

The Fall 680

Chapter 680: Big Boss's Big Wall

"The Big Boss what?" Zac asked with confusion.

"The founder once tried to forge a huge axe, but he failed spectacularly and even blew up his forge along with most materials. He got so angry that he went on a rampage and hacked away at the core metal he was planning on using," the devil snickered.

"Ah?" Zac said with a confused smile, his image of powerful Monarchs somewhat ruined.

"Well, the material was no longer suitable for crafting after that, but it was a unique C-grade metal sheet after all. It stored some of the Founder's Dao insights. Looking at the scars he left behind can give some inspiration into the Dao," the devil said. "I finally managed to form my Branch of the Axe after studying it for three months. Crazy expensive, but worth it."

Zac's eyes lit up in excitement. He hadn't made much headway on improving his Dao over the past years, and this might be an opportunity to find some direction. Besides, he didn't need to worry about accidentally breaking through to Peak Mastery for his Fragment of the Axe and losing a bunch of attribute points. With his odd constitution, he also needed to consume some Dao Treasure to power his breakthrough.

"Where do I go?" Zac asked.

"I'll take you," the devil shrugged as he led the way.

The two chatted a bit on the way, and Zac realized that the devil attendant, whose name was unpronounceable but went by Woz, was a Half-Step D-grade wandering cultivator who still hadn't given up on breaking through. It was actually possible to take that step even with a defective core, but it was far more difficult than forming a core normally.

You needed to completely disintegrate your defective core and immediately form a new one. Fail, and you'd blow up from the rampant energies. Very few people had the guts to make that attempt. After all, if they really had the ambition to become a true Hegemon they normally wouldn't form the Half-Step Core in the first place. Zac guessed that Woz had encountered some sort of opportunity soon after becoming a Half-Step cultivator, which made him change his mind and give it a go.

Woz was currently trying to accumulate experience and inspiration, and he had become an inner member of the Coliseum to get access to restricted resources. It meant he was giving up most of his freedom, but the Big Axe Coliseum restrained inner members a lot less compared to most clans and sects.

In his case, his employment would last a thousand years, but it would get renegotiated if he managed to break through. Managing to form a Dao Branch was a huge improvement for him, but he still didn't feel confident since he had already failed to form his core once.

The raucous atmosphere of the arenas was soon replaced by a solemn silence, but the combative attunement in the air just kept getting more condensed until they reached a huge courtyard. A few

Hegemon guards were standing by, but they had obviously been informed of Zac's arrival as they let him and Woz through without a word.

There was not much happening in the courtyard. There were just roughly fifty cultivators and a massive slab of scarred metal.

"What kind of axe was the founder trying to make?" Zac exclaimed as he looked at the enormous sheet.

It was over a hundred meters tall and three times as wide. It was like Zac was looking at a city wall rather than a block of metal meant to be turned into a weapon.

"The Big Boss had a berserker state where he grew to three hundred meters," the devil said. "The axe needed to match that size in its original form, and then it could simply be shrunk to match his normal size. It would be cheaper to make an axe based on his original size, but then the weapon would become a lot weaker when he grew."

Zac nodded thoughtfully. It was true, he had noticed a similar issue in his undead form when his axe grew into a 3-meter bardiche. However, the difference there wasn't too big compared to its original form, and it wasn't causing a problem. But Billy probably lost some of his lethality with his huge club, though [Bonker's] true size might be larger than Zac realized.

"So how does this work?" Zac asked as he looked at the fifty-odd cultivators sitting in meditation.

"Those guys can't hear us. The mats they are sitting on have isolation arrays," Woz said. "You can walk freely back and forth until you find a scar that resonates with your Dao. Then simply take a seat on a free mat and see what you can gain. Someone will wake you up when your time is up. Oh, don't bother anyone who is sitting in meditation, and don't walk forward from the mat."

"I understand," Zac nodded and stepped inside.

He didn't know what made some big-shot donate two weeks in front of this wall, but he wouldn't say no to this opportunity. Part of him screamed that this was all a conspiracy, but he forcibly stilled those thoughts. The Multiverse was ruthless, but not everything was a plot and not everyone was out to destroy him.

Passing all five trials in the first go wasn't that common, and it was possible that some elder simply wanted to give Zac a good impression of the faction. Perhaps it was that Ogre from before who had taken a liking to him, and Zac guessed that he could easily fork out the cost for two weeks if Woz had been able to study the scars for three full months.

Zac didn't want to waste a minute of his allotted time, and he quickly walked over to the walkway behind the prayer mats. It was odd, some of the cultivators in front of him were warriors over ten meters tall, but Zac could still see the wall in its entirety as long as he stood on that road.

