

## The Fall 739

### Chapter 739: Reciprocity

Clearly, Zac wasn't the only one who held animosity toward the other escapee. The Octopus screeched with a mix of fury and fear, and it made its move before Zac had time to figure out a way to deal with the crisis. It was like space twisted as a tentacle shot toward him, extending far beyond what should be possible. It was just a blink of an eye, but the attack was already upon him.

Zac only had time to readjust his shield and empower it with the Fragment of the Coffin before the vicious swipe slammed into him, throwing him back against the mountain range. Simultaneously, a vast haze of black sludge covered the waters, and it was somehow resistant to the incessant pull of the currents as it hovered in the area like a thick haze.

The fury in Zac's heart turned into a raging conflagration as he glared in the direction of the Beast King. There was no doubt about it; the Octopus wanted to use him as a scapegoat while it escaped. But how could Zac give up without a fight? He activated all the talismans he had left in various spots in the mountain range, hoping that a series of explosions would divert the snake's attention.

Meanwhile, a grey pill flew into Zac's mouth as he set off after the tentacled beast, and the effect was immediate. His muscles swelled and torrential amounts of Miasma started coursing through his body. Just like with all berserking pills he had eaten before, this one came with a surging momentum and battle lust as well, though not to the point of full-on-lunacy like the Rageroot Oak seeds.

Still, the goal of escape grew a bit blurred as Zac's abyssal scanned the area in search of the Octopus, and [Love's Bond] changed to its offensive form as forced himself through the obstacle it had left behind. However, the Beast King was in its natural habitat, whereas Zac was not. Even a top-quality Berserking pill wasn't enough to allow him to catch up to the frantic escape of the octopus, especially considering how the weird cloud of ink it left behind felt like sticky goo that impeded his progress.

Even worse, the enormous snake seemed completely uninterested in investigating the cascading series of eruptions from the talismans and it was fast catching up. Zac couldn't be certain, but judging by how rapidly the towering aura in the distance grew more and more distinct, he had less than half a minute before the beast had caught up. The snake should have been on the other side of the mountain range, but the speed the snake exhibited was far exceeding anything that should appear in this trial.

The situation wasn't looking good, and desperate times called for desperate measures.

A black spike appeared in Zac's hand, and a surge of cursed power immediately coursed through his body as the berserking compound he looted from Faceless #9 activated. It felt like he would explode as the two berserking treasures caused havoc on his body, and his body suddenly disappeared in a puff.

Of course, it wasn't Zac actually exploding, but rather him activating [Abyssal Phase]. His mind screamed for speed as he cut through the churning waters, and the additional energy and the battle madness from the berserking pills allowed him to withstand the currents far longer than he would normally.

He didn't care about the damage that was being wrought upon his intangible form, his mind was fast becoming consumed by the hunt, of going ever faster. Suddenly, it was like the already turbid surroundings became even more leaden, almost to the point that time seemed to have stopped

altogether. It immediately became easier to navigate around the worst of the currents, and Zac pushed through the restrictive ink and caught up to the fleeing octopus in no time.

It almost looked like it had been frozen in time, but reality quickly caught up when Zac appeared right on top of the octopus' mantle, his eyes burning with madness as [Verun's Bite] ripped through the waters. A massive jagged edge appeared in front of the axe as two streams of mental energy empowered by Dao and madness burrowed into the skill fractal of [Gorehew].

The octopus tried to use a tentacle to swipe Zac off from its body, but two chains dug into flesh as the other two moved to intercept. The jagged edge of Zac's offensive skill slammed into the bulbous mantle, and the defensive measures of the octopus proved utterly incapable of forming any significant defense. A water barrier was ripped apart and the thick sinewy flesh was cut right through by the skill empowered by two Peak Dao Fragments.

Eight tentacles spasmodically flailed about in the air as Zac's axe dug into the innards of the beast, but he still didn't get any surge of energy even after swinging his weapon three times in rapid succession. Zac growled in frustration as he saw flesh rapidly regenerate, the Beast King showing its resilient life force. Zac knew this wasn't the time for a protracted battle, and two new streams of Mental Energy entered his shoulder.

A small sphere appeared between his hands, and Zac unhesitatingly pushed it into the bleeding wounds before he activated [Abyssal Phase] with the help of [Force of the Void] once more. He had almost run out of energy after restoring his arm and leg a few weeks back, but he recovered just enough to barely form an extremely weak Mark of Creation by this point.

Zac didn't expect the small outburst of pure creation to actually kill the enormous beast, especially seeing how durable it was. But his eyes lit up when he saw how a series of weird transformations took place inside the mantle. The Beast King's thoughts were no doubt in turmoil with the snake bearing down on them, and wild imagination was like fertilizer for the Mark of Creation.

Between the grievous wounds and the Mark of Creation creating havoc, the Octopus was dead in the water, allowing Zac to activate his movement skill once more to create a commanding lead. However, the energy-dense waters were soon too much for Zac even when filled with energy from the berserking treasures, and he was forced to revert to his normal form. Thankfully, he had managed to create a distance of over two thousand meters by that point, but every hair on his head stood on end as he sensed an extremely powerful consciousness lock onto him.

