

The Fall 379

Chapter 379: Fragment of the Axe

Zac felt bad about leaving while people were still barely able to get to their feet, but he followed Alyn's advice. He lastly went over to check in on his sister, and he was relieved to see that she was fine as well. In fact, she might be even better off than himself as she was still able to spread her Dao in the area around the Dao House.

Only then did he return to his courtyard with brisk steps. He felt a bit muddled the whole way back, as though he was dreaming. Zac knew he had warned everyone of the dangers involved, but he truly hadn't expected anyone to get hurt, much less get killed. He could only endeavor to etch this lesson in his heart so that something like this would not repeat itself.

The arrays around his place flitted to life as he sat down on a padded mat with a sigh. He wanted to immediately go over his gains, but a wave of exhaustion hit him the moment he sat down, and he immediately fell into a dreamless slumber.

Zac opened his eyes again, only to see that four hours had passed in the blink of an eye. The nap had made him feel noticeably better, with only a small headache remaining. He hadn't felt comfortable going over his gains while his people lay dead right in front of him, but he couldn't wait any longer and opened up his Dao Screen.

Dao

Stage

Effect

Fragment of the Axe

Early

All attributes +10, Strength +110, Dexterity + 80, Endurance +15. Effectiveness of Strength +5%.

Seed of Trees

Peak

Endurance +20, Vitality +90, Intelligence +5, Wisdom +5.

Seed of Hardness

Peak

Endurance +100, Wisdom +20.

Seed of Sanctuary

Peak

Endurance +50, Intelligence +20, Wisdom +50.

Seed of Rot

Peak

Endurance +5, Vitality +45 Intelligence +25, Wisdom +45.

Zac slowly read through the changes, but he was truthfully a bit disappointed with the result. Fusing two Dao seeds into a fragment had only increased the total attributes gained from 240 to 275. He knew that he had attained almost no "new" insight compared to upgrading a single Dao seed, but he had still thought that he would get more when evolving from a Seed to a Fragment.

Of course, he had to remember that if things progressed the way it did with a seed, where the number of attributes given doubled every time it progressed, it would still rack up to a lot. A Fragment would end up giving 2 200 attribute points at a peak mastery, which was a huge number even in the E-Grade.

He hadn't gained a Title by forming a Fragment either, something he had pretty much thought was a done deal. Then again, if there was a 'first in world'-title like all his other Progenitor titles, then it had likely already gone to Abbot Everlasting Peace. And the general reward for gaining a Dao Fragment might simply be the fact he now had access to Epic classes.

The good part was that he actually gained all attributes from the Fragment, which meant that his luck got boosted as well. And if the pattern kept going as it did with the seeds, then he might end up with a huge boost to Luck by the time the seeds reached Peak. However, if he was being honest with himself he hoped that he wouldn't gain any more Luck from his Dao Seeds.

One of his unique advantages was his huge pool of Luck, where he had almost ten times the amount compared to most people. It had allowed him to survive countless dangers, and often turn the tables on his enemies. That advantage would quickly get eroded if one had an easy-to-access source of the special attribute.

He also got a boost of effectiveness for his main Strength, and that in of itself might turn into a tremendous boost if the number kept increasing as the Fragment evolved. What if he got a 25% boost or something at the peak? The value from that was far higher than static increases, especially with his already large number of High-Tiered Titles.

Then again, he knew that the true benefit of a Dao Fragment wasn't the attributes it awarded. It was just a bonus that the System tacked on. The true benefit came from the huge boost in fighting power. That was doubly true for someone like Zac who was a bit lacking in his control department and who could only use one Dao at the time.

The Seed of Hardness hadn't provided any surprises, even though he had tried to skew the results in his favor. When he pondered on the final upgrade he focused on the rebounding effect of hardness. He imagined creating a body so sturdy that people hurt themselves when they attacked him and thought that he might get some strength that way.

But it still simply doubled down on the Endurance, pushing his highest attribute to even more ridiculous heights. Luckily he had still a lot of room for improvement before he hit his limit. He had already asked Ogras about it recently, and it turned out that the next limit usually lay around 2500 attribute points for humanoids.

But it also meant that he would have to evolve his race as quickly as possible since he was already halfway there. It was only a matter of time before he reached 2 500 Endurance with the increased gains in E-Grade.

The Seed of Rot had a surprising change in the attributes it provided, but not overly so. Alea had been on his mind a lot lately, and the way she fought had influenced his insights. He already knew that Alea's highest attribute was Intelligence, closely followed by Vitality, and that was reflected by the gains in his Seed of Rot.

He was especially happy with the extra 45 points in Vitality since the Tower was a 100-day climb. Having a great regenerative ability would be a huge boon. If he could cut down his rest-time to a third, then he would have a lot more time to spend on the harder floors at the top of the tower. He soon closed the Dao menu and opened his skill menu next to take a look at his new Skill.

Hatchetman's Spirit - Proficiency: Early. Oneness with nature. Upgradeable.

He wasn't sure what oneness with nature meant, but he guessed it was some sort of boosting skill. He knew that Ogras received the skill that turned him into a winged shadow demon was something he got at level 75, and he hoped he got something similar.

