

Desolate 961

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 25: Three Great Leaders

Both Ji Ning and Solewind kept a cautious watch as they advanced through the world of the inner reaches.

“Brother Darknorth, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Heartlord Solewind suddenly stared at one of the corpses in front of them, a corpse that was seated in the lotus position and emanating an aura of faint golden light. The awesome aura emanating from that corpse was boundlessly majestic, and it would forever be an aura of true eternity. A total of sixteen treasures had been placed before that corpse, and each of the sixteen radiated extraordinary power.

“Are you talking about how the corpses are divided up into three groups?” Ning asked.

“Right.” Heartlord Solewind nodded. “The thirty-five corpses here seem to be divided up into three groups, each of which had a leader. This corpse before us, the one radiating golden light... it is one of the leaders. I have the feeling that he was a Heartforce Cultivator who gained eternity through that path.”

Ning revealed a shocked look. “A Heartforce Cultivator? Are you sure about this?”

“I’m absolutely sure.” Solewind’s eyes were flickering with excitement as he stared at the glowing golden corpse.

Ning couldn’t help but feel truly stunned, because Heartforce Cultivators truly were incredibly rare. The entire Heartforce Palace only had a few Daolords. For a Heartforce Cultivator to become an Eternal Emperor... Ning had never even heard of such a figure. And yet, seated right before him was the corpse of an Eternal Emperor who was a Heartforce Cultivator.

Rumble...

Ning and Solewind couldn’t help but walk towards that seated corpse. Suddenly, a series of invisible ripples swept outwards and brushed past the two of them.

“Eh?” Ning suddenly sensed a powerful force push back at him, making it impossible for him to move forward by a single step.

“It seems as though there are no ties of destiny between this ancient power and myself.” Ning smiled.

Solewind, however, suffered no impediments at all. He glanced at Ning. “Brother Darknorth, although there are thirty-five other corpses here, I’ve already decided that I’m going to choose this one and give it a try.”

“If you’ve made up your mind... all I can say is, be careful.” Ning nodded.

All thirty-five of these ancient powers had peacefully welcomed death, leaving behind all of their treasures and legacies.

If you wanted to acquire them, you would have to overcome the trials and challenges they had laid out! These trials were extremely dangerous, and some were even lethal. Daolord Owlbath had long ago warned them that many entered the inner reaches and then died there, never to return.

“He is one of the three leaders within the inner reaches, and the only Eternal Emperor who was also a Heartforce Cultivator.” Heartlord Solewind stared at the towering, seated figure with a blazing look in his eyes. “No one in the Heartforce Palace has ever been able to become an Eternal Emperor through heartforce. Now that I’ve finally found someone who was able to do this... I’ll risk everything I have. If I can learn some of the techniques this ancient power used, I might have a shot at gaining eternity in the future as well.”

Ning nodded.

Heartforce Cultivators had the most difficult path of all! The Sword Palace, Spacetime Palace, and other palaces all had cultivators who were able to become Eternal Emperors. The Heartforce Palace was the only palace which had never produced a single one. In fact, the entire concept was unheard of.

And yet... here in the inner reaches of the Genesis Lands of this alternate universe, they had discovered the corpse of a deceased Heartforce Cultivator who had reached that level.

“I’m heading over there.” Solewind looked at Ning. “Be careful.”

“Mm.” Ning nodded.

Heartlord Solewind began to move forwards once more. Whoosh! A rippling wave of spacetime swept past Solewind, causing him to completely disappear.

Ning stood there for a brief moment. Sensing that the powerful barrier in front of him was not going to disappear, he chose to turn and leave. He was still very weak in terms of heartforce; clearly, he didn’t meet the minimum threshold this deceased figure had left behind for those who wished to acquire his treasures.

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Ning advanced by himself through the inner reaches. The more he inspected those thirty-five corpses, the more he got the feeling that they did indeed belong to three different factions.

As for the three most powerful corpses, they had auras of incredible might that were absolutely on par with the almighty Hegemon’s.

“The second leader.” Ning stared at an enormous four-legged beast that had a pair of curved horns on its head. Its aura was filled with the intent of endless annihilation, and just looking at the beast made Ning’s heart clench. Even in death, its eyes seemed cold, lofty, and proud. This was a creature who was unwilling to bow its head to anyone. Behind it were five Eternal Emperors that looked like its retainers.

“The third leader.” After walking forwards for a long period of time, Ning raised his head and stared at the third leader. What he saw caused his eyes to light up. This third leader was a sword-wielder!

He saw a towering man standing there, both hands clenched around an enormous greatsword that was a deep blue color. The hilt of the sword was pressed against his chest while the tip leaned against ground. The man himself stood there like the pillar which could hold up an entire world! He had a

distant gaze in his dead, peaceful eyes. Anyone who looked at him would get the feeling that he would probably be able to survive even the annihilation of the universe itself.

And yet... this grandmaster of the Dao of the Sword, a man who emanated an incredibly dense and heavy aura of sword-intent... had died here as well.

Behind him stood two other men. One was a white-robed man with a smile on his face who carried three swords on his back; a violet sword, a golden sword, and a white sword. He stood there, emanating an aura of ephemeral grace, and his invisible aura of sword-intent seemed similarly ephemeral.

The other man was dressed in azure armor and had a mask on his face, revealing only a pair of eyes that were filled with hatred. Behind him there were nine enormous blood-colored swords that had been plunged into the earth, and every single sword carried an incredibly powerful aura of murder.

"The greatsword-wielding leader was able to convince two other Eternal Emperors of the Dao of the Sword to stand behind him as they died. The three of them had to be incredibly close friends or family," Ning mused.

An absolutely overwhelming amount of power could be used to cause other major powers to serve you, much as how the Eternal Emperors of the Brightshore kingdom all served the almighty Hegemon. But when everyone knew that death was certain... continued servitude was no longer contingent on mere power alone.

If you knew you were going to die but still chose to stand behind someone, it most likely meant that you felt tremendous amounts of affection for that person.

"Eh?" Ning's gaze suddenly shifted to a nearby mountain range, located quite close to the three towering masters of the Dao of the Sword. The entire side of the mountain range had been completely carved flat, and the surface was filled with multiple paintings of that greatsword-wielding man. There were paintings of him in battle, paintings of him smiling, and even paintings of him drinking wine in a leisurely manner.

There were a total of nineteen of these paintings, and Ning could sense the deep emotions that had been infused into every stroke. There was an intense sense of longing and wistfulness in those paintings which hadn't lessened at all despite the passage of countless years. Clearly, the artist truly missed the greatsword-wielding expert very much.

"Who painted this?" Ning mused. "It seems as though the artist had an extremely close relationship to the deceased."

"Later, I'll definitely have to go take a closer look at him." Ning glanced at the greatsword-wielding expert.

It must be understood that the greatsword-wielding expert was one of the three dead leaders. When Ning looked at him, Ning could sense an aura that was not one whit inferior to that of the almighty Hegemon's! The two other Eternal Emperors stood directly behind the greatsword-wielder, and the trials the three had left behind were actually linked as well. If Ning moved just a little bit closer, he would be drawn into a danger-filled trial grounds.

Ning had tested things out already. When he moved closer to the corpses, he hadn't been pushed back by any invisible surges of power... but he knew that if moved any further in that direction, he would immediately be drawn into a world of trials.

"They really did leave behind quite a few treasures." Ning couldn't help but sigh.

For one, the greatsword which the leader was leaning on emanated an aura of incredible density and ponderance. Ning felt certain that this sword had to be a Universe treasure! The weapons which the two experts behind him were wielding were comparatively weaker, but they also had other treasures which had been placed next to their corpses.

As for the leader himself, there was a total of twelve treasures which had been placed in front of him.

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Thirty-five corpses, three of which belonged to experts of the Dao of the Sword.

Still, Ning was in no rush. He continued his explorations, moving to investigate the other corpses. He even spent a bit of time inspecting the scars of battle, because he was already gaining some insights from what he had seen thus far.

Whoooooosh.

The canyon wind howled through the mountains, carrying with it a mysterious, ancient aura.

"The wind." Ning stood there in the center of the canyon, eyes shut as he focused on everything around him.

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The world here was distorted and shattered, and spacetime itself was in disarray. Ning had entered this world, which was nothing more than something created accidentally due to the battles between those major powers. It wasn't an actual trial-world, and so it wasn't that dangerous.

Ning strode through the distorted fields of spacetime, avoiding the most dangerous places as he continuously meditated on everything he saw.

"Is this the nature of spacetime?" Ning murmured softly.

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Fire blazed throughout this area. There was the corpse of a major power seated in the lotus position, and everything around him for a million kilometers was bathed in endless flames.

This major power had died long ago, but his Dao was eternal. As a result, it continuously attracted and drew in flames from the surrounding world, causing the conflagration to burn perpetually.

Ning stepped into the flames.

The closer he moved towards that major power, the hotter the flames burned. As Ning walked through the flames, he could sense a hint of an eternal Dao of fire which whispered through the tendrils of fire. Ning was able to learn much as he carefully attuned himself to each flickering flame.

“Fire...” Ning murmured to himself.

The Desolate Era

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 26: Shadowless Sword-Intent

Time flowed on.

Ji Ning continued his journey through the world of the Prime Reaches, going through the various battlefields and scars that had been left upon the land.

While doing so, Ning came to realize that there were actually thirty-nine different types of scars! It must be understood that even Eternal Emperors who had gained eternity through the Dao of the Sword would all have followed different paths and interpreted their Daos in unique, special ways. Thus, there were differences in the ‘Dao vestiges’ they left behind through their attacks, making it fairly simple to differentiate the scars and markings into multiple ‘types’.

“Thirty-nine? There are thirty-five deceased major powers, and they match up to thirty-five of the Dao vestiges left behind. But there are four types of scars which don’t match up to anyone.” Ning was rather amazed by this, as he had discovered something else as well. “The Daos of those three leaders are all awesome and overwhelming, filled with inconceivable force. But one of the four types of Dao vestiges can be found everywhere, even though it seems plain and unremarkable. I spent more than three hundred years inspecting this place before I realized how terrifying it is.”

Most likely, that particular Dao vestige belonged to the Dao of Primordial Chaos. It seemed very ordinary, but when you truly delved deep into it you would realize that it had surpassed the level which those three leaders were at.

“In the battle that was fought, there was someone who was even more powerful than those three leaders.” Ning was truly stunned. He could sense that those three leaders should have been on par with the almighty Hegemon himself; even if they were weaker, they wouldn’t have been weaker by much. But this fourth figure... Ning had the feeling that he had actually surpassed the almighty Hegemon.

“There’s always a mountain taller than the ‘tallest’ you’ve seen.”

Ning shook his head. “But what in the world happened here, within the Genesis Lands of this universe?” Ning couldn’t help but sigh. Moments later, his eyes lit up. “Still... as far as I’m concerned, this is an enormous present for me!”

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Ning had spent quite a bit of his time and energy on attuning to the various different Dao vestiges that had been left behind, especially the strongest vestige of a Dao of Primordial Chaos. Every so often, he would nap at the top of a mountain. At other times, he would sit down in the lotus position next to a river, listening to its waters gurgle. He would walk through an icy land of snow, then occasionally drift within the waters of a lake... and just like that, 6913 years went past.

“There’s a certain type of a sword in this world. It is unfathomable and inscrutable, traceless and untrackable. The moment it appears is the moment when the enemy shall perish.”

Ning revealed a smile as he drew out Violetjewel, then struck out with it.

Whoosh.

Both Ning and his sword both completely vanished, becoming truly traceless and untrackable.

It wasn't a spatial teleportation. It wasn't a secret art of some sort. Just like that... Ning vanished.

Pop! Three thousand meters away, Ning suddenly reappeared as his sword chopped downwards towards a mental target.

