

## The Fall 587

### Chapter 587: Pathstrider

It almost felt like Zac had never left the solitary rock hurtling through the boundless expanse. He felt the heat of the drained sun on his back, and the surface of the meteor was still illuminated by its rays. He soon realized that the meteor wasn't as simple as it seemed though as space and time seemed to bend to its will. It kept running into one energy-dense object after another at a rapid pace, the vast distances of outer space made inconsequential.

Everything from stars to mysterious meteors was sucked dry by the cultivator, turning him into a wandering calamity. But the world suddenly shuddered as the meteor was forced to a stop in the middle of nowhere, and Zac spotted a man standing in the void. He radiated terrifying killing intent, and he looked at the unmoving man on top of the meteor with greed in his eyes.

The man said something as a sword materialized in his hand, but Zac couldn't make out any sound at all. However, the sword alone spoke volumes, and its sharpness immediately forced Zac to look away. Zac's still couldn't see the features of his presumed ancestor from his vantage, but it looked like he didn't care all too much about the man who barred their path.

The ancestor didn't summon a weapon of his own, but he rather just pointed at the swordmaster with his left hand. Zac felt the world was ending the next moment as both space and time were ripped apart. An area spanning millions of kilometers was caught up in the storm of annihilation, and not even the vacuum of the void was unscathed.

Zac could somewhat spot the swordmaster struggling within the torrent for a few seconds, but he was soon drowned and obliterated. Neither his body nor his treasure sword survived, and the whole sector of space still hadn't restored its spatial integrity by the time the meteor started moving again.

The vision started to fade as soon as the 'battle' ended, but it still replayed over and over in Zac's mind.

There was one thing that Zac was certain of; the attack hadn't contained even a shred of Cosmic Energy. It was a simple outburst of Dao and mental energy, a truly weaponized version of a Dao Field. That fact alone almost made Zac's mind short-circuit, and one thought remained even after Zac woke up in the silver forest.

Just how powerful was that man's soul to be able to utterly destroy an area far surpassing a planet just with just his Dao?

Another screen appeared like when he opened his last node, but the text wasn't all that helpful this time around either.

[Spiritual Void - An omnivorous mind tempered by the primordial void.]

He quickly turned his sight inward once more, but not much had changed. The three apparitions still floated about in the center of his soul, and the Hidden Node inside his avatar was still slowly drawing on the energies of the three images. However, the node was properly opened this time around, and Zac figured that this behavior was one of the features of the node.

Part of him wanted to immediately start experimenting with his Daos, but the time that Verun could maintain its corporeal form was quickly running out. He conveyed a couple of orders through the Tool Spirit, and he was relieved to see that most of the remaining wolves blended into the forest the next second.

He had only given two orders to the pack since he was afraid that they wouldn't be able to follow anything more complex than that. The first was to stay away from the wall at the side with the glasshouse. Secondly, he ordered all but six wolves to go away, to go about their business. The remaining six wolves were just at the Peak F-Grade, and Zac alone could subdue their fighting spirit with his aura even after being afflicted by the weakness of [Hatchetman's Rage].

Verun turned into a stream of blood that squeezed into the axe a minute later, leaving Zac and the wolves in an awkward stalemate. However, Zac was relieved to see that releasing his aura wasn't even necessary. The wolves were actually subdued by Verun even after it returned to the axe, and they even followed basic commands by Zac himself.

The group started to walk back the way Zac came from as soon as he had looted the corpses of both the alphas and most of the elites. Zac still held off on experimenting with his Daos, partly because he was afraid that he'd spook the wolves, and partly because he felt that his new hidden node hadn't completely stabilized yet.

But there were other things to check while he made his way back, and he opened his status screen to see if the recent experiences had changed anything there.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

83

Class

[E-Epic] Edge of Arcadia

Race

[E] Human - Void Emperor (Corrupted, Unawakened)

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, Pathstrider

Limited Titles

Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star - 14th

Dao

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

Core

[E] Duplicity

Strength

2756 [Increase: 91%. Efficiency: 228%]

Dexterity

1312 [Increase: 65%. Efficiency: 187%]

Endurance

2338 [Increase: 99%. Efficiency: 218%]

Vitality

1552 [Increase: 89%. Efficiency: 218%]

Intelligence

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

Wisdom

1071 [Increase: 70%. Efficiency: 187%]

Luck

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

Free Points

0

Nexus Coins

[F] 1 839 996 020

Zac felt a surge of adrenaline course through his body when he saw how much his attributes had improved, almost completely making him forget how exhausted he felt from the backlash. The probable source was easily spotted as well, and Zac quickly opened up his Dao Screen.

[Fragment of the Axe (High): All attributes +30, Strength +500, Dexterity +250, Endurance +30, Wisdom +110. Effectiveness of Strength +15%.]

He had initially been afraid that the series of Dao Visions wouldn't improve his Fragments, but it looked like it was an unfounded fear. The digested Tribulation Lightning had actually allowed him to push his main Dao to the next level just based on his insights back during the Zhix Wars. That was a huge windfall for Zac, and that improvement alone drastically increased his confidence for the upcoming battles. The attributes were a welcome boost, but the true gain was the improvement to the Dao's lethality in battle.

