

CULTIVATION IS CREATION

Chapter 7: A New World

They say a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. In cultivation, that first step involves trying not to panic while your personal universe-seed decides whether it wants to sprout or explode. Fun times.

"The Qi Condensation realm marks the crucial early stages of your Seed of Creation's growth," Senior Sister Liu explained during morning assembly, her voice carrying that 'pay attention or regret it' tone teachers perfect. "Each breakthrough represents a significant evolution in both your seed's development and your inner world's expansion."

My own seed had grown from its initial marble size to about the size of a tennis ball, glowing an intense blue that made the space around it bend like a funhouse mirror. Azure popped into existence beside it, looking way too excited about my impending spiritual crisis.

Current Status: Cultivation Level: Qi Condensation First Sub-realm (Peak)

Seed of Creation:

- *Size: Tennis ball equivalent (way bigger than last week!)*
- *Energy Density: 97/100 (aka about to burst)*
- *Development Stage: Late Germination*

Inner World:

- *Size: 8 cubic meters*
- *Breakthrough Probability: 89%*

"Pay attention," Azure nudged as my mind wandered to thoughts of whether spiritual seeds could actually explode. "This is important information."

Senior Sister Liu continued, making glowing images appear in the air that put my sect's light shows to shame. "As your seed develops, your inner world must expand to accommodate its growth. Think of it like a cosmic garden - you need enough space for your seed to flourish."

She used an illusion technique to show us the different stages of Seed Creation development, and wow. Even the smallest mature seed looked like someone had caught a star and taught it to dance. The later stages? Picture a flower made of galaxies starting to bloom.

"First sub-realm cultivators," she explained, "typically maintain inner worlds of 5-10 cubic meters, with their seeds in late germination stage. Second sub-realm expands to 20-30 cubic meters, third to 50-60, and so on. By the ninth sub-realm, your inner world should span at least 1000 cubic meters, housing a seed that has begun sprouting its first true leaves."

The crowd of outer disciples went quiet. Those numbers were huge, and the images of evolved seeds were... intimidating.

"Of course," she added with that teacher-smile that means trouble, "size alone means nothing. An unstable seed will collapse regardless of its development stage."

Azure appeared in my inner world, watching the energy patterns rippling through my seed like waves in a cosmic ocean. "The pressure has been building for days. You'll need to find somewhere private soon."

He wasn't wrong. My seed felt like a balloon at a pin factory, weeks of careful cultivation finally reaching its limit. The sect manuals said breakthroughs should happen naturally in meditation. Azure had... other ideas.

Breakthrough Analysis:

Traditional Method: 45% success rate (yikes)

System-Assisted: 92% success rate (better!)

Warning: Current location unsuitable for seed evolution

"After evening meditation," I decided. "I'll find somewhere quiet."

The rest of the day was like trying to study for finals while juggling fireworks. My herb garden duties suffered - I may have accidentally supercharged a patch of Sky Spirit Grass that decided it wanted to live up to its name.

"Distracted much?" Lin Mei asked, helping me wrangle the floating plants.

"Just feeling a bit... pressured."

She gave me that look that said she knew exactly what was up. "Breakthrough coming? There's a nice quiet spot behind the herb storage hall. Good spiritual energy density, and the storage formations help mask fluctuations."

I tried not to look too relieved. "Thanks. I might take you up on that."

"Just try not to blow anything up. Some of those herbs are worth more than we'll earn in a year."

Finally, evening arrived. I waited until after curfew, then snuck out to Lin Mei's suggested spot. It was perfect - hidden, spiritually charged, and shielded by storage formations that would hopefully hide any... incidents.

"Ready to begin?" Azure asked as I sat down to meditate.

I looked at my seed, pulsing with barely contained power, and took a deep breath. "Let's do it."

The first step was like trying to balance a spinning plate while riding a unicycle - keeping the spiritual energy stable as it built up around the seed. Azure's guidance helped, showing me exactly where to reinforce the energy patterns.

Then came the hard part. My seed started to stretch, not just growing bigger but somehow expanding into directions that shouldn't exist. The carefully maintained garden of my inner world warped and flexed as both seed and space began to grow.

