

The Fall 562

Chapter 562: Back Again

A deluge of sorrow and self-blame had turned Zac's mind into mush as he stared down at the unmoving form of Ogras. Countless what-ifs swirled in his mind, ways that he could have prevented this from happening. But he still couldn't comprehend how these latest events came to be. He had seen Void's Disciple die, he just knew it wasn't some sort of illusion that he cut the man apart.

However, things had gone out of hand too fast, even if you discounted the Dominator's miraculous recovery by the end. They had scrambled to get back in control since the moment two of the Anointed were swallowed by that scroll, but things had only got worse instead. It wasn't completely unexpected though, they had only learned of the situation less than an hour ago, and there had been no time for proper preparation.

The turbulence in his mind finally gave way to a bleak desolation. He had worked so hard, pushed himself beyond what he thought possible in his efforts to become stronger. Yet the ones he fought for kept falling one after another. First Alea, then Ogras. Would even more of his companions join the two when they set out for the Mystic Realm? The situation was almost as bad with the Anointed. The fight had lasted less than a minute, but Zac didn't doubt that the group of seven had burned a significant portion of their already limited lifespan.

Even more frustratingly, there was nothing he could do to remedy the situation. He still needed to enter the abandoned Research Base, and he still needed to fight Void's Disciple again, along with Inevitability and whoever else proved to be a threat to Earth. They had paid such a huge price just now, but they got almost nothing in return.

However, a sudden change startled Zac out of his self-reproach as the previously unmoving body of Ogras started to shudder and spasm. His skin turned pitch-black the next moment, and the instantaneously turned into shadows only to be reformed once more. His limbs twitched and kicked as well, but it didn't look like natural movements at all. It was more like a powerful electric current made him twitch uncontrollably.

Zac was aghast as he witnessed the macabre spectacle, but there was also a tinge of hope in the back of his mind.

If there was one thing that the demon excelled at, then it was keeping himself alive by any means. Had he actually found a way to defy death itself and bring himself back, just like Void's Disciple himself? However, Zac's anticipation was soon poisoned with suspicion. A minute passed while the cycle between demon and shadow kept repeating, and Zac could see that something was off.

The energy signatures the demon was emitting were wrong. They felt alien, sinister. Like a devil had taken the opportunity to possess Ogras' body when his own soul left it. However, Zac couldn't bring himself to nip this potential threat in the bud. He could only shake his head in an effort to clear his muddled thoughts, preparing for the worst.

If something really had possessed the demon, then he could only pray it wasn't a strong one as he had already entered his weakened state after using [Hatchetman's Rage].

The odd fluctuations finally ended, but Zac's heart was still hammering as he stood vigil in front of the body. He had clearly seen what had the transformations had done. Ogras had cycled between shadow and flesh over and over, but a small change had taken place between each revolution.

The gaping hole in his chest grew a little smaller from each cycle, but not through flesh regrowing like how the Shard of Creation had healed his own mortal wounds. Missing flesh had instead been replaced with congealed shadows, shadows that had regrown the demon's missing organs bit by bit. An indistinct heart had formed from darkness itself, and Zac had felt its beat when it was fully formed.

The only sign of Ogras even being wounded in the end was the copious amount of blood around him, and the fact that the recreated skin on his chest was dark grey. Zac wasn't sure what to do, but the demon made the decision for him as he suddenly coughed and woke up, his eyes blearily looking around. Zac was relieved to see that Ogras' gaze looked the same, but he still could feel that sinister aura emanating from his body.

"Urh? Ah? I'm alive?" Ogras wheezed with confusion, but Zac wasn't in any state to answer him.

"What's the first thing you ever said to me?" Zac asked as [Verun's Bite] materialized in his right hand.

"What?" Ogras sputtered, clearly having some trouble understanding what was going on.

"Answer me," Zac said, the grip on his axe tightening. "What was the first thing you ever said to me?"

"I said 'You natives are barbarians, so aggressive.' You were wearing a dress at the time. Now what the hell is going on?" the demon sighed.

"You're emitting some pretty sinister energies," Zac said as he relaxed slightly, though not completely.

"Well, I can't seem to move. I need some healing," Ogras eventually said after a brief pause.

Zac hesitated for a second, but he eventually took out one of his best healing pills and shoved it into Ogras mouth as he infused the demon's body with the Fragment of the Bodhi. Only then did he realize how bad a state the demon was in, even after having reformed the hole in his torso. His spiritual sense couldn't see what was going on in the shadow-part of Ogras' body at all, but countless small scars covered the rest of his insides.

Worse yet, healing them with his Dao Fragment seemed to barely have any effect. The demon wasn't really at any risk of dying as far as Zac could tell, but it would no doubt be a long road of recovery, even provided that the demon's new heart worked as intended.

"What the hell happened at the end?" Ogras asked. "I remember escaping into the shadows when those vortices destabilized, and then waking up with your ugly face scowling down on me."

Zac sighed before he sat down himself, and he retold the final events without missing anything while simultaneously trying to gauge the demon's thoughts. However, the demon didn't let on anything, he just silently listened to the series of events with a small frown on his face.

"Well, people often say that I am heartless, I guess they were right," Ogras eventually said with a weak smile, but Zac felt that he could hear some confusion and perhaps even fear in his voice.

"It wasn't you who did this?" Zac asked. "I thought it might be the skill you got at E-Grade or something."

"A skill that could allow me to walk away after getting a netherblasted hole in my chest? I wish. This must have been Leech. Can you take off my cast?" the demon said.

