

The Fall 247

Chapter 247: Heart of Oblivion

A slow but steady heartbeat echoed out into the void, each thump vibrating with the primordial Dao. For untold ages the [Heart of Oblivion] grew, its tendrils reaching further and further. But suddenly its sanctuary was encroached upon.

His eyes were the stars and his hand was the sky, and when he moved the Dao shied away. He gripped the heart and clenched with enough force to tear the fabric of reality to shreds. The shockwaves shattered the black hole that the heart hid inside, the explosion destroying innumerable planets.

Unwillingness. Desperation. Hatred. The heart shattered, its remnants fleeing to all corners of the myriad planes. One day it would return.

A tower reached toward the stars, thrumming with dark powers. It was completely black and charred, as though it had been struck by an endless number of lightning bolts, and millions upon millions of bodies hung from varying weapons that had been slammed into its rough exteriors. Darkness slowly swirled around it, a testament to the owner within.

Thousands of warriors desperately fought against a tide of frenzied and putrefied beasts, the wide plains they stood on already covered with the fallen. In the background a towering roc stood perched on a hill, its eyes radiating boundless darkness.

The ghost slumbered deep within the earth, only occasionally waking up in a bout of frenzied mania to wreak havoc upon its former home. A wail containing its self-hatred and desperation couldn't help escaping its incorporeal maw before the darkness once again shrouded its mind.

The young beggar could only look up at the floating palaces in the sky and dream of a better life. But fate had abandoned him, straddling him with a weak body unable to cultivate. He was trash, forever relegated to the lowest rungs of society. But a whispering beckon called to him, and he crawled deeper and deeper into the sewers until he found the pitch-black gemstone that would change his fate.

The scenes kept changing in a dizzying array, and Zac had almost lost all sense of reasoning by now. But one thing in the scenes was constant; the Darkness. Each vision only lasted for a few seconds, but what he had seen was enough to scar him for a lifetime.

Luckily many of the visions were not as bad as the ones filled with unrelenting carnage. Most of the visions were of hidden pockets of the multiverse, where the splinters of darkness drifted about unchecked and unencumbered. The visions kept sweeping him away, but suddenly they stopped as he found himself in front of a woman sitting in a lotus position in a vast cave.

Her skin was as white as death and she wore robes that were completely black apart from the occasional silver details. While her features were unblemished and perfect it was impossible to feel a sense of beauty, and Zac rather only got a feeling of desolation and death from her.

An ocean of miasma slowly swirled around her, its density thick enough to turn the energy into a liquid. Suddenly the woman opened her eyes, and Zac found himself staring into two pitch-black orbs of the abyss.

“Child of Draug, you have stepped on the path of Oblivion?” she sighed as she looked down at her hands. “Is it fate?”

The flurry of visions had stopped, but Zac still had no idea what was going on. Was he teleported, or was this all an illusion? He desperately tried to utilize any method he had learned during his entrapment in the corridor, but there were no clues on how to get out.

The feeling was the same as when he had his Dao visions and the fact that the woman in front of him spoke to him just like the guards indicated this all might be real. His real body was likely still back in the cavern, and god knows what was going on.

Zac was desperate since he knew just how bad the situation was. His real body might currently be exposed to the corruption of the Core of Darkness, and at such proximity, his miasma would soon be drained from the consumption to keep himself safe.

He had a strong feeling his core wouldn't be able to help him out in this type of situation. Either the specters or the mysterious crystal itself would take possession of his body long before the process could finish.

“How curious, I do not recognize your lineage,” she muttered, showing a slight change in her expression for the first time. “Karma ties us, we will meet again. But it is time for you to return.”

A crystalline hand pointed toward him, and suddenly a storm of miasma was ripped out from the ocean around them and crammed into his mind. It felt like his soul would rip to pieces until it was suddenly stabilized by some unknown force.

The next moment enough miasma to explode him a thousand times over were crammed into [Indomitable] and it felt like his mind had truly become unassailable. The vision shattered around him, and the last thing he saw were those two familiar pitch-black eyes.

The next moment he found himself standing in the cavern, and to his shock, he was holding the Core of Darkness, or rather the splinter from the [Heart of Oblivion] in his bare hands against his forehead. He quickly tried to throw the thing into his Cosmos Sack, but it was too late as it suddenly disappeared with a shockwave. Unfortunately, that wasn't the end of it as he suddenly found an alien presence in his head.

The black crystal had rushed right through the defenses of [Indomitable] and entered his mind, and he simply had no means of removing it. Zac was dismayed by these developments, but he had even more immediate concerns. The moment the splinter entered his mind its restrictive effect on the specters was gone.

A cacophony of wails echoed through the chambers as the specters assaulted him with enough wrath to make it seem like Zac had killed all their ancestors. He found himself in the middle of storms of rabid ghosts who completely ignored their wounds as they tried to rip him into shreds. Zac quickly oriented himself and immediately rushed toward the exit at the other end of the cavern.

Wounds were quickly accumulating on his body, and the golden robe of the Medhin Royal was completely drenched black before he had even run a third of the way. At least he was gaining a huge

amount of energy from the continuous kills since the ghosts were even angry enough to attack his Dao-empowered fractal shield.

