

## The Fall 564

### Chapter 564: Precipice

The following days passed quickly after Zac's group returned to Port Atwood. He sent Ibtep and Joanna with the Anointed to act as liaisons to iron out the logistics of the upcoming mission. As for himself, he had been planning on dealing with all kinds of things to prepare Port Atwood for the Mystic Realm. However, Zac was quickly shown the value of a proper support system as everything was being taken care of better and more efficiently than if he had done it himself.

Triv and Abby were working in tandem to quash all sorts of issues, from designing a proper base that could hold everyone in Port Atwood, to figuring out what sorts of materials they needed to bring into the research base. The general plan was to set up a proper outpost in the garden on the other side of the portal, and then build advance posts as they reached further and further inside the Mystic Realm. This freed up most of Zac's time, allowing him to spend most of his time inside his Cultivation Cave, nursing his wounds while looking for ways to improve his power.

The brush with death had increased his desire to become stronger even further, but time was limited. The best he could come up with was to solidify his gains from the battle while trying to figure out if there was any concrete gain from his epiphany. Unfortunately, no matter how he looked or experimented he knew that he neither gained any affinity to his Daos, nor had he evolved any of them.

He had definitely taken a step in the right direction on the mountain top, but he was still very lacking if he wanted to upgrade any of his Dao Fragments to high mastery. However, he did make one interesting discovery as he searched for clues inside his body. His [Void Heart] had turned inert since swallowing the tendril of Tribulation Lightning. It wouldn't activate no matter what he did or what energies he consumed.

Zac noticed the anomaly while dealing with the wounds from the fight. His broken ribs and flesh wounds would heal by themselves thanks to the atmosphere in his cave and his high Vitality, but there were extremely stubborn pieces of foreign Dao lodged in the wounds. Both the exploding stars and Void's Disciple's kick had been infused with Daos, and different ones at that.

The one in the kick was the strongest, and Zac guessed it might even be a High-Tiered Dao. It was completely foreign as well, and not something that he had encountered in any of his other fights. The closest sensation the stubborn Dao before was when he was thrown out of the Technocrat spaceship and found himself swirling in space for a bit. It wasn't surprising considering all of Adcarkas' skills seemed to be related to space.

The wounds from the stars instead contained an energy that made him think of the sun, a fire-aspected Dao that was distinctly different from neighboring Daos such as the Seed of Tinder. It wasn't as explosive, but it was still extremely stubborn as it smoldered in his wounds as though it would do so for billions of years. The Fragment of the Star did exist according to Big Blue, though the space octopus had no idea how to form it.

These invasive Daos didn't really affect his combat readiness all too much after his bones had set and flesh healed, but it was still a hidden threat that he needed to deal with. Grinding them down with his

own Daos was slow and arduous, which was why he thought of his [Void Heart]. If it could swallow tribulation lightning, it could surely eat a little bit of foreign Dao?

The problem was that it didn't act on the alien energies in his body, and he didn't have any control of the Hidden Node either. Since manually activating it was out of the question, he instead thought of another way to activate it. He once more absorbed some miasma as a Human to kickstart the node, but it ended with him being nauseated for 30 minutes until he managed to disperse the chill of death inside his body.

He still didn't know what to do with this information, but he hoped that he would get a huge surge of energy when the node was finally done digesting the purple lightning. Getting a free level or two wouldn't be enough to defeat Void's Disciple, but it was a start.

Ogras had immediately entered seclusion as well when they returned, but the rest of Port Atwood exploded into action as every department worked around the clock to ready everything in time. His sister was one of the busiest people of all as she kept traveling between Mystic Island, Thea's Library, and The Tower of Myriad Dao to gather as much information as she could before trying to crack open the spatial tunnel.

The elites of his army were also recalled from the zombie hunt to prepare and consolidate their gains over the following days, while the non-combatants prepared hundreds of different things that might be needed in the upcoming mission in the Mystic Realm. The settlements that Void's Disciple attacked were recaptured as well, but no one could figure out what Void's Disciple had done in those mines.

