

The Fall 528

Chapter 528: S-Grade

"He did it!" Kenzie smiled, her clenched fists finally relaxing in her lap.

"It's amazing," Lyla said from the side. "It's finally over. Maybe we can finally start living our lives again."

"There are still some things that needs to be done though," Kenzie smiled, though the smile felt a bit strained.

"Like what?" Lyla asked with confusion.

Lyla had stayed with Kenzie in her courtyard to help take her mind off the fact that Zac was risking his life against the cultists. She had instead asked far and wide about the various arrays and contraptions. It was a welcome distraction, and Kenzie had freely told her about the various arrays she was working on.

But all things must come to an end sooner or later. Her hesitation had already cost too much.

"Dealing with the traitors and the spies on the island, for example," she said with a steady voice, her eyes boring into Lyla's.

Kenzie had known for a while. She had known that Lyla was the one feeding intelligence back to the mainland through an ingenious array that was no doubt provided by the cultist infiltrators of the New World Government. It was because of her that so many had died, and she was the reason the cultists had learned of the entrance to the Mystic Realm.

Zac had saved her life, but she had returned the favor with malice, increasing the risk to him and everyone else in Port Atwood. Lyla had almost cut off their access to something their mother had left behind as well, which was unforgivable by itself.

Lyla only looked at her with incomprehension for a second until her form fell apart, her body replaced by a clay dummy. However, how could Kenzie not be prepared for something like this? She had seen Lyla use this very skill to survive multiple times during the Tutorial and their expeditions in the Dead Zone.

Her garden was like a fortress with layers and layers of arrays. They were originally meant to keep the area safe in case of a mishap with her experiments, but they worked just as well for trapping a level 36 cultivator. Not even her brother would be able to sense the slightest fluctuation even if he passed by right outside.

Lyla had learned to almost perfectly blend with the earth, but Kenzie had already managed to push her Seed of Loam to Peak Mastery. Together with Jeeves, it was effortless to pinpoint her location. Kenzie slightly circulated her Cosmic Energy, and an earth pillar rose from the ground, unearthing a horrified Lyla.

"Wait, they have my parents! I had no choice-" Lyla cried, but it was too late.

A Dao-empowered flame swallowed her whole, and no substitution or movement skill would save her from the Seed of Tinder. A shrill scream emerged from her throat, but it was almost instantly cut short by a wind-blade that decapitated her. The headless corpse was turned into ashes in less than a minute, and a wave of Kenzie's hand spread the ashes in the garden.

Lyla had almost been as powerful as herself back during the Tutorial, but those days were long gone. She had stopped pushing herself since arriving at Port Atwood, spending most days not even cultivating at all. Killing her was completely effortless for Kenzie.

Some confusion and guilt appeared in Kenzie's auburn eyes, but a red flash appeared in their depths and she gradually regained her composure.

"You're right, I need to harden myself," Kenzie sighed before she looked down at the scorched spot on the grass. "I'm sorry. But those who move against the family will have to pay the price."

Zac's eyes lit up upon seeing the prompts. It looked very similar to when he had completed the Incursion Master quest, where he had gained the Dao Repository. He obviously wasn't surprised at being placed first in the contribution tally, but the grade was something new.

He had only heard of A-Grade before, and this was something even above that. Did that mean there were S-Grade cultivators as well? Zac had asked around about what the limit of cultivation was, but he had never got a real answer. The people of the Zecia sector didn't even know what the B-Grade entailed, let alone anything above that.

The next moment an even better prompt appeared.

[Distributing Rewards]

[Additional Reward: Limited Title Slots +1. Frontrunner Title Permanence.]

Zac whistled in surprise seeing the reward, or rather tried to whistle with his badly burnt lips. This was pretty huge. He had essentially received not one, but two additional Limited Title slots in one go. This was just what he needed to maintain his attribute lead against the elite cultivators of the sector.

He might not get double the attributes per level any longer, but having five Limited Title slots should allow him to stay ahead of even the greatest elites of the sector. Of course, that still required him to actually find some opportunities that provided a title.

The title permanence was a welcome surprise as well, but it made him think of something. Zac quickly tried to open the Ladder screen, only to find that nothing happened. Zac grimaced in annoyance when he realized the System had finished its Ladder experiment.

This could both be seen as good news and bad news. It was good news in the sense that no one beneath D-Rank would be able to find out his level any longer thanks to his bracer. Every single step he had taken until now had been monitored by millions of people, but now he was suddenly free. However, the change came with detriments as well.

He could no longer find any information about the Dominators either, though he didn't expect them to gain a bunch of levels out of nowhere. But more importantly, he wouldn't be able to keep tabs on his force and make sure everything was alright. Just opening the screen and looking at the familiar names during his tower climb had been a huge source of comfort, but he wouldn't be able to do so any longer while traveling the Zecia sector in the future.

There were life-monitoring treasures to buy that would provide a similar function, and Zac added it to the ever-growing list of things that Calrin needed to get him. But he also realized that the odds actually getting something useful from the Sky Gnome might have increased now that the incursions were gone and some restrictions were removed.

