

The Fall 855

Chapter 855: Upgrades

"One thing at a time. I've been asleep for most of the time since we met last, but I have some preliminary ideas for the transformation skill," Yrial nodded. "I just need to see how the pathways of the core have changed during its upgrade. I even have some ideas to improve the aesthet-"

"No, wait," Zac urgently interjected. "You can't add any effect to the skill! It will expose me mid-battle."

"I guess you're right," Yrial eventually sighed, not without some reluctance. "Alright, let's see what we're working with here."

He pushed a finger against Zac's chest and closed his eyes next. Only five minutes later did he open them again with a thoughtful look.

"Is there a problem?" Zac asked.

"How could something like this stump your exalted master?" Yrial harrumphed. "But the patterns are growing quite complex, requiring an understanding of the Daos infused into your Spy Core. I can somewhat circumvent it for now, but I doubt I will be able to form a D-grade version of the skill. So after this, you're on your own."

"That's no problem," Zac nodded. "I need to start forming skills myself soon anyway."

"Yes, that's one department you've fallen behind," Yrial nodded. "By the time I evolved, I had already created six skills."

"Six?" Zac blurted, feeling that one or two was already quite good.

"There's no need for you to go that far," Yrial shrugged. "I didn't have as many opportunities as you when starting out, so I had a similar problem as you did with your Draugr class before. I had a Rare E-grade Class that didn't quite incorporate my path, so I needed to form skills that better represented my Path of Cyclic Supremacy. Otherwise, I would have been stuck with a pendulum-oriented Class in D-grade as well."

"Pendulum?" Zac said, but he immediately realized what Yrial was talking about.

In the visions, Yrial was constantly swapping between cold and hot when fighting, a bit like how Ilvere often shifted between light and heavy when using that boulder-like weapon of his. Somehow, that seemed to have a greater effect than constantly using either one of the elements.

"It is a viable path, but it doesn't provide the level of amplification as a true fusion of elements," Yrial nodded. "There is a chapter about it in the book you bought. In a sense, it keeps the elements separate, and the absence of a fusion becomes the third element. Perhaps it's worth for you to look into."

Zac thoughtfully nodded in agreement. That kind of system didn't seem too bad. He wasn't swapping between life and death currently when fighting, but his core comprehension when clashing against Alvod's path had been that Life was Life, Death was Death, forever separate, and always in conflict. Perhaps that kind of system could be useful for a base that he retooled for his purposes.

“Well, here we are,” Yrial eventually smiled as he handed over a crystal. “The skill isn’t naturally upgradeable, so you will have to refine the paths yourself.”

“That’s fine,” Zac said. “Thank you.”

He had already gained some experience in this regard inside the Orom World, with his human side having reforged [Piercing Gaze] into [Cosmic Gaze] already. Doing something similar with [Beauty Yrial’s Great Transformation Skill] shouldn’t be too difficult as long as he had the blueprint and as long as he was careful.

After all, he had long realized that his pathways had a much greater ability to recover compared to most people’s. Some pathway adjustments that would require a cultivator to rest for a month were dealt with in a couple of days, speeding up the process significantly. If that was thanks to his high attributes or his unique constitution, Zac had no idea. Probably a little bit of both.

“Now, what’s this about a Buddhist technique?” Yrial said.

Zac stowed away the transformation skill for now as he recounted his meetings with Three Virtues, the technique, and his guesses about his path.

“Scheming baldies,” Yrial snorted. “I’ve been on the short end of that stick myself. However, I have to say his words are not without merit, and the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] is a well-known Body Tempering Technique. Your undead side currently has an attunement that your human side lacks. For normal people, that would make your cultivation slanted concerning the Dao, but I’m not too sure that aspect matters to you. However, it might affect your cultivation in other ways.”

“Like an imperfect fusion of life and death,” Zac ventured, receiving an affirmative nod.

“If your goal is to fuse, or even just stabilize, your two sides, a perfect balance might be required. The Dao of Chaos is a miracle – a Dao that shouldn’t exist, a paradox. There should be extremely stringent requirements for it to form, where a single missing component will make the transformation impossible.”

“What about the pathbreaking effect of Buddhism? Or any other traps hidden in the method?” Zac asked.

“Pathbreaking only works on the weak of heart,” Yrial snorted. “If you’re so useless that you become a monk from practicing their techniques, you don’t have the qualifications to continue your path. I would be more concerned as to why the Buddhist Sangha is helping you. They are not some benevolent samaritans – they are incredibly pragmatic with their cause and effect. If they provide you with these kinds of resources, they are expecting something in return.”

“Do you think it’s a brainwashing technique, turning me into a vessel for possession or something similar?” Zac asked, remembering the pitiful end for his old enemy, Inevitability.

“That, I doubt,” Yrial said. “They cultivate the heart and the self. Possession would break their path. They don’t forcibly convert people either, though who knows what they do in the dark. Personally, I believe that would hurt their path as well. Theirs is a supreme belief of Buddha’s Path. If they need to use trickery for conversion, that would mean their path is not perfect, and it would harm their cultivation and the Sangha itself.