Current Size: 8.5 cubic meters

Target Size: 25 cubic meters

Seed Status: Beginning metamorphosis

"Focus on maintaining the seed's core structure," Azure instructed. "I'll handle the spatial calculations."

Easy for him to say. It felt like trying to hold onto a star that had decided to rearrange itself. Sweat beaded on my physical body as my seed strained against reality itself.

"Almost to the first threshold," Azure reported. "Prepare for transformation."

This was the tricky part. The seed wasn't just getting bigger - it was evolving, changing how it processed energy. Everything I knew about handling spiritual energy suddenly felt like trying to read a book in the dark.

Then... it happened.

Reality shifted, and my seed... bloomed. It cracked open along impossible lines, revealing a core of pure starlight. As my inner world expanded to its new size, the seed settled into its new form - still small in cosmic terms, but now glowing with the intensity of captured moonlight. And there, impossibly beautiful, its first true leaf began to unfold into dimensions I'm pretty sure weren't there before.

New Status: Cultivation Level: Qi Condensation Second Sub-realm

Seed of Creation:

- *Size: Softball equivalent*
- *First True Leaf: Emerging (and breaking several laws of physics)*
- *Energy Configuration: Stellar Phase*

Inner World:

- *Size: 25 cubic meters*
- *Features Unlocked: Enhanced Energy Compression, Secondary Formation Anchors*

I opened my physical eyes to find several boxes of dried herbs floating near the ceiling. Growing pains, I suppose. But as I watched my newly evolved seed pulse with starlight, I couldn't help but smile. One step closer to growing my own universe.

Though I really hoped the next breakthrough wouldn't involve levitating quite so many expensive herbs.

"I'll help put those back," a familiar voice offered.

I spun around to find Lin Mei leaning against the doorway, looking amused.

"How long have you been there?"

"Long enough to see you perform the most methodical breakthrough in sect history." She helped me retrieve the floating herbs. "Seriously, most people thrash around and break things. You looked like you were solving a math problem."

Recommend partial truth strategy

This book's true home is on another platform. Check it out there for the real experience.

Previous cover story: Natural talent for energy perception

Right. "I can see energy patterns very clearly," I explained, sticking to our established story. "Makes it easier to control things."

"Useful talent." She finished restoring the last box to its shelf. "Your inner world must be interesting, being so precisely structured."

I shrugged noncommittally. "It works for me. Thanks for the spot recommendation, by the way."

"Any time. Though maybe warn me next time - I only came to check because I felt the energy fluctuations from my room."

After helping clean up any evidence of the breakthrough, I returned to my quarters. The walk back felt strange - everything seemed clearer, more spiritually distinct. I could feel the formation arrays running through the sect's architecture, see the flows of energy that I'd previously only vaguely sensed.

Enhanced Perception Activated

Spiritual Sensitivity: +80%

New Feature: Basic Formation Recognition

"Is this normal?" I asked Azure as I settled onto my meditation cushion.

"The increase in spiritual awareness? Yes, though you're processing it more efficiently than most thanks to the System's integration. Would you like to see the changes to your inner world?"

I closed my eyes and shifted my consciousness inward. The difference was stunning.

The energy circulation paths were clearer, more defined, and I could feel the potential for new formations and structures in the freshly expanded space.

Inner World Analysis:

Primary Features:

- *Energy Circulation Network (Enhanced efficiency)*
- *Formation Foundation (Ready for expansion)*

"It's beautiful," I admitted, watching the patterns of spiritual energy flow through the carefully arranged spaces. "Though I'm guessing maintaining it just got more expensive?"

"Resource requirements have increased by approximately 150%," Azure confirmed cheerfully. "Would you like to see the projected contribution point requirements?"

"Not really, but go ahead."

Monthly Resource Needs (Updated):

Basic Maintenance: 200 points

Optimal Development: 500 points

Advanced Progression: 800 points

I groaned. "Please tell me my herb processing skills are worth more in this realm."

"Indeed! Your enhanced spiritual sensitivity should allow for more precise work with valuable materials. Estimated income increase: 30-50%"

Small mercies.

