

The Fall 514

Chapter 514: Cultivation Cave

Zac had finally set up a private cultivation area for his Draugr-side and Soul Cultivation, or rather his sister and Triv had. They had completely transformed the cave system around the original cultivation cave, and it would barely be recognizable by this point. He felt bad about constantly having his sister work on one array project after another, but he had no one else to turn to.

The demons were completely incompetent in that regard, and the Creators couldn't help with this project. The Sky Gnomes had helped with a portion of it, but they were only allowed to help install arrays that were bought through them. Triv was a welcome addition though.

The ghost was just acceptable in his skill of placing arrays, but he had shown a surprising insight and attunement to natural energy flows, a genuine Feng Shui Master. That knowledge allowed Kenzie to take advantage of the rich energies in the cave to a much higher degree, drastically increasing the efficacy of the formations.

Between that and Kenzie's unnaturally high precision in array placement, they had managed to make amazing progress in one short week. He would have to hire a genuine Array Master to improve things even further, but those kinds of services weren't available in the Town Shop. It was a restriction put in place by the System to prevent people from having too easy access to means of empowerment. It wanted people to struggle, after all.

There were a lot of buildings he could purchase from the store, but they were almost all services that were geared toward various types of convenience. He had for example purchased a bank to go with the Merit Store in the square of the town, though there were pretty strict limits on how much you could deposit. Not by the bankers themselves, but on the System.

Zac had already deposited his maximum allowance as an Early E-Grade warrior, 1 Billion Nexus Coins, which would be directly handed over to his sister in case he died. It would be just a small portion of his full wealth, but he couldn't be certain what would happen if he got himself killed. The people of Earth might turn on Kenzie because of greed, but she could just use one of his Teleportation Tokens and withdraw the money on some other world instead.

The cave Zac stood in right now was simply the entrance rather than the real cultivation area, as Triv insisted that a Teleportation Array would cause too much spatial turbulence. Besides, Kenzie would be able to teleport here now without inadvertently disturbing him mid-cultivation. The shudder he had felt as he stepped forward was a simple illusion- and containment array, hiding the real entrance and stopping the dense energies from escaping.

The tunnel had changed a lot since he visited the last time. Before it had been filled with subterranean plants such as the mushrooms and glowing moss, creating a magical passage into the hidden cultivation chambers. But now it was like the tunnel had been split in two, each side representing either life or death.

The left side of the tunnel still looked very much the same, but the right side had turned dour and colorless as an ashy haze emerged from the rock wall itself. Some of the plants had already died off,

whereas others were barely hanging on. New growth had started to emerge though, mainly a pitch-black moss that had supplanted the luminescent one.

It was an odd feeling walking in the middle of the tunnel, with half his body feeling the vigorous life coming from the Lotus, while the other side was drenched in the cold grip of death. This was obviously not an accidental design, but rather meticulously planned. However, the miraculous environment was nothing compared to the cave he entered next.

It was a perfectly circular cavern that had actually been turned into a small forest, with the domed ceiling reaching almost fifty meters in the air. Half the chamber was filled with Death-attuned trees that had been brought over from the core of the Dead Zone, and the other half were trees that had grown in the secluded valley.

It was Triv's idea to plant the trees here, based on Zac's preferences. Some liked to cultivate in sheer chambers without any distracting components, whereas others liked to be surrounded by things that made them peaceful. Zac had chosen this type of environment as this was how usually had meditated since the beginning, sitting in the forest by his campsite.

In the middle of the cave was a large glade, with a prayer mat placed perfectly aligned to be in the center. There were two more mats in the chamber, though Zac couldn't see them from his current vantage. They were placed at central locations in the respective attunement of the cave. The area around the left mat would be full of life-attuned energies, whereas the other one would be surrounded by miasma.

The trees might seem haphazardly planted, but that was anything but the truth. This was the work of Triv, who had meticulously aligned every tree to form the embryo of a natural formation. The formation itself wasn't anything special, but it filled a very important purpose. It would gather the energies in the room and have them naturally flow toward the prayer mat in the center.

If he sat down on that mat he would be able to see two passageways perfectly opposite each other, one to the left and another to the right. The left one would lead to his original cultivation cave, where the Life-attuned Lotus still resided in the pool of Cosmic Water. Dense waves of purest life-force entered his subterranean forest from that side, but it met an opposing force coming from the other.

The right door led to a completely new chamber that had been dug into the mountain, and it was a smaller and modified version of the array they had found beneath the Undead Fortress. In the center of the chamber was the Seed of Undeath, surrounded by the very same pillars as before.

However, the pillars didn't blast miasma toward the world core any longer, but rather extracted it from the Seed to push it toward the central cave.

There was also a hidden room beneath it filled with Unholy Beacons. They took the Cosmic Energy that the Nexus Vein emitted and transformed it into Miasma that fed the Seed of Undeath and its array. Together with a couple of shielding arrays that kept the Death Attunement from spreading out, it had formed a hidden eco-system of death in the heart of the mountain.

Zac heard some rustling on the life-attuned side of the forest, and he walked over to see his sister scrutinizing a large stone pillar. It was embedded into the ground just outside the glade on the life-

attuned half of the forest. It did look a bit like the pillars that now stood in the Death Chamber, but they were actually Array Flags that Kenzie had created herself.

Normally such a flag would just be a few decimeters long, but she was still unable to make them as small as the small sticks he had bought from the System.

"How does it look?" Zac asked as he walked over.

"It should work as intended, I've compared it with the disks you gave me. I've also recreated similar pillars on the other side of the cave," Kenzie smiled.

"Why?" Zac asked curiously. "Was there something wrong with the Array Disks?"