"What type of a sword can truly be described as traceless and untrackable? An invisible sword, a sword you cannot see or sense at all. This type of sword is the most difficult sword to defend against." A smile was on Ning's face as he turned his gaze towards the corpses of the ancient powers that were off in the distance, then bowed deeply in gratitude and respect. "Thank you, seniors. I have finally developed the sword-intent of my 'Shadowless' stance."

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance.

In the past, when Ning used this stance, he would use various omnipresent Daos to greatly enhance the speed of his strikes. For example, if he was in a windy area he would borrow the power of the wind itself, while if he was in a sunny area he would borrow the power of light. He could even borrow the power of the spatial ripples which filled almost every place.

Because this was a technique which borrowed the power of various different Daos, Ning's Shadowless stance was truly ghostly and inscrutable, allowing it to fluctuate and speed up in odd ways, giving it tremendous power.

However... his stance had never been able to improve to reach the same level which his Yin-Yang sword-intent and his Blood Drop sword-intent were at.

Only after coming to the inner reaches and seeing all the Dao vestiges left behind by many Eternal Emperors, especially the vestiges related to the deceptively simple and yet overwhelmingly powerful Dao of Primordial Chaos, had Ning suddenly realized the truth.

"What does 'Shadowless' even mean? It isn't about borrowing from the power of all things around it; it means to truly become one with all things.

"There's no way a sword can truly 'vanish', but when it becomes one with all things around it will become completely undetectable to any enemies.

"When the weather is windy, it can transform into a gust of wind.

"When it is bright, it can transform into a streak of light.

"When it is in space, it can transform into a spatial ripple.

"Every single part of a universe, no matter where, is subject to the influence and power of the prime essences of that universe. If my sword can completely merge into those things, it'll naturally become truly shadowless and invisible." Ning finally realized what his true goal for his 'Shadowless' stance should be.

And so, after having spent 6913 years in the inner reaches meditating on the various different Dao vestiges, he was finally able to develop a completely new Shadowless stance.

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Ning's body was as tough as a magic treasure. Just like his sword, it could also merge into all things. After both he and his sword did so, his attacks became even faster and even more ghostly than before.

"At present, I can just barely merge my sword into its surroundings. Although it cannot be seen, it can still be detected through godsense," Ning mused to himself. "As my skill in this stance improves, I'll be able to truly make it one with all things, making it so that not even godsense will be able to detect it. Only then will this stance be truly deadly."

The Dao was present in all places. One day, his Shadowless stance would also be in all places.

A sword which not even godsense could detect, a sword which you would only see when it suddenly plunged into your skull... how terrifying such a sword would be! But of course, actually reaching this level would be very difficult.

"If I can train this technique to the apex, it will become truly shadowless and formless, capable of appearing anywhere. Alas... I'm still far, far away from that stage." Ning knew how far he still had to go. In fact, he had actually witnessed someone else who had succeeded in this goal – the major power who wielded the Dao of Primordial Chaos. The primordial chaos encompassed all Daos. The reason why it had taken Ning so long to discover that this major power was even stronger than those three leaders was precisely because this power's Dao of Primordial Dao was nigh-invisible, having seamlessly integrated all the other Dao vestiges into it.

Only after carefully inspecting the inner reaches for many years did he come to this shocking realization!

As for that major power... he had infused all things into his Dao, making it almost undetectable by even godsense or heartforce. One could only discover it through other means.

Of the [Brightmoon] sword-art, Ning now had three complete sword-intents; the Blood Drop sword-intent, the Yin-Yang sword-intent, and the new Shadowless sword-intent.

Although the Shadowless sword-intent had a weakness in that it could be detectable through godsense, strictly speaking this wasn't really a weakness. How many Daolords could make themselves undetectable to godsense, after all? Because the Shadowless sword-intent could be merged into all things and all Daos, it was now even faster and even more inscrutable than before. This made it far more powerful, and it had been fundamentally transformed, allowing it to skyrocket to the same level as that of the Blood Drop sword-intent.

"Whew." As Ning walked through the world of the inner reaches, he'd occasionally disappear without a single sound, then reappear a few hundred thousand kilometers away.

This was how he 'walked'. He had incorporated his training in the Shadowless stance into his way of walking.

"If I didn't have the chance to meditate on the Dao vestiges left behind by so many Eternal Emperors, it would've taken me at least a hundred million years to master this stance," Ning mused. The other four

of the five stances of [Brightmoon] required meditation and sudden epiphanies, while the Shadowless stance required Ning to broaden his horizons and gain many new experiences. Thanks to the many Dao vestiges left behind by the Eternal Emperors in this world, Ning managed to comprehend his enhanced stance far more quickly than before.

Every single Dao which Ning possessed would become a Supreme Dao. For instance, his attacking Daos included the Blood Drop sword-intent and the Shadowless sword-intent.

The Blood Drop sword-intent, at its peak, would allow Ning to annihilate all obstacles in his path. Space... time... nothing would be able to par his sword, which would reach incalculable levels of power.

The Shadowless sword-intent, at its peak, would make it so that the enemy would be completely incapable of locating Ning before dying.

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"I've now developed three of the five true stances of [Brightmoon]. The Soleheart stance and the Heavenbreaker stance are left," Ning mused. The Soleheart stance would be a defensive Dao, whereas the Heavenbreaker stance would be another offensive Dao. Each of the stances would be fundamentally different from the three which had come before.

"Here I am." Ning continuously disappearing and reappeared as he advanced at high speeds. He was now moving even faster than his previous maximum speed.

This movement skill of his could be described as the 'Shadowless' evasion skill. Most likely, the large majority of Daolords would be unable to catch up to Ning in pure speed. This was why Supreme Daos were so terrifying! Each and every Supreme Dao was utterly unearthly in power. Even if you only came up with one of them, you would definitely become a truly terrifying Daolord in the future.

"The leaders?" Ning stood there, head upraised as he stared at the three sword-wielding figures off in the distance.

In front was the muscular man who was gripping that enormous deep blue greatsword. Behind him was the white-robed man who was carrying a violet sword, a golden sword, and a white sword on his back, and to the side of the white-robed man was the terrifying man who had plunged nine blood-colored swords into the ground before him.

These were the only three experts of the Dao of the Sword who were within the Inner Reaches.

"Three seniors." Ning bowed respectfully. He felt tremendous veneration towards these experts who had reached such heights in the Dao of the Sword.

Ning began to move forwards. Soon, he could sense a series of invisible ripples spread over his body. If he advanced any further, he would be swept away and taken to the trial grounds. Many dazzling geniuses and Daolords had perished within these trials.

"My opportunity is right before me. How can I possibly shrink back from it?" Ning didn't hesitate at all as he took one more step forwards.

Whooooosh.

He was completely enveloped by those invisible ripples. This time, Ning didn't use his Shadowless evasion-art. Instead, he truly disappeared into thin air, having been teleported into the trial-world which had been left behind by these three powers.

The Desolate Era

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 27: The Abyss of Fiends

At the same time as Ji Ning was entering the trial-world left behind by the three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword, something else was happening in the outer reaches of the Genesis Lands.

This was region of complete darkness. Only a single source of light could be seen – a solitary figure who stood there, emanating an aura of golden light. This was Prince Greatjoy.

A series of ripples emanated outwards from him, causing spacetime to continuously fluctuate. Even though he had yet to strike, it was evident that the aura of power surrounding him was significantly greater than it had been in the past. He had reached a brand new level.

“True freedom and free will. From this day forth... I, Greatjoy, have truly reached the peak. I am no longer any weaker than Bertulu or Eastcult.” Prince Greatjoy revealed a smile.

When he had journeyed with the others to the primessence chains, Ji Ning and Solewind had managed to pass while he had failed.

Prince Greatjoy was an incredibly proud figure. He accepted his loss with seemingly good grace, but in reality a seed of resentment had been buried deep within his heart that day. Now, he had finally managed to perfectly merge his offensive Dao and his defensive Dao together, resulting in him growing more powerful yet again.

Prior to this, only two members of the World-level cultivators of the Twelve Palaces of the Brightshore Kingdom had been able to reach this level – Bertulu and Eastcult. Now, Greatjoy had joined their ranks!

“The level I have reached is the true apex of power for any World-level cultivator.” Prince Greatjoy nodded slowly. “Now, it no longer matters what mysteries or marvels the Prime Reaches contain. There is nothing that can result in me improving much more. However, I still want to pay a visit to that place. Perhaps I might acquire a few special treasures that will be of use to me once I become a Daolord in the future.”

If he was back home in the Brightshore Kingdom, he probably would've made some simple preparations then immediately broke through to become a Daolord. However, if he did so here in the alternate universe, he would never be able to go back home again.

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Prince Greatjoy had two Supreme Daos. He had now merged them together in a perfect fashion, resulting in him reaching the apex of power.

Heartlord Solewind continued to experience many life-and-death trials within the trial-world left behind by the Heartforce Cultivator leader.

As for Ji Ning? He had just entered the trial-world of those three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword.

Ning could sense an invisible surge of power spread out and cover him, instantly warping him away.

“Eh?” When he could once again make out his surroundings, he was rather startled.

The area around him was filled with living creatures, as far as the eye could see. He could even make out a giant citadel off in the distance, a citadel that emanated an aura of utterly breathtaking power. Although it didn’t affect Ning too much, normal World-level cultivators wouldn’t be able to resist the aura at all.

“What’s this?” Ning’s gaze suddenly fell upon a seemingly-ordinary rock nearby.

This rock was a very ordinary one... but all of a sudden, a series of golden characters began to fly out from within it, as well as a map.

“The Abyss of Fiends has a thirty-six layered world. It was created as a trial ground by three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword. The twelfth layer, the twenty-fourth layer, and the thirty-sixth layer all have exit tunnels. These are the only ways out, the only ways by which you can leave and return to the Genesis Lands.

“Remember this. Only the strong will win what they desire.”

The golden words and the map levitated there in the air for a moment, then quickly disappeared.

Ning turned his gaze while sweeping out with his godsense to scan the area for a billion kilometers around him. The only building in this area was that towering citadel, and the citadel was filled with ten million cultivators, with the three strongest being a trio of World-level cultivators. Those three World-level cultivators were bold, heroic figures, but when they sensed Ning’s godsense lock onto them they were horribly frightened.

What powerful godsense!

It must be understood that many years ago, when Ning had visited the Eastsmoke branch of the Bluegrace Sect, he had been able to use his godsense to simultaneously crush the godsenses of more than three hundred other World-level cultivators.

“The three grandmasters died countless years ago, but there are still so many living creatures here within the world they left behind to test their would-be heirs,” Ning mused. The reason why he had scanned the area was because he could tell that the restrictive spells covering the citadel didn’t seem to be all that powerful.

Whoosh. Ning took a step forward, then completely disappeared.

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“Who did that godsense belong to?! It was ridiculously strong. This world is a trillion kilometers in size, but there aren’t many with godsense on that level.” A golden-robed elder was seated in the lotus position, a frown on his face.

Whoosh.

A white-robed youth suddenly appeared out of nowhere on the seat located next to him. The youth sat there calmly as he stared at the golden-robed expert.

“You...” The golden-robed elder was horrified as he stared at the white-robed youth. “Y-you...”

He was a World-level cultivator! He was someone who stood at the very peak of power within this world. And yet, this youth was powerful enough to appear next to him without him even noticing?

“I have a few questions,” Ning said..

“Please ask them, senior.” The golden-robed elder’s heart was quivering in fear.

“I hope you will not try to lie to me. If you lie... you should be able to guess what will happen,” Ning said.

The golden-robed elder hurriedly smiled. “Senior, if you wished to kill me you could probably do so with a flick of your fingers. This junior would never dare to deceive you or hide anything from you.”

Ning nodded. “I ask you this – have you heard of the Abyss of Fiends?”

“The Abyss of Fiends? I have, of course I have.” The golden-robed elder gave Ning a curious look. Logically speaking, every top-level expert in this world should know about the Abyss of Fiends.

Ning’s gaze hardened.

