

The Fall 773

Chapter 773: A Seed of Fear

Two powerful auras clashed inside the enormous chamber, but Zac's murderous intent and Dao were undeniably surpassed by Uona's might. It was no surprise, considering she far surpassed him both on Dao and levels. She was a true Heaven's Chosen, and she was even able to avoid part of the Twilight Energy's restriction thanks to her heritage.

The blood mistress looked a bit different from the last time the two met. Her face was still as beautiful and ever, but two of her limbs were dark red and veiny, and Zac could feel how they lacked the spirituality of the rest of her body. It was no doubt a result of getting blasted with annihilation and having regrown the limbs using some sort of technique or healing pill.

Those limbs didn't seem nearly as complete as his own regrown limbs, but the loss didn't seem to have had much of an effect on her aura. Zac's heart hammered as he looked around for a way to come out ahead, but he was instead coming up woefully short. No matter how he looked at it, his odds weren't great.

He had expended more than half his Miasma already, and his biggest skill had been used up. The Shard of Creation was still churning out tremendous amounts of power, but he only had a quarter left of his Longevity Gem. Soon enough, he would have to pay with his life to keep using that cursed power.

Besides, he had already lost the element of surprise. He had been hoping to blast Uona with a surge of Creation, corrupting her blood in one go to seize an opening. But now, there was little chance of that happening. She clearly knew what the remnants were, and she would most likely figure out a way to minimize her exposure.

A seed of fear had taken root in his heart as he looked into the sanguine eyes of the vampire. This was one of the deadliest enemies he had ever faced. It almost felt like he was standing in front of that terrifying cyborg again, but there was little chance of Uona running out of life-span mid-fight.

But Zac pushed down the fear as he tightened the grip of his axe. He had managed to come up with a couple of gambits, but there was no telling if they would work. He would have to find the answer in the heat of the battle. The air exploded as Zac shot forward, a cascading wave of killing intent filling the air.

The domains of [Fields of Despair] and [Deathmark] were once more released, and the three pygmies had reformed behind his back. Zac noticed with some surprise that their auras had risen, while their bones had gained a dark shimmer. It wasn't something related to Creation, but rather that the skill had actually evolved after the previous battle.

It wasn't too surprising. He had used the skill quite a bit since entering the ocean. If anything, the upgrade was long overdue, even if E-grade skills took a lot longer time to evolve. It didn't look like the evolution had added any new functions to the skill, but rather made it all-around stronger at the cost of slightly higher energy expenditure.

The evolution came at the right time as ten massive orbs of blood appeared in the chamber, forming a circle almost as big as the cage of [Pillar of Desolation]. They looked like sanguine suns, drowning out

the darkness of [Deathmark] with a profane light. A stench of blood filled the air, and Zac suddenly found himself in a world of blood.

It was an illusory technique, yet it wasn't. It was a mix of real and fake, drowning out his senses while his domains were being dismantled. Oceans of blood had appeared all around him as thousands of streams filled his vision, but Zac ignored the confusion blur as he looked around to pinpoint Uona's true location.

She had disappeared from her spot the moment the surroundings changed, proving that she didn't want to fight him head-on. Unfortunately for her, Zac had a unique advantage in this case. No matter how strong her ability to restrain her aura, it didn't affect the Splinter of Oblivion. It was like a lighthouse beacon in the world of blood, leading him in the right direction.

As he saw it, there were only two outcomes. Either Uona kept the remnant close to her, allowing him to locate her at any time. If she tried to hide it somewhere, like in a pocket of space, he would be able to snatch it, and hopefully manage to use its power to end the fight in one go.

Zac only managed to take a couple of steps toward the remnants before his mind screamed of danger, but the shield pygmy's timing was impeccable. A shield rose the moment his Danger Sense warned him, blocking out a lance of blood. However, the spear was just the first of many, and Zac found himself bogged down as deadly attacks came from all around him.

It was the orbs of blood that were the source. They kept launching extremely powerful attacks while he was disoriented by the blood world. It was a highly effective cage, and it was pretty reminiscent of Zac's own fighting style in this class. Still, with Zac's extreme Luck, he had an early warning system, and it lasted him long enough to activate [Abyssal Phase] without using his hidden Void Power.

His bloodline was his most important hidden card, and he would have to use his Void Emperor talents where it counted.

The world of blood was still there as his surroundings shifted, but it had at least slowed down remarkably, allowing Zac to freely flitter between the incoming spears as he closed in on the splinter. The chamber was just over five hundred meters wide, and it would take him less than a second to reach the seemingly unassuming pool of blood.

However, just as Zac was about to reach it, a shockingly poignant scream of mortal peril stopped him in his tracks. He hurriedly regained his corporeal form, just in time to turn [Love's Bond] into its shield form while also conjuring another coffin-shaped barrier above his head. It was just in time as well as a pillar of red light slammed into the pond with the remnant. Zac was right at the edge of the attack thanks to stopping in time, yet he found himself pushed to his knees by the pressure.

