

## The Fall 659

### Chapter 659: On the Horizon

Zac woke up with a start, but he immediately regretted the sudden movement as sharp pangs of pain wracked his body. He had fallen asleep again, his own body's way to forcibly try to make him rest. His pathways were a mess, and his body was completely wrung dry. He was so weak, like his body had been ravaged by illness for weeks.

He felt extremely lucky to have opened his third Hidden Node, [Purity of the Void], just before he was sent out of the Mystic Realm. He had actually missed the vision due to exhaustion, and he only remembered fragmented pieces of the man on the meteor. But the effect of the node spoke from itself.

Every ten minutes or so it released a mysterious pulse that shook loose small amounts of impurities, which apparently included everything from foreign Dao to Pill Toxicity, from his cells, which then entered his bloodstream. As his blood passed the node, some of the impurities were swallowed, never to return.

[Purity of the Void] essentially formed a perfect cultivation system with [Void Heart], where one node helped him absorb all kinds of energy while the other made sure his foundations didn't worsen. It was still best to exsanguinate himself when his body was flooded by impurities, but that was ultimately a crude method that only worked on some of the gunk in his body.

Still, Zac was far from shedding all the toxins left from the [Rageroot Oak Seed] and the mysterious spike, and some of Adcarkas' foreign Dao lingered in his body. He had already checked himself with [Spiritual Anchor], and there thankfully weren't any new brands hidden as far as he could tell.

He took a deep shuddering breath as he gazed across the vast forests of his island from the mountain peak he had made into his observatory. Still nothing. Two weeks had passed since their return from the Mystic Realm, and there was still no sign of Voridis A'Heliophos. There was no way for Zac to be certain, but it really looked like The Great Redeemer had no way to find Earth through the Integration Shroud now that the Karmic Links were cut and the Mystic Realm destroyed.

As for the old bastard being dead, Zac didn't hold much hope. A Peak D-Grade warrior was extremely difficult to kill unless there was a massive power gap, and that went doubly true for a Karmic Cultivator. Unless the Collector had some extremely powerful hidden means it unleashed after Zac was teleported out, then Voridis had probably left on the crumpled Cosmic Vessel in search of another world to devour.

At least that was the assumption Zac was operating under. The threat might be averted, but only temporarily. Voridis' final, furious roar still echoed in his mind. Their hard work had hopefully gained them a century of safety, but Zac knew he wasn't in any position to relax. He needed to do everything in his power to come up with some method to deal with the lingering threat.

Of course, the most surefire way was to gain enough power to hunt down and kill The Great Redeemer outright. There was a long road ahead until Zac could reach that point though, especially if the old bastard somehow managed to break through to C-Grade.

For now, there were other things to take care of.

Zac got up on his feet and started to slowly walk down toward the teleportation array at the edge of the hidden valley, somewhat regretting his decision to keep watch at such a high altitude. The trip that normally would take a minute took half an hour, but he eventually managed to return to his compound where he walked over to his sister's residence.

There was no one inside the gardens or in one of the living rooms, and Zac sighed as he walked over to one of the workshops. The door was ajar, and he heard some whizzing sounds from within, which meant that Kenzie was once again hard at work with her machines.

It looked like Jeeves had finally woken up again after deactivating the Administrator for a few minutes.

"How are you doing?" Zac hesitantly asked as he walked inside.

"Jeeves isn't able to make any deductions of what happened to the Dimensional Seed and those within, and upgrading him is still far away. We figured we might be able to increase the calculating power with these computers. I read that most space simulations on old Earth used these kinds of things to make accurate models," Kenzie muttered without taking her eyes off her work. "And these machines seem pretty high-quality, even by Technocrat standard. Far beyond the technology that went into those machines you got me from the Incursion."

"Uh, the Administrator isn't hiding inside these computers, right?" Zac asked as he looked at the Supercomputers with worry.

"No, these computers are just there for simulations, but they can't actually store an AI," Kenzie snorted, like that was something obvious. "Remember that sun-like ball? That was the AI's core."

"Alright..." Zac sighed. "Don't forget about your own cultivation though. You can't only rely on tech in this world."

Kenzie made a noncommittal grunt as she kept working, and Zac mutely looked on for a few seconds, unsure how to deal with the situation. She had at least snapped out of the morose state she had been in since they returned. It was a big blow to them both when Ogras wasn't transported out with them, and neither was Billy.

It almost felt like Zac had lost a limb now that the demon wasn't around any longer. Sure, Ogras was sometimes self-serving and a bit narcissistic, but he was also someone Zac felt he could trust his back to, something that had been irrevocably proven by his final selfless action.

Billy didn't deserve to go out like that either. The gentle giant had fought tirelessly to without a word of complaint, unhesitantly lending his aid against terrifying beings like Adcarkas. For him to have been taken while so many egotistical and self-serving remained alive on Earth felt like an affront to the core purpose of the System itself.

Kenzie still maintained that they definitely were alive, but Zac didn't know what he believed. There were life-treasures in the Multiverse that could tell whether someone had died while out adventuring, but no one on Earth had something like that. Of course, if someone could survive getting swallowed by a spatial treasure, then it was the scheming demon.