The golden-robed elder said hurriedly, “This world of ours is a trillion kilometers in size, and powerful experts are as common as the clouds. Many experts have been born over the course of countless years, but the most powerful figures have always been the terrifying devils of the Abyss of Fiends. According to the stories, there are a total of thirty-six levels to the Abyss of Fiends. Countless devils live in that place, and some of them are so incredibly strong that they are honored with the title of ‘fiendlord’.”

“Every single chaos cycle, a large number of devils will charge forth from the Abyss of Fiends under the guidance of a fiendlord and sweep through this world. When this happens, all of the experts within this world must join together if they wish to withstand the assault. But of course, sometimes we will fail. In any case, the devils will have to retreat back into the Abyss of Fiends after a brief period of time.”

Ning frowned. “fiendlord?”

Know thy enemy and know thyself; only then would you be the victor in every battle. The reason why Ning had come to interrogate this local expert was because he wanted to learn more regarding this Abyss of Fiends. This was at trial-world established by three Eternal Emperors, after all, and one of them was on the same level of power as the almighty Hegemon himself. There was no such thing as being too cautious.

“According to the legends, the first twelve layers of the Abyss only hold a single fiendlord. Starting from the thirteenth level, each level shall have many fiendlords within them. The fiendlords are extremely powerful, and it is easy for them to kill us.” The golden-robed elder sighed. “As for what the final twelve levels hold... that is a mystery to us all.”

Ning nodded slowly, as if enlightened.

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This world was merely a trillion kilometers in size. After some detailed questioning, Ning came to understand that the strongest experts here were merely are the World level. Those who reached the Daolord level would all vanish without a trace.

“The Abyss of Fiends?” Ning stood at the peak of a mountain, staring off into the distance towards the great black abyss, a circular hole in the earth that was a million kilometers in circumference. The abyss was so deep that there was no way one could see to its bottom. The only thing one could sense was that terrifyingly baleful aura emanating from it.

“So this is the trial which the grandmasters left behind?” Ning revealed a hint of a smile. These so-called ‘trials’ were actually processes of elimination. Major powers were all incredibly proud figures, and thus ordinary cultivators were not qualified to even attempt to peek at their treasures. It must be understood that any of the treasures left behind by Hegemon-level figures would assuredly be valuable beyond price.

“I wonder if I, Ji Ning, will be found worth by the three grandmasters.” Ning transformed into a streak of sword-light, then flew out while using a hint of the Blood Drop sword-intent. The streak of sword-light instantly charged into the Abyss of Fiends.

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

A black mist wafted outwards from this place, carrying strange spatial ripples with it.

“Eh?” Ning soon arrived at the first level of the Abyss of Fiends. This first level was a world of volcanos, lava, and endless amounts of blazing light.

Ning swept out with his godsense but wasn’t too worried. The first twelve levels only held a single fiendlord, after all. Even the local World-level cultivators would often come adventuring through the first level.

“This level is roughly ten billion kilometers in size and constitutes a world unto itself. It has more than three hundred devils, each of which has the aura of an ordinary World-level cultivator.” Ning’s hands tightened around his sword, Violetjewel.

“Someone has come from the World Above!”

“He actually dares to intrude into our world, the Abyss of Fiends?!”

“Kill him!”

When Ning stretched out with his godsense it instantly attracted the attention of some of the nearby devils, causing them to charge towards Ning. These fiends all belonged to the same race, a race with grayish-black skin, veiny wings, and a pair of sharp claws that glimmered with metallic light. These devils were able to easily surpass the limits of the Heavenly Daos when flying, and the invisible aura of power surrounding them was quite great.

Ning swept the area with his gaze... and his gaze transformed into swords!

A series of sword-intents burst forth, transforming into an enormous Yin-Yang Sword Domain that was like a terrifying grindstone that easily ground away all of the attacking devils. The attacking devils were utterly terrified – this foe was actually able to kill them with just his sword-intent alone?!

Ning, however, was quite calm. These little devils weren't even worthy of him using his Dao lightning or Dao water. Using his intent alone to form the Yin-Yang Sword Domain resulted in a domain which had perhaps only 10%-20% of his full power, but it was enough to effortlessly wipe through these opponents.

Rumble...

The terrifying sword-intent washed out wantonly, easily annihilating all invading devils.

Ning continued to fly downwards, passing through the ground and another layer of black mist before arriving at the second level of the Abyss of Fiends.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 28: Death Approaches

Ji Ning charged through one level after another, easily battling his way all the way down to the twelfth level. Thus far, he hadn't even needed to draw his sword; his Yin-Yang Sword Domain was enough to sweep through all obstacles.

"Level twelve."

Ning stood atop a hill and was staring off into the distance.

The twelfth level of the Abyss of Fiends was a world of dark-red earth and dark-red mountains. Even the rivers were dark-red in color. The only thing that was different was a pitch-black whirlpool that could be seen off in the distance. The whirlpool was enormous in size and emanated powerful spatial ripples.

"Is that a teleportation tunnel?" Ning recognized it right away. This was a spatial corridor that would allow the user to safely pass through it and leave this place. However... was he supposed to leave before he even encountered any fortunes or opportunities? Ning certainly wasn't willing to resign himself to such a thing!

Ning knew very well that someone making it to the twelfth level meant nothing to those three grandmasters of the sword. Forget about Ji Ning; even some of the local World-level cultivators were able to make it to this level! As Ning had travelled downwards, he had discovered quite a few magic treasures left behind by the locals who had challenged this place.

"This is the twelfth level. There should be a fiendlord here. Supposedly, large groups of fiendlords roam the deeper depths of the Abyss of Fiends, and every chaos cycle there will be a fiendlord who will lead the devils out of the Abyss to assault the world outside. However... since they are often defeated, I imagine that the so-called fiendlords aren't that powerful either." Ning revealed a smile. He really didn't hold these fiendlords in any regard. He spread out his godsense once more, using it to instantly encompass the entire twelfth level.

Once his godsense spread out, it immediately startled awake the devils on this level as well as an extremely powerful devil... the so-called fiendlord.

A short period of time passed, enough for a kettle of tea to be boiled.

Boom! Ning's sword stabbed through the dark-red skin of a gigantic devil. Previously, the devils all had grayish-black skins. This particular devil was much larger and had dark-red skin; it was a fiendlord!

“Graa... graa...” The fiendlord’s throat had been pierced through, but it continued to make those strange yelping sounds as it swiped its sharp claws towards Ning, seeking to dismember him.

Swish! Swish! Swish!

The divine sword in Ning’s hands sliced out in a series of bizarre arcs of sword-light, splitting the fiendlord with three strikes. However, the fiendlord’s body then quickly reformed and healed and it let out a furious roar as it once more charged towards Ning. Every single punch and kick it unleashed was filled with incredible power that caused its own body to tremble. Clearly, it didn’t have extremely fine, minute control over its power.

Ning, for example, was capable of easily crushing and annihilating the power contained within entire chaosworlds. He was completely surrounded by his sword-light, and none of the power was able to escape at all.

Slash! Sword-light flashed out, resulting in the fiendlord being bisected at the waist once more.

And so, just like that...

Ning first used his Yin-Yang Sword Domain, then his Blood Drop stance, then the Shadowless stance, then his other techniques to repeatedly dominate and clobber the fiendlord for nearly a full hour. Although this was a creature which was born for battle, it had been dominated so effortlessly and ruthlessly that after a full hour, it finally knew fear and chose to flee.

It wasn’t too hard to kill a fiendlord, but to frighten it so much that it would flee for its life? This wasn’t easy!

“Mm. This fiendlord’s body is fairly tough, probably comparable to that of a Daolord of the Second Step.” Ning nodded slightly. “However... it has an incredibly low level of insight into the Dao. Any random World-level cultivator would be far superior to him in this regard.”

After testing out the fiendlord several times, Ning realized that although a single fiendlord would pose no threat to other monstrously talented World-level cultivators like Prince Greatjoy, in sufficient numbers they would still be dangerous. This was because they had bodies comparable to Daolords of the Second Step, which meant their attack power was dangerously high. Their weakness lay in the fact that their attacks were a bit clumsy and easy to dodge, but with enough attacks they could bury you in a storm of strikes which would be very difficult to deal with.

Still, since Ning had his Yin-Yang Sword Domain as well as seven types of Dao lightning and Dao water, it would be much easier for him to deal with massed fiendlords.

“Time to go.” Bathed in sword-light, Ning began to fly downwards.

Boom!

He easily traversed the ground beneath him, passing through yet another world-membrane and reaching the thirteenth level of the Abyss of Fiends. This was a blood-red world which emanated an endless stench of blood and an alluring aura which sought to guide the hearts of any cultivators here in descending into madness.

Ning's godsense quickly spread out to cover this world. This world only had eight living creatures, all of which were fiendlords.

"GWAAAR!"

"Kill!"

"Kill him!"

The eight fiendlords were all located in separate regions of this world, but they all now flew straight towards Ning. In his previous battle against a single fiendlord, Ning had thoroughly dominated it for nearly a full hour before it chose to flee. This was a testament to how ferocious and savage these creatures truly were.

"How weak." Ning held them in no regard at all, easily defeating one of the nearest fiendlords as he flew down towards the fourteenth level.

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He continued to fly down one level at a time. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain ensured that these fiendlords were unable to pose any threat to him whatsoever.

Soon, Ning reached the nineteenth level.

Ning had thought that he would go through this level quite easily as well, but when he noticed that this level had an Eternal weapon within it, he immediately knew that things wouldn't be that easy.

"The first thirteen levels held quite a few treasures left behind by deceased cultivators, but those cultivators were probably all locals. At best, their weapons were mostly Dao weapons. From the fourteenth level to the eighteenth level, I saw no treasures at all." Ning had a solemn look on his face. "But the nineteenth level actually has an Eternal weapon."

There was no way these locals could possibly forge an Eternal weapon.

Ning scanned the level warily with his godsense. This level merely had nineteen of these fiendlords. It didn't seem to be all that different from the seventeenth level.

WHOOOSH!

Suddenly, an aura of power burst forth from deep within the ground, so powerful as to cause even Ning to be slightly shaken.

He saw the ground split apart, far off in the distance, as a figure suddenly sprang out. This figure was dressed in azure armor and had a mask on, with only his cold eyes being visible behind them. On his back, he was carrying a total of nine blood-colored swords.

"You..." Ning's face turned pale.

He had seen those three grandmasters of the sword in the outside world. The strongest had been comparable to the almighty Hegemon, the towering man who had been wielding that deep-blue greatsword. The other two had been his friends or retainers, and one of them looked exactly identical to

the man who had just appeared, except the 'original' version had plunged those nine blood-colored swords into the ground.

"If you can slay me, you will win the nine treasures which Master left behind. Those nine swords accompanied Master for countless years and possess such extraordinary power that they are incredibly close to Universe treasures in power. Even if you do not wish to use them and choose to sell them off... every single sword will fetch you at least fifty million cubes of chaos nectar. If you sell them off as a set, they will be of incalculable value," the azure-armored figure said coldly.

Those nine swords were indeed incredibly valuable... but Ning didn't feel the slightest bit of avarice at all. The entire time, he stared unblinkingly at the azure-armored figure in an incredibly serious manner.

Although the figure spoke of his 'Master', the terrifying aura of the sword-intent residing within his body was absolutely identical to that of the deceased grandmaster outside! Their auras were auras of murder and slaughter, but exalted to a level that surpassed Ning's current level by unfathomable amounts. In fact... Ning felt certain that this was what the sword-intent of a true Eternal Emperor would feel like!

"I'm just at the World level. To be able to beat the fiendlords is one thing, but this guy seems to have a terrifyingly high level of insight into the Dao." Ning had already manifested his [Three Heads, Six Arms], and he gripped his six Eternal swords as he waited solemnly.

