

The Fall 797

Chapter 797: A Thought to Change the World

Apart from the compendium on arrays and souls in Aia Ouro's Spatial Gem, there was also a good treasure compendium, along with descriptions of popular cultivation resources the Eidolon used. The special treasures that the ghost had saved were listed as well, giving Zac a proper understanding of what he was dealing with. Unfortunately, the glass pane was related to crafting Illusion-based items, and thus useless for him.

However, both of the others were Natural Treasures with great effect on the soul. One would strengthen it, while the other purified it. Aia Ouro had probably saved them for when making a push for the D-grade, but now they had rather become fuel for his second reincarnation. He was already somewhat confident his soul had reached the required levels before. But with this, he was almost certain.

Apart from the two treasures, most of Aia's other items were geared toward soul cultivation as well. Many had similar effects as the treasures but with lesser potency. Apparently, the Eidolon used sticks of incense rather than pills though, which made things a bit difficult for Zac. He was afraid of wasting the efficacy with his corporeal body, so he simply started eating the sticks instead, ignoring the extremely acrid taste.

Eventually, five more days had passed, and Zac saw how activity had started to die down in Freedom's End. Some people had taken the opportunity to stretch their legs when the new batch arrived, others had tried to scam them. But with the excitement all-but-over, most returned toward their cultivation caves while the new arrivals spread out across the Orom World.

Now, there was just a smattering of people walking down the streets of what almost looked like a ghost town. It wasn't a surprise, considering that most people in this world were Hegemons who usually spent years at a time in seclusion. The next time people would emerge was probably when the new products had been tallied and added to the contribution stores.

Seeing as his condition was way better now compared to before, Zac knew it was time for him to get started. It was time to find out whether his plans to escape would work. Zac hadn't just rested and studied Aia's soul missives over the past week. He had started planning his escape while scouring the city for intelligence on how harshly the Orom World was monitored.

As far as he could tell, the Orom didn't care one whit about what went on in this place. It didn't monitor its inner world at all by the looks of it, and simply let the attendants do all the job while it passively reaped the rewards.

Even if someone escaped, it didn't seem to care too much. If anything, the old captives expected the new arrivals to try various methods to escape. If someone actually figured out a way, good for them. Of course, any attendant who reported a missing person or an escape method would be awarded a bunch of Contribution Points.

Knowing this, Zac had decided to perform a few experiments, and he left Freedom's End heading due north. Traveling by foot was pretty inefficient what with the restrictions and his inability to use

[Earthstrider], but he had still decided to walk between Freedom's End and Samsara's Edge. The two cities were pretty closely situated, with the Life-attuned areas neighboring the Nature-attuned zones.

There were even two unusually large mixed-meaning zones where cultivators could set up their caves.

Going by foot would take around two weeks, but it would allow him to get a better understanding of this place. Unfortunately, it turned out his second sense coming from [Forester's Constitution] was disabled as well as he walked through the forests, but it wasn't like there would be a bunch of treasures waiting right at the edge of a city.

With the energy being so dense and rife with Dao, treasures could certainly grow. Unfortunately, the people who had been trapped in this world for millennia had essentially memorized all the hotspots and picked the Spirit Herbs the moment they matured. Many also liked to stake out small claims to grow herbs to supplement their cultivation or took up professions like inscriptions or alchemy to save on Purchase Points.

Days passed, and Zac eventually reached a slightly dour stretch of woods where there was a clear depression of Cosmic Energy. It was a no-man's-land between the attuned zones. All the zones in the Orom World were supported by gargantuan gathering arrays that concentrated the energy into smaller areas, which resulted in seams of lower-quality land appearing in-between.

This stretch was the worst for setting up cultivation caves or growing herbs, and the only time cultivators spent in these zones was when they passed through the area. Conversely, the middle-point of every zone was where the energy and attuned energy was the densest. That was also where the Orom Attendants set up their cultivation caves, and they were able to push out people with the help of their superior attributes.