He slowly walked back and forth, and his eyes lit up as he looked at the wall. It had just looked like a broken mess from where he and Woz stood before, but now it felt like all the scars contained some clues to the Dao of the Axe. A few scars gave Zac an impression of furious momentum powerful enough to split the world in two, others an undeniable bloodlust that made his eyes water in pain.

Other tears seemed to be filled with the fundamental aspects of the Axe. There were Heaviness and Sharpness, the two Daos that he had fused to create the Fragment of the Axe. But there were also a few others. There were a few with hardness, one that Zac felt was related to steel. There were a few that made Zac think of the bloody swirls around Verun's legs.

All in all, there were over fifty concepts that made up the Big Boss's understanding of the Dao from what Zac could tell. Some resonated with him, and others didn't. Finally, Zac settled on one particular set of scars. It was two seemingly simple marks that formed an 'X' on the metal sheet. They weren't as deep as some marks, and not as large as others.

But they gave Zac a mysterious feeling, and he felt like he was looking at two clashing armies when he looked at the scars. Luckily, there was no one sitting in front of that particular section of the wall, and Zac immediately sat down on the closest prayer mat.

The moment he sat down a wave of tranquility spread through his body, no doubt the effect of the prayer mat. Zac's mind was crystal clear, but at the same time suffused by the pervasive battle lust in the air. That was just what Zac wanted, and he let the killing intent permeate his whole being as he gazed at the axe scars.

The rest of the universe soon disappeared, and there were only the crossed lines on the metal sheet, or rather the two opposing armies locked in an endless conflict. It felt like the air around him was drenched in the Dao of the Axe, like he was sitting in a purified version of the Dao Chamber Kenzie had constructed for the Dao Funnel.

He soon took out [Verun's Bite], but he simply held it in his hands for most of the time. Sometimes he slowly swung it in various directions as though he wanted to confirm something, but most of the time he was lost in thought. New impressions replaced the previous in an endless cycle, like an everchanging battlefield in his mind. He had long lost any concept of time, only stopping occasionally to take a fasting pill and go over the insights.

"Brat, it's time," a powerful suddenly voice resonated in his mind, startling Zac awake.

Two weeks had passed that quickly?

Zac didn't tarry, and he quickly got up on his feet after taking one last look at the two scars. He hadn't broken through, but Zac was certain that he was right at the precipice of pushing his Fragment of the Axe to peak mastery. He just needed to incorporate what he had gained over the past two weeks into his own understanding, and then eat some treasure that could be used as fuel for the breakthrough.

He didn't plan on staying in the Bloodwind World much longer, but he was pretty curious about the information heritages Woz mentioned. Besides, if trouble would come to find him in this place, it should have done so a long time ago, like when he was in the middle of his epiphany. So Zac made his way into the private areas only for Coliseum members, and he was soon surrounded by a sea of meatheads.

Humans were by no means rare, but they definitely didn't belong to a majority in this place. If the Base Town had been a perfect cross-section of the Zecia Sector races, then this place clearly gravitated toward Devilkin, Ogres, Orcs, and certain beastkin. Part of the reason definitely was that these races leaned toward brutal weapons like axes, clubs, and various two-handed weapons.

But another reason was that the Bloodwind Planet was placed in what was called the Tribal Constellation where these races were more common. It wasn't a force, but rather hundreds of forces spread out across an area even larger than the big empires. It was a pretty chaotic part of Zecia, but there were a few powerful C-grade tribes that kept things somewhat in order and helped gather the forces in case of outsider pressure.

"Newcomer! I saw your fight! Big balls!" a clearly drunk minotaur Hegemon suddenly roared from his seat on a balcony of a large bar as Zac walked along the street.

Zac only laughed and waved as he moved on. There were actually quite a few people who recognized him as he walked, and he guessed that these people were all members who were currently taking a break in their cultivation. Most people took time-outs for a few months now and then to clear their heads and destress, and these meatheads probably watched some fights and got drunk.

Some just praised the last battle or his axe, while others invited him to join hunting parties. Zac politely declined the invitations as he kept going forward. He only stopped once to read a massive sign. He saw dozens more further down the line, and he guessed it contained some important information.

[Big Axe Coliseum has entered an Alliance with the Divine Chalice, Blue Moon Mercenaries, and Celestial Constellation Formation Guild.]

"Who are these factions?" Zac asked an orc who read the sign as well.

"Don't know about the last guys, but Divine Chalice is a faction of healers," the Orc muttered, excitement written all over his face. "A lot of lasses, a lot of them... If Urbuk manages to form an adventurer party with a few... Springtime is finally coming to Urbuk."

Zac thoughtfully nodded as he walked on. One faction of healers, an Array Master guild, and some mercenaries. It looked like the Big Axe Coliseum wanted to shore up its weaknesses. But the Coliseum had stood alone for over a Million years, why make the change now? Was it about the war the Ogre from before mentioned? Did they want to create more balanced war parties to increase their survivability?

