

The Fall 749

Chapter 749: Folly of the Boundless

Ogras grunted with disgust as he chewed on the astringent mixture of herbs. The sickly heat radiating from the wound on his back was soon replaced by a cooling wave, proof that his makeshift antidote did at least work to some degree. It would take a lot more to rid himself of that sinister poison, but there was no opportunity to properly rest until he reached the next checkpoint.

He didn't know how, but his location was always exposed by those bastards, no matter how well he hid.

The demon sunk into the shadows, and his form soon appeared outside the dilapidated mansion, right in front of the squad of wretched creatures that had hounded him for the past two days. They were no more than a meter tall, but Ogras knew all too well the terror that was hidden within their diminutive forms.

They looked a bit like goblins though their skin was a dark mottled purple. They were also covered head to toe in an arcane script that Ogras couldn't make sense of at all. It felt completely disconnected from the general runes of the Ruthless Heavens, indicating they were wrought in a place outside Heaven's purview.

Their eyes empty holes filled with sinister energy, and they sparked with malice when they saw their target appear. The goblins needed no order to instantly attack. Their bodies bent and twisted as everything from simple spearpoints to massive maws was created from their bodies, attacking Ogras without hesitation or mercy.

His body cracked like a mirror while two ruthless eyes peered at the scene from a safe distance.

Ten spears wrought with condensed shadows sprung out from the ground, impaling a few members of the war party. The spears were covered in ethereal patterns of their own and imbued with the Peak Fragment of the Umbra to maximize their power. The ten spears targeted just six of the goblins, but none of them actually shot toward a vital.

Instead, they all pierced specific runes that shone brightly on the goblins' bodies, causing a chain reaction of cracks spreading through the script. Four of the goblins instantly shattered and turned into dust, leaving not even a corpse behind. However, the other two withstood the attacks as the runes covering their bodies shuddered and frantically rearranged themselves.

The next moment the shadow spears cracked, and the goblins stood there unaffected at all by what should have been a lethal strike. Ogras swore, realizing they had changed up the script again. The surviving goblins screeched in fury as their auras rose, and dozens of purple cracks appeared in the sky, each one of them emitting a cursed aura.

They looked a bit like spatial tears, but Ogras suspected they were something else. Because he had never seen the void on the other side of those things, only nightmares. It was one of these scars that had left the nasty wound on his back a month ago, teaching him a valuable lesson about the danger of these creatures.

The cracks quickly spread like a poison on reality, ripping everything in the surroundings to shreds. Decaying trees, walls, and even the ground turned mottled before it was reduced to ash, prompting a

storm of dust to swirl through the area. The building where Ogras had rested was turned into nothingness as one of the goblins drowned in with tears a fit of fury, but it was no skin off Ogras' back.

He had already receded into the shadows, heading west as he sent another of his shadow puppets running due north. He looked down at his forearm as he ran, a small hint of satisfaction on his face. Another line had been added to his tattoo this time, meaning there was just one pattern missing to complete the tapestry.

One out of four would have been considered proper shit luck two weeks ago, but he had hunted these goblin scouts for two weeks without a single one of the two missing lines being filled in. Meanwhile, the creatures had tightened the net in their hunt for him, making every step fraught with danger.

But it was worth it, Ogras figured, and he once more opened the quest screen for a boost of motivation.

The folly of the Boundless. (Limited, Trial): Hunt the Qriz'UI and collect their core runes. Each fully-filled pattern will form a key. Reward: Based on the number of keys gained. (4/6)

NOTE: All 6 keys are required to enter the Main Repository.

In the beginning, Ogras had felt the mission easy enough. He still remembered the glee upon finding this fragment of a long-lost civilization at the corner of this realm. It had taken the better part of a year trekking through the worlds that simpleton of a Realm Spirit had swallowed as it gallivanted through the void.

He had felt like the chosen one for once, finding ancient ruins at the end of his arduous journey. This was what adventurers dreamt of, the opportunity to rummage through the rotten carcass of a failed society. It was his opportunity to rekindle the dashed hope he had felt upon realizing that the Mystic Realm back on Earth wasn't holding anything of value.

This was a proper Cultivated Realm, where any random building might hold supreme methods and resources. Certainly, none of them had done so thus far, but he was still locked out of the core sections of this place. As he had traveled the broken lands, it quickly became clear that the civilization had fallen in war – and a war of their own making by the looks of it.

It had taken him two months and gathering the first sets of tattoos, but it hadn't been too hard to piece together what had happened. And it was a tale as old as time - a tale of hubris and taking shortcuts in the endless pursuit of power. These people, the Ra'Lashar, had clearly dabbled in the unorthodox, and they mainly cultivated through summoning beings from another plane – the very same beings that now hounded Ogras every waking moment.

