

The Fall 642

Chapter 642: Infighting and Finishers

Zac quickly pieced together the puzzle of his Bloodline Talent as he ran behind the Anointed and the demons in their mad dash away from the section with a weakened spatial barrier. The battle just now had given him a crash-course on the effect of [Force of the Void]; it appeared to be some sort of energy reserve hidden in the Void, one that allowed for instantaneous attacks.

It somewhat answered one of the big question marks in his mind. He had absorbed thousands of tons of Memorysteel along with the energy from a huge number of treasure caves, yet there was relatively little to show for it. Now Zac was rather suspecting that all that energy went into setting up this hidden pocket in his body.

At least he suspected that it was a hidden pocket. He still didn't have perfect control over his new bloodline, but it didn't feel like the energy was inside his body. He should have sensed it if that was the case, more than just the slight sense of hollowness after activating [Nature's Punishment].

That feeling was also a clear indication that this effect was limited. Zac guessed that this hidden energy source had a certain amount of energy reserves, and he would go back to normal Cosmic Energy consumption after that reserve was exhausted. He wasn't exactly sure how to refill that source though. His body was still full of energy since he hadn't wasted any of his own during the battle, but he didn't feel any drain or absorption at all where the [Force of the Void] was restocked.

Did it perhaps need some specific energy source to be refilled? It shouldn't be, since the skills he activated felt pretty much the same as before, except for the ancient aura that his skills emitted.

Another possibility was that it wasn't an actual energy pocket, but rather him connecting to the energy of the Void. The sense of hollowness would then be exhaustion from forming the bridge to the other realm. He was still fuzzy about how it actually worked, but what was more important right now was what kind of benefits it could provide.

And it was huge.

The more he thought about it the more excited Zac became. Instantaneous skill activation was massive, especially at higher grades. He had tried to improve his battle techniques lately after his disappointing battle with Void's Disciple, though the events in the Mystic Realm had generally taken precedence.

However, he remembered one short exposition on battle-theory he had bought through Calrin. It was written by a D-grade pugilist, and Zac had hoped it would give him insights into dealing with Void's Disciple. The D-Grade hegemon hadn't covered how to deal with pugilists, but he had still provided a lot of insight. The master essentially divided his fighting style into two types of actions; infighting and finishers.

He argued that F-Grade battles were just children launching finishers at each other, with no skill or technique. But such a battle-style wouldn't work as people rose through the ranks. People at D-grade would be able to move miles in an instant and launch a dozen attacks in the blink of an eye. They were also a lot more sensitive to Cosmic Energy, and would usually be able to sense skill activations and

instantaneously react. Massive skills that required preparation and charging would create lethal openings if you activated them without thought.

Infighting and cheap skills weren't meant to break through the defenses and kill your enemies, but rather to whittle them down and tire them out so that you could create an opening. Only then would you unleash your ultimate skills. Overwhelm the opposition, seize the rhythm, finish them in one move. That the optimal combat tactic according to the pugilist.

Zac could easily understand the theory. For example, at lower levels his skill [Deforestation] was pretty overpowering, causing wide swathes of destruction. However, a skill like that would quickly lose its efficacy at higher levels, and not only because of limited energy.

Someone at late or peak E-Grade wouldn't just stand around and watch that wave of destruction come washing over them. Someone that powerful would be able to move hundreds of meters in a second even without a movement skill, and they would simply move out of the way. Or rather, they might launch a counter-strike during the short instant when Zac gathered the energy to summon the enormous axes.

Doing something like that at F-Grade was nigh-impossible, but a peak E-Grade warrior definitely had the skill and insight to launch a quick precision strike that could disrupt the skill activation.

This theory of infighting and finishers pretty much held true for most combat classes, not just melee fighters such as himself. First, get the upper hand one way or another, force them into a passive state, and finally finish them off. There were of course a million ways to create an opening. Take the Second Elder of the Cartava Clan, for example.

