

The Fall 430

Chapter 430: Manuals

[Sixth Floor Complete. Upgrading Title.]

[Choose Reward: Compatible Soul Strengthening Manual, Compatible Body Tempering Manual, Beast Mastery Manual]

Zac's eyes made a beeline for the rewards, but his face scrunched together when he noticed that there weren't any rewards related to the Dao. He had almost been certain there would be a Dao Treasure waiting for him, but it looked like the System had a sense of humor. Or perhaps it simply didn't award any Dao Treasures at all since there was still the projection waiting when he exited the tower.

[Tower of Eternity - 6th Floor: Reach the 55th level of the Tower of Eternity. Reward: All stats +10. All Stats +10%.]

The title was just what Zac expected, but he still couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed. One of his goals before evolving was to reach 1000 points in Strength, but he knew now that he had already maxed out on the benefits he could get from the Tower Title.

The next floor, if he could even pass it, would most likely add a high-tiered component to the title, not any more raw stats. It would be better if you looked at raw combat power, and it was usually more desired to keep the raw attributes down so that one would be able to enter restricted Mystic Realms. But it was far worse for Zac now that he needed to reach a certain threshold rather than stay under it.

Zac didn't have any good ideas on how to boost his Strength with the final 73 points to reach his goal of a thousand. He had only gotten 7 points from the Peak Strength Fruit, but he should be approaching the limit of what he could gain while still in F-Grade. Not that he could get his hands on any more of them anyhow.

There was some Strength waiting for him when he formed his final Dao Fragment, but it wouldn't be enough. Neither Sanctuary nor Trees gave a single point into Strength, and he would probably only get the 10 points from the boost to all attributes.

Was getting a middle Dao Fragment the only option?

Unfortunately, that was easier said than done. He had discussed the topic with Galau a couple of more times after they discussed [Axe Mastery] when he mastered the skill. According to him it wasn't any easier getting a mid-grade Fragment than pushing your Race Grade to D while still having a F-Grade Class.

A low-Grade Dao Fragment was the standard limit for almost all cultivators. As Galau explained it, over the almost million years his clan had existed, there had been no lack of geniuses who formed Dao Fragments before they evolved. But there hadn't been a single one who managed to evolve the Dao Fragment while still in F-Grade.

It could technically be done though, but it required both a tremendous insight into and affinity with the Dao in question. In other words, you needed to be a cultivator to evolve the Fragment. However, Zac had reason to believe that he might be an exception to this rule.

Galau had said the same thing about Early Stage Dao Fragments as well. According to him one even needed a high affinity if you wanted to form a Dao Fragment at all. It had something to do with an F-Grade warrior lacking a natural spirituality, something that only affinity could make up for.

The first grade of cultivation was based on building a foundation. You started with a weak mortal constitution, and gradually improved it to be able to support cultivation and harmonize with the Dao. In fact, the youth had assumed that Zac was a cultivator based on the fact that he had formed Dao Fragments.

However, Zac hadn't encountered any problems forming his Dao Fragments even with his non-existent affinity, leading him to believe that there were no such restrictions for him, as long as he got some help in forming the Fragments.

That still meant he needed to encounter an opportunity even greater than the Dao Funnel or the Tower Apparition though, and Zac didn't want to rely on such a longshot for the chance at pushing his Fragment of the Axe to Medium Stage.

There was the possibility of utilizing his Apparition on his Fragment of the Axe instead fusing his third Dao Fragment, but Zac wasn't too sure about that gambit. It would mess up his class choices a bit, but more importantly there was no guarantee of succeeding in upgrading the fragment.

He was pretty close to forming the life-attuned Dao Fragment, and he was almost certain he would be able to push the final distance with the help of his apparition. But the same couldn't be said of his Fragment of the Axe. He barely got used to fighting with it, and he hadn't really figured out what direction to take it.

There was a pretty large risk he would just make some improvements, rather than evolving the Axe Fragment, even with the help of an apparition. If that happened he would essentially have wasted that huge opportunity. Perhaps the following floors would present him with a solution though, so Zac didn't completely give up, and instead turned his attention to the rewards.

Galau had broadened his horizons greatly during their travels, especially after the merchant realized Zac was a pretty clueless progenitor who only got integrated a year ago. One valuable piece of information after another had flooded out of his mouth to curry favor.

The subject of manuals was one such topic. Zac had been looking for something like a meditation manual to combat the splinter in his mind since he returned from the hunt. Calrin hadn't been able to get his hand on anything useful though, and Zac had been forced to solely rely on the miasmic fractals in his mind.

But such a thing did in fact exist, along with various other types of manuals. A Soul Strengthening Manual was a technique to gradually improve on one's soul, just like the Pool of Tranquility did. It would not only make one more resistant to soul attacks and Illusions, but would also increase one's spiritual energy reserves.

The soul was the power source of the Daos, and none of the attributes directly contributed in this regard. Intelligence and Wisdom didn't help you with controlling the Daos or strengthen your soul, and neither did any other. The soul's strength was pretty much inborn, though it got stronger from leveling up.

Zac had a feeling that his soul was already a lot stronger than normal, especially after having completely steamrolled the Enlightened Three with his Dao storm. The Splinter of Oblivion had helped by strengthening it even further, and his dip in the pond had helped remove some impurities.

