

The Fall 777

Chapter 777: Greed and Chaos

Shock filled Uona's heart as she saw the core arrays of the Blood Effigy simply disappear, turned into nothingness in a burst of Oblivion. All she had sacrificed, all she had done. It was for naught. Her plans ruined, the effigy destroyed.

Why had she angered that thing?

The ill-starred Draugr fell onto the ground, but not even a second passed before he crawled back to his feet, and the wounds across his body were already closing. How were you supposed to fight something like this? Someone not following the Law of Balance, wantonly drawing on cursed powers to achieve his goal. He was unkillable and with nigh-unbeatable methods of destruction.

Her final act had been one of desperation. To nullify the corruption with destruction, infusing the remnant into the effigy to destroy the invading force, at the cost of all the remaining Essence Blood in the hidden vessel. Even if it ultimately failed, it should at least have provided enough power to annihilate that man a few times over.

Yet he had managed to push straight into the effigy, using that other unholy ability at the last moment to break past the blood barrier. Now he stood there, with destruction in his eyes and corruption in his hands.

Why? Why had she listened to that voice to steal that thing, even when she had been uncertain whether the voice actually belonged to her kin? She knew the answer; hubris. She was a chosen, standing over trillions. She had even gazed upon the Bloodmother's avatar once. This was just a trial at the frontier, how did anyone dare bar her path, even harming her? In here, she believed herself the Heavenly Law, of unmatched power and heritage.

Foolish.

She had even been forced to ignite her bloodline to avoid death in that nullification zone, and then sacrifice her Blood Essence to stem the corruption in the effigy. She would have to be submerged in a blood pond for at least twenty years to completely recover. And she hadn't even accomplished her goals.

The Draugr still stood while the effigy was gone, making Grandpa Nether's mission far more difficult. Being relegated was entirely possible, between the lost momentum and her impetuous actions. However, a clap of thunder made her realize that was the least of her problems. She looked at the sky, her eyes wide with incomprehension.

What was going on?! The Ruthless Heavens had descended, a true consciousness at that. Why? Why would the System shift such a significant part of its mind to this desolate corner of the multiverse? Not even defending one's Dao would garner such a presence in most cases, especially not an ascent at the Frontier.

Yet it was here. The sky rumbled as arcs of golden lightning lit up the sky, making it impossible to draw any other conclusions. She could feel the heavenly presence weighing down on her, she could feel the

gaze of the supreme arbiter. She couldn't as much as get back on her feet, not that she dared stand in defiance of the Heavens themselves.

But he did.

She once more looked in his direction, only to find a monstrosity stare back. She had been right. Letting him get his hands on that cursed thing was the beginning of the end, and a terror she had never felt before filled her heart as she stared into those eyes.

She was no longer looking into the Abyss. She was gazing upon Primordial Chaos.

The long steely hair of the Draugr danced in the air, buffeted by chaotic winds that swirled around him. His eyes had lost the familiar darkness, replaced by the endlessly churning grey storm of chaos. His whole face was covered in two sets of jagged scars, together forming something that her mind couldn't begin to comprehend.

Sharp pain in her mind made her shudder, and she was shocked to realize a crack on her Soul Core had appeared. Just gazing upon those markings had damaged her soul. The thunder rumbled again, this time with even greater ferocity, and Uona felt she could feel some ancient anger hidden inside.

What was the Heavens angry about? Was it him? Was it her? The array they had set up in this city was technically permissible, but it was still toeing at the edge of unorthodoxy. No, it wasn't her. A flash of golden lightning slammed into the ground, barely missing the Draugr who had somehow managed to take a step forward.

Toward her.

The sky grew darker in response, like it was infuriated at the man's defiance. But Arcaz Black paid it no heed it seemed. His aura grew more erratic, more primordial, creating a hair-raising feeling. Something was brewing inside him, something that shouldn't exist. At least not here, in an E-grade cultivator.

Another rumble, and the Draugr had somehow shifted position, removing half the distance between them. She hadn't noticed him moving at all, but she wasn't surprised. He had swallowed both Creation and Oblivion, and Chaos was now coursing through his veins. Trying to understand the situation based on a cultivation system created by the Apostate of Order was hopeless.

Once more reality changed, and he now stood only a few dozen meters away. It was palpable by now, the danger that was hiding within his body. Small pieces of her reality were being stripped away, turning into motes of red that escaped from her body. Just being in his proximity was deadly, and she had to get away.

Uona struggled against the weight of the Heavens, but she barely managed to push herself up to a sitting position. Her desperation grew as she struggled, but it was futile. It quickly became clear; without sacrifice, there was no chance for her to survive this madness.

Seventy-five Nodes ignited, each one exploding and releasing a torrent of energy. At the same time, the nucleus condensed by her Dao and her Path cracked, undoing five years of preparations and marking the loss of dozens of valuable Natural Treasures. Her aura rose to unprecedented heights, allowing her to finally stand up.

But she was just a candle in the wind, burning through both ends to give her a fighting chance. She still felt as weak as a mortal, and she started running away. Crippling herself cultivation had cemented her fall from the elite, but it was better than dying. As long as there was life, there was a way.

Her progenitor would perhaps take pity on her and help her recover her cultivation. Or perhaps, the Eternal Court would use these events to put political pressure on the Abyssal Shores, which would increase her value enough to be restored. That was her only hope.

