

Bai Xiaochun's arrival attracted quite a bit of attention. Everyone looked over at him, including Shangguan Tianyou, Zhou Xinqi, Lu Tianlei, Beihan Lie, Xu Song, Gongsun Wan'er, Gongsun Yun, Hou Yunfei... and Ghostfang!

An encouraging look slowly appeared in Li Qinghou's eyes. Bai Xiaochun hurried up to Li Qinghou, then clasped hands and bowed deeply. Li Qinghou could see how bloodshot his eyes were, and knew it must have been quite a struggle to convince himself to come. "Stand behind me," he said. Bai Xiaochun straightened up and hurried over to stand behind Li Qinghou. Looking around, he caught sight of Hou Yunfei, whom he hadn't seen since being transferred to the north bank. During the time they had been apart, Hou Yunfei participated in an Inner Sect trial by fire. After becoming an Inner Sect disciple, he benefited from the assistance of his clan, soaring all the way to the tenth level of Qi Condensation. Their eyes met, and Hou Yunfei nodded encouragingly. Bai Xiaochun nodded back. There was no time for chatting, though, as the main doors of the grand hall were already opening. As they did, Zheng Yuandong's voice echoed out from inside. "The origins of the Primordial Spirit Hollow are unknown. Long ago, before the existence of the Lone Hell Pocket Realm, it was the only location in the eastern Lower Reaches where earthstring energy gathered. Countless wars were fought outside the spirit hollow, until three powerful sects controlled it. When the Spirit Stream Sect rose to power, it came to be under the control of the Four Great Sects! "The Lone Hell Pocket Realm suddenly appeared 10,000 years ago in the Hellwood Continent. It's a barren wasteland without a single living thing inside other than the earthstring banebeasts. Many wars were fought over that location as well, until the Four Great Sects occupied it and chose to share it as the second of the Foundation Establishment Holy Lands. "The Fallen Sword Abyss traces its origins back to 5,000 years ago, when an indescribably enormous sword fell from beyond the heavens. It is huge, larger than a hundred Spirit Stream Sects put together, and contains terrifying power. It pierced through the canopy above, plummeting down to stab into the ground near Mount Flamecrane, sending sword qi all the way down into the underworld. As for the body of the sword itself, it is permeated with earthstring energy. [1. This "Flamecrane" is a type of bird from Chinese mythology. I couldn't find any good articles about it in English. According to the Baidu article I found, it represents an omen of imminent destruction. The name of the bird in Chinese "bi fang" supposedly comes from the sound of burning wood or bamboo. The bird somewhat resembles a red-crowned crane, except that it has one leg, blue feathers, red spots, and a white bill. Whenever it appears, it means that fiery destruction will soon occur.] "Because of that, the inside of the sword is much like the other two Foundation Establishment Holy Lands; it is filled with countless earthstring banebeasts. Kill them to collect earthstring energy, and when you have enough, you can form it into an earthstring capture crystal, to summon the latent earthstring energy present within the Fallen Sword Abyss! "According to the investigations and analyses of the Four Great Sects, when the sword fell from beyond the heavens, it absorbed a bit of Heaven-Dao aura, which means that there may be a bit of heavenstring energy within it! "Of course, Heavenstring Foundation Establishment is also called Heaven-Dao Foundation Establishment!" At this point, Zheng Yuandong paused for a moment, and looked out at the crowd, his eyes sparkling as if with lightning. "The path of cultivation is cramped and narrow; the only way to walk it is to tread upon countless corpses. Only then can you have a chance to make contact with... a supreme great Dao! "During this Foundation Establishment trial by fire.... all of you must do your best to kill the disciples of the other three sects. After all, it is a trial by fire, but also a war between the four sects, and even more importantly, directly related to the destiny of the Spirit Stream Sect. I will reveal more to you about that upon your return! "I have no doubt in my mind that the disciples of the other three sects will do their best to kill you. In the Foundation Establishment Holy

