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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 5: Ji Ning's Second Disciple

Within the mountainous forest. That gray-templed youth continued to work on his simple tools, while Ji Ning continued to stare at him while holding his fish bucket in one hand and his fishing rod in the other.

“How odd. He looks like a youth, but he speaks in such a grandiose manner. I’m just here working on some furniture for myself, and he’s been staring at me for more than an hour,” the young man muttered to himself. “Still... from the looks of him, he probably isn’t an ordinary mortal. How could an ordinary mortal youth be fishing by himself in the deep mountains? His demeanor seems quite extraordinary as well.”

Ning just continued to stare, and the young man didn’t say anything about it.

Suddenly, Ning let out a laugh as the sword-light in his eyes completely faded away. In truth, no ordinary mortal would even be able to see the sword-light generated from the visualizations he had just performed.

“I just came here out of curiosity on my way home from fishing... who would’ve thought that I would’ve mastered yet another stance of [Brightmoon] as a result?” Ning laughed and shook his head, his gaze still focused on the young man. “Although he doesn’t realize it... that drilling he did earlier helped inspire me to master this stance. I have to repay him for that.”

Ning had already taken a liking to the man due to his extraordinary heart. Now that the young man had also helped him comprehend the Dao, Ning decided to bless him with some transformative luck.

“First, I’ll take a look at his history and see what he experienced. Only then will I know what he truly needs.” Ning’s gaze rested on the young man’s figure as he began to visualize all of the young man’s past experiences.

Although he wanted to thank and reward this young mortal, he had to first know what the man wanted.

After seeing the man’s history, Ning couldn’t help but shake his head. This young man’s true name was Yang Quding, and he came from an excellent family background. His mother had died when he was young, resulting in his father doting on him. Ever since he was young, he had been covered in brocade cloth and jade treasures. He was the son of a rich merchant, after all. He was born with great cleverness, and his father had once wanted to come up with a way for him to become an Immortal cultivator. Alas, Yang Quding didn’t have a so-called ‘spiritual root’. Ning, however, knew that the so-called ‘spiritual root’ was actually linked to one’s affinity for the natural energy of Heaven and Earth.

The greater an affinity you had for that natural energy, the easier it would be for you to absorb it. Ever since Ning was young, for example, he always had a close affinity for water. But of course, after he trained in the [Ninehorn Lightning Serpent] his body gained a high affinity towards lightning. Alas, Yang Quding had absolutely terrible elemental affinity.

If you were only able to absorb 1% of how much others could absorb, it would naturally be far more difficult for you to engage in cultivation. Even worse, this continent possessed very sparse elemental energy to begin with, making cultivation difficult for all. For someone in a place like this to absorb

elemental energy at such a ridiculously low rate... the chances of becoming a successful cultivator were incredibly poor.

For the sake of allowing his son to become an Immortal cultivator, Yang Quding's father had paid an enormous price. In the end, he had perished while escorting a shipment of valuables. This had been a tremendous blow to Yang Quding. After failing to become an Immortal cultivator, Yang Quding focused all of his efforts on continuing his father's legacy as a merchant. He was quite clever and capable, and in just a few short years he had become a huge tycoon. In fact, he even employed two Foundation cultivators as well as several weaker Qi Condensation cultivators. He eventually married a woman as well.

But then... one day, a young, evil man entered the city which Yang Quding was in. He took a fancy to Yang Quding's wife, and desired to kidnap her and make her his concubine. However, Yang Quding wasn't an easy person to deal with; he had Foundation cultivators by his side, and he was able to bring a stop to this!

The problem was that this evil man had an extraordinary background. When Yang Quding looked into this man's background, he immediately befriended a Core Formation elder of a major sect, giving him many precious treasures and eventually becoming that Core Formation elder's adopted son. But of course, this was only in name! What really mattered was that with this protector of a 'father', his opponent wouldn't dare to be too rash.

Alas, that evil man played some tricks in secret, forcing Yang Quding's wife's family to bow their heads before him. In the end, even Yang Quding's wife had chosen to follow the evil man and leave him.

His parents had died long ago. Yang Quding had no family of his own, and so his love for his wife was deep and intense. And yet... his wife had actually betrayed him and left to follow another man. When she left, she had said, "Quding, you are able to protect me, but can you protect my mother and father? Don't blame me."

He had suffered a severe mental blow, but he had no desire to take revenge. Instead, he had just sat there dully every day. Eventually, he dispersed his family's savings and entered this mountainous forest, giving himself the name 'Green Bamboo'.

"Now, let me take a look at his future." Ning's gaze was still affixed upon Yang Quding's figure. Yang Quding's future was a bit cloudy; as soon as he had met Ning, it was guaranteed that his destiny would change. Ning was strong enough to annihilate this entire continent with ease, after all!

If Ning chose not to interfere with his life...

Yang Quding would stay by himself within this mountain forest for more than sixty years. After sixty-plus years, he would encounter a Nascent Soul cultivator of the Nirvana Sect. The two would chat together, resulting in the Nascent Soul cultivator feeling tremendous admiration towards Yang Quding. The Nascent Soul cultivator would pay an enormous price to help him to become an Immortal cultivator. Alas, due to his great age and his poor spiritual root, he was still only able to become a Foundation cultivator.

However, he had reached an extremely high level of enlightenment. As a Foundation cultivator, he was capable of slaying Core Formation Daoists. He was also a good man with a virtuous reputation, and he

was incredibly skilled in the 'Illusions of Nirvana', a skill which allowed him to trap foes in myriad illusions which would cause them to feel regret, then repent and change their ways. He even ended up slaying that vile man who had taken his wife from him. Although he was merely a Foundation cultivator, he was respectfully addressed as 'Daoist Green Bamboo' by others. In the end, due to his allotted time being used up, he passed away peacefully.

"His heart has already reached such a profound level that he is even more formidable than Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators in this regard. After he becomes an Immortal cultivator... that 'Illusions of Nirvana' technique is a classic example of something which major powers who belong to the Buddhist paths would use." Ning nodded slowly. "Given his heart, he truly is well-suited to become an Immortal cultivator."

"Go!"

Two streaks of sword-light suddenly shot out from Ning's eyes, and they landed upon the body of the furniture-making man.

The sword-light quickly covered his entire body, rapidly transforming and overhauling it. The young man's body quickly began to completely transform, with his muscles and tendons reaching a level of perfection in strength. His physical strength alone was stronger than even Xiantian-level Fiendgods of the Three Realms.

With a body like this... it could be said that Yang Quding's spiritual result was unquestionably number one in this entire continent.

Whoosh. Ning waved a finger, tapping Yang Quding on the forehead. A surge of divine will surged outwards and was transmitted straight into his sea of consciousness.

Yang Quding was just an ordinary mortal, after all. Even though his body had been completely transformed, he still couldn't withstand the power of the memories which Ning wished to give him. Thus, Ning could only choose to leave a stream of his own divine will within Yang Quding's mind, much like how Emperor Mirrorsnow had left some of his own divine will behind. However, the reason why Emperor Mirrorsnow had done this was because he had left long ago and wished to be able to pass something onto his disciples. Ning had done this because his disciple was too weak and wouldn't be able to endure a 'normal' transmission.

"Right now, you are too weak. You are only able to endure me passing unto you sword-arts and techniques which are at the Emyrean God or Celestial Immortal level," Ning mused to himself. That stream of divine will contained complete cultivation systems, including both of Ning's proudest accomplishments, the 'Yin-Yang' sword-art and the 'Blood Drop' sword-art. These were Ning's most impressive techniques to date.

As the young man grew stronger, he would naturally gain more and more information from this legacy. When his soul became sufficiently powerful, he would finally be able to endure and receive it all.

"You are the first person I've truly transmitted my sword-arts unto." Ning laughed.

Ning's first disciple was Bluecliff Xiaoyu, but that was because of the rules of Mount Innerheart. Ning had to choose a person of great karmic virtue as his disciple! His Primaltwin stood guard over the Three

Realms and would often provide Bluecliff Xiaoyu with some advice, but alas she simply wasn't that talented.

'Green Bamboo', also known as Yang Quding, was Ning's second disciple.

Ning only left behind a cultivation method and his sword-arts! As for divine abilities and what not, he didn't leave any of those. Emperor Mirrorsnow had left behind four Daolord-level golems, but Ning didn't leave a single protective measure behind at all. This was because these fairly weaker protective measures wouldn't really be that useful. Given Green Bamboo's talent, it wouldn't be hard for him to rise to prominence in this Mortal Realm. As for those excessively powerful protective measures? They might actually result in some unnecessary trouble.

Guiding and nurturing a mortal was completely different from guiding and nurturing a World-level cultivator.

Emperor Mirrorsnow required his potential disciples to be World-level cultivators who had passed multiple trials. Yang Quding, however, was still just an ordinary mortal.

"W-what did I just..." Yang Quding felt as though he had just awoken from a dream.

When he came to his senses, he saw a youth carrying a fishing bucket and a fishing rod walk far off into the distance. "Disciple, if fate wills it the two of us shall meet again, ahahah..."

And just like that, Ning vanished into thin air.

"Disciple?"

Yang Quding was stunned. Moments later, a large amount of information flooded into his mind.

There were detailed instructions on how to go from being an ordinary mortal to a Celestial Immortal or Empyrean God. There were also two inconceivably powerful sword-arts known as the [Yin-Yang] sword-arts and the [Blood Drop] sword-arts. Only part of the information was available to him for now. When his soul grew stronger, he'd naturally be able to gain even more of this legacy. Ning had set down restrictive spells on his memories, preventing him from teaching these things to any others.

"B-b-but..." Yang Quding was stunned. He wasn't someone who knew nothing of cultivation at all. He knew what the major impediments to Immortal cultivation were, but today he had just gained techniques which would actually lead him past tribulation and reach the legendary level of Celestial Immortals and Empyrean Gods? And this was just a portion of the true technique? And those infinitely powerful sword-arts!

Yang Quding instantly understood that from this day forth, his life would be changed.

If a major power was to scry his destiny, he would discover that this man's life had been completely changed. His future would actually become extremely fuzzy, and the farther one gazed the more difficult it would be to divine.

"Master." Yang Quding immediately knelt down and kowtowed towards the direction in which Ning left. He remembered that Ning had addressed himself as Darknorth.

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“He’s in an alternate universe, while I must return to the Endless Territories. I wonder if we’ll ever meet again,” Ning mused. He had been seized by the sudden impulse to teach a disciple. He... really was an absolutely irresponsible ‘master’.

“Brother Darknorth.”

“Darknorth.” Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Waterlord Firesurge, and Skyfire Brightshore were seated next to each other, drinking some wine.

“I just caught a big fish.” Ning grinned as he lifted up his fish bucket.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 6: Sacred Immortal Realm

Ji Ning, Prince Greatjoy, Solewind, and the others lived a life of leisure here at Wintermount. Although they were ten billion kilometers away, their gazes were still often turned towards what was happening at the spacetime transfer array.

“This disciple of mine actually has some talent for the sword after all.” Ning paid quite a bit of attention to his disciple. Although Yang Quding lived on Wintermount as well, nobody here was able to detect Ning’s presence unless he wished it.

“Brother Darknorth, this kid’s sword-arts seem quite similar to your own Yin-Yang Sword Domain.” Prince Greatjoy sat nearby, watching as Yang Quding trained in swordplay ten kilometers away. “He trains by himself within the deep mountains, neither impatient nor hasty, and his heart is as calm as water. I have to say, his heart is quite impressive.”

“He can be considered my disciple,” Ning said with a laugh.

“Disciple?” Prince Greatjoy was shocked. “You accepted an ordinary mortal as a disciple?”

Although he had a good impression of Yang Quding, the man was still nothing more than an ordinary mortal. The five of them were amongst the most truly, freakishly talented figures of the entire Endless Territories. Even Skyfire Brightshore, who was currently still the weakest of the five, was a dazzling genius of the Brightshore Imperials. As for the other four, they all wielded their own Supreme Daos.

