

The Fall 613

Chapter 613: Helping Hand

Zac couldn't help but give the demon an appreciative look when he saw the objective of his new quest. As far as quests go, this had to be one of the easier ones. The containment field was still keeping Ogras at bay, but with his help it should just be a matter of time before they breached it.

Better yet, the punishment for failure had reduced once more, and it was a huge relief to see that his skills were finally safe. Losing four levels would still be a kick to the groin, but he could always regain them later if he needed to abruptly end his training regimen early. For example, he knew he needed to get back to his people immediately after dealing with this place, even if it meant giving up on his quest.

Thankfully it didn't look like that would be necessary, at least not for the next quest. After all, it was like Ogras said; why were they here if not to seize a couple of opportunities? Furthermore, Zac's instincts told him that the System would point him toward Clan Cartava for his sixth quest.

The System liked war and struggle, and that was the only option left after Leviala's final betrayal. She had chosen to give her clan a shot at escaping, even if it meant trapping Zac here and killing her way out. There was no way he could let that go unanswered. Besides, she had the Spatial Drill now, and something like that might be needed later to drill through spatial storms at the Core.

Ogras' words about Divine Guidance also echoed in the back of Zac's mind. The drill might be exactly what the System was leading him toward, but Leviala messing with the timelines might have pushed its plans out of whack.

Zac eventually gave up on trying to figure out the purpose of what the system was doing, instead turning his attention to the task at hand. He needed to seize the first opportunity for his follower. It was a transparent vial containing just a deciliter of some unknown liquid. The liquid was red like blood, but small golden sparks swirled around inside it even though the vial was completely immobile.

It looked a bit like a health potion from a video game to Zac, but it definitely was something more valuable since it was the only thing in the room. Out of all the side rooms it was the item most likely to be something that could boost one's race, as the three rooms he had visited only housed various metals. Unfortunately for Ogras, the containment field that protected the vial was extremely sturdy.

"Come on," Ogras growled as extremely condensed shadows glommed onto the energy field.

Zac immediately understood what the demon was trying to do. He was trying to exhaust a small section of the field to create an opening. However, the shadows were being destroyed far too quickly, only slightly weakening the electric field. He sighed and stepped up next to Ogras, his arm suddenly covered in thick layers of leaves as his arm started emitting an aura of death.

"Oh?" Ogras exclaimed, but he quickly understood Zac's plan and redoubled his efforts.

Searing pain ripped through Zac's arm as he forcibly pushed it through the opening Ogras had created. Leaves were rapidly being disintegrated even though they were infused with the Fragment of the Bodhi, and the Fragment of the Coffin only helped block some of the damage to his arm as he reached for the vial.

Pushing forward was extremely arduous as well, reminiscent of how it felt to activate [Deforestation] before his Strength had reached its current state. Sweat ran down his forehead from pain and exertion, but he refused to back down as he desperately pushed forward centimeter by centimeter, finally grasping the vial.

He immediately stashed the thing in his Spatial Ring and dragged his arm back, plumes of smoke rising from his scorched skin. But Zac was still beset by shocking amounts of lightning even after having retracted his arm, and the supercharged power rampaged through his body. Zac actually hoped for his [Void Heart] to deal with the mess, but it was too slow.

Organs were lacerated and burned, and even his veins had turned to conduits that allowed the lightning to course all through his body. But the electricity was thankfully an attack without source, and every wound caused it to exhaust some of its energy. [Void Heart] finally woke up as well, releasing a deep beat that could be heard even outside his body, but it barely managed to swallow any of the lightning. It had already been used up on torturing Zac.

The wounds weren't too bad at least, and Zac quickly healed it up with the help of a pill and [Surging Vitality]. Ogras expectantly looked at Zac as he stood up and took out the vial, the liquid inside illuminating the surroundings in vibrant gold as it sloshed around. Both were surprised at the change, but the vial quickly turned red again when the liquid stopped moving. Zac knew the Ogras wanted it, but he didn't immediately hand it over.

He first wanted to get a sense of the liquid it contained. It didn't give off a strong sense of spirituality, but Zac's cells were still screaming with hunger as he looked at the contents. Zac guessed it had to be made from natural materials before being processed by some unknown Technocrat technique, an alternative method to the pill-making of Alchemists.

"This..." Ogras hesitantly said.

"Just take it," Zac snorted and handed it over after a second. "Don't drink it before Kenzie figures out what it is. It would be pretty messed up if you died drinking poison after all your near-death experiences."

Just as Zac expected his quest updated itself the moment he handed the vial to Ogras. It looked like the System really was referring to the items in the side-rooms, and it didn't get marked as half-complete until Zac physically handed it over. Just one more bout of electrotherapy and he would be done.

"This is no poison, I can feel it in my bones," Ogras muttered. "With all the netherblasted misfortune we've encountered until now, we're slated for some stunning gains next. Balance of the Heavens."

"I've found it!" Kenzie's voice suddenly echoed from outside, drawing their attention.

"See? Balance of the Heavens," Ogras grinned and flashed outside, with Zac quickly following in tow.

"This thing is our ticket outside!" Kenzie exclaimed as she pointed at one of the tables.

The item hovering on top of it looked like a mirror or a solar cell, a circular disk with a diameter of roughly a meter.

"What is it?" Zac asked curiously.

"This is an escape pod of sorts," Kenzie said with excitement. "It makes use the spatial energy that's all over this base, and it can teleport people away. However..."