Suddenly it was as though his whole body thumped from a heartbeat, though not his own, and he couldn't stop himself from falling over from the shock to his system. He quickly looked inward at the splinter, only to see that it had changed, and hundreds of tendrils were growing out, reaching toward his pathways from his mind.

Panic filled Zac's heart, since between the ghosts that inhabited this mountain and the hundreds of visions he was shown he knew only too well the fate that awaited those who were corrupted by the [Heart of Oblivion].

He desperately erected as many defenses as he possibly could with [Indomitable] but the black tendrils effortlessly crushed them, and Zac groaned since every defeat felt like his soul was ripped in two. But suddenly a shocking change appeared in his mind.

Archaic fractals wrought out of pure miasma appeared, forming a defense that was infinitely stronger than the one he erected himself. He was completely befuddled for a second, but his mind quickly turned to the mysterious woman in the vision.

Judging from her appearance she should be a Draugr just like him, which might be why she helped him. She also seemed to understand what was going on far better than himself, and it felt like he only kept finding more and more questions as he trudged along.

It seemed he needed to look into the heritage of his current form as soon as possible, and how he could even become a Draugr at all. His cosmos sack back home was filled by notes from Mhal, and Zac felt that it would be a good place to start looking.

But now was no time for that. The mysterious miasmic fractals had stopped the advance of the black tendrils, at least for the time being. The runes had even created something like a separate dimension that contained the splinter away from his mind and his pathways. But they hadn't stopped the unceasing onslaught of the ghosts. Zac forced himself up to his feet and heedlessly pushed toward the tunnels.

He already used [Verun's Bite] to destroy the specters in front, but the wounds were just accumulating too quickly. His vision started to get blurry as he stumbled and almost ran straight into one of the pillars.

A new presence suddenly entered his mind, and his bleary eyes couldn't help but turn toward his axe. It was his tool spirit that had finally awakened from its slumber. Apart from the initial communication after the evolution, it had been in hibernation the whole time.

The only time it showed any reaction had been when he killed E-Grade beasts, at which point some of its blood got absorbed into the crimson fractal on the handle. When he first upgraded the axe it had been a shimmering crimson, but the color had soon dimmed to a weak and watered down red shade.

However, with every kill the intensity of the colors had increased, like killing E-grade beasts were charging up the fractal. By the time he reached this cavern it was already shimmering in a crimson red once again. Zac didn't know how to communicate back, so he simply spoke aloud hoping that the beast could hear him.

"I need help, buddy," Zac said with a raspy voice.

Warmth filled his heart as a roar responded in his mind, and the next moment the huge beast materialized. Another roar echoed through the cavern, and Zac suddenly got a huge surge of energy as Verun ripped dozens of ghosts to shreds with a swipe of its claws.

Pained and even scared wails echoed through the cave as the Tool Spirit almost became unhinged in his goal to destroy everything around Zac. Pillars shattered and were broken from its rampage, and Zac quickly snatched those that he could as he resumed his flight toward the tunnel.

Even though Verun had lessened his burden by a large degree he still was extremely wounded, and the Tool Spirit couldn't block all of the thousands of ghosts. Many still managed to pass it and attacked Zac with suicidal fervor.

Zac popped his strongest healing pills as he fled, and he barely managed to reach the edge of the cavern when suddenly a terrifying sense of danger blared to life in his mind. Zac unhesitantly hunkered down behind his bulwark as he pushed as much energy as he could into [Indomitable].

The next moment an extremely piercing wail echoed through the cave, drowning out all the calls of the smaller specters. Even with his newly acquired defenses it felt like Zac was hit in the head with the sledgehammer, and he couldn't stop himself from blanking out.

Luckily the wail had also stopped the ghosts in their tracks, and they all ignored him to instead turn toward a huge figure that had appeared sometime in the cavern. A roar echoed straight back, and Verun unhesitantly pounced on the new threat.

The indistinct figure only pointed at the tool spirit, and the next moment a deluge of darkness flooded out toward it, drowning the spectral form of the primordial beast. Zac's eyes opened in alarm, but he soon breathed out in relief as he saw a stream of light break out and enter his axe once again.

The tool spirit had been forced to flee, and Zac truly felt it was the best course of action as he started running the last few meters toward the cavern. But his surroundings were suddenly blanketed in darkness, and the next moment the form blocked the exit in front of him.

Despair filled Zac's heart since he already knew this thing was the leader of the ghosts, the very source of the wails that had shocked his mind the first time the darkness descended. He also sensed that this being was far beyond his power, being peak E grade at the minimum.

He knew that there was no way to beat this thing, but he refused to give up without a fight. So he readied himself for his final battle with a grim demeanor, but that specter suddenly started to shrink and transform. In just a second the faceless shape of the huge specter had changed, and in front of him stood a man in a black cultivator's robe.

He was mostly humanoid, apart from the same type of third eye as Anzonil. He had a handsome face and he gave off a heroic disposition. But his eyes betrayed desolation, and Zac felt like he looked at someone who had lost all hope.

Zac knew that the man in front of him wasn't alive, at least not in the same sense as himself. Even if the thing in front of him had taken a humanoid form it was still mostly translucent. It was mostly wrought

from the energy from the [Heart of Oblivion], but it seemed to be clashing with some force within that shone with a silver luster.

“You... Fool....” the spectral cultivator stiltedly said with a sigh after throwing a glance at the empty center of the cavern. “Tell.... Master.... Sorry....”