Any of them could break through into the Daolord level at any moment, and they would be extraordinary ones at that. Given Ning’s status... if he wanted to choose a disciple, virtually all World-level cultivators would be crying and begging for a chance to be chosen. And yet, he instead chose an ordinary mortal as his disciple?

“Your disciple?” The nearby Solewind laughed. “We’re just passing through this place. Why’d you accept a disciple? And is this how you treat your disciples? You just completely ignore them?”

“Even if I wanted to mentor him, I wouldn’t be able to do so for long. Better to just let him grow naturally.” Ning took a slow sip of wine.

“Brother Darknorth certainly takes it easy,” Waterlord Firesurge said.

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In the blink of an eye, more than sixty-one years went past. The spacetime transfer array was almost ready once more.

“Time to leave.” Greatjoy rose to his feet.

“Time to head out, Darknorth. Stop staring at your disciple,” Solewind teased.

Ning had just glanced off into the distance. His second disciple, ‘Green Bamboo’ Yang Quding, had long ago departed from Wintermount and was out adventuring through the world. He was already quite famous for millions of kilometers around, and was venerated as ‘Sword Immortal Green Bamboo’.

“Time to go.” Ning nodded.

Once he left, the two of them truly would have parted from each other. Once Ning returned to the Endless Territories, the two would be located within two separate universes. It truly was hard to say if they would ever meet again. It would all be up to fate.

Although the core of the spacetime transfer array was quite large, it was still completely packed with hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had gathered here throughout this utterly massive continent.

“Fellow Daoists, the ancient transfer array shall only be activated once every hundred years.” A middle-ranked Apotheosis cultivator was standing in midair and speaking in a sonorous voice. “Our Mortal Realm is unfathomably vast and filled with countless cultivators. Thus, I would like to invite all fellow Daoists interested in going to the Sacred Immortal Realm to first enter this estate-world! This estate-world is a very simple and crude one which is quite weak; any Apotheosis cultivator can easily tear it apart from within. All of us will enter this estate-world, and then the ancient transfer array will teleport it to the other side. This will be much easier.”

“Agreed.”

“Makes sense.”

“This has been the standard method for many years.”

Countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators nodded in agreement. This was a custom that had been established many years ago. Otherwise, how was the array supposed to be able to accommodate hundreds of millions of cultivators? The estate-treasure before them was quite crude and simple. They were able to see through it to know what was going on outside, and were also able to tear through it at a moment’s notice.

As for Ning’s group of five, they were mixed into the enormous group of cultivators. No one paid them any heed.

“Fellow Daoists, let us go inside together.” The tall middle-aged man in midair was the first to fly towards the entrance of the estate-world which was placed at the very center of the ancient transfer array.

This estate-world was shaped like an actual Immortal estate, and it had a normal ‘gate’.

Swoosh! Swoosh! Swoosh!

Countless streaks of light flew towards the entrance as well.

“Let’s go.” Ning’s group of five followed the crowd into the estate as well.

“It really is weak.” The five found a corner within the estate-world, and no other cultivators were able to notice their presence. Ning laughed as he sent mentally, “I feel like the slightest vibration would be enough to cause it to completely collapse.”

“Let me stabilize it a bit. I actually am worried about it splintering,” Solewind said.

Rumble...

A cultivator on the outside had just activated the spacetime transfer array. Because it had already stored up enough energy, it now was able to completely activate.

The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators gathered inside were all incredibly excited.

“The Sacred Immortal Realm!”

“We’re finally going to arrive at the Sacred Immortal Realm.”

“All the elders of my school are in the Sacred Immortal Realm. According to the legends, there are far more cultivators in the Sacred Immortal Realm than there are in our world.” They were all incredibly excited by this. Ever since they had embarked upon the path of cultivation, they had dreamed of one day reaching the apex of power in the Mortal Realm and then heading to the Sacred Immortal Realm.

Those qualified to head into the Sacred Immortal Realm were all major figures of the Mortal Realm.

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A short while later, the teleportation effect came to an end. The estate-world had been sent to the Sacred Immortal Realm.

Ji Ning’s group had been relaxing in their little corner. Now, all of their faces tightened.

“Something’s wrong.” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally, “Everyone, let us hide ourselves for now and watch what happens.”

“Right.” Ning and the others all nodded.

This feeble estate-world had virtually no impact on them at all. They were able to see through it to the outside world and knew what was happening outside.

“We’ve arrived.”

“We’ve arrived at the Sacred Immortal Realm.” The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators were all incredibly excited.

Rumble...

The shoddily-made estate-treasure blew apart with a boom.

The countless Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators all suddenly appeared in midair, covering the skies and blocking out the sun like a horde of locusts.

“Such dense elemental energy!”

“The elemental energy here is far denser than it is in our Mortal Realm.”

“So this is the Sacred Immortal Realm?” The countless cultivators all stared excitedly... but suddenly, they saw a large number of stone pillars off in the distance. The stone pillars all had cultivators bound to them. Some were humanoid, some were monsters, and some were beasts. Although they looked different, all of them were covered with blood, wounds, and scars. Many of them had eyes filled with furious hatred.

Deathly silence.

The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had just arrived were all deathly silent.

Those cultivators bound to the stone pillars had clearly suffered countless types of torture. What was going on?

“Another batch has arrived.” One of the many bound and tormented cultivators let out a low mutter.

“One batch after another. There’s never an end.”

“Who can send a message to the people of the Mortal Realm? Tell them not to come to this ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’. Do not come!”

“I truly shouldn’t have come here.”

“I regret it so much.”

“Don’t come to the Sacred Immortal Realm.” The countless bound cultivators all mumbled and moaned in broken, pained voices.

As for the hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators who had just arrived, they all knew that something was wrong. Their hearts were as cold as ice.

“Ahahaha!” Suddenly, the vast land began to tremble as a deep laugh rang out from the depths of the earth. Slowly, one mountain-like figure after another began to emerge from underground. There was over a hundred of these figures, and each one was thirty thousand meters tall. An aura of darkness spread out to cover the skies as they stared at the countless cultivators with their blood-red eyes.

A hundred towering figures, and every single one of them possessed an aura that caused the cultivators to quiver in terror.

“Where are we?!” A golden-robed man amidst the crowd tamped down his horror enough to say, “This isn’t the Sacred Immortal Rea-”

“This is the Sacred Immortal Realm.” One of the towering forms spoke out in a thundering voice that shook Heaven and Earth. As he waved his hand, he caused an enormous cloth sack to appear.

Whooooooosh.

The cloth sack gave birth to an utterly, incredibly powerful sucking force. The hundreds of millions of Nascent Soul cultivators and Apotheosis cultivators tried to resist, but they were still forcibly sucked into the cloth sack. After all the cultivators were sucked away, the cloth sack shrank in size and flew back into the towering figure's hands.

"A few more toys." The towering figure looked at the cloth sack, then let out a low laugh. "Master shall be excited by this! I will go deliver him his toys. As for the rest of you, stay here and deal with the disobedient ones."

"Alright." The other towering figures all nodded.

Whoosh.

The bag-holding figure quickly flew off into the distance.

Ning's group of five was standing there in midair. Given Prince Greatjoy's mastery over spacetime, the towering figures were completely unable to see them.

Ning's group just watched silently as this all happened.

"A hundred Elder God-level golems." Ning narrowed his eyes as he sent mentally, "And they spoke of a 'master'. His master is most likely a Daolord."

"Agreed. This 'Sacred Immortal Realm' most likely has a Daolord standing behind it." Solewind had a solemn look on his face as well.

"This will be trouble. Let's be careful as we investigate this matter," Prince Greatjoy said somberly.

"Agreed."

"Let's go."

The five of them left the area silently.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 7: The Enormous Prison

Ji Ning and the others didn't dare to cause the slightest disturbance, for fear of drawing the attention of the 'Daolord' they suspected of being behind this Sacred Immortal Realm. Right now, they had the advantage of stealth. Once they were discovered, things would become difficult. This Sacred Immortal Realm was someone else's territory, after all. There had to be many formations protecting it.

For example, that local branch of the Bluegrass Sect in the Brightshore Kingdom was only staffed with weak World-level cultivators, but they were still able to trap Ning thanks to the grand protective formation! A Daolord's lair was an incredibly dangerous place. There was no such thing as being too careful.

But of course, Ning's group was fairly confident. Generally speaking, they wouldn't be worried about weaker Daolords at all.

Swoosh.

Ning's group of five silently teleported through space to move to the margins of this great continent, the Sacred Immortal Realm. Given Prince Greatjoy's mastery over spacetime, a spatial teleportation caused no spatial ripples at all.

"Eh?" Ning's group stood next to some boulders at the rather ragged edges of this continent. When they looked at the chaotic space up in front of them, they saw countless streaks of golden runes flickering and flashing. An enormous, ethereal formation was covering this entire continent.

"What a powerful formation," Heartlord Solewind said softly. "This formation is so profound that even I find it difficult to fathom. There's no way an ordinary Daolord was capable of creating it. I wonder if this formation was purchased by this Daolord or if he created it himself."

"Hopefully, he bought it." Prince Greatjoy looked as solemn as the others had ever seen him.

Ning nodded as well.

Anyone capable of developing this formation was a Daolord of the Third Step, at the very least. In fact, it might even be a Verge-level Daolord of the Fourth Step! Given this Daolord also had the advantage of being on familiar terrain... they were going to be in serious trouble.

"Then how should we leave this place?" Waterlord Firesurge asked, "You all saw that spatial transfer array. It'll only allow us to return to the Mortal Realm! Once we activate it to go back to the Mortal Realm, that Daolord will definitely find out and might chase us all the way back. We'll have nowhere to run."

"Return to the Mortal Realm through the formation?" Prince Greatjoy shook his head. "Those golems would probably notice as soon as we did anything, which means their master would know as well. Given how powerful Daolords are, this one would probably be able to send his will to span the entire Sacred Immortal Realm in an instant! He would be able to disrupt the transference process. We probably won't have any chance of going back to the Mortal Realm."

Ning, Solewind, Skyfire, and Firesurge all had heavy looks on their faces.

A Daolord definitely was an opponent who could prove to be a huge threat to them.

"We're not going to be able to defeat this formation." Solewind raised his head to glance at the great formation covering the entire Sacred Immortal Realm. "Even if we go back to the Mortal Realm, it won't be of any use. Once we go back, we won't be able to escape."

"Let's keep looking," Ning advised. "Perhaps we might find something useful."

"No other options."

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The five of them began to stealthily search the entire Sacred Immortal Realm.

The Sacred Immortal Realm was much smaller than the Mortal Realm, covering just a few tens of billions of kilometers! The entire continent was covered by this enormous formation, and in the very center of the continent there was a dim, faint green mist. Deep within that mist, there was a towering estate that could vaguely be seen. This was the only place in the entire continent which Ning's group did not dare to enter.

It was highly likely that this estate was the place where the Daolord lived!

"What a terrifying aura of resentment and hatred."

Ning's group was standing atop a barren, black land as they stared towards the enormous black edifice off in the distance.

Above that enormous black edifice was an aura of hatred which was so strong that it had actually become corporeal. Some of the hatred was tinged with red light, while others glowed with a black aura. However, the hatred located at the highest parts of the edifice were transformed into a deep green color, a deep green which was formed as a result of the condensed hatred of countless cultivators over the course of countless years. Every so often, furious faces could be seen appearing within the aura of hatred.

"Even if I destroyed a hundred chaosworld, the hatred and resentment wouldn't be as strong as it is here." Greatjoy frowned.

"I can sense that there are countless cultivators imprisoned within. This aura of hatred should be generated by them," Solewind said. "The reason why it is so dense is possibly because these cultivators are suffering unspeakable torments. We saw early on how many cultivators were lashed to those stone pillars."

