

The Fall 248

Chapter 248: Cursed Success

Zac could only gape, and he mutely nodded his head in agreement. He hadn't expected the ghost to speak with him, but it was a far preferable alternative to battle.

"Go..." ghost responded before it turned away from Zac and disappeared.

Zac thanked his lucky stars that the ghost seemed to have regained his sanity, if only temporarily, and he started to run toward the tunnel. A jumbled chorus of screeches behind him forced some extra strength in his legs as he leaped the last few meters.

He sensed a decrease of Darkness in the atmosphere, proving that he once again had passed an array protecting the mouth of a tunnel. He quickly turned around to survey the cavern, and he exhaled in relief when he saw that the ghosts whirled around in confusion. They clearly couldn't see where Zac had gone and frantically flew around in the cave in search of their target.

However, the larger ones seemed slightly more intelligent as they rammed their bodies at the cave opening, making Zac take a few steps back. But the ghosts simply bounced off the unseen shield and roared in rage when they couldn't get through it.

A few of them even tried to rip the air to shreds, and even though Zac was extremely tired and wounded he felt he couldn't stay here. He wasn't sure if they were just unwilling to give up or whether they could sense the splinter lodged in his mind, but creating some distance from this place was probably for the best. He had no idea just how strong those arrays at the opening were, and it was a bad idea to risk it.

He kept walking for a few minutes, and as the rush from the battle waned it was replaced with extreme tiredness. His mind felt like it would explode at any moment. Between those tendrils breaking his mental defenses and the extreme consumption of mental energy his mind was exhausted to the point that his soul might be wounded.

His body wasn't in much better shape, and he was completely covered in wounds all over. It was a good reminder that he still wasn't invulnerable just from his high attributes. A sturdy frame wasn't enough to completely block out the damage from the stronger ghosts who were approaching, or even reaching, the E-Grade in power.

Suddenly the dark caves gave way to light, and Zac stumbled out of the tunnels with some effort. He had walked the last bit on pure will power, but now it was as though the air went out of him. His overtaxed mind barely registered the change in the surroundings as his vision started closing in on him.

There was only a smidgeon of miasma left in his body to barely keep it running, but Zac simply sat down with a grunt and closed his eyes without taking out a Miasma Crystal. It time to let the last of the miasma leave his body and return to his human form.

It was only hours later that he opened his eyes again and finally took a proper look around at his surroundings. It was a hallway that looked very much the same as the one he had arrived at from the ravine earlier. The walls were cut with the same precision, and the hallway was illuminated with the familiar crystals.

It gave such a sense of déjà vu that Zac had to open up his status screen to make sure that he hadn't been stuck in an illusion the past days.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

62

Class

[F-Rare] Hatchetman

Race

[E] Human

Alignment

[Earth] Port Atwood - Lord

Titles

Born for Carnage, Ultimate Reaper, Luck of the Draw, Giantsbane, Disciple of David, Overpowered, Slayer of Leviathans, Adventurer, Demon Slayer I, Full of Class, Rarified Being, Trailblazer, Child of Dao, The Big 500, Planetary Aegis, One Against Many, Butcher, Progenitor Noblesse, Duplicity Core, Apex Hunter, Heaven's Chosen, Scion of Dao

Dao

Seed of Heaviness - High, Seed of Trees - High, Seed of Sharpness - Middle, Seed of Hardness - Middle, Seed of Sanctuary - Early

Core

[F] Duplicity

Strength

451 [Increase: 55%. Efficiency: 116%]

Dexterity

232 [Increase: 40%. Efficiency: 116%]

Endurance

621 [Increase: 60,5%. Efficiency: 116%]

Vitality

301 [Increase: 50,5%. Efficiency: 116%]

Intelligence

97 [Increase: 40%. Efficiency: 116%]

Wisdom

113 [Increase: 40%. Efficiency: 116%]

Luck

101 [Increase: 60%. Efficiency: 116%]

Free Points

3

Nexus Coins

[F] 96 525 943

But the attributes and Dao Seeds remained, proving he wasn't caught in some array. It had even increased since he now once again benefitted from the boost from [Forester's Constitution] once again.