A knock at my door interrupted further calculations. Wei Lin didn't wait for an answer before poking his head in.

"Ha! I knew it! Breakthrough successful?"

I nodded, resigned to his enthusiasm.

"Excellent! Now we can discuss advanced techniques suitable for your new cultivation level. My family has some excellent methods for the second sub-realm, very reasonably priced..."

"Still focusing on basics," I said automatically.

"You can't keep saying that forever! The foundation building phase is important, yes, but you need proper techniques to... why are you smiling?"

"No reason. Just happy about the breakthrough."

He narrowed his eyes suspiciously. "You're hiding something. Again. Does it have to do with that special perception ability of yours?"

"Wei Lin, it's late, I just had a breakthrough, and I'd really like to sleep before morning practice."

"Fine, fine. But this conversation isn't over!" He paused at the door. "Oh, and congratulations. Even if you are being frustratingly secretive about your methods."

After he left, I spent some time exploring the new features of my expanded inner world. The ability to compress spiritual energy would be incredibly useful for cultivation, and the enhanced environmental controls opened up new possibilities for herb growing.

Exploring New Features:

Energy Compression Test: 94% efficiency

Environmental Control Test: All systems nominal

Formation Anchor Test: Ready for implementation

"We should focus on stability for the next few days," Azure advised. "A new sub-realm means relearning some basic control."

He was right. Even simple energy manipulation felt different now, requiring more precise control and attention. It would take time to adjust to the enhanced power and sensitivity.

"At least the timing is good," I mused. "Two weeks until evaluations, plenty of time to stabilize the breakthrough."

Analysis: Evaluation Requirements

Previous Standard: Qi Condensation First Sub-realm (Mid-stage)

New Standard: Qi Condensation Second Sub-realm (Early-stage)

Current Status: You are already meeting the minimum requirements

"Though I'm guessing just meeting the minimum won't be enough?"

"Given the sect's recent emphasis on rapid advancement, achieving mid-stage second sub-realm would be safer," Azure confirmed. "Which means we need to focus on resource acquisition and efficient cultivation methods."

I sighed. "Back to the herb gardens then."

"Look on the bright side, Master! Your enhanced spiritual sense will make identifying valuable specimens much easier. And with the new compression techniques, we can process materials more efficiently!"

"Your optimism is sometimes exhausting, you know that?"

The little spirit just smiled. "I maintain optimal emotional support parameters at all times!"

"Right. Wake me if anything tries to kill me in my sleep."

"That has only happened twice so far!"

"Still not reassuring!"

The next morning's practice session was interesting. The other disciples immediately noticed something was different - it's hard to hide a breakthrough from people trained to sense spiritual energy. The reactions varied from congratulations to barely concealed envy.

Senior Sister Liu simply nodded when she saw me. "Acceptable progress. I trust you'll maintain this rate of advancement?"

Threat Level: ModerateImplied

Expectations: Continued rapid development

Recommendation: Careful balance of visible progress and concealment

"I will continue working hard, Senior Sister," I replied carefully.

"See that you do. The sect has high hopes for this year's outer disciples. It would be... unfortunate if you failed to meet expectations."

Well, that wasn't ominously vague at all.

The rest of the day was spent adjusting to my new capabilities. Everything felt different - spiritual energy responded more readily to my commands, herb processing required a lighter touch, even basic meditation produced stronger results.

"Your energy circulation is even more precise now," Lin Mei commented during afternoon herb gathering. "I've never seen someone adapt to a breakthrough so quickly."

I shrugged, carefully extracting spirit essence from a particularly temperamental flower. "Good foundation, I guess."

She gave me a look that said she wasn't buying it but wouldn't press. Yet.

Social Analysis: Lin Mei

Suspicion Level: Moderate

Trust Level: High

Recommendation: Consider limited disclosure

"Not yet," I thought to Azure. "Let's see how things develop first."

The spirit realm was getting more complicated by the day. Between advancement pressures, resource requirements, and maintaining my various cover stories, I sometimes missed the simplicity of my old life.

