

The Fall 669

Chapter 669: Grasping for Perfection

The will was there, but Zac soon realized that performing a perfect reincarnation would be easier said than done.

Things went quite smoothly in the beginning, with the soul shards almost effortlessly merging. But more and more force was required to keep the process going. It was almost like the extremely energy-dense shards had a mind of their own as they kept trying to fly away from the congealed ball in the middle of Zac's mind.

Zac's concentration was pushed to its limits as he kept moving the Life-Death energies around to set off explosions aimed at pushing any errant shards back into the fold. Losing a shard was akin to losing a piece of his soul, and he knew that could result in all kinds of weird afflictions down the road, ranging from lost memories to insanity.

Lose too many and the soul might even become unstable and fall apart, instantly killing him.

Worse yet, Zac felt his mind starting to become blurry as whatever kept his thoughts cohesive started wearing off, and he caught his mind drifting off on random tangents. A burst of pain shocked him awake as he used his go-to method to stay coherent; stabbing himself in the leg. It allowed him to keep pushing the now-radiant shards together, leaving just 32 splinters behind.

But that didn't change the fact that he was running out of Life-Death energy. Zac had already known that this might happen the moment he realized the purpose of the life-death clouds.

After all, he had already seen these clouds before.

Over the past months when he didn't feel any improvement of his soul, there had been small clouds of life and death left behind after the cultivation session. Zac had figured the clouds were left behind because he didn't manage to make any improvements, but Zac didn't feel it was cause to worry because his [Spiritual Void] had swallowed it all long before he started the next cycle.

But Zac now understood that those clouds were meant to be saved, to be accumulated. When you finally reached a large enough amount of fuel in your mind, the force would be strong enough to crack your soul and use the huge amount of clouds to begin the fusion process. However, Zac had completely bypassed that by going overboard with the help of Dao, Oblivion, and Creation entering the Array.

Of course, that also meant that Zac would never have been able to break through the normal way. If he hadn't taken the risk today he would just have kept treading water as the clouds failed to accumulate, wondering why he never reached a point where he felt he could make a breakthrough. Thankfully, Zac was long used to doing things his own way.

He had run out of one type of fuel, but weren't there others? He just needed to cause some explosions, right?

Zac immediately flashed over to the prayer mat in the middle, the nexus between life and death in his cultivation arrangement. He punched down at a certain array to his right, and massive waves of attuned energies stormed into the cavern, submerging him in what almost looked like black and gold liquid.

It was a special function that Kenzie had installed, a stopgap that would instantly crush and release the energy of over a hundred D-Grade attuned crystals and push them toward the center of the cave. It even removed the majority of the Cosmic Energy from the boost, leaving mostly just distilled Dao behind. It was meant to be used if he felt himself on the precipice of having a breakthrough in his Dao or something, giving the environment a massive temporary boost.

But the dreadful amounts of energies were extremely helpful in this situation as well, and Zac felt relief rather than worry as almost-lethal levels of attuned energies pushed into his body through his pores. Parts of it was gobbled up by [Void Heart], but his [Spiritual Void] had entered a frenzied state from the upheavals around it.

It created a powerful suction that dragged more and more life-and-death-energies into his mind. Some of it was swallowed by the Hidden Node, but Zac managed to use a lot of it to unleash a chain of powerful explosions as well.

The extra surge of external Life-Death Energy gave him the push he needed, lowering the number of shards to just eight. They all looked like radiant pearls that reminded Zac of an early embryo, and Zac felt his mind clear once more now that his soul had stabilized. Zac wasn't content with just this though, so he kept trying to force another fusion.

Unfortunately, the ambient energy was no longer dense enough to keep pushing the remaining shards together. The problem wasn't lack of energy, but rather the fact that Zac's body wasn't able to absorb it quickly enough to keep the process going. Even his two Hidden Nodes could only swallow so much, and Zac had released far more energy in the cave than he could absorb in a short while.

He couldn't do any absorbing on his own either considering he was just a mortal, which left his body in a state of equilibrium. The Soul Balls that formed the core of his reincarnated soul contained too much power on their own, and they naturally resisted the outside pressure. Just ambient energy wasn't enough to keep going.

