

The Fall 681

Chapter 681: Buyout

Zac appeared in his courtyard back on Earth, and a look outside showed that the environment was fast returning to normal thanks to Triv and the golem gardeners. His initial outing had taken just over a month, but he believed that the next one might take a lot longer. So before heading out there were some final matters to deal with.

First thing's first, Zac looked inward and started to channel more and more energy into his hidden Specialty Core until he felt something change. There was no explosion or huge burst of energy, but his Specialty Core was suddenly back in plain view, which meant that the one-month timer had started. That was the earliest he could leave earth while using the array to hide his Duplicity Core.

The things he needed to do during this month were already planned out, and Zac sent out a series of messages through his Communication Crystal before he opened his status screen.

Name

Zachary Atwood

Level

101

Class

[E-Epic] Edge of Arcadia

Race

[D] Human - Void Emperor (Corrupted)

Alignment

[Earth] Port Atwood - Planetary 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, Sovereign-Select, Frontrunner, Apex Progenitor, Pathstrider

Limited Titles

Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star - 14th, Weight of Sin, Equanimity, Heart of Fire, Big Axe Gladiator

Dao

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

Core

[E] Duplicity

Strength

4385 [Increase: 105%. Efficiency: 228%]

Dexterity

2149 [Increase: 75%. Efficiency: 187%]

Endurance

4167 [Increase: 111%. Efficiency: 228%]

Vitality

3266 [Increase: 99%. Efficiency: 228%]

Intelligence

960 [Increase: 69%. Efficiency: 187%]

Wisdom

1844 [Increase: 76%. Efficiency: 187%]

Luck

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

Free Points

0

Nexus Coins

[D] 1 000 000

His Limited Titles were finally filled as well, and Zac opened another screen to get a full overview.

[Tower of Eternity Sector All-Star - 14th: Attain the 14th best all-time result in the Zecia Sector. Reward: Strength, Endurance, Vitality, Luck +6%. Effect of Strength, Endurance, Vitality +6%]

[Weight of Sin: Ascend Taboo Mountain Reward: Base Attributes +2%.]

[Equanimity: Reach the floor of the Havenfort Chasm. Reward: Base Attributes +2%. Wisdom, Endurance +2%.]

[Heart of Fire: Touch the Heart of Fire. Reward: Strength, Endurance, Vitality +4%.]

[Big Axe Gladiator: Complete the trial of the Big Axe Coliseum. Reward: Strength, Dexterity +50. Strength, Dexterity +6%.]

Zac nodded with satisfaction as he closed his screen. His attributes had increased by around 5%, most of them centered on his more useful stats. For example, his Strength had almost increased by 10%, which definitely was a noticeable boost. It wasn't a transformative change, but it was a free boost that had only cost him a month. Not only that, he had both stabilized his soul and made inroads with his Dao, his path, and his new method to perform Dao braids.

After having confirmed the situation he immediately started walking over toward his first appointment, which was located at the Atwood Academy.

The whole campus had grown by over ten times since its inception, and it had almost turned into a city within a city with blocks of student housing, whole parks, and large courtyards where the professors stayed. There were almost a hundred thousand students enrolled by this point, of which roughly 20% were 'exchange students' from various subsidiary forces on earth.

It wasn't much compared to the largest alliances on Earth, but Zac still focused on quality over quantity for his Academy. For those less talented there were the city guards, the army, or various enterprises of his that needed cultivators. For example, there were thousands of cultivators who worked in the mine, clearing out the wildlife as they dug deeper and deeper.

Zac didn't head toward Alyn's offices, but he rather turned toward one of the secluded mansions in the faculty residence district. A few minutes later he sat in a beautifully manicured courtyard and with an elderly monkeyman opposite him.

"Lord Atwood, it has been a while. I am sorry about your loss," Hekruv Vira sighed. "To walk the path of Cultivation is to suffer. Death is all too common. But I am glad to see that it hasn't broken you."

The 'official story' had already been spread by this point, that a powerful cultivator appeared on earth in search of the Dimensional Seed. After finding that it was gone, she had killed Kenzie and Thea out of frustration before leaving. Zac only survived because of his hidden means. Zac only nodded in response, and the two sat in silence for a few minutes until a series of quick steps approached.

"I am sorry for the delay. You said you needed me?" Helo, the Gemling leader said as he walked into Hekruv Vira's courtyard.

"I wanted to talk to the two of you to let you know that I will be leaving Earth for a while," Zac said. "This trip will probably be a lot longer than previous outings. A year if it's short, a decade if it's long."

