

The Fall 627

Chapter 627: Hunger

Zac's hidden node felt like a ball of hunger trained on a specific spot inside the dissipating "corpse" of the Void Beast. He instinctively understood what was going on though and activated his [Cosmic Gaze] as he tried to find the source of the avarice. The creature had turned into a haze by this point, but there was a small spot that released mysterious fluctuations to his augmented sight.

Zac hesitated for a moment, but he still sent one of his chains inside to snatch whatever radiated that odd energy signature. The chain was mottled when it came out a second later, but Zac could sense that it was just temporary. The links would soon heal up by themselves, partly thanks to the massive amount of energy it had swallowed during the fight with the Cartava Clan.

Seeing that the coffin was safe, Zac instead turned his attention to the thing he had dragged out of the cloud. It was roughly as large as a fist, but it hard to tell what it was made from as it reminded Zac of a pallasite meteorite; a mix of pitch-black metal and dark-golden crystals. Zac couldn't be completely sure, but he guessed it was the failed core of the Void Beast.

It was mesmerizing to look at, completely different from the fake cores he had harvested from the beasts and zombies in the Dead Zones. This was a proper Beast Core, albeit a failed one. It still held the accumulation of the Void Beast's cultivation, and it was clearly marked by whatever Dao the caterpillar had gained during its life in the void.

More importantly, it contained massive amounts of energy, far more than any D-Grade Crystals. The energy was extremely different though. It felt like it was some sort of Attuned Energy, but also different. It made him think of the blue sword-streaks that Thea had gained from the inheritance trial.

The best comparison he could think of was that Attuned Energy was like lemon-flavored water, whereas the energy hidden inside the small core in front of him was pure fruit-juices squeezed straight from the citrus itself. Attuned energies were ultimately flavored Cosmic Energy, whereas this force had become something else.

More impressively, it felt like the energy was almost sentient, as it seemed to flinch every time his hidden node beat.

It almost felt like he was looking at a nuclear warhead with a will of its own, but his [Void Heart] was obviously of a different opinion. If the node was a human it would be screaming on top of its lungs right now in an epic tantrum, and Zac eventually decided to oblige. He gingerly reached his hands toward the Beast Core and touched its surface.

"What are you doing!" Verana shouted with shock as she hurried over, and Zac noticed that quite a few demons and Tal-Eladar looked at him like he was crazy.

Zac couldn't worry about that at the moment though as thick black tendrils spread across his arm, and it felt like someone had poured molten lead in his veins. Small bloody explosions erupted all along his arm in an instant as even Zac's body had trouble containing this chaotic power. But things quickly stabilized when his hidden node started to absorb the energy, and Zac almost felt like it was giddy as it thumped

over and over. The pain was still excruciating as the energy was dragged from his arm into his heart, but at least it didn't look like he would explode this time either.

His guess from before proved right as well judging by the behavior of the Beast Core. It initially stormed into his arm with a brutal fervor, seemingly intent to rip him apart. But the moment his hidden node thumped and absorbed its first mouthful the Beast Core drastically changed its behavior as it tried to cut its connection with Zac's pathways.

Unfortunately, it had already been caught by [Void Heart] as it dragged more and more energy from the core with glee. However, it only absorbed a fifth of the energy inside the core before it started slowing down, and Zac got a sense of exhaustion from it. He quickly threw the Beast Core into his Spatial Ring to avoid any mishaps, and only then did he look over at Verana who gazed at his arm with wide eyes.

"What's wrong?" Zac asked.

"That was a Beast Core! Absorbing the raw energies of a Beast Cores is like drinking poison, the energy is too chaotic to control or make use of. And that was a Beast Core of an aberrant lifeform! Who knows what kind of dangerous energies it contains," Verana hurriedly explained, though she quickly calmed down as well. "But you seem fine for some reason...? I don't understand..."

"Don't worry about it," Zac shrugged. "My body is pretty resilient when it comes to weird energies."

"Alright," Verana sighed as she dropped the subject, though there was both curiosity and skepticism in her eyes.

"Is everything okay with the bridge?" Zac asked.

Verana had been somewhere in the middle of the army to guard the soldiers in case the walls suddenly attacked, which meant she had been trapped outside the square when the Void Beast attacked. Not that she would be a lot of help since all three of her companions were still wounded and overtaxed from the previous fight.

"Everything's fine," Verana nodded. "We got stuck outside for a bit when the wall woke up, but there were no further attacks on us or the bridge. These creatures might hold their own territories in the darkness, preferring solitude."

"Good," Zac nodded, wholeheartedly hoping her theory was correct.

Dealing with one Void Beast hadn't been too difficult. Part of it was thanks to the huge numerical advantage, but it was mostly because the Void Beast was restrained by this dimension. Its aura was definitely a match to the golem he fought in the Dao Repository, but the actual strength it exhibited was less than half that.

But even with such an advantage then they would still be in deep trouble if just two attacked at the same time. He could only hold down one at a time, which would give the second one free rein to rampage among the normal soldiers. He glanced up at the ceiling again, a sense of foreboding chilling his heart. There was no point in tempting fate.

