

The Fall 492

Chapter 492: Heartbeat

Zac wasn't sure. Was he willing to bet his and Kenzie's lives on his mother being a friend who wanted the best for them, or should he start looking for ways to actively hide from her just like he was planning to do with the Great Redeemer? Perhaps the two plans could be fused, making sure neither party could find their way to Earth.

The more Zac thought about it, the better the idea seemed. He would try to stop Leandra from finding them, at least until they could protect themselves from whatever she had planned. One piece of good news in that regard was that she was wounded just thirty years ago or so. It might seem like a lifetime to him, but it was just the length of a single round of meditation for high-grade powerhouses.

Getting wounded enough to lose your memories at that level must mean that her enemies, possibly the rulers of Firmament's Edge, were extremely powerful, and healing from such a battle could take centuries. It was just like the Great Redeemer and his nasty scar that radiated terrifying energies. He would probably carry that wound for centuries before he could completely heal.

Leandra might be unable to come back for the time being due to being forced to focus on recuperating. She had been awoken ahead of time, and perhaps there were repercussions for that. The longer he had to prepare, the better he could hide himself and his sister. He would begin with the lantern, but he had a feeling that a Technocrat's tracking wouldn't be based on something like Karmic Threads.

Perhaps there were anti-technocrat arrays that would stop her from finding Jeeves. The orthodox forces had been fighting the Technocrats for millions of years, there should be all kinds of solutions in circulation.

Zac stood up with a grunt and walked out of his courtyard to let his sister know he was fine, but he was surprised to find a drone hovering just a few meters outside. He knew it must have been Kenzie who put it there, and she came running a few seconds later as expected.

"You did it," Kenzie said with a wide grin, and Zac nodded with a smile, inwardly thankful he had erected his obscuring arrays around his courtyard before he evolved.

Zac knew that he would have to tell her about his visions sooner or later, but now was not the time. However, he couldn't help but feel a foreboding as he saw the undeniable similarities between Kenzie's and Leandra's features.

His mother's appearance had always been a bit blurry in his mind, but it was refreshed upon seeing her twice in short order. And Kenzie really took after Leandra, no matter if you spoke of the slightly curled hair or their hazel eyes. Her appearance was a stark reminder that Leandra might come to collect at any moment, and it reignited his desire to become stronger.

And the first step toward that end was to open his first Hidden Node.

"I'm fine," Zac said as he looked around. "I passed the tribulation without any issue. I just wanted to tell you that before I headed inside again."

“What’s going on?” Kenzie asked. “Do you need to undergo the tribulation twice because of your two races?”

“No, I actually got two tribulations, but they descended at the same time, so it’s dealt with. I have gathered a few things I can finally use now that I’m E-Grade,” Zac explained. “I can use a few of them while heading toward the Dead Zone, but some need to be taken while in seclusion. I’ll be away for a few more hours.”

“Is it dangerous?” Kenzie asked with some worry. “You just passed the tribulations. Don’t you need to stabilize your foundation or something?”

“It should be fine,” Zac said, though he honestly had no idea.

Yrial didn’t explain exactly what would happen when he used the [Eye of Har’Theriam], apart from that it would break open a Hidden Node. If you were lucky and knew to listen well it could also expose more of the Hidden Nodes spread through your body, but only the one node was essentially guaranteed.

However, the Lord of Cycles never divulged if there were any dangers to absorbing the treasure. Taking normal pills to gain a level wasn’t dangerous from what he had gathered though. It mimicked the method used when cultivating, but it sped up the process drastically. It would hurt a bit, but you wouldn’t cripple yourself from opening a node this way.

It was nothing like forcing them open by cramming the nodes full of cosmic Energy.

But opening a Hidden Node was his best shot at getting a direct power spike before setting out to the Dead Zone. He would be able to force a few nodes open as well while traveling, but he had no idea what to do about the skill quests for the time being. He didn’t have any Dao Treasures either, at least not that he was aware.

So the Hidden Node had the highest priority.

“Alright, I’ll keep helping old man Gemidir with the Array,” Kenzie said. “Be careful.”

“Don’t let that old thief scam you,” Zac smiled before he returned to the courtyard.

Zac erected the restrictive arrays once more, and he sat down as he took out the box he bought during the trial, the container that held the [Eye of Har’Theriam]. It was the most valuable item available in the inheritance, except for Yrial’s lock of hair, that is.

He gingerly took it out, and the whole courtyard was suddenly drowned in cascading waves of energy. The fluctuations were extremely exotic as well. They neither felt like Attuned Energies or Dao Energy, but rather something he had never encountered before. Of course, it could simply be a higher-tiered attunement that he was too stupid to recognize.

The so-called [Eye of Har’Theriam] didn’t really look like the eye of a beast, which wasn’t a surprise since it actually wasn’t one. The Pathfinder Eye he recently expended to create [Love’s Bond] was actually part of a slain beast, but this thing was something else entirely. It was rather a natural treasure, a convergence of specific energies that had been given physical form.

It was an object created by chance from some unknown event in a dead universe, something that had proven extremely hard or even impossible to reproduce. It meant that the supply was extremely limited,

and not something that normally would appear in the hands of someone like him. The name came from the fact that the crystalline clump had a discoloration in the middle that somewhat looked like an eye.

Zac didn't eat the treasure, but he rather took off his robe to leave his chest bare before he pushed the item against his navel. Next, he simply started infusing the thing with Cosmic Energy. The small rock was like a bottomless abyss, swallowing everything Zac threw at it. But it was finally satiated after Zac had spent more than half of his reserves, and treasure started to sink into his body.