It felt like a Heavenly Punishment had descended from above, and the barrier of [Profane Exponents] only managed to weaken the attack before cracking, letting the light spill down on Zac who held up his shield to protect himself. His whole body groaned as he strained under the pressure, but he didn't even have time to figure out a way to move away before another pang of danger came screaming. He desperately tilted his body, but it wasn't enough as his left lung was completely punched through by a dark-red spear.

It was better than getting a hole punched in his neck, which was where the skill was originally aimed. With the force contained in that stab, he might have been decapitated altogether, which was probably something that not even the Shard of Creation could fix.

This time, the attack wasn't a skill, but it was rather Uona herself who had appeared. She had completely transformed, donning an exquisite plate mail of dark-red metal which covered her from head to toe. Even her fingers were protected by fine interlocking scales that would have no problem bending, and the only thing visible from her face was two dark-red lights shining through a slit in her helmet.

Zac could immediately tell that this wasn't a skill like his own [Vanguard of Undeath], but rather extremely high-quality equipment. It was covered in dense sets of fractals, and Uona was clearly infusing it with a steady stream of Miasma and blood power. The armor had in turn pushed her aura to the next level, and Zac guessed that its defenses were no doubt were excellent as well, possibly even surpassing [Love's Bond].

Normally, people in the lower grades wouldn't use such gear because of the massive energy requirements to keep it powered. One's pathways simply couldn't supply enough and still maintain combat effectiveness, turning skill summoning and energy circulation sluggish. That would do more harm than good, making it much more practical to use defensive talismans or barrier conjuring treasures like necklaces and rings.

Only at the D-grade would one's pathways be widened and energy supply so great that you could equip proper war gear to boost both power and defenses, but it looked like there were some exceptions. Uona was somehow able to withstand the downsides of such demanding gear, which put Zac at even more of a disadvantage.

The pain of getting a hole punched straight through his lung was excruciating, but he found his opportunity to finally counter the blood mistress. A surge of Creation entered the vampire's spear, overwhelming and corrupting the innate ability of the weapon to block foreign Dao. The spear immediately started to distort, but Zac's heart sunk when he only heard a snort from within the helmet.

The next moment, the spear simply exploded as Uona disappeared in a burst of blood, perfectly avoiding the fallout. Zac wasn't as lucky, and deep scars covered his whole body as small spatial fractures lacerated him all over. Only then did he finally manage to get out from the restrictive light.

He realized he had mistaken Uona's class. He already knew that most Eternal Clan members were Vitality-based cultivators, no matter if they leaned toward physical fighting as he did, or rather classical magic classes. Higher Vitality nurtured their blood, which in turn powered their class. Zac had figured she was a blood mage after their last battle, focusing on Vitality and Intelligence, but he was wrong.

She was a warrior just like himself. She had probably simply not bothered using her actual skills before, seeing no need to wield her spear. Uona was still not willing to stay in close-quarters with him though, probably out of fear that she'd get blasted by either Creation or Oblivion. That gave him a small breather to scramble back on his feet and reorient himself while activating [Undying Mark], but the situation wasn't looking good.

While he had been stabbed, the splinter had been moved again. The signal now came from the opposite side of the blood world, and Uona was nowhere in sight. She was just like the spider waiting to strike,

having completely seized the momentum. However, Zac noticed something interesting, and he started to formulate a battle plan.

The blood had lost some of its energy, meaning it probably took a decent toll to teleport something like a remnant. Meanwhile, she had this immensely powerful domain running, along with her war gear. She had to be expending tremendous amounts of energy every second, to the point it had to affect even a Heaven's Chosen of a supreme race like the Eternal Clan.

As long as he could drag out the fight for a while, she should be losing steam soon enough. Problem was, he wasn't really in peak condition either after dealing with both the thralls and the Eidolon. He could only pray that he'd last long enough to find some kind of opportunity. Until then, he would have to keep forcing her to expend more and more energy.

A storm of blood spikes was already bearing down on him, so Zac wasted no time as he started running again, this time staying in his corporeal form as he made a beeline for the splinter again. He felt a bit like a bull being played by a skilled matador, but the fact was that getting close to the splinter would force Uona's hand.

She would either have to make an appearance and rebuff him or teleport the remnant away from him. In either case, it would put her on the defensive, forcing her to expend more of her energy. Meanwhile, there were still things to do even if he was unable to pinpoint Uona's exact location.

The four chains of [Love's Bond] shot forward while Zac grew into the hulking five-meter behemoth of [Vanguard of Undeath]. The skill was severely limited by this time since it was still in F-grade, but it at least provided both some protection along with a small attribute boost. Besides, it had one more very important use that might turn this fight around.

