

## The Fall 549

### Chapter 549: Adcarkas

Harbinger's Cosmos Sack was gone, its contents probably lost in some unreachable spatial fold, but there was at least something for him to loot; the pitch-black spear that was lying in the grass, its shaft still in the grip of the Dominator. It was definitely valuable, probably a High-Quality Spirit Tool judging by the spirituality it emitted.

Zac lifted it and looked it over for a few seconds, but he couldn't figure out what it was made of. It was extremely hard and looked like some sort of stone, but it was pliable like a spear made from wood or metal. He was able to bend it almost 180 degrees when he exerted himself, and it sprung back to its original form the moment he let go.

It was a bit regretful, but it definitely looked like something that was a perfect fit for Ogras.

He didn't begrudge the demon from finally getting his hands on a Spirit Tool. A boost in Ogras' combat strength was a direct benefit for Port Atwood. But Zac had been the one to almost get himself killed this time, yet he gained nothing, not even some trinkets. Perhaps he could squeeze some of the valuables out of the demon's paws in exchange for the weapon later.

"Warmaster, are you safe?" a rumbling voice suddenly echoed out as Rhubat came rushing, closely followed by a score of massive Anointed and hundreds of elite warriors. "We sensed a massive spike in corruption and realized something was happening here."

Only then did Zac remember the ongoing war, but he breathed in relief when he saw that things weren't as bad as he had feared. The Anointed had spread out and reinforced the rear, and the frontlines were stable enough to allow a contingent to freely head over to his location.

Larger numbers weren't enough to turn the tides when the opponents were life-force-burning Anointed.

"We got ambushed," Zac said as he pointed at the head on the ground. "I think it's Harbinger, but I can't tell for sure."

"It was truly one of the three!" another of the Anointed exclaimed. "The head releases such waves of corruption even in death."

"This is Karath... It's really them," Rhubat sighed as the giant knelt down to inspect the remains. "I met this one before the integration. To think such a promising scholar was hiding a secret like this. This must mean that Void's Disciple is Adcarkas after all, the Sage of the Grand Basin."

Zac's brows rose in interest. It sounded like the Dominators were actually some sort of important people even before the Integration. Their ability to mask their powers must have been shocking to be able to walk among the Zhix with their corruption-spotting antennae. He wanted to know more about their history, but there were more pressing matters at the moment.

"So, what's our next move?" Zac asked. "It seems that the enemies have realized what we're doing here."

"Four hives were cleansed before this, and enough warriors to fill three more will be purified in this battle," Rhubat slowly said. "The numbers are now in our favor. We will try to keep going and take out

more Hives, but we expect the remaining heretics to have adapted by now. Our warriors need rest as well, so we will pause for reconnaissance after this battle.”

“Good,” Zac nodded with some relief. “I need to rest a bit as well. How long do you need?”

He had a huge amount of energy sloshing around his body at the moment, and he didn’t want to waste it.

“Ten hours,” Rhubat said after some thought before he turned toward Thea. “We’d like to keep the Pathfinder though in order to send out the scouts.”

“That’s fine with me,” Thea nodded.

The Anointed returned to the war after seeing that everything was fine, but they still stayed close-by so that they could come to Zac’s aid at moment’s notice. Zac himself was about to sit down and rest up, but he suddenly saw an azure stream of light shooting straight toward him. He wasn’t worried as he saw the magical light though, but rather amused.

It was Triv who was using some sort of movement skill to return to him and the Jammer.

“Young master, you are safe,” the ghost said with relief as it congealed into a proper form.

“Just where did you go earlier?” Zac snorted. “I couldn’t find you anywhere.”

“I, ah... repositioned myself a bit. I did not want to become a burden during the Young Master’s fight. That aura you released...” the ghost hesitantly said.

“Well, thank you for your assistance,” Zac snorted, not seeing any reason to divulge the origins of his Annihilation Sphere. The lack of information might help keep the ghost in check even better. “I need to keep the energy inside my body for another hour while they finish up the battle. Look after the Jammer for me.”