"What's wrong?" Zac asked with a sinking feeling.

"The experiment is incomplete, the control feature isn't quite finished. It might spit us out in the Void, inside the Core, or back where we came from."

"Are you able to fix it?" Zac asked.

"I can try, but it will take some time. I need to run some calculations, and my... computer can only work so fast. It might take up to half a day, and even then I can't promise anything," Kenzie said.

"It's all we got at the moment," Zac said. "Do it."

"So... where do you want it to go? I think I can get it to send us in a certain direction only, but it would take too long to make a proper fix that would allow you to actually steer it," Kenzie asked.

"Take us back where we came from," Zac said without hesitation. "Get us as close to the Lunar Forest as possible. Overshoot into the outer rim rather than undershoot if that's an option."

Kenzie nodded and immediately started typing away, while Zac took proper stock of what else there was in the laboratory. There were eight side-rooms altogether, two of them larger stockrooms full of unguarded materials. These metals and minerals all seemed to be very high quality though, so Zac immediately snatched them up.

Three of the rooms contained more valuable metals from the looks of it, each of them no larger than a bowling ball but still protected by the same sort of setup as Ogras' vial. The seventh room contained something far more interesting though.

It was a fist-sized crystal that hovered on top of a pedestal and miniature spatial fractures kept erupting all around it. It had to be crammed full of energy to look like that, likely Space-Attuned energies thanks to the Dimensional Treasure. It was still just a piece of stone that Zac saw no immediate use for, but he soon thought of another quest of his as he looked at it.

Materials for Karunthel (Unique, Limited): Acquire 100 Kilograms of [Urgarat Flakes], 1 kilogram of [Realm Locus], 1 living [Ferric Worldeater], 1 [Daemonic Manastone] Reward: Upgrade Iliex Shipyard to Early D-Grade. 1 Custom-Designed Early D-Grade Vessel. (0/4)

According to Calrin's description, he could very well be looking at a ball of [Realm Locus]. It was supposed to be a gemstone full of spatial energy, and it was mainly used when making spatial treasures. Like the weird machines outside. The environment in this Mystic Realm should be perfect for those things to spring up as well, and looking for a few crystals if an opportunity arose was already on Zac's agenda.

He had no pictures of how [Realm Locus] was supposed to look, but he figured that he would know if he had the right thing as soon as he held it in his hand, provided that the crystal weighed more than a kilo. He didn't immediately try to snatch it though, but he rather went over to inspect the last room, where he found Thea standing looking at the protected treasure.

It was another crystal hovering in the air, this one a calm blue rather than the chaotic black of the possible [Realm Locus]. It didn't emit any spatial fluctuations like the other one either, but it rather contained a mysterious shimmer that caused Zac's vision to double for a second before he quickly activated [Mental Fortress].

"Is there something special about this crystal?" Zac asked curiously as he walked up to Thea whose eyes were trained on the item.

"My Spirit Tool seems to want to absorb it," Thea said. "I think it might be one of the crystals of those natives you mentioned? It might actually awaken spirituality in my weapon, just like how you've done with your axe."

"Doesn't that sword already have Spirituality?" Zac asked curiously. "It sounded like that was the Blade Emperor's thing."

"It's for my other one, [Petalstorm]," Thea explained before it shook her head. "It's not worth it though. We have more important things to worry about."

Neither [Verun's Bite] or [Love's Bond] showed any indication of wanting the crystal inside the containment field, which probably meant that Thea was on the money with her guess. The Gemling crystals supposedly contained a part of their soul, and feeding such an item to a treasure with a soul of its own might cause a clash rather than provide any benefits.

"It's fine, we're stuck here for a few hours anyway. Let me get it out for you," Zac said, seeing an opportunity to complete his quest in one fell swoop.

However, he stopped himself before trying something foolhardy, and instead walked out and called Ogras over first. There was no point in getting himself maimed when the demon could weaken the field for him as they did before.

"What is it? You really need a third participant?" Ogras grinned as he entered the room. "Fine, but no eye contact. That goes for both of you."

"Stop messing around. Help me get this crystal out," Zac sighed.

The demon snickered, but he still walked over the electricity barrier and started flooding it with shadows just like the last time. Zac cracked his neck and made sure there were no lingering threats in his body before he got ready again. He pushed his hand into the shield, but alarm bells suddenly went off in his head as he saw a Memorysteel spike shoot straight toward his head.

The whole room was coming alive as liquid electricity started pouring down the walls by the gallons.

"What the-!" Zac exclaimed as he tried to back away. "Run!"

Both Ogras and Thea were thankfully Dexterity classes, and they turned into gusts as they sped out. Zac was right on their heels, but a shocking pain made Zac's vision go white for a second as he was stabbed by another spike that shot straight out of the doorframe itself. He pushed down the pain and tried to flash out, but the brief delay had robbed him of his opportunity to get out.

The door was already sealed shut, with another layer of electricity on top of it. Zac's first instinct was to force his way out, but he hesitated, afraid that attacking the door would trigger the alarms outside and put the others in harm's way as well.

“What did you do?!” Zac heard a frazzled Thea shout on the other side, but he had no time to worry about that at the moment as the whole room was submerged in a chaotic storm of electricity.

Zac sighed and turned away from the door, wondering why he cursed himself by thinking that the quest would be easy.