

The Fall 323

Chapter 323: Sowing Grudges

Even though Zac was placed face to face with the largest threat to Earth he didn't panic. The reason was that The Great Redeemer was obviously not there in person. With his hazy appearance it was clear it was a projection or a splinter of his soul like the one inside Salvation's protective talisman. He had already survived a hologram of this man before, and that was when he was far weaker than now.

But after observing the man for a second Zac felt that the former was more likely than the latter. While the man who appeared from destroying the token was clearly The Great Redeemer, so was it also clear that he looked a lot older than the man Zac saw during the hunt.

The version of the Redeemer that saved Salvation looked to be around Zac's own age or even younger, a man in the prime of his life. But the figure currently glaring at Zac and Ogras was a lot older, looking like someone in his fifties or sixties. That wasn't the only difference as a large scar ran across his face, and the wound contained some sort of sinister energy. It seemed like the result of an extremely powerful attack, one that couldn't be easily healed.

Zac knew there was only one reason that a cultivator would look this old. There was a large difference to how aging worked with cultivators compared to mortals. Most of one's lifespan was spent looking pretty young and when you evolved further you gained enough control to change one's apparent age without using any skill. At the same time, you would be at peak physical capacity all the while.

It was only when one was truly closing in on the end of one's lifespan would one begin to age physically, and most races even lost attributes as the body degraded. The undead was one exception to this rule, as they became stronger as they lost their sanity due to the degradation in their minds.

That meant that the Great Redeemer was nearing the end of his life, and might be dead in just a hundred years unless he managed to break through his current bottleneck and improve his race once again. It was no wonder he had concocted such a cumbersome method to harvest new worlds that took thousands of years; he was out of options and running out of time.

"The two of you are not mine, and you have broken my beacon," the Great Redeemer said with a raspy voice as he looked back and forth between Zac and Ogras. "It looks like you know of my grand design."

Zac was about to answer, but Ogras quickly motioned for him to be quiet as a muzzle of shadows appeared around his mouth.

"Clever child. A bit unusual for your race," the man snickered with a sinister light in his eyes. "But it will not be enough. Those who try to cut my lifeline will inevitably be condemned to a lifetime of suffering. If I cannot find you now then I will find you a hundred years later."

The next moment the projection disappeared, leaving the two alone by the Mystic Realm.

"That was close," the demon muttered as he put away Salvation again.

"Why didn't you want me to speak with him?" Zac asked.

"A precaution, and it looks like I was right. That man was truly here in person this time, who knows what means he possesses," the demon explained. "He obviously has some insight into Karma, and I don't

think he would do something so taxing as to project himself all the way here without reason. He was likely trying to form a new Karmic connection with us."

Understanding dawned in Zac's eyes, and he once again felt lucky to have the demon by his side.

"What about his threat? Do you really think he will try to find us in a hundred years?" Zac asked with some skepticism. "Even if we lose our protection from the System we wouldn't be that easy to find in the multiverse."

"Hmm," Ogras mused. "Probably?"

"What, really? He would be that petty?" Zac blurted.

"Well, he seems to be at the end of his line. If he fails his promotion because of us he might as well kill us as revenge before he passes on, right? And if he manages to evolve in spite of us he might still go for us to nip any potential revenge in the bud, or just because he can," Ogras said. "It's pretty common. Keeping grudges in one's heart is detrimental to concentration and can even negatively impact one's cultivation. And he does not look like the person who will just let go of his grudges."

Zac remembered the crystal about Galvarion he read in Thea's Library. That man had been the same. The moment he broke through to the next stage he would start a round of revenge against everyone that had slighted him while he was weak. Perhaps it was not only due to being unforgiving but also to clear his mind of any demons that might haunt him as he pushed toward new heights.

"So even if we defeat the Dominators he will still be a threat?" Zac asked.

"There is always a threat," Ogras laughed. "If not him then some other bastard that either has what you need or needs what you have. That is what it is to be alive. But it would at least buy us 100 years to get stronger. Don't dwell too much on it."

"You're right," Zac nodded, "No point in taking his words to heart when there's a century to go."

"Well sure, but it might also be another ploy by him. Why would he expose his plans like that like some second-rate villain? He seems more calculating than that. Perhaps he wants us to obsess about the looming threat of his arrival to the point that we actually form a connection with him that way," Ogras said.

"Is that even possible?" Zac asked after a brief pause.

"No idea, Karmic Cultivators are pretty secretive about what they can and cannot do. It's best to focus on the tasks at hand anyway. What will be will be," Ogras said and walked over to the chest with the array flags. "For now let's squeeze that asshole's disciple for all benefits we can get."

"I've asked my sister to look into a way of getting the Origin Dao inside the fractal. She should arrive when the gate is stabilized. If you're in the area help her out if you're able to," Zac said, drawing a surprised look from the demon.

"What does that lass know about arrays? She's an Elemental Mage," he said with confusion.

“She’s pretty good with energy control and she has started looking into inscriptions and arrays lately. Besides, we don’t have any other experts in that area, and I trust her. Unless you want me to ask around with the Tal-Eladar?” Zac explained.

“Don’t bring those beasts into the mix. We should keep the Origin Dao for a small circle to maximize our gains,” Ogras said.

Zac snorted, knowing he was mostly thinking about his own benefits. However, he did agree with keeping the Dao for a small group. He did not know the effect of the Origin Dao, but he didn’t want to dilute it if it was anything like the Dao impartment he got from Yrial.