He didn’t dare break open the node right away in case one of the other Dominators would show up so he could only focus on retaining the energy until he could go back to Port Atwood. The battle thankfully didn’t last that long though, and Zac hurried toward the Teleportation Array of the fallen Hive after just 40 minutes.

The deaths after this battle were staggering even compared to the previous ones, and Zac sighed when he heard that over 100 000 of their own had fallen over the last hour. It was still a great victory on paper considering how many enemies they faced, and a testament to how a small group of elites like the Anointed could keep fatalities down. But their losses were still large enough to populate a small town, making it hard to celebrate the win.

Zac soon appeared in his compound, and he found Joanna sitting in meditation just outside. She woke up when she sensed the fluctuations from the array and immediately turned to Zac.

“I wasn’t able to contact you, but Billy’s returned as well,” Joanna said with an odd face.

“Did he pass the trial?” Zac asked.

“I... don’t know,” Joanna said after some hesitation. “But I think so?”

“What’s going on? Where is he?” Zac asked with a frown.

“He’s just outside the Dao Repository. He’s been sleeping for 14 hours straight,” Joanna said. “He isn’t deeply wounded, but it looks like someone has been using him as a punching bag. He fell asleep the moment he emerged from the Inheritance, and Brazla immediately threw him out because of the snores. I tried to move him but he almost bashed my head in without waking up.”

Zac’s gazed at the Valkyrie with confusion before he flashed over to the Dao Repository once more. It didn’t take a lot of effort to find where the giant was lying as it sounded like someone was performing large-scale logging in his forest.

Billy was lying sprawled on his back just outside the tiled square of the Dao Repository, and Zac couldn’t help but laugh when he saw Billy’s face. It was completely swollen to the point that it looked like he just had an allergic reaction. However, the fact that his face also was almost purple from layers of bruises that looked like meaty fists indicated he had been repeatedly punched.

It seemed that the titan’s trial was a lot more straightforward than his own or Thea’s.

Zac guessed that Billy’s nose was broken as well as it was completely congested which caused the terrifying snore, and he shook his head as he prodded him from some distance with the help of his club.

“NO MORE!” Billy screamed as he shot up to his feet.

The giant wildly looked around for a few seconds with heaving breaths until he realized what was going on.

“Ah- It’s you. Billy thought he was still stuck with the crazy one,” Billy sighed in relief as he sat down.

“How did it go?” Zac smiled as he took out an ointment. “Your face is a bit swollen. This will help.”

“Stupid crazy Titan said he wanted to teach Billy self-defense. But it only ended with Billy being punched in the face over and over,” Billy sighed. “But Billy is a lot better at defending now! Come, hit Billy.”

“Uh, okay,” Zac said before he immediately moved forward, his club ripped through the air as he swung it toward Billy’s chin with a decent amount of strength.

However, Billy’s massive muscles suddenly tightened to the point that they looked like steel wires, and the hulking man turned to a blur the next instant. Zac’s mind suddenly screamed of danger as the grotesque skull on Billy’s club was bearing down on him with shocking speed.

The ground cracked all around Zac as he pushed himself back, narrowly avoiding the smash. He looked with surprise at the giant, feeling he was over twice as fast as before. Billy had neither excelled at defense nor speed before, making him an extremely lopsided meathead. However, one of those weaknesses had been shored up during the inheritance it looked like.

But it seemed to be his speed rather than endurance that had been improved, so Zac didn’t understand what Billy meant by self-defense.

“I thought you said that the Titan taught you how to protect yourself?” Zac asked with some confusion.

“Crazy man said that the best way to not get hit is to kill everyone before they can hit you,” Billy sagely said.

“Hard to argue with that logic,” Joanna snorted from the side.

“Crazy man taught Billy a good skill that makes Billy quicker the stronger he gets. But it is very tiring,” Billy sighed as he gulped down a couple of huge mouthfuls of water.

