

The Fall 515

Chapter 515: Divide

A lot of work for little benefit. That was Zac's first impression of the results from completing a full cycle of the [Nine Reincarnations Manual].

His soul was in very good condition, all things considered, and it looked like it had turned a smidgeon more condensed. However, Zac had spent almost fourteen hours in this session, and the results felt a bit lackluster for such an investment. He started to understand why so few warriors chose to spend time on a Soul Strengthening Manual.

But he didn't have a choice.

The two Remnants would wake up sooner or later, and he needed to empower his soul before then. He needed to be the one in charge, a fact that had become even more apparent after seeing the name of the Arcane Class he was presented. He didn't just want to be a vessel, he needed to be the controller.

But it was undeniable that there was a problem with the time expenditure. He couldn't waste 14 hours a day on this array, he needed to gather Cosmic Energy to crack open nodes, ponder on the Daos, and work on his Race Evolution as well, besides all the other stuff that required his attention in Port Atwood.

The situation wasn't hopeless though. This was just a trial run in unoptimized conditions, and he was hopeful that he would be able to expedite the speed of each revolution. If he could decrease each Revolution from 45 to 15 minutes with the help of his unique constitution he would suddenly only need to spend four and a half hours a day on Soul Cultivation, which was far more acceptable.

And Zac already had ideas on how to improve efficiency. The two arrays were essentially dialysis machines for his mental energy. It sucked the energy out and ran it across the arrays, where some impurities were shed while some attuned energies were infused. Each revolution would increase the attunement until his soul was stuffed, at which point he swapped array.

The clash between life-attuned energies and death attuned energies at the second set of revolutions seemed to strengthen his soul without really hurting it as well, and he had a feeling that this controlled clash was one of the interesting aspects that set this method apart from other Soul Strengthening Manuals.

The other was obviously the transformative impact when enough cycles had taken place to form a "Reincarnation".

Another small benefit came from his [Void Heart]. It had actually absorbed some of the dense energies in the cave and pushed it into the next node to break open; this one located in his right leg instead. It wasn't a huge amount, but it also wasn't negligible. If he also managed to get his hands on a better version of the [Mother-Daughter Array] the benefits would be quite noticeable over time.

Zac also felt pretty relieved that the nodes in early E-Grade seemed to be located on his extremities. A lot of nodes were located on his torso, neck, and head though, and they were the cause for a lot of sleepless nights. Those around his heart and organs could always be cracked open in his undead form, but others felt extremely dangerous. What if he accidentally decapitated himself when he cracked open a node in his throat?

He needed to find a way to contain the damage from node-breaking to only his spirit body somehow, leaving his flesh intact. Either that or become sturdy enough that a node explosion couldn't harm him. Zac wasn't all that worried though, as a lot of E-Grade mortals had passed this hurdle before him. He just needed to find out how they did it.

Part of Zac wanted to sit down again and immediately start tinkering with the process, for example trying to perform a revolution while changing his race. There was no time to experiment with improving the process right now though. The Manual said that he could only do one revolution a day. Any more would just needlessly tax his soul without any benefits.

He walked over to the central glade instead and looked down at the small tree that grew there.

It was the very same branch he had brought from the Dead Zone, the tree that encompassed both life and death. He had planted it right at the delimitation of the two attunements, which meant that half of its branches were drenched in death while the other half enjoyed the sweet succor of life. He hoped to study what changes that brought to the mutated tree, and perhaps even gain some insights from the process.

A second branch was placed in the life-attuned side, with a final one being steeped in Miasma. He wanted to see how the saplings adapted to the different environments. The branch shouldn't have any problems surviving being replanted in the area teeming with miasma, as that would be the same conditions it had in the Dead Zone.

But what about being placed in a place already teeming with life? Would it double up on producing vibrant energies, becoming a beacon on verdure? Or would it perhaps swap over and start creating miasma? Zac couldn't wait to find out. Of course, something like this wouldn't change in a day or two.

Not much had happened in the few days since the tree was replanted, but Zac was relieved to see that it was doing just fine. There were no signs of wilting or that it hadn't taken to the earth, and after infusing it a bit with the Fragment of the Bodhi he could confirm that roots had already taken hold.

