

The Fall 648

Chapter 648: Paradise

Zac looked around with shock and confusion, really feeling that he had arrived at paradise. He had an extremely weak perception of the Dao, but even he could feel like there was something special about the world he had appeared in. Looking at the stalks of grass gently swaying in the wind filled his mind with impressions and ideas, and the same held true for the trees in the distance.

It was like everything was filled with meaning. It wasn't to the point of the mind-bending experience where they cracked open the Dao Funnel back then, but it was far beyond what he had ever felt on Earth even when the Origin Dao was at its thickest.

Was that what was going on? Was this hidden world the place where all the Origin Dao of Earth had gone? They had already noticed that it was running out quicker than was normal, and Zac had even thought it was absorbed by the Mystic Realm for a while. But back then he discarded the theory since the cultivation environment in the research base was much worse than it was back on Earth. Of course, it was also possible that his mother's clan had simply arranged far better living conditions for those in the core of the base.

Or was this vibrant atmosphere something created by the Dimensional Seed? A virgin world full of life. Everything pointed to the seed being a C-Grade spatial treasure, which might mean that it would create a C-Grade world. Was this the normal environment on the enormous C-Grade continents out in the Zecia sector? It couldn't be. If that was the case, no C-grade force except lunatics like the cultists would bother risking their lives in Incursions.

At least there was no immediate threat, and the pressure was mostly gone as well, though it did feel like the gravity on this world was at least fifty times that of Earth. However, Zac quickly realized something odd and quickly looked around him.

Where was the corpse?

The body he had thrown out before was nowhere to be seen even with the help of [Hatchetman's Spirit], which didn't bode well for the others. But just as Zac started to believe that the rune sent people to random spots in this mysterious world, one flash of light after another appeared in the distance.

The others were teleported into the same grasslands as himself, appearing one after another in the vast grasslands. It almost like the endpoint of the rune was moving in a straight line, dropping people off along the way.

Zac was relieved to see his sister appear in the middle of the pack, just after the Anointed who were losing life-force to sustain the pressure outside, but seeing her reminded him of a troubling reality. How would her Memorysteel control help her in this place? He hadn't spotted a single Technocrat structure, let alone massive amounts of Memorysteel that could keep her safe.

Even worse, there was no way to send her back by the looks of things.

There was not much to do about it, so he simply flashed over to her, and the whole group had soon assembled and were looking around in confusion.

“What is this?” Ogras muttered as he looked around with a slight frown. “It’s like a cultivation haven for some supreme being. But are we inside the sphere or in a different realm?”

“The corruption in this place... Almost feels holy,” Rhubat mumbled with wonder, and the other Anointed nodded, clearly having some difficulty reconciling their deep-seated beliefs and what their antennae were telling them.

“Perhaps it's the Dimensional Treasure birthing a new world?” Kenzie ventured. “Has it become the World Core of this place? But if that’s the case, how can anyone take it?”

“It should be related to the treasure,” Zac agreed before he looked around with some helplessness. “The real question is what we should do now? How do we find the Dominators in a massive world? We already tried that on Earth for a year, and we only have two days now.”

Like an answer from the heavens themselves, a tremendous clap of energy suddenly erupted far in the distance, somewhere on the other side of a small mountain range. They couldn’t see the source of the blast, but radiating tendrils of energy swayed back and forth for a few seconds before a wave of pure Origin Dao swept across the lands.

Everyone braced themselves for the ripple that expanded with a speed that far exceeded the limits of E-grade warriors, but it passed right through them without causing any harm. In fact, it was the opposite. Zac took a deep breath, feeling like his body and mind had been cleansed by the shockwave. He couldn’t imagine what kind of progress he would make if he could cultivate in a place like this for a few years.

“Uh... How about we go there?” Ogras said after everyone regained their wits, and he gave Zac a slightly incredulous look. “Why don't you ask the Heavens for some treasures as well?”

“Let’s go,” Zac snorted. “There’s no way to figure out what's going on here, but that place should hold at least some answers. Keep your eyes peeled for enemies.”

The source of the blast could only be one thing; The Dimensional Seed. And even if it by some chance wasn't, it was a supreme treasure that would hopefully lure the Dominators like moths to a flame. What cultivator could say no to an item that released ripples of pure Dao? Normal Dao Treasures was trash compared to an item like that.

Judging by the distance from the mountains it would take half a day to get there even if they ran, and that was provided that there weren’t any more weird spatial zones that hindered them along the way. The group quickly passed the grasslands, only stopping every thirty minutes or so as new pulses spread out from the other side of the mountain.

Zac was making rapid progress on his Daos, especially the Fragment of the Bodhi because he was surrounded by life. Who knew, he might even make a break through before this excursion was over.

Everyone else was the same. Billy was silently walking next to the Anointed with glazed, eyes like he was in a dream. Furthermore, Zac had already felt the ripples of a Dao-breakthrough from his sister.

The experience was almost surreal, and it caused Zac to hate the Dominators with newfound vigor. What a waste of time to be forced to hunt for those bastards when they only had a few days to stay in this magical place. He would much rather seclude himself somewhere in the forest, becoming one with nature.

