

Teaching

Zach walked through the halls of the Consequence school. There were several classes going on at the same time, each filled with children sitting attentively and learning about a wide variety of topics, most related to Cultivation. It was illuminating in some ways, and interesting to see how the Sect taught its young. He had been given free rein to walk through the school and attend any class he wanted—without interruptions, at least. The children in the classes were very young, those that didn't yet have access to the Framework. The things that they were being taught seemed very basic to Zach, most just knowledge about the Framework and how it worked.

Eventually, he paused near a class led by a cthul woman. He entered the classroom and leaned against the back wall. The things she was talking about were... interesting.

“—all Essences have two parts, the shell and the core or *meaning*,” the instructor said.

Zach listened, intrigued. He didn't know what she was talking about, but it all made sense to him from his own observations. He got so engrossed in the listening that he was almost startled when a chime announced the end of class.

Before the children stood, he left, not wanting to cause any unnecessary commotion. He left the school and walked out into the courtyard. Ryun was waiting for him outside.

“What did you think?” He asked once Zach came near.

“It is... good,” Zach said slowly. “Knowledge should be shared freely. But I've not seen any older classes. Do they learn somewhere else?”

Ryun shook his head. “We don't provide classes for those who have reached maturity. Once they gain access to the Framework, they start their own Path, it is up to them to walk it. Most will get personal instruction from their parents, inheriting their Paths, or they will join a family and be taught by them.”

Zach blinked, that was... a bit disappointing. But it did match what he had come to know about Sects. From everything he had heard and seen, this sect was a lot more unorthodox, others don't even provide the basic schooling they did.

Zach was of the mind that proper instruction should continue for longer. Knowledge was a tool that everyone should be granted freely. It equipped people properly for the future, it opened up different paths for them to walk.

"I've listened in a bit on a class about Essence," Zach commented. "It was very interesting and illuminating. I heard many things I've not been aware of."

Ryun nodded. "Valthua's class. I am not surprised, most of the world doesn't know what she teaches. She is probably one of the greatest experts on Essence in the world. She has helped me greatly in advancing my own understanding. What she teaches are only the basics, she does it as part of our deal. She spends most of her time researching Essence."

Zach tilted his head as something occurred to him. "Do you think that she would agree to talk with me? I have been preparing to advance, perhaps she could provide some insight."

Ryun glanced in his direction. "I could ask, but she is a very busy person. If you want her insights, you will need to provide something of worth for her."

"If she is amenable to making a contract, I think that I have something that she would agree has worth."

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Zach sat in a small, warded room with the cthul woman, as they just finished making a Framework contract. It was a simple one, both agreed to not share what was discussed in this room with anyone else, not the knowledge itself, of course, though it had taken some convincing and a condition added to the contract for the woman to accept that. Zach didn't believe in keeping knowledge a secret, and he fully intended

to use and share what he learned. What they agreed to was to keep the source of the knowledge a secret. The woman agreed that she would share insights and research, assuming that Zach had something of worth.

Once they were done, she tilted her head.

“I am told that you are one of the strongest High Rankers in the world at the moment,” she said slowly.

Zach shrugged. “Strength is relative. It is a term that people like to throw around without full understanding of what it means. Anyone can be overcome. I possess enough strength that I can live free.”

She nodded. “Well, you said that you have something to offer in trade for my knowledge?”

Zach’s answer was to make several windows visible. He saw her frown, then start to read. He had shown her his **Sage of Time** perk and **The First Dao—Way of Aspect** title. He saw her surprise, then shock as the information seeped in. For a few minutes she didn’t move, but he could see her mind working behind her eyes.

“This... this explains so much,” she whispered, almost to herself. A moment later a book appeared in her hands, on her table and she started writing. Zach let her work through whatever it was that she had thought of. Then, a few dozen minutes later, once she stopped and blinked, realizing that he was waiting patiently.

“I apologize,” she inclined her head. “I got caught up in my own thoughts. Please, can you tell me how? I’ll tell you everything that I know, but if you could just tell me how?”

