

The Fall 409

Chapter 409: Fermentation

Zac quickly discarded the thought of letting his anger take the wheel. That felt like a great way to become a raving lunatic, especially with the splinter still in his head. He would gladly take the upgrades it provided him, but he didn't want to rely on it any more than that.

The splinter only helped with a scant few of his skills though, and a few other skills showed disappointing progress. Inquisitive Eye was still stuck on early proficiency, which didn't really surprise Zac. He no longer used it since it had essentially become superfluous for him. There was no point in using it on weak enemies, and strong enemies were too powerful for the skill to work on them.

He had tried to purchase the ocular skill Galau used, but the youth didn't possess the actual crystal. He had bought the skill from a Skill House on his home planet, which essentially was like an open Dao Repository.

Warriors short on cash could spend some time working in conjunction with the inscribers of the Skill House to produce skill crystals, and the remuneration would depend on the quality of the skill and the number of uses the crystals contained in the end.

The subject of Skill Crystals had always made Zac a bit confused, especially the high price they commanded. He had always wondered why they weren't cheaper. Couldn't you just copy the skill a thousand times and sell it across the multi-verse? Such a thing would no doubt push the price down from the exorbitant prices they had today.

But it was through Galau he finally realized that creating skill crystals was extremely arduous. First, it needed the owner of the skill to have completely mastered it. Just reaching the peak of the skill wasn't enough, one needed to know its ins and outs completely to the point that it almost came like breathing to them.

Secondly, it required a skilled inscriber to translate the insights of the warrior into an inscription embedded in the crystal. The two had to work together for months, sometimes even years for high-grade skills, to create the crystal, creating a huge opportunity cost.

Of course, this process could be somewhat sped up if the inscriber and the warrior were the one and the same. In fact, many wandering cultivators learned the basics of inscriptions for this very reason. If they ever found themselves hard on cash they could spend some time refining a skill crystal or two. It wasn't as good money as hunting powerful beasts, but it also didn't put your life at risk.

Some even traveled the multiverse collecting popular skills in order to learn them and resell crystals at other planets for a profit. The fact that skill crystals usually only lasted for a couple of uses guaranteed a constant demand as well, as long as the skill was strong enough.

Inheritance crystals like the one in his Dao Repository were far rarer, and they required extremely expensive materials to not deteriorate after a skill fractal was extracted. It also required a peak D-Grade inscriber at the least, and it wasn't something some hobby inscriber could create. The Inheritance Crystals in the Tower of Myriad Dao was no doubt the result of a labor of love that took the original Brazla centuries to complete.

As for the other lacking skills like [Forester's Constitution] and [Hatchetman's Spirit], Zac wasn't really sure how to progress them. Forester's Constitution had only upgraded once, and it was while he ran through the corrupted forests of the Dead Zone. Since then there had been no improvements in the skill, making Zac believe it might need constant exposure to various forests to progress.

Unfortunately, that wasn't something he could train on command, and he could only hope that some of the following levels would take place in locations that would benefit the skills. As for [Hatchetman's Spirit], he had no idea how to improve it just yet.

For now it looked like he was done with his training session, and it would probably be more efficient to delve deeper into his Daos on the higher floors. Zac got back to his feet and quickly made his way back to the small town some distance from the valley that the Church had turned into a temporary command central.

"How goes the investigations?" an acolyte standing guard asked as Zac approached.

"I think I may have found a lead," Zac answered off-handedly. "But I need to confer with my associates."

"That's great!" the acolyte exclaimed. "Your colleagues are currently meditating in your courtyard."

Zac nodded and walked toward his courtyard, where he found Galau going over the haul from the past floors while scribbling in a book. His focus was so great that he only noticed Zac's return when he stood right next to him.

"Oh? You're back?" Galau asked. "Are you taking a break or are we done with this level?"

"I have accomplished what I needed here. I will probably go higher if I want to improve my other skills," Zac said. "Where's Ogras?"

"He's out back with the barrels. He might actually have a talent for brewery," the youth said.

"Who knows?" Zac smiled. "He might change vocations as well."

"Did you find anything about the corruption?" Galau asked.

"I found a spot in the valley with much denser energies compared to the rest, the source is probably around there, but we might need your eyes to pinpoint the source. I also have an idea of how to deal with it," Zac said as he walked toward the back of the house.

But he suddenly stopped in his tracks and turned to Galau.

"Are you familiar with mastery-skills?" Zac asked.

"Of course, why do you ask?" Galau asked with confusion. "I have the [Sword Mastery] due to my class."

"I just reached peak proficiency and was shown a bunch of visions. But I didn't gain any Dao insight from it. Is that because of the Tower?" Zac asked, some worry creeping back into his heart.

"Dao vision?" Galau repeated before he shook his head. "No, the mastery skill doesn't provide that. The visions simply give various examples of how you can further your studies, but it's not required to follow. If you have a Heritage you'll simply follow that instead."

Zac sighed in relief, realizing he had been correct with his guess. He thanked the youth and went around the back of the building the church had allocated for them.

"What the-" Zac exclaimed the moment he walked around the corner, as the whole backyard was filled with over a dozen massive barrels, each holding hundreds of liters of liquor.

"Just how much did you buy in the Base Camp?" Zac asked with shock as he walked up to a vat to smell the fragrance.

"Half of it was bought inside the Tower, remember the 21st level? It was dirt cheap over there," Ogras smiled. "I am experimenting and trying to improve my odds of keeping my stuff."