He had expected to feel a scorching pain like he had put a piece of coal against his flesh, but nothing of the sort happened. It rather felt like he suddenly had eaten a massive feast, making him a bit bloated. The treasure was quickly getting ready to do its thing, and Zac immediately focused his mind again as he observed the changes.

The slightest fluctuation could be a clue to another hidden node going by how Yrial had explained it, and he didn't want to miss a single thing.

The amount of energy Zac could sense from the [Eye of Har'Theriam] was just shocking, like he had swallowed dozens of high-grade pills in one go. His own Cosmic Energy was just a fraction of the whole, something to mark the treasure with his own aura. However, the energy ball didn't spread out across his pathways and, but it rather set up camp close to his Duplicity Core.

One tendril after another reached out in various directions of his body, like they were some sort of scouts that looked for their target. After having looked around for a bit they returned, looking slightly expended. This repeated over and over, and Zac tried to engrave every movement and every pause in his mind.

However, he couldn't help but worry as time passed. He and Yrial had briefly wondered whether he actually had any Hidden Nodes due to his unique constitution, and things weren't looking too good right now. The ball of energy had almost halved in size over the hours as it sent out one tendril after another in search of a node, but it hadn't found anything of note just yet.

Zac refused to give up unless the ball of energy completely ran out of steam though, so the search continued until there was finally a change. Zac felt a surge of victory as one of the tendrils froze after having dug into his heart. One tendril after another joined it until there suddenly were ten of them reaching inside, clearly having found what they were looking for.

The next moment the main energy ball pounced like a predator going for its prey.

Only then did Zac see what the treasure was doing. A major section of his pathways ran through his heart, and six normal nodes were surrounding it. However, there was now a small distortion added to the mix right in the middle. Zac was 100% sure that it hadn't been there before, since he had gone over his whole body after his evolution.

Or rather it hadn't been visible to his internal vision.

However, the Eye had managed to find it, and the small disturbance was quickly enlarged as the ten tendrils of the [Eye of Har'Theriam] poured massive amounts of the mysterious energies into the hidden node. Another stagnant pond quickly appeared, though this one looked completely different to the other ones he had seen so far.

It looked like an actual black hole, and any energy that entered it was swallowed without a hint of where it was going.

A shudder spread across his body as it suddenly felt like he had two hearts, each one beating to its own tune. The new addition was deeper and slower, like the beat of a war drum. Each beat became heavier and heavier as the hidden node was getting unlocked by the remaining energies of the [Eye of Har'Theriam], and Zac finally couldn't hold on as he spat a mouthful of blood.

He was shocked to see that the blood actually looked like brown sludge, but he didn't get a chance to even consider any course of action before he felt a crack in his heart, and a surge of energy stormed into his mind.

Zac had once again been thrown into a vision, finding himself on an utterly lifeless piece of stone soaring through the vast cosmos. There were no stars around him, leaving the area almost completely shrouded in darkness. The weak light from a distant nebula was all that illuminated the surface of the celestial body, and the single feature that barely stood out against the bleak surroundings.

It was a man, or Zac at least guessed it was a man going by the muscular build, stoically sitting on top of a prayer mat. His features were shrouded in darkness, and most of his body was covered by a simple robe, giving no indication of who it might be. He was completely unmoving as well, utterly blending in with the surroundings to the point Zac would have thought he was a statue or a corpse if it wasn't for one detail.

The heartbeat.

A heavy heartbeat beat once every few seconds with such vigor that ripples pushed out from around the cultivator's unmoving form. But more interestingly it looked like there was a pushback the next moment, like a receding wave. The counterforce dragged dense amounts of energy into his body, before the man's heartbeat once more to send out another ripple to gather even more.

It felt as though his heartbeat was absorbing the power of space itself, and even the stars in the distance flickered as if they were affected by the beat as well. It was like this man was an actual black hole, taking everything from the surroundings for himself. It was no wonder that the meteor he was sitting on was completely void of life and energies. He had no doubt already consumed it all.

Was this some sort of cultivation method based on the heart? Or was it simply the effect of his unique constitution? Was he traveling across the cosmos like a locust, draining any area he passed of its vitality?

Zac quickly realized that the meteor was moving with shocking speed as well. They were rapidly closing in on a sun and looked like they could collide at any moment. However, the man was completely oblivious to his surroundings, and Zac soon understood why. The sun was completely helpless in front of that man's heartbeat, and a massive chunk of flames was ripped from the enormous sphere in an instant.

An odd crack in space appeared above the man's head, and the stream of flames was swallowed without leaving a morsel behind. Zac was flabbergasted at the scene, as just a fraction of those streams of flames

were far more condensed than the whole scorching sun that Iz Tavn summoned during the Battle of Fates.

Finally, there was a change in the man's demeanor as they whizzed past the dimmed-out sun. Steam rose from his body as he slightly shuddered, and Zac looked on with a mix of confusion and anticipation. It appeared as though the heart cultivator might have swallowed a bit more than he could chew, and Zac was curious to see if he would show some way to deal with the fallout.

Zac had found himself in the very same predicament a couple of times after all, and he had only survived by the skin of his teeth.

There was also one more question burning in Zac's mind. Was this man in front of him an ancestor of his, either living or dead? Dao Visions showed you people who were walking the same general path as you, such as the Axe-Man and the Immutable Defender, but this wasn't a Dao Vision. It was a vision brought forth from his own body, a hidden node in his heart.

And such a vision would probably be based on an ancestor of his.