

The Fall 234

Chapter 234: Square Up

There was an unmistakable aura of the suffocating darkness permeating the cracked ends of the chains which gave some hints about whatever was once trapped in the middle of the square. Zac could only guess that the inscriptions on the obelisk were meant to keep it suppressed, but that obviously didn't work out in the end.

He couldn't tell whether the prisoner was able to destroy the obelisk, or whether the obelisk cracked for some other reason, which allowed the captive to escape. But then again it didn't really matter. What mattered was how long ago the prisoner escaped.

If it was something that happened thousands of years ago, then it was fine. But if it was something that was set in motion the moment the trial started he might be in grave danger. It was a real possibility that whatever was once held here might be the source of the darkness, and perhaps even the thing that released the harrowing wail during the attacks.

Another possibility was that the thing captured here had gotten thoroughly corrupted by the darkness, which gave it enough power to escape from its shackles. Then it might mean that it had gone crazed the same way as the cultivators who got possessed, and was currently roaming the chasm.

In either case, it was bad news for Zac. Something this powerful wasn't something he could contend with even if he got back to perfect health. He once again internally swore at Inevitability for making him lose his token, putting him in this dire situation.

Still, he didn't want to give in to despair just yet. Even if the source of the darkness was once imprisoned here it didn't make sense for it to stay on after it made its escape. He slowly made his way toward the square, maintaining an extreme vigil all the while.

There was an unmistakable aura of power still radiating from the towering obelisk even if there was a large crack that destroyed a good amount of the fractals. The obelisk might even protect from the Darkness if it Descended once again, making this one of the safer places around.

Before he stepped onto the square he carefully looked down at the stones to see if there was anything out of place. Perhaps there were other arrays active at a place like this that might spell trouble for him in the end. But when he looked down he saw that there were extremely intricate inscriptions on all the small cobblestones. However, each and every stone had a crack running over it, ruining the fractals that covered them.

Zac was actually slightly relieved to see that the fractals were ruined since it lessened the risk of him getting trapped inside whatever this square originally did. But before he stepped on to the square he took one last hesitant look back.

If he was to turn back, then this was the time. It was getting late by now, but if he pushed himself he might make it back to the spot where he first fell down into the chasm before darkness could descend. But the problem was that he didn't have any idea what to do after that.

The chasms ran across the whole mountain range, and he'd seen many that passed over ten mountains. There was no guarantee that there would be any exit waiting for him if he went the other way, but only more dark passageways.

So it was with grim determination he placed his right foot upon the square, leaving the natural stone floor of the chasm. When he stepped on the cobblestone he immediately felt a suffocating pressure, almost bringing him down to his knees.

The pressure didn't only bear down on his body, but also his very being. It was a mental suppression as well, making his mind feel muddled and his thoughts scattered. However, Zac growled and kept going, activating his Dao of Heaviness to counteract the suppression around him somewhat.

But after just two more steps he realized that the pressure had multiplied, and with a few more meters and he would reach the limits of what he could bear. It seemed that the suppression got stronger the closer to the center of the square he was, and even if he activated [Hatchetman's Rage] he wouldn't even get close to the obelisk before succumbing to the pressure.

He quickly backed away right to the edge of the square once again, the broken ribs screaming in protest from being subjected to this added pressure. It felt like someone was digging around his side with a hot poker, and if Zac wasn't already deathly pale in his undead form he would have definitely paled from the pain.

The weight came from an array that was essentially broken, with both the cobblestones and the obelisk ruined beyond repair. Zac's attributes were already higher than most people at early E-Grade, but he only managed to take a few steps in this prison.

Just how strong was the thing that once was trapped here in these chains, to not only survive but even break out?

It was as though the Obelisk was the source of a local gravity zone, and the closer he was the worse it would get. This relative heaviness gave Zac an idea for his Dao Seed, but now wasn't the time to ponder on it any further. He needed to leave the square and find safety before night fell.

At least it wasn't all bad news. After having walked a few steps along the edge of the square something that was once hidden behind the obelisk came into view. It was a doorway, and he was hoping that it would take him up toward the ground.

Since something had been trapped down here Zac figured there would be guards, and they needed a way to access this place from the surface. The door might give him access to the path that would let him leave.

Since he couldn't simply cross the square he needed to tread along the edges which barely allowed him to pass through. Still, after only fifty meters sweat was streaming down his face from the strain, and every wound on his body had reopened.

But he couldn't rush out of the array either since every step was a struggle. In the end, he was submerged in the intense pressure for half an hour before he pushed open the doors on the opposite side of the square with great relief.

The insides were actually lit up by crystals in the wall, showing that the inscriptions that kept this place running were still operational. There was no way that the crystals would last for thousands of years by themselves, meaning there was a gathering array supplying the place with energy.

