

The Fall 572

Chapter 572: Flames

Zac normally wouldn't have done something so risky as to challenge a Half-Step D-Grade Golem, but he was running out of options. He had ambushed Void's Disciple with the strongest people he could muster, but he still walked away almost scot-free. Certainly, he did seem to have been slightly worse for the wear in the security feed, but their group was in a far worse condition.

He needed another power-up.

That was his greatest takeaway from the battle, and that feeling had only increased since arriving at the Mystic Realm. The influence that the Dao of Space had over this whole base was far greater than he had expected, and who knew whether that would bring Adcarkas even more advantages.

He had tried to come up with other ideas over the past ten days, but this was the only thing with a decent chance of success. His first hope had been to quickly find some way to awaken his bloodline, they hadn't found a single useful thing inside so far. There were a lot of signs pointing toward this being a bloodline research base, but the useful stuff might all be locked in the center of the research base. Furthermore, the portal would close in a couple of days, so it was now or never.

It didn't look like his Hidden Node was gearing up to provide him with pure Dao distilled from Tribulation Lightning either, so he would have to risk his life for power once more. If he could gain access to the E-Grade skills he would gain a large boost in power, and the same went for Ogras and the elite Demons who had already evolved as well.

Besides, Zac wasn't doing anything he didn't have a certain confidence in succeeding. Zac believed that he had found a path to victory, or at least a way to survive the attempt.

It became possible only when combining a few things that had changed over the past weeks. First of all, was the discovery that [Blighted Cut] worked just as well on inanimate objects as it did on living beings. Even rocks would rot and lose their structural integrity when hit by the E-Grade skill of his Undead Class.

Zac had also confirmed the same thing on the guarding puppets he got for closing the Incursions. It was the most similar target to the trial of the Dao Repository, and his undead skillset was extremely efficient in taking them out. Even the captains were helpless against the combination of his extreme durability and high lethality.

Secondly, it was the fact that Triv had already confirmed that the [Rageroot Oak Seed] would work on his undead form. He had been worried before that he would encounter the same issue as with the Race-improving herbs. Luckily there were surprisingly almost no Life-attuned energies inside the seed, just a fiery power that would work even on the unliving.

Finally, he had visited Brazla five times over the past week, each time finagling a little bit of information about the trial as he mainly focused on finding out about the Dimensional Seed. The takeaway was that berserking items such as the seed were allowed in the trial, whereas powerful arrays or talismans were not. The logic was that surviving using a powerful Berserker Treasure could be considered a strength of your own, and a unique perk of cultivators with high Vitality.

This meant that he could use his Draugr-class, push it to the equivalent of Middle E-Grade with the seed, and restrict and grind down the trial golem while staying safe with the toolkit of his Fetters of Desolation-class. Zac quickly turned thoughts to action as he snuck back through the Spatial tunnel, with only the guarding Valkyries knowing he had left the Mystic Realm.

Zac wasted no time back on Earth either and he immediately teleported back to his compound. Everything pointed to him having almost a week, but he still felt the risk of getting locked outside. He had already decided that he would stay in Port Atwood at most for an hour or two, even if he had to drag himself back to the Mystic Realm while half-dead.

"Oh? I thought you had left. I was looking forward to some peace and quiet," Brazla snorted as Zac entered the Repository, but Zac still inwardly breathed out in relief when he saw that the Tool Spirit seemed to have one of his more amiable personalities today.

"I want to undergo the trial to unlock the E-Grade skills," Zac said as [Verun's Bite] appeared in his hands.

"So you think you're infallible now that you've spent some time among the weaklings," Brazla said with disdain. "Well, no matter. It makes no difference to The Great Sage whether you live or die."

Brazla lazily waved the arms of his golden robes next, and a portal appeared in the middle of the hallway.

"Just step inside and you'll be taken to the trial ground," Brazla said with disinterest.

Zac nodded but he didn't immediately enter. He instead swapped over to his undead class while [Love's Bond] transformed into its shield-form. Zac didn't stop there either, but he also activated [Vanguard of Undeath] along with [Immutable Bulwark]. This would be a trial conducted by Brazla himself, and Zac wouldn't take any chances. He might not get the opportunity to transform on the other side.

"So cautious," Brazla snorted, but Zac only ignored him as he stepped up to the teleporter.

"Any last-minute advice?" Zac asked.

"The faster you fail the quicker I can return to my rest," Brazla said after some thought. "So don't dally."

"Great," Zac sighed as he stepped onto the teleporter.

The teleportation was immediate, but Zac didn't even have an opportunity to take stock of his surroundings before a stream of lava the thickness of his thighs almost hit his head. He barely had time to move his shield in time, but he was still pushed back over ten meters from the incredible force of the molten rock. If that wasn't enough Zac also was assailed by a terrifying heat until he finally managed to divert the stream in its entirety. He could feel a stinging sensation on his face, and he audibly groaned when he knew that he had become a monk once more.

However, he was still more concerned about the stream of molten rock as it wasn't simple lava like the one in the Underworld. This lava contained a fierce spirituality, and Zac actually guessed that it could be considered a powerful E-Grade material. That fact alone made him gawk as he took stock of his surroundings. It was a huge sea of lava, with the only solid ground being the small island he was standing on.

