

## The Fall 376

### Chapter 376: Impressions

"As I've said, I have no guarantees this will work," Kenzie muttered as she turned toward the golden funnel.

She took out a small inscription tool and started to add new lines to the funnel. Odd undulations started to appear in the room within seconds, and Zac looked around with wonder. He had never taken any hallucinogenic drugs in his life, but he believed that what he experienced right now might be a bit similar. The world felt as though it was alive, and everything pulsed with life and mystery. He quickly took out his last Dao Treasure so he would be ready to boost his experience.

"Here we go," Kenzie said, though Zac felt he heard the voice from far away.

A small snap echoed in the room the next seconds, and Zac's all senses were completely overloaded by impressions and scenes he couldn't understand or decipher. If the magical sense of oneness with the universe earlier was a subdued whisper, then what he currently experienced was an unrelenting storm that threatened to rip him to shreds.

It was at that moment Zac realized that they might be in over their heads. Zac's vision was flooded by colors and shapes that shouldn't exist, and he heard whispers that threatened to drive him insane.

The energy they unleashed was far beyond what he had expected, and he felt like a small boat in the middle of the ocean during a terrifying storm. He was on the brink of succumbing, and he spotted his sister toppling over as she tried to get back to her spot. Ogras was already bleeding out of his nose, and he had actually cut himself on the leg with a small knife as his eyes were completely bloodshot.

"Too... Strong," he croaked, and Zac understood.

The density was just too much, it was not something that people at their level could handle. If they didn't dilute the Origin Dao they would die or have their minds broken. It took all of Zac's willpower, but he managed to slam down on the restriction in a bid to release the Origin Dao to a wider area.

A second later Zac could finally take a breather, but he was still teetering on the brink of collapse as he looked around, trying to see what was really going on through the hallucinations. Just the quick look around made him forget what he wanted to do, as it felt that each hallucination contained a mystery that could elevate his understanding of the universe.

"Steady your minds and close your eyes. Focus on your own Dao," Ogras growled, which allowed Zac to snap out of it long enough to push the Dao Treasure into his mouth and swallow it.

The surroundings kept getting more abstruse, and Zac got the notion that he would be able to grasp myriad Dao just by looking at the plaster on the wall or a spot melted wax on a candle. The fractals on the wall kept squirming, and Zac believed they tried to spell out divine secrets for him. Everything was calling out to his very soul, but he quickly closed his eyes as well to resist the temptations.

He knew it was the effect of the Origin Dao, that the enigmatic energy was exposing the truths of everything in nature. But just because there were truths to find didn't mean he should delve into them. It would cause chaos to his cultivation system if he got a bunch of new Dao Seeds at this juncture.

He instead used his whole being to focus on the concept of the axe, basing his meditation on the fractal axe in his body. It was still split between the two Daos, and it radiated an immense pressure since Zac reached peak Dao with both his seeds. The groans and shuffling from the people around him soon drifted away as he closed in on himself and his whole being focused on the Dao of the Axe.

Unfortunately, he wasn't shielded from the chaotic energies around him just because he closed his eyes and focused his mind. The madness crept into his body through each and every one of his cells, making him feel as though he could topple any moment. Zac did everything in his power to ignore the whispers that kept trying to lead him astray, believing they were hints to various Daos in the multiverse.

Luckily a warmth spread from his stomach after a bit, and calming tendrils moved through his body and silenced the chaos to a certain extent. It was the Dao Treasure, and it allowed him to refocus on the Axe with unprecedented clarity.

Space and time no longer held no meaning as his mind was overwhelmed by the endless profundity of the axe. The fractal axe he envisioned kept growing in his mind and Zac started to sense one scene after another play the weapon itself.

He saw scenes of himself, swinging his axe in one desperate struggle after another. He kept pushing forward, and his prey kept getting more dangerous. He saw himself desperately struggling to cause a lethal wound against a barghest, where he was forced to use the environment to his advantage to survive. He could almost taste the blood as his hatchet made its way into the spine of the beast.

Beasts, cultivators, invaders, and even armies entered his vision, only to be bisected and conquered. Everything in the world was fleeting, and the only truth was the weapon he held in his hand. Whoever stood in his path would be crushed by the towering force of his swing, whatever tried to resist would be cut by the gleaming edge.

The scenes kept flashing through his mind, and something started to crystalize. It was the path of the Axe that he had arrived at yesterday. It was a path of indomitability and furious offense, one that gave up on the flexibility of the sword or the speed of the rapiers in favor of monstrous power and momentum.

Nothing could hamper the progress of his axe. All defenses would get crushed, all obstacles cut in two. The axe was the truth that would allow him to walk to the end of the path, and also the tool of slaughter that would keep those around him safe. But before his epiphany could mature into something real, the visions started to change and he felt himself getting dragged inside.

