, territories were located extremely far away from each other. The distance between two territories could be a hundred times greater than the size of each territory.

“Based on what my senses are telling me... the heart of the Archaeus region is quite far away from us. If we keep teleporting like this, it’ll take us at least ten thousand years to reach it,” Prince Greatjoy said. “That is assuming, of course, that we don’t encounter any dangers. In reality, this place will be full of danger.”

“Let’s just keep advancing step by step,” Solewind said.

“We’ll fight fire with fire,” Ning laughed.

Whoosh.

The second day after they entered the Archaeus region. They had just performed yet another spatial teleportation. When the shuttle came to a halt...

“Quick, look.” Prince Greatjoy’s face tightened.

“Eh?” Ning and the others looked over. Ning stared past a faint layer of mist and was able to see an utterly enormous continent floating in space. Although there was a barrier of mist between them, Ning was still able to see out to a distance of a billion kilometers. He instantly saw that this continent had a few figures residing within it. He was able to make out a few dozen figures in total.

“Cultivators?” Ning frowned.

“Dozens of them? Why are there so many?” Prince Greatjoy was surprised as well.

Based on what they knew, one had to have an Archaeus medallion in order to enter the Archaeus region. This was true even for weaker cultivators like Elder Gods, Ancestral Immortals, True Gods, or True Immortals. Anyone who didn’t have a medallion would be crushed by the power of the Archaeus region.

There were very, very few Archaeus medallions. They had spent a thousand years travelling through many different territories, and as a result they had come to understand just how rare these items were! Logically speaking, it should’ve been almost impossible for them to encounter large numbers of cultivators bearing Archaeus medallions because of how rare those things were and how vast the Archaeus region was. They had only expected to encounter other cultivators after they actually entered the heart of the Archaeus region.

“Something doesn’t make sense. They... they give me an odd feeling.” Heartlord Solewind shook his head slowly. “It feels as though the invisible power of the Archaeus region is protecting them, rather than oppressing them.”

“Right. That really does seem to be the case.” The others quickly noticed this as well.

They had entered bearing Archaeus medallions, and so the Archaeus region did not harm them. However... those dozens of distant figures were actually being supported and protected by the power of the Archaeus region.

“They are moving very slowly,” Ning sent mentally. “In fact, they are flying at ridiculously slow speeds. Most likely, even average Emyrean Gods and Celestial Immortals would fly much faster than them.”

Whoosh.

The vessel slowly advanced towards the borders of that vast, levitating continent. Ning and the others all flew out of the vessel.

“Let me take a look.” Heartlord Solewind stared hard at a nearby figure who was merely three hundred million kilometers away. He sent an invisible wave of heartforce out to completely cover that figure.

“He is very weak. He’s an ordinary mortal who hasn’t even undergone the Celestial Tribulation. Strictly speaking, he would be considered at the Wanxiang level,” Heartlord Solewind said.

“A mortal?” Ning and the others were all surprised.

In the Three Realms, it was said that after surviving the Celestial Tribulation, one would be 'no longer subject to the rules of the Three Realms and the fetters of the Five Elements'. Prior to overcoming the tribulation, one would be constrained by the rules of that world. These people were referred to as 'mortals' by powerful cultivators!

"Are there actually mortals who live here in the Archaeus region?" Ning and the others were all puzzled.

"Let's take a look and see," Heartlord Solewind said. He took a single step forwards, causing the space around him to shimmer as he teleported three hundred million kilometers and moved close to that distant mortal lifeform.

"Let's take a look as well." The others all teleported forwards as well.

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Daoist Rainskill was riding on a magic treasure as she engaged in careful exploration. She could be considered a beautiful woman who was quite famous. In just a hundred short years, she had reached the Core Formation stage.

"I'm now in the deepest reaches of the Western Wastes." Daoist Rainskill was extremely cautious. "I hear that at the end of the Western Wastes lies the endless chaos storms. I've never seen the chaos storms before. I was lucky enough to be teleported deep into the Western Wastes... I can't waste this chance to check it out."

Suddenly...

A bald man dressed in fiery robes suddenly appeared in the air directly above the marsh in front of Daoist Rainskill. Moments later, several other figures appeared as well. There was a youth dressed in deep blue robes, a white-robed youth carrying a sword on his back, a black-robed man who wore a crown on his head, and a youth with long, crimson hair. All of them looked extraordinary.

"What? They can actually teleport straight into the Western Wastes?" Daoist Rainskill was badly startled. The Western Wastes was a chaotic place that was quite close to the endless chaos storms. Space was extremely unstable here. Only the 'Grand Cultivators' were able to teleport in places like this.

"Rainskill pays her respects to you all, seniors." Daoist Rainskill was extremely respectful.

"We wish to ask you some questions." Solewind smiled.

