

The Fall 427

Chapter 427: Storm

Zac immediately noticed something odd with the help of [Cosmic Gaze], but he initially wasn't sure whether he was just imagining things. Thin tendrils of energy seemed to be passing between the three siblings unbeknownst to him or the other spectators, making Zac believe that they were somehow sharing their spiritual power.

The tendrils were extremely minute though, looking like glistening fishing lines in the air. It made Zac doubt his eyes for a second, especially since none of the spectators were commenting on it.

Or was this the advantage of having the home field? There were tens of E-Grade warriors among the spectators, but none of them spoke up. It was impossible that none of them realized something was amiss if Zac would see it with his newly acquired early proficiency skill. They simply didn't say anything since it happened to an outsider.

It was only good if Zac got thrown out, as it would leave more spots in the pool for their own progeny. So everyone kept their mouths shut in a tacit agreement. Fury started to build in Zac's mind as he railed against the injustice, but he stopped his anger from running amok. He needed to find a solution that didn't end with a bloodbath.

Calling them out wouldn't work. If the spectators cared about fair competition for outsiders, then they should have spoken up already.

If this had been a real fight, he would have launched something like [Deforestation] by this point, laying waste to all three of them while taking down the whole stadium and crushing the [Dao Discourse Array] into pieces. But doing so would no doubt end with him not being able to access the Pool of Tranquility.

He had tried to circumvent the quests multiple times during the climb, where he had defeated the guardian first before trying to get the treasure related to the quest. That tactic had invariably failed, as the treasures were protected by all kinds of safeguards the System had put in place. One time a bird even swooped down from nowhere to snatch a spiritual herb out of his hands before he could react.

Prickling pain in his mind made him realize an odd change with the array. The moment Zac noticed the reinforcements on the other side he had ordered his avatar to back away while he tried to figure out a plan. But while his mind churned to figure out a plan he had unbeknownst kept infusing the control crystal with massive amounts of spiritual energy.

None of it had entered the axeman though since that required Zac's full attention, but it had rather formed a large formless blob of destructive energies at the bottom of the high platform. Weirder yet, the haze that rested beneath the surface had started to mix and integrate with his spiritual energy without taking any specific form.

It was like his Dao Fragment was a magnet that kept absorbing the mists in the array. Zac completely froze witnessing the spectacle, and it felt like he had woken up from a stupor. He felt as though he had been muddled for the past months, but the Dao Discourse had finally dispersed his illusions.

He had been so focused on the Cycle of Life and Death since meeting Yrial that he had ignored his unique points, and forcibly tried to create a cultivation system that seemed fitting on the surface, but

one that still kind of missed the mark. Yrial had tried helping him by having him learn [Cyclic Strike] and improve his Dao control, but it was that very skill that had made him reach an impasse.

It was time to accept reality. Creating a cycle where he integrated two diametrically opposite concepts was like trying to breathe underwater for him. It was not in his nature, and forcing such a thing would only create mediocre results.

His thoughts went to the weird ball that Yrial played with and he remembered how it seamlessly flitted back and forth between frigid flames and fiery ice. Did he truly need to create something like that with his Daos of Life and Death? His sister might be suited for such a path with her amazing affinities and Ai to help her fuse the four elements, but he needed to find another direction to take.

He would still keep the core parts, with Life and Death each being one half of the whole, with the Dao of the Axe being the delivery method, or perhaps the thing that bound the two together. But braiding the two together into a revolving cycle was too complicated. Perhaps he could come back to that idea when he was as powerful as Yrial, but for now he needed something simpler.

His eyes again turned to the mists that churned under the surface of the [Dao Discourse Array]. By this point he had poured more than twice the energy into the ground compared to what he had used to create the eight axe warriors earlier.

His heart was pounding a bit, but he kept infusing more and more inside as he moved his axeman to the edge of the stage. He suddenly had an idea and started to push his Fragment of the Coffin into the control crystal as well. However, he didn't try to fuse the two fragments or even control them after they entered the ground.

Combining the two Daos would have been impossible, but just pouring it into the control crystal wasn't too bad. It was just like when he infused his body with the Fragment of the Coffin while he infused an attack with the Fragment of the Axe. As long as he didn't need to coordinate the two to work with each other the strain was just a fraction of before.

The second fragment still joined the growing blob of chaos in the ground, and the mists turned more violent and unpredictable. The whole array was starting to shake, and the three dryads seemed to have realized that something odd was going on. They had probably been waiting for Zac to summon new avatars since they saw him steadily infusing the control crystal with more and more spiritual energy.

Striking down all his avatars at once would have a much stronger effect, just like when one of them defeated the first wandering cultivator. But now it looked like they didn't dare wait any longer and they immediately sent a few of the avatars toward the axeman still stumbling around on the corner of the arena. However, Zac didn't care as his [Cosmic Gaze] was trained at the bottom of the arena.

It was like he was mesmerized by the growing mass of untamed destruction hiding at the bottom of the array. Wasn't this the way things had always been when he fought? Supreme might crushing any resistance or any technique. If those three bastards wanted to create a dozen avatars with their combined energy, then he would simply drown them in an avalanche of even more energy.

