

The Fall 441

Chapter 441: Faceless

The vision of the consecrated tree and its kingdom slowly faded as Zac returned to his body. Before he fell into the vision his soul had been crumbling while his body was grievously wounded, but he realized his body was almost completely healed upon waking up. A vigorous energy was gathered at his remaining wounds, and he felt them close with enough efficacy to put most of his healing pills to shame.

A thought struck Zac and he immediately opened his Dao Menu, and as expected there was a new entrant.

Fragment of the Bodhi (Early): All attributes +10, Endurance +60, Vitality +80, Intelligence +15, Wisdom +50, Effectiveness of Vitality +5%.

The vision had actually managed to help him form the third Dao Fragment, and the Fragment of the Bodhi even had tremendous healing capabilities from the looks of it. However, it was his mind rather than his body that had been in a critical state, and Zac hurriedly looked inward while still maintaining his unmoving posture. Unearthing all the capabilities of his new fragment would have to wait.

A vibrant emerald force surged through his soul, encompassing the splintered pieces of spiritual energy into a warm embrace. Most of his soul was already back together, and the remaining fractures were being mended with a speed visible to the naked eyes.

However, he noted with a frown that his soul wasn't uniform any longer. Whenever he had gazed at it before it had looked like a translucent ball in his mind, and this ball had become slightly larger and more pristine after taking a dip in the Pool of Tranquility.

However, now it almost looked like some sort of tadpoles were swimming about in his soul, small fuzzy blotches on an otherwise clear backdrop. It was no doubt the remnant energies left from the Splinter of Oblivion's rampage. Not only that, but it also seemed as though some of the alien energies had crammed themselves into the cracks of his soul turning itself into some sort of mortar as the [Prajñā Cherry] healed him.

Zac had no idea what this infiltration would result in, and it felt like this was the very thing that the Miasmic Fractals had defended against the past months. The Draugr-lady's cage had managed to cleanse the energies for him before they merged with his soul.

He didn't feel anything amiss or different at the moment, but he knew he couldn't trust those instincts. The splinter had manipulated him many times before, and sometimes with him only realizing it after the fact.

Seeing the situation about almost made Zac want to leave the tower early and find someone who could create the second of his Soul Strengthening Arrays. He was losing miasmic fractals left and right and it felt like things were spiraling out of control. However, he knew he couldn't give up now. He had paid a steep price to remain in contention, and he wasn't ready to exit now.

The mentalist was pretty insane, but he had now transformed into his Draugr-form. Reaching middle proficiency on [Indomitable] had allowed him to infuse the skill with the Fragment of the Coffin, and the two together should make him strong enough in case another mentalist lurked in the arena.

As for anything else, he had [Immutable Bulwark] and his shield.

Zac had initially turned his focus toward his soul, but he now tried to get a grip of the surroundings while maintaining the disguise of a corpse. The vision had clearly taken less than five minutes, as he would have been booted from the arena by now otherwise.

He was still lying on the ground with the still-warm corpse of the woman who fractured his soul, and their combined blood had created a large pool that he was currently lying inside. The scene was pretty gristly, but that was a blessing in disguise as he had at least been left alone.

Zac tried to move a bit, but he realized he was still extremely weakened even though the transformation to his Draugr-form had ended. Perhaps it was due to the fact that his soul was still being pieced back together by the emerald glow. A lot of his organs were also turned to mush by the stab from the assassin's spike, which might have left some hidden weakness even if he had been restored by the cherry and his new Dao Fragment.

Each second felt like an eternity as Zac waited for the reconstruction of his mind to finish. He really needed to fight someone since he could be kicked out of the arena any second now due to inactivity. But Zac realized he should have been careful what he wished for, as he was suddenly shrouded by a shadow.

A figure had appeared out of nowhere, a small goblin-looking humanoid no more than a meter tall, and he bent over to rummage through the clothes of the dead woman next to Zac. There was actually someone bold enough to loot the corpses while battles raged all around them? Zac made sure to be completely unmoving, and he anxiously tried to urge his body to regain its strength.

Zac's didn't as much as blink when the thief started to rummage through his clothes as well, or even when he found the Cosmos Sack hidden within his robes. Anxiousness burned in his chest, but he finally felt a sense of completeness as his soul was finally whole again. Zac's hand snapped forward like a spear, and with the help of the Fragment of Axe his hand became sharp enough to stab straight into the chest of the unsuspecting thief.

The man looked one-part confused and two-part horrified as his torso turned into shreds in an instant. Zac almost gaped in disbelief at the scene, but he quickly snatched back his cosmos sack in case it would be teleported out. But the man was deadlier than dead, and his upper torso slid off to the side while his legs crumpled.

Zac looked down at his hand with some shock, not able to comprehend the terrifying burst of power he had unleashed. His jab had been infused with the Fragment of the Axe, but the effect more chaotic and destructive than it should be. Was this the result of his soul getting tainted?

The situation was too chaotic to investigate at the moment though, and Zac knew he would have to look into this after he left this level. He instead quickly rummaged through the mangled corpse, but he only found the spatial ring that seemed to have belonged to the mentalist before. As for the thief's own possessions, he could find none.

There was not even a complimentary cosmos sack dropped by the system, making Zac snort with irritation as he got up to his feet. Maybe thieves got the same sort of pocket dimension skills like merchants did, effectively robbing Zac of his chance to loot another scion.

However, he quickly realized his mistake and he immediately changed his face with [Thousand Faces], bearing the painful transition. He didn't think the cultivators around him had the time to completely understand what transpired here, but he didn't want the fact of his dual-class to spread even if these people were from completely different sectors.

