

## The Fall 435

### Chapter 435: Breeder Clone

"We weren't successful in inscribing the life-aspected formation," the undead inscriptionist said as she took out a couple of pitch-black array disks. "You will likely need a life-attuned Array Master for that half. I do maintain some contact with a master who might be able to do it, but it will probably require a few months."

Zac stared at the inscriptions with bemusement for a second before he looked down at the densely inscribed array disks. Was there really a need to leave him on a cliff like that just now?

"This is great, no need to disturb your friend," Zac assured after he composed himself. "How many did you manage to inscribe?"

"We made six, but I assure you we use high-quality materials," Ildera said with some confusion. "They will not break even after repeated usage, so having six of them is overkill."

The first thing Zac had done after arriving at the outpost was to commission the construction of array disks for his Soul Strengthening Manual. The forces he encountered in the Tower were all at least E-Graded by now, and many had skilled inscriptionists who could help save some time. He still had over 40 days left in the tower, and he wanted to use the days to the fullest.

It would also save his sister a lot of effort if he could simply get his hands on array disks rather than having her spend weeks on creating two cultivation caves. The reason he commissioned multiple copies was even simpler. He needed to improve the odds of the arrays making it out of the Tower.

"What do you know about redrawing skill fractals?" Zac suddenly asked, taking the opportunity to learn from an E-Grade cultivator. "Seeing as you're an expert on inscriptions I hope you would have some insights to share."

Ildera surprisingly didn't answer though, but rather looked at Zac with a troubled expression.

"I am not qualified to discuss such matters with the young master. I am sure that your elders will show you the way when you reach the point of creating, adjusting, and fusing skills," she said. "I am afraid that me intervening at this point would deviate your path of cultivation."

It appeared that using his imaginary master and elders as a shield from any questions and courtships had its drawbacks. He tried to cajole some answers for a while but she was like a brick wall, citing that it wasn't her place to disrupt 'his master's plan'.

She eventually relented a bit by gifting him a handful of sheets that were actually made from the skin of E-Grade cultivators. Zac's hair stood on end when he realized what he was holding, but it was apparently a material made for practicing inscribing skill fractals and pathways. It was the closest one could get without starting to experiment with your own body.

The Array Master once again tried to turn the short visit into a romantic outing after the main matter was dealt with, but she was soon enough led out from the courtyard by Uro.

"My master contacted me earlier. He ordered me to take down the Breeder within the day as a trial. I will be leaving in a few hours," Zac said when the steward returned.

Uro, the ever stoic servant, simply inquired whether Zac needed assistance or any specific equipment for his task. Zac asked for some more [Warrior Pills] after some deliberation, along with another batch of Miasma Crystals. The steward bowed and left the courtyard once again.

Ildera not being willing to help out with redrawing the fractals was a bit of a let-down, but she still had provided a lot of help. Her words had indicated that modifying skills was possible, and not some cockeyed idea he had come up with. Even more surprising, she had actually mentioned that Fusing skills was possible as well.

Creating skills was nothing strange. It seemed to be somewhat expected after reaching E-Grade, at least if you had a higher rarity class. Those with uncommon classes would probably get by with just buying skills, but he had a hard time believing someone with an Epic class would be able to reach D-Grade without having created at least one skill tailored to their cultivation path.

Modifying skills to better suit you felt pretty straightforward as well, though it was probably a lot more complicated than it sounded. Skill fractals were delicately designed networks of thin pathways that allowed Cosmic Energy to transform into all kinds of magical effects.

The skill fractals were something like an imbue of Dao as far as Zac could tell. Pushing the energy through the network infused the un-attuned energy with higher truths, which is how Cosmic Energy turned into anything from fireballs to Zac's fractal edges formed from [Chop]. That was also why one could ponder on the Dao through studying skill fractals.

Even small modifications of a fractal would destroy the delicate pattern the fractal created, and you really needed to know what you were doing to not completely mess everything up.

Fusing two skills was another beast altogether. Zac had no idea where to even begin with such a daunting task. He could only assume that the System assisted somehow since skill fusions sounded way too complicated to understand for someone who hadn't spent eons studying fractals.

Zac looked up at the dour sky with some wistfulness. It almost felt as though he was back on the island again during those two solitary months. An ignoramus fumbling in the dark, trying to make sense of what was going on.

He had stepped over a mountain of corpses to get where he was right now, but he was still just someone on the threshold of cultivation. In the beginning he was like a caveman, crudely pushing Cosmic Energy into various body parts to increase his strength. But was he all that much better now, impaling himself with daggers to create shortcuts in his skill fractals?

The steward returned soon enough and he wordlessly handed over a Cosmos Sack. Zac didn't think much of it, but his eyes widened in shock when he scanned the contents of the pouch.

"What's all this?" Zac asked with shock.

"It's from the Royal Family. Killing the breeder is just a stepping stone on Lord Piker's path, but it is the difference between life and death for the Kingdom of Zervadar. This is a token of our appreciation," Uro said, some life appearing on his face for the first time since he was assigned to Zac.

The reason Zac was so shocked was that there were roughly a hundred D-Grade Nexus Crystals inside the pouch, along with all kinds of pills and herbs. It might not be much compared to the vast amount of

wealth he found inside the Spatial Ring belonging to Rasuliel, but it was still the biggest haul of any single level unless you counted special encounters such as the Pool of Tranquility.

Since Zac had made his decision he immediately prepared to set out. The commander of the outpost apparently wanted to hold a banquet in his honor, but Zac declined as he much preferred to depart without any pomp or ceremony. Fearing some sort of commotion he donned a cloak before he slipped through the back door of the mansion to blend in with the soldiers.

