

The Fall 485

Chapter 485: Choices

He had already noticed it back during his meeting with Catheya, but there was something wrong with his chest. Iz Tayn had left a burn on his body that he hadn't been able to get rid of with healing pills.

However, getting his torso blown apart and reformed by Creation Energy had dealt with that problem.

Or so he thought.

He still couldn't see any mark on his body, but he had felt a slight pain in his chest multiple times now, but the feeling was gone before he had a chance to react, making him almost doubt it was ever there.

He couldn't see anything amiss, but the fire mage seemed to come from a real powerful force.

She might have all kinds of means of tracking he had no idea about.

"The Thayer Consortia happens to be skilled in those kinds of endeavors, we'll happily help in this regard... For a small remuneration," Calrin said as he gave a prim bow. "Young Lord, it is good to see you again."

Zac didn't immediately greet the wily merchant, but he rather gazed at the Sky Gnome for a few seconds as his thumb rubbed the defensive treasure that he received from Calrin before he left for the tower.

"Did you know that the ring you gave me would cause trouble with the Tsarun clan?" Zac asked while he tried to gauge the slippery merchant's face for any lies.

"No way!" Calrin said, looking genuinely shocked. "It is just a defensive treasure that has been kept in my family. I just wanted to make sure that you, my great benefactor, wouldn't meet any untoward end during your first sojourn into the Cultivator World!"

"Well, your small gift led to the destruction of the Zethaya Pill House, and the death of almost a hundred elites of the sector. Including a Dravorak Princeling," the demon snorted from the side. "Oh, and a main branch Tsarun Scion along with all their members at the Base Town. Thayer Consortia might become famous across the whole sector over the following years as the rumors spread."

"It- Ah? Dravorak as in the Dravorak Dynasty?" the Sky Gnome said, his face aghast. "Did they see the signet as well? I mean, it wasn't my intention to cause any trouble. I don't understand what's going on?"

"Just what happened during your climb?!" Kenzie exclaimed with shock from the side after glaring at the Sky Gnome, who quickly busied himself with the pile of treasures by the side.

"It's complicated," Zac sighed. "I got spotted by one of Calrin's old enemies, but problem was that I didn't handle it well. Things got a bit out of control from there and a bunch of people tried to kill me. But it was mostly sorted out."

"Sorted out?" Ogras snorted from the side, but he didn't add any more oil to the fire after a glare from Zac.

"Well, we also learned a few things about the origins of the Redeemer. For now, make sure that no one on Port Atwood mentions where they come from if they decide to head to the Tower of Eternity. My identity might be a bit delicate," Zac said after some thought as he turned to Kenzie.

"If I may, young master," Calrin said from the side, "What level did you reach?"

"73rd level. The entrance of the 9th floor," Zac said, not bothering to hide the truth.

"9th Floor!" Calrin screamed while the appraisers looked up from the pile of treasures for the first time, shock clearly written all over their faces.

"Monster! True monster!" the Sky Gnome muttered, before his face lit up again. "But that's for the best. With you as a guardian, The Thayer Consortia will reach unprecedented heights. I, Calrin Thayer, will not only have led my family out of a calamity, but toward the heaven's themselves!"

"What are you getting so big-headed for, you little bastard," Ogras snorted from the side. "You better think of new ways to provide benefits to your shareholders instead. A big tree might give you shade, but it also requires a lot of nutrients."

Zac slightly smiled at the antics, but he didn't correct the demon. He still couldn't tell if the Sky Gnome had exposed his connection to the Thayer Consortia on purpose or not, but it had caused heaps of trouble regardless. The little merchant would have to work extra hard to make up for the chaos he had caused.

But he knew that he would have to rely on the Sky Gnome to a certain degree after meeting Catheya. He had no idea that elites required more energy to level up compared to weaker cultivators, which honestly made him worry about his own situation a bit.

Not only were his attributes almost ten times higher compared to a normal cultivator, but he also had high efficiency on the attributes. Add to that that he had a second class to level, and the even more troubling issue of him being a mortal. All that combined made for an extremely torturous leveling experience that would require terrifying amounts of bloodshed and treasures to reach the peak of E-Grade.

As for the grades above that, he didn't even dare think about it.

"How long until you've gone through everything?" Zac asked instead as he turned to Clarin.

"We'll have a preliminary answer for you in two hours," Calrin hurriedly said. "You can focus on your cultivation with ease."

Zac nodded before he turned to Ogras.

