

## The Fall 494

### Chapter 494: Balance

Thankfully it wasn't critical to Zac's plan that Ogras had evolved. He mainly wanted to bring the demon for his obscuring capabilities, and those seemed to be mainly based on his Dao of Shadows. Getting a boost to his main attribute Dexterity probably wouldn't make those skills any stronger.

The fact that Ogras wouldn't be as strong wasn't a huge deal either, as he would personally deal with the Lich King. However, as Zac looked around at the three people he was reminded that no man was an island. Certainly, none of these people were nearly as strong as him in direct battle, but they all brought something to the table that would increase the odds of success.

He realized now how foolish his initial idea to deal with the Undead Empire alone was.

"I've done what I can about that array," Kenzie said as she pointed toward the house housing Zac's private Teleportation Array. "The old Gnome is performing the finishing touches over there."

"I'm thinking of leveling up immediately," Zac said, changing the topic. "Is there any problem for me to start taking the pills I've prepared?"

"Not that I'm aware of," Ogras said. "That's usually how it goes. Of course, most people spend years at the peak of F-Grade to solidify their progression. But you should be fine. You're a meathead who find your path in battle anyway, I'm not sure sitting down and meditating will do you any good. Just eat it and then stabilize your foundation by bashing zombies."

"Sounds good to me," Zac said as he took out one of the pills that would give him a level.

It wasn't the [Four Gates Pill] with spirituality he found during the Hunt though. He wasn't sure if he wanted to eat that thing right now, or rather save it for when he hit a roadblock. It might even be something that he could use to open up more hidden nodes in the future.

There were no guarantees, but Zac felt he had a pretty good idea about the location of one hidden node at least thanks to ingesting the treasure earlier. He had observed every movement of the energy tendrils from the [Eye of Har'Theriam], and it had sent its tendrils to one specific spot multiple times, and they had stayed there with hesitation for a bit before moving on.

This node was close to a crossroads of pathways on the top of his head. He obviously couldn't be sure, but he believed that the node the tendrils had found might be the [Spirit Gate], one of the three common Hidden Nodes. It supposedly increased your control over Mental Energy by a large degree, which was something Zac desperately needed.

His control was atrocious because of his non-existent affinity to the Daos, but opening the Spirit Gate might allow him to at least control his Daos to the same degree as most cultivators did. He probably wouldn't reach the level of people like Catheya or Iz Tyn, but it was at least something.

His goal wasn't to become the most powerful man in the universe or anything, but he still wanted to maintain his ability to punch above his weight class. Being an elite was the best deterrence, after all. People still spoke about the Eveningtide Asura in hushed tones after a million years. He wanted to

create that same effect so that Earth would be left alone without him having to guard the planet day and night.

Of course, there was no guarantee that the pill he picked up during the hunt was any good for opening hidden nodes, and he didn't want to take the gamble just yet. Judging by the power it contained it might even be able to break open nodes at high E-Grade. Besides, he still knew nothing about his [Void Heart].

Perhaps he would see far better results if he waited to take that pill until he could maximize the benefits with that node somehow. There was a chance that the Node might have an impact on the absorption of pills, after all. But until then there were still a bunch of normal pills he could take.

He couldn't wait any longer, and he took out one of his normal leveling pills. Zac really wanted to know how leveling would work in E-Grade. The attribute gains were split between opening nodes and gaining levels, and he still didn't know if the Node breaking needed to be done in both his forms.

"And eating these kinds of pills won't weaken or wound me before the battle?" Zac asked.

"It'll hurt, but not like forcing it open with excess energy," the demon said as he looked on with curiosity.

Zac nodded and immediately popped the pill in his mouth as he sat down. The pill felt like a small sun that ran down his throat before it hit his stomach. However, the energies didn't set up camp like the [Eye of Har'Theriam], but it rather shot out like it had a life of its own.

The little packet of energy surged around his body with shocking speed until it suddenly stopped at one of the weak spots on his right arm. Zac was a bit surprised as he had simply assumed that it would go clock-wise from where his Duplicity Core was placed, but it looked like it was random.

The intensity of the pill energy kept increasing as a huge amount of warmth streamed into the node, and Zac was shocked at how much energy the unassuming bead had contained. It was just like Ogras had said, it hurt a bit but it wasn't too bad, it almost felt like he was getting pinched. However, his brows started to furrow as time passed.

Over twenty minutes had passed, and the pill was starting to lose its steam. However, the node showed no signs of changing, and the pill finally petered out. Zac felt the same, but he opened his status screen to be sure. But just as expected, he was still level 75.

"Wasn't this thing supposed to guarantee a level up to level 80?" Zac complained as he opened his eyes and turned to the demon. "What now?"

The demon looked perfectly jubilant as a grin spread across his face.

"I guess there's some justice in the world, after all," Ogras snorted. "If you gained level quickly on top of everything the rest of us might just as well have given up."