What they actually were, Ogras still didn't know. Because they sure as hell weren't goblins. In fact, Ogras had already realized that their appearance was a simple form of mimicry, taking the shape of the ones who had summoned them. Their true form was some sort of energy creature, and they could even be considered living arrays.

The Qriz'UI were actually the dense scripts covering the bodies, rather than the bodies themselves. The only way he had found to kill them was by piercing their core runes, but the problem was that the runes kept changing. He had managed to kill four easily enough this time, but the stronger ones were far harder to deal with, especially considering every drawn-out battle attracted hundreds of these things.

Ogras had never heard of beings such as this before, but he knew that they could pose a huge threat if they ever spread out of this place. He had seen it, seen how three creatures suddenly split into nine, each one almost as strong as the originals. With that kind of ability to multiply, they would become a blight on any planet they inhabited.

Thankfully, it looked like the civilization that had summoned these things understood that fact as well and had created some sort of multi-layered seal that kept these critters inside their kingdom. They had even created a trial to cleanse the Qriz'Ul in return for their heritage, which was the quest the Ruthless Heavens had provided the moment he stepped through the outermost seal.

Most likely it was an act of vengeance on their killers rather than an act of goodwill, but Ogras didn't care. Killing these things was decent experience, and as soon as the tattoo was filled to the next tier, he would be able to access a higher tier of rewards. And he knew where the final piece of the puzzle waited.

Ogras eyes turned toward the tower far in the distance, his eyes gleaming with desire. Every checkpoint brought him closer to that structure, and the rewards would grow better with every step. Now that this place had been integrated by the Ruthless Heavens, there was no chance for them to balk on the reward either.

That didn't mean there were no hidden traps, but Ogras knew he could turn back any moment. Between every seal was a secure checkpoint which doubled as an opportunity to exchange his tattoos for riches, and if things got too heated, he'd simply back down. The price of overconfidence was apparent all around him, and he wasn't about to get done in by some demon-goblins.

He was getting out alive from this netherblasted realm, and he'd exchange some of the wealth he had accumulated in this prison for a bacchanalia that would make the Succubi of the Twin Lotus Pavilion blush with shame. If he didn't beget a dozen little bastards in whatever town he found outside the Dimensional Seed, then his name wasn't Ogras.

That didn't mean he wouldn't push himself. Every time he considered cashing in, he pictured that dull face. He pictured that annoying smile as one treasure after another fell into that man's paws. He could feel it. Whatever Zachary Atwood was doing right now, he was no doubt falling headfirst into some opportunity, no doubt while setting the whole sector on fire.

Ogras knew that the five years in this virgin world had completely elevated his prospects and allowed him to make shocking progress, but it wasn't enough. How embarrassing would it be if they met in a couple of years, and that bumbling human had somehow gone even further ahead after Ogras had enjoyed this kind of environment for years on end?

It was unacceptable.

So Ogras refocused on the task at hand, slowly following the calling on the incomplete tattoo. When he was missing two marks, it had pointed in every direction, making it completely useless. But now that there was just a single piece missing, it was pointing him toward a single location. Ogras had encountered this phenomenon four times already, and he knew that the big boss held the final piece of the puzzle.

Killing any more of these troublesome critters would just draw more attention, so he melded with the shadows as he moved through the ruins like a wraith. Eventually, he reached the spot indicated. It was a large domed building that might once have served as a temple. Dozens of Qriz'Ul ambled around at its gate, but Ogras noted that not a single one stepped inside.

Using [Darkside] to teleport onto one of the balconies would have been the easiest solution, but it was out of the question. These things looked pretty dumb, but they were pretty alert when it came to energy fluctuations. If not for his Fragment of Mirage, he would have been caught innumerable times by now.

Instead, Ogras was forced to slowly crawl closer, making use of brief windows of opportunity where the aimlessly wandering creatures had lumbered far away enough that he could sneak a bit closer. Finally, he reached the wall of the temple, and with one fluid motion dragged himself up along the wall until he reached a secluded balcony five meters up.

He jumped inside, [Skybreaker] already at the ready in his hand, but he was thankfully greeted by an empty room that seemed to have serviced as a scribe's workstation. Old illegible scrolls covered the floor, the ink on the parchment long faded away. The door to the chamber was closed, but it luckily didn't squeak at all as he pushed it open to peer outside.

A nose.

That all Ogras saw. A nose as large as an Alpha Barghest, full of welts and sinister runes, pointing straight toward the sky in defiance of both beauty and common sense. Ogras' heart almost jumped out of his mouth, and he pushed the door shut again ever-so-slowly, afraid to startle the thing right outside.

How was this fair?

The goblin that was lying in the domed chamber at the heart of this temple had to be over fifteen meters tall while maintaining its original proportions. By the looks of it, it was sleeping, but Ogras didn't know if these creatures actually slept. He hadn't seen any evidence of them doing so thus far at least.