"Let's go inside," Skyfire Brightshore urged.

"Let's go."

They needed more information. None of them dared to be arrogant in dealing with the Daolord that might be living in seclusion within this continent.

The enormous black edifice was a jail of utterly titanic proportions, and countless cultivators were imprisoned within it. It must be understood that the Mortal Realm's formation would activate once every century. It was only natural that many cultivators had been imprisoned here.

"This place..." Waterlord Firesurge's face paled as he continued to walk forwards. "This place is even more terrifying than the terrible Nightmare Lands which the legends of my homeland spoke of."

"And more terrifying than the Eighteen Hells of my own homeland." Ning was equally somber.

This enormous prison was filled with various implements of torture and punishment. This entire prison was in reality designed strictly for the torture of cultivators. It must be understood that the Eighteen Hells of the Three Realms were designed to punish great sinners, but this place had only one purpose... to torture and torment as much as possible. This made it a thousand times as frightening, causing even the faces of these five to turn pale.

"AHHH! All of you will die one day! You demons! You devils! All of you will DIE!"

“Nooooo...”

“Spare me! Spare me! Spare me!”

“No begging. Begging is pointless.”

All sorts of voices could be heard. Some were filled with hatred, some rambled, some were frenzied, some were screaming.

The entire prison was being used to furiously torment all of the hundreds of millions of newly imprisoned Nascent Soul and Apotheosis cultivators. Some of the new abductees were still begging for mercy, but they soon realized that this was completely pointless.

Whoosh...

Ning’s group of five continued their journey through the prison. Nobody was able to see them, not even the golems responsible for torturing the prisoners.

Most of these golems were at least at the Elder God level. Some were at the True God level, and a few were even at the Empyrean God level. There had to be millions of golems within this prison.

“Who would’ve thought that the ‘Sacred Immortal Realm’ so many dreamed of was actually a hell such as this?” Ning murmured softly.

“Indeed. However, there are very few Elder God-level golems. Most are weaker... perhaps the Daolord of this land is fairly weak as well,” Solewind said.

“Hopefully.” A murderous look was in Greatjoy’s eyes.

If the Daolord was a weak one, the five of them would join forces to kill him! That would end all their worries at one go.

Whoosh.

Although there were restrictive formations scattered throughout the prison, they were meant for weaker cultivators and were completely ineffective against Ning’s group. Ning’s group was able to easily enter one of the jail cells.

This jail cell held over a hundred cultivators, all shackled in chains. One of them was a skinny old man who was seated silently in the lotus position, a terrifying look in his eyes.

“I can’t accept this. I can’t accept this!” The skinny old man growled mentally, “I have to ascend and escape. If I can escape, in the future I’ll come back and kill these devils.” To this very day, he had yet to realize that his tormentors were actually golems.

“Eh?” The skinny old man suddenly felt that something was off. Five figures had suddenly appeared before him.

“You-...” The old man was stunned. This was absolutely bizarre. These five figures were simply too clean and pristine, and none of them were wearing shackles. What’s more... the doors to the prison hadn’t even opened.

"I have some questions for you," the skinny, bald, red-robed youth said.

"Yes," the skinny old man said obediently. He felt a sense of absolute devotion to the man before him. If the man ordered him to commit suicide, he wouldn't hesitate in the slightest.

As for other manacled cultivators in the jail cell, they weren't able to see a thing.

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As Ning's group infiltrated the enormous prison, a figure suddenly flew out of an ancient, towering estate which was surrounded by faint green mist that was located in the very core of the Sacred Immortal Realm. This figure was dressed in light green robes, had a stooped form, and just a few green scales on his forehead. His eyes looked quite cold and insidious, and his ancient face was covered in wrinkles.

"Master." An Elder God golem standing outside the estate, waiting respectfully.

"Mm." The stooped old man nodded. "The new batch of cultivators have arrived?"

"Yes, they just arrived. We've already sent them all into the prison," the Elder God golem said respectfully. Golems were a type of magic treasures, but when they gained sentience they would be just as intelligent as actually living beings. The difference was, they would be unswervingly loyal and would do whatever their master ordered them to do.

"Mm. Let's go take a look." The stooped figure nodded slowly. The Elder God golem followed behind him respectfully, and the two quickly flew into the skies. In the blink of an eye, they moved more than ten billion kilometers and arrived at the enormous prison, wreathed in an aura of baleful energy.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 8: The Hope of the Cultivators

The enormous prison was divided into many different regions. Within a jail cell located in one particular corner of the prison, Ji Ning's group of five was staring at that skinny, elderly prisoner.

"I was captured and brought to this place six hundred years ago, after I travelled through the spacetime transfer array and arrived at the Sacred Immortal Realm." The skinny old man's eyes were filled with a reminiscent look as he said softly, "Ever since then, I've been imprisoned here. I've suffered countless torments. Some cultivators chose to self-detonate because they were unable to endure the misery. Ugh... I really wish I could go back to the Mortal Realm."

Ning's group all frowned. Solewind asked, "Do you know nothing about the rest of this Sacred Immortal Realm?"

The skinny old man shook his head. "I know very little. We've been trapped here this entire time."

"Do you know about the 'master' which these devils who torture you serve?" Solewind asked.

The skinny man trembled as a look of terror appeared in his eyes. "He... he's the master of the devils. He's terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. After I was imprisoned here, I saw him visit the prison on two

separate occasions. He used a terrifying spell to personally torture us. Countless cultivators were simultaneously tortured at the same time. He was simply too powerful, too terrifying.”

“Twice? He visited the prison twice in the past six hundred years?” Solewind’s face tightened slightly.

“He comes quite frequently,” Prince Greatjoy growled.

“We have to be careful. Who knows when this Daolord will appear again?” Ning said solemnly. He didn’t dare to spread out his own godsense, as once he did that it would be very easy for their foe to detect them.

Prince Greatjoy suddenly frowned. “I ask you this. The ancient transfer array activates once every century, which means that an utter flood of cultivators has been sent over here over the course of many years. If the torment never comes to an end... why are so many of you still alive? If you know that life will be worse than death, and that you will be subject to perpetual agony with no way of fighting back, why are you still enduring?”

Ning and the others were intrigued. Right. When faced with overwhelming power, overwhelming despair, and the prospect of never-ending torture, why wouldn’t they choose to die? Logically speaking, most would rather commit suicide than to continue like this.

“Because we are going to get revenge,” the skinny old man growled, his eyes filled with fury and hate.

“You? How?” Prince Greatjoy was puzzled.

“If we can ascend, we can leave this place.” The skinny old man ground his teeth. “After ascending, I will become a Celestial Immortal and will be able to continue to cultivate. In the future, after I grow stronger, I’ll definitely come back and get my revenge.”

Heartlord Solewind asked, “Ascend? If you ascend, you’ll be able to escape the Sacred Immortal Realm?”

Ning and the others were all puzzled. Logically speaking, ‘ascension’ should represent ascending into an estate-world of a Daolord.

“Those who ascend can indeed escape,” the skinny old man said immediately. “Long, long ago, before our Mortal Realm even had that ancient transfer array, it was somewhat easier for cultivators to train to the late Apotheosis stage. In the Mortal Realm, there were some who were occasionally able to reach that stage, and once they did the Celestial Tribulation would soon descend upon them. After the tribulation, they would ascend to a land of Immortals.

“Later, cultivation in the Mortal Realm became more difficult. However, the ancient transfer array then appeared, and some of our ancient predecessors chose to travel through it and go to the Sacred Immortal Realm. Some of them even came back and then told their descendants and juniors that the Sacred Immortal Realm was a holy place for cultivation with incredibly dense elemental energy. As a result, successive generations of cultivators have come to this place.

“Only after entering did we realize that it was all just a trick.” The skinny old man gritted his teeth.

Ning and the other four were all extraordinary figures. They immediately understood what had happened.

Long ago, before the 'Mortal Realm' was discovered by that Daolord, cultivation was a much simpler path. When the enormous protective formation sprang up to protect the continent from the spatial storms around it, it naturally caused the elemental energy in the continent to grow sparse, making cultivation much more difficult. The ancient transfer array then appeared, followed by some cultivators who were soul-compelled to return from this 'Sacred Immortal Realm' and widely spread rumors of how wonderful it was.

It was only natural that more and more cultivators would be drawn to enter it.

"It was all a plot. In truth, in the Mortal Realm it is still possible for outstandingly talented geniuses to reach the late-stage Apotheosis level, then successfully overcome their tribulations and ascend." The skinny elder continued, "But it truly is very, very difficult. The Mortal Realm is unfathomably vast, but only a handful of people each century can achieve their goals and ascend. That is why we all entered this Sacred Immortal Realm."

The skinny elder shook his head. "Although we are imprisoned here, it is still true that elemental energy in this world is far denser than it was in ours. It isn't too hard to reach the late-stage of the Apotheosis level. However, once those devils notice us reaching that stage, they'll immediately strike and kill us! Thus, we have to accumulate as much power as possible. We need to build up so much power that as soon as we reach the late-stage of the Apotheosis level, the Celestial Tribulation will immediately descend. By then, those devils won't be able to do anything to us."

Ning and the others were quite curious.

"So as long as you cause a Celestial Tribulation, you'll be out of danger?"

"Once the Celestial Tribulation comes, they would never dare to interfere! All they would do is stand off to one side and watch. Even if that devil lord came himself, he would just watch from afar. Anyone who succeeds in the tribulation would immediately ascend to the legendary Immortal Lands," the skinny elder said.

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As Ning and the others questioned him, they continued to discuss this matter amongst themselves.

Generally speaking, in places like the Three Realms the so-called 'Celestial Tribulation' might pose a threat to ordinary cultivators, but it definitely wouldn't be able to threaten a World-level cultivator! A World-level cultivator would be capable of annihilating the entire Three Realms; how could a mere tribulation be able to do anything to him? By the same principle, it was impossible for a Celestial Tribulation to threaten a Daolord! Even if a Celestial Tribulation did descend, a Daolord could forcibly intervene and completely destroy the tribulation.

"I have a possible answer," Firesurge whispered. "Ever since we entered the Archaeus region, we've been hearing stories of 'ascension' from the continents that we visit. Do you think it's possible that there's a Daolord in every single continent? That they will all go so far as to spend time and effort setting up an estate-world to protect them?"

"What are you saying?" Solewind looked at him.

"I imagine you've all noticed this by now as well. After we entered the Archaeus region, we've been able to sense that its power permeates every inch of this region," Firesurge said. "The only reason we aren't crushed by it is because we bear Archaeus medallions."

Ning and the others nodded. It was true that the power of the Archaeus region was omnipresent here.

"Then... it is entirely possible that the 'Celestial Tribulation' sent down upon the countless living creatures of the many continents here were all sent down by the Archaeus region itself," Firesurge said.

"Right."

"Right, that has to be it."

Their eyes all instantly lit up as they came to understand this matter.

The Celestial Tribulation... it only came about as a result of the natural laws of Heaven and Earth.

In a chaosworld such as the Three Realms, the 'laws' in question were the laws of the chaosworld itself, and thus it was the chaosworld itself which sent down the Celestial Tribulations.

But here in the Archaeus region, those vast continents did not have any natural laws that belonged to the continents themselves. Logically speaking, there was no way for the continents themselves to send down Celestial Tribulations. Which meant... it had to be the entire Archaeus region which sent down the tribulations!

"Because the tribulations are sent by the Archaeus region itself, not even Daolords would dare to interfere. If they did, they would be punished by the power of the entire Archaeus region," Firesurge said. The reason why someone like Ning would be able to destroy the Celestial Tribulation of the Three Realms was because he wasn't afraid of any reprisal from the Three Realms. But a reprisal from the Archaeus region... even Eternal Emperors would fear such a thing.

