

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1121 - The Emperor's Spear - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1121 - The Emperor's Spear**

The whole platform buckled under the force of the golden-robed warrior's attack. No skills or Cosmic Energy were involved, yet the spear conjured a glistening dragon over twenty meters long as it pierced toward Joanna's forehead. Only scraps remained of her armor, and she was drenched in blood from head to toe. Her aura was like a flickering candle, but the grip on her spear was firm.

Ruthlessness shone in her eyes as she shattered the apparition with a lightning-quick swipe. The true strike within wasn't so easily rebuffed, and a streak of golden death penetrated the chaos and raced toward her heart. Death was looming, telling her it was time to put down her weapon. It was long overdue.

Joanna ignored the stifling feeling, crushed the despair. She didn't retreat from the deadly strike; she welcomed it. Bones broke, flesh tore, and pain raged like a fiery inferno. She was stabbed clean through, her left lung destroyed by the ravaging force in the spearman's strike. Even her heart was lacerated, but the flames of war forced it to keep beating.

A flood of destructive Dao poured into the shaft and surged toward her chest, but a bloody hand grabbed on. Joanna dragged herself closer while a storm of her own entered the enemy's weapon. She knew her Dao couldn't compete with the opponent's, but she didn't care. Conviction and desire urged her on, suffocating any thoughts of defeat or surrender.

And like a squad of soldiers erupting with impossible strength as they faced down a far larger army, the enemy's Dao was stalled. It was only delaying the inevitable, but the winds of war could change at a moment's notice. Her companion was seemingly made out of water as it bent at an impossible angle, piercing toward her target's head.

The spearman tried to rid Joanna and parry, but her muscles bulged as she stood rooted to the ground like bedrock. There was still not a flicker of emotions emotion in his eyes as the spear drew closer. Joanna had seen a thousand expressions as her opponents grappled with the realization of their end, but the blank acceptance was not one she'd encountered before. The spear hit true, ending the duel in a flash.

Joanna looked down at the fallen warrior for a minute, each heaving pant feeling like she'd been stabbed all over again. She welcomed the pain. It was a lesson and proof of her path. Finally, she bowed slightly at her opponent before turning toward the gate waiting for her at the arena's edge. Each step was slow and painful, but her heart beat with anticipation as she stepped through.

Not enough.

Despair filled her heart as she found herself at the familiar plateau among the clouds. Like after the previous battle, there were still two staircases on the other side. One led to the next challenge, while the other led back to Earth. Eight victories had been necessary to count as passing, earning her an award and the option to return.

However, the existence of the stairs had urged Joanna on, despite the desperate fight in the eighth challenge. Nine was the utmost and the number of outer courts. She had thought the optional battle against the golden spearman had been the final challenge to claim the real prize—the seal of the Indomitable Court. She walked over to make sure, but the prompts quickly dashed her lingering hopes.

[Continue]

[Return to Earth. Reward: [Kalyndor's Glory]]

A burst of information indicated the reward was a high-quality War Regalia perfectly suited for those walking the path of war. It came with a matching D-grade spear skill and emitted a natural halo that empowered herself and her subordinates. An item of this quality couldn't be bought with money in Zecia, and it would cost far more merit than what she had accrued over the past six months.

But it wasn't what she'd come for.

The storm in Joanna's heart gradually calmed down as she turned toward the glistening stairs that led into the haze. She could vaguely tell a deadly threat was hiding within, like a primordial beast waiting for its prey. Perhaps it was the final guardian before Indomitable Seal. Perhaps it wasn't. There was no way to tell. Joanna was, however, painfully aware of her chances of victory should she ascend those stairs.

There were none.

There was a significant gap in strength between every opponent. She'd swept through the first three within thirty minutes, but the eighth battle had forced her to use every tool in her arsenal. The ninth was even worse. She had been suppressed throughout the battle against the golden spearman. He was just a Peak E-grade Cultivator like herself, but it had almost felt like she'd fought someone like Zac. Each strike of his contained the ferocity and force of a dragon, leaving Joanna unable to mount a counter until the very end.

Yet she didn't immediately take her winnings and leave. Joanna sat down and ate a Healing Pill, calmly dragging pieces of shattered armor from her wounds. She had six hours before she had to make her choice, so there was no point in deciding while the desperate plight of the previous battle still occupied her mind.

The hours passed, and the wounds across her body slowly closed thanks to her top-quality pills and the restorative effect of [Steelspirit Cascade]. Her lung wouldn't fully recover in time because of the powerful intent of her opponent's attack, but the stabbing pain had been downgraded to a dull ache. Eventually, only five minutes remained, and Joanna stood up to face the two roads.

One road led to death and the other defeat. The choice was simple.

The steps of her steel boots broke the silence like funeral tolls as she proceeded toward the next level. Her mood was complex as her thoughts turned to Earth, her subordinates, and her friends. To her Lord. Her choice could be considered a betrayal. She had people depending on her, yet she was about to throw her life away.

Despite all logic and reason, Joanna's heart was calm as she walked toward her end. The very essence of her being called for her to continue, that the answers waiting within the clouds were more important than living or dying. She had to keep going, even if there was no chance of victory. If she backed down, she would forever be locked outside, seeing the chosen ones drift further and further away.

She would be selfish this one time.

The clouds eventually parted, and Joanna found herself standing atop a tower surrounded by the ashy smoke of war. It was impossible to glean anything from the surroundings, but Joanna could somehow sense that the conflict

hidden beyond the veil would make the Intersector war look like a kid's brawl. The air reeked of antiquity and doom.

There was nothing on the stone tower except for her new opponent, whose appearance caught Joanna off-guard. The previous fighters had differed in strength, but they had all been exceptional in some way. Her fifth opponent wielded the power of a thunderstorm, his strikes as swift and fierce as bolts of lightning.

The seventh was steady as a mountain, its spear seemingly able to hold a whole army at bay. Each had their own style and their own comprehension of the spear, and it was proudly on display as an expression of their very existence. This woman was different.

She was a pure human, by the looks of it. She stood silently at attention, the spear in her hand slightly leaning forward. Her weapon and gear appeared very basic, looking even worse than the standard armaments of the Atwood Army. There was no aura of brilliance, no apparitions generated by her Dao. But when their eyes met, Joanna saw seas of blood and mountains of corpses.

It wasn't a trick or even an expression of her Dao. It was the experience of a warrior of a million battles, someone who had peered into the very essence of war. Zac's almost inhuman aura of bloodshed was nothing in front of the blood on this woman's hands, yet there was eerie tranquility to her gaze. The corpses were the proof of her path, the blood the price of her choices.

She held the answers Joanna sought.

"I am Joanna Thompson," Joanna said as she stepped forward. "I'm searching for Indomitability."

"Indomitability," the woman slowly answered. "It's a narrow path that ends in tragedy."

Joanna paused for a moment, surprised that her opponent actually answered. Her previous opponents had almost felt like puppets. They didn't speak, and there wasn't any expression or emotions when they fought. They were just the backdrop to the spears in their hands and the style they exhibited. This woman was different, in more ways than one.

"Even so."

"Then show me."

There was nothing else to be said. Cosmic Energy surged through Joanna's body as she unleashed her [Armament Zone], and one spear became a hundred as steel birthed war. She soared across the tower, forming the vanguard of a river of destruction. Joanna knew there was no holding back. If she did, she'd die before even having a chance to put her path on display.

Destructive weapons imbued with the Branch of the Victorious Spear fell like rain, but there wasn't so much as a ripple in her opponent's eyes. She calmly took a few steps forward, effortlessly avoiding Joanna's deadly gauntlet without using any skills. The scene was shocking, but Joanna knew such a crude attack wouldn't do much. So long as it could give her some clues about her opponent's fighting style, it was fine.

Unfortunately, the spear maiden wasn't giving Joanna anything, forcing her to strike blind. The spear in Joanna's hand glimmered with murderous portent as she stabbed down with enough force to reduce the whole tower into rubble. Her opponent returned a strike that almost looked laughably simple, but Joanna's instincts screamed of mortal danger. Was that enough to make her back down? Of course not.

Joanna split in two, her straightforward strike turning into a pincer. Her opponent didn't react to the sudden change and continued to strike right between Joanna's two halves. Yet Joanna's dread only increased, and she desperately forced herself to move even further apart to create a wider berth.

Her shoulder was still ripped open, creating a painful gash that opened up old wounds. Still, Joanna knew she'd barely survived having her throat pierced. Her own strike fared no better. It was like an invisible force field held her attack at bay. What had just happened? Her opponent had clearly attacked empty air, yet Joanna was bleeding like a sieve. Conversely, the aim of her spears was accurate, but they didn't even reach the opponent.

There was no time to analyze as one deadly calamity replaced the previous. Joanna's heart hammered at how close to death she'd come at the first exchange, and her instincts screamed at her to run for her life. But she transformed the fear into fuel and her spear into a blur as she launched an all-out assault. The dance of death had begun, and there was no stopping until one of them fell.

Joanna fought like an asura, extracting every scrap of power and comprehension she'd arduously accumulated over the past years. The unrelenting pressure let her reach new levels of mastery, like coal turning into diamonds. But what did it matter? Her opponent seemed to be just casually swinging her spear in the basic movements they taught at the Atwood Academy, but every strike was more terrifying than any finishing blow.

They were unstoppable, undodgeable. Each attack was a brush with death. Joanna couldn't understand how she was doing it. She couldn't feel any Dao, and the opponent didn't seem to be using any technique. It was like her opponent's will was bending reality itself, and anything Joanna did could, at best, slightly alter the chosen outcome.

One wound after another was added upon the ones before, and the fight only grew more lopsided as the opponent's aura grew. Bones shattered and muscles tore, and the ancient tiles drank their fill of Joanna's blood. Joanna's mind grew hazy from pain and blood loss, but her strikes only grew fiercer. She knew she'd failed, but she wanted to leave at least one mark on her opponent before it was over. One mark that could act as proof of her existence, of her path.

Nothing else mattered. Nothing else existed. There was only her spear and her unbreakable desire to embed her spear in her enemy. She stumbled after a hole was punched through her thigh, but she turned her fall into a lunging strike that continued the war. Her heart was running out of blood to pump, but its beats only grew louder, like a war drum rousing the exhausted soldiers.

She stabbed, she swiped, she parried. When a slash severed her forearm and she lost her weapon, she switched to punches and kicks. She didn't relent even when muscles were severed and sinew snapped, and her limbs failed her. Joanna's vision was red and blurry, but she gathered her last vestiges of energy for a desperate leap fueled by sheer force of will; her teeth bared in defiance as she aimed for her opponent's throat.

Even now, there was no emotion in her opponent's eyes. No pity, no contempt. There was only fire and blood as her spear stabbed forward, its gleaming tip containing a will capable of crushing mountains and moving seas. Joanna sighed, knowing that was it, the disappointment far greater than the fear of death.

'Couldn't even touch her clothes.'

The spear pierced her forehead, but a shattering sound like breaking glass echoed through the tower. It wasn't her skull that had fractured, but her opponent's spear. Joanna knew she was thickheaded, but her bones weren't strong enough to break her opponent's weapon. Something else was going on, but her brain failed to grasp it. She'd already stepped through the gates of hell, and the matters of the living world felt distant and confusing.

The destruction continued from the broken spear into the woman's arm, and she broke apart piece by piece. She wasn't angry or scared. She smiled, like her death was nothing. The unbreakable conviction was still present in her eyes, to the point Joanna expected her will alone would subvert her body's collapse.

However, the reversal didn't happen. The spear maiden was soon reduced to nothing but a swirl of white dust while her own body mended with impossible speed. Joanna's mind was a mess, blankly looking at the spectacle until a blue screen blocked her vision.

[Time: 5 minutes 12 seconds. Passed.]

It took Joanna over a minute to drag herself back from the other side and digest what the prompt said. Time? Passed? She was never meant to defeat her opponent? She was just meant to hold on long enough? The miracle she'd silently prayed for had arrived.

Also, was that really just five minutes?

The prompt faded, but Joanna realized no new gateway had appeared. Instead, the swirling dust was rapidly gathering into another shape. It was a broken spearhead. It looked almost identical to the one her opponent had used. However, it was covered in cracks, scars, and dark spots that emitted such terrifying auras that it almost knocked her out. Joanna was forced to take a stumbling step back before stabilizing her mind and turning toward the spearhead.

It had to be blood. Ancient blood, from the looks of it. The spearhead emitted such an archaic aura that there was no doubt in Joanna's mind of its origins. Zac had told her about his vision of the Left Imperial Palace, the damaged walls that had withstood an unimaginable assault. This spear emitted that kind of monstrous will. And only the blood of the ones who could threaten the Left Imperial Palace could create such an impact.

Just what kind of enemies had the woman fought that the power of their blood remained to this day?

"I was called Indra Eyler, but the world knew me as the Emperor's Spear. Right or wrong, I followed my beliefs to the end."

It was her opponent's voice, but it grew with force and grandeur with every word. After the first sentence, Joanna could no longer stay upright even if her flesh and bones had been restored. The conviction in Indra's voice was so overwhelming it could crush stars.

"Indomitable will, unbreakable spirit! Sweep the Six Directions and suppress the Eight Hells! Subdue the Dao and pierce the Terminus!"

Each word was like a bomb going off in Joanna's head, filled with such resolve that reality didn't seem its match. Each syllable held a mountain of meaning and experience, like the condensed essence of millions of battles. Each sentence was compounded and superimposed until something was born in the depths of Joanna's mind.

An impartment?

Joanna's heart trembled as she was filled with a burst of information. At first, it was just short snippets of memories. Memories of struggle, of starting as a lowly soldier that no one would remember. Of fighting against one's unimpressive talent on the road of cultivation. Of never giving in, of never using their lacking providence as an excuse to stop or settle. Of looking death in the eye and not backing down.

The timer might have been the System's test, but Joanna's response had been the mysterious spear maiden's. If Joanna had given up, fled, or stalled, she wouldn't have gained Indra's recognition. Now, she'd left something behind, a piece of her legacy for someone walking the same path.

Unfortunately, Joanna didn't have time to investigate the gift sent across time as three white lights had appeared in her soul. Utmost truth and certainty filled every corner of Joanna's being. She had worked herself to the bone for so long, pushing herself to the breaking point and beyond. It was time to harvest. Joanna looked at the glowing lights, understanding her path better than ever.

"The Emperor's spear..."



## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1122 - Frontlines - Read**

### **Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1122 - Frontlines**

An intense aura of steel and blood greeted Zac as he stepped through the Teleportation Array, accompanied by Vilari and Rhuger. They stopped at the elevated podium to get a better look while a river of battle-hardened warriors poured past them to make room for the rest of the fused army.

A brutal city of wide streets, sharp angles, and rough materials stretched across the horizon. Apart from a few larger structures, the buildings were mostly identical, resembling hastily erected warehouses. The city didn't look too impressive at a first glance, but Zac soon realized the view was messing with his sense of scale.

The distant streets that looked no wider than a normal two-lane road were at least a few hundred meters across, surpassing most squares back home. The buildings, too, were extraordinarily oversized, each a city unto its own. Zac felt like he'd returned to the Mystic Realm on Earth, which had been spatially expanded by the Dimensional Seed. The city couldn't compare to the continent-sized world disks of Twilight Harbor, but it had to be a huge undertaking to build something like this.

Scale aside, it wasn't the capital of some barren world. It was one of the temporary camps of the Zecia Alliance, erected upon a huge platform floating through space. The stars in the sky slowly drifted, indicating that the platform was actually moving, and with great speed at that.

The city was accompanied by dozens of Cosmic Vessels silently flying above, and Zac immediately spotted a few of his own products. They were all covered in scars, and some missed whole sections. However, that only added to their fierce impression, making them seem like lions in a flock of hyenas.

Not only that, but there were six more city platforms within his line of sight, and Zac wouldn't be surprised if there were even more nearby. Zac estimated this grouping alone could house well over a hundred million soldiers. It was a shocking number that would be able to steamroll most factions on Earth, yet it was only a fraction of the total number of combatants in the region.

The war on the frontlines was different than the neatly arranged battlefronts. The Battlefront Arrays didn't send your armies directly to a battleground, but rather to these war camps controlled by the Zecia Alliance. From there, they'd

either take Cosmic Vessels or use the Alliance Teleporters to reach the frontlines. The war camps themselves were constantly on the move, partly to avoid attacks and partly to reach contested regions.

The Zecia Alliance also had Spatial Gates that could open portals to enemy worlds. Such arrays were normally beyond the means of the factions on the frontier, but the uniqueness of the location worked in their favor. They were at the edge of the Eternal Storm, and the dimensional barriers were thin and unstable. The war had further pushed them to the brink of collapse, making it significantly easier to poke a hole or connect two locations.

Their range was still very limited, and the windows of opportunity were small, but it was enough to quickly send your army to a nearby battle. The gates were prohibitively expensive to open, though, so they were only used for important missions where speed was critical. It was also difficult to locate the correct coordinates because of the spatial turbulence, but the Zecia forces had a home-field advantage.

"Let's go introduce ourselves."

Vilari smilingly nodded, and they descended the Battlefront Platform toward a huge square below. It was more than large enough to accommodate his combined armies, and there was already a group of soldiers waiting for them. A fierce-looking middle-aged captain was already waiting by his men, his baleful aura strong enough for Zac to sense it hundreds of meters away.

He was a demi-human with yellow eyes and mottled green spots on his face and hand. He was just standing there, yet a red haze of intense Killing Intent was forming around him. Zac could tell it wasn't directed at his people; it was simply an air he exuded after centuries, perhaps millennia, of bloodshed. However, the captain had seen better days. He was missing an arm, and there was something wrong with his energy flow—the sign of a damaged Cosmic Core.

"You're not registered at all? How's that possible?" the soldier swore at Ra'Klid, his voice like steel grinding against bone. "Idiots, did you spend all your Faction Merit to avoid contributing? Ah? Where did that leave you now? Broke and still here. Or did you bribe someone? Don't think I can't see the fancy gear you're all wearing under your cloaks. That won't fly here!"