Zac was no longer looking in on his deed from outside, now it was suddenly him getting killed, and he felt himself dying one indignant death after another. He could see himself as the aggressor, and he looked up only to peer into his own wooden face and two pitch-black eyes that held no emotion or succor as the Zac in the vision swung his axe down.

He was the merchant only following orders, his heads getting cut off in one swift motion. He was the mink defending its mountain, only to get slain. He was a tiger, a cultivator, a zombie, one being after another with their own dreams and aspirations.

But those dreams turned to dust with the arrival of that sharp edge. His resistance was futile against the towering weight of the weapon soaring toward him. Zac died a thousand deaths, and he felt his soul was getting wounded each time.

Soon enough it wasn't even himself who killed, but he rather saw visions men and women getting forced to their knees, and their whole vision was filled with a finger that moved toward their forehead. Pain that Zac never had experienced before rippled through his body as his soul was dragged out of his body in the visions.

The visions became increasingly chaotic as time passed, showing a jumbled mess of scenes that were unfamiliar to him. But as the scenes kept appearing he felt an increasing amount of anger and hatred filling his body. It was different from the Splinter, it was more open and direct. But even though Zac could see it coming he couldn't avoid his mind getting corrupted, and the destructive thoughts were eroding his soul.

But his resilience wouldn't let him falter or give up, so he forcibly lived through the discordant visions of death and destruction as he searched for that feeling that he lost just before. He needed to get back to the axe, the truth that he almost grasped before his mind was led astray.

He felt he was on the cusp of success before things turned dark, and he only needed to regain it. But the constant flurry of visions took their toll, and Zac was starting to lose track of what was going on. Everything felt muddled as the thousands of impressions threatened to destroy his sense of self.

But some hidden spark inside his mind suddenly ignited his cognizance for one final burst, and he managed to grasp hold of the feeling once more, finally putting an end to the endless visions. The visions finally stilled, and he found himself in outer space, facing the huge fractal that was formed as an axe.

In the far distance in the deepest space were two lights radiating boundless power. It was the very same stars as the one he saw during the Dao Impartment, though this time they felt far more distant. It was no surprise, as he had the help of a C-Grade powerhouse to connect to those stars last time.

But he had another type of help this time. It felt like he was full of a boundless power that allowed him to create a tendril of his own, one that reached for the distant stars just as they reached for him. It was the Origin Dao that empowered him to reach further than he would have been able to on his own, effectively creating a bridge to the Grand Dao.

The tendrils finally connected, and Zac felt a surge of endless knowledge enter his mind. His whole soul, which was already wrung dry from the onslaught of visions, shuddered from the impact, but he held on.

He first didn't know what he was waiting for, but he soon had his answer. As knowledge crammed itself into his brain the fractal started to grow in front of him. He instinctively reached toward it as he absorbed additional truths from the stars. The axe released a keening echo the moment Zac's intangible hand touched it, and the lines that made up its body started to twist and writhe with blinding speed, rearranging themselves after some unknown blueprint.

The outer shape of the enormous fractal was the same, but the lines had reformed to no longer possess two separate sides. The axe looked far more complete now, with one completely integrated pathway. The weapon radiated an immense power, and Zac sensed both his earlier Dao seeds in the mix.

Everything from the emotional heaviness to the most recent indomitable will to cut through everything was accounted for, but there were many additions that he hadn't recognized before. The snippets of truth were all meshed together into a perfect whole, and they together made up the Dao of the Axe.

He knew he had done it, he had upgraded his two Dao Seeds into a Fragment. If he was physically there he would have breathed out in relief.

The two stars in the distance receded after Zac had managed to upgrade the fractal in front of him, and the large axe started to dissipate as well. He realized that this epiphany was over and willed himself to exit his mysterious state. The deed was done, and this step guaranteed that his classes would at least be able to upgrade his class immediately. He was pretty sure that he had passed the 'achievement' part with flying colors, anyway.

But Zac didn't even have had time to celebrate the success of his advancement before a shocking sight entered his vision when he opened his eyes. His experience hadn't been smooth, but Zac had initially chalked it up to the difficulty of forming a Dao Fragment.

The insight needed for that was on a higher level than upgrading a seed, and Zac guessed that would take a greater toll on his body. This was something he had already discussed with Ogras earlier, and the demon had agreed. But reality proved different.

He didn't know how long his meditative state had actually lasted, but the house was still under the full effect of the Origin Dao. Zac felt he had a bit greater resistance against the hallucinations now, and the brief moment of clarity allowed him to witness the state of everyone else in the building.

Something was terribly wrong with the energy they had released.