

## The Fall 505

### Chapter 505: Fate's Obduracy

If this really was the Incursion Leader of the Church of Everlasting Dao, then a massive chance had presented itself as Zac still didn't know where the cultist Incursion was located. They had somehow managed to hide their base of operations all this time while sending out roving death squads that killed everything in their path.

The best idea his people had to find these guys were to investigate the zones of Pangea that had no reports of human activity. They figured the lack of surviving towns could mean that everyone had already been killed by the Church, and the Incursion Pillar was close. But killing the leader here would save them all that trouble, as the Incursion would still end if he died.

However, the Head Priest of the church was clearly no chump. One of the flaming balls hovering behind his back entered the whip as it elongated to reach well over a hundred meters. The very air burned while the whip ripped through the sky as the weapon's flames increased in intensity many times over. Zac instantly felt a blistering pain in his arm as the damage to the branch was transferred over.

It was like the whip was a boa constrictor that tried to squeeze the life out of the branch as it looped around it multiple times over, preventing it from freely growing in size. The white-hot flames had quickly latched on to the branch as well, and an inferno raged on across its surface. Burnt bark fell like rain from the sky as new layers grew out at the cost of even more of Zac's Cosmic Energy.

Zac felt like a fool when he saw the scene. The pain from opening his node had made him activate the skill as usual, instead of thinking things through. He had always used the wooden punishment since gaining the Fragment of the Bodhi as the two resonated the best, but he would clearly have been better off using the mountain or water punishment this time around. Still, there was no point in crying over spilled milk.

The fight had turned into a battle between destruction and creation in a sense, and Zac intended to emerge the victor of that struggle.

He kept infusing [Nature's Punishment] with his Dao and Cosmic Energy while he tried to force the branch to descend. The priest on the other hand was forced to infuse one globe of flames after another into his Spirit Tool to power the fires raging across the swelling branch.

But Zac still hadn't met anyone who was able to outlast him in a clash of endurance, but he actually felt the skill starting to destabilize much quicker than usual. He had no choice, and the energy around him veritably exploded as he activated [Hatchetman's Rage]. The branch suddenly radiated powerful waves as well, and the flames were quickly subdued.

Zac saw his chance as he made a final push, and the whip simply snapped as the branch exploded in size. Newly born branches spread in every direction before they all turned toward the warship, like hundreds of falling spears. The wooden punishment had finally gained its momentum, and it crashed into the warship with enough force to push both the miasmic clouds and the flames aside.

A golden shield appeared to block the strike, but it quickly broke as the main branch punched a massive hole. Flame and metal rained down toward the ground as both the ship and the sun that powered it

broke apart and screams echoed across the golden sky as dozens of cultists plummeted toward the ground. Zac managed to kill most of them with a rapid flurry of fractal edges, but his focus was still on the leaders.

The head priest was still alive, as the surge of cosmic energy he felt was nowhere big enough to correspond to killing someone that powerful. Finally, his target emerged through the smoke on top of a far smaller flying vessel with four powerful warriors to his side. Zac prepared himself for a final clash, wanting to end the battle before the timer for his buff ran out.

But his eyes widened in shock when he realized that there would be no cataclysmic battle in the sky. The so-called zealots left a burning trail in the air as they fled for their lives.

Zac couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the Church Leader escape with enough gusto to almost punch a hole in the sound barrier. Was this the same faction as the one where pretty much everyone was ready to blow themselves up just at a shot at dragging you with them to hell? Where was the fanaticism?

The leaf ripped through the air as Zac instructed his flying vessel to pursue, as he didn't want to let the cultists get away. A chance like this wouldn't come again. The smaller vessel shot away with shocking speed, but Zac's own leaf wasn't any worse than whatever some local cultists could bring to the table.

It whizzed after the group of five, taking advantage of the fact that the cultists were actually burning away the death-attuned haze in front of them, forming some sort of a wind tunnel. But Zac soon realized that he actually was unable to catch up to the group, as they seemed to have an endless supply of fire-attuned Nexus Crystals that they fed into the vessel, allowing it to burn through the Dead Zone.

