

## The Fall 813

### Chapter 813: Technique

The chains of [Chainbox], the working name of Zac's spare coffin, caused the whole ravine to be drowned in a raucous rattling which was continuously reinforced and multiplied by the iron-rich cliffs to his sides. The clamor was almost at the level of a mental attack by this point, but Zac barely noticed it as he focused on perfecting his control over his armament.

Fifty meters away from him, a harried mountain rat with metal plating desperately tried to break out from its besiegement, but the four chains of [Chainbox] caused an inescapable net around the bison-sized critter. A few of the clashing sounds of metal against metal came from the links slamming into the damaged scales, but most of the sounds actually came from the chains colliding with each other.

Looking back at his fight with Pavina month ago, Zac almost wanted to dig a ditch and hide in it out of shame. He had been so full of vigor, feeling like he was inching closer and closer to the true meaning of inexorability, a restrictive stance that embodied Death and Conflict. But all the while, he had used his chains, a major component of restricting and seizing the momentum, like a flailing orangutang.

It also made him want to apologize to Alea for wasting such a precious resource. Unfortunately, she was still in a passive state as she hung from his neck. Even now, years later, Zac had no idea what was going on. For all he knew, she was still absorbing the massive amounts of energies she swallowed from Uona, along with the purifier ball she ate just as they entered the Void.

It was also possible she had completed the absorption already, but that her evolution was restricted by the Orom. Zac could probably break the seal on the necklace with his Void Energy, but he didn't dare in case it would hurt Alea's progress. He would have to wait and find out when he got out of this place. For now, [Chainbox] would have to do.

He had always considered the chains to be a flexible addition to his repertoire, but within a limit. He could control their force and direction, which pretty much made him consider them as mobile spears he could stab into his enemies. If the target was weakened enough that Zac believed the chains would hold, he could bind them.

But that was barely scratching the surface.

Over the past month, he had gone through innumerable variations with his chains as he walked through the early reaches of the first band. He had exclusively focused on mastering his armament as he evolved his newly acquired mastery skill, and he only used his axe when out of options. Over the last three days, he had only been forced to do so four times.

It didn't seem like much considering he was fighting the weakest of all the beasts in the Wilderness, Zac knew it was a huge accomplishment. After all, he didn't use his Daos, and neither did he use any skills. He simply followed the various concepts hidden inside [Armament Mastery] to take out beasts with twice his attributes. He had soaked up the teachings like a sponge, rapidly turning them into something practical and deadly.

Zac had first been worried that he would have to scrap the Inexorable Stance altogether to fix its underlying issues, but that wasn't the case. He simply put aside the concepts of death and conflict for a

moment, and instead focused on the underlying theory. Trajectories, movements, pathing, tempo, momentum.

One by one, these concepts were rehailed as [Armament Mastery] went from Early to high mastery, and Zac was shocked to see how much his lethality improved. The first few days, every single beast had managed to break out from the proverbial cage of chains, but they were increasingly finding themselves helpless against Zac's techniques.

He had also used the Peak-Proficiency [Axe Mastery] a bit between fights to give himself a refresher course to see if he had missed something. Looking at it with a fresh set of eyes after having worked on a technique of his own, he was both embarrassed and delighted to see how many insights were hidden in the seemingly simple swings.

It wasn't just about the Dao of the Axe, and neither were the ever-flowing set of attacks empty receptacles to be filled with his Daos to reach the Integration Stage. It was like every marked-out trajectory contained a lesson on everything from tactics to momentum, if you knew to listen. They were unsullied by outside concepts, unblemished by biases or the influence of classes or anything else.

The rat screeched with helpless frustration as it swirled and lashed its tail at one of the chains that slithered around it like a snake. The collision pushed the chain away, slamming it into a second. However, with a small mental nudge from Zac, this transfer of momentum allowed him to alter the trajectory of the second chain.

The chain that had previously just stopped the rat from escaping took a sharp turn. With the boost of speed from the rat's attack, it shot forward, piercing straight into the eye of the beast as it completed its swipe. It was almost like the rat had given the push then delivered itself to be slaughtered, but the truth wasn't so simple.

Zac felt the minute influx of energy as he replayed the battle in his mind. The chains were not separate entities, they were one. There was always cause and effect, where even the enemy was becoming a part of the method. This method of control was the greatest takeaway over the past month, and it was what had skyrocketed his efficiency with his chains.

