

## The Fall 854

### Chapter 854: The Oriole and the Orchid

Zac inwardly grumbled, but he kept his opinions to himself as he infused a wisp of energy into the information crystal. However, only a second passed before he looked up at his master with complaint in his eyes.

“There’s a lot fewer items this time.”

“I told you last time. Brazla had me fill the inheritance a certain number of times for each grade, with the F-grade needing the most items. However, while the quantity is lower, the quality of items is a lot higher on average. I wouldn’t say that anything here is earthshattering, but I would have killed for some of these things when I was your grade back then.”

It made sense. It was in the original Brazla’s interest to focus on the higher stages of the inheritances, while just handing out some decent baubles at the F-grade. After all, Brazla was a Peak Hegemon from what Zac had gathered. If he had a descendant that managed to pass this inheritance, they would be an elite worthy to nurture.

If someone passed the D-grade Inheritance, they would be a contender to become a future leader of Brazla’s clan.

Zac scanned the list of roughly 50 items carefully, but there were just too many items with names that didn’t immediately explain their function. Worse yet, only a certain category of items had descriptions, each one of them more detailed than the last. “To begin with, I’ll take the ‘The Oriole and the Orchid’.”

“Excellent choice,” Yrial said, his smile seemingly illuminating the whole world as a large box appeared next to him. “It’s good to see that you at least have learned some manners since last time we met, buying another memento to remember your dear master by.”

Zac nodded with a strained smile, as though Yrial hadn’t just blackmailed him to buy another vanity item. Even then, there was some anticipation as his gaze turned to the box containing the statue of his master. Yrial waved his sleeves with excitement, and a lid opened to expose the alabaster statue within.

It was an expertly sculpted Yrial sitting in a meadow of extremely lifelike flowers, the whole piece hewn from one solid piece of some spiritual rock. One of Yrial’s hands was outstretched, with a small bird perched on his index finger. It was almost indistinguishable from the real thing, and it felt like the small bird could fly off at any moment. The statue itself also emitted great tranquility, almost as though Zac was the one sitting among the flower without a care in the world as he communed with nature.

This feeling was the true reason he chose this particular item, even if there were cheaper items that would satisfy Yrial’s demand. According to the description, ‘The Oriole and the Orchid’ had a very strong soul-nurturing effect after being placed in some sanctum of Yrial’s inner world for dozens of millennia.

Why Yrial had some sort of sanctum with statues of himself wasn’t something Zac required deeper digging. He was simply interested in its ability to hopefully speed up his Soul Strengthening.

In fact, there were a few more vanity items Zac was eyeing, from ornaments to paintings, and a scroll of poems detailing Yrial’s beauty. He remembered what happened when he gave away the painting the last

time around; a bunch of people formed Dao Seeds over the next week. Its effect was even better than most of the Dao Treasures in Yrial's credit store, yet it cost the same or even less.

In other words, the vanity items were actually among those with the greatest value, as long as you could get over the aesthetics. For example, the lock of hair was still for sale, an item that could almost be considered a C-grade material. However, before spending any more credits, Zac first wanted some advice.

"Unfortunately, a lot of the items available are not suitable for you," Yrial sighed. "I didn't expect someone with such a different path to pass my inheritance. This includes the two supreme items, [Bowl of the Raging Seas] and [Infernal Mote]. They are extremely potent Core-strengtheners for those following in my path. For you, they are just shiny baubles."

"I guessed as much," Zac sighed. "So, what can I use?"

"First of all, you should buy the [Book of Duality]," Yrial said. "It's only 1,000 credits because it's a normal book that you can copy, but its value isn't ordinary – in a sense, it's almost as valuable as the two supreme treasures. I only managed to get my hands on it toward the end of my journey, but if I had it when I was still in E-grade, I would have avoided a lot of pitfalls."

Zac looked at the book Yrial mentioned. There were actually five copies of the [Book of Duality] in the heritage and they were cheap. This indicated they weren't extraordinary, so Zac had passed them by during his cursory scan. However, his interest was piqued by Yrial's description and he quickly bought it.

A moment later, Zac held an actual leatherbound book in his hands, reading the short message on the first page.

I am Kalo, and my path has taken me to the edge of the Heavens and Earth. In this book, I have left my gathered knowledge and insights on duality. May they assist you in the pursuit of the Terminus.

If Zac hadn't just gotten a better description of the elemental peak, he might have thought this book related to Creation and Oblivion because it mentioned the Terminus, but he now knew that was unlikely. Zac flipped through the pages, and as expected they were filled with various diagrams and arrays related to the elements, accompanied by mysterious letters that each seemed to contain thousands of words and meanings each.

