

The Fall 358

Chapter 358: Catharsis

Zac looked down at the unmoving form of Alea. He had seen her getting attacked by the group of wraiths while he stood on the flying disk, unable to do anything to save her. The feeling of impotence had quickly turned into rage. But his smoldering rage was finally overcome by a sense of panic as he saw her close her eyes in his arms. His mind was a mess, and he didn't know what to do.

"Alea? Alea!" he said with horror, before quickly turning to Sui. "Can you heal her?"

Zac didn't understand why Alea and Sui were together, as she was on the other side of the Dead Zone the last time he saw her. But right now wasn't the time to ask.

"She... Her soul is wounded, almost to the point of crumbling altogether," Sui said, not daring to meet Zac's burning gaze. "It's beyond my power to heal something like this. I am sorry."

Zac took a deep breath to calm down and collect his thoughts. He knew just how terrible wounds to the soul was. He remembered the small wound he got when he tried to clash with the Splinter of Oblivion. It had almost killed him, and that was nothing compared to the soul failing altogether. But he refused to give up like that.

"Can you keep her stable for now?" Zac asked.

"I... My power is limited..." Sui hesitantly said.

Zac immediately took out most of his Divine Crystals, all of them E-Grade. The miasmic haze in the area was immediately pushed away, replaced with a refreshing atmosphere. Even the furrowed brows of the unconscious Alea smoothed out slightly, indicating that the crystals helped a bit at least.

"How is she?" a voice asked from behind, and Zac looked over to see Ogras standing behind him, the metal casing around his missing arm taken off, allowing a large tentacle shadow slither around the area.

"Her soul's wounded, it's bad," Zac sighed.

"Shit," Ogras spat and looked up in the distance. "I'll go kill some dead things in the rear. You should send her back on the disk. Perhaps the blue one can get his hands on something to salvage the situation."

Zac perked up at the idea and immediately called for his treasure. It had essentially crashed into the ground after he jumped off it, but it was sturdy enough to take a hit or two. All the passengers were fine as well since all of them were powerful enough to easily jump off in time.

He wouldn't need the disk for the time being since he would have to lead the army back to the closest Teleporter to make sure there were no more losses. He quickly broke his connection to the disk after it arrived and called over the squad of Valkyries who arrived with him.

"Escort Sui and Alea back to Port Atwood as quickly as possible. Have Calrin get his hands on treasures that would help heal or at least stabilize her soul," Zac said.

He knew that it was far from certain that the Sky Gnome would be able to get his hands on a treasure that could heal a badly wounded soul. Healing the soul was far more complicated than healing a broken body, and the requirements on the pill were on another level entirely. There was one such item among the treasures Yrial had inside the trial, but he wouldn't be able to get back inside for a decade.

The lotus in his cultivation cave would perhaps be able to help as well, but it was still just a sapling and didn't generate any energy so far. It would be years before it grew to sufficient size, even if it was constantly nurtured by the Cosmic Water and the Nexus Vein.

"Wait, my people," Sui hesitantly said.

"I will clean out the undead and allow everyone to rest before returning to Port Atwood. We'll join you in a few days," Zac said before nodding at the Valkyries.

They immediately moved the Divine Crystals to form a bed on the desk, and gingerly placed Alea on top of them. Sui hesitated for a bit before she stepped on top of the disk as well.

"It seems I keep owing you more and more," Zac said with a tired smile as he looked at her.

"This is just what I should do, you do not owe me anything," Sui hurriedly said as she started

"Wait," a voice suddenly echoed from behind, and Zac turned over to see Tylia hurrying over.

Zac's eyes lit up when he saw the Tal-Eladar. He had forgotten that she wasn't a beast tamer like most of the people in her clan, but rather a healer. She differed from Sui who had a purifying class that was especially adept at healing Death-attuned wounds though. She was actually closer to his own attunement, having a class related to nature.

But even importantly, she had already evolved to E-Grade, and her means should be superior to Sui's.

"Can you help her?" Zac hurriedly asked as he indicated the Valkyries to not set out just yet.

Tylia sat down next to Sui and closed her eyes while her hand started to radiate a green light while touching Alea's forehead. The small purifier gawked at the unfamiliar form of the Tal-Eladar, but she didn't say anything. Zac didn't even dare to breathe loudly as Tylia performed her inspection, but his heart started to rattle when he saw her frown. A few seconds later she removed her hand with a shake of her head.

"I cannot heal her either I am afraid. I can only help keep the pieces of her mind together," Tylia explained.

"Is there nothing that can be done?" Zac desperately asked.

Tylia seemed to consider the question before a few seconds before answering.

"Well, luckily she's only F-Grade, so her soul is relatively small. It would be much harder if she had evolved already. A D-Grade healer should be able to slowly piece together her soul. A healing treasure that could mend souls would be even better," Tylia said. "It's just..."

"It's just what?" Zac pressed.

"I am not sure she'll even survive the trip back to Port Atwood. And even if we manage to keep her stable during the trip, then what? A treasure that can mend a fractured soul is not something you can get through normal channels," Tylia said.

"Please do what you can," Zac said with grit teeth. "If you can't find a means to heal her, try to stabilize her condition at least through any means necessary. I'll figure out a way to get a healer or a treasure."

Zac turned to the squad captain among the Valkyries who would take them back, and immediately transferred 200 million Nexus Coins to her. The woman's eyes widened in shock, but she quickly understood that it was to make sure Calrin had the resources to buy a treasure if it popped up. Zac nodded to the squad captain, who controlled the disk to fly away at top speed.

"Die!" a sudden shriek erupted from just a few meters away, and Zac looked over with confusion.