Without even realizing it, Daoist Rainskill began to relax. In her heart, she began to view this man as person who she completely trusted. "Ask away, senior."

"How large is this continent? How many living beings does it hold?" Solewind asked.

"This place is the Northspring Continent. It is unimaginably vast and holds countless living beings," Daoist Rainskill said. "The number of cultivators and monsters in this place is numerous beyond count, much less mortals and ordinary beasts."

Ning and the others exchanged looks, all rather surprised. There were actually countless living beings here?

“But this place here is the Western Wastes. Space is distorted here, making it impossible for mortals to survive in such a place. Only cultivators would dare to delve deep into this place,” Daoist Rainskill said.

“What is the highest level of cultivation in this continent?” Solewind asked.

“First, you have the Qi Condensation stage. Then, you have the Foundation stage. Next comes the Core Formation stage... and the highest stage is the ‘Tribulation’ stage,” Daoist Rainskill said.

“The highest stage is the ‘Tribulation’ stage?” Solewind followed up on this. “There are none stronger than the ‘Tribulation’ stage? What happens after the tribulation?”

“After the tribulation, you ascend, of course!” Daoist Rainskill said, “You ascend to the Immortal realm. There’s no way back from there.”

“Are there any continents aside from the Northspring Continent?” Solewind asked.

“There are. If you go through the ancient transfer arrays, you can reach some other continents,” Daoist Rainskill said. “From our Northspring Continent, we can reach an incredibly distant continent known as the Blackfiend Continent as well as a place known as the Astral Ocean. I don’t know about any other locations.”

“Alright.” Heartlord Solewind nodded slowly, then looked at the others. “Let’s go.”

Ning and the others nodded, quickly disappearing as they left this place.

“Eh?!” Daoist Rainskill felt her mind go blurry for a moment. “What the hell? I actually started to daydream in a place like this?” She had no recollection of her meeting with Ning’s group at all.

“But... I feel very comfortable right now.” Daoist Rainskill felt a very comfortable feeling permeate through her entire body.

“What?! I’ve reached the peak of the Core Formation stage? And why does it seem as though my body has been completely transformed?” Daoist Rainskill was now truly stunned. What she didn’t know was that Heartlord Solewind had given her a glance as he left, bestowing a small parting gift upon her.

As for Ning’s group, they now stood once more at the margins of this vast continent.

“I never would’ve thought that the Archaeus region can give birth to living creatures as well,” Ning mused softly.

“Any environment can potentially give birth to living beings,” Solewind sent back. “The almighty Hegemon captured quite a few cultivators from this universe but was only able to learn a few things about the Archaeus region. It makes sense that there is a great deal of information we were unaware of.”

Ning and the others nodded.

Just now, they tested out the process of teleporting some people from the estate-worlds they held. They had all brought out people who had committed tremendous sins and were viledoers. Unexpectedly, all of them were able to survive here in the Archaeus region.

“Just now, that young lady spoke of ‘ascending’ to the Immortal realm after the tribulation.” Prince Greatjoy’s eyes narrowed. “As you all know, once you overcome the tribulation you’ll escape the rules and confines of a world. That means you will no longer be protected by the Archaeus region itself. Without an Archaeus medallion, you’d be instantly crushed to death. Most likely, those ascendants all ‘ascended’ to certain estate-worlds which are probably under the control of major powers who live here in the Archaeus region. In other words... it is very likely that behind this continent is a Daolord.”

“A Daolord?” Ning and the others nodded.

In the Three Realms or other chaosworlds, those who ascended and became Immortals or Gods would still be able to come and visit the mortal lands. However, here in the Archaeus region there was no coming back from ascension. Clearly, this was all due to the power of the Archaeus region, which ensured there was no way for them to return. If they wished to survive, they would only be able to do so by living in estate-world treasures.

Ning’s group naturally wouldn’t worry about them... but Daolords were definitely worthy of their attention and concern!

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 2: Spatial Tempests**

“It’s also possible that I’m just overthinking things,” Solewind said with a laugh.

“Mm.”

“There may be many things in the Archaeus region unknown to us.” None of them dared claim they knew everything about this place.

Did the mortals of the Archaeus region go to a Daolord’s estate-world after ascending, or did they go into some other special place? None of them were certain. Still, they had to remain vigilant. Given their current level of power, battles against Daolords were still quite risky for them.

“Let’s go,” Prince Greatjoy sent. Ji Ning and the others re-entered his flying vessel, then quietly and stealthily departed from this enormous continent and continued their journey via teleportation through the Archaeus region.

One year. Ten years. A hundred years...

