

The Fall 282

Chapter 282: The Lord of Cycles

Zac actually gained two insights from the past fight and he was eager to try to formalize at least one of them while the feeling was fresh. That's why he immediately went into meditation as soon as his body allowed it.

However, he did not ponder upon the Dao of Trees, even though he had a hint of the direction he wanted to take that Dao seed. Pushing a Dao Seed to the peak was no easy matter, and he felt he needed some more time to prepare before he tried to push the seed to the limit. The hints he had gained from the Dao of Life was great, but it was just a start.

Zac was instead focusing on something completely new. He was planning to attain a Dao Seed that he hadn't gained a Dao vision for. Every Dao Seed so far had been attained through his class skills, but he had realized that there was one component he was missing.

Ever since Zac gained his second class he had been thinking about creating a holistic 'build' for himself, one that focused on building both great Offense and Defense through his classes. He would empower them with both Life and Death, and while he would use the axe to launch devastating attacks containing these concepts. He had a far-off vision of combining it all into an invincible power.

There were still many question marks of how he would fit everything together, and the fight just now had proven that he had been thinking too much inside the box. He had felt that the Dao of Trees and later the Dao of life was useless for offense against anything except the undead, but that clearly wasn't the case.

That glowing ball had been terrifying, and if he didn't possess the Core to absorb the damage he would have exploded from one attack, even though he possessed over 700 Endurance. But there was one realization that was more important than any other; he was lacking a Dao Seed that could eventually evolve into the Dao of Death. He had no opposite for the Dao of Life.

He had always considered the Miasma as the part representing death, but in the end it was only the equivalent of Cosmic Energy. His Undying Bulwark class was also a class purely focused on defense, and Zac didn't believe that he would gain any more Dao visions from it. He would rather unearth more improvements to Hardness and Sanctuary through the extremely profound vision.

That meant that he needed to adjust his toolkit a bit. He needed another seed that could be the complement to the Dao of Trees. In the long run it would hopefully allow him to become truly powerful, and in the short run it would help him get through this Inheritance. He couldn't slam an unholy beacon onto everything that barred his path after all.

Luckily he believed he had gained enough clues through being undead and from his time in the inheritance to formalize another Dao Seed. He based it upon the hints that he had gotten from the monument before it turned into the construct. A second fractal had slightly lit up from the Dao of Trees that had felt rotting and decaying, and that was exactly what he was going for. His mind focused on the feeling of life faltering, exuberant life slowly giving in to decay, and finally death.

The Dao Treasure had put him into a trance, and he felt he was on the cusp of grasping the kernel of truth that would allow him to gain a seed. Zac didn't know how much time passed as he held fast to the images of faltering life and the unstoppable decay of anything living.

But just as he felt he was about to grasp the Dao Seed the trance ended, and he opened his eyes with frustration. He knew that it never was a good idea to force the Dao, but he was so close that he could taste it. So Zac unhesitatingly swallowed a second Dao treasure and once again closed his mind.

Finally, everything clicked and he sensed a mysterious energy appearing in his body. Zac had initially thought that it would either add itself to one of the three Dao fractals in his body, or create a new one, but instead it simply formed a small seed in a separate space located in Zac's mind.

Zac could only guess that it was because this was a seed that was naturally formed by himself without the assistance of a skill, but he would have to investigate whether he needed to somehow create a fractal to house it later. Since he was done he quickly opened his status screen in anticipation, and as he expected he saw the sixth Dao Seed of his.

[Rot (Early): Wisdom +10, Intelligence +5.]

This was exactly what Zac had aimed for, though he was a bit disappointed the attributes did not really suit him. The wisdom would help him with his resilience against mental attacks, but he still hadn't found any use for Intelligence for either of his classes.

As he sensed the seed in his mind he was certain that the fractal that he had slightly lit up was the Dao of Rot. His Dao of Trees slightly encompassed the concept of Life through death, and Rot was placed right on the crossroads between these two concepts.

He hoped that he could lead the Dao of Rot toward the direction of Death through life, and with the Dao of Trees form a complete cycle. But for now, it was a simple Early-stage Dao Seed that he guessed would add some corrosive effects on his attacks.

Zac quickly summoned a fractal edge with [Chop] and just as he thought the fractal gained a murky green color when it was imbued with the Seed of Rot. Unfortunately, there wasn't anything living in the area that he could test it out on, so he simply attacked the ground.

There was no added power to the fractal edge, and the scar that was created by the swing didn't corrode as though it was attacked by acid. However, a wet sheen of some green liquid was left around the rift, meaning that the attack was more akin to adding poison to the blade. It would be useless against inorganic things, but it might contain surprising power against living enemies.

Flush with success, Zac considered taking another Dao treasure in hopes of pushing his Dao of Trees forward as well, but in the end he forced himself to calm down. His instincts told him that he was too far away from being able to push the seed to its peak, and he probably wouldn't reach it even if he ate all three of his Dao Seeds.

Zac checked his watch and to his surprise 7 hours had already passed. It was more time than Zac had planned on spending inside the inheritance in total, but there was no getting around it. At least they knew he was still alive since he maintained his position on the ladder. He had also gained a level so they should understand that he was in a battle of some kind.