There was no mention of it in his cultivation manual, but Zac was certain that barely passing the first Reincarnation would mean limits on his future soul cultivation. Perhaps the first three reincarnations would be the ceiling, just like how picking a Common E-grade class would stop your cultivation progress at that grade.

Zac thought for a second before he grit his teeth and focused on his [Spiritual Void]. A massive torrent of stored Dao was extracted from within, completely flooding his mind in gold and black. He had been pushed to his limits before when activating the array, but the real bottleneck then hadn't been his Dao. It was rather his mental energy being drained beyond what was safe.

His [Spiritual Void] wasn't without limits, but he had noticed that he was able to slowly expand the storage over the past years by continuously pushing excess Dao inside and then waiting for the node to stabilize. It could hold a huge amount of energy by this point, even surpassing the total strength of his soul. Or at least his old soul.

There was still a decent amount of Dao Stored from before, and it had even been bolstered a second ago by the immense clouds of energy around him. But Zac now opened the floodgates, and it all came

storming out. Bodhi and Coffin, Life and Death. But now there was also a third cloud; a silvery cloud wrought from the Fragment of the Axe.

Zac was completely draining the Hidden Node, which meant that the Dao of his third Fragment was also released. Zac wasn't worried though, as it was all in his plan. The two clouds of life and death churned and clashed, but the clashes turned into a chaotic inferno the moment Zac pushed the third Dao into the mix.

Fragment of the Axe represented Conflict on his Cultivation Path, and he had made some inroads into this concept over the past years. Part of the insights came from studying the Annihilation Sphere and Origin Mark, which he had decided to call his Pink Flash.

Life and death were in constant struggle, as was evidenced by the unceasing clashes in his cultivation cave. However, there was a natural balance in the clashes and they formed a clear line of demarcation. Zac had eventually found a way to turn the orderly conflict into a chaotic war by infusing his Fragment of the Axe into the mix.

It had resulted in him almost losing a limb from a massive explosion that ruined his whole cave the first time, but it was exactly that kind of force that he needed right now.

One terrifying explosion after another was set off in his mind as life, death, and conflict stirred up a war of unprecedented proportions. The eight spheres were caught in the heart of it like innocent bystanders dragged into someone else's dispute. A massive shockwave suddenly dispersed the energies from his hidden node, causing Zac to see double.

What remained in his soul were four pristine spheres, each of them a masterpiece that radiated power.

Unfortunately, the eruption had pushed dispersed the three clouds, and losing all his Dao was a big roadblock to his goal of completing the reincarnation perfectly. It also looked like he was running out of time. The Soul Shards had been malleable at the start, but the spheres felt increasingly rigid, like balls of glass that were cooling down. He needed to speed up or he'd lose his window of opportunity.

Zac was full of reluctance, but two small chests appeared in front of him, one gold and one black.

His sister had collected hundreds of rare treasures over the past years, so how could still Zac be empty-handed after all this time? Inside the two boxes were two treasures, one of life and one of death, that matched even Kenzie's nine final treasures in value. In fact, they had been given by Kenzie himself.

His sister had been consumed with gathering everything needed for her evolution, but that didn't mean she had forgotten about the rest of Port Atwood. Pretty much every core member of Zac's faction had been given some sort of treasure that normally only scions of large clans would be able to enjoy. Unsurprisingly, Zac was the biggest beneficiary of Kenzie's generosity.

Zac had saved the two treasures for when he had solved the issue of his Draugr Race bottleneck. They weren't Dao Treasures, but they contained both powerful and profound energies of life and death. The plan was to eat them the moment he had accumulated enough Inspiration to push his Fragment of the Bodhi and Coffin to the next level, which would hopefully satiate the requirements of his bloodline.

However, it looked like he had no choice but to make use of them early.

Of course, these treasures were ultimately not too difficult to get hold of as long as you had access to a few dozen auction sites and over 100 billion Nexus Coins lying around. They were far from the kind of peak treasures like the [Eye of Har'Theriam] which only had demand but no supply.

His financial situation was completely different compared to before, and replacing them wouldn't prove a big challenge. Certainly, that was only thanks to the System providing hundreds of thousands of teleportation destinations. Even Hegemons would find it nigh-impossible even if they somehow managed to gather one million D-grade nexus coins since they would still be locked to their local cluster of planets.