"I assure you, we've done no such thing," Ra'Klid said. "We arrived later because the Ruthless Heavens called upon us later."

"Uh huh," the warrior scoffed, suspicion written all over his face. "Well, whatever. You're here now, which means you're bound by the Alliance Laws. So, stop acting mysterious and tell me who—"

The old captain seemed ready to continue his tirade but stopped upon seeing Zac's approach.

"This rain of sunshine is Captain Tussar," Ra'Klid said. "He's been assigned to get us settled."

"Zachary Atwood of the Atwood Empire," Zac calmly said.

He wasn't about to apologize for arriving late—they'd earned that right through hard work and sacrifice. But he also didn't get angry at the fierce attitude. Zac could understand where the gruff veteran was coming from. The frontline in the Red Zone was the last line of defense safeguarding Zecia, yet too many people were only putting in the minimum effort.

Between the battlefronts preventing the Kan'Tanu from appearing on your doorstep and the distant frontlines at the sector's edge, most prioritized the former. Meanwhile, Captain Tussar was clearly from the Allbright Empire, judging by an insignia on his lapel, which meant he and his people had been desperately fighting to protect their homeland since day one.

"Zachary Atwood? Atwood Empire?" he said, his eyes widening with realization. "The Atwood ships? That's you?"

"That's me."

Zac wasn't too surprised his mixed-race army hadn't immediately tipped off the man. The Atwood Empire's unique composition was no longer a secret, but it was mostly the leaders who knew of the situation. Some could figure it out through his two entries on the Early D-grade ladder, but it wasn't like many people in Zecia knew who the Umbri'Zi were. In fact, very few people in the Allbright Empire had even heard of the Radiant Temple, their own overlord.

"I—Uh," the soldier grunted, looking like he'd swallowed a fly. But he soon found his bearing and bowed slightly, an action that seemed incredibly ill-practiced. The shock on Tussar's followers was proof it was a drastic departure from a usually fierce bearing. "I apologize. I know your faction's contribution is greater than almost anyone's."

"Don't mind it," Zac waved.

"Those ships," the grizzled warrior ventured, his eyes glancing at a Starflash above them. "You... uh... got any more?"

"I'm sending everything over the moment they leave the production line," Zac said with a shake of his head. "I would have expanded production, but it's a System-limited resource."

"Shame," the general sighed. "Anyway, welcome to the Allbright Empire and the Zecia Alliance. I'm Tussar Arondo, and I'll do my best to get you up to speed."

"I didn't expect a Late-stage Hegemon to act as a greeter," Zac commented.

"Bah, couldn't just sit around in the sick tent and wait for my core to heal," Tussar spat. "And I'm no good with tactics or planning, so I'm helping with a little bit of everything until I can return to my men. Usually, I'm beating some se—ah, I'm training the newcomers. The last batches have essentially been penal colonies of worthless dregs. Not even good enough to become fodder."

"No wonder you're in a mood," Ra'Klid grinned but backed down after Zac glanced in his direction.

"Nice to meet you, captain," Zac said. "Which section is this?"

"You're now part of the third barracks of the Twenty-Second Field Army," Tussar said, not without some pride.

"The Everfast Monarch?" Zac exclaimed.

Zac could understand the pride in Tussar's eyes. Zecia had undeniably come out on the losing end during the initial clash, but a few heroes emerged and became legends. The Everfast Monarch had been mostly unknown beyond his identity as part of the Dravorak Imperial Clan. However, he was one of the few who managed to slay a Kan'Tanu Monarch during the first battle.

Not only that, but he destroyed a powerful killing array that would have been a huge threat to the region. The battle had cost him a War Fortress and damaged another, but the victory was only possible because the Everfast Monarch had hidden the fact he'd managed to step into Middle Monarchy just before the Kan'Tanu arrived. He'd burst forth with power at a critical time, and

his decisive victory had stabilized a huge swathe of the Red Zone. The original appearance of this chapter can be found at [NøvEIB1n](#).

"That's the one," Tussar said. "You're pretty lucky. The fighting's tough everywhere, but our situation is better than most."

"Actually, we have already been assigned to the forty-seventh," Zac said, handing over a crystal exuding the unique marking aura of the Allbright Empire.

The crystal was a relocation order signed by an actual Monarch of the Allbright Dynasty, which had binding power anywhere within the Alliance Army. The System hadn't given them any options but to join the madness, and Zac wasn't about to cower behind his men. However, that didn't mean he was above pulling some strings to improve their situation.

As Tussar said, the twenty-second was probably one of the best field armies to join, but it was ultimately under the control of a Monarch from the Dravorak Dynasty. Zac had a small grudge with the ancient Zecia faction after killing the Dravorak Princeling in the Tower of Eternity. It had mostly been smoothed already, mostly thanks to his Cosmic Vessels, and he already had an official status equivalent to a middling nobleman within the Dravorak Empire.

Zac was more worried about the people standing behind them.

Arcaz Umbri'Zi had been singled out as one of the main reasons for the accelerated collapse of the Twilight Ocean and the disastrous fallout for the Havarok Empire. Their general had no choice but to force his way through the mysterious teleportation gate because Alvod's ascent started early. As a result, the Umbri'Zi gained the opportunity to launch a large-scale war against the Havarok's feeder sectors.

The Havarok imperials hadn't attempted to contact or target him since appearing in Zecia, but that didn't mean they'd forgiven him. They would definitely deal with him if given the chance, and that didn't even take into account their hunt for seals. Worse, the Havarok probably didn't care about his Creator Vessels or his agreements with the Zecia Alliance.

Neither did Zac dare move to the sections manned by the Undead Empire. Their cooperation was still working without issue, but Tavza's final warning lingered in the back of Zac's mind. The System had measures against outright

conflict between allies, but rules were dead and people were alive. War was chaotic, and "accidents" happened all the time.

Ultimately, Zac chose to stay with the Allbright Empire since he had a decent relationship with the Allbright Dynasty, Peaks, and Radiant Temple. Furthermore, they were the ones who would suffer the most if his supply of Cosmic Vessels was cut short, so the Allbright Dynasty was more likely to prevent any schemes on his life.

His first choice was actually the Void Temple, but they'd rejected his request for assistance. They'd been very helpful before he left for the Perennial Vastness but drew a clear line after the war started. Zac suspected the rules of the Vigil were holding Perala back. The fact that they helped defend the frontlines at all was probably bending their rules of non-interference.

"The forty-seventh? Ah! Damn, it's actually stamped by Lord Endemire," Tussar blurted. "I thought you belonged to the deadies. Uh, no offense."

"Can't have too many friends," Zac smiled. "If you could make the arrangements."

"Of course," Tussar quickly nodded, pointing at a huge building nearby. "Quickest way to move over to the forty-seventh is to teleport to—"

The grizzled Hegemon didn't get any further before a blaring siren shook the city awake.

"What's going on?"

"It's a general assembly. All hands on deck," Tussar frowned. "Something big must have happened on the front."

"Is it good or bad?"

"Could be good, could be bad," Tussar muttered, hesitating before adding another sentence. "For the soldiers, it's always bad. The call means a huge battle is about to break out, and many will have to lay down their lives."

Zac exchanged a pointed look with Vilari. Wasn't the timing too coincidental?

Tussar took out a token and infused his will. His scowl only deepened, and it almost looked like he was about to throw the token on the ground.

"Information blockade? Bastards! Sending us into the unknown again!"

"It might not be too bad," the captain added when he saw Zac's stormy expression. "The bigshots might have created an opening, or a sudden weakness in the dimensional barriers has given us a unique opportunity. The blockade makes it harder for our enemy to anticipate our plans. Either case, we're moving fast. They're opening a gate and sending everyone through."

"What about us?"

"That's, uh," Tussar grimaced. "An order at this level is considered critical for the war effort. It takes precedence over other missions or assignments. Everyone nearby would have to join, and failure to comply is considered treason. Not even Lord Endemire's stamp can overrule that."

"So we're stuck?" Zac frowned, his bad feeling only growing worse.

Had his circumstances leaked, and the Havarok were prepared for his arrival? Was someone else making a move? Or was he just being paranoid? Thank God they only sent one of their two armies to test the waters.

"I can't send you off even if I wanted to," Tussar sighed, nodding at the teleportation building. "See the barrier? The Alliance Network has already been sealed to prevent leaks, and any vessel veering off on its own will be shot down. Only the Battlefront Arrays work since they're controlled by the System rather than us."

Zac sighed as he looked up at the shimmering stars. It looked like they were being thrown into the grinder sooner rather than later. He could only pray that his preparations over the last few days were enough.

-----

"Go ahead, take your places."

The voice was gentle, tranquil, like its owner hadn't just massacred a roomful of famous captains he'd fought alongside for months. Or perhaps it couldn't be considered a massacre, considering his energy kept their hearts beating, and a wisp of their souls remained. The masked group flowed into the secret chamber, each targeting a specific dignitary.

Sealing talismans were placed over the eight chakras, sealing life and soul within their leaking containers. Next, they took out identical masks looking like crystalline pieces of art and placed them over the victim's faces.

"Remember, every word and every action carries a risk of being exposed. Your predecessors have already set the events in motion. You only need to gently guide them in the right direction."

There was no answer, only the silent shuffle of blood being swept and Karma cleansed. The masks were soon finished imprinting, and the Blank Slates placed the masks onto their faces. A wave of his sleeve isolated the crackling sounds of bones being crushed and remolded. Ten seconds later, the transformation was complete.

The group carefully stowed the bodies in their respective Mourning Vats, retaining the link and fate. Finally, they shed their Emptiness Shrouds, displaying the dazzling clothing beneath—clothing identical to the fallen captains whose places they'd taken. Qul'Uster looked across the room, nodding in satisfaction when not even his augmented sight could spot any imperfections. Only the most discerning Class-3 Cultivator would be able to see through the ruse.

"Our partner will contact you within the hour. There is no telling how things will shake out, but I trust you can arrange things to everyone's satisfaction. Remember our purpose."

The group sat down at the overseer's table, placing their hands on the Command Crystals. The shrunken-down urns hummed, and dense rows of data appeared. There was nothing else to say. The Blank Slates would finish their task to perfection. They'd be discovered eventually, but that was their fate. They only existed when taking the role of others. Being exposed was simply returning to nothingness.

"Are you really planning on being a hired hand for that twisted bastard?"

The voice was tinged with anger and disgust. Qul'Uster looked over as he stepped out of the sealed chamber, finding Nuztu standing in the shadows. Her mask hid any expression, but the anger veritably oozed from its slits.

"Working with those wretched people is as close to treason as you can come. And you know they're bound to betray us. They hate us almost as much as we hate them."



"Such is the way of things," Qul'Uster said with equanimity. "Our interests are aligned for the moment, and we want to push events in the same direction. Who'll seize the opportunities and accomplish their goals will ultimately depend on fate and strength. Who knows? We might all end up walking away empty-handed."

"You think those barbarians can overcome our arrangements? How's that possible?" Nutzu scoffed, crackling light appearing around her hand. "They're walking testaments to the folly of Heaven's Path, unrefined and inefficient. I'm more interested in testing the strength of these so-called imperials or that ancient monster roaming the battlefield."

"Don't underestimate the natives," Qul'Uster said, recalling the ancient, scattered notes he'd found in the abandoned archives. "Nothing is what it seems, and everything is at stake. The war for the Fifth Pillar of Sin has already moved those at the peak, and fate is bound to shift in unpredictable ways."

"Whatever, I'm just here to kill whoever gets in the way," Nutzu said as they emerged from the hidden base.

The city was already coming alive, and the winds of war were stirring.

"Do you think it's actually possible? Can the Supreme Ancestor's remnant be found in this desolate place after being missing for so long?"

"That's what we need to find out. But the events undeniably line up. The last clues to the Kayar-Elu's whereabouts lead to this quadrant, and now the Fifth Pillar appears out of nowhere in this nascent sector," Qul'Uster said, his gaze growing distant. "What else can drag it from the depths but the call of the Void Emperor?"

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1123 - Armageddon - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1123 - Armageddon**

Zac glanced at Vilari and felt the spiritual nudge that confirmed she'd set up a mental network for their group. Petrus' voice immediately appeared in his head.

'The Havarok Empire only has one Monarch in Zecia as far as we know, and he should be stationed with the second field army. I doubt this is a

premeditated ploy. We could have been sent anywhere. The Havarok shouldn't have enough pull to set up such an elaborate plot.'

'Not premeditated,' Zac emphasized.

'You always have to be careful. Just your fancy equipment might give birth to greed in some commander's heart.'

'We knew that going to the frontline as sealbearers comes with unavoidable risks. This shouldn't be any different,' Vilari added.

Zac knew Vilari was right. People would be eyeing him and his people no matter which battlefront they visited. Not even the threat of invasion could curtail the greed in some people's hearts.

At least there hadn't been any rumors of Monarchs targeting the young, snatching their seals. The System's unspoken rules and the risk of ending your faction's fate with the Left Imperial Palace acted as safeguard. There were even stern warnings for such actions in the public bounties. That didn't guarantee anyone's safety, but Zac felt they had enough measures in place to deal with any insider threat.

Zac wasn't worried about any Hegemons. His armies were strong enough to tear even Peak Hegemons apart if they spared no expense. Just his Hegemons throwing out a bunch of D-grade Talismans would probably do the trick as long as it wasn't a top-tier Heaven's Chosen. As for Monarchs... Well, he did have two lifesaving graces from Sendor hidden within his bodies.

"Ah damnit," Tussar swore. "I can't help you transfer, but I'll tag along and make sure you don't get the short end of the stick. I can't let you newbies run onto the battlefield blind."

"So what do we do?"

"For now, nothing," Tussar said. "Your people are still being sent through the battlefront array. We can use that as an excuse to let others take the lead."

"When does the operation start?"

"Any second now," Tussar said.

The city had already come alive. An endless stream of warriors emerged from the huge barracks and rushed toward a gathering spot on the platform's opposite side. They stayed put while Tussar gave a crash course of fighting on the front and the situation in the Sixteenth Field Army.

Reading a bunch of redacted reports back on Earth couldn't compare to the practical experience of a seasoned veteran, and Zac learned a lot. Even Petrus looked at the old warrior with respect after a few minutes. Most important were the unspoken rules and hidden hierarchies within the Field Army.

The Havarok Dynasty had the official responsibility for this region, but it turned out that less than a fourth of the Everfast Army came from the Havarok Empire. It used to be higher, but so much new blood had joined over the past month. The Havarok were still influential, with most generals present at the highest levels, but they couldn't act as they wanted.

For instance, activating the Space Gate required the go-ahead from multiple parties, including the Alliance Headquarters. Tussar even said it was entirely possible that another C-grade Cultivator than the Everfast Monarch would oversee the mission.

Some Monarchs were constantly on the move, looking for openings on the other battlefronts or even in the depths of the Million Gates Territory. Even those who were officially stationed in a region might be elsewhere. Their names alone were a deterrent, making the Kan'Tanu leery about going all-in. The Everfast Monarch might be gone, but he might also be waiting for the cultists to reach too far and overexpose themselves. They were like Schroedinger's nuclear warheads.

The old Hegemon only had time to go over some surface information before there was a change. The streets of the continental plateau lit up with blue light, forming a shockingly large array. Similar scenes could be spotted on the neighboring barges.

A monstrously condensed beam shot out from each vessel, converging on a singular spot in space. It was hundreds of miles away, yet Zac's hair stood on end upon feeling the shocking amounts of energy that had been gathered. Unsurprisingly, space quickly buckled. It clearly wasn't a simple attack, though, as a huge portal appeared instead of a spatial tear.

The azure beams lost some of their intensity, but they didn't dissipate. They resembled tunnels of light leading into the gate, and it didn't take more than a few seconds before the first group of warriors were sent through. Dozens of ships turned into streaks of light and entered as well. The operation had begun.

Another alarm blared through the city, and Tussar grunted. "That's it, can't stall any longer. Follow me."

The expanded Acheron Company had already passed through the Battlefront Array. Zac gave the call, and his enormous army set out. The city turned into a blur as they stepped onto the glowing streets, and Zac realized it was outfitted with a space-contracting array like Twilight Harbor. Their army was moving at over fifty times their original speed, reaching the platform's other side in no time.

There were hundreds of races gathered at the platform's far end, a sea of people waiting with somber faces. Every few seconds, one of six city-sized platforms lit up, sending the army atop it through the pillar of light. A group of administrators adjusted a complex array tower between each batch before reactivation.

"What's that?" Zac asked with a low voice.

"Calibration Array. Can't send everyone to the same place, or they'd have to stack you until you formed a mountain of flesh," Tussar explained. "It's a big battle. It'll cover dozens of planets, at least. One or two should be the main targets, while the other battles are distractions or preventing reinforcements from arriving. We're locking down a whole region."

Zac nodded, silently observing the proceedings as they quickly moved closer to one of the platforms.

"Do you have some greeting gifts?" Tussar suddenly asked with a hushed voice.

"Ah?"

'Bribes,' Tussar explained with a mental message. 'I'll try to have the controllers send us to one of the less dangerous spots. Or at least not mess with you because of the deadies in your ranks.'

Zac inwardly sighed but handed over a Spatial Ring with some D-grade Natural Treasures.

"Damn," Tussar swore, his eyes wide upon scanning the contents. "Should've become a shipwright."

"Didn't save me from being sent here," Zac smiled, realizing he might have overdone it.

Their turn was coming up, and Tussar approached the somber-looking man overseeing the randomizer. He looked at Tussar with a frown, but both smiled like they were old friends after exchanging a few words. Zac couldn't hear them, but his scouts transmitted their words.

Tussar simply mentioned that he was caring for newcomers, and it would be a shame if they ruined an important mission by creating disorder on the important battlefields. The overseer hesitated but happily agreed after scanning the spatial ring. Zac shook his head at the scene. It was simply impossible to curb human nature.

'No mental communication,' Vilari confirmed as Tussar walked back.

Zac only had the chance to bark a few quick orders before the Acheron Company was ushered onto the stage and whisked away.