The Archaeus region was the very core of this entire alternate universe! A strike from it would essentially represent a strike from the entire universe itself! Who would dare to withstand such a blow?

"It makes perfect sense." Skyfire Brightshore nodded.

"There is a high probability that you are correct. I'd say the chances are at least 80%. But there's another 20% probability as well... perhaps all this talk of 'ascension' is nothing more than a cruel lie meant to give these cultivators hope. Once they lose all hope, they probably won't be able to keep on living," Solewind said.

Whoosh. Ning and the other four silently emerged from that small jail cell. They continued to walk through the enormous prison, with no one able to detect them.

"GREETINGS, MASTER!"

Suddenly, every inch of the prison exploded with raucous chants. Every single one of the million-plus golems obediently knelt down, and the sound of their knees hitting the ground echoed throughout the prison.

"He's coming."

“The lord of the devils is coming.”

“N-no...”

“He’s come again.”

When the prisoners trapped within those countless jail cells within the prison heard the noise, they instantly became filled with terror. Each time this ‘lord of the devils’ arrived, he would bring them nightmarish torment that was even worse than what the devils were able to dispense. Everyone’s breathing became ragged and chaotic, and even the aura of hatred, resentment, and madness which permeated the place became much stronger than before.

Ning’s face turned pale, as did that of the other four.

“Hmph.” A cold snort rang out, followed by an awe-inspiringly powerful surge of heartforce that swept out and covered the entire prison. At the same time, some faint green mist began to seep towards every single cell.

But suddenly, the green mist came to an immediate halt.

Even that wave of heartforce trembled.

“Who are the five of you?!” A furious and stunned mental query rang out.

Ning’s group of five was standing there in the hallways. They were able to easily ensure the golems were unable to detect them, but there was no way for them to avoid the heartforce scan of a Daolord.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 9: Slaying a Daolord

Ji Ning and the other four felt a bit frantic. All this was happening too fast.

“Senior.” Heartlord Solewind sent mentally, “We came on the command of our master to enter the Archaeus region and test ourselves here. Alas, we accidentally entered the Mortal Realm, then rode the spacetime transfer array in preparing to depart from this place. We never imagined that the Sacred Immortal Realm was a place which we could not exit, and so we began to search for a way which would allow us to leave this place. We have no intentions of being your enemy, senior. I’d like to ask you to permit us to leave the Sacred Immortal Realm.”

“Oh? Five World-level cultivators and five Archaeus medallions... such wealth!” The stooped Daolord who stood at the entrance of the prison sent his voice out echoing with the ears of the five. “Letting you leave isn’t completely out of the question. However, you have to agree to one of my conditions.”

“Pray tell, senior,” Solewind immediately said.

Without actually fighting them, no one would be able to tell how strong Ning’s group was!

In the Archaeus region, there were some Daolords who would slay any World-level cultivators they saw and steal their Archaeus medallions. However, the majority of Daolords were unwilling to lower themselves and rob juniors, nor were they willing to offend the sect standing behind those World-level

cultivators. Generally speaking, World-level cultivators within the Archaeus region all had significant backgrounds.

“I need you to swear a lifeblood oath that once you leave this place, you will never let anyone else learn a single thing about what you experienced in the Mortal Realm and the Sacred Immortal Realm. If you accept, I’ll let you leave this place,” the stooped Daolord said.

“A lifeblood oath?” Solewind immediately smiled. “That’s simple.”

“Careful!”

The nearby Prince Greatjoy’s face tightened as light suddenly shot out of his eyes.

Moments later, the faces of Solewind, Ji Ning, Skyfire Brightshore, and Firesurge all changed. They, too, could sense a terrifying strong surge of power descend from the heavens towards the prison. For this surge of power to descend from the heavens was a clear size that it came from the grand formation which protected the entire Sacred Immortal Realm.

“Kill!” Firesurge had an ugly look on his face.

“Kill!” Prince Greatjoy bellowed out the same word.

The five of them attacked simultaneously!

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The stooped Daolord was at the entrance to the enormous prison, and his eyes were unspeakably cold and grim. The skies above him suddenly lit up as the previously ethereal-looking formation was activated, causing an enormous black serpent to appear out of nowhere and descend from the heavens at tremendous speeds as it shot towards the prison.

Just now, the stooped Daolord had intentionally been wasting some time chatting with them to buy himself enough time to unleash the power of the formation.

“All those who discover the existence of the Sacred Immortal Realm must perish.” A murderous look was in the stooped Daolord’s eyes, and the enormous serpent moved so quickly that it appeared before him in a flash. However... immediately afterwards, the stooped Daolord’s face turned pale. “WHAT?!”

His godsense was showing him what those five World-level cultivators were doing... and they were absolutely terrifying.

Of the five, Ji Ning and Heartlord Solewind were the fastest to attack.

“Heartworld, descend!” Solewind’s red robes fluttered as he glared towards the stooped Daolord coldly, and he showed no mercy at all when he attacked.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

His heartworld projection instantly descended upon this area, causing the entire prison to boom violently. It was as though something incredibly heavy had smashed down upon it, and it was smashed apart as easily as a piece of tofu. This enormous prison was capable of holding countless cultivators prisoner, but for people on Ning’s level it was incredibly fragile. Previously, they had been deep within

the prison while the Daolord had been at the entrance, which meant they were separated by many different gates. It was simpler to just destroy the entire damn thing.

“What?!”

‘B-but...’

Countless cultivators gawked in amazement at this scene. The jail cells they had been trapped in were all crushed into tiny pieces, but they themselves were left completely unscathed. This was a testament to how precise and masterful Heartlord Solewind was!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

The million-plus golems were all knocked flat onto the ground under the crushing pressure of the heartworld projection. They weren’t able to resist in the slightest.

“An Exalted Immortal!”

“A Grand Immortal!”

“The heavens have finally come to our aid!”

Countless cultivators stared at the red-robed Heartlord Solewind, who stood there like a veritable god. Heartlord Solewind seemed to have become the center of this entire world, and he stared at that distant, stooped Daolord as he sent the full weight of his heartworld projection crashing downwards.

“A Heartforce Cultivator?” The stooped figure was stunned.

“BREAK!”

Next to Heartlord Solewind was the white-robed Ji Ning, and his eyes were equally cold. Rumble. A terrifying mixture of electric light and watery light appeared around him. The seven types of Dao lightning and seven types of Dao water transformed into a series of divine swords. The many divine swords moved incredibly fast, quickly sweeping towards the distant stooped Daolord and forming a terrifying domain that was like a vortex of darkness which ground away at his form.

This was the Yin-Yang Sword Domain!

“A sword cultivator? How could he be as terrifying as this?!” The stooped Daolord was now completely flabbergasted, and he hurriedly controlled his black serpent and used it to protect himself.

The black serpent howled furiously as it struggled to ‘survive’. The surrounding Yin-Yang Sword Domain was like a deadly fishing net that had been tightly wrapped around the serpent’s form and furiously tearing away at it.

“Great Annihilation!” Prince Greatjoy had a similarly icy look on his face as he immediately unleashed his most powerful killer attack. His twin palms suddenly glittered with dazzling golden light as they instantly pierced through the skies, striking with invincible and deadly intent towards the stooped Daolord.

BOOM! When the enormous golden palms struck down upon the black serpent, the black serpent tried to endure the power... but with a rumble, it began to shake and then crack apart.

“Ahhhh!” The stooped Daolord let out a furious, terrified scream.

“Kill him!”

“Die.”

Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge simultaneously struck out. The former struck out with a blazing red tail while the latter sent out two enormous entwined water dragons that shot out. The black serpent was already at the brink of collapse due to Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Intent and Prince Greatjoy’s attack. Now, it completely broke apart... and the power of the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and the other attacks all simultaneously thundered down upon the Daolord’s body. The Daolord did have other treasures he could use to defend himself, but he was completely unable to do so.

Boom!

He was completely, totally annihilated!

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Utter silence.

The countless cultivators all just stared in a dazed fashion. That invincibly powerful and utterly terrifying ‘lord of devils’, a man so strong that he made their souls quiver when they looked at him... had been instantly killed?

It really had been just an instant.

The five of them had only struck out a single time each! Ning had only made use of his Yin-Yang Sword Domain; he wasn’t even given enough time to launch a second attack before the Daolord had died!

“We... we...” The countless cultivators stared at Ning’s group.

“Bind them.” Heartlord Solewind swept the area with his gaze. His heartworld projection had the appearance of an endless range of blazing mountains. As for the million-plus golems that were being suppressed by it, the death of their master had resulted in them instantly becoming ownerless. Thus, Heartlord Solewind was able to bind them all right away.

“Although these golems are fairly low-level, there’s certainly a great deal of them. Let’s split them up into five portions,” Heartlord Solewind sent.

The other four didn’t really care that much and so just waved their hands to accept it.

“This Daolord was really quite weak. I felt as though he was merely an ordinary Daolord of the First Step.” Prince Greatjoy shook his head. “If it wasn’t for the formation itself being incredibly powerful, brother Darknorth’s sword-intent domain alone probably would’ve wiped him out.”

Ning and the others all nodded. This Daolord had been very weak.

When Ji Ning, Solewind, and Greatjoy had attacked, their attacks had been blocked by the black serpent. In the end, it had been the attacks of Skyfire Brightshore and Firesurge which had caused the black serpent to collapse! As for the Daolord himself? He wasn’t able to resist them in the slightest.

"I wonder... is there perhaps a second Daolord here in the Sacred Immortal Realm?" Prince Greatjoy was worried. "This one was far too weak, while the formation itself was rather strong."

"It's quite rare for there to be a Daolord assigned to watch guard over a continent. Do you really think there would be a second one?" Solewind shook his head. "As for the power of the formation... perhaps this Daolord purchased it from somewhere else. Truly powerful Daolords generally wouldn't deign to do things like torture and torment mortal cultivators. Only the weaker Daolords would generally do such a thing. If there really was another Daolord here, he probably would've sent his godsense over to investigate long ago. If he did so, there's no way it would've been able to avoid interacting with my heartworld projection."

"Mm." Firesurge nodded in agreement. "These golems all belonged to the Daolord we just defeated. I think there probably was just one."

"It doesn't matter if there was one or two," Ning said. "Either way, we still need to go into the Daolord's estate in the very center of the continent! The formation remains active, after all, and the core of the formation is probably located within the Daolord's estate. Only if we go there will we be able to disrupt the formation and leave this place."

"Let's go to the Daolord's estate." Prince Greatjoy nodded. "If there are no other Daolords, things will be much simpler. If there is another Daolord, then we'll just have to give him a fight. There's no other options for us!"

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 10: Karmic Virtue

If they wished to leave the Sacred Immortal Realm, they had to first enter the Daolord's estate.

Swoosh.

Ji Ning and the rest of the five transformed into streaks of light that flew into the air. Space rippled around them as they then disappeared.

Only now did these countless cultivators who had just been freed from torture, from their doom of eternal torment, finally come back to their senses. They had been too stunned by the death of that 'lord of the devils'.

"Thank you, five Exalted Immortals, for sparing our lives!"

"Thank you, Grand Immortals, for saving us from an eternity of suffering!"

"Thank you, seniors!"

Countless cultivators fell to their knees in gratitude. Tears streamed down their faces as they cried out their praises. Aside from the hundreds of millions of cultivators who had just recently been taken prisoner, there were the countless cultivators who had been imprisoned here long ago. They had suffered endless torment, and only the hope of ascension and escape had kept them alive. However... whenever those million-plus golems noticed anyone breaking through to the late Apotheosis stage, they would immediately kill that person! Thus, every century there was just a very small number of

cultivators who managed to overcome their tribulations and ascend. The rest all died miserable, tormented deaths.

Now, they finally had release.

They would all be able to survive. The boundless hatred and rage which had built up over the course of countless years began to transform into gratitude towards Ning and the rest of the five.