The chains were only so nimble, but a simple collision could change everything. It could allow a sharp turn, block strikes by shifting a part of the chain into position, and create a general pressure through constant changes and variations. Before, Zac had almost only focused on the end-point of the chains, but now the whole length was fast becoming an instrument to be manipulated.

There were an endless number of patterns that could spring from simple collisions between the four chains he used. Different types of collisions caused different effects, and you could create a chain reaction that became harder and harder to anticipate for the target. And all this could be further manipulated by Zac infusing energy into the chains, retracting, extending, turning, and empowering them.

This ability bordered into the techniques of some types of mages, who created inescapable nets of death by planning dozens of steps ahead like in a chess game. Zac had no goal to take this theory to its limits though, and he was happy if he could smoothly generate 2-step attacks like the one that killed the steel rat. Any more than that, and the patterns would become too complex for him to manage.

After all, his axework was ultimately the main driving force in his combat style, and he had no interest in changing that up. But as long as he had the mental capability and energy reserves to add something to his combat stance to make it more lethal, why not? Especially when the chains tied into his Dao and his skills.

Zac soon enough found another target to hunt, this time a group of three stocky lizards that might as well have been dinosaurs considering their three-meter length. His hair danced from the wind the four chains kicked up as they shot forward, instantly putting the three animals at the defensive. The clattering sounds of chains once more echoed through the mountainous regions, intermingled with the angry roars of the beasts.

Fighting and restraining three beasts were far more difficult, but Zac had become a lot more skilled in restraining without actually binding someone. The moment one of the beasts tried to break away, one of its brethren stumbled into him, tripped up by a sneaky chain or trying to avoid a strike at their vitals.

Meanwhile, the third one was forced to move so that its body became a barrier when the beast got ready to rush out again. This was the kind of restriction he aimed for, and he wasn't even using his Daos to accomplish it. If he wanted, Zac could have pushed [Armament Mastery] to peak mastery in a few days, but he had wanted to completely digest every piece of information.

The goal during this outing wasn't simply to maximize his lethality and push deeper into the wilderness. It was to accomplish his goals with the smallest possible investment, just like how Pavina had created wonders with her minute movements. The fights over the past month made Zac truly appreciate what Kaldor and Pavina meant by saying he needed to learn to walk before he could run.

Apart from leaving hidden flaws in his technique, he had been wasting so much energy and effort by trying to solve every little thing through his understanding of the Dao. Revisiting the Mastery-skills made him realize that he was dreadfully inefficient in this manner. Some things did not need a fancy solution.

His fight with Adcarkas had been eye-opening, where he for the first time saw true integration of Dao into movements. But it had also saddled him with some bad habits. In a sense, it was like taking a helicopter to your next-door neighbor to borrow a cup of sugar. It technically worked, but it was way too much work.

Zac had ample stores of both Miasma and Mental Energy to bear this kind of inefficiency, this wasn't just about energy conservation. It was more about time management. The more he could accomplish with small actions during a fight, the bigger the time window he would have to unleash his skills or killing blows.

One beast after another fell, leaving Zac the last man standing. It was time. He could feel the build-up in the skill fractal in his chest, and Zac rushed toward the hidden site he had prepared.

Over the last few days, he had been essentially walking in a circle in the mountain range. In the middle of the circle, he had prepared a cultivation cave where he could reach Peak Mastery of [Armament Mastery] in peace. Soon enough, he reached the secluded cave, and he activated the set of arrays he had arranged beforehand.

The cave was sealed, and the chance of any beast finding this place in the next couple of weeks was extremely small, let alone the few hours he needed to undergo the vision. After lighting up three sticks of incense, Zac sat down on his prayer mat, no longer holding back the breakthrough.

A moment later, his vision changed, and Zac saw an elderly man walking up a lush mountain with a weave basket on his back. Out of the forest, six masked men suddenly jumped out, clearly full of ill intent. Just as they were about to decapitate the old man, the lid to the basket rose and a large wooden hand emerged, blocking

The hand wasn't something born from nature like the hand of [Arcadia's Judgement]. It was rather meticulously carved and painted to almost look like the real thing. After the hand, a lanky figure emerged from the basket, stepping out in front of the old man. It was a six-armed demon, where two hands held stakes and another two hammers.

The demon suddenly flew forward with such speed it almost looked like teleportation, driving a stake through the head of one of the assailants, its jab dreadfully quick. Two of the masked attackers tried to circumvent the demon, but Zac was surprised to see them suddenly falling down as their bodies were cleanly cut apart. Only then did Zac notice the dozens of nigh-invisible strings that ran from the basket to the demon.

