

**Chapter 289: Setting a Course**

Yrial's features smoothed out and he adopted his lazy expression once again.

"No, that shouldn't be the case. There is no connection between talent and the number of hidden nodes, talent only affects the ease of breaking them open. So you should be fine. Everyone possesses at least the three gates unless their race gives them something similar," he said with a dismissive wave.

"The Three Gates?" Zac asked.

"The Gate of Truth, the Spirit Gate and the Gate of Flesh," Yrial explained. "These are the three foundational nodes that most possess. One increase your connection with the boundless Dao, one expands your mind and one tempers your flesh. All of them are pretty good, though the best ones are usually the special hidden nodes, and those vary from person to person."

Zac slowly nodded, remembering Ylvas' mention of bloodlines and constitutions. At least it seemed that no matter how bad his constitution was he would still possess some Nodes to open up.

"So how do I open the other nodes after the first one?" Zac asked after sighing in relief.

"There are two aspects to bursting open the hidden nodes," Yrial said. "The first is to locate them. This is normally impossible for mortals, so pay close attention to every feeling when you eat this treasure. Don't let anyone disturb you," Yrial said. "The second part is to force them open. Various treasures can do that, though they are always extremely rare as well."

"Sometimes the nodes even burst open due to special encounters. You might get a sense after an intense battle, and might be able to open up a hidden node through resonance. But that is extraordinarily rare," Yrial said.

"Hidden nodes is about chance and fate. For most people, especially mortals, it's impossible to force. So don't fret if you can't open as many as you aim for. There are other opportunities to make you stronger apart from bursting up all your nodes," Yrial said.

Zac agreed and kept going through the list to spend his remaining 6000 credits. After buying the Eye he also bought the robe, leaving him with only 2250 points. The treasures inside were mainly geared for either boosting one's achievements at the peak of the F-Grade or give a good start right after breaking through the bottleneck. So after some hesitation he bought a natural treasure that would give a significant boost to his Race after evolving.

It wouldn't be enough to push him all the way to D-Grade, but it was a good start. He knew that the attribute cap was quite high, but so were the attribute gains in the E-Grade. He did not want to encounter the same issue as he did with his Strength last time. The natural treasure would get the ball rolling, and for the rest he would have to use medicinal baths like most people.

The [Fruit of Rebirth] only cost 500 credits, as body tempering seldom was the hard part of progressing. Zac still had some problems deciding what to do with the rest of the points. He couldn't afford the top tier items, but he also felt that the other items couldn't help him too much in the short run. He also bought the teleportation talisman for a 1000 credits in the end.

"You should buy [Cyclic Strike] as well," Yrial suddenly said from the sidelines.

Zac quickly glanced through the list of treasures to find that it was an offensive skill that would cost him his remaining credits.

"Is it strong? What's it good for?" Zac asked.

"I wouldn't say it's a too strong an attack, that's why it's so cheap. But it will help you progress," Yrial said, making Zac a bit confused. "I noticed that your utilization of Dao is still a bit clumsy. It's not too surprising since such a short time has passed since the Integration of your world, but if you plan on walking the path of duality this is something you need to improve before you advance."

"How come?" Zac probed with some lingering confusion.

"To start creating a system, and have your classes reflect your long term goals," Yrial explained. "[Cyclic Strike] isn't a particularly amazing attack, but it requires two opposing Daos to work. So you will need to learn to combine your Dao of Rot and Dao of Trees to channel it. It will be a good lesson for you to learn to control your specialty core as well."

Zac noticed that Yrial was actually doing his job as a teacher, and he memorized every word the ghost said. Yrial seemed pretty happy with the attention he was getting, and a satisfied grin started to appear on his face.

"In fact, take this as the first lesson of your master. After looking through your situation I understand that your current goal is something that has been born from a series of coincidences rather than a strict vision from your path of progression. You even learned the accompanying Dao inside my trial," Yrial said.

Zac slowly nodded in agreement. What he said was true. He had no goal of walking a path of life and death in the beginning. He had only wanted to gain the Dao of Axes and perhaps use the Dao of trees to heal and protect himself somewhat. But one thing after another led to his current situation.

"There is nothing wrong with that," Yrial said with a nod. "Searching for your path, or being able to adapt it due to circumstances is a good thing. But now that you have started to crystallize your path you need to formalize it."

"What does that mean?" Zac asked.

"Your two classes are not moving in the same direction at the moment," Yrial said. "But you can force them to align with the help of your Dao. The biggest problem is, in fact, your epic class. I am pretty sure I understand your reasoning for choosing it, but getting classes with complementing attributes isn't as important as complementing Daos. You need to force your classes into a new direction."

"Change direction? Can I even control that?" Zac asked with bewilderment.

"Dao fusion is the easiest way," Yrial said with a nod.

Zac suddenly understood what Yrial was getting at. His Undying Bulwark was currently based on the Dao of Hardness and the Dao of Sanctuary, exemplified by the vision of the ancestral protector. What would happen if he modified those Daos? Yrial nodded when he saw Zac's thoughtful expression.

"It seems you understand. You have various options, but if you would listen to my opinion I would recommend that you fuse your Dao of Sanctuary with your Dao of Trees, and your Dao of Rot with your Dao of Hardness. It is still worthwhile to pursue your Dao of Axe since it would work as the delivery method for your cycle of life and death," Yrial proposed.

