

The Fall 589

Chapter 589: Tracks

Zac's new Hidden Node had finally calmed down and the somewhat erratic trajectories of the two circular apparitions had stabilized. The three now formed a stable system, and Zac's intuition told him that using his mental energy shouldn't pose a problem any longer. However, Zac still noted that his Hidden Node was still slowly eating the energies from the three Dao projections, though not nearly as frantically as before.

It felt like a small drain on his mind, but his soul was pretty strong by this point, and he was generating new Mental Energy a lot quicker than the speed of consumption of his Hidden Node. It would no doubt slow down his recuperation after a battle, but he still had a pile of Soul Crystals in case he was in a hurry.

He was about to infuse his skill, but a thought suddenly struck him as he activated [Primal Polyglot] first. The translation function worked passively just like the [Book of Babel], but the active interpretation of the Dao-based language needed an infusion of Cosmic Energy. He had tried using it a few times before as they traveled through the endless tunnels, but it appeared as though the skill didn't really help with Technocrat materials.

His vision didn't change at all after activating the skill, but it still felt like he was looking at something different than before as he gazed at the halo hovering behind him. It felt a bit similar to how two different people could have completely different impressions of a painting or a poem, it gave Zac a completely new outlook as he gazed at the circular fractals.

The skill allowed him to gain a better understanding of how the halo and the apparition were connected, but he didn't gain any immediate insights into the limitations of his skill though. Zac guessed he would have to experiment with one apparition after another to see what would be useful, and what would be inefficient.

Zac briefly considered using the Chaos Pattern or his Remnants for a huge destructive boost, but he quickly dispelled any such thoughts. He didn't want to call down the Tribulation Lightning again, even if things turned out pretty good the last time around.

That scene with the endless sea of lightning might even have been a warning by the heavens, so he instead focused on his Dao. He tried infusing [Conformation of Supremacy] with the Fragment of the Axe seeing that everything seemed to be in order, but worry gripped his heart when nothing happened.

However, Zac immediately calmed down when he found that he could infuse the skill with the Fragment of the Coffin just fine. It would appear that the choice of projection also impacted what Daos were infusible. The feeling he got from the shield was mostly one of imperviousness and hardness, and his Fragment of the Coffin was the Fragment that best represented that feeling.

A stream of mental energy made its way into the halo from his mind, and Zac noted with interest that the energies seeping out of the hanging coffin joined the mental energy flow, effectively turning it into Dao Energy. The infusion somehow felt a lot smoother from before, like the process had been streamlined. That by itself didn't really change its power or anything, though the speed of his infusion seemed to have somewhat sped up.

It was only a difference of a fraction of a second, but even such a small boost could prove vital in a pitched battle.

However, another change made Zac's eyes glisten. A second stream was released from his avatar, or rather the Hidden Node lodged within his body. It was the same pitch-black energy as the one released from the coffin, and the two streams seamlessly merged just before they entered the skill fractal.

Zac initially didn't know whether this change held any significance, but he quickly realized what was going on. He hadn't used his new E-Grade skill a lot, but he was almost certain that he was able to instill more of his mental energy compared to before.

Of course, that might be because he had changed the avatar to a shield that really matched the Fragment of the Coffin.

There was a simple way to make sure though, and Zac quickly dispelled [Conformation of Supremacy] to instead conjure a fractal blade with [Chop]. It was the skill he was most used to, and he knew exactly how much mental energy he could infuse into the blade before it wouldn't work any longer.

Zac's eyes lit up as he infused more and more of his Dao into the blade, and he was still using the Fragment of the Coffin. A similar scene took place in his mind this time around as well, as two streams of energies fused just as they entered the skill fractal on his hand.

The fractal blade immediately gained a sinister aura as it was filled with the putrefying part of his Dao Fragment, but the color kept increasing in intensity and power until it almost turned pitch-black.

It didn't take Zac long to figure out the difference from before. He could suddenly infuse around 20% more mental energy into his skills, which made his attacks around 10% more powerful compared to before if you contributed half his power to his Dao Fragments. It was an amazing boost that seemed to come with pretty much no downsides, apart from a small but constant drain on his mind.

Of course, there was some bad news that came along with the good. Zac had hoped that the Hidden Node in his mind would be related to Dao control and affinity like the general Hidden Node [Spirit Gate], but it rather looked like [Spiritual Void] was a combat-oriented node that replaced quality with quantity.

Zac experimenting for a few minutes longer to make sure, but he could quickly confirm that he was still beyond incompetent when it came to things like Dao Braiding. He couldn't turn his Hidden Node on or off either, though he could somewhat reduce the amount of energy it expelled along with a Dao infusion.

Another change took place a few minutes later, as the additional infusion from his Hidden Node started to wane, leaving Zac with just his own mental energy. He wasn't too surprised about that though. He had already guessed that the [Spiritual Void] acted like some sort of Dao Battery, storing excess energy until it would be released in battle.

The node was a bit unwieldy in the sense that he couldn't control when to use it and when his own Dao was enough, but his control would probably improve when his bloodline awakened. The boosting effect would probably become even greater in the future as well, and he couldn't help but think back to the scene where his presumed ancestor crushed his enemy by simply releasing the floodgates in his mind.

