

The Fall 576

Chapter 576: Plunge

Zac struggled against the restraints that covered his body, but it was to no avail and the only reason he didn't cry out in shock as he fell toward the red-hot magma was that he was physically unable to.

It was a poignant reminder of the true power of the annoying braggart who usually just messed around in the Towers of Myriad Dao. Brazla might not be a real cultivator, but he was definitely a top-tier D-Grade Tool Spirit, perhaps even approaching C-Grade. Going by how powerful Verun already was in E-Grade, then Brazla was probably the most powerful being in Port Atwood, with Karunthel being the only possible exception.

The lava in the small pond below him was definitely something far more dangerous than the lake surrounding the platform, and Zac was almost thankful that he couldn't activate [Cosmic Gaze] close to the pond. The shocking amounts of attuned energies below him made the hair on his arms stand on end, and looking straight at it with his skill might have blinded him.

However, Zac quickly calmed down even as he still fell. Suddenly being stripped naked and thrown into a metal anvil with enough force to break his nose had plunged his exhausted mind into chaos, but he quickly remembered what was going on. Brazla might be annoying and fond of causing trouble, but he always did what his creator had instructed him to.

The Tool Spirit's execution was definitely lacking, but this was no doubt an opportunity that Zac had to seize.

That notion only grew stronger as an extremely intricate script appeared on the pool of lava just before he dropped into it, and Zac immediately realized how similar it was to the golden array that currently covered and restrained his body. He didn't get the chance to get a better look though as he was submerged in the lava the next moment, forcing him to quickly close his eyes.

His body instinctively strained to swim up to the surface, but he was still completely unable to move as he sunk deeper and deeper into the depths. Thankfully, he quickly realized that the lava around him didn't hurt at all. The magma rather felt like a warm embrace, allowing Zac to breathe out in relief. That by itself confused Zac even further as fresh air somehow entered his lungs even when he was supposed to be submerged.

Was the lava around him just an illusion?

The notion was so strong that he actually opened his eyes, but surrounding him was just an endless red, with the occasional wisp of white-hot fires. It definitely looked like lava, but his vision wasn't completely obfuscated as he could actually see his body just fine, making him feel like he was submerged in water rather than molten rock.

The situation was extremely odd, but his attention was quickly seized by the small sparks of white flames that flitted about before they disappeared. There was something unique about those flames. It was definitely fire-attunement, but also something more. It felt like he could only grasp the edge of it, similar to how he was unable to understand even a corner of the Chaos Pattern back then.

It was pretty annoying that he couldn't activate [Cosmic Gaze] to get a better look, but he wasn't too sure it would do him any good against those small fires. They didn't feel as vast as the Purple Lightning or domineering as the System's presence, but they were extremely pure. The impression they gave Zac was that all the attuned energies he had seen until now were fake, a hollow mimicry of energies truly touched by the Dao.

Was this perhaps how C-Grade attuned energies looked like? Or was it something else entirely? It honestly didn't feel as powerful as something that could be considered C-Grade, and it was rather more reminiscent of the Dao Intent that Thea had been imparted from the Inheritance. In either case, it was definitely something valuable, and Zac's heartbeat sped up in anticipation.

The odd surroundings made it impossible to get a proper bearing but it felt like he was being submerged deeper and deeper by the second, to the point that he had descended thousands of meters into the depths of the volcano. The pure energies around him only seemed to become even stronger as he sank deeper, and the surroundings quickly changed from red to a warm yellow until it was just a world of pure white.

When the color gradient stopped changing so did Zac's impression of descending, and he knew that his opportunity was about to arrive. Brazla had said that he had gained 20 minutes of Body Tempering, and he guessed that the clock had already started ticking. The problem was that Zac had no idea what to do next.

He didn't own any bloodline tempering manual just yet, and the white fire around him didn't seem to do anything apart from heating his body. He wasn't a cultivator either, so he was unable to naturally absorb the energies from his surroundings. Not that he was sure it would be possible to circulate a Cultivation Manual when covered in a set of restraining runes.

However, tendrils of warmth finally started burrowing into his body, filling him with that mysterious force he had sensed earlier. Zac was initially worried that such a force would be dangerous to absorb when he was just E-Grade, but the white fire was extremely gentle as the warmth spread across his body. The intensity kept increasing, but it didn't hurt at all.

It was as though his body could contain an endless amount of this force without issue, and that he could withstand the steadily increasing heat in his body. The exhaustion from the battle was soon forgotten, replaced with a state of complete relaxation. It was like he had returned to the womb, and his eyes were starting to get heavy.

But Zac's eyes shot open just as they were about to close as he noticed a startling change across his body. His skin had started to change color, rapidly turning molten red. Zac couldn't believe what he was seeing as he looked down at his hands. It looked like he was made out of metal, and that this metal was heated in a furnace to a melting-point. It didn't hurt at all though, and Zac guessed this was the tempering that Brazla mentioned.

