

Chapter 294: Cultivation

“No one has been able to connect to the underworld yet?” Zac asked.

“Not to our knowledge,” one of the aides said with a shake of his head. “There are speculations that there is some layer far down into the ground that hinder the teleportation arrays. Others even believe that the underworld is in fact on one of the moons.”

Zac’s first looked at the man with skepticism, but upon further consideration he felt it wasn’t too far-fetched. Their new planet had three moons now, and while none of them looked like a proper planet there was nothing saying that it wasn’t possible to survive underground up there. Perhaps his theory of the underworld being beneath the other continent was completely wrong.

But something told Zac this wasn’t the case. It would be extremely odd if an incursion was placed on one of the moons. How were they supposed to close it if that was the case? His theory felt much more promising. But for now he kept his thoughts to himself. And, of course, none of his people would explain the situation either.

Henry seemed intent in sounding out Zac’s thoughts about the coming battles, but Zac still hadn’t decided on his course of action and kept his intentions vague. Besides, he did not want to make large decisions while both Thea and Billy were absent.

It was already well past midnight, and Zac was starting to feel tired since he had come here straight from the Inheritance trial. So he instead said he needed to cultivate, and he excused himself from the table. Emily had turned quieter during the evening, likely thinking about her siblings, and she excused herself as well.

No one slept a lot any more with their improved constitution, so Zac left Adran and Calrin to accompany Henry and his aides to discuss the details of their alliance instead. Alea chose to stay behind as well as a liaison for the military arm of Port Atwood. A group of maids waited outside, and Zac and Emily were shown to their rooms.

Zac's living quarters was a huge suite comprised of five rooms. There were two separate bedrooms, a living room and what seemed to be cultivation chambers. When Zac entered he was surprised to note that the density of cosmic energy was slightly higher inside compared to the outside. He also sensed that the walls were extremely thick, providing great isolation.

There even was a high-quality air control function inside that kept the air just right. The increased density didn't make any difference for a mortal like Zac, but it undoubtedly felt nicer to reside in more energy-rich areas. Zac closed the door behind him and noted with some interest there was even a Do Not Disturb-button by the door.

He had to admit that the Marshal Clan had gone a very interesting route where they combined their old lifestyle with the integration, creating something unique for themselves. That was also made apparent from their effort to incorporate inscriptions in modern items.

Port Atwood was to a far greater degree adapted to the general state of the multiverse, and Zac realized there were almost no modern items in his private courtyard anymore.

It almost felt as though he was inside a sensory deprivation chamber from the moment he closed the door, and he had no trouble to calm his mind. Zac usually preferred to sit in his courtyard to meditate while listening to nature, but this experience was nice as well.

The first problem he wanted to take a minute to ponder upon was what he should do in regards to Yrial's advice regarding his Dao.

The earlier he decided which of the paths he would take, the better. That would allow him to try to gain suitable insights for his Daos as he pushed them toward Peak mastery. As he saw it there were three alternatives to take, rather than the two Yrial mentioned. He could also go for only two Dao Groups in addition to three or four.

The final option would be where took his fusions one step further and created one group of life and defense, with the other group representing Death and Attack. That would reflect the two top tier Daos, Creation and Oblivion. But he quickly discarded his path as he took out [Verun's Bite]. Zac slowly dragged his fingers across the large axhead, and he felt a small resonance in his mind.

Zac had held an axe in his hand since the integration took place, and it had become a part of him. He couldn't imagine giving up the path of the axe in favor of only focusing on the two elements of life and death, so he quickly discarded the thought of only having two Dao Groups. Besides, he felt that doing so might result in his following classes to become even more lopsided.

After some hesitation he also decided to give up on having a fourth group, one solely dedicated to defense. He didn't have any connection to a shield like he did with an axe, and pushing for that Dao wasn't something he felt being too important.

He would shore up his defense with the help of massive attributes, skills and Hybrid Daos instead. That left the original suggestion that Yrial had put forth. The Dao of Corpse didn't sound too appealing to him, but Yrial said there would be other alternatives as well.

He spent a few hours consolidating his improved Dao Seeds. He had very little experience with the Seed of Rot, and he knew that he would have to battle it out a bit while using it to test its might. He also taught himself both [Cyclic Strike] and his Transformation skill.

Yrial's transformation skill formed a layer around the core, and Zac realized he would need to either infuse it with the Dao of Trees or Dao of Rot if he wanted to change his form. [Cyclic Strike] was a bit more unique though.

The skill was the first one he had encountered that was comprised of two fractals, one on each of his shoulders. He was worried for a second he would need to use both his arms for the attack, but after channeling the two Daos into their respective fractals he realized that wasn't the case.

He did, however, realize that he was unable to completely activate the fractals. A very delicate balance was needed between the two Daos, and if Zac didn't control his energies exactly right the skill would fizzle out immediately. This was only exacerbated by the fact that the two Dao Seeds he used weren't of the same grade.