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Ning's group of five void-blinked straight to the location of the spacetime transfer array.

"These golems." Heartlord Solewind waved his hand, easily binding the hundred-plus Elder God golems present here, then split them into five lots and gave each person a lot.

"What?"

"What's going..."

"Does this mean..."

The tens of millions of cultivators who were bound to the stone pillars all raised their heads towards the skies, staring at Ning's group of five. Those terrifying devils had been dealt with, as easily as that?

"From this day forth." Heartlord Solewind swept them with his gaze as he summon his heartworld projection, smashing apart all the chains on every single cultivator. "You are no longer prisoners. You and the countless cultivators who were imprisoned in that jail were all free now. I hope you will all train hard and build up this 'Sacred Immortal Realm' into a place which is truly worthy of that name."

"Freedom?" The tens of millions of cultivators were all stunned for a moment. Then, they began to tremble in excitement.

"Let's go." Ning's group of five quickly departed. As far as they were concerned, helping out these mortal cultivators was nothing more than a casual act in passing. They naturally weren't opposed to helping out.

The tens of millions of cultivators watched as those five airborne figures all disappeared. Only then did they come back to their senses and hurriedly kowtow, pressing their foreheads against the ground.

"Thank you, Exalted Immortals!"

"Thank you for rescuing us, Exalted Immortals!"

"Finally, Immortals from the Heavens have come to deliver us!"

The cultivators cried out with hoarse sobs of excitement and gratitude.

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The towering Daolord's estate emanated an aura of faint green energy, and the estate itself seemed ethereal as well, as though it didn't quite exist at all.

Ning's group of five stared at it from afar quite cautiously.

“Eh?” Suddenly, a surge of strange power swept through the air and descended upon the bodies of Ning and the others. Apparently, faint layers of golden light were continuously descending upon them.

“What’s this?” Ning and the others exchanged glances.

“Karmic merit,” Solewind said softly. “What an enormous amount of karmic merit. All the karmic merit I’ve ever gained since I started cultivation isn’t as much as this.”

“This really is a lot of karmic merit,” Prince Greatjoy said. “I once battled against an evil cult and rescued more than three hundred chaosworlds from their grasp, but I still didn’t get as much karmic merit as I am right now.”

Ning was quite shocked as well.

At their level of power, the effect of karmic merit was negligible, just icing on the cake. They might have slightly better luck while adventuring, but that was it. Still... this amount of karmic merit was simply ridiculous in size and scope. If others knew that rescuing these cultivators would result in such a reward of karmic merit, it was likely that many Daolords would run around seeking opportunities to rescue people.

Once your karmic merit reached a certain level, your luck would become better and better. Although it wouldn’t be of much use to you in the Daomerge, it would still be of assistance when adventuring. In truth, however, you could run around rescuing chaosworld after chaosworld and you generally wouldn’t gain as much as one-thousandth as much karmic merit as right now.

“Earlier, we all saw how the aura of hatred above in the prison had reached utterly shocking proportions,” Solewind said. “This place had a simply ridiculous amount of hatred. It makes sense that the reward for rescuing them is a similarly ridiculous amount of karmic merit. It goes without saying that the number of cultivators who were tortured to death by them over the years was simply unimaginable. Even though they died, their ‘echoes’ sent down karmic merit to us.”

“Mm.” Ning nodded.

The cultivators they had saved were mostly captured within the past few thousand years. The earlier cultivators had almost all been tortured to death. Compared to the number of cultivators they had saved, the number that had perished was far higher.

“The Daolord’s estate...” Prince Greatjoy stared at the towering estate, hidden deep within the shadows of the faint green mist. “I feel as though it won’t be an easy place to go through. Let us first try and see if we can destroy it.”

“Mm. Worth a shot.”

“If we can destroy it, we can then hopefully destroy the core of the formation which covers this entire Sacred Immortal Realm. That would be perfect.” Ning and the others were all hoping for this outcome.

An estate which was being controlled by its master would possess incredibly strong defensive powers, but now the Daolord was dead. Ning’s group did indeed stand a good chance of destroying it.

“I’ll go first.” Ning smiled as he walked through the air towards the distant Daolord’s estate. As he moved forwards, his seven mighty streaks of Dao lightning and Dao water all flooded out as well,

forming an enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain. A dark and terrifyingly powerful domain appeared around him, completely annihilating all of the faint green mist as it furiously swept towards the estate-world.

“Break for me.” Heartlord Solewind immediately summoned his heartworld projection, causing an entire world to come crashing down upon the estate.

“Shatter!” Prince Greatjoy flew over as well as he stretched out his giant golden palms. His palms were capable of unleashing the most savage attacks amongst the five. Although Ning’s own Blood Drop sword-intent was also a Supreme Dao, its advantage lay in its penetrating power. Prince Greatjoy, however, specialized in overwhelming, brutalizing power.

BOOM! BOOM!

Two enormous, heaven-covering golden palms came crashing down like a pair of titanic golden clouds. The golden palms came crashing downwards repeatedly, striking heavily upon the Daolord’s estate. The air pressure generated by the blows was so great that an enormous palm-size imprint appeared in the ground around the estate.

“GWRAAAR!” Skyfire Brightshore transformed into his true form of a flame-bathed beast. His hooves kicked at the ground as his fiery tail lashed out in an aura of absolutely power.

As for Waterlord Firesurge, he charged forwards and launched attacks from all around the estate as well.

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The entrance to the Daolord’s estate was open, and so Ning’s Dao lightning and Dao thunder flooded straight through it, smashing through all obstacles in their path.

After causing absolute havoc for a brief period of time, it finally came to a halt.

“Eh? But the door to the estate is clearing open.” The blazing beast once more transformed into a fiery-haired youth. “Brother Darknorth’s lightning and water, as well as my lifeblood fire... and that heartworld projection of brother Solewind... it all flooded into the estate to cause damage. Why, then, is the formation covering this realm completely undisturbed?”

“Mm.” Ning raised his head to stare into the skies as well. Golden runes could still be vaguely seen high up in the air. Clearly, the enormous formation hadn’t been impacted at all.

“We probably haven’t destroyed the core of the formation yet,” Ning said. “Perhaps the core of the formation is located in some secret, hidden location inside the estate.”

“Then what should we do now?” Solewind swept the area with his gaze.

“What can we do? Go inside!” Prince Greatjoy said coldly.

“Mm.” A murderous look flashed through Firesurge’s eyes as well.

Ning and the others all felt quite cautious about this Daolord's estate. An estate was essentially a foe's lair! If there really was another Daolord inside... fighting within the estate would be incredibly disadvantageous to Ning and the others.

But right now... there really was no way to tell whether or not there was a Daolord inside. If a Daolord truly decided to hide inside there and refused to come out, then Ning's group would still have to go inside the estate and wreck the formation's core in order to leave this Sacred Immortal Realm.

"Brother Darknorth, let us join forces to set up a defensive perimeter," Solewind said.

"Alright." Ning nodded.

Solewind's heartworld projection was an excellent detection and warning system, whereas Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain was a Supreme Dao of defense.

For now, the group of five was guarded by a chaotic domain of sword-intent as well as countless world-shadows.

Whoosh.

Ning's group went straight to the entrance of the Daolord's estate. Although they had hammered against the estate for quite some time, it remained completely undamaged.

They entered the estate through the main gate.

The estate was actually quite large inside, and its internal layout was quite complicated. There were quite a few dismembered and shattered golems located inside of it as well, all destroyed by the water, lightning, flames, and other attacks which the group had unleashed.

"What a large estate." It was built almost like a maze. Ning's group spent a full hour wandering inside of it, jointly defeating the various formations and restrictive spells as they extensively searched the place.

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At the deepest reaches of the Daolord's estate, there was a hovering passageway that was lined with fiery red stones.

Whoooooosh. A blazing wind howled through the air above the hovering passageway.

There was a cave entrance located amongst the many boulders present in this place. Within this cave there was a black-robed Daolord who was seated in the lotus position. His aura was incredibly ancient, and he was unfathomably more powerful than the Daolord which Ning's group had just slain. Images of Ning and the others wandering through the estate could be seen reflected off his eyes. "So these five World-level cultivators really did enter my estate! For World-level cultivators to be comparable to Daolords of the Second Step, and for five of them to appear at once... they have to have a truly incredible school behind them. Their master might be an extremely important member of the Church of Annihilation. Although they killed one of my retainers, I'd really rather not fight them unless absolutely necessary."

"But... Master's orders were clear. I am to guard this place diligently, and I am to slay any outsiders who invade this place." The black-robed Daolord slowly shook his head.

The Desolate Era

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 11: Moksha

The black-robed Daolord sat within that fiery stone cave. Suddenly, he turned his gaze towards that levitating passageway. Deep within it, a bulky and muscular creature was crawling across the fiery stones. The creature was brandishing an enormous greataxe, chopping downwards with it time and time again. Just looking at this muscular creature, one would easily be able to tell what tremendous power this greataxe held within it. However, the greataxe was just barely able to split the blazing stones apart, and it took dozens of blows from the greataxe in order to 'harvest' a single piece.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The reverberations were quite weak by the time they made it to the black-robed Daolord.

"Moksha." The black-robed Daolord called out to the creature. "Come here."

"Yes, Master." A rumbling voice rang out from below.

Whoosh.

A streak of light flew out from the depths of that levitating passageway, then landed within the fiery stone cave. This was a strange, incredibly muscular thing whose unclad body radiated a metallic light. Clearly, this was not a normal living creature. The creature held a black greataxe in its hands that was almost as long as he was tall, and upon entering he immediately knelt down respectfully. "Master, what is your bidding?"

The black-robed Daolord nodded. "Five World-level children have entered the Sacred Immortal Realm. Although they were merely at the World level, all of them can be said to have reached a level of power comparable to that of Daolords of the Second Step. The five of them have already entered my estate, and they are continuously advancing in this direction! I order you to go and wipe them out. Remember... no matter what, do not let them damage my 'Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower'."

"Moska understands," the towering creature said respectfully.

"Then go," the black-robed Daolord ordered.

The muscular creature instantly departed through the passageway as he continuously flew upwards. Soon, he reached the entry point to the bottommost layer of the estate.

The black-robed Daolord nodded slightly. He really didn't care much about the death of that retainer, as the retainer had been someone who had only been able to break through thanks to a Pseudo Samsara Pill. His only real job was to assist the black-robed Daolord in torturing those mortal cultivators. Someone like the black-robed Daolord wouldn't want to lower himself or waste his energy on tormenting mortals. He would simply order his subordinates to do it for him.

"Five absolutely incredible World-level cultivators. They most likely stand a good chance of becoming absolutely incredible Daolords. A pity." The black-robed Daolord let out a soft sigh. "Why did you have to come here?"

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Deep within the Daolord's estate.

Ji Ning and the rest of the five were still advancing forwards.

"There has to be a tremendous secret deep hidden within this path," Prince Greatjoy said. We've already encountered eight different restrictive seals on this path, and it took us tremendous amounts of effort to break through them. Why would they put this many seals here if this wasn't an important place?"

"We've broken quite a few seals in the estate, but no foes have emerged to face us. There probably really aren't any Daolords here," Solewind laughed. "I hope everything will continue to be this easy. That would be just wonderful."

"I hope that is the case as well."

They advanced through the passageway, delving deeper and deeper through the various layers of the estate. Suddenly, an enormous stone door appeared at the end of the path before them. This stone door was covered by strange carvings which emanated a dark, sinful aura. Just looking at it made the five of them uncomfortable. In truth, they had all noticed that it seemed as though the entire estate was filled with the aura of hatred and sin, with the aura being especially pronounced in certain areas.

Crackle, crackle, crackle. Solewind's heartworld projection and Ning's sword-intent domain both slammed into the stone door.