And if someone could figure out a way to bring Ogras back, it was his AI-empowered sister.

Zac still hadn't told her about his lingering suspicions that the System was gunning for her, and he still wasn't sure if telling was the right thing. First of all, it was just a hypothesis of his, but perhaps it was just his paranoia taking over.

But if the System really was going after her, then it was obviously not because she fiddled around with some low-grade drones and random found tech. It was because of Jeeves, and getting rid of that thing was impossible. So telling her might not serve any purpose except to push her even deeper into the rabbit hole.

"I'll leave you to it," Zac eventually said. "Let me know if there's anything I can do. If they're alive, we'll definitely save them even if we have to turn the whole sector upside-down."

"Right," Kenzie nodded as she turned back. "There is actually something. We finally realized how to upgrade Jeeves after visiting that isolation chamber. We are going to need a lot of materials. A lot of them."

"Well, hopefully, my new reward can help," Zac, feebly smiled, hating the fact that Kenzie sometimes spoke in a 'we' as of late.

"If people knew, they'd be green with envy," Kenzie snorted, not noticing Zac's antipathy toward her actions. "Perhaps even more than your weird core."

The reward she was talking about was the one he got from finishing the Training Quest chain. Part of the rewards were definitely all the valuables he picked up along the way, and the fact that he managed to save most of his people. He did voluntarily skip the biggest gain, the Dimensional Seed, but the System did thankfully award him something else instead.

Access.

When Zac returned from the Mystic Realm his Teleportation Screen had drastically changed, with an endless number of places added. Altogether there were over seven hundred thousand towns on the list, and it had taken Abby over a week to confirm where they led.

He had essentially been given access to various D-Grade worlds all over the Sector, ranging from hundreds of options in the massive empires like Allbright and Dravorak, to locations he had never heard of before. Not only that, but it even looked like the System was giving him a hefty discount of over 70%, which would save him billions compared to if he used the Teleportation Tokens he had amassed.

It was a bit of a shame that the System had excluded all C-Grade continents and racial empires like the Demon Horde and the local chapter of the Undead Empire, but it was still a shocking number of amazing places to visit.

What was it that limited most cultivators in the end? It was access. Even D-Grade cultivators often found themselves stuck at their home planet or to the local cluster of planets. Zac had a bunch of Tokens because he passed the 9th floor of the Tower of Eternity, but most people had no way to ever leave their own backyard.

And even if you got a Teleportation Token like Zac, it usually ended up being a one-time thing. Teleporting back home again meant having lost your chance. So, the few who got a Token through quests or from greater factions usually cut ties with their home planet to continue their cultivation.

Only the luckier lived in a powerful place that controlled small wormholes or had access to families with wide networks or who owned Cosmic Vessels that could traverse the Sector. But Zac had suddenly been given the keys to the kingdom, to the point that he could go almost anywhere, and without relying on the Tokens which might alert people of his presence.

Between the access and his [Spatial Gate Array], his mobility might be one of the greatest in the whole sector, which would not only improve his survivability, but also his ability to accrue further advantages for his cultivation. It almost felt like the System opened the door when it provided him with golem guardians and the escape bracelet, and now it was kicking him out to go explore.

The question was if he was ready.

Zac left his sister to her devices. Exhausted by even this small amount of exercise he walked over to the ocean and sat down on a rattan sofa he'd left behind. He had spent a lot of time looking out at the waves as he slowly recuperated over the past days. A clap of thunder rumbled in the distance, and it almost echoed the turbulence in his own heart.

The battle between the titans in the Mystic Realm had really left a deep impact on him, and he still remembered the feelings of helplessness and despair. And here were millions of people just as powerful as The Great Redeemer out there, and Zac wouldn't be able to rely on some Spatial Seal teleporting him to safety the next time.

"What are you thinking about?" a familiar voice drifted over.

"I guess I'm thinking about what to do next," Zac shrugged.

"So what's the plan?" Thea asked as she sat down next to him and snaked her arm around his.

The wind buffeted his short hair, and he took a deep breath of the salty air. He couldn't believe that just over a year had passed since the integration. So much had happened, and he had been forced to run back and forth to put out one fire after another. Now that things were finally over and there were no direct threats, he almost felt lost.

But Zac's gaze soon hardened as he looked out at the thunderstorm. There was no such thing as a final storm, and there was no such thing as absolute safety in the Multiverse. At least not until you stood at the top of the firmament, unrivaled and unopposed.

Voridis A'Heliophos was just the most immediate threat in the cosmos. There was still the mystery of his heritage, his mother, and her enemies. The Tsarun Clan, and who knows what else lurked on the horizon. There was even the threat of the System itself wishing his sister harm, and the time bombs it had placed in his head.

Only one thing was certain; he was still too weak to take charge of his fate.

"I guess I'll keep training?" Zac said.

"Figures," Thea snorted with a small smile.