"Do not be afraid. These nine swords on my back are not the actual swords which Master used; they are nothing more than nine Dao weapons which Master casually forged before his death." The azure-armored figure walked towards Ning, every step echoing with his killing intent. His every movement felt like the crash of armies and chariots, filled with murder and such despair that even Ning felt breathless.

Ning understood how deadly this would be. Anyone capable of passing the primessence chains and entering the Prime Reaches would be a genius amongst geniuses... but judging from the nineteen Eternal weapons and various storage treasures, more than one person had perished here! And no wonder... this opponent was absolutely terrifying.

"If you slay me, you'll earn those nine swords which Master used," the azure-armored figure urged.

Ning's eyes grew colder and colder. When he had arrived in this world, he had seen that those nine blood-colored swords had been plunged deep into the ground. No one was able to take those swords away! In other words... there had never been any World-level cultivator capable of killing this azure-armored figure!

Rumble...

Ning's eyes were like ice. Ignoring all else, he instantly unleashed his dazzling Dao lightning and Dao water, transforming them into enormous swords that furiously swept out, instantly turning a region of ten thousand kilometers around him into a terrifying, desolate wasteland of the Dao of the Sword.

As for the azure-armored figures, he didn't seem to see or hear any of this at all as he continued to walk towards Ning's direction, towards that wasteland filled with nothing but swords.

The Desolate Era

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 29: A Fortune

“My Yin-Yang Sword Domain is one of my best killing techniques. Let’s see how it does first.” Ji Ning wanted to use his domain to test his opponent out first.

Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang! Clang!

The azure-armored figure suddenly manifested a total of nine arms that reached out and drew those nine blood-colored swords. The nine swords suddenly began to vibrate slightly, in doing so somehow coming together to naturally form a layer of strange sword-light which served as a rippling barrier around him. He slowly strode forwards, delving deeper and deeper into the area of effect of Ning’s domain.

The sword-light barrier formed by those nine swords were able to easily pierce through Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain, almost as if they were fish moving through water.

“W-what...” Ning was in control of the domain, but he felt as though his opponent was as slippery as an eel, making it impossible for him to land a true attack against him.

“He isn’t all that strong; most likely, he’s not even at the World level of power. The problem is that he has a ridiculously high level of insight.” Ning was able to clearly make out every movement the opponent made, but Ning truly found it difficult to understand how those nine swords resonated together to form a rippling barrier of sword-light.

This was a Sword Dao of the Eternal Emperor level. It must be understood that in the Brightshore Kingdom, the Sword Palace didn’t have a single living Eternal Emperor!

“What should I do? How should I deal with him?” Ning was growing rather nervous.

He could sense his opponent wasn’t all that strong, which was what he had expected; if his opponent had the insights of an Eternal Emperor and the strength of a Daolord, there was no way Ning would be able to stand a chance against him! And yet... while Ning was as fast and as stronger as a Daolord of the First Step, he still felt as though he was completely unable to land any blows against this weaker opponent.

This was the most frustrating part of battling someone who had a higher level of insight than yourself. You might be strong, but you’d have no way of making use of that strength. As for your opponent, he would be able to make his attacks a thousand times more effective than they had any right to be.

“Your Sword Dao domain is actually able to slow me down a bit.” The azure-armored figure continued to advance calmly as he spoke. “It isn’t bad, actually. However... if this is all you have, you aren’t even close to being qualified to win Master’s treasures. Better for you to die instead.”

He clearly could’ve advanced quite quickly, but he instead chose to advance at a steady gait.

“Eh?” A flash of light went off inside Ning’s head as he stared at the rippling barrier of sword-light... but a moment later, the insight vanished.

They were ten thousand kilometers apart. Although the azure-armored figure walked rather slowly, he reached Ning in just ten short seconds.

“Kill!”

The killing intent in his eyes exploded as all nine of his blood-colored swords began to move.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

The nine swords struck out in a consecutive, orderly fashion, carrying a beautiful but strange rhythm. As the nine swords simultaneously struck out towards Ning, they suddenly transformed into a single enormous blood-colored greatsword. Clearly, the nine had joined together to become one, resulting in them becoming dramatically more powerful as well.

Clang!

Ning emptied his mind of all other thoughts as he used his six Violetjewels to executed the ‘Soleheart’ stance, transforming the six swords into six black holes which he used to defend against the attack.

Bang!

Ning’s defenses were instantly splintered and destroyed by the clash. He was immediately blown backwards and sent flying, a deep gouge appearing in the earth. This gouge was tens of thousands of kilometers long and many dozens of meters deep.

Ning’s face was rather ashen. Not even Greatjoy, Solewind, or any of the others would be able to crush him in such a manner.

“Unacceptable. I have to counter-attack! If I just let him hammer away at me, I’ll definitely lose this battle.” With a swoosh, Ning transformed into a streak of light and charged forwards, his Yin-Yang Sword Domain once more covering the area.

Faced with the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, the azure-armored figure once more used the nine blood-colored swords he was wielding to form a protective barrier of sword-light that easily protected him from the domain. He raised his head, giving Ning a cold look.

Ning’s eyes actually lit up. “Although he’s able to resist my domain, he’s now moving much slower than before. I, however, am still moving at my normal speed.” Ning immediately transformed into as treak of light that once more shot out towards the azure-armored figure.

Swish!

When Ning had charged to within just ninety meters of the azure-arored figure, he suddenly vanished without a trace. Even his sword had completely vanished.

[Brightmoon] sword-art, Shadowless stance!

Tchtchtchtch... streaks of sword-light appeared, hidden within the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and completely undetectable. They flew out as chops, slashes, and hacks as they struck out towards the azure-armored figure.

“Mm?” The azure-armored figure raised an eyebrow as the nine swords in his hands trembled slightly.

The protective barrier of sword-light surrounding him began to oscillate, whittling away at the power of Ning’s strikes before completely dispersing them.

Whoosh.

While defending against Ning's attack, the azure-armored figure immediately launched an attack of his own as he once more struck out towards Ning.

"Time to run." Ning did his best to defend while retreating.

"Hahaha..." This time, he was able to retreat with ease. Ning revealed a look of delight. "If I seize the initiative to attack him, he'll have to focus his efforts on defending against me. When he switches to attacks, he'll be just a hair too slow and I'll be able to withdraw. I can't let a foe like this seize the initiative in a battle."

Ning began to attack furiously.

Shadowless sword-intent! It was incredibly ghostly and unpredictable, but the rippling layers of sword-light surrounding the man were still able to block all of Ning's attacks, even though they shook while doing so.

Blood Drop sword-intent! These attacks possessed incredible penetrative power, but it was a straightforward and above-board attack that the opponent could prepare for.

"Attack!"

"Dodge."

Ning clashed against this expert repeatedly. A chance to duel someone who had an Eternal Emperor level of insight in the Dao of the Sword was incredibly valuable.

For some strange reason, Ning continued to feel as though a spark of inspiration was floating deep within his mind... but alas, he remained unable to locate it no matter what he did. Now, the more he battled against the opponent, the more he felt as though he was vaguely touching upon it.

"Are these all the techniques you have?" The azure-armored man suddenly said.

Ning was slightly startled.

"How boring. You haven't even been able to truly merge your offensive Dao into your defensive Dao." The azure-armored figure let out a sigh.

Whoosh! He finally made his move.

This was the first time the azure-armored figure's speed suddenly and dramatically increased. The nine blood-colored swords surrounding him transformed into a curtain of sword-light, and the man himself transformed into an enormous sword. If he previously moved through Ning's domain like a fish moving through water, he was now like a sword that simply smashed through the domain with terrifying speed. He pounced at Ning, moving far faster than Ning himself could. There was no way Ning could dodge at all. Only now did he realize that his opponent hadn't used anything close to his real power earlier.

"Chop!" The azure-armored man and his nine swords, in the form of an enormous greatsword, sliced downwards through the air and chopped directly towards Ning.

Ning had no other choices; all he could do was do his best to block the attack.

Bang!

The world seemed to break apart.

Ning was completely blown backwards. His six Eternal weapons were completely unable to defend against this attack, and all of his stances collapsed at first contact. In fact, two of his Violetjewels were actually knocked out of his grip and sent flying.

Rumble...

The ground beneath him shuddered as everything within a region of several hundred thousand kilometers was reduced to dust by the shockwave ripples.

Ning lay there in the giant crater, his fingers twitching numbly. He had been able to just barely keep a hold over four of his Eternal weapons. The other two had been knocked flying.

“Receive my second chop!” The azure-armored figure said coldly.

But Ning actually had a look of delight on his face... because he had finally realized what that elusive flash of inspiration was. “The sword... in the end, you can’t hold up a house on a single pillar of wood. It needs to be part of a whole...”

“Haha... so that’s how it is! I’m most skilled in defense, but my Soleheart stance has been trapped in a bottleneck for some time now. I’ve come up with two offensive Supreme Daos, but I haven’t been able to truly upgrade my Soleheart stance. Haha...” Ning laughed. His talent for defensive techniques was extremely high, and so he had reached a bottleneck a long time ago during his journeys through the alternate universe.

His offensive techniques had improved nonstop, to the point where he had developed two Supreme Daos for them. And yet, his Soleheart stance had come to a screeching halt.

When Ning first saw his opponent utilize that barrier of sword-light, he had the vague feeling that he had stumbled into a tremendous stroke of luck. Alas, he wasn’t able to truly grasp what he was seeing. As the battle progressed, Ning finally was able to do so.

“A single chopstick can be easily snapped in half. An entire bundle of chopsticks is almost impossible to chop.” Ning couldn’t help but laugh at himself. Sometimes, this was how things worked. Once you were able to see through to the true nature of things, you couldn’t help but marvel at how simple the principle was.

The reason why Ning’s Soleheart stance wasn’t truly able to evolve into a Supreme Dao was because his Soleheart stance was a single-target defensive technique. Ning would use each of his swords to defend, and was able to use a maximum of six swords in this manner at the six time. Each of the six swords worked independently. Of course there was a limit to how much power they could unleash! True, they were cooperating to a certain extent and in the past, Ning had thought that they were working ‘as one’, but now he realized he was wrong. When he saw his opponent use that defensive sword-art, he realized what it truly meant to be working ‘as one’!

He had to do the same thing, to truly fuse everything together. His opponent's nine blood-colored swords were able to easily merge together to form that barrier of sword-light. When his opponent chose to attack, they were able to easily merge together into an enormous greatsword.

That was what 'working as one' truly meant!

"Soleheart stance."

Ning's hand swept out, causing the two Eternal swords that had been knocked out of his hands to come flying back to him at high speed.

The six Eternal swords moved simultaneously, each of them exerting the Soleheart stance and beginning to link together. Slowly, the six Eternal swords began to transform and harmonize little by little. Ning had personally watched his opponent use a similar technique and had clashed against him multiple times, allowing Ning to learn some of the key elements. To truly merge the stances together wasn't as simple as to have all six swords use the exact same stance. Rather, they had to be responsible for different parts of it.

This was much like how a 'complete' man would have a nose, a mouth, two eyes, and other body parts.

Ning furiously pulled backwards, doing his best to stay away from his opponent as he tested this new idea out.

BOOM! Ning's six swords suddenly transformed into a single black hole that completely surrounded Ning, and at the edges of the black hole there was something that looked like a rippling barrier.

"This is the true Soleheart stance. This is finally something worth of being described as a Supreme Dao of defense." Ning revealed a smile. His Yin-Yang Sword Domain was superb at dealing with groups of attackers, but the Soleheart stance was much better for dealing with a single foe of tremendous power!

Ning had finally comprehended and mastered his Soleheart sword-intent, the fourth sword-intent of his five stances of [Brightmoon]!

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 30: Stop Him!

"Chop!" The azure-armored youth transformed into an enormous streak of sword-light, forcibly shattering a path through Ji Ning's Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Ning couldn't help but feel a sense of despair when he gazed upon the sword-light. This was what happened when there was a tremendous disparity in insight and comprehension. The sword-intent of an Eternal Emperor... this really was completely unfair.

