

The Fall 463

Chapter 463: Chaos

The Shard of creation immediately stormed toward the Miasmic Fractal while pouring out unprecedented amounts of energies like it was suicidal, and the Splinter responded in kind. The rune cracked in an instant, causing a chaotic storm of energies that left a new set of cracks on his soul. However, a fractured soul wasn't actually his most pressing issue, as something terrifying was brewing in his chest.

The two streams of energy resisted being merged. Meanwhile, the dual skill fractals were like funnels that didn't stop infusing the two energies, causing more and more opposing energies to gather in his chest. Zac wasn't even providing any mental energy to the skill any longer, but the energy was rather ripped from the two remnants. He couldn't understand what was going on, nothing like this had happened before when forming a flash.

However, the two remnants seemed completely uncaring about the shocking amounts of energy they were losing. Dozens of tentacles shot out of the cage the instant the gap was created, all of them targeting the Shard hovering outside. It met the assault with radiant tendrils of its own. Dozens of clashes took place in an instant, but the battle was quickly slowing down as the two remnants started to look faded and listless.

It was too much.

Zac couldn't even begin to prepare a strike in this condition, and he was horrified to find himself locked in the air as massive surges of power radiated around him. In fact, it seemed as though the whole area had been forced to a halt, as neither the dragon nor the descending mountain moved in the slightest. However, the wind still blew, and Zac briefly noted a bird flying in the sky above, proving that time actually hadn't stopped.

Both Zac and his foe were just locked in place as a bomb was growing inside his chest.

Finally, the situation reached a tipping point just as the two remnants seemed to be on their last legs. They no longer fought, but their tentacles rather gripped each other for support as they teetered on the brink of collapse. Meanwhile, the pressure in his chest had built to such a degree that the two sides no longer were able to resist the merge, and the two streams finally fused into a new energy.

However, that was anything but good news as Zac was still frozen, and this new creation contained such terrifying force that Zac was almost scared out of his mind. Just its existence was breaking apart Zac's body, but he was utterly incapable of moving it even an inch.

Zac screamed with desperation in his mind, fervently wishing for the Spark of Creation to push the thing out of his body. His desire was thankfully granted, and a spear of white metal was forged by some of the left-over energies spread through his body. It emerged from his chest and shot toward the throat of the dragon with the terrifying creation residing within.

The universe suddenly stopped as time and space unraveled, and a hazy pattern emerged as the fused energy exploded.

Zac was still stuck in the air, and his eyes were glued to the thing he had brought forth into the universe. It emitted an unlimited sense of vastness that threatened to turn him insane. It felt like it was trying to force the whole universe into his mind, but his soul was already bursting at the seams from just being subjected to an insignificant corner of the whole.

He needed to look away, but he wasn't even able to blink. Zac was forced to witness the profundity of the universe and the end of his existence.

The dome of heaven suddenly cracked as boundless lightning spread across the horizon. They were the only thing that moved in this world of grey, and the lightning seemed to accumulate right above his position. Zac tried to look up to see what was going on, but his eyes were still fixed as they were before the world stopped. He could sense a terrifying pressure from above though, like he was being gazed upon by an indifferent god.

Power, supremacy, but also happiness?

There was no way for him to comprehend the series of events, but he was relieved to see that the odd pattern in front of him was starting to fade. His mind was right on the brink of a meltdown, and he fervently prayed he would be able to withstand the insane pressures until the grey rune was gone.

A pure pillar of lightning suddenly slammed into the pattern from above, but it was forcibly dispersed by a deep shudder emerging from within the rune. Another blast followed immediately after, and this process repeated eight times with increased intensity until a golden beam of lightning descended.

Its might was even a match to the mysterious rune, and it wasn't as easily dispersed as the earlier bolts.

Zac felt multiple shudders deep in his soul, but the final lightning bolt was like an unmovable fixture. Only after ten seconds did it dissipate, but it left behind a pillar of golden fractals so densely inscribed that Zac's couldn't even begin to comprehend what they were meant to do. The pattern inside seemed intent to escape, and a world-ending amount of energy ravaged inside the cage.

The world shook and the universe seemed to be cracking as Zac's vision faded to black.

A shudder ran through his body he was startled awake, and he scrambled to his feet as he looked for threats in all directions. It felt like his eyes were full of sand and his head turned to mush, but he was alive. The dragon lay unmoving next to him with a massive hole in its throat where the mysterious rune had appeared. The summoned mountain was lying beside it, making an odd addition to the environment.

There wasn't any sign of either the grey pattern or the terrifying lightning though. The massive dragon was completely unscathed apart from the hole in its throat, even though it should have been reduced to ash by the lightning strikes that struck the pattern right beneath it. It almost felt like what he witnessed while the world had stopped was a dream.

But he knew that what he had seen was all too real, and he had an inkling of what was going on. The grey pattern he had summoned was something the System desired, and it had slowly created a situation for Zac to provide it on a silver platter. He had sensed the greed of the heavens, and the jubilation when the pattern was trapped.

He had been played.

Zac had a pretty good idea of what the thing he summoned was as well. It was Chaos, or more likely a small fragment of it. It was the origin of the Dao, and just looking at it had almost driven Zac insane. If the System hadn't swooped in to steal the thing he would have probably died then and there.

He didn't even have the energy to be mad about being used as an incubation chamber for the System. What could he do? Scream at the sky like a raving lunatic? A sigh emerged from Zac's lips as he looked down at the token by his side. It looked like he had been unconscious for over twelve hours, giving him some time to finish things up on this level and recuperate, but nothing more than that.