“Well, I’ll help the girl out as best as I can while I look into what might be hiding inside this place,” Ogras said as he looked at the crack in the air in the distance. “When are you leaving?”

“My arm is mostly fine, but I need at least another day to get in fighting condition,” Zac said before he left the demon to set up the array.

Zac spent the next day catching up on everything that had happened while he had fought the Incursions and Salvations while he planned his foray into the underworld. The war with the Zombie hordes was proceeding as expected, but it was clear that the Undead Empire did not care about the braindead Zombies they unleashed on the world.

It seemed as though there were surprisingly few elite zombies, and foreign undead like the Corpse Golems and specters were nowhere in sight. Ilvere posited in a report that he believed that the Undead Empire was simply using the hordes as sacrifices to spread Miasma.

Every place they passed essentially turned into a Dead Zone, increasing the area that was under their control. It wouldn’t surprise Zac if they started expanding in other directions as well now that the threat of the monastery with their purifying powers was gone. Zac frowned as he read the reports, once again feeling how strapped for time they were.

Emily had already caused a storm in Port Atwood to get the expedition to the underworld ready at the fastest speed, and while she held no official position most knew that she lived in the restricted area. So many took an order from her as an order from Zac himself, apart from the true core of Port Atwood. Zac didn’t bother stopping it since it was the first and only time she had borrowed his authority like this, and her orders were in line with his wishes.

Both soldiers and non-combat classes stood at the ready to quickly set up a base camp in the underworld. It would both extract the riches of the area while acting as a stronghold in the fight against the underworld incursion. Since everything was dealt with at the home front Zac instead headed over to the Tal-Eladar to get some help.

He might be enough to conquer the Incursion alone, but they didn’t know exactly how strong the invaders were. Besides, it had proven extremely effective to have two powerhouses in the strike squad. Zac couldn’t protect everyone all the time, and Ogras had been instrumental in keeping casualties at the minimum.

A maid immediately led Zac to a sprawling mansion when Zac arrived through the teleporter, which was Verana’s private manor. The beast tamer sat and enjoyed the breeze as she had Grub in her lap while

Lulu lay snoozing to the side. When the fat little beast noticed Zac's arrival it roused itself and made a gurgling sound that he supposed was meant to be threatening.

"What brings young master here today?" Verana asked as she petted Grub to calm him down. "I heard about your battle with the one called Salvation. Is that demon talking you into removing the competition before the war is even won?"

"The integration turned Salvation crazy. He killed over a million of our own people before I stopped him," Zac explained.

He still hadn't told her about the looming threat of the Great Redeemer, but he felt that it still wasn't time to divulge that. That topic would instead be broached when the situation on Earth had stabilized somewhat.

"More importantly, I require your assistance," Zac added.

"We stayed behind as to set the foundation of a mutually beneficial cooperation between our two forces," Verana said with a frown. "We are not soldiers you can simply send to the front line."

Zac rolled his eyes before he explained the situation with the underworld, making sure to divulge the massive wealth in passing.

"While we might not be soldiers we are also Tel-Eladar. We can't stand for innocent people getting slaughtered like that. We will join your assault on the fire golems," Verana nodded, before quickly adding. "As for the resources that might fall under your control, we of course expect a share equal to the help we provided."

"Of course," Zac snorted.

It looked like that one thing that tied most people together was the love of shiny things. After Verana agreed to accompany Zac she asked her maid to gather twenty soldiers to join. Since battle would likely take place in tunnels and slightly cramped spaces they didn't feel fielding a large army was the best option. Instead, they would stay with the tactic of utilizing small elite squads.

But the Tal-Eladar also insisted on bringing a contingent of non-combat classes to eke out their own piece of the underworld. The demons and Calrin had already prepared similarity in addition to the people that Emily gathered, so Zac didn't stop Verana from doing the same.

He would still be in control of the outpost and the teleporter above-ground, and he could easily have it act as a toll booth for any and all resources that flowed from the underworld back to this continent.

Besides ironing out the details of their cooperation Zac also had Verana sign the same type of agreement that all others of the strike force had already agreed upon. He had already decided that he would take this trip in his undead form unless the underworld incursion proved too powerful. He wanted to be as time-efficient as possible, and he wanted to gain some levels to his Undying Bulwark Class.

He had already planned a few things out since it would be too troublesome to force everyone to sign an agreement. Instead of using the easily recognizable [Verun's Bite] he would use the unassuming Spirit Tool Sword from the hunt along with his shield while changing his appearance with [Thousand Faces].

Only the core people who went would know his real identity, while the rest would know him as another alien expert that he took under his wing. Between the different skills, face, and aura there should be no one who was able to glean his true identity.

Divulging his second class after Verana was sworn to secrecy went about as expected with her almost keeping over in shock. Interestingly enough she seemed equally annoyed as Ogras about his unique advantages.

“No wonder Tylia has looked constipated since returning. She hates keeping secrets,” Verana muttered. “I can’t believe you possess two races. Teaming up with you might be my biggest contribution to the family ever.”

“That’s nice, I guess,” Zac shrugged.

“So what should we call you when you play undead?” Verana asked, pulling herself together.

“Uh...” Zac said, blanking out.

“Why not something simple, like Mr. Black?” Verana proposed.