

The Fall 803

Chapter 803: Journey

Zac grimaced when he heard the Revenant's description of the spatial seal that prevented them from leaving the Orom World. He wasn't exactly certain what 'Dao manifested into law' meant, but he guessed it was like a Dao Field but innumerable times more powerful. From what he had gathered, Dao Intent was the next step after a Dao Field, and Dao Law might be multiple levels above that.

Dao Intent was a testament to the degree you controlled your Dao. It wasn't dependant on the strength of your soul, though a powerful soul generally helped. When you reached the level of forming Dao Intent, you could condense your understanding into something more corporeal than just a large field around you.

It could essentially be turned into something akin to a skill, where you could kill a thousand people with a simple thought or empower your normal attacks. He still remembered the powerful blade of sword intent Thea had been imparted with from the Blade Emperor inheritance. That small fragment contained a huge amount of insights into the Dao of the Sword, and it had helped her both cultivate quicker and unleash powerful strikes.

Those were just simple tricks though, which were mostly useful against a large number of weaker enemies. The more important aspect was that by the time you could form Dao Intent, you had a far greater command of your Dao. Skills empowered by the Daos would become stronger and you would more easily integrate the Dao into your combat style.

Most likely Dao manifested into law meant you had such high control of a Dao that you could essentially change how the world worked in a certain area around you.

"Perhaps there are times weaknesses appear," a beastman ventured.

"I think you are right," another cultivator agreed. "I heard from a Gold Attendant that the Orom world occasionally enters some sort of dark state. All Cosmic Energy is dragged out from the world and the laws grow dim. People might think it happens when the Orom is fighting or entering dangerous pockets of space. It can't waste energy on us in that kind of situation, which might present some opportunity."

"I heard about that as well," a golemoid cultivator with an earthy aura rumbled. "But cultivators are sealed by the brand when that happens, and everyone's energy is siphoned off like in the bubbles. Who would be able to break out in that kind of state?"

Zac's heart shuddered when he heard that there were windows of opportunity that could appear at any moment, but he kept his face impassive. Seeing as nothing else came up, he eventually excused himself before walking away. Zac continued along the edge, prompting half his field of vision to be the mountain range he had just passed, and the other half the purple nebula that stretched to the sky.

A few hours passed, and Zac activated his ocular skill to make sure none of the others were close. After making sure he was alone, he once more started pushing into the haze as he kept going, using everything from his Draugr-vision to [Void Zone] in an attempt to force his way through. The only thing he didn't do was unleash powerful strikes like [Arcadia's Judgement] out of fear that someone would notice.

Unfortunately, no matter what he tried, the result was the same.

It was just like the Hegemons before said, the concepts safeguarding the edge of the inner world were just too profound. It wasn't a barrier that could be broken, and it wasn't some sort of energy that could be nullified. The laws of the universe had been altered right at this edge, where up was no longer up, and left was no longer left.

Not even his Void Emperor-bloodline could subvert the laws of space like that, rendering his [Void Zone] useless. Still, Zac refused to give up. He had already decided to walk along the edge of the whole Orom World in search of opportunities, and that was what he would do. Some setbacks right in the beginning weren't enough for him to give in to despair.

A few weeks passed like this, and Zac eventually entered the next zone. Along the way, Zac had encountered even more people who sought an escape, and his helplessness was mirrored in their expressions as they passed each other by. The place he had just entered was another rocky region, this one illuminated by a scorching sun and filled with fiery energies.

Rivers of magma flowed in crevasses, and Zac was shocked at how rapidly his surroundings had changed over the past hour. Zac eventually steered away from the edge, finding an unclaimed cave an hour's trek away from the edge. There, he set up his arrays before taking out a bottle of [Stellar Enkindling Pills].

Three weeks later, Zac emerged, having broken open another 4 nodes and filled them with energy, providing him with thousands of more Contribution Points. He had officially entered the Late E-grade now, which meant that each node and each level provided even more attribute points.

Zac believed he had a pretty big advantage compared to the other E-grade cultivators in that regard. The few "lucky" ones who had survived the great filter were mostly at Peak E-grade already, with their eyes set at forming a core. They didn't have easy access to Contribution Points in the same way as he did, which might become more important as a speedy escape started to look less likely every day.

Even after having consecutively opened four nodes in his head, Zac was still in decent shape. He had a pretty bad headache, but it was nothing compared to the suffering of blowing up your brain. It could have been much worse, but the damage was kept to a minimum thanks to his powerful soul.

Zac had continuously worked on familiarizing himself with his transformed soul while traveling, and he was getting increasingly adroit when controlling the nine tendrils. It was still not exactly smooth, but he wasn't making big mistakes like the first time he tried shielding a node any longer.