His climb would end at the entrance of the 73rd floor.

He took a deep breath as he looked up at the sky, and he felt a sense of peace, for the first time in months it felt like. But the tranquility made him freeze in realization as he finally noticed that the two remnants had been completely quiet since he woke up half a minute ago. He quickly turned his sight inward, and he almost reeled in shock at the drastic changes that had taken place.

The most important changes were obviously the ones that had happened to his Miasmic Cage. Only six Miasmic Runes remained as expected, but they had gotten company. Six golden fractals teeming with power had been added to the mix, forming an alternating circle in his mind. The construction seemed extremely robust, as though the two sets of runes formed something greater than the sum of its parts.

More importantly, the cage already housed the two remnants. Was this the System's method of reciprocity, some sort of reward for Zac providing it with the Chaos Pattern?

The two remnants were still entwined by their tendrils just like at the end of the fight, and they still seemed completely listless. They didn't move or struggle at all, and they felt faded, almost dying. They had been forcibly drained in order to form that special blob, and it seemed that it had almost taken all the power they had in the end.

Zac took a shuddering breath as he sat unmoving for a few seconds. He had made it after all. The two remnants had glommed on to each other and formed a mutual restriction, while his cage had upgraded to an unprecedented level. Of course, he knew that he couldn't completely count on the issue being solved.

The remnants couldn't even be destroyed by a warrior who was able to crush a black hole with his bare hands, so he doubted that getting slightly overtaxed would take them out. Besides, he wasn't confident in putting all his trust in the System's restrictive fractals. What if the System suddenly decided it wanted another Chaos Pattern and started prodding around in his head?

He still needed to quickly upgrade the strength of his soul to make sure he could handle any future problems. Besides, he still hadn't given up on his path after his recent troubles. On the contrary, he felt more confident about his choice than ever, which meant that strengthening his soul was still a top priority.

Fusing the Coffin and the Bodhi again was obviously out of the question, at least for the foreseeable future. But the bronze flash and its Bodhi-based equivalent were still very much on the table. He just

needed to create a proper foundation first. He was currently like a kid with matches, playing with things he didn't understand.

He was shocked at the recklessness he had displayed during the latter parts of the climb as he looked back on the past weeks. He had not only risked his life untold times by creating the bronze flashes, but he had headed straight toward the Shard without any regard for his life.

Was it the Splinter that had egged him on toward his own path of destruction? Or was it the System that was somehow messing with his sense of reason in order to achieve its goals?

The current breather he had been given would hopefully give him the time he needed to work on his soul, and figure out a way to control the high-grade energies to such a grade that he could reliably use them.

There was no need for him to go to the lengths that he had to forcibly try to tame the flashes while still being a beginner cultivator. The glimpse of the Chaos Pattern had proved that he was in way over his head, and he needed to learn to walk before he could run.

However, it wasn't all good news as his soul had once again gone through a change after his encounter. Another set of white scars had been added to the black tendrils, making his whole soul look checkered. However, both the black and white scars seemed ephemeral and dim, like they were about to fade away. It looked like they had been completely drained just like the real slivers.

At least his soul seemed to have been healed by the Creation's infiltration, but Zac still swallowed one of the soul-healing treasures he had gotten from the mentalist just in case there were hidden wounds he couldn't spot.

It did clear his mind a bit, though it obviously wasn't able to expel the two high-tiered energies that had infiltrated his soul. There were no creation-based globules of energy in his soul though, but there was still a decent amount of left-over energies spread across his body. It was just a pittance compared to what he had spent in the final clash, but it would be able to help him out in a pinch.

As long as he didn't accidentally let his mind stray and waste it, of course.

His soul getting marked by the events didn't feel too surprising, as it had been the unwilling conduit as the two remnants were drained. However, another change was pretty startling. The two fractals on his shoulders had changed. The torrential amounts of energies that coursed through the crude shortcut he had made had actually remolded the skill fractals, making the pathing permanent.

But that was not all as fine markings lined the paths, creating patterns way beyond his comprehension. They were not fractals, and neither were they formed in the inscription language that was commonly used in the Multiverse. They felt more primal, like they were natural markings created by the Dao itself.

The fractal on his left shoulder had clearly been marked by the Shard of Creation, whereas the right one gave off the desolate aura of the Splinter of Oblivion. This could be both good news and bad news, but Zac wasn't ready to experiment whether it would cause any trouble when forming the bronze sparks.

Not that he was very sure that he'd actually be able to form one, judging by how pale and faded the scars on his soul were.

Apart from that his body was in decent condition, except for the horrifying cost of life force. He would have to ask an expert to make sure, but he believed that he had lost decades from the intense usage of the Shard. If he had kept going like that for a few days he would have died of old age, or at least reached an advanced enough age to make further cultivation impossible.

There was no way that using the Shard for recuperation was worth it, as it cost way more of his life compared to slowly recuperating with healing pills.

At least the Shard's forced healing regimen had helped him prepare for what waited outside the tower. The long bout of unconsciousness had also restored most of his missing Cosmic Energy, and he would be able to reach peak condition before the deadline was up. Only two hours remained on his climb, and his two companions had probably already emerged.

If he knew Ogras he would probably want to maximize his benefits by witnessing both his own and Zac's Apparitions. He didn't immediately enter the Teleportation array though, but rather turned to the unmoving body of the dragon.

His climb might have ended prematurely, but there were still treasures to be claimed.