

The Fall 391

Chapter 391: The Eight Calamities

"You're not worried we will take the Dao Treasures and run?" Zac couldn't help but ask. "Don't you need them for yourself?"

Dao Treasures were obviously hard currency here, especially now that some bigshot was about to emerge from the tower. Giving them out like this was to give up on either an opportunity for himself, or the chance to sell the treasures outside for a huge mark-up.

"I am sure I can trust in your character. Besides, I have managed to get my hands on a few more," Galau said, but he quickly followed up with another sentence when he saw Zac and Ogras' eyes light up with avarice. "I can't part with those though. They're for my family members and myself after I've broken through."

"Do you even need Dao seeds if you want to become a merchant?" Ogras smiled. "Why not part with a few more of them?"

"The Dao is important for non-combat classes as well!" Galau said as he took a step back. "It can help us in all kinds of ways just like with a warrior. Besides, I plan on becoming a hybrid class at least for E-Grade."

"Thank you, we'll remember this favor," Zac nodded as he took out his prayer mat.

Time was of the essence so he immediately rotated his Cosmic Energy through his pathways a few rounds to clear out the lingering effects of the alcohol. The sky was still the same beautiful spectacle of shimmering stars, and the three silently looked up at the scenery in silence as the minutes passed.

The ethereal mindset as when he gazed upon the skies earlier soon returned, and he felt like he was on the verge of something. He didn't try to force it though, and rather let the feeling naturally stir and grow in his mind.

The tranquility of the night was suddenly broken as a massive titan appeared in the space behind the tower. It stood thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, meters tall, and seemed to be completely wrought out of metal. However, it was clearly not a golem or puppet, but rather a projection of a being made from flesh and blood. It just had a bluish tint like zinc or osmium.

Its head and torso were mostly obscured by the tower itself as it actually stood behind the structure and didn't move, and Zac could only see the sides of the behemoth. That was just fine for Zac as his eyes were glued to the things that it carried in its hands that each was as large as an island. The Titan actually possessed eight arms, each one bare and bulging with muscles, and each hand held a mysterious object.

Most of the treasures did not seem to match the gruff and bulky figure of the Titan, but Zac looked at each and every one of them seriously. One hand held a flute made from a golden metal, and Zac felt like he saw a meteor shower when his eyes locked onto it. Another hand gripped a fan as large as a mountain, seemingly capable of causing a hurricane with a wave.

There was also a burning sword, a castanet crackling with terrifying bolts of lightning, a calabash releasing the sounds of a raging ocean. One hand even held a drum shaped like a volcano, emitting a fiery glow that reminded him of his visit to the magma world and the Fire Golems.

But his eyes only briefly swept over these items before they stopped at the two hands that each held a flower. One was a large Basket Flower, and it swayed as the Titan held onto its long stalk. The air around it seemed to be vibrating to the point space itself cracked.

Zac's eyes finally landed on the last item, a single lotus flower. His thoughts initially went to the massive lotus that was in the Abbot's possession, but he immediately realized the thing in front of him was in a completely different league. This was a grand treasure of the universe, containing endless power.

Its attunement seemed to be completely different from the Abbot's lotus as well, and its purple leaves emitted a chilling sense of death and putrefaction. It didn't feel like it released toxic plumes, but that it was pestilence itself.

There was something mesmerizing about the lotus, making Zac unable to move his eyes away. He barely had enough presence of mind to quickly cram his Dao Treasure into his mouth. His consciousness started to wander, and his vision was closing in on him. Just as he was about to drift away he heard the seemingly distant voice of Galau speak up in a daze.

"It's The Eight Calamities!"

Zac had no time to react before his whole being was consumed by the Lotus flower. His vision suddenly changed to show a battlefield where two endless armies fought. One army looked a bit like the lizardmen of the church, but they were more akin humanoid dragons. The other force were actual cyclops, each reaching over a hundred meters in height.

At first glance it might have been a foregone conclusion that the lizardmen who only seemed to reach two to three meters in height would be hopelessly outmatched, but reality proved different. The warriors somehow summoned, or more likely used massive war arrays to conjure, fiery dragons to battle their enormous foes.

The battlefield stretched into the horizon, and it felt like thousands of warriors died every minute, and the corpses created mountains of the unwilling dead. The resentment in the air was palpable, and it only grew worse as the war raged on for years and years. The losses were uncountable, and the boundless world itself was teetering on collapse from the accumulated resentment.

Terrible maladies sprouted due to the sea of corpses, and but the armies seemed to be possessed, ignoring their increasingly horrific bodies as they transformed and mutated from the corruption in the air.

A small purple flower quietly floated in a turbid pool of blood, hidden in one of the largest corpse mounds on the planet. It consumed the energies of everything around it and steadily gained power as the war raged on. The massacre only got worse, but the diseases and resentment oddly enough disappeared over time, and suddenly it was as though a spell had been broken.

The war stopped, all thanks to a blood-drenched lotus having eaten its fill.

The grand generals, each one a Peak C-Grade warrior at the least, called for a ceasefire. Everyone seemed to be horrified by their actions and looked as though they were walking in a living nightmare. Their eyes turned toward the thousands of corpse-mountains as immense regret gripped their hearts. It looked like they wanted nothing more than get away from this cursed world that had whipped them into a murderous frenzy, yet they stayed on.

