

The Fall 796

Chapter 796: The Pursuit of Completeness

It wasn't just a kneejerk reaction to stay inside the Orom for longer than Zac had initially planned. From what he had gathered, the Orom would keep dragging poor souls to be filtered for over a week.

Even if Zac managed to escape right now, he would probably be dragged right back in. However, according to what he'd heard, the Orom moved with a shocking speed most of the time, swimming through various dimensions just like its smaller brethren. It would be far better to escape while the beast was on the move since it would be gone in an instant, hopefully leaving Zac behind in some empty corner space.

Having traveled Freedom's End for half a day had proven that this place was full of opportunities as well. There were unique resources, and the place was veritably teeming with old masters that he would normally never have the chance to interact with on a somewhat equal standing.

There was also the wilderness, a place that seemed perfect for him to perfect his stances. Your power was fixed, but the beasts kept getting stronger the deeper you delved. The only way to push further was to improve what you could do with the power you had, just like how that old man had easily knocked him on his ass earlier.

Apparently, there were some powerhouses in this place that had been able to accomplish unbelievable things in the wilderness with raw skill and tactics. There was still a lot of room for improvement in this regard, and Zac got the feeling that working on his stances would also help him get closer to forming his last two Dao Branches.

Zac looked out across the settlement from the window of his temporary residence for another few minutes before he made his decision. He would follow his guts – stay behind for a while longer to recuperate and consolidate his gains. Then extract this place for all the benefits that he could get his hands on before escaping.

As for the downsides of this place, it didn't much matter to Zac if he didn't plan to stick around. He was safe from the first relegation, and he had enough resources to produce impressive improvements in case he was still around in three years for the shake-up.

However, this all hinged on his bloodline being able to help him break out of this place.

If that didn't work, Zac knew he was in big big trouble. He wasn't as smart or as knowledgeable as most people in this place. He didn't have any cultivation method to gradually push him forward, and he wouldn't be able to simply meditate to make breakthroughs. His Void Energy was the only thing that gave him an edge.

If these kinds of people hadn't managed to flee from this prison through conventional means, how could he?

But cultivating in this place for the long-term was out of the question. He had gained a decent idea of the required advancements to be safe from relegation, and it didn't look good. With new people being added every few hundred years, there was no settling down. In fact, the demands were so high that the average lifespan in the Orom World was just a tenth compared to the outside.

Monarchs were lucky if they could survive 100,000 to 150,000 years, a far cry from their natural lifespans. Hegemons would usually be relegated out by the time they turned 10,000 unless they managed to break through to Monarchy and get a boost of momentum. Of course, there were also innumerable examples of people suddenly finding themselves stuck, dying far earlier compared to this.

The reason was simple; after that initial burst of breakthroughs, their improvement slowed down, making them unable to compete with the new arrivals. Soon enough, the old were relegated, replaced by new faces who hadn't expended their potential or momentum yet. Zac didn't want to live in a desperate environment like this longer than he had to, but there was one more reason he knew he had to escape.

After seeing the Contribution shop and learning about the various places and benefits available, Zac had come to a simple conclusion; he wouldn't be able to continuously progress in this place. He hadn't encountered any real bottlenecks with his unique cultivation method so far. But in return, he required a lot of resources to progress, no matter if you talked Dao, Levels, Soul, or Bloodline.

The Orom expected you to make most of your progress simply by cultivating, making use of the dense ambient energy and attuned zones. There were unique cultivation grounds in this world as well, but those places cost Purchase Points, and people only used them when they were at the precipice of breaking through.

Making breakthroughs in this place would net him Contribution Points and the equivalent amount of Purchase Points, but he would have to spend far more resources for every breakthrough compared to what the breakthrough was worth.

The wilderness wasn't any help either. Since people's attributes, including the Orom Attendants, were limited to 1,000 in the wilderness, the beasts were just early to middle E-grade over there. Even if Zac managed to slaughter half the wilderness, he wouldn't get enough kill energy to reach peak E-grade.

His fortune in the form of Nexus Coins was almost useless in this place as well. Who'd take a System currency in a prison where there was no place to spend it? Besides, there were the harsh restrictions on trade that didn't go through the Contribution Store. There had been occasions where late Monarchs had started hoovering up Nexus Coins when they were at the precipice of confirming their Dao, but events like that were extremely rare.

Luckily, Zac was disgustingly wealthy for an E-grade cultivator, which would keep him safe in the short run. However, his requirements would only increase. What felt like a mountain of wealth in his Spatial Rings right now, might not seem as impressive by the time he started looking to form his Cultivator's Core.

Ultimately, Zac knew he would enter a downward spiral, where his gathered resources were rapidly depleted while being unable to replenish them. Soon enough, he'd be broke, and he would be relegated one step after another until he was culled.

