

The Fall 394

Chapter 394: Last Opportunity

"Is that the Zethaya Pill House you mentioned?" Zac asked as he looked over at the grand pagoda that emanated a palpable medicinal scent that could be sensed from where they stood.

Behind the pagoda was a garden that looked large enough to be considered a proper park, but a high wall obscured what went on there. Only treetops and the occasional roofs could be discerned.

"Yes, that is them. The number one alchemy clan in the system," Galau nodded with avarice flashing in his eyes. "Imagine being able to buy a few pills from them. I'd be able to double my investment simply by targeting collectors."

"The door is open, why don't people just go in? I don't see any guards keeping people away," Zac muttered, unable to tear his eyes away since that might be the final opportunity to accomplish at least one of his tasks.

"There's an extremely powerful restrictive array blocking the entrance. Most people would be turned to paste just by trying to enter the gates. You need the invitation of the Zethaya to avoid the array," Galau explained.

"What happens if you simply endure the array and push your way through? Will you be able to buy things?" Ogras asked. "Or will you be attacked as an intruder?"

Zac's eyes lit up as he heard Ogras' question. Having an array to keep out the average people, but allowing the elites of the sector to enter would make sense. It would prevent a bunch of tourists entering their shop while also allowing the family to make friends with unknown powerhouses.

"Well... I've heard of people pushing their way through and completing purchases, but I've also heard of people getting thrown out. I am not sure about the details," Galau hesitantly said.

"So this place has been accessible from the start?" Zac said with a scowl at Galau. "Why have we wasted so much time at that auction house if we could simply have gone here on day one?"

"That array is crazy strong, you can only dream of entering if you can't easily conquer the fourth floor. Entering it might cause wounds that will take weeks to heal," Galau entreated as he looked at Zac with worry. "Furthermore, there is a high risk of injury even if you give up early. It might ruin our climb."

Zac realized that he might have been a bit too restrained. If he had showcased some more strength then Galau might have told him about this opportunity long ago, but even now the aspiring merchant believed Zac to be too weak to even think about barging in.

"Don't worry, isn't it just an array to keep out the rabble?" Ogras smiled before turning to Zac, clearly understanding what was on his mind. "See if you find something useful for me as well. It's not every day you get access to a stockpile like theirs."

Zac took a deep breath and walked over toward the house. A group of people nearby first looked at him speculatively, as though they were trying to figure out which force he belonged to. Only the top tier factions could get into a place like Zethaya, yet Zac was completely unfamiliar.

But those faces quickly turned into sneers when they noticed him stopping outside the array, clearly trying to figure it out. Zac didn't mind the looks at all as his eyes were trained on the space in front of him. He tried to glean what sort of array it was so that he could best prepare himself.

He had encountered all kinds of barriers during the hunt, and he felt confident in defeating most of them. But he wasn't without his weaknesses. His mental defense was good but not great, and he wasn't confident against any poisons that Zethaya's alchemists would concoct.

But his guts told him that the array wouldn't deal with poison or things like fire. It was a gatekeeper and a test, and it was unlikely that even an arrogant place like Zethaya would try to poison their presumptive customers. He felt it more likely to be some sort of restrictive array that required a certain amount of strength to push through

Zac looked over at the group of humanoids who stood some distance away, looking at him like he was some sort of clown.

"Do you guys know what kind of array this is?" Zac probed.

Two of the people only ignored him, but the third spoke up after seemingly thinking it over.

"It's a general suppression array from what I've heard, it restrains both your mind and your body. It gets lighter if you block it with the Dao or strong skills. It's a test of power," the youth said. "But I haven't seen it personally."

"Thank you," Zac nodded and immediately stepped in.

He didn't put all his faith in that man's words, but he thought his words rang true. Some excelled in Dao while having a low Endurance, and others had amazing skills. It made sense that Zethaya would want to test for any sort of unique trait that would qualify aspiring guests as potential powerhouses.

