

The Fall 281

Chapter 281: Life Versus Death

A wave of relief flooded Zac as he sensed that the Duplicity Core once again woke up and finally started to absorb the sinister energies that were coursing through his body. In just a second it had absorbed it all, but Zac's body was still left in a state of disrepair.

Between the two attacks his body felt beyond feeble, and he knew that he was running out of time. His core might have stabilized, but there was no way he would be able to absorb another set of those terrifying Dao-empowered strikes. Neither his body nor his core would be able to handle it.

He couldn't worry about whether there were any hidden components to this trial any longer, and he immediately started to charge up [Nature's Punishment] the moment that his core stabilized. It would take a few seconds, and the construct seemed to notice that something was up.

Extremely strong energies ripped through its body as it flashed forward with more than twice the speed compared to before, its black tentacle already hurtling toward him. Zac knew he had to stall for a bit longer, so he shot a fractal imbued with the Dao of Hardness at the tentacle as he backed away.

However, the fractal immediately withered and broke apart even though it was imbued to be more resilient and the attack kept moving toward him. When Zac saw what happened to the fractal he suddenly had an idea, and he imbued the next [Chop] with the Dao of Trees. The edge flew toward the arm of death, and as he hoped it didn't immediately break.

The two attacks clashed, neither gaining ground for a whole second. But soon enough the Dao of Death seemed to finally whittle down the Dao of trees, and the edge crumbled just like Zac's earlier attacks. The difference in efficacy between the two last attacks gave Zac a clue into the proper way to deal with this trial, but he also realized it wouldn't work for him.

Luckily the clash had bought enough time and the familiar wooden hand emerged out of a crack in space above him. It rippled with the Dao of Trees since Zac believed he would hopefully be able to restrain the death-attuned side of the construct that way. Besides, apart from slightly restraining the Dao of Death it also gave an all-round boost to the attack.

Zac wasted no time as he pushed the hand to slam straight down at the construct, and even though it erected a golden shield it still was slapped like a fly down into the ground. The attack didn't end there, as even though Zac's hand was burning from the golden shield he still forced it to continue its trajectory and slammed down into the downed construct with tremendous force.

The next moment the huge hand gripped the construct, though it barely managed to fit the whole thing in its hand. Zac used all his might to try to crush the golem in his hand, but the Life-Death Construct wasn't going down without a fight. Radiant flashes of both gold and black lit up the whole area, and the transmitted damage from the hand was almost enough for Zac to pass out.

The wooden hand was extremely resilient with the help of the Dao of Trees and its power was unparalleled to anything else he could throw at his enemies. However, both the Daos that the Construct possessed were extremely corrosive to the wooden hand. It was like a feedback loop was caused inside the hand where it was continuously pushed between life and death.

The pain was unbelievable, and Zac's eyes were completely bloodshot by this point, but he kept pressuring the construct with all his might. Creaking sounds of metal being torn and twisted could be heard until a wide shockwave containing concentrated Death erupted from the golem.

Luckily most of the attack was blocked and absorbed by the hand, but the sudden burst of death was too much and Zac was forced to release the attack. The hand was already disintegrating from the frantic retaliation of the construct and the speed of its dissolution rapidly sped up when Zac decided to relinquish control.

His final action before he let the hand go was to throw the distorted metal into the ground once more, causing another shockwave to spread. He hoped that the construct was already destroyed from how dismal it looked, but he wouldn't bet his life on it.

As he looked at the unmoving scrap of metal in the crater he saw that its composition had undergone one more change from Zac's massive assault. The pitch-black metal had turned ashen grey, and it looked completely devoid of energy. He had completely destroyed the death-attuned half with the combination of brute force and the Dao of Trees.

However, he still couldn't breathe easily. While the other half of the construct was twisted and deformed, it still shone with the same golden luster as before. Worse yet he could sense the Dao of Life inside it. Zac sighed in disappointment, but he readied himself for one more round.

Another hand was already emerging from a crack above him, even though such a rapid consumption of energy was pretty harmful to his body. This hand was imbued with the Dao of Heaviness though since it felt useless to fight against the Life-attuned half of the construct with a worse version of its own element.

The construct was slowly rising from the crater as it smoothed out its deformed shape. But luckily the grey area was still completely lifeless and showed no signs of regenerating. Zac felt empowered by the sight and roused the remaining energy in his body as he pushed the second hand straight at his enemy.

The wooden hand slammed into the construct like a falling meteor, the attack causing a far larger shockwave compared to the first punishment. The whole field that held the inheritance trail was cracking, making Zac wonder if the trial area would break apart from the battle.

Zac hesitantly looked at the crater to see whether his attack was effective, but some panic erupted when he sensed the familiar deluge of vitality flooding the wooden hand. The next moment an almost blinding golden glow erupted from beneath the hand, almost completely swallowing it.

Zac quickly canceled the attack as he wracked his brain for some way out. Would he have to take the Coward's Escape after all? But Zac grit his teeth in stubbornness again, feeling the same unwillingness to back down as he felt in his battle with the Dominator. His eyes followed the movement of the construct as it once again picked itself up from the ground.