The transfer was nigh-instantaneous, and their appearance resulted in a spatial explosion that leveled a whole forest. [Verun's Bite] was already in Zac's hand as he soared into the air, but the familiar grip of his old companion wasn't enough to sweep away the fear in his heart as he looked at the scene around him. Only one word could convey the vast, earth-shattering battle already raging in every direction.

Armageddon.

Flashing lights illuminated a twilight continent filled with vaguely tainted energy. The sky rumbled like a thunderstorm, yet there was not a single cloud above. The source was an intense battle in the sky. Zac didn't have any skills that would let him see the details, but he knew each flash of light represented an attack at Early D-grade or higher. And the spatial ripples indicated new Cosmic Vessels joined the fray every second.

The sky was full of smaller eruptions of power where Alliance Hegemons clashed with either cultists or manmade calamities made from enormous Heart Curses. Most chaotic was the war raging on the surface. There were everything from clashes between armies dwarfing the Acheron Company to smaller engagements taking place all around them. Their side had the advantage in some regions but barely held on in others.

The chaos was unrelenting, and it was getting worse by the second. How could he possibly lead his people through this meatgrinder? Unfortunately, Zac barely had time to take in the deadly tapestry before his mind screamed of danger.

"Defend!" Zac roared, his voice empowered by urgency and Cosmic Energy.

A talisman had already appeared in his hand, and torrential amounts of Divine Energy poured into it. A golden bridge appeared before him, blotting out a huge swathe of his army. It barely formed in time to intercept a purple pillar of destruction that descended from above. Spatial tears spread in every direction as the D-grade talisman blocked the unrelenting force of the ambush, and the region shook from the collision.

It wasn't enough.

The bridge shattered before Zac could activate another, having only partly exhausted the attack. Dozens of purple splinters pierced toward the ground, each filled with the force of a D-grade attack. There wasn't nearly enough time to erect the War Machines. Still, an early warning and great discipline allowed the defenders of the Acheron company to erect a series of barriers and blockades.

Even then, the rampant energy reaped thousands of lives before it was exhausted. Zac was furious, but there was nothing he could do to exact vengeance because the attack came from outer space. Zac's enhanced vision could barely make out a small dot, which could either be an orbiting Array Tower or a Cosmic Vessel. It had targeted them the moment they appeared through the group teleportation.

They weren't the only ones hit. Zac had noticed a dozen streaks crashing onto the ground. Each was like the descent of a sun, destroying everything in a huge region. Whatever had attacked them was not the strongest defense prepared by the Kan'Tanu, and not even Zac felt confident of his survival chances against some of the blasts he saw.

As expected, the result was devastating. The weaker armies had lost large chunks of their men, and Kan'Tanu was already swarming toward them to take advantage of the chaos. Thankfully, no second salvo followed the first. Such powerful attacks should need charging time, and their side's Cosmic Vessels were already launching a counter-attack. But they couldn't just sit around and hope for the best.

"Spread out and activate the formations!" Zac roared, and he sensed hundreds of commands rippling through his army through a mental network.

"Incoming!" another voice boomed through the region, and Zac turned to Rhuger far in the distance.

A sea of building-sized tendrils had burst through the ground and rippled toward them like a tsunami of twisted flesh and sin. It resembled a Kan'Tanu War Array, but Zac could tell it was part of something far bigger. The whole world they stood on was inflicted with a curse, drawing energy from the World Core itself. No matter which direction he looked, Zac saw various facets of the Heart Curse.

World's Blight.

Zac had read about the method in reports but never encountered it while fighting in the graded battlefields. On the surface, it resembled the Realignment Arrays of the Undead Empire, but it shared more similarities with the low-grade Heart Curses of the Kan'Tanu war slaves.

World's Blight was a parasite, and this planet would rapidly be drained to fuel its growth. The world might be Early D-grade now, but it would likely be F-grade within a few decades. The Kan'Tanu would never do something so destructive to their homeworlds, but what did they care about the frontier planets in the Zecia sector? This way, the Alliance Army wasn't just facing the Kan'Tanu defenders but the world itself.

The bloody tsunami teemed with spatial energy, and an army matching theirs in size poured out of nowhere. They moved toward the Acheron Company with great momentum, but Zac still felt them the lesser of the dangers they faced. The army was decently equipped, but Zac didn't sense any deadly threats from within.

Zac was more worried about the threat above, but he breathed in relief upon seeing a blinding flash in the sky. It looked like a purple star igniting, but it was

actually their attacker exploding after being hit by a very familiar beam—the main cannon of a Starflash Cosmic Vessel.

The immediate and overwhelming chaos had far surpassed Zac's expectations, but there was no time to worry about anything but the most immediate threat. The tide of Kan'Tanu was already about to ram into the defensive line formed by his soldiers. The vast gore cascade had visibly withered after summoning such a huge army, but it acted as a wallbreaker against the Acheron Company's protective barriers.

Screams and explosions filled the air as the Atwood Empire joined the mayhem. The familiarity of life-and-death struggle helped settle the soldiers after being thrown into the thick of it, and Zac was the same. Over twenty Hegemons had emerged from the Kan'Tanu party, making a beeline for his warriors while burgeoning with power.

Zac shot forth to deal with the leader and his assistants while familiar faces emerged from his ranks. Soon, their situation mirrored those around them, where desperation and killing intent formed a tangible storm.

The Kan'Tanu leader conjured dozens of bloated heads staring down at his army, their eyes radiating malevolent light. The skill resembled the large avatar of the lipless Aural Cultivator Zac fought in the Void Star, though Zac could sense the Daos of Water and Poison within. Poison Masters, especially, were a huge threat to lower-rank cultivators, so Zac immediately activated his skills.

A vast forest of twisting trees appeared before the cultist could unleash his strike. Not two trees were exactly alike, but most were over ten meters tall and had large crowns with either silver or golden leaves. Together, they formed a dense canopy that blotted out the stellar battle above. The trees grew out of thin air, their roots disappearing into golden scars, creating a magical, floating forest.

The scene could have been mistaken for a vision of paradise at first glance, but it was clear the forest was not a blessed land. A sharp and ruthless aura radiated from the plant life, like each tree was a general of a hundred battles. Their fierce emanations were so strong that one's perception could easily shift, making one think you were looking upon huge axes with gleaming blades.



Some Kan'Tanu had managed to move out of the way, but the leader and four more Hegemons were trapped within. The demonic faces opened their mouths just as the forest had been conjured, spewing a torrential downpour of sin. The other Hegemons similarly unleashed attacks, though only two used D-grade skills.

Judging by their mottled auras, Zac guessed at least half the Hegemons of the opposing army had forced their way into the D-grade through taboo means. In other words, they weren't part of the Kan'Tanu elite chapters. The realization allowed Zac to relax and fully focus on his targets, knowing his subordinates could handle the rest.

Poisoned water, infernal flames, and a river of conjured weaponry swept through Zac's forest. Some of their power was aimed at Zac, while most targeted the ground. It was an attempt to create some havoc and nudge the war in their favor before dealing with Zac. However, it was as though the trees had eyes and a desire for battle as they moved to intercept the attacks.

They moved according to a mysterious pattern that would seem random to most outsiders, but Zac felt the echo of the trajectories he'd observed in his Soul Core. Echoes of the Dao of Life, based on the trajectories his Life-attuned Outer Cores had before he reached Minor Sublimation. However, there was also a warlike purpose in their movements, where Conflict joined Life to form something greater.

The whole forest moved in accordance with the Evolutionary Stance.

The trees blocked everything, even absorbing the poisoned liquid without letting a single drop escape. A few dozen trees collapsed, but most survived the onslaught with just scarred trunks or withered canopies. Meanwhile, dangerous auras seeped out from the trees hit by the Kan'Tanu's attacks.

Streaks of light shot out from their tree crowns, moving toward the floating heads and the Hegemons themselves. One moment, the streaks looked like all kinds of primordial beasts, their fangs and claws bared at their targets. The next, they were deadly arcs of axe light, not two identical.

A few demonic heads were instantly ripped apart, spewing a seemingly impossible amount of tainted blood into the surrounding trees. Flames were suppressed, the sword river dimmed, and the E-grade skills crumbled, exposing the attackers to the onslaught. The situation rapidly descended into

a state of madness where the jungle grew increasingly hostile to everything within.

The Kan'Tanu were quickly forced into a passive state thanks to Zac's Daos and attributes clearly surpassing his foes. The weakest Hegemon already sported a grievous wound across his chest after an unpredictable strike snuck past his defenses. And their situation would only grow worse from here on out.

They had entered the [Apex Jungle], where even the strongest predator would become prey.

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1124 - Apex Jungle - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1124 - Apex Jungle**

Zac had made significant adjustments to his Domain Skill when upgrading it, essentially giving up on most of its defensive properties. Before, he could transfer damage from himself to the trees, but what was the point? His attributes and dual constitutions already made him unbelievably durable, and he had [Empyrean Aegis] and [Ossuary Bulwark] to boot. Anything those layers couldn't handle would force him to dodge anyway.

Instead, Zac shifted toward a forest that resonated with his path. It wouldn't protect him, but it would create a kill zone to trap and target his prey. The beasts were real axe attacks, and any outer stimuli accelerated their growth. So long as the trees survived an attack, they would respond in kind based on the concepts inside his Evolutionary Stance.

Hiding wouldn't work either—so long as the trees could sense an enemy's aura, they would charge up and target them like predators pouncing on someone encroaching their territory. Zac could also control the process, manually generating stronger attacks by infusing more of his will and Dao. Against these kinds of enemies, letting the skill run autonomously was enough.

The trapped Hegemons had already realized they'd encountered a dangerous enemy and decisively chose to retreat. Unfortunately for them, leaving the jungle was easier said than done. The tree's movements were one with the Dao, forming a natural formation at the level of his Late-stage Dao Branches.

You'd have to be incredibly fast or possess some top-tier Array Breaking means to sneak out. Everyone else would have to destroy all the trees

blocking their way. Otherwise, they would find themselves moving in circles, prey until they proved themselves predators. The seal wasn't as absolute as [Pillar of Desolation], but that didn't matter in most fights.

A ruthless gleam shone from Zac's eyes as a golden haze of spores spread through the primordial jungle. Slithering vines emitting a brutal bloodthirst appeared on a trunk just as Zac sunk into it, soundlessly teleporting toward the Hegemon closest to the edge.

The rustling canopies had blocked the sky, and his worries were swept away along with the view. They'd been thrown into an incredibly dangerous environment without fully understanding the situation, but that didn't matter at the moment. Ultimately, there was one simple truth that could shine the path forward. The more Kan'Tanu Zac killed, the more of his men would survive.

[Primal Edict] had already spread throughout the jungle, using the connection of all life to propagate far faster than it could outside. Soon, the keening cries of the axe-beasts were joined by the creaking groans of countless vines joining the assault. Some sprouted from thin air, others emerged from within trees, creating an unpredictable and unrelenting barrage from nature itself.

The Kan'Tanu weapon master had created a fifty-meter-wide domain of destruction around him by ferociously rotating his spear, each swing conjuring a river of blades. If placed on the battlefield below, he would have quickly created rivers of blood to join those of his blades, and not even the trees of [Apex Jungle] could stand long under their assault.

But the forces of nature couldn't be defeated. New life would sprout from fallen trunks, and new beasts would replace those that couldn't endure evolution's eternal war. And like a silent specter, Zac emerged from a nearby tree, one step taking him past the rivers and right next to his target.

Zac's aura would normally shine like a blinding beacon when unleashing his power. Today, it was almost indistinguishable from the surrounding wilderness. It couldn't completely fool a D-grade cultivator, but the slight delay to the spearmaster's reaction sealed his fate. A keening cry shook the forest as a flash of unbending finality split the cultist in two. It was like the ruler of the jungle had woken from their slumber, and the first interloper became an offering to its altar.

Streams of gold and steel swirled around Zac's right arm, forming a shroud resembling a familiar figure—Verun. It was like a hazy miniature of his Tool

Spirit had wrapped itself around his arm, instilling it with power and potential. In reality, it wasn't actually an effect of his upgraded Spirit Tool. Rather, the Dao-Empowered haze was entering his axe rather than vice versa.

It was the appearance of [Evolutionary Edge], the upgraded version of [Nature's Edge]. It was one of the first skills he upgraded after returning from the Perennial Vastness, and Zac had long since excavated every aspect and ability of the skill. His idea was to create a semi-passive skill that could boost his lethality when infighting, and it had allowed him to execute a Hegemon and his Heart Curse with a simple swing.

However, imbuing [Verun's Bite] with sharpness and strength was far from its limits.

Zac disappeared like a ghost, a single step moving him into a tree and transporting him to another section of his domain. The Pyromancer nearby was trying to incinerate the whole forest, but both vines and trees displayed a shocking resilience. Burnt bark and scorched vines fell like ashy rain, but stronger wood grew to replace what was lost.

The fire cultivator was a lesser threat than their leader, but it would take the poison master a while longer to break free. The leader didn't seem able to avoid the formation, which meant his only other option was to use a taboo escape treasure. That was fine by Zac. Using something like that would neutralize the threat to his, and that was Zac's true goal anyway.

The raging storm of tainted flames had spread hundreds of meters, almost completely blocking Zac's vision. However, Zac calmly swung his axe upon spotting a small gap in the inferno, and a streak of deadly Life shot forth. The energy moved like it was alive, weaving through the web of destruction as it approached its target. At the last moment, it pounced on its prey by transforming into a fractal edge.

There wasn't much difference between the edge and its predecessors when it came to appearance or function, but upgrading the skill to D-grade automatically came with a fundamental improvement. Energy. Ten times the energy was compressed into the small blade, making it incredibly resilient and a better carrier of the Dao.

The Pyromancer had already discovered the incoming threat, but even a normal strike empowered by two Late Dao Branches pushed the limits of what they could endure. Furthermore, the blade hadn't been weakened at all by the

fiery domain, opting to dodge rather than clash until the last moment. Still, the Hegemon hadn't cultivated in vain his whole life.

A burning shield intercepted the fractal edge, giving the cultist enough time to activate a defensive treasure. The shield proved insufficient to exhaust Zac's attack, but the life-saving treasure finished the job. However, the impassable inferno had destabilized during the desperate defense, creating multiple openings. A figure emerged from the flames, his weapon already descending toward the weakened treasure.

Two halves of the Pyromancer fell into a golden tree crown below, a yet-not-activated escape treasure tightly gripped in his hand. The inferno faltered, exposing Zac surrounded by swirling ash. He didn't bother with the corpse or his spatial tools, knowing he was running out of time. Two out of five trapped Hegemons had died in the span of a few seconds, and a third was about to succumb to nature's onslaught without Zac tipping the scales.

The cultists had known the situation was bad, but convention had given them a false sense of security. Killing a Hegemon was easier said than done unless there was a massive disparity in power, and most clashes ended with the weaker party escaping after paying a price. That delusion had finally shattered, and they knew they'd been targeted by a god of slaughter. What was convention to them?

The golden forest was already showered in sanguine light. Zac sensed the fluctuations that had become all too familiar by this point—the Hegemons were borrowing power from their Heart Curses at the cost of longevity and their futures. Their actions would give them a significant boost in strength, but they had a high chance of losing control even if they survived.

Zac didn't bother with the underling, making a beeline for the leader, who looked positively terrifying. His figure had grown into a bloated titan over ten meters tall, and an unceasing cascade of putrefying liquid poured out of his mouth. A manmade plague ripped through the jungle, causing a wave of rot to spread outward. The remaining floating heads exploded one after another, joining the destruction in a last-ditch attempt at survival.

No tree remained in the leader's vicinity, but a few aerial steps took Zac into the poisonous domain. Zac was about to deliver judgment but was surprised to find his vision lurching and his energy scatter. There were few things he was less afraid of than poison, especially after awakening his Draugr

Constitution all the way to Early Shallows. But shockingly, his multiple layers of defenses couldn't fully withstand the Poison Master's toxins.

Zac felt himself rotting from within, where the poison tried to destroy his pathways. His Hidden Nodes were furiously consuming the plague, and boundless Vitality revitalized what was infected. He'd quickly recover if he left the poisonous haze, but there was no time. A thin silver band on one of his fingers lit up, creating a barrier over his skin. Even his High-quality Defensive Treasure failed to contain more than half the poison. What remained would be a death sentence to some, but was easily dealt with by Zac's body.

Arrows of black water pierced the storm just as Zac recovered. Their appearance or aura was nothing impressive, but Zac's Danger Sense exposed the truth. Those arrows contained more poison than the whole toxic storm, but it had been concentrated and sealed to hide their lethality. The captain might look like he had lost his mind, but it was clearly just an act. As expected, all Middle Hegemons had at least a few tricks up their sleeves, especially those who could survive on the frontlines.

Normally, Zac would have shattered the arrows with Vivi's vines and deflecting blows, but he instead activated an amulet just as they were about to collide. Space inverted, where Zac and the arrows instantly switched positions. The Kan'Tanu leader urgently exploded his projectiles, but Zac had already flashed out of the arrow's range to appear before their controller.

The poison was incredibly dense at such close proximity, but Zac was certain his axe held far greater lethality. The captain seemed to have come to the same conclusion. A pitch-black snakehead appeared to block Zac's attack while a storm of energy erupted in the cultist's chest to trigger a final blaze of glory.

Zac had faced countless enemies over the past decade, where both sides knew the conclusion of fate and karma had arrived. He'd seen it all. The cultist before him displayed the excitement of a fanatic about to drag a heretic with them to the afterlife. It was nothing new. Thousands of Kan'Tanu had tried to infect him with their Heart Curses, their go-to method when all else was lost.

Something was different this time. Zac's instincts screamed of danger. [Spiritual Void] opened wide, and a storm of Dao entered [Evolutionary Axe]. The intercepting snakehead went from barely resisting Zac's strike to immediately splitting in two. The axhead continued into the cultist's head, and a large surge of energy confirmed his kill. It was too easy.

