

The Fall 493

Chapter 493: Void Heart

Hidden nodes could generally be categorized into two types from what Zac had gathered. There were the Racial Nodes that most cultivators of the same race had, such as the Three Gates. Pretty much all humanoids had these three hidden nodes, with one important exception. They could have been swapped out by Inherited Nodes provided by your bloodline.

Perhaps there were more types out there, but those were the two that Zac could gather intelligence on.

People with strong enough bloodlines had hidden nodes more specialized for their Paths, and these types of Inherited Nodes were one reason that families with amazing bloodlines churned out so many powerful warriors. However, he was a bit confused by what he saw, as the most likely source of any bloodlines and Inherited Nodes was no doubt his mother.

However, the shuddering man in front of him definitely didn't look like a Technocrat. He was emitting a terrifying force from his body, like his average-sized frame contained endless power. It was the same sort of fierce aura like he had sensed from Greatest, one of a warrior who used his own body as a weapon.

However, Zac felt this man was on par with those supreme existences he had seen in his previous visions, rather than some D-Grade warrior.

Finally, the man stopped shaking, but plumes of steam still rose from his body from the heat he emitted. A small dagger that seemed able to tear space apart by its very existence suddenly appeared in his hand, and he stabbed his leg in one swift motion.

A torrent of blood shot to the sky, and Zac was shocked to see the amount. The wound had closed itself in a fraction of a second, but hundreds of liters had poured out in that short window. Weirder yet, the blood didn't actually freeze from the glacial cold of the vacuum of space.

In fact, it did the opposite as it suddenly combusted like it was gasoline rather than blood, lighting up the meteor for a short moment before the area was once more plunged into darkness. It looked like expelling the burning blood had drastically improved the man's situation, and he had once returned to his statuesque demeanor.

The heartbeat the only proof that the man still lived.

Zac slowly woke up from the vision, but he somehow still heard the man's pulse deep in his soul. Each thud made Zac's blood rage like it followed the mysterious man's heart rather than his own. With every thud, their hearts synchronized a bit more until Zac's heartbeat was perfectly in tune to the hooded man's.

His blood started coursing through his body at unprecedented speeds, but he felt no discomfort at all. It was like his heartbeat was in tune with the universe, and a small ripple spread out from his body before space stabilized itself again.

A crackling sound from the sky woke Zac up from his reverie, and he was shocked to see a massive swirl up in the sky. Massive amounts of Cosmic Energy had gathered into a whirlwind of untamed power, and Zac's eyes lit up in anticipation as he waited for the energy to descend.

However, elation quickly turned to confusion, before he was filled with annoyance. The energy had no intention of entering his body as it did with the mysterious cultivator in the vision, but it was rather dispersing again now that Zac no longer heard the deep heartbeat. Zac's dreams of a few free levels crashed and burned just as they were born, and he instead turned his attention to a screen that had appeared in front of him.

[Void Heart – An all-encompassing heart born from the primordial void.]

Zac looked at the screen with some confusion, trying to understand just what this new node meant. It was clear that it was an Inherited Node he had opened, rather than something like the three gates. But the problem was that there were a huge number of these Inherited Nodes, and people rarely divulged them.

A hidden node was like a secret weapon of a clan, and one of the most guarded secrets. This had made it impossible for Zac to gain a decent understanding of Inherited nodes, like what limits and capabilities they usually had. But he had learned a thing or two from Galau, who freely admitted that his clan possessed no Inherited Nodes.

Him getting an unknown Inherited Node rather than one of the Three Gates could be both good and bad, as Inherited Nodes ranged from being extremely overpowered to utter trash. [Void Heart] seemed to be a Node that helped with cultivation rather than giving a direct boost to his power like the common nodes like the [Flesh Gate].

But the description was unfortunately of the less informative variety.

The "all-encompassing" was no doubt referring to the man's ability to seemingly absorb any energy, as he swallowed anything he passed, even a sun. There was also no doubt an element of energy gathering to the node, evidenced by the convergence of Cosmic Energy in the sky just now.

Unfortunately, improving energy absorption might mean that it increased cultivation speed, which would be pretty useless to Zac since he couldn't cultivate. What if this [Void Heart] kept gathering massive amounts of energies around him, but he could only look at it from a distance, unable to take it for himself?

Wouldn't that be a novel way of torture?

But the vision gave him an inkling that it might not be exactly that case. There seemed to be two components to the ability that the node provided, judging by the vision. The first was the heart, and the second was the blood. The heart seemed to swallow the energy of the area, which was related to some sort of absorption, though not necessarily one related to normal cultivation.

The man also exsanguinated himself on purpose, and there was clearly something wrong with the blood. Zac's best guess was that it was a node that would allow him to absorb various types of energies better than a normal warrior, but that kind of absorption would fill his heart with impurities or toxins.

The exsanguination would in turn allow him to simply flush the toxins out of his body. It was a system of keeping the good and expelling the bad. Something like that seemed to match with Zac's impressions of his own body as well. He had survived his body getting crammed full of all kinds of weird energies until now.

There was the Cosmic Water, then the storm of Miasma in the Dead Zone, and finally the high-grade energies of the two Remnants in his mind. His body was clearly unnaturally resilient to all kinds of energies, and this Hidden Node might actually be the first step toward taking advantage of this, more than just surviving.