After a few seconds, all the attackers were dead, and the demon separated into thirty smaller parcels that flew back into the basket as the old man continued on his journey.

The next scene depicted a warrior with a scarred marble statue on his back. Embedded in it were eight weapons, each one unique of a distinct design. One by one they were dragged out and flew off to fight the cultivator's enemies, the blades working together as smoothly as a professional hunting party.

One such scene replaced the next, and Zac's horizons kept getting wider as he saw one odd method replace another. He saw puppeteers, insect controllers, armorers, array masters, and all kinds of unique fighting styles. Mages who had somehow pre-stored spells in a backpack, poison masters who unleashed unholy mixtures upon their surroundings, there seemed to be no limit to what was possible with armaments.

Some of the techniques were only tenuously related to his coffin-and-chains-combination, but they did still display how one should fight using the mother-daughter weapon type. Most of the cultivators he saw had their armament as main weapon, while some used it like Zac, to reinforce or complement their main attack.

Out of all the visions, the one that Zac felt most familiar with depicted a reptilian man using two tulwars as main weapons. On his back, a beautiful set of steel wings hung, where the largest feathers at the edge could detach from the wings and be controlled. They were razor-sharp, like small knives that cut through the air, tormenting the reptilian's enemies from the flanks while he unleashed a storm of carnage with his swords.

Zac eventually woke up, but he didn't immediately move out. Instead, he sat in his cave, ruminating over his Inexorable Stance. What should it look like? Even now, he wasn't thinking in conceptual terms like the inevitability of death, but in simpler terms.

What kind of technique should he strive for? What kind of footwork? What roles should the chains ultimately have? What kind of strikes should he use with his axe? Should he battle head-on, or adapt a style of quick strikes before creating distance? Had he gone wrong anywhere with what he had built so far, focusing on Dao more than on himself?

Ten days passed until Zac finally opened his eyes again, and he immediately exited his cave. He could spot a beast in the distance, but he didn't bother with it, instead making a beeline in the direction of the second band with the help of [Abyssal Phase]. Two days later, he had found a target at the edge of the second band; a 2-meter tall macaque surrounded by arcs of lightning.

It was one of the rulers of the first zone of the wilderness, a perfect sparring partner to put his latest theories to the test. The primate immediately rushed forward, and a wave of lightning shot toward Zac. He used one of his chains to soak up the lightning and disperse it into the ground while the other three continued toward the beast.

This time, Zac went forward as well, and the arcs of blue lightning were reflected in his axehead as he swung his weapon in a seemingly straightforward arc. But while it wasn't imbued with the concepts of death or his Branch of the War Axe Zac had infused into the Inexorable Stance before, it still managed to leave a deep wound in the primate's chest. It was like his swing was invisible to the hulking monkey.

The effect wasn't thanks to superior attributes or the Dao, but rather due to the smart usage of his chains. While one chain was dealing with the lightning, the other three instead targeted the beast. Through constant collisions with each other, the ground, and the animal's razor-sharp claws, they formed a confusing tangle that could deliver a strike from seemingly any direction.

This alone forced the beast to spread its awareness, not only targeting the undead warrior in front of it. Finally, a snap from two chains colliding right by the animal's right ear, followed by a swipe against its right haunches, provided a short window of opportunity where the left side of its chest was wide open.

The monkey instantly realized its mistake, but it was too late. It only managed to generate a lightning field to protect itself, but Zac's powerful strike still managed to leave a grievous wound almost unopposed. After delivering such a strike, it was just a matter of time before the primate fell.

He had actually managed to reach the edge of the first band without using any skills or Daos. Of course, this accomplishment was not just thanks to [Armament Mastery]. Most of his strength ultimately came from the past two years of refining his technique, even if his method had been a bit inefficient.

The kind of trickery with sounds and feints that tricked the macaque would be less useful against a hardened veteran, but it was a proof of concept that he could create a very similar effect to his old Inexorable Stance without even infusing any of his Daos into his technique. It was akin to creating a restrictive formation with the help of the constantly moving chains.

As long as he integrated his Dao insights into his current stance, it should reach a completely new level of power. But Zac shook his head, ignoring the voices tempting in the back of his head. Instead, he left the Wilderness, heading for the skill upgrading chambers in Samsara's Edge.

It was time to enter phase two of his training.