

## The Fall 471

### Chapter 471: Quid Pro Quo

Iz Tayn slowly walked through the vast gardens in her home, not sparing the divine flowers a second glance until she reached a burning mountain.

"Hello, uncle. Is grandpa awake?" she asked, and the ground started to shake the next moment.

Enormous pieces of rocks rearranged themselves, and the mountain turned into a golem hundreds of meters tall. Its whole body was covered in extremely dense scriptures to the point that not a single inch of its body wasn't covered with fractals. Iz always liked looking at the mysterious patterns while meditating, but she had other things to do today.

"Master has been expecting your return, he is awake," the enormous golem rumbled as it stretched out a finger that was over a dozen meters wide.

Iz disappeared in a puff of flames the next moment, and the fiery flowers and red sky were replaced with the boundless cosmos. In front of her a scorching sun hovered in the void, with an impossibly large man sitting on top of it. The man looked to be an amalgam of man and flames, and the heat he emanated far eclipsed the sun beneath him.

It was Mohzius Tayn, her grandfather.

Iz was just a speck of dust compared to the terrifying size of her ancestor. However, the scales of the cosmos somehow changed, and the gargantuan man was suddenly the same size as Iz herself, and the sun even smaller than her own [World's End].

"How did it go?" the middle-aged man asked with a warm smile.

"51 Days," Iz said as the bored expression she usually wore outside became increasingly animated. "You lied! It wasn't exciting at all. The last guy was pretty tough, but it was just one long slog."

"Ha!" Mohzius laughed, and the star beneath him flickered as it shared the man's mood. "Old Man River's descendant in your cohort took over 65 days to break the ceiling. I can't wait to see his face when he hears about this."

"My age group? Theleferos is almost twenty thousand years old," Iz snorted, but she was still secretly happy about her grandpa's expression.

Seeing his smile more valuable than the titles and new treasures she received, since her grandpa had been pretty down since her grandma had to leave.

"Still the young generation," Mohzius smiled. "By the way, haven't you only been gone for a few days? Why didn't you stay and play with your friends? I am sure we have a nice house by the tower."

"What friends? Just a bunch of people who only thinks about benefits and getting stronger all day," Iz muttered before her eyes lit with excitement. "I met someone interesting inside the Tower though! But I need your help, grandpa."

"Hm? Met someone? A boy?" the old man said, a frown quickly appearing on his face.

"Yes, but I just found him interesting," Iz hurriedly explained.

"Bringing someone out from that spatial fold is quite troublesome," the man muttered. "Your uncle can't do it without getting hurt, and I can't leave this place for the next few centuries."

"No, he's not someone from that place," Iz said with a shake of her head as she described her encounter on the 7th floor.

"Dual classes and dual races? And you say he's a human rather than a wanderer?" her grandpa said, looking a bit interested. "Sounds like a mutated constitution or a twinned soul. Perhaps even the fusion of two individuals with interwoven fates."

"But he somehow managed to remove the marking just after I returned. Can you help me?" Iz entreated.

"That is much easier," the man nodded, and a small mote of flame split off from the sun and entered Iz's forehead.

A small rune emerged a few seconds later, and the man grabbed it in his hand.

"He seems to have completely blown up his torso to rid himself of the mark," Mohzious said with a smile. "A gutsy fellow. But he didn't notice the branding on his spirit body. I strengthened it a bit, he won't be able to remove it easily now. But why do you want to see him?"

"No particular reason," Iz shrugged. "I was bored and he was interesting, so I thought I would go visit and take a look. Besides, he called me a lunatic, he owes me an explanation."

"Remember to not go around causing trouble in the lower realms," the man sternly said. "Most people are just trying to live their lives."

"I know, grandpa," Iz muttered.

"... Fine," the old man eventually relented. "You can go when you have undergone your next bloodline evolution and formed your first Dao Branch."

"But that can take decades!" Iz exclaimed.

"Just the blink of an eye," Mohzious smiled. "Better work hard."

"Fine. I'll go and break through now. Goodbye, grandpa," Iz Tayn said before she looked up at the stars. "Goodbye, grandma."

The next moment she disappeared from the remote star system, leaving the giant sitting on his sun. However, a massive claw ripped through the fabric of space, and a scar even larger than the celestial body appeared the next moment.

