

## The Fall 1038

### [Chapter 1038 - One by Nine](#)

Zac only caught a glimpse of the seal before he was back in his own body, where he was greeted by a groan as Kruta finally stirred. Then, the barbarian shot to his feet, eyes wide as he looked for threats. None remained, and Valsa's body had fully dissipated already, so Kruta turned to Zac with a confused look plastered on his face.

"You're up," Zac smiled.

"Uh," Kruta said as he looked around. "Did I beat that wench?"

"Something like that," Zac laughed, but his thoughts were still on that seal.

Who would have thought that one of Valsa's followers held an outer court seal? Had they ambushed another guest in the same manner as him? Perhaps a trial run using one of her followers before getting the real thing? The seal's appearance made him worry for Catheya and Ogras for a second, but the unclaimed seal thankfully belonged neither to the Hollow nor Daedalian Courts.

It belonged to the final court yet not within his cycle; the Indomitable Court.

"Wait, when did I get healed?" Kruta suddenly said as he looked down at his fully-restored body.

"What's going on?"

Zac briefly recounted what had just happened, though he skipped the System's entry or the matters regarding his bloodline.

"Those imperials have always been shameless," Kruta sighed. "But to think she actually summoned Vastermal the Benevolent."

"Didn't seem that benevolent to me," Zac muttered.

"The era of the previous Emperor was very turbulent. The Planur Dynasty waged a series of ruthless wars, both as aggressor and defender. It reached a point where Vul'Zerdo Planur was called the Blood Emperor," Kruta shrugged. "When Emperor Vastermal took the throne, he donned the epithet of benevolence to indicate the empire's future direction. And things have been relatively stable under his rule."

Zac nodded, though he knew managing the Planur Dynasty had nothing to do with Vastermal. That job was left to the younger generations. The Supremacies only bothered with the titles because they brought tangible benefits; faith. Ancient factions' A-grade Emperors and Sect Leaders were essentially gods lording over their domains. That gathered Faith Energy, which was apparently quite useful even to the top dogs of the Multiverse.

"Still, can't believe the big boss himself came down to heal me," Kruta grinned. "I guess Kruta the Great is too handsome to stay down for long. I must be fated for greatness."

"Fated..." Zac muttered as he thoughtfully looked at his companion.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Kruta shuddered. "Giving me the creeps."

"You have a decision to make," Zac slowly said. "A decision that will have a great impact on your future."

"What?" Kruta said, his expression sobering upon hearing Zac's words. "Is it related to the imperials?"

"Both yes and no," Zac said, collecting his thoughts. "Something big is happening on the outside, something that has made many of the peak factions stir. A small part of that struggle has been turned into a trial for the younger generation. It starts in three years, where the cut-off point is 100 years of age. Valsa targeted me because I have one of the tickets to that trial."

"Why did you suddenly decide to tell me this?" Kruta asked.

"Because it turns out one of her followers carried a ticket as well. It's currently left where we first fought Valsa. No one has found it yet, but it's just a matter of time," Zac said. "You have to decide whether you want to seize the opportunity."

"A trial important enough to have an imperial emperor barge into this place," Kruta mused. "What can you tell me?"

"I'm not sure if I should divulge the event's origin, but it has made the ancient factions go mad. The Seventh Heaven is already involved, and the First Heaven tried to sneak in by killing other guests and me. More peak factions beyond the Imperials are also involved, but I don't know who. One thing's for sure; the dangers will be far beyond the Red Zones, and it'll be crawling with people like Valsa. Powerful factions will send their most talented people."

Kruta's eyes glimmered with desire and battle lust, but he quickly reined himself in. "Will that mean I'd compete with you for the inheritance? What kind of trial is it?"

"No one knows what will happen inside, but there are indications that teams will be formed. I'm not aiming for the main prize. Some real monsters will join the contest; I'll let the peak factions fight it out over the inheritance. I plan to grab some random goodies before escaping with my life."