The five of them continued to advance carefully. The Archaeus region truly was the core of this entire alternate universe, the place from which everything had first arisen. This place was filled with countless marvels and dangers as well as quite a few precious treasures. Ning’s group, however, didn’t dare to be too greedy. They did their best to avoid as many danger zones as they could, but they still encountered trouble on quite a few occasions.

Roughly 1308 years after they had entered the Archaeus region, they encountered an extremely powerful Daolord! They had come incredibly close to dying that time!

They had been teleporting through space using their flying vessel when all of a sudden, they discovered a green-robed Daolord had suddenly appeared a few billion kilometers up ahead of them. This Daolord was quite ugly, with white eyebrows hanging down all the way to his chest. He was leisurely strolling

through the emptiness of space, but when he saw Ning's flying vessel appear a look of murder appeared in his eyes.

That glare alone gave all five of them a sensation of tremendous danger.

"Leave right away."

"Flee!"

"Quick!"

All five of them could sense death impending.

"Ahh!" Prince Greatjoy furiously sent his vessel into an immediate teleport. Swoosh! Right after his vessel disappeared, a sharp thread-like streak of light lashed through the empty space where the vessel had been.

"Hmph." The green-robed Daolord's gaze was cold as he relaxed his godsense to inspect the surrounding area of a trillion kilometers. "They ran quite quickly. I wonder which master they are apprenticed to." The green-robed Daolord let out a cold snort, then walked away and disappeared from the scene.

Although that interaction had been a very brief one, Ning's group remained terrified by the memory of it.

"That Daolord was definitely at the Verge of the Daomerge! Although Daolords are quite rare here in the Archaeus region, there's still more of them than World-level cultivators. Many World-level cultivators have entered then exited the Archaeus region, with almost none of them actually staying here for an extended period of time! Given how vast the Archaeus region is, we have a much higher chance of running into Daolords than into other World-level cultivators." Solewind shook his head. "Still, I never would've thought we would run into a Daolord just a thousand years after entering the Archaeus region. Worse, it was a shameless Daolord who immediately moved to attack us and steal our Archaeus medallions. Thank goodness brother Greatjoy was here."

"That old bastard was very powerful. If I had been just a bit slower, we wouldn't have been able to escape." Prince Greatjoy also felt fear at what had nearly happened.

"It was all thanks to you, brother Greatjoy." Ning was still petrified as well. If they had actually been forced to fight... even though Ning had those four guardian golems protecting him, there was no way he would've been able to defeat a Verge-level Daolord.

That near-brush with death had caused their souls and truesouls to all quiver with terror.

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To be in a 'relaxed' state or to be in a 'tense' state where you straddled the line between life and death were two completely separate concepts.

You might spend multiple chaos cycles in a relaxed state without making any improvements, but just one or two life-and-death adventures might be enough to result in dramatic gains in strength! To live a peaceful life for countless years, or to straddle the line between life and death as you reached for greater glory and greater heights? Clearly, the majority of cultivators chose the latter.

More than 2800 years had passed since Ning's group had entered the Archaeus region.

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Boom!

"Charge!"

"Let's charge through!"

Ning's group of five were all aboard their flying vessel, using all their power to resist.

They were surrounded by countless spatial tempests, and their flying vessel was being tossed about by the spatial storms like an ordinary vessel might be tossed about by giant waves. They were completely unable to fight back as the spatial tempests pressed them forwards nonstop.

Ning's group was still trying their best to resist, and Ning himself sent out an enormous streak of sword-light to tear a spatial tempest apart.

Firesurge sent out enormous waves of water to crash out against those spatial tempests.

Skyfire Brightshore had been growing noticeably more powerful ever since he had entered this alternate universe. He was now working alongside Firesurge, and the two were combining their skills in fire and water.

Greatjoy and Solewind were doing their best as well.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The flying vessel was still being buffeted and tossed about by the spatial tempests.

"Won't work. We can't charge through." Prince Greatjoy shook his head. "The difference in power between us and these spatial tempests is too great. These spatial tempests are simply too violent. Even my control over spacetime won't be enough to calm them."

"Ugh." Firesurge frowned.

"Let's just go with the flow, then." Solewind chuckled. "This isn't exactly the first time we ran into something like this."

Ning nodded as well, then laughed, "These spatial tempests won't always maintain such a high level of strength. If we just follow the flows, eventually we'll reach a spot where things calm down."

The Archaeus region was filled with many dangers, and they had encountered spatial tempests on quite a few occasions by now. Although Ning, Solewind, and the others all had certain trump cards they could use, these naturally occurring phenomena really weren't worth the cost.

They ended up following the flows of the spatial tempests for nine more months.

"The spatial tempests are actually growing stronger and stronger." Prince Greatjoy continued to helm the flying vessel through the storms, seeking a relatively easier 'path' for them to traverse.

"Everyone, look over there!" Prince Greatjoy suddenly called out.



