

## The Fall 436

### Chapter 436: The Tallest Trees

Ogras warily looked around as he appeared in the new world. Only when he saw that he had appeared on a busy street did he allow himself to look down at the gash at his side. Luckily the mayor's all-out attack had barely missed as Ogras jumped onto the teleporter, allowing him to avoid wasting a week recuperating.

Who knew that the old goat would become so infuriated? Becoming a grandfather should be a happy occasion, after all.

That world was done with, but he couldn't help but once again wonder if these worlds were real. Would he become a father? Well, not that he wasn't one already after his years of whoring and playing around about back home. There were no doubt at least a dozen little bastards with his blood running around the streets of Ter'Ferizan.

The demon's gaze darted back and forth across the street as he popped a pill in his mouth, his shadow tendrils meanwhile spreading out in search of threats and treasures. But it just looked like a somewhat flourishing metropolis, though the energy density was pretty abysmal. Luckily he didn't have to search for long as the quest screen appeared on its own the moment he started walking.

[Become an honorary disciple of the Transcendent Master.]

The demon sneered when he saw the name. Anyone who had the gall to call himself a Transcendent Master in a place like this was no doubt an insufferable asshole of the highest order. Just the thought of becoming a disciple to such a pretentious prick made his hair stand on end. An ornery person like that would no doubt request the full ceremony with kneeling and offering thanks to the heavens.

It didn't take a lot of time to find out that the so-called Transcendent Master was an adviser to the crown and one of the guardian pillars of this country. The title had been awarded him by the former emperor after having fought off an invasion of the Grev Reapers, whatever that was. He currently lived alone, and he accepted 5 honorary disciples to carry on his legacy every year.

The next trial was unsurprisingly tomorrow.

"Leech, you better help me this time or I won't feed you for a month," the demon said as he sat in the hotel room he had hired for the night.

Ogras still had no proper means to communicate with Leech, but the creature living in his shadows released a few undulations, which he felt represented a reluctant acquiescence. Ogras' mouth widened into a grin as he started to prepare, and one item after another fell into his shadows, seemingly transported into another dimension.

The next day Ogras found himself shoulder to shoulder with a bunch of middle-aged warriors, all seemingly stuck at the precipice of evolution. Becoming an Honorary Disciple also meant getting access to the vast fortune of the old master, which included various herbs that would help push one's constitution forward. It was a huge opportunity in a country where even worthless stalk of grass could be coveted if it contained some Cosmic Energy.

There were three trials to the apprenticeship; Mind, Body, Heart. The Trial of Mind was essentially just a confusion array, and his grandpa had thrown him into enough of those while growing up for him to effortlessly pass through. He did however slow himself down somewhat as to not garner too much attention, as that might interfere with his plans. The standards of mental strength in the kingdom were obviously wanting, and just a third of the trial takers passed it.

The Trial of Body was just as simple, and Ogras was starting to wonder if the old goat was simply phoning it in. The old master simply said that the trial would be over when half the contestants had been thrown out of the courtyard where the trials were being held, which resulted in an all-out brawl.

Ogras had initially been planning on going easy again to stay unnoticed, but he was a bit embarrassed to realize his worries were superfluous as he found himself perfectly mediocre without even trying. Then again, he was holding back on his shadow skills, and instead tried to make do with his spear skills.

During the free-for-all he had barely needed to act to be thrown into the six specific positions he needed to reach. But thankfully no one seemed to have noticed that a spike was shot into the ground the moment Ogras landed, and by the time the Trial of the Body was over the six spikes had formed a circle that covered the entire courtyard.

"The Trial of the Heart will test your convictions, your morality, and your loyalty to this great nation," the stalwart old master said as he stood in front of the 20 remaining trial takers. "A crooked tree will never grow to its full potential, always forced to live in the shadows of others. As such, I will only assist those with a righteous heart."

The old master proceeded to walk toward one warrior after another, using some unknown means to figure out whether they were righteous. Ogras' heart started to beat in anticipation as the Transcendent Master got closer and closer, readying himself for battle. But Ogras' eyes widened in alarm when the old master suddenly turned toward him, hostility all too apparent in his eyes.

He had been exposed.

"You!" the old man roared as a massive surge of energy started radiating from his body, transforming him from an aged scholar into a ferocious warrior.

An explosion erupted from a nearby pavilion as a shimmering sword burst through its ceiling before it shot toward the old master, but Ogras saw no need to let the Transcendent Master arm himself. A massive crystal appeared in his arms and he immediately slammed it into the ground while infusing it with Cosmic Energy.