Zac immediately started peppering them with fractal blades from behind, but he sighed when he saw the man with the whip crush them one by one without overtaxing himself. The Spirit Tool in the Head Priest's hand was no doubt top-tier, and he was clearly some ways into the E-Grade as well.

Zac kept trying to take them down while [Hatchetman's Rage] was still active, but he was out of cards. The sense of power was soon replaced with weakness, and he wasn't sure what he should do. He didn't want to leave these guys alive. But he also couldn't leave Kenzie and the others alone in the middle of the Dead Zone while he harried the Church of Everlasting Dao for god know how long. Besides, there was still the Realignment Array to deal with.

A few more minutes passed as he adapted to the state of weakness while they flew further and further. But finally, he had an idea, and the amulet around his neck slithered to his back to gain its backpack form. The inscribed circle on the lid was dimmed out after having used [Death's Embrace], but there was another set of inscriptions that were still in working order. Zac infused a large chunk of his remaining Cosmic Energy and the two lines of fractals running along its length lit up.

The scripture started to slither back and forth across the coffin lid for a second before they suddenly rose into the air, forming two actual chains wrought from darkness that shot toward his targets. However, the Head Priest unleashed a massive arc of flames that crashed into the two chains, causing to them shatter in an instant.

However, a skill from [Love's Bond] obviously wouldn't be defeated so easily. The two shattered chains suddenly regrew into four before they resumed their pursuit. The cultists desperately swatted them

down over and over, but it was useless. They just split and grew back when they broke apart, just like the heads of a hydra.

Zac had already gotten a hint of what the skill would do, but his eyes still widened in shock when he saw the sea of darkness rushing after the vessel with wild abandon. Finally, the cultists couldn't hold the tide back any longer, and they were swallowed up by a ball of chains that frantically writhed as it tried to crush everything within its cage.

The ball was quickly dragged back toward Zac who could hear crunching sounds and screams from within. However, a massive blast of flames suddenly erupted from within, forcing the chains away long enough for a flash of light to escape the stranglehold.

Zac frowned as he looked at the river of flames that rushed toward the horizon with a speed that superseded Zac's leaf by many times over. He knew it wasn't an errant burst of flames, but rather some sort of escape skill or treasure, something in the same vein as the top tier escape skill that was in Thea's possession.

Zac sighed as he knew that there was no way he'd be able to capture whoever had fled, and he turned his attention back to the ball of chains that hovered in front of him. The chains of darkness had pretty much turned into a solid by this point, and things had turned completely silent by this point as blood dripped down from the bottom.

This was the second skill of [Love's Bond], called [Fate's Obduracy]. This skill could be used like now to wear down a single target with an unceasing wave of chains. Another strategy could be him sending the set of chains out to cause widespread destruction, where any attempt of stopping the advance would worsen the situation. In either case, it was a nigh-unstoppable skill of destruction.

Just like [Death's Embrace] it had a pretty long cool-down. He wouldn't be able to use the skill for a full two weeks, and he would need to feed the coffin with some energy-rich treasures to recharge itself.

There was also a limit of just how many times the chains could reproduce. The cultists hadn't actually been that far from shaking off the attack. If the Head Priest hadn't burnt all five of those globes of flames to deal with [Nature's Punishment] he might have been able to exhaust the skill completely.

Zac instructed the mess of chains to unravel, and it displayed an utterly crumpled ship along with three barely distinguishable corpses. That meant that the burst of flames had contained two people, one of them being the man with the whip. Zac sighed as he instructed his leaf to fly back toward the Undead Fortress after looting the corpses.

He couldn't help but feel some disappointment upon failing to kill that man. If he had just died with the rest of the cultists he would have been done by now, having killed the two most annoying Incursion leaders in one fell swoop. But he guessed he couldn't always luck out, even with a Luck of over 300.