Golden runes immediately appeared on the surface of the stone door and began to flow across it. The runes were incredibly powerful, and they weren't damaged in the slightest by the attacks.

Heartlord Solewind carefully inexpected the formation which had just appeared atop the stone door. Of the five, Heartlord Solewind possessed the highest level of skill in the Dao of Formations. He spent quite a bit of time, head upraised, as he stared at the stone door.

"Do as I say," Heartlord Solewind instructed. "Brother Ji Ning, strike out with your sword using maximum force and destroy the runes over here."

His heartworld projection immediately caused a particular part of the runes to light up.

"Brothers Firesurge and Skyfire, the two of you shall attack these two places." Heartlord Solewind once more left behind sparkles of light atop the stone door, this time pointing out two areas with runes at the very top and very bottom of the stone door.

"Brother Greatjoy, all you need to do is to launch full-strength blows against this door," Solewind laughed. "Leave the rest to me."

To use raw, brute force to breach the formations would be incredibly difficult. If you were skilled in the art of formations, things would be much easier. Even if you weren't able to overcome the formation by yourself, if you could point out certain critical areas and then focus your efforts on those areas, it would be hundreds of times easier than simply trying to brute-force the entire thing.

"Everyone... attack!" Heartlord Solewind barked.

Swish!

Ning struck out with his sword.

The sword struck out without creating any sound, but in the instant that it stabbed against the divine runes, its might was fully unleashed along with a terrifyingly strong penetrative power. If Ning wished it, he would be able to tear space apart and enter a completely different spatial dimension. The runes were completely pierced through and ripped apart by Ning's strike, resulting in the formation covering the stone door to begin to tremble.

In truth, a small part of such a large formation being destroyed normally wouldn't have much of an impact. Only a critical part of the formation being destroyed would.

"Good." Heartlord Solewind revealed a look of delight.

Ning's sword was indeed quite terrifying. Previously, as they had been breaching one sealed barrier after another within the estate, they had encountered a particularly nettlesome barrier that not even Prince Greatjoy had been able to break. In the end, it was Ning who had stepped up and used his sword to stab through a critical part of the formation. All of them had been stunned by how terrifyingly strong Ning's sword was.

In terms of raw, overwhelming attack power, Prince Greatjoy was the strongest of the five.

In terms of viciousness... Ning's sword was the deadliest.

"Attack!" Skyfire Brightshore and Firesurge simultaneously attacked, the former using fire and the latter using water. These two were diametrically different types of energy, and they were equal in power. As a result, when they joined forces they resulted in an absolutely explosive amount of energy being unleashed. Skyfire had truly grown much stronger in recent years, perhaps because the twelve scrolls of the [Sutra of Eternity] was indeed an incredible technique. By now, Skyfire was just as strong as Firesurge, who had been the weakest member of the four elites of the Twelve Palaces.

"Break." Prince Greatjoy sent his enormous golden palms crashing downwards towards the two sides of the closed stone door.

Rumble...

The sealing barrier twisted, no longer able to endure the surging power that had been brought to bear against it. With a rumbling sound, the closed stone door began to swing open as the barrier naturally broke apart.

The two sides of the stone door were smashed open by the twin palms, revealing an empty pavilion behind them.

"So we have reached the end of this passageway?" Ning and the others were all stunned. They had encountered multiple barriers on the way over and had felt certain that there would be another passageway beyond the stone doors. Who would've thought that it would instead be a pavilion?

Ning and the other four advanced with caution, surrounded by the heartworld projection and the sword-intent domain. They walked through the stone door and into the pavilion.

The empty pavilion was roughly thirty thousand meters in size. An extremely muscular form was seated within the pavilion. The creature was completely crimson in color, and even its eyes were blazing with fire. It didn't look like an ordinary living creature at all.

"A golem?" Greatjoy frowned.

"What a powerful golem." Solewind's face tightened as well.

"The Daolord we killed was merely at the first step. Why is there such a powerful golem here?" Ning's heart sank. They could all tell that this was nothing more than a powerful golem, but it was different from those weaker golems that had existed in the Sacred Immortal Realm. Those golems were at the Elder God level of strength at most. This one... it was at the Daolord level.

Its aura was so weighty and dense that there was no way an ordinary Daolord could match it in might.

Whoooosh. There was another stone door on the other end of the palace. That tightly sealed stone door was covered with a layer of deep green energy that radiated hatred, with the hatred so dense that furiously roaring faces would constantly appear on its surface. Unfathomable amounts of dense elemental energy were being gathered from the surrounding areas, then channel into and through the stone door.

"The hatred and malice is all gathering here? What on earth is behind that stone door?" Ning realized that they were getting very close to uncovering some of the secrets behind the Sacred Immortal Realm.

The five of them exchanged a glance, their hearts sinking. They all knew that this would most likely be the most deadly battle yet in this alternate universe... and that it was possible they might die here.

"We have entered the Archaeus region on the orders of our master. I'd like to ask for you to give way and release the five of us from this Sacred Immortal Realm," Solewind said. "If there is anything you want from us, just tell us."

The massive golem, seated in the lotus position, slowly raised his head and stared at Ning's group with his fiery eyes. His lips parted in a savage smile as he rose to his feet, then stretched out his left hand. Instantly, an enormous black shield appeared within it. He then stretched out his right hand, causing an enormous greataxe to appear.

A shield in one hand, a greataxe in the other... and his aura completely exploded forth, sweeping through the entire palace and causing it to echo and thunder.

"I want..." The massive golem's voice boomed forth, "For you all to die!"

BOOM!

The golem transformed into a streak of light as it charged straight towards Ning's group.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 12: In Danger of Dying

The entire pavilion was merely thirty thousand meters in size, and thus it was completely filled by the Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Torrents of electric light and watery light transformed into enormous swords that furiously hacked at everything near them. The towering golem was assaulted by endless attacks,

but it simply roared with fury as it charged towards Ning's group. The Yin-Yang Sword Domain wasn't able to do anything to it at all.

Whoosh. Heartlord Solewind rose high up into the air, his red robes fluttering. He actually seemed to transform into a divine bird that was bathed in flames. More and more of these flaming birds began to appear in the area around him, as well as enormous amounts of blazing lava.

"Focus." Solewind instantly manifested a total of eighteen arms, and each arm represented a beak of a firebird as they all flew towards that golem.

"Kill!"

"Attack!"

Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge joined forces in a practiced manner. They had long ago grown accustomed to combination attacks, and thus they sent intertwined attacks of water and fire straight towards the golems.

As for Ning, he first used [Three Heads, Six Arms], then drew out his six divine swords. Prince Greatjoy actually manifested six arms as well, a rare sight to behold. The two of them had the most powerful attacks... and were the final ones to attack.

"GWAAAAR!" The massive golem roared furiously as it chopped horizontally with the massive black greataxe in its hand.

This chop seemed to sever the heavens from the earth itself. Ning and the others all instantly felt their hearts turn cold!

Heartlord Solewind had used his heartworld projection to manifest eighteen blazing firebirds, but they were all chopped into two pieces by this blow.

"Careful." Skyfire Brightshore was sent flying back by the chop as well, and he furiously cried out to warn the others.

Whoooooosh.

Waterlord Firesurge's body was cleaved apart at the waist. Blood flew everywhere, and a look of shock and rage was in his eyes. And then, his entire body transformed into a flow of water that tried to flee.

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

Prince Greatjoy's six enormous golden palms began to descend from the skies, striking against the edge of that greataxe and preventing it from continuing its attacks. Thanks to him, Skyfire and Firesurge were saved.

"Brother Darknorth!" Prince Greatjoy vomited out a mouthful of blood as he flew backwards, but he still managed to send an urgent mental call to Ning.

Six silent streaks of sword-light. As Prince Greatjoy tied down the greataxe, the six streaks of sword-light scraped past it and stabbed directly towards the fingers of the golem's right hand. Ning knew very well

that this was a golem which was as tough and resilient as a magical treasure! To actually destroy this golem? Not even a Daolord of the Fourth Step would be able to do this, to say nothing of Ning.

Ning's Blood Drop stance had penetrating power, true... but it wouldn't be able to pierce through the golem's body by even an inch!

Thus, Ning had only one goal – to attack the finger-joints on the golem's right hand, then seize its greataxe! Ning had been able to tell quite quickly that this golem was at an extremely high level of skill in wielding a greataxe. If Ning was able to disarm it and take the greataxe, the golem would instantly lose the majority of its power! This was similar to how if Ning himself lost his six Eternal swords he would only be able unleash 10-20% of his true power!

Crunch. Clang!

The six streaks of sword-light simultaneously stabbed into different finger-joints on the golem's right hand. The terrifying penetrative power of the Blood Drop stance caused the fingers of the mighty golem's right hand to involuntarily unclench just slightly, causing its grip over the greataxe to grow weak.

Ning was delighted to see this. Just as he was about to move forwards and seize the greataxe...

"Darknorth, careful!" Solewind's voice rang out in Ning's mind.

"Eh?!" Ning's face turned pale, because an enormous shield was crashing towards his head with an absolutely unstoppable amount of power!

The golem smiled coldly as it sent its enormous shield spinning towards Ning. Its greatest proficiency lay in the art of using shields! It was created in order to serve as a guardian for its master in dangerous situations, so as to help buy its master some extra time. The only reason it was also quite skilled in wielding axes was because it had been assigned to work as a miner for countless years now. Still... comparatively speaking, its true expertise still lay in wielding shields.

Rumble...

When the shield came crashing down, it was as though the skies themselves were pressing down upon Ning. Even a chaos star would most likely be reduced to dust by a blow from this shield! As the shield moved closer and closer to Ning, layers of multicolored space generated by the terrifying pressure began to appear right in front of it.

There was no way for Ning to seize the greataxe. All he could do was to use his sword-arts to defend as best as he could.

BOOM!!!!

The shield slammed directly onto Ning's six swords. Although Ning was skilled in using his longswords to defend, that meant very little when there was such an enormous disparity in power. The shield crushed through Ning's six arms and slammed into Ning's body. Ning felt his head grow dim as he was sent flying backwards with a boom. He almost instantly slammed into the walls of the pavilion, and blood immediately spewed out of his mouth.

The faces of Prince Greatjoy, Heartlord Solewind, Skyfire Brightshore, and Waterlord Firesurge all turned pale when they saw this. They were all completely stunned.

The strike from that shield... it was far more powerful than the strikes from the greataxe had been!

“You actually made me lose my grip over my greataxe. What a formidable sword-art! I’ll make your death a cleaner one.” The golem charged forwards, each step causing the pavilion to tremble. He continued to wield the shield in one hand and the greataxe in the other as he pounced towards Ning. Clearly, the fact that Ning had caused him to temporarily lose his grip over his greataxe had rather irritated him.

Prince Greatjoy and the others felt their hearts turn cold when they saw this. Right now, they didn’t really care about the greataxe any longer. It was that shield which had them worried.

“I, I...” Ning’s mind was still woozy, and he was only slowly regaining full consciousness.

Just now, he had been knocked completely unconscious for a brief moment. Thankfully, he had a suit of Eternal armor protecting him, and had already completely mastered the [Golden Idol] technique. That was the only reason why he had been able to survive that terrifying strike! If he had a slightly inferior protective divine ability, such as one which only made his body comparable to the toughness of an ordinary Dao weapon, he probably would’ve died from that collision.

Thankfully, Ning’s body was as tough as a top-grade Dao weapon. It wasn’t that easy to destroy.

“Dodge, brother Darknorth!” Prince Greatjoy once more struck out with his six golden palms towards the golem, and the golem once more bashed out with his shield, causing that immense level of power to once more descend upon the cultivators.

BOOOOM!

The six golden palms collided head-on with the enormous shield!