Even before he entered the last cavern he had a free point to allocate, but now there were three. That meant that the insane onslaught of the specters at least had provided him with two levels, making his grind end at level 53 this time around. His endurance was starting to look completely monstrous, though he knew that the increase wouldn't be as drastic going forward.

The final 22 levels of the class wouldn't be so easy since he knew just how many kills were behind the 9 levels to 62. And the 13 levels after that would only be worse. Zac hesitated for a bit, but he finally bit the bullet and put two points into Intelligence. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough for the system to round up to 100, so he put the third and last point inside as well, bringing the total to 101.

There was a direct effect from the addition, and he sensed his power was increased throughout his body, even though his attributes remained the same. He quickly looked at the title screen to see that there was a new addition in the mix.

[Omnidextrous: Attain over a hundred points in all attributes during F-Grade Reward: Effect of Attributes +5%]

It pushed his Efficiency up to 121%, and Zac felt the high tiered titles were really starting to provide a huge hidden bonus. It provided around 120 points worth of extra Endurance, and almost 100 points more in Strength, which could likely take anyone by surprise at this stage. That many points were more than many had in total, and he had that just as a hidden bonus.

He was a bit annoyed at himself for holding off on putting the points up there, but he didn't require the extra attributes down in the caverns. The title also wasn't listed in his little booklet of titles, but he realized that might be because extremely few should be able to bring their Luck all the way to 100, at least this early in cultivation.

Zac also realized just how lucrative his week down in the caverns had been when he noticed he had gained roughly 50 million Nexus Coins. It might not have been as high gain per hour as the best stretches

in his Hatchetman class, but he had also spent most of the time walking the endless tunnels rather than fighting.

Finally, he was hopefully done with everything here apart from picking up the treasure. After that, he would be able to join the final few days of the hunt, and he couldn't imagine the situation up there to be anything but desperate. The new Daos and attributes would likely come in handy.

Five E-Grade powerhouses were running around up on the surface, two from his and three from the other world. There were the two Dominators, the Medhin emperor, the Medhin Crown Prince, and finally the champion of Berum, Beruv Ylvas.

One of the three Medhin Royals in the E-Grade had disappeared from the ladders three days ago, but Zac had no way to know whether he was killed or simply returned to manage the Medhin Empire. But Zac assumed he was killed since the royal was in the top ten of both ladders. Leaving just a few days before he would get both levels and a title would be crazy.

Zac was still leery about meeting any one of the remaining powerhouses after his battle with inevitability. His progress down here had given him a huge boost in survivability, but unfortunately it didn't provide the same boost in attacking power. But that was a later problem and for now he needed to deal with his banged-up body.

Even though Zac had changed form his wounds were still there, and Zac quickly swallowed a healing pill to speed up the recovery before he took out some of the high-grade meat he had brought. He ripped into it like a starving ghost, and he hadn't realized just how much he had missed the taste of food during the past days.

As he ate he turned his sight inward, and his eyes were immediately drawn to the mysterious black crystal still hovering silently inside his mind. Surrounding it was a string of fractals wrought from miasma, and Zac couldn't help but feel a twang of panic upon seeing them.

He hadn't thought about what would happen if he turned back to human, and had instinctually assumed the crystal would stay locked down behind the fractals. But those were made from miasma, and there was no guarantee they would stay in his human form. He had come very close to letting loose those dreadful tendrils by his carelessness.

But luckily no such thing happened. The miasmic fractals had turned the area with the crystal into a separate space, and it had no bearing on him as far as he could tell. Still, it felt like having a ticking time bomb inside his mind, and as he sat in the corridor he felt extreme regret over his actions.

Both the ghost and the powerful Draugr woman had seemed to think that he had done something spectacularly stupid by taking this sinister thing. And Zac was inclined to agree after being shown all those visions of other beings that had fused with a splinter. There were no happy endings in those visions.

