

The Fall 760

Chapter 760: Golden Canopy

The towering mountain and the mindbending sky of pure Dao shattered, and it was like someone had started up time again as Zac found himself back in his body. He felt like days had passed as he had been taken through one vision after another, while in reality, it had only taken an instant. The swirling whirlpool of magma once more started spinning, but Zac saw that it was starting to collapse now that there was no shard to maintain balance.

However, Zac didn't have time to worry about something like that as a tremendous force built up inside his body, a storm of creation. Not only did it forcibly pull in shocking amounts of energy from the surroundings, but it robbed Zac as well. Mental energy, Cosmic Energy, even his life force went into the mix, joining the madness the Shard of Creation was concocting.

The absorption of the shard was quickly getting out of hand, but Zac did have one advantage this time around that he lacked the last time. First of all, he was almost a whole grade stronger compared to when he fled through the technocrat vessel. But more importantly, he now had a properly awakened bloodline to help out.

His pores had once more turned into small vortices that siphoned off some of the endless energy radiating from the Shard of Creation. [Void Heart] was hard at work as well, swallowing a decent chunk with every bite. And it quickly became evident that the more Creation Energy his body drew away, the less energy and life-force did the storm draw from its surroundings.

[Purity of the Void] helped as well, though it didn't actually expel the Creation Energy, but rather stripped some of the shard's latent will from it. Some even entered his Soul Aperture, some getting swallowed by [Spiritual Void], and some getting infused into the golden ocean. The very system that helped him deal with the Twilight Energy had come through and protected him once again.

But most surprising was a new addition, an unusually powerful vortex that had appeared almost right where the Shard of Creation had been frozen while he was shown the vision - at the top of his sternum, just below his neck. Its suction was not as powerful as [Void Heart], but exponentially greater than the small passive draw from his cells.

However, Zac couldn't see where it went. It just disappeared, like it was drawn to another dimension. There was one very exciting possibility for this, but there was no way he had time to investigate the situation. Not even his Void Emperor-bloodline could contain the vast energies that the rampaging shard exuded. It needed release, and Zac desperately struggled to expel it from his body before he burst at the seams.

A thousand streams that fluctuated between opalescence and gold shot out in every direction, each one of them filled with the majestic force of Creation and Zac's very essence. Anything they touched, changed. Most notably, the ocean of magma in the supersized volcanic chamber immediately started to undergo tumultuous changes, and thousand chaotic scenes played out at once.

And in the middle of it, Zac found himself a conduit of energies he couldn't understand or control. Why was this so different? Pain muddled Zac's thoughts, but he struggled to stay sane as he tried to figure

out a solution. But the voices were so loud, almost drowning out his thoughts. It was just a deep buzz in the depths of his brain, but it was rife with meaning.

It was a constant flood of suggestions, thousands of them crashing into his mind every second. Form wings and fly out of here. Create a tunnel of unmeltable steel and walk out. Turn fire to ice. Become an elemental and embrace the heat. The whispers were endless and without reprieve, to the point that Zac started to lose sight of what was him and what was the shard.

He had thought it would be different with his first set of remnants being behind lock and key, but the calamity the Aetherlord mentioned had come just the same. Was this the reason for the fall of the Eastern Trigram Sect? One was an eternal curse, two was a calamity where the user became a walking disaster.

Zac despaired as he felt a second wave of unfettered creation coming on again. What was the use of his bloodline improving or a new Hidden Node being born, if he wasn't alive to enjoy it? But he suddenly remembered his talk with the Autarch. He had talked like the effect of collecting five shards was something well-known, meaning that two was just a threshold.

A bottleneck that needed to be conquered, no different from the other difficulties he had managed to conquer thus far. Others had passed this step before him, so why couldn't he?

Magma beneath his feet turned into a stable plateau of stone, but Zac didn't move away even as magma fell toward him like crashing tidal waves. He needed to somehow force the shard until submission and pass the calamity before he could worry about anything else. Even rapidly transforming lava that had submerged him had to take a backseat.

With his Endurance, Vitality, and Gear, he would survive at least half an hour like this, but the same couldn't be said about the remnant. His body was already overflowing with energy again, and Zac knew that he couldn't simply make it disappear. The wheels had already been set in motion, and a price needed to be paid.