Luckily he was completely drenched in blood and viscera, making it nigh impossible to match him going by clothes either. Furthermore, he would soon be covered up in another layer of miasmic armor. The large shield that appeared on his arm would hopefully also make it even harder to connect to his human side. As for his axe, there wasn't much he could do about that.

The people around him were far too dangerous for him to use [Hunger] instead of his main weapon. He didn't even dare to swap out [Verun's Bite] for a spare axe.

A wide sweep proved that he was out of trouble for the moment, and Zac thanked the gods that there was no immediate threat. He had just killed a cultivator, which meant he had some breathing room before he needed to fight again. But the situation that he was met with was a bit odd.

There were still roughly 30 people in the arena, but only a handful of battles still raged on. The others were simply looking at the others and up at the ladder. Quite a few were actually looking right at him as well, donning calculative expressions. Their discerning eyes were a bit hair-raising, but there was nothing he could do about it.

He knew he wasn't strong enough to kill everyone that might have witnessed his transformation. Zac could only pretend nothing was wrong and hope that they'd chalk up the situation to some odd transformation skill. At least he wasn't jumped by the remaining warriors, which gave Zac a chance to look up at the ladder as well.

A lot of changes had taken place in the ladder during his unconsciousness. Only the first three positions were completely unmoved, and it looked like they were content with the results as they leisurely looked around at the others. All of them had over twenty points, making it essentially impossible not to pass the trial as long as they didn't get kicked for inactivity.

The second and third positions actually seemed to be from the same Clan as they shared the same last name, but they seemed to have no intention of teaming up judging by how far they stood from each other. Things generally seemed pretty civil, and Zac couldn't understand why some of the spectators didn't try to take advantage of the few people who were currently embroiled in life-and-death battles.

Had the remaining elites agreed upon some code of conduct while he was out of it?

Zac wasn't on the ladder as expected, which wasn't surprising as he had only defeated two people, one of which only provided one point. It was unlikely that the thief he just defeated was anything special either, and he had probably defeated one opponent at best before deciding to loot rather than compete for the top ten positions.

The problem was deciding who to target next. Picking one of the people on the ladder would guarantee a top ten placement if he won, but the battles would no doubt be pretty rough. Fighting Iz Tayn who still sat on top of her miniature sun was a non-starter, but the other 9 were obviously no weaklings either since only one of them was currently getting attacked.

The other option was taking on one or a few of the remaining spectators in hopes that his combined points would at least push him to the tenth spot. That tactic might end with him expending a lot of energy without anything to show for it though. Those who still stood in the arena were no doubt the elites of elites, and taking out two of them to gather points was probably harder than just one person in the top 10.

Zac soon enough made his choice and started moving, prompting most of the spectators to look over at him with vigilance. Zac ignored the gazes as a sea of miasma started to billow out around him, followed by the massive fractal bulwark that started to hover in front of him in case of a sneak attack.

His body groaned and creaked as he activated [Vanguard of Undeath] next. Zac didn't summon his skeletal helpers this time around though, as he wasn't too confident in their ability to help out in a place like this. Judging by the attacks he had seen they would be ripped to shreds in no time unless he infused them with his Dao, and he would need his fragments for his other skills.

He had a feeling that the skill would change in interesting ways as it leveled up, but for now he couldn't justify the cost of activating the [Undying Legion]. Instead, he stomped down on the ground and disappeared, and stomped down again the instant he appeared in front of a familiar figure.

It was actually the masked man wielding a pitch-black spike, the guy who had almost killed him earlier. His pseudonym was Faceless 9, and he was currently holding the 7th position on the ladder with 13 points.

Zac couldn't deny that part of his reasoning for choosing this man as a target was fueled by vengeance for getting his innards shredded, but there was also some logic to it. He had already seen some of the man's repertoire and weapon whereas most of the top contenders were a mystery to him.

Furthermore, judging from what Zac had witnessed the man seemed to be an assassin-type character, which was the best match for his current form. He had already been forced to change race, and he wouldn't be able to swap back to his human form anytime soon. Finally there were a couple of corpses around him, which would help fuel his miasmic reserves through [Fields of Despair].

"Wrong choice," the masked man grunted with an emotionless voice before he disappeared, and Zac's mind screamed of danger the next moment, prompting him to immediately block the back of his head with his shield.

If Zac had been a fraction of a second slower he would probably have died then and there as the black spike slammed into [Everlasting] with enough force to make Zac stumble forward. The sturdy shield was almost pierced straight through as well, though the fractals helped it to quickly regain its original form.

Cold sweat ran down Zac's back, but he pushed aside his lingering fear as he quickly infused [Deathwish] with the Fragment of the Coffin before it was too late. The assassin snorted and disappeared the next moment, but even he seemed a bit shocked to find himself right in front of the massive Bardiche Zac wielded.

A huge gash tore open the man's chest as the spectral projection stabbed into the back of Faceless 9, but he narrowly avoided any lethal wounds. Zac tsked in annoyance as he tried to swing his axe again, but it appeared that the assassin quickly learned from his mistake as he managed to move further away, somehow circumventing the taunting effect of [Vanguard of Undeath].

Zac sighed in regret when he saw that his gambit had failed. He had hoped to take down the man with a surprise strike relying on the discombobulating effect from [Vanguard of Undeath], but the masked warrior had dodged with almost impossible nimbleness. Zac did manage to leave a pretty nasty gash though, but it wasn't enough to weaken him to any significant degree.

It looked like Zac would have to do things the hard way, and billowing clouds of corrosive gas started to shroud the cage as the wails of fifteen chains started echo out of the cage as an azure fractal formed in the sky.