

The Fall 672

Chapter 672: Skill Fusions

Zac had gained his first skill upgrade quest at level 90 as expected, and another one at level 100. Both of them provided him with one opportunity to freely fuse or upgrade one of his F-Grade skills, though the upgrade only allowed for upgrading Class-specific skills. The fusion could make use of external skills, but only if the first skill in the fusion was provided by the class. Secondly, only F-grade skills were useable in the fusion.

Zac had reached level 90 just two months after the events in the Mystic Realm, and he completed the quest in two weeks. Yet he had held off on accepting the reward based on a recommendation from Alyn. He would only get a few freebies, and he needed to make the most of it. Zac got two shots per class, which felt sorely lacking as he went through his long list of abilities.

There were many reasons to not immediately cash in the rewards. The System assisted in the upgrades, but the cultivator could actually nudge the process in certain directions as long as they had a clear understanding of the skill fractals and what they wanted to change. That was a big reason why Zac had worked so hard on shoring up his foundations over the past years, to give him a shot at creating skills suited for his cultivation path.

This was extra important for his Fetters of Desolation-class, where he had several skills that he rarely used or simply didn't fit too well with his envisioned combat style. He wanted to turn the class more offensive while still maintaining some defensive capabilities, and he hoped he had found a way to do that. Right now the class combined Defense and Death, and Zac needed to turn that into War and Death.

He had gone over his options hundreds of times in his mind as he worked on his Soul Cultivation over the past years, and he had long reached a decision for both his classes. All four opportunities would be used for fusing skills, leaving the normal evolutions to his own hard work. The reason was simple; fusing skills was a lot harder than simply upgrading one.

It took two different skill fractals and turned them into one, combining their effects to something new. It required a high understanding of fractals, the Dao, and the skills themselves to work, along with some sort of inspiration. An upgrade wasn't easy by any means, but ultimately a lot more straightforward.

Fixing his Draugr skillset was important, but Zac wanted to work on his human side first. He figured that the fusions he had planned for his Edge of Arcadia-class were more straightforward, and the accumulated experience would hopefully help him when performing the more transformative fusions of his Draugr side.

Zac looked at the prompt from the Nexus Node in front of him and took a deep breath before choosing [YES] and swiftly picking his first two skills to fuse. It was [Deforestation] and [Nature's Punishment]. He was very happy with both skills, but they ultimately served a similar purpose in his skill set.

So, Zac had decided to fuse the two into one, creating one terrifying ultimate skill that would crush all opposition in one go. It was a combination of two of his Daos as well; the Fragment of the Bodhi and the Fragment of the Axe, the essence of his Edge of Arcadia class and his cultivation path. Now with his burgeoning ability to braid two Daos into one attack, it held even greater potential.

Zac's surroundings suddenly changed, and he found himself sitting in a vast cosmos, and his eyes lit up with expectation when he saw the familiar stars far in the distance. It looked a lot like when Yrial imparted his Dao onto him years ago, like he was staring into the Heavens themselves in this secret dimension.

Two streams of energy suddenly emerged from his body, turning into the fractals of his two skills, each of them as tall as Zac. Two streams emerged from his glabella next; the familiar Dao clouds that were continuously released from his Dao Avatars. The streams were unsurprisingly those released by the Fragment of the Bodhi and Fragment of the Axe.

Two fractals crashed into each other the next moment, turning them into a cloud of stardust that swirled about. It was mesmerizing to look at, but Zac didn't forget himself as he staunchly focused on the direction he wanted to take the skill in. Pure power stemming from the endless force of nature itself, paired with the unstoppable momentum of an axe. The two would turn into a single attack that would cleave earth and end a war altogether.

A rippling force shuddered within the stardust, and Zac felt certain his general idea for the skill had been accepted by the System. The stardust created from the former two skills congealed into a brand new fractal, while energy from the distant stars poured in and gave it even greater strength. The result was a skill fractal far more detailed than those before, radiating unquestionable might.

Zac looked at it with awe, and he could quickly make some deductions thanks to his years of study into the patterns that the Apostate of Order brought to the cultivation world. First of all, the energy requirement and strength of his new skill should be around twelve times greater compared to the old ones.

