

Dorian spent much of the next few hours in a delirious haze. He grew well acquainted with the texture of the floor. He rolled about, groaning and twitching, in a mattress of his own sweat. It was like having the multiverse's worst case of indigestion, constipation, and diarrhea—all rolled into one singularly unpleasant cocktail.

At least the power kept coming!

They'd streamed in, bit after bit, until it became a blur of light and meaning in his mind. All he saw was the jump—his Core Saturation easing past 150%, then 160%, his Bloodline density inching closer and closer to 80%, 85%...

He added half a Dorian's worth of qi in the span of a few hours—and more, each mote of qi strained his capacity to hold himself together.

Then a new kind of update broke through the fog.

[Level-up!]

[Weapon Technique: Acid Rains]

He perked up. *Oh?*

[Expels a cloud of qi that looses acid projectiles upon the enemy]

Dorian propped himself up on his elbows and half-groaned, half-chuckled.

He had a blocking ability—[Void Shield], Lv. 1.

He had a single-enemy striking ability—[Shadow-Strike], which he'd gotten all the way to Lv. 3.

He had a movement ability—[Night-Stalker] Lv. 1, which let him jump in and out of shadows.

And now a multi-enemy striking ability—[Acid Rains].

Which meant his suite of Techniques—at least, at a basic, preliminary level—was now complete! He'd unlock more advanced Bloodline Techniques as he reached higher cultivation levels, or leveled these Techniques 'till they evolved to higher forms. For now, the only thing left was to keep on chugging...

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[85% -> 87%]

[Core Saturation]

[163% -> 169%]

And on and on it went, the most beautiful and awful thing in the world. Dorian was giggling deliriously, drooling onto the floor, his eyes glazed over, mind a thick bog of pain—

And then, after a long while, one last notification hit.

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[94% -> 97%]

[Core Saturation]

[186% -> 192%]

Dorian was going to puke. He was going to shit himself. He was going to give birth to a being formed of pure qi. This unconscionably huge glut of qi was going to pop open his belly and climb out of its own accord. None of these things happened, of course, but they all felt in that moment very imminent. His body was telling him—*stop! Enough! Please, dear Saints, I can't take it anymore! Spare me!*

He gurgled, grinning, tapped his Interspatial Ring, and popped in the second Beast Core.

You see, sometimes you had to read between the lines. His body *told* him he'd reached a limit. But had it, actually? Dorian felt the walls of his Spirit Sea. Sturdy as ever—no change from when it'd been at 100%!

All this was was his internal organs groaning in protest. That, and the fact that a human body *really* wasn't meant to hold this much qi. If you got past those little hang-ups, though, he was all clear to keep up his mad dash!

[Bloodline Density]

[97% -> 100%]

[Core Saturation]

[192% -> 201%]

*If I'm not mistaken, I just eclipsed the qi pool of a fully-grown Peak Sky Realm adult dragon!*

And dragons had the most qi of any mortal creature.

Which meant, as of right now, Dorian had officially achieved the title of 'Fattest Creature on the Plane!' *Huzzah!*

He gave himself a brief moment to celebrate. This whole enterprise was going as well as he could've wished!

He was at 100% Bloodline Density, too—which meant that now his Blood was as pure as any pure-blooded Torchdragon's, a rare sight even in the higher Realms. Maybe only the Dweller had as pure a Bloodline, among those Torchdragons gathered on this plane. The trouble was, there was no spill-over here; there was no going over 100% Bloodline Density.

The only thing he could do about the excess was to burn it.

*Time for part two of the plan!*

From his Interspatial Ring he drew out a thick barrel stuffed full of the Devil's Promise. The Elixir that would burn his Bloodline in exchange for an outpouring of qi. The very same one he'd resorted to to prep for his match with the Rat-King.

Now he attached a metal straw to the bottom of the barrel, put his lips to it, and took three huge sips. *Glug-glug-glug—*

The dark liquid began its nasty work almost instantly. A burning feeling gnawed at Dorian's gut.

[Bloodline Density]

[100% -> 98%]

[Bloodline Density]

[98% -> 96%]

*It's working!* Then, as more Bloodline gushed in from the Beast Core—

[Level-up!]

[Bloodline Density]

[96% -> 98%]

*Perfect.* Dorian smirked around the straw. The Bloodline burned at nearly the same rate as new Bloodline poured in. His Bloodline Density would be held constant around 100%—which meant that the only thing that *changed* should be his Core Saturation.

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation]

[201% -> 208%]

*That should be the gains from the incoming Bloodline... I wonder what the burned Bloodline will—*

He didn't have time to finish the thought.