Zac only managed to take two steps before he was stopped in his tracks. It felt like he was carrying a huge boulder on his shoulders, and the air itself had congealed into an impossibly thick sludge that required his body to strain to push forward.

But the strain was only slightly worse than the power required to unleash the second axe of [Deforestation], and he didn't even feel the need to imbue himself with one of his Fragments to proceed. After the brief stop, he started to move forward one step after another, walking through a beautifully decorated tunnel.

The tunnel was only 50 meters in length, but it took him over a minute to traverse toward the end, and sweat was starting to drip down his forehead from the exertion. What was a bit more embarrassing was that the tunnel turned transparent half-way through, and he noticed there were a decent number of people observing his entrance. He considered activating one of his Dao Fragments, but he felt it might be more impressive to push through without any assistance.

He kept thinking of ways to make sure the deal went through with the discerning clan, but his musings were rudely interrupted. A foot suddenly came out of nowhere, landing straight on his chest with a resounding thud. The attack itself wasn't anything special, but Zac was still within the array which caused a tremendous strain. Zac felt some blood in his mouth, and he had no option but to act.

The Fragment of the Coffin spread through his body, turning it impervious. Not only that, it felt as though his rage imbued him with power, and a monstrous strength surged throughout his body to the point that it felt like he was bursting at the seams.

The unprovoked kick had well and truly pissed him off, and his instincts kicked in. His hand shot forward like a snake and he grasped the ankle with enough force to cause some cracking sounds to echo through the tunnel.

“Wai-“ a voice screamed, but Zac ignored it as he slammed the attacker into the ground with shocking force before he threw him out from the Pill House like a piece of trash. Only a few cracked stones smeared with blood was the evidence that a struggle had taken place.

Zac didn’t know if the man was alive or dead after that response, but he didn’t care as he took the last steps into the Pill House, his Fragment making the final stretch effortless. A glance showed that the man was lying motionless outside, allowing Zac to focus on the matter at hand without worrying about him throwing out an attack from behind.

The whole shop looked like a luxurious lounge rather than a store, with groups of sofas and beautiful fountains creating a harmonious atmosphere. There were no pills or other wares on display anywhere, but there was a rich medicinal aroma in the store that made all of Zac’s cells feel full of life and power.

The whole area was lit up by a glass dome in the ceiling tens of meters in the air, and he saw there were multiple stories that all had open balconies toward the central lounge. There weren’t a lot of people inside, but he could spot a couple of groups scattered about, most of them looking over at Zac with curiosity.

But a small sense of danger suddenly pricked his mind, and his eyes turned to see a young human standing on the second floor looking down at him with cold eyes. Zac frowned when he sensed the animosity since he had never seen that guy before. Was it him that sent out an underling to sound him out? And if so, why?

Was it someone from a force that ran one of the Incursions he had closed, like the Ez’Mahal Empire? There were no obvious signs on him or his clothes that could give Zac a hint, and he didn’t dare to use [Inquisitive Eye]. He was pretty sure that anyone that could enter a place like this possessed an item similar to his own bracer anyway.

The young man looked away soon enough and walked away from the balcony, disappearing out of sight. Zac could only drop the matter as he refocused on a clerk who walked toward him.

“We do apologize for the disturbance, that guest breached our rules and will no longer be allowed back inside,” he said, though Zac could tell that he wasn’t all that contrite. “I am Orbat, a clerk working for the Zethaya Clan.”

“No matter. I passed through that array, does that mean I can shop here?” Zac asked, not wanting to press the issue.

Their reception was an indicator that they did not put all too much value on him, only sending a clerk rather than whoever was running the shop at this moment. A large clan like the Zethaya would no doubt

have a couple of people at the Tower at any point in time, meaning they definitely could have sent someone with higher status.

That was the problem with a lack of renown. He was a nobody in the end, someone without strong backing. Even if he was powerful enough to break through the array he was only someone with potential, whereas the usual guests at this place no doubt had living ancestors at C-Grade.