One could almost liken a skill fractal to a perfectly crafted machine, and some patterns shared purpose across most skills. For example, there were the transformers that took normal Cosmic Energy and transformed it into whatever force was needed to conjure the skill.

There were also storage patterns that allowed the skill to compress and store Cosmic Energy until it was all released in one mighty blast. The more storage patterns a skill fractal contained, the more power would the skill be able to unleash. Of course, it also meant the skill would cost more to activate as well.

The number of storage patterns nestled into the skill fractal was a good indicator of what type of skill one was dealing with since massive finishers would obviously contain tens, perhaps hundreds, more of these types of mini-fractals compared to weaker repeatable skills like [Chop]. It was this that gave Zac an idea of how powerful the skill would be without even using it.

Furthermore, Zac was elated to see that the transformative patterns had a decent balance between nature and axe, though it looked to be a sixty-forty balance in favor of his Dao of the Axe. It meant that it would be a primarily axe-based skill that borrowed the elements of nature, rather than a nature-skill with the cutting-ability of an axe.

A fifty-fifty split might have been optimal in terms of his path, but Zac knew he was still an axe-warrior first and foremost. Over the past years, he had managed to incorporate the Dao of the Axe far more into his fighting style than his other two Daos, which wasn't a surprise as he fought with an axe. Getting a

sixty-forty split was pretty good all things considered, and he might even be able to gain some inspiration in the future by studying the fractal.

The skill wasn't completely formed just yet though as two streams of starlight washed over the skill, each one transforming the pattern a bit. Zac couldn't put his finger on it, but the fractal looked a bit more perfect afterward. This was the benefit of the System doing the fusion rather than doing it yourself.

You might not have full control over the process, which meant that the skill might not be one hundred percent suited to your path. But the resulting skill fractal would be without flaws. A fusion-reward from an Epic Class would result in a Peak-quality E-Grade Skill without fail, which was especially important in Zac's case.

After having studied skills for a long time he had already confirmed that while both [Deforestation] and [Nature's Punishment] had amazing effects, they were ultimately High-quality skills. They were extremely close to peak quality, but there was still a short distance away. In comparison, [Profane Seal] was a proper peak-quality skill since both its defenses and restraining prowess were top-tier for the grade, while even including a teleportation effect to close distances.

Meanwhile, over 90% of those who fused skills on their own ended up with a skill with a lower quality compared to the source skills. For example, turning two High-quality F-grade skills into one Medium-quality E-grade skill. It would be a huge loss if Zac wasted the potential in his two signature skills that way.

Certainly, it was possible to maintain the quality of one's skill, but it required tremendous insight and talent. To improve the quality like what was happening right now most likely required some great fortuitous encounter, like an epiphany or special treasures that could aid in the process.

The skill was finally complete, and it turned into a streak of light that entered his body, and Zac waited with rapt attention for it to stabilize. A wide smile spread on his face the next moment as it settled in the position of [Nature's Punishment]. This was exactly what he was hoping for because that came with a special benefit.

He could get the Endurance-based defensive skill in the Dao Repository now.

[Nature's Barrier] was all but useless by now, leaving Zac without any real defensive options. Between his huge pool of Endurance and his Dao Fragments he was definitely hard to kill, but he needed a skill that actually took advantage of his strengths and pushed his defenses to the next level. He had already shored up his weaknesses on his mental side with [Spiritual Guardian] and evolving his soul, and this was the next step.

It wasn't time to worry about that though, and Zac pushed away any errant thoughts as he wanted to imprint the feeling and memorize every single change that had taken place in his body since he started the fusion process. Obviously, it wasn't as magical when doing the same thing yourself, but it could provide some guidance.

Zac soon enough he found himself back in front of the Nexus Node, but he sat in meditative silence for a few minutes to imprint everything. Only then did he open his Skill Screen.

[E] Arcadia's Judgement - Proficiency: Early. Only judgment awaits those who encroach on the mandate of Arcadia. Upgradeable.

Zac nodded in satisfaction before he sat down and studied the fractal for another 30 minutes. Only when he felt he had imprinted the whole thing in his mind did he stand up and step onto his flying treasure. There were still a few skills to fuse, but he first wanted to see the effect of the first fusion firsthand so that he could get a better understanding of the result.

