

The Fall 556

Chapter 556: Heaven's Mandate

Pain and pressure threatened to tear Zac's body apart in an instant as it swelled to uncomfortable proportions. However, Zac wasn't the same person as back when he was flooded by Cosmic Water, and he forced himself to remain conscious as he looked for solutions.

Another thing that differed from similar situations was that Zac wasn't exactly being filled up with a terrifying amount of Cosmic Energy as he was in the Cosmic Water or when forming his Duplicity Core in the Dead Zone. Whatever the purple bolt of lightning was made of seemed to be something different.

It would be more apt to call it a messy mix of countless different Daos.

Zac was almost delirious from pain, but he strove to actively combat the lightning bolt as well by utilizing his newest method of controlling his mental energy. Directly defending hadn't worked, so he instead tried to push it out of his body with Fragment of the Bodhi mental energy, essentially doing the opposite of when he completed the quest for [Blighted Cut]. However, the mysterious lightning bolt was completely unmoved by Zac's efforts.

The odd and messy heterogeneity that Zac had never encountered before made it extremely hard to combat. His Daos were effective against some parts of the bolt but almost seemed to be making things worse on other parts. He was quickly reduced to passively enduring the lightning as he ground it down by exhausting his mental energy. However, it wasn't enough.

There was simply too much energy inside that bolt. And it was not only that, there were hints of high-tiered concepts beyond Zac's current understanding hidden in the chaotic mix, making it even more precarious to carry it around in his body. Even the remnants seemed subdued in its presence, something he only had witnessed once before, trying to appear inconspicuous rather than railing against its prison due to the chaos.

Zac popped one pill after another into his mouth as he tried one thing after another to weather the storm, and the others had realized something was wrong by now. They rushed closer, but they didn't get too close after Zac arduously shook his head at them. They wouldn't be able to help him this time, but he was starting to despair as the bolt seemed to have no intention to relent in its efforts to rip his body apart. Bloody cracks had spread all over his body already, and a similar situation could be seen in his soul.

But a deep heartbeat suddenly echoed out across the area as [Void Heart] thumped.

Nothing Zac had done until now could even be considered a temporary relief against the bolt, but there was actually a change in the lightning that coursed through his body after his Hidden Node activated. Better yet, it didn't seem to be on an isolated part of his body either. The whole bolt was frozen after the first heartbeat. However, Zac also felt a sharp pain in his heart, seemingly a backlash from messing with the purple lightning. It looked like even his omnivorous Hidden Node had problems dealing with this.

The [Void Heart] didn't give up after just one try though and another beat, this one even heavier, made his whole body vibrate. This time the foreign lightning didn't just stop, but the Hidden Node actually managed to rip off a small piece of the purple energy in the bolt before it swallowed it whole.

The stabbing pain that followed almost made him black out.

Zac started to worry for real as blood seeped down his mouth. He had only absorbed a few percent of the energy, but the backlash felt almost as dangerous as the lightning itself. He would be dead long before the Node had absorbed it all and Zac still hadn't found any way for him to control it. Zac was elated that something finally worked, but he was also worried about the implications.

He was pretty sure that this bolt was some sort of Tribulation brought forth by the system. The timing was too spot-on, and what else would be able to conjure that endless bolt in the sky? Perhaps the tribulation came from forming a proper path, or perhaps there was something else behind its emergence.

In either case, it was something that should be sent by the System. It felt extremely risky to try and steal that energy for himself, especially as the pain after the second beat almost knocked him unconscious. What if the System got angry and retaliated?

A third beat and another piece of the bolt was sucked into the vortex in his heart, disappearing into some unknown space of the [Void Heart], and Zac was lying on the ground by this point. The rampaging energies lost their energy once again, freezing in place all over his body. It was extremely lucky as well, as the backlash this time actually did knock him out, though only for a few seconds.

Zac realized he had fallen down on the ground at some time, but he was too tired and in too much pain to sit up. He could only lay sprawled on the ground, panting and fearing for what would come next. Not a scrap of energy had been released back from the Hidden Node either, which was odd by itself.

The Node instead started shaking more and more violently until Zac puked out a huge stream of blood that shot down the mountain and turned into a red mist. It was the trapped purple lightning that had actually managed to escape from his node, damaging it a bit while doing so. It did seem a bit changed though, like he had spit it up mid-digestion.

A fourth beat echoed out but it looked like the purple bolt had enough of Zac's weird bloodline. It actually reabsorbed the regurgitated lightning and fled out of his pores, its tendrils seemingly destroying everything in his surroundings out of frustration. It created a magical scene where the whole mountain was illuminated in purple, and this time it looked as though the lightning was visible by everyone.

The bolt in the sky disappeared the next moment after emitting a final burst of fury and murderousness. Zac looked like he had just lost ten battles in a row, but the lightning didn't get away completely unscathed either. The Hidden Node had actually managed to reabsorb a small part of the escaped energy before it left his body.

Zac weakly opened his eyes to see the group staying some distance away, seemingly afraid to approach without his go-ahead.

"Are you okay? What can we do?" Joanna shouted with worry in her eyes.

"It's over, it should be fine now," Zac said with a weak voice, but everyone on the mountain could easily hear it as even the weakest among them were late F-Grade warriors by now.