Kruta's eyes lit up at that. "Good! I knew I made the right decision grabbing onto your thigh!"

"So you're in?" Zac smiled.

"When has Kruta the Great ever shied from some danger?!" Kruta said, grandly slapping his chest.

"What are we waiting for?! Let's go!"

Zac nodded, and the two stood before the seal five minutes later. It looked exactly the same as in the vision. It was a replica of the seal of the Indomitable Court made out of pure energy. Zac guessed only the unused fragments would be found in things like rocks or statuettes, while those seized through battle would be more obvious.

The ripples it released were filled with the truth of the Lost Plane, or rather of Ultom. It didn't hold as much energy as the unused seals, but it was much more than Zac expected. It was almost certain to provide Kruta with an epiphany.

"This..." Kruta said hesitantly as he looked at the floating seal. "I've never seen energy like this before. It's not Dao; it's... I don't know what."

"It's unique," Zac nodded. "Just joining the trial is an opportunity in itself. It'll give you a powerful epiphany. It can't help with your Dao, but it'll provide a moment of utmost clarity and comprehension. It can be used for all kinds of things, from upgrading your Blueprint to techniques and manuals. The sky's the limit."

"Anything?" Kruta said.

"It's how I came up with my trickster core, as you call it," Zac smiled.

"Well, I don't know if I want such a weird Cosmic Core, but there are a few things I've been wracking my brain over," Kruta muttered. "Alright, here I go."

Zac stepped back as Kruta walked over to the seal. He touched it, and it was gone in a flash of light. Kruta's eyes closed, and he stood immovable for over ten minutes. Zac looked on, feeling a pang of desire as he felt Ultom's aura drain from the area. That blissful state of total comprehension was almost like a drug. Even a weakened seal would have to be far beyond what the tainted Lake Water provided.

What would happen if he claimed outer court seals during the war? Could he claim the insights but discard the ticket?

Eventually, Kruta's eyes opened, and he looked at Zac in shock.

"This... this..." Kruta said. "Not even the greatest tribes can provide inspiration at this level. I doubt even the Imperials can."

"Yeah, it's something else," Zac agreed.

"Indomitable Court," Kruta said, his eyes veritably burning. "You're really my good brother!"

Zac was happy he could provide Kruta with the opportunity, and not just because the Indomitable Court was the only missing piece to his quest. Finding companions you could trust with your life was difficult, but Kruta had proven his mettle inside the Stand of Saeward.

"Can you tell me what's going on now that I'm tied to your chariot?" Kruta grinned.

The phrasing piqued Zac's curiosity, and he opened his Quest Screen.

One by Nine (Unique, Inheritance): Form a full cycle of Sealbearers. Reward: Entry to the Left Imperial Palace (9/9) [1343 days] (COMPLETE)

[NOTE: Multiple cycles can be formed.]

Zac nodded with satisfaction as he closed the status screen. With Kruta and the Indomitable Court, he had a full set with some spares. When he first saw the requirements, he wondered how he'd ever complete the quest. Now, it didn't seem impossible to form a second cycle through the war.

With that out of the way, Zac explained the broad strokes to Kruta as he had to his followers and the theories he and Ogras had come up with so far.

"You weren't kidding," Kruta eventually exhaled. "Left Imperial Palace of the Limitless Empire? An Eternal Heritage that's also a pillar of the Ruthless Heavens?"

"Are you okay?" Zac asked.

"If I'm okay?" Kruta said, an almost deranged grin spreading across his face. "This is the kind of opportunity that all Cultivators dream of. The kind of opportunity that can completely reforge one's fate and leave a mark on history."

"It'll be extremely dangerous," Zac commented.

"So what?!" Kruta roared as his aura exploded toward the sky. "I'd rather die aiming for greatness than live a safe but ignoble life! Besides, let the others fight for the Eternal Heritage! I just want the soup!"