Half an hour later he stood overlooking a vast valley from the vantage of his leaf. Thousands of beasts milled about within, some sleeping while others fought for sport. The stench of blood and death was palpable, and incessant roars full of power reached him even though he was hundreds of meters into the air.

This was a perfect spot for his experiment.

Zac soon landed at the mouth of the valley, making no attempt to mask his aura. His arrival was immediately noticed as thousands of weird beasts turned their attention toward him. They were Truzkirs, a beast that once lived on the Zhix homeworld.

Back there they were a small nuisance looking like a mix of some type of warrior ants and scorpions. Nowadays they had turned into a real threat to the surroundings, as they voraciously devoured everything around their lairs and multiplied quickly. They were both very small for spiritual beasts and agile to boot, which in conjunction with their endless numbers made it a pain to hunt them for normal people.

This particular hive was slated for eradication since it had grown too big, and there was a real risk of a beast tide if nothing was done.

The clattering screeches were almost deafening as a tide of Truzkirs rushed toward him, completely uncaring that his aura was hundreds of times stronger than theirs. Zac wasted no time and immediately started to infuse his new skill fractal with Cosmic Energy, and a slight frown emerged when it only stopped after two seconds and gobbling up 25% of his total reserves.

That was a huge amount considering his attribute pool, and it would cost him most of his void energy from [Force of the Void], but that was ultimately a good thing in his book. His Void pool had already increased to 27% over the past years, which meant he wouldn't completely be drained. Besides, the more energy it consumed, the greater the force the skill would exert.

Zac felt a tremendous weight assail him the next moment as an enormous hand appeared above his head. It looked a bit like the old wooden hand of [Nature's Punishment], but it was over ten times larger; a mountain of bark, vines, and wood covered in glaring red runes. It was like Zac had borrowed the hand of a young treant before, but now the patriarch had showed up.

And it didn't come alone as a massive primal axe was held in its hand. The axe was wrought from wood and stone, and it felt like it was a natural product of mother nature itself. The insect tide was almost upon him by this point, and Zac didn't want to let them surround him. Zac's hand swung down, and he felt his bones creak and groan from the tremendous weight his skill exerted on him.

The hand in the sky mirrored his action, just like [Deforestation] did. The enormous axe fell, and it sounded like two mountains were ground against each other as arcadia unleashed its judgment. It felt like the whole planet would get cleaved in two as the axe slammed into the ground, digging over twenty meters into the valley. Thousands of beasts were instantly crushed and ground to dust as a scar over five hundred meters long was formed.

The wound on the earth radiated an undeniable might, and the whole valley shook from the force. The vibrations turned into a full-blown earthquake, but it only lasted for a second before the whole valley veritably exploded in a chaotic jumble of broken flesh and stone.

The hidden hive beneath the ground had been destroyed in an instant and the whole area had been transformed from a valley into a deep pit that radiated an immense aura of slaughter. The whole atmosphere had transformed as well as it held the weight of a mountain. The occasional Truzkir still screeched in pain and fear, but almost all of them had been annihilated by one single strike. The few remaining beasts would easily be dispatched if Zac was inclined, since the lingering pressure had rendered them completely unable to move.

Zac looked down at the destruction for a few minutes, feeling that he really had delivered judgment on this whole valley. The direct force unleashed from the enormous stone axe matched and even eclipsed the third swing of [Deforestation], while the scope of the secondary eruption was a lot larger than any of the punishments from [Nature's Punishment]. Power and scope; [Arcadia's Judgement] had both.

And this was just Early Proficiency.

His goal was accomplished, and there was no point in him lingering any longer. The next day was spent performing one fusion after another, and Zac gained a lot of inspiration and comprehension every time. Zac also realized that he had worried about nothing as every single fusion lived up to his expectations, even the two for his Draugr side. Then again, the great outcome might be thanks to him slowing down and gaining a deeper understanding of fractals and skills.

Zac visited the Towers of Myriad Dao once more after everything was dealt with to pick up his new defensive skill as well. He had hoped Vilari would surprise him and Brazla, but she was still embroiled in the trial. Zac could only leave for now, and he found himself in front of the Nexus Hub a few minutes later. With his skill fusions dealt with, nothing was holding him back any longer.

The next part of his plan would take place off-world.