

The Fall 678

Chapter 678: Tyrant

Zac didn't mind the announcer's tone since he understood that the man was just playing things up to elicit more bets. He was more interested in the results of the last battles. The effect of his two Dao Fragments on his new skill was pretty interesting. The Fragment of the Bodhi increased the number of leaves, and Zac felt that they also contained more energy, which would make them harder to destroy.

Meanwhile, adding the Fragment of the Axe actually decreased the number of leaves compared to no Dao-infusion at all, but it did instead drastically increase the lethality of the individual leaves. That left the Fragment of the Coffin, but Zac wasn't too certain he would be able to infuse that skill with his third Dao Fragment.

Besides, Zac wanted to avoid using that Dao in his human form if possible. It was something Zac had decided upon over the past years as he had arduously worked on incorporating his Path into the way he fought. He initially tried to incorporate everything he had envisioned, the trinity of life, death, and conflict, but it quickly became apparent that it was simply too huge a task.

So Zac came up with a plan. His first step would be to better mix Bodhi and Axe, Life and War, in his human form, while focusing on Coffin and Axe in his undead form. It was based on the creation of his Bronze- and pink flashes, or rather his Annihilation Sphere and Origin Mark. One half of him would delve into the depths of life through conflict, while the other into death and conflict.

That was why he had focused on only creating skills that followed these fusions. Both [Nature's Edge] and [Arcadia's Judgement] followed this rule, as did his two new skills for his Fetters of Desolation-class.

The second step would then be trying to somehow fuse these two battle styles into one coherent system that could fit across both his classes, using his Dao of the Axe as the bridge. It would be the equivalent of creating the Chaos pattern in the Tower of Eternity. Of course, that was a long road ahead, and it might not even turn out as he envisioned right now.

The first step was simply shoring up his understanding and his foundations, but he still hadn't reached the point of how Adcarkas somehow merged with his Dao. Zac had made some inroads, but cultivation was an endless path of self-discovery. Three years simply wasn't enough, at least not when cultivating in absolute safety as he had.

Zac was soon dragged out of his thoughts as a golden light appeared in front of him. This time there were just five beasts. They looked like huge creepy alien kangaroos with two sturdy legs keeping them upright and one ten-meter-long tail. They had no sharp claws though, and neither did they have any large fangs.

It made Zac a bit leery, as it made them seem like magical beasts, which often meant they were more powerful than common beasts.

"Oh! [Twinruin Battlecaller] quintuplets! These mentally linked beasts are quite a handful, and the larger the pack the greater the danger. Meeting quintuplets is both a blessing and a curse! A blessing because you've got to see a rare marvel of nature, a curse because it means you'll probably die! A real terror of a challenge this time, and the last hurdle for membership! Place your bets!"

There were still three battles to be had, but that was just for the best version of the title. Zac could bow out after this fight and still become an outer member of the Big Axe Coliseum. Keep going, and you might get a better title along with a reputation. Fail, and you'd die since the battles were to the death. Zac was obviously aiming for a perfect run since he still hadn't been pushed very hard.

He also tried to understand what kind of beast a Battlecaller was, but neither their appearance nor the announcer's description made it very clear. Then again, Zac guessed that it didn't really matter, and he immediately shot forward. He wanted to end this quickly, so a splendid halo appeared behind his back. A simple yet powerful axe hovered in its center, and [Verun's Bite] was imbued with a huge force.

"Oh my god! Our contestant has borrowed the image of the Heavenfall Autarch's cleaver! Is this a testament to his ambition? To follow in the path of the father of axes?" the announcer screamed, his voice an octave shriller compared to before.

Zac only snorted. He had already learned that the axe-man in his vision was a real person; the Heavenfall Autarch. He wasn't from the Zecia sector, and he died tens of millions of years ago. Yet he still held fame all across the multiverse thanks to one of his fights being used to impart the Dao. That was something quite a few aimed for.

After all, true immortality was just a myth from what Zac had gathered, but being accepted by the System was a way to live on forever in the hearts of cultivators. There were even rumors of some sort of rewards to the descendants of Dao Teachers like the Heavenfall Autarch, as though the System were paying them licensing fees.

The distance between himself and the beasts was quickly shrinking, but the air suddenly started to vibrate before Zac found himself on a massive battlefield, frenzied cultists all around him. The fury of battle coursed through his veins, and his heart beat in sync with the drums of war. The war against the Church of Everlasting Dao had reached a fever pitch, but Zac only snorted as he flashed forward and swung at empty air.

It turned out the battlecallers were illusionists. They used the unusual attunement of the planet itself to deliver insidious and almost unnoticeable mental attacks. But how could Zac completely fall into confusion after evolving his soul? He still couldn't completely block out the illusion even with his defenses, but he could still somewhat discern the truth like a superimposed reality.

