

There wasn't even time to play with his nasty new Javelin forme, no time to settle down and soak in his new power gains—the Bloodline would not stop *flowing*!

Dorian was a man of many flaws; this much he admitted, and he didn't really care a whit about most of them. But one flaw he *did* acknowledge as a real issue was his sheer thirst. That inner goblin of undying greed sometimes grew so big he and it were one and the same. And that was when the trouble began. *That* was when he was most prone to losing his head.

In the heat of the moment, right now, he was *gone*. Even as he kept his soul wide open, even as he embraced the flood, some quiet, rational part of him sighed and buried its face in its hands.

He couldn't bring himself to give a shit. He was still cackling, sounding a little deranged even to himself, as he inhaled that sweet sweet Bloodline, as the energies of the Heavens and the Earths set every vein on his body on fire, torched his flesh with the living breaths of the Multiverse, flushed every inch of him with a sizzling ecstasy. He was getting godsdamned *huge*!

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[39% -> 41%]

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 78% -> 84%]

Oh, he was really starting to feel it now, bloating up his stomach; he felt a little like a balloon tied up to a hose, sagging with water, stretching to new limits and stretching further, faster still, impossibly—it was this great glut of qi and Bloodline sitting heavy as two sandbags in his core and his Spirit Sea, overflowing, spilling a turgid mass of white-hot energy into the rest of him.

Still—like a chuckling fatty at a buffet reaching for his tenth dish even as the buttons started popping off his coat—Dorian persisted. He felt greasy. He felt sort of awful.

But he also felt like a godsdamned Saint descended to the mortal plane. His cackling grew louder.

89?! *Hells* if he was stopping now!

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[41% -> 43%]

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 84% -> 90%]

HRGGHGGGGG—

Dorian started.

What the hells was that?!

Was that a *mental burp*? Some strange gasp of the Spirit? That tiny voice of reason in the back of Dorian's head was starting, once more, to niggle at him. He frowned. Even *he* hadn't gone from almost 0 to 100% of the Earth Realm in one sitting. He'd blasted through the thing without touching on a single Law!

You were *supposed* to infuse your cultivation gains with Law insights, and in this way create a symbiotic foundation for the Sky Realm. It was the only way to advance.

He'd just swallowed a huge, unrefined chunk of qi. Bloodline-dense qi, true, qi that on its own was deliciously potent even without a Law—but still...

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[43% -> 45%]

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 90% -> 96%]

He was struck by a weird spell of drowsiness.

Okay, fine—I'm at the limit. Time to end things. His greed was sated, as was his flesh. His skin was glowing with qi, and not in a good way; in a bulging-water-balloon-filled-to-its-limit sort of way. One wrong move and he might just pop. He was about to run up against a hard bottleneck, and that'd be the end of it—and perhaps the end of *him*. It still stung some deep-down part of him to let the Bloodline left in the Torchdragon's Core dissipate into its corpse, but such was life. He'd snatch up the Relics it made later.

Sighing, he made to yank his hand out.

It wouldn't budge.

He frowned. He tried again, harder. Couldn't move it an inch.

No way. With one last heave of his Spirit he tried tearing himself away. It felt like trying to yank his arm out of a vat of tar. No luck. Tried again, desperately. Nope.

Shit, shit, shit—

Somehow he was *stuck*! Not merely physically—*spiritually* too. His Spirit had so firmly connected to the Core that it wouldn't let him go. It was like they'd been welded together.

And *still* the gains kept coming—

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[45% -> 47%]

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 96% -> 100%]

FUCK!

Dorian's whole spirit felt sluggish, bogged down. His skin was literally cracking; a white lattice of qi shimmered down his body like the fissures dicing the earth before the earthquake struck.

He almost couldn't believe the absurdity of the situation. Every inch of him was so raw and so seething hot he could hardly believe his skin wasn't melting like a wax sculpture! He wracked his mind, running down a list of possible escape plans. *Something—anything!*

A beat.

Nothing came to mind.

Fuck.

Another excruciating heartbeat passed, then another, the morbid ticking of a grisly countdown clock.

This is the single stupidest way I could possibly go out. He felt his Core and his Sea flexing under the weight of the Bloodline, under the qi, felt his innards groaning in protest. Any moment now...

I really managed to speedrun the Realm too fast, he thought miserably. *I'm really about to fail—by being too good!*

It was such a damned shame, too. How often did he get a Perfect Grade Spirit Sea? Perfect Grade Spirit Seas were given their name not merely because of their great capacities. They were also seamless, their walls utterly durable. They leaked no qi. To a god such a thing was invaluable.

It wasn't just that. How often did he chance on such a good Bloodline *this early*? He'd never tried his current setup before, precisely because it was so ridiculous! No-one knowledgeable, talented and skilled enough to attain a Perfect Grade Spirit Sea would then steadfastly refuse to infuse a *law* into their Earth Core. It'd be like building a pristine granite foundation, and then slapping a ramshackle straw hut on top of it! The most optimal procedure was to build up Dao insights alongside qi progress, weaving them together into a glorious tapestry of being...

Instead he'd just gotten fat. So fat with qi it strained the imagination. He'd kneecapped his own progression by going too fast, and not ingraining even a hint of a Law in his cultivation. It would've taken him a mere month or so of meditation to do it—

—time he didn't have. He was forced to do this. Still... *what a silly set of circumstances! What a dumb way to die!*

The lines on his skin flared out deathly white, as though leaking the glow of the afterlife. The qi and Bloodline boiled up in him at once, sloshing about with pent-up energy, and he felt a knife-stab pain in his gut, then an unpleasant, nauseating tearing as his Core and his Sea stretching beyond their seams. Wheezing, he opened his mouth, trying to breathe. All that gushed out was a stream of black qi.

