

The Fall 443

Chapter 443: Fate

Zac felt like a block of swiss cheese as he desperately rotated his new Fragment while eating Healing Pills like they were candy. Whatever that assassin had infused himself with had made him disgustingly durable, and Zac couldn't believe how many Dao-infused strikes it took to force him to give in.

Scabs had covered almost every part of the man's blackened body, and he looked more like an undead compared to Zac himself by the end. It appeared that whatever the black spike infused into the man's body forcibly kept the assassin going while instantly patching up his accumulating wounds.

But the layered corrosive effects had finally proven too much, forcing the man to crush his Token. The encounter had been too close for comfort though, and Zac wasn't sure whether he would have been able to endure if it wasn't for his new Dao Fragment that kept patching up his lacerated body. Zac shook his head as he arduously moved over to the spot where the assassin left the arena and bent over to pick up the Cosmos Sack he left behind.

A glance at the sky confirmed that he was pretty much safe from elimination at this point. He was in sixth place on the ladder with 18 points. He had a shot at reaching even higher since there was only a 3 point difference between the 4th and his spot, but he wasn't sure his body would be able to take it.

He had barely defeated the assassin even though his class was a direct counter, and he was running low on miasma due to the massive loss of ichor. He did pop a [Soldier Pill] to restore some of his reserves, but running low on Miasma wasn't the only issue. Zac looked down at [Everlasting] with a sigh.

The shield currently had multiple holes after getting brutalized during the fight. The fractals of the shield were thankfully still intact, and the holes were slowly closing themselves by the automatic repair function. However, its structural integrity was breached, and the weakness would transfer over to [Immutable Bulwark] as well, meaning his defenses were compromised by at least half until the shield had restored itself.

There was also the issue of the splinter. The side-effects of having one's soul filled with the splinter's corrosion had started to make itself known during the latter half of the fight. A smoldering fury had started to build as he got increasingly wounded, and it was a strain to stay in place.

His subconscious had been screaming at him to destroy everything, to bravely rush forward and crush everything with the axe in his hand. That was obviously lunacy though, as he couldn't even see his own hand in front of him, much less his target flitting about in the darkness domain.

The impulses had luckily calmed down the moment the battle ended, and Zac felt like himself again after just ten seconds. But it proved that prolonged battles could turn a bit iffy in the short term. Any thought of retreat had been long thrown out of his mind as he fought, and he would rather have died than given up in the heat of the moment, even though he was just inside a trial.

That fact alone made Zac leery about entering another battle. Getting a higher position would probably improve his reward if past experience was any indication, but he wasn't ready to die just to get a better placement. But it might not be up to him if he entered another battle, but rather the Splinter.

All this combined made Zac unwilling to fight until getting a better handle on his situation. In fact, he wanted to keep [Profane Seal] active until the trial ended as a protective measure, but he felt that he was losing control over the skill, meaning that it was reaching its limits of how long it could stay active. He could only reluctantly release the skill as he tried to appear as intimidating as possible to avoid immediately getting attacked.

Thankfully his miasmic armor from [Vanguard of Undeath] automatically repaired itself, and it should be impossible to see all the wounds covering his body. Along with the swirling clouds of his [Fields of Despair] and [Winds of Decay] he should look just as menacing as when he was at full strength.

However, not even a second had passed after the cage went down before alarm bells once again went off in his mind, and he saw a massive pillar of fire bearing down at him with terrifying momentum. He barely had time to adjust [Immutable Bulwark] before the beam was upon him, and it suddenly felt like he was being burned alive.

Flames burst out in all directions as the attack slammed into the bulwark, and the fractal shield only managed to block parts of the shocking amount of energies, before the excess energy went around its edges. Zac was soon enough trapped within a corridor of flames, barely holding on.

He was slowly being pushed back as [Everlasting] started to lose its shape from the heat. Each second felt like an eternity as Zac could only focus on holding on. He had seen what had happened to the beastkin warrior by just getting grazed by a beam just like this one, and he couldn't let it hit him. His defensive fragments and sturdy constitution might be able to handle the flames, but he wouldn't bet his life on it.

Zac's whole body was shaking from the strain, and much of the miasma he had just restored with his [Soldier Pill] had been expended as his wounds reopened. Finally, he wasn't able to hold any longer. Perhaps if he had been in peak condition he would be able to withstand such an attack multiple times, but now there was simply no way.

The shield cracked and Zac reached down toward his token to escape before it was too late. But no flames waited behind the crumbled bulwark, only the vast sky. Just a few errant sparks remained, but Zac barely dodged them by ungracefully frog-leaping forward. It looked like he wouldn't share the same fate as the poor beastkin woman at least, but a furious rage just as potent as the flames had erupted in his mind from the brush with death.

His vision turned a bit jagged and monochromatic as he glared at the woman sitting atop the sun. The air twisted and turned around him as he lifted his bardiche as his arm swelled from a massive infusion of miasma from [Unholy Strike]. Blood would be repaid with blood.

Only at last second did he manage to wrest back control of his mind, and he was shocked at what he had almost done. He had just been about to infuse his weapon with the Fragment of the Axe before throwing it at Iz Tayn.