"So, do you have any advice? The information crystals I have only mentioned the three tribulations," Zac asked. "Heart, Body, and Soul. It said that using treasures to pass is impossible and that you had to rely on your own prowess. Then it just went on to say that one should have an elder near-by in case of a mishap."

The information crystal was something he had bought in Base Town during the first week he stayed there. He had bought a bunch of general information crystals that contained all sorts of things that were good to know. Most of it was things that any teenager belonging to a cultivation force would know, which was why they cost almost nothing.

However, that also meant that they didn't delve too deep into any topics, only giving an overview.

Buying the crystals had been the first step toward self-reliance for the humans of Port Atwood. It wasn't that he didn't trust Ogras or Alyn's teachings, but their world view and knowledge were influenced by growing up in Clan Azh'Rezak.

What worked there wasn't necessarily optimal for Port Atwood, so it didn't hurt getting another source of knowledge. It wasn't anywhere near as comprehensive as Thea's library, but it was a start.

"It differs," Ogras said as he looked at the Nexus Node while Kenzie was putting the finishing touches to the support array. "It tests you in one of three ways, depending on where The Ruthless Heaven's feels you are lacking. The tribulation will strike at your weakness, and either you pass or you fail."

"What happens if you fail?" Zac asked.

"Anything from mild wounds to death depending on how badly you performed and whether someone could disperse the tribulation for you," the demon shrugged. "But truthfully, I've only met one who failed his trial so badly he was forced to give up on cultivation. Obburak, a guard in my home. He undertook the trial drunk out of his mind, it ended with him going insane."

"Insane? Just what did he encounter?" Zac asked with a frown.

"The Body Tribulation is essentially The Ruthless Heavens beating you up, and you just have to bear it. It is to test that you have created a foundation sturdy enough to keep building upon. You will probably not get that one considering your monstrous constitution," the demon said with an envious glance. "It is the most common trial for Dexterity and Intelligence-based classes."

"And then?" Zac urged.

"Next there is the Spirit Tribulation," the demon continued. "Your soul is attacked in a way that neither Skills nor items can protect you from. You need to use your soul and Dao to defend yourself. The Soul is the connection to the Heavens, and it needs to be strong enough to withstand the weight of the Dao," Alyn said.

Zac grimaced as he heard the description. His soul was already in a pretty fragile state after having been forcibly torn apart and mended twice the past month. It was a patchwork upon a patchwork, where the slightest thing might set off a chain-reaction beyond his control. However, his soul had become pretty sturdy from the series of harrowing experiences, so he still felt some confidence in case he got that one, at least while the Remnants stayed inactive.

"Finally there is the Heart Tribulation. You will be thrown into illusions and temptations, and you will need to break free. The Heavens test your conviction and mental fortitude. A sturdy body and soul is needed to walk the path of cultivation, but a resolute heart might be even more important," the demon continued. "This is the trial that turned Obburak into a simpleton, by the way."

Zac slowly nodded as he listened to the options. The third one didn't feel too difficult either. His mental state should be a lot sturdier compared to most peak F-Grade warriors after his countless life-and-death battles. Many cultivators who had reached this point had never even left their own clan's estates, and this kind of trial might be pretty difficult for that kind of greenhouse warriors.

Still, it was a relief that the risk of death or crippling was pretty low. He could still fail, but he would at least be able to heal up and fight the Undead Empire in his current condition.

"Is it the same for all the rarities, or are there more things to be wary of when talking Epic Classes or higher?" Zac asked.

"Perhaps Epic and higher have different trials apart from the normal three, I wouldn't know," the demon slowly said. "But they will no doubt be more dangerous. Each increase in rarity means a sharp increase in difficulty that accompanies the tribulation."

Zac looked at the Crystal with mixed emotions. He wasn't sure if he was ready. He wanted to consolidate his gains and stabilize his foundations before attempting this. But time waited for no man, and he couldn't hold off any longer.

Hearing about the losses out on the ocean, and seeing the scorched landscape outside his home had been a stark reminder that every day he spent on accumulating his strength was another day of disastrous losses across the world.

Perhaps he would be able to enter the heart of the Dead Zone and take out the Lich King without evolving. But perhaps he wouldn't. With the situation looking like it did there would be no second chances or do-overs. If his assault failed or even got slightly delayed the whole world would fall.

He could not have that on his consciousness.

"It's done," Kenzie said as she looked up with a tired grin.

"Thank you. Try to rest up," Zac smiled, a pang of guilt blossoming up in his heart again.

He had heard from Ogras just how hard she had fought to keep things together while he was gone, and her unstable aura clearly indicated that her soul was overtaxed. He had already learned from Jaol that using high tech was draining on the soul, and Jeeves was no doubt as high tech as they came.