The empty air was actually the closest battlecaller, whose sharp tail was already piercing toward Zac's heart. Zac had sidestepped the attack and flashed forward with the help of his movement skill, and he was aiming to destroy the heart of the beast in return. However, found his axe impeded by a powerful barrier that didn't even crack when attacked by [Conformation of Supremacy].

That was saying something, considering that he had already reached Middle Mastery for the skill, which had kicked its offensive power up a notch. Add to that the increased power of his axe, and the barrier had to be something else to not even crack.

"Oh! What powerful mental defenses! The contestant can even withstand a five-layered mental attack!" the announcer screamed, though his voice sounded muted and far in the distance. "But will it be enough?! The Battlecallers are not dreaded just for their mental attacks!"

Zac soon found that the announcer wasn't speaking out of turn as the five battlecallers encircled him. They were an extremely tricky enemy. They combined powerful illusions, sturdy arrays, and powerful tails into a full combat system. Furthermore, their cooperation was so perfect that Zac suspected they were rather one entity than just mentally linked.

Another wave of dizziness hit him, but it was like his mind held multiple layers. Only the surface layer of his mind was steeped in the madness of the battlecaller's abilities, whereas the core of his soul maintained perfect clarity. [Verun's Bite] cut through the air in a ruthless arc, aiming straight at an incoming tail.

Their bodies might be guarded by a fierce shield, but would they really be able to maintain such strong defenses around their long tails? The battlecaller desperately retracted its tail by pivoting with almost impossible speed, but it still got a deep gash as Zac's swing left a huge scar in the arena.

A pang of danger cut through the illusions assailing Zac's mind as a second, then a third tail shot forward, taking advantage of the extremely minute opening. Zac was barely able to dodge the second stab by pivoting his torso, but he simply wasn't quick enough to avoid the third one. A huge force slammed into his back, and Zac was lunged forward as the wind was knocked out of his lungs.

Only a shallow wound was left on his back even if the stab contained enough power to easily pierce through his body. It was all thanks to his new skill, [Innate Ward]. Just like the other skills from Brazla's depository, it was a simple skill but with a strong direct effect. It formed a second layer of protection right beneath the skin, its power based on one's Endurance.

It was simple and unadorned, but that also meant that the skill fit with most classes. It was the same with Zac, who had no problem using the skill to over 85% of its full potential even when his human side was a Strength-Vitality class.

Another wave of illusion hit him as he righted his body, but Zac didn't even try to push it away as he resumed his battle. In fact, he welcomed the illusion. Between his evolved soul, the unique attunement in the atmosphere, and the illusion, he felt himself making tremendous progress on his efforts to integrate War into his combat style.

This battle alone was more effective than months of secluded cultivation, and Zac felt his technique subtly change. The swings became more forceful, more intractable. It was like his axe was a unit of seasoned warriors, piercing into enemy ranks. They always found a weakness in the enemies' lines, mistakes rife for exploitation. When it appeared, the soldiers struck without remorse, as there was no mercy in war.

Zac rushed toward the closest battlecaller, barely avoiding two piercing tails as [Verun's Bite] keened with battle lust. Zac leaped forward but suddenly disappeared as he activated [Loamwalker] mid-air to appear in front of another of his foes. The axe ripped through the air in an upward trajectory that seemed to change every second. The teeth on its axehead caused whistling sounds to spread through the arena, but for some reason, it sounded like the trumpets of heralding a charge.

[Conformation of Supremacy] empowered the swing to a new height, fully taking advantage of Zac's massive reserves of Strength as he slammed into the defensive barrier of the battlecaller. The first swing wasn't enough, but the second swing immediately followed the first, and it was enough to finally crack

the shield. The axe bit into flesh and blood rained down on him, but that only spurred Zac on even further as he completely bisected the large beast with a third and final swing.

The four remaining Battlecallers screeched in pain, but Zac moved on them like a tide of cavalry, seizing the victorious momentum to win the war. It was clear the beasts were mutually empowering each other, and with the first one down there was an obvious weakness in their War Array. The second beast fell to just one swing even after the four desperately tried to gore Zac to death.

His movement was turning more and more inscrutable as one beast after another fell as his path and [Loamwalker] slowly fused as well. Zac felt himself on the precipice of something, but he suddenly found himself without opponents to test it on. The quintuplets were lying in ten large pieces around him, the blood staining the arena.

The heat of battle quickly died down, and Zac quickly lost the feeling. He swore in annoyance, but he knew it wasn't the end of the world. He was right at the threshold, and it wouldn't take him long to take that final step.

Zac sat down and closed his eyes to go over the battle in his mind. He heard that the announcer was shouting something, but he was more focused on his inward journey.

