

## The Fall 715

### Chapter 715: Ripples

A ripple spread through the web, and a small smile spread across Alvod's face. It looked Va Tapek's little disciple really did deliver. He had been worried there for a bit since he felt the node condensing. Luckily, the node was broken apart before the change was irrevocable.

Not that Catheya Sharva'Zi's role was critical to his designs. It was not like his path toward Eternity was so fragile that it couldn't take a few mishaps. It was only one conduit out of hundreds, most of which had been in place for eons. But the more lines that were added, the closer to perfection his tapestry would get. The fallout of this particular node wasn't as good as the constructed route, but it was good enough.

If anything, things were going above expectation. He should have guessed. Destruction always came easier than conservation, and change was part of the heavenly law. The real question was what the local natives had planned for the final step. They wouldn't roll over at the core of their foundation being extracted and stolen, especially not by an outsider.

Alvod waited with anticipation, and a shimmering drop suddenly appeared in front of him. It was dark green in color, though it sometimes felt it was golden or black. It hovered in the air, its very existence impacting reality around it. Death was not death. Life was not life. It was the cyclic harmony of twilight and daybreak, the eternal evening tides.

A small bead of Primal Dao. Truth condensed into the purest form the base dimensions could take without unraveling. Something that only formed naturally in the exalted domains, the cultivation havens that someone like him would never gain access to.

The Heavens had been gated off, and the ancient factions held the keys. You would either have to pursue the broken peaks or bend the knee for a chance to drink at the fountain of truth. But Alvod wasn't willing. His Path was within the purview of the Heavens, but he would never surrender his freedom.

Even his old friends thought his actions in the Havarok Empire were a matter of vengeance. They thought he had fled here and entered the Twilight Ocean like a rat scurrying for safety. It couldn't be further from the truth.

Reociv Havarok was a full-bodied bastard who deserved to die for what he did to Tola, but would Alvod really have risked everything if not for the item that had fallen into the princeling's possession? The item which now formed the core of the tapestry of life and death. Alvod had found half of the core before coming to power back in Zecia, and he had spent four hundred thousand years looking for its other half.

Yet that bastard had swooped in and accidentally got his hands on it just as Alvod was on the precipice of success. It was Alvod who brought that Immemorial Realm to the surface at the cost of most of his fortune. Yet that man had gotten his hands on the item without even understanding what he was dealing with?

He had no choice. If Reociv was allowed to bring that item back to his ancestors, they'd soon realize its true nature.

Tens of thousands of runes emerged from the tapestry and they formed layers after layers of seals and protections around the bead of truth. This realm was too lowly for it to contain a bead of pure Primal Dao for long. It would get tainted in no time, reduced to its baser components.

The sealed bead was soon interred into the tapestry, which caused shuddering waves to spread out through the patterns. The bead eventually joined the others in the core, and Alvod's eyes gleamed with anticipation as he saw that the beacon was three-quarters full. His cells screamed with desire as he looked at the Primal Dao, but he forced himself to look away. He knew that his chances were slim even if he managed to fill the chalice to the brim.

He needed to be patient. Just two more years.

"Hear ye, hear ye," the ever-suffering grand marshal of the Kingdom of Billy sighed, still not fully understanding the nomenclature of his new overlords. "King Billy, Lord of Bonk Mountain has in his infinite wisdom sent out a divine decree, so listen well! The Divine Kingdom of Bonk Mountain requires more Dao Stones to be sourced for the conflict with the others! Every household will need to contribute 3 Dao Stones."

The gathered Smallboys, or rather Gnivelings as they were called before King Billy's grand impartment, listened on as their large ears shook with worry.

"We have been fishing for stones every week for the past four months," one of the Smallboys said as he stepped forward. "We appreciate what King Billy has done to protect us in this new environment... but the stones are becoming scarce. We lost Lorom just two weeks ago."

A few voices of agreement rippled through the crowd, causing Hanos' brows to scrunch up. The Marshall nervously glanced toward the mountain, but he steeled his heart as he felt a tendril poke him between the shoulder blades. Hanos somewhat liked his new master, but he liked living even more.

"What do you know!" Hanos roared. "King Billy is who keeps us safe through his communion with the holy spirit. King Billy is the one who protects us from the badlands, tirelessly swinging the holy scepter for our salvation! But do you think such a sacrifice comes cheap? Do you think King Billy's miracles can be created out of thin air? He needs more resources! No more complaints, set out right this instant!"