“They would rather use the apparent perfection of their techniques to leave small nuggets of doubts in your heart, nuggets that would form a trail leading straight into the embrace of Buddha. That would reaffirm their path, strengthening the Sangha.”

“Can you scan the technique for me?” Zac ventured.

“No way. I’m just an aged soul wisp. Getting in contact with a complete Buddhist Heritage would probably destroy me. Besides, just because it’s not a faulty technique, it doesn’t mean they haven’t made precautions to prevent the spread of their secrets,” Yrial said. “Try infusing the method into an empty crystal.”

Zac nodded and took out a spare crystal from his ring, but a frown spread across his face a moment later. Nothing happened when he tried to engrave the words in his mind.

“You see?” Yrial smiled. “You will have to make the decision yourself, weighing risk and reward is a core component of being a cultivator. Do your research before making your choice, and then act on it decisively. But while you have time, don’t dally too long if you want to keep your momentum. I can tell you though that undoing body tempering can be difficult, impossible even. Even if you stop in the middle, you might find yourself stuck with an incomplete constitution.”

“I’ll try to do some more research before making a decision,” Zac nodded.

Zac spent the next few hours inside the trial inheritance. Most of the time was Yrial regaling him about his exploits of the past, while Zac occasionally inserted some question that had plagued him over the past years. Yrial answered some, ignored some due to not wanting to affect his path, and pretended he wasn’t clueless about others.

For example, when Zac asked whether he’d ever heard of a Tayn Clan, Yrial haughtily answered that he couldn’t keep track of every little faction in the frontier. Neither did Yrial know too much about the Perennial Vastness of the [Perennial Vastness Token]. He had only briefly heard of it, but by that point, he was already a Monarch and uninterested since it didn’t pertain to him. Thus, Yrial had even less information than what Zac had gathered from the elites in the Orom World.

But finally, it was time to go.

“Time is running out,” Yrial sighed as he looked out across the field of flowers. “I know you are loath to leave your dear master, but I need rest.”

“When can I come back next time?”

“The trial is meant for someone approaching Peak Hegemony, but you might be able to brute force your way into the trial quicker than that. But no earlier than reaching Late Hegemony,” Yrial said. “As for time, it doesn’t matter. My soul wasn’t damaged this time around like after the impartment.”

“Late hegemony,” Zac nodded. “Alright, I’ll see you soon again. Thank you for all your help today. You’ve really helped me figure some things out.”

“Have fun with your war,” Yrial grinned. “I joined a big one once. There was a lot of loot to be pilfered, both from allies and foes, and ample opportunities to be seized. Just try not to die.”

“Sage advice,” Zac snorted as the world started to twist.

The last thing he saw was Yrial turning his head toward the left across the field of flowers with an inscrutable look in his eyes, in the very direction Yana had come from in the vision.

A flash of light later Zac appeared in the hall of the Tower of Myriad Dao, and he shot a complex look at the towering statue behind him. His second go at the Lord of Cycles inheritance had been a bit of a mixed bag. It had been nice to see his master again, but he hadn't quite accomplished all of his goals, the biggest one being a solution on how to form his Cultivator's Core.

However, he had gained some nice items along with the resources needed to start his own research in earnest, and he had a few ideas already on where to start. And with his transformation skill soon to be upgraded to E-grade, he would once more be able to use both his classes in battle.

As for the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation], Zac was leaning toward using the body-tempering aspect of the technique while forgoing the heart cultivation chapters. If that was even possible. However, he first wanted to do some investigation, preferably getting his hands on a couple of similar manuals to contrast and compare.

"Took your time," Brazla snorted as he appeared in front of him. "Those little battle-slaves of yours have kept bothering me while you underwent the trial."

"They're not slaves, they're my elite soldiers," Zac sighed. "What did they want?"

"How should I know?" Brazla shrugged with disinterest.

"Alright, thank you for your work the past week," Zac nodded before turning toward the exit, not wanting to spend his limited free time being berated by an unstable Tool Spirit.

"Wait," the Brazla said just as Zac was about to leave.

"You should think of what to do with the other inheritances," The Tool Spirit said. "Right now, I'm not fulfilling my purpose, which is like having a fly buzz around my head. The shady demon and the dumb brute are gone from what I gather, as is your sister. With your woman dying, that means only you and your undead progeny are occupying the inheritances."

Zac looked at the statue of the Blade Emperor for a few seconds before turning back to Brazla.

"Well, like you said. You're eternal. I'm in no hurry; no need to waste your gifts on the undeserving," Zac shrugged. "But I'll have my people keep a lookout for potential candidates."

"I don't care much about the others, but you need to find a suitable candidate for the Celestial Artisan," Brazla said with uncommon seriousness in his eyes.