This manual was a chance to work on his soul even further.

Better yet, it was even possible to use such a manual without being a cultivator, so it wasn't something that he would have to throw to the Merit Exchange. There was, however, a pretty big reason as to why it was almost unheard of for cultivators to practice Soul Strengthening Manuals.

It was slow. Excruciatingly slow.

One could spend millennia refining and empowering one's soul, turning it into a diamond completely free of impurities. But you could instead have focused on meditating on your Dao or progressed in levels during that same time, and both would have a greater effect on one's survivability and strength.

Body Tempering Manuals were related to special constitutions or improving one's bloodlines. Practicing a manual along with taking certain treasures or medicinal baths would slowly transform one's body to gain a specialized constitution.

Alea was such an example, though there seemed there were some problems with the method she used. Ogras' grandfather was probably unable to acquire a complete manual, so they had jumped into it blindly. Another possibility was that they had tried to forcibly use a manual with low compatibility.

If the main reason for the scarcity of Soul Strengthening Manuals was the slow progress, then compatibility was the main reason for there being almost no Body Tempering Manuals in circulation. Pretty much all manuals had extremely strict requirements on things such as race, affinities, and even bloodlines to work.

To simply train an unsuitable manual was to court death. If Alea was practicing an incompatible manual then just turning into a monster was the least of her worries. She ran the risk of dying at any moment, and considering her class and constitution she might end up taking half of Port Atwood with her in a storm of poison.

Beast Mastery Manuals were somewhat of a mix between a skill and a mental exercise, and likely the most popular of the three supportive manuals that Zac was offered. It allowed anyone to gain a facsimile of the abilities that a true Beast Master like Verana possessed by allowing you to slowly form a connection to a beast through prolonged meditation.

One could use it to gain a mount like the floor guardian that Ogras fought, or a pure battle companion to fight alongside you. The connection sounded a lot like what he had with Verun, and the chance of betrayal was pretty slim unless the beast got too powerful.

There were drawbacks to this type of manual as well though. Compatibility was an issue with both Soul Strengthening and Body Tempering manuals, but with Beast Mastery Manuals the compatibility issue lay with the beast. You needed certain manuals to tame certain beasts, and some beasts were simply not possible to form a connection with unless they wanted to.

Ogras was the victim of a forced connection from what Zac could tell, where The Umbra had forced a connection that normally wasn't possible to create. He hadn't dared to experiment on himself due to

the risk of death, so he had used Ogras to satisfy his curiosity after having turned into an Inheritance Spirit.

Since the System didn't mention compatibility with the manual Zac guessed that it would have to be either pretty general, or that it was like a lottery what sort of beasts that it would work on. It might turn out useful, but it might also only work on beasts that didn't exist on earth.

In either case the manuals weren't something that would benefit Zac in the short run, but with enough time all of them could help him in different ways. Finding a compatible manual was extremely rare, and most were created through an arduous process of trial and failure by clans that had the resources and manpower to experiment.

A few of the peak forces in the sector would no probably possess them, but having the means to create a specialized constitution that fit your heritage and bloodline was no doubt rare even among the strongest forces in the area.

All three manuals were also a chance for a warrior to gain more class options before evolving, so Zac could understand why they were presented as a reward. Of course, the additional classes Zac would get from a stronger soul or acquiring a beast companion probably wasn't something that Zac wanted right now.

His bottleneck wasn't his constitution either, but rather the Dao and the concept of creation.

But even if Zac didn't need them to get a better class they were still useful in their own way. Zac guessed that this was a way for the System to provide an uncommon perk that most powerhouses could benefit from, or use to shore up weaknesses.

Indecision plagued Zac as he looked back and forth, and he couldn't reach a conclusion. All of them had benefits and drawbacks that made Zac leery to pull the gun. The body refinement manual would allow him to improve on his already monstrous constitution, but there were some pretty big question marks about his body.

There was obviously something special about his body, and Zac worried that the body refinement manual he got from the System wouldn't work well with a body of Technocrat heritage even if it said it was compatible. It might take away what made his body special in order to create something new.

Or perhaps the constitution that would be formed from a technocrat heritage simply wasn't in line with the cultivation path he had embarked upon, that of Life and Death.

Getting a beast companion would be a pure plus, Verun had proven that many times. But there were extremely few decent beasts on Earth, and it wasn't even sure that the manual would work on it. He was also hesitant that there were any beasts strong enough to actually make a difference. He would have to find a pretty monstrous animal to be able to keep up with his own power and growth.

As for the Soul Strengthening Manual, it was simply too slow. Zac wouldn't see any direct benefits until after the incursions and Dominators were gone. He also wasn't sure whether the time spent grinding such a manual would be better used to kill beasts and open up nodes. Leveling up did strengthen one's Soul as well, and reaching higher grades was probably the best counter to the Splinter of Oblivion.

Zac finally made his decision, but before he claimed the reward he paused, first opting to check in on Earth by opening the Ladder. It had become somewhat of an emotional support to see that Kenzie and the others were all alive, so Zac's eyes quickly scanned through the lists to find the familiar names.

But he suddenly froze as the latest change in the Ladder was just too shocking.