Furthermore, the process of reaching Hegemony was a problem. Ignoring issues like missing out on the Inheritance Trial back home, would he even be able to form a core in this place? He had long since gathered a few missives that had methods for Mortals to take that step, but it didn't look too optimistic. The exact methodology differed, but the essence was the same.

You had to consume innumerable treasures, preferably containing the attunement of your path. From there, you'd use one method or another to extract the essence of the treasures, and push it into the spot where your core would form. Like that, you would add one layer after another while keeping constant pressure with arrays and Mental Energy, until something like a core would form.

It was technically possible for Zac to accomplish that here, though there were no facilities available that could aid him with the process. After all, the Orom didn't swallow Mortals, but only those with extremely high attunements. Zac was even afraid to commission the arrays he needed, in case it would result in him being purged.

Besides, Zac was reluctant to use the methods he had on hand. It was painfully clear; the methods he had gathered so far were extremely basic. Their odds of success were abysmally low even for people with weak foundations. With so many different treasures making up the core, it would become unstable.

When connected to one's pathways the rampant energies would rip it apart before you had a chance to properly refine and strengthen it. For someone like him, Zac wasn't even sure if it was possible.

Secondly, even if he succeeded, the result would be lackluster. The kind of core you formed with this type of method would be weak and full of imperfections. Most likely, you'd be stuck at early D-grade, unable to evolve the core any further. Zac's plan had always been to find some sort of high-grade technique that worked for mortals, possibly through a System-reward like how he got his Soul Strengthening Method.

If that failed, he would try to adapt the best one he could get his hands on, making it more suitable to his unique condition and the opposing elements of his path. After all, it wasn't like he simply needed to form an ice-attuned Cultivator's Core or something. He had to somehow cram Life, Death, and Conflict into the core without it exploding.

Perhaps Yrial had some insights considering his path of fire and ice, or Zac might be able to glean some solutions from the Realm Spirits in his Spatial Ring. He might even be able to figure something out with the help of the term Edgewalker, now that he knew he wasn't alone. But that all required time, and the ability to freely travel in search of answers.

Certainly, the prospect of being bottlenecked and killed in this place wasn't the only reason he needed to escape. Just the thought of being stuck inside the Orom as the world outside passed him by filled his heart with a sense of existential dread. Perhaps the people of Port Atwood would think he died during the Twilight Ascent, especially if they managed to find out about the collapse of the Twilight Harbor. Perhaps they would believe he had abandoned Earth, turning his gaze toward a wider stage.

Zac quickly stabilized his mind before his thoughts spiraled out of control, instead of focusing on what he could do. For now, he needed to recover himself to peak condition, so Zac spent the next five days stabilizing his body. He even decided to use 200 of his Purchase Points to use one of the high-grade facilities in Freedom's End for two days.

It was a recovery room that used dozens of arrays and attuned energies to recover all sorts of wounds and ailments. As Murbot said, the Orom fed during congregations of fate, which usually meant war. A lot

of those who were dragged here were already wounded, sometimes grievously so. The Orom knew this, and therefore provided services that would get its captives to quickly return to cultivating.

Zac's wounds were pretty bad, but the room he used could even heal Peak Hegemons. The cracks in his soul were rapidly mended, though that was partly thanks to some of the items found in Aia Ouro's Spatial Gem. The same was true for his wounds, though the lingering echoes of Chaos resisted the healing process.

Another thing that the arrays were unable to fix was the hidden damage from overusing the energy of the remnants. The spider vein-like cracks on the upper half of his body were still there, though they were invisible to the naked eye. The array did at least help [Purity of the Void] shoo some of the foreign Daos from his body, and when he walked out of the healing chamber, it felt like had been on bed rest for over two months.

During his stay in Freedom's End, he had seen one group after being led here. His group was the largest one so far though, with some of the others only having a dozen people. However, on the third day, a lot of Havarok warriors and undead Revenants arrived, staring daggers at each other.

Zac was shocked to learn that the Umbri'zi Clan had declared war on the Havarok Empire, and fierce battles were currently taking place across multiple frontier sectors. He even spotted a couple of Draugr, though he noticed that every single one had pretty diluted bloodlines, kind of like Nala who had guided him through Twilight Harbor. He guessed that Orom knew enough not to anger a clan like Umbri'Zi and left the true clan members alone.

Or perhaps it killed them all to hide any traces of what it had done.

On the third day, Zac had also made an extra trip to the Contribution Store and taken out all the various cultivation methods he had gathered since arriving in the Twilight Harbor. Some came from those he had fought, others came from various sources. For example, there was a stack of old methods he had found in the cave of the Beast King where he got his aura-hiding bracelet.