The New World Government had sent in over 50 thousand people according to Julia, so there was definitely a use of man-power inside. Zac initially felt a bit reluctant to follow suit, as he had dealt with most threats either alone or with the help of a small group. But he couldn't run around those endless tunnels by himself in search of the Spatial Treasure, so this time he would bring a large chunk of his army. Besides, if it turned out that the excess personnel was superfluous, then he could always send them back at the last minute.

Julia tried to help out by gathering more intelligence from the New World Government, but it was slim pickings. Thomas Fischer had put in place a new set of extremely restrictive protocols to stop any further leaks, and anyone who entered the Mystic Realm had to sign a contract of confidentiality. A System-enforced contract, so there was no chance of shirking the agreement.

Ilvere suggested launching an assault, but Zac decided against it. He was afraid that the New World Government would do something drastic if he appeared at this juncture, like opening the pathways so that the natives of the Mystic Realm could escape and reach Earth. He couldn't let that happen, he didn't feel confident in leaving Earth exposed to a bunch of E-Grade aliens while he was stuck inside the mystic realm.

It wasn't the end of the world though, as Zac doubted there was much that Thomas Fischer knew that he couldn't figure out by himself in a few days. There was no way that these so-called native allies had given the government too much intelligence on the research base, the New World Government simply wasn't powerful enough to barter with high e-grade elders that might be over a thousand years old.

Kenzie arrived at the Cultivation Cave five days after Zac returned from Site 16, and Zac frowned when he saw her eyes were sunken from chronic sleep deprivation. Triv was with her as well, and the ghost bowed toward Zac before it started sprucing up the place.

"Don't overwork yourself," Zac sighed as he looked at his sister with worry.

"I'll be able to rest as soon as I pack things up here," Kenzie smiled.

"So it's done?" Zac asked with relief.

"It's done," Kenzie said, her smile turning into a grin. "You could start it up right now if you wanted, but it's better if you wait two days. The spatial turbulence grows weaker every day."

"That's amazing, good job," Zac applauded. "Do you need any help here?"

"No, you'll just get in the way. Triv and I can handle this, you go deal with things in Port Atwood instead. Verana has been wanting to talk with you for a while," Kenzie said.

"Fine, I'll get out of your hair," Zac said as he stood up from his prayer mat. "What do the Tal-Eladar want?"

"They want to join us in the Mystic Realm, of course. No one should have told them outright, but it is impossible to keep an expedition of this magnitude secret," Kenzie shrugged.

"Is Ogras out yet?" Zac asked.

He liked having the demon with him when dealing with Clan Tir'Emarel. Ogras couldn't help himself when he saw the beastmasters, he immediately started to annoy them by ruining their plans out of spite. That usually resulted in a better negotiation position for Zac, which was just what someone like him needed.

"No," Kenzie said with a shake of his head, her smile turning into a frown. "What happened back then? He doesn't even answer when I call."

"Void's Disciple is just as strong as we feared," Zac sighed. "None of us got off scot-free. He was wounded, and he might be a bit depressed after taking a loss right after evolving. He'll be out for the Mystic Realm though."

Kenzie's eyes thinned a bit in suspicion, but Zac didn't want her to know just how close to dying Ogras got. He simply flashed away the next moment and teleported over to the academy to deal with the Tal-Eladar. Zac eventually made a deal with Verana where she would send a squad of 150 experts into the Mystic Realm, focusing on cultivators excelling in scouting and healing.

Tylia was probably still the greatest healer on Earth, and having her join the mission might save a lot of lives. The keen senses of the Tal-Eladar war-beasts might be invaluable as well, so Zac relented on his stance against them for now. However, he did make sure to sign a contract with Verana that the Spatial Artifact and any D-Grade or higher treasures would go to Port Atwood.

They would be given Merit Points for turning them in though. This type of employer-employee contract was pretty common when exploring Mystic Realms, and she wasn't really surprised at all when Zac

brought it up. As for E-Grade resources and lower, it was up to luck. If you found it, it was yours. That was the simplest way of encouraging people to explore the depths of the research base.