Although Ning was mentally shaken, he was still able to stay calm and alert as he unleashed his six swords into the Soleheart sword-intent he had just developed.

Whooooooosh.

It was like a peacock spreading its feathers, or like leaves swirling in the wind. The six swords moved in unison like a perfect whole, naturally coming together to form a terrifying black hole, with each of the swords playing a specific role in the black hole's creation.

Boom!

The azure-armored figure's terrifying sword-light chopped directly against that black hole. Tchtchtch!!! Ning poured all of his power, comparable to that of a Daolord of the First Step, into his new Soleheart sword-intent, allowing it to unleash a simply terrifying level of force that furiously ground away at his opponent's stance.

BANG!

His opponent's sword-light began to shudder and twist as it immediately began to fall in power, causing the azure-armored figure to become visible once more. At this moment, the azure-armored figure didn't hesitate at all, immediately choosing to retreat at high speeds.

The figure stood there in the distance, staring at Ning with some surprise.

"I succeeded. This... this is the true Soleheart stance." Ning's heart was filled with joy. This was the true Soleheart stance he had wanted all along. Six swords striking out in unison, as if they were a part of a single, indivisible whole. If he fought anyone on the same level of power as him, he would be able to completely shut down their attacks.

Even those who were stronger than him and who had a higher level of insight into the Dao would see their attacks dramatically weakened by this defensive technique.

"Hmph." The distant azure-armored figure let out a cold snort. "Don't get too smug. You were only able to block me once thus far. Now... take a look at my third chop!"

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Although the azure-armored figure was quite physically weak, his sword-arts were at a terrifyingly high level. Ning had to use all of his power to deal with every single strike, and as a result he was able to increasingly perfect his Soleheart stance.

The two battled for the amount of time needed to boil a kettle of tea, but the azure-armored figure was still unable to do anything to Ning.

"Hey kid. Tell me your name." The distant azure-armored figure suddenly spoke out in an icy voice.

"I am Darknorth." Ning smiled as he spoke. He was naturally in a wonderful mood, now that he had developed a new sword-intent.

"Darknorth? Mm. You've reached the apex of perfection when it comes to defensive prowess," the azure-armored figure said. "When you have that sword-intent domain active and spread out, I have to first endure its power if I wish to attack you. This distracts me, resulting in me only being able to unleash 60%-70% of my full power."

Ning laughed.

His Yin-Yang Sword Domain was highly suited for dealing with group attacks! However, if Ning was dealing with just a single opponent, it would also be highly effective in entrapping and slowing that opponent down, making it so that the opponent's power lessened! The azure-armored figure needed to

constantly ward off the domain via his sword-arts, and so in battle he was completely unable to unleash his full, peak power.

“And your close-combat defensive skills are also quite formidable. When you combine the two... even I am not able to defeat you.” The azure-armored figure nodded. “I can’t kill you. You may leave now.”

“Leave?” Ning was startled.

The azure-armored figure glanced sideways at Ning, his cold eyes the only thing visible behind that mask he wore. ‘I can’t stop you, which means you can proceed to the next level.’”

“Then what about the nine swords which your master left behind, senior?” Ning couldn’t help but ask this question. These were the swords left behind by an Eternal Emperor! Ning had witnessed for himself the terrible power which each sword contained; there was no way any ordinary Eternal weapon could possibly be a match for them. Moreover, when used together they would probably gain certain other special powers as well.

“You actually plan on taking my master’s nine swords?” The azure-armored figure smirked.

“I certainly wouldn’t decline them if you were willing to give them to me,” Ning said with a laugh.

“As I said, if you kill me you will win the nine swords which Master left behind.” The azure-armored figure continued coldly, “Although I can’t kill you, you can’t kill me either. This naturally means you are not worthy of acquiring Master’s nine swords.”

After speaking, the azure-armored figure dove into the ground, disappearing without a trace.

“That was fast.” Ning couldn’t help but laugh. “Was it really necessary for him to run away that fast? It’s not like I’m able to take those swords away from him by force.”

The azure-armored figure had truly been quite terrifying. His attacks were much stronger than Ning’s, and he was significantly faster as well. Thankfully, Ning had the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and his Soleheart stance, two exceedingly strong defensive techniques, which he was able to use to ward off this tough foe. This was the reason why Ning had survived this trial.

“Time to go.” Ning drilled the ground as well, passing through it to the next, deeper level and the abyss-world it contained.

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Ning continued to go downwards through the levels of the Abyss of Fiends. The next few levels were quite simple, as he only had to deal with a few fiendlords. And so, just like that, he made it to the twenty-fourth level.

On the twenty-fourth level, he saw a prominently placed blood-colored estate. Before the estate stood the azure-armored figure, and there was an entire group of fiendlords which surrounded the estate, all of whom appeared to revere the azure-armored figure greatly.

“Greetings again, senior.” Ning flew over then bowed towards the azure-armored figure.

“Mm.” The azure-armored figure nodded, then pointed to an enormous vortex off in the distance. “That over there is the exit tunnel. You can pass through it to reach the outside world. For you to have made it to the twenty-fourth level is already quite impressive. If you choose to leave now, you’ll earn one of my master’s treasures as well as one of his sword-art legacies.”

“A treasure?” Ning asked, “Is it one of the swords?”

“It is not.” The azure-armored figure glanced sideways at Ning. “Those nine swords were my master’s most important treasures, and they will be given to his true successor. You? I suppose you could just barely qualify as an honorary disciple. I’ll give you one of the various random treasures which Master had on him.”

Ning asked, “Senior, isn’t it true that the Abyss of Fiends has a total of thirty-six levels? I’m only at the twenty-fourth level.”

“What, you want to keep going downwards?” The azure-armored figure smiled coldly. “The lower levels are far more dangerous. Be satisfied with one of my master’s treasures and a sword-art legacy.”

Ning shook his head. He had experienced many hardships in order to travel to this alternate universe, including ten thousand years of wandering before even reaching the Genesi Lands! Was he supposed to just leave after merely becoming an honorary disciple of an Eternal Emperor? Ning would have agreed if the man had been willing to give him those nine swords, as a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush, but for one of the random treasures the Eternal Emperor had been carrying?

Ning had acquired an enormous amount of darkspace flamestones. He really didn’t care about other treasures. In addition, Emperor Mirrorsnow had given Ning four incredibly valuable golems! The ‘random’ treasures of this deceased Eternal Emperor probably wouldn’t be worth that much.

“I choose to continue,” Ning said. “I’ll head downwards now, senior.”

Whoosh. Ning transformed into a streak of light and disappeared without a trace. His Shadowless evasion skill allowed him to easily pass downwards to the next level.

“This kid...” The azure-armored figure frowned as he watched Ning drill downwards. “He’s too self-confident. He insists on going down a path of no return, and I can’t even stop him.”

Swoosh. The azure-armored figure immediately disappeared as well, moving far faster than Ning had.

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The thirty-first level of the Abyss of Fiends.

This place was a place of incredible beauty, filled with singing birds and fragrant flowers. There were no devils here.

A white-robed man was seated at the peak of a towering mountain, a triad of gold-hilted, white-hilted, and violet-hilted swords on his back. He sat there in the lotus position, gazing upon this vast, beautiful world.

“Second brother.” A voice rang out. Moments later, the azure-armored figure appeared out of nowhere.

“Third brother. Long time no see.” The white-robed man smiled. “Why have you suddenly come to visit me?”

“I met this kid. He really is quite talented in the Dao of the Sword, and I did exactly as Master instructed. I held nothing back, but I still wasn’t able to kill him.” The azure-armored figure shook his head. “I had a good opinion of him. I felt the kid had a lot of potential, and was good enough to become one of my master’s honorary disciples.”

“Not even you could kill him?” The white-robed man revealed a smile. “Not bad! It is rare for us to encounter such a talented figure.”

“But he insists on going deeper,” the azure-armored man said impatiently. “He obviously doesn’t care about becoming my master’s honorary disciple!”

“I bet he’d listen to you if you were willing to give him those nine swords,” the white-robed man teased.

The azure-armored figure said angrily, “All Master really had were those nine swords. I absolutely won’t give them to anyone until I find the perfect successor for him. This kid isn’t bad, but he’s not even close to being the ideal candidate I’ve been hoping for.”

The white-robed man shook his head. “Well, if he insists on going downwards... what am I supposed to do?”

“Stop him, second brother. Stop him and make him go back,” the azure-armored figure said immediately. “The thirty-sixth level was left behind by the Hegemon personally, just before he died. You know how terrifyingly dangerous it is! Over the course of countless years, there have been a number of self-confident geniuses who refused to listen to me and insisted on going all the way down... and all of them died there.”

When the white-robed man thought of the thirty-sixth level, he couldn’t help but frown.

Their Hegemon had personally created that place. It was the most mysterious and most terrifying place in the entire Abyss.

Their Hegemon was such an incredibly strong figure that even their masters, those two Eternal Emperors of the Dao of the Sword, were willing to serve as his retainers.

“Ugh. I’ll do my best to stop him, but if I fail... there’ll be nothing else I can do,” the white-robed man said.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 31: Void Sword Realm

Ji Ning quickly fought his way to the thirty-first floor of the Abyss of Fiends.

“Eh?” Thus far, the Abyss had been a place filled with baleful auras and negative energy. Ning couldn’t help but feel somewhat flabbergasted upon suddenly encountering a level that was filled with flowers and birds, a level which was almost like an otherworldly paradise.

Whoosh.

A white-robed man drifted towards Ning from afar, bearing three swords on his back; one violet-hilted, one gold-hilted, and one white-hilted. He emanated an ephemeral, drifting aura which was similar to that of the clouds in the sky.

A serious look immediately appeared on Ning's face. Him?

Three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword had perished outside. The muscular man who wielded that deep blue greatsword was the leader, while the other two Eternal Emperors were his retainers. One was dressed in azure armor, while the other looked just like this white-robed man before Ning.

Appearance, bearing, sword-aura... everything was identical.

"Darknorth?" The white-robed man said.

"Greetings, senior." Ning bowed.

The white-robed man had a warm look in his eyes as he carefully scrutinized Ning, then smiled. "For you to be able to make it past my second brother means that you are probably quite strong. Unfortunately for you, I'm not my second brother."

As he spoke, he drew forth the violet sword and the golden sword from his back. As for the white sword, it automatically unsheathed itself and transformed into a streak of white light that floated next to him.

"Be careful, senior." Ning's body blurred as he manifested his [Three Heads, Six Arms], then drew his six Violetjewels.

Boom!

A fierce light flashed through Ning's eyes as his Dao lightning and Dao water immediately burst forth, roaring through the skies and covering an area of ten thousand kilometers around them. The white-robed man was standing fairly close to Ning and was naturally wrapped up within this as well. The lightning-water Yin-Yang Sword Domain possessed truly remarkable amounts of power, and it constantly launched attacks against that white-robed man.

The white-robed man just stood there, not moving at all. And yet, the blurry sword-light emanating from around his body was like a cloud or a mist that easily absorbed and repelled all oncoming attacks.

"Eh? Not good." Ning's heart sank. "The azure-armored man had needed to use those physical nine swords to form a barrier of sword-light to protect him from my domain, but this white-robed man... the light from his sword-intent alone is enough for him to easily defend against me. Clearly, his defensive prowess is far superior to the azure-armored man's."

Ning's guess was correct!

The azure-armored man's specialty lay in attack, in slaughter! Ning had two Supreme Daos of defense, the Yin-Yang Sword Domain and Soleheart sword-intent, and only by combining them was he able to withstand the onslaught. This was a testament to how ferocious the azure-armored man's attacks were.

By contrast, the white-robed man seemed much calmer and gentler.

“The Emperor Sword.” The white-robed man instantly transformed into a streak of light as he chopped out towards Ning with the violet sword.