Lands, the chance to reach Foundation Establishment is not presented to everyone! Resources are limited; this is a competition for a great Dao!" Zheng Yuandong swished his sleeve as his thunderous voice echoed out in all directions. All of the more than 200 Inner Sect disciples present responded with a confident cheer. "This Foundation Establishment trial by fire will be presided over by the peak lord from Irispetal Peak, the peak lord from Violet Cauldron Peak, and Ouyang Jie from the Hall of Justice. They have already made all the necessary arrangements. 100 disciples will enter the Fallen Sword Abyss, while two groups of 75 will go to the Lone Hell Pocket Realm and the Primordial Spirit Hollow. And now, activate the grand spell formation which leads to the Foundation Establishment Holy Lands!" Soon, intense rumbling sounds could be heard as a huge spell formation opened up, and the group of over 200 disciples slowly faded away. Outside of the spell formation, Li Qinghou stood there with an expression of anticipation and anxiety on his face. He felt like he was looking at a young eagle spreading its wings. Down below was a bottomless pit, and off in the distance, the sun was just beginning to rise. Mount Flamecrane was located on the Righteouscraft Continent, and long ago, had risen as high as the heavens. Back then, it had been taller than any of the mountain peaks in the Spirit Stream Sect, and in fact, bigger than the entire Spirit Stream Sect in general. But now, things were different. More than half of the mountain had been destroyed, and the lands stretching far and wide around it had all been reduced to a barren wasteland that filled nearly half of the Righteouscraft Continent. Neither mortals nor beasts could survive in such conditions, and even cultivators who spent too much time there would eventually experience shocking deaths. They would spontaneously explode, whereupon streams of scattered sword qi would billow out from their destroyed corpses. The reason for all of that was the enormous sword which had fallen from the heavens. It was an ancient sword, its surface carved with countless magical symbols, which were in varying states of erosion. The sword was stabbed halfway into the ground directly in front of Mount Flamecrane. Crevices spread out from the sword in all directions, the narrowest being a few meters wide, the largest being thirty or more meters across. The crevices themselves were pitch black, and pulsed with intense coldness. The entire surface of the ground around the sword was covered by a glittering shield, which prevented anyone from entering. The sword was enormous; even the portion of the blade that was visible, along with the hilt, rose up far higher than Mount Flamecrane. If the sword were compared to the size of a hand, then the mountain would be like an ant. Of course, when you compared the cultivators to the mountain, the mountain was like the hand and the cultivators standing at its summit were like ants. Two sects had already assembled at the top of Mount Flamecrane. One group contained 80 disciples, and the other, 100. Both were led by Foundation Establishment cultivators, who were currently engaged in idle chatting. The two groups of disciples, on the other hand, were staring at each other with open hostility. On the left-hand side was the group of 80 disciples. They all wore white robes, the sleeves of which were embroidered with the image of a medicinal pill. Furthermore, the entire group emanated a medicinal aroma. They were none other than the Pill Stream Sect! Opposite them was the group of 100 disciples. They wore deep blue robes, and emanated profound cultivation base fluctuations. If you looked closely at some of the disciples, it was possible to see that certain parts of their bodies rippled and blurred in strange ways. They were none other than the Profound Stream Sect! Even as the two parties measured each other up, the clouds up above began to churn, and countless magical symbols appeared. At first, they flickered back and forth between the shape of a cauldron and the shape of a sword, but in the end, they resembled an enormous ink dragon, roaring at the top of its lungs. The leader of the group from the Pill Stream Sect was a middle-aged woman. Looking up with glittering eyes, she murmured, "The Spirit Stream Sect is here." The cultivator leading the Profound Stream Sect was an old man with numerous oddly bulging protrusions on his face that gave him a very sinister appearance. The pupils of his eyes were vertical like a cat's, and every time he blinked, anyone who was looking him would be filled with a very bizarre sensation. Currently, he was looking at the Spirit Stream Sect's spell formation forming up above. Before long, a beam of light shot down and landed in another area of Mount Flamecrane. More than a hundred people slowly materialized, with Ouyang Jie at the front. When the woman from the Pill Stream Sect and the old man from the Profound Stream Sect saw him, their faces flickered with surprise. "Daoist Jackal!" Ouyang Jie chuckled in a grating voice and then said, "Fellow Daoist Hai. Fellow Daoist Lin. Long time no see." After all of the disciples materialized, he waved his hand, dispelling the protective shield created by the spell formation. With