Some of the Gnivelings muttered and waved their oversized ears at the towering mountain, but most simply went to prepare their gear for excavating the Dao Rocks from beneath the ocean bed.

'Good, just three more villages,' a gleeful voice echoed in his mind.

'What about King Billy? What if he finds out?' Hanos cried in his mind 'I don't want to be bonked.'

'I'll deal with that. Besides, the great king has other things to worry about right now.'

Two weeks of fervent collection, but it was finally time. Ogras looked at the pile of Dao Stones with anticipation shimmering in his eyes. Over two years of arduous cultivation, and one year of planning. He was finally ready to leave that insufferable giant's shadow.

Who would have expected a netherblasted Dimensional Seed to gain sapience? And who would have expected it to form such an intimate connection with that brute, when there were far more dashing

candidates so close by? Was it because Billy saved these big-eared bastards while Ogras secured the treasures of the newly incorporated realm? Or was it simply because simpletons flocked together?

Things hadn't been too bad in the beginning. Those Th'Zaroth Hivebeasts weren't joking around, but they provided ample opportunities to hone one's combat skills. With the air being teeming with the Dao, each day was a revelation. Be it skills, Daos, or even levels, everything came smoothly in this place. Even evolving skills was accomplished as naturally as breathing since you were in a constant state of inspiration.

Two months of slaughter, and the two of them had finally managed to kill the Hive queen and seize the enormous meteor that contained her hive. It had not only provided them with a Nexus Node, but also a large amount of food as the warrior ants were actually quite delicious.

But from there, things started to go awry.

It turned out that the Earth's Nexus Nodes weren't the only ones Ogras was locked out of. He was even unable to become the master of a desolate rock in a hidden realm. Instead, he was forced to once more don the mantle of the helpful advisor, steering Billy in the right direction. But he couldn't understand why such a simple mind was so hard to control.

If anything, his experiences over the past three years had ingrained him with a deep respect for that bespectacled human that usually followed Billy's side. Nigel was his name? How did he manage to get anything done with this bastard holding the reins?

It was time to change his approach. He had tried so hard to get the brute to do the heavy lifting, but he was adamant about holding the fort rather than sending the troops to the depths of this ever-growing realm. And if he couldn't get others to pave the way, he would simply have to do the job himself. He could feel it. It was beckoning to him deep in the darkness. Something related to his path.

Something with the ability to reforge his fate.

Besides, it was now or never. It was clear that the pocket realm they lived inside was stabilizing. For over two years it had frantically moved about and swallowed one realm after another, but the sky seldom changed color any longer. Eventually, the Dimensional Seed would find some spot it liked and settle down.

And when that happened, it was just a matter of time before this place was discovered, before an entrance was drilled open and greedy bastards came swarming in. All these Hidden Realms collected, each of them most likely never touched by other men. Each of them full of unique treasures and opportunities.

He needed to snatch them all before the outsiders arrived.

"Behind you!" Bubbur roared, and Galau whirled around as his large two-hand sword drew a ruthless arc.

A desiccated head jumped out of the pirate's sleeve to bite down on the edge, but it shrieked and started to break apart when the corrosive acid smeared on the blade touched its mouth. It instinctively released its bite, which allowed Galau to finish the swing and cut both the guardian head and the pirate apart.

Galau sighed and looked around, relieved to see that things were finally calming down across the hidden base. These situations could spiral out of control at moment's notice. Normally, that would have been a problem for the soldiers, but all hands were fighting hands in the Muscle Brigade, even his own.

A burning meteor suddenly slammed into the protective dome on the sky, and Galau hurriedly shot out a hook from his belt before he was dragged out into the void again. He wasn't really phased about the environmental array being broken though, since something like this happened weekly.

And the source of the chaos was often the same.

"Boss, watch out!" a man screamed. "You'll break the base before we've looted it."

"Sorry, sorry!" a rough voice laughed as Greatest Peak flew through the new entrance he had created. "This captain was pretty strong, I got a bit excited."

Galau sighed as he looked at the burning crater. The pirate captain's gear was definitely unsalvageable at this point. Again.

"Money brat! Stop moping around and get to counting," Bubbur said as he threw over two Cosmos Sacks.

"It's Quartermaster Gobao," Galau said as he took out his inspection table before he started scanning the contents of the sacks.

Most items were simply categorized in the back of his mind, while a few were taken out to be properly scanned.

"You mean Shartermaster?" another brigadier who came to turn in the haul sniggered, prompting a few roars of laughter.