This was an ephemeral, unpredictable chop, but it was so fast that it caused Ning’s heart to be gripped in ice. It was simply too fast. His opponent wasn’t even as strong as an ordinary World God was, but his sword was simply incredibly fast.

Clang!

Ning hurriedly executed his Soleheart sword-intent, manifesting a black hole which had flickers of sword-light swiveling inside of it. He used this stance to defend against the opponent’s chop. It was a good decision. The power contained within the black hole was simply too enormous, allowing it to block the opponent’s lethal attack head-on.

“The Killsword.” The white-robed man spoke out once more.

Whoosh. This time, he struck out with the golden sword which he wielded in his left hands. The sword carried an aura of incredible sharpness as it pierced straight towards Ning!

This stab was actually somewhat similar to Ning’s own Blood Drop stance. However, it was a strike formed from the sword-intent of an Eternal Emperor. When the golden sword struck out, it carried an aura of such terrifying sharpness and destructive power that Ning couldn’t help but shudder. However, Ning knew that although the sword-intent itself caused him to uncontrollably shake in fear, the person using it was so incredibly weak that he probably wasn’t even at the World level in strength. This enormous disparity in physical power was enough to let Ning make a fight out of it.

Whoosh. He once more used the Soleheart stance to form that black hole. Sword-light once more swiveled and circled within that black hole, allowing him to once more forcibly block his opponent’s terrifying attack.

“Your defensive techniques truly are incredible.” The white-robed man shook his head and smiled. “As I expected... for you to be able to withstand my third brother means that my own attacks stand even less of a chance.”

Although he was superior to his third brother in overall power, his third brother was still stronger in raw attack power.

“If you are able to defeat my third sword, I won’t try to stop you,” the white-robed man said. The violet sword and golden sword in his hands began to move at the same time... and as for the most important sword of all, that streak of white light that had been hovering around him? It instantly vanished without a trace.

Whoosh...

The violet sword and the golden sword emanated dazzling amounts of light, putting the sun in the skies to shame with their omnipresent radiance. It was like an enormous gauzy cloak of light had covered the entire world, completely covering Ji Ning within its perimeter.

“Break!” The Dao lightning and Dao water continued to rage around Ning, but himself disappeared without a trace as well. He had just used the Shadowless stance. When he next appeared, he was

directly in front of that violet-golden gauze of light, and he furiously struck out with his six Violetjewels against the gauze.

Whoosh!

Six streaks of white light suddenly appeared out of nowhere in front of the gauze, easily blocking Ning's attacks.

"Eh?" Ning felt as though he had just chopped down upon a cloud or a layer of mist. There was nothing for him to exert his power against.

"I refuse to believe it." Ning once more struck out with his Shadowless stance, launching another silent sneak-attack at another area. Alas, as soon as his attack was about to collide against the violet-golden canopy, streaks of white light once again appeared from the surface of the gauze. The white light was ethereal and ephemeral, giving Ning no way to exert his full force upon it, causing his attacks to fail repeatedly.

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Ning was completely covered by that gauze canopy of violet-gold light, and the streaks of white light hidden within the canopy rendered Ning's attacks completely fruitless.

"Haha, well done, second brother! You were able to easily trap that young fellow." The azure-armored figure appeared off in the distance.

"If Master knew that I was using his most powerful killing technique, the Void Sword Realm to simply trap a foe... he'd probably be so insulted that he'd wipe me out." The white-robed man's figure appeared within the violet-golden canopy. When he used this technique, he completely merged himself into the canopy of light itself.

This was the Void Sword Realm, an extremely terrifying sword technique. It was definitely on par with Emperor Mirrorsnow's most powerful strike, the Heartseal stance. Alas, the white-robed figure was merely using it with Elder God level power, making it much weaker. It was just barely capable of trapping a genius like Ning, who was comparable to a Daolord of the Second Step! If an Eternal Emperor used this technique, the entire violet-gold canopy would become completely ethereal, and it would be simplicity itself to use this technique to cover an entire territory!

Swish.

Suddenly, an incomparably sharp streak of sword-light pierced out from within the violet-gold canopy.

"What?!" A hint of shock could be heard in the white-robed man's voice. "How could he be able to pierce through my Void Sword Realm?! Third brother, why does he have such a terrifyingly strong sword-art?" The white-robed man roared.

"Ah?! He does have an extremely strong sword-art that carries tremendous destructive, penetrative power," the azure-armored man said hurriedly. "Even I have to face that attack head-on in order to block it."

"Damn!" The white-robed man grew furious and frantic.

The Void Sword Realm created an ethereal world which was unmoved by raw power. It could completely absorb even the most savage of strikes! Although the Shadowless stance of Ning's [Brightmoon] sword-arts was rather strange, it simply wasn't strong enough to overcome the world's defenses. As for the Soleheart stance or the Yin-Yang Sword Domain, they were defensive techniques. But the Blood Drop stance... this was Ning's most penetrating attack of all.

Even if Ning did come up with a Heavenbreaker sword-intent in the future, his Blood Drop stance would still have the greatest penetrative power.

It was an attack which destroyed everything in its path, which pierced through all things which sought to bar its way!

The Void Sword Realm wasn't truly perfect and flawless. Perhaps only someone on the level of a Hegemon would be able to make it truly perfect... and its one weakness was to attacks that had tremendous penetrative power.

Whoosh!

After Ning discovered that his Blood Drop stance was the perfect counter to the violet-gold gauze before him, he struck out three times in a row. His stabs blasted a hole through the canopy before him, and he immediately transformed into a streak of light and flew out of that hole.

The enormous violet-gold canopy instantly disappeared, transforming back into that white-robed man. The three swords the man had been using all flew back into the sheaths he was carrying on his back.

The white-robed man stared at Ning, a complicated look in his gaze.

The Blood Drop stance truly was the perfect counter to the Void Sword Realm. But of course, at present Ning's Blood Drop stance was still rather raw and unpolished; the only reason it had succeeded was because the white-robed man's level of power was limited to the Elder God level. Still, if Ning ever reached the Eternal Emperor level and was able to upgrade his Blood Drop stance to that level as well, he would be able to use it to defeat the Void Sword Realm as used by the Eternal Emperor who had created it.

"There is a counter and a complement for every sword-art." The white-robed man sighed. "You were actually able to come up with a sword-art that perfectly countered mine. I truly don't know if this was a blessing or a curse for you."

"Darknorth." The distant azure-armored figure spoke out as well. "Both my second brother and I wish for you to stop here. You truly are quite talented. We really don't want to see you throwing your life away on the thirty-sixth floor."

"Throwing my life away?" Ning frowned.

The azure-armored man said, "Just listen to me. My sword-arts and my second brother's sword-arts all come from our respective masters. Although our masters were Eternal Emperors, they weren't at the Hegemon level. Master's sword-arts were never truly perfected, but the Hegemon's... his sword-arts were truly perfect and without flaw."

"You are skilled in defense, making it so that I can do nothing against you."

“Your sword-arts possess tremendous penetrative power, allowing you to defeat the Void Sword Realm.

“But if you were to go to the thirty-sixth level, you will realize that your sword-arts are all completely useless.” The azure-armored man shook his head. “You’ll die in despair! Over the course of countless ages, there have been quite a few monstrously talented World-level geniuses who were able to make it past myself and my second brother, but all of them died on the thirty-sixth floor.”

Ning was stunned. What?! There had been multiple individuals who had made it past the azure-armored man and the white-robed man, only to die on the thirty-sixth level?

“I urge you to give up,” the white-robed man said. “If you go back now, you can return to the exit tunnel on the twenty-fourth floor. I’ll give you one of my own master’s treasures as well! I’ll also transmit my master’s sword-arts legacy to you.”

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 32: The Thirty-Sixth Level of the Abyss of Fiends

The white-robed man also viewed Ji Ning with great favor. Although there had been other geniuses who had been able to make their way deep into the Abyss of Fiends, he could count on one hand the number of geniuses who had been able to force their way path both himself and his third brother.

Both he and his third brother wished for Ji Ning to become honorary disciples of their two masters.

“A treasure? And just ‘honorary’ disciple?” Ning asked.

“Yes.” The white-robed man nodded. “According to master’s instructions... he will accept one personal disciple and six honorary disciples. Although I like you, you aren’t even close to meeting the standard necessary to become Master’s personal disciple.”

Ning felt rather disappointed. Still, he understood that because these three Eternal Emperors were already deceased, they would be extremely careful in selecting their legacy disciples. Emperor Mirrorsnow was still alive; even though he was taking on a total of ten personal disciples, every single disciple would only be given a set of four Daolord golems. These three Eternal Emperors, however, were giving all of their most important treasures to a single personal disciple.

“Can you at least tell me what the thirty-sixth level holds?” Ning asked.

“Our masters once followed and served our Hegemon,” the azure-armored figure growled. “Do you know what the exalted title of ‘Hegemon’ means? It means that they are able to rule over all other things.”

Ning nodded. Of course he knew. The Brightshore Kingdom had a Hegemon. His entire homeland of the Endless Territories only had three Hegemons in total!

“To inherit everything a Hegemon left behind...ahaha! I once encountered someone who was even more talented than you in the Dao of the Sword. He had perfectly merged his offenses and his defenses into a truly perfect whole.” The azure-armored figure sighed. “I was willing to let him become my master’s personal disciple, but he was too proud. He chose to go the thirty-sixth level instead.”

Ning was stunned. Apparently, that genius of the Dao of the Sword was on the same level as Bertulu and Eastcult.

“But he still died on that level.” The azure-armored figure shook his head.

“Give up.” The white-robed man looked at Ning.

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Ning stood there silently.

Should he give up? Even those more talented than him had perished on the thirty-sixth level.

“A Hegemon’s legacy lies there... the legacy of someone who was on the same level as the almighty Hegemon of the Brightshore Kingdom.” Ning’s eyes slowly began to blaze with resolve and a desire to fight. “Why have I left the Three Realms and braved the dangers of the Endless Territories? Why have I chosen to go on so many deadly adventures? It is all for the sake of being able to bring her back to life! I dream of the day when the three of us... her, me, and Brightmoon... will once more be able to live together as a family.”

Ning’s deepest desire was to bring his entire family back again. It was this stubborn desire which kept him going, which made him strive so hard.

“To reverse the flows of spacetime and bring her back to life will be incredibly difficult. If I let myself be filled with fear, I probably won’t be able to make it to the apex of power and won’t be able to convince someone like the Hegemon to bring her back the life.”

“What’s more... even if I fail my attempt at the thirty-sixth level, I’ll merely lose one of my clones. I can rebuild it eventually.” All hesitation vanished from Ning’s gaze.

He was going to charge straight down his path. No one would be able to stop him!

“Darknorth?” The white-robed man and the azure-armored figure both looked at Ning, awaiting his decision.

“Forgive me, seniors.” Ning murmured softly, “I still wish to continue.”

“What if you die? You won’t regret it?” The white-robed man asked.

“No regrets,” Ning replied. He then transformed into a streak of light and tore through the ground, diving through to the next level.

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man both let out long sighs as they watched Ning leave.

“I knew he would choose this path. Every single person who has developed their own Supreme Dao is filled with terrifyingly strong resolve,” the white-robed man said.

In the end, fortuitous occurrences were external sources of power. When the strong rose to power, it was the stubborn will and resolve in their heart which drove them to continue forwards.

If you didn’t have an almost insanely stubborn desire to accomplish a certain something, it was virtually impossible for you to be able to stand at the apex of power in this vast universe. Even if you were incredibly talented and had many tremendous strokes of luck, if you didn’t have a terrifyingly amount of determination there was no way you’d be able to make it to the top.

An infatuation.

A desire.

A regret.

A longing.

All sorts of emotions could be transformed into a determined will.

“Ugh. He’ll probably die on this path he has chosen. But if he doesn’t die, he’ll definitely become one of the most dazzlingly talented figures in this vast universe, someone who countless other cultivators will willingly submit to,” the azure-armored figure said.

