

The Fall 279

Chapter 279: Proving One's Worth

"The Lord of Cycles," Zac said with resolve in his eyes.

This was the final decision that Zac had arrived at after weeks of deliberation. He did consider taking Undying Fiend in hopes it was a Defensive Inheritance that might contain a Spirit Tool shield. But in the end, he chose the one that seemed to fit best overall with his current skillset.

Zac didn't know exactly what to expect from such an inheritance, but there might be various things that might increase the synergy between his two classes. The best would be to find a way to use both his classes at the same time. If he managed that he'd be almost invincible.

"Oh, Lord of Cycles? Interesting. It's the first of the two C-Grade inheritances as well, well chosen," Brazla said with a nod.

"Which is the other one?" Zac quickly asked when he saw the Tool Spirit was in a sharing mood.

"I don't want to tell. Build something nice for me and I might become more accommodating," Brazla snorted. "Now, enter the portals. I won't assist you at all while you undertake the trial, and there is no exit. Final chance to change your mind."

As he spoke two fractals lit up in front of two of the huge statues that lined the hall. One of them was a humanoid whose features were hidden in a large cowl, each of his hands gripping a dagger. It was pretty clear it was the creator of the Umbra inheritance, and the demon immediately walked over.

The other statue that lit up was of a man or woman that looked human. The face was completely androgynous so he couldn't tell its gender at all, but since he was called a Lord, Zac guessed he was male. He wore a loose robe and held his two hands together forming a circle in front of his chest, and behind him was a large disk split in the middle.

As Zac walked over he tried to understand what type of class this person had, but he truly couldn't tell. The disk might work as a weapon, but Zac rather leaned toward this person being some sort of magic user, which might not be what he needed. The odd circle behind was split into two, one side looking like flames, while the other was ice.

He even hesitated for a second, considering whether he should switch over to The Undying Fiend even though its grade of inheritance likely was worse. He had a feeling that the last C-Grade inheritance was the Crown of Despair, likely personified by the statue of the woman holding her head in her hands, but that one was likely an even worse fit for him.

But his eyes once again turned to the circle of fire and ice behind the Lord of Circles. It was this duality that made Zac believe that the Lord of Cycles tried to do something similar to himself; merge two opposing elements.

For better or worse Zac had already started walking the path of life and death. One of his classes veered toward nature, and the other side was an undead warrior turning the area around himself into a projection of the underworld.

He was hoping that the Lord of Cycles Inheritance could help him create a coherent system of his two opposing sides, and create something greater than the sum of its parts. Granted, each side of his two identities had its strong points, but there was currently no synergy between them apart from the extra attribute points.

He wanted to find a path that made sure both his classes were pushing toward the same goal, even though they were the opposites of each other. He had a feeling that something amazing would be created if he was able to fuse his two sides in the future, and this was the step to attain that.

Since he had already made his decision he resolutely stepped inside his own portal. The next moment he found himself in front of a huge metal plaque in an otherwise empty field, and he quickly took out his axe as he looked around for any threats.

But no matter where he looked he only saw a hazy mist, and his senses didn't warn him of any hidden dangers lurking about. So Zac put away [Verun's Bite] again as he looked at the large slab of metal in front of him. It was completely smooth and rectangular, apart from a large engraving in the middle.

The engraving was not a large fractal, but rather a circular pattern containing inscriptions of smaller fractals. There was an outer circle containing at least one hundred fractals, and there were multiple rings inside. For every concentric circle inside there were fewer and fewer fractals until it reached the center.

The innermost part was just a dot, and the row outside consisted of just two crudely drawn fractals. Zac was confused about why they had such shoddy workmanship compared to the others, but he barely had time to look at them before a familiar feeling entered his mind.

The splinter of oblivion became restless the moment he looked at one of the two fractals, and its tendrils started to furiously pound the miasmic runes that had locked it away. Zac quickly closed his eyes until the splinter calmed down. Luckily it seemed that the prison in his mind still held strong.

But the eruption was an uncomfortable reminder that he hadn't gotten any closer to figuring out what to do about the alien object in his head. However, now was not the time, so he once again refocused on the patterns on the monument, though he avoided looking at the innermost part.

"Creation and oblivion," Zac suddenly muttered with understanding.

The circle in front of him was a Dao Chart following the same system that Anzonil mentioned. The center was the origin of Dao, the Primordial Chaos. From that came Creation and Oblivion, and the splinter in his mind reacted to the crude fractal in the center of the chart.

That would explain why the details of the fractals got increasingly crude the further in they were placed on the chart in front of him. Creation and Oblivion were the top two Daos of the multi-verse, and even if the Lord of Cycles was a great C-Grade powerhouse he likely was far from grasping such esoteric knowledge.

Those Daos were likely reserved for the top tier powerhouses of the multiverse, those who stood at the apex of whole planes.

"As night begets day, so does oblivion beget creation," a voice suddenly echoed across the field. "The cycle restricts and empowers. Prove your duality."

Zac quickly looked around for the source of the voice, but no matter which direction he looked there was nothing. The source of the gentle voice was nowhere to be seen, and he was still alone in the mists with the metal plaque in front of him.