Not even mentioning if such a crude attack would ever reach her before Verun was turned into ash, just what was he thinking? That crazy powerful cultivator was the last person he should antagonize, especially considering she only seemed intent on attacking once judging by her demeanor.

The power in his arm still needed a release though, and a powerful slam into the ground caused a massive rift that stretched fifty meters forward as the miasmic mists swirled around him. Zac quickly turned back toward the scorching sun afterward as he readied another [Undying Bulwark] just in case.

The two stared at each other for a few seconds, until Iz Tayn finally broke eye contact as she turned to the other participants who looked at the spectacle with confusion and trepidation.

“This has gone on long enough. Start fighting or leave immediately if you're not in the top ten,” the woman said with a bored voice before she turned pointed at Zac. “Not him though. We are connected by fate.”

Her eyes once against turned toward him, and Zac felt like she was looking at an interesting curiosity. Had she witnessed his transformation and wanted to dissect him like he had been warned off by his master? Warning bells went off in Zac's mind when he saw her look, and he slowly started to back away even further from her.

Thankfully she didn't seem to have any interest in attacking him again and instead chose to spectate the six battles that immediately erupted as a direct result of her words. More than half the remaining warriors had targeted someone else, whereas the rest immediately crushed their tokens with downcast expressions.

No one did target Zac though, and he didn't make any moves either. He had already been hesitant to fight any more due to his wounds and gaining the attention by that pyromancer didn't allow him to split his attention. He needed to be alert enough to counter anything that she had planned, or at least flee fast enough before being burned alive.

The battles took less than two minutes, and Zac was pushed down to the 8th position in the end as two warriors, one unranked and the other the previous 10th spot holder, managed to accumulate enough points to pass him. The moment the fighting was over ten pillars of light emerged, and Zac realized that one of them was placed on top of the platform where he started out.

The others immediately realized what was going on, and over half the winners rushed toward their respective platforms with as fast as their legs could carry them, none of them interested in staying behind. There was nothing to gain by staying in the arena, but everything could be lost if Iz Tayn decided to burn everything to the ground.

Only the two cultivators from the same family slowly walked toward their respective teleporter after bowing toward Iz Tayn, receiving a small nod in return.

Everyone seemed loath to stay in the arena, but perhaps no one was as motivated to flee as Zac himself. He couldn't care less what fate the insanely powerful pyromancer thought she had with him, his only interest was getting to the teleporter. But horror gripped his heart as the bored voice echoed out behind him.

“Wait, Mr. Bug,” Iz Tayn said, and Zac's eyes widened with alarm when he saw that the scorching sun transformed into a massive river that snaked toward him.

There was no way he would wait to see what this maniac had in store, especially after she actually referred him to a bug even though his name was on full display in the ladder. He redoubled his efforts at

reaching the teleporter, but he was forced to stop in his tracks when a towering wall of flames rose to block his path.

If it had been someone else's flames he would have simply run straight through, but he didn't dare to do something so foolhardy here. He quickly launched a wide swipe with [Unholy Strike] empowered with the Fragment of the Axe, but the strike was quickly swallowed up by the wall of flames like a pebble in a lake.

Zac turned around and saw that the girl was almost upon him, and his instincts screamed at him to get out as he saw a white flame forming above her hand. He desperately tried to think of some way out, but he could only come up with one solution.

His miasmic armor dissipated into a gust of smoke as he shrunk back to his normal size, and he stabbed his shoulders with two daggers as he ran straight toward the wall of flames. A massive surge of mental energy pushed into the two fractals of [Cyclic Strike] and Zac felt a mix of fear and anticipation when the two fragments actually fused into a bronze flash.

A roar echoed out across the arena as he punched the wall of flames with all he got, and a five-meter wide void was created as the bronze spark sprung out of his fist and erupted in a fierce implosion that simply deleted the flames barring his path. Zac was flush with elation at finally being able to use the bronze flash for something useful, but he had no time to think about that now as he jumped straight toward the teleporter that was just twenty meters away.

He glanced back mid-air just in case, only to see that Iz Tayn was only ten meters away. She donned an incredulous expression as she watched Zac soar toward the teleportation array, but Zac was unclear whether it was due to his incredibly stupid technique or because her wall got breached.

However, her expression soon turned thoughtful as she pushed two fingers into the white-hot flames she had conjured. A small glob of flames covered in dense fractals was quickly extracted and Zac couldn't help but curse when she flicked it toward him with a small smile.

He quickly moved his bulwark and infused it with the Fragment of the Coffin as he braced for impact, but his defenses weren't enough. The small flame shot straight through [Immutable Bulwark] and hit him in an instant. The stench of burnt flesh spread out in an instant as a burn-mark as large as a fist appeared on his chest.

Zac growled with pain as he quickly applied the Fragment of the Bodhi on the wound, but he was relieved to see that the flames seemed unable to spread as they did with the beastkin. It still hurt like hell and he shot a furious look at the girl who had stopped in her tracks.

"God damn lunatic," Zac spat through grit teeth as he disappeared through the teleporter.