The thick ink left by the Octopus shuddered and dissipated the next moment as half the horizon was replaced by a maw the size of a mountain. Zac peered into its depths, feeling just as weak as when he had gazed upon the true form of the Collector back then. Thankfully, he only had to gaze at that terrifying scene for an instant before the maw closed around the octopus, turning it into yet another appetizer.

Zac was in no mood to stick around, but his horror only mounted when he realized he was utterly unable to do so. It was like the whole Twilight Chasm had frozen solid. The furious currents were gone, no longer leaving lacerations across his body. It would normally have been a relief, but the terror in Zac's heart only mounted upon finding himself unable to do as well. His arms were flailing and he was expelling

huge amounts of Miasma to create momentum, but he didn't move an inch from the terrifying head that grew ever closer.

Thankfully, it didn't look like it was intent on ruthlessly gobbling him up like it did the octopus as the snake stopped a few hundred meters away from Zac. His whole vision was blocked out by the huge snout of the beast, and he felt his heart tighten as the sixteen eyes focused on him.

'DRAUGR' a booming voice echoed out in Zac's mind with enough power to make him puke out a mouthful of ichor. 'WHERE ARE THE FORMATION FLAGS? RETURN THEM, AND YOU CAN LIVE'.

If being stared down by a primordial creature wasn't clue enough, Zac knew he was in deep shit the moment he heard it wanted its items back. Most likely, the array flags had been swallowed by the void with the rest of the treasures of the mountain range. His thoughts whirred, and he tried to see if he could lie his way out of this one. It hadn't ever worked so far, but he didn't have a lot of options at the moment.

"I am Arcaz Black from the Abyssal Shores. I don't know what you're speaking of. I was dragged down here just minutes ago because of some sort of earthquake. Help me reach the surface and the Empire will reward you. You are connected to the Twilight Lord, I'm sure he would appreciate gaining another friend among the Draugr," Zac said with a bow, trying to mask his fear.

'IF YOU DO NOT HAVE THEM, THEN YOU CAN JUST DIE,' the earthshattering voice echoed out in Zac's mind as the beast spat out a wave of destruction that rippled toward him.

"SAVE ME, AND I'LL PROVIDE ANOTHER PIECE OF THE PATTERN!" Zac roared at the top of his lungs, seeing no option but to turn to the only one who could save him right now.

The Beast King only snorted in response, but it froze as the whole chasm rumbled.

The world of darkness was suddenly illuminated by a golden hue as the sea turned into one of lightning. An aura of vast power, far eclipsing that of the snake, descended, and Zac knew his gambit had succeeded. He wasn't trying to elicit help from The Twilight lord. He was looking for someone more reliable.

The System itself.

'IMPOSSIBLE!' the snake screeched, its voice filled with shock and dread.

There was no response to the snake's cry, but a bolt of lightning entered the wave of destruction rippling toward Zac, causing it to unravel halfway between himself and the Beast King.

Zac felt like he had been slapped by an angry god from the impact, and cracking sounds echoed out through his body as dozens of bones shattered in an instant. The force launched him like a rocket through the waters, completely ignoring the snake's restrictions. It was almost like he teleported as he slammed into the mountain wall tens of kilometers in the distance, causing massive cracks to spread out like a spider web for hundreds of meters in each direction.

The world grew blurred as Zac felt yet another set of bones shattering from the collision, but the berserking pills thankfully forcibly stopped him from losing his consciousness. He quickly used two of his healing brands, which at least allowed him to somewhat stabilize his body's gruesome state. The area

was still drenched in lightning, and having been thrown away to a greater distance gave Zac a proper vantage of what was going on.

Thousands of golden lightning bolts rained down on the snake, its gargantuan scales cracking one after another from the impact. The area around the oversized beast had turned into a zone of death, and lower beast kings would probably have been turned to ash if they entered. However, Zac couldn't help but worry when he saw that the snake didn't actually get ripped apart from the heavenly punishment.

It fought tooth and nail, and a whirlpool consisting of terrifyingly condensed Twilight Energy had sprung up around it, protecting its body as it forcibly tried to endure the tribulation. Not only that, but Zac saw how nine white peaks suddenly rose from the depths, each of them covered in intricate patterns. Together, they cut through the water like it was nothing, forming an immense formation that released waves and waves of power that surrounded the snake in yet another layer of protection.

The thunderstorm raged with greater and greater intensity, but Zac sensed that the amount of tribulation lightning the System had conjured was limited, prompting him to swear in exasperation. How could the endlessly powerful overlord of the Multiverse lose against an oversized snake? A familiar voice suddenly echoed out in his head, and thankfully not the painfully loud roar of the beast.

[Reciprocity has been achieved and balance is maintained. Beware the Terminus.]