However, he wasn't worried, but rather elated. The voice had essentially confirmed that the Lord of Cycles walked the same path as himself. The problem was how he would go about to prove his own cycle, that of life and death. Did he need to first force some Dao of Trees into the inscription, then kill himself to infuse miasma next? It seemed extremely cumbersome.

Besides, did he need to know which fractal to infuse? All of them were completely inert, and it looked like someone had simply carved the fractals into the metal without empowering them with any Dao or other energies.

Zac chose to simply touch the monument in the end, and he quickly saw that he was on the right track. A deep hum erupted from the monument, and an invisible wave pushed out from it, trying to enter Zac's body.

The second that the wave came in contact with him the bracer on his arm became scorching hot, and the invading force was immediately rebuffed. Nothing happened for a while and Zac moved his hand away.

He hesitated for a bit, but he finally chose to remove the bracer that Greatest had given him before he once again touched the monument. He didn't love the idea of exposing his secrets like this, but he was inside a closed-off inheritance of a long-dead powerhouse. No one could spread his secrets from here, at least not as long as he was alive.

The wave entered his body one more time after he activated the monument, and he felt something was digging around and inspecting his whole body. The wave had turned into tendrils that poked and prodded him all over. The tendrils quickly honed in on the Duplicity core, but they also went over to the three Dao fractals in his body. 3

Even the one that was in his heart was found somehow, even though it belonged to his other class. The hidden compartment in his heart had simply appeared after the mysterious energies prodded around inside, and it was a huge clue as Zac saw it. If the Dao Fractal could be made to appear like this while he was in his human form, what about his other skills? Perhaps even his pathways?

Zac's heartbeat sped up in anticipation, and he truly hoped that the spirit of the Lord of Cycles would be as accommodating to provide information as Anzonil was. Perhaps he would be even more helpful since Zac would essentially become his in-name disciple if he passed the trials.

The moment the Dao fractal touched the tree he got from seeing the Lifegiver vision one of the fractals on one of the outermost rows lit up, emitting a strong aura of vitality. It represented one of his main paths, the one of moving toward the Dao of Creation. Of course, he was still only on the periphery with his basic Dao.

At the same time, he saw that a Dao on the opposite side lit up, but its light was far weaker. When he sensed the fractal it felt like he was prodding a dead carcass or something rotten, and after a second Zac felt that fractal might have lit up due to the nature of his Dao Seed of Trees. His major insights into that were centered around life through death, and it was what connected his Dao to his Draugr side.

To his surprise, he also noticed that the Dao of Hardness slightly lit up a rune at the rim, and it gave a sense of stability like he was looking up at a mountain. However, the Daos of Sharpness, Heaviness, and Sanctuary did nothing it seemed. After the inspection had looked at those Daos they moved on, completely disinterested.

The next moment two more fractals lit up, and both were pretty close to the core of the rings. In fact, they were only two layers outside the Daos of Creation and Oblivion. Better yet, they were almost exactly the opposites of each other, meaning they would hopefully allow him to pass this inspection with flying colors. After just a glance he knew they represented life and death, and they were the results of the two energies his Duplicity core contained.

They were by far the best combination, but he didn't know if the inheritance would accept it since the two energies were simply the representation of his two races and classes. They were not really a result of his Daos, and Zac felt the Dao was the core of this test.

Finally, the tendrils reached his head and they even found the miasmic prison for the splinter. The crude fractal in the middle resonated for a fraction of a second in response, but it immediately grew dim again, leaving the other five fractals in various states of illumination.

As soon as the inspection hit upon the runic prison in his mind they immediately dissipated, and afterward they stayed clear of the area. Zac wasn't too surprised since the prison was created by the mysterious Draugr woman. He couldn't be sure, but he had a feeling she was one of the powerhouses of the Draugr-race, and likely more powerful than the Lord of Cycles.

The monument kept checking his body for a bit until the inspection ended, leaving Zac feeling slightly violated. It was like he had been stripped naked and every nook and cranny had been inspected. Keeping one's cards close to the chest had been ingrained into him since the integration, and this was the complete opposite of that.

But at least it was over, and Zac looked around to see what would happen next.

"Understanding the self is understanding the Cosmos," the same voice suddenly echoed out, as the two fractals that Zac believed represented life and death lit up with far more power compared to before, while the other three fractals dimmed down.

The next moment the monument started to vibrate, and it looked like it was melting as it bent and twisted. All the fractals were quickly smoothed over, leaving only the two illuminated inscriptions.

The two fractals kept growing larger and larger as the monument turned into a large hovering metallic ball that started to pulsate with the powers of life and death. Soon the two fractals had grown to over a meter in size as they moved next to each other on the sphere. Both of them radiated the power of life and death, two extremely profound concepts that Zac had only glimpsed before.

As Zac sensed the great Dao energies that coursed through the inscriptions he started to believe that this might be the first gift of the inheritance. Unfortunately, there wasn't much he could do with the Dao of Death since he had no matching Daos, but he might be able to glean some insight from the fractal representing life. That, in turn, might be the key to pushing the Dao Seed of Trees to Peak mastery.

But just as he was about to sit down to ponder on the secrets of the Dao of Life his mind suddenly screamed of danger.