As expected, the cultist's chest exploded the moment he died, but no vengeful tendrils emerged. Instead, a pulse of concealed Spatial Energy burst from within, forming a sanguine cage before Zac could escape. Zac swung his axe but realized the barrier was powered by all the cultist's remaining life force and the accumulated energy of the Heart Curse. He'd be able to break through it in a couple of seconds, but a few seconds would be too late.

He quickly homed in on the source of his unease. A seemingly unordinary piece of debris had fallen through the atmosphere in the distance, but Zac instantly sensed the extreme danger it represented. Like a veil being lifted, the piece of rock transformed into a large skull that opened its maw. It had already been gathering its attack for a while, and an immense ball of purple destruction burst forth.

The ball didn't contain as much energy as the attack that cost them thousands of lives before, but it was extremely condensed and fast. It was an orbital bombardment designed to take out a single person.

Trees and vines were turned to dust as the beam entered [Apex Jungle], his domain utterly incapable of stopping its advance. There was no way he'd be able to block that thing. An ancient aura momentarily filled the sealed cage before a towering trunk winked into existence. Roots and canopy didn't fit in the cage, but the trunk was all Zac needed.

The spatial cage was consumed, and space instantly buckled. It looked like a purple star had imploded, taking half the forest with it. Zac emerged from a faraway tree, right by the final Hegemon about to escape. The shockwave almost knocked Zac unconscious, but his opponent was even worse off. An unadorned swing finished the job.

The final Hegemon had died, and [Apex Jungle] collapsed with him. However, some of the orbital attack had escaped the implosion and crashed into the ground. Zac briefly lost control from a shockwave throwing him upward, and he had to take a few urgent steps to dodge a storm of spatial scars left in the ball's wake.

The army below didn't have that luxury. The spatial tears and shockwave had ripped into the rear of his army, killing hundreds of reserves and support staff. The scene was heartbreaking, but Zac knew they were lucky. The blast would have decimated his army below if not for its angle of descent.



Who could have expected a normal Middle Hegemon to control such a dangerous weapon? That skull was clearly at Lage Hegemony and had to cost a fortune. Zac had encountered much stronger World Lords than this captain, but he'd never been faced with such a powerful weapon during months of campaigning.

The core strength of the enemy army had died in seconds, yet Zac somehow felt like he'd lost. He hadn't expected to use Void Energy on the very first encounter, but the trap had left him no other options. He might have been able to break the cage if he had gone all out, but failure would have meant death. It was a poignant reminder they no longer fought on the manicured battlefields of the System. There was no telling what they'd encounter going forward, and luck played as big a role as strength for their survival.

Thankfully, such powerful means were expensive and thus rare, and the Cosmic Vessels in the sky were working overtime to clear them out. Zac's danger sense indicated they were temporarily safe from attacks in the sky, allowing him to focus on the battle around him. The goretide had been exhausted, and the Acheron Company was tearing through the Kan'Tanu defenders.

The situation to his left was especially lopsided. An enormous eye looked down at the war slaves like an indifferent god, and its effect was shocking. It was as though the Kan'Tanu had gone mad, gleefully killing each other or letting their Heart Curses go out of control. Meanwhile, a Kan'Tanu Hegemon was unleashing death on her men with such ferocity that her Cosmic Core and foundations were being damaged.

This was the terror of a Mentalist Hegemon. It had only been a few days since Vilari broke through, but she was likely the most dangerous person in his army apart from himself. The Kan'Tanu were already teetering at the brink of madness because of the cursed things growing in their chests, and a skilled Mentalist could easily push them over the edge.

Most terrifying was her control of emotions, where drowning a target in despair while suppressing their souls made the enemy lose their sense of self. It allowed Vilari to temporarily hijack their bodies, using them like puppets. Kan'Tanu Hegemon had killed tens of thousands of her own, though her twitching body indicated she was about to regain control over her body. Suddenly, she dug into her chest, destroying her core and Heart Curse in one go. Vilari didn't even spare her a glance as she floated further ahead, and no Hegemon dared get close.



Rhuger also performed valiantly. He had already killed his D-grade opponent and turned his attention to the soldiers below. He radiated immense waves of darkness, resembling a lunar eclipse. The thousands of cultists below seemed to have lost their senses, randomly attacking in every direction in fits of panic. Such a scattered response left them utterly exposed to the veterans of the Acheron Company, and thousands died without knowing what hit them.

There were similar displays of extraordinary might taking place all across the battlefield. Still, Emily was the only one who could get close to Vilari's wide-scale destruction. An enormous salamander tore through the Kan'Tanu's ranks, resembling an ancient god of flames. Attacks and Heart Curses were utterly incapable of stemming its advance.

Emily herself was no less of a threat. A totem pole the size of a skyscraper had crashed into the heart of the Kan'Tanu army, becoming the heart of a vast storm hiding thousands of swirling axes. Within, Emily had become a goddess of death, opening a path for her subordinates. N0v3lTr0ve served as the original host for this chapter's release on N0v3l--B1n.

Zac couldn't sit still while his subordinates fought so hard. A step cut through thousands of meters, putting him in a dense region of Kan'Tanu reserves. Soon, widespread carnage erupted around him, and the brutal reality of evolution was enforced on the battlefield.

With their leaders dead and the goretide exhausted, the army of E-grade cultists quickly crumbled. Their rear scattered, trying to reach neighboring battlefields where their side still stood strong. Some tried to group together and at least take a few enemies with them, but it was futile. The Acheron Company moved as one, acted as one. Meanwhile, the small pockets of resistance were uncoordinated and without support, and they were consumed one after another.

Just a few minutes had passed since they appeared on this cursed world, and the Acheron Company had already proven themselves more than able to survive in this hellhole. Yet a sense of foreboding premonition crept into Zac's heart as he gazed across the horizon.

A storm was brewing.

**Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1125 - Sun's Descent - Read  
Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1125 - Sun's Descent**

Zac held his axe in one hand and a Cosmic Crystal in the other as he tore into the remaining cultists. He retained most of his energy, but this isolated skirmish was just the beginning. And as he upgraded more and more of his skills to D-grade, the higher his energy consumption would become.

It was worth it.

His dealings with the Undead Empire felt like walking a tightrope, where one misstep would lead to death or becoming a puppet to their schemes. However, his experiences had undeniably broadened his understanding of his path and cultivation. Whether it was his experience in the Abyssal Pond or his loss against Kator, both had shown that his view was too narrow and his path incomplete.

He'd felt that not everything needed to be completely attuned. After all, not everything could be explained through his stances, and forcing things into a certain box would only leave him weaker. Or so he thought. But even the inheritance of Mez and Azol could become parts of his Inexorable Path, and Kator could integrate every aspect of his cultivation into a singular purpose.

So why couldn't he? The Abyss explained the whole Heavens through Death. Zac was obviously nowhere near that point, but it was a worthy goal. The concepts of Evolution and Inevitability were the crystallization of his Dao, and his path was confirmed through his Cosmic Core. The more he could put under that umbrella, the better his skills and fighting style would mesh.

Just adding the Dao of Conflict to the many nature-aspected skills on his human side wasn't enough. He needed to instill the idea of evolutionary struggle, of breaking fate and ceaseless rebirth. It still restricted him to some degree, but as his comprehension deepened, he'd be able to express more and more ideas through his path.

It had taken him a lot of work to rework [Ancestral Forest] into [Apex Jungle], but it might have taken him years without the [Court Cycle Token] to provide inspiration. But infusing all of his understanding into the skill had been enough to create its natural formation, strengthening the skill beyond what Zac had originally expected. And thanks to its harmonization with his technique, he could instinctually understand how the trees would move and act.

Similarly, [Forester's Constitution] had seen such a transformation that the System named it [Inborn Predator]. The passive buff still provided attributes,

but instead of 15% to Endurance and Vitality, it improved Strength, Endurance, and Vitality by 10% each.

The transition had drastically weakened his connection with nature, and the passive improvement to his natural recovery was gone. Losing the former was more than made up for by the experience he'd accumulated over the years, and the Void Vajra Constitution replaced any need for the latter. What the skill provided instead was the instincts of a predator.

Survival always came first in the wild, so the skill now amplified his danger sense. Its effect was similar to the [Lucky Beads] but focused more on direct threats. It was [Inborn Predator] that had allowed him to pinpoint that the inconspicuous piece of falling debris was the source of his unease.

The skill also strengthened his attunement to his Evolutionary Stance. The effect wasn't anything new—it was the very phenomenon he first encountered when fighting Commander Kaldor inside the Orom World. He'd used his [Thousand Lights Avatar] to amplify his connection with the Dao and his path, elevating his technique. Thanks to [Inborn Predator], the effect was permanent and steady and could be further boosted using the spiritual framework.

This harmonization also strengthened Zac's connection with all skills based on his Evolutionary Path. It made his aura harder to spot when surrounded by [Primal Edict], [Apex Jungle], or any future skill he created. It even improved his control of the vines and trees, though the effect wasn't as pronounced as strengthening his soul.

[Earthstrider], now called [Skystriker], had also seen some changes. The most obvious was that it no longer depended on the ground to work—a fundamental requirement for combat-oriented D-grade movement skills. Furthermore, reshaping it based on his Evolutionary Path changed its method of movement.

The original design he'd prepared inside the Perennial Vastness barely incorporated the Dao of Conflict. His old movement skill only leaned on his Dao of Life, but it perfectly matched his requirements. Even a conservative upgrade would have given him a powerful skill that fit with his pathways well enough to work without issue.

Conversely, trying to force a new Dao into the delicate balance that made up the Skill Fractal was extremely difficult—a risk that wouldn't add much, if any,

utility. Nothing said a skill based on two Daos was stronger than a skill based on one. It all depended on what you could create with the insights and your understanding of energy and fractals.

But pushing himself to fully realign the skill had provided far more than the few extra percent's utility from higher compatibility with his pathways. The difference didn't come from efficiency or speed. It came from harmony, for a lack of a better word. [Skystriker] had become more than just a movement skill; it was now an extension of his technique.

He no longer shifted between bursts of rapid movement and attacking his enemies. It was all one flow, where activating his movement skill didn't disrupt the momentum he built through the Evolutionary Stance. Beyond that, it had a surprising side-effect that proved very useful on the battlefield.

Zac was like a vengeful ghost, passing through a clump of cultists with incredible speed. He didn't even swing his axe, yet streams of Kill Energy constantly entered his body. The cultists collapsed one after another, their bodies destroyed by invisible cuts. By that point, Zac was already hundreds of meters away, eviscerating another group.

[Skystriker] had blurred the line between a movement skill and an attack, where Zac himself became the axe. [Loamwalker] and [Earthstrider] had enabled rapid bursts of movement by compressing space and forcing their way through it. [Skystriker] didn't just compress space; it also cut through it.

Zac had quickly learned he could control this phenomenon to some degree. If he compressed his energy and Dao, he could increase the speed a bit further. Conversely, if he let it disperse as he moved, he'd create a trail of destruction filled with invisible axe cuts. The effect was mostly useless against skilled enemies, but it let him wreak havoc on weaker enemies who could barely follow his lightning-quick movements.

The last roars of battle eventually abated, and Zac flew into the air while his men wrapped everything up. The victory was swift, but it left Zac feeling lost. What were they supposed to do now? Reinforce the other armies? He had already gotten a quest for his Flamebearer of Zecia designation, but it was just a general mission to take out as many Kan'Tanu as possible.

Thankfully, Zac saw Tussar fly over. He hadn't expected the wounded veteran to actually enter the battlefield with them, but his experience would prove invaluable.

"I don't know what to say. Never seen such a scary bunch of juniors," Tussar said with a shake of his head upon reaching Zac.

"What now?" Zac asked without preamble.

His army had already activated their mobile defense arrays and shrouded their army to hide from the enemies in the sky, but they couldn't just turtle up here. Death could rain down from above at any moment, and the longer they stayed stationary, the higher the risk of a powerful fortification locking in on their position.

"It's messy when you haven't been properly connected to our channels," Tussar asked him to wait a second as he took out a series of communication devices.

It didn't take long before Zac sensed a mental nudge indicating that the old warrior was trying to share a quest with him.

[Special Operation (Alliance, Campaign): Seize the Transference Array of Wolf Teeth Camp. Reward: Contribution and Alliance Merit based on contribution.]

"Take down Wolf Teeth Camp," Zac mused. "Transference Arrays?"

"The biggest danger to any mission is powerful entities rushing over. Our job is to prevent that from happening. Transference Arrays are like beacons, letting the Kan'Tanu home in on this region and perform long-distance jumps and teleportation," Tussar explained. "Similar beacons are placed across multiple worlds, each making it easier for the cultists to reach us. If we break theirs while installing our own, we'll eventually overwhelm the enemy."

Zac relaxed upon hearing the explanation. They still didn't know the operation's main goal, but their objective wasn't much different from the numerous conquests he'd led his men through. Of course, this frontline base would likely be better fortified than any world in a unified sector, but he wasn't working alone. There were Cosmic Vessels in the sky and higher-grade armies participating in this mission. The Acheron Company didn't need to take a central role.

"Our target is in that direction. Looks like it'll be quite a trek," Tussar pointed in the direction the Kan'Tanu spawned from.

Zac frowned at the chaotic environment they'd have to pass through. "Why not teleport us closer?"

"Control over space is one of the facets of this war. This whole planet is acting like a jammer because of these nasty thorns, and space around the camp is further sealed. Just forcing our way onto the planet is hard enough."

"Flying treasures..."

"I know you're a shipwright, but I recommend against it," Tussar said. "If you use large barges, you'll become a prime target for both fortifications on the ground and the defenses above. If you take out enough smaller vessels to stay spread out, you'll expose your wealth and status. That might attract even deadlier attention. Besides, why would you want to go fast?"

"You're saying we should ignore the mission?"

"What ignore? Just work your way toward the base like the rest. Do you see anyone rushing or taking out their ancestral treasures to force a path? We were lucky enough to be dropped off some ways from the target. Let the big shots deal with the fortifications. It might lead to less contribution, but you have to be alive to enjoy your riches. Besides, taking out these bastards on the way helps lessen the pressure on the vanguard."

"What about the fights around us? Do we help them?" Zac asked.

"If you can," Tussar said. "But don't try to be a savior. You also risk drawing too much attention if you gather up multiple armies. If you see our side having a small advantage, just let them deal with it. If you see us losing, consider helping out to avoid leaving a threat behind us."

Tussar's words were callous, essentially using the other factions as meat shields. However, Zac knew he was right. Idealists didn't last long on the frontlines, and every move he made came at the price of his soldier's lives. And was he ready to trade his soldiers for some strangers? Obviously not.

"Still, you shouldn't dally too long. You want to be close to where our elites are gathered. That's where we'll be safest and where the extraction points will appear. The situation can shift in a heartbeat, and we've been forced to leave people behind before. I'm sure you have some ships prepared for emergencies, but I doubt we'll get the chance to set them up if the alliance is

routed," Tussar continued, briefly scowling at the sky. "Thank the Heavens Jusis still has a conscience. He really sent us to one of the safer worlds."

Zac had to give the old captain a double-take, thinking he'd heard wrong. "This is a calm battlefield?"

"I see no motherships, and the Hegemons are mostly Early and Middle stage. We seem to have a slight edge in the sky, lessening the risk of planetary bombardment. And the Kan'Tanu clearly haven't had time to fortify this world properly. The World's Blight is in an early stage, and you shouldn't have much trouble dealing with it," Tussar explained. "But we can't relax. The stakes must be very high for the headquarters to take such drastic measures."

Zac wholly agreed with the sentiment. His instincts had warned him that there was more at play since the start. The Kan'Tanu would likely push back hard against such a forceful play. If nothing else, it was a good opportunity to lay waste to a whole Field Army.

The region around them had been drained to summon the huge army, letting the Acheron company advance unopposed. Even then, Zac's nerves were drawn taut, and it felt like death could appear at any moment. It was undoubtedly even worse for the soldiers marching below him. They could do nothing if another streak of death descended from above except pray Zac and the others would be able to block enough of its force to give them a fighting chance.

Dozens of orders were relayed through an intricate network of mental connections, allowing the huge army to move as one. Zac didn't involve himself in the details, content with staying in the middle of the pack, ready to reinforce his men in case something dangerous cropped up. They advanced steadily, cutting and burning their way through the cursed environment.

A preliminary path had already been plotted, and they moved toward a large accumulation of corruption that had formed a miniature mountain range. It was clearly a semi-living formation holding a lot of Kan'Tanu inside, but avoiding it would put them too close to conflicts involving multiple Middle Hegemons.

It would take them thirty minutes to reach their target, but Zac's eyes opened wide when they reached halfway.

"Barriers!" Zac ordered, and shimmering walls immediately rose to protect their frontline.



The shield formation had barely linked up when it looked like a sun was born before them. Not a life-giving sun, but a primordial sun full of chaotic energies, where the Dao of Space was most dominant. Rays of destruction lacerated the lands, where both Kan'Tanu and Alliance armies were struck by the fallout. The Acheron Company was actually lucky, as the Kan'Tanu formation stood between them and the explosion.

The mountain range was swallowed whole, and their sacrifice drastically weakened the assault. Even then, the barriers barely managed to block the wild storm of energies that swept forth, and more than one War Array was overloaded and damaged. Hegemons and defensive cultivators moved as one, reinforcing the breach with layers of defensive skills.

The initial onslaught abated after a few seconds, but Zac would have to be a fool to resume their march. Their path was cleared of Kan'Tanu, but what remained was even more dangerous. That terrifying blast had unraveled the Dao and exhausted the spatial integrity. A spatial storm remained, holding immense amounts of chaotic energy.

"What the hell was tha—" Emily muttered, but her words caught in her throat when an ancient and overbearing aura swept through the region.

The feeling went as quickly as it came, but that ephemeral eruption was enough to force the whole Acheron Company to their knees. Zac's insides churned, but he managed to stay afloat thanks to [Conviction of Eoz]. The other Hegemons weren't so lucky. Even Tussar was pushed toward the ground, though he'd likely been able to resist if it weren't for his damaged core.