The weakness from using [Hatchetman's Rage] during the battle had already passed, and his Cosmic Energy was mostly full thanks to his passive absorption of energy during his meditation. So Zac didn't waste any more time and immediately headed toward the passage.

He held [Verun's Bite] ready in his arm, prepared for any kind of situation. But the passageway was completely barren, with not a single object or being in sight. It was only fifteen minutes later that the scene changed, and Zac stared wide-eyed at the world in front of him.

Paradise. That was the only thing that Zac could think of as he looked at the lush atmosphere around him. The hazy mists had given way to an exquisite field where each and every strand of grass seemed to be meticulously crafted to give a sense of beauty and harmony.

Small rivers were running through the fields of flowers, and various small pagodas and patios were placed along the field. Even more miraculously there were floating islands drifting about in the sky above him, each of them connected by steps wrought from fire and ice.

It slightly reminded him of the vision of the floating cultivation palaces in his vision with the axe-man, though these islands were far smaller and rather seemed to be there for aesthetic reasons. It was like someone had wanted to create a multi-layered garden, and had even bent the laws of nature to make it happen.

There was no sun in the sky, but instead there was a beautiful night sky unblemished and undiminished by any light pollution. Yet everything was completely illuminated thanks to a huge moon spreading a silver luster at the area, which added a mystical and dream-like ambiance to the scenery.

But Zac wouldn't relax just because the scene was breathtaking, and he hesitantly proceeded with his axe at the ready. He strained his mind to find any clues of hidden traps or arrays, but he couldn't sense anything. He couldn't even sense any Cosmic Energy being used to keep the islands afloat, which made him question whether he was stuck in an illusion.

That, of course, raised the question of where the inheritance actually took place. Was this whole zone even real, or did it all take place in some dreamscape? But Zac's instincts told him it was real, as it would be odd if he was able to gain a Dao Seed and gain a level while asleep.

"I had some hopes, but alas," a sad sigh suddenly came from one of the islands above. "You fail."

It was the same voice that spoke at the start of the trial, and Zac's heart lurched when he heard its proclamation. Had he really failed the inheritance because he used brute force to kill the construct earlier? But there was simply no other way for him to pull through.

The idea was to use death to snuff out the life and life to overcome death, but he didn't possess either of those elements in a way that he could properly utilize them in a fight. In the end, he could only win with the help of overwhelming might.

"You are far too ugly to even become an honorary disciple of mine. I might be dead, but I'm not that desperate," the voice continued with an unmistakable note of disdain, and Zac's blood pressure immediately spiked.

The way of speaking was way too similar to a certain tool spirit, and Zac started wondering if Brazla had somehow weaseled himself into the trial. The voice was different, but Zac saw no reason that Brazla

should be stuck to one voice since he wasn't technically a living being. Zac quickly ran up the shimmering ladders toward the floating island that he heard the voice come from.

The sceneries on the islands were even more exquisite than on the ground, but he had no time to admire them as he hurried up toward the top. His anger had even made him forget the very real possibility that there were hidden tests on the islands, but luckily it seemed that he had already passed the only trial at this stage.

Zac was ready to blast off a tirade at the arrogant Tool Spirit, but the moment when he reached the top his words got stuck in his throat as he stopped in his tracks.

It felt like he had arrived at the garden of a fairytale castle, where every detail shone with beauty and perfection. Hundreds of different types of flowers that all had their own unique charms spread out in a seemingly haphazard manner across the island, but somehow there was order to the chaos.

A small pond was placed in the middle, and a brook that ran through it gave off a soothing sound. However, neither the flowers nor the brook was as striking as the celestial form of the Lord of Cycles sitting and basking in the moonlight. Where the statue had depicted a fine-chiseled but androgynous male, Zac saw a picture-perfect beauty in front of him.

He looked like he was chiseled by a master artisan as he looked up at the moon with a sorrowful gaze, one hand outreached as though trying to grasp it, with the other held over his heart. It was a scene of frailty and longing, and the silver light of the moon gave it a haunting feeling.

"Don't fall in love with me, child," the Lord of Cycles said with a long-suffering sigh as he turned his limpid eyes toward the gaping Zac.

But suddenly Zac realized there was a sense of wrongness, and with a grunt he pushed [Mental Fortress] to the limit. The result wasn't reality cracking, showing him that he had escaped an illusion. But everything he saw had shifted somewhat.

The flowers, the brook, and the pond were still there, as was the Lord of Cycles, but while the environment was beautiful it was not enough to gobsmack him any longer. And the man in front of him was no longer the personification of perfection, but rather a somewhat feminine man who wore a robe that might be mistaken for a dress.

Everything about him was ambiguous, from his hairstyle to his choice of clothes, but that wasn't what terrified Zac. That was some extremely scary illusion he had been put inside. What would have happened if he didn't notice something was wrong? Would he have become the lover of a long-dead ghost?

Zac's back was immediately drenched in cold sweat, and he thanked the stars that he had gained some experience in spotting illusions from his time in the hunt. The being in front of him was clearly not completely benign, and his vigilance rose to the peak to protect his mind and his butt.

"Tsch, so you broke my beautification field? How boring," the man muttered and swapped out his elaborate pose to a more laid-back one. "So you are the one who passed the first inheritance trial? As I said, your face is pretty pathetic, I can't take you as a disciple. Not that I was planning to take one in any case."