It was also somewhat of a relief that the title rewards didn't provide immediate attributes as he still wasn't sure how much his home-made Draugr Baths had increased his attribute cap. Zac quickly opened his title screen to be sure nothing had changed though.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

81

Class

[E-Epic] Fetters of Desolation

Race

[E] Draugr

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, Frontrunner, Apex Progenitor

Limited Titles

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: 218%]

Dexterity

992 [Increase: 65%. Efficiency: 187%]

Endurance

2083 [Increase: 86%. Efficiency: 218%]

Vitality

1375 [Increase: 76%. Efficiency: 218%]

Intelligence

545 [Increase: 65%. Efficiency: 187%]

Wisdom

911 [Increase: 70%. Efficiency: 187%]

Luck

340 [Increase: 91%. Efficiency: 197%]

Free Points

0

Nexus Coins

[F] 5 919 187 601

Zac sighed in relief when he saw that his attributes were still the same, but he did notice a few differences after looking around through his screens. The first of all was the update of the titles, with Frontrunner having moved to the permanent bracket. But he had also gained a new title, which honestly wasn't too surprising.

[Apex Progenitor: Pass the World Integration Trial with S Grade. Reward: Effect of Attributes +10%]

It was a real top tier title, only being rivaled by his Tower Climb and Apex Hunter titles so far, giving a whopping 10% efficiency in every attribute. It had actually pushed him past 200% efficiency on his main attributes, meaning that he was more than twice as strong as his attributes indicated.

Efficiency was pretty much impossible to discern even with high-quality spying skills from what Zac had learned, so even if someone managed to glean his attributes they might only set themselves up for disaster. They would see Zac having 2000 Strength, only for him to burst out with the power of more than the double a second later.

He was also happy to see that he had finally taken some steps forward with his undead skills, with [Indomitable] reaching Late Proficiency, and both his ultimate skills having reached Middle Proficiency. He was still lagging behind compared to his human class, but it was a step in the right direction.

The fit of his skills, especially [Undying Legion] and [Indomitable] had worsened in compatibility since evolving, but they were still useful. They might turn into components of skill fusions for his new class in the future, but they would have to reach Peak Proficiency first for that to work.

There were also a lot of additions to his Town Shop, mainly defensive arrays that looked far more powerful than anything he had been able to purchase before. However, they were still limited by his power, with the strongest arrays being marked as “Early E-Grade”. That didn’t really come as a surprise though.

The system would never let people buy too powerful defenses, as that would drastically lessen the amount of conflict in the multiverse.

It was still a big upgrade to his weak Town Protection Array though, and Zac looked through the options for a few seconds until he suddenly froze in realization. The System called the Limited Title boost an additional reward. If that was the addition, then where were the original rewards?

The greed for loot quickly overcame the weariness in his body, and he scoured the whole crater for treasures. However, there was nothing apart from smoking-hot soil and an inert Nexus hub in the hole he found himself in. Glee was slowly replaced with confusion as he looked around. What was going on?

Was the reward once again related to his town? The phrasing of the prompts was extremely familiar to the way the System spoke when he received the Dao Repository, so Abby might have gotten the rewards back home. Last time the Stargazer held it back so that he would be able to choose where to place the reward, so there might be a similar situation waiting for him.

Zac immediately bought a Teleportation Array, but this time he didn’t make it public. Zac rather kept it to himself like the array in his private area. If the teleporter was open a group of Valkyries and Demons would step through to this place a few minutes later, and Zac wasn’t comfortable leaving them here in case the cultists returned.

He soon found himself back in his compound instead, somewhat relieved that there were no signs of his sister. It allowed him to hobble over to his courtyard and close the arrays without causing any worry with his wretched appearance. There were no rewards in his home either, but he still held off on his urge to visit the Stargazer.

There was no way he wouldn’t cause a panic if he entered the government building looking like a mix of a zombie and a rotisserie chicken, but more importantly, he still had a node to break open. He had been interrupted by the prompt just as he was about to break it open, and the rewards had allowed him to slow down and think clearly. There was no point in staying in a burning crater to open a node when he had free access to his home.

The accumulated energy in his chest was running a bit low because of the delay, so Zac ate one of his node-breaking pills while channeling the remains from the [Void Heart] to his leg. He also ate an anesthetic pill to block out the pain of his broken bones and burned skin. The pain wasn’t to the point that he was immobilized, but he was afraid that it would mess with his concentration breaking open the node.

He only got something like 20% of the efficacy of the Node Breaking pill, but it was enough to tide him over along with the energies ripped from his cursed sword and the holy flames. A small explosion

echoed out in the isolated courtyard after around ten minutes, and a splatter of black ichor stained the ground.

Zac suddenly remembered learning about a medical factoid before the integration, of how some women naturally forget the excruciating pain of childbirth. It was apparently an evolutionary measure so that the people wouldn't shy away from having more children. The reason for remembering such a random tidbit was obviously that he must have blocked out just how painful breaking open the last node was.

His pain-relief pill had worked wonders against the burns, but it was utterly incapable of dealing with the agony of getting his pathways blasted open. Waves of pain crashed into his mind, and he helplessly fell back on the ground, unable to move in the slightest. He ate another healing pill as he grabbed a Miasma Crystal in each hand, his eyes closed to block out the world.

Only an hour later was he able to get up again, but he had to admit that his state was a lot better than last time.

Recuperating instead of entering a life-and-death battle right after breaking open a node had not surprisingly helped him minimize the damage from the node-breaking. He would still need to redraw the section of the pathways around the Node, this time in his Draugr form. But he felt stable enough that he could get up again without falling unconscious like he did last time.

He soon left his courtyard, but he still didn't enter the town. He instead returned to the burnt-out crater he just came from, relieved to see that it was still void of cultists. He finally made the teleporter public as he gazed at the massive golden pillars that were deeply embedded in the ground. Just how had the zealots gotten their hands on this much gold?

And how much was it worth?