The next two days were like a blur, and more and more powerful people appeared in Port Atwood by the minute. First it was Thea along with a hundred experts and 500 support personnel of the Marshall Alliance. Then came Billy and Nigel, the latter looking less than enthused about entering such a dangerous place. However, Nigel had a rare buffing class similar to Emily's, and he would be able to singlehandedly bolster the defenses of any base.

The Underworld Council provided warriors of all four races as well, along with Gregor and five fellow councilors. The rest would stay to make sure nothing happened to their bases in their absence, just like the majority of the Port Atwood Army. Finally the Zhix arrived, and the appearance of over a hundred hulking Anointed caused quite the commotion among the citizens of Port Atwood.

In fact, a lot of people didn't even know about the existence of the Anointed since they mostly stayed in the hearts of their Hives. It caused quite some chaos, and Zac was forced to send them to Mystic Island early as to not cause a riot. Of course, it was only a day later that Zac and the others joined them.

Everyone had gathered in the central valley of Mystic Island, and Zac couldn't help but marvel as he looked back at the group of over 5000 people behind him. Most of them normal Zhix warriors and the soldiers of Port Atwood, but this was still the greatest army that Earth had ever assembled. This group would probably be able to take out the New World Government in minutes even if he didn't personally get involved.

Zac eventually turned back looked with anticipation at Kenzie and her group of craftsmen as they performed the finishing checks on the array they had drawn around the spatial tunnel. It would block out the turbulence from the Spatial Bomb that the Cultists detonated, allowing the old teleportation array to work once more.

Even Zac couldn't help but feel some butterflies in his stomach as he looked at the still inactive array. There was so much hanging on this expedition. If they won then Earth would finally be free of threats, at least for another 99 years. It would give him and everyone else a breather, an opportunity to solidify their foundations and find their bearings.

Conversely, if they failed, then that was that. The Great Redeemer would come sooner or later, and Earth would be turned into a cultivation resource. Ogras and he had even discussed giving out some of his teleportation tokens beforehand just in case, but he knew it was kind of a moot point.

Coughing up between one and ten billion Nexus Coins for the Nexus Hub activation wasn't something that the average people could endure.

"Sometimes I don't know whether you're my lucky star or an ill omen," sighed echoed out from Zac's side as Ogras appeared out of nowhere. "A normal warrior would be given months to stabilize his foundation and get to understand their limits. I get time for a celebratory drink before I'm thrown at the big boss, and then I'm dragged here before I even have a chance to nurse my wounds."

"You can go on as long a vacation as you want after this is dealt with," Zac snorted.

"See, you say that, but how can that possibly be true while I am living next to a disaster magnet? If you run out of enemies, then the Ruthless Heavens will just conjure one for you," Ogras spat.

"Can't do much about that," Zac smiled before he turned serious again. "How's your situation?"

A shroud of shadows covered the two before Ogras spoke up.

"There's both good and bad news," the demon shrugged. "I won't be able to fight for at least a month, perhaps even longer. There are some complications on top of the wounds."

"Anything I can do to help?" Zac frowned. "I have a lot of pills."

"No, I think that I need to wait this out," Ogras said with a frown, and he hesitated a bit before he kept going. "Spare is redrawing my pathways."

"What?!" Zac blurted. "Is that even possible?"

"Apparently," the demon grimaced. "I don't think it's too bad though. The changes are small, and they seem to be improvements. Even better, my affinity to the Dao of Shadows has taken a huge leap forward. I was a genius before, but now I'm simply a heaven-defying scion."

Zac only rolled his eyes in response, but he couldn't help but feel a pang of jealousy upon hearing about the affinity. Then again, Ogras had literally died to gain this lucky opportunity. And judging by the demon's face, it wasn't as simple as he let on. There were definitely dangers that accompanied this sudden windfall.

"Well, it's good that you're up and runn-" Zac responded, but he drifted off when he saw that Kenzie had stood up and waved at him.

Everything was ready.

"Do it," Zac nodded, his heart rapidly beating as he prepared for disaster.