“Land.” Ning and the others turned to stare as well, only to see an utterly enormous continent hanging in the void just past the spatial tempests.

“There’s actually land here? Hopefully this continent will have actual people living on it.” Ning and the others revealed looks of delight.

A short while later, Ning and the others all descended upon the great continent. The edges of this continent were surrounded by strange whirlpools of power that continuously weakened the spatial storms that swept towards the continent. By the time they made it a few billion kilometers into the heart of the continent, things were completely calm.

“An ancient, major power has passed by this continent before.” Ning’s group advanced through a desolate desert. This place was still considered as being part of the ‘border regions’ of this continent. The environs were quite harsh and not suitable for life.

Heartlord Solewind raised his head and stared off into the distance. “I can dimly sense that this entire continent is covered by an enormous formation which is diverting the power of those spatial tempests. This formation must’ve been left behind by a major power.”

“Yes, a major power has been here.” Prince Greatjoy stared towards a place roughly a billion kilometers away. “This continent is filled with countless living beings. It is very likely that this continent holds a spacetime transfer array.”

“Haha, it’ll be much easier for us to leave if we can move through a spacetime transfer array.” Ning laughed.

“Remember that time from five hundred years ago, when we were trapped in that sea of fire and unable to escape? In the end, we discovered that there was actually a continent located deep within the sea of fire.” Skyfire Brightshore couldn’t help but reminisce about this. “That continent was also filled with many living beings, and it also had a spacetime transfer array. It even had an estate left behind by a Daolord. Thankfully, that Daolord had left long ago, and so we were able to easily enter the spacetime transfer array and reach a different area. It actually shortened our journey considerably.”

Ning and the others all nodded. By now, they had spent nearly three thousand years in the Archaeus region, and they had accumulated a great deal of experience.

The Archaeus region was filled with countless continents that were in turn filled with many living beings. Small continents were generally ten billion kilometers in size, while larger ones could be a trillion kilometers in size! There were often traces of ancient major powers having passed through these places, albeit very few of them would actually set up residence. There was no point in living alongside ordinary mortals, after all.

However, virtually every single continent with living beings on it had a spacetime transfer array!

Ning’s group, however, didn’t dare to randomly use those arrays without doing some careful investigations. They’d rather continuously teleport through the Archaeus region than accidentally run into a reclusive Daolord who was residing within one of those continents!

“I hope things work out this time,” Ning sent mentally.

“Don’t worry, Darknorth. Even if there are Daolords residing in this continent, Daolords often go into closed-door meditation sessions that last a million years or more. We’ll move in and depart immediately. There’s no way we’ll be unlucky enough to run into one,” Greatjoy chortled.

“Just be careful, everyone. Don’t randomly send out your godsense to search this place,” Solewind warned.

If you swept a region with godsense, you might be able to discover a Daolord... but that Daolord would also discover you!

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Ning’s group of five advanced through the continent, quickly reaching a place which was bustling with life and activity.

This place was a city known as Thousand Mountains, a place where the eight major sects of the region all recruited disciples from.

In the city of Thousand Mountains resided an old freak known as ‘Old Demon Qixiu’. He truly was the number one expert of this region, superior to all others in the eight major sects. However, he was a very low-key figure who very few people knew about.

“Patriarch.” As the Old Demon walked out of his room and through his estate, quite a few servants and retainers would call out to him with respect when they saw him.

“Ugh. This world places enormous restrictions on my power.” The Old Demon’s gaze drifted off into the distance as he stared at the mountain ranges outside the city of Thousand Mountains. “And yet, I really just can’t bear to leave...”

“Eh?” The Old Demon’s face suddenly turned pale. Five figures had suddenly appeared next to the lake nearby him. They were Ning, Solewind, and the others.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 3: Transfer Array**

Upon seeing the five, Old Demon Qixiu could sense that his very soul was beginning to shudder. He swallowed, hard, then bowed and said respectfully, “Greetings, five seniors.”

Good heavens! He stood at the very peak of power in this world. By all rights, he should’ve been invincible, and yet... why was it that these five were unfathomably more powerful than him?

“I have a few questions for you,” Heartlord Solewind said with a smile.

“Please ask, senior.” The Old Demon was quite cautious, but even he himself didn’t realize that deep within his heart, a seed of trust was beginning to blossom towards this bald, red-robed youth.

“What is the name of this continent?” Solewind asked.

“This continent is quite vast, stretching hundreds of billions of kilometers,” the Old Demon said.

“Because there are so many mortals living here, we refer to this continent as the Mortal Realm.”

Solewind nodded slowly. "Has anyone ever left this 'Mortal Realm' and ventured off into other continents?"

"There's only one way to do that. You'd have to activate the ancient transfer array and head to the the Sacred Immortal Realm," the Old Demon said.