.....

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning continued downwards through the various levels. These levels in the Abyss only contained fiendlords. In the end, Ning managed to make it all the way to the thirty-sixth level, the deepest level of the Abyss of Fiends.

Whoosh.

Ning stood there gracefully in midair, staring at this bottommost level of the Abyss of Fiends.

Gugugu...

This was a world of volcanos, and Ning was able to see three towering volcanos located in three different parts of this world. Each of the volcanos continuously belched out plumes of fire and lava which flowed out throughout this world. Due to the terrifying degree of heat, the bubbling lava would continue to bubble and hiss for a very long period of time before slowly solidifying into volcanic rock.

“Eh? Where’s the exit tunnel? Why isn’t there an exit tunnel on this level?” Ning was searching for the exit tunnel for this level, but was able to find nothing.

Suddenly, the earth began to tremble.

Ning immediately turned his gaze off into the distance. The vast earth, covered with flowing streams of lava, was shaking. Slowly, the earth began to split apart as an ancient, towering shrine began to gradually emerge from underground. The shrine was a deep blue color, and it was covered with strange diagrams. In front of the shrine stood a towering figure.

The towering figure stood there silently, hands clasped around a deep blue greatsword. He stared at Ning from afar, and his gaze alone made Ning feel as though an entire world was crashing down upon him. That stare alone made Ning feel as though this man was absolutely invincible.

“Him? His aura is absolutely identical to that Hegemon’s aura.” Ning remained very calm and composed.

“Another challenger has come?” The muscular man standing in front of the shrine glanced at Ning, his eyes extremely cold and calm. He said in a flat voice, “Kill him, children.”

“Kill him, children.” His deep voice boomed throughout every inch of this world, echoing again and again.

Ning was stunned upon hearing this. ‘Children’? But it didn’t seem as though the thirty-sixth level had any other living beings within it.

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

Three booming voices instantly burst forth from within the three towering volcanos.

Those massive volcanos actually began to move, and as they moved they quickly began to transform into similarly towering volcano titans! All three volcanos had transformed into three enormous volcano titans.

The three volcano titans had pitch-black forms, but Ning could sense the blazing, flaming power which filled their bodies. Their eyes were flowing pools of lava, and every single one of them seemed to possess the power of an enormous world. Just looking at them, Ning felt certain that they were far physically stronger than he was.

After the three volcano titans appeared, they first turned towards the distant, muscular, grim-faced man who stood in front of the shrine. All three went down to one knee.

The muscular man nodded.

“Kill!” Only then did the three volcano titans rise to their feet and charge towards Ning.

Their galloping paces caused the earth to tremble. They left enormous footsteps in the ground, and their glares made Ning feel rather startled.

“But so what if they are strong? From the looks of them, they are Aberrants that were formed from or out of volcanos,” Ning mused. “They are probably much weaker than me in terms of insights into the Dao.”

Ning manifested three heads and six arms, then drew his six Eternal swords.

Rumble...

The seven streams of Dao water and Dao lightning all surged forth, filling an area of ten thousand kilometers with sword-light formed from lightning and water.

Boom! The volcano titan closest to Ning charged into Ning’s Yin-Yang Sword Domain. Although sword-light repeatedly hacked down upon his volcanic form, the attacks were only able to leave behind a few white marks on its rocky skin. It barely paused at all, not slowed in the slightest as it continued to charge forwards with heavy steps.

Ning wanted to see exactly how physically strong these volcano titans were, and so he first chose to fight it in a head-on clash through using his most penetratively powerful attack, the Blood Drop stance.

Six streaks of sword-light shot out like an enormous meteor shower that shot out towards that terrifying stone hand.

Boom! The giant stone hand howled as it flew through the air. It crushed the six streaks of sword-light, then slammed directly onto Ning. This time, it was Ning who was knocked flying backwards like a meteor.

As Ning flew backwards, he forcibly twisted himself upright and landed on the ground. The earth shudder from the collision, caving in for an area of a million kilometers as an enormous basis suddenly appeared.

Ning rose to his feet, his face rather ashen.

“A single volcano titan is already this much stronger than me... and there are three? And these are just the ‘children’?” Ning finally could sense that death was approaching. Finally, he realized why no one had ever been able to survive the thirty-sixth level.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 33: The Five Sword-Intentions of [Brightmoon]

“Kill!” The other two volcano titans howled as they charged forwards, each seeming just as valiant and mighty as the first. Their thunderous steps were as heavy as the mountains, but they moved faster than the limits of the Heavenly Daos. Although each of their punches and strikes seemed rather ungainly to Ji Ning, they carried enough power to truly overmatch him.

“I refuse to believe I can’t even take care of the three ‘children’.” Ning’s body constantly blurred, disappearing and reappearing thanks to the Shadowless stance, and every so often he would rely on his superior agility to throw out rope treasures and other treasures to slow down his foes.

Using your strengths to attack your opponent’s weaknesses. This was the way of combat!

.....

The muscular, greatsword-wielding man continued to stand there in front of the distant shrine, a cold look in his eyes as he watched all this happen. Right at this moment, two new figures suddenly descended; the white-robed man and the azure-armored man.

“Big brother.” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both spoke out.

“Mm.” The muscular man acknowledged them calmly.

“The kid’s able to hold his own against the combined attacks of three volcano titans. He really isn’t bad.” The azure-armored figure glanced at the distant Ning, then smiled. “Big brother, would you agree that this kid is worth us spending some effort teaching?”

The muscular man said coldly, “Far from it. He’s merely relying on a few defensive tricks to stay alive. Once my children unleash their ultimate attacks, he’ll definitely die.”

“Are you just going to watch him die?” The white-robed man asked hurriedly.

“He might’ve developed two offensive Supreme Daos and two defensive Supreme Daos, but so what?” The muscular man said coldly, “He hasn’t been able to truly join them together... he’s not even worth me giving advice to.”

The azure-armored man and the white-robed man exchanged a glance, then shook their heads helplessly.

“Big brother, you really have set your expectations too high. Remember that guy, all those years ago, who had perfectly fused his offensive Dao and his defensive Dao? You ended up personally kill him!” The azure-armored man muttered.

“Hmph. That’s because he was too stupid. I personally gave him pointers on what to do, but he still wasn’t able to improve at all. He deserved to die.” The muscular man continued, “And even if he did have a so-called flawless union of an offensive Supreme Dao and defensive Supreme Dao, what of it? It must be understood that advancing forwards on such a path is incredibly difficult. Each step will be taxing, and the final step of completing the Daomerge and gaining eternity will be unspeakably arduous.”

“Over the course of countless years I’ve seen many dazzlingly talented figures who, as Daolords of the Fourth Step, were capable of killing weaker Eternal Emperors. Almost none of them, however, are capable of succeeding in their Daomerge and gaining the power of a Hegemon.” The muscular man shook his head. “Master is already dead. He can only accept a single personal disciple and two honorary disciples. There’s only three slots total. I have to be incredibly cautious when doling them out. Even an honorary disciple has to be both a perfect candidate as well as have a Dao which is very similar to my master’s Dao. As for becoming a personal disciple? Only someone who can receive the acknowledgment of my master’s Eternal weapon and make it voluntarily wish to serve him is qualified be given that position!”

“You really do have high expectations.”

“Excessively high expectations.”

The white-robed man and the azure armored man both shook their heads. After their masters had perished, they had only met a single genius who had been able to truly and perfectly merge an offensive Supreme Dao and a defensive Supreme Dao... and in the end, the muscular man had personally killed him! He hadn’t even been willing to hand over a position of honorary disciple.

“Master decided to only accept two honorary disciples. I’m willing to bet that the personal disciples of the leader of the Church of Annihilation are given less than my master has prepared for his two honorary disciples,” the muscular man said coldly.

In the end, the term ‘disciple’ was just a titular one. What really mattered was what the teacher and master had prepared! There was only so much a living Hegemon would give; there was no way he would bestow his most important treasures to someone else. Only a dead Hegemon would be so truly selfless as to hand over all of his treasures!

.....

The three volcano titans stood in three different directions as they surrounded and attacked Ning. Ning no longer dared to face them head-on, as the volcano titans possessed overwhelming levels of brute strength. Worse, he was completely incapable of damaging their volcanic bodies. Not even his Blood Drop stance could punch through them! For now, he could only rely on his Soleheart sword-intent to buy himself some time. Ning also used his rope-type magic treasures to try and tie down one of the volcano titans. Ning believed this to be his only method for capturing and subduing them.

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

They used the most elementary, simple of attacks. Sometimes, they would swing their giant rocky hands. Other times, they would raise their fists high in the air, then smash downwards towards the ground. Every so often, they would bring both arms to their chests, then make a sudden pushing motion towards Ning. The attacks were simple but filled with speed and savagery, causing Ning to be at a complete disadvantage in this fight.

“Mm. Although they use similar techniques, it seems as though there are some differences.” Ning realized that there was something off with these three volcano titans. One of them was faster and more explosive while the second always attacked with both hands. As for the third, he was the slowest of the three; he would spend quite a bit of time building up power before each attack, but the attacks he unleashed were incomparably devastating.

“Although their attacks aren’t exactly the same, they seem to share certain similarities.” Ning was slowly mesmerized by the possibilities. From their attacks, he was able to see some of the things he himself had been searching for but unable to truly master.

Slowly, as the battle continued Ning began to gain a few insights into the various battle stances that the three volcano titans used. But of course, he was only able to gain a few. The three volcano titans were very crude in using these techniques, after all.

“The Heavenbreaker stance...”

Right now, the only stance remaining was the Heavenbreaker stance!

The five stances of [Brightmoon]. He had already developed Supreme Daos based on the other four stances. Only the Heavenbreaker stance was left.

The Heavenbreaker stance was the most ferocious of stances, containing truly wild and berserk levels of power. It used overwhelming power to crush all foes and was Ning’s most physically powerful attack. It was the perfect solution for dealing with foes whose defenses simply couldn’t be pierced through or penetrated.

The Shadowless stance focused on being fluctuating and unpredictable; this naturally caused the power of the actual attacks to be somewhat weaker.

The Blood Drop stance destroyed everything in its path, letting it pierce through all which would oppose it.

These two stances had both reached the apex in their respective fields... but both had made sacrifices in terms of total, raw power! Only by focusing in one area could one reach the apex in that area, after all.

The Heavenbreaker stance didn't have a terrifying penetrative ability, nor was it unpredictable in the slightest. It was simply an awesome, direct attack that contained the strongest levels of power possible.

"Mm... ah! Is that how it is?" Ning's battle against the three volcano titans grew increasingly frenzied, and he continued to secretly learn from their striking techniques.

This furious battle persisted for roughly the amount of time needed to boil a kettle of tea.

"Time for the final attack." The distant azure-armored figure and white-robed figure both let out soft sighs. They had grown accustomed to seeing this long ago. The strongest attack which these three volcano titans had was actually a single attack that was combined from three different attacks. Once they joined together to form the final attack, they would be able to unleash the most powerful killing strike they were capable of.

The power of that attack was terrifyingly great! If you did not have a truly perfect Dao, it was all but guaranteed that you would perish from it. And even if you did have a perfect Dao... it was likely that their 'big brother' would personally attack and kill you!

.....

After battling furiously for the time needed to boil a kettle of tea, the movements of the three volcano titans suddenly changed.

"Eh?" Ning's face tightened slightly.

Whoosh! One of the volcano titans suddenly lifted up his enormous stone hands, preparing to slam downwards towards Ning. The second volcano titan slowly advanced, both hands in front of his chest as he prepared to make a shoving motion. The final volcano titan began to prepare to swing his arms towards Ning...

The rhythm of the battle had changed. The attacks of the three volcano titans had joined together to form a whole, and the power of their attacks actually began to rise.

