

The Fall 398

Chapter 398: Piker

Darkness quickly gave way to light, and Zac in his muddled state was a bit confused when he was met with a prompt that covered his whole vision.

[Tower of Eternity entered. Use pseudonym or real name?]

It was just like when the ladder system was initiated back in the day, and Zac looked at the prompt blankly for a few seconds. The events that just had transpired made him unwilling to use his real name, but he also didn't want to be known as the Super Brother-Man again. He had already introduced himself as Zac at the Zethaya, and Boje was still alive, so he was a bit unsure what to do.

But suddenly he had a spark of inspiration.

"Zac Piker," Zac said with a raspy voice.

Piker was his mother's maiden name, at least according to his dad. Zac had been one year when they married, and Leandra took on Robert's last name. By now Zac realized it was probably a fake name she used when she arrived on Earth, which made it a solid option to choose.

Picking this pseudonym was a way for him to signal his mother that they were alive. She would perhaps hear of the name somehow, especially if he climbed far enough, and come help them out with their situation back on Earth.

The scene quickly changed and Zac found himself sitting on by a camp-fire, joined by his two travel companions and a headless corpse. The moment the prompt disappeared Zac felt a pang of worry, and he couldn't help but wonder if he had just made a monumental mistake choosing that name. But done was done, and Zac rather focused on the others.

Galau had woken up at some time during their frantic escape, and he currently sat on the ground looking as though his soul had left him. His eyes were glazed as they stared into the distance, void of thought and hope. Ogras was instead staring evenly at Zac, his eyes rife with unspoken words.

"I'm sorry, I didn't expect that to happen," Zac coughed as he scratched his chin. "But I did get a treasure for Alea I think."

Of course, his true feelings weren't quite as calm as he wanted to let on. The Splinter had thoroughly screwed him over this time, to the point of no return. Zac groaned as reached for his Cosmos Sack and took out a Nexus Crystal to start restoring his energy.

The combination of his terrible wounds, using [Hatchetman's Rage], and activating the first two swings of [Deforestation] had really done a number on his body, and he felt so weak that a level 20 would be able to wring his neck if they wanted to.

Luckily he hadn't suffered any wounds to his soul, so he had no problem activating his Dao of Trees to help recuperating. The Dao soothed his harried body, and he finally had a chance to look around.

If it wasn't for him remembering entering the Tower he would have thought they had left the special dimension and were teleported somewhere on Earth. He knew that the place was magical, but he had underestimated the Tower of Eternity.

Zac had somewhat expected to find himself inside some sort of maze, where he had to beat the floor boss to proceed to the next floor, like some old school dungeon crawler. But he was currently sitting in front of a fire in a small glade. Around him was a tranquil leafy forest, and there was even a normal sky when he looked up through the canopy.

Nothing about this place felt like either a tower or some sort of Trial, but rather a simple camping trip that brought back his memories to the day that the Integration took place. They were only missing the trusty camper and a cooler full of beer to complete the experience. But everyone present obviously didn't share Zac's nostalgia.

"I'm finished," Galau said with hollow eyes from across the fire. "My cousins will tell the elders what transpired. I will be sacrificed to the Zethaya Clan in an effort to curry favor and distance themselves from you two lunatics."

"Well, this is our bad," Zac said, but corrected himself after seeing the face Ogras was making. "Fine, my bad. I got a bit heated and things got out of hand. We will do our best to make things right for you."

"You can always say that we kidnapped you," Ogras finally said after releasing a heavy sigh. "We did carry you into the tower after all."

Galau didn't answer, as he kept looking into the distance with a face full of regrets. Zac and Ogras could hear him mumbling under his breath, but Zac could only make out 'Why did I sit down at that table?'. Ogras only rolled his eyes before he turned to Zac.

"Are you okay?"

"Can you give me a few hours?" Zac sighed.

"It's fine, we're not short on time any longer," Ogras shrugged. "We'll wait."

Zac nodded in thanks and arduously got up from his sitting position, but he suddenly turned back toward the fire as he took out the small vial he got from Boje.

"Can you tell me what this is?" Zac asked as he waved it at Galau.

The youth initially wanted to ignore him, but he soon enough reluctantly got up to his feet to look at the bottle.

"It's actually a bottle of High-Grade [Serene Flesh Pill]. It's part of the Zethaya Pill House Serene Path-series of healing and nurturing pills. These three pills are worth almost 200 Million Nexus coins!" Galau blurted out. "The Zethaya truly have the best stuff."

"Can you be sure that it's not poisoned or something?" Zac asked.

He initially hadn't planned on eating these things, but if he only relied on his own pills and constitution he would be in a bad shape for weeks, which was too much time to waste even within the Tower. He literally had pieces of guts dangling down from the side, and he was hesitant to move around as it was.

Galau looked a bit confused, but his eyes started shimmering with a slight glow, indicating he was using some sort of ocular skill.

"It looks fine to me?" Galau said. "Besides, I think the Zethaya wouldn't do something to create poison pills disguised as their healing pills. Such a thing would cause massive harm to their reputation. They would rather offer an extreme bounty for your capture if they wanted to deal with you."