Even though he was a bit tempted to activate it right now he chose to wait until he visited Mystic Island. Even if he had a hint of what the skill entailed he couldn't be sure, and he didn't want to accidentally blow up his courtyard.

There was one final thing that he wanted to do before heading out, and he eagerly walked over toward the Nexus Node. He had kept himself in check all this time, but now that he possessed a Dao Fragment he couldn't stop himself from checking out his options to evolve.

He had already confirmed from multiple people that he could simply skip evolving even if he activated the Node. Zac walked over to the huge hovering crystal with eagerness in his eyes, but his face fell after touching the crystal to begin the process.

There was no response.

He kept trying to activate his the Node to display his choices, but no matter how many times he tried there was simply nothing available for him. He swapped through the other systems, such as the skill shop, to see if the crystal was on the fritz, but it worked just fine. It was hard to believe, but it looked like Zac truly wasn't able to evolve at this point even if he wanted to.

Zac couldn't believe that there was not a single option for him to evolve even after having gained the Fragment of the Axe. Hatchetman was only Rare, and he had already gained the prerequisite Dao for an Epic class. He had a slew of titles and accomplishment under his belt as well, and it felt ludicrous that the system wouldn't deem him worthy after all he had done.

Swallowing his burgeoning anger he rapidly tried to think of any reason why he could be stuck like this, and he could only imagine there being two reasons. The first was his skills. Only two of his skills had reached the peak, while the rest were between Early and High mastery. Not even Axe Mastery was at peak proficiency, which might mean that the System didn't consider him ready to evolve.

The other possibility was that some issues had arisen due to his special situation. His Duplicity Core was still F-Grade, which meant it wasn't good enough to accommodate E-Grade classes. This was something that had worried him for some time, but no matter where he looked into the matter he couldn't find any clues.

Or perhaps he needed to evolve both classes at the same time, which was impossible since his other side was only at level 73?

Zac's eyes lit up with hope at the idea as he left the building housing the Nexus Node. He couldn't do anything about the issues of his skills or his Duplicity Core in the short run, but he could easily grind levels with his Undying Bulwark class.

He quickly headed over to Tul'Sarath, the town the Tir'Emarel Clan founded before their Incursion ended. The town felt a bit desolate since a large contingent of people left along with the former slaves being freed. But by now there were quite a few humans and a couple of Ishiate who walked the streets as Zac arrived.

Some had chosen to stay behind after getting liberated, and even more had returned over the past weeks. Life outside was extremely chaotic and dangerous, and many chose to work for the aliens rather than getting eaten by some beasts. Zac shook his head at the irony as he entered Verana's mansion.

"I hear something big took place in Port Atwood," Verana said with a light voice from her seat in a garden when she saw Zac being led over by a maid.

"Nothing too major," Zac said. "I found a trinket containing stored Origin Dao, and we released it."

"It's good to see you are fine," she said with a staid demeanor. "What brings you over today?"

"I am planning to hit a couple of more Incursions over the next days, I could use your support," Zac said.

"Unfortunately we're not able to help this time around," Verana said without hesitation. "My people are exhausted, and I fear another round of battle will cause too many casualties for us to bear. If we keep fighting with this intensity there will be no Tal-Eladar left on this planet in a hundred years. We need to rest and recoup before we can discuss joint battles again."

Zac silently looked at Verana in an effort to figure out her thoughts, and she returned the stare in kind. It was pretty obvious she was angry with him and refused to help out as payback, even if that meant losing out on staking a claim on another Incursion's resources.

"Remember, you asked us to stay behind as a trading partner, not as part of your army," Verana added, ending the prolonged silence.

Zac slowly nodded in agreement.

"It's fine. But don't forget why you, in particular, chose to stay behind. Are you already tired of moving forward?" Zac said as he turned to leave.

Verana didn't answer, and only silently watched him leave.

Not having the help of the Tal-Eladar was a bit of a setback, especially now that all the elites of his force were down for the count for the time being. The only reason he hadn't needed to order his Army to

completely retreat was the fact that their lines were bolstered by the huge army of the Underworld Council.

Only nine councilors were currently on the surface, with four staying behind to keep the situation in the Underworld stable. But those nine were enough to stabilize the battlefield, perhaps even more than his three demon generals.

Besides, perhaps it was a blessing in disguise that the Tal-Eladar refused to help him this time around. He had used [Hunger] while fighting alongside the beastmasters, as only two of them knew of the true identity of Mr. Black.

Now that they weren't around he could freely use [Verun's Bite] to fight, allowing him to take full advantage of his new Fragment. He was pretty sure that the Fragment would still work when using a sword, but the effect would be greatly diminished.

He did consider bringing a couple of the demon soldiers or Valkyries along, but he eventually decided against that as well. There would be a lot of casualties if he brought soldiers without powerful generals to hold down the fort, and all of them needed to rest for a couple of days.

Eventually, he arrived at the most logical conclusion. He would go back to his roots and close a couple of incursions on his own. He got everything ready before he headed over to Westfort as Mr. Black. He needed someone to guide him to the hidden outposts next to the incursions so he commandeered one of the Marshalls who worked for the intelligence department.

Just 30 minutes later the scenery was flashing past him as he utilized [Loamwalker] to run through the wilderness.