It was still a bit weird walking among the undead in their natural habitat. It was as though he was in some sort of bizarro-world where everything was similar but not quite the same. He had seen a young couple walk hand in hand, one of them a human zombie sporting a decent amount of decay and the other a Corpselord stitched together from at least 5 different races.

Another thing that had been a bit surprising was their love for scents. Almost all the undead living in the kingdom were too low-tiered to eat and drink, so they looked elsewhere to find the satisfaction a good meal could bring. Many enjoyed complex fragrances and most households created their own incense or potpourri.

Zac had long known about the location of the level guardian and he switched over to his human form when he was far enough. It was still quite the distance, and it took him six hours to reach the insectoid stronghold where the Breeder Clone was located, even when he employed [Loamwalker] to its fullest.

The location wasn't very hard to find as it was a huge crater caused by the insect hive slamming into the undead planet. The Breeder had arrived alone and quickly started to produce an army for conquest. The insectoid queen had essentially shot out a bunch of hives specially designed for space travel, and they would autonomously conquer planets they landed on before reconnecting with the main hive.

Zac deliberated for a few seconds, but he eventually decided to head in as a Draugr. He had somewhat fallen into the routine where he relied on his human form for most tasks, while occasionally switching over to Undying Bulwark when Hatchetman proved a bad fit.

This was reflected in the slanted masteries of his skills, and Zac decided to push through the whole of the 7th floor in his Draugr form unless a level was a particularly bad match.

Sneaking inside the hive was out of the question no matter what class he chose as the whole crater was crawling with warriors. But full frontal conflict was Zac's forte, so he started to grow from activating [Vanguard of Undeath] as he ran down the slopes.

Just seconds later enraged screeches echoed across the area as Zac mowed down one warrior after another with the help of [Immutable Bulwark]. He didn't bother killing too many of the warriors, wanting to save his miasma. Some unlucky warriors got bisected by the massive miasmatic axe from getting too close, but most just got lightly maimed before they were thrown out of the way.

He was however forced to start cutting his way forward when he reached the hive, which pretty much looked like a nondescript comet. The entrance was completely blocked with innumerable warriors and beast companions, and Zac was completely drenched in a mix of blood, ichor, and green goop when he finally reached the Breeding Chambers.

The Breeder Clone seemed to be something like a mix of a worm and a factory, a gargantuan mound of flesh over 50 meters long. Zac barely had time to consider a course of action as a massive burst of Fragment-empowered acid threatened to swallow him whole.

He initially planned on enduring the blast before countering, but his Danger Sense screamed that doing so would be a monumental mistake. He could only slam his foot into the ground to teleport next to the massive insect with the help of [Profane Seal] and then stomp again to erect the cage.

His pitch-black bardiche swiped at the enormous slab of flesh, but he was surprised to see that the creature had a consistency like pudding. His axe went right through, but the only effect was that he almost got doused by another spurt of acid. Even worse, just seconds later the large wound had closed.

Zac briefly considered swapping over to his other class to deal with this weird creature, but he suddenly had an idea. The ten chains all stopped killing the soldiers that kept emerging from pods that covered the Breeder's body and instead shot far into its gelatinous flesh.

The Clone violently started to shudder and shoot acid in all directions, forcing Zac to desperately scramble back and forth as he combated the tide of newly hatched insectoids that tried to rip him into shreds. However, he almost moaned in pleasure as torrential amounts of energy kept surging into his body from the Breeder Clone.

The amount of energy that the chains managed to drain from the queen was shocking, and a massive cloud of miasma had long formed over Zac's head as he simply had no way to storing this much energy. It took a full 10 minutes for the ten chains to completely drain the queen, which awarded Zac a final burst of energy that confirmed the kill.

The whole Breeding Chamber was partly submerged in massive pools of corrosive acid by this point, and together with the black clouds of [Winds of Decay], the hive had truly turned into a hellscape for any being, living or dead. Zac wasted no time inside the hive and quickly stepped through the teleporter.

The combination of his shocking Endurance and the layers of defensive skills that Undying Bulwark provided made Zac a nigh-impervious tank, but he still looked beyond saving when he appeared in the middle of the streets of some massive town. His pale skin was sloughing off his body in multiple spots, and Zac shuffled into an alley as he threw a healing pill into his mouth.

It appeared the days of easy victories were over.

The Breeder Queen hadn't been an insurmountable enemy, but the thing was both hard to kill while possessing unique strengths that would make her a pain to fight for either of his classes. The realization forced him to stay in place and heal up before heading out, as he didn't dare to challenge the level in his current condition.

Zac was thankfully able to reach an almost perfect condition within a few hours thanks to the pills he was given, and he immediately resumed his climb. He wanted to regain the days he lost on the first level, sparing barely an hour a day for sleep and meditation.

But progress was getting slower and slower, and not a single level provided a quick solution.

Worst of them all was the 60th level where he was trapped in an endless loop of restrictive arrays for nine full days. When Zac finally managed to break out through a bout of unhinged fury he didn't even attempt to complete the quest, but instead opted to turn the poor guardian into a pile of meat.

The unceasing experiments into fusing his Dao Fragments was also a cause of constant delays. In fact, the largest threat to his well being was his own training regimen. The guardians left their fair share of wounds by this point, but none of them had managed to blast one of his lungs into smithereens like he had during a particularly ill-fated training session.

Zac was essentially leaving a trail of bodies and black ichor in his wake, but that trail was at least getting closer and closer to the peak of the 7th floor.