An eye of impossible proportions gazed down through the tear, and just its gaze put tremendous pressure on the whole star system. However, the giant wasn't worried in the least, but rather looked up with a smile matching the one that was usually reserved for his sole granddaughter.

"It seems you're well on the way of getting better. Just a few dozen millennia and you might be able to descend," he said with barely restrained elation.

"I didn't hear everything just now. Has little Iz met a boy? And you actually wanted to send her into his arms?" a booming voice echoed across the cosmos.

"Iz is more talented than both of us combined, but she lacks the drive and curiosity to walk toward the Terminus. I am hoping that she will find something worth fighting for, like how I fought for you all those years ago," Mohzius said, his smile widening.

A snort could be heard from within the void, and the whole star system shook in response.

"If my granddaughter runs away with some man before I can even meet her, I'll fight it out with you, old man," the voice said as white flames danced in the eye. "How dare he call my beautiful granddaughter a lunatic. He better not come to this sector of space."

"Yes dear," the old man smiled as he closed his eyes, some wistfulness flashing in their depths. "You should go back now. I can only hold back the Heavens for so long."

"How do you know my ancestor? Is she your master?" Catheya asked point-blank, her pitch-black orbs boring into Zac's eyes.

Zac was about to respond, but he suddenly felt a small pang of pain in his chest. He was already feeling pretty wretched after the fight, and he couldn't help but wonder if the cursed sword had left some lingering threats.

However, he felt fine except the exhaustion and a quick inspection couldn't pinpoint any issues, so he returned his attention back to the Draugr sitting in front of him.

"It's not what you think," Zac finally said after the pause.

"Then what?" She said, leaning forward in eagerness.

"There is an Incursion of the Undead Empire on my home planet," Zac slowly said, ignoring the question. "Can you deal with it?"

Catheya froze for a second before she wryly sighed.

"No. I am willing to pay a lot for information pertaining to my ancestor, but I cannot help you in that regard," she said with a shake of her head.

"Why not?" Zac said with a frown. "One small planet shouldn't matter to you guys."

"It doesn't really, but there are a few iron-clad commandments in the Empire. The first one is cohesion. Undead Kingdoms cannot go to war against each other. Skirmishes for unclaimed resources and are okay, but full-scale wars are banned. The second commandment is the Commandment of Conquest," she said.

"Conquest?" Zac repeated.

"All the Kingdoms of the Empire have a quota to expand, and no one is allowed to hinder a crusade. I could take over the Incursion if I could somehow make my way to your planet, but I would still be bound by law to conquer the planet," she said.

"Why?" Zac said with incredulity.

“Do you know the history of our people?” Catheya asked.

“I just know the Undead Empire is older than the System,” Zac shrugged.

“Well, the undead races are older, but the Undead Empire is not,” she said. “Do you know about the Darkness?”

“What? The Darkness?” Zac said, the rapid change of topics throwing him off-balance.

“When the System was born, the universe was drained of its energy to feed its usurpation of the heavens. The path of cultivation was cut off,” she said.

Zac nodded in understanding. Alyn had told him about this while she explaining the origin of the System.

“For most races it was a great inconvenience, but for the Undead Races it was a calamity. Our existence is dependent on death-attuned energies, and when the universe was being drained so was our lifeline,” Catheya said.

Zac’s eyes immediately widened in understanding. This was something he hadn’t considered. If all Cosmic Energy was suddenly gone, then Zac would live as he did before the Integration. But his Draugr-side would be screwed.

Even just sitting around would slowly expend miasma, though nowhere near the amounts that were expended during battle. But he would no doubt die within the year if he didn’t have any Miasma Crystals to top himself off.

But Zac remembered that the Darkness as Catheya called it had lasted over a million years. How did the undead races survive for so long? He could only imagine that more powerful warriors required a lot of Miasma to just survive.

“The Founders and the Undead Princes searched the whole universe for pockets of energies that could sustain us, but over 95% of our population succumbed before we found the Heartlands. Since then there’s been a standing order to realign the universe, because if the whole Multiverse is death-attuned we’ll never be without a lifeline again. So we will never stop expanding.”

“That’s... Crazy,” Zac sighed.