Zac was about close his eyes again and let the warmth wash his body clean, but a sudden force slammed into him, startling him awake. It felt startlingly similar to when the blacksmith golem pummeled him with its hammer, and sharp pain radiated across Zac's torso. It wasn't quite at the level of the terrifying [Bone-Forging Dust] he had used a couple of times by now, but it was still extremely painful. However, he knew that he had to endure to get the full benefits of whatever this tempering entailed.

One slam after another made Zac's body shudder, and the words of Brazla reappeared in the back of his mind. Less than a minute had passed and it felt like he was about to pass out from the pain, how would he be able to withstand almost 20 more minutes of this? But Zac forcibly pushed those cowardly thoughts out of his mind, and he emptied his mind as he welcomed another hammering.

This was a god-given opportunity to empower himself, and he wouldn't waste it.

The hits kept increasing in both strength and frequency though, and Zac's conviction was quickly starting to crack. He had essentially been turned into a piece of raw metal that was being worked over by this mysterious array, his flesh turned malleable by the heat around him. Were there even any benefits of doing this? He was just being pummeled over and over. What if this opportunity was meant for Peak E-Grade warriors who had properly evolved their bodies to D-Grade long ago? Was this perhaps even detrimental to him rather than beneficial?

However, those invasive thoughts were suddenly thrown away after a couple of minutes as Zac suddenly could see palpable results, and his eyes lit up as he wished the hits could come even faster.

His body was still glowing red-hot, but murky clouds were being expelled from his pores all across his body. They tainted the pure white of the surroundings for an instant before incinerated to the point that they were utterly annihilated. These clouds were definitely impurities and various types of sequelae trapped in his body, and he could even recognize their sources with the help of the weak aura they emitted just before they were burnt away.

First to get expelled was the fiery energies of the [Rageroot Oak Seed], and small explosions erupted as they came in contact with the magma. Next were the stubborn Dao energies left in his body from his fight with Void's Disciple. The sight made him widen his eyes, as there was a lot more stuck in his body than he had realized.

His pores kept spewing out the two foreign Daos, and by the time the slams no longer could extract any more he had expelled even more than he had removed himself over the past ten days. The tempering didn't end there though, and Zac's eyes were wide with marvel as impurities left from his [Bone Forging Dust], node-breaking pills, and all other sorts of treasures spewed out one by one.

Every second he felt as though his body was becoming lighter, and worry had long been exchanged with elation. Who would have known that such a huge boon was hidden within the Dao Repository? The magical molding even managed to find hidden remnants of the wound Mhal left when implanting him with the Draugr-samples so long ago, and the deathly energies were quashed in the lava lake.

Zac couldn't help but lament that his time in the lake was limited even though it felt like his body was being broken and remolded every second.

That feeling only grew when there was finally a reaction from his [Void Heart]. It had been utterly silent since swallowing the Tribulation Lightning, but it had suddenly started vibrating as it gobbled up a small part of the fiery energies in his body. Not only that, but Zac' actually felt two more spots on his body vibrate in a similar fashion.

First was the same spot in his head as he had sensed before, the spot that Zac suspected to be another hidden node related to his soul or the Dao. The second vibration came from his spine down at the small

of his back. It immediately made him think of the [Bloodline Marrow] he had been awarded before, and he could only lament that it was left in his Spatial Ring.

Unfortunately, the three spots only seemed to resonate with each other, with the two spots seeming unwilling to be opened. Zac tried everything he could to steer more of the mysterious energy into those two spots, but it was to no avail. Soon enough there were only seconds left before twenty minutes had passed, and Zac knew that this opportunity wasn't enough to break open the two nodes.

He could only give up on breaking open those two nodes, but he also knew that just finding them was a huge step forward. Before he only suspected the spot in his head, but now he was 100% certain about the location of two hidden nodes. Forcibly opening them was just a matter of finding the right sort of treasure by now.

The time was running out, so Zac readied himself mentally in case he would have to swim out by himself somehow, but a scene right at the end made him almost forget about the hidden node.

Not one, not two, but six small runes that clearly were of different origins suddenly shot out between his brows just before his vision blurred. The next moment he found himself panting on the ground in the hallways of the Towers of Myriad Dao, and Zac was relieved to see his spatial ring and treasures lying next to him.

His mind was foggy and unfocused after having both gone through a tough battle and the subsequent tempering, but he forced himself to stay awake as he reached for his spatial rings and robes. Just getting dressed felt like an almost insurmountable task, but by the time he was clothed again, he actually felt a lot better.

The six runes he saw at the end were definitely cause for concern, but Zac couldn't stifle his curiosity as he quickly opened his status screen. His body had been thoroughly cleansed and tempered, and he hoped that the encounter had pushed him to D-Grade race. However, confusion rather than elation marred his face after opening the status screen. His status had changed, but definitely not as he had expected.

[E] Human - Void Emperor (Corrupted, Unawakened)