

## The Fall 682

### Chapter 682: Attendant

Things proceeded quickly from the moment Calrin had taken the bait, and Zac soon found himself as the main shareholder of the Mercantile License. There was a simple reason why Zac wanted majority stakes; he needed to start planning for his cultivation early. Getting one million D-grade Nexus Coins was an almost unfathomable fortune to him right now, but would it be the same in a few hundred years as he was working on his Cultivator's Core?

Yrial had already said that nurturing a Mortal to become a powerhouse was expensive enough to bankrupt a clan, so he needed to become wealthier than normal clans. And what would be a better investment than buying a Mercantile Licence on the cheap? Thayer Consortium held the greatest control of the economy on Earth by now, and this move improved his control over the planet even further.

Calrin was more than happy to supply all sides of a war, but Zac could now essentially take out whole factions through business, quelling any uprisings before they even started. Besides, he was the main reason for the survival and expansion of the Consortium, so it stood to reason that he should be the one to reap the majority of the rewards.

With that dealt with, he stepped onto the teleporter, and he arrived in a vast subterranean hall a few moments later.

"Warmaster," a few Zhix guards bowed when they saw who it was that had appeared in their hive.

"I'm here to see the Chainbreaker," Zac said, and he was immediately led through a series of tunnels without any further question from the guards.

"Is Ibtep here?" Zac asked, thinking he should say goodbye to his oldest Zhix friend as well.

"The Breeder is working on new variants in the underworld," the guard said, respect written all over their face.

Zac could only wryly smile and nod. If Rhubat, the Chainbreaker, held the most respect in the hearts of the Zhix population, then Ibtep was a close second. The liaison had returned heroically with the Elixir of Ascension, which helped the remaining Anointed deal with the drawbacks of their Elixir of Anointment. But that was not the only thing that garnered such respect.

The Zethaya had wanted to butter Zac up and offered the elixirs free of charge, which Ibtep gladly accepted without caring whether that put Zac in an awkward position. Instead, he had used the billions of Nexus Coins on a high-quality Beast Pouch and thousands of different insects, larvae, and other creepy crawlies.

He now bred billions of the things down in the depths, and he provided the Zhix population with everything from "delicious" grubs to enormous worms that were extremely efficient at digging tunnels for hives. The Zhix warriors hadn't cared in the slightest that Ibtep used their money for his own venture. What were some intangible numbers on a status screen in comparison to tasty food?

The hobby had gone so far that it actually skewed Ibtep's evolution. They had been a Seeker before, a class aimed at scouting, exploration, and knowledge. Zac didn't know the exact name of Ibtep's new

class, but it was mainly related to discovering, taming, and breeding beasts. So it still held some of its old features, but it had added husbandry to the mix, making it a proper hybrid class.

Zac soon reached the inner sanctum of the hive, and he was hit by a mist full of Cosmic Energy when the guard opened the gates to Rhubat's cultivation cave. Inside were a few braziers, with a pond fifty meters across in the middle. There was also some odd moss growing on the ceiling, and a single glance was all it took for Zac to understand it was a material at the same level as his [Tree of Ascension].

The place wasn't quite at the level of his own cultivation cave, but it wasn't too far off either.

"Warmaster, it has been a while," a rumbling voice echoed through the cave as Rhubat rose from the pond.

The Anointed looked quite different compared to before, now only reaching three meters in height. That didn't mean they had been drastically weakened though, but rather the opposite. Rhubat's aura was extremely condensed, like they were a bomb on the verge of exploding. Since Ibtep had succeeded with their mission during the events of the Mystic Realm, a large number of the former Anointed had long passed into E-Grade.

The titanic Zhix had lost between 50% and 70% of their attributes to rid themselves of the chains that kept them in the F-Grade, but Rhubat was the sole exception. Rhubat's experiences in the Hidden Realm along with their latent potential had allowed them to retain almost 80% of their former strength even after taking the antidote, and Rhubat had regained that and much more after passing into the E-Grade.

Their whole appearance differed from the normal Zhix as well as white cracks covered their whole body. It was a result of his final attack that slew Adcarkas, and they bore the jagged scars like a badge of honor. Zac thought it looked pretty good, and it reminded him of kintsugi pottery.

"Looks like you're progressing smoothly," Zac smiled.

"The Zhix are finally learning to embrace the new chapter of our lives," Rhubat nodded. "We have found a new methodology we like, and a lot of warriors are making impressive progress. A second revision will soon come out as well, improving it even further."

Zac nodded, having already heard about it. The Zhix had initially completely disregarded things like cultivation manuals, and to some degree even skills. And while most had stopped considering Cosmic Energy as corruption, they still hadn't quite acclimatized to their new reality. However, that was quickly changing as the Anointed and a large group of Zhix scholars had started creating a unique Cultivation Manual made by the Zhix for the Zhix.