Far in the distance rocky walls could barely be discerned through the smoke rising from the fiery lake, and they reached toward the sky in all directions until he could spot a circle of red sky straight above him. It didn't take a genius to figure out that he had appeared inside a volcano, and a high-grade one at that.

Thankfully Brazla had saw fit to let him out on the only safe spot, a circular plateau that rose a few meters above the sea of lava and spanned around five hundred meters across. It didn't seem to be a natural formation as it was perfectly circular and flat. Even its surface consisted of beautiful tiles, each of them with a unique image engraved.

The platform was mostly empty apart from what looked like an enormous anvil placed in the middle. Next to it was what looked to be a small pool of lava, no more than ten meters across. Zac guessed that it was connected to the massive lake, but he couldn't be certain as the intense attuned energies that rose from that pond almost blinded him when using [Cosmic Gaze].

There were also several boulders studded across its surface along with a dozen slabs of unknown metals stacked to the side. The raw materials looked different from each other, but it was clear that all of them could withstand the intense heat without a problem, meaning they likely were spiritual metals.

At least Zac guessed anything that could survive in this harsh environment to be a valuable material.

Zac couldn't be certain, but it felt as though the sea of lava was at least a dozen miles across, which meant this monstrosity of a volcano completely dwarfed both the volcano in the underworld and the one that the Church of Everlasting Dao had controlled. It almost beggared comprehension how much lava would be required to fill it up.

There was one break in the lava right behind him though, a single pathway leading across the whole ocean into a tunnel on the other side of the wall. But it was precariously narrow, just two meters across, and it was constantly being blasted by waves of magma or gouts of flames.

His first instinct was that his trial would take place on the other side, and Zac couldn't help but feel he had bit off more than he could chew by taking on this trial. He wasn't confident in making it across that narrow bridge even when using his sturdier class. The power in that sea of lava was just too intense.

However, a voice soon dragged him out of his musings.

"This was my creator's smithy. Or well, one of them," a grating voice echoed out, and Zac looked up to see Brazla floating in the air.

The Tool Spirit had changed getup since entering the trial ground, and he was currently gripping a grotesquely large hammer, its massive bulk even overshadowing Billy's club. It was golden just like everything else Brazla used, but this weapon actually had a palpable aura in contrast to the other weapons the Tool Spirit often conjured. A thought suddenly struck Zac, and he looked at the Tool Spirit with suspicion.

Was the guardian actually Brazla himself?

"A Celestial Craftsman such as Brazla wouldn't deign to lower himself to muck around in the mud with some child," Brazla snorted with disdain, clearly understanding what Zac was thinking. "Your opponent is over there. The Great Sage is only here to be amused."

Zac nodded in understanding as he turned in the direction the tool spirit was pointing in.

A ten-meter rock was lying on the other side of the stone plateau, looking just like the other boulders that studded its surface. Zac had initially thought that those pieces of rubble were things that had been spit out by the lava and accidentally fallen onto the plateau, but the truth didn't seem so simple. Just as Zac looked over a startling change took place as the rock itself exploded, causing the whole area to be shrouded in dust.

"Have fun," the Tool Spirit laughed as he floated higher in the air.

Zac wanted to swear at the cavalier attitude of Brazla, but he knew better than that. It was better to direct his ire toward the guardian than the tool spirit, as there was no telling that Brazla would do if he got annoyed. Zac couldn't see what was going on inside the dust cloud, but his [Cosmic Gaze] noticed that vast amounts of attuned energies radiated from its center.

Something illuminated the cloud in grey and a fiery orange, and Zac recognized both the Daos; Fire and Steel. Zac frowned when he felt the intense spiritual fluctuations, as they almost rivaled his own Dao Field. He had somewhat hoped that the trial guardian would be more like the Cyborg in the Underworld. It had possessed shockingly high attributes, but it didn't utilize the Dao at all, severely limiting the damage it did.

If the Cyborg had also been able to use just a Peak Seed rather than just its body, then Zac definitely wouldn't have survived the encounter.

However, he was clearly not as lucky this time around. An explosion erupted from within the cloud once more, and the blast forced Zac back a few steps. He quickly swallowed the [Rageroot Oak Seed], decidedly going all-out from the start. His instincts told him that undergoing this trial without it would be nigh suicidal.

It was as though Zac swallowed the molten ocean itself as a shocking force spread through his limbs. It felt like every cell in his body suddenly had a heartbeat of its own, and all of them were beating like the drums of war. Even his soul had ballooned up to unprecedented proportions and Zac almost believed he was the heavens themselves for a moment before he found his bearings.

However, he couldn't sit still and wait to see what was going on in that ominous dust cloud. A surging momentum was building up in his chest, and it demanded release. A mighty roar escaped from his lips as he bent down toward the ground to rip out one of the intricate tiles. He would start this battle like he often did, with a pre-emptive throw containing all his bloodlust.

However, the stone refused to budge, and Zac felt a towering fury lambasting his mind, a fury directed at the creator of this place. How dare a mere tile setter subvert the will of a god? His arms shook with exertion, but it was to no avail. But Zac figured it might be for the best as he started running toward the cloud with purpose in his steps and death in his eyes.

After all, was there any better feeling than ripping apart your enemies with your bare hands?