But did it really have to be his own life force? Zac was reluctant, but he still took out a small box containing what looked like a milky-white diamond, the third of the five supreme items he had picked up at the depths of the Chasm. Inside, an almost heaven-defying energy was trapped – longevity. This thing was just like the Longevity Pearls he found back in the Tower of Eternity, but it was on another level completely.

This thing was enough to create over ten peak-quality longevity pills according to Catheya, far more external life-force than anyone could absorb on their own. After all, these kinds of treasures were all limited, just like Attribute Fruits. Some cultivators could take in more longevity than others, but it would normally not surpass 10-20% of your original lifespan.

For Zac, whose current lifespan was around 5,000 years, it meant a couple of centuries. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough, going by the rate the shard was going. But as long as he could continuously draw the energy from the gemstone and use it to power the forced creation rather than supplant his own life, he would hopefully not emerge from this as an old man.

The energy kept building, but Zac breathed out in relief when feeling a warm stream of what best could be described as time entering the fleshy blob his arm had turned into. It worked. Instead of losing

decades of his lifespan, he had only lost a couple of months, with the rest coming from the longevity treasure. It was a shame using one of his five supreme treasures like this, but it was far preferable to dying.

But dealing with the cost of the shard's outbursts was just the first step. Zac immediately cursed when a deep rumble spread through the area as if prompted by his wayward thoughts. Something was brewing, and it wasn't hard to guess what considering he stood in the heart of a volcano.

The magma around him suddenly transformed from molten rock to water, which in turn was instantly vaporized by the searing heat. It resulted in a tremendous eruption, where magma and Zac were both pushed away to make room for the heat expansion. Zac groaned as he felt a few bones snap, but they instantly fused back together thanks to another thought.

He had to stay calm. An errant wish for the hard-to-traverse magma to be more like water had almost knocked him unconscious. Getting out that way was certainly possible, but Zac refused to lean on the shard unless he absolutely had to. He had seen the result of indulging desire over and over in the visions.

It was a poison, like the Cosmic Water that seemingly quenched your thirst while burning out your pathways. He needed to seal the remnant somehow, but there was simply no time. In fact, Zac realized there wasn't time for anything at all as he sensed a terrifying force build beneath him.

This wasn't something like the attack of a Hegemon, this was the fury of nature itself. There was no time to push through the sea of lava and run through the endless tunnels. His mind frantically spun, and he reluctantly infused his will into the third burgeoning pulse building inside him. A wave of opalescent gold shot out, and the whole area around him turned into a 50-meter diamond with him securely ensconced in a small chamber in its heart.

Zac's arm turned into a blur as he threw out array after array, talisman after talisman, heedless of the cost to enhance his lifeline. It was just in time as well as an apocalyptic explosion erupted beneath his feet, and an unbearable kinetic force pushed him down on his knees as he, along with millions of tonnes of magma, shot toward the sky. A deafening bang caught up with him a moment later, just as a shocking wall of heat passed straight through his diamond and breaking his arrays, setting his whole world on fire.

The stench of seared flesh assaulted his nose, but it only lasted for a moment before his body reformed again. The one good thing about this process was that his body was nigh-indestructible, though the same couldn't be said of his other creations. The diamond, famed for its hardness, couldn't withstand the volcanic eruption and cracks rapidly spread through it until it shattered into a million pieces.

Luckily, it had absorbed most of the initial force from getting shot up thousands of meters in the air, and Zac suddenly felt a sense of weightlessness. A dozen eyes appeared on his body as he looked around, and he was met with the scene of an endless ocean stretching in every direction. Above him, an impossibly large plume of ash from the eruption, and an unfathomable amount of lava cascading down toward the ocean below him.

Zac knew he had been flung thousands of meters into the air. Falling from this height would normally not be that much of an issue, especially now that he could use his movement skill in the air. The more troubling issue was the hundreds of thousands of boulders, each one of them teeming with fire-attuned

energies, that had been dragged from the depths of the earth. If just one of them smashed into him, even he would get wounded.

But the more pressing energy was once more the shard. Another eruption was brewing. This one was far worse than anything the shard had released so far, and Zac prayed it would be its final gambit in imposing its will on him. A storm of life-force was drawn out from the gemstone as the voices in his mind reached a crescendo.

A hundred-meter-wide whirlpool instantly formed around him, and the red-hot magma inside the storm instantly turned into cold, cracked stone as all energy was siphoned off. Zac did what he could, but it was too much. He released a roar coming from the very depths of his soul, containing the full force of his mental energy and his conviction.