"Sacred Immortal Realm?" Solewind asked. Upon hearing this, Ji Ning, Greatjoy, Firesurge, and Skyfire all revealed smiles. They were going to be able to leave this place.

This entire continent was surrounded by spatial tempests, making it impossible for them to leave. Only by using a spatial transfer array to go to another continent would they be able to escape.

"This entire continent holds just a single transfer array within it," the Old Demon said. "Supposedly, an incredibly long period of time ago there was a major power from the Sacred Immortal Realm who descended upon this continent who personally set up the array. There's no way for the cultivators of our Mortal Realm to come up with such a complicated array."

Ning and the others all laughed. Most likely, this spacetime transfer array leading to the Sacred Immortal Realm was something which had been personally established by an extremely powerful Daolord.

"Here in our Mortal Realm, the elemental energy of Heaven and Earth is very sparse. It is incredible if you can even reach the Nascent Soul stage. To reach the Apotheosis stage is even more difficult." The Old Demon continued, "Thus, countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators shall gather from throughout the continent and travel through the array towards the Sacred Immortal Realm. According to the Apotheosis cultivators who came back from that place, the elemental energy there is far denser than it is here in our Mortal Realm, making it easier to cultivate and easier to overcome the tribulation."

'Nascent Soul', 'Apotheosis'... these were different terms for Ki Refiners. In the Three Realms, the mortal ranks were Zifu Disciple, Wanxiang Adept, Primal Daoists, and Void-level cultivator. This represented what the most perfect Ki Refining systems in the Three Realms could accomplish.

However, in the Endless Territories and in this alternate universe there were many different mortal races that used different Ki Refining techniques which had different terms and titles.

"Where is the transfer array?" Solewind asked.

"Here is a map." The Old Demon immediately took out his treasured map.

Solewind glanced at it while simultaneously flipping through the Old Demon's memories, wiping away all traces of this encounter.

"Time to leave," Solewind said. The five immediately vanished.

"What just happened?" Old Demon Qi Xiu stared at his surroundings. "Why do I have the feeling that something is off..." The Old Demon frowned but wasn't able to comprehend what had just happened.

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Afterwards, Ning's group chatted with two other Apotheosis cultivators who were considered extremely powerful in this continent. Everything they said was roughly the same as what the Old Demon had said.

The five of them roared atop a cloud, staring down at the lands below.

"It is true that the elemental energy in this continent is quite sparse." Ning nodded. "It is true that mortal cultivators would find it very hard to train here."

If there was no elemental energy at all, there would be no way to cultivate whatsoever. The elemental energy in this continent was only enough for someone to just barely reach the Primal Daoist stage. If you wished to reach the Void level and become an Earth Immortal, it would be extremely difficult. The 'Old Demon' which Ning's group had questioned would've been considered a Void-level Earth Immortal in the Three Realms.

"It is because of the formation which covers this entire place," Solewind said. "This formation covers everything, drawing power from the entire continent. That's why the elemental energy in this continent is so sparse! Still, the reason this continent is protected from the spatial tempests is because of this formation."

"The Sacred Immortal Realm should be a continent where the density of elemental energy is normal," Firesurge said. "However... as a result, the living creatures here refer to it as the 'Sacred Immortal Realm'."

"When there's a difference in density of elemental energy, it's only normal that there one realm is viewed as higher and one realm is viewed as lower."

Ning and the others chatted as they advanced through the clouds and moved towards the ancient transfer array. They stared at it from afar.

The ancient transfer array took up an extremely wide amount of space. The entire formation itself covered hundreds of millions of kilometers, and its core components were extremely complicated and exquisite.

"It really is a spacetime transfer array." Ning and the others were able to recognize it at one glance.

"Ahah. Quite lively here." Prince Greatjoy glanced downwards, then let out a surprised sigh.

"These so-called 'Nascent Soul' cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators really are frighteningly numerous." Solewind let out a laugh. This was the only spacetime transfer array within the entire continent. As a result, this place naturally attracted countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators from throughout the continent, making it very bustling. In fact, an enormous city had been erected here.

This city was filled to the brim with Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators. There had to be hundreds of millions of them.

Ning couldn't help feel secretly amazed. This continent was hundreds of billions of kilometers in size, making it much vaster than the entirety of the Three Realms. Although in quality of elemental energy it was inferior to the Three Realms, its vastness resulted in the existence of hundreds of millions of

Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators. Any one of them would be considered a local hegemon when scattered in any of the other places in this continent.

“Let’s enter the city.”

“Let’s go take a look.”

Ning and the others walked through the city, moving directly towards the transfer array.