It was still pretty rough, but over 90% of all Zhix warriors had still chosen to use it, displaying the characteristic unity of insectoid species.

"It's good to hear," Zac said. "I came to tell you that I will be leaving Earth soon, possibly for years."

"I think that is the right choice," Rhubat said. "I believe I still have much to gain here in our new world, but I can feel that I will need to leave for the stars within a few decades if I want to move forward. Go without worry, the Zhix will watch over our planet. The Zhix Hives all stand behind you, we know you are searching for power for the sake of us as much as for yourself."

Zac didn't stay long, and he left just five minutes later as Rhubat sunk back into the depths of his pool. Zac kept traveling back and forth making arrangements with his allies and inner circle, though he only told those he really trusted he'd be gone for over a year. Next, Zac spent the following weeks appearing across all corners of Earth, unleashing a storm of violence on the beast populations.

He had been lying low for too long, and the world needed to remember his might if he was to leave for a long time. It also allowed him to make some more inroads into the evolutionary combat technique he had made some inroads into during his battle with the bloodstalker. Unfortunately, he found that he wasn't making much progress when simply crushing the opposition.

It wasn't a surprise to him. Progress only happened when one was pushed to the limit, no matter if you talked about the wilds or cultivation. He would have to find some more powerful enemies if he wanted to perfect his new style.

Finally, after waging his one-man war for three full weeks, Zac got a message from Triv. There were energy fluctuations coming from the Dao Repository, meaning that his Revenant captain was finally coming out after almost two full months inside the inheritance trial. Zac quickly hurried back, just in time to see Vilari emerge from the array.

Zac breathed out in relief when he saw her unscathed. He had been worried that a trial lasting so long would be extremely deadly, but his revenant commander came out looking completely unscathed.

"How did it go?" Zac asked. "She didn't make things difficult because of your race, right?"

"The Tool Spirit was right. Master said that it didn't matter as sapience is all that's needed to understand suffering," Vilari answered with an airy voice.

Zac couldn't help but feel that the 'Crown of Despair' was a real downer after hearing that, but how Vilari referred to the mysterious mentalist piqued his interest.

"Master?" Zac asked.

"Master Ralz Carzood took me as an in-name disciple," Vilari said with a nod. "She was very pleased with my performance and provided the maximum benefits the rules of the trial allowed. However, I would have to reach her main body for her to take me as a true disciple."

"Main body?" Zac asked with confusion before his eyes widened in surprise. "She's actually alive?"

"She said so, at least," Vilari nodded. "She is a master of the soul, so I guess Master could still maintain a small connection even after having severed a small part for the inheritance."

"That's amazing," Zac said. "What's your next step?"

"I gained a new Soul Strengthening-method that I believe ultimately suits me better. It has a lower ceiling compared to young master's, but I think it will be hard for me to perform more than one reincarnation with my lacking affinity into Life," Vilari said. "I have already created a good foundation though, so I just need to keep working for a year or two, after which I will evolve to E-grade."

Zac nodded, happy to hear that she had found a path suited for her. Her aura had changed as well. It was more stable, deeper in a sense. It almost felt like he was talking to an old monster rather than a

junior cultivator, but Zac couldn't put his finger on why. Her strength had definitely increased a bit, but not to the point for him to get that feeling. It was rather a sense of vicissitude that was the source.

"Well, I'm glad you're back. Come with me," Zac nodded as he sent a message into his communication crystal. "There is someone you should meet."

The two walked over to his courtyard and sat down. They didn't have to wait long until they could hear steps approaching. It was Joanna who had hurried over at his command. She entered the courtyard, but she immediately froze as her spear appeared in her hand when she spotted Vilari. It was hard to miss her with her strong deathly fluctuations and striking appearance.

Of course, she didn't attack since Zac just sat there, and she instead looked over at him with confusion.

"I thought it was high time the two of you met," Zac said with a wry smile. "Joanna, meet Vilari, the commander of the Einherjar. Vilari, this is Joanna, commander of the Valkyries. I guess you could say the two of you hold the same position."

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you," Vilari said with a small smile as she nodded in Joanna's direction.

"You've made an army of Revenants?" Joanna exclaimed with wide eyes, but she still nodded back at the undead mentalist. "Where? How? Why?"

"I've worked on it for a few years now," Zac said. "Our world is changing into one of duality, and I'm kind of adapting. It would be a waste to have half the planet empty."

"Still..." Joanna said as he looked at Vilari with mixed emotions. "People will freak out. And what about when the shroud lifts and people find a bunch of undead on Earth?"

"There are tens of thousands of cultivators who have become necromancers or have other death-related classes on Earth. Hiding a few true undead in the mix shouldn't be too big of a deal," Zac shrugged before he turned to Vilari.