Zac nodded and he gingerly took off the metal arm that usually held the congealed shadows. He was ready to blast out with a [Verun's Bite] in case of an ambush, but his brows rose when the cast opened and nothing was there apart from Ogras' stump. He turned to Ogras, but he saw that the demon wasn't all that surprised by the disappearance of his shadow tentacle.

"I guess that I can't call that bast-, I mean little buddy, Leech any longer. How about Spare? If he's going to turn into spare organs for me in the future," Ogras grinned, still lying sprawled on the ground.

Zac wryly smiled, but there was still worry in his heart. Ogras seemed to want to pretend it was all under his control, but he had definitely cut it close just now. His pale was completely pallid, and his hand shook noticeably. And who knew what the future ramifications would be for something like this? Getting possessed and having your body turned into a vessel wasn't unheard of in the multiverse.

"Well, I'm glad you can laugh about this," Zac snorted as he glanced at the destruction around them.

It looked like Ogras had cheated death this time once more, but the others weren't so lucky. The two unscathed Anointed had just returned with the body of the one who was flung away, and he really had perished from the Dominator's strike. With Void's Disciple having escaped there was probably no chance of saving the ones trapped in the scroll either, if that was even possible in the first case.

It was a poignant reminder of how cheap life was in the multiverse.

"This was such a shitshow," Zac muttered with a shake of his head.

It looked like the universe agreed as a massive explosion erupted far in the distance, in the direction of Site 16.

The displacement had caused more damage to Void Disciple's already harried constitution, and waves of all-consuming pain buffeted him until he finally couldn't take it any longer. The only way for him to withstand the chaotic storm in his mind had been to unleash his might once more, destroying parts of the town around him.

Sweat trailed down his face as he started running, unhesitatingly abandoning his original goal. It was regrettable, but he had already found most of what he needed. The enormous surplus of foul Karma gathered from the Zhix Wars would hopefully be able to substitute what was missing. The notion made him start, and he quickly shook his head to refocus his straying thoughts.

He wasn't in the Mystic Realm right now, he couldn't let his minds wander so freely out here.

Fragment of the Vacuum helped remove the space in front of him, and he pushed himself as quickly as possible to get out of the range of whatever was preventing his [Cosmic Gate] from activating.

Void Disciple's mind was filled with reproach as the surroundings flashed past him. To think that a moment of anger could cause such devastating results. He knew that he should have just left, what could those people have done to prevent it? But seeing the face of his son's murderer had made him

lose control. How could he face Harbinger in the afterlife if he didn't exact at least a punishment that was within the bounds of his Master's acceptance?

But the newly integrated sapling had grown into a towering tree, and Void's Disciple knew that he had barely gotten out of the situation alive.

At least he had managed to get back at that wretched demon for using [Skybreaker] right in front of him. There had been no energy forthcoming from his strike, but he should at least be crippled from the punch full of spatial tears. Void's Disciple kept moving for another hour until he finally sensed that the hidden dimensions were tranquil once more, and he arduously opened a gate toward the nearest hive.

However, he barely had time to walk through the portal before the pain erupted once more, and Void Disciple helplessly fell over as he desperately clutched his head. The cost of subverting fate wasn't an insignificant one, at least not with the treasure that his Master had provided. The timeline struggled to repair itself, and the wound spreading from his shoulder all the way to the hipbone on the opposite side deepened once more.

Having insight into a corner of space had driven home just how terrifying that final strike of Zachary Atwood was. It combined two opposing Daos to create an endlessly deep rift in space, and not even he would have survived normally. But it was also a testament to the greatness of space, the great delimiter.

The soul-shaking pain continued for a few more minutes until the bleeding finally stopped. The wounds managed to close a bit thanks to him having over 2000 Vitality running at a tremendous efficiency, but he knew that it would keep getting worse almost no matter how high the attribute was. The threads of karma surrounding the human progenitor were too strong, and subverting his deeds was far more difficult than normal.

Transferring all of it to the [Karmic Subversion Effigy] was impossible, and the effect would slowly weaken over time, the damage seeping back to him.

He popped a pill into his mouth as he got back on his feet, arduously opening a portal again. He needed to get back into the Mystic Ream, to enter the healing vats they had commandeered. He had been loath to use unknown technology thus far, especially since it required the assistance of those scheming natives, but now he didn't have too much of a choice. He would really end up bisected if he didn't increase his rate of healing.

Of course, the physical wound was just the most immediate concern.

The [Karmic Subversion Effigy] was a taboo item, and using something like that would have consequences even when not used against someone so loved by karma as the Super Brother-Man. It was one of his master's more successful experiments into harvesting Karma on a large scale, but it was ultimately a flawed item.

His Master hadn't mentioned anything of the sort in the scriptures he left behind, but Void's Disciple had managed to make a few discoveries over the past centuries. Using it would allow you to live when you should have died, but that life would eventually become a curse. He could already feel the darkness spread in the depths of his mind, and he still hadn't figured out a method to counteract it.

Not yet.

He couldn't stop now. He had a goal to accomplish, and his daughter needed him to be strong for a while longer. The loss of his necklace was a shame, but the [Scroll of the Depths] would be able to be activated again as soon as it had absorbed enough energy from the stars. It should be finished well before the doors of the Mystic Realms closed.

Void's Disciple finally reached the hive, and he wordlessly activated the Teleportation Array before disappearing, his brooding aura quenching any questions from his followers. He appeared in a snow-blasted valley a minute later, the spatial tunnel just a few kilometers away. He entered the Mystic Realm after handing over the scroll to his trusted attendant, and he felt the sense of freedom once more as the darkness transferred him to a shielded subspace. Not even a brush with death and getting cursed could dampen the spirit of liberty after centuries of bondage.

Here he was Adcarkas once more.