

The Fall 578

Chapter 578: Sacrifices

"What? It was the System who created that trial?" Zac asked with confusion. "I thought it was Brahem, your creator who put it there for his descendants?"

"Are you stupid?" Brazla sneered. "My creator didn't plan on being dead when his descendants would use the Towers of Myriad Dao. Why would there be restrictions and trials to visit the higher floors? It was the System that refitted my body a bit, perfecting the towers even further. Seems like a waste of effort to award the towers to someone like you if you ask the Great Brazla, but here we are."

Zac was surprised to hear that the System was personally stepping in to modify its rewards, but he had to admit that he had never considered things from Brazla's perspective. Indeed, why would the original Brazla put forth such trials to access the skills? Most Dao Repositories were free to enter for the owning force, with the elders deciding who could get what skills. But Zac had to accomplish feats of strength to gain the same sort of access.

Furthermore, it was the same with Thea's library. She would also have to pass some sort of trial to gain access to higher-tiered intelligence. So it turned out that the System was refitting these quest rewards, both improving them and making them serve as motivational- or training tools.

"Besides," Brazla said with a shake of his head, a hint of wistfulness flashing in his eyes. "That world is no more. Now that the final fragment was awakened, it will be lost forever, with the System taking the last energies."

"Then why couldn't you let me have it?" Zac muttered with some annoyance. "If the System was going to steal the rest anyways."

"Those were the rules that were put in place," Brazla shrugged. "It doesn't really matter in either case. You would only have gained the same amount of time even if you waited until reaching middle E-Grade for real. I guess it was a bad matchup. If you focused on Agility or Intelligence you might have had a shot even without that treasure. That puppet was even dumber than you, after all."

Zac felt a bit disappointed he couldn't have his body forged inside the lava again, but he couldn't complain. It was a free bonus that he didn't even know existed, and while it hadn't directly improved his power it did solve a lot of hidden issues for him. Besides, there was still the real reward to go for. However, Zac wanted to take advantage of the Tool Spirit's uncharacteristic mood to see if he could get some information.

"The tempering expelled something from my body I didn't know was there. Six marks, probably left by my enemies. Do you know what those are?"

"I saw, you really shouldn't let yourself get branded like that. Most of them were tracking marks, and one was a curse," Brazla snorted.

"Tracking marks? Are heading for earth now because of me?" Zac exclaimed. "Is it a Karmic Link?"

"Karmic Link? Don't get blinded by that one Karmic Cultivator who wants this desolate rock for some reason. Those methods are beyond rare. Isn't his family famous through this whole sector because of

their extremely rare ability to touch upon that Dao?" Brazla snorted. "Even then, a small mark like those that got expelled isn't enough for something as great as intergalactic tracking. Perhaps if it was a supreme existence placing the mark. But why would someone like that turn his gaze toward you, or even this whole sector for that matter?"

"Then what is it?" Zac asked.

"The trees and bushes around my square--"

"I'll have someone beautify and prune the forest around you," Zac sighed without pause.

"I can't tell you about the curse, but the others are minor markers that would stay dormant until triggered," the Tool Spirit said as a satisfied grin spread across his face.

"Triggered? How?" Zac asked.

"The better ones could trigger upon entering an array covering a set area, usually a town. The worse ones would require a direct scan of your body specifically. It would essentially make it harder for you to stay hidden while traveling. Intelligence houses are notorious for placing such things on their clients if they think they can get away with it, but anyone with a portable array can do the same. Those runes are easily destroyed by purification methods though, so they are generally useless against the wealthy," Brazla shrugged.

Zac sighed in relief, realizing it wasn't as bad as he had previously feared. The looming threat of The Great Redeemer had really made him a bit paranoid about the dangers of the multiverse. But it was worth remembering that the plan of Vordis A'Heliophos was thousands of years in the making, and it still seemed easier said than done to find even Earth after all that effort.

It was a weight off his shoulders, and it allowed him to properly focus on the task at hand. As for plotting revenge for some random tracking mark, it wasn't really worth his time and effort. He had enough enemies as it was.

"I want to see the E-Grade skills," Zac said as he slowly got to his feet.

Brazla shrugged with disinterest and a set of stairs leading to a previously inaccessible section appeared to Zac's left. He looked over to see if Brazla was planning on joining him, but the tool spirit had already disappeared. It felt a bit like Brazla was depressed after visiting the lava world. It might have brought back memories of his creator, and the volcano was perhaps even Brazla's own birthplace.

Zac didn't mind the peace and quiet as he made his way toward the next floor. However, he actually had to stop and take a breath after just a couple of steps, his hands shaking with exhaustion. The lava bath had managed to cleanse him of the remnants of the [Rageroot Oak Seed], but he was still completely wrung dry. He felt hungover, sick, and voraciously hungry at the same time.

He was really craving a proper dinner full of E-Grade meat, but he wasn't sure he would be able to hold it down at the moment. He ate a couple of fasting pills instead, which somewhat relieved his symptoms and allowed him to walk up the rest of the stairs.