In truth, Prince Greatjoy’s palm-arts were actually quite similar in function and effect to the golem’s shield. In fact, Prince Greatjoy’s techniques actually evinced a much deeper understanding of the Dao! The problem was that the golem was simply too overwhelmingly powerful. Prince Greatjoy just barely qualified as having the physical power of a Daolord of the First Step, but this golem had the power of an apex Daolord of the Third Step! Even though its technique was rather weak, perhaps comparable to just that of a supreme World God, it would still be able to completely dominate Prince Greatjoy.

For a golem to be able to reach a level of mastery in using a shield which was comparable to that of a supreme World God was actually quite incredible. After all, golems were by nature far inferior to true cultivators in terms of being able to understand the Dao.

Bang!

Golden light radiated from every part of Prince Greatjoy’s body, making him seem as though he was made out of gold. And yet, he couldn’t help but spit out a mouthful of golden liquid as he was sent flying backwards. Still, his interception gave Ning the time he needed to fully regain consciousness.

“DIE!” The golem struck out with his greataxe once more, this time chopping towards Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge.

“Kill him.” Ning had come back to his senses, and a cold look was in his eyes.

Whooooosh.

A slight ripple suddenly appeared with the pavilion. The ripple was very delicate, and even Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain found it difficult to detect it. However, once the ripple moved next to the golem, the golem revealed a look of shock.

Swish!

A vicious, insidious streak of sword-light suddenly appeared, avoiding both the greataxe and shield as it slashed at the golem’s head.

Rumble...

The golem couldn’t help but be knocked backwards. As it was knocked backwards, that viper-like streak of sword-light appeared once more. This time, it actually began to twist as it quickly bound the golem up in rings of sword-light, completely trussling it up.

“Get in here.” A figure wreathed in black mist suddenly appeared, causing the golem to disappear with a wave of the hand. The figure glanced at Ning. “Per Master’s orders, you are permitted to have me help you one time. Now that I have dealt with this golem, I have completed my promise.”

“Mm.” Ning was still slumped on the ground of the pavilion. He nodded.

This figure wreathed in black mist was one of the four golems which Emperor Mirrorsnow had prepared for his personal disciples... the golem known as ‘the assassin’!

Whoosh.

The assassin instantly disappeared, returning to the world of the Mirrorsnow Painting.

Within that world.

The assassin, the golden-robed emperor, the fisherman, and the swordsman were all together, staring at the shield-bearing and axe-wielding golem.

“You really moved quite quickly,” the golden-robed emperor laughed.

“This guy isn’t too bad. He can be considered to be as physically strong as an apex Daolord of the Third Step,” the assassin said coldly. “His shield-wielding techniques are weak, though, and his greataxe-wielding abilities are even weaker. Overall, he can just barely be considered as strong as a weak Daolord of the Third Step. I was the perfect counter for him in every respect. This was an easy win.”

The four of them were all comparable to apex Daolords of the Third Step. In terms of speed and power, they had actually reached the threshold of Daolords of the Fourth Step, and they all had exceedingly profound sword-arts. Although Ning had ‘defeated’ them, that was because Emperor Mirrorsnow had ordered them to only use a certain level of sword-arts! But of course, their skills were slightly inferior to that of the sword-arts of a true Daolord of the Third Step. Thus, they averaged out to be as strong as an apex Daolord of the Third Step!

Strength? Speed? Comprehension? They surpassed this new golem in every way.

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Within the pavilion.

Ning continued to sit there on the ground. Waterlord Firesurge slowly reformed his true body out of the currents of water, while Skyfire Brightshore turned to look towards Ning. Solewind let out a long, relaxed sigh. As for Prince Greatjoy? He began to roar with laughter.

“That was close,” Solewind laughed.

“Brother Darknorth, I owe you my life.” Prince Greatjoy looked towards Ning.

Ning let out a sigh of relief as well.

That golem had brought them far, far too much pressure! In the end, they were still just a five-man group of World-level cultivators. When faced with a golem that was comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step, they were completely flattened with each class. If too much time passed, they probably would've lost their lives.

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Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 13: The Black-Robed Daolord

“Thanks, Darknorth.” Skyfire Brightshore and Waterlord Firesurge both looked towards Ji Ning gratefully. Just now, had Ning been just one moment too slow, the two of them would've perished. Of the five, the two of them were undoubtedly the weakest.

“Brother Darknorth, just now I saw a dark figure appear, capture the golem, then say something about only helping you once?” Prince Greatjoy frantically asked, “We've disposed of the golem, but it was probably just equivalent to a Daolord of the Third Step. There's no way its master was the Daolord we slew earlier... which means that it is highly likely that a second Daolord resides within the estate. If we can't even deal with his golem... we're probably going to be in grave danger once that Daolord attacks.”

The others all understood this point as well. They had disposed of the golem and managed to stay alive, buying themselves some extra breathing time, but the danger was still there! Still... there was nothing that could be done! If there truly was an even more powerful Daolord here, there was nothing they could do except face him. This was the Daolord's estate, after all. They were on enemy grounds.

“Yes, he can only help me once.” Ning nodded. “My master once said I can't rely on him to deal with every danger I encounter, which is why I'll only be assisted a single time.”

Greatjoy, Solewind, and the others all nodded. They understood this principle.

Ning didn't reveal the fact that he had three more golems. It was best for him to be able to leave a few more trump cards up his sleeve.

“Skyfire, you are a member of the Imperials. Don't you have any trump cards of your own? If Darknorth had been just one second slower, you would've been finished.” Greatjoy glanced at Skyfire. The five had completely severed this local region of spacetime from the rest of the estate, and Solewind's heartworld projection was keeping a close watch as well. There was no way any form of godsense or heartforce would be able to spy on them.

Skyfire laughed awkwardly. "So what if I'm a Brightshore Imperial? Shortly after I joined the kingdom, I was dragged off by the Hegemon and sent here to the Archaeus region. Since the entire point of this adventure is for me to learn and grow, he naturally refused to give me any protective treasures at all. Once you have too many trump cards, an excursion like this would no longer be an 'adventure', it would be 'tourism'. So... I really don't have any trump cards at all."

Ning and the others were truly surprised to hear this.

It was very hard for cultivators like them to acquire particularly powerful trump cards they could use. Ning himself had to become the personal disciple of Emperor Mirrorsnow before he learned that he would have four golems who could each assist him once. Most likely, the other disciples of Emperor Mirrorsnow wouldn't divulge this fact either.

The more powerful a golem was, the more valuable it would be. A golem that was comparable to a Verge-level Daolord would be an utterly priceless treasure. Even the Sword Palace itself had only been able to acquire a few such golems over the course of countless chaos cycles! Daolord Allgod was an incredible grandmaster of artificing, but even he was only able to create a single such golem in his lifetime, one which he would never even think about selling. After all, there was simply no way one could possibly find another such golem of tremendous power and unswerving loyalty!

Emperor Mirrorsnow similarly had just a single golem of such power. In the end, he had traded it for forty golems that were comparable to apex Daolords of the Third Step which he left behind to his personal disciples.

Thus... it truly was quite rare and difficult for one to acquire truly powerful golems! Weaker golems, those which were comparable to Daolords of the First Step or Second Step, were much more common. Every single one of the twelve Daolord Cloudworlds of the Twelve Palaces had an enormous number of these golems.

As Ning and the others saw it, the person in their group who was most likely to have a truly, ridiculously powerful trump card had to be Skyfire Brightshore! After all, his backer was the almighty Hegemon, someone who could truly be described as standing at the absolute apex of the Endless Territories! Even the most casual of trump cards bestowed by the almighty Hegemon would be terrifyingly powerful. Alas... Skyfire's response disappointed all four of them.

"Ugh. This is going to be tricky. That shieldbearer golem was roughly comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step. Those golems are very expensive. His master might very well be a Verge-level Daolord." Prince Greatjoy was rather worried.

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Ning sent a divine power clone to descend upon the estate-world of the Mirrorsnow Painting.

"Gentlemen." Ning looked at the assassin, the fisherman, the golden-robed emperor, and the swordsman.

"Can you help me bind this golem?" Ning glanced at the captured shieldbearer golem. Although it was much weaker than the golems which Emperor Mirrorsnow had left behind, it still had the power of a

Daolord of the Third Step and was capable of dominating Ning's group and even killing them in a short period of time.

Alas, Ning had 'cheated' by releasing an even more terrifying golem... the assassin.

"Even if we helped you tie it down, you wouldn't be able to bind it." The golden-robed emperor shook his head. "All we can do is keep it trapped here and make sure it can't fight back. In the end, it is still an extraordinary golem, while your Immortal energy remains at the World level. If you wish to forcibly send your energy into the golem's body and wipe out its master's seal... there's no way you can do it."

Ning nodded. He had simply hoped that the four golems might have some special tricks.

A mighty golem comparable to a Daolord of the Third Step was right in front of him, helpless and bound, but there was no way for him to bind it. It was a pity that his azureflower mist energy was unable to leave his body. Otherwise, he might've been able to use it to bind the golem instead.

"I have a question for you." Ning shifted his gaze to the golem.

"Hmph." The towering golem let out a cold snort. "Stop struggling, brat. The five of you are all going to die. You have no idea who you just pissed off."

"Oh? And who did we just piss off?" Ning smirked.

"Hmph." The towering golem swept the area with his gaze, his eyes blazing with fire. He let out a snicker. "There are some things which I cannot speak about... but although these golems of yours are a bit stronger than me, they aren't that much stronger. Even if all of them helped you out, you still would have no chance at all of surviving this encounter. You won't even be able to fight back."

Ning laughed coldly. "Oh, so you were talking about the Daolord behind you?"

"You'll know soon enough." The towering golem shut his mouth, saying nothing further. There were some secrets which even he didn't dare to divulge. He had received strict orders long ago regarding these matters, and as a golem he would never violate the orders he was given.

Ning couldn't help but begin to worry even more. Judging from the golem's behavior, the golem seemed to feel supremely confident in the outcome of this fight. Why? What gave it such confidence?

Were the five of them really going to die here?

Ning wasn't that afraid, as he had a clone in the outside world which would allow him to rebuild his body. Although he would've lost six Eternal weapons, four powerful golems, and the seven streaks of Dao water and Dao lightning in his body... he would still be alive. The price he paid for dying here would be a heavy one, but so long as he remained alive there would always be more possibilities in the future.

But Ning had no idea as to whether or not Greatjoy, Solewind, Skyfire Brightshore, and Firesurge had clones in the outside world. There were some secrets which you simply didn't ask or tell others.

Within the pavilion.

Although the five of them knew that the situation was dangerous, they had no way out. They had to face it.

“Break!” The five of them joined forces once more to slam open the stone doors on the other side of the pavilion.

Rumble... the stone doors began to slowly swing open.

“This...” Ning and the others all took deep breaths. The aura of hatred and resentment here had to be a thousand times greater than the aura had been in the air above the great prison. The hatred was so intense, it had liquefied into a deep green pool that was swirling in a vortex of more than a hundred ‘streams’ of hatred that circled an absolutely beautiful, enormous flower.

This flower had many black leaves. Ning counted exactly a thousand of those black leaves, and they were layered atop each other in a strange, evil, yet beautiful way.

Atop the leaves there were the soul-stirringly beautiful petals. The flower petals were multicolored and emanated an aura of intoxicating fragrance. They were truly dazzling in their beauty, and they emanated faint streams of rainbow light.

“Was all that hatred meant to nourish this flower?” Ning and the others felt their hearts tremble when they saw this sight.

The deep green streams of hatred all centered around this pool, condensing into an actual liquid form which then split off in a hundred streams which were used to nourish the flower in an extremely detail-oriented manner.

“A Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower?” Heartlord Solewind murmured these words softly.

“Aren’t those flowers supposed to be impossible to cultivate? I thought they could only grow naturally in certain environments.” Prince Greatjoy was shocked as well. Ning and the others all had heard of the awe-inspiringly famous ‘Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers’, which were known throughout the Endless Territories. It was one of several precious ingredients that were needed to refine some truly powerful magic treasures, and it was incredibly precious. A single flower would be worth roughly a million cubes of chaos nectar.