He had been too impulsive, and his greed had made him get stuck with something that might turn out to be far more troubling than the miasmic wound that plagued him until his core was formed. He needed to quickly find a way to get rid of this thing since he had no idea how long those defensive runes would last.

As Zac looked back on his actions he couldn't believe it was himself who acted so foolhardy. That thing screamed danger, and he knew that it might have been the cause of D-Grade powerhouses falling. To try and take it was beyond foolish, and he would normally take the long way around such an inauspicious object.

His only conclusion was that he had been manipulated somehow. He briefly considered Anzonil, but he did not think he was the source of the manipulation, though the old man should know the crystal was there. He was more inclined that it was the splinter of oblivion that had corrupted his thoughts in order to get out of that desolate cave.

But there was one good thing that had come from this ordeal. He was suddenly in the first position of the Gatherer Ladder, having passed even the Medhin Emperor. Since he hadn't found anything else of value the past days it could only mean that the parasitic crystal was counted by the System, and it was regarded as extremely valuable.

A thought struck Zac and he got up to his feet with a grunt. Suddenly the whole hallway was filled with mounds of treasures. Zac had poured out everything that seemed to be of high value in his sack but still kept his first position. He had a feeling that even if he lost his whole pouch he would still keep his position.

The East Trigram Sect contained lots of great treasures for newly integrated worlds, but Zac estimated that it was a strong E-Grade Sect, or a weak D-Grade Sect at the best. Anzonil and perhaps a few others were the only D-Grade powerhouses.

Meanwhile, the crystal that had lodged itself in his brain seemed to be a supreme, albeit cursed, treasure that would be considered valuable even on higher-graded worlds. He became extra thankful that he possessed the bangle from Greatest. Otherwise, he might find himself in even bigger trouble from the crystal than from his Specialty Core.

Zac was still far from healed, but he didn't want to wait any longer so he quickly retrieved all the treasure he had thrown out. He looked like he had been dipped in ink from all the ichor, but at least the golden robes were slowly healing themselves.

Zac started to walk down the hallway, and it was with some relief he saw another gate not far off that looked very similar to the last one. This time he didn't equip his shield, but simply pushed open the doors with a grunt.

"Welcome young... uh, human? Were you not a Draugr?" the familiar voice echoed through the majestic chambers.

"I'm leaving for the surface soon, looking like a human is more convenient," Zac said with a shrug as he walked inside the room, not wanting to get into specifics.

Its architecture was similar to the last one, with the pillars and beautiful sculptures, but it was far smaller than the last one. The Array Spirit had already materialized in the other end of the room, roughly twenty meters away.

"How curious. If I wasn't a ghost I'd try to get to the bottom of such a mystery," the old man said as he stroked his long beard.

"Anyway, I am here," Zac said.

"It is good to see that you passed my final trial. To see such an enticing treasure but have both the intelligence to spot the dangers and the mental fortitudes to walk away," the old man said with an approving nod. "If we only made the same choices back in the day, so much would be different."

Zac blankly looked at the old man for a second before he understood what was going on. The array spirit had purposefully led him to that cavern with the intent to test his character. If he was smart enough he'd leave that cursed thing alone and walk straight through the cavern to get here.

"Well yes, it felt like something cursed, I am not strong enough to tangle with such a thing," Zac said with a straight face, but he could feel his ears heating up from embarrassment.

"If I may ask, those ghosts... Are they your former sect members?" Zac probed, eager to change the subject.

The old man sighed and looked at the exit with deep helplessness and sadness in his eyes.

"Yes, it is true. Will you listen to this old man's tale?" the Array Spirit said.

Zac was more interested in the treasures, but he also needed to know more about that crystal.

"Please, go ahead," Zac said.

"The East Trigram Sect was a small sect that could barely be considered a D-Grade force on a low-tier D-Grade world. We only had half-step D-Grade cultivators, but somewhat made up for our lack of power with our insight into arrays," the old man began.

"I am sorry, half-step?" Zac asked confused.