A ghoul that was just skin of bones were rushing toward him with a sword in hand, his eyes radiating endless madness and killing intent.

Zac frowned, unsure how an undead was able to make it all the way to the center of the army. His first instinct was that the undead was an assassin, but the ghoul seemed frail enough to topple over from a gust of wind. Zac's danger sense was also completely unresponsive. Still, just seeing an undead made his rage flare up again, and he immediately took out his axe again.

"Wang Fang!" another voice shouted from nearby. "Stop!"

The name sounded vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place it as he swung down his axe, its range increased with a fractal blade from [Chop]. The ghoul shrieked as he tried to defend from the defending strike, but he was completely helpless and was immediately bisected from the attack.

A trickle of Cosmic Energy entered Zac's body, making him shocked how low leveled the undead assassin was. It even doused his reignited anger a bit, replacing it with confusion.

"Ai," the voice from earlier exclaimed, as a young Asian man ran up to the ghost. "You fool."

"What now?" Zac muttered in annoyance as he looked at the man running toward him.

"Wang Fang wasn't a saint, but you did not need to kill him," the man sighed. "He was ill, both in body and mind."

Zac blankly looked back and forth between the zombie and the man, until he finally spotted a familiar flask attached to the zombie's belt. Only then did things click in his mind. Wang Fang, the man who had snatched his flask of Cosmic Water in the Dead Zone.

He didn't know what to think when he looked down at the malnourished form of Wang Fang. Zac had truthfully thought that the man would have died long ago from Cosmic Water Poisoning, but he had somehow held on until now. From the rage in his still-open eyes Zac could only assume that the man had already figured out his real identity as well.

Zac shook his head in bemusement before turning to the man who had tried to stop him. He didn't recognize him and curiously enough he didn't wear the standard gear of the Atwood Army either. The young man wore a similar battle-gear as himself, though the arms of his green robe was a lot wider.

But the most striking thing about him was the countless scars on his face and sloppily mended tears in his clothes. His state was even more wretched compared to Zac's before he was able to improve his race and remove most of his scars. This was clearly someone who had lived in constant battle since the integration, though his power was a bit above average at best.

"Just who are you?" the man asked with a frown. "What gives you the right to execute one of my citizens and send away the only Purifier when we're in the middle of a sea of the undead?"

"I am Zachary Atwood," Zac simply answered. "And her skills were needed to keep Alea alive."

The man froze when hearing Zac's response before he calmed down with two deep breaths.

"Lady Alea has saved quite a few lives, perhaps more so than anyone else here. It's good that Sui's helping her," he finally said. "I am sorry for my response, we have many wounded and I lashed out. I am Ling Tian, and it is an honor to meet you."

"Ling Tian?" Zac repeated with surprise. "The Ling Tian of Eastern Hills?"

"Yes, have we met before?" Ling Tian asked with confusion.

"No, but I passed through your town once while traversing the Dead Zone. I heard good things. Do you know John from your town? I forgot his last name," Zac asked, feeling the world was pretty small after all.

"Yes, he's here. He's still defending our rear," Ling Tian nodded. "Thanks to your intervention the main threat is dealt with, and Lord Ilvere is rounding up the stragglers. But there are still some of the weaker undead harassing us from behind. Normally they wouldn't be a problem, but our people are wrung dry."

"How many zombies are there behind us?" Zac asked.

"Hard to say, there were a million at the start. Your army killed hundreds of thousands, but the undead have also gotten reinforcements. I'd say there's three hundred thousand of them remaining unless there are more in hiding," The young man said after thinking it over.

"Not too many..." Zac mumbled before looking up at Ling Tian. "We'll destroy that horde before giving the people here a well-deserved rest. How's the stock of healing pills and food?"

"Destroy?" Ling Tian blurted in shock. "That's a sea of zombies over there!"

"The pills?" Zac only repeated.

"We ran out two days ago after the battle at Baoqui," Ling Tian sighed.

Zac nodded and threw Ling Tian a Cosmos Sack.

"Could you do me a favor? Distribute the pills in this sack to help our wounded. I'll go help my friend with the Zombies," Zac said and stood up.

"Wait, I can help as well! I can still fight!" Ling Tian said, looking up from the Cosmos Sack in his grasp.

"No need. Healing our people is the most important," Zac said with a shake of his head before some anger flashed in his eyes. "Besides, I am still pretty pissed off. I need the targets for myself."

Unbridled bloodlust started to seep from Zac's whole body as he spoke, blanketing the area. Ling Tian took a step back in shock, and even his own people looked over at him with fear in their eyes.

It was true what he said. He had kept it together as best he could, but seeing Alea's pitiful state had ignited a furious fire in his heart that threatened to consume him. If he didn't get an outlet for this wrath soon he felt he would literally explode. So he wasted no more time before rushing over to the rear, where a thick sea of darkness had created a line of demarcation that the zombies were unable to pass.

Any Zombie foolish enough to enter the sea of shadows was immediately stabbed by multiple shadow spears, giving the defenders a rest from their desperate defense. But Zac had no intention to play it safe, so he simply leaped over the large shadow and landed in the middle of the elite zombie horde with a crash.

The rotting zombies shrieked and immediately threw themselves at him with reckless abandon. Teeth and claws tried to rip him to pieces, and Zac let them try their best as he closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

He didn't know who he was angry at. Was it himself, for delaying the rescue? At the Undead for pushing his people to such a pitiful state? Or the System that set the stage these blood baths just for the off-chance that someone worthwhile would rise from the mountain of corpses? He had no answer, but then again he hadn't jumped into a sea of zombies in search of answers.

He was looking for catharsis.