

The Fall 366

Chapter 366: Manufacturing A Fortuitous Encounter

The Cyborg had utterly destroyed his shield with its final punch, and Zac didn't have any good replacement. He had been using much weaker spare during the battles, and he realized that using a low-quality shield weakened his class skills to a certain degree.

This hadn't proved too large a problem against the Incursions so far, but Zac was afraid that it would negatively impact him if he encountered a real threat like the Dominators or the natives in the Mystic Realm. He was already leaning toward the idea of his undead form focusing on dueling strong opponents, but that would prove difficult if he didn't have the equipment to match his power.

Zac finally closed down his screens with a shake of his head before he closed his eyes. There was no point in worrying about his gear as things stood. He could only hope to either loot it somewhere or buy a better one when he visited the Tower. For now, he would rather focus on the things he could improve; the Dao.

The demon leader's frenzied bladework felt like the final clue that Zac needed to push his Seed of Sharpness to the peak. The demon was a true warrior, and his will to cut seemed to affect reality itself as every swing of his passed through all his defenses. It was this sharp and indomitable will that Zac wanted to incorporate into his Dao Seed since it felt perfect for his fighting style. It also reminded him of the axe-man, whose very being radiated an unquestionable faith in his axe, the surety that anything he wanted to cut would get cut.

The hours passed and Zac didn't move a muscle, as he was completely absorbed in searching for the truth to sharpness. Finally he reached some sort of tipping-point, and he sensed that his gains were successful. The half of the axe fractal in his chest that contained his Seed of sharpness gained a burst of intensity, and he felt that the whole fractal was finally balanced.

Both his Seeds of Heaviness and Sharpness were finally at the peak, meaning that the next step was to fuse them. Zac breathed out in relief as he opened his eyes. He was worried that the Splinter in his mind would ruin his attempt, but his mind was like a calm pond.

The past day's relentless battle seemed to have exhausted the negative emotions that accumulated from first seeing Alea get wounded and then meeting Void's Disciple. It allowed him to think clearly for a bit and meditate without lapses in focus.

It felt like he had latched onto a small clue on how to survive the continuous corruption from the splinter in his head. The Dao of Oblivion was the purest form of destruction, the end of everything. It seemed that adapting to that Dao through actions would lessen the negative effects to a certain degree.

Shutting himself off from the world to find a calm center might actually have the opposite effect of what he desired, creating a constant conflict in his mind. If he was right he realized he was already self-medicating to a certain degree, since he was constantly fighting one enemy or another.

There was also the issue of balance. Even if it was true that fighting and killing helped him to get rid of the corrosion in his mind, he couldn't just keep following his impulses to continuously slaughter. He felt there was a real risk that he would end up like a murderous lunatic if that happened.

Zac knew he would have to keep experimenting to figure out the best solution, but for now he had accomplished his goal. A lot of his plans somewhat hinged at improving this seed to peak mastery. He wanted to utilize the Dao Funnel before he headed for the Tower of Eternity, and now he had a chance to actually form a Fragment if all went well.

He had already realized that he most likely wouldn't be able to gain more than one Dao Fragment before entering the tower, and he already knew that gaining Dao Insights inside the tower itself was impossible without finding a treasure or having an epiphany.

His Fragment of Death was especially far off, with both Rot and Hardness still being at High mastery. His Fragment of life was a bit closer along, with Seed of Trees already being at peak mastery.

So Zac chose to focus on the Fragment of Axe, or whatever came before axe in that line of truths. A Fragment of Axe would hopefully increase his offensive power by a huge degree, which would allow him to climb much further in the Tower. The other two fragments might have great potential in the long run, but Zac was forced to look for quick powerups as things stood.

Even if he didn't manage to fuse his other two fragments before evolving it would still allow him to base his upgraded classes on the Fragment of Axe. From there his Hatchetman upgrade would hopefully be influenced by the life-attuned Dao seeds, and Undying Bulwark would rely on Rot and Hardness.

Zac would certainly have preferred to gain all three fragments before evolving the classes, since he believed that would ultimately lead to better choices, perhaps even two Arcane classes. It would also follow the advice he gained from Yrial. But he was simply out of time, and the path he chose would hopefully at least provide him with two good Epic-Graded classes that would allow him to fight the Dominators and the Lich King.

The old gamer inside him once again felt bad about not being able to grind for a few years extra to push all three Dao Fragments and his skills to the peak. The fact that he was forced to upgrade his class before he had exhausted his potential was truly a waste.

But such was life. There was no such thing as a perfect path in an imperfect world. Perhaps if he was the son of some great hegemon he'd be able to leisurely cultivate for a decade or two before he felt ready to Evolve. But if he did that now he'd probably condemn his whole planet since so much relied on him getting stronger quickly.

Zac sighed and got up on his feet, immediately walking out of his courtyard. The sound of laughter could be heard from the distance, and Zac immediately flashed over with relief flooding his heart. It was Ogras and Kenzie who sat by a patio table having a drink, probably having returned while Zac was meditating.

"Oh, you're out?" Ogras said as he looked up from the table, a glass of champagne in his hand.