"How's so?" Zac asked with interest.

"Refined items have a higher chance of staying in your Cosmos Sack when leaving this place, but I have no skills in refinement. So I throw various things into the vats to see what will happen," the demon explained and pointed at the bottom of the large vat in front of Zac. "Look inside."

Zac threw Ogras an amused look before he peered into the bottom of the massive container, and his brows rose when he realized just how wasteful the demon was. Apart from a few handfuls of various Spiritual Herbs they had picked up along the climb there were dozens of small shimmering balls lying at the bottom.

"Are those the longevity pearls we found?" Zac said with surprise.

"Yes, that is now my 'Ten-thousand-year wine'. I am sure it will be a great hit," the demon said with glee.

"You know people will think that the wine has been fermented for ten thousand years if you call it that?" Zac snorted.

"Exactly, which will allow me to charge me more for it. Not my fault they don't know their wine," the demon shrugged.

Zac was about to refute, but he honestly didn't know what to say. Instead, he could only change the subject to why he came back here.

"I'm done with things here," Zac said. "I think I will need to find real enemies if I want to improve my other skills. What about you? I haven't seen you working on your skills at all."

"I got my class twelve years ago. Even if I was hiding my amazing talents from my family, most of my skills would have reached the peak by now," the demon said with a roll of his eyes. "Only the new skills I got at level 75 remain, but those will not improve because I activate them among some trash monkeys."

Zac nodded and took out and looked at the Tower Token. It had been inside a fortified bag that ran along the small of his back the entire time, as it wasn't possible to put inside a Cosmos Sack for some reason. It was a truly mysterious item. He had clearly crushed it to arrive at this place, but he found it back on his waist in perfect condition when he arrived at the Base Town.

It looked mostly the same, with one side covered in inscriptions. But since he entered the tower there was also a small corner that said how long he had stayed inside. It was written in some general script

that was widely used across the multiverse. Zac still didn't really master the language just yet, but he at least knew the numbers.

Twelve days had passed since they entered, meaning roughly 3 hours had passed in the outside world. Had things calmed down on the outside now, or was a whole army already stationed and waiting outside the tower? The bounty had remained on his head all this time after all according to Ogras.

"I know that look," Ogras snorted as he placed a heavy lid on one vat after another before he stowed them away in his Cosmos Sack. "Just focus on the climb. We can't do anything about what's going on outside, apart from climbing as high as possible."

"You're right," Zac sighed.

The three set out from the town in short order, and Zac led them to the area where he had found the high concentration of corruption. Zac kept his Dao Field out at all times as he was tired of fighting the monkeys, and they arrived at the spot uncontested. But when they were a few hundred meters from where Zac guessed the source was Ogras stopped with a sour expression.

"I won't go closer than this. That energy is wreaking havoc in my body, any closer and it will get annoying to cleanse," Ogras explained with a frown. "You'll have to deal with this alone."

Zac looked over at Galau who looked pretty bad as well, even though he had produced some sort of talisman that cleansed the area around them. It looked like he wouldn't be able to use his ocular skills to figure things out.

"It's fine, I'll do it," Zac shrugged. "But you'll have to deal with the monkeys after I leave."

His target was a large black boulder that seemed placed there rather than a natural part of the valley, but as Zac walked a few circles around it he couldn't figure out what was so special about it. There were no inscriptions on it, and he couldn't find any other signs it had been tampered with either. So why did it emit such nasty energies?

"Just break it," Ogras shouted from the distance as he sliced a frenzied monkey into pieces. "These bastards won't relent while you are over there."

Zac nodded and went back to do what he did best. Why bother wracking his brain when one good punch would do the trick?

One massive slam was all it took for the boulder to be reduced into rubble, and Zac started to sift through the wreckage for clues. It only took him a few seconds as a thick black haze shrouded a particular piece of the rubble, and even Zac started to feel the effects of the corruption even though he ran the Fragment of the Coffin to the fullest.

He could probably destroy the source with a swing of his axe, but curiosity got the better of him and he walked over to get a better look at the object. A quick inspection from the distance made it clear it was some sort of fossilized bug that had turned into what looked like onyx unless it was an extremely lifelike sculpture.

The bug was slightly larger than a baseball and appeared to have three sets of wings and six sets of legs, making it diverge from the beasts of Earth. It was also evidently clear that it was long dead, so why did it emit such terrifying energies?

"Please hurry, the corruption is getting dangerous!" Galau shouted from the distance.

Zac shrugged and threw fossil or statue into his Spatial Ring, and it joined all the other foreign objects he had collected over the past 20-odd levels. The moment he stowed away the bug the corruption in the area started to dissipate almost immediately, allowing Ogras and Galau to relax a bit.

Was it that easy?

Perhaps it wasn't meant for people to be completely immune to the effects on this floor, but they rather had to figure out a way to destroy the item from a distance. Zac looked over at the other two, and Ogras shrugged as he pointed at the array that had appeared among the rubble from the boulder. Zac shrugged before he joined the two as they moved on to the final level of the third floor.

This time they found themselves on a set of expansive steppes and the only break from the sea of tall grass was a small nomadic village in the distance.

[Challenge the chieftain for the defining treasure of the tribe.]

"You can wait here," Zac said as he started to walk toward the village, but he was suddenly stopped by Ogras.

"Wait, let me do this one."