Still, Zac couldn't help but feel a pinch as he swallowed the death-attuned treasure first. It was called [Nightcast Lily], and Zac ate it stem and all. A terrifying cold quickly spread through his body as inscrutable markings started to superimpose over his pathways, and Zac's hand shook as he quickly swallowed the second treasure.

These natural treasures were proper D-grade items, which made them far more potent compared to items like the Fruit of Ascension who mainly got their grades thanks to its requirements on environment and usefulness. Even Peak E-grade cultivators would be careful when consuming one, and no one would be foolish enough to take two treasures of clashing attunements at the same time. No one except Zac, that is.

Life and death once more used his body as a battlefield, and Zac desperately pushed the rampant energies toward the space holding his soul. Cracks spread out across his body, and he was soon drenched in black ichor. But Zac was like a possessed person as he ignored the dangers, his mind set on forcing another fusion.

Soon the two energies entered his soul aperture, and his vision swam from the pain as small hairline cracks spread across the four Soul Spheres from the furious collisions between the energies of two D-grade treasures. The force required to decrease the number of crystals was clearly immense, and his soul could barely take the pressure. However, a wave of soul-wrenching pain was immediately followed by an unprecedented sense of clarity as four turned into two.

The new spheres were beautiful and radiant. It was like his mind housed two small moons, each of them worthy of being an elite mentalist's soul judging by the power they contained. Zac could feel it. There had been a qualitative change when he decreased the number of Soul Spheres to four from eight, but the difference was far greater this time around.

It was like his soul was completely remolded into something far greater and far more durable, and the qualitative jump made him even more adamant about shooting for perfection. Problem was, most of the energies of the two treasures had been expended, and his body probably wouldn't be able to take it if he ate two new ones. Not that he had them.

But there was one more trick he could use, though it came with some danger.

The passages in the manual, 'The Heavens are subject to the demarcation of Yin and Yang, the delimited Dao. Supreme above all is the Primordial Chaos, a singular unity.', had given him an idea for his final fusion and his eyes turned to the cage in his mind.

The two remnants were still locked in their eternal struggle, but they looked a lot better compared to their wretched state after being forcibly drained to generate a Chaos Pattern. They were continuously gaining energy through some unknown method, only part of which was extracted by the cage.

More importantly, it almost felt like being locked in a struggle with their nemesis forced the two remnants to continuously be refined, and extremely esoteric patterns had started to appear across their surfaces. Zac once had the idea to use those patterns as a basis to meditate on his Dao Fragments, but he had gained absolutely nothing.

It wasn't a problem with his Bloodline this time, but the concepts hidden within those markings were just too esoteric. It was ultimately too early to use those things as a reference. He couldn't even keep his mind safe without the help of his fractal cage, which was the biggest reason he was working on his soul in the first place. After all, there was no way for him to rely on the cages forever.

He had clearly sensed it by now. The two sets of fractals were extremely sturdy, but the remnants were slowly corroding them. They would break sooner or later unless Be'Zi and the System somehow replenished them. It was still in an early process, and Zac believed he had decades before they would break.

Though that grace period would most likely shorten from what he was about to do.

Zac's mind shuddered as he pushed the two massive Soul Spheres closer to the anchor point of the sub-space prison, a nondescript part off to the side in his soul aperture. The movement went without issue, but Zac's heart still beat like a drum as he pushed a large number of tendrils of mental energy into the hidden dimension housing the remnants.

The whole air around him ignited the next second as a torrent of energy came bursting out, filling his mind with unimaginable force. Black holes were replaced with sparkling stars around him as Creation vied for dominion against Oblivion. Zac almost felt like an almighty god as a thought could destroy anything around him, but he forcibly reined in his imagination.

He instead repeatedly wished for the rampant energies to create pressure on his two soul spheres. Oblivion and Creation, Yin and Yang, clashed in his mind, causing Zac to puke blood as deep cracks spread across the two spheres. One explosion after another rocked his whole soul aperture, but he arduously kept the two forces in check so that they didn't completely destroy his soul.

Finally, his mind shuddered as ripples spread out from his glabella. The air itself started vibrating throughout the whole cave like someone had dropped a stone in a still pond. The delimited had become a singular unity, and his soul was made whole as the two cracked moons turned into one blazing sun.

A perfect reincarnation.