

The Fall 235

Chapter 235: Dao of Formations

It is folly to believe the study of formations to be differentiated from other pursuits such as Alchemy or even fighting. All are children to the same parent, the boundless Dao.

Zac was quickly getting engrossed as he kept reading the introduction by the array master, almost even forgetting his current predicament of being stuck inside what he assumed was an entrapment array.

The Alchemist gives form to Dao through concoctions of pills, and the warrior gives form to Dao through unleashing devastating attacks. Even the farmer gives form to Dao through plowing the fields. But none is as multifaceted as the study of formations. It is not bound through medium or execution, but is boundless just like the Dao itself.

Through learning the fundamentals of constructing arrays, any Dao can be given shape. Furthermore, even if the Dao concepts behind a formation eludes your grasp one can still bring out 80% of its power through sheer knowledge of proper placements.

To understand the role of array flags one only needs to look inside themselves. The body consists of crossroads, the major ones being the Spirit Gate and the Cosmic Core. But these two alone are not enough to sustain a warrior.

Minor nodes can be found at every intersection inside the body as anyone who has reached E-Grade knows. These can both store and direct power so that magnificent effects can be brought to bear.

Placing an array flag is akin to breaking open one of the nodes, letting the energies of heavens and earth flow through it. Placement dictates the flow of power, the fractals dictate the nature of power. When a complete system has been created through the flags, a pathway for cultivation is born.

There were a few parts he didn't understand but he got the general gist of it. An array was essentially a closed system of energy in circulation, just like the pathways inside his body. That explained why the easiest way to destroy an array in its entirety was to destroy one of the array flags since that would interrupt or at least weaken the energy circulation.

Of course, more robust arrays would survive one or a few array flags getting destroyed, but they would always lose some of their effectiveness. While he believed the Array Master was a bit partial in his introduction, Zac couldn't help but keep reading and deepen his knowledge.

However, soon something happened that made him lose his patience. After roughly three hours trying to gain insight into arrays he was passed on the gatherer ladder, pushing him down to the second spot. It was a clear reminder that this was no time to just sit around and read. Others weren't so relaxed and kept hunting for opportunities.

Since he couldn't find any path out he would simply have to make his own path. The reason the walls outside were so sturdy was that they were infused with the mysterious energy from the darkness, but the same couldn't be said for the tunnels around him.

Zac took out his axe and with a mighty swing slammed it straight into the wall next to him. Unfortunately, his plan didn't work out, and a shimmering light appeared over the wall when he hit it, protecting the wall completely. Not even the slightest scar could be seen after his strike.

Zac frowned in displeasure, and once again hefted his axe, this time imbuing it with the improved Dao of Heaviness. He slammed it into the wall with all force he could muster. But the result was the same, and the shimmering shield once again nullified the force in his strike.

It was only with some helplessness he could sit down again and continue reading the crystal. Zac didn't think that swapping over to his Hachetman class would have any effect on the results, as even with his newly improved Dao he couldn't make a small crack on the wall.

The powers that were protecting these walls were far beyond what he could destroy. Perhaps he'd manage to do something with [Nature's Punishment], but Zac would rather just sit and wait out the time of the hunt than do something that risky.

He was under a kilometer of rock, and there was just no way to know what would happen if he unleashed everything he got. The most likely scenario was him getting buried alive with no token to help him escape if he let the huge wooden hand slam into the wall.

The hours passed and suddenly Zac got the familiar prompt that darkness was once again descending. But even after twenty minutes nothing happened, proving that the ghastly specters truly didn't come to this secluded passage. Since he didn't have to defend himself against an onslaught of ghosts he kept scouring the crystal for anything that could help him get out of here.

While it was true that he was pretty safe while ensconced in the middle of the mountain he wasn't happy with it. He had already lost his first spot on the Gatherer Ladder, and his placements would keep dropping the following weeks if he didn't get out.

Not even half the duration of the hunt had passed, and the others would keep accumulating points while he was stuck here. If he didn't get out and start grinding again he might actually leave the hunt without rewards from either ladder.

So Zac put all his efforts into devising an escape, putting the matter of the ladders out of his mind as to not get distracted. The hours turned to days while Zac tried to learn more about array breaking until Zac suddenly got a prompt.

[Teleporting to Arena in 1 minute. Tokens Disabled]

Zac wasn't surprised since he hadn't done anything for three days, and he quickly put on a hood to hide the fact that he was undead as he readied his axe.

He wasn't worried about meeting anyone dangerous in this bout since only those who had shied away from battle would get sent here. In fact, Zac was a bit surprised that there were people who remained that avoided battle for three full days.

He was more disgusted about being forced to kill someone far weaker than him just because the System deemed him a coward. But he knew there wasn't any other option for him. Zac had been shocked to find out what happened when neither party chose to fight since it was all too familiar to him.