He frowned a bit, knowing he wouldn't be able to use his new skill in the short run. But he understood what Yrial meant that this skill would help him improve his control of his Dao. At the moment he only pumped his attacks full of his mental energy, but this skill required far more sophistication.

Since there would be no quick results from [Cyclic Strike], Zac instead turned his attention toward the transformation skill. But before he tried to activate it he stopped himself as he looked around. He took a second look at the roof and all the corners for any hidden spying devices before sitting down again. But even then he put on a cowl to cover his face just to make sure.

Content that there was no one spying on him he infused the fractal with the Dao of Rot, and he felt a decent amount of Cosmic Energy getting dragged into the fractal as well. The next moment small lines of energies connected with the core, and Zac immediately sensed the change.

Miasma immediately started to flood his system, and he almost fell even though he was already sitting. At the same time his Cosmic energy was quickly getting absorbed by the core, and it was as though a cycle had formed where the death-attuned energy was driving all normal energy out of his body and into the Duplicity Core.

A wave of nausea hit Zac but he held on and kept infusing the skill with the Dao of Rot. Luckily Yrial's estimations had been correct, and the change only took around ten seconds. He opened his status screen to be sure, and he had truly changed to his Draugr form.

It was the first time he had the opportunity to properly observe the transformation, and it was pretty interesting. It wasn't only the energies that changed, but something else was dragged out of his body and pushed into his core. In its stead, his organs were filled with something else.

It was the change of this mysterious force that was the difference between vibrant red blood and the black sludge that now sat in his veins. He had no idea what it was since he couldn't sense it properly. At least he felt it was something completely different compared to life force and miasma. In the end, he could only chalk it up to be the essence of the respective races.

Luckily there was no trouble in learning the two skills in his undead form either. The transformation skill was already adapted for his dual races by Yrial, whereas the attack was mainly powered by the Daos.

Since he was already in his undead form he decided to test something that had been on his mind for days. He quickly took out the Cultivation Manual that Mhal had left behind. Zac already had learned how to utilize a manual from listening to Alyn and his sister and knew exactly what to do to see whether he was a cultivator in this form.

Luckily it didn't seem that the Undead manuals were any different, apart from running on miasma instead of Cosmic Energy. The first thing he did was to take out and crush a few Miasma crystals to fill the cultivation chamber with Death-Attuned energy. Next, he looked down on the manual and tried to start it up.

The first step to cultivation was slightly confusing to Zac, as it was to 'connect with the universe' as Kenzie had explained it.

By pushing his miasma in the specific pattern of the manual a rotation would be formed through his pathways. This rotation would, in turn, connect the energy outside the body with the energy inside, and

as the rotation kept going some of the external energy would be dragged inside through his pores and join his internal energy.

Rotating the miasma didn't prove difficult, as he had ample experience of moving energy through his body to utilize his skills. But no matter how many revolutions he performed following the Cultivation Manual nothing happened. His internal energy was completely cut off from the miasma in the room.

Not even holding a Miasma Crystal helped in the least, even though he had seen Thea regain her energies a lot faster that way. Zac even expelled a bunch of miasma to test whether the manual could at least help him restore his energies faster.

But Zac's final hope was dashed when revolving his energy didn't help in the slightest to improve his missing miasma. Some Miasma continuously seeped into his body as it always did when he wasn't topped off, but cultivating made absolutely no difference on the rate of absorption.

Finally, he had to reluctantly give up on the rotation. If he was a cultivator he would almost immediately have started to absorb energy. There was no such thing as 'sensing the Cosmic Energy' for months until a connection could be made. It was an instant change, where the only difference over time was the amount of energy one could drag into one's body.

It looked like he wasn't meant to cultivate even in his Draugr form. He had honestly known this was a very real possibility after meeting Yrial, but it was still a disappointment. Zac shook his head with a wry smile, realizing he might be the only Draugr in the multiverse without any inherent connection to miasma.

Since he was done with everything he wanted to check out in his undead form he decided to change back to a human. He crushed a divine crystal in the room next, making the life-attuned energies cancel out the miasma to some degree. The rest would naturally be diluted and eradicated by the ambient energies in the air.

But when Zac tried to change back he was immediately stopped.

He soon learned that the transformation skill refused to activate for almost an hour until he could change again. It appeared that freely swapping back and forth still was impossible. But with some timing and subterfuge it should at least be possible to swap once during a battle, though it couldn't be done if he was completely exhausted since it required a decent amount of mental energy.

For the rest of the night, he kept going over his experiences and his Daos, trying to decide on the best path for himself. He only took a short nap of two hours before he resumed his meditation. He lost track of time until suddenly a subdued chime could be heard in the room, gently bringing him out of his meditation.

It seemed the Marshalls had installed a doorbell of sorts to alert the person cultivating. Zac stood up with a grunt and opened the chamber to the outside world. To his surprise he found Thea standing right outside. A quick glance at the time showed it was almost noon, making his mouth slightly widen in surprise.

"You're an addict," Thea said with a shake of her head as she pointedly looked at the unused bedrooms before a small smile spread across her face.