Zac's brows furrowed when he heard Yrial's idea. Honestly, the Dao of Trees and the Dao of Sanctuary together didn't seem like a bad idea. He could envision a large tree providing shade and protection, meaning it shouldn't be too hard to fuse the two. But the Dao of Hardness and the Dao of Rot?

"Are the Dao of Rot and the Dao of Hardness even possible to fuse?" Zac asked with hesitation. "And wouldn't that risk cutting off my path of progression? And also, how do you know of all my Daos? I never mentioned them and I haven't used Dao of Sanctuary since I entered."

"Well, first of all, I'm your master so how can't I know your situation?" Yrial said and waved his hand, causing a slightly modified version of Zac's status screen to pop up. "And I have to say that your situation is a bit disgusting. If I had this many titles with my supreme talent and beauty I would have become a Divine Monarch by now."

"As for the other parts, it seems you have a too reductionist understanding of the boundless Dao. That is usually the case with lower worlds. Dao Seeds are not small isolated nuggets of truth, but part of an endless fabric," Yrial added and pointed at Zac with his finger.

Zac's vision once again started to change, making him worry that Yrial was once again sending him into a dreamscape. But the scenery soon changed and he wasn't looking upon some new world, but rather an enormous fractal. It reminded him of the first vision he had when he had an epiphany on the Dao of Heaviness.

The fractal in front of him was far more supreme though like it contained all the secrets of the universe. At first he thought it was Yrial's Dao, but he couldn't be sure because to his surprise he sensed the familiar auras from his own Daos in different parts of the fractal.

As far as he could tell all his Daos were represented to some degree in the fractal, though they were only a small part of the tapestry. Zac tried to remember as many details as possible, but the esoteric knowledge hidden in the vision immediately slipped out of his hands. Soon the vision shattered and Zac was back on the floating island again.

"Did you understand? Everything is part of something bigger. Those kernels of truth you have grasped aren't really the truth of Trees or truths of Hardness. They are simply truths that the System has packaged in an easy to digest manner. But it is within your purview to repackage them to something that suits your path better. It requires talent and a high understanding of your Daos though, so it is not something done in a day," Yrial said.

"It simply seems a lot harder to fuse the Dao of Hardness with the Dao of Rot, though," Zac said. "What Dao could I even strive for?"

"Well, the Dao of Corpses comes to mind, and it would be easy to upgrade to Death. But there are other alternatives as well I'm sure. In any case, it will allow your next class to not be so unbalanced," Yrial added.

"Unbalanced? My Undying Bulwark class is pretty damn strong," Zac retorted.

"It is, but much of its utility is lost on you. It's a class meant for an undead champion, leading legions of the dead into war. Is that a future you see for yourself?" Yrial probed.

Zac unhesitatingly shook his head. He wasn't even sure he'd ever visit the Undead Empire, and he had no plans to keep the undead on Earth.

"I have a feeling that you walk a solitary path, just like I did. Your classes need to reflect that better. Your other class is much better in that regard, it boosts a little bit of everything, and its weaknesses are easily shored up," Yrial said.

It was a sobering realization for Zac. He had felt that his second class was almost a cheat, but in Yrial's eyes it was barely serviceable. And what he said about solitary was true. He was so far ahead of the others on Earth that it might even restrict his progress to travel in groups. Perhaps a small group of elites would work, but not armies.

"So why incorporate the Dao of Sanctuary into Dao of Trees?" Zac asked.

"For one it's to not leave any Dao lying around that might affect your class choices negatively. Having too many Daos will cause your path to be crooked, so don't get lured in by the bonus attributes. Every Dao must have a purpose, so you need to categorize your Daos into three groups.

"One for life, one for death, and one for attacks. Both your life and death groups will also help your defense as well due to the nature of your insights. It will cause a balance that will make your progression smoother. Being a super trash will already make your path of cultivation extremely arduous, there's no need to complicate it further," Yrial said.

"Another alternative is to have four groups, with one for Defense as well. In that case, you should not fuse your Daos as I recommended," the spirit then added after some thought.

Zac slowly nodded. It felt like a shroud over his eyes had been lifted, and he was finally seeing the path he should take. It truly helped to have an experienced master. Just a few small pointers would make his life a lot easier in the future. What was even more shocking was that the annoying narcissist in front of him was such a good teacher.

"How do I fuse Dao seeds though?" Zac asked. "I have only heard that it is possible, but not how you would actually do it."

"First of all both need to reach the peak, so you have some work to do. After that you need to merge the two Dao seeds within your body while focusing on the way you want them to fuse. If you succeed you will have a new Dao Fragment, a piece of Dao that is no longer a seed," Yrial said.

"What happens if I fail?" Zac asked.

"Then you'll receive a pretty monstrous backlash. Some die, others get their brains turned into soup. But with your constitution you'll likely be fine after a few months of recuperation," Yrial said.

"Is it as risky to simply upgrade your Dao?" Zac probed with some hesitation.

“No, but it’s a lot harder instead,” Yrial said. “You need one piece of insight per stage to evolve a Dao Seed, apart from the peak where you need two. But to Evolve a Dao Seed into a Dao Fragment you would need to attain the equivalent of five insights in one go.”

“It’s not really hard for someone in the D-Grade, but it’s extremely hard for someone in F-Grade,” the ghost continued.

“So by when should I have fused a Dao?” Zac asked.

“You have no choice, you need to do it before you evolve. For one it’s a minimum requirement to have a Dao Fragment to get an Epic E-Grade Class. But you should do it in any case if you’re planning on getting a Class that suits your path,” Yrial explained.