The emerald leaf whizzed through the air as Zac returned toward the undead fortress. However, he started to worry again as he flew, as he saw terrifying numbers of zombies stream toward the core of the Dead Zone as well. He had already noticed that the outer shield had been deactivated, perhaps as a result of him breaking the Array Towers in the base, and now the enormous number of zombies who were previously stuck outside were on the move.

Zac didn't hesitate to infuse the leaf with the Fragment of the Bodhi to speed up his return, but he quickly changed course when he saw a group of familiar faces some ways from the ruined fortress. It was everyone except Ogras who had planted themselves on top of a small hill, and the Valkyries had once again erected a shield wall as they were utterly surrounded by a sea of zombies.

However, it barely seemed necessary. The shield occasionally received a swipe from a close-by zombie, but there was no concerted effort to push past the barrier. They all kept moving forward, streaming toward the fortress as though they were under a spell.

"You're back!" Kenzie said with a relieved smile. "What happened?"

"I've dealt the cultists, but a few got away. What's going on?" Zac asked with bemusement as he landed next to them. "And where is Ogras?"

"He went off to check things out," Kenzie said. "As for these guys? We think they are heading toward the Incursion, it started just a minute or two after you flew away. It's like something luring them toward the teleporter."

"We think the Undead Kingdom is doing something to attract the Zombies to bring them over to the other side," Joanna added.

"Why aren't you fighting them?" Zac asked curiously. "It should be a good opportunity to level up."

"It feels weird," Kenzie said. "It was one thing when they were attacking us, but now they are just ignoring us. They are former Earthlings after all. We were thinking it would be better to simply let them go if it means they'll at least live on in some way."

"Besides, we've even gained a lot," Emily said with a wide grin.

"Oh?" Zac said with confusion, but he suddenly remembered the teenager should have gotten a part of his Cosmic Energy due to her buff. "How much did you gain?"

"Six," she said, her widening grin almost splitting her face in two. "I gained more than six levels thanks to you! I told you we should go out hunting together. I'd pass Thea Marshall in a week or two."

"If you always ride the coattails of others you'll turn into a useless vase," a voice echoed out across the hill as Ogras appeared from the shadows. "You need to rely on yourself."

"What about you playing all cool and saying you'd deal with that lady general? Kenzie detonated a bomb right in her face just a few days ago. Zac almost knocked the soul out of her body and then cut off her hand. It's not like you're any different," Emily retorted with a scathing glance.

"You were a lot cuter after Zac picked you up from the streets. Feels like I've lost a daughter," Ogras sighed with an exaggeratedly forlorn expression.

Or perhaps it was just his wretched appearance that gave that impression, as he looked like he had been oven-roasted for a few hours. His body sported multiple new scorch-marks that weren't there when they met earlier, and even his white hair had been singed clean off.

"What's with your look?" Zac couldn't help but ask with a snort, as the demon really cut a sorry sight. "I thought you left the fortress before the cultists arrived."

"Those netherblasted lunatics really didn't hold back. Who knows how much wealth was destroyed? I tried to salvage what I could before it was too late," the demon explained.

"Hey, you two are matching now," Emily said with glee as she pointedly looked at Ogras' bald head.

"Shit, don't lump me together with that eunuch," Ogras spat as his white hair quickly grew back until it reached his shoulders again. "That's better."

"Did you find anything?" Zac asked with a frown.

"Not much," the demon shrugged. "A storeroom full of half-burnt herbs. I don't recognize the thing, but there were massive quantities. I am guessing it's something used on zombies from how much of it they had. So what happened with the cultists? Did you get the leader?"

"I don't think so," Zac sighed as he retold his encounter with the zealots.

"A whip? That's a pretty rare weapon for a man," the demon muttered. "I never heard of him from any reports either. It should be the leader of the incursion who only ventured out to deal with you. Shame. Such life-saving measures usually come with a price though."

"Let's hope so. I'll go check things out at the Incursion," Zac finally said as he took out the flying treasure again.

However, the moment he was about to instill the leaf with some energy to activate it, he felt the whole world shudder and turn slanted. An agonizing pain ripped through his body, and he felt his vision close in on him.