Perhaps even more importantly, the node gave him an important glimpse into his Void Emperor bloodline. Things were finally started to make sense, and the lack of affinities no longer felt as detrimental as they once did. His body might be 'corrupted' with a complete lack of affinities, but it appeared that his bloodline was shoring up those weaknesses one by one.

The [Void Heart] was related to energy gathering, allowing him to eat all kinds of energies as an alternative form of cultivation. The second node in his soul allowed for an additional outburst of mental energy, replacing Dao Braiding or Dao Arrays with additional force.

It perfectly aligned with his insights back during the Dao Discourse to the point that it made him question whether that epiphany was actually just his bloodline telling his subconscious how to fight.

Zac did fell a few trees with his improved Fragment of the Axe as well, and it had taken a noticeable step forward in lethality. The fragment hadn't really seemed to gain any new functionality as they sometimes did, but it had rather just become more powerful. It wasn't too surprising, as the upgrade had been based on war and conflict rather than adding something new like Mental Heaviness.

Seeing that everything was fine even after the drastic changes to his mind Zac set out again, taking a circuitous route through the forest. It took almost 20 hours for him to reach the other side, but he had spent a few hours picking up energy-dense plants.

He didn't recognize a single one of them, but they all contained the energy of the moon. The combination of specific growth requirements and unique attributes was usually a recipe for a valuable treasure, so he had high hopes that the Sky Gnome could turn these things into piles of cash even if they proved useless in awakening his bloodline.

A few hours were spent on rest and redrawing his pathways as well. He ate a small hill of meat before he set out again, but he finally felt like he had rid himself of the last after-effects of the [Rageroot Oak Seed]. His body was in pretty good condition all things considered, with only his pathways causing some issues now.

It was a bit of an annoyance, but Zac knew he couldn't complain. Most mortals would probably turn green with envy when hearing how quickly he pushed through levels.

Zac kept moving forward after resuming his exploration, and the silver forest finally gave way to the band of grass that ran along the wall. The opposite side of the forest was constructed pretty much the same way as the area they came from, with a thirty-meter tall wall stretching across the horizon.

However, there was one startling difference; the wall was actually damaged, like it had just endured a siege. The scripts had lost their luster at multiple places, and there were hundreds of cracks. Zac even believed he would be able to cram himself through some of the larger fractures.

Zac's first guess was that another battle had taken place here just like the one that should have taken place just before Ogras first arrived in the Mystic Realm, but he quickly discarded that thought. The damage was simply too widespread, going on for as far as he could see. If a battle had caused this kind of damage they definitely weren't at the E-Grade.

But more to the point, Zac sensed the same type of spatial energies in many of the cracks, making him believe that this was rather the result of spatial turbulence.

There were no spatial tears or other dangers for the moment though, so Zac started walking along the edge of the forest in a parallel to the wall, keeping his form hidden among the shrubbery. He was looking for a natural exit like the glasshouse or a gate, but so far there were no clues.

The cracks might provide ingress to the other side, but Zac wouldn't try that unless he really needed to. After all, the walls were alive, and he didn't want to get buried alive inside the technocrat alloy. A sudden shudder from his forester's intuition made him turn his concentration to a patch of the forest ahead of him.

He first didn't understand what [Forester's Constitution] was trying to tell him as there were no herbs there, but his eyes widened when he noticed something.

There were footsteps, and not something left by the wolves.

Zac bent down to get a closer look, and while he was no expert in tracking he felt the trail was fresh. He hesitated for a second, but his curiosity quickly overcame his caution. He soon took out his axe and he started to follow the tracks, taking great care to not create any sounds.

The tracks came from the depths of the forest before they made a turn at the edge. It looked like a group had taken a shortcut like him, but the droplets of blood on the grass indicated that their passage might not have been as carefree. The trail moved in the same direction as the one Zac already walked, keeping to the edge of the forest all the time.

There was no doubt that the owners of the footprints weren't far away as the blood on the ground still hadn't dried, and it only took him fifteen minutes before he spotted some movement ahead. Zac had thought about how to make first contact with the natives a fair bit over the past weeks, but no planning had prepared him for the situation in front of him.

Five werewolves were standing not far from the wall, most of them sporting somewhat severe wounds. One of them even seemed to have lost an arm recently, and he swayed a bit where he stood. But more importantly, one of them was carrying an unconscious human, a girl who looked no older than Zac himself

How were you supposed to react to what looked like a straight-up kidnapping?

His first instinct was to save help the captive out simply based on the fact they both were human, but he quickly discarded the thought. He had no idea what was going on, and getting involved might cause unnecessary trouble. His main goal was to kill the two remaining Dominators to cut off the last two Karmic Links leading to earth.

Anything else was secondary.

However, a burst of annoyance made Zac grit his teeth when an all-too-familiar prompt appeared in front of him.

[Damsel in Distress (Training (1/10))]: Rescue the Damsel in Distress. Reward: Reward based on performance at the end of training regimen. (0/1) NOTE: Failure to comply with training regimen will result in loss of two random skills and 9 levels.]