He first restrained Zac with an array, then hid his true move by conjuring ten clones. He had seized the rhythm and made it impossible for Zac to counter while he prepared his finisher while hidden underground. Zac had thankfully been able to ruin the schemes with sheer force and some shamelessness, but he wouldn't always be so lucky in the future.

But his bloodline seemed to turn that simple system on his head.

Even an energy-hungry skill like [Nature's Punishment] had been activated without warning in an instant. There were not even any energy traces in his body from the activation, the hand had just suddenly appeared out of the crack in space. It had grabbed the three tentacles almost before Zac had finished his mental command.

What if that had been a pitched melee-battle? Zac and his enemy could be standing in a lock with their weapons, only for the poor bastard to be smashed by a five-meter fist out of nowhere. A bloodline talent like this opened a whole new world of possibilities for him. It might even be more valuable than becoming a cultivator provided he learned to make the most of this ability.

Certainly, there were some limitations to the talent. Zac guessed that he could draw an amount equivalent to 18% of his normal Cosmic Energy stores, based on the number in the bloodline panel. That would track with his experiences as well. [Chop] barely cost any cosmic energy at all, but [Nature's Punishment] cost him around 8 to 9% of his Cosmic Energy by this point.

Another fractal blade appeared out of nowhere, confirming that the ability remained even with the sense of hollowness. He conjured and discarded a dozen edges in rapid succession, at which point he could confirm that the sense of emptiness got a bit stronger. Figuring out how to remove that feeling would require some time and experimentation though.

There were a lot of other questions that needed to be solved as well, but Zac sighed when he saw that reality was quickly catching up to him. He had been running for over ten minutes by now, and it was clear that the Collector had given up by this point. The others had realized the same thing, but that didn't mean the situation was resolved.

There was still the issue of the strangers who had escaped from the two vessels. They had all rushed in the same direction as the people of Port Atwood, and they currently found themselves surrounded by his army. They didn't try to break out though, but rather just stood their ground in somber silence.

Zac wasn't too surprised the natives seemed fine with being surrounded considering that they had actively chosen to run together with his people. Perhaps it was because he saved them, or perhaps because they wanted to look for sanctuary. After all, there were just over one hundred left of them, and they probably had no idea about the situation on the mountain.

A furry beastkin turned toward Zac as he approached, and Zac realized that he was actually a monkeyman with silver fur. He reminded Zac of the almost human-like Stone Monkey Ogras had thrown through the incursion, but the cultivator in front of him was obviously a lot stronger. However, his late E-grade aura was quite weak and unstable, and he was missing large spots of furs where nasty burns could be seen.

He wasn't the only one, most of the more powerful warriors seemed to sport these kinds of wounds. The injuries were at least a day old, so it looked like these people had been in pitched battle even before reaching the Memorysteel mountain. Zac couldn't sense any Dao from the wounds though, no matter if he used [Cosmic Gaze] or [Primal Polyglot] for clues.

"The True Sky Faction is extremely grateful for your saving grace, Lord Atwood. Without your aid we wouldn't be standing here right now," the monkeyman said with a bow, his voice deep and gravelly. "I am Hekruv Vira of the True Sky Council."

"You know me?" Zac asked with some surprise.

"We have seen reports on you provided by the New World Government of your planet," the monkeyman nodded.

"Speaking of, where are they? The officials of New World Government," Zac said as he looked across the group.

Almost a third of the group were humans, but Zac didn't recognize a single one of them. More importantly, almost all of them were at the E-grade, confirming that they weren't part of Earth.

"Many of them are back on Earth. Some were killed when the islands collapsed. Some... Were killed by us," the monkeyman said, causing a few of the refugees to look over at the speaker with some shock.

However, the monkeyman along with the dozen emitting the strongest auras were unphased, proving they had already decided to divulge that information. Seeing that Zac didn't interrupt, Hekruv Vira kept talking.