"Here, take these with you as well," Zac said as he took out a stack of Soul Crystals. "They'll help restore your mental energy."

"Where did you get that?" Ogras said with wide eyes, his hand already reaching out to snatch one from Kenzie.

"Here, take this," Zac snorted and took out a few more after he slapped away the demon's hand. "I got these Soul Crystals from the Mentalist Cultivator on the 7th floor as well."

"It's called a Soul Crystal?" Ogras asked curiously as he tried absorbing it.

"No idea, that's just what I called it," Zac shrugged. "They didn't have these things on your home planet?"

"I don't think I've ever heard of crystals like this in our sector at all," Ogras muttered with a frown.

"Perhaps our sector simply doesn't produce them. Trade between sectors is pretty difficult from what I've heard, and only the top people do it. Nobodies like us will have to make do with local products."

"So I won't be able to restock on these things?" Zac muttered with disappointment.

He had thought that might be a real possibility after not having seen a single Soul Crystal during his time in the Base Town, but he had held on to some small hope that was because he'd only been there for less than two weeks. But judging by the demon's reaction he wasn't so lucky.

He suddenly regretted using Soul Crystals like candy during his climb, but he also knew that they had played a large part in him managing to break through the 8th floor. But he would have to be more careful about any expenditure going forward, which was fine now that the two primordial Remnants were restraining each other.

With the array installed Zac couldn't wait any longer, and he walked over to the large crystal with brisk steps, anticipation making his heart pound. The moment Zac touched the Nexus Node to initiate the upgrade a screen appeared in front of him, but it was vastly different compared to the sparse rows of information he had seen the last time. He almost completely forgot his surroundings as he eagerly read the boxes.

Free Attributes Gained Per Level: 10

Base Attributes Gained Per Node 76-100:

Common, Uncommon: Base Attributes: +6

Rare, Epic: Base Attributes: +7

Arcane: Base Attributes: +8

Base Attributes Gained Per Node 101-125:

Common, Uncommon: Base Attributes: +14

Rare, Epic: Base Attributes: +16

Arcane: Base Attributes: +18

Base Attributes Gained Per Node 126-150:

Common, Uncommon: Base Attributes: +22

Rare, Epic: Base Attributes: +25

Arcane: Base Attributes: +28

[Option 1.]

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Gatekeeper of Sukhavati [E-Epic]

Vitality + 10, Endurance +8, Wisdom +5

Chains of Samsara

Paradise is waiting, but only the worthy may step past your gates. Divergence from Hatchetman.

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Undying Warlord [E-Epic]

Strength +12, Endurance +10

Profane Annihilation

Unstoppable. Undeniable. Unmatched. Divergence from Undying Bulwark.

[Option 2.]

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Vessel of Destruction [E-Arcane]

Strength +38, Agility +5 Endurance -10

Avatar of Wrath

Only through destruction can creation take place. Become the harbinger of a new era. Upgrade of Hatchetman.

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Nature's Lament [E-Epic]

Endurance +10, Wisdom +11

Touch of Anguish

Paradise is a lie, a putrid tomb of unimaginable horrors. Divergence from Undying Bulwark.

[Option 3.]

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Edge of Arcadia [E-Epic]

Strength +14, Vitality +8

Rapturous Divide

Even paradise needs a butcher, an unrelenting storm of violence. Upgrade of Hatchetman.

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Fetters of Desolation [E-Epic]

Strength +11, Endurance +8, Wisdom +5

Blighted Cut

Bind them to your calamity. Sever their path. Emerge alone. Divergence from Undying Bulwark.

[Option 4.]

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Gaia's Apostle [E-Epic]

Strength +5, Vitality +12, Wisdom + 5

Gaia's Eruption

The champion of verdure, unmatched and unkillable. Upgrade of Hatchetman.

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Wall of Bones [E-Epic]

Endurance +18, Vitality +5

Profane Phalanx

The living can only run in fear as the tide of bones moves forward. Upgrade of Undying Bulwark.

[Option 5.]

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Warmaster of Hecate [E-Epic]

Strength +15, Vitality +7

Nature's Fall

Empowered by the Sacred Yew, the Warmaster becomes Death incarnate. Divergence of Hatchetman.

Name

Attribute Per Level (x1/x2/x3)

First Skill Gained

Risen Asura[E-Epic]

Strength +12, Endurance +11

Winds of War

Not even death can chain down your furor. Divergence of Undying Bulwark.