"You are doing the right thing," Hekruv said with a nod. "You are in your prime, spending your days here would be a waste of your potential and momentum. Look at me and the other old goats who you took in. Our momentum is all but gone, and reaching Hegemony the normal way is nigh-impossible."

Zac nodded, and he actually felt a bit relieved at the fact the old powerhouses of the Mystic Realm were stuck in their cultivation. It was a bit too early for D-Grade cultivators to start sprouting up on Earth. But what Hekruv Vira said was true; their cultivation had pretty much locked in at their current state, and simply changing their cultivation manuals wouldn't do.

It was also a huge mental component to breaking through. The few members of the True Sky Faction who still had reaching Hegemony as their main goal in life had bought Teleportation Tokens from him. They wanted to set out onto a larger stage in search of opportunities just like most wandering

cultivators. Those who stayed on Earth had essentially given up on forming a Cultivator's Core and instead focused on academia and their legacy.

For example, Hekruv Vira had actually married an Ishiate of the nature-faction he met while traversing earth two years ago. They already had a child, which felt like a miracle to Zac considering their species were so different. Then again, how was the monkeyman's situation any different than the hundreds of half-demon infants in Port Atwood?

Zac was all for it, since forming a family would strengthen their connection to Earth and his town, and it allowed him to leave Earth with fewer worries.

"Is there anything we can do?" Helo asked.

"Just help the officials keep things under control. Try to stop any large-scale wars that will weaken the base strength of Earth," Zac said thoughtfully.

The three kept talking for a while later before Zac set off to his next destination. The meeting with the True Sky Faction and Clan Volor was partly a courtesy call, and also to show he was fine after the events that led to Thea's death. He knew there were some rumors floating about already, and one of the things on his agenda was to travel around to make sure people knew he was alive and well.

His next destination took him to Thayer Consortia, another district that had essentially turned into a town on his own. The Thayer Consortia had kept growing over the past three years, partly fueled by the almost endless wealth they gained through his sister. It was like Calrin was on stimulants as he kept expanding the operations, and there were already three branches that had been opened on other worlds.

All three were on unimpressive E-grade planets, but they helped open new business channels and they were profitable from the get-go.

The fact that Smaug had somehow disappeared into thin air while Zac was occupied dealing with the Mystic Realm was a bit of a hit, but it ultimately hadn't dampened his plans too much. Perhaps it was for the best since Smaug had proven himself wily and self-serving since the start, without weighing it up with good features like Ogras.

Zac had wanted to use Smaug as his representative in the Consortia, but perhaps it was for the best that the position had become vacant. He had made some inquiries into the Stumpbugle cooperation that Smaug got his license from, since Calrin believed they had to be the ones who helped him escape. Zac hadn't found much though, and he could only confirm they were located somewhere in the sector.

Instead, he had hired a man named Vikram, a former Harvard Graduate who would likely have become a real business star if the world hadn't ended. Vikram was officially in charge of the expansion of Thayer Consortia to human towns across Earth, and unofficially in charge of making sure the Sky Gnomes weren't fleecing him.

He was also the only Earthling currently under a contract with him, apart from the Valkyries. It wasn't Zac's idea, but rather Vikram's own, as a method to fast-track his career. It wasn't life-long though, but rather for 1000 years, and it posited that Zac needed to provide the means for him to gain that

longevity. Of course, the contract also contained a slew of additional provisions to shore up the kind of Loopholes that Smaug probably had used.

So far Zac hadn't found any reason to be worried, but you never could let your guard down. Zac didn't immediately head over to Calrin, but he instead visited Vikram's offices first. The two went over Zac's idea in detail over the next few hours, where the analyst helped Zac tweak and optimize the plan. Only then did the two head over to Calrin's office, where a despondent Sky Gnome barely had the energy to greet them.

"What's with you?" Zac said as he sat down.

"Do you really need to ask?" the Sky Gnome lamented, looking like he had lost the love of his life. "Your sister was such a divine spirit, full of grace and benevolence."

Zac would have laughed out loud if not for the fact that Kenzie was officially dead. Zac knew that the Sky Gnome no doubt missed his sister's money-making capabilities far more than the person herself, but the sentiment was still appreciated.

"How are things going?" Zac asked as he sat down, though he somewhat knew the answer.

"We made a lot of enemies through your sister's side business. She could stay hidden, but the transactions ultimately took place under our license. Now our income is negligible compared to before, and our enemies are putting the squeeze to us," Calrin sighed. "Forget expansion, we might be forced to close our branches and get pushed back to the bottom again."

"Is there anything we can do to turn things around?" Zac asked with an impassive face.

