

## The Fall 280

### Chapter 280: Fight Fire with Fire

Zac's mind was screaming at him to get away, and he had learned to not question his danger sense by now. He unhesitantly pushed backward with the help of [Loamwalker] only to see a spurt of liquid metal from the sphere lash out at him like a whip.

The air cracked as the line of darkness ripped through it, and Zac sensed a horrifying finality contained inside it. He wasn't simply being attacked by some liquid metal like when he fought Salvation. He was being attacked by death.

Luckily he had reacted in time and was able to quickly create enough distance from the ball, allowing him to understand what was going on. The sphere made out of the metallic plaque had started to transform, not only in shape but also in composition.

It looked like the inert nature of the former monument was changing as it started to teem with both exuberant life force and desolate death. One half of it was gaining a golden sheen as the other half turned pitch-black.

It reminded Zac of his Duplicity core as it shared similar characteristics, with the difference that the sphere in front of him lacked the intricate inscriptions on the surface of his core. Another pretty obvious difference was that the ball in front of him was over five meters in diameter.

The sudden attack that had come at him had stemmed from a part of the death-attuned part of the sphere and had felt like a tentacle of death. But the whip was long gone, having returned to the main form, which now seethed with chaotic powers.

Zac had already taken out his axe and summoned a fractal edge. He still wasn't sure what was going on, but the thing had already attacked him, so he wouldn't just stand around. That ball contained extremely dangerous Daos, and he couldn't let it act as it pleased. He felt it was best to destroy it first, then ask questions.

He imbued the fractal edge with the Dao of Sharpness, and with a grunt unleashed it straight at the sphere so that he could destroy it before it managed to undergo whatever transformation it had in store. However, the moment the edge was about to slam into the floating ball the golden side flashed, and a protective glow spread to cover the whole thing.

Luckily the ball didn't retaliate, but instead it kept changing form at an extremely rapid pace. It looked like it consisted of two different colored shapes of clay that were pushed together, and currently some unseen hands were twisting and reshaping the ball.

The object elongated again into an oblong shape. It almost had the form of an enormous matryoshka doll, apart from being slightly more rectangular and having two arms. One arm was mostly golden with some black veins running through it, but instead of a hand it just had a large circle that reminded Zac of the object that was behind the statue depicting Lord of Cycles.

The other arm was mostly black and was the only part of the construct that still looked mostly liquid. It was this arm that had attacked him before it had properly formed, and it still radiated a terrifying aura. He truly didn't want to know what would happen if that thing hit him, but it felt extremely dangerous.

One thing that differed from both his Duplicity core and the sphere from before was the main part of its body. It didn't simply have one side that was golden and another side that was black, but it had created an intricate mesh of the two colors, where neither side dominated the other.

Zac couldn't be sure, but he felt that the pattern that had been formed on its body was an enormous clue that could help him immensely if he only had proper time to study it. It was as though it represented the fusion of life and death. But unfortunately, he was in no position to ponder on the mysteries hidden in the body of the enormous doll. It floated toward him at a steady pace, and black motes of light started to rotate around the arm of death.

The moment it got within twenty meters of Zac the arm once again lashed out, and Zac was forced to reposition himself again. The attack wasn't impossibly fast, but he didn't dare to intercept it until he had a better understanding of what the effect of the arm was.

Perhaps his Draugr form would be immune to the Death-attributed arm, but he had no way to swap mid-battle. He would have to fight the thing as-is. Zac quickly used [Inquisitive Eye], and to his surprise it actually worked even though the information was a bit sparse.

[Life-Death Construct – Dao Vessel. Level 83]

The good news was that the thing was only level 83. The bad news was that it was clearly much stronger than some random early E-grade beast. Even worse, it possessed two very strong Daos. He wasn't sure how it worked with these particular Daos, but he suspected they were like the Dao of Time and Space - advanced Daos that had no basic seeds to attain. They were much too strong to gain as an F-Grade cultivator.

That meant that the power they imbued was also far stronger than one should encounter at this stage in cultivation. He had a feeling that he truly had been boned by this combination, and it reminded him of the desperate fight with Inevitability. Life and Death were truly the most appropriate paths to fuse of the fractals that lit up, but they were far more dangerous than any others as well.

It would have been more reasonable for him to encounter a construct that consisted of the Dao of Trees and the Dao of Rot, or whatever that murky fractal represented. It would still have been a challenge, though not as bad as this one.

But since Zac knew its level he also felt more confident. If it came down to it he should be able to brute-force the thing. The only thing that was holding him back from summoning the giant hand of [Nature's Punishment] and smashing the construct to bits was that he wasn't sure if there was something else to this test than just destroying the construct.

He didn't want to slip up and ruin his inheritance, so before he went the usual route he decided to test the thing out for a bit, and perhaps glean any insights from the intricate pattern on its chest. Zac kept his distance from the large construct by occasionally flashing away with his movement skill as he peppered the thing with fractal edges.