-----

The darkness continued, as it had for weeks. Was this death? An endless out-of-body experience where you were left with nothing but your thoughts? He had read about Purgatory in the holy scriptures on Earth, was it actually real? Perhaps it was, but it wasn't like he would remember it anyway. A pulse would sooner or later come and scatter his thoughts.

Speaking of, here it comes.

A tremendous shudder startled Ogras awake, and he found himself lying face-first in the dirt. Blank confusion assaulted his mind as he tasted the earthy soil in his mouth. But his mind was soon kickstarted as his memories came back to him. At least it looked like he was alive, unless this was the next part of the afterlife. But it didn't look like it. He had made it. Somehow.

"Shit, what was I thinking," Ogras muttered as he got up to a sitting position.

What could possess him to do something so stupid as to sacrifice his life for someone else? It went against every lesson on how to in this ruthless world that he had imprinted into his bones. To make it look like you risked your life was one thing, but you needed assurances that you wouldn't actually end up croaking when pretending to be the hero.

Yet it was almost as though his body moved by instinct as he flashed forward to throw that lass out of harm's way. That wasn't a calculated risk at all. In fact, he had already realized that he probably wouldn't be able to teleport back. That treasure was messing space to an extremely high degree, and there was no way he'd be able to enter the grey world in such close proximity to that thing.

Those two siblings were rubbing off on him in all the wrong ways.

He had accepted death then and there, yet he was that he was alive for some reason. It didn't make any sense. Ogras got up on his feet and gazed at the surroundings with some confusion. Where were the others? And why was he back out in the forest?

"Ah! Where is the bad Insect-Man?! Where is the big room?!" an overly loud voice exclaimed from a hundred meters away.

"What the hell," Ogras muttered and swooped over to the oversized human who looked around with a dumb stare. "You're here as well?"

"Ah, horny guy, it's you!" Billy said with some disdain. "Why did you carry Billy out here?"

"I didn't carry you anywhere," Ogras snorted. "You got yourself knocked out. I don't know why the hell we are out here."

"Ah, Billy remembers. That Insect-man was really strong. And a werewolf, just like the movies," Billy sighed before his eyes turned as wide as saucers. "Ah! Insect-man stole the building!"

"How would that even..." Ogras snorted in disdain, but his words were caught in his throat when he realized that the dumb brute was absolutely right.

They hadn't been transferred to some random spot in this hidden realm. They were just a few hundred meters away from where the enormous isolation dome should have stood. There was a hole thousands of meters deep where it once stood, but vibrant grass had already sprouted in the pit, growing with a speed visible even to the naked eyes.

There was no chance to get a grip on what was going on before another enormous tremor shook the whole world. The sky turned chaotic the next moment. One moment it was the aquamarine blue of before, the next moment there was only darkness. Then the darkness turned into a star-studded night sky.

Ogras and Billy looked up at the continuously transforming sky. It was like the owner of the realm couldn't decide how the sky should look, and tried on a series of different environments. A huge meteor suddenly appeared on the horizon, and it was like it was teleported as it suddenly hit land.

"Oh crap," Ogras said as he looked at the enormous plume of soil and dust that rose high into the sky.

However, the fear of seeing a meteor slam into the ground was nothing compared to the fear that followed it. The fear of realization. Ogras eyes immediately shot toward his hand, and despair immediately set in when he saw that the rune was gone. "Oh Crap."

"Ah?" Billy said with confusion, finally looking away from the still-transforming sky.

"I think we're stuck here, you and I," Ogras sighed, and he clarified what he was talking about when he saw the blank look on Billy's face. "The seals are gone. We will not be able to get back to Earth."

"Like castaways?" Billy frowned before he nodded.

Ogras looked on with confusion as Billy walked over to a young tree and ripped it straight out of the ground.

"Mama read Billy a book about being a castaway. First, you get a spear. Then coconuts. Have you seen any coconuts, horny man?" Billy asked.

"Coconuts? What? And why would you need that shitty spear? Don't you have that big club of yours?" Ogras said with exasperation.

"Ah!" Billy exclaimed again, his eyes lighting up. "Billy has lots of meat too. Billy is really smart after all."

"What would you even hunt with that weak spear of yours?" Ogras snorted as he took out a flagon of liquor. "There aren't even any life forms in this place. Well, at least there is plenty of Cosmic Energy and Origin Dao. Cultivating here will be extremely efficient."

He wasn't really thirsty, but this seemed like an excellent time to get drunk. He didn't have the slightest clue of how to get out from the hidden realm of a Dimensional Seed. Even worse, it looked like the seed was traveling between dimensions judging by the sky. Who knew if he would even still be inside the Zecia sector by the time he figured a way out of here.

A clattering shriek suddenly broke the silence, and its piercing tone made Ogras' hair stand on end. What the hell was that? It came from the direction of the meteor. Ogras suddenly thought of a terrifying possibility. That weird stone, was it really a meteor?

Or was it a Hive?

"Ah stupid horny man, you jinxed it," Billy muttered as he gave Ogras a scathing look.

"Of course," Ogras sighed and closed his eyes before taking a long, long swig.

This is what you get when you risk your life.