Then again, my old life ended with a face-plant into concrete, so maybe complexity wasn't so bad.

At least I had a system to help me manage it all.

Daily Status Update:

Cultivation: Stabilizing

Resources: Adequate

Secrets: Maintained

Overall Progress: Acceptable

"Thanks Azure. Very helpful."

"I live to serve, Master! Would you like a breakdown of your efficiency metrics?"

"Maybe later. Time for evening meditation first."

I settled into my usual position, breathing deeply as I began cycling spiritual energy through my newly expanded pathways. The familiar patterns felt different now, more potent after the breakthrough. Each circulation brought fresh insights into the nature of spiritual power.

Warning: Energy Fluctuation Detected

Recommendation: Immediate—

Azure's warning cut off as something... shifted. The carefully maintained flows in my inner world began to writhe and twist, taking on patterns I'd never seen before. My consciousness felt strangely light, disconnected.

"Azure? What's happening?"

"Master! Your spiritual essence is—"

The sensation of lightness increased until I felt myself rising. For a moment, I thought I'd somehow mastered flight cultivation techniques in my sleep. Wouldn't that be a nice surprise? But then I looked down.

My body was still sitting there in meditation position, looking perfectly calm and completely not floating.

"Oh, that's probably not good."

"Master! Your soul is separating from your physical form!" Azure's voice held an edge of panic I'd never heard before. "This isn't a technique—something is forcibly extracting your so—!"

Everything went black.

Not the gentle darkness of closed eyes or even the dramatic darkness of unconsciousness. This was an absolute void that seemed to swallow even the concept of light. For a timeless moment, I floated in that nothingness, wondering if I had died. Again.

The void shattered.

The world exploded back into existence with the clash of steel on steel and the thundering of hooves. The bitter taste of blood filled my mouth, and my ears rang with the sounds of battle cries and screaming.

"Tomas! Stop standing there like a lost sheep and help us with the barricade!"

I blinked, trying to orient myself amid the chaos. A burly man with a woodcutter's axe was waving frantically at me from behind a hastily constructed wooden barrier.

"Azure?" I whispered, relieved to feel the familiar presence in my mind.
"You're still here?"

"Of course, Master! I am bound to your soul, not your physical form. Though speaking of physical forms..."

Status Update - Current Body:

Name: Tomas the Miller's Son

Level: N/A (No cultivation detected)

Core Essence:

- *Spiritual Essence: 0 units (Previous: 246 units)*
- *Soul Essence: 300 units (Unchanged - Soul Transferred)*
- *Physical Essence: 12 units (Previous: 215 units)*

Skills: Grain Milling, Basic Farming

Warning: Zero spiritual energy detected

I started to ask Azure what that meant when I finally looked down at myself. Gone were my cultivation robes, replaced by rough homespun clothes and a flour-dusted apron. My hands were calloused in all the wrong places, and my arms felt weak compared to my cultivator's body.

"Watch out!" Someone yanked me behind the barricade as an arrow whistled past. A young woman with a pitchfork glared at me. "Has fear addled your wits, Tomas? The raiders will be here any moment!"

"I'm... working on understanding the situation," I managed.

"Different universe," Azure helpfully supplied. "Though I suspect you've already noticed the most obvious sign—"

I looked up and immediately wished I hadn't. Two suns blazed in the alien sky—one blood red, one electric blue. They hung there like the eyes of some cosmic entity judging my life choices.

Right. Different universe. Because apparently reincarnating once wasn't complicated enough.

I tried to circulate spiritual energy, reaching for the familiar patterns of cultivation. Nothing. Not even a whisper of qi. Just the ordinary aches and pains of a body that had never known spiritual power.

"Tomas!" The burly man slapped my shoulder. "By the twin suns, I can't believe you're still standing after taking that hit to the head. But we need every able body now. The raiders are almost through the east gate!"

The young woman thrust a rusty sword into my hands. "Here. Try not to stab yourself with it."

Warning: Combat Situation

Imminent Recommendation: Perhaps we should have spent less time processing herbs and more time on basic sword work?

"You know," I told Azure, "I'm starting to think my karma might need some adjustments."