He had observed the thing for a moment, but that creature was clearly not only big but also filled to the brim with the dark energies of the Qriz'Ul. Ogras guessed it might even have evolved to the next step, though its aura wasn't nearly as deep as his grandpa's. Still, tackling a creature of this magnitude, it was asking too much of him. Even with the skill he got at level 125, Ogras didn't feel confident at all.

"Well, I guess that's it for me," Ogras muttered with reluctance as he turned toward the balcony.

"Are you sure?" a shrill and guttural voice muttered from behind. "I can- ACK!"

The speaker didn't get any further as [Skybreaker] pierced straight into its forehead, and the spear turned into a blur as it kept stabbing over and over. Unfortunately, it looked like the attacks were completely ineffectual.

"I'm dead damnit, so stop trying to kill me," the goblin said with exasperation as he tried to swat the spearhead away, though his hand simply went straight through the weapon. "Look at me, you idiot. Do I have those runes across my skin?"

"Sorry, didn't notice," Ogras lied as he moved toward the balcony while he gripped a thick stack of exploding talismans.

Of course he had noticed, but what did it matter? It wasn't like the original citizens of this place were his allies even if a few of them had somehow survived until now. If anything, they might get in the way of him getting to the treasures. Better kill and say a prayer in case the goblin was friendly, than get killed by some rune-parasite-summoning lunatic.

"So long our world has been lost to the river of time, and a bastard like you is the one who finds us," the goblin muttered. "Well, I guess it's destiny."

"Whatever," Ogras whispered with a roll of his eyes. "What do you want? And speak with a lower volume, you imbecile."

"Because of that dolt?" the goblin sneered as he glanced at the closed door. "We could sing and dance for an hour without that thing noticing. It's placed itself in a type of stasis to reserve energy."

"Good to know," Ogras shrugged, still whispering. "So what do you want?"

"It would be a shame if you left like this," the goblin grunted. "There are still a lot of Qriz'UI profaning our final resting place."

"Well, that's not my problem," Ogras shrugged. "Should have thought of that before you summoned them."

"Well, that's true. The second part, that is," the goblin agreed. "As for the first, I wouldn't be so sure."

"Is that a threat?" Ogras asked, his eyes thinning as he tried to figure out if he had any ghost-killing capabilities. Unfortunately, he lacked any life-attuned abilities like those Zachary Atwood possessed.

"Threat? No, an opportunity," the ghost said with a wide grin. "That Ka'Zur Planeswalker in your body is giving you trouble, no?"

"What are you talking about?" Ogras shrugged, barely managing to keep his face impassive.

"No need to play dumb with me, brat," the goblin snickered. "I might just be a figment brought back from the void to maintain this place, but I was once a Grand Warlock who had delved in the arcane for eons. I know one of those shadelings when I see them."

"And you want to help me?" Ogras said with a raised brow. "Pretty generous for a goblin ghost."

Simultaneously, his mind was going over what he had learned of these goblins so far, comparing it to what the little ghost in front of him was saying. This civilization had almost all focused on contracting and training nefarious creatures from another realm, using them to fight in their stead. And while these things were distinctly different from Asshole in some regards, they were a bit similar in others.

Were they actually related? Did Asshole come from the same realm as the odd parasites outside? And did that mean their methods might actually be of use for him?

Getting fused with Asshole had led to a higher affinity to shadows, at the risk of his very soul. The Ka'Zur Planeswalker had been quiet for a long time, but Ogras knew it was lurking somewhere in the depths of his soul, waiting for the opportunity to pounce. It wouldn't get the chance. However, permanently dealing with Asshole without losing the benefits that the creature provided was easier said than done.

If he could impose a Soul Brand on Asshole, he would be completely safe from attack as long as he maintained his cultivation lead. Now, he didn't even dare get too wounded or go all-out in a fight out of fear that the creature would make a move.

"Generous? Not really, but my hatred for the bastards outside is greater than my indifference to you. This shield won't last forever, and I'm afraid it will break apart before someone more competent than you appear here," the goblin shrugged.

"Well, I'm all ears," Ogras said.

"Whoever tampered with that creature in your body didn't know what he was doing," the goblin said as he looked at Ogras with disgust. "You are one, yet separate. One of our great shamans possessed a technique to draw the creatures of the Lost Plane into her body, using them to empower herself. With that method, you will be able to truly make use of the power locked inside you."

"And look how that went for her," Ogras said with a pointed look.

"Our demise was due to another experiment," the goblin said with a roll of his eyes. "Rasata fought to the very end, and the creatures that had fused with her soul never managed to revolt. Of course, the moment she fell, her body became an eldritch horror that accelerated the fall of our civilization. A regrettable quirk, but who cares what happens to our body after we fall? Might as well go out with a bang."

"And let me guess," Ogras sighed. "That method is locked inside the tower? Probably guarded by a bunch of supercharged bastards like the big guy outside?"

The widening grin of the goblin was all the answer he needed.