But Zac wasn't interested in the cultivation havens at the heart of the zones. In fact, he had decided to travel by foot exactly because he wanted to reach this desolate place. He walked around a few hours until he found a small mountain, and he dug himself deeper and deeper through the rock until he was over a hundred meters below ground.

At this kind of depth, it would be extremely difficult for cultivators at the surface to notice his activities even if they chanced upon the area, which was perfect in case you planned on performing some clandestine experiments.

Zac looked around the area for a good while even after setting up the isolation array, but he eventually turned his attention toward the ring on his finger. At first, he tried to instill it with his Cosmic Energy, but the result was the same as before. There was an invisible barrier barring his path, and his Cosmic Energy turned completely turbid upon even attempting to activate the spatial treasure.

Next, he took a steadying breath before rousing his bloodline. He wanted to use his Void Energy to activate the Spatial Ring. At first, there was no response, but Zac knew it wasn't because of his plan being a failure. It was simply a bit difficult to control this elusive energy. If Cosmic Energy felt like a hard-to-control river that coursed through his body, then Void Energy was simply a vacuum.

How do you push nothingness into a Spatial Ring?

However, his eyes lit up after a few minutes upon seeing his hard work paying off. He had simply been forced to expel a larger chunk of Void Energy, completely covering his right hand. That had been enough to trigger the ring, and his mouth turned into a wide grin as he took out a Supreme Nexus Crystal. Zac placed it on the ground and waited for over an hour, but there was no response.

Zac breathed out in relief before placing the item back in his Spatial Ring, fearing that putting an unauthorized item in the authorized Cosmos Sack might somehow be exposed. Next, he decided to take an even bigger risk, and he took out an offensive talisman. Even then, nothing happened, though Zac only kept it out for five minutes before hurriedly putting it back.

Five minutes was what it would take him to take out and finish one of his spare Teleportation Arrays. Seeing that he could take out a talisman that long meant that part of his plan would work. Zac breathed out in relief, but he decided against actually activating a Teleportation Array at this point. He was afraid that activating a Teleportation Array in the Orom World would spoil his only opportunity to escape.

Zac also took out [Verun's Bite] for a moment and he was relieved to feel its weight suddenly decreasing after sending a mental command to the axe. A fractal leaf from [Nature's Edge] appeared just fine as well, and Zac grinned when he felt the power the skill emitted. It was weaker compared to his full power, but it was definitely stronger than just 1,000 effective Strength.

With this, he doubted that anyone but Emerald Badges in the Orom World would be a threat to him if it came down to it.

All through the experiments, the prison seal had been completely inert. It didn't look like it had any safeguards that scanned for energy output or spatial fluctuations in the vicinity. His bloodline completely circumvented its limitations, just like he had hoped. Having confirmed his Bloodline mostly worked in this place and what he could and couldn't do, Zac didn't waste any more time in this place.

Zac immediately set off, heading toward the life-attuned side. He wanted to find a place right at the edge of life and death to set up a Cultivation Cave, which would give him the best environment to perform his second reincarnation. The energy density in these seams was far worse compared to the central zones, but they were still better than most places on earth.

Besides, there was that intangible quality of Dao in the air. That alone made the Orom World superior to most D-grade planets as far as he could tell, no matter where inside the space fish you stopped to cultivate. As for the lacking density of ambient energy, Zac had more than enough crystals to create a terrifying life-death environment.

Soon enough he left the desolate band between the zones of Nature and Life, and he found himself in another lush forest a day later. Zac looked around with interest, and he felt that the contrast between the two zones was quite illuminating.

Life and Nature were closely linked, to the point that a huge chunk of those who cultivated either, cultivated some sort of mixed-meaning Dao. He would personally have walked down that road as well with his Hatchetman class, if not for the remnants changing his plans and pushing him down the paths of Pure Life and Death.

Therefore, seeing the difference between the forests helped him somewhat get a better understanding of the two peaks.

