

## The Fall 460

### Chapter 460: Indigestion

Zac took a deep breath as he found himself back in his body, and he was almost surprised to see that he was still in one piece after the four-eyed cultivator refused to provide him with a cage for the Shard. He did sense a new power coursing through his body, but it didn't feel too bad. His whole body was pins and needles, but there was nothing like the all-consuming rage and insanity that the Splinter sometimes brought forth.

Even the Splinter seemed to have been subdued by the alien presence in Zac's body, and the railing against the Miasmatic Cage had completely stopped. This alone made Zac pretty hopeful for the future, as this was exactly the sort of effect he had hoped to gain by taking this huge risk. Satisfied that he wouldn't up and explode the next minute he quickly took in his surroundings.

The radiant lights that previously lit up the core chamber were gone, and he found himself sitting on the metallic floor. He immediately reached for the token fastened to his belt, but he stopped himself when he realized that there was no threat.

The initial plan was to snatch the token and escape if he encountered the captain, but he realized that might not be needed now since the core containment shield had been erected again with him inside it. Three massive machines that had appeared while he took his spiritual journey powered the sphere from the outside, each of them shuddering with power.

Just outside the energy cage the metallic Transhuman stood guard, staring at Zac like a praying mantis. Beside him were a few technocrat scientists that were busying themselves with dozens of panels in front of them. It had been impossible to make out the orders the captain shouted earlier, but Zac quickly put two and two together as he looked at what was going on.

Jaol had mentioned a drastic increase of issues on the ship, and Dr. Fried believed that the anomalies appeared because the Shard wanted a host. Perhaps the technocrats hoped that him absorbing the Shard would result in fewer problems, which was something they desperately needed until they were out of harm's way.

"I don't know what your plan was, but I'll be keeping an eye on you until we return to our domain. Deramex Dynamics will no doubt pay even more for the Shard being delivered a compatible host," the silver Transhuman said, immediately confirming Zac's guess.

Zac ignored the man as he touched the shield, only to feel a painful zap that traveled along his arm. He wasn't worried in the slightest about being imprisoned; it was actually the opposite. This was the perfect outcome for him since they couldn't possibly know he would disappear the moment he cracked his Token.

Since his safety was guaranteed for now he wasn't too anxious to return, and he would rather wait things out for a few days to see whether any unanticipated changes arose within his body. He also didn't want to exit too early, as he had made an agreement with Ogras and Galau. Perhaps he would even be able to figure out a way to complete the mission on this level and then test his mettle against the floor guardian.

However, his eyes widened in shock when he looked down at the token. It showed that less than two days remained on his climb. How was that possible? He had over a week remaining on his climb when he arrived on the ship, allowing him to allocate over three days to finish this level before moving on to the floor guardian. There was even the chance of fighting for a treasure if one appeared on the 73rd level, in case he defeated the 8th floor guardian quickly.

He had pushed himself to the limits over the past weeks, but the system had somehow invalidated his efforts and stolen time on his climb. But a sudden realization made him want to curse out loud. He wasn't inside the tower any longer. He hadn't even considered it until now, but it appeared as though he had been forced to complete this level under normal temporal conditions. He had spent an hour and a half on this level, which pretty much was the equivalent of 6 days in of climbing time.

It also meant that his climb would end in less than thirty minutes unless he managed to get to the next level.

Even worse, were there perhaps other changes to the rules he had taken for granted? Would he even get sent out if he crushed his token at this point? Panic started to build in his body, and he was no longer as calm and collected as before. He desperately started to look around for an opportunity to escape, wishing for some solution to present itself.

A deep thud made his whole body shudder for an instant, before a shockwave of creation spread out, causing the environment to turn into a chaotic mess of random shapes and colors. The shockwave was contained within the shield though, and it seemed as though the power was slowly drained by the three large machines.

"It's pointless," the captain's voice could be heard from outside, but Zac couldn't bother with it as he had more pressing issues to deal with.

The Shard had awakened.

A shudder traveled across Zac's whole body as it felt he was being ripped apart, and the next moment hundreds of bleeding cracks appeared across his body before quickly closing again. What had changed? The thing had been quietly moving about his body like a curious animal, but suddenly it was frenetically releasing power to the point that Zac had trouble withstanding it.

Desire. Was this what the cultivator in the vision had warned him about. Zac had suddenly wished for a way to return to the Tower, and the Shard of Creation started rampaging a moment later. Worse yet, the Splinter had woken up from the massive fluctuations in his body, and Zac felt his mind tremble as it pitted itself against one of the Miasmatic Fractals.

It almost seemed as though the two remnants were creating some sort of loop where they kept agitating each other further and further. The visions he saw were pretty grim, but it was nothing like this. The Shard was going haywire in his body, pouring out an ever-increasing amount of unfamiliar energies.

It was just like when he was drowning inside the pond of Cosmic Water, except that this time the energies came from one of the highest Daos in existence. There was no telling what would happen next, and he briefly considered whether he should crush his token in hopes that he would get sent out after all.

However, Zac eventually decided against it. His situation wouldn't be any better in the Base Town than here, and there was a complicated situation waiting outside. He would need his mental faculties to deal with whatever the forces in the Base Town had planned, and he would rather try to deal with this mess onboard a technocrat vessel than among the elites of his sector.

