

## The Fall 742

### Chapter 742: Mind's Eye

The humongous crystal was like an emperor among its subjects, but it wasn't hard to see that it wasn't actually a Twilight Crystal. It looked more like an oversized tiger's eye gemstone or an agate if anything. He didn't immediately approach, but he first scoured his information packages to find something similar.

Eventually, he found something promising, though he looked up at the man-sized gem with some hesitation. There was a rare gemstone called [Mind's Eye Agate] that looked similar and could sometimes appear in energy-dense crystal mines. However, the examples he saw in the missive were no larger than his pinky, and they didn't have the markings of the humongous stone in front of him.

The normal agates were popular additions to jewelry or prayer mats as they emitted a weak aura that could help calm one's mind just like spiritual incense. This thing was obviously doing something similar as well, but on a far greater scale. It gobbled up the ambient energy and in turn exuded an aura that covered half the cave.

Seeing as his danger sense was completely quiet, Zac slowly went inside the field to test its effect. He was instantly filled with a sense of calm and stability, and he could feel how his mental energy was rapidly being restored. It felt like he had crushed a dozen Soul Crystal going by how quickly his mind was recovered, and it was absolutely perfect for his goal, so Zac started to set up array after array to prepare the area.

This chamber would become his cultivation cave for the foreseeable future, and he needed to protect the area. First came the defensive arrays at the heart of the cave, followed by observation arrays keeping watch in miles and miles of tunnels, mainly in the direction of the Chasm and the surface. Finally, he took out some furniture and placed them at the edge of the cave before placing his prayer mat right in front of the marvelous gem.

The final set-up might not be as tailormade for his needs as his cultivation cave back on Earth, but it more than made up for it in the raw energies available. Even with the mutated [Mind's Eye Agate] sucking up half of the Twilight Energy, the ambient energy left behind was far higher than anywhere on Earth, including on Port Atwood.

It was actually to the point that his body couldn't completely deal with it, with more and more Twilight Energy gradually filling his body the moment he deactivated [Void Zone]. However, the effect was nowhere near what he was forced to endure while climbing the mountain peaks just a few weeks ago, and cracking a Supreme Nexus Crystal allowed him to be shielded from the ambient energy for almost two minutes.

With [Void Heart] constantly absorbing the invasive energies, his stockpile of Void Energy was gradually getting restored as well, though it took almost a day for his reserves to be completely topped off. In either case, he had more than enough crystals to last him up to two years, and he would even be able to recoup the loss by looting the chamber upon exiting.

Seeing as everything was set up, Zac took out the intricate Array Disk and started up his soul cultivation once more. This time he wasn't just cultivating to protect himself from the environment, so he did

everything he could to make the process as efficient as possible. That meant cultivating opposing alignments, with his Draugr side absorbing life, and his human side absorbing death.

Furthermore, he started to empower the cycles with his Daos to increase the effect. A stream of pure Dao entered the small array disk along with the flood of Mental Energy, and Zac instantly felt a sense of weakness. The drain was ten times that of infusing the array before the first reincarnation, and small beads of sweat started to run down his head just as he completed the first circle.

The gains were just as powerful as during the first reincarnation though, and a storm of death entered the black ocean, to the point that his whole Soul Aperture shuddered a bit from the sudden and rapid infusion of Mental Energy. He still wasn't at his limit, and he infused the second circuit with his Dao as well, followed by the third.

However, Zac wasn't certain he'd be able to complete all 9 revolutions if he kept going this way, and from the fourth revolution onward, he cultivated the normal way. The hours passed, and by the time the ninth revolution had finished, Zac was barely able to restrain the deathly ocean in his mind. He actually needed to use a decent amount of his mental energy from just keeping his Soul Aperture from going out of control, and he quickly started to cultivate the second set of revolutions to restore balance.