The forest rife with the Dao of Nature had filled him with harmony. It felt like every plant and tree had been somehow connected, a part of a bigger whole. It was almost akin to the interconnectedness of the Dao of karma, where the forest was as much one singular entity of massive power as it was millions of individual plants and beasts.

Cultivating the Dao of Nature would allow one to draw on that vast and ancient power, becoming one with the forest. It was to let the cycles of nature push one forward, cultivating in balance and tranquility.

The forest of life was a stark contrast to this concept. The feeling Zac got here wasn't one of harmony, but rather one of chaos. Some trees towered toward the sky as they drenched their surroundings in darkness, their trunks uneven from greedily absorbing the ambient life. Others were twisted and full of bulbous knots, the Divine Energy having resulted in weird mutations.

No two trees or bushes were alike, each one reborn into something unique from the Life Attunement. They had set off on their individual journeys, fueled by the endless possibility of life. Most journeys clearly ended in disaster judging by the hollow trunks and dead plants on the ground, but Zac saw how some of these failed creations were consumed by their neighbors or turned into vessels for parasitic plants.

It was a scene of constant and unpredictable growth, and Zac eventually took out a practice axe as his eyes glistened. The axehead danced among the foliage as the air whistled. Zac kept swinging his axe while moving forward, not one of his swings identical to the previous ones. The turbulent forest had resonated with his Evolutionary Stance, and he couldn't stop himself from practicing it for a while.

He didn't infuse any energy into the attacks, and neither did he imbue the weapon with his Dao. He just moved along the path, his attacks echoing the impression he got from the various trees around him. He didn't know how long he was in this state, where he kept delving deeper into the heart of the Evolutionary Stance, urged forward by the ambient energy and the whispers of the leaves.

With each swing, he also got closer to his vision of the Branch of Life he wanted to form. It was finally starting to diverge from the nature-heavy aspect he had inherited from his Hatchetman class. But looking around, Zac realized he didn't need to give up the imagery of a tree just because he wanted to walk down the path of Pure Life.

Life was everything, and anything could be life. It represented the endless possibilities, the spark that led to a river of events. It was-

Zac didn't get any further as he suddenly felt a pressure weigh down on him, and his eyes immediately flicked open just in time to avoid walking right into a person. He hurriedly took a step back, realizing the person he had almost crashed into was some sort of tree person.

Or at least he assumed that. Half of her face looked human, except for the green hair and iris, but a transformation covered the other side. Skin was replaced by bark, and small twigs grew from her chin and eyebrows, sprouting small purple leaves. The woman almost made Zac think of a corpse that had been left to rot in a forest. But her aura was vibrant much like the trees around them, though Zac felt he could sense a hint of something malicious beneath the exuberance.

The pressure she emitted was the same as his, but Zac still felt some trepidation from her gaze. It was not just the fact that she was no probably a late Hegemon or even higher, but there was also something

else. Meeting someone in this desolate stretch of forest was a poignant reminder that he had just arrived in the Orom World, and there were probably a bunch of hidden rules and tricks he wasn't aware of.

"A bit crude, but it has captured the essence," the woman smiled, though the smile turned crooked because of the wooden side of her face. "I don't recognize you. Are you part of the new arrivals?"

"Uh, yes," Zac slowly nodded.

"Samsara's Edge is that way," the woman said and pointed to the right. "If you continue down this path you will reach my abode. I hope this little friend will accommodate me and take the long way around. A few of my experiments are approaching fruition."

"Experiments?" Zac asked with confusion.

"Plants," the woman explained. "I don't want them to be impacted by your killing intent at the precipice of their metamorphosis. A thought can change the world, don't you agree?"

"I guess?" Zac said with confusion. "I'm sorry, I wasn't planning on intruding on anyone's domain. Is there any way for me to make sure I don't make this mistake again?"

"Normally, someone will extend their aura to warn you if they don't want you to approach their arrays. Unfortunately, it seems you were a bit caught up in your axe to me notice me," she explained.