He had a feeling that no matter how many attacks he launched at the thing it would keep regenerating, as long as he didn't use a proper element for an attack. He needed to use death to vanquish life.

The construct was quickly returning to its original form as Zac's mind moved a mile a minute trying to figure out a way to destroy that thing. Finally, he took out an E-Grade Miasma Crystal and launched it straight at the construct like he had done so many times with rocks to kill beasts.

The crystal ripped through the air like a bullet and slammed straight into the golden arm with enough power to push it back a few meters. The crystal itself exploded into thousands of splinters, but unfortunately, it didn't result in an explosion of death-attuned energy. Instead, the miasma stored in the crystal simply spread out like a cloud which didn't seem to particularly affect the construct.

Zac sighed in disappointment, but seeing the cloud of miasma actually gave him an idea. He barely had time to formulate it as another ball of light started to shine inside the golden circle on his enemy's eye. This was no time to second-guess himself since if that ball hit him like the last one he would likely die. He desperately moved his arm to his pouch, and the next moment an enormous monolith appeared in front of him.

It reached around ten meters into the air and was wrought from some cursed black stone. Zac had never been so close to an Unholy Beacon before, and he started to feel nauseated by the aura it emitted almost immediately. At the top of the monolith a turquoise light radiated outward, and it had immediately started to convert the Cosmic Energy in the atmosphere.

Without waiting Zac grabbed the base of the monolith. But to his dismay he realized that he barely managed to lift the thing, and worse yet he noticed that the attack by the construct was almost fully formed. Out of better options he activated [Hatchetman's Rage], and with a roar properly lifted the Unholy Beacon as he started running with heavy steps toward the construct.

He didn't want to use this skill at first, afraid that there would other trials would await after this one. Undergoing another battle while weakened by the side-effects of [Hatchetman's Rage] might prove lethal, so he wanted to avoid using it against the construct. But it was Hail Mary-time.

Zac's muscles burned with strain, but the unnatural power and rage brought by the skill pushed him forward. An all-consuming desire for wanton destruction filled Zac's mind, and this time he didn't try to curtail it. With a bestial roar he finally jumped up in the air, causing huge cracks to spread from where he stood.

The construct lifted its arm toward Zac, but he didn't care as he heedlessly swung the enormous monolith as though it was a club. A golden ball of life flew straight at him, but it was swallowed into the turquoise haze at the top of the pillar. Putting a ball of pure life into the conversion chamber of an Unholy Beacon was clearly a pretty bad idea since extremely erratic energies immediately started to radiate from the monolith.

Zac sensed that the Unholy Beacon was highly unstable even in his muddled state, but he didn't care as he slammed the tip straight into the head of the Life-Death construct in a thwunk that would make Billy proud. Life and death clashed in a blinding explosion, and Zac was thrown away like a ragdoll from the shockwave. Luckily he activated [Nature's Barrier] at the last second, protecting him from some of the damage at least.

As he was falling he at felt a huge surge of Cosmic Energy entering his body, pushing him to level 74. He breathed in relief since that meant the construct was truly destroyed and the gambit had worked out.

He remembered that both Ogras and Karunthel had told him that it was possible to turn the Unholy Beacons into weapons, which made him try to use it against the large life-attuned golem. They might not have meant such a direct method of utilization, but at least it worked out in the end.

Zac knew that there must be some strong death-attuned item inside the monoliths to be able to continuously turn Cosmic Energy into miasma, and his gambit was that it would cause proper damage in contrast to the Miasma Crystal.

A groan escaped his mouth as Zac slammed into the ground, every part of his body aching. But without giving himself a breather he got back on his feet and quickly ate a top tier healing pill as he scanned the surroundings for any change.

He wasn't necessarily safe just because he had destroyed the construct.

He quickly spotted that one thing had changed after he had destroyed the construct. The field the battle had taken place in was surrounded by a gray haze since he arrived, but in one direction the shroud had given way to a path that led away from this place. However, Zac ignored the path for now as he walked over to the crater with the broken monolith.

The clash between life and death had quickly snuffed out each other, but not before it had utterly destroyed the area. Zac looked into the pit and sighed in disappointment when he looked at the mangled remains of the Life-Death construct. The pattern on its chest had been a great clue to the path he wanted to walk, but it was demolished from his attacks.

In the end he put both the broken Beacon and the crumpled remains of the construct into his Cosmos Sack, but instead of heading over to the exit he instead sat down and started to absorb energy from an E-Grade Nexus Crystal. A few seconds later a huge wave of weakness hit him as the effect from [Hatchetman's Rage] ran out.

He realized that one more positive effect of either his improved Vitality or Endurance was that the side-effect of the berserker skill had become far more manageable compared to before, though he still wouldn't want to start another fight in his current condition.

But he wasn't completely out of it like before, so instead of heading to the next stage he instead took out one of his Dao Treasures as soon as he felt his state was somewhat stable. Time was of the essence while the pattern and the Construct's attacks were fresh in his mind, and without hesitation swallowed it and closed his eyes.

He knew the next step he needed to take on his Dao Path.