The hours passed as one cycle replaced the previous, and the depths of death were gradually being countered by the peaks of life. The ninth revolution finished and the two opposing concepts reached equilibrium. However, balance didn't mean harmony. An unprecedented storm erupted in his mind, with the core of his soul being constantly pelted by the raging waves.

Zac grimaced as his vision blurred from a soul-rending pain, but he grit his teeth and endured. It looked like infusing three revolutions from the get-go was overdoing it a bit. Truthfully, he had only managed to push himself that far thanks to the aura of the large gemstone in front of him, but he had faith in the resilience of his soul.

Besides, he had something prepared for a situation like this.

The storm continued for almost an hour, at which point small hairline cracks covered the surface of the pristine core in the heart of his soul. It was rather the effect of overextending oneself than actual wounds, but Zac still ate a soul-mending pill as he took out a stalk of shimmering grass. It came from the small patch he had discovered on the mountain peak the other day, and his soul screamed with hunger as the stalk gave off an enticing aroma.

Zac looked at the 80-centimeter stalk for a second before he shrugged and crammed it into his mouth. Taking a Spiritual Herb like this was wasteful at best, and suicidal at worst. Many herbs contained dangerous and chaotic energies that interfered with the medicinal efficacy you wanted, or even contained poisons that required refinement to get rid of.

However, it wasn't like Zac had an Alchemist hiding in his sleeves, and his Hidden Nodes were more than able to deal with chaotic energy and poisons alike. Besides, Zac believed that his Danger Sense would warn him if the stalk was actually deadly. Thankfully, the stalk contained such pure energy that it could almost be considered a natural treasure, and Zac soon felt a soothing stream entering his Soul Aperture.

It was like a warm gust from spring swept the gloom of winter away, and a haze of radiant green light spread across the waters of his mind. The radiant sphere at the heart of his soul was like a sun-parched

desert, and it greedily swallowed the light, prompting the hairline cracks to rapidly close up as impurities were expelled.

His Soul Core was like an insatiable vortex as more and more energy was absorbed, until things finally calmed down. And Zac had to say, the result was tremendous, with his soul having gained at least 5% strength from one session. Some of it came from the cultivation method itself, whereas a little bit was added by the soothing aura of the [Mind's Eye Agate].

But the star of the show was obviously the unnamed stalk of spiritual grass he had eaten.

It was just a stalk, yet it had improved his soul more than a couple of weeks of running his Soul Strengthening Array would. Zac gave it a thought before he took out another one, but the effect was far worse the second time around. The energy entered his Mental Aperture just the same, but it almost looked like his Soul Core was satiated.

Most of the emerald haze was instead swallowed by [Spiritual Void] replenishing the stores he had expended when attacking the Octopus in his frenzy. Zac wanted to just keep going, but there was not much he could do for his soul now that the revolution had finished. There was another thing he could do though, and a massive bone thumped down on the ground, its weight enough to make the whole cavern shudder.

It was the treasure bone that he had found stuck between two rocks the other day, and Verun keened with hunger as Zac took out the axe from his Spatial Ring. A series of incessant roars echoed out in Zac's mind, and he smiled as he swung the weapon straight into the bone, deeply embedding the edge into the marrow.

A joyful roar followed those filled with hunger, and while Zac couldn't see anything with naked eyes, he could sense that the Spirit Tool had already started extracting the essence from the bone. As for how long it would take, Zac had no idea. It had taken it weeks to absorb the dragon's blood, and Zac guessed this bone came from some powerful Beast King to survive in the harsh environment of the Twilight Chasm.

Zac followed the transformation as he recuperated from the Soul Strengthening cultivation, occasionally crushing a crystal while occasionally feeding [Love's Bond] a Twilight Fruit. Twelve hours passed, at which point Zac started up his cultivation session again. This turned into a daily routine, and three weeks eventually in this manner.