It was a bit of a disappointment that his earlier theory had been wrong though, with neither the All Attributes nor Efficiency doubling at every upgrade. It rather looked like he gained 10 All Attributes and 5% Efficiency at every step. It meant that he would end up with 40 to all attributes at Peak Mastery, as opposed to 80.

The total amount of gained attributes would still be the same, but the difference meant a loss of hundreds of points in Luck when including all three Fragments. This way it would possibly be easier for him to maintain his lead compared to others though, so Zac figured it might not be too bad. The other two Dao Fragments hadn't improved this time around, though Zac felt he had made some strides just by congealing those two apparitions.

That wasn't the only gain of the battle, as he had actually gotten a new title. Zac eagerly opened his Title Screen to see what the Pathstrider title provided, but the prompt almost made him collapse in despair.

[Pathstrider: Form a cohesive Cultivation Path while still in E-Grade. Reward: Marked for further training.]

This was the second title he got without an actual reward, but Zac inwardly groaned as he felt that this one was even worse than the Terminus title. He knew all too well what the System considered 'training'. This title was essentially a trouble-magnet, and the only thing that Zac felt was missing was the infuriating 'congratulations' that the System extended.

Zac sighed and closed the status screen, which drew a few wary glances from the young wolves. At least the title brought some good news; his cultivation path had been given a passing mark by the system.

There was nothing else for him to do in this forest for the time being, and he increased his speed toward the glasshouse. The wolves followed in tow, though it looked like every step they took was full of reluctance as they ran further and further from the rest of the pack.

The return trip took him almost an hour thanks to his weakened condition, but he finally reached the area with the camouflaged glasshouse. Zac wasn't sure whether the others were still around or whether they were on the way back to the base, but his question was soon answered as Billy appeared out of nowhere with his club at the ready.

"Wait! I tamed these guys," Zac explained, but his voice rapidly lost its strength as the group of wolves pounced at the giant without hesitation.

The young wolves were clearly out for blood, and nothing Zac did with [Verun's Bite] could quell their bloodthirst. Zac could only sigh and flash forward, punching the closest one on the side of its head,

instantly knocking it out. Billy grinned and followed suit as he bashed the closest one, and a few seconds later all six wolves were lying unconscious on the ground.

"Ah, stupid dogs," Billy muttered. "Need to be trained."

"Exactly," Zac nodded as he turned to Thea who had walked out from the illusion array while the two dealt with the wolves. "Are you okay?"

Billy was still looking a bit tired, but his wounds were mostly superficial. He would most likely be fine in a few days. However, Thea looked a lot worse for the wear. Her face was completely pallid and her eyes were sunken, and they even seemed to have lost some of their color. The skill she used, [Void Piercer], was able to display a completely shocking might, but something told him that the cost of using it was equally harsh.

She simply shouldn't be able to release such an amount of power as things currently stood, and Zac guessed that the skill could be considered a Taboo Skill like the escape method she possessed. It either had to cost life force or come with some other huge drawback, something far worse than his current state from using [Hatchetman's Rage].

"It's nothing," Thea said with a shake of her head. "I'll be better in a bit. It's good to see you're fine as well, the energy outbursts before were pretty intense."

"... Be careful," Zac could only say, realizing that Thea didn't want him to worry. "How's Emily and Joanna?"

"They're both sleeping," Billy yawned. "Thea should be sleeping as well, but she refused."

"Emily overdrew her energy to the point that she even used a little bit of life-force," Thea sighed. "She needs to rest, or it might harm her future cultivation."

Zac nodded with a grimace, feeling a wave of guilt coming over him. He knew that the teenager needed to spread her wings and join proper missions if she would have any chance of making it on the road of cultivation, but this was probably the wrong place to do so.

"Don't blame yourself. No one can predict everything, and she will be fine," Thea said. "More importantly, we were afraid you would be coming with a thousand wolves nipping at your heels, but you actually tamed a few of them? What's going on? Why didn't these guys attack you?"

"It's my Tool Spirit," Zac said after some thought as he looked down at the pitiable animals, explaining how Verun became the alpha of the pack.

"It's that powerful?" Thea asked with glimmering eyes. "It seems I need to focus even more on my new companion."

"I was hoping they would stay docile even when I'm not around, but It looks like that might take some time. Perhaps the beastmasters have some means to quickly domesticate them tough," Zac muttered.

"The Tal-Eladar, can they be trusted?" Thea asked. "Your relations seem a bit strained."

"They are a business partner rather than an ally," Zac said after some thought. "They were pretty useless before, but they seem to have come around since they failed to assist during the Undead Incursion. Their ambiguous situation makes them work really hard as well."

"So what are you planning on doing next?" Thea asked, putting the matter of the wolves aside.

"I'm going to explore the forest a bit," Zac said without hesitation. "But I need to do something first."

As for what that was, it was simple. He still had a storm of Cosmic Energy rampaging about in his body, and he needed to break open some nodes now that he was safe within the glasshouse.