

**Chapter 283: Mortals and Cultivators**

Zac was starting to regret choosing the Lord of Cycles rather than the Undying Fiend inheritance. This person was almost as bad as Brazla. Or had perhaps all the predecessors gone crazy stuck with the Tool Spirit for those untold ages? If that was the case then the inheritances might be useless.

He barely survived his trial and he was far stronger than anyone else on the island. How could he in good consciousness let his sister enter the trial for the Invoker if this was how it was going to be? But still, Zac had pushed through the trial and he wasn't ready to give up just yet.

"I'm sorry, I can't do much about my face, but I guess it'll get better as my race ranking improves. Why did you set this place up if you didn't want to find inheritors?" Zac probed.

"Because of that stupid Brazla," the man said as he leisurely ran his fingers through the pond. "I needed him to create something for me, and he wanted me to set this place up as payment."

"Brazla?" Zac asked with confusion. "You made a deal with the Tool Spirit?"

"That little spirit is not Brazla," the man said with a chuckle. "It has just confused its own identity with his creator and ours over the years. Brazla was a peak D-Grade artificer, and he also called himself The Celestial Artisan. That a D-Grade cultivator dared call himself that tells you all you need to know about his temperament."

Zac's brows rose in surprise from that little tidbit. He finally understood why the Tool Spirit acted so haughtily. It had taken various traits from the 8 predecessors, including his own master's. And if Zac was a betting man, he guessed that the narcissism came from the individual in front of him.

"So you made a deal with the real brazla. He created something for you, and you set up an inheritance. Why did he want to create this place? And may I ask what your name is?" Zac probed.

"Money isn't enough to create a true heritage for a clan. Brazla was rich, but money can only buy unimpressive and widely distributed skills and cultivation manuals. Things that might take you to early D-Grade but leave you with a pitiful core that can't evolve," the man said with a disdainful snort. "And my name is Yrial, so you can call me Lord Yrial or Beauty Yrial."

Zac really wanted to roll his eyes, but he held himself in check since Yrial seemed pretty capricious. Who knew how he would react if Zac did something that he considered disrespectful.

"So why not go to someone else? Don't you need to cut off a piece of your soul to create an inheritance?" Zac probed.

"Do you think it's that easy to hire skilled craftsmen that are at peak D-Grade or C-Grade? They are extremely scarce, and most are snatched up by superior forces. Rogue cultivators such as myself can't hire them no matter how beautiful we are. Brazla was simply unattached because he was obsessed with creating a force of his own for some reason," Yrial explained.

Zac frowned when hearing that. He was hoping to hire a blacksmith to create a real Spiritual Tool Shield for him, but if things were as Yrial said it might be harder than he expected. Still, that was a problem for later. He first needed to make this narcissist cough up some valuables.

"Well, anyways. I'm here now. I proved my cycle and I defeated the construct," Zac tentatively said.

"Don't you think I don't know your so-called cycle is fake? Those fractals shouldn't have lit up at all," Yrial snorted as he threw Zac a disdainful glance. "But I have to admit, using the spy core for such a thing is pretty novel. I'm not sure what you encountered to allow your Duplicity core to work like that."

"Spy core?" Zac asked with confusion.

"That's what the duplicity core usually is used for. You take the race of those you wish to spy on. But usually, you shouldn't get a true copy as you have, but rather a watered-down version that only gives a fraction of the bonus power. For some reason your variant seems a lot stronger," Yrial said with a shrug. "Even I can't understand the fractals covering the core."

Zac wasn't too surprised that the ghost knew about his situation. He had been probed by that monument just a few hours before, and he guessed that whatever the monument found out, so did the Lord of Cycles.

"I did some research on it when I was exploring my path since it contains the potential for duality," the ghost added. "But in the end, I didn't feel it was a good fit."

"What do you think caused the difference with my core?" Zac eagerly said.

It appeared that this man was far more knowledgeable about his specialty core than anyone he'd met so far. And if the construct was any indication it was pretty likely that Yrial might be able to help him fuse his classes, or at least improve upon the core.

"Who knows?" the Lord of Cycles said with disinterest. "The multiverse is full of odd chances and miraculous things. Almost everyone who reaches any distance on the path of cultivation has survived some insurmountable odds and encountered some strange opportunities. You made your specialty core much better than normal, which is good but nothing too exciting."

Zac slowly nodded, though he wasn't really sure what to believe. Greatest seemed to have been of another opinion, and Zac truly felt that getting two classes was a pretty huge deal. He was more inclined to believe that the man in front of him downplayed or simply didn't understand the greatness of his Duplicity core. Or perhaps nothing that wasn't related to himself could enter his eyes.

"So, I might not be what you're looking for in a disciple, but I still passed the test," Zac said, focusing on what was important. "I should be given some treasures, right?"

"I guess," the man grumbled, and reluctantly got to his feet. "It's not like I need any of the things stored here in any case. Come here and let me sense your talent."

Zac was elated and hurried over. Yrial indicated for him to hold out his hand, and it looked like he was going to inspect him directly. However, the moment before their hands touched the spirit seemed to have a change of heart, and first conjured a napkin to place over Zac's hand.

Zac couldn't help but feel pissed off. Was his hand that disgusting that a damn spirit needed some extra layers of separation? But he held his tongue since he knew that this was not the last time he was seeing this infuriating ghost. He would also administer future trials when he reached the E grade and higher.