There was no fusion and no adroit braiding of the two energies into something greater. This was mindless destruction, a tsunami of unrelenting force. And it was time to unleash it. However, that was easier said than done.

His mind strained to the limit as he urged the large blob to rise, but it felt like he was trying to lift a mountain with his mind. The rumbling of the arena got more and more severe, and small cracks could be seen on both the platform and the control crystal that Zac touched.

A searing pain flashed in his mind as the axeman was cut to ribbons by the dryads' avatars, but he didn't care as he was completely focused on the counter he had cooking below.

Finally the blob he had infused almost his whole soul into reached the surface, and Zac was reeling by exertion by this point. Multiple capillaries in his eyes had burst, and he felt the salty taste of blood in his mouth as it freely poured down his nose.

The sounds of exclamations that had been missing earlier finally erupted among the spectators as what looked like a thundercloud rose through the ground. It was a messy mix of light gray spots and a sinister black, with the occasional flashes of bronze. It was probably impossible to tell what it was made from unless one had a skill like [Cosmic Gaze], but one thing was clear.

It was dangerous.

There was just no way for Zac to really control the thundercloud, and he could only push it in a certain direction with everything he had, forcing it forward by sheer force of will. Zac's mind felt like it would snap in two, but he refused to stop. The control crystal started to crackle as the small crystalline cracks turned into major fault lines, but they were continuously removed by the repair fractals.

The mix of Destruction and Putrefaction brought on from his two Daos swept toward the other side like a tidal wave, swallowing the stalwart army of the Enlightened Three in an instant. Explosions and sounds of clashes could be heard from within, as the three siblings desperately tried to dispel the onslaught. But it was like trying to stop a storm with your bare hands.

One avatar after another was either melted into a rotten pool by the Fragment of the Coffin or ripped into pieces by the sharp winds brought on by the Fragment of the Axe. A few simply got annihilated in a flash when the odd bronze-colored flashes appeared. There was no contest between the two sides, and all the refinement and skill the three could muster was pointless in front of Zac's insane outburst of power.

In just a few seconds the whole avatar army was ripped to shreds, and the effect on its controllers wasn't small. The girl staggered backward and clutched her head before she fell over unconscious. The other two siblings shuddered as well, with blood starting to pour out of their noses and ears as they slumped down on the ground.

The two had been implicated as well since they had assisted their sister, and their souls had been wounded as a result. However, Zac was in no position to gloat as he wasn't all that better off. His eyes were completely bloodshot as he looked across the platform, and he had trouble gathering his wits since it felt like his head would split apart in any second.

The method of battle that Zac had chosen was one of mutual destruction. His soul had always felt pretty sturdy just like his odd constitution, and it was only made stronger with the help of the Splinter of Oblivion. Between his soul's strength and his more advanced Daos, Zac bet that he would be able to take the Enlightened Three out before his soul was ripped apart.

It had worked, but he was still a bit giddy, and he quickly took out an intricate box from his spatial tool. Inside was a blue rose seemingly made from ice, a piece of unblemished beauty. Zac didn't care about that though as he crammed the flower into his mouth and swallowed, allowing a cool sensation to spread down his throat and then throughout his mind.

It was the reward he had gotten from the Ice Troll back on the first level of the 6th floor. It was a soul restoration treasure which quickly soothed his strained mind. He had a couple of items in the same category between his shopping in the Base Town and Rasuliel's pouch, which was what allowed him to identify it.

The icy rose was the strongest such item in his possession though, and he had a feeling that he needed all the strength he could get to handle the fallout from taking out the three dryad brats in one go. The others hadn't been inactive while Zac ate the natural treasure, and the matriarch had already hurried down from the platform she spectated from.

"Elyss!" the dryad cried as she took out a crystalline bottle and poured some unknown mixture down her grandchild's throat, before directing a murderous glare at Zac. "You are pretty ruthless. This is a discourse, not a battlefield."

She punctuated her words with having her aura expand around her, causing her long hair to flutter without any wind. But the matriarch's killing intent wasn't even a tenth of Zac's blood-drenched aura, and he didn't even flinch by being targeted.

"Injury is always a risk during a Dao Discourse," Zac answered with a hoarse voice, completely unphased. "I am more curious why the other two got hurt though. Perhaps you can explain?"

"They are triplets, so of course they're bound to have a deeper connection, one reaching even the spiritual level," the matriarch said without missing a beat.

"So, which one of them is heading up next?" Zac said, eventually deciding to not push the issue.

He was in a pretty bad shape, but the two remaining dryads were far worse off. Crushing them wouldn't be too hard by simply repeating a smaller version of the earlier storm. The Perenne Matriarch's sharp eyes were locked with Zac's for a few seconds before her strained face blossomed into a charming smile.

"No need. I know these children well, they are no match for the might of your Daos. We concede this match, one of the slots to the Pool of Tranquility will belong to you," she said without a trace of the earlier animosity.

Zac, who was ready to go all out in case things deteriorated, mutely looked at the Perenne Matriarch for a few seconds before he slowly nodded and walked back toward his platform. Was it over that easily? But a sudden realization made him certain that things weren't over just yet.

The teleporter to the next level still hadn't appeared.