“I’ve been trapped at the Nascent Soul level for far too long. The density of elemental energy in Heaven and Earth is simply too low. I failed both of my attempts at reaching Apotheosis. Once I enter the Sacred Immortal Realm, I’ll be able to reach Apotheosis. I might even have a chance at overcoming my tribulation and reaching ascension!” The various cultivators in the city were chatting amongst themselves.

“I’ve become an early-stage Apotheosis cultivator, but I’m not able to improve any further. There just isn’t enough elemental energy here. Perhaps I’ll be able to become a Celestial Immortal once I go to the Sacred Immortal Realm.”

“This array only activates once every hundred years. I have to wait sixty-one more years. This really does make me impatient.”

“We’ve waited thousands of years, my brother. What’s another few decades?”

The eyes of the countless cultivators in the city were filled with eagerness. They had already reached the end of the path they could traverse here within the ‘Mortal Realm’. Only in the Sacred Immortal Realm would they have a chance to continue their path.

But none of them realized that those five seemingly-ordinary men who just walked past them were major powers who were truly capable of virtually anything! Even those ‘Celestial Immortals’ they dreamed of becoming would be wiped out in the billions by these five cultivators.

“Once every century?” Skyfire Brightshore frowned. “This spacetime transfer array only activates once every century?”

“Each activation uses up some energy. When this spacetime transfer array was created by that ancient power, only a few chaos jewels were left behind to guide it in gathering the surrounding natural energy into itself. It takes a century for it to accumulate enough energy to be activated,” Heartlord Solewind said. “My guess is that the Sacred Immortal Realm is located extremely close to this continent, which is why the activation can be as frequent as once every century. If it was farther away, it would probably be once every thousand years.”

Ning and the others nodded. This was different from the spacetime transfer arrays of the Endless Territories; if you were willing to pay enough chaos nectar, it could be activated for you whenever you wished! This array here in the alternate universe had been created by a major power, apparently out of an act of selflessness. Of course, it was also possible that this was done by the Church of Annihilation.

“Let’s go. We’ll first find a place to wait it out. Sixty-one years from now, we’ll come back,” Solewind said.

“We have no other choices.” Skyfire felt quite resigned.

It was possible for them to pour energy into the formation and activate it by force, but... once they did so and the transfer array became active, any reclusive Daolord in either this continent or the Sacred Immortal Realm would immediately realize that something was wrong! For the array to suddenly fire off before the hundred year mark had to mean that something had happened. Thus, they had no choice but to wait patiently.

In this continent, there was a place known as 'Wintermount'.

Ning's group of five secluded themselves here within the mountains forests, occasionally sipping wine, fishing, and sparring. Life was quite relaxing as they waited for the spacetime transfer array to activate.

Whoosh.

A fishing pole flicked upwards, followed by a fat fish being yanked out of the surface of the water. It fell down onto the bank, still flopping furiously.

"Haha, we'll have fish soup tonight." Ning put the fishing pole on his back as he walked through the forests. For the past thirty-plus years, he had lived the life of an ordinary mortal.

Rumble. Rumble. Rumble. A series of sounds rang out from afar. Curious, Ning walked in that direction.

A young man dressed in simple clothes whose temples were graying was seated there, using a wooden drill to drill into a piece of wood. As the wooden drill ground away, those grinding, rumbling sounds could be heard.

"I've never met you before." Ning laughed. "You new?"

"I just moved here." The gray-templed youth raised his head to smile towards Ning.

"At such a young age, you've chosen to live by yourself in a desolate mountain wilderness, rather than in a city or a mountain village. How odd." Ning hefted his fishing pole.

"Sometimes, being by yourself is better," the young man said.

Ning couldn't help but laugh. How intriguing.

He could tell that this youth was less than thirty years of age, but his eyes were as calm and as deep as the sea. He clearly had an extraordinary heart that was far more formidable than that of many Nascent Soul cultivators or even Apotheosis cultivators. This gave Ning a completely different way of viewing him.

"My name is Darknorth. I live just a few kilometers away from here. What's your name?" Ning smiled.

"My name is Green Bamboo," the youth said, continuing to use his wooden drill.

### [The Desolate Era](#)

#### **Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 4: Brightmoon Sword-Art, Blood Drop Sword-Intent**

The young man continued to spin his wooden drill across that piece of wood, leaving behind one hole after another as bits of wooden detritus went flying about.

Ji Ning held his fish bucket in one hand and his fishing pole in the other. His gaze was focused on that spinning wooden drill, and he stared at it as though time itself had stood still for him.

“Eh?” The young man glanced at Ning in puzzlement. Was this simple tool of his really that interesting? Still, he didn’t say anything.

“The faster you rush, the slower you go?” As Ning stared at that wooden drill, a look of reflection was in his gaze. “Perhaps I should try something else.”