Zach smiled, then he started to talk, telling her about Hastur, the prison, and everything else that happened after.

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Zach stood on the walls of Consequence, the part of it that had finished construction. It was an amazing city, from what Zach had been able to see. With people that truly believed in what it represented. It was... harsh, as Zach had come to learn their Sect Head was. The name of the city was apt in that manner. There were many things that he agreed with, their schools for example, but just as many that he didn't particularly care for. Still, it was not his place to judge, they were doing what they believed to be best, and they protected their own people, they prepared them, in their own way.

Zach had been thinking a lot about how he could achieve his goals. Keeping people safe, giving him an opportunity to grow and be free. He had the answer, now he was in the process of figuring out how exactly to bring it to fruition. Seeing this place had given him ideas.

With Naha's comforting presence in his shadow, he turned his attention from the city to beyond the walls, the commotion outside the walls was no less than inside the walls, but it was framed by mountains and forests in the distance. He let his eyes drift over it all as his mind worked. His conversation with Valthua had been illuminating. So many things made more sense now, things that he had glimpsed intuitively, but now had words for. His understanding of Aspects was much greater now.

He felt more confident in advancing his skills now. In the last few years, he had taken three more skills, in preparation of advancing them his skills to tier 8. He was preparing, trying to shape his skills based on the Aspects within his Arsenal. It felt... right, somehow. Learning about more Aspects, and mastering the few, was something that he wanted to do. Knowledge was one of his guiding tenets.

Now armed with more knowledge, he felt confident that he could do better than what he had planned. He had raised the three skills to tier 6 in preparation of merging them with his other skills. **|Perfect Wind Control|** was the first, taken because it enhanced his perks and his Wind Aspect. His plan was to merge it with **|Perfect Greater Parry|**, perhaps allowing him to eventually parry attacks with wind around him alone. It was one of the things that he had noticed in his fights. He could survive a lot, but he wasn't a big defensive fighter. A bit more defense wouldn't hurt. And besides, it allowed him to fly more efficiently.

Next, he had taken **|Perfect Mind Palace|**, it had started as **|Mind Library|**, a Warden skill that he learned from a tome. After discussing it with the wardens, and deciding on what he wanted, it came on top as the best option for what he wanted to

achieve. It would be merged with **|Perfect Mind Training Analysis|**. Hopefully it would allow him to store and train repeatedly with the targets of his analysis.

Next was the pair for **|Perfect Field of Frozen Time|** which had given him some trouble. So far he used it as a ranged crowd control skill. To block areas and attacks, to slow down people or outright freeze them in place if possible. It was a good skill that he didn't particularly want to change too much. Toward that goal he had decided to go with **|Perfect Aim|**. Something simple, which would make his use of that skill more precise.

And last skill he had decided to evolve was his **|Perfect Tireless Body: My Body, Under My Will|**. Right now it prevented him from getting tired, and he could run on willpower alone. His other three skills had each been flavored by one of his Aspects, Wind, Mind, Time. He was hoping to get Ethereal and Soul in his skills soon. So, one of the reasons for his visit here was to see if he could find something that would fit him. His idea was to somehow tie his body to Soul, though he didn't have an exact idea as to how to do it yet. His talk with Valthua had already given him some ideas, but he wished to learn more.

Ryun arrived, interrupting his thoughts.

"You two ready?" He asked.

Zach nodded, and Naha stepped out of Zach's shadow to answer. Ryun had received a report about a missing patrol on the border of his Sect, and sightings of a powerful monster. He and Anatalien were leaving to check on it, and he had asked Zach to come along.

It seemed like a good opportunity for him to practice his skills and perhaps evolve and merge them.

The three of them boarded an airship and met Anatalien in the sky. Zach cast a look at the city. Bera and Okim would keep an eye on Hiro as he spent his time learning his new Path. Hopefully he learned what the sects had to offer. Time was growing short, one dome was opened, and the next was not that far away.