Zac nodded in agreement. You'd never reach the peak without putting it all on the line. That was a fundamental truth of the Multiverse, to the point it was hard-wired into the System itself. And even if he wanted his friends and followers to stay safe, they had the right to take a chance on themselves in their pursuit of the Dao.

"What now?" Kruta said, his surging momentum causing the haze around them to stir. "How do I find the other pieces?"

"Ah," Zac said, his eyes glazing over.

Only then did Zac realize the logistical issue of adding a follower from the other side of the Multiverse. Kruta belonged to the Redleaf Tribe of the Everwind Steppes, which was actually a vast region on a B-grade continent. Apparently, the steppes were the size of a large C-grade continent, far larger than any frontier continent, which was almost impossible for Zac to comprehend.

Crossing the steppes from one side to the other would take a Hegemon centuries, if they even survived the journey. The region was filled with dangerous beasts; even Beast Emperors couldn't be considered too rare. There were also tens of thousands of danger zones, odd anomalies created by the tremendous energies and Daos released by a B-grade world.

More importantly, the Everwind Steppes' continent was extremely far from Zecia.

Directions were iffy with the confusing dimensional composition of the Multiverse, but the steppes and the Seven Empires could be considered on the "other side." The distance between Zecia and the Undead Empire was actually much shorter between the Everwind Steppes and the Undead Empire.

Kruta getting to Zecia was incredibly difficult, and even his Autarch elders would be hard-pressed to accomplish that feat. The cost alone would be staggering. And it wasn't even a matter of resources and willingness. You needed connections to cross such vast swathes of space. Zac doubted that a B-grade tribe could cross multiple Multiversal quadrants and Empires, at least not in a few years.

"What's going on?" Kruta said, noticing Zac's silence.

"Honestly, I'm not sure you need them to enter the inheritance," Zac said. "Though getting the full seal is obviously much better."

Zac wasn't just making things up. His followers getting just one piece of the seals was enough for his quest to progress. With Kruta, he'd already formed a cycle, even if no one had a full seal. He and Ogras believed a fragment would be enough to enter, but a full seal would be required to enter the main parts and trials.

"But I won't find them here," Kruta surmised, his eyes glimmering with understanding. "You said you're from the Frontier."

"The exact location of the inheritance is still unknown, but it's probably at the edge of my home Sector and the Endless Storm," Zac said. "The whole Sector is sealed, and only Monarchs and lower can enter. Representatives from the Multiverse Heartlands are currently turning the place upside-down in search of seal fragments."

"I can't believe the kind of luck you have," Kruta said, looking at Zac with wonderment. "One of the greatest inheritances of the Limitless Empire popped up in your backyard?"

Zac wryly smiled. He wondered what Kruta would think if he heard it wasn't a coincidence. According to the Void Priestess, Ultom had picked him as an inheritor. Without the System's interference, there wouldn't have been a contest for seals or any trials.

That alone filled Zac with mixed emotions. It felt a bit like he'd been robbed of his good fortune, while at the same time feeling he was benefitting from someone else's hard work. He ultimately hadn't done anything to deserve the attention of the Left Imperial Palace. His mother's clan had somehow found and stolen the bloodline of the Void Emperor for their experiments.

Zac wasn't a true descendant, and he sometimes felt like a thief and an impostor. It was another example of his fate being decided by things outside his control. Ultimately, he'd reached the same conclusion as he had with the Remnants and the System's interference. He wasn't in a position to say no to opportunities and power just because he didn't like how he got them.

"Still, that's a problem," Kruta frowned. "Just leaving the Raulfi Continent without going through the Heavens is almost impossible. Me reaching the Frontier? I can't see a way. Even if my elders tried to plot a path with the help of porters, I fear the Imperial Families would catch wind of it. If they're even sending people into places like the Perennial Vastness in search of tickets, they're looking high and low."