"We told them that the world was ending, and they entered an agreement with us. We would help them battle their enemies in this realm and assist them in scouting for the Spatial Treasure. They would in return allow our people to leave before the realm collapsed. We upheld our part of the bargain, they did not," Hekruv Vira said. "We tried to force our way out, but it failed. They closed the tunnel and unleashed a taboo weapon. That might even be what drew the attention of the System to this place."

Zac was surprised about how candid the monkeyman was, though there was no way to confirm the truth until they left this place. But Zac leaned toward his explanation being mostly true, since it matched pretty well with what he had heard and how the Cartava Clan acted.

He guessed that the few survivors of the True Sky Faction felt the need to take a chance, not only for their immediate survival but also for the future beyond the Mystic Realm. There were only a hundred twenty or so of them left, and they would be stuck with Zac for a century on the outside even if they survived this place. Lying right now would just put them in a dangerous situation as soon as they got out.

"I'm not an enemy with the New World Government... But I am not an ally either. I won't involve myself in your dealings with them," Zac slowly said, making the survivors relax somewhat. "However, that only goes for this place. I will incorporate the New World Government after leaving this place, if there's anything left to incorporate. More importantly, why did you follow my people after escaping the Collector?"

That was the most pressing matter. These people were exhausted and wounded, but they were elites every one of them. There were a few that had weak auras, but Zac guessed they were expert Datamancers based on their attire. Leaving them to their own devices might come back to bite him in his ass, like if they decided to attack his people after he had left for the sphere in the sky.

"We wish to follow you," Hekruv Vira said without hesitation.

"Having a bunch of powerful strangers in one's midst is a good way to get a dagger in one's back," Ogras said as he walked over to Zac. "Sometimes it's easier to nip a problem in the bud."

"We simply wish to follow behind your faction for protection, and we will not fight you for Seals. We are too exhausted and wounded to deal with the threats of the rival factions, let alone yours. Besides, we can pay for ourselves. Ten Million Nexus Coins per person," Hekruv Vira said. "But what I really meant was that we wish to join your force upon leaving this place."

"Join Port Atwood," Zac slowly said. "Why?"

"The True Sky Faction is gone, and only a few of us remain. Even if we settled and started a new faction, we would just be a small group of foreigners in a world under your control. We have already deduced that you are a supreme Progenitor, and we understand what that means all-too-well, far better than the officials of the New World Government," Hekruv Vira said. "The Boundless Heavens follow the law of the strongest. I don't wish for us to become fertilizer to your cultivation path."

"We can also see that your force has already taken in all kinds of races, just like we of the True Sky Faction did inside this prison. We also believe that we can get stronger by banding together and sharing insights and experiences," a large-headed humanoid added.

Zac looked at the group deep in thought. Having these people around would definitely help since they would add over a dozen peak warriors to Port Atwood's roster, which was something he desperately needed. However, these warriors were all much higher levels than himself, making it impossible to sign the kind of contracts that External Elders sometimes did in the multiverse.

He would have to solely rely on trust or suppression. It worked out fine with Ogras in the end, but these were people old schemers who were all centuries old. Would he be able to leave Earth without worries in the future with these people staying behind?

"We also have this, and are ready to hand it over upon joining your faction," Hekruv Vira said. "After all, it would be in our best interest to strengthen our allies as much as possible."

People tensed up as the monkeyman reached for a worn-out Cosmos Sack, but they visibly relaxed when they realized he just took out a tablet.

"What's that?" Zac asked curiously, and Kenzie looked over with interest as well.

"It is the database on all bloodline research we have collected over the past millennia. Our own experiences during cultivation, the experimental data of the Tsarun Clan who captured us and brought us here. Even some notes and insights from the ancient and powerful creators of this place. A lot of warriors on your world seem to carry our bloodlines for some reason. With this database, you will be able to unlock their potential. Perhaps even your own."

Zac looked at the tablet for roughly half a second before he turned toward the monkeyman with a smile.

"Welcome aboard."