He believed he would be able to improve his technique even further as long as he kept working on it, but it was enough to barely receive any physical damage while breaking open nodes with the help of pills, though the damage to his foundations was still there. Unfortunately, he had reached the limit of the [Stellar Enkindling Pills] for now, though he still had mountains of Beast Cores in his Spatial Rings.

The real test would be whether he could safely brute-force levels with all his new advantages, but Zac would wait and restore his state to peak condition before attempting something like that.

As Zac got more and more used to his odd nine-core soul, it became increasingly clear that his cultivation method was pretty unique. He had found that he could choose whether he wanted to drag

attuned Mental Energy or pure Mental Energy from his outer cores, making it something in-between an attuned and unattuned cultivation method.

However, the amount of energy the cores released was greater when he extracted attuned energy. It was like only half of the core was used when conjuring unattuned energies. In other words, only a cultivator who cultivated both life and death could make the most of the soul that the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] created.

Zac had only undergone the second reincarnation so far, but the effect might only grow greater as he progressed further with the method. It was pretty lucky that Vilari had dropped the method in favor of whatever Soul Strengthening Method that Ralz Carzood, the Crown of Despair, had imparted. Otherwise, she would probably find herself unable to use a significant part of her soul down the road.

It made Zac quite curious about the origin of the [Nine Reincarnations Manual]. He had scoured the contribution store already, and it wasn't listed among the thousands of methods that were for sale. Conversely, all the common methods were there, most of them in various editions.

More importantly, how many people did actually cultivate both life and death at the same time? From what he'd gathered, it was extremely rare to have affinities in both those paths. Was the technique something created by a life-death Edgewalker such as himself? Or was it custom-designed by the System to allow him to keep gathering the remnants for it?

There were indications that the method had Buddhist origins, but Zac knew too little about the various branches of the Buddhist Sangha to draw any definite conclusions. Who knew, it was perhaps possible to turn the Daos of Life and Death toward some sort of Dao of Samsara or Reincarnation, rather than pushing the Daos toward Chaos.

Perhaps he could ask some monk later, they seemed pretty open about themselves. For now, the method worked just fine for him, which was all that mattered.

Zac continued his journey after reaching level 129 in one go. Unfortunately, while he made some strides with his cultivation, the same couldn't be said for his prison break. No matter if it was the fiery region or glacier that neighbored it, there were simply no weaknesses to exploit. The barrier was impenetrable, and digging downward was no use either.

After pushing roughly two kilometers into the ground, a similar spatial barrier appeared. It was like he had reached the core of a planet, where every direction technically was up. He found himself floating in the air, continuously falling without actually moving. If he tried forcing his way through the odd field, he encountered the same type of spatial bending as before. He could only climb out of the tunnel with disappointment and continue on his way.

Zac wasn't interested in the Daos that had left their mark on the frozen world around him, but he was a bit interested in how they impacted their surroundings. Zac doubted that the Orom bothered to meticulously craft every zone for its prisoners. Rather, it just flooded the areas with different Daos, and the attunement slowly terraformed the world.

Was this how attuned worlds looked? Would Earth become like the zones around Samsara's Edge in the future, where the dominant Dao had a direct impact on everything from a blade of grass to the cultivators who lived on those lands? Or was it amplified here for the sake of expediting breakthroughs?

No matter what was the case, Zac found it harder and harder to ignore the whispers in the back of his head. His prospects of escaping were getting lower and lower each day. He had considered himself unique, armed with both his unique bloodline and the remnants. But he had underestimated just how absolute the Orom's domain was.

In this place, the Orom was the Heavens, and its will was Heavenly Law.

More than once, Zac found himself beset with hesitation, but he pushed those thoughts aside as he kept going, looking for fault-lines while visiting nearby settlements to gather information. He also had a blacksmith fashion a copy of [Love's Bond] in exchange for 500 Purchase Points.

The copy could not change form and it had no skills. But it was made from high-quality materials, especially the five pitch-black chains. The blacksmith had even managed to infuse the metal with some corrosive crystal that would help strengthen his skills even though the tool wasn't death-attuned.

It was a far cry from the real thing, but it would be enough to serve his needs, no matter if you talked about training in the wilderness or practicing his Inexorable Stance. As for the real deal, it was still in deep slumber. Zac wasn't sure if it was because of the dangerous energies or the Purifier it had swallowed, but he could only wait and see.

Showing up inside a settlement in his Draugr persona was also a way for him to legitimize his other personality. There was no census or anything, so this way people would simply assume he was one of the new prisoners from the latest batch. He made sure to make some connections in his undead form as well, though he wasn't able to gather too many tokens this far from the sections where the undead generally stayed.

