

## The Fall 382

### Chapter 382: Enforced Balance

There was no doubt in Zac's mind that the System had decided that his two class upgrades could not both use the same Daos as a base for its upgrade path. This was by far the most likely reason why he was provided two different options for epic classes for his Undying Bulwark class, but none for his Hatchetman class.

He already knew that the evolution of Undying Bulwark would have to be at least Epic Rarity, which in turn required at least one Dao Fragment to upgrade. That's why the Fragment of the Axe was 'used up' to provide an option to upgrade his Draugr-Class first.

This forced his Hatchetman to rely on his remaining Dao Seeds for options in what direction to evolve in. The fact that neither Fallen Groveskeeper nor Mountain's Ward seemed to have any obvious connection to axes was another strong indicator that his theory was correct.

He could also make a decent guess about which Daos were used for which class choices.

Zac guessed that Undying Warlord used his Fragment of the Axe together with the Dao Seeds he got from Undying Bulwark. It would still likely be a class geared toward leading Undead armies, but with a more offensive component added.

That left the seeds of Rot and Trees for Hatchetman, creating the 'Fallen Groveskeeper' class. It also felt like he had the accomplishments for such a class. He had literally created a 'fallen grove' on his property, the hidden valley where corrupted Tree of Ascension stood.

The Curse of Nature seemed to have incorporated Rot and Trees with the Fragment of the Axe instead, leaving hardness to create the Mountain's Ward in conjunction with his nature-aspected skills. There were a few more possible combinations of Dao Seeds, but Zac guessed he lacked other qualifications to get other class choices.

It did leave him a bit confused about what sort of connection Curse of Nature had with the Fragment of the Axe. Would it be some sort of class that caused corruption and curses with the swing of his axe? He did have a mental component baked into his Axe Fragment come to think of it, the mental heaviness.

What Zac didn't know was if the System split up everything between his two paths, not only Daos. For example, did the System take half of his accomplishments to evolve Hatcheman, and the other half to evolve Undying Bulwark? It was much harder to figure out what the rules were on something intangible like accomplishments.

Luckily he had some extra merit in the bank from closing the Technocrat incursion, which would hopefully help him out a bit if he found himself lacking in the future. There were also more accomplishments to be had in the Tower of Eternity before he had to pick a class.

Perhaps his current situation was a way for the System to enforce some balance. Having two classes was an almost disgusting advantage, and it was fair enough that he would have to work twice as hard to Evolve both of them to high-quality classes. But it also begged the question of whether he should maintain his goal of getting as high rarities as possible.

He was so far beyond everyone else on Earth, and he had advantages that would make most people in the multiverse green with envy. Yet he hadn't even managed to get any options to upgrade his classes' rarity after all he had accomplished. That proved the difficulties surrounding the highest rarities, and he was once again reminded of Alyn's exhortations of not biting off more than one could chew.

But at the same time, he couldn't stop himself from being drawn toward the concept of an Arcane class. What was the point of cultivation if not becoming as powerful as possible in order to protect those around you? His classes and the opportunities they provided were a large reason he could defeat even those that possessed equal or even higher attributes than him.

Besides, if he got stuck when evolving to D-Grade in the future he could always head out to adventure and find new opportunities to make up for what he lacked. This time he was pretty much forced to quickly evolve to meet the threats on Earth, but Zac wouldn't be as rushed for time after dealing with the Incursions and the Dominators.

He would have 100 years to slowly and steadily progress, allowing him to push both his Skills and his Daos to the peak before attempting to form his Cultivator's Core.

His options for classes weren't exactly what he had wished for, but they gave him a good hint in what direction to work in. He felt that his optimal choice was to focus on a Fragment of Death next, or at least some subordinate Dao to the Dao of Death. That way he could use his Fragment of the Axe to upgrade Hatchetman, and the Death-attuned Dao Fragment to upgrade Undying bulwark.

Best of all would certainly be if he could get both fragments, which might at even give him the chance at one Arcane class and one Epic, but he couldn't be too greedy.

As for the specific classes he was presented, he didn't analyze them too deeply apart from figuring out why he could choose them. His options would probably change completely the moment he gained another fragment, making it premature to plan his cultivation around the classes he saw now.

He quickly left his private domain to head over to the Thayer Consortia. It was time to finish his preparations.

"The brave general returns!" the Sky Gnome said as he handed over a Cosmos Sack. "I bet your name will be used to scare unruly children after the invaders return home. I've never heard of anyone singlehandedly closing multiple incursions in one week."

The Sky Gnome had already prepared a long list of items that Zac would need, containing everything from a wide array of Attuned Crystals to provisions to last for almost a year. Ogras had said that anything could happen inside the Tower, so he had prepared for every contingency he could think of.

"Half of them fled the moment it became apparent that I would be able to singlehandedly breach their defensive arrays," Zac said with a wry smile as he accepted the sack. "The leaders usually fled first, leaving mostly the slaves and non-combat classes to cover their escape. I simply stood and watched for the most part."

"It's good to have some benevolence, but don't be complacent when you arrive at the Tower of Eternity," Calrin said with a serious face. "You will be mixing with all kinds of people, some from

terrifying forces, and not everyone will share your kind-hearted mindset. Keep your head down and focus on your task.”