"Well?"

"I don't know? Take another one, you should have a few," the demon shrugged as he looked at Zac as though he was an interesting oddity.

He also threw a Cosmos Sack at Zac, who caught it with an inquisitive look. It wasn't like Ogras to freely give out any gifts.

"These are some of the gifts I gathered from the rich bastards in Base Town earlier. There should be a few dozen such pills inside. I handed most of it over to the gnomes to categorize," Ogras said as a grin spread across his face again. "Now let's see how many you need to eat to break open the first node."

Zac sighed, but he could only oblige. He took out a second pill that guaranteed the same effect, and he was relieved to see that the pill energy stopped at the same node as the last one and continued the work there. However, his frown quickly returned as the pill energy quickly drained while the node stayed the same.

Only at the last second did he felt something change in his body. It was like he had cracked his neck and suddenly felt looser. His body felt lighter, and the energy surged through his body with greater vigor.

Zac quickly looked inward and saw that the weak spot had completely transformed. The murky pond that sucked energy had changed into a slowly rotating whirlpool that kept moving from its own momentum. It reminded Zac of the Dao whirl he had experimented with a bit during the time he tried to keep the Draugr-wound in check with the Seed of Trees.

A quick check on the status screen showed him that he had gained 7 points to the base attributes, but surprisingly enough he hadn't gained the extra Strength and Vitality from gaining a level in Edge of Acadia. He frowned in annoyance and immediately ate another pill, ignoring the demon's snicker from the side.

Ten minutes later the whirlpool had gone from a slightly weak swirl into a surging but stable whirlpool that empowered rather than weakened his pathways. He had finally gained a level and reached level 76 in his Edge of Arcadia class. It looked like two pills weren't quite enough for both opening the node and gaining the level, but the third one did the trick.

He would probably have been better off using a Nexus Crystal after the node was opened, as breaking the node was the hard part. After that, he only needed to gather enough energy to qualify for a level increase. But he had been a bit impatient, and the condensed energies in these pills were far more efficient for this purpose, though they left some toxins behind.

Having to use three pills wasn't great news when only one was supposed to 'guarantee' a level, but it also wasn't too bad, especially after having gotten his new hidden node. However, there was one more problem. He didn't gain anything from his Draugr side it seemed, neither from levels or nodes.

Zac gave it a thought before he activated his Duplicity Core, and he changed into his Draugr for the second time this day. A glance at his status screen proved what he already knew; Fetters of Desolation was still at level 75. However, there was an interesting change when he checked out the node on his right arm.

It had actually turned into a whirlpool as well, but it was so weak that it was almost completely unmoving. It was far worse than it had been in his human side at any point in time, and it looked like it could die out at any moment. It was obviously lacking energy, perhaps the full amount needed for a level.

Node-breaking was something that affected both his classes simultaneously it seemed, but he would need to fill the nodes with energy separately. That, unfortunately, confirmed that he wouldn't get a second set of base attributes and that he no longer would get twice the amount of attributes from levels compared to others.

This was a pretty big blow to his unique advantages to becoming a powerhouse. His massive pool of raw attributes was his greatest ace against the cultivators who could fuse their Daos and empower their strikes with their Manuals. He would still get more points than others, but the difference was nowhere near as big any longer.

It was a very important reminder that he couldn't relax in the pursuit of power. You needed to keep pushing yourself and keep finding new opportunities to advance. If he couldn't steamroll people with raw stats any longer, then he would simply have to find another advantage. The first thing that came to mind was the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] that hopefully would be able to make his soul strong enough to handle the Remnants.

The second thing was the possibility of getting rewards for closing down the last Incursions and reaping the rewards.

"How are your preparations?" Zac asked as he got back to his feet. "How soon can we leave?"

"We're ready anytime," Kenzie said as she got up from the table she had summoned while Zac focused on leveling up.

"Good. There's no time to waste," Zac said. "We're heading out in 1 hour. Get a defensive squad of Valkyries as well."

"I can protect myself," Kenzie disagreed.

"Yes, but Emily is a Support class who needs guardians. We're going all out here, and we have no idea what we might be facing," Zac said. "I'll be able to unleash more power if I know you guys are safe."

"Fine. We'll get everything in order," Kenzie nodded. "Meet back here?"

"I'll go see if I can get some goodies from that slippery bastard we picked up in the underworld," Ogras muttered. "Knowing you, things will turn pretty chaotic over there."

With that, he disappeared in a puff of shadows, and Emily sat down on a rock and started to play with her tomahawks. Kenzie sent out a Drone before she walked back to the Teleportation House, no doubt to make sure the Stabilization Array would be installed in time.

"Good," Zac muttered as he simply sat down under the sun to start stabilizing his mind. "In one hour we'll assault the Undead Incursion."

As long as we don't get ripped apart by the spatial turbulence, Zac added in his mind.