The array that Kenzie was working on wasn't something related to energy flow, but it was something much more pressing. It was the array to practice his Soul Strengthening Manual. The Remnants were still very docile in his mind, but he hadn't forgotten just how dangerous they could be. It felt like a miracle that he was still standing after the events in the tower, and he needed to be proactive in dealing with them.

The Remnants were still extremely weak, but they were slowly but surely regaining their strength. Most of the energy they gained still entered his soul and his body to strengthen them, but a part of it remained. For example, he was pretty certain that he would be able to conjure a bronze flash by this point just based on the amount of energy contained in the markings covering his soul.

Part of him wanted to just exhaust the energies that had gathered up til now to avoid any danger, but part of him was reluctant to waste his hidden ace. Who knew when he would need to be able to blast something with a ball of pure destruction?

"No, they were honestly better than what I created. But I can't create Array Disks, and the Arrays would become lopsided if one was a small disk and the other half a forest in size," Kenzie said, looking a bit embarrassed. "I talked with Triv, and he believed that it might cause the death-attuned energies to push into the life cave too much."

"That's fine," Zac said. "Thank you for your help, and sorry I keep asking you to do stuff like this."

"I'm not in a hurry to reach the E-Grade, and I don't care about ladder positions or stuff like that," Kenzie shrugged. "This way I can at least help you and help protect Earth."

The two walked around the cave for a bit longer, where Kenzie made a final inspection of the pillars.

"It good to go. I won't disturb you any longer," Kenzie said as she packed up her things. "Good luck with this stuff."

"Thank you," Zac said as he walked over to the mat placed on the right side of the cave.

Dense clouds of miasma slowly swirled around it, somewhat reminding Zac of how it looked in his opened nodes. The mat itself was actually a piece of the massive mat that he had looted from the dragon cave.

Calrin had identified it to be made from extremely valuable materials that aided in cultivation, with the inner pieces holding the most value. It had been cut into almost 100 pieces and refashioned into a set of

mats with the inner mats going to the core warriors of Port Atwood, with the rest being put in the Merit Exchange.

Zac took a deep breath before he sat down. It was finally time for him to start working on his [Nine Reincarnations Manual].

The cultivation method for the first Reincarnation of the [Nine Reincarnations Manual] was quite simple. There was not much he needed to do, except alternate between using the Death-Array aptly called [Death Soul Array] and the counterpart that Kenzie had just finished setting up, the [Life Soul Array].

There were some ways that one could improve the efficacy of the two arrays though. The manual mentioned cultivating in life- and death attuned cultivation caves for example, and there were also a few treasures listed that could help speed up the process. However, Zac had only taken the most basic steps with the help so far by relying on the attunements generated by the Lotus and the Seed respectively.

But it was entirely possible that he would start using more expensive methods to boost the cave even further. Triv was quite adept in improving the atmosphere this way, though his knowledge was mostly limited to death attunements so far. But the ghost was already studiously working on expanding his knowledge of life attuned measures to be more of service.

Honestly, Zac was becoming more and more pleased with his decision to keep the ghost around. Triv had already proven an extremely valuable asset in the construction of this cave, and he had all sorts of ideas to improve the state of Port Atwood in general. Most of the changes would be pretty expensive to enact, but Zac wasn't too worried about cost at the moment. Now that the undead threat was dealt with his force had started to focus on expansion rather than war, and his income increased every day.

There was still the Zealots and the Dominators to deal with, but they weren't a threat that required his whole force. He himself and perhaps a small strike squad would be all that he needed for those two threats, whereas the endless number of Zombies had required the cooperation of the whole world.

Zac went over the cultivation method in his mind, still keeping his human form. He wanted to get the hang of things before he started to experiment with swapping races for the cultivation.

A low hum echoed across the glade as Zac activated the array, and it felt like the Miasma around him stirred. His skin prickled as well, and he quickly started to become a bit uncomfortable. However, he ignored the impulses to turn into a Draugr as he infused the array with some spiritual energy.

The moment his mind made a connection with the array he felt a weak, but constant, drain on his mind as the array absorbed more and more of his mental energy. It wasn't a problem in the beginning, but he started to feel a bit queasy after half an hour had passed. He even started to wonder if there was something wrong with the array.

However, just as he was about to abort the experiment a surge of energy rose from the array, and he felt a powerful stream enter his mind. It was his own mental energy, but it was tinged with death this time. Zac nodded in satisfaction and kept going, and the array had completed a circulation after roughly 45 minutes.

Zac kept going according to the manual, seeing that the array worked as intended. He slowly completed one revolution after another, and his soul became a bit ghastlier every time. The two Remnants even woke up from their slumber for a few seconds, but they quickly calmed down again for some unknown reason. Perhaps they knew that whatever Zac was doing wasn't a threat to their existence.

Only after nine full revolutions was the first half of the cultivation session complete. His mind was completely permeated by death by now, and he almost felt like a ghost. The Miasma around him no longer felt uncomfortable, but rather inviting to the point that Zac almost thought he had changed to his Draugr constitution subconsciously.

It even felt so good that he was inclined to lay down and take a nap in the soothing mists. However, he immediately snapped out of it as he walked over to the other side of the forest. The usually soothing life-attuned energies that had turned the greenery even lusher felt like scorching gusts that threatened to blister his skin, but Zac ignored the illusion as he sat down at the second prayer mat.

Another revolution began, but this time his Mental Energy brought back some warmth after it had passed through the array. He completed the nine revolutions once more, and only then did he feel like he was back to his normal self. Zac stood up from his mat and stretched before he checked on his gains.

And truthfully, they weren't all that great.