"Oh..." Zac coughed as he turned away. "Well, again. I'm sorry. Have a good day. Good luck with your experiment."

Zac hurried away after that, making quick strides toward the city. The woman had been congenial enough, but her aura was a bit off. Zac couldn't be sure, but there was a sheen of madness and despair hidden in her smiling eyes. Perhaps, she was on the edge of relegation. Who knew what someone in that position might do to someone she believed was messing with her final chance at breaking through?

The weirdly exuberant forest had turned oppressive after that encounter, and Zac increased his pace while keeping greater watch of signs of other cultivators. It still took him five days to reach Samsara's Edge, at which point it almost felt like a weight had lifted from his shoulders.

The settlement was quite similar to Freedom's End, though half the city was shrouded in the familiar turquoise haze of Miasma. Zac had to admit that the Orom was quite gutsy, daring to set up sections of pure death in its body. What if it spread, turning the beast into some abomination like the creatures you could still encounter in the Dead Zone back on Earth?

In either case, it wasn't Zac's problem, and he made a quick trip to the Contribution Store. Just like the clerk back in Freedom's End had said, this store provided a few life- and death-attuned treasures that weren't available anywhere else. Zac spent another 58 points to purchase a few more items before leaving again.

Zac kept going straight through the city, heading down the main street which also acted as a demarcation between life and death. From there, he entered the wilderness heading deeper and deeper for three full days before slowing down. He looked down at the mapper in his hand, and he could confirm that he had reached his destination.

He had traveled down the no-mans-land between Pure Life and Pure Death for the past week, and he had reached the spot that was right between the central spots of the two zones. This place was where the no-man's-land was the thinnest due to the overflowing energy density, and Zac smiled when he felt the familiar clashes between Life and Death in the area.

He spent the better part of the day looking for the perfect spot, and he finally found something with potential. There was a small lake that had rivers coming in from both zones, bringing with them attuned energies. A constantly churning haze covered the surface of the waters, but Zac still entered.

Initially, he had hoped to find an underwater cave to dry out, but he actually found something better. There was a small island in the middle of the lake, completely hidden by the haze on the waters. Zac stepped back onto land, and the more he looked around, the more satisfied he became.

The ambient energy wasn't as good as in the Twilight Chasm, but there were constant winds of either life or death coming his way as he stood at the shores. They were pure as well, far more so than the muddled concepts that had been crammed together into Twilight Energy. With some work, this place would become his paradise while remaining unusable for others.

Zac walked across the island a few times before coming to a decision. The ground was soft sand, making it too annoying to set up a proper cave. There wasn't much point in undertaking that kind of job for a temporary abode, so he simply covered the whole island in an illusion array and isolation array.

From there, he added the cultivation arrays, though he swapped out the gathering and purity arrays with a portable arrangement he had brought from Port Atwood. Their quality wasn't necessarily better than the Elementary Array Kit, but they were more suited for his purpose; to gather and agitate Life and Death to complement his cultivation method.

Finally, Zac cut down a couple of trees and fashioned a simple cabin, and he placed it in the middle of the island. It was extremely crude, with just a bed in a side room and a prayer mat in the living room. But it would serve his purposes. He spent the next few hours making sure everything was up to par, which led him to also add a second line of arrays to cover the whole lake, just in case.

Of course, the odds of someone crossing this particular segment were far lower compared to most areas in the Orom World. No undead would willingly leave their miasmic zone to enter an area that was essentially poison to them. The same was true for people cultivating pure life, or finding inspiration for their mixed-meaning Daos in the Life-attuned zones.

With this many layers of arrays, it would be impossible even for Emerald Attendants to spy on him. Only the Orom should be able to peer inside, but that was a risk Zac would have to take. With that, Zac returned to his cabin before taking out another Array Disk. This time it wasn't another protective array, but rather the disk needed to practice the [Nine Reincarnations Manual].

He had investigated what needed to be investigated. He had healed what needed to be healed. It was time for him to start working on his breakthrough, so he could earn some points and treasures before getting out of here.