But there wasn't much to do about the situation except take in as many impressions and insights as he could along the way.

Vicar Uld sighed and opened his eyes, his body abuzz after the ripple of condensed Dao that just passed through him. He had made strides forward again, further consolidating his insight into the Fragment of the Lance even though he gained it just a few hours ago.

But what good did it do him?

They might be in as close an embrace of the Heavens as they ever would be right now, but reality would come crashing down on them any day now. How could he have looked up at the high Cardinals as beacons of arcane knowledge that eclipsed the whole sector? It was a rude awakening, realizing that these mythological beings that held his very life in their hands were just muddling along like everyone else.

What hiding in this pocket realm for a hundred years? They didn't even last a hundred days before the thing collapsed because of the very item they were sent to collect. Even if they managed to snatch the treasure out of the hands of the monsters who all vied for the same thing, they would still be stranded on a hostile planet without any support.

After all, there was no way those pawns below would survive this place. They were sent to destroy all the bridges leading to the mountain, but at least one of the powerful native factions should be able to reach the mountain in time. And that was not counting the Sovereign-select aboriginal of the outer world.

The best they could hope for was to seal the spatial treasure in some corner of the world and shed their mortal coils to avoid any tracking methods. Perhaps the Grand Cardinal would take pity on their souls and provide new vessels, but Uld knew all-too-well the reluctance to impact profit margins among the upper echelons.

Inquisitor Arkensau maintained that his teacher would find a way to solve their plight before it came to that, that the ripples that were sent out into the cosmos would somehow guide them here. But Uld wasn't so sure. After seeing the world crumble around him he had carried a strong premonition in the back of his mind, and not even forming a Dao Fragment would change that.

He would die in here.

Uld had seen space get twisted and bent, how the dimensions melded into a singular point of past, present, and the future. But there was just darkness on the horizon, just a bone-chilling nothingness.

"Someone triggered our outer array," Trovad said with some reluctance, causing Uld's heart to beat with discomposure.

The fire of the Heavens no longer burned as brightly in Trovad's eyes either. Setback after setback would do that to your convictions. He was clearly unwilling to expose the interlopers since he knew what it would lead to.

"Get ready for battle," Arkensau said, confirming Uld's fears. "This is our chance. Erect the altar."

“How about going into hiding, waiting for these heretics to come into contact with the other interlopers? We can follow them and strike when the time is ripe,” Uld entreated.

“Our order doesn’t abide cowardice, Vicar Uld,” Arkensau snorted with disdain. “So many of our brothers have entered the embrace of the Heavens, and you carry doubts and hesitation?”

Easy for you to say, bastard. You’re the one carrying a bunch of treasures from your master. Bastard, Uld raged in his mind.

“Besides, we would not be able to make the same preparations by following your plan. The thing I have brought need some time to come into power,” Arkensau said as he looked down at the lantern with a weak fire burning inside.

The order was given, and their brands forced them to obey. The words of Inquisitor Arkensau might as well be the commands of the Heavens themselves as far as they were concerned. Go against them, and you’d burn in heavenly fire.

The tolls of death clangored even louder in Uld’s mind, but he grit his teeth and started helping the others prepare. No matter who it was that had arrived in this world, it was a given they weren’t any weaklings unless the pressure on that mountain had dissipated. After all, they only managed to bring just over thirty of their soldiers even though they tried bringing over three hundred. The rest had been unable to bear the suppression and were forced to descend again.

Then again, it wasn't all bad. There was definitely a seed of truth to what Arkensau said. The church did have a deeper heritage both than the aboriginals of either the outer world or the Mystic Realm, and their best chance to make use of that fact was to set up a trap that used the things they had brought along. There shouldn't be more than five parties that could make it this far, and taking out just one would drastically increase Uld's chances to survive this calamity.

The restrictive array was quickly and quietly moved so that it would coincide with the interlopers' path, and the adjustments to the altar were completed in quick order. From there they only had to wait, hidden by the [Heaven’s Cover Array]. The targets would reach the designated Killzone in twenty minutes, and they soon could get a visual of who they were dealing with through their sentries.

It was a group of a few humans along with the hulking insectoid miscreations. They were led by a man with a dumb smile on his face as he walked through the forest, but he was still emitting an earth-shattering aura.

“It’s him,” Arkensau muttered with glee. “I had hoped I’d run into that bastard again, and he's still distracted by the wonders of this world. This is perfect, using the [Ember of Glory] on him is a worthwhile sacrifice.”

“The Sovereign-Select?” Uld muttered, not really sharing the Inquisitor's jubilant mood.

Their order's track record with this monstrous aboriginal wasn’t exactly stellar, with almost every encounter ending in abject defeat. The only small success was when they managed to destabilize the tunnel to this realm, but that obviously hadn’t kept this maniac out.

Uld's emotions were frayed as he looked at the projection, but he slowly calmed his mind since his fate had already been sealed. If the ambush worked, then he wouldn't even need to lift a finger to eradicate a huge threat.

If it didn't, well, then at least his worries would be over.