Sword-light began to shimmer within Ning’s eyes.

Ever since he had left the Brightshore Kingdom four thousand years ago and entered this alternate universe, he had experienced countless dangers. Skyfire Brightshore’s level of power had been increasing quite rapidly and noticeably, while Ning and the others were improving much more slowly! Ever since Ning had gained insight into his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, he had been meditating on his other four stances. Alas, he hadn’t been able to make a fundamental breakthrough.

Rumble. Rumble. The wooden drill continued to bore holes into that piece of wood.

“He’s nothing more than an ordinary mortal. If he wanted to use a knife to cut a hole in that piece of wood, he wouldn’t be able to do it! But by using the wooden drill in such a fashion, he’s able to easily drill straight through it....” Thousands on thousands of scenes suddenly flashed through Ning’s mind.

In his past life on Earth, there were some ordinary mortals who used electric power drills to drill holes in walls. To ordinary mortals, concrete was incredible hard and tough... and yet, a power drill was able to easily pierce through it.

Ning thought back to the time he had spent wandering the Three Realms, where he had seen ordinary mortals battling in close combat, using their fists to punch out like Flood Dragons suddenly bursting forth from the waves... or perhaps cultivators who used the spear...

“I always thought... that the Blood Drop stance should be the fastest stance I have. If you want to be fast, you should take the shortest route and move as quickly as you can.” Sword-arts were flickering through Ning’s eyes. “Perhaps I was wrong.”

Ning continuously mentally mapped out one sword-art after another.

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When one reached Ning’s level of sword-arts, what one truly needed was inspiration. A single inspiration could allow his many years of accumulated insights to suddenly burst forth and be transformed! During his past life on Earth, there had been a scientist who saw an apple fall to the ground. As a result, he was suddenly inspired and came up with the law of universal gravitation. And yet, ordinary people might see the same thing happen a billion times without coming up with this idea. The reason why this scientist could was because he had a deep background and numerous past insights. All he needed was that spark of inspiration.

Ning needed a spark as well.

The reason he had been able to come up with his Yin-Yang Sword Domain was similarly because he had a moment of epiphany, allowing him to understand where his future direction lay.

Within the estate-world which Ning carried on him at all times.

Su Youji, World God Pillsaint, Elder God Wilddog, and the others were all present here, as were the World God servants who had been captured in the Bluegrace Sect.

“Master?” Su Youji had been meditating by the seashore, but she suddenly saw the white-robed Ji Ning appear off in the distance. This was a divine power incarnation which Ning had created.

“Strike.” Ning stabbed outwards with his sword. Boom! Sword-light flashed and a few cracks could be seen.

“Again!” Ning stabbed out once more. This time, his sword-light actually became a spinning, draconic vortex. Roaaaaar! The stabbing sound caused the space around him to tremble.

Slash!

Bang!

Boom!

Ning struck out repeatedly with his sword, using actual practice to verify the many ideas he had come up with.

In truth, there were many different paths to train in the sword, and every single path could theoretically lead to incredibly profound heights! In the past, although Ning had been able to see sword-arts which were similar to the ones he theorized about, he had never paid much attention to them. Those were sword-arts which belonged to others! Now, however, he had accumulated enough experience that he was able to naturally advance to this new level.

Only one’s own sword-arts would allow one to have deeper levels of insights.

For one who trained in the sword, only those sword-arts you yourself created would allow you to reach the greatest heights of all.

“Why are Master’s sword-art changing repeatedly? But these sword-arts are all so powerful.” Su Youji watched in a spellbound fashion. She was truly stunned.

“Whoah.”

“What terrifying sword-arts.”

Everyone on this island, including Elder God Wilddog and World God Pillsaint, were all drawn to and intrigued by the sight of Ning training with the sword. They all came over to watch, and all of them were stunned by what they saw. These were all techniques which Ning had mentally visualized and theorized. Although he felt they were ‘failures’, every single one of these sword-arts was enough to allow a cultivator to become a truly, freakishly powerful Daolord. Most likely, if you used one of those sword-arts to become a Daolord you would instantly be a match for peak Daolords of the Second Step.

However... this wasn’t what Ning wanted!

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Ning completely ignored him, absorbed in his own sword-arts.

One sword stabbed out after another. Slowly, his sword-arts became to transform, becoming very silent. Only in the final instant would they roar forth with an explosion.

BOOM!

When the sword-light stabbed out, there was no sound. Only when it came to a halt did it release that odd explosion.

BOOM!

BOOM!

Those strange explosions were growing louder and louder. They started to sound like thunder, and anyone within tens of thousands of kilometers would probably be able to hear them.

Ning struck out once again. This stab was as silent as the others, but in that final instant, there was just an extremely odd and extremely soft sound. The sound was incredibly soft and subdued, but it filled the hearts of everyone present with terror.