In those weeks he had made some discoveries. It turned out that the spirit grass was reusable, but only once every five days or so. If he ate them any quicker, he would waste a lot of its efficacy. Meanwhile, the agate was seemingly inexhaustible, constantly releasing its aura. Zac couldn't wait to place that thing in the middle of his cultivation cave back home, perfecting it even further.

The Zac before integration would have been bored out of his mind after just sitting around for weeks on end, but making gradual improvements to one's cultivation was pretty addictive, to the point that Zac doubted he ever would tire of the feeling. Besides, he had something else to look forward to, and it was finally time as crackling sounds suddenly echoed throughout the cave.

Zac curiously walked over after finishing his cultivation session, and he noticed that large cracks covered the surface of the sturdy treasure bone. He gripped the hilt of [Verun's Bite] and he exclaimed in surprise over the weightlessness as he lifted weapon and bone alike.

The treasure bone had weighed as much as a tank before, but Zac guessed that it only weighed something like fifty kilos now that its essence had been completely extracted. A powerful roar echoed out through the cave, and Zac smiled as he took out a couple of bottles. Whole rivers of blood were poured out as Zac uncorked the stoppers, but the Spirit Tool swallowed it all to the last drop.

Some of the blood was collected by himself during the trial, but most of it was actually purchased in Twilight Harbor. [Verun's Bite] wasn't unique in desiring high-grade blood, and it was useful in everything from cooking to pill making. With the world disks of the Harbor holding whole ecosystems including millions of Beast Kings, there was no lack of supply of blood, to the point it was even cheaper than Beast Cores.

Soon enough a sanguine crystal had been formed, with the beastcrafted axe suspended in the middle. Zac grinned from ear to ear as he carried the large crystal to another spot beneath the agate, in case its aura could help Verun finish its transformation quicker. It had been a while since the axe had evolved last, but that bone alone had been enough to actually push it toward becoming a High E-Grade Spirit Tool.

The evolution probably wouldn't bring any great increase in power since it wasn't a fundamental evolution like becoming a D-grade Spirit Tool. But another ability would be unlocked, which might prove useful in the future.

Seeing that his weapon was moving forward, Zac felt it was about time he did the same himself. His body was back to tip-top shape, and the foreign energies were mostly expelled. There might be some of it lingering in various nooks and crannies of his body, but if it was, then it was too fine for [Spiritual Anchor] to spot it.

In either case, he felt ready to finally test something he had been waiting on for so long; the efficacy of the [Stone of Hope].

He had long been at the precipice of gaining a level since using the pills back in the Hollowtongue Mountains, and he took out a Beast Core with anticipation. A storm of wild energies entered his hand as he started to absorb the stored energies. [Void Heart] instantly woke up, each beat of the node creating an intractable suction as more and more energy was dragged inside.

The process continued for ten minutes, at which point the hidden node was satiated. It wouldn't take long for [Void Heart] to refine this type of energy, so Zac quickly stowed away the core as he steadied his mind. Next, the small vial containing the [Chainbreaking Pills] appeared in his hand.

Zac quickly swallowed the pill that emitted a pungent odor, and he grimaced as he felt a sickly and murky gunk spread through his body, covering his nodes and pathways in what almost felt like spiritual excrement. However, he did feel that the tightness of the nodes loosening a bit, and it was just in time.

A surge of pure energy was expelled by the hidden node in his heart. Normally, Zac would expel this energy, but this time he immediately seized control of it as he pushed it toward his midriff. The next

node was located on the side a bit lower than his navel, and if the explosion was too bad, it would mean a whole lot of intestines getting destroyed.

More importantly, quite a few of his pathways intersected in that area since the cultivator's core would eventually be placed beneath his navel. A node exploding there would leave him severely weakened for months, which was why it was so important for him that his two prepared methods worked.

The node was already right at the precipice, and the surge of energy was more than enough to blast the node wide open. A sense of trepidation filled his heart as he sensed the familiar signs of the node being about to explode. This kind of pain was something that stayed with you like a mental scar, and he remembered those days in the sickbed back in Port Atwood as clear as day.