They eventually found the reason for their salvation, a large purple lotus that rested in the middle of an ocean of blood. It had taken on their sins, their resentment, and their ailments, giving the two races a chance at survival. The generals bowed toward the grand treasure in reverence, no one having any ideas of taking it for themselves.

However, things suddenly took a disturbing turn as large welts started to appear on the people around the flower. Just a second later flesh was dripping off everyone's bodies like melted wax. Not even the immensely powerful generals were spared, and they crumbled before they managed to reach any of the teleportation arrays near-by.

The unstoppable putrefaction spread like an invisible wave, reaping the little life that still remained on the once glorious planet that stood at the core of a star sector. The mountains of corpses were slowly absorbed as the lotus kept growing, and every millennia or two another petal emerged on the flower.

Within that petal was the lament of a million powerful warriors sealed, forever unable to leave. The lotus kept slowly growing in its domain as the sole emperor of the planet.

But one day a hand as large as a continent appeared above the desolate planet, and it reached down to grasp the cursed lotus. A torrent of pestilence and rose up to meet the hand, but the Lotus' attack was immediately defeated as a black coffin appeared out of nowhere, sealing the flower within.

The stone sarcophagus shuddered a few times, likely from the lotus releasing immense attacks to escape, but it quieted down again soon enough. But the terrifying power the coffin now radiated was a clear signal that the lotus might be sealed away from the world, but still very much alive. The moment the coffin opened again all life would end.

The scene ended with the enormous hand rising through the atmosphere, leaving the cursed planet behind, and Zac's eyes opened just in time to see a screen appear in front of him.

[Fragment of the Coffin - Early - All Attributes +10, Endurance +80, Vitality +50, Intelligence +15, Wisdom +60, Effectiveness of Endurance +5%]

Zac looked at the line with incomprehension, not understanding how he had gotten there. He had imagined something along the lines of Petrification or Decay when considering the combination of Rot and Hardness, but the vision had rather created an odd Fragment. Was there such a thing as the Dao of the Coffin?

Was it because his thoughts had been on Alea lying in her crystal coffin for the past week? Zac felt that the vision of Alea lying beneath the Tree of Ascension somewhat mirrored what he had just witnessed during his epiphany. Alea was poisonous just like the lotus, and both were preserved within a coffin.

It made him confused whether what he witnessed was something that actually had happened, or whether it was just something his mind conjured to make sense of the insight that he gained from looking at the lotus in the Titan's hand.

Of course, the real issue was what the hell the Dao of the Coffin entailed. He could understand the concept, as a coffin was both hard and the corpses inside would rot away, but he didn't understand how the Dao of the Coffin would be utilized in battle. Was it defensive? Offensive? He simply couldn't tell.

Unfortunately there was no way for him to try it out before he entered the tower either. His only clue was that he had actually lost a little bit of Endurance in favor of more Vitality and Wisdom when he fused Rot and Hardness. Endurance was obviously the main stat, but its somewhat balanced spread might indicate a Dao less focused on simply defense.

The projection had already disappeared by the time Zac opened his eyes, so he decided to close his eyes again to ponder on his newest Fragment. But his eyes were drawn to a gaping Galau who sat a few meters away, looking at him with what looked to be a mix of elation and jealousy.

"Did you actually gain something?" Galau said with some shock in his eyes. "The fluctuations around you were quite massive."

"Yeah, didn't you?" Zac asked with confusion. "I was dragged into a vision the moment I looked upon that Titan."

Galau opened and closed his mouth a few times, but no words came out.

"You'll get used to it after traveling with that guy for a while," Ogras sighed. "At least we'll hopefully get some soup while the general eats his meat."

"What's going on?" Zac asked.

"That was the 'Eight Calamities Titan', one of the rarest projections representing the 62nd level," Galau explained. "Only those with a connection to one of the calamities will gain something from the items in the Titan's hands. Rumors say that special bloodlines might gain something directly from the Titan itself, but I haven't heard of anything like that actually happening so it might be false."

"Eight calamities," Zac muttered. "So those lucky enough to have a Dao that resonated with one of the treasures would get a guaranteed epiphany?"

"Perhaps not an epiphany, but they would make improvements," Galau nodded.

"Then it's perhaps thanks to you and your Dao Treasure I managed to take a step forward. I'll remember the favor," Zac said seriously.

It was true. The Dao of Death, or rather the Dao of the Coffin was the remaining fragment he felt most leery about completing before evolving, but he suddenly gained it when he was actually targeting his Life Fragment.

Even just before Galau came barging into their courtyard he had felt he was on the verge on something, making him somewhat confident he had taken the first step toward a suitable concept for his final Fragment.

Of course, three low-grade Fragments was unfortunately still not enough for him to get his hands on an Arcane class according to the report he bought the other day.

But gaining the Fragment of the Coffin was definitely a step in the right direction, making Zac more hopeful for the future. It truly felt like his high Luck had helped him out again, presenting him with just the vision he needed.

“How does luck work?” Zac suddenly the demon asked after Galau left their courtyard. “Could my Luck have caused that Reoluv to fail the final challenge in order for me to gain this opportunity?”

“Luck is an obscure subject, and I don’t know any specifics,” Ogras said hesitantly. “But I don’t think its effect would be that exaggerated? That guy reaching the 62nd level is exactly what was expected of him.”

“Yeah, but wouldn’t a guy like that have a few hidden means to reach even higher?” Zac ventured.

Ogras didn't answer and rather opted to glance in the direction of the Tower with a pensive expression.