The skill did force him to use one of his spare shields since he wanted to keep his coffin in its offensive state, but it wasn't much of a bother. In fact, it allowed him to crush a few of the incoming blood spears, as long as he was careful to not take the hits straight on with the shield. After all, his spare shield was just a peak E-grade shield of decently sturdy materials and then reinforced by an F-grade skill.

Meanwhile, his chains shimmered with an opalescent oil as they punched into the thickest accumulations of blood energy Zac could pinpoint as he ran. The reaction from the pools of blood was immediate as they started to undergo frantic upheavals. It was no wonder - the chains were channeling [Blighted Cut] which were in turn boosted by the Fragment of the Coffin and Creation.

Zac had already confirmed that creation was extremely effective against the blood thralls with their vibrant blood, and the blood arts of the Eternal Clan were connected to their Blood Essence somehow. Damaging the blood would harm Uona more than destroying most cultivators' skills would. It was one of the few detriments to the disgustingly blessed existence that was the Eternal Clan.

The reaction was almost immediate as Zac felt a scream of danger before he even had reached halfway to the splinter. Uona had appeared right behind him in a puff of blood, but Zac was ready this time. He swirled around, this time getting a grievous wound in his gut, narrowly avoiding getting his spine destroyed.

Uona didn't lack for spears it seemed as she used an identical one to the weapon she sacrificed before. The armor of [Vanguard of Undeath] had been utterly incapable of even slightly impeding Uona's strike, but Zac had already been prepared to use this opportunity to trade strikes.

His reach was even greater than Uona's in his current form, thanks to his towering physique. His massive bardiche was even longer than Uona's spear, and it swung down straight toward her head in an effort to end the battle in one go. The edge also gained a sanguine glow and earth-shattering weight as Zac activated two of the fractals on [Verun's Bite].

The blood world was drowned in the bestial roar of Verun, but Uona had no intention of taking the herculean strike straight-on. Blood started to swallow her up to once more allow her to blend into the chaotic environment, but she suddenly stumbled as the blood world lost its luster. The movement skill failed, just as the bardiche was almost upon her.

It was Zac who had activated [Void Zone].

Zac had spent months of traveling alone in his submersible after leaving the chasm, and it had given him ample time to try out all kinds of things. He had performed hundreds of experiments with his recently gained Bloodline Talent to ascertain exactly what it could and couldn't do for him.

He had found a few interesting interactions, and one of them was related to [Vanguard of Undeath]. The original [Void Zone] had a radius of slightly over 2 meters around his body, which barely allowed him to inundate an enemy in a melee. However, when he activated the talent in his super-sized form, the aura's radius actually scaled perfectly with his increase in height.

With him going from 1.80 meters to a bit over 5, so did the radius of [Void Zone] expand to almost six meters at the cost of costing four times as much Void Energy. Another downside was that he lost his attribute buff from [Vanguard of Undeath] and that the armor became useless, but that didn't matter to him since they weren't helping him any longer in either case.

What did matter was that it allowed him to completely surround the blood mistress in his nullification zone, robbing her of her skills. Zac couldn't activate any skills either, but his axe was already bearing down on his target. The sanguine luster had disappeared, and the weight had turned a bit hollow, but the swing would strike before the nullification zone managed to rob the axe of the empowerment completely.

At the same time, the thousands of patterns covering Uona's armor had dimmed down, meaning that its protective and empowering measures were just a shadow of its true force. Uona was frazzled by the mysterious change, but she still reacted quickly as her spear rose to guard against the incoming swing.

But the preparations were too different, and there was too little time for her to adjust. The axe came bearing down on her before she even had time to raise the spear, pushing it out of the way as the gleaming edge slammed into the armor with shocking force. The metal plates couldn't take the force and cracked as Uona wailed with pain, but Zac's full-powered attack didn't manage to kill her.

The blood mistress had managed to tilt her body to at least avoid getting her head crushed. The axe had instead cut straight through her left collarbone and continued toward her heart, but it didn't quite get there. Zac was burning with anxiety as he hurriedly swung again while Uona was blinded by pain, making use of the opening he had created by targeting the same spot.

The armor was far sturdier than Zac had anticipated even without any Miasma powering it, and the helmet looked at least three times as thick. Having felt the sturdiness of the equipment, he wasn't confident he could actually cut through it without Dao or skills, so he went for the heart instead of the head. The nullification zone had completely deactivated the skills of his axe by now, but the armor plating was completely broken through already.

The axe bit into flesh again, and he felt a surge of elation from Verun as it greedily swallowed blood while it dug deeper. However, a sense of extreme danger suddenly filled him. It felt like a primordial beast had awakened inside Uona's heart just as he was about to destroy it.

Zac didn't know what happened next. One moment he was standing above Uona, ready to finish the job. The next moment he found himself flying through the air as the ichor in his veins churned, almost like it was boiling. But one thing was clear by the lack of energy entering his body.

He had failed.