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation]

[208% -> 225%]

*OH HELLS—*

A mind-bending burst of nausea and white-hot pain struck him. As in he nearly felt his mind deform, such was the force of the feeling.

It was not so much a failure of willpower. His mortal brain simply felt that tide of overwhelming sensation, went, 'Nope! Not dealing with *that shit.*' and headed out the psychological backdoor.

Dorian whited out.

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He came to in a puddle of his own sweat He tried propping himself up, gurgling spit, and found that his whole fur cloak was soaked through. So was the flooring. This was less a puddle than a small pond.

*I'm... alive?*

*Nice!*

And by that invisible-knife-digging-a-hole-in-his-stomach feeling, the Bloodline burning process was still ongoing, too...

[Level-up!]

[Core Saturation]

[302% -> 306%]

*Oh my dear Saints—what has happened here.*

He blinked to make sure he was seeing correctly.

He'd jumped a full *hundred percent*, while *passed out?!!*

He felt light-headed, wobbly. And for the first time today, it wasn't from the tempest in his gut.

*I think—I think I can now officially and proudly claim the title of 'fatass'. I've become a real specimen, haven't I?*

He thumped his belly and let out a happy burp. A cloud of warm qi left his mouth. It felt right, somehow.

He got to his feet.

He noticed the qi instantly. It was like having triple the blood circulating in his body, except instead of Blood it was a constant stream of pure energy coursing to and fro, buoying him with a constant sense of *power*. Anything in this room he knew he could reduce to dust with two fingers—by dint of the sheer force his newfound qi would let him exert!

*And applied to my Martial Techniques—my word. How stupid strong are they now?*

Grinning, he opened the door to the chamber, letting the outside world back in.

Then he was greeted by the piercing shriek of sirens.

He frowned, leaping out. *The hells? We're under attack?!!*

The Heilong Estate was deserted. No soldiers. No Bin. Not even construction workers were present—steel girders and hammers were strewn haphazardly about the site. From the main street outside the compound came a din of cries and shouts. Citizens stumbled over one another, ducking through doors and under awnings fast as they could—ducking for cover. *From what?*

A thunderous bellow answered him. He glanced up.

*Ah.*

On the far side of the Oasis, beyond the walls, was a full-fledged Frost Dragon. It must've been the size of the Artificer's Guild by itself—like a thousand huge, angry icicles glued together, come to life. Its body was a translucent ice-blue, steeped red in the setting sun. Its eyes were cruel black gemstones, its wings a dewy film spidered with long icy bones. A hailstorm flowed out its frothing mouth. A hailstorm thick with the Laws of Frost. Even from here Dorian could feel them shivering the fabric of the plane.

*Peak Sky-Realm!*

And it was not alone. Another Frost Dragon circled by its side—also deep in the Sky Realm, also wreaking utter havoc.

Behind it, on backs of Vordors and wyrms and lesser dragons, were a fleet of Ugoc shamans.

The Azcan Oasis's best response was ranged across the sky. Two dozen massive airships spewing cannon-blasts of qi, helmed by dozens of Earth-Realm crew each. Lightning-qi crackled across the sky. Booms rang out as rows of cannons let loose at once, peppering the Frost Dragons with blows. They did little more than annoy the creatures. Dorian watched as one of them spat out a breath, a breath suffused with Dao—it froze the air itself, spreading like cold wildfire, and swallowed up a battleship. Just like that, in seconds, the thing was the world's biggest icicle. It dropped without protest, thundering into the sands. A tide of sand and dust thickened the air.

Dorian felt like his brain was being slowly crumpled up.

*What the hells—they're here ALREADY?!*

*Wait—no. No.* From here he could only detect two Sky-Realm presences. This was not the main fleet. This must be a probing force.

Even so, by the swathes of auras flickering out at the Oasis's perimeter—things were not going well...

*No.*

His eyes hardened. *No, no, no—none of this nonsense. This ends here.*

Dorian's Javelin flared into being. Its shadowy aura now soaked triple the range it had before; everywhere Dorian went he carried with him his own little shard of night.

He turned his eyes to the sky. He could imagine Nijo looking on with an insufferably serene grin through his scrying-glass. This was a test—almost a taunt. The man was playing with him. To him Dorian was no threat.

If Dorian had to guess, Nijo had chucked the Ugoc unit already stationed closest to the Azcan Oasis at them, simply for the hells of it. His message was clear. *I don't need to drag my full army across the desert for the likes of you. Why take a full two weeks for that when one quick blitz will do the trick?*

The sad thing was, he would've been right. He was *almost* right.

*Except you've attacked a day too late, I'm afraid...*

Dorian's new qi seethed in his veins.

He snorted. *Choke on this, why don't you?*

Then he stepped into shadow, and was gone. *Time to throw my weight around.*