

## The Fall 459

### Chapter 459: Perception of Reality

"Two days remaining," Ogras muttered as he looked out the window of the small farmstead. "I guess it's about time."

"What's that, darling?" the lithe woman purred in Ogras' ear.

"I need to go out for a bit," the demon said with a smile as he pinched the bare bottom of his little savior.

"You shouldn't walk around too much with those wounds of yours," she said with some admonishment in her eyes. "You were on death's bed just three weeks ago."

"Didn't I prove just how healthy I was yesterday?" Ogras said with a cheeky grin and received a roll of the eyes in return.

He had been pretty confident in defeating the 5th floor guardian after his experience with the Transcendent Master, but the fight had pushed him way harder than expected. The enraged beast had been a perfect counter to him as well, too stupid to be tricked.

Things didn't really turn for the better at the following three levels as he looked for an inheritance to end his run with. His wounds kept accumulating until he almost died at the hands of the assassin who guarded the gates to the 49th floor. If it wasn't for the defensive treasures he had commandeered from Galau he might have actually met his end then and there.

Thankfully he managed to escape from the assassin's pursuit, and he quickly disappeared into one of the neighboring kingdoms. However, the wounds were too severe, and he had fallen unconscious outside this Uynala's farmstead.

"Are you sure you don't want to enter the path of cultivation?" Ogras asked as he looked at the girl lying in the bed.

"Only problems will come from that. Life is beautiful because it is short. Why would I want to prolong it just to fill it with bloodshed?" Uynala said with disapproval. "Look at that wound on your chest. Is it really worth it?"

Ogras only smiled in response as he finished dressing and walked out of the small house. He didn't have a specific place in mind, but rather simply chose to walk a while to loosen up. One day on the inside meant roughly 15 minutes on the outside. He might find himself in deep shit real soon and needed to be ready.

The massive gash in his chest was still a bit troublesome, but he would be able to fight at full power without issue. Hopefully, it wouldn't come to that though. Zac should have reached a floor high enough to scare off any attempt at their lives, and if not he would serve as an excellent lightning rod for their attacks until they tired themselves out.

The demon found himself on top of a small hill soon enough, and Ogras took a deep breath as he looked around at the quiet vale where he had stayed the past days. The world of cultivators and immortals was

almost completely cut off from this little community. The strongest person he had encountered was an old hunter who was level 29.

People worked their fields and lived off the land, without strife or any real suffering. Their lives were short but fulfilling. Uynala would probably marry someone from the community, and their three weeks together would turn into a hazy memory of an adolescent escapade.

“Is it worth it...?” Ogras mumbled as he looked up at the sky. “Definitely.”

He donned a mask and robe and crushed his token the next moment, not sparing the house and its savior another look. A brief bout of darkness shrouded his surroundings until the world exploded into colors.

-----

The beautiful lake was hidden deep within the mountains, untouched for thousands of years. Not a ripple could be seen on its surface, making it seem like a perfect mirror that reflected the heavens above. If one looked from a certain angle it would be impossible to discern which sky was real and which one was fake.

A scream suddenly broke the tranquility of the secluded mountain as a harried cultivator desperately fled for his life. A group of warriors was high on his heels, and the man’s back was covered in wounds. He looked back and forth, but there was nowhere to hide. He knew he would have to make a final stand if he wanted to break free.

An hour later the same man slowly breached the crest of the mountain housing the tranquil pond, and his eyes lit up when he saw the inviting waters. He had barely survived the ordeal, and he was grievously wounded and without provisions. But at least he could drink his fill.

The man dipped his hands in the pond, causing a ripple spread across the tranquil surface. If the man hadn’t been completely focused on quenching his thirst he would have noticed a shocking change in his surroundings. Just as the pond rippled from his actions, so did the sky above.

Heavens and lake mirrored each other, and it was impossible to tell which was which.

But his mind was occupied with thoughts of escape, and he lamented the fact that he couldn’t simply sprout wings and fly away, leaving his problems behind. He was so engrossed in his escapism he didn’t even notice how the air behind him shuddered as two crystalline wings appeared on his back. He only kept drinking the icy cold water, feeling it was the most delectable thing ever.

He finally managed to quench his thirst, and the moment his hand left the pond the ripples disappeared, once again turning into a mirror. The man looked down at his reflection again, feeling that he wasn’t as harried any longer.

There was something odd about him though, but he couldn’t put his finger on it. Did he get the feeling because of the wound across his chest? No matter. The important thing was that he would be able to keep moving for a bit longer.

He jumped off from the ground, his wings vigorously pushing through the air to lift him into the sky. The warrior soon soared among the clouds and set off toward the sunset. Each beat of his wings filled his

tired soul with a sense of freedom as trees and hilltops flashed by beneath. But his sense of euphoria slowly dimmed down and was replaced with a creeping unease.

Something was wrong.

He had sensed it before, and the feeling only became more and more palpable as time passed. It was like he was dream walking, where the world wasn't true and correct as he had always known it.

The wings!

Since when did he have wings?! What were these crystalline monstrosities attached to his back? Was this some curse the guards of his family had placed on him before being struck down? But he had never heard of anything like it.