It wasn't like he suddenly gained a boost in attributes out of nowhere, but it was rather that his will, his Dao, and his body moved as one. It probably wasn't an exaggeration to say that he might only use 60 to 70% of his attributes normally, with the rest of it wasted on inefficiencies and inability to draw on his full potential.

But finding a combat style that resonated with the truths of the Heavens would remove some of these inefficiencies, which was a pure power-up with no demerits.

A massive roar suddenly echoed through the arena, and Zac frowned as he opened his eyes. There was, unfortunately, no time for him to absorb the lessons of the last battle, because the next enemy had already appeared. This time, the target was a hulking beast reaching over eight meters in the air. It looked like a mix of a bull and a tiger, with two gristly horns that radiated terrifying sharpness. The air itself crackled at their tips, and that was only one of its weapons.

The beast almost seemed to be bred for war, with a thick hide that almost looked like plating covering its body. It didn't even have any eyes, nose, or ears, removing those weaknesses from its head. Instead, it was just one massive jaw filled with three rows of sharp teeth. Its legs ended in sharp claws rather than hoofs, and even its tail ripped through the air with enough speed to cause small sonic booms.

"It's really a [Twinruin Tyrant]! Generally considered one of the nastiest critters below the D-grade, these hulking beasts are tools bred for carnage. Powerful defenses! Deadly claws! Powerful bloodline talents! These bastards have it all. Is this the end of the line? Is our friend Arcaz getting too greedy by staying behind? Place your bets!"

The beast roared with bloodlust, but another roar of similar intensity echoed out in Zac's mind. It was actually Verun who seemed extremely keen at battling the massive beast. Zac gave it a thought, and he felt why not? Verun had been stuck in his axe for three years, and sending it out shouldn't really be a problem.

The primal dragon-hyena appeared next to Zac the next moment, its legs shaking from restrained battle lust as swirls of blood danced around its paws.

“What! Such a corporeal Tool Spirit! Amazing! The resources that have gone into this axe are nothing to scoff at!” the Announcer exclaimed, but he paused when some people started boo on the stands. “Are you angry? Think this is cheating? Too bad! The Tool Spirit of an axe is naturally part of an axe warrior’s strength. No refunds for bets!”

Zac smiled a bit as he turned to Verun, which growled as it kept the tyrant in its sights.

“Have fun,” Zac only said and sat down and instead focused on his insights

“What confidence, daring to ignore the presence of a tyrant! I think we’re in for a treat!” the announcer hollered, and the hecklers were soon drowned out by cheers.

Verun roared with bloodlust as he shot forward, shooting straight toward the [Twinruin Tyrant] with mad abandon. The tyrant tried to bite down on Verun’s throat with its oversized jaw, but the dragon hyena was extremely nimble, effortlessly dodging the bite while returning a ruthless swipe in return.

Three deep gashes appeared on the tyrant’s throat, and three streams of blood were extracted, each of them floating toward a gleeful Verun. Seeing a Tool Spirit feeding on its blood made the boar delirious with rage, and its muscles rippled as it started emitting a fearful aura.

Zac was initially barely paying attention as he was fully focused on his experiences from the battle before, but he was soon mesmerized by the carnage a few hundred meters away. Claws, bites, tackles, swipes. Feints and full-on aggression. Blood, dust, roars. The two beasts fought with everything they had in a primal war of supremacy.

Wounds accumulated on the Tyrant’s body as the energy radiated from Verun steadily weakened. Yet neither backed down. In fact, the fervor of the battle only increased in intensity. Four sanguine rivers swirled around Verun, each of them rife with cutting intent. Meanwhile, black crackling lightning appeared on the horns of the Tyrant, and it soon covered the whole beast’s body.

Their energies surged.

The rivers were like cutting edges of an axe, and any time they drew blood they were empowered in an endless cycle of carnage. Meanwhile, the crackling bolts caused Verun to take damage every time they clashed, and any errant bolt was powerful enough to cause huge scars across the arena. Even Zac was forced to move even further away unless he wanted to eat those attacks head-on.

Finally, the Tyrant slipped up due to blood loss and exhaustion, and Verun seized the opportunity. It bit down on the tyrant's muscular throat, and with a tremendous tug it ripped out half the bull's neck to bathe itself in a cascade of blood. The Tyrant took a shaky step as it tried to gore Verun with its horns in one final act of defiance, but it fell on the ground with a thump.

Hundreds of liters of blood were dragged out from the bull’s body, and it joined blood on the ground as it turned into a storm around Verun. The Tool Spirit raised its head toward the sky, and unleashed a roar with such force that the air trembled. It was full of bloodlust, pride, and victory.