The Valkyries and Triv immediately rushed over while Ogras and Thea maintained the distance as they vigilantly looked at the surroundings. Zac snorted as he knew that the demon was simply afraid of getting hit by some surprise lightning. The Valkyries immediately started to clean his wounds as they erected a series of arrays around him, hiding Zac's wretched state from any prying eyes.

The ghost flitted around as it seemed to be observing the air around Zac. It only took a few seconds before Triv's eyes widened as its head snapped toward Zac who was still unable to get on his feet. It had clearly gleaned something from the remnant energy that had melded with the air and disappeared.

"This is Heavenly Lightning! Ancient Tribulation!" Triv said with horror in its eyes as it flew away from Zac once more. "What did you do to draw the wrath of the heavens?!"

The Valkyries already looked utterly baffled as they looked at Zac's pathetic state and that only intensified when they heard Triv's words.

"Just meditating," Zac said with a frown, his whole body feeling like it had been incinerated. "Why did I suddenly get blasted by another Tribulation?"

The ghost seemed to be hesitating about something, its eyes darting toward the Valkyries who were still inside the arrays.

"I have to rest a bit," Zac simply said. "Wake me up if something changes."

Zac spent over an hour in an almost fugue state where he completely focused on recuperation. He finally dared to move and circulate his energy a bit, and he was relieved to realize that his body wasn't as grievously wounded as he had feared. There were a huge number of both internal and external wounds, but that wasn't a problem to Zac.

The situation was similar with his soul, but it was thankfully far from fragmenting. His state more resembled having overextended himself in battle, which would be a lot quicker to recover from. Of course, there was always a risk that hidden threats were lurking in his body waiting to explode.

"Thank you for your help. Give me and Triv a moment please," Zac said with an exhausted voice as he opened his eyes. "No one comes in."

Joanna nodded and handed him a bottle of water before they exited the layers of arrays. However, they didn't go far, simply choosing to erect a perimeter around him.

"You know something," Zac evenly said.

"I... Ah..." The ghost said before its voice echoed out in Zac's mind.

It's the punishment of the Heavens, the result of embarking on the Boundless Path, Triv's voice said.

"WHAT?!" Zac exclaimed with shock before he quickly erected a sealing array and dragged the ghost inside. "When did I do something like that? Explain yourself."

"It is just what I heard," Triv said. "I might be wrong!"

"Just tell me what you know," Zac exhorted.

"Before the System, all cultivation went against the Heavens. It was to steal the essence of the Dao to attain immortality. But the universe wouldn't give in just like that, and it would send tribulation down on the cultivators," Triv sighed. "This all changed with the arrival of the System.

"Cultivation no longer goes against the Heavens; it is now Heaven's mandate. The only tribulations now are the trials that the System has envisioned to weed out the weak and train the strong. It is completely different from how it was before when the Heavens tried to smite those who stole its lifeblood."

"What does this have to do with me?" Zac asked with a sinking feeling.

"It seems Young Master has gained an insight that is either moving in an unrecognized direction or is outside the Heaven's Mandate altogether. You need to adjust your path to once more enter Heaven's Path."

Zac didn't understand what the ghost was talking about. How had he entered the Boundless Path? However, he suddenly remembered something. The last thing he had thought of before the lightning appeared was to personally take charge of Creation, Oblivion, and the Primordial Chaos itself. He only now realized how ballooned his ego was at that moment. This was something that not even the greatest masters of the universe could control from what he had gathered.

More importantly; if he really took control of the Dao of Chaos he would probably become one of the strongest beings in the universe, perhaps even superior to the previous Apostates. Was this what the system meant by 'Beware the Terminus'? Did it think he was fomenting an insurrection when creating his cultivation path?

It was a bit odd though, there shouldn't be any lack of people dreaming of seizing control of the Dao itself and become the master of the multiverse. In fact, should be one of the most common goals among elite cultivators. Was the System really zapping people left and right for having ambition? It seemed completely contrary to its purpose. Or was there some other reason that the System actually felt threatened and took action? Something unique about him?

In either case, the ghost's words came at a really bad time. The vision he had seen during his epiphany earlier had already turned muddled and indistinct in his mind, but he still remembered how vast it was and how it encompassed his path of cultivation perfectly. How could he just part with it like that? He felt that he would never reach his full potential if he walked away from this.

"And if I don't change my path?" Zac asked with reluctance.

"The further you walk down this path the greater the suppression of the Heavens. Not only will you be forced to withstand the true tribulations of the Heavens, the ones aimed at murder rather than training, but the even System will turn its back from you. I doubt the System would care about an E-Grade or even D-Grade warrior, but if you go too far you might find yourself unable to freely walk in integrated space," Triv said fearfully. "However..."

"However what?" Zac asked with exhaustion.

He had somewhat understood where Triv was going with his explanation from the very beginning, but he had let them prattle on as he gathered his own thoughts. He truly didn't know what he should do

even if the ghost was right. There was still a burning reluctance in his chest as he thought about giving up just as he began, but was it worth it to keep struggling?

He was not out to overthrow the Heavens or anything. He mainly wanted to get stronger so that he could protect those close to him. He had started to enjoy becoming stronger while uncovering the secrets of the universe, but it wasn't the main reason he pushed himself so hard. He would still be an elite even if he gave up on his envisioned path of cultivation, wasn't that enough?

"However, every single one of the Apostates walked the Boundless Path," Triv eventually said. "As did the Primo."