Incongruous emotions clashed in his mind, memories of a life in the heavens, and memories of a life on the ground. But the memories of soaring among the clouds soon shattered, turning into crystalline shards that floated away.

He was elated at grasping the truth, but his eyes widened in horror when the wings on his back disintegrated, turning into shards just like the false memories. Without any means of flight he plummeted toward the forest below, and a large thud echoed out across the desolate mountain as he slammed into the ground.

The wounds of the warrior had worsened, but he was at least alive. The false memories were gone, and his pursuers were half a world away. A sense of freedom once again filled his soul, and it allowed him to rally the energy to keep going.

Dreams of his boundless future started to form as he walked across the unknown forest, but he suddenly felt the creeping unease return. He started running to escape the mounting dread, but it only worsened as time passed. What was happening to him? Who was messing with his mind, his perception of reality?

And what else about him was false? Something was no doubt the origin of the undeniable unease. He looked down at his hands and froze in place. Were these hands really his? Or were they figments of his imagination just like his wings?

The answer soon presented itself as the hands fractured and turned into crystal shards that started drifting toward the sky. But as more and more of his body fragmented and split off from his body, the heavier his apprehension became.

These memories that were left in his mind, were they real or more figments of his imagination? They turned more and more disjointed, and soon enough they were filled with nothing but short bursts of faces and places that he couldn't name or place.

Am I even real?

A swirl of crystalline fragments floated into the sky, and a ripple spread out as they breached the surface. The small crystals kept falling until they fell onto the bed of the tranquil pond, joining the millions of other ones just like them.

-----

Ogras found himself standing on top of the teleportation array, and he took a deep breath beneath the mask before sat down and went over his final gain of the Tower of Eternity.

"Reality is a perception," Ogras muttered with a frown.

A surge of energy inundating his body as his understanding coalesced, and he felt a new path opening up before him. He had gained the Seed of Mirage from the inheritance trial, and he had quickly incorporated it into his fighting techniques as a means of distraction.

But was the way he looked at the concept too shallow? What if false could be true, and true be false? How could someone defend at something that was neither real nor fake, while simultaneously being both? His eyes stayed closed for another five minutes until Ogras finally took another deep breath and opened his Dao Screen.

Seed of Mirage (High): Dexterity +15, Intelligence +35, Wisdom +10

It looked like he had gained 5 Dexterity and Wisdom along with 20 points into Intelligence. It wasn't a huge amount, but it did push his somewhat lacking Intelligence a bit further. He had never planned on focusing on the attribute even though it was beneficial to some of his skills, but he would gladly take it when it came for free.

Only after having secured his gains did he bother to check in on his surroundings, and his expression immediately soured when he saw what was going on.

"Shit..." Ogras muttered as his eyes met the hundreds of glares from the mob waiting outside the protective shielding.

Had something happened to Zac's climb that emboldened these fools? Or did they have a false sense of security by their numbers? They would find that numbers were meaningless in a battle of powerhouses, and if they got swept up by the chaos it was their problem.

At least they couldn't target him until he stepped off the platform, but he knew that was only a temporary protection. The human cockroach would have to find a more permanent solution for their trio.

The array suddenly shuddered, and a pale Galau appeared the next moment. No apparition appeared upon his exit, but he still sat down with closed eyes as he took out a pill from his Cosmos Sack.

"You're late," Ogras grinned beneath the mask, quickly pulling himself together. "Just missed my Apparition, and it was a pretty good one. By the way, do you have a tool to check what level that guy has reached? Hello?"

"Ah?" Galau suddenly said. "Mr. Azh'Rodum? It has been a while, I am glad you are fine. What did you say just now? You want to see the tower ladder?"

"What happened to you?" Ogras asked with a raised brow. "Trouble at the desert town?"

"Ah- well," Galau said with a weak smile as his hand reached for his spatial pouch again. "Negotiations fell through at the last moment. I got a bit greedy I am afraid, wanting to make a big profit right before I left."

This face turned even whiter the next moment, and he looked ready to puke. Ogras looked on with incomprehension before his eyes widened in understanding. He quickly reached for his own Cosmos Sack, and a second later his expression was an exact copy of the merchant's. So many barrels of fine liquor gone.

"It's that bad?" Ogras asked, trying to find some solace in the sorrows of others.

Almost a third of his barrels remained though, and most importantly he still had the treasure he got for defeating the fifth floor. That thing alone was worth more than everything he had stashed away combined. Together with what that asshole provided in the inheritance he stood a chance to open up two of his hidden nodes in one go, provided that he would survive, of course.

"It's worse than I expected," Galau confessed with an almost crying expression, but he still took out an opaque crystal. "At least I could keep some of m- WHAT IN THE HEAVENS?!"

"What?" Ogras asked with a frown.

"He's reached the 71st floor," Galau sputtered, incredulity evident on his face. "Almost at the gates to the 9th floor."

"Monster," Ogras snorted with a shake of his head, even though he wasn't as calm as he let on. "We'll see if it's enough to deter the group of starving Gwyllgi waiting outside the gates."