"Well, money," Calrin shrugged. "We are bleeding right now, but so are our enemies because they undercut me on all my purchases. But with enough time I'll be able to find new revenue streams that will tide us over until they give up."

Zac slowly nodded, but nothing the Sky Gnome said was honestly a surprise. He had a full understanding of the financial state after his meeting with his liaison. What Calrin said was true, though things were not quite as bad as he let on. But Thayer Consortia would definitely be unable to continue their expansion if things continued, and probably even be relegated into a native business that didn't spread outside the planet.

"Well, I have a proposal," Zac eventually said. "I am willing to inject capital into the business, but I want controlling share of Thayer Consortia. Vikram would be made vice manager and get access to the License."

"What!" Calrin exclaimed with shock. "You are trying to squeeze us out! Don't look down at the value of a License. How do you value the infinite potential it represents? Not even your sister would be able to buy it."

"I value the License at 5,000 D-grade Nexus Coins. I am willing to invest 3,300 right now of which 250 would go directly to you," Zac said, which made the Sky Gnome freeze in shock. "I would increase my stake to 51% by myself, and if Ogras' shares get released, they would fall to me as well."

The shares to the consortium were sanctioned by the System itself, and Ogras' shares along with dividends were currently put in limbo. The System had various rules for this. Essentially, if Ogras didn't come back within 100 years, then ownership would be relinquished to descendants. Since Ogras had none, at least no official ones, the ownership would revert back to Zac and Calrin.

If the demon had been a D-grade Hegemon instead, the timeframe would instead be a millennium. This was a ruleset that the System had enacted since people kept disappearing in the Multiverse. Some were lost in Mystic Realms, others entered wormholes and wound up in different parts of the universe.

Ownership of protected ventures ultimately required some sort of link to the business in question. For unprotected ventures, such as holding ownership of a city, there were no safety guidelines. Anyone could attack a town or world at any time, and if the defense failed, you'd lose your ownership. Of course, you could always reconquer your town or planet in case you came back.

"Fi- Five thousand? D-grade?" Calrin muttered, his eyes almost going red instead of their deep azure. "What? How?"

"Don't worry about how," Zac shrugged. "Five thousand is most likely a fraction of its value when you were at your peak, but those days are long gone. To return to that level on your own without my help? How long will that take? Can you even do it? With an infusion of over 3,000 D-grade Nexus Coins, you'll be able to save eons of effort and immediately leapfrog to a larger stage."

"You should also know that I hold the building ordinance for a High-quality Trial, but I don't plan on putting it on Earth. That structure by itself will transform the economy of the whole area, but you'd require my help to seize the opportunity there," Zac said.

Zac wasn't lying. The reward came from completing the Second Step of Sovereignty with an S-grade performance, and the quest reward was a Limited Trial. That was actually one of the reasons why he had decided to visit the popular Trial Locations in the Zecia Sector. He had wanted to see how they organized things to turn the trial into a profit center.

And Zac had seen first-hand the huge business opportunity that spots like the Havenfort Chasm represented. There was an endless stream of people wanting access to that opportunity. Zac had initially planned on simply putting the structure in his Academy for his members, but he was extremely happy now to have held back on receiving the reward.

He instead wanted to place it on a neighboring planet after the shroud was lifted. He just needed to jump a few dimensional layers and find an abandoned planet with a livable atmosphere. D-Grade planets were almost all taken, but E-grade planets were plentiful. The distance would be short enough for transportation to be cheap and effortless for Earthlings, but it would still be hard for outsiders to pinpoint Earth's location.

The Sky Gnome got another round of shock after learning about the Limited Trial, and his face kept undergoing rapid changes.

"Owning 44% of a massive venture is ultimately far preferable to owning 75% of a small local industry," Zac added, seeing Calrin's hesitance.

"It is indeed, but it's not about that. The consortium is the lifeline of our clan, and by giving you the majority stake we would lose our freedom, completely tying the fate of our family to your chariot," Calrin exhaled.

"Don't you think that ship has sailed already?" Zac smiled. "Boje Zethaya saw that ring of yours as well, and more and more Earthlings will start traveling the Sector over the coming decades. The peak factions might already know, so why not make a bet and swing big?"

Calrin sat frozen for over a minute, and Zac could almost hear gears rapidly turn in his head.

"Ai," Calrin eventually sighed, and Zac's lips quirked upward. "I thought my good days would finally arrive when that demon bastard got sucked into that living Mystic Realm. But I guess that to live is to suffer. But how about 500 D-grade Nexus Coins for your friend? After all, there are some cranky elders I'd need to bribe, ah, I mean convince."