Roiling waves of illusory flames immediately inundated the whole courtyard and the trial takers fell over screaming, desperately clutching their heads.

The Transcendent Master seemed a lot better off though, perhaps due to being the floor guardian. His eyes still looked bloodshot though as he gripped the flying sword and slashed toward Ogras with an enraged roar.

The demon narrowly dodged a wind blade that would no doubt have cut him into two as he charged the old man with his spear drawing a majestic arc in the air. But two sharp lances of congealed shadows suddenly gored the old master from behind, leaving two nasty wounds.

The old man was obviously a seasoned fighter who would normally have been able to intercept such an attack, but his soul was currently on fire courtesy of the [Voidfire Array].

Two wounds weren't enough to take the old man down. However, it did cause him to lose focus for a short moment, which allowed Ogras to launch a massive shadowlance that ripped a hole through his torso.

The old master looked at Ogras with confusion, anger, and betrayal as he fell on his back while Ogras retrieved the six spikes with his shadow tendrils. It looked like the old man couldn't comprehend why someone would assault him after his centuries of service to the kingdom.

Ogras walked over to the old man who barely clung onto life and looked down at him with a bland gaze. One swift strike ended it, and Ogras quickly snatched the powerful sword before it flew away.

"What's so bad about living in the shadows?" Ogras muttered as he jumped onto the teleporter. "It's the tallest trees that have to bear the winds."

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"How did things go?" Catheya asked, her eyes never leaving the screen in front of her.

"There are no more members of the Tsarun-Clan in the Base Town. However, three managed to destroy their tokens and leave," Varo recounted stoically.

"He's already passed the 6th floor, but his speed is average at best and it keeps getting worse," Catheya muttered. "It's hard to draw any conclusions. What do you think?"

"I took the liberty of asking around some more after completing my mission," Varo slowly said. "I would venture that he is being held back by a lack of knowledge of the tower and assisting treasures such as Array Breakers."

"Why do you say that?" Catheya asked with interest.

If Zac Piker truly was a disciple of her ancestor, then he should be well aware of all the hidden risks and opportunities inside the Tower of Eternity, especially those on the higher floors. But his speed did honestly indicate that there were some problems.

"I found something at one of the Intelligence offices at the outer rim," Varo said as he handed her an Information crystal.

"Super Brother-Man? Fights with an axe... A powerful native who defeated an incursion?" Catheya mumbled as she scanned the contents. "Who are these Ez'Mahal-people?"

"It's a small feudal force in the sector, no one of import. Judging by their strength I would guess that the newly integrated planet was of the lowest grade," Varo said. "The Ez'Mahal could barely be considered a High D-Grade force, and a splintered one at that."

"It doesn't make sense," Catheya muttered as her brows furrowed with confusion.

Zac Piker being an Integration Progenitor would explain why he was so powerful without anyone knowing about him. The combination of the Tutorial, the massive amount of Origin Dao, and the various opportunities The Ruthless Heavens provide to such planets could sometimes create extreme outliers.

But it also made the connection to her ancestor all the more baffling.

"It is a bit disappointing. Perhaps I am overestimating my instincts," Catheya muttered before she turned to her steward. "How far do you think he will go?"

"He will pass the 7th floor," Varo said without hesitation.

"Why do you say that?" Catheya asked, her mouth tugging upward.

"Instinct," Varo answered after some hesitation.

"That's why we're such a good combination," Catheya smiled. "I think so too. In fact, I think he might even beat the 8th."

Varo's brows rose a bit before his expressionless appearance returned, but Catheya knew it meant that her attendant disagreed. Catheya still had a feeling about that man, even if she didn't have anything to substantiate it with.

"Do you remember Reoluv of the Dravorak Dynasty?" Varo suddenly said.

"What about him?" Catheya mumbled with disinterest as her gaze returned to the Tower Ladder.

"His brother just arrived, and he's ready for a fight."

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"The Zethaya sends their regards," a young woman said with a bow as she handed Yeorav a crystalline vial.

"Mh," Yeorav nodded as he stashed away the pills without much interest. "What did you find out?"

"It is just as your informant indicated. A confrontation between Zac Piker and Rasuliel Tsarun resulted in the destruction of the Zethaya Pill House and the death of Rasuliel. Boje Zethaya indicated that there was likely some unknown history between the two, as Rasuliel went out of his way to antagonize Mr. Piker."

"What else?"