It was just a hypothesis though, but one easily tested. Zac took out a Miasma Crystal from his Spatial Ring and absorbed some of its energy. At first, he felt extreme nausea having condensed death-attuned energies in his system, but something mysterious soon happened.

The death-attuned energies entered his pathways and were shot in a few quick revolutions through his body, but each time they entered his heart the nausea lessened. A few minutes later the feeling was gone altogether, but there instead was a chilliness in his veins. Zac took out his axe and drew a small cut on his arm, and blood that was slightly darker than normal started dripping down on the ground.

It was barely discernible, but then again he had only absorbed death-attuned energies from the Miasma Crystal for a short duration. Perhaps his blood would turn into the black Ichor altogether if he kept at it long enough.

This quick experiment clearly indicated he was on the right path with the node, but this obviously wasn't the right way to utilize the hidden node. It would be a lot more efficient to simply use a normal Nexus Crystal in this case, as there would be no need to waste time and energy on cleansing it.

But some things might work, such as Natural Treasures. A lot of herbs and other Natural Oddities contained massive amounts of energy, but they were too chaotic and toxic to ingest unless made into pills or concoctions first. And sometimes even that was impossible. Besides, this sort of refinement always led to a significant loss in energy, at least among pills made by normal Alchemists.

Perhaps it wasn't the case with top tier Alchemists in the multiverse, but it wasn't like Zac had access to those kinds of people.

He didn't dare try that out right now though, as he might be badly wounded if proven wrong. But if he was right, then he might have found the key to leveling up quickly in E-Grade, perhaps even beyond. He might not be able to gobble up a sun anytime soon, but he might be able to bargain hunt for energy-rich items that were normally too chaotic to turn into anything useful.

He really wanted to find the little blue merchant and requisition some items immediately, but he knew that such experiments would have to wait until after the Undead Horde. Instead, he went out of his courtyard only to find Emily waiting some distance from the gates. She was lazily throwing rocks at a drone that deftly dodged the small projectiles.

Zac was a bit surprised to see the teenager here, as she was out at sea last time he heard, boosting the Intelligence for the scouts and water mages in charge of searching for the Jamming Arrays.

"You're back! But why do you look the same?" Emily added from the side as she suspiciously looked at him up and down. "And what did you do just now? I thought you were about to upgrade the Nexus Vein or something."

"It didn't work out, unfortunately," Zac said with a smile. "You'll have to make do with the normal one for now. And why would I look different?"

Suddenly a fiery axe appeared in her hand, and she threw it at Zac.

"WOW!" she screamed as she looked at Zac with wide eyes. "Monster! At least you got stronger. A lot stronger. How am I supposed to beat you up now?"

"I guess you'll have to work harder," Zac snorted.

"Aren't people supposed to become more handsome when evolving? But you're still the same monk as ever," Emily said, waving at Kenzie who was coming over as well.

"You're thinking of race upgrades," Zac sighed with some exasperation as he ran his hand across his once-again bald head. "I haven't upgraded that yet. I thought you were helping the others looking for the jamming arrays?"

"I returned when I heard you were back. I'm coming with you to fight the zombies," Emily said, her face scrunching up with stubbornness when seeing Zac's frown. "You might need me. What if you're just too weak to win? Wouldn't you feel stupid if you got stuck outside an array, just lacking 10% Strength to get through?"

"... Fine," Zac sighed. "But you should know that even getting to the mainland will be risky."

"I'm going as well," Kenzie suddenly added from the side.

"What? Why?" Zac said, just stopping short of staunchly refusing.

"Calrin and I figured out a few of the Array Breakers while you evolved, but you probably won't be able to use them," Kenzie explained. "They either takes a few weeks of study or general knowledge of formations. So I need to go as well."

Zac really didn't want to bring his sister to the heart of the Dead Zone, but he knew that he might not have much of a choice. It was all hands on deck right now, and Kenzie might be the foremost expert on arrays among all the natives of Earth. There were more skilled people among the Sky Gnomes and the Creators, but he couldn't bring them for something like this due to the limitations of the Mercantile System.

"Alright, alright," Zac sighed before he turned to the demon who had appeared to the side as well. "Did you evolve as well?"

"No," Ogras said. "Me evolving won't change the grand scheme of things in the battle with the undead. I need a month or two to consolidate everything. So, what classes did you get? Epic? Or Even Arcane?"

"It's too early for me to get an Arcane," Zac said. "I don't think it's a good idea to get that rarity before you really know what you're doing from what I gathered."

“Well, I guess that excludes you. So what did you end up with?” the demon said, almost leaning forward in anticipation.

“What about you?” Zac snorted. “There’s no way you didn’t check out your options while I evolved.”

“He did, like two seconds after you left,” Kenzie smiled from the side. “But he won’t say what options he got.”

“Why aren’t you working on that reinforcement array?” Ogras said with some exasperation.

Zac laughed, but he was inwardly a bit worried about the demon. Was there some trouble with his evolution? He had seemed pretty intent on evolving the moment they returned based on their discussions in the tower, but something seemed to have changed his mind.

He knew that the demon had a Rare class right now. Was he perhaps lacking something to get an option? Or was it the opposite? Did he feel that he was on the verge of getting enough merit to be provided with an Epic class, and closing out the Undead Incursion might give him the final push to take that step?