He and Thea had caught someone like that, and he confessed what had occurred. Thea didn't believe the man, but Zac was much more prone to believe him. If neither party had won within 10 minutes The System would perform a draw just like it did when Zac first got integrated. The winner would survive and the loser would cease to exist.

Even though his luck was through the roof he wouldn't take his chances with a gamble on his life. He had people to protect, and if he was forced to kill someone to survive he would do it, even if it wasn't fair.

The next moment he found himself standing on a stage that floated in space. There was no sign of the mountains or valleys from the hunt, dashing his idea of getting back to the surface through leaving the arena.

He wasn't alone on the stage, as another man had been teleported here the same moment he did. Zac frowned when he saw his opponent. To get sent here one would have to have avoided battles for three days, but the man in front of him looked like he had just barely survived a rough bout.

He was covered in bandages that had turned red with dried blood, and some wounds seemed to have reopened recently. He looked like he had one foot in the grave, and gave off a wheezing cough the moment he appeared. Zac couldn't believe this man chose to stay inside the hunt with these kinds of wounds rather than just crushing his token.

"Forgot the time," the man said with a weak voice after looking over at Zac with a sardonic smile. He clearly understood what was going through Zac's mind. "I can't believe a monster like you got sent here as well."

Zac silently looked at the man as he stood up with some effort.

"Can I make a last request from you?"

"What is it?" Zac said after some hesitation.

He wasn't worried that there was some hidden agenda from the man. He'd already used [Inquisitive Eye], and together with the somewhat low ladder placements he already knew that there was no way this man could muster up a fight against him even if he was in perfect condition.

"I don't want my body to be left in space or those god-forsaken mountains to be possessed by those ghosts again. Please bury me after you return to your homeland," he said.

"... Fine," Zac said.

The man gave a weak smile, and the next moment he slit his own throat, bleeding out in seconds.

Zac silently looked at the body of the man in front of him until he silently walked over and put the body into his Cosmos Sack. This brief meeting was a stark reminder that this hunt wasn't meant to help people apart from a few select individuals. The System wanted to create powerhouses, but for that it needed fodder.

It lured thousands of the strong to duke it out by dangling some treasures and titles in front of them, all in the hopes of creating a few powerhouses. If the others all died to achieve that goal it was acceptable to the System.

The next moment he found himself back in the tunnel, dashing the last hope he had of the System lending him a helping hand by teleporting him back to the surface. He ate one of his fasting pills before once again sitting down to scour the crystal for any help.

The days passed but Zac was making steady headway, and he started to believe that he would actually be able to get out soon. It all came down to the power of the array. It was no way for him to learn enough about arrays so that he could get out by technique, but he believed he would learn enough about arrays to spot weaker spots to attack with brute force.

Those kinds of weak spots were usually quite hard to spot, but this was a passive array that didn't have an owner. If an array master was in control of it he could keep moving the weak spots to impede escape, and there would be no way for Zac to slowly be able to analyze it from within without getting attacked.

But who knew how long this place was abandoned, leaving this array to run passively. Besides, Zac suspected that the System had modified the power of all the arrays in this hunt. He believed that this sect was once At least a High E-Grade or low E-Grade sect, and there was no way that he should be able to break the protective arrays of top tier E-Grade Array masters with brute force.

But Zac was once again summoned to the arena before he could make any final breakthrough in his research on the arrays. The second person he met wasn't quite as in peace with his fate as the first one. It was someone who was placed in the top 300 on the hunter ladder, so no weakling by any means.

But it was also clear that he wasn't any good person. He had adorned a cruel smile until he saw Zac's far higher rankings. After some questioning and arm-twisting, Zac realized that the man had avoided battle just to kill and rob a weakling in the arena. He had hoped that the people who avoided battles would spend their time finding valuable loot instead.

The man was summarily executed by Zac, who only needed to imbue a strike with his Dao of Heaviness to crush any resistance. At first, he thought about grinding his class quest with the help of this man, but in the end he decided against it.

The reason was that he felt that he was getting closer to finding a solution to his situation. The more he read about the formations the better he could discern, and to a certain extent understand, the minute fluctuations in Cosmic Energy that permeated the tunnel.

At first, he hadn't noticed anything amiss in the air around him, as Cosmic Energy was always swirling around, almost like a wind that you could sense with your sixth sense. Its movements were chaotic and unpredictable, and Zac hadn't felt anything out of the ordinary the first times he had walked through the corridor.

But now he felt that there was a method to the madness, but it was only one day later that he felt ready to try out his theories. He had already found out what type of array this was. It was a common type of Entrapment Array that was mentioned in the crystal.

The normal way to pass this type of hurdle was to know a specific set of steps. Walking through the corridor correctly would result in the array staying inactive, but stepping out of the predetermined path would spring the trap.

Essentially it was like a password, and Zac had no way to figure out the correct one. However, he had started to gain a slight understanding of the pathways of the entrapment array, and he was planning something else. He spent the next hours to slowly observe the whole pathway until he finally found what he was looking for.