From there, he had hurried to a nondescript mansion where a dozen cultivators were already lining up. Zac entered when it was his turn, and he emerged with a smile on his face thirty minutes later. The information crystals had all been sealed to block his prying, but how could that be a problem in the Orom World?

The man Zac had visited was called Provedius, a middle-grade Monarch and a Jade Orom Attendant, surpassing even Murbot. He was also known as the greatest unsealer of the Orom World, and he had effortlessly unlocked every single method that Zac had gathered, with the sole exception of two of the crystals belonging to Uona and one of Aia Ouro's.

Provedius had been unsealing stolen and looted missives for over 50,000 years in hopes of stumbling onto something that would provide the inspiration to break through his current bottlenecks. In fact, he had specifically come over to Freedom's End for that very purpose. Even better, the only price he demanded for his services was that he was allowed to make a copy of any information he unlocked.

If he ever managed to get out of this place, he would probably have an exceedingly valuable Heritage to base his faction on. Unfortunately, the Orom prevented from Provedius selling any of the methods he

had gathered over the millennia since that counted as selling outside goods. Then again, he probably wouldn't have made the methods public even if he could.

Most people would be unwilling to sell any techniques in a place where people competed in terms of progress. What if you sold a method that allowed your competitor to surpass you, forcing you into relegation?

As for the content of the information crystals Zac had unsealed, they were mostly useless. There were almost one hundred different cultivation methods, though it only felt worthwhile to put five or so in the Academy back home. It wasn't that the others were bad, but there were issues with spreading your base too thin.

It was better to focus on a handful of paths where the successive generations of Port Atwood could expand and add detail to the Heritage. That way, they would also be able to form more coherent armies if needed. If Zac put the hundreds of methods he had collected until now in the Academy, it would become too chaotic and the odds of elites emerging would decrease rather than increase.

But there were a few information crystals that were quite useful to him as well, especially from Aia Ouro's Spatial Gem. More than half of them contained a vast compendium of Arrays and inscription patterns, a good chunk of them supplementing the information he'd gained from Catheya. There was also a Soul Cultivation manual that seemed extremely powerful. It was called the [Thousand Lights Chapter], but Zac wasn't sure a non-spectral cultivator would be able to cultivate it without making some pretty big modifications.

However, there was a lot of general information about soul cultivation attached to the method, which was helpful even for Zac and his [Nine Reincarnations Manual]. It delved deep into what a soul was, and how to utilize it as efficiently as possible. There was even a technique that couldn't quite be considered a skill, but something he was keen on trying out.

It was called the [Thousand Lights Avatar], but it didn't actually look like it required the [Thousand Lights Chapter] to work. It was a technique where you continuously extracted Mental Energy and your Dao from your soul and infused it into your spiritual body. In the beginning, it wouldn't do much good, but after you had reached some success you would see all kinds of benefits.

First of all, it would continuously strengthen the spiritual body, which included one's pathways, which was extremely useful as Zac neared the later stages of the E-grade where every node-breaking was fraught with danger. At higher grades, it could do even more miraculous things, such as performing spirit walks with your spiritual body.

For a Spectral Cultivator, it was pretty much a cloning technique.

At the highest stage, it would be a second life of sorts. If you got your soul destroyed in battle or cultivation mishap, you could reform a backup soul with your [Thousand Lights Avatar]. It would be significantly weaker compared to your original soul, but it was obviously far preferable to dying.

Reaching that state would take hundreds of years of effort though, and wasn't something that could benefit in the short run. For now, all the general information on soul cultivation and soul evolutions were far more useful. While the comments were for a different heritage, they still added to his understanding of his own method.

After all, the version of [Nine Reincarnations Manual] he had on his hands was extremely terse, without any insights or experiences. Last time, he had only realized mid-breakthrough how the first reincarnation actually worked. He wanted to be better prepared for the second round, and this might help him out.

As for the description in the Nine Reincarnations Manual, it wasn't much more helpful compared to the first one:

Refined by the seas of Life and Death, the soul returns to the Samsara. Continuous reinvention is at the heart of the Heavenly Law. From a singular unity, the multitudes of the Cosmos can be beseeched. From Eight Trigrams a system is formed, where the singular unity is supreme.

Nine Dharmas, nine Heavens, nine layers of the Abyss.

The cycle of Life and Death is the cycle of the Samsara and the pursuit of completeness.

Zac felt that the clue lay in the second paragraph. But what did Nine Dharmas, Nine Heavens, and nine layers of the Abyss refer to? The number nine was central to his Soul Strengthening Method, and to the Dao itself, but it didn't help him much in preparing for the second reincarnation. But if there was some repeated process involved in the reincarnation, he would have to aim for nine revolutions to reach perfection.

And that was exactly what Zac was planning on doing.