“I will be careful,” Zac smiled. “About that money?”

The sky gnome looked a bit queasy, but he transferred over almost 4 billion nexus coins without complaint. It was the combined worth of the sales of his Beast Crystals, along with his accumulated dividends from all the profits the Thayer Consortia had accumulated since the Beast Waves.

“Here, take this as well,” Calrin said as he took off a ring from one of his fingers. “It’s something the Thayer Progenitor found during his travels. He sto... discovered this from an ancient gravesite, and it has extremely impressive defensive properties. It can only be used once every year though, so only activate it if you’re all out of options.”

Zac wasn’t too surprised that the Thayer ancestor was a hobbyist grave robber in addition to a merchant after having met his descendants. He gratefully accepted the ring, since one could never have too many aces in a place like the Tower of Eternity.

“Thank you, I appreciate it,” Zac said as he put the ring on his right hand.

“When are you leaving?” Calrin asked curiously.

“In a few hours. I just need to deal with a few matters first,” Zac answered after some thought. “Can you find Ogras to make sure he’s ready as well?”

“I’ll find him, he has requested some items as well,” Calrin nodded. “Good luck. And remember, a great leader always has time to earn some money on the side. Keep your eye peeled for good trades!”

There were a few more things to take care of, and the first was to head over to the battlefield. There were a couple of people he needed to speak with, and he began with the Marshall Clan rather than visiting his own army. He was leaving for a while so he felt he should touch base with Thea first.

It had been over a month since they last spoke in person, though he got regular updates on her activities and her army’s situation. He headed over to the battlefield with the help of a Marshall Liaison residing in Port Atwood and was quickly led toward the command tent of the Marshall's allied army.

The army was far larger than Zac had thought, with tents almost reaching the horizon. There had to be at least half a million people in the camp, and Zac didn't understand where she had gotten so many people. But it was good that she had found help against the threat, and he put aside the question as he entered the tent.

There was a middle-aged man who gave off a military vibe standing by a large map, and Thea stood next to him looking slightly troubled. Something had changed about her since he saw her last. She felt harder, and a bit colder compared to before. But Zac wasn’t surprised as war had that effect. He could imagine it was especially demoralizing to be forced to face zombies that were once your people.

The fact that she stayed in a constant cloud of miasma didn’t help either. He had seen the effect the death-attuned energy had on people personally. Zac himself was fine since he could simply cram any errant miasma into his Duplicity core, but others weren’t so lucky. They would first become broody and grim, until they were finally transformed into true zombies.

He could still remember the scene where the poor adventurer finally lost control over the accumulated miasma in his body. And the following scene where his former companions ripped him to pieces to get a hold of his Zombie Core. But Zac could tell that the people he passed in the camp was far from reaching that state, which was a small relief at least.

"Long time no see," Zac said with a small smile as he walked up toward the table.

"Indeed. I hear your people have closed the final incursions?" Thea said as she looked up from the table.

"Are you preparing to assault the Dead Zone? How can we help?"

"Not quite," Zac sighed. "I need more preparation."

"Every day of delay costs us ten thousand lives," Thea said with a frown. "And there's also the issue of the array."

Port Atwood had immediately sent an update regarding everything they've learned about the array the moment Zac turned back, so the Marshall Clan and the Sino-Indian Alliance long knew about it.

"We still have a few weeks before the array can activate, especially now that we've gotten reinforcements from the Underworld," Zac said, feeling a bit startled about Thea's strong reaction.

He knew he had gotten a bit side-tracked with the Underworld and rescuing his army, but the fact remained that he was pretty much on schedule. They had discussed a timeline of up to two months to close all the incursions on the surface, and Zac had completed the task well within those parameters.

At the same time he could understand her sentiment. It was her people, many even from her own family, that kept dying in their continuous effort to keep the zombie horde at bay. He had heard that Thea almost lived out on the battlefield, taking on as much as she could so that as few of her people as possible would die.

It might have felt extremely frustrating to suddenly see Zac's progress stop after only closing a handful of the incursions on the surface. It was only last week he resumed his work, closing the remaining ones in quick succession. That made the three weeks in-between look particularly suspicious.

But even then things couldn't be rushed.

"We have to be careful about the Undead Empire. They are far beyond any other incursion in power. We need to do everything in our power to improve our odds while we still can, only attacking when we have confidence in success," Zac said, trying to underscore the importance of taking their time to power up.

"I understand," Thea sighed.

The two kept discussing the war for twenty minutes or so until Zac needed to leave.

"Ten days to two weeks. I will launch an all-out assault within that time. I hope I can count on your assistance," Zac said as he left, leaving the two Marshall Clan members silently looking at his back.

"What do you think?" Thea asked as she watched Zac disappear out of sight.

"I think he speaks the truth, he doesn't feel like the scheming type. He needs to do something before evolving," Mark said after some thought. "All our research does point that evolving to E-Grade is a quick

process though, even if you have a high-rarity class. I would guess he has been holding off in order to get a better class. Our liaison mentioned some large event took place at their Academy the other day. ”

“A better class...” Thea mumbled, some light dimming in her eyes. “But he’s been level 75 for over a month by now while Earth is dying. So it’s for himself in the end... Was I wrong about him?”