Boom. Such a tiny sound. When Ning's sword stabbed forwards, a pitch-black hole suddenly appeared in the space in front of him.

Swish.

Ning stepped forwards, walking into that pitch-black hole.

Within that hole, there was a gleaming, rainbow-like tunnel. Ning could sense that this tunnel was leading him to many other places.

"A spatial passageway?" Ning advanced forwards through the spatial passageway.

"Come out." Ning stabbed out with his sword, and another hole suddenly appeared in the rainbow light next to him. Ning stepped into this new hole.

When Ning emerged, he realized that he was now in a desert.

"It seems as though I went around the estate-world quite a few times in the blink of an eye," Ning chuckled. "I didn't expect that I would be able to use the Dao of the Sword to break through the bonds of space and enter a different spatial dimension."

Space was divided up into many different dimensions. Prince Greatjoy had reached an extremely high level of skill in the Dao of Spacetime, which was why he could bring Ning and the others along with him when teleporting through spacetime. This sort of escaping ability was incredibly formidable! Ning himself was at most able to engage in spatial teleportation, which was nothing more than teleporting to a different place within the same spatial dimension. His sword, however, was able to shatter through the spatial laws of a small area around it, allowing one to pass through into a different spatial dimension.

In other words, through his Dao of the Sword Ning was now able to damage the Dao of Space and force his way into a different spatial dimension.

“According to the legends... any Dao, when trained to the ultimate apex, allows for mastery over all things,” Ning murmured softly. “At this point in time, my Dao of the Sword has reached a level where I can enter a different spatial dimension.”

“This stance... has finally been completed.” Ning smiled.

This sword-stance allowed him to forcibly destroy the Dao of Space in a localized region. Being able to enter a different dimension? That was nothing more than a side effect. In the end, the power of this stance was what truly mattered!

“I really have to thank that ‘Green Bamboo’ kid.” Ning revealed a smile. “I just changed my way of thinking slightly and was able to finally finish my path.”

Swish! Ning stood there in the desert, sending out yet another stabbing strike. In the instant in which his stab came to a halt, the sword-light around Ning’s sword twisted just slightly. This twisting represented the true, marvelous nature of the new Blood Drop stance! The reason why a wooden drill was able to drill through a wooden board was because it had to pass through the resistance of the wood.

Actually, it had to pass through the resistance of the air itself. Even in the emptiness of the space, there were forms of energy that would pose a degree of resistance, and even in true emptiness of the void, there would be the ripples of energy that came from the various prime essences of the universe, such as the prime essence of the sword, the prime essence of metal, the prime essence of wood, or the prime essence of space.

Every single place was filled with traces of the Dao. All of them served as barriers or forms of resistance that laid countless invisible strands around you. So long as any trace of the Dao existed in a place, Ning’s sword would have to go through those layers of resistance. There was no way it could ever reach an infinitely fast speed! Thus, Ning’s current stance was a stance of destruction, of piercing through anything which sought to bar his path!

His sword was like that wooden drill which forcibly drilled through that wooden board.

In fact, Ning’s stance even had the effect of destroying the Dao itself! It was capable of destroying the Dao of Space, allowing him to enter a separate spatial dimension.

“When my sword strikes out, nothing can bar its path. After I am able to strengthen it so that nothing can stop it, not the Five Elements, Yin and Yang, or even spacetime... then that is when this stance of mine should be comparable to the strongest stance which Emperor Mirrorsnow left behind.” Ning still remembered the image of his master, Emperor Mirrorsnow, displaying the most powerful stance of the [Heartseal] sword-art. That, too, was a strike that completely surpassed the limits of space and time.

Emperor Mirrorsnow had relied on that stance to gain eternity!

“The faster you rush, the slower you go. In the past, all I wanted to do was strike faster and faster... but that isn’t real speed.” Many thoughts flickered through Ning’s mind. “Many cultivators and many mortals try to seize every moment of every day, but they still end up failing.”

“Sometimes, if you slow down and catch your breath, then explode with full power, you might be more successful. The Dao can be found in life itself. It can be found in all things.” Ning smiled.

In comprehending the Dao, one had to fully understand life in all its myriad forms, to understand the essence of all things. If you did so, then when the moment came you would be able to see through to the true nature of things.

This sword-stance Ning had created destroyed all other Daos that barred its path. It seemed slow, but in reality it was now faster than ever before.

“My Blood Drop stance is the fastest of all swords, a sword of destruction, a sword that annihilates all other Daos. It is a stance that seeks to raise the sword to the ultimate level.” Ning nodded slowly. “Now, of the five stances of [Brightmoon], my Yin-Yang sword-intent and my Blood Drop sword-intent have taken form.”