Zac could understand the sentiment. Something probably went wrong for the original Brazla, with his Dao Repository becoming a System Reward rather than a resource for his descendants or disciples. His inheritance was different than the others in that way. The others added the trials and rewards as payment for Brazla's services, while the Celestial Artisan's inheritance probably was a genuine one.

Unfortunately, there was simply no one in his surroundings who deserved this reward. No standout craftsman had appeared on Earth so far, and the Gemlings had their own path of craftsmanship.

"I'll do my best, but I might have to recruit someone from off-world," Zac said.

“As long as you understand,” Brazla nodded. “Now, off you go.”

Zac snorted before he flashed away, leaving the Dao Repository behind. A scan of the surroundings indicated no Valkyries were waiting around, meaning whatever message they had couldn't be too important. So Zac started walking toward his compound rather than Port Atwood. However, he didn't stop when he reached his manor but rather continued until he reached the sea.

“Lord Atwood, it has been a while,” the Creator liaison said as Zac entered the shipyard reception, its emotions impossible to tell on from the featureless face where apertures were replaced by a single fractal.

“Brat, not bad,” a booming laugh echoed through the hallway as Karunthel, still using his enormous spider-legs, ambled into the room. “Already a Baron.”

“Just lucky, I guess,” Zac smiled, not bothering to ask why the golem foreman knew something like that.

“So, are you here about the upgrade?” Karunthel said with excitement. “About time. It's a bit embarrassing to be the foreman of this toyshop.”

“Kind of,” Zac nodded. “I know where the worldeaters are, and I'm heading off-world soon to go get one. Now that it's drawing closer, I wanted to check with you how long time it would take to build the reward, and if there was anything I could do to improve the quality of the vessel.”

“Oh? Our wares are not good enough for your tastes, brat?” Karunthel sniggered, though it was clear he didn't take it to heart. “What's the problem?”

“I'm heading into a chaotic strip of space teeming with invaders and pirates, I could use every advantage I can get.”

This was his biggest worry. An Early D-grade Cosmic Vessel had seemed impressive when he first saw the quest, but now with the war brewing and the general danger of the Million Gates Territory, it might not be enough to safely traverse the Million Gates Territory safely – especially not if he and his followers were planning on racking up some contribution through battle.

Certainly, some of the vessels of pirates and bounty hunters in the Million Gates Territory could barely be considered D-grade from what Zac had gathered. However, others were quite powerful, there were even Technocrats and unorthodox Cultivators using taboo methods in the area.

“Brat, don't forget; we are the Iliex,” Karunthel snorted. “Our Early D-grade wares are at least at the level of Middle D-grade when put in the perspective of this backwater region.”

“I understand that,” Zac said. “But still...”

“Well, let me check,” Karunthel shrugged before freezing in place. Only a couple of minutes later did he move again, and it almost looked like he had rebooted. “Huh.”

“What?” Zac asked.

“Well, I am not allowed to build you anything better than an Early D-grade vessel,” Karunthel said.

“So it's impossible,” Zac sighed.

"I'm not finished," the huge golem-spider said. "I am not allowed to build one according to the quest, but I can create a specialized Cosmic Vessel. One that's barely flightworthy in its current state but easily upgradeable. A framework, if you will."

"Absolutely," Zac said, his eyes lighting up. "Let's go with that."

"Hold on," Karunthel. "While this method is permissible, the actual upgrade would be outside the agreement of the System-awarded quest. First of all, the maximum output of an Early D-grade Shipyard is Middle D-grade vessels, and only once per century. Secondly, with the limitations set in place on a System-run store like this, you would have to provide the materials yourself rather than use our channels."

"That's no problem," Zac said as he handed over an Information Crystal before pouring out a mountain of resources around him. They were a sample of all the peak-quality materials and items he had kept for himself rather than handing over to Calrin, while the crystal was his semi-accurate tally of items he had already handed over to the Sky Gnome.

It would obviously have been better if the System didn't limit the Creators, but such were the rules. Licensed Stores added through the Town System had all kinds of rules and regulations they had to follow. In return, they got the System's protection and access to new markets. Meanwhile, unlicensed stores were not related to the System at all.

They had no limitations and no protections except whatever muscle they could muster. The Thayer Consortia had lost all their unlicensed stores centuries ago, the moment the Tsarun Clan turned their gaze toward their little business. In that sense, if the Creators had actually made their way to Earth on their own and set up a shipyard, they would have been able to do business however they wanted.

They could even have sold B-grade vessels if they so desired, and the System wouldn't care.

"I guess your adventures were quite lucrative," Karunthel hummed as he scanned the piles of materials, occasionally prodding them with his metallic spider legs. "The value of this trove is counted in C-grade Nexus Coins. Of course, so are decent Cosmic Vessels."

"I have recorded the materials," Rahm added from the side. "Give us a few minutes while we will run simulations on viable frames."

Zac nodded before he started stowing away the materials, his heart already beating with anticipation. How could one not get excited over the prospect of a personal spaceship?