If he left the Tower of Eternity like this there was a decent chance that the tragedy of the Zethaya Pill House would repeat itself, this time perhaps causing trouble of irrevocable levels.

Zac knew he needed to get rid of this excess energy before he exploded, and he desperately tried to force the energy out into his arm just like when he experimented with the bronze flashes. If something was going to explode it was better if it was an appendage. Ogras had lost an arm, but it hadn't really slowed the demon down at all.

However, the energies from the Shard of Creation weren't that easy to manipulate. Besides, his whole body, including his arms, was already crammed full of power. Zac briefly lamented that he couldn't expand his arm to contain the energies like with [Unholy Strike], and his eyes widened in horror the next moment as his arm turned into a macabre slab of sinew and muscle that kept growing until it slammed into the entrapment a few meters away.

The shield wobbled for a bit but it didn't break, but Zac didn't care about that as he frenziedly wished for his arm to get back to normal over and over in his mind, in hopes that the Shard would comply. And Zac was almost ready to cry when he saw his arm twist and turn until it returned back to normal.

In fact, it was actually better than normal. There had been a few wounds and a crack in one of his bones earlier from launching the third swing of [Deforestation], but the arm was completely unblemished now, even missing a few recent scars that had yet to fade away. It was both a relief and cause for worry, as he wasn't sure whether this was really his old arm, or rather something that the Shard of Creation had reforged from nothing.

Worse yet, he felt that while the rapid transformations had expended some of the energies of creation building up inside him, it had also expended something from him. He wasn't sure what, but it was something else than Cosmic Energy or Mental Energy. However, Zac barely had time to feel a sense of relief before hell broke loose.

He sensed another buildup of energies in his chest, but it refused to budge in the slightest this time. Instead, it shot toward the Miasmic Cage with furious momentum. The Splinter wasn't about to be outdone and the whole cage shuddered as it started to release unprecedented levels of power.

Zac desperately tried everything he could think of to stop the inevitable, but the two forces crashed into one of the seven remaining fractals at the same time. The pain in his mind threatened to turn him insane, but his mind felt like a small ship lost on a raging ocean. The Miasmic cage barely held, but Zac sensed that the Fractal had started leaking from the crash.

The two remnants had failed in destroying each other, but their war was turning Zac's body into a ravaged battlefield as even higher amounts of energies rampaged around, and he was barely cognizant of the fact that he was on the ground screaming his lungs out as the air around him crackled before it broke apart.

"What is he doing?!" the captain screamed from outside, but Zac barely heard it over the roar of the powers clashing in his body.

The whole core containment was already painted red as his body kept crumbling before being forcibly restored by the Shard. The pain was excruciating, but that was only a minor inconvenience compared to the cost. Zac had finally recognized the pain deep in his soul that came each time he expended the Shard's powers. It was feeding on his life force.

His mind was a hazy mess, but he still understood that he needed to expel the excess energies even if it came at a cost of his longevity. He arduously got back on his knees and started punching the ground, each punch containing enough Strength to cause the whole room to shake.

The alloy was made to withstand terrifying power, but each punch expelled some of both the two peak Daos of Creation and Oblivion. Oblivion turned metal to nothingness as Creation turned his hand into massive sledgehammers. The entrapment had only been meant to keep the waves of creation inside, but that was only half the force inside Zac at the moment.

It just took a few seconds of rabid punching for a deep hope to form, and he suddenly found himself falling face-first over twenty meters into a subfloor that seemed to be some sort of service level.

The pain startled his muddled head awake for a second, and he quickly stopped swinging to instead look around. All kinds of pipes ran along the walls and into the floor and ceiling above, and there were no signs of any technocrats anywhere.

"Lower the shield!" a voice roared from above, and Zac desperately looked around for an escape route.

He started running toward what he believed was the rear end of the ship, and the aura around him kept increasing as Creation and Oblivion started to seep out of his body. Wherever he passed destruction followed, either in the form of utter annihilation or rampant mutation.

The waves that radiated from him had been contained while he still was within the shield, but now he was like a walking radiation sphere that ruined everything around him no matter if he wanted to or not. But that was fine with Zac as it both lessened the stress inside his body while it worked toward completing the mission.

Hopefully he'd break enough to make a Teleportation Array appear, which would send him back to the tower and its elongated spacetime. As long as he left soon he would still have a day left to deal with this mess.

A sense of Danger suddenly cut through the pain and confusion, but he felt himself getting punched before he had a chance to even erect any defenses. A biting cold spread through his body as a massive hole was blasted open in his chest, the force throwing him through multiple walls. It was the Captain who had caught up, and it looked like he was no longer interested in keeping him alive. Half Zac's torso was gone, and it was barely held together by a few thin strings of flesh.

Zac felt death creeping forth, and not like when he changed his race to Draugr. This was a true death. He was full of reluctance as there were too many people counting on him back home. And the Vibrant energies surged in his body, and Zac was started awake by excruciating pain as his torso grew back in an instant.

Cold sweat ran down Zac's forehead as he shakily got up on his feet and glanced down at his perfectly intact chest. Was this why the Technocrats had launched an orbital strike on the previous host? He briefly wondered what Ogras would say after seeing such a disgusting regeneration speed, but he knew it came at a cost. He had lost even more of his longevity, and it was not a small amount as far as Zac could tell.

Worse yet, the captain was already charging up another strike.