A huge shockwave pushed the closest lava and boulders away as it dispersed the hurricane that had formed around him, but it was nothing compared to what came next.

It looked like a sun had been born in the middle of the chaos, a radiant sphere of gold over five hundred meters across. For a moment, it seemed like it was kept afloat by the enormous gout of lava, but the scene only lasted for a second before it started to change, the gold spreading in every direction like a mushroom cloud.

Zac could sense it all through his connection with the cloud as he plunged toward the surface, propelled forward by both the outburst and his Cosmic Energy. The shard was exhausted for the moment, and Zac took the opportunity to form a sturdy shield of Mental Energy around it. It still exuded creation energy as it struggled to break free, but it was nowhere near as bad as before.

The final explosion had weakened it enough to provide Zac a reprieve and focus on survival. He had become yet another falling meteor, joining the tens of thousands of the others around him. The sound was deafening, with thousands of birds screeching in pain as their bones broke and their feathers burned, and the falling projectiles created sharp whistling sounds that felt like daggers in Zac's brain.

As bad as it was, it was still nothing compared to what was going on above him, at the epicenter of the final outburst. The golden cloud had spread out and fused the ash, and a storm of Creation had erupted within, fueled by the still-ejecting lava. Thousands of sounds wrought from god-knows-what kind of creations had turned into a deafening cacophony.

As Zac plummeted toward the relative safety of the ocean, occasionally using falling boulders to reset [Earthstrider], he looked back at the chaos he had caused. And while the sound was enough to turn a man deaf, the scene was simply breathtaking. Zac's eyes widened as he froze in place, even forgetting to breathe.

It was a tree. A tree of Creation.

The thousand-meter pillar of lava created a red-hot trunk, and the golden cloud and ash had turned into an enormous crown. Within the crown, Creation ran rampant, where every branch held a thousand possibilities. No matter where you looked, there was something new, and it almost looked like it was decorated with magical Christmas lights as new colors joined the gold before being changed into something else.

Zac woke up from the stupor after a few seconds and started to flee further away again, but he felt that scene would stay with him for a long time. That 'tree' he had accidentally formed almost felt as impactful as the grandeur of the Lifebringer Tree he had seen in his Dao Vision so long ago. In a sense, this magical apparition behind him was more of a Tree of Life, holding not only the key to life itself, but to all creation.

Unfortunately, Zac's lapse in concentration had given the shard the opportunity it needed to escape, and it broke apart the chains that bound it with a burst of energy. However, it didn't start charging another burst. Instead, it started undulating at a weird frequency, and Zac's heart beat an extra time when he felt a matching vibration coming from the cage in his mind.

He tried to trap the shard again, but the remnant burned through the barriers even the action made it dim even further. The shard pushed straight into his Soul Aperture before Zac had a chance to reform his cage, completely ignoring the defenses of [Soul Guardian]. The shard seemed exhausted, but it was still like a second sun had entered the area, and the golden ocean especially practically frothed as it was drenched in Creation.

Zac got a bad feeling seeing the shard's course of action, and his fears were immediately realized as it slammed into a seemingly empty spot in his aperture. Of course, it wasn't simply a random spot, but rather the hidden gate connecting Zac's Soul Aperture with the cage holding the other two remnants. The trapped shard frantically struggled in turn, while the Splinter was fighting for its life to prevent itself from getting overrun.

Another slam rocked his Soul Aperture, and Zac felt that the tunnel would be forced open soon enough if he let things proceed.

But the shard had entered his soul, and that was Zac's turf. It looked like a shimmering haze rose from the glistening core in his soul as he released way more Mental Energy than most Peak E-grade cultivators could muster at the threat of death. It turned into a new cage around the shard, this one so dense that it almost looked corporeal.

The shard fought hard to break out and resume its siege of the prison, but it was to no avail. Cracks formed on Zac's makeshift prison, but they were quickly healed as he kept instilling more and more energy into it. After half a minute the shard stopped, and Zac was filled with a surge of victory as he landed on the ocean surface.

This was why he had worked so hard for close to five years, never forgetting to cultivate his soul. The Shard was sealed by his mind, and he had plenty of energy to keep it going until he found a permanent solution. He turned back and took one last look at the scene he had created before he dove into the ocean.

A golden canopy shimmering with a million lights, a trunk created with the heart of a world, and ten thousand red meteors falling like leaves in autumn.