Kenzie sat opposite of him, one of the information crystals on arrays placed on the table in front of her. Seeing his sister again was like having a weight lifted from his shoulders. He knew that the risk for something happening to the army was small, but it had been a constant worry in the back of his mind since he went ahead of the others.

"I'm glad you're okay. Did everything go as planned?" Zac asked as he sat down on one of the free chairs, grabbing one of the fruits on the table.

"We came back twelve hours ago," Ogras nodded. "There was no activity worth mentioning. We were assaulted by a pretty massive wolf pack led by a few E-Grade Alphas, but it was dealt with easily since everyone was well rested by that point. If there's one thing our people know by now, it's how to kill wolves. More importantly, I've heard you've been busy?"

Zac's brows rose when he heard they had been back for so long. He quickly took out a watch from his cosmos sack and realized that he had been meditating for well over a day. It had only felt like an hour or two, but he would need to return back to the Underworld pretty soon.

"I took care of the underworld Incursions," Zac explained. "I still have the flame golems to deal with, but afterward I'll be able to move the Union and Council armies to the surface to help with the situation with the undead. In fact, we can probably start sending people from the Union immediately."

Ogras nodded in agreement.

"The average warriors are better used for thinning out the zombies than fighting incursions. I'll have someone gather up Union warriors with decent potential to bolster the numbers in our army," Ogras said.

"How's the study on the Dao Funnel going?" Zac asked.

"I still can't figure out how it was originally meant to be used. I think we're missing half of the item, the one that would infuse the gathered energy into someone," Kenzie said.

Zac was inclined to agree since the Great Redeemer would no doubt want to keep the collected Origin Dao for himself. It made no sense to leave the key to extract it on the planet where anyone could find it. He would rather keep it on his body.

"But I have an idea," Kenzie said as she pointed at the crystal. "I think I can set up a certain array recorded in this thing that will help."

"Oh?" Zac said as he leaned closer with interest.

Ogras didn't seem surprised as he leisurely kept drinking his liquor, so Zac guessed that his sister had already consulted the demon on this matter while they were on the road together.

"I mentioned earlier that I can crack open the funnel, but I don't know what would happen next. I still haven't made much progress in that department. But I think I have found an array that will allow us to trap the Origin Dao for a while, allowing us to cultivate inside it for a much longer duration," Kenzie said. "It's the best idea I could come up with."

"We never had any means to directly absorb the Origin Dao anyway, so I believe this is fine. It will depend on luck and fate how much we could gain from the experience," Ogras said from the side. "We're essentially manufacturing a fortuitous encounter."

"I agree," Zac nodded. "We are not in a position to research the funnel for decades. We'll have to take the gamble. The issue is how many should be present."

That was the crux of the matter. How much Origin Dao were actually collected inside the funnel? Salvation had slain hundreds of thousands of people, but they had no idea how much Origin Dao that

would translate into. It would be a problem if they gathered the whole army only to realize that the energy got so diluted it had almost no effect.

The same could be said about the opposite. What if they found an ocean of Origin Dao inside when only a couple of people were present? It would be a huge waste if almost all of it dissipated and was wasted. Zac was painfully aware of the fact that they didn't have enough powerful people to take charge of important matters. The Origin Dao might be the key to turn the Valkyries and some of the promising soldiers from elites into powerhouses.

"We actually formulated an idea about that on the way back," Kenzie said. "We make two or three layers of arrays. If we notice the inner layer is too small, we'll break it open to open up the Origin Dao to spread into a wider area where more people are waiting."

Zac slowly mulled over the idea, feeling that it wasn't too bad. It would be a shame for the people sitting in the outer layers if they never even got a whiff of the Origin Dao, but he also knew that they needed to ration the stuff if there wasn't too much of it.

"How long would it take for you to set everything up?" Zac asked.

"We have already tasked Calrin to gather the items for the arrays. I think I will need a week or so to set everything up and make sure everything works," Kenzie said. "He also told us about Alea's situation."

Zac sighed when he heard his sister mention the poison mistress, but he simply nodded.

"Don't worry, aren't you going to the Tower soon?" Kenzie said. "Alea might be back on her feet within a month!"

"That's true. And even if we don't find what we need there, we still have a couple of years. If we can get the Nexus Hub to work we might be able to head to a real metropolis and hire a healer or alchemist," Ogras nodded.

"That's true," Zac smiled. "So what will you do until Kenzie has finished the array?"

"I'll help out against the undead," Ogras said. "I need to confirm a few things in battle before improving my Dao, and I wouldn't be much use against the Fire Golems. I plan to lead the army back to the Dead Zone tomorrow after they've had a day's worth of rest and I've gathered the reinforcements."

Zac felt a bit bad for the army who already needed to go back to the front lines when they just had returned. But this was a war for Earth's future, he couldn't be softhearted in such a situation. They needed to do everything in their power to slow down the completion of the array as much as possible.

"Good," Zac said as he stood up. "I'll head down to the Underworld in an hour or two after making the rounds."

"Be careful, those invaders seem pretty strong," Kenzie said with some worry.

"I'll be fine, I'll see you in a couple of days," Zac smiled. "Those golems don't know what's about to hit them."