It was a common way to convey a lot of information in a short space, but it required the one who wrote it to have a true understanding of what they were writing. In other words, Yrial could probably copy the text, but if Zac tried to do the same, they would lose almost all their meaning. He almost got lost in the words as he read a random page, so he quickly shook his head to clear it before stowing away the book.

Zac didn't really understand what he had just read, but he still understood why Yrial wanted him to get the tome. An encyclopedia containing a powerful Edgewalker's insights into the specific difficulties of cultivating duality would surely be useful, no matter how different Kalo's actual path was to his own.

"Who is Kalo? Where is this thing from?" Zac asked curiously.

"Some ancient faction far from the frontier," Yrial sighed. "For a while, I hoped to visit their land for a chance to continue my path, or at least get a copy of the book that hadn't lost so much of its original meaning. This thing is probably just a copy of a copy. Unfortunately, I never found any more information

about Kalo or their origins. Still, the book helped me understand my path better even as a Monarch. I doubt whoever wrote it was someone simple. Perhaps you can find some inspiration within and use it to stake out your own path.”

“It will be a great source to reference,” Zac nodded. “I also need some escape treasure, preferably a reusable one.”

“With your penchant for getting yourself in trouble, that’s probably a good idea,” Yrial snorted. “The most powerful ones are the [Panopticon Seal] and the [Flashfire Flourish]. I think the latter is better suited for you.”

Zac wasn’t surprised Yrial mentioned those two, even if their names didn’t expose being escape treasures. They both cost over 8,000 credits, making them some of the most expensive items in the inheritance – there was no way they could be simple.

“What kind of items are they?”

“The [Panopticon Seal] is an ancient treasure that I think once might have been a clan-defining treasure for an ancient formation clan. It contains a terrifyingly complex array that can utterly seal space for over a kilometer in every direction almost instantly. As long as you hold onto the seal, you will be able to escape through a path only you can see. Meanwhile, everyone else will be frozen in place, no matter if it’s one or one hundred enemies.

“The [Flashfire Flourish] is a fire-based escape treasure I found shortly after becoming a Hegemon. It will turn you into a ball of flames and launch you through space, while sending out hundreds of decoys in every direction.”

“Why do you think I should get the second item then?” Zac frowned. “If the [Flashfire Flourish] is based on the Dao of Fire, Can I even use it?”

“The seal is extremely powerful, being able to seal space with such success that even Late Hegemons will find themselves stuck for a minute or two. However, it is best used in conjunction with other escape measures. It sounds to me that escape is one of your weaker suits, with your path being one of constantly forging ahead. What will you do after the Hegemon breaks free? Don’t think some random escape talisman can save you from a motivated D-grade cultivator.”

“Meanwhile, the [Flashfire Flourish] will shift you to a neighboring dimensional layer, while also making it harder to find you. That feature obviously doesn’t work inside Mystic Realms, but it will still take you extremely far in an instant. As for the fire-based aspect, it’s mostly fine.”

“Mostly?” Zac said with a raised brow.

“Well, with you not having an affinity with fire, it will probably hurt like hell to use the item,” Yrial snickered. “But better a little pain than death, right? With your constitution, you should be fine.”

“Just pain, but no damage to my cultivation or anything like that?” Zac thoughtfully asked.

“I didn’t say that. Both items are supreme escape treasures. Apart from being a pain to charge, activating them will damage your foundations. Such is the law of balance.”

“It almost sounds like they are meant to be used together,” Zac ventured. “One to seal the enemy, and one to run away.”

“That’s how I did things when out of options,” Yrial nodded.

“So how about...”

“Forget it.”

The two were locked in a wordless struggle for a few moments, but Zac eventually relented with a sigh. “Alright, I’ll take the [Flashfire Flourish].”

It might not be exactly suited for him, but it was the kind of treasure he needed – something akin to Thea’s escape skill or the item the cultist leader used after their battle in the Dead Zone. Meanwhile, the [Panopticon Seal] sounded a bit too much like his [Pillar of Desolation] to make it worth 8,750 points, even if it was a powerful item.

He would simply have to find another way to restrain his pursuers while activating the [Flashfire Flourish] in the future.

“Good choice,” Yrial said, his smile widening as a box appeared in Yrial’s hands. “I didn’t want to influence your choice, but I actually modified the flourish one day when I was beset with an epiphany. Now, it’s even better than when I used it. You’ll be the envy of the cultivation world – it took me quite some effort to instill my charm and aesthetics into this item.”

“Better how? What did you do?” Zac asked with a sinking feeling as he heard the ambiguous words.