Zac felt it made sense, and he took out one of the pills that looked like a pristine pearl. It was a lot better than any pill he had found during the hunt or bought from Calrin. His gut feeling didn't warn him either, so he quickly popped the pill into his mouth as he went over to the body of Rasuliel. He searched through his clothes, but a frown started to emerge when he couldn't find what he was looking for.

"Where is the Cosmos Sack?" Zac muttered, worried that he had lost it during the battle. "I clearly saw him putting away a treasure."

"It's probably the ring on his finger," Ogras muttered. "Rich bastard."

Zac suddenly remembered Calrin mentioning that the high-class Cosmos Sacks were jewelry rather than literal sacks. They were a lot more valuable as they required a craftsman proficient in the Dao of Space to create.

He twisted the ring off from Rasuliel's finger and limped over to a tree some distance from the campsite. Zac needed to rest a bit and let the pill do its magic. His head was also a complete mess for some reason, and he needed to restore his mental state as well.

Sitting alone in the forest full of wounds made his thoughts go back to his first months on the island, where his body was always in various state of disrepair. He usually felt like a completely different person compared to the guy who kept getting himself in trouble while fighting the dumb demonic beasts, but sometimes it seemed like he hadn't actually improved all that much.

Zac restarted his recuperation with practiced ease as he went over what had just happened. The whole fight was just a jumbled mess in his mind, and he couldn't remember the details. Had he forgotten due to his anger, or had the splinter actually controlled him? The distinction was extremely important, and he quickly looked inward to check up on the splinter.

The [Splinter of Oblivion] was extremely docile at the moment, and it had retracted all its tentacles that usually tried to finagle their way out of the miasmic prison in his head. It didn't release any of that odd energy into his mind either, making the funnel completely empty. But that alone didn't bring any comfort to Zac at all, and the reason was simple.

One of the Miasmic Runes were missing.

He had looked at the runes that encircled the [Splinter of Oblivion] many times in an attempt to understand them, and he was certain that there were one fewer of them now. Initially there had been nine of them, but now only eight remained, making the gap between them slightly larger.

Worry filled Zac's heart, and he started to wonder if the protection of the mysterious Draugr lady was failing. If the runes disappeared with this speed then he would lose all protection in just a few years. He might be able to reach peak E-Grade in ten years if he pushed himself, but he knew that wasn't enough to control the effects of the splinter.

Or perhaps it happened because he lost control due to his anger. It had empowered the Splinter enough to break one of the runes, resulting in the destruction that followed. If that was the case he would have to focus on ways to fortify his mind to avoid such a scene repeating itself.

Unfortunately there wasn't much he could do about the issue as things currently stood, and he retracted his mind from the splinter.

He instead looked down on his finger to see that the ring Calrin lent him had lost all its luster, and the large inlaid crystal looked like a murky piece of glass. Zac couldn't help but groan when he saw the sight. This had been his strongest defensive ace, but he only had one use of it and it had been expended before he even entered the tower.

It was a poignant reminder that he wasn't invulnerable even with his massive pool of attributes. Everyone had their own advantages and hidden aces. That Rasuliel hadn't seemed like a peak genius, yet he had almost killed Zac even if he activated the ring. There was also the attack fueled by a Dao Fragment that almost hit him as they fled, indicating his level of insight wasn't anything unique in the Tower.

At least his battle came with a few upsides Zac reckoned as he turned his attention to Rasuliel's Spatial Ring. It had turned into an ownerless item since the guy died, allowing Zac to immediately bind it. But he was surprised when he saw the somewhat limited space when he inspected the insides.

The space was only a bit larger compared to the ordinary Cosmos Sacks that cost just a few million Nexus Coins. Zac had expected a spatial tool belonging to a rich guy like that to be able to store mountain ranges if needed, but he guessed he had severely underestimated the difficulty of making Spatial Rings. The space in his own cosmos sack was a lot larger than this.

However, it was a lot more convenient compared to the Cosmos Sack. He needed to physically touch a sack to take out an item, but he could simply will the ring to spit out its contents since it was already on his hand. That would allow him to take out his axe or a defensive treasure a lot quicker, which might be the difference between life and death. He also knew that the space inside a Spatial Ring was a lot more stable, whereas Cosmos Sacks needed to be replaced at regular intervals as to not lose the contents.

Just the ring itself was an amazing treasure worth well over a Billion Nexus Coins, yet he knew that was only the tip of the iceberg after a cursory glance at the contents. He immediately found the box that Rasuliel put away just before the battle started, and just that box alone almost made Zac feel the danger he found himself in worth it.

He still couldn't be certain that the [Prajñā Cherry] would be enough to heal Alea, but it would no doubt make her situation better than it currently was. If he could prolong the time she could stay inside the coffin to a few decades he felt confident he would be able to find a few more treasures to feed her.

Perhaps the Tree of Ascension would be able to produce another fruit as well, and with its odd mutation it might be able to help the Poison Mistress.

Of course, the cherry was just one of a large number of treasures, making Zac feel that expending the charge on his ring to not be the end of the world. There were no doubt more defensive treasures in the Spatial Tool that Rasuliel didn't have a chance to use during their hectic battle.

Zac took out one box or vial after another, glancing at their contents. All of them were clearly good items judging by their spiritual emanations, but he had no idea what they did. He could have Galau go through the things to find anything that would be useful during the climb. But he suddenly froze after opening a particular box.

Wasn't that the Eye of the Pathfinder Oracle?