Zac believed he understood what Billy was talking about. It was either some sort of rare skill that increased Billy’s Dexterity based on his Strength, or perhaps a movement skill that was based on Strength rather than Dexterity as was the norm.

“I have to go,” Zac sighed. “What are you doing next Billy?”

“Billy is going to Billyville,” Billy said after some thought. “Billy is tired and has not been home for a long time.”

“That sounds good,” Zac said and added after some thought. “Thea and I are going away in a few weeks. To a special place like the hunt. We don’t know how long we will be gone. Do you want to come as well?”

“Why are you going there?” Billy asked curiously.

“Find treasure and beat up bad guys,” Zac smiled.

“Haha, you always do that. You need a hobby. But Billy will come help you,” Billy grinned as he started walking away, heading toward the town.

Zac nodded at Joanna who followed him to make sure he got home rather than kidnapped by some group of lovestruck demons. He was left alone in his private forest, and he entered his courtyard to finally absorb the massive amount of Cosmic Energy surging through his body.

However, he didn’t immediately push the energy into his body, but he rather swapped over to his Draugr-form first. He figured that if one of his pathways was going to be destroyed, then it might as well be the pathways in his undead form. His human pathways wouldn’t be harmed this way as they would be stored in his specialty core.

This allowed him to keep using his Human form while recuperating while only bearing some of the detriments of node-breaking. He would still be weakened due to the shock to the system, but he would be able to use Cosmic Energy without getting a backlash like in the Dead Zone.

The process went quite smoothly, if you could consider a part of your body literally blowing up smooth. The energy from taking out the Dominator was easily able to crack open his eighth node, even though that node alone required about as much energy as the first three nodes combined. The energy was even enough to provide his Fetters of Desolation class with a level and set the foundation for his ninth node, meaning he was now level 83 in his Undead form while his human side was still 82.

The next node was in an unfortunate spot though. It was just between his right elbow and his bicep, making it a very precarious spot. He had already learned to somewhat decrease the degree to which he maimed himself with every node opening, but he needed to be careful now. His arms were pretty damn muscular compared to before the integration, but they were still far thinner compared to his legs.

One mishap and he might find himself in the same situation as Ogras, with only a stub for an arm. He wouldn't be able to grow it back before reaching D-Grade at the earliest unless he managed to get his hands on a treasure with the same effect. However, Ogras had searched high and low for such a thing in the Base Town without any success, so items with that sort of effect seemed as rare as soul-mending treasures.

He needed to keep improving the process of node-opening with every level he gained. Pretty much all the nodes during early E-Grade were located in his extremities, but he would move onto more precarious placements in middle E-Grade. In late E-Grade, the nodes would all be located around his head and heart, and even cultivators could die from a single mistake at that point, let alone mortals.

A wave of exhaustion gripped him after the upgrade was complete, and he fell into a deep slumber as the Fragment of the Bodhi worked on both his node-related wound and the weird cracks that had appeared on his shoulders and neck.

Zac woke up only seven hours later, and he frowned when he saw that the tears from unleashing the Annihilation Sphere hadn't healed at all. They didn't really seem to cause any more problems than some random scars, but Zac knew it was important that he slowly healed the wounds. These kinds of injuries were a big problem to cultivators.

High-concept wounds from battles or overextending yourself was like spiritual sequela, and it could cause problems to one's future cultivation if left unchecked. What if some remnants of Oblivion hiding in his shoulders suddenly exploded when he opened a near-by node in the future? He might die then and there.

Zac's body was still feeling wrung out even after resting for such a long time, and something seemed to have changed at the war front while he was out. Nonet and Ibtep had actually appeared in Port Atwood as he was inspecting his body, and they were quickly ushered to his compound.

"What's going on?" Zac asked when he saw the two Zhix. "I thought I was supposed to meet up with you in two hours?"

"There is no need. A challenge has been issued and a final battle will take place in ten days," Nonet simply said.