Everything had stopped when the aura descended like subjects freezing before an emperor. However, the winds of war were still blowing, and the battles spanning the region quickly resumed. It was clear the memory of the explosion and its aura was still fresh in everyone's mind, though, as the neighboring clashes were inching away from the epicenter.

The tacit accord between cultists and alliance soldiers also created a large pocket around the Acheron Company, who were the closest force to the explosion. Zac gave no orders, silently observing the situation. That aura had been enough to exhaust the lingering energy from the explosion, and he could tell space was already mending. Eventually, he felt Vilari fly over, and they shared a look of mutual understanding. *nôvel binz* was the first platform to present this chapter.



The aura of the Left Imperial Palace.

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1126 - Bleeding Through - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1126 - Bleeding Through**

It was impossible to mistake the overbearing aura that just suppressed the whole region with anything but the Left Imperial Palace. However, as impressive as it were, there were undeniably some important differences. Despite destroying miles of land, the explosion was like a matchstick compared to a sun in front of the Left Imperial Palace.

Had a seal appeared on the battlefield? No, there would be signs. The explosion felt different to the pulses of annihilation brought by the seals. Besides, the seals he'd encountered so far hadn't an aura resembling that of the Left Imperial Palace. The two were connected, but Zac didn't know exactly how.

"...Shit," Tussar exhaled as he returned to Zac's side in the sky. "So that's what triggered this all."

Zac turned to the old veteran with surprise. Zac should be one of the people with most inside information to this matter, and even he wasn't sure what was going on. Why did a captain from the Allbright Empire seem to have the answers? The man's eyes briefly wandered before taking a steadying breath.

"I can't say for certain, but there's been some rumors lately. About this ancient aura. The constant fighting at the edge of the Million Gates Territory has weakened the barriers between dimensions and even stirred the Void. Ancient things have been dragged to the surface—powerful tools from a war preceding our sector. Most of it has broken down already, but a few terrifying treasures have emerged.

"This is not made public yet, but the Sixth suffered disastrous losses after the Kan'Tanu unearthed an ancient weapon. It was just a rusted sword with a shattered edge, but it released such a murderous aura even Monarch had to stay clear. Those bastards somehow managed to launch it towards us. It tore through our defenses and disintegrated one of our War Fortresses before disappearing into a spatial tear. I bet the aura we just felt is related to that mess."

"But this explosion just now was nowhere near that level of destruction," Emily muttered.

"It must've been a small sliver that bled through to this dimension," Zac said, and Tussar nodded in agreement. "So, the Alliance ordered this sudden assault because they noticed something was emerging?"

"Probably. Can't let the Kan'Tanu get another inheritance. It's also an opportunity to get our hands on something that can turn the tides."

Zac thoughtfully nodded. It was true, any random array or treasure from the Limitless Empire could have a huge impact on a frontier war. A few of the manuals they'd found in the Ensolus ruins had become core techniques of his Atwood Army, others were so complex he could only hold onto them until their foundations grew deeper. And those ruins had belonged to simple commoners living in the vicinity of the Left Imperial Palace.

"But it's already wreaking havoc," Emily countered. "Doesn't that mean someone is already in control of the weapon and using it on their enemies? What if they hit this world with a direct blast the next time?"

Zac shuddered at the thought. Accumulations, treasures, and being an elite were useless in the face of such destruction. He'd be no different than the E-grade cultivators around him when faced with something like that. At best, his Danger Sense might give him a brief window to activate [Flashfire Flourish] or Sendor's seals, but survival was up to the Heavens.

"No idea," Tussar said with helplessness. "I've only heard some rumors, so I'm mostly guessing here. But it shouldn't be? The operation just started a few minutes ago. I can't imagine it's that easy to take over these ancient relics. I bet there's an intense battle going on right now."

Zac sighed, gazing at the huge crater in the distance. "Fate is gathering."

His anxiety only increased after learning their mission might involve a war machine built by the Limitless Empire. They were already under immense pressure after being flung into such a dangerous battlefield the moment they arrived, and now they had to fight for a relic that could impact the whole war?

They'd already known this clash involved huge man-power, but Zac realized they'd only seen the tip of the iceberg. All nearby field armies were undoubtedly mounting all-out offenses of their own, hoping to stop

reinforcements from joining the fray. But the past months had proven the Kan'Tanu were anything but pushovers, and there were also the outsiders to worry about.

Prehistoric weapons were not the only thing that would emerge from the Void. There was a good chance for seals to be unearthed along any relics related to the Left Imperial Palace. And if he could realize that from a single glance, then so could the other established factions. Sealbearers and promising elites would be dragged together by the winds of fate and hunger for power.

Was this situation orchestrated by the System? Was his arrival on the frontlines the trigger for the carnage around him?

Zac wasn't sure what their best move was, but he ultimately ordered the Acheron company to increase their pace by half. The army passed the flattened mountains but had to circle around the enormous crater. A dense storm of chaotic energies had gathered within, making it resemble an active caldera. Ultimately, it was just a small delay on their road toward the Wolf Teeth Camp.

The sea of soldiers moved like locusts through the land. They were swift but kept a sustainable pace. Zac wouldn't forget the most immediate threat because of the glimpse of that ancient aura. Their War Machines were ready to attack or defend at moment's notice, and all tainted ground they passed was burned and purified. The World's Blight would eventually undo their work, but the Acheron Company would be long gone by that point.

Even then, it proved impossible to avoid conflict or prevent more cultists from teleporting over. The sea of thorns seemed almost sapient, gathering spatial energies to summon hordes of war slaves as they advanced. It was also impossible to completely avoid the surrounding conflicts, and the Acheron Company was repeatedly embroiled in larger conflicts.

The fierce resistance had essentially locked most of the Alliance armies in place. Only the strongest managed to advance, but not even the Acheron Company had managed to reach their target after a day of struggle. Half of that time had been spent fighting, the other recuperating while on the move.

Their strength and equipment had made them a core force among the Alliance armies. Moving by their side was an army of Springsteel Demons, an elite race from the Ar'Khar'Khit Horde. More alliance factions had tried to join their

protective umbrella, but Zac had ruthlessly rebuffed any forces that wouldn't be able to hold their weight.

Just like Tussar said when they first arrived, a lot of the fighters sent to the frontlines were barely better than the Kan'Tanu war slaves death. These weak factions opted to trail behind Zac at a distance, essentially using him them as a meat shield. Some had suggested they forced these armies to take the lead for a bit, but having a large clump of soldiers trailing behind them had its uses.

By now, the rear was ten times the size of their Acheron Company. The orbital bombardments were still going, and this huge clump of soldiers became a more promising target than their smaller, spread-out squads. The World's Blight had also proven just how fast it could recover and send over more people, and the rear had been forced to rebuff multiple assaults.

Only the demons had proven their mettle as they pushed toward their destination. They weren't as strong or well-quipped as the Atwood Empire, but they were a grade higher on average. Zac would still have preferred to go at it alone, but the roadblocks between them and the Wolf Teeth Camp had grown increasingly difficult to overcome. The Springsteel Demons helped share the pressure, and they had multiple Middle Hegemons who could deal with the stronger cultists.

Zac was still in good condition, and he hadn't been forced to use any of his aces so far. His new skill, [Adaptive Symbiosis], had proven its worth ten times over already. Haro still slumbered inside the Worldring, but the Half-step Plant King was constantly feeding Zac with Vigor. In return, Zac supplied streams of his Dao and the bloody aura that gathered on battlefields.

His soldiers lacked his unique methods to sustain their energy. Rotating squads and getting capable helpers wasn't enough to alleviate the accumulating exhaustion. And judging by the immense energy fluctuations they could sense beyond the horizon, the battle for the Wolf Teeth Camp had entered a fever pitch.

The good news was that the Calamity Company had avoided being dragged into this mess. As reluctant as he were, Zac had a deadline to follow. Their second elite army had teleported over half a day after the first, appearing in the 33rd Field Army. From there, they'd smoothly transferred using the prepared decree and were currently undergoing orientation and group drills under the Allbright Empire.

It was with mixed emotions they finally reached their target three hours later. Coming this far meant relative safety as the sky above the Kan'Tanu base was clearly in control of their side. But the ongoing war was of an almost unbelievable scale as dozens of units had gathered around the Wolf Teeth Camp.

It was an almost comical understatement to call the Kan'Tanu base a camp. Let alone Port Atwood, the military complex dwarfed his whole island. But it had clearly seen better days. Its towering walls were destroyed, their accompanying array towers forming rubble the size of hills. A heated war was raging within, with hundreds of powerful auras clashing in the sky.

Innumerable alliance soldiers were pushing toward the central district from every direction, but the Kan'Tanu weren't giving in. Ash and dust obscured the exact situation, but even Zac could sense the immense spatial fluctuations. The Kan'Tanu was clearly unwilling to give up the Wolf Teeth Camp and was still transporting reinforcements.

The war wasn't just taking place inside the camp. An outer perimeter of alliance armies had formed a wall between a sea of Kan'Tanu and the Wolf Teeth Camp. Their side were essentially surrounded, furiously fighting cultists and enormous curse constructs to stop them from reaching the camp. The situation looked dire when looking at raw numbers, but the alliance held an advantage in quality and equipment.

Neither side enjoyed a clear advantage, but the World's Blight would keep teleporting over people and growing new goretides. Their side needed to thin out the hordes and create an unshakeable position. Besides, standing by the sidelines wasn't an option. The cultists had already noticed their approach, and a flood of warriors were ready to meet them.

"Go!" Zac ordered, and the Atwood Empire war machine roared into action.

The Kan'Tanu were forcibly drawing on the World's Blight to empower their side, but huge swathes of tendrils and thorns were shredded with every swing of Zac's axe. Only a small part of [Evolutionary Edge]'s fractal design were responsible to create blades, but it was ultimately a Peak Quality D-grade skill. Each attack could create as much destruction as the E-grade skill's special burst just based on the huge discrepancy in energy.

The strongest fighters among the cultists were already held up by the alliance defenders, giving the Acheron Company free reign to the rear. A few Early-

stage Hegemons tried to bar Zac's path, but they only lasted a few seconds against [Verun's Bite] before dying. All forms of tricks and last-ditch measures, from self-destruction to escape treasures, were useless in the face of overwhelming power. N0v3lTr0ve served as the original host for this chapter's release on N0v3l--B1n.

Zac dug deeper and deeper into the Kan'Tanu ranks. The cultists fell in droves, and the mayhem only grew worse when the vines of [Primal Edict] joined the fray. World's Blight rose in the pockets of death Zac created, trying to use corpses as fodder to grow. However, the lingering Dao inside Zac's victims were too brutal, and the few tendrils that managed to take root were strangled by vines before they could grow.

The Kill Energy from an E-grade cultivator was so small that Zac barely noticed it now that he had reached level 164, but the sheer quantity of slaughter over the past day had put him right at the threshold of leveling up. The System must have made teleportation to Zecia almost free for the Kan'Tanu bring over so many.

His people had already slaughtered half the swarm of cultists by the time Zac made his way back twenty minutes later. He unleashed a furious burst of violence that eradicated all stronger targets within a few miles before returning to his ranks. Zaa still retained almost half his Cosmic Energy, but he needed to focus on his core for a little bit.

The process of leveling up was effortless compared to the struggle Zac had faced in the E-grade. That was especially true considering the quality of his Cosmic Core. However, each level meant more energy would be crammed into the small core, and he had to be careful about the balance between conflicting elements.

Zac gingerly guided the Kill Energy into the complex pathways beneath the core's surface, his Draugr side mirroring his actions on the pathways he couldn't control. The process required understanding of his core and his Daos, but it ultimately wasn't nearly as difficult as building the core itself. One minute later, the final sections were activated, and Zac felt a small burst of power coursing through his body.

The war still raged on, and the conflict inside the Wolf Teeth Camp seemed to have reached new heights. Zac was about to rejoin the battle, but a pang of danger and primal fear made him look to the sky. Six magic circles appeared one after another, each teeming with horrifying power.

Each had to be a dozens of miles across, and they formed an intricate array above the Wolf Teeth Camp. He wasn't the only one to notice their appearance. Millions of faces gazed upon the spectacle with hope and fear, unsure what was going on. But while the power contained within the array made Zac's senses scream of danger, he breathed out in relief.

"As expected! The headquarters even brought out such a powerful Spirit Array for a subsidiary battlefield!" Tussar guffawed as he flew over. "It's over for these cultists bastards!"

Zac nodded in agreement. The array was clearly not connected to the heritage of the Kan'Tanu, which meant their side had managed to deploy an incredibly powerful array right at the heart of the battle. The circles lit up, and not even Zac managed to stay afloat from the pressure they exuded. A silver palm appeared the next moment, crashing down toward the military base.

The hand was massive enough to flatten half of Port Atwood, but that wasn't what made it so extraordinary. It was instilled with incredible amounts of truth, to the point that it left illusory images in its wake. Thousands of smaller hands were formed by the Dao. Some formed mudras, others seemingly in the middle of a strike.

The illusory hands formed, dissipated, and were remade in the wake of the main hand's descent. Zac mutely looked on with awe. He hadn't expected to see such profound insights into the Dao of Pugilism.

The truths on display were useless to Zac, and his incredibly steady Dao Heart prevented them from influencing him. However, he suspected that more than one observer today would have their path altered by the silver hand. The large array was likely Peak D-grade, but whoever created it had to be a Monarch whose path were based on the art of pugilism.

Even then, the array's power obviously far beyond what one could expect, and for good reason. Just like Tussar said, it was obviously a Spirit Array—an array with a soul. The first time he encountered such a thing was when meeting Anzonil in the hunt back during the integration. However, the huge Spirit Array meant to cleanse the Splinter of Oblivion's corruption wasn't a true Spirit Array since Anzonil had grafted his soul into it.

True Spirit Arrays were extremely rare and significantly harder to craft than Spirit Tools. Most Array Spirits were born inside arrays installed in unique environments for extremely long timeframes. In that way, they more



resembled Realm Spirits than Tool Spirits. For a Realm Spirit to appear in a mobile array, something incredible must have happened during the crafting process.

A treasure like the array before them would be considered a top-tier hidden ace even in a C-grade faction, and Zac doubted there'd be more than a few hundred of them in the whole sector. For a grand treasure like this to be expended on a Middle D-grade battlefield proved just how important this mission was.

The mesmerizing scene briefly made Zac forget why the fist had appeared, but a resounding rumble reminded him. The silver palm had crashed into the haze surrounding Wolf Teeth Camp. An intense eruption of cursed energy rose to meet the attack, and the clash unleashed a storm that covered the whole battlefield. Visibility had become zero, but there were multiple clues to the result.

The powerful spatial fluctuations from within the Kan'Tanu camp were gone, and the sinister energy rising from the ground had become chaotic and directionless. Whatever controlled the growth of World's Blight had been destroyed along with the rest of the camp. And if Zac needed any conclusive proof of their victory, he only needed to open his quest screen to confirm the alliance mission was completed.

Zac was relieved he wouldn't have to send any of his men into the high-grade conflict within the camp. Yet, he couldn't feel any joy over the fact their mission had succeeded. They were just part of a subsidiary battlefield, tasked with one of multiple side goals on this world. But more than fifty million soldiers laid down their lives to create the opening needed for the Alliance to destroy the Transference Array.

Such a heavy price, yet the fighting was far from over.

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1127 - Wolf Teeth Camp - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1127 - Wolf Teeth Camp**

"The bigshots have dealt with the Transference Array and the World's Blight, but there are still a lot of Kan'Tanu here," Tussar grunted, echoing Zac's thoughts.

Zac nodded, and the Acheron Company resumed its push. The sea of thorns had lost their strength and ability to bring over reinforcements, and the trapped Kan'Tanu had lost their morale. It only took an hour for the combined alliance armies to utterly cleanse the region. There was no surrender, and no prisoners of war were taken. It was gruesome, but months of fighting with these crazed cultists had proven there was only kill or be killed.

The dust eventually settled, and Zac looked down at his exhausted soldiers. They were worse for wear but held enough reserves in case something happened. If anything, their eyes burned fiery retribution, some even looking around for targets to vent their anger on. Zac felt the same way. They'd lost over 80,000 soldiers since arriving and there were twice as many wounded.

If not for the high-quality Healing Pills and defensive talismans, that number would have been significantly higher. Still, it was a far better outcome than most. The spread-out camps of Alliance armies told a tale of immense struggle and suffering. Some must have lost half their men judging by their size, and Zac knew there were dozens of armies who fell on their way to the Kan'Tanu base.

No one moved for the next two hours. The only sounds from the sprawling camp around Zac were muted discussions and ripples from cultivators breaking through. The hard push had led to another round of breakthroughs, especially among those who'd recently been integrated to the elite company.

Zac wasn't as lucky. He was one of the few who had participated in every single battle, but the opponents he'd faced weren't enough to stir any particular insights. Seeing a whole planet embroiled in war had resonated with his Branch of the War Axe, but not to the point it had become anything tangible. It was still much-too-early to think about Peak Branches.

He had gained a good chunk of contribution points, though. Each Hegemon he'd killed was worth twice as much on the frontlines for some reason, and he'd killed way more than he did in any campaign. It was no wonder he'd been falling on the ladders until now. The losses were great, but the survivors would grow at an accelerated pace.

The tranquility lasted for two hours until Tussar came knocking at his door. "Young lord, we've been called."

"Why? By who?" Zac asked as he got to his feet.

"The commander. He's waiting for us in the center of the Wolf Teeth Camp," Tussar said. "As for why? I'm guessing we're about to get new orders."

"It's not to go back and rest by any chance?"

"Wouldn't keep my hopes up," the veteran scoffed.

Zac called over his captains, and the small group flew into the conquered base. Zac looked down at the destruction below, thanking his lucky stars they hadn't arrived any sooner. Hours had passed since the fighting ended, but using [Cosmic Gaze] almost blinded him. The city was absolutely covered in lingering Dao and energy, proof just how intense the battle had been.

The dust had already settled, but the alliance had erected huge isolation arrays covering its center. They were stopped on their approach, but a few words from Tussar let them pass through the barrier. Their surroundings shifted, but they weren't met by the expected crater. Instead, they found themselves at the edge of a huge square with thousands of Alliance members scuttling back and forth.