Ning instantly understood what he was seeing. This was much like how he perfectly merged his six Eternal swords together when using the Soleheart sword-intent. In this moment, the three volcano titans had truly merged together, and the power of this attack would definitely be ten times greater than their previous ones. Ning had already been at a complete disadvantage. For their attack power to increase tenfold... he was going to get crushed!

"AH!" Ning's eyes suddenly lit up. "T-this... this is how the Heavenbreaker stance should be!" A look of wild joy suddenly appeared within his eyes as he stared at the three volcano titans.

In truth, the three volcano titans were using one of the techniques which the Hegemon had developed. This technique was 70%-80% similar to Ning's Heavenbreaker stance.

When Ning had watched and sparred with the volcano titans, he had gained a number of new insights. Given that his Heavenbreaker stance had already reached a bottleneck and only needed one final push

to break through to a new level... once the three volcano titans joined forces, Ning suddenly understood it all.

A warhorse needed enough space to gallop before it could reach its maximum velocity.

A bow needed to be drawn to a full arc before it would reach maximum power.

Hints of the truth to this Dao could be seen throughout the mortal world.

The Heavenbreaker stance... if you wanted to release the full, terrifying level of power it contained, you would need to first build up power! For example, in archery you would build up power by drawing your bow... and then let it explode forth with its full might, like a volcano erupting! Only by building up enough might would you be able to unleash the full power of your attack! But just as importantly, the moment you unleashed your power had to be fast, fierce, and compressed into a short instant.

This... this was what a Heavenbreaker stance should look like.

“Heavenbreaker.” Ning made his move. He raised all six of his arms high into the air, filling his Violetjewels with his divine power and causing them to instantly skyrocket in weight.

Ten times. Ten thousand times. A trillion times...

The six Violetjewels each became as heavy as a chaos star! This was approaching the maximum level of weight which Ning was currently able to control. The Heavenbreaker stance was ideally executed with extremely heavy weapons, such as the deep blue greatsword of the deceased Hegemon. That was actually an incredibly dense and unique weapon which was perfect for using the Heavenbreaker stance.

[The Desolate Era](#)

Book 28: Archaeus Region Chapter 34: Sword Dao Samsara

Ji Ning’s six Violetjewels all chopped towards his opponents at the same time, and as they moved forwards they crushed everything in their path, causing space itself to tremble and distort. They moved forwards in seemingly slow arcs, but their power only continued to grow until they reached a crescendo of might, then slammed head-on into the giant stone fists of a volcano titan.

The power now contained with every single one of Ning’s six swords was stronger than when he previously used all six swords combined to execute the Blood Drop stance. This was the difference between the Heavenbreaker stance and the Blood Drop stance!

In terms of penetrative power, the Blood Drop stance was far superior to the Heavenbreaker stance... but it was still useless against these volcano titans, who had bodies that were comparable to precious treasures. But in terms of raw power, the Heavenbreaker stance was similarly far superior to the Blood Drop stance. It was perfect for head-on clashes!

BOOM!

The enormous volcanic body of the volcano titan shuddered violently, and he couldn’t help but stumble back quite a few steps. Even his giant stone hands were visibly trembling.

“Kill!”

“Kill!”

Ning was clearly much faster and more agile than the volcano titans. He only had to deal with one of them each time.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

A series of explosions rang out as the towering volcano titans were knocked stumbling backwards one by one, thanks to Ning’s overwhelming power. Although the volcano titans bellowed furiously and charged forwards repeatedly, Ning was able to beat them back each time. Ning was physically much smaller than them, but the power of his Heavenbreaker stance allowed him to completely outstrip them and shut them down.

“Eh?” An odd, surprised look appeared on the formerly emotionless face of the muscular, greatsword-wielding man who stood in front of the distant shrine.

“Is that...?!” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man next to him both revealed looks of joy.

“Big brother, that Sword Dao... isn’t that just like the Dao of the Hegemon, a Dao that overwhelms and crushes all foes in a straightforward manner?” The azure-armored man said hurriedly, “Darknorth is a perfect fit for learning the Hegemon’s Dao of the Sword.”

The muscular man calmly shook his head. “Although he’s developed five Supreme Daos, he hasn’t been able to link them together in a perfect manner. He’s not even qualified to become my master’s honorary disciple.”

The deceased Hegemon would only accept one personal disciple and two honorary disciples. Not even that now-deceased World-level genius who had perfectly fused an offensive Supreme Dao with a defensive Supreme Dao had been able to qualify as an honorary disciple. In fact, the muscular man had personally slaughtered him!

“Big brother, your requirements are too stringent. The Sword Dao this kid has come up with is extremely similar to that of the Hegemon’s,” the azure-armored man said frantically. “There are incredibly few such geniuses of the Dao of the Sword. If you kill him, who knows how long it will be before we encounter another one?”

“I’d rather have no successors at all than poor ones.” The muscular man shook his head. “If I am to choose a successor, I will only choose a perfect one.”

“A perfect one?”

“Big brother, you... ugh.”

The white-robed man and the azure-armored man both shook their heads. But right then, both their bodies trembled. Even the muscular man was somewhat astonished as he stared at what was happening.

“What?!” The white-robed man and the azure-armored man called out this word at the same time.

“How could he have made yet another breakthrough so quickly?” A look of true astonishment was on the muscular man’s cold features as well.

After Ning developed the Heavenbreaker stance, he immediately found the battle against the three volcano titans was now much easier than before. Thanks to the Shadowless evasive skill and the Blood Drop evasive skill, he was far more agile than his opponents. Defending was inherently easier than attacking, but now his attacks carried crushing power as well.

It was an absolutely delightful feeling. But just as Ning was battling to his heart's content, he suddenly had the vague feeling that his five sword-intents could actually be linked together in some manner.

"Is this..." Ning suddenly realized that there were certain aspects of his five sword-intents that resonated with each other and attracted each other. They made up for each other's weaknesses, and in fact it could be said they all stemmed from the same source.

The Dao of the Sword...

Although it was awesomely vast, different aspects of it could lead to different directions of development. Ning's starting point was the essence of the sword itself, and he had divided it up into five different aspects that he believed included all types of sword-arts the Dao of the Sword could contain. His five aspects were the Blood Drop sword-intent, the Shadowless sword-intent, the Heavenbreaker sword-intent, the Yin-Yang sword-intent, and the Soleheart sword-intent. These five types of sword-intent, when separated thusly, truly did encompass all possible elements and aspects of all sword-arts.

These five types of sword-intents were, in truth, five parts of the complete Dao of the Sword.

When Ning had developed his first, second, third, and fourth sword-intents, he hadn't realized this. But now that he had developed his fifth sword-intent, this battle instantly caused him to realize that there were deep, inextricable connections between his five sword-intents.

"The five sword-intents can be completely joined together." And so, Ning naturally began to do just that.

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He was unlike all other geniuses. Bertulu, Eastcult, Prince Greatjoy... they hadn't actually truly understood or mastered all aspects of their chosen paths.

Eastcult had merely come up with a single offensive Dao and a single defensive Dao. When he managed to join them together in a perfect manner, his power increased dramatically! But of course, joining together two Supreme Daos was incredibly difficult.

The same was true for Prince Greatjoy. He too had only comprehended a pair of Supreme Daos, eventually joining them together here in the Genesis Lands of this alternate universe.

As for Bertulu, he was a bit stronger than the other two, having mastered and joined together a trio of Supreme Daos.

But...

Imagine a porcelain plate which had been shattered into five bizarrely-shaped pieces. Eastcult and Greatjoy had merely mastered two of those pieces. Thanks to their tremendous intelligence and wisdom, they had managed to find a way to jam these two pieces together into a complete whole, albeit with great difficulty, and use the joined pieces to form their Daos.

Bertulu had been able to take control over three pieces, and had also had to work incredibly hard to join them together.

But Ji Ning?

He had mastered all five pieces, allowing him a degree of understanding of every single aspect of the Dao of the Sword. It was as though he had acquired all five pieces of that shattered porcelain plate. He didn't need to waste time and effort finding out a way to make them fit together; they fit together in a natural manner, because they represented the five parts of the full Dao of the sword.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Ning's sword... began to change. It was no longer limited to any specific stance.

Whoosh. He unleashed a sword that was almost invisible to the naked eye, a traceless and shadowless sword. And yet, when it appeared before the volcano titan it suddenly transformed into a swirling black hole of sword-light that dragged the volcano titan sideways. This had all happened too suddenly, and the volcano titan couldn't help but stumble off-balance.

It was like he was toying with a child.

Boom. Whoosh! Boom.

Ning strode amidst the three volcano titans, his five mighty sword-intents having joined together to form a cyclical sword-intent, a Samsara sword-intent. His five mighty sword-intents were like five wooden spokes that now came together to naturally form a perfect wheel! This naturally-forming cycle allowed the different types of sword-intent to mutually reinforce and strengthen each other.

For example, Ning could first initiate the Heavenbreaker sword-intent. Once he built up enough power, he could suddenly transform it all into his Blood Drop sword-intent, giving it an even more terrifying degree of penetrative power.

The Blood Drop sword-intent's incredible speed, in turn, could be transferred into the Heavenbreaker sword-intent, giving its ponderous strike a terrifying level of speed that only made it even more powerful than before.

Ning's five mighty sword-intents flowed in a perfect cycle. As the saying goes, where water flows a canal shall naturally form. Just like that, the five mighty sword-intents easily came together to form a perfect cycle, the Samsara sword-intent.

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"Five Supreme Daos? Just like that, he merged them together?" The azure-armored man muttered to himself, "Don't you dare fight with me over him. Please oh please, don't fight with me over him. He's going to be my master's personal disciple!"

"Third brother, Darknorth didn't choose to leave when he reached the twenty-fourth floor. Clearly, he gave up the right to become your master's disciple. As per the rules that were set down, you are responsible for the first twenty-four floors while our big brother and I are responsible for the final twelve floors," the white-robed man said immediately. "Our big brother is incredibly strict when it comes to choosing a successor. So what if this kid has perfectly joined his Supreme Daos together?"

There's no way our big brother will be interested in him. So, I think the best solution is to have him become my master's personal disciple."

Countless aeons ago, those three grandmasters of the Dao of the Sword had perished. For endless years, the three of them had abided by the orders of their master and had waited here in the hopes of finding successors.

However... finding suitable successors was simply far too difficult. Although Ji Ning had displayed a certain degree of talent, none of the three had been truly impressed by him. He hadn't even been able to perfectly join any of his Supreme Daos together! Give him the treasures left behind by their Eternal Emperors masters? Preposterous!

But now, Ning had perfectly joined together FIVE different types of Supreme Daos! Looks of blazing desire instantly filled the eyes of the white-robed man and the azure-armored man. If looks could release energy, their gazes were so heated that Ji Ning would've instantly melted into a puddle.

"Hmph." The muscular man let out a cold snort.

"Big brother, I'm certain that there's no way someone as strict as you would be interested in him," the white-robed man said hurriedly.

"So what if he has five Supreme Daos? So what if he's perfectly joined them together? In the end, he's still nothing more than a World-level cultivator." The muscular man continued coldly, "The more difficult a Dao one chooses, the more difficult the path a Samsara Daolord shall have. With each step, a Samsara Daolord must straddle the line between life and death. This is especially true with regards to the Daomerge. Every era has given birth to monstrously powerful Daolords, but how many of them have been able to gain eternity and become Hegemons? Don't be fooled by how talented this Darknorth kid seems to be; I'm afraid that he has almost no chance of succeeding in his Daomerge in the future."

There were many monstrously powerful Daolords; every single generation would give birth to a few. But...

Even the Endless Territories had only given birth to three Hegemons over the course of its entire history. The muscular man's words were spot-on; to succeed in the Daomerge and gain true eternity was simply far too difficult for these monstrously talented geniuses.

"So... don't be overly infatuated with him," the muscular man said coldly.

"In other words, big brother, you aren't interested in him, right?" The azure-armored man said.

"If that's the case, then he'll definitely become my master's personal disciple," the white-robed man said hurriedly.