Zac slowly nodded, sighing with regret. But then it hit him. Didn't he know someone who might be able to help?

"Have you heard of the Tayn Family or Dynasty?" Zac said. "They should be pretty famous."

He initially hadn't thought of this option because of the rules governing the Perennial Vastness, but that had completely changed now that he and Kruta's confidentiality seals only affected the details of the realm itself.

"Pretty famous? That's the understatement of the century," Kruta guffawed. "Those lunat—"

"Stop," Zac said with a wave of his hand. "I don't want to know."

"Ah?" Kruta said, looking at Zac with confusion. "Then why did you bring it up?"

Zac sighed. He knew he wasn't being rational, but he really didn't want to know the details of Iz's background. Zac knew she came from a terrifying background; her unfathomable strength alone was proof of that. Still, he felt something would change with their relationship when he learned the details of her family. He wanted to hold onto the simple friendship he'd formed with Iz as long as possible, even if he was sticking his head in the sand.

"It's complicated," Zac said. "Suffice to say, I'm friends with Iz Tayn. She's part of the younger generation of that faction."

Kruta's expression told him that the clarification was entirely superfluous and that he absolutely knew who Iz was, but Zac powered on.

"If you can contact Iz and mention my name, they might help ferry you over to the Frontier. They might not, though, or demand something in return. I don't know. I don't think Iz would mind, but I haven't really dealt with anyone else in her family."

"You're friends with Iz Tayn?" Kruta said, looking at Zac like he'd suddenly grown three heads and six arms. "And you're not messing with me? Is this some test to have those lun— ahem. To have the esteemed Tayns test my fate?"

"Do I look that bored?" Zac said with a roll of his eyes. "Didn't you just say you'd die a thousand deaths in pursuit of greatness?"

"Not much greatness in getting your whole tribe turned into ash," Kruta muttered, but he took a steadying breath. "Fine! I'll have my elder convey the message when I return. I'll mention your name front, back, and center. If it fails, I'll just see you inside the trial."

"Sure," Zac smiled.

"So I guess we're done here?" Kruta said. "I can't believe that bastard extracted all the spirituality from the puppets. Not even the champions are worth their weight as scrap now."

"I know," Zac said, feeling his intestines twist at the loss. Then he remembered Sendor's words and looked at Kruta hopefully. "Do you know how to open Valsa's spatial ring without triggering any seals or traps?"

Kruta answered with a resounding laugh, dashing that idea.

"Never mind," Zac sighed. "Well, there's at least some good stuff in the castle."

Kruta nodded, but Zac had one more thing to do before returning. He swept through the battlefield, looting the fallen warriors. He didn't expect a bunch of Deathsworn to carry any wealth worth mentioning; he was more interested in their bodies. Six of the bodies were damaged to the point he couldn't motivate the expenditure of Creation Energy, but the others would become the next generation of Einherjar's elites.

There was a whisper of caution in the back of his head, of the danger of using bodies with such a troublesome providence. But he had already made the decision. He needed citizens and believed in Sendor's ability to thoroughly erase any karmic threads upon exiting the Cosmic Gallery. If anything, his confidence had only increased after seeing Sendor toy with the Planur Supremacy.

"What?" Zac said when seeing Kruta's odd look.

"It's easy to forget you're also a Draugr when you walk around in your human form," Kruta said as Zac stowed the final body into his Corpse Sack. "Doesn't it feel weird, raising your enemies to fight for you?"

"Not really," Zac said after some thought. "I guess it would have been awkward if they retained their memories. The Revenants who awaken don't mind either. After all, my conflict with these people allowed them to be born. Besides, aren't you kind of the same, summoning the ghost of your ancestor to help you out?"

"That's different!" Kruta rejected, but his brows slowly scrunched together in thought. "That's... Huh... Am I actually a Necromancer?"

"I have some Lich techniques if you want them," Zac laughed, and they set course for Saeward's Castle. "Let's see if there are any goodies left."