So he soon found himself in an austere chamber illuminated by only natural light. Gone were the opulent displays of the first floor, replaced with a display of pure craftsmanship. There were

painstakingly engraved pictures covering the wall, and a quick look indicated that they were probably scenes out of the original Brazla's life.

It piqued Zac's curiosity, but he was ultimately more interested in the fourteen crystals that hovered in a semicircle on the other side of the room.

There were not a lot of crystals compared to the first floor, but Zac already knew that each and every one of them was a peak-quality skill hand-picked by Brazla himself, with the purpose of creating a foundation for his family. He could only pray that there was at least one or two that he could make use of.

Zac walked past the crystals one by one, touching a plaque in front of them to receive a stream of information about the skill stored within. After having gone through the whole set he couldn't help but nod in appreciation at Brazla's foresight when preparing this set of skills.

There was an endless number of paths to take in cultivation, just like the name of the Dao Repository indicated. That meant that the odds of being a perfect match to a skill you randomly picked up was pretty slim though. The first floor of the Dao Repository was a reflection of this, as the skills placed there were extremely varied, to the point that Zac barely had gained anything from it.

But seeing the selection on the second floor Zac realized that the original Brazla probably had a purpose of arranging things like this. The first floor was available to anyone who had just set out on the path of cultivation. A new level one cultivator would be able to unlock a huge array of classes with the help of that set of skills.

That was how most people in the Tutorial started their cultivation journey according to Thea. They were given a choice of skill after completing the first mini-mission, and that skill would become their main method of survival until reaching level 25. If someone picked [Fireball] and used it during the month-long Tutorial, then they would probably be able to choose some sort of mage class upon reaching level 25.

However, cultivators who had reached E-Grade would generally set in their own ways, with the more talented ones already having started forming their cultivation path. The Celestial Craftsman understood this fact and had therefore focused on skills that would be helpful for a wide array of people.

Six of the fourteen skills were heavily related to the six base attributes, without possessing a connection to a specific Dao. They also seemed to be following the concept of greatness from simplicity, which not only made them powerful but also easy to fuse with other skills down the line.

For example, the Dexterity-based skill was an offensive skill simply called [Soaring Ocean], but it wasn't actually a water-based skill. It was rather a bit reminiscent of how Ogras fought with his shadow spears.

It was a speed-based attack that made use of a rapid series of strikes rather than one strong attack. The weapon could seemingly be almost anything from the looks of it, from hands to bladed weapons to even things like Ogras' shadows. The true power of the skill came from the fact that each consecutive strike would increase your speed by a bit, and your momentum would keep growing endlessly as long as you kept attacking.

Eventually, your speed would be far beyond your normal limits, and with increased speed came improved lethality. The enemy would be drowned in an endless sea of attacks until they succumbed.

It was a bit like a berserking skill though. If you pushed your speed too far your body would start to get hurt as well.

Meanwhile, both Endurance and Wisdom were defensive skills, while Vitality was a self-recuperating ability. Intelligence was surprisingly not a spell, but that was perhaps because most spells leaned toward a specific attunement. It instead was a mind-boosting spell that put your mind into overdrive, essentially slowing down the world around you.

That would allow you to use your other spells even faster and from the sound of it, to the point that you would become a spell turret wreaking havoc on the battlefield. Zac was initially pretty interested in that skill even if it was meant for mages, but it clearly stated that it put high requirements on both calculating speed and affinities, so he would be completely unable to use it for things like rapid-fire [Chop].

As for the rest of the prepared skills, they were mainly ancillary skills that would come in handy for most adventurers.

The first one that piqued Zac's interest was actually an upgraded version of [Thousand Faces], aptly named [Million Faces]. It worked similarly to the F-Graded skill, but it both gave a greater influence on modifications.

With this skill he would be able to completely change his build if need be, and even be able to pass off as other humanoid races to a cursory glance. But most importantly, it allowed you to curtail and modify your aura to some degree. It could both bolster the aura you emitted, fooling others into thinking you were stronger than you were, or weaken it to make others underestimate you.

It would even be able to slightly change the 'flavor' of your aura, which was even better. Your aura was like a fingerprint, and Zac could essentially identify anyone he knew in the base was just by sensing their aura. There were a few exceptions to that though, namely Billy and Kenzie.

Kenzie had help from her AI to completely mask her aura, while Billy could do so himself for some reason. Ogras was hard to spot as well, but that was because his shadows helped mute his aura a bit. Zac still could recognize the flavor as long as they were close enough.

The other ancillary skills were similarly impressive and Zac felt like a child in a candy store as he looked at the varying options. However, his luck had finally caught up with him, as he, unfortunately, had spotted several clashes with his current skills. He only had so many slots for skills, and more than half of them were already used up.

If he wanted to learn these new skills, then he would have to sacrifice a few of his old ones.