A glance with [Cosmic Gaze] showed that the tree was still mostly attuned to death though, which wasn't a surprise considering where it grew up. However, life was slowly gaining a foothold in the branches, and it didn't seem impossible that it would reach a true equilibrium in the future.

Zac nodded with satisfaction before he sat down at the central mat. It was already getting late, and Zac wasn't in the mood to leave this place for the day. Many people would still be awake all the way until 2 or 3 am now that they only needed a few hours of sleep, but old habits die hard. You couldn't just pop in at someone's place at 11 pm.

He instead focused his attentions on Fragment of the Bodhi. Zac hoped to gain some sort of insight by sitting in an area where life was in a constant struggle against death. The battle with the Lich King, unfortunately, hadn't provided any real inspiration, and the only thing he could do now was to grind at it until it was time to face the last threats to Earth.

That was not to say that his experience in the Dead Zone was without any benefits. His battle of attrition with the Head Priest, where his Bodhi-infused branch managed to overpower the scorching flames, had resonated with him. Following that it was his meditation in front of the mutated tree.

The two together had pushed him forward, and it felt like he was on the cusp of crystallizing some sort of breakthrough. But it still needed more time or some sort of breakthrough.

He needed to make the best of the time, as he actually sensed that the Origin Dao was slowly starting to dissipate. It wasn't like it was a rapid decline, but the peak had clearly been met. What would follow would be a gradual dissipation of the Origin Dao until Earth was indistinguishable from any other world of the Zecia sector.

It was a bit surprising the decline was happening so fast, the snippets of information on the subject indicated that it could stay for well over a decade. However, as things looked now the Origin Dao would run out in a year or two. One possibility was that there actually were more Dao Funnels like the one Salvation carried on Earth.

If The Great Redeemer really was planning to harvest the Origin Dao of a planet, then it also made sense that he would leave more than one funnel behind to collect it for him. That way he would only need to pick up the Funnels upon arrival before he did whatever the Fulcrum-plan entailed.

Another possibility was that the Realignment Array had caused some irredeemable damage to Earth even if it was shut off in time. It still was anyone's guess whether the massive swathe of death around the undead incursion would ever heal completely, but the damage was perhaps also done to a more fundamental level.

In either case, the time of rapid growth for Earth's population was coming to an end as quickly as it began, and most cultivators of Port Atwood had been instructed to focus on the Dao rather than leveling to make the most of it. Anyone could reach peak F-Grade in a few years with the right support system, but gaining and evolving a Dao Seed was something else entirely.

It was by far the most common reason for people to not being able to evolve. People simply didn't have the affinities or opportunities to form a Seed on their own. A large number of the citizens of Earth might never form a Dao Seed if they didn't seize this opportunity.

The scenes of his recent battles flashed through his mind as he occasionally looked over at the branch that was able to perform such a miraculous transformation. He even thought back to the original vision with the cherry tree, where the blessed tree had created a magical realm beneath its branches.

The canopy had turned into a perfect barrier that took on the heat and the desolation from the badlands outside and fed it into its Buddhist Kingdom inside. It was just like how the branch in front of him took the miasma of the area and turned it into life.

However, the transformation process was just one part of the miracle. The other was to form and protect the core of life that was allowed to grow powerful without outside interference. The Seed would be weak at the beginning, and only through protection would it be able to grow. Otherwise, it would be like a candle in the wind.

"Isolation. Creation through protection," Zac muttered, and his mind shuddered as he felt a resonance from the Dao.

Zac followed the instinct and kept searching for answers, various scenes flashing before his eyes as they slowly congealed into something new. It all began with the vision in the Tower. The general had been

allowed to grow into his potential only due to the stele shielding him from the outside worlds for millennia, which echoed his current thoughts.

The hours passed until something finally congealed in Zac's mind. A surge of warmth spread from his mind to every corner of his body as the Fragment of the Bodhi evolved into middle stage. He felt more powerful than ever, but he held off on checking his gains as his intuition told him that he wasn't done. There was more to gain.