"That was almost two years ago! And I was out on my mind on that hexbrew we found the day before!" Galau said with grit teeth before he shot a baleful glare at the laughing pirate hunters. "Go on, keep laughing. We'll see who gets their salary paid with Nexus Coins and Spatial Fragments, and who gets paid in unsellable scrap."

"I'll call you whatever you want the moment you can beat me," Bubbur laughed. "Now hurry up, boss has that glint in his eyes."

Galau groaned, but he still sped up as he looked through the Cosmos Sacks one by one in search of hidden markers. It was a common practice between these space brigands. They'd leave a concealed treasure or two among their hoarded loot, in case it was stolen. That way they could always find the loot again if stolen.

Others would turn into beacons warning anyone in the vicinity, making it impossible to sneak up on unsuspecting targets. He was making fast progress, but he got a sinking feeling as he saw Greatest walk over with the fires of war burning in his eyes.

"Wait, boss!" Galau entreated. "Just a few more minutes!"

"You know the rules," Greatest said as he flashed forward, his fist ripping through the air with enough force to bend space itself.

Galau inwardly cried as he scrambled away, and he could only look on with despair as one Cosmos Sack after another was swallowed by the void caused by the swing. The most effective method to make sure you weren't being tracked was to destroy everything.

This Heavencursed family.

Why did the pirate captain have to possess that taboo technology, which resulted in an epic clash between the Boss and a machine swarm outside the meteor? Now the madness of the fight had already claimed Greatest Peak, and anything that delayed him fighting another worthy adversary would be destroyed, even if it was a mountain of wealth.

"Let's go, Shartermaster," Bubbur said with a wry smile. "There's still the young boss. If we hurry you might be able to find some good things."

Galau's eyes lit up and he immediately jumped onto Bubbur's Raider.

The Raiders were something they had looted two years ago after one of the tougher fights of the Muscle Brigade, and they had helped them adapt to this chaotic place tremendously. The Raiders were small four-meter vessels that almost looked like umbrellas.

They only housed five people, they could barely turn, and they had no weaponry. But they had two very desirable features that had made them a fan-favorite among the brigadiers. First, they were extremely quick, cutting through the chaotic spatial waves like butter. Secondly, the front of the vessel, the umbrella, was both an extremely sturdy shield and an efficient Array Breaker.

Now, every time the Muscle Brigade found a target to interrogate, or rather rob, over a hundred Raiders shot out from the mothership like small meteors, each one manned by five bloodthirsty meatheads. Those who owned Raiders almost always reached the criminals, or rather prey, faster than the others.

Galau shook his head as Bubbur escorted him to the satellite base that Average was in charge of taking down. It was an intelligence post, but Galau didn't hold much hope that they would find what they were looking for this time either.

They had arrived over three years ago in the central region of the Million Gates Territory, and they had eventually managed to confirm that a Space Gate really was forming somewhere. However, Million Gates Territory was just too vast. More to the point, space was too chaotic, making any attempt at navigation nigh impossible.

So even after searching for two full years, they hadn't come any closer to figuring out where the gate actually was. For all they knew, it might have already stabilized, and an endless army was gathering at their gates without the Zecia sector knowing. Hopefully, that wasn't the case though.

It appeared like the invaders didn't have it too easy. The odd Spatial Ripples that was the source of the disaster were still ongoing, though they only affected the Million Gates Territory these days from what he'd heard. Forming a Space Gate between sectors through such turbulence should be impossible, or at least prohibitively expensive, for frontier forces according to the boss, so they were most likely waiting for things to settle down.

Blood and a few corpses littered the halls as Bubbur crashed his Raider through the closest wall of the satellite base, but it looked like most of the defenses were the mechanized troops sold by the heretics hiding at the outer rims of the Million Gates Territory.

The cultivator in Galau despised these things, but the businessman in him almost salivated at the prospective earnings these taboo tools represented. He had seen just how money these items could bring in while visiting one of the Leviathans to trade and stock up on items. Unfortunately, these things were all slated for destruction now that the Muscle Brigade had its hands on them.

Galau found Average in the command room, and the young man nodded at Galau as he pointed at a small pile of Spatial Treasures. Three years of fighting pirates had completely reforged the youth, turning him into a capable warrior brimming with killing intent. However, the years in the heart of the Million Gates Territory had left their mark on Average, and he looked more like a pirate than pirate hunter by this point.

Then again, that could be said about himself as well, and Galau shook his head as he looked down at his scarred hands.

“Anything interesting?” Galau asked as he started scanning the Spatial Rings.

“I found it. I finally found it.”