So he endured the injustice as he waited for the spirit to finish his inspection. Zac didn't know exactly what Yrial was looking for, but he guessed it had something to do with the Dao runes he lit up. Perhaps he was trying to choose which category of impartment would suit him best.

But Zac started to get worried as the frown on Yrial's face only deepened the longer he held Zac's hand. Soon he even felt some powerful pressure bear down on him, and he caught a glimpse of an extremely vast aura from the spirit.

It was tightly controlled, but it was far beyond the impressions he had of both Greatest and The Great Redeemer. He didn't know why, but it felt like he was pressured by the weight of a world when he felt the aura. That proved that the man in front of him had truly been an existence of a higher tier once upon a time, even though he was pretty annoying.

"This is unbelievable," Yrial finally said and looked at Zac with wonder.

Zac looked up at the spirit, suddenly filled with anticipation. Perhaps he had realized how special his core was, or that his body was far stronger than normal due to his numerous titles. Making a good impression would perhaps help him gain better treasures and guidance.

"You are beyond trash. You have absolutely no talent in any way manner or form. How are you even alive?" he said as he looked at Zac like he was a zoo animal. "I don't know whether to call you ultimate garbage or a genius."

"I know I'm a mortal," Zac said with grit teeth, stabilizing his heart from the emotional freefall it had just endured. "But I have been pushing along just fine until now. And with my special core I don't think I'll be worse off than any cultivator, even if my road will be bumpier."

"No, you don't understand," Yrial said with a shake of his head. "This goes beyond being a mortal. I knew you were a trashy mortal the moment you stepped inside my trial."

"Then what do you mean," Zac asked exasperated.

"Do you know what the difference between a mortal and a cultivator is? Apart from the obvious," Yrial said as he conjured up a divan to lie down on, making Zac shake his head.

"Being a cultivator is having a certain amount of affinity with the deeper truths of the universe. Some call it spirituality," Yrial said as he formed a ball of burning ice in his hand. "However, it's not a binary situation where you either have it or you don't."

"Simply put you can have various affinities with all the Daos, and you need a minimum affinity with at least one Dao to become a cultivator. Let's say that an affinity is a number. Someone with an affinity of 120 to an element will have an easier time learning that Dao than someone with an affinity of 80," Yrial continued as a second ball, this one frozen fire, appeared next to the earlier ball.

"Some races have extremely high affinities with certain Daos, essentially turning their whole population in a certain direction of cultivation. But many races, like us humans, don't have any racial affinity," he continued as the two balls started to dance around in his hand.

"I am a supreme genius who showed an extremely good affinity with both fire and ice, which is why I embarked upon my path. But most people aren't talented enough in any element that they would

choose their class by their affinities. They simply get whatever class they get,” Yrial continued, not forgetting to tout his own horn.

“No one knows the exact cut-off, but let’s say the minimum to be able to control Cosmic Energy and push it through their pathways according to a cultivation manual to be 50, no matter which element.

“Both someone with an affinity of 60 and 160 will be cultivators in other words, though the one with the higher affinity might have an easier time pondering the Dao and breaking through the smaller bottlenecks,” Yrial continued. “Most also have multiple affinities, though not as high as myself. Apart from fire and Ice I also have an affinity with dozens of other Daos, though I don’t focus on them.

“Choosing a path that both fits with your affinities and your personality is the best way to go as far as possible when it comes to cultivation. That’s why children are tested when young.”

Zac thought back to Emily, and how Alyn and Alea had tested her to confirm her great talent for cultivation. This was no news for him, but it was interesting to learn that nothing was completely clear-cut.

“In the same way, mortals can both have an affinity of 20 and 40. Both are trash, but different degrees of trash. And the one with an affinity of 40 will have an easier time of forcing open nodes or turning into a low-grade cultivator in the future,” Yrial continued.

“So what’s my affinity,” Zac said, already having an inkling of the answer going by Yrial’s earlier reaction.

“Zero. No affinity at all, not to any element, which technically shouldn’t be possible. Cosmic Energy is the basic building block of the universe, and it should be impossible to at least not have a small connection to it,” Yrial said. “Especially you who have already walked on the path of cultivation for a while. Yet I can’t find a speck of spirituality in your body.”

“I seem to have pressed on fine, though?” Zac asked hesitantly. “I even have a pretty good tolerance of energy, I can absorb crystals pretty damn quick even without being a cultivator. And I have formed multiple Dao Seeds.”

“That’s what’s so mind-boggling,” Yrial said with wonder. “You’re ugly, but you are pretty interesting. Perhaps your trashy constitution might even be an opportunity.”

“How is it an opportunity to have no talent?” Zac asked with a helpless smile.

“Because you are free. We’re all prisoners to the System, playing within its ruleset. The system won’t let you chose a class that is not in line with your talents since that would statistically lower the chance for you to become a powerhouse. And that’s just one of the ways the System limits the boundless Dao. But you who have no talents are unfettered, able to do anything,” Yrial said, growing more and more excited.

“I’ve decided, today is your lucky day. I’ll lower myself to make you my disciple after all,” the Lord of Cycles said, truly looking like he was throwing Zac a bone. “Hurry, kneel down and accept me as your master!”