“First, leave a drop of blood and bind it,” Yrial urged as he took out a small red wand from the box, prompting Zac to reluctantly comply.

“Perfect,” Yrial smiled. “Don’t worry, I won’t waste the actual escape charge. I’m just a bit curious how it will turn out with you as the controller.”

“How what will turn-” Zac asked, but he didn’t get any further as a fiery ball shot out from the wand, shooting right past his head.

Zac scrambled out of the way with alarm as he covered his head, but he breathed in relief when the fireball wasn’t followed by an explosion. However, Zac’s expression sunk with dismay as he turned around, wholeheartedly feeling that Yrial’s modifications were far worse.

The blue sky and the field of flowers in the pocket dimension had lost their luster in the face of the almost blinding spectacle the [Flashfire Flourish] had left behind. However, it wasn’t some sort of combat-related apparition, or some maze-like array meant to confuse the enemy.

It was rather an image of Zac’s face left as a ten-meter hologram floating in the air.

However, while it was him, it also wasn’t. Zac saw his eyes sparkle like stars with a tearful expression that spoke of both reluctance and love. There was a slight blush on his cheeks and rosy lips locked in a small pout, with his usual buzz cut replaced by a wavy cascade of chestnut-colored hair. Surrounding his face was a swirling sea of fiery and icy flowers, illuminated by rays of light. Finally, beneath the spectacle was one line written by glittering stardust.

Parting with a dear companion is always a sweet sorrow.

“It’s not quite the same when you’re using it,” Yrial sighed with a shake of his head. “At least it fixed your hair.”

“This... what...” Zac stuttered, finding himself lost for words.

He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. The failed effeminization of his face. His ambiguous expression and the even more ambiguous words. In what universe was this a suitable function to add to an escape treasure? The only way it could be useful was if the scene was so unexpected and surreal that his pursuers found themselves shocked enough to lose track of him.

“Ah, don’t worry,” Yrial sagely nodded. “It’s designed to use whatever face you’re currently wearing. So no need to worry in case you’re using a disguise.”

‘Like that’s my concern right now!’ Zac wanted to roar, suddenly worrying that his already strained reputation would take another hit if he was ever discovered using this cursed escape wand.

“Not only that, but this is only one of five different memorable scenes I engraved into the [Flashfire Flourish]. It’s impossible to be certain, but I think it might be one of the most stylish escape items in your sector.”

“It’s quite something,” Zac said through grit teeth as he turned away from the still-glimmering apparition. “But I worry these superfluous additions might weaken its main function. I think it would be better to restore the item to its original state.”

“Well, it does cost a bit more energy, but it is negligible compared to the expenditure for the actual escape,” Yrial explained. “And I refuse to ruin this piece of art, even if it will be sullied by your face. I suggest you rather start thinking on how to improve your features, allowing you to leave behind an even more mesmerizing scene that will linger in the hearts of your pursuers forever.”

“Alright, well, I guess that’s fine then,” Zac sighed with a sense of defeat.

“With this purchase, you still have 5,500 Credits,” Yrial smiled. “Do you want any more advice?”

In the end, Zac purchased a non-attuned Natural Treasure that would help strengthen any prototype core, which would speed up the process after he’d found a proper core blueprint to work from. It only cost 1,500 Credits as well, making it a steal. For the final 4,000 points, Zac got another unique treasure called [Hanamon’s Awakening].

It was yet another Node Opening treasure, one that Zac hoped would help him out with his Draugr Eoz heritage. Unfortunately, it could only help open nodes he had already located, and it only worked with constitution-based Hidden Nodes, which was why it was so much cheaper than the [Eye of Har’Theriam] he got last time.

It was a bit of a gamble, but there wasn’t much else he wanted from the inheritance. Race-boosting pills weren’t a thing in the D-grade since once’s race was connected to one’s Cultivator’s Core at that stage. Every time you upgraded your core, your longevity and attribute cap would increase. Finally, when you perfected your core, you’d officially reach C-grade race.

“Looks like you got your money’s worth,” Yrial nodded after Zac had stowed away the final item. “But remember, treasures can only help you remove some roadblocks on your path. Cultivation ultimately comes from within.”

“I know,” Zac nodded.

“Now, is there anything else you want to ask of your beautiful and benevolent master?” Yrial smiled.

“Remember, it will probably be a while before we see each other again.”

“Actually, there are a few things,” Zac nodded, relieved that Yrial still had the energy to chat. “First of all, I was hoping you could help me upgrade your transformation skill. Secondly, I was wondering if you had ever heard of the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation].”