His eyes squeezed shut. *So long...*

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[47%-49%]

[Weapon Technique: Nightstalker] Lv. 0 -> 1

[The wielder of the Heilong Javelin may enter any shadow within a set radius, and exit from any other.]

Great! In any other instance Dorian would've been ecstatic. This thing had so many uses! If only he lived to realize them. At this moment it felt almost ironic, a sick joke. *Thanks, Fate. Excellent timing.*

He sensed it in his Perfect Sea. He sensed it struggling mightily, trembling within him, seeking out the next Path: seeking a way to merge fully with the Core, melting into each other, and in so doing form a perfect Sky of being.

But it simply could not. There was no bridge, no Dao, no spark to melt them into each other. For a second they ground up against each other, struggling yet finding no purchase. No way forward. Dorian soaked it all in, resigned. Any moment now his Sea would give and it'd all break out like floodwaters smashing through a dam.

And his poor, poor body would its victim. He was about to be burned alive, popped, burst wholly open—*by his own qi!*

He tensed, sucking in a breath. *Here it comes!* He felt his Spirit Sea stretch to its ultimate limit.

He felt it at the threshold.

Then, with excruciating slowness, it edged past—

And *held*.

He blinked. *Wait. What?*

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 100% -> 104%]

....

His Spirit Sea had flexed. It had stretched. It had met the bottleneck and been denied the path forward.

And then, at last, it *didn't break apart*. Instead—*has it adapted?!*

Dorian gaped.

It can do that?!

He sat there, frozen.

That shouldn't be possible! Yet there it was. He was very much still stretching at his seams. He was still bloated as all Hells. And yet... he was not unraveling.

Is this because of some hidden property of the Perfect Grade Sea? Could this be due to its seamlessness?

He was half-convinced this was a fever dream.

How the hells hadn't I known about this?!

He paused. *Well, it is rather obscure...* almost every Earth-Realm fighter ended up with some Law insight or another, merely by osmosis! Most stumbled upon it by accident, like Artificing Head Thon. The few that knew what they were doing intentionally wove it into their Cores.

Which left a group of wackos that now included *him*.

People skilled and talented enough to form Perfect-Grade Cores, and yet willfully oblivious enough to choose *not* to infuse them with Laws across their whole time in the Earth Realm!

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[49-51%]

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation: 104% -> 106%]

He took it in numbly. His mind was still far away. *Yeah—no sane person would choose to do this! The Sky has nearly double the capacity than the Sea and the Core combined. And the addition of Laws puts you in a whole new category of power altogether! In truth there's no benefit to going down this wacky side-route. It'd be like choosing to remain a child when you could evolve into an adult. Nonsensical.*

No wonder I haven't heard of it.

And yet here he was. *Huh.*

He shrugged. *Well, at least I'm alive!*

The Bloodline flow was slowing to a trickle, now. He wasn't even sure he'd squeeze another Level-up out of it. He grinned, burped, patted his belly. *Peak Earth-Realm, huh? Not bad!*

Then he froze.

A strange thought came to him out of the blue.

... Wait. Can I exploit this?

His Spirit Sea didn't feel stretched at all now; it had stabilized, and comfortably housed the sum total of his qi. *...Huh.*

It had grown to accommodate his new qi reserves. Now it *felt* like he was at 100% saturation—even though in theory he'd gone 6% beyond the limit.

The implications were starting to break his mind a little.

He now had more qi than the Perfect Sea and Core should've been able to hold. And yet the idea now struck him like a bolt of lightning.

...Can I go even further?

I can burn my Bloodline for qi, right? Qi that can would then go into my Core... and as long as I don't take in any Laws, I can't advance to the Sky Realm! So won't my Sea be forced to stretch and expand further, and further, and further?

He sat there, in the belly of the beast, utterly dumbfounded.

6% more than the theoretical limit is already a noticeable difference. What if I burned more of my Bloodline, and got up to plus 10%? 15%? 20%?! Is that even possible?!

And then—

His eyes shone.

I can burn my Bloodline. And use it to overload my qi reserves.

Isn't there a repository of Bloodline I can use to replenish my lost Blood with? Right below my feet—err, foot?

There *were* several other resonances in that Sinkhole, after all...

Can't I go fishing again? And burn more Blood? And take in more qi?!

Dorian sucked in a sharp breath. If he kept burning, and his Sea kept adapting and expanding, and he snagged a few more of these Godbeast Cores—just how massive could his qi reserves get?

He'd gone a little weak at the knees.

If—and this is a huge if—if this theory is right...if adaptation is simply an innate property of my Sea—if it has no real limit...

If I simply refuse to infuse myself with a Law and keep eating, and expanding, and farming more Bloodline, and eating, and expanding, and so on—

Could I become the single fattest Earth Realm creature on this plane?! Hells—the single fattest Earth Realm creature in the whole Multiverse?!

This idea, this setup, was aggressively stupid. It would be like if everyone else came to a fight wielding a sword—their Law insights, which sharpened their Techniques into deadly weapons—he'd come in nude, wielding only his prodigious fat rolls of qi.

But if I cultivate enough mass, will it even matter?

His mouth went dry. His heartbeats thundered in his ears.

Could his battle plan simply be to get fat enough with qi that he could steamroll his way to victory via sheer, dumb, brute power?!

...

This was an incredibly stupid idea.

And the more he thought about it, the more excited about it he got. *Oh, no...I'm going to go through with this, aren't I?*

My gods.

If I am to beat down Sky-Realm creatures wielding LAWS with only an Earth-Realm base...

Just how fat will I have to get?!