that, he stepped forward. As the Foundation Establishment cultivators began to confer, Bai Xiaochun rubbed his eyes and looked around, feeling a bit dazed. The sight of the enormous sword left him gasping. Looking up, he realized that he couldn't even see the end of the hilt; it disappeared into the clouds above. It was a very shocking sight indeed. Light gasps could be heard around him as other Spirit Stream Sect disciples also looked up in shock at the huge sword. It was at this point that Bai Xiaochun noticed that there were a lot fewer people around him. Two hundred had been gathered upon their departure, but now there were only a hundred people with him. Zhou Xinqi was nowhere to be seen, nor was Lu Tianlei. However, Shangguan Tianyou, Ghostfang, Beihan Lie, Gongsun Wan'er, and Hou Yunfei were all present in the crowd, all of whom were currently studying the shocking sword in front of them. It didn't take long, though, before they all started to sit down cross-legged and produce jade slips. After pouring some spiritual power into the slips, they then began to study the disciples from the Pill Stream Sect and the Profound Stream Sect. Likewise, the disciples from the other sects turned to look at the newcomers. Quite a few disciples were looking at Bai Xiaochun. The expressions of the faces of the disciples differed from group to group when they saw Bai Xiaochun. Those from the Pill Stream Sect seemed skeptical, as if they didn't quite believe what they had heard about him. As for the Profound Stream Sect, they wore looks of derision. Bai Xiaochun was a bit surprised by all this. Moments later, Hou Yunfei approached and handed him a jade slip. "You showed up late," he said quietly. "Before you came, the peak lords and Ouyang Jie explained the bitter struggle we'll face in more detail. They said that the best way to stay safe was to kill as many disciples from the other sects as possible. They also gave us jade slips with information about the Fallen Sword Abyss, as well as the disciples of the other sects. Presumably, the other sects have information about us too." Bai Xiaochun took the jade slip and poured some spiritual power into it. The first thing he saw was a detailed introduction to the Fallen Sword Abyss. The Fallen Sword Abyss was also called the Fallen Sword World, and had descended from above several thousand years in the past. More than half of the sword was buried deep in the earth. The sword itself formed a tilted world, the depths of which were filled with increasingly powerful earthstring beasts, whose bodies contained large amounts of earthstring energy. The entrances to the Fallen Sword World were the numerous subterranean holes which had been punctured into the body of the sword during its fall. Within the world of the sword, there were not only earthstring banebeasts formed from earthstring energy, there were also banesouls. Many people believed that they were the souls of people slain by the sword, who materialized due to the presence of the earthstring energy. Although they did not possess the same battle prowess they had before death, they were still dangerous. Thankfully, they weren't intelligent, and wouldn't take the initiative to attack. When Bai Xiaochun read about that, he took a deep breath and resolved to pay close attention to the banesouls. As far as he was concerned, they were basically the same thing as evil ghosts. The jade slip also provided detailed information about earthstring energy. Essentially, there were two types of earthstring energy. One was the type in the banebeasts. When a banebeast was killed, it would release some faint earthstring energy, which could be collected into a Dao bottle and transformed into an earthstring capture crystal. That crystal was like a key which could unlock the method to collecting the second type of earthstring energy. The truth was that ninety-nine percent of the earthstring energy was fused with the world itself, and couldn't be collected directly. It had to be summoned! The amount of earthstring energy in the world was limited. Upon reaching Foundation Establishment, a certain number of spiritual sea Tideflows would occur depending on the latent talent possessed by a given individual. Because of that, the earlier one reached Foundation Establishment, the better. Every person who actually reached Foundation Establishment would reduce the total amount of earthstring energy within the Fallen Sword World. Generally speaking, unless some incredible disciple came along who achieved eight Tideflows, there would be enough earthstring energy for thirty people to reach Foundation Establishment. Those who reached Foundation Establishment sooner rather than later had a huge advantage. If someone was too slow, it would become difficult to absorb enough earthstring energy to cause a Tideflow, thus making it impossible to reach Foundation Establishment.