“Well,” Catheya said with a smile. “Only the fanatics take the mission seriously nowadays. But conflict is still the cornerstone of progress, and The Ruthless Heavens is very much in favor of the way we’re doing things as it causes conflict everywhere. That by itself provides us with some special benefits. Besides, we cannot disobey the commandments since they are coded into our bloodlines by the Primo.”

“The Primo?” Zac asked.

“I cannot discuss the Primo,” Catheya said with a shake of her head.

Zac sighed with a nod. He could only guess that the Primo was either the founder of the Undead Empire or the current Emperor. It didn’t really matter though. What mattered was the fact that there was no way for the Draugr in front of him to settle the Incursion.

However, the Undead Incursions was just the first of the many threats that Earth was facing, and he was pretty confident in dealing with it on his own after all his recent gains.

"What about the thing I mentioned out in the square? You said you're not from this sector, so you wouldn't care about offending these guys, right?" Zac probed.

"I'm not sure how I would be able to help with this matter? He sounds like someone on his last legs. I doubt he would care for a second that your planet was under the protection of some powerhouse unless the powerhouse was actually standing guard over the planet," Catheya slowly said. "I also don't carry anything that can kill someone that strong with any guarantee, since items of that grade can't be taken to this place."

"Can't your clan do something?" Zac asked with some helplessness.

"My master probably wouldn't mind killing that guy if I asked him. He has no love for the unorthodox cultivators. But we have no means to find him. He could be anywhere in this sector, and him being versed in the Dao of Karma which makes him twice as slippery. Do you have a token to summon my master if needed?"

"A-" Zac stammered, realizing that there were glaring issues in his plan of getting a patron.

"I am willing to join a force as long as they can provide protection of Earth," Zac said.

"Well, that might work, though not with me. Undead Kingdoms and forces cannot form alliances with the living, with you being targets of conquest and all. We could strike an unofficial partnership though," the Draugr smiled. "But there are a lot of problems with this plan."

"Problems how?" Zac asked.

"Is my ancestor alive?" Catheya smiled, but the effect was extremely creepy if you combined it with her dead eyes.

Zac sighed and mulled it over for a second.

"She was alive three months ago to the best of my knowledge. Or well, alive by undead standards I guess?" Zac said. "What problems?"

"She's really alive?!" Catheya exclaimed, even standing up in excitement.

Zac was pretty sure by this point that the Draugr-lady in his vision was an ancestor to the one in front of him, one that seemed to have gone missing. Had she perhaps left her clan behind due to issues stemming from the Splinter of Oblivion? She was clearly extremely powerful, and if she went mad it wouldn't be just a small Pill House going up in smokes.

She might blow up a whole planet.

It was a great bargaining tool for Zac though. She clearly was anxious to learn about her ancestor, and she seemed to come from an extremely powerful faction of one of the oldest forces in the Multiverse. She was probably the most knowledgeable person he had met, perhaps with the exception of some of the scions he had met during the fight on the 7th floor.

It was time to get his money's worth.

"The problems?" Zac reminded.

"Well, you can technically join a faction, either as an ally or a subordinate. But that doesn't mean that you can get the help you need," Catheya said after having composed herself. "First of all, travel will not be possible as your world probably hasn't met the requirements to connect with the multiverse. You can't even teleport to local factions, how are you going to teleport to other factions of the sector?"

"So there's no hope?" Zac said with some bleakness.

"Well, most people here have tokens to give out. You could technically form an agreement now, and then use the token to fetch a powerhouse to assist you. The one going would need to be a Planetary Leader though, since others wouldn't be able to bring anyone back while the planet is closed-off," Catheya said.

"How do you know this?" Zac asked. "Seems like a pretty specific rule."

"I've led an incursion myself," Catheya explained as it was a matter of course. "That's how I met Varo over there. I guess you could say he was that planet's version of you. Anyway, the rules are pretty much the same for an invader, so I read up on how things worked. It's a bit more convenient for the invader though, as the world immediately gets integrated after the conquest is done with. But you will still be cut-off for a hundred years even if you win."

Zac's eyes turned toward the silent Revenant, and he couldn't help but shudder. Would this have been the fate of himself and Kenzie if he hadn't managed to accumulate enough power? The Revenant seemed to feel the gaze, and he opened his eyes and looked over at Zac.

"That was him, I am me. We're nothing but strangers fated to never meet," Varo said before he once again closed his eyes.