For now, it wasn't something that had any relation to Zac though. He would ask Calrin to look into the matter, but he had other things to deal with first. Zac soon enough reached the contribution exchange, a massive hall that almost looked like a gladiator arena. There were almost a hundred desks with attendants, and Zac walked over to one of the empty ones. It was manned by what Zac assumed was a female orc.

"New guy?" the orc asked with a raised brow as he approached.

"Yeah, just joined. Just figured I'd take a look," Zac said.

"That's fine, but not much you can buy straight away. We've had problems with newcomers clearing out some precious resources and so on," the Ogre shrugged.

"I heard I can improve my level by selling things?" Zac asked as he started browsing a crystal.

"Oh, a Gladiator?" the orc said with interest. "It was you who fought the bloodstalker? Can't believe I had to work during that fight. Well, you still can't become a second-level member for the first ten years,

even if you reach the contribution needed. A century for the third level. Of course, if you get an elder to sponsor you, that's another matter."

There were a huge amount of materials listed, tens of thousands of different resources meant for axe cultivators. Of course, he could only buy the basic things that he could already get through Calrin. But there were also quite a few items that were at the level of what Kenzie had planned on feeding Jeeves.

There were even rarer objects as well, but they all required level three membership or higher.

As for information, there were a lot of interesting intelligence crystals that piqued Zac's interest. There was one in particular that contained information that Zac really wanted.

[Primal Axes; Picky bastards, Trusted Friends – How to evolve your toothy companion.]

It was written by a late Hegemon rather than a Monarch, but it was still pretty detailed all the way up to high D-grade according to the description. Unfortunately, he wouldn't be able to get it for a whole decade. He would probably be able to get some elder to sponsor him if he divulged his real identity, but that would just open a can of worms.

[Verun's Bite] had been strengthened a lot since drinking all that Dragon Blood, and Zac felt it wouldn't bottleneck him until he reached peak E-grade. He suspected that ten years would pass long before he got to that point. Apart from the missive detailing evolving his axe, there were more generalized guides geared toward Spirit Tools as well.

Zac wanted to get those as well in case they divulged something useful for [Love's Bond]. Of course, he didn't hold much hope in that regard. He hadn't been making much headway with his second Spirit Tool, or rather any at all. He had come in contact with all kinds of treasures, but nothing seemed to have been of interest for Alea.

"Take this as well," the orc said as she handed him another crystal. "These are requests members have put out. If you can find some of the things people are looking for, you can quickly reach the higher levels of membership as soon as the trial period ends. You can also go to the mission hub. You're a gladiator, so the Mission Points will be converted to Contribution points for you, making missions doubly rewarding."

"Alright, thank you," Zac nodded as he exited the Contribution Exchange.

Zac would be able to easily complete a lot of the rare materials commission thanks to his almost unfettered access to all corners of the sector. Materials that were almost impossible to get on the Bloodwind planet might be readily available in another empire. The Big Boss's Big Wall and a few other opportunities such as private Mystic Realms were only accessible through contribution points, and this was an easy way for Zac to turn Nexus Coins into contribution.

He stowed away the crystals as he left toward the closest Teleportation Array. Part of him wanted to head out and refine his technique, but he ultimately felt uncomfortable grinding when he had to hold back on everything from levels to Dao Epiphanies. So he would head back to Earth before moving toward his real target.

"Are we really letting him go?" the heavily scarred human asked as he looked up at the huge Ogre who gazed at the human walking toward the teleportation array in the distance. "The Tsarun clan--"

“Bah, who cares about those bastards? We’re not so strapped for cash we need their little rewards,” the Ogre snorted. “Besides, I never liked Zinvul Tsarun, that hoary old goat. He’d sell out this whole Sector if it just gave him a chance of breaking through. I’m more willing to bet on this little brat.”

“He walks the path of war and carnage, and he is the Harbinger of the conflict. He will definitely find himself in the middle of the madness, chances are he will fall,” the man countered. “If that happens we’ll end up empty-handed.”

“Perhaps,” the Ogre shrugged. “But perhaps not. He might also survive, becoming the next Eveningtide Asura. And then our gains will far overshadow some random bounty. The fact that such a little monster is an axe wielder is a heaven-sent opportunity for us. I told you he’d appear here sooner or later. Obfuscate the details of his visit.”

“Already done,” the human nodded as his eyes gleamed with anticipation. “Well, his disguise is pretty decent and he seems aware of the threats facing him. It will be hard if not impossible for the Tsarun clan to track him down in the vast battlefields. If he really survives...”

“Exactly,” the Ogre nodded before his brows furrowed with confusion. “However, I really thought he’d break through... He looked at the wall for two whole weeks while I personally empowered his prayer mat and improved his surroundings. I think he might be a bit of an idiot?”