The whole square was an enormous array. It was dozens of times larger than the already huge battlefront arrays, and there were innumerable array pillars teeming with spatial energy. Zac was shocked how quickly the alliance had cleaned up and set up such a complex array. But on second look, he realized something was wrong.

For one, the array was clearly of Kan'Tanu origin. Secondly, most of the core pillars had huge silver hands grabbing them.

"Was it fake?" Emily muttered. "What's going on?"

"The attack was real, but we didn't want to show the whole picture while there still were so many Kan'Tanu around," a deep voice said.

Zac looked over to see a Dravorak General fly over. He looked no older than 20, but his aura and strength indicated he was a powerful Late-Stage Hegemon at least a few thousand years old.

"As for what we're doing? We're rerouting it," the general continued. "Rather than turning the Transference off, we're connecting it to a beacon of our own. It'll cause a disturbance that'll hopefully throw some cultists into a deadly spatial storm should they transfer over."

"Ah, this is Rastorik Hersafir, one of the 128 generals of the sixteenth," Tussar introduced.

Zac nodded in greeting. He didn't know the man but vaguely remembered that the Hersafir Clan was a powerful faction in the Dravorak Dynasty. They were considered a C-grade faction by Zecia standards, but it was unknown whether they actually had any living Monarchs in their ranks.

"Zachary Atwood," Zac said with a nod.

Rastorik's eyes widened a bit, but his face soon became an impassive mask again. "I knew your army had to belong to a powerful faction, but I didn't expect it to be led by Baron Atwood himself. I have to give you my thanks. You're not even part of the sixteenth, yet your valiant effort helped lessen the pressure on my men."

"It's what I should do," Zac smiled. "Can I ask why you've called us over?"

"I've just received orders from central command," Rastorik said. "Due to its nature, I decided to call you over to discuss it in person."

"What's going on?"

"I'm sure you have a decent idea of our goal by now," Rastorik said. "A small Mystic Realm has appeared in this region. It's currently grinding against the main dimensions, causing tears and pathways. You should have seen it on your way over."

Zac nodded. He'd sensed the aura of the Limitless Empire three more times after the first, though the following encounters hadn't been as intense.

"Why are you speaking in such a roundabout way, you old man?" Tussar said. "What's the relic you're fighting over, and what does it got to do with the lord? Just spit it out."

Rastorik sighed. "We're indeed fighting over a relic left from the Limitless Empire, and we absolutely can't fail this time. Our target is an ancient war fortress whose power far surpass anything we've managed to build. If we can seize it..."

"An ancient fortress?" Tussar said with a sharp intake.

Zac was equally shocked. If a broken sword from that ancient war could decimate a whole field army, then what about a whole fortress? Whoever got their hands on it would be able to sweep through the frontlines.

"As for what it has to do with Baron Atwood..." the Dravorak Hegemon continued. "The fortress is generating a manmade Mystic Realm to travel within the Void. But its dimensional barrier is weakening and we can't send high-grade inside. The battle for the entrances is also still raging. Thus, I've been ordered to send Baron Atwood to the main battlefield to assist with the recovery of the fortress."

"You want to send me to the main battlefield?" Zac asked, his eyes thinning with suspicion.

"To be exact, I've been ordered to transfer a fifth of your army as soon as we've set up the Teleportation Array," Rastorik said.

"What? Are you crazy?" Tussar roared, his spittle flying. "You want to send an Early D-grade army to one of the main battlefields?! Why not just ask them to take out a Kan'Tanu central base? Besides, these people haven't even been integrated to our army! How are they to cooperate with the others?! Bastard, just wait until I recover!"

"Why are you screaming at me? We both know this operation is controlled by central operations. I'm just relaying their orders. This is a critical mission, and they desperately need soldiers who can fight above their grade," the Commander said before giving Zac a pointed look. "Besides, some things are just fated."

"Fated my foot!" Tussar swore.

Zac sighed, knowing there was truth to the commander's words. The Acheron' Company's smooth advance and rapid accumulation of contribution had clearly raised some brows back in the alliance headquarters. Holding back more might have avoided this situation, but Zac's instincts told him it would have backfired one way or another.

With a Limitless Empire War Fortress as prize, there was no way his faction could stay on the sidelines. The System had repeatedly shown that its mandate of 'Struggle for Supremacy' wasn't optional for those it had its eyes on. Zac even suspected that the weakened spatial barrier was arranged by

the System. It was the perfect way to let sealbearers and candidates duke it out without interference from the older generation.

"What about my other men?"

"This world has two more strongholds and hundreds of weaker bases. They've temporarily been cut off, but we need to root out the threat before they can reconnect with the Kan'Tanu networks."

"Cleanup is nasty, but not very dangerous," Tussar added. "With control over the sky, these bases are sitting ducks. Your men will just need to deal with the cultists as they run for their lives."

"I understand," Zac said. "How much time do we have?"

"It'll take roughly two hours for Senior Silver to absorb enough spatial energy," the Dravorak Commander said.

"Senior Silver?"

"The Array Spirit," Rastorik explained, bowing at the hands. "We can set up the arrays and find the right coordinates, but this world is too exhausted because of the World's Blight. And having Senior Silver's assistance will make the pathway far more stable."

"The Array Spirit can even help with other arrays?" Emily muttered with surprise. "Still, this doesn't seem safe."

Zac had to agree with the assessment. While most of the established empires could build rudimentary arrays without the System's aid, they were generally quite limited. Most only worked within a planet, and only to one specific location. To set up a transfer array on a newly claimed world and use it to reach a battlefield with unstable space? That sounded like a deathtrap.

"Child, I was already adept in the profound art of spatial formations during Polbi's reign. You should thank your ancestors I'm around. These incompetent brats might have sent you into a black hole, but nothing will go wrong under my watch," a rich voice said, seemingly coming from every direction.

"Uh, I'm sorry, Senior Silver," Emily said with surprise, giving Zac a pointed look.

Was there something wrong in the head with all sentient Tool Spirits?

"Senior Silver has been an elder of the Imperial College for six dynasties and an instructor for multiple seniors of the court. Your transfer would have been far more dangerous if not for her expertise," Rastorik nodded. "However, we will provide all your men with a [Voidwalk Talisman], Atmosphere Arrays, and rescue beacons in case you are deposited in space."

"Isn't that a relief," Zac said with a roll of his eyes.

The Dravorak general paused a moment, glancing at the axe in Zac's hand. "I'm not trying to make things difficult for you. Your vessels have saved the lives of my men countless times."

"I know. So what's the situation? Where are you sending us?"

"The main battlefield is spread across six planets closest to the Mystic Realm," Rastorik said. "We are sending you to one of the Late D-grade battlefields."

"Late D-grade," Zac muttered with a frown.

The Acheron Company had managed to take down a Late D-grade world as part of his campaign mission, but he'd spent a whole month resetting battlefields until encountering a weaker target. That had still been a tough fight only made possible through his armada of Cosmic Vessels. Stepping onto a hectic battlefield with multiple Late D-grade factions was another thing entirely.

"I won't lie to you, the situation over there will be dangerous," Rastorik said. "However, with the spatial turbulence, neither side dares to go overboard and use powerful weaponry."

"That'll only hold until one side starts losing," Tussar muttered.

Zac didn't feel optimistic either, but there was nothing to do. He could ignore the order, but that would brand his faction as deserters during a critical mission. At best, his soldiers would become penal warriors pushed to the frontlines. At worst, they'd be branded traitors to Zecia and executed. It was not just Alliance rules, but something enforced by the System.



Their group stayed for another 20 minutes to go over details and orders were sent back to the army. Zac stopped just as they were about to leave the illusion array and thoughtfully looked at the large silver hand holding the main array pillar. He slightly nodded in thanks before leaving. The Acheron Company was covered in a haze medicinal energy upon their return, and large braziers were constantly releasing more.

It was an extravagant measure that would increase their recovery, but two hours was too short a span to fully recover. But there was nothing else they could do. The orders had been given and it was time to set out. The first division, led by Vilari, stood ready, each soldier a handpicked elite.

"Emily and Ra'Klid, have your seconds-in-command take charge of your divisions. Janos, you're in charge. Follow the arrangements of the Alliance."

'Your job should be relatively safe, but don't take any unnecessary risks,' Zac added in a mental message. 'If it seems you've been given a suicide task, then stall until reinforcements arrive. If you're pushed against the wall, use the emergency items and drown the enemy with money. Your lives are more important than this mission.'

Zac led his men back toward the base and was relieved to see he wasn't the only one. Seven more groups had been called, each looking quite impressive. A whole block had been cleared out over the past hours, and a simplified version of the array that took them here had been installed. It was already humming with power, and one army after another stepped onto the podium and disappeared.

"Are you sure about this?" Zac asked as their turn came up.

"I feel responsible, so I'll see this through to the end," Tussar said with a solemn expression.

"I understand."

The array activated and the world turned into a nauseating hurricane of erratic patterns. Zac felt a tight pressure on his intangible form, but it wasn't to the point it was threatening. Senior Silver lived up to her reputation, forming a spatial tunnel through such a chaotic patch of space. Furthermore, their destination was in the same neighborhood, and their surroundings soon changed once more.

Zac had already learned his lesson, and his army was ready to go the second they appeared. Thankfully, they'd appeared inside a military base, and the region seemed to be fully under alliance control. It was just a temporary stronghold like those erected in the graded battlefield, but it proved the situation was at least somewhat stable.

"Baron Atwood?" a Dravorak liaison asked Zac led his men off the teleporter.

"That's me," Zac said while stowing the defensive talismans he'd prepared.

"I'm Hask Serlin. Your army will be under General Dossin's command for this operation. I've been ordered to lead you and your second-in-command to meet with the others."

Zac glanced at Vilari, and the trio flew toward to a reinforced structure nearby. Over twenty people were already gathered, most of them Middle Hegemons. General Dossin was another Dravorak soldier had the strongest cultivation in the room, though her aura seemed more like that of a magician or Array Master than a straightforward soldier.

She was in the middle of discussing something to a seated warrior, but indicated for Zac and Vilari to take two open seats. It soon became clear that more than half of the gathered leaders were newcomers like himself, gathered from four different subsidiary battlefields. Only one of the faces were familiar though. It was a stalwart woman wearing loose robes, her aura crackling with lightning. She was the first to pass through the teleportation array at Wolf Teeth Camp, while the rest seemingly had been sent elsewhere.

Judging by an irate comment from an elderly Clan Leader, they'd been incredibly lucky to be assisted by Senior Silver. Some transfers hadn't been as smooth, with the unlucky ones losing over twenty percent of their people to spatial turbulence. Even now, they didn't know if the lost men were dead or lost in outer space.

"It seems like everyone is gathered. Our time is limited, so I'll keep things simple. You're all talents who've proven you can accomplish more with less, which is why you've been picked for this mission. But rest assured, you are not carrying this burden alone. There are over a hundred similar units spread across this and a few more worlds. And while there are great risks with this mission, there are also incredible rewards."

A bloodwood box appeared on the table before the general, and a gust of highly condensed energy spread through the room when she opened its lid. A single green pill was placed upon a bed of white pebbles. It was completely in uniform in appearance, except for an unfamiliar sigil imprinted on one side. Zac didn't recognize the pill at all, but his pores screamed for it.

"Our main goal is to seize the ancient fortress, but there are more things at stake. This pill was retrieved from the body of a Kan'Tanu who emerged from a pathway. We don't know its name, but we've confirmed it was once a C-grade Pill of a quality surpassing anything ever produced within our sector. Even today, it's the equivalent of a Supreme Late D-grade Pill."

It was possible the Dravorak general had taken out an old treasure of her dynasty to trick them, but Zac doubted it. Zac could tell the pill was incredibly old. Its aura gave a weak hint of antiquity matching the Limitless Empire. It was almost like it held a glimpse of the original, untamed Dao within.

"Everything you find inside the fortress is yours, be it ancient relics or the loot of your enemies," Dossin said as she closed the lid. "This is an unprecedented opportunity. For you, and for the alliance as a whole. Victory will allow us to finally push back against the invaders. Defeat will be the nail in our coffin."

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1128 - Into the Maws - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1128 - Into the Maws**

General Dossin spoke of victory and defeat, but it was greed rather than righteousness that shone in the eyes of the assembled leaders. Zac wasn't surprised, and neither was the Dravorak leader by the looks of it. Concepts like the direction of the whole war were too far removed from early and middle Hegemons. Neither could glory keep you and your kin safe when marauders were kicking in your door.

In comparison, the promise of ancient treasure was far more palatable. Most soldiers were constantly wracking their brains to gain an edge, anything that would allow them to survive another day on the frontlines. The pressure was just as real for the leaders who faced not only the Kan'Tanu elites but also carried the weight of command. And what Hegemon didn't have an obsession for cultivation and an unquenchable dream of walking further down their path?

"Of course, the alliance is willing to purchase or exchange anything you may find," the Dravorak general continued. "Furthermore, we've already confirmed

the System is awarding everyone on these critical battlefields quadruple contribution. In other words, you'll be richly rewarded even should you fail to enter the Mystic Realm."

"Fail to enter? Is the entrance contested?" a fiery-looking youth asked.

Speaking of, Zac realized most of the leaders in the room were quite young. And those who were older were invariably accompanied by an elite of Zac's generation. It made sense, considering the mission called for elites who could fight above their weight limit. However, Ogras once mentioned that one should be wary of two types of elites—the ruddy-faced youngsters and the spicy old gingers.

The latter were those hopelessly bottlenecked who never gave up on the martial path. Instead, they spent millennia polishing their foundations and braving dangers in hopes of finding an opportunity to take that next step. Most such cultivators ultimately failed to reforge their fate, but a few accumulated enough fortuitous encounters to give them incredible fighting prowess.

The room was veritably teeming with youthful exuberance yet lacking the measured experience of the skilled veterans who'd overcome countless obstacles. Was the System really gathering candidates for the inheritance, or was this part of some gambit devised by the alliance? Either case, the imbalance only increased Zac's misgivings, but there was not much to do but keep his eyes and ears peeled.

"Entrance? There is none," Dossin said. "Strictly speaking, the space surrounding our target is so unstable that it's impossible for a stable entrance to form. Neither have we successfully managed to install a doorway ourselves. The only way to reach the fortress is to stumble onto a temporary pathway."

"A temporary pathway? Like a Spatial Tear?" another commander frowned.

"In a nutshell."

Zac and Vilari shared a hesitant look. It was obvious they couldn't just jump into any random Spatial Tear and expect they'd reach the Mystic Realm they sought. However, they'd "enjoyed" front-row seats to one of the rare spatial anomalies connected to the Limitless Empire War Fortress just yesterday. They had better chances of survival flying into a sun than that terrifying explosion.

Others had similar doubts, but Dossin eventually lifted her hand to still the heated discussions in the room.

"The pathways I speak of differ from the chaotic eruptions many of you have witnessed. Those are formed by the fortress's protective barriers bleeding into our dimension, forming unstable energy exhausts. The pathways are rather gaps in these same barriers. You'll know when you've encountered one. Our challenge is that they only last a second or two, and it's up to fate who reaches them before the opportunity's gone."

"So we're just supposed to wait around and pray a pathway appears next to us?"

"No. Some regions have more promise than others. The situation is in constant flux, but it's not completely random. Our scholars are constantly monitoring the spatial deterioration and other clues to pinpoint potential hotspots. We'll move out the second they find a target near our base."

"I'm guessing the Kan'Tanu have similar means?" another leader asked.

"War will break out wherever a window of opportunity appears," Dossin confirmed. "Only a few will enter Mystic Realm while the rest of us deal with the Kan'Tanu. The more elites we kill, the fewer they can send into the fortress. And the further we push back their ranks, the more of the pathways will be used by our people."

"So we're just supposed to jump blindly into an unstable vortex when it appears? What if we don't wish to take the risk?" a thin elder asked.

"Everyone here was picked for their strength and ambition. Our assessment is that few among you would turn down this opportunity should it appear before you. Remember, there are no powerful War Machines or Late Hegemons inside the fortress. Furthermore, the alliance will provide incredible rewards to those who provide even the smallest assistance to the fortress's takeover. Just entering a passage entitles your faction up to 250,000 Alliance Merit," Dossin said. "Everyone present for this meeting will trigger the full award, while warriors of lower grade or rank will lead to smaller payouts."

Her calm face and flat delivery would make it seem she was covering some inconsequential details, but another wave of shocked and excited discussions erupted within the room. The dangers were still there, but the juicy carrot the

alliance had dangled before them would make it even harder to pass up on the battle for the war fortress.

Alliance Merit was a copy of the official Contribution Stores as an additional frontline perk. Instead of the System, it was the established factions who opened their coffers to provide treasures. The items weren't as good as the best things in the Elite Exchange, and the exchange rate was worse, but the treasury was still full of items that were highly sought after even by Late Hegemons.

It wasn't that the people present lacked the funds necessary to fuel their cultivation. All were picked because their faction stood above their peers. It was rather that they simply couldn't get their hands on too many items useful for D-grade cultivators. Even Zac, who could freely traverse the whole sector, had found it impossible to convert his growing fortune into materials good enough for his Cosmic Core. Just acquiring D-grade Natural Treasures that could speed up his body-tempering and Soul Cultivation was a huge challenge.

The best materials went to those with the biggest fists, and that was the established forces of the Multiverse. Zecia wasn't any different, and the shortages of good cultivation materials had only been exacerbated by the war. The powerful empires or clans would never let the good stuff reach the open markets. They'd either keep the materials for themselves or trade for equivalent resources with other factions. It was only now that the ancient empires faced the threat of extinction they'd been willing to make some concessions.

250,000 Alliance Merit wasn't enough to reforge your fate, but it was enough for a leader or a group of strong subordinates to make noticeable strides in their cultivation. Not to mention the fact this mission would award large amounts of real contribution on top of the Alliance Merit. Even Zac would be lying if he said he wasn't tempted. There were just so many desirable items in the System's Elite Exchange, but he was almost tapped out after his latest round of purchases. The Alliance Treasury was one of the few remaining places where he could gather the materials necessary for his breakthrough.

