

The Fall 544

Chapter 544: Intent

Zac looked over at the Tool Spirit with surprise. This time Brazla was dressed like a scholar, and he held a golden abacus in his hands instead of some sort of oversized weaponry. There was also a sense of calmness in his eyes like he had transcended the mortal plane or was beyond mundane worries.

Of course, it was just Brazla playing the part, but it was far comparable to the domineering and arrogant persona he had when pretending to be a cultivator. In fact, Kenzie had already told him that Brazla was usually easier to deal with when he was dressed as a non-combat class. If you saw him wielding some sort of weaponry you were usually better off throwing out a few compliments and trying again tomorrow.

Thea appeared the next moment, and Zac's eyes widened in shock when he saw her appearance. Brazla wasn't kidding around when he said that Thea had barely passed. She was unconscious and she looked beyond wretched. Her clothes were in tatters and her whole body was completely drenched in blood. Just a few stripes of her hair remained, hanging in clumps held together by coagulated blood.

The only thing that looked completely intact was a blue sword that hummed with power. It was gripped in Thea's right hand with such force that her knuckles were white. Zac wondered if this was the invisible weapon she usually wielded, or if it was something she had gained inside the Inheritance.

This was not the time to worry about the details though, and Zac unhesitantly rushed over as he took out one of his better healing pills. However, his mind actually screamed of danger the moment he reached her side.

"Wai-" Zac shouted as he jumped backward, but it was too late as an extremely sharp energy shot out of one of her wounds and flew toward him, cutting open a shallow wound on his right arm.

He had been utterly incapable of stopping that attack, and his usually impervious skin was cut like butter. If Zac reacted any slower he might actually have lost his arm. The odd energy thankfully didn't try again but rather returned and entered Thea's body once more, causing a small shudder.

Zac barely felt any pain at all from the small cut, but a burning pain bloomed a second later. He looked down at the wound with surprise, and he found that it was an extremely clean wound, even exceeding the sharpness of the cuts he formed with [Rapturous Divide]. Was this the power of the Fragment of the Sword, or was this something else entirely?

Because that small energy didn't simply feel like a Dao.

"Such profound Dao Intent," Brazla muttered. "That strand of consciousness has actually made progress on his path."

"The Blade Emperor did this?" Zac asked. "And what is Dao Intent?"

"That girl is not adept enough in the Dao to form such a pure strand of Sword Intent. It can only come from Irei. It's really a shame," Brazla said, unfortunately ignoring the second question.

Only then did Thea wake up, and she looked around with some confusion before she realized where she was.

"Hey, catch this," Zac said before throwing the pill to Thea who immediately swallowed it before she once again closed her eyes to focus on her recuperation. Zac sighed in relief when he saw Thea was fine before turned back to the Tool Spirit. "What's a shame?"

"Irei," Brazla said as he looked up at the statue. "He was destined to become a C-Grade Monarch, but he fell to his demons in the end. Do you know why the Blade Emperor is the only one who left a complete heritage in addition to an Inheritance?"

"Because he was a friend of your creator?" Zac asked, not hesitating to take advantage of the fact that Brazla was in one of his rare sharing moods today.

"True, but that's not the reason. It's here because of his obsession with the sword and creating a family. He adopted one Sword Child after another after marrying his main weapon, and he poured obscene amounts of wealth into them to awaken their spirits. When he ran out of money he turned to my master, who helped him evolve the Swords in return for the Heritage," Brazla said. "If he had used even a third of all that wealth on himself he would have broken past his bottleneck without a doubt. He is the second most talented person of the seven."

"So what happened?" Zac asked.

"Mental disorder brought by betrayal. It turned into a heart demon that was the source of his obsession with gathering swords," Brazla said with a shake of his head. "Remember his fate well. You mundane beings are not meant to grasp at heaven's secrets. To cultivate is to go against the heavens, and it is not done without shedding your humanity. As the millennia pass you will come to realize that you don't recognize the person that stares back at you through the mirror any longer."

Thea opened her eyes and listened to Brazla with a serious expression, and Zac felt a sense of heaviness as well. It was true. How could someone keep their humanity as the eons passed and almost every one they had ever known had long turned to dust? The reasons for struggling to become more powerful might no longer matter, and you were suddenly just a walking nuclear weapon devoid of purpose.

"Thankfully The Great Brazla is not limited by such trifles, as he is endless and eternal," Brazla said as he drifted away with a snort.

"Are you okay?" Zac asked, shaking off Brazla's ominous portents.

"I'll be fine. I haven't completely absorbed the sword energies. Did the Tool Spirit Call it Sword Intent just now? And where is Billy?" Thea croaked.

"Billy is still inside," Zac said before looking at Thea with interest. "He called it both a Dao Intent and a Sword Intent. Are you able to share how it's created?"

That small amount of energy had been extremely powerful, and Zac was hoping to form something similar for himself. After all, if there was Sword Intent, then there should surely be Axe Intent as well. If he could add that power to his strikes, then he would probably be able to fight one tier stronger enemies without breaking a sweat.

"It seems to be something that comes after a Dao Field," Thea hesitantly said as she started smearing her vast number of scars with some ointment. "The Blade Emperor was able to materialize real objects

with it. He trapped me in a cage of Dao Intent Swords, and I had to use my own Dao Field to get out. I'm not sure if it's even possible to create naturally in my rank. You might be able to do it."

"So how do you still have the energy?" Zac asked before he remembered how rude it was to pry into other's cultivation secrets. "Sorry, it's fine if you don't want to tell."

