

The Fall 229

Chapter 229: The Great Redeemer

The man standing next to the crater was clearly the same as the one in the sky earlier, though there were some minute differences. The normal-sized one felt more lifelike, whereas the huge avatar that tried to crush the whole summit might as well have been a mask or statue.

The mysterious briefly man scrutinized the surroundings until his eyes met Zac's. It was as though a lightning bolt went through Zac's mind when he met the stare, and it truly felt like he would perish if he held eye contact.

He quickly looked away, and thoughts of fleeing were quickly filling his mind. But something stopped him. The aura this man emitted was on the same tier as that of Greatest, and if he truly was here there was nothing he could do. His life and death weren't in his hands any longer.

But at the same time, they were in an enclosed space for a system-organized treasure hunt. He didn't believe people even of that level of power would be able to break into a place like this. The rules of a System-sanctioned mystic realm were inviolable.

If there were attribute- or grade-limiters in place then there was nothing that could be done. Not even an A-ranked old monster could break in as far as Zac understood. That meant that the man in front of him might just be a powerless illusion and that the towering aura was just empty blustering. That would also explain why he only stood there. Zac grit his teeth with determination.

A huge fractal edge fell straight toward Salvation, who fearfully looked up at the edge as he hastily gathered the last remnants of his silver energies to produce a feeble defense. But Zac knew that small defense wouldn't stop his assault as his attack was powered by the Dao of Sharpness and his very lifeforce.

But suddenly the man simply pointed a finger at the incoming attack, and it felt as though all life was drained out of his body as the fractal edge disintegrated from some unseen force.

"Insolence," the man said with a melodic voice, and Zac couldn't help but cough up blood as he fell back, unable to stand up again.

"It's true. I am not here in person, I am just an imprint. But my very existence is enough to ward off some baby cultivators," the man continued as he looked down at Zac with disdain in his eyes.

It was clear though that the man was not truly there, since whatever the man did to stop Zac's approach had drained the imprint enough to make him transparent. Zac knew that he would perhaps only be able to stop one more attack, but his body wouldn't listen when he tried to command it to move.

"Are you my inheritor? Disappointing. This is my only intervention," the man sighed as he looked down at the crumpled form of Salvation, but the next moment he looked over at the space on the opposite of the crater.

He didn't say anything, only disdainfully snorted, but immediately after a pale-faced Thea emerged from nowhere coughing out blood, a slender sword in her hand. It looked like she had tried to assassinate Salvation unseen, but she couldn't escape the gaze of Salvation's protector.

"This unworthy one thanks you, Great Lord!" Salvation feebly coughed as he grasped his Cosmos Sack in his hand. "I will continue your bidding."

The next moment he started fading away, but Zac was unwilling to give in to the imprint. He summoned strength he didn't know he had, and with a roar threw [Verun's Bite] at Salvation. He had no energy left to summon any skill, and could only pin his hopes to non-magical means.

Unfortunately, Zac was completely spent, and his aim was slightly off. The axe had quite a bit of force as it hurtled toward Salvation, but it was flying too low to hit anything lethal. But it was still a throw from someone possessing over three hundred Strength, and Salvation desperately swirled to avoid the incoming edge.

A muffled groan escaped Salvation's mouth as the axe tore through the man's wrist and cut off his right hand along with the Cosmic Sack that fell down on the ground. Zac could only shake his head in disappointment, and the next moment Salvation winked out of existence.

The last thing Zac saw of Salvation was two eyes that burned with madness and vengeance. The pouch that had just fallen turned into motes of light and flew into Zac's Cosmos Sack.

The whole thing had happened in an instant, and The Redeemer was unable or unwilling to lend any further assistance to Salvation, and he instead only gazed up into the sky with some anticipation in his face. Zac knew the imprint was running out of time and hoped to gain at least some information before it disappeared.

"Who are you? Are you from the Church of Everlasting Dao?" Zac coughed.

Zac's words brought back the attention of the quickly fading form.

"I am not one of those filthy body-peddlers. Their path toward immortality is a dead end, an empty pit of despair. I sense that my true body is still alive, which means that eons of planning are soon coming to fruition. We will meet again, little defier," he said with a small smile as he finally was reduced to just motes of light.

Zac didn't dare move for a few seconds even after the man disappeared, but soon he ardously tried to get over to Thea. His vision was swimming, but he knew they couldn't stay here. But his body was completely spent, and he helplessly was lying down on the ground. It was Thea instead who got up to her feet, fearfully looking over at the spot where the man once stood as she walked over to Zac.

"Who the hell was that?" she muttered, perhaps to herself or perhaps as a question to Zac.

"Definitely not someone from Earth," Zac said with a frown. "He was at least a D-Grade powerhouse, likely higher."

"I've read that powerful people could imprint treasures with their very essence. Somehow Salvation must have gotten his hands on such a treasure. But I don't understand how. It's extremely arduous to make such an imprint because you need to cut off a piece of your soul to leave the imprint. It's rarely done," Thea explained.

"They are usually only awarded to direct disciples and are extremely rare treasures. It's not something the system awards either," she continued.

"Salvation kept talking about some Great Redeemer," Zac said, trying to keep his scattered mind focused. "Perhaps that was him. He might have gotten his hands on an inheritance or something. That kind of treasure sounds like something that might be left to an inheritor."