However, based on what Ning and the others knew, these flowers could only grow in natural environments. But now, it seemed as though there was a major power who was capable of actually growing them.

“Yes. This is a Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower.” A voice suddenly rang out.

Ning and the others simultaneously turned their heads to look. They saw a streak of dark light slowly manifest in the skies, revealing an ethereal figure which slowly began to materialize into a black-robed Daolord.

The black-robed Daolord landed, staring at the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower with a distant look in his eyes. He then turned to sweep the five of them with his gaze. “The five of you are able to match Daolords of the Second Step, despite merely being at the World level. I imagine you all have incredible backgrounds! Not even my master himself would be willing to offend the major power who undoubtedly stands behind you.”

Ning and the others all felt their hearts turned cold. The more casually this Daolord spoke, the more nervous they became. Only someone who possessed an absolutely overwhelming advantage in power would act so casually.

“If that’s the case, then why don’t you let us leave, senior? We can immediately swear oaths to never divulge any information regarding the Sacred Immortal realm to anyone,” Solewind said.

“Haven’t you noticed? Ever since you entered the Sacred Immortal Realm, all your connections to the outside world have been completely cut off.” The black-robed Daolord looked curiously at them. “The reason we set up the formation which separated this realm from the rest of the universe was to prevent anyone from leaking information about it. And now that you’ve seen the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower... don’t you know who you’ve just offended?”

Ning and the others blinked. They really had no idea, because they weren’t from this universe.

“Given how monstrously talented you are, the sect behind you has to be an incredibly powerful one. I imagine that your sect would’ve told you about the most powerful members of the Church of Annihilation.” The black-robed Daolord was puzzled. “The only person in the entire universe who can grow these Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers is my master, Emperor Trisilk? Don’t you know anything?”

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 14: Two Options to Choose

Ji Ning and the others exchanged glances, their hearts quivering.

Emperor Trisilk?

They had naturally never heard of this ‘Emperor Trisilk’ before, but even a fool could understand that he had to be an Eternal Emperor! And supposedly, he was the master of this black-robed Daolord and was the only person in this entire alternate universe who could plant Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers. Clearly, he was not just an Eternal Emperor, he was an incredible one.

The five of us just wanted to journey through the Archaeus region. How the hell did we manage to run afoul of an Eternal Emperor?

When the black-robed Daolord saw how the faces of Ning and the others all turned pale, he couldn’t help but laugh. “It seems you now understand.”

“So what if he is an Eternal Emperor? My master slays Eternal Emperors as easily as turning over his hand,” Prince Greatjoy said coldly. “You had best let us go. Otherwise... given my master’s abilities, he’ll definitely be able to find out who killed us, even if it ends up being a bit troublesome for him! It won’t just be you who will be doomed; Emperor Trisilk himself won’t be able to withstand Master’s wrath!”

“No need to threaten me.” The black-robed Daolord smiled. “The five of you are at the World level, but talented enough to match Daolords of the Second Step. Not even my master himself has five such talented disciples under his tutelage. I find it highly likely that one of the sixteen Starkings of the Church of Annihilation stands behind the five of you. Am I right?”

Ning and the others were stunned.

They knew a bit about the Church of Annihilation. The most exalted member of the Church of Annihilation was, without a doubt, its legendary leader! Their leader was the person who unified this entire alternate universe, and he was unspeakably powerful to the point of being virtually omnipotent. Most likely, not even the almighty Hegemon would be a match for him.

Second to the leader were the sixteen Starkings.

Below the Starkings were the mighty Paladins.

The 'Nine Godstars sect' which Ning's group had originally encountered upon entering this alternate universe only had a single Paladin in their organization! Generally speaking, ordinary Verge-level Daolords were not qualified to be given the rank of 'Paladin'. Only breathtakingly powerful Daolords, along with Eternal Emperors, were qualified to be called 'Paladins'!

"As I said a while ago, not even my master would wish to offend the person who stands behind the five of you. Alas... it was your own fault for barging into the Sacred Immortal Realm. It no longer matters how powerful the person who stands behind you is." The black-robed Daolord laughed. "In order to prevent your school and master from tracking you down... as soon as you entered my estate, I sent my subordinates to destroy the spacetime transfer arrays linking the 'Mortal Realm' with this 'Sacred Immortal Realm'."

"Ah?!" Ning and the others were stunned.

"From this day forth, that 'Mortal Realm' will no longer be connected to this world of ours." The black-robed Daolord sighed. "Because of the five of you, I had to sacrifice a large continent. Alas, I had to ensure that there would be no way for your school to trace you to this place and attack me here. I decided to remove all traces of your passing right away."

If the spacetime transfer array between the Mortal Realm and the Sacred Immortal Realm was destroyed, then even if a major power managed to track Ning's group to the Mortal Realm, there would be no way for him to find out where the Sacred Immortal Realm was located.

"In the outside world, the only person who even knows this 'Sacred Immortal Realm' exists is my master." The black-robed Daolord smiled coldly. "As for myself, I've been permanently assigned to this place. Without Master's permission, even I shall never be permitted to leave. As for the formation which surrounds this realm, my master was the one who personally set it up. It ensures that this realm is completely separated from the rest of the world. Even if you have other clones outside, there will be no way you can sense where this realm is."

"Thus... no one knows that you are here, and no one will be able to find you. As for fighting back? Hmph. My master personally set up this formation, and I'm the only person who can fully unleash its power. Not even a Verge-level Daolord who stumbles into this place would be a match for me." The black-robed Daolord swept the five with his gaze. "However... I have decided to give you a way to survive."

"A way to survive?" Ning and the others stared at the black-robed Daolord. They had guessed long ago that the Daolord had ulterior motives, which was why he had spoken to them for so long. If he truly wanted to kill them, he would've done so long ago. Why would he first let them view the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower and ensure they felt despair at knowing they had transgressed against Emperor Trisilk?

If they truly were geniuses who belonged to this universe, they probably would've felt despair upon hearing Emperor Trisilk's name.

Emperor Trisilk was a true demon who had committed towering sins, and it was his idea to use enormous amounts of hatred to nourish Prismatic Kiloleaf Flowers. Just imagine how skilled he was in sin and how steeped he was in hate, for him to be able to manipulate it so effectively? As a man who had committed many sins, he had offended many major powers over the course of his life... and yet, he was still alive. Although he was merely a Paladin of the Church of Annihilation, he truly was skilled in staying alive.

Most importantly of all... Emperor Trisilk's true specialty lay in torture. He could torture even Daolords to the brink of insanity, causing them to choose to commit suicide or to submit to him. All of his disciples were skilled in torture as well.

"Yes, a way to survive. If you are willing to swear lifeblood oaths to serve me forever and to obey my orders as my slaves, I'll spare you." The black-robed Daolord stared at Ning's group, his eyes gleaming. The five of them were all monstrously talented cultivators who could become Daolords whenever they chose. Once they became Daolords, their future potential would be limitless. It was entirely possible that all five of them would become more powerful than the black-robed Daolord himself. And, if he had them work for him as miners after they became Daolords, they would definitely be far more effective than the shieldbearer golem.

His master had given him strict orders, true... but that was to prevent any secrets from being released. If these five swore lifeblood oaths to become his slaves, then there was naturally no chance of anything going astray. Even better, with these extra subordinates helping him mine this place he would be able to finish his task much faster and thus no longer need to remain here.

"Become slaves?" The faces of all five tightened.

"Impossible," Solewind roared angrily.

"Nothing is impossible." The black-robed Daolord laughed. "In the face of death... everything becomes possible."

"Change your conditions," Solewind growled. "We would die before becoming your slaves. We can carry out tasks for you and swear to divulge no information about this place to the outside world, but there's absolutely no way we will become your slaves."

The smile disappeared from the black-robed Daolord's face, only to be replaced by an icy coldness. "You only have one choice – become slaves and live, or die!"

"Let us think it over." Solewind gritted his teeth.

The black-robed Daolord stared coldly at the five of them. "Make it fast." As he spoke, a savage-looking serpent began to appear in the air around him. The giant serpent coiled around the black-robed Daolord as it stared coldly at Ning's group with its emotionless reptilian eyes. Ning and the others couldn't help but shiver when they saw this. They knew that it could probably wipe them out in a single blow.

"What should we do?" Solewind, Ning, Greatjoy, Skyfire, and Firesurge traded glances.

“The power of this formation truly is incredible. He was telling the truth. Here in the Sacred Immortal Realm, not even Verge-level Daolords would be able to defeat him.” Prince Greatjoy sent mentally, “What should we do? I have a few trump cards, but they would at most be able to deal with Daolords of the Third Step. They wouldn’t even be enough to deal with that shieldbearer golem we just fought, much less this Daolord.”

“Right.” Firesurge had an ugly look on his face as well. As for Skyfire, he didn’t say a word. He really didn’t have any trump cards at all.

The black-robed Daolord sat there leisurely next to the Prismatic Kiloleaf Flower, the enormous black serpent continuing to coil around him. He said softly, “Tell me your choice. Do you choose life... or death?”

“LIFE!” A voice suddenly rang out.

The black-robed Daolord cracked a smile as he looked at the speaker.

As for Ning, him and three others also stared at the speaker in astonishment.

It was Heartlord Solewind.

Heartlord Solewind had just crushed an odd-looking jade pendant in his hands, causing an arcane surge of terrifying power to descend.

Whoosh.

It was formless. Colorless. Shapeless.

Ning and the others couldn’t see it or sense it at all; all they could sense was that something utterly terrifying had just appeared as a wave of something washed over them. The black-robed Daolord’s smile turned stiff, and a look of utter terror appeared in his eyes. He opened his mouth as though he was about to say something... but then, all traces of life fled from his body.

The only thing left was his seated corpse, and it no longer had any trace of life in it at all. As for the terrifying serpent that had been created by the power of the formation? It completely dissipated into nothingness.

“He died?” Ning and the other three were boggled as they stared at Heartlord Solewind.

“Ugh. Just like that, I was forced to use up the life-saving Dao-seal the Heartforce Palace bestowed up on me.” Heartlord Solewind sighed softly. “Dao-seals like that aren’t available for sale anywhere. The power of each seal is incredibly great, equivalent to the Palace Lord himself striking with 30% of his maximum power. It could easily kill even a Verge-level Daolord.”

Ning and the others were speechless.

Good heavens. A Dao-seal comparable to a 30% maximum power strike from the Palace Lord of the Palace of the Heart? The Heartforce Palace truly had very few Daolords, but it was one of the most terrifying palaces of the Twelve Palaces precisely because each of them truly were incredibly powerful. As for the Palace Lord, if he was to personally intervene even Eternal Emperors would turn pale with fright and scamper off.

A strike which contained 30% of his full power... such a blow would threaten even Eternal Emperors to a certain extent, much less ordinary Daolords.

"That Dao-seal is... a bit ridiculous." Prince Greatjoy was stunned.

"Are you sure you are the Imperial, not him?" Firesurge glanced at Skyfire Brightshore.

"That's just..." Skyfire Brightshore mumbled...

"Our Heartforce Palace is different from your palaces. We have very few members, and so we truly treat every member as we would family. I naturally was given a few protective measures for this adventure." Heartlord Solewind smiled. "A pity. I only was given two Dao-seals of this level of power."

"You have another one?!" All four of the others were starting to grow jealous. It seemed as though the old saying, 'less is more', really was true. The Heartforce Palace had very few members, which was why it was incredibly kind to those few members it had.

Prince Greatjoy glanced sideways at the seated, lifeless corpse of the black-robed Daolord. The black-robed Daolord had a look of utter terror on his face, and his mouth was open. Clearly, death had descended upon him with incredible speed. He had died while still gripped by astonishment.