"How is almost killing me and not even dealing with the beast achieving balance?" Zac spat with incredulity, but there was no response. Zac could feel that the System's presence was already gone, leaving behind only a single prompt.

Reciprocity (Unique, Limited): Surrender a glimpse of Chaos. Reward: - (0/1) [598d]

[NOTE: Failure to comply will result in loss of 10 levels and one random Dao.]

Zac's eyes grew wider and wider as he read the prompt, almost to the point that he forgot the predicament he was in. Losing ten levels wasn't too bad, but the System was actually threatening one of his Daos, the very core of his Path? That was even worse than when it threatened his skills back in the Mystic Realm, and there was clearly no room for negotiation.

The System really wasn't holding anything back when it paid up-front.

Unfair as it may be, Zac knew that there was no meaning to railing against the Heavens. He could only suck it up and be happy he got to live another day. It was just like how Catheya described it. He was bound to be a chess piece until he gained the power to control the board himself.

A tremendous clap of thunder refocused Zac's attention, and he saw how the sea of lightning was condensing, seemingly gathering for one final strike. Meanwhile, the snake's aura was reaching unprecedented heights as the white mountain peaks below it cracked. The peaks crumbled, but as they fell apart the shards of milky stones formed a tremendously large rune, spanning over ten kilometers across.

Looking at the sigil was like looking at the truth of the ocean itself, and it seemed able to even borrow the unending force of the Twilight Ocean itself as the waters started to churn. The terrifying Beast King was clearly going all out in an effort to withstand the thunder punishment. Win or lose, Zac knew he

couldn't stay around for the result. His body was already teetering on the brink of collapse, and he wasn't actually that far from the battleground.

Zac looked back and forth in search of a solution, and he saw his chance when he spotted a piece of moss deep within the crack in the mountain wall. The crack had been caused by him slamming into the wall, but for there to be moss, there had to be a tunnel system even before this area was exposed.

No matter if he climbed up or down the mountain wall, he'd still be exposed to the snake. But if he managed to head deep enough into the side of the Twilight Chasm, he might be safe.

He took a steadying breath and activated [Abyssal Phase], and he was immediately beset by the terrifying energies that suffused the area. It wasn't just the Twilight Energy any longer, but also the thunders of the Heavens themselves that had infiltrated the waters, along with the extremely powerful energy that Zac suspected was part of the snake's Dao.

There was no time to lose, so Zac immediately shot into the crack, digging deeper and deeper in a frantic effort to put as much solid rock between himself and the cataclysmic clash outside. Suddenly, the seemingly frozen world of [Abyssal Phase] cracked as an apocalyptic explosion erupted far in the distance.

Zac was immediately forced out of his intangible form, but he was ready as dozens of Defensive Talismans activated while the pygmy skeleton appeared in an instant, covering him in barriers while a black haze ensconced him to divert falling rocks. The shockwave ripped through the area, throwing Zac into a wall, his defensive barely able to do anything to lessen the impact.

The world turned din, but a pained wail echoed through the mountain and woke him up. Zac had hoped it would be a final roar of defiance before inevitable death, but there was an unmistakable tone of elation hidden within the pained howl. The snake had survived, though it most likely was a pyrrhic victory.

Zac's whole body screamed in protest, but he forcibly activated his movement skill once more, squeezing even further into the tunnel system at the edge of the twilight chasm. Deeper and deeper he went, until he could go no further. He reverted into his physical form and activated his last healing brand before swapping over to his human form. He was running dangerously low on Miasma, and he would rather transform himself than suddenly just fall over.

The transformation took just a few seconds, but Zac felt himself on the precipice of the passing out three times over. But he soon gained his human form, and he arduously set off through the tunnels once more, using [Earthstrider] to make his way through the sprawling tunnel system. Using the skill the normal way while having [Void Zone] active was impossible, so he could only tap into his rapidly dwindling stores of Void Energy to make do.

He felt a few more shockwaves coming from the direction of the snake as he fled for his life, but they grew more and more indistinct until they couldn't be heard at all. Zac no longer had any idea just how far into the bedrock of the chasm he had escaped, but he knew that he couldn't go much further. His vision was already closing in on him, and he looked back and forth until he found a secluded spot.

Zac hadn't seen any creatures making these tunnels their home just yet, but there should be some considering the walls were covered in valuable herbs and the atmosphere was full of energy. His hands

were shaking, but he managed to place down a set of isolation and obfuscation arrays before he fell down on the ground, cradling the Void Beast organ.

He was out of better options. He felt his mind slipping, but he needed to keep the [Void Zone] active to not get killed by the ambient energy. The talent had been activated while he was unconscious the last time, and he prayed that it would work out this way. Finally, he let the darkness consume him, and he fell into a deep end dreamless slumber.

It might have been a few minutes, or it might have been a few days, but Zac was suddenly startled awake as a prompt appeared in front of his face. He looked at it with bleary eyes, and a wry smile spread across his face as his mind drifted back to sleep, briefly wondering what kind of reaction people would have upon seeing his name on the top of the ladder.