Yara went over the details of the altercation in the Pill House, with Yeorav occasionally asking clarifying questions.

"So he either has an extreme amount of Endurance, or he possessed some sort of treasure to withstand the Tsarun brat's [Abjuration of Zerthava]. Where did he get his hands on that thing, anyway? Only those in the Boundless Factions can make that cursed item," Yeorav asked.

"There have been rumors of the Tsarun doing business with unorthodox forces," Yara said after some thought. "But nothing substantiated and not to the point that it has created a pushback."

“That old pretender is too greedy, too impatient,” Yeorav snorted with disdain. “He wants to stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of the Allbright Dynasty and my ancestors, but his ambition has turned him insane. How can a dynasty be created on such a murky foundation?”

“Well, these events will no doubt infuriate them. Boje also let slip that Rasuliel was the one who bought the Pathfinder Oracle’s Eye a few days ago, and it is now in Mr. Piker’s possession,” Yara added.

“Oh?” Yeorav said with some excitement.

He knew his family had a few body parts of Pathfinder Oracles in their treasury, but there was no chance of getting his hands on them because of their ancestor’s strict rules about cultivation.

The number of resources he could draw from the treasury while still in F-Grade had long been tapped out. He would only be able to trade for it with an item of equal value, and it had to be something he had found himself without assistance.

The odds of that happening without him entering the depths of dozens of Mystic Realms were almost nil, but such an opportunity had somehow presented itself in front of him now. A treasure like that was something that you couldn’t get your hand on even if you had the money, and he could think of multiple ways he could utilize such a thing.

His little brother was no doubt kicking himself for not having the patience to wait just a few days before attempting his climb. But luck was sometimes as important as skill.

“Has everything been set up?” Yeorav asked.

“Everyone is in position. But multiple forces are similarly preparing for when Mr. Piker emerges,” Yara said.

“What have the undead been up to?” Yeorav asked.

“They haven’t made any movements since they threw out the Tsarun Clan from the Base Town,” she said, some confusion clearly written on her face.

“Their motivation doesn’t really matter. Perhaps they just want a top grade body to bring back home,” Yeorav said as he gently grabbed Yara’s hand. “It will be an all-out brawl later. Don’t get mixed into this mess.”

“Is... All this really necessary?” Yara sighed as she moved closer to Yeorav.

“You know how my family operates. If Reoluv ascends I will probably just be relegated to manage a far-off corner, but if it’s second brother I’ll be assassinated along with everyone close to me,” Yeorav said with a pained grimace. “My only hope is passing the 7th floor and getting accepted to one of those far-away places. I’ll take you with me and leave the in-fighting to my siblings.”

Not many people in their remote corner of the multiverse were aware, but passing the 7th floor essentially gave you a direct shot at entering massive factions that towered far beyond anything else in the sector. The whole sector was just a small corner of their domains, breeding grounds that occasionally fostered promising seedlings.

Most thought that Lord Beradan had been lucky and encountered a great master after passing the 7th floor, but he would probably still have been able to join one of those forces due to his amazing talents and his showing in the tower.

Yeorav knew his own limitations, and he hadn't seen passing the 7th floor as a realistic opportunity. He knew he wasn't his brother's match in either talent or diligence, especially since their ancestor had taken Reoluv as a direct disciple.

Just reaching the 7th floor was a stretch without expending some treasures. Defeating the floor guardian? A fool's dream. But that had all changed now. Yeorav didn't know what that poor man had done to piss off the Boundless Heavens to this extent, but it actually awarded everyone who appeared in the Base down the quest.

His previous plan was to wait a decade or two and pass the 6th floor with the help of some treasures, but now a better opportunity had presented itself. It had prompted him to cache in on every favor and borrowing from everyone he could think of to stock up on enough offensive and defensive treasures to conquer a minor empire.

It should allow him to propel him through the 7th floor, and with the help of the quest he'd skip the floor guardian altogether.

He normally wouldn't stoop to such despicable levels as he had no bad blood against this Zac Piker. He would rather meet whatever fate came his way when Reoluv or their Second Brother ascended to the throne, but he knew that wasn't an option any longer. His relationship with Yara had been exposed, so whatever ending he would meet, so would she.

It was a shame, but Zac Piker needed to die so that they could live.

"But that man seems dangerous, and he's already entered the 7th floor," Yara said with worry.

"Opportunities are always found in the midst of danger," Yeorav muttered as he stroked Yara's hair.

"Besides, I didn't come to the Base Town empty-handed."