"We're setting off," Zac said.

The group didn't want to loiter in case another beast was lurking outside the dome atop the square, and they scurried into the corridors with gusto. Zac let the other elites lead the way while he jumped up and sat on the shoulder of one of the Anointed who usually accompanied Rhubat. The weakness of activating [Hatchetman's Rage] had hit him, and the ambient Cosmic Energy had gotten so sparse by this point that his natural absorption had turned into a weak trickle.

So he could only depend on the gargantuan Zhix for a while as he started absorbing Cosmic Energy from Nexus Crystals. He also took the opportunity to look inward to see if something had changed with his [Void Heart], but Zac was disappointed to see that it had gone quiet again. It didn't look like it was about to spit out anything either, but rather like it had gone into hibernation.

Zac still felt like this was an opportunity for him though. He had just remembered that this wasn't the first time he had encountered energy with this particular flavor. He had actually absorbed the very same force from the Collector when they fought, but he was in the middle of a fight for his life at that time and didn't have any chance to look into it.

He still couldn't figure out exactly what it was. Even if it was something more advanced than Attuned Energy he still felt he should be able to recognize its flavor somewhat. He had encountered all sorts of cultivators by this point, and he was seldom completely flummoxed when trying to figure out what kind of Dao they were cultivating.

All fire-related Daos gave off a similar fiery aura, and the same went for all other Daos as well. But these Void Beasts seemed to have a flavor of their own. Zac could only guess it was because of the unique environment they lived in, so he simply named the energy Void Energy in his mind.

Zac wondered exactly what his node wanted with this energy. It usually spat out anything it swallowed, but this particular energy seemed to stay inside. He guessed that it was something that could actually nurture the hidden node, or perhaps even help with awakening his bloodline down the line.

The issue was that he had never heard of upgrading Hidden Nodes. Hidden Nodes were supposed to give permanent and unique boons, sort of like titles. They were either opened or unopened. But was it perhaps possible to upgrade them if they were linked to a Bloodline?

There was unfortunately much he could figure things out at the moment. Perhaps he could find some records at the Core of the Mystic Realm, though he wasn't sure whether the innermost sector of the research base even existed any longer. That by itself put a pretty big dent in his secondary goals to find out more about Leandra and awakening his bloodline.

For example, those bloodline vats that the Gemlings controlled might already be lost to the Void by this point. His only other chance was to stumble onto something at the core, but he wasn't too optimistic as he looked around.

It was clear, the state of the islands was gradually getting worse, and not because of the weakening Cosmic Energy and protective film. Zac believed that the rough state of the walls and structures of the inner island was due to something else. The closer they got to the core, the more the materials had been impacted by the spatial expansion. That in turn had resulted in larger destruction when the Dimensional Seed took everything back.

The increasingly dilapidated state of the corridors at least helped expedite their progression somewhat since more and more walls had crumbled to provide new pathways. Of course, the sparse Cosmic Energy in the atmosphere also made it harder to restore one's reserves, which made it difficult for the cultivators to keep a high tempo.

They thankfully passed over to the next platform without issue, and Zac once more closed his eyes to focus on restoring his energy after they had passed over.

"Zac," Kenzie suddenly exclaimed, dragging him out of his meditation as he looked down at his sister.

"What is it?"

"Look," Kenzie said as she pointed down a side corridor.

Zac looked over, and his eyes widened when he realized that the section looked remarkably similar to the corridors they had passed just before entering the pipe. However, those paths went in a different direction compared to the route they were following. He quickly jumped down from the Anointed's shoulder and walked over to Kenzie.

"Can you see if it's the same place?" Zac asked with a mix of hope and trepidation.

"Wait a second," Kenzie said as she took out her tablet and changed the screen to a map. "Ah! I knew it!"

"What?" Zac asked.

"I gave Thea a few communication modules while you were recuperating back then, and one has been installed," Kenzie said. "Oh, and there's a message a message recorded."

"Well, go ahead and play it," Zac said anxiously.

If you hear this the world has transformed already, Thea's voice emerged from the console. We're fine. The chaos destroyed the laboratory though, allowing us to escape. We have decided to move toward the mountain to scout things out. Who knows? We're in a pretty good position, so we might actually be able to get there first. I only have one more of these things, so I'll save it until we reach the mountain.

Zac slowly exhaled, extremely relieved to hear the two were fine. He had worried for a second it was Thea or Ogras recording a final goodbye or something. Then again, he wasn't too surprised to hear they were okay. If anyone could survive on their own in this place, then it would be them.

"What do you want to do?" Kenzie asked.

"Let's follow our original route. You heard her; they'll be at the mountain. In fact, they might already be there by this time. Both of them are powerful Dexterity-based cultivators. They should have been able to get quite far before the energy got too scattered," Zac smiled and turned back without another look.

"What about the items in the lab? Didn't you need that crystal?" Kenzie asked.

"It's not worth the delay," Zac said after some thought. "Reaching the mountain before our enemies blow up the bridge is more important than anything else. Besides, if one such crystal can appear here, then I bet there will be more around the Dimensional Seed itself."