"It's okay. I was imparted with a small amount of Sword Intent to guide me on the path of the sword. I think I might be able to use it sort of like a mother dough for my own strikes too, as long as I don't overuse it," Thea said after some thought. "We could spar a bit if you want."

"It sounds like a good idea, but it would have to wait. The war against the dominators is starting right now," Zac sighed.

"I'll come along," she said as she got up and started walking toward the exit, though her steps were shaky.

"Are you crazy?" Zac said. "You're covered in wounds, go rest. We do need someone from the Marshalls to take us around, but I'll grab one of your cousins."

"No, I'm going. I'm not staying behind any longer," Thea said with her determination. "I'm moving forward as well."

"You... Fine," Zac sighed. "Our job is only ancillary anyway. I won't fight either, I'll just help with the jammers. This is the Zhix' war, and they don't want us to step in unless absolutely necessary."

"Fine," Thea said as she wobbled out of the Dao Repository.

"Are you really...?" Zac couldn't help but interject again, but he was quickly shut up by another glare.

Zac was about to call Triv as well, but he actually appeared from between two bushes and shot toward them.

"My lord," Triv said, but his greeting turned into a scream as Thea unhesitantly drew her blade in one fluid motion aimed at slaughter. "Ai!"

"He's my butler," Zac shouted in alarm, and he barely had time to block the swing with Verun, narrowly preventing Triv from getting cut in two.

Normally a sword swing wouldn't matter to a ghost, but Zac sensed a shadow of that terrifyingly sharp energy inside the weapon. He still wasn't completely clear how it was made, but it would definitely be able to harm the ghost since it was related to the Dao.

"I'm sorry," Thea said as she sheathed her weapon before she gave Zac an odd look. "You have a ghost butler?"

"This is why young master shouldn't consort with the living. Violent and lowly creatures," Triv sighed as he made some distance from Thea.

"Triv is quite knowledgeable about all kinds of things, and he helps me sorting out the day-to-day," Zac shrugged.

Zac hesitated for a bit before he also told Thea about Triv's early findings.

"A life and death planet," Thea slowly said before she sighed. "This will be a detriment to most of us."

"Well, as I said, it's not sure it will come to happen," Zac said as he scratched his chin, feeling a bit guilty.

There was no way it was a coincidence that the planet got such a weird attunement. Zac was the main contributor to the quest, dealing with the lich king, the elite army, and two and a half of the generals himself. The planet probably got its attunements to match his, as the System wanted to gift him a suitable cultivation environment. The fact that it screwed over the rest of the planet wasn't something that the elitist System would care about.

"It might not be too bad for normal humans either. A lot of people lived quite well at the edge of the Dead Zone, living outside and hunting inside. As long as we can concentrate the attunements to certain spots we can maintain that sort of balance," Zac added after a bit, trying to find some positives in the situation. "And both life and death are powerful attunements. Powerful healers and black mages might emerge from Earth in the future."

Undead might not be able to deal with life-attunements, but Humans didn't have the same limitations. Having a high affinity to Death was extremely unlikely, but people could still go down that path without too much going against them. Assassins, Necromancers, Black Mages. A death-attuned planet would help nurture all those kinds of powerful existences.

"That might be true. Even if half the world will turn into a Dead Zone there will still be plenty of room to live on," Thea slowly nodded as she walked toward the teleporter. "Well, that's an issue for later. Let's go."

"You might want to change clothes first," Zac coughed, which drew a snicker from Triv as well.

Only then did Thea look down at the rags she wore over her bloodied body, and her hand moved up to her almost-bald head. She stiffly nodded without a word and Zac hurriedly led her to his sister's mansion where she could shower and change.

She only emerged 30 minutes later, but the transformation was almost shocking. Her hair had been regrown and her clothes changed, but the sword scars remained all over her body, angry red lines that seemed to refuse to disappear. Zac's wound was actually in a similar state, though he felt it would close a few hours.

That still was a pretty long time for an errant spurt of energy, just a fragment of whatever Thea carried inside her body. Zac could actually sense that very same power in her eyes as well as her piercing blue eyes had gained an undeniable sharpness to them. The only thing that he couldn't ascertain was whether that energy was something beneficial or yet another risky venture like his own Remnants.

The trio soon returned to the teleporter where Ibtep still was waiting, and Zac turned to the ghost.

"You better enter your house for now. We'll be traveling with the Zhix for a while. The Anointed seem to really hate the undead."

"Those things," Triv muttered with a mix of disgust and incredulity, clearly understanding who Zac was talking about. "Not natural."

"A being wrought from purest corruption shouldn't talk of what is natural," Ibtep said with a snort as it gave the ghost an askance look.

Triv didn't respond, and only flew into the pagoda in Zac's sleeve and disappeared. The trio activated the teleporter the next moment and found themselves surrounded by dozens of Anointed who stood ready. The teleporter they appeared in was another one than the array he entered through last time.

They were in an unfathomably large underground chamber, and Zac spotted a vast army behind the towering priests. There were hundreds of thousands of Zhix standing ready and armed to their teeth, every one of them radiating palpable killing intent. The whole chamber felt like a pressure cooker from the accumulated aura, and it felt claustrophobic even though it was over twenty meters to the ceiling.

"We're ready to go," Zac said after making sure he wouldn't get sucker-punched again. "Where do you want to teleport first?"

"We want to take out the first Hives as quickly as possible, which will hopefully help us trap more of them before they devise some sort of retaliation," Rhubat said as he turned to Thea who was clearly affected by the extremely dense killing intent. "Please take us to the town called Lübeck, pathfinder."