While traveling in his undead form, he wore a simple mask to shield his Draugr heritage, similar to the one he wore when arriving at the Twilight Harbor. It was a bit unusual, but it wasn't unprecedented that people hide their appearances one way or another. Some cultivators developed quirks, and people chalked it up to something similar.

Weeks turned to months as Zac made his way toward the wilderness, one step at a time. He also secluded himself a few times to digest various ideas and insights he had on the road. Eventually, he reached the eastern section of the Orom World, and Zac stopped one day as he stood atop a small hill that provided great vantage of the surroundings.

When reading about the Orom World's arena on the stele of rules, Zac had pictured something like the Big Axe Coliseum back in the Zecia sector. However, the structure that stood in the distance was just a fraction the size of what he expected. Of course, it was still a couple of times bigger than the sports arenas back on Earth since it required enough space for superhuman to clash, but it was nowhere near the city-like size of the coliseum he visited on the Bloodwind Planet.

Zac thought about it for a moment before he decided to head over, and he was met by a raucous round of cheers as he passed through the gate. There were a couple of clerks stationed by the entrance in case you wanted to sign up for battle, but Zac was more interested in observing some fights.

You seldom had to wait long to spectate a duel from what he had gathered, considering there were tens of thousands who sought inspiration by alternating between fighting in the wilderness and battling on the stage. This soon after the Orom fed, the number of participants and spectators was even greater.

Only the years before a culling would see more foot traffic, when people desperately struggled to break through.

Zac sat down at an empty seat with a decent view, just in time to see two warriors leave the arena. One was a human sporting a nasty wound in his side, whereas the other one was a beastman who was carried out by an attendant. Seeing as he might have to wait a while for the next fight, Zac took out a vat of spiritual wine he had moved over to his Cosmos Sack.

"First time here?" a friendly voice echoed out, and Zac looked over to see a smiling woman donning leather armor covered in unfamiliar runes.

On her belt, there were over twenty identical daggers, while two short-swords were sheathed by her hip. She had a bloody aura, but Zac didn't believe she walked some sort of assassin path even if her weapons leaned that way. He felt a sense of familiarity as he looked at her. It wasn't that he recognized the woman, but he rather suspected she walked some path related to the Dao of Conflict.

"Just arrived," Zac nodded.

"New batch, huh?" she said as she thumped down next to him, her eyes locked to the vat in Zac's hand. "I'm Yurul. I guess you could say I have some renown here. Fought over 2,000 matches, altogether."

Zac smiled slightly as he took out another vat and handed it to her, prompting her eyes to light up. Her hands turned into a blur before she poured at least five liters worth of alcohol down her throat.

"That hits the spot. I've mostly been drinking ol' Barrel's swill for over a thousand years. It's strong enough, but he insists on putting those centipedes inside. They taste alright, but it's a pain when they bite your tongue," Yurul sighed. "That's what you get when buying alcohol from a poison master."

"The centipedes are alive?" Zac said with a raised brow.

"They cultivate inside the vats, which purifies the brew," Yurul shrugged. "You planning on competing? You seem like the fighting type."

"I was told to avoid this place," Zac smiled. "For now, I'm just here to watch."

"Avoid?" Yurul repeated with confusion until her eyes widened. "Oh, you're one of the brats? Bad luck, huh? Well, better than becoming fertilizer, I guess. Any chance of you getting out of here?"

"We'll see," Zac smiled.

He had been asked that quite a few times by now, though few were as direct as the gladiator next to him.

"Mooching off the newcomers again, Yurul?" a gruff voice snorted as a scarred ogre walked over.

"Don't mind him. He's just a bit pissy he lost 5,000 Purchase Points yesterday," Yurul laughed. "Another of the regulars had just made a breakthrough in secret, and he chose Obbo to provide the celebratory gift."

Zac looked at the ogre with confusion.

“People hide their breakthroughs to swindle good folks out of their Purchase Points. Arol pretended to get in a heated argument with me that lasted for five days, and it ended with me challenging him. It was all a ruse to make me place a larger bet,” Obbo sighed as he thumped down next to Yurul.

“Like you haven’t done the same,” Yurul snorted as she glanced at the arena. “Oh, Pavina is fighting today? She’s a tough one.”

Zac followed her gaze to see a Revenant emerge from one of the gates, her aura reeking of death. A small smile crept up across Zac’s face as he looked on. His luck had come through for him again. Pavina was actually a Silver Attendant and someone who seemed to cultivate Pure Death.

He had just visited the arena out of curiosity, but an opportunity to study someone who walked a similar path as himself had fallen right in his lap.