Accruing enough Alliance Merit also provided unique perks on the frontlines. More autonomy, higher authority, and the option to choose your battlefields—all things that could prove more important than raw strength when it came to survival.

The meeting lasted for another twenty minutes, but Zac was still carrying a belly full of unanswered questions by the time they emerged from the meeting room. There was surprisingly little to go on regarding the situation within the fortress and how they were supposed to take control of the thing. Only a few reports had made their way back to the outside, even after a whole day's struggle.

The entrances were rare and random, and the same seemed true for the exits. Not to mention, there was a decent risk of appearing in the middle of a Kan'Tanu army if you jumped into a random vortex. Still, the Mystic Realm wasn't completely isolated, and Dossin relayed some pertinent information.

The fortress was badly damaged, both from an ancient conflict and more recent spatial turbulence. That was the only reason they had a chance to pass through its barriers. Furthermore, the fortress had awoken on its own for some reason, and it considered everyone a hostile target. In fact, the Kan'Tanu wasn't the greatest threat inside—it was the fortress itself.

The assembled leaders repeatedly asked for more detailed descriptions but could only glower in frustration when Dossin rejected or sidestepped any such requests. Only those who managed to enter would be appraised of the actual situation, with fear of critical intelligence being stolen by spies cited as the reason for the secrecy.

The information lockdown didn't just extend to the fortress, either. Even the battles outside were kept vague, and they would only learn of their role right before clashing with the cultists. Dossin assured them that The Alliance had provided several aces, but she also implied neither side wanted to make any big moves at this stage.

Any high-energy attack came with the risk of backfiring spectacularly, what with space already being weakened by the War Fortress's dimensional barriers. Everyone was ordered to use War Machines sparingly and only to use models that spread their force over a large area. The focus was on securing and defending spatially active regions rather than killing cultists.

"The more things change, the more they stay the same," one of the old retainers muttered as they left the command center.

"Grandpa, what do you mean?" the valiant-looking youth to his side asked.



The young man appeared slightly naïve, but he was a Peak Early Hegemon with an aura as steady as bedrock. His combat strength might pale compared to Zac's, but fighting with a common Middle Hegemon shouldn't be a problem. Furthermore, going by his exquisite gear and the respectful attitude of the Middle Hegemon to his side, he was likely a core descendant of their clan.

"Young master, I've participated in many similar meetings before receiving your third elder's grace. Wild Mystic Realms, unpredictable Danger Zones, and newly-formed Grand Formations—they all need someone to sound out the dangers and bring back the harvest. But why would those in control send their own men, the talents they've arduously raised? Why not dangle some rewards and let outsiders take the risks?"

"That's right," another warrior snorted. "They say this is a critical mission, so why are there only unaffiliated factions in our group? Where are the imperial armies or members of the Eight Grand Clans? Hell, I only recognize a couple of faces here. They're sending us into the maws of our enemy blindfolded."

The man was right. Dossin was a Dravorak General, but she led a mixed army of the sixteenth rather than a Dravorak elite regiment. Furthermore, representatives from Zecia's top factions, from empires to sects and clans, were conspicuously absent. Of course, this was only one of hundreds of similar camps, but it was still a worrying sign.

"But what can we do but enter those maws?" the youth sighed. "Military law aside, I can't pass up on this opportunity. No matter if it's for the clan or myself."

The other leaders wore complex expressions, but the young clan leader's words rang true. One by one, they returned to their armies to prepare themselves. Zac was no different, but they only got another ten minutes before a blaring alarm broke the calm.

"It's here!" Dossin's voice spread through the camp. "Assemble within 30 seconds!"

"Go!" Zac ordered, and the Acheron Company moved as one.

They appeared on a designated spot outside their barracks, every warrior teeming with conviction and killing intent. They knew the upcoming battles would be grueling, but they'd also entered the Atwood Empire's strongest unit for these kinds of opportunities. Contribution, merit, and treasures were all up

for grabs, and those who survived would have taken another step forward on the road of cultivation.

Dossin had already taken up a position in the center of the square, but she didn't give any order to set out. Zac looked around with confusion, wondering if the hotspot was right in their backyard. A spatial collapse would undoubtedly impact the environment, and Zac didn't have to wait long for signs to appear.

A deep rumble soon shook the camp, and one barrack after another crumbled as waves of incredible energy surged through the ground. The only structures surviving were two black pillars Zac assumed were Array Towers.

"We're moving," Vilari suddenly exclaimed, and Zac sharply inhaled upon realizing what was happening.

The commotion wasn't created by spatial turbulence. The whole square slowly rose into the air, casting off all temporary structures connected to it as it rotated. The whole base was actually a supersized flying vessel and not a simple one, judging by the energies involved.

"Get ready. This ship is made for speed and little else," Dossin warned.

There was no time to ask for clarifications before one of the towers shattered with a deafening bang. A sharp tug rocked the whole platform, but the soldiers of the makeshift army were all Late E-grade or stronger. A few had to take a steadying step, but that was about it. Of course, the situation would have been very different without the sleek barrier a few meters above their heads.

Zac was shocked to find they were moving at a speed approaching the levels of an escape treasure, leaving a mile-long streak of spatial chaos in their wake. Their acceleration had been nigh-instantaneous, shattering both space and the atmosphere. Mountains and rivers were reduced to flashes of light as they roared across the continent, but the indistinct landscape suddenly became clear.

Most seemed to think their mad dash had already led to the hotspot, but Zac's brows furrowed as he gazed upon a massive storm formation in the distance. This couldn't possibly be their destination. He could tell space was incredibly solid, to the point their vessel had lost most of its speed. The kind of environment that could endure powerful War Arrays.

This was an ambush.

A stone bell the size of a city block emerged from the vortex, and even the reinforced space buckled from its mere presence. It seemed to be made from emerald-green jade, but it had seen better days. It was covered in cracks, and one section was completely missing. The whole clapper had also fallen out, leaving a rotten rope within.

Its state wasn't good, and there were no cultists around to box them in or control the huge treasure. Still, you'd have to be blind to not realize the bell, damaged or not, was a terrifying treasure. It alone was more than enough to deal with their motley army.

The whole bell reeked of forbidding power, but the most terrifying emanations were released by the lines of engravings covering its surface. The bottom row had been ruined by the missing section, which seemed to prevent a mirrored engraving on the bell's top from activating.

However, the three bands in the middle remained intact and left Zac's soul shuddering. Two were bands of complex scripts Zac didn't recognize, but something about them made Zac's skin crawl. They were sinister but in a different way from the Kan'Tanu's heritage. It felt more like a force of nature than a heretical treasure.

The middle band wasn't another formation but rather an exquisitely depicted scene. The bell was dozens of miles away, but Zac could see every detail for some inexplicable reason. And it filled him with an immense sense of wrongness.

The engraving portrayed a motley procession approaching a small cave entrance. The cave looked completely normal, like something you'd find on any mountainside. Yet it filled Zac with much greater dread than the arcane scripts. It was like a primordial evil lurked within, staring back at him from within the bell.

The procession was comprised of beings of all shapes and sizes, from powerful cultivators to small critters. All different, yet all the same. Everyone was decked in matching robes of finest red silk, even the small mice, and they had joyful smiles plastered on their faces. They could have been a wedding procession, but the celebratory gifts in their hands were their own beating hearts.

Zac had no idea what this kind of treasure would do, but he had a looming feeling they would find out sooner rather than later.

So much for not using large-scale weaponry.

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1129 - A Joyful Gift - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1129 - A Joyful Gift**

The bell's formless pressure grew with intensity as their vessel continued its approach. Those with weaker mental fortitude were already suffering, and a quick scan showed that no less than a third of the soldiers were twitching erratically or holding their heads. More alarmingly, a few displayed smiles resembling those on the carving, even when their eyes were wide with horror.

Zac felt fine beyond a profound sense of wrongness, but [Immutability of Eoz] desperately tried to fend off something he couldn't sense or see. Neither his overwhelmingly powerful soul nor recently upgraded Soul Defense skill seemed to be of any use against the mysterious threat. In other words, it wasn't a mental attack, but neither was it strictly a curse.

Considering their enemy, most elites carried some form of ward against curses. They should at least have shattered upon failing to block the attack, but not a single one so much as shook despite one soldier after another adorning a macabre smile.

The situation was bad, but Dossin made no attempt to turn or evade. The flying treasure pressed through the solidified space like a moth to the flame. Zac doubted that turning around would save them from their predicament or that the vessel was even capable of such a feat. It was more like they'd strapped themselves to a rocket and launched it toward their destination.

Zac furiously went over his means and stockpiled treasures in search of a solution. The most obvious was to jump ship and run away, but that would be like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire. They were no longer moving at dangerous speeds, but that only proved just how impassable their environment had become. It was impossible to tell whether space had solidified because of the bell or if the bell had been used because of it.

Either way, most E-grade cultivators would find moving impossible when they left the vessel's protective barriers. There was no way that the common escape talismans his men carried would work either. Even if activated, they'd displace their users a few dozen meters at best. They'd still be exposed to the bell, which seemed to be stirring from its slumber.

"Shield your mind and infuse the platform with Cosmic Energy!" a clear voice boomed in Zac's mind.

It was Dossin, but her voice contained a mysterious power that made her order feel like an imperial edict or a God's decree. Millions of soldiers instinctively followed her command, flooding the platform with streams of energy. Even his undead followers followed suit but quickly stopped after Zac sent an urgent command.

Whatever treasure Dossin used to cut through the bell's influence wasn't enough to pass through Zac's mental defenses, but he still joined the effort. For now, their best chance at survival was the safeguards provided by the alliance. If even that failed, Zac could only sacrifice his strongest lifeline and ask Sendor for assistance.

Creaks and rumbles shook the floating barge as it struggled to endure the immense accumulation of Cosmic Energy. It was so dense that a knee-high layer of shimmering light formed on the square. And that was just the spillover that the vessel failed to contain. Most of the energy was dragged toward three distinct locations on the vessel—toward the fore, to Dossin, and to the still-standing Array Tower.

Radiant streaks of destruction lit up the desert as an array of hidden weapons all activated at once. The display was far more overbearing than the Acheron Company's lineup of War Machines, but Zac frowned upon seeing that none of the attacks targeted the bell. Instead, Dossin seemed content with randomly firing at empty space.

No, not random. The Dravorak general was using the weapons like an icebreaker, weakening the spatial blockade that had reduced their speed by over 90%. As a result, the vessel was rapidly picking up speed, though that only meant they were hurtling toward their doom with increasing velocity.

"Stop!"

Zac's head snapped around just in time to see a grinning soldier push a comrade aside. More people tried to restrain him, but it was like he'd been imbued with intractable power. The smiling man's eyes were bloodshot with strain and struggle, and tears streaked down his cheeks as he dug into his chest. The next moment, he was holding a still-beating heart in his hand in a gruesome reproduction of the bell engravings.

The horrific scene was like the trigger for a mental plague sweeping through their ranks, where the first casualties were the soldiers who had tried to stop their friend. Chaos quickly erupted as more and more warriors dug into their chests before presenting their gift to the sky. Zac moved to stop a few of them, but a scream of danger made him freeze with hesitation when he was about to grab a man's arm.

"Close your eyes! If you touch a possessed, you'll be the next! Focus on nothing but infusing!" Dossin shouted, her voice hoarse with strain and determination. "Hold on a bit longer! It's almost ready!"

Zac wanted to scream with frustration as he helplessly watched his men succumb one after another. Such wretched endings, and there was nothing he could do. Worse, the bell didn't even grant its victims death. It should be impossible for Late E-grade Cultivators to last long without a heart, but their auras were steady as they stood frozen with extended hands.

The only solace was that the struggle on their faces was gone. The profound terror in their eyes had been replaced with joy, completing their transition into the heretical imagery. Hopefully, it meant these poor men had fully succumbed to the bell and didn't need to suffer any longer.

Most terrifying was that all the extracted hearts beat in perfect sync, where each thud was a toll that empowered the bell even further. The phenomenon created a negative spiral that was rapidly going out of control. Dossin had urged them to hold on, but their armies would be wiped out within the minute unless something changed.

None dared to interfere with the dead, but they tried everything to save those who remained. Talismans, War Arrays, and Defensive Treasures were thrown out without any care for expenditure. A few leaders even took out mysterious items to shield their men. But despite their best efforts, the sacrifices only grew more frequent.

The only one who had a semblance of success was Vilari. A blanket of spiritual pressure covered the Acheron Company and two neighboring forces as Vilari activated a large-scale domain. She didn't possess any large-scale defensive skills, so she used her emotional manipulation to combat self-harming actions with sloth or nihilism. Unfortunately, a terse shake of the mentalist's head indicated the effect was limited and that she couldn't hold on for long.

Then, a pulse of pure light was released from the middle of the barge, and a high-pitched sonorous call echoed through the region. The light formed a huge celestial bird whose song swept the madness aside. Dossin had finally come through, but Zac swore upon seeing cracks appear on the summoned avatar. Whatever Dossin activated stopped the coerced deaths, but it was clearly not a match to the heretical bell.

The bird seemed to understand its plight and shot toward the bell as it sang with increased fervor. However, Zac didn't get to see the creature's final stand, as he felt a tremendous pull from below. The ship crashed into the ground, but instead of an explosion, there was a flash of brown light and an embrace of the earth itself.

It was the second Array Tower that had been activated—a bird to buy a window of opportunity and an earth movement skill to take them away. Zac had become part of the stones they passed through, and he felt his speed rapidly increase.

But not even deep underground could provide sanctuary from the heretical bell.

Immense vibrations shook the very essence of Zac's being. It was like the world was whispering in his ears, whispering ancient secrets of boundless terror. He was overcome with despair, to the point there was nothing left to do but rejoice as he embraced the inevitable end. If you can't defeat them, then join them.

Zac wailed when reality shattered, but the only sound was the ebbing voice of earth's madness. Thoughts eluded him, and the passage of stone and sand provided little context. It might have been a second or an hour before dry darkness gave way to light, and the disjointed impressions solidified into a harried consciousness while clumps of mud became flesh and bone.

The surroundings were utterly foreign when Zac opened his eyes, which was the biggest gift he could ever hope for. He unsteadily got to his feet among a sea of sprawled-out soldiers and broken debris. A voice in the back of his head screamed at him not to look up, to not invite that horror back into his life. Zac calmed his beating heart before warily peering at the sky.

The bell was gone, and the space around them was so fragile it almost felt like he could tear a hole in the dimension with his bare hands. It should be



impossible for such a powerful treasure to appear anywhere close—its mere presence would collapse space and deposit it in another dimension.

Besides, even for a Monarch, the heretical bell had to be difficult to control. It might even be impossible to collect for a good while after being deployed. Zac couldn't imagine anyone getting close and living to tell the tale after it had been awakened.

Zac turned back to the broken pieces of the flying vessel scattered about. Their exit from the ground was not meant to have been so chaotic, but there was no doubt in Zac's mind the ship had saved everyone's lives. His back became slick with sweat from remembering his mind being fully consumed by madness. Those unstoppable impulses must have come from when they passed right beneath the bell.

If his body hadn't been in an intangible state, he would have dug his heart out with a smile. And if even his Dao Heart and Hidden Nodes proved insufficient to protect against the bell, then who could possibly have survived the brief encounter? Whatever was hidden within the bell was simply on such a high level of existence that it made any resistance irrelevant.

Zac turned his sight inward as the people around him got to their feet. Everything appeared normal after scanning himself head to toe with every method in his arsenal, but that wasn't nearly enough to fully assuage his fears. But his Hidden Node had fully calmed down, which hopefully meant the bell didn't leave any lingering threats behind.

In other words, those who still lived when they entered the ground should have all survived. Still, no matter where Zac looked, he saw smiling corpses gripping their hearts. At least a tenth of their recently assembled army had fallen in less than a minute, and many more would undoubtedly walk away with Heart Demons.

Zac was still shocked at how powerful a weapon the Kan'Tanu had managed to deploy, but he had survived enough terrifying and inexplicable ordeals for the bell not to leave a lasting impression on his Dao Heart. However, not everyone was the same. Being exposed to this kind of calamity differed from life-and-death battles on the battlefield. The helplessness could plant the seeds of fear that would poison one's path, preventing you from going any further on the road of cultivation.

"How do you guys feel?" Zac asked with a low voice as his commanders gathered around him.

"I'm... I'm fine," Emily said, but Zac hadn't seen her face so grim since the day they first met.

"We'll make them pay for what they did," Zac said, his voice rising into booming thunder as roiling Killing Intent spread through the region. "We'll capture that damn fortress and blow up the bell and every single cultist who had anything to do with it."

Confused, fearful faces hardened, and eyes shone with a promise of bloody retribution. It wasn't just his men who stirred from Zac's forceful proclamation. Fury spread through the ranks like the mental plague before. Smaller gusts of Killing Intent joined the overwhelming amounts of murderous air Zac deliberately released. It fused, forming something akin to a communal desire. A desire for steel and fire, of vengeance and murder.

Zac was happy that so many had been dragged out of their mental prisons by his actions, but his words weren't just empty posturing. He meant what he said with every fiber of his being.

Until now, he'd been so focused on survival and potential conspiracies that he'd lost sight of the big picture. Zac even felt ashamed as he recalled his behavior in the meeting half an hour ago. He'd listened to the discussions like an outsider, silently judging the other commanders for focusing on personal benefits over the war effort.

But how was he any different?

The thought of seizing the ancient War Fortress hadn't even crossed his mind. If anything, he'd felt it an unnecessary risk, especially since he'd have to hand the thing over to the alliance if he succeeded. He better focus on keeping himself safe and potentially harvesting some seals or treasures.

But how could Zecia possibly win if no one ever stepped up? How could he say he'd done everything in his power to keep his friends and subjects safe if he didn't try to make a difference, an actual difference, to the war? This wasn't about Contribution Points or quests.