The construct had multiple ways of handling the attacks. Sometimes the golden circle on its left arm lit up and formed a shield that blocked out the attack. However, after seeing the shield a few times he realized that it wasn't a traditional mage's bubble or array defense.

The golden layer was pure life-attuned energy, and it didn't block the attacks as much as it somehow swallowed them. The attacks entered the golden shield, making it flicker a bit, but nothing exited at the other side.

Zac couldn't quite grasp what type of concept it utilized to neutralize his attacks. If it just used the Dao of Life to heal itself after getting hurt he could have understood it, but this was something else entirely.

Suddenly he sensed some danger again, and he started to reposition himself as he kept his eyes on the tentacle of death. But to his surprise it wasn't the death-attuned side that attacked him, but rather the golden arm. A bright light lit up in the middle of the golden circle at the end of the arm, and the next moment an energy ball shot straight at Zac.

Zac's brows rose in alarm as he quickly flashed away, but it didn't help one bit as the energy attack followed him like a bloodhound. It was also much faster than Zac was, even when utilizing [Loamwalker], so in the end he was forced to stop and erect his defenses.

Shimmering leaves whirled around him, each imbued with the Dao of Trees, as he took a defensive posture where he imbued his body with the Dao of Hardness. The energy ball zoomed straight toward him, and the leaves moved to intercept.

But the moment the ball touched the first layer of defense the leaves lit up in a blazing emerald luster. Since Zac was the one who summoned it and imbued it with his Dao he could sense what was going on, and he couldn't make heads or tails out of it. The leaf wasn't getting damaged, it was getting empowered.

Unceasing and vast energies of life were flooding the leaves, and they shone brighter and brighter as they actually grew larger. But in just a second the effect drastically changed, as the lights dimmed and the leaves started to wilt.

The next moment it crumbled and the light passed straight through. Zac's brows rose in alarm since he had acutely sensed what happened. The ball of life had pushed too much lifeforce into the leaf, and even though they weren't real the ball had forced the leaves to go through their natural state of life in just a second.

Zac immediately gave up his defense and tried to flash away again, but it was to avail as the ball slammed into his back. The Dao of Hardness didn't help him in the slightest as it entered his body like a burning sun.

Zac's whole body turned red in an instant, veins popping out all over his body. It felt terribly similar to when he had been in the pond of Cosmic Water. Terrifying amounts of life tried to force themselves into his cells, overtaxing them and forcing them into death. It was the opposite of his own insights; this was death through life – an attack using the natural lifecycle.

Zac felt his lifeforce getting spent at an alarming rate to exhaust the energy ball, and he was out of ideas of how to deal with the alien force in his body. It was just too strong and vast, and it felt like his Daos were children trying to push away a grown adult when he tried to utilize them to isolate the attack.

But suddenly his Duplicity core woke up and started to frenziedly absorb the energies in his body. It looked like the life-attuned energy was getting sucked in by a black hole, and the ball fractured while its

energies were drawn inside. In just a moment the core had absorbed the whole attack, and it's golden half buzzed with energy.

Unfortunately, it was not all good news. There were limits to how much energy the Core could contain, at least in its current state, and the absorption of the pure Dao of Life had pushed it to its limits. Worse yet, the balance between the two sides had become lopsided due to the lack of death-attuned energy.

It felt like when the core had just been formed, and there was a massive lack of life-attuned energy inside. However, now there was nothing for the core to absorb, and Zac sensed that it was getting more and more out of control.

He didn't know what would happen if the core got damaged or cracked, but he didn't want to find out. At the very least it would cause massive damage, but it wasn't impossible it would deprive him of his second class. Or even kill him. He quickly took out one of his miasma crystals, but the rate of absorption was nowhere near what he needed.

The energy in the crystals was a lower grade compared to the real Dao of Life, and it was like he was trying to divert a river by throwing some gravel in the waters. Perhaps it would work after a while after he had absorbed enough crystals, but he sensed his core wouldn't be able to take it until then.

Out of options Zac grit his teeth and pushed straight toward the construct. It lifted its golden hand again, but Zac growled and launched a quick succession of Dao-empowered fractal blades at it, each aimed at the same spot.

Another golden shield erupted around the hand, but the force of a dozen blades was not something that even the construct could handle. The first handful of blades were cleanly absorbed by the shield, but at the 7th one, it flickered and disappeared. The next two attacks actually landed right on the golden arm, pushing it away and causing some dents to form.

But just a second later another golden shield was formed and started to absorb the remaining strikes. Luckily Zac had already accomplished his goal at this point, and he was closing in on the thing while its golden arm was occupied. The black tentacle launched straight at him with terrifying speed, just as he had expected. Even though his mind screamed of danger Zac chose to stand fast this time, allowing it to hit him square in his chest and throw him away.

Zac spat out a mouthful of blood and unsteadily got to his feet. His face was pale as a sheet as he sensed a horrible energy rampage through his body. It felt like his whole being was quickly withering away, but he forcibly ignored his decaying state, his all attention being on the Duplicity core.

He was already in desperate straights, and his only idea was to fight fire with fire.