"Vilari, take Joanna to your compound after this. It's high time your two armies learn to work with each other," Zac said. "The Einherjar is my dagger hidden in the dark though, so they can't be exposed to anyone but the Valkyries. Unfortunately, you only have ten days to figure things out. After that, I'm leaving Earth for a long time."

That caught both of their attention, and they waited for him to properly explain.

"I am setting out soon in search of opportunities," Zac said. "I will probably be gone a long time this time around. Vilari, I was thinking of bringing you along, are you interested?"

"I am afraid I would drag you down," Vilari hesitated.

"I am going to a metropolis, so it should be somewhat safe. Bringing an attendant wouldn't be out of the ordinary. However, the length of your stay would depend on what we encounter over there. You might spend just a few minutes, or perhaps over a year," Zac explained.

"It would be my honor," Vilari said with a small smile.

“Only her?” Joanna said with a frown. “How about I and a squad of Valkyries accompany you? We can’t match your strength, but we can match hers.”

“No,” Zac said with a shake of his head. “Where I am going next, only the undead can follow.”

Zac had gone over his options many times over, and he had long decided. His first real outing would be Twilight Harbor.

It was technically possible for Joanna to come with him instead of Vilari, but Zac had decided to set out as a Draugr this time and hide his Specialty Core with the array. He hadn’t managed to get hold of a single piece of intelligence on the Twilight Harbor place so far, and he was afraid that it would look odd for a human and a Draugr to travel together.

Leaving the Zecia Sector to visit the grey zone was a huge risk, but one Zac had to take. First of all, it felt like such a place might hold opportunities for someone like him who walked both the path of Life and Death. His progress had stagnated a little over the past years and he needed something to kickstart it.

Besides, a place that even a pureblood Draugr like Catheya felt worthwhile to mention was probably even more special than she let on. After all, she had followed her peak C-Grade master as he traveled, and they had consciously made a stop there. Conversely, they only stopped in the Zecia Sector at all because her master needed to enter seclusion for a few years.

That was not the only reason to head there first. Zac also needed access to items for himself and his undead warriors. The chapters of the Undead Kingdom didn’t trade with the living factions of the Zecia Sector, at least not openly. That meant pretty much all the resources his Revenant followers used were foraged in the Dead Zones.

It was the same for himself. He needed something to push his undead Race to D-Grade, and the Twilight Harbor was his best bet. It also felt like a good place to widen his own skill repertoire. For example, he still didn’t even have a Movement Skill on his undead side. A commercial hub like the Twilight Harbor would definitely have a few repositories to peruse, and he might even find some good skills for his human side.

Part of him had wanted to immediately set out to the Million Gates Territory to search for Ogras now that he was confirmed alive, but it didn’t seem like a good idea. He was still too weak and inexperienced to travel a chaotic territory like that. A proper metropolis like the Twilight Harbor should be at least somewhat safe in comparison.

Besides, he didn’t even have a vessel to travel in that place full of chaotic spatial anomalies. Teleportation Arrays didn’t really work in that sector from what he had gathered, so he needed a proper Cosmic Vessel. His best bet was completing the Creator Shipyard-quest first and have Karunthel build him a vessel specifically suited to traverse a dangerous place like that.

He could probably buy a ship with his massive fortune by this point, but he had far more trust in the Creators than some local shipwrights. Furthermore, his sister was gone, and there would be no way for Zac to tell if the salesman left some hidden dangers in a bought vessel. And why wouldn’t they leave some sort of marker if some unknown E-grade warrior appeared with endless wealth?

So, until that point, he'd work hard on gaining power so that he wouldn't actually get himself killed the moment he entered that lawless territory. He at least needed the power to escape from D-Grade Hegemons, preferably even killing weaker ones. Luckily he had a decade to work on himself until that point unless Leandra was lying about the timelines.

Zac spent the next ten days resting up and waiting for the cooldown of his cloaking array to end. He tried to replicate his rudimentary Dao Braid a few hours every day as well, but progress was slow. It did work, but the activation was painfully slow. It was like his mental energy was turbid when he wasn't in a heated state, and it took him almost five seconds to create a Dao Braid and infuse it into a skill.

Such a delay mid-battle would almost definitely create a huge opening. But Zac hoped that if he formed his crude braids over and over it would become an ingrained skill that would flow naturally when it had to be actually used.

Ten days soon passed and Vilari returned to his courtyard. Zac had talked with everyone he needed to talk to, and he had prepared everything that needed to be prepared. There was also nothing holding him back on earth any longer. In fact, part of him couldn't wait to get away from Earth for a while.

So there was no reluctance in his gait as the two headed over to the Nexus Hub in the center of the island.