Like it or not, he was one of the people with the highest chance of seizing the fortress. With the Mystic Realm being limited to Middle Hegemons, only the

vanishingly rare monsters like Kator could pose a threat to his life. Besides, taking over the fortress might not come down to strength but rather fate and luck. And how many could compete with him on that front?

'Thank you.'

The voice came from Dossin, and Zac slightly nodded before turning to Vilari.

"Can you tell if there are any lingering dangers?"

Vilari looked lost in her thoughts but shook herself awake after a second.  
"There shouldn't—"

"LIAR!" an enraged roar reverberated through the valley, silencing all discussions.

Zac glanced over and found one of the young commanders standing before Dossin with fires in his eyes and a sword trained at her throat. He had six Hegemons standing behind him, ready to back him up. They were all from the same faction, but Zac sensed they wouldn't be fighting alone if a battle truly broke out.

His call for vengeance had momentarily unified their allied army, but reality was bound to come crashing back. They had been sent into this mission blindly, and they'd encountered something terrifying and inexplicable right out the gates. A tenth of their men had died before seeing a single Kan'Tanu, and General Dossin was ultimately responsible for their mission.

"You said neither side would use large-scale treasures! So, how do you explain that cursed thing? And where was the alliance when we were almost wiped out?!"

"Since when has war been predictable?" Dossin said. "Our enemy managed to outplay us this time, but they ultimately failed. They activated such a powerful taboo treasure but only managed to kill a small number of our men. What if they had used it on a large-scale battlefield instead? Hundreds of millions could have died.

"I have already reported the situation to headquarters. The alliance will surely make them pay for exposing such a powerful item."

"The alliance," the young man scoffed. "Who but the alliance knew where we were going? What regions we would cross? I wonder how the Kan'Tanu could set up an ambush with such speed and precision..."

Dossin's eyes thinned. "I would be careful about your following words."

The young man's chest still heaved like bellows, but one of his retainers knew they couldn't let their Lord go any further.

"The young master is just lamenting the fallen. If we'd entered the ground a bit earlier..."

"It takes some time to charge and deploy the [Eightfold Earth Traversal Array]. Secondly, the ancient bell created mysterious ripples in the ground. I suspected they would damage the ship, and reality proved me right. We barely got through the bell's sphere of influence. Had I activated the traversal any earlier, we would have been crushed or spat out right beneath the bell. Everything I did was to minimize our casualties and give us a chance at survival."

Zac nodded in agreement. Dossin was only following orders just like the rest of them, and she did the best of a bad situation. If anything, her judgment and quick thinking were extremely impressive. Her calm and rational explanation also helped defuse the tense situation.

"If you feel my actions or leadership lacking, you are welcome to petition a complaint upon our return. However, despite our accident, our mission is ongoing, and I am the commanding officer. Our vessel failed to take us the whole way, but we're only ten minutes from our destination. The Kan'Tanu didn't have any covens nearby, so we still have a chance to reach our destination first. Collect the fallen and ready yourselves for battle. We move out in two minutes."

Zac turned back to Vilari, only to find her dazed off again.

"What's wrong?" Zac asked as he pulled the mentalist to the side. "Did you harm your soul by using your skill? Or did you notice anything from the bell?" The original appearance of this chapter can be found at [NøvE131n](#).

Vilari almost flinched at his words, and Zac's worries only intensified. He'd thought Vilari would be the one who could handle that cursed influence the best, but Zac now realized he might have had it backward. Her soul was

incredibly powerful, but that was ultimately useless when it came to the bell. Conversely, the sense of despair that blossomed into deranged joy had a lot of common ground with Vilari's path. The way their companions had ended their lives was even similar to Vilari's puppeteering ability.

However, the bell contained a form of evil that had twisted the Emotional Daos. It resembled the Lost Plane and how it had tainted the pure truths of Ultom. Had Vilari's Daos been damaged, or had the corruption somehow taken hold within her?

Vilari seemed to understand the thoughts going through Zac's mind and shook her head.

'I... I'm fine,' she answered in his mind. 'But I fear the bell might have come for me.'

## **Defiance of the Fall #Chapter 1130 - Embers of Seven Sensations - Read Defiance of the Fall Chapter 1130 - Embers of Seven Sensations**

'You don't think the bell is related to the Kan'Tanu?' Zac asked.

'I'm not certain, but think about it. It's like General Dossin said—imagine if our enemies deployed the bell on a large-scale battlefield instead. Why use such a mysterious object to ambush us? And what would be the point? Whoever has the strength to wield that ancient bell could just annihilate us with a wave of their hands.'

Zac slowly nodded in agreement. The situation was undeniably odd. It had only taken a single look to understand there was no way the Kan'Tanu had made it themselves. The bell hadn't even activated, but its mere presence killed so many elite soldiers from miles away.

It was undoubtedly a C-grade weapon despite being so damaged. Who knew what grade it had when in perfect condition?

Even if it were the Kan'Tanu's, they had no reason to deploy it like this. It almost felt like the Kan'Tanu had deployed a nuclear warhead to deal with a minor threat, only to forget to arm it. There had to be hundreds of better strategies available if they knew when and where to lay a trap.

'Still, why do you think it came for you? What's going on?'

Vilari hesitated. 'I could feel a connection even before the bell emerged. When it appeared, I heard a deep toll in my mind. Before I knew it, the sound transformed into an incredibly mysterious technique called the [Embers of Seven Sensations].'

Zac's eyes widened in alarm. He was so horrified he almost forgot they were speaking through a mental connection.

'You absolutely cannot practice it! Don't even try to analyze the concepts within!'

Any method stored within such a powerful treasure would undoubtedly be astonishing, but there was something profoundly wrong with it. The evil symbolized by that cave felt like a primordial devil. Practicing any method with such a dubious origin would invite a disaster unto yourself.

'I know. I have already conditioned myself to not think of the details within.'

Zac exhaled in relief, but the situation only made him more confused. Where the hell had the bell come from if it wasn't the Kan'Tanu's? Was it related to the War Fortress, or was it perhaps another ancient relic dredged from the depths of the Void? Or could it be...

'Could it be related to your bloodline?' Zac exclaimed.

Iz had recognized the young Mentalist who almost killed him in the Battle of Fates as a descendant of the Ignus Clan. He hadn't dared inquire any further, but any faction known by Iz Tayn had to have some renown, even in the heartlands. He hadn't expected to hear from them in this remote corner of the Multiverse, but it was no longer so farfetched with the Left Imperial Palace appearing in Zecia.

Zac fearfully glanced at the sky, wondering if a C-grade Mentalist from the Ignus family was currently bearing down on their position. He couldn't imagine what they'd do to him after finding out he not only killed their descendants but even turned her into a Revenant. The Undead Empire had suffered more than one calamity by turning bodies with complicated origins.

'No, that can't be,' Zac said after taking a calming breath. 'I remember the original owner of your body. Her bloodline wasn't evil or heretical at all. It more

felt like something inherited by a high-tier race or a unique being born from the cosmos.'

'You're right,' Vilari said. 'It's difficult to say what about me attracted the bell since I've unified my path and bloodline through Ultom's inspiration. But I believe it's connected to the inheritance left by my master rather than my body's origin.'

'The Crown of Despair?' Zac said with bewilderment, but a thoughtful look slowly appeared on his face.

Indeed, the Mentalist inheritance left in his Dao Repository was more closely related to the bell's true nature, even if there were several critical differences. But at the same time, it sounded ridiculous for such a terrifying treasure to be connected to Brazla and the Towers of Myriad Dao. Then again, the details surrounding the Crown of Despair had always eluded them.

Zac had gathered clues to Brazla's origins over the past years and reached a few conclusions. Towers of Myriad Dao undoubtedly originated from the frontiers, but the original Brazla should have lived in a more established frontier sector.

Brazla had been an unattached blacksmith with above-average skill thanks to a fortuitous encounter. Still, he should mostly have been dealing with other Hegemons. C-grade materials were almost impossible to find in these neighborhoods, and no Monarch would let a D-grade craftsman touch them unless they were absolutely out of better options.

Yrial's situation was slightly special. He may have been a late Monarch, but Zac had seen snippets of Yrial's road to the peak. He'd been constantly hunted, barely scraping by through deception, swindling, and outright robbery. Yrial had repeatedly lamented that he would have easily become a Divine Monarch or even an Autarch if he'd even enjoyed a fraction of Zac's lucky encounters.

Zac inquired why Yrial went to Brazla for help during his last visit. As expected, his ascent into Late Monarchy had completely wiped out Yrial's entire fortune, and he'd even been forced to steal a few incredible treasures from multiple C-grade factions. He found himself hunted from every direction and was forced to make a desperate gambit. N0v3lTr0ve served as the original host for this chapter's release on N0v3l--B1n.



Yrial knew of a certain opportunity. It was incredibly dangerous, but there was a chance of confirming his Dao if he managed to seize the fortune within. He'd approached Brazla to craft a set of special items that would improve his odds. Unfortunately, Zac and Yrial's soul wisp had no idea whether he succeeded or not, and Yrial refused to tell him any details about the opportunity.

The details surrounding the Crown of Despair were harder to understand. Vilari had a seal preventing her from divulging most details of her two encounters with her in-name master, but everything about Ralz Calzood screamed 'mysterious powerhouse.' Her means and inheritance were incredibly profound, and Vilari even suspected she was a Divine Monarch. Why would someone like that approach Brazla?

A Divine Monarch Mentalist would be unstoppable in a sector like Zecia. She could have walked right into the ancestral homes of the Dravorak Dynasty and abducted their artisans. There was no way anyone would dare raise an issue. So why Brazla? And why would a Mentalist agree to sever a part of their soul to pay a D-grade artisan?

They had come up with two potential scenarios. One, Ralz had stumbled onto a material or Natural Treasure that was critical for some goal of hers but wouldn't last long after being harvested. Brazla was simply the best craftsman she could find before it was too late, and Ralz had been forced to go along with his demands because of it.

That theory would explain how Brazla died and how the Towers of Myriad Dao became a System reward. Extorting a Divine Monarch as a Hegemon was simply asking for trouble. The second theory was that Ralz Calzood had another purpose for leaving behind a piece of her will. Perhaps it was simply a test of fate in search of a disciple, one that Vilari passed.

More importantly, Ralz Calzood was still alive, which made the bell's appearance more problematic. Was the Crown of Despair embroiled in the contest over Ultom and the Left Imperial Palace? If so, was she hidden among the Kan'Tanu, or was she one of the outsiders? Had Vilari unwittingly become a pawn in an elaborate play for the Eternal Heritage?

'How certain are you?'

'Without a shadow of a doubt. The bell's technique is very unusual, but I am almost certain it shares a common root with the original version of my Cultivation Manual.'

'You're thinking Ralz Calzood's inheritance was derived from the bell?'

'No, they are too different for that. It's possible that master found an incomplete inheritance of an ancient faction while journeying, and the bell was made by the same people.'

'Do you think the Crown of Despair is an unorthodox cultivator?'

'Maybe, but there's something else wrong with the bell. It's like an artist has painted a masterpiece, but then someone else came along and added a few minor details. The additions seem innocuous on their own, but together, they've completely subverted the original intent behind the painting. I felt it on the bell, and I felt it within the technique.'

'The second painter, could it be the Kan'Tanu?'

'Perhaps,' Vilari hesitated. 'I'm too inexperienced to guess what a Monarch can and can't do. But I believe the bell's subtle corruption would require an almost godlike understanding of the soul and the Daos of the Seven Sensations.'

Zac agreed with Vilari's assessment. The aura of evil had reached the levels where it had essentially become an indelible truth like the forces of nature. Reforging an ancient treasure and a whole heritage in such a sublime way required incredible skill. If the Kan'Tanu had such lofty beings within their ranks, the war would have looked much worse than it already did.

'What should I do?' Vilari asked, the worry evident in her eyes. 'If I stay with you, I might implicate everyone.'

'I doubt we'll see the bell again in the short run. We would have seen some signs by now if it really wanted to hunt you down. Honestly, I think we'd have to be more worried if the Kan'Tanu controlled it.'

Zac wouldn't say it now, but he felt the real danger came from the [Embers of Seven Sensations]. Sure, the bell may have sensed someone walking the path of its creators and imparted a technique to continue the lineage. But meat pies rarely just fell from the sky, especially not when the delivery method made people rip their hearts out of their chests.

'But what if—'

'Then we'll cross that bridge when it comes. I'll bring you out of here if it comes back. We'll see if it can outrun my teleportation arrays,' Zac smiled. 'Don't worry, we'll figure this out together after we return. If all else fails, I'll just blow it up somehow.'

'That thing should have known better than to mess with a professional demolitionist,' Vilari smiled as she grabbed his hand. 'Thank you.'

'Of course, always.'

There were still no signs of the huge bell returning or space solidifying, but everyone was still eager to create more distance. Even rushing headfirst toward an army of elite Kan'Tanu was far preferable to the certain death the bell represented. It took less than a minute to stow the fallen, and they were on the way soon after.

Dossin ordered a breakneck pace where the Late E-grade Soldiers ran close to the limits of what their attributes would allow. Doing so back on old earth was a surefire way to lose a battle, but E-grade cultivators wouldn't even be slightly winded when they arrived. For Zac, it was like a casual stroll.

He had joined the other commanders at the vanguard to better coordinate the response to any subsequent threats or traps. Everyone's eyes were mostly roving the sky, and not just because of the ancient bell. The battleground was a remote corner of an uninhabited world, so aerial bombardment was the greatest threat they'd face.

"You don't have to worry about attacks from above," Dossin eventually said while pointing to the sky. "Look."

It was a streak of shifting light hovering in the sky, resembling the northern lights from back home. It was a beautiful phenomenon, but Zac didn't understand what the Dravorak general was driving at.

"It's ancient Dao bleeding into this dimension," Dossin explained. "The Mystic Realm is pushing against our reality, but the ambient energy of this world reinforces the dimensional barrier. The emptiness outside the atmosphere does not have the same advantages. It's just an insignificant phenomenon now, but that'll soon change."

"A spatial storm?" a commander ventured.

"One that will soon cover this whole continent," Dossin confirmed. "Truth be told, this whole stellar system is incredibly fragile. We've already lost dozens of Cosmic Vessels, and any items we've deployed were destroyed within minutes. The Kan'Tanu have fared even worse since this region was originally under their control."

"Luck is an important part of war," one of the strategists nodded.

"True. Now, all fighting is done on the ground, where each side brings in reinforcements whenever we manage to form a link to this unstable region."

"So what about the bell? The Kan'Tanu haven't used it before?" Zac asked, and Dossin shook her head with a small frown.

"Never. I still can't explain the events surrounding the bell. But it should be impossible for it to appear now that the storm is about to break out."

Zac slowly nodded, not pressing the matter further. They'd have to delve into the mysteries of the bell and Vilari's master later. For now, there were cultists to fight. Zac could already feel Spatial Energy among the planet's energy, which meant they were getting close to the hotspot. Meanwhile, the Dao streaks in the sky were rapidly multiplying.

"They're here," Dossin said, and Zac suddenly felt a spiritual nudge from the army's War Array.

He accepted and suddenly felt as though his Soul Sense expanded from one hundred meters to stretch far into the horizon, where a huge monstrosity rapidly approached. It looked like a centipede as wide as a mighty river, but a second glance indicated it was a construct created through the familiar arts of the Heart Curses.

The centipede exuded a dark shroud as it advanced, but Zac could vaguely make out an army sitting on its back. A sharp red light released from within the shroud shattered the scene, but it didn't take long before he could see the moving river with his own eyes.

The Kan'Tanu's approach looked more overbearing, but Zac could tell their army was roughly the same size and strength as theirs. Zac returned to his men, his mind already filled by a rapid-fire peppering of instructions. The Acheron Company took up a position at the left flank, setting up a solid line designed for a steady advance.

The orders were detailed and exhaustive, which drastically lessened the pressure on Zac and his, admittedly, inexperienced commanders. Dossin's team of tacticians also showed surprising insight into their strengths and equipment, including War Arrays they hadn't showcased on the frontlines or mentioned in the short briefing.

It was unnerving to know there likely was a dossier on him and his budding faction in the headquarters, but the detailed strategy also proved Dossin was well-prepared for the upcoming battle.

Suddenly, the huge centipede exploded, turning into a cascading tangle of rapidly advancing thorns. It was a strategy they'd dealt with many times before, so Zac wasn't worried, even if it contained a stronger aura. His people had already proven their strength, and Dossin had already anticipated this move.

Two dozen enormous glass spheres thumped down on the ground, and a cascade of stellar flames rippled forward. Their unrelenting flames collided with the advancing tide, creating a writhing inferno spanning more than a mile. The other armies unleashed similar attacks, and the incoming cascade was stopped in its tracks.

The cursed ground was rapidly withering away, but Zac's eyes thinned upon seeing hundreds of huge shadows in the smoke. Hulking figures soon emerged, their heavy steps suffocating the lingering effects of the War Machines. Each was dozens of meters tall and teeming with energy.

These goliaths were wrought from the dense tendrils of Heart Curses, but these creatures differed from the cultists who chose to enter a berserk state. The complex patterns covering their fleshy appendages exposed where these miscreations came from—The Chapter of Hallowed Flesh, one of the seven core units of the Kan'Tanu.

Each chapter was the equivalent of a powerful C-grade empire, and their elites used higher-quality Heart Curses. They also possessed methods to utilize the parasites beyond cultivation accelerators and double-edged berserking methods. Hallowed Flesh focused on the physical manifestation of the Heart Curses, using sacrifices and rituals to replace their bodies or create constructs to fight for them.

Zac couldn't tell which of the two the lumbering creatures were, but their energy levels were shocking. They were like mobile Array Towers, shooting

thousands of tendrils toward the advancing line of alliance soldiers. The goretide was reborn with redoubled ferocity through their appearance. A bloodthirsty growl escaped from [Verun's Bite] as Zac gripped its handle tighter, while a savage smile spread across his face.

These enemies were completely different from the uncoordinated and ill-trained war slaves who weren't good for much else than human wave tactics. It was the kind of enemy he had worked so hard to prepare his men for.

They were ready.