However, he suddenly felt reality shift, like he had stepped into a dream. The gems embedded in the walls around him emitted a fuzzy luster, and sounds had become muted as his perception had been turned down. Zac looked down at his hands, worried for a second that the [Chainbreaking Pills] had hallucinogenic effects, but he immediately realized what was going on.

It was the [Stone of Hope] that hung from its neck.

Previously, the inlaid gemstone in the necklace had been completely inert, but it was currently emitting a strong white light that clearly had a tremendous effect on its surroundings. Zac didn't have time to enjoy the state he was in though as the changes in his body still kept going.

An explosion erupted, and Zac was beset by a soul-wrenching pain as flesh and ichor flew across the area. However, both the explosion and the subsequent agony were somehow muted, like an eruption taking place underwater. His surroundings suddenly shifted once more as the [Stone of Hope] shut itself off, leaving some of the agony behind in that dreamscape it had wrought.

Zac took a shuddering breath as he activated the three healing brands on his back one by one, each one generating a surge of vitality that helped patch up the flesh wound on his side. Physical wounds weren't really an issue, especially when there was no foreign Dao or other energy causing trouble in the wound. Spiritual wounds were far trickier to deal with though, and Zac quickly turned his sight inward to check up on the aftermath.

It only took a few seconds to realize that the result was even better than he had hoped. The unique treasure had reduced the foundational damage by more than half in one go, which was the difference between being bedridden and just grievously wounded. His pathways were still a mess, but the damage to his foundation wasn't nearly as bad as before.

The [Chainbreaking Pill] and his necklace had worked perfectly together. The pill had weakened the structural walls so that the eruption wasn't as bad. Normally, bursting a node was like filling a gas canister with too much gas, eventually resulting in a tremendous explosion. With the [Chainbreaking Pill], it was more like a balloon being filled with too much air.

The explosion was still there, but not nearly as dangerous. It was harder to understand what the [Stone of Hope] had done when it illuminated the cave with the ethereal light. The most similar experience he could remember was when he fought the Karmic Cultivator back in the Tower of Eternity.

It was almost like the stone had conjured a dream-version of himself, and it was this alternate reality Zac that bore the brunt of the damage. He had no idea what kind of magic or Dao made something like that possible, but he wouldn't question it as long as it worked. Judging by the state of his body, a few weeks to a month of rest and he should be fine.

He would be hard-pressed to exhibit even a third of his combat strength in his current state, but it was far better than spending months in a sickbed too weak to even lift a finger. With this pace, he might even reach the late stage of E-grade before leaving his seclusion.

Having completed the task, Zac immediately activated his [Void Zone] ability, getting a reprieve from the Twilight Energy as his body started to expel the gunk from the [Chainbreaking Pill]. A lot of the impurities had actually been expelled the moment his insides were plastered across the floor, but even more remained like a murky film over his pathways.

The thing was perhaps even worse than Catheya explained, a ball of condensed toxins that essentially poisoned you to make it easier to break through. The left-over gunk didn't really weaken him, but Zac still found that the compounds were extremely hard to remove, even with his [Purity of the Void]. It almost felt like his pathways were covered in rust or something, and he understood why no one would use something like this unless absolutely necessary.

Removing these toxins would probably waste more time than they would save for cultivators, and it would probably cost a lot of money as well. Most people would be forced to sit in purification arrays or medicinal baths designed to extract impurities. Even then, it would probably be difficult to remove all the impurities, which would cause all kinds of troubles down the line. Only a desperate mortal would eat something like this.

In either case, Zac had found a method that would at least work during the middle stages of the E-grade. With that, his days turned into a blur with half of it being dedicated to his soul and the other half to expelling toxins and preparing for the next breakthrough.

Soon, days turned to weeks, and weeks turned to months, and Zac almost forgot about all the pressing issues of the outside world.