Other than that it was completely empty, just a long hallway that seemed to stretch into eternity. Zac hesitated a bit, but eventually he decided to hold off on heading down the hallway. Now that he had found a secluded spot that seemed pretty safe he sat down and closed his eyes, though still gripping his axe just in case.

The main reason he dared to relax like this was that the moment he entered this hidden pathway the ominous aura from the darkness was completely gone. It was unlikely that any of the ghastly specters had ever walked these halls.

He couldn't be completely sure, but he felt that he would be safe in here even if darkness descended once again. But then again he didn't have a lot of options apart from staying here during the night. With the intense aura that the cracks out in in the canyon emitted he didn't dare stay there during the night.

But the reason he stopped before exploring any further was that he had found a great clue from the suppressive formations outside to upgrade his Dao, and he didn't want to waste any time in going over it. It actually felt extremely clear in his mind, perhaps since he had been steeped in the suppression.

He was imagining heaviness as it worked with a gravity source, such as a sun or a black hole. The heaviness came from a source, and the closer one came the more the pressure increased. This wasn't really something that was possible to encounter normally on earth, but the arrays outside had created that very phenomenon outside.

He imagined himself a black hole, and the closer one came the heavier the pressure of his aura would be, to the point of crushing everything that got too close. Upgrading his Dao came with surprising ease, bringing his Dao of Heaviness to High grade, just like his Dao of Trees. It was a great relief because this was something that had troubled him since he got here.

He'd been caught in four very intense fights and many minor scuffles since he had arrived here. The battles against Salvation and Inevitability were particularly taxing. Yet he hadn't gained barely any insight into his Dao seeds since he had arrived. It was as though this place somehow blocked the Dao from him, preventing him from progressing further. But the immense arrays on the square had finally allowed him to push through.

He was also happy to see that this particular upgrade only gave him strength.

Heaviness (High): Strength +45, Endurance +10, Wisdom +5

He was already planning on putting points into Strength to boost his fighting prowess and this was a great step in the right direction. He only wished there were some enemies down here as well so that he could finish grinding his two Class Quests as well. He was pretty sure that at least one of them would give him a new vision, adding to his steadily growing Dao Repertoire.

The whole process had taken him roughly two hours, and since he was finally done with everything he got to his feet with a grunt. Staying still for this long also helped his body recuperate from both the wounds and passing the square, and he felt a lot better by now.

Zac started to head down the endless hallway, already wishing that Thea was there to use her scouting abilities to find any hidden dangers. Since he was back on his own he could only rely on his default method, brute force.

He held [Verun's Bite] in a firm grip as he kept a brisk pace, eyeing the vicinity for anything that might be out of place. But the hallway was created with expert craftsmanship with clean surfaces floor to ceiling, and the illuminating crystals were placed with exactly measured distances from each other.

But after pushing forward for thirty minutes he knew something was amiss. There was no reason to build such an insanely long hallway, as it would probably be both easier and cheaper to place down two low-grade teleportation arrays for transportation.

He took out a high-quality dagger he'd looted the past days and carved a '1' under the next illuminating crystal he encountered. From there on he kept increasing the count by one as he carved a number under each and every stone he passed.

Suddenly when he was about to carve the 82nd marker he saw that the spot was already occupied by the very same '1' that he first carved. Zac sighed and sat down.

It was as he thought, he was inside some sort of array that tricked his mind somehow. It either made him walk in circles without noticing, or it somehow connected two spaces so that when he walked past the 81st mark he arrived back at the start.

However, he had no idea where the start and the end were. He just marked down number 1 when he started counting, but it might just as well be the middle of the hallway. But at least he knew the length of the hallway by now, and it wasn't actually that long, just a couple hundred meters.

He walked the full length three times over, trying to discern any way to get out by any means possible. He used [Inquisitive Eyes] as well, but nothing happened. Next, he tried to sense any disturbances in the cosmic energy in the air, but it gave no clue either.

Finally, he sat down and took out the formation crystal that was the first thing he found inside this hunt. He had been extremely busy over the past two weeks hunting and fighting, but he finally had time to go over it.

He browsed through the contents page by page, arduously going over each and every detail. A vast majority of the information was above his understanding at the moment, but he was quickly getting a deeper understanding of formations.

Thus far he had only used arrays provided by the system, and they even came with guidance systems that helped him set it up. But this crystal was meant to teach him about the foundations and the basic workings of the knowledge of formations.

Zac didn't even understand the difference between an array and a formation in the beginning, but he soon realized the difference. Arrays were just man-made formations, creating various types of effects with array flags or array disks. All the arrays he had encountered so far were these types of formations.

But formations didn't necessarily need to be created by placing down an array. They could naturally form in nature, and the most powerful formations in the multiverse had naturally formed over billions of years, almost like a solar system.

There was one passage in the beginning that Zac found particularly interesting, and it was imprinted by a grand elder of the Eastern Trigam Sect, someone who was a pure Array Master.