"Certainly," Orbat said as he smilingly led Zac to a sectional not far away.

"What's on the other floors?" Zac asked offhandedly as he sat down.

"The Zethaya Pill House is both a store and a residential district. The Zethaya maintains friendly relations with many forces, and some choose to stay here during their climb, while others simply visit," the clerk smoothly explained with his ever-present smile.

'So only for big-shots, huh?' Zac thought with a wry smile as he shot a look toward the balustrade where he saw the man who emitted some hostility.

He was no longer anywhere to be seen, and Zac threw it into the back of his mind as he refocused on the task at hand.

"I am looking for two items. I am first in need of a pill or a treasure that can heal a fractured soul. Secondly, I am looking for things that can help evolve a specialty core," Zac explained.

"We do not carry anything that can generally evolve Specialty Cores. I am afraid only extremely rare items like the Pathfinder Eye that appeared earlier has such a magical effect," the clerk said as he took out a crystal, causing a screen to emerge. "However, we do have the capability to produce the following pills."

Zac seriously read through the list, and he saw that there were six different pills that were geared toward evolving specific Specialty Cores. Unfortunately, none of them was the Duplicity Core, and he could only sigh internally in disappointment. However, this was a rare opportunity to get some clues at least.

"Does taking one of these pills guarantee an evolution?" Zac asked, not divulging that he wouldn't buy any of them.

"Unfortunately no, there is a chance of between 40 and 60% of a full evolution with the pills that are brought here. But even if the evolution is not successful a strong foundation will be created, allowing for easier evolution down the line," the clerk smoothly explained.

Zac slowly nodded and moved on to the second item he looked for, the soul-mending treasure for Alea.

"May I ask if it's a preparation for the tower, or whether it's meant for a patient?" the clerk asked.

"Why does that matter?" Zac frowned.

"The Zethaya carries the [Serene Soul Pill] that can perform emergency repair on a fractured soul. It will not heal you completely, but it will stop the fracturing and allow you to slowly recuperate with the help of regular soul-nurturing pills afterward," the clerk said. "However..."

Zac's eyes lit up when he heard the explanation, but the 'however' sounded extremely ominous.

"The [Serene Soul Pill] needs to be imbibed within 5 minutes of being wounded," Orbat concluded.

Zac closed his eyes to restrain a surge of fury that lambasted his mind for a second and took a deep breath to curtail the Splinter locked in its Miasmic cage. He needed to enter the tower soon.

"It's for a patient, the wound is a month old," Zac conceded.

The clerk nodded, some sympathy showing in his face. Zac frowned when he saw the clerk's reaction, fearing that he was simply out of luck.

"Well... There is something," the clerk said after some hesitation. "There is an item in our treasury, but I do not have the authority to make any decisions regarding treasures of that grade. A proper Zethaya Clan member needs to give the go-ahead."

"What Item?" Zac asked with eagerness.

"I cannot divulge," the clerk said. "Please wait a moment, I will consult the manager."

Zac nodded in agreement, and he impatiently waited for the clerk to come back. His mind spun as he tried to come up with arguments for the Zethaya to sell him the item. It seemed like the item was something they kept for themselves in case of emergency or something, which probably meant its effect was pretty amazing.

Paying above market price probably wouldn't work in such a case, since the Zethaya didn't lack for money. Should he promise a favor if he could buy it? Would they care? Did he have anything else to trade with apart from money that would interest an ancient clan?

Soon enough the clerk returned, but he was a bit pale and didn't dare to look up. Next to him was a young man wearing a luxurious blue robe. He radiated an impressive pressure, but it was more like a gently flowing river compared to Zac's usual aura of brutality. It was no doubt the Zethaya Clan member who could decide on the matter.

But Zac frowned when he noticed that a third person was approaching him, walking shoulder to shoulder with the Zethaya Alchemist. It was the young man with the cold eyes that had stood on the second floor earlier.

Zac sighed as he realized that trouble had finally come for him.