"That's impossible. This is a new world, there are no inheritances here," Thea said with a shake of her head.

Zac scratched his face for a couple of seconds before he coughed.

"Well, it's not completely impossible. I have a couple of them as well, got them as a reward," he explained, his voice getting lower and lower as the intensity from Thea's glare increased. "And more importantly that man called Salvation his inheritor."

She didn't say anything only gave an annoyed huff as she surveyed the area before pulling Zac to his feet.

"I think we need to go," she said. "The palace is destroyed, and people from all surrounding mountains should have seen the battle. None of us is in any condition to fight another battle."

Zac was about to agree, but suddenly his vision turned slanted. It took a bit for his muddled mind to realize that he had fallen over, which made him finally realize just how bad his condition was. That last strike had used up most of his remaining lifeforce, and when it was destroyed it got even worse.

"Don't put my body into a Cosmos Sack," was all that Zac could say before his vision turned black.

An unknown amount of time later that Zac woke up with a cough, his eyes straining to adjust as he slowly opened them. He saw that he had been moved after all as he was inside what looked to be the ruins of some of the structures closer to the foot of a mountain.

However, he realized that his fears had been true, as his vision had once again turned into that of his Draugr-form. His feeling only worsened when he realized that he was tied up to the point that he was barely able to move, and the bindings were actually strong enough to keep him secured.

"So you're up," Thea's voice sounded from behind, but Zac wasn't even able to turn over.

"Thanks for carrying me away. So, uh, why have you tied me up?" Zac asked, trying to make his voice sound as warm and alive as possible.

There was no response for a few seconds until a light shuffle could be heard as Thea entered his field of vision. She looked to be mostly fine apart from being slightly pale, but she had a frown on her face as she scrutinized Zac from some distance.

Zac knew very well just how different he looked at this current form, particularly his pitch-black eyes that looked like portals to the abyss.

"I am not an undead, I am still Zac," Zac said.

"You sure look like an undead, and you're deathly cold to the touch," she said with an unconvinced face.

“Well, it’s a long story, but through a few deadly encounters, I found a way to get two lives. I can somewhat freely swap between my two forms, but sometimes the change is forced upon me,” Zac said.

“Like dying,” Thea said with a blank face.

“Well, yes, that would do the trick,” Zac coughed.

“So you are immortal?” she probed.

“I don’t think so?” Zac hesitantly said. “It’s not like I’d survive getting my head cut off.”

The moment the words left his mouth he regretted it, as Thea’s eyes thinned as she pointedly stared at his exposed throat. However, nothing happened as the seconds passed, and Zac could finally breathe easy again.

But soon Thea spoke up, and he couldn't help but get a bit antsy again.

“You should understand my position. It is already clear that Salvation is under the thumb of some alien influence, bringing a great threat to Earth. Now I find out that the top ranker is an undead when there’s an undead Incursion on earth that has ravaged a good deal of Asia,” she said with an even stare.

“What you said might be true, but I need to ask some questions to ascertain the veracity of your claim,” she continued.

From there on she kept asking him various questions that only he would know, such as the content of their explorations during the hunt, or their shared experiences at the Auction earlier. However, after a while the nature of the questions started to change.

“How old were you when you stopped wetting the bed?” she suddenly asked.

“What? No Idea, three perhaps?” Zac answered with a perplexed face.

“How many girlfriends do you have, and how do you rank them?” she continued without missing a beat.

“Rank them? What are you talking about? I am single,” Zac answered with an exasperated voice.

“That’s not what our intelligence indicates,” Thea retorted.

“Are you talking about Hannah? We broke up some time ago,” Zac said but frowned when he saw her mouth quirking slightly upward. “Wait, are you messing with me?”

The next moment the ropes around him were released, and he was free again. However, he shot a glare at Thea who innocuously looked back at him as he stretched his sore body.

“We need to get going, we’re still somewhat close to the scene of the battle,” Thea said without commenting the earlier line of questioning.

Zac only snorted but he was quick to follow behind her. He sensed that his Core wasn’t filled at the moment, making it a risky venture to turn back again. Instead, he simply donned a cloak that covered his head that would hide his identity until he could turn back again.

The two kept moving as soon as Zac was freed by Thea since they were still pretty close to the scene of the battle. They weren't worried about the average cultivators, but rather the top names on the ladders, such as the Dominators and the Medhin Emperor.

Their battle with Salvation might as well have been a blaring sign showing half the mountainous region where top powerhouses were, and if the E-Ranked evolved had done any sort of reconnaissance they should know that there were only three E-Rankers present at the hunt.

However, it didn't mean they stopped their treasure hunt just because they wanted to avoid any further battle for the time being. However, they decided to avoid the top tier palaces in favor of looting the high tier sites that were not quite as conspicuous.

But they soon learned that the competition for these mountains was much harsher compared to the top-tiered ones that were guarded by extremely powerful arrays. Two out of the three mountains they visited during the day had already been looted, and it was only thanks to Thea's observation skills that they managed to find any treasures at all.

She had managed to at least find a few hidden stashes that contained decent returns, but it was far worse than the usual haul they had during the day. Thea had already lost two positions, but Zac had soared up to the first position on the Gatherer ladder, thanks to looting Salvation.