Zac stood up, pushed forward by an intangible momentum, and he swiped his right through the air as though his hand was a bladed weapon. A shudder spread forward as the swing actually was infused with the Fragment of the Bodhi. However, the energies in the air didn't turn chaotic from the action, but rather the opposite.

The whole air around the central glade was one big conflict zone between life and death, where miasma and divine energy fought for supremacy. At some places, the miasma had encroached a bit on the other side, whereas life had managed to gain a small foothold on places at the death attuned side.

However, the moment Zac swung his palm the fighting stopped, and a clean line of demarcation could be seen. The miasma spread to an invisible line but didn't move an inch further. Order had been brought to the area, and life was split from death.

This was thanks to Zac's latest insight into the Fragment of the Bodhi, and Zac marveled at the scene until the effects of the swing dissipated, causing the thousand small conflicts to once again erupt all over the glade. But it had been enough to reach his goal, and Zac opened his Quest Screen to check it out.

Rapturous Divide (Class): Split Life and Death. Reward: Rapturous Divide Skill (1/1) COMPLETE

A fractal appeared the next moment, taking a spot on his left arm, essentially mirroring the fractal for [Nature's Punishment] on his other arm. The fractal looked a lot different though, forming two completely separate lines that didn't have one single fractal that connected each side. The only fractal until now that had even been a little bit similar was [Cyclic Strike], though these fractals were a lot more intricate.

Zac's heartbeat sped up with excitement, but he restrained himself from immediately busting out the skill. Who knew what effect the skill would have, he's get lambasted by his sister if he accidentally tore apart the arrays she had spent so much time and energy to set up.

Zac instead only turned his sight inward, to try and get a sense of what kind of skill [Rapturous Divide] was. But there were no clues he could glean at all from the new pattern. However, he did notice that the two lines looked far more intricate compared to his previous skills, like it was an embroidery using extremely fine silk threads compared to the coarse rope of the F-Grade skills.

He marveled at the fractal for a while before he eventually retracted his sight. He also wanted to see his attribute gains, so he opened his status screen to see the boost he got from his upgraded fragment.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

81

Class

[E-Epic] Edge of Arcadia

Race

[E] Human

Alignment

[Earth] Port Atwood - Lord

Titles

Born for Carnage, Ultimate Reaper, Luck of the Draw, Giantsbane, Disciple of David, Overpowered, Slayer of Leviathans, Adventurer, Demon Slayer I, Full of Class, Rarified Being, Trailblazer, Child of Dao, The Big 500, Planetary Aegis, One Against Many, Butcher, Progenitor Noblesse, Duplicity Core, Apex Hunter, Heaven's Chosen, Scion of Dao, Omnidextrous, Eastern Trigram Hunt - 1st, Tyrannic Force, Achievement Hunter, The First Step, Promising Specialist, Tower of Eternity - 8th Floor, Heaven's Triumvirate, Fated, Peak Power, Monarch-Select

Limited Titles

Frontrunner, Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star - 14th

Dao

Fragment of the Axe - Middle, Fragment of the Coffin - Middle, Fragment of the Bodhi - Middle

Core

[E] Duplicity

Strength

2090 [Increase: 91%. Efficiency: 199%]

Dexterity

992 [Increase: 65%. Efficiency: 170%]

Endurance

2229 [Increase: 99%. Efficiency: 199%]

Vitality

1476 [Increase: 89%. Efficiency: 199%]

Intelligence

545 [Increase: 65%. Efficiency: 170%]

Wisdom

911 [Increase: 70%. Efficiency: 170%]

Luck

340 [Increase: 91%. Efficiency: 179%]

Free Points

0

Nexus Coins

[F] 5 919 241 817

Fragment of the Bodhi (Middle): All attributes +20, Endurance +140, Vitality +160, Intelligence +30, Wisdom +80, Effectiveness of Vitality +10%.

He had made shocking progress in one night, though the two breakthroughs were related. However, Zac knew he couldn't rest on his laurels as things stood. Some things had gone above expectations, but he was still struggling in other compartments.

Perhaps he should have realized that his unique situation with dual races would cause complications when upgrading them.