The madman seemed occupied, barely noticing her escape as she ran toward the closest exit. But that was not much of a relief as the intensity of the thunder above just kept increasing. She felt so excruciatingly slow, like her reality had been reduced to a crawl. But finally, she managed to leave the courtyard, and she felt the pressure slowly abate as she moved away from the epicenter of the Heavenly Descent.

Opulent mansions were replaced by a dead forest as she kept moving, but escape talismans and movement skills kept failing her. It wasn't a surprise though. Even if the whole city wasn't suppressed, she still wouldn't be able to control the rampant energy in her body.

"Not so fast, bloodling," a thunderous shout erupted like a clap of thunder, but it was fury rather than fear that filled her heart.

It was that Havarok princeling, making his appearance at the worst possible time. Behind him, over a hundred soldiers had formed a defensive line, though all of them were on their knees or prone on the ground. Only the prince himself was still standing, though he had to use his sword to remain upright under the pressure from above.

"Fool! Out of the way," she screeched, her heart hammering with horror upon seeing her path being barred. "You'll kill us all! He is coming!"

"I am already here," a voice echoed out, all-too-close.

Terror threatened to turn Uona mad, and the horror only intensified when she found herself unable to move, locked in place as the Heavens bore down on her with unprecedented weight. She barely managed to turn her body to look behind her.

There he stood, an aberration that shouldn't exist – chaos taken physical form.

"You brought this on yourself," Arcaz Black said, and he suddenly stood right in front of her.

There were no rules to his movement. He just was. Unpredictable, unstoppable. And between his hands, it appeared – Chaos.

Her thoughts grew muted and distant as she was mesmerized by the pattern that had appeared. It was not as poignant of the holy ponds back home, nor as palpable as the Dao of her Ancestor. Yet it contained endless mystery and the whispers of that long-forgotten era where Chaos reigned supreme.

The barriers were broken, unable to remain standing after she had sacrificed her cultivation. She felt her mind straining, unable to bear the weight of the Dao. Her eyes were opened wide as she desperately tried to understand the message in that small glimpse of the peak. As long as she could just grasp a corner, she would be able to not only survive, but to gain unprecedented benefits.

She was-

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Ykrodas looked on with wide eyes as a golden pillar of lightning slammed into Uona Noz'Valadir, completely extinguishing her spirit and ending her reign of terror. The first bolt was followed by a few more, until her harried body was given a reprieve as it fell to the side, exposing the man who had appeared behind her.

"If you want to live, look away," a voice echoed out in his mind, and there was no hesitation as he complied.

This was beyond his scope of knowledge. This was true Heavenly Intervention, something he thought a myth. The thing that man had conjured had called the Heavens to this small corner of the Multiverse. His heart hammered as he squeezed his eyes shut, but his vision was still lit up by lightning multiple times over until the immense pressure on his shoulders was finally lifted.

Groans echoed throughout his lines, and Ykrodas took a shuddering breath as he turned around. Most of his followers were fine, if a bit worse for the wear. However, he sighed with some helplessness upon seeing that over ten people were staring blankly ahead, their eyes milky-white and not emitting a speck of spirituality.

They had gazed upon something they shouldn't have and paid the price of coveting something claimed by the Heavens.

Ykrodas shook his head, and he turned toward the source of the terrifying events. Arcaz Black stood in silence, his eyes closed as his face was turned toward the still-churning sky. Ykrodas didn't know if he was in the middle of an epiphany or if his soul had been wounded by the Heavenly Intervention, but the Draugr's aura was shuddering erratically as the weird patterns on his skin twisted and started to fade.

Now would perhaps be the optimal time to strike, but Ykrodas wouldn't do such a foolish thing. He had seen the harried form of Uona as she ran for her life. Her cultivation had been destroyed, her soul damaged. Most importantly, he had seen the horror, the sheer terror in her eyes that was so strong that it made his own heart beat faster.

This Draugr was too mysterious, too volatile. Ventus had called him Chaos incarnate, and Ykrodas only now realized just how correct he had been. Ykrodas wouldn't risk his life or the plans of the empire to strike at this enigma, at least unless he absolutely had to. Instead, he took the opportunity to look around.

The haze over the City of Ancients had been completely cleared by the lightning, and Ykrodas could even see the heart of the city. He saw the central tower, the seat of the Realm Spirit. He saw how the protective rune in front of it flickered with lightning for a minute before going out completely.

Had the barrier been actively destroyed by the Heavens, or had the commotion simply been the last straw to unravel that ancient protective seal? In either case, it meant the core was completely exposed, and Ykrodas cursed as he tried to find any traces of Kataron Rissit. They had entered this park roughly around the same time, yet he was nowhere to be seen.

He was nowhere to be seen, and Ykrodas was filled with a sense of urgency. He needed to move, yet he dared not pass the man in front of him, even with an army at his back. So he could only wait, steeped in impatience, for Arcaz Black to wake up. Soon enough, the terrifying appearance of the Draugr returned to normal, the patterns gone entirely.

The dark thunderous clouds were gone as well, but Ykrodas frowned as he felt an alien aura suffuse the Twilight Energy, subtly altering it. Arcaz Black opened his eyes, and Ykrodas was confused when he saw the confusion on his face. It almost looked like the Draugr had woken up from a dream, but he quickly regained his wits as he turned his gaze to Ykrodas.

"Ykrodas Havarok," he slowly said.

"You sent a message that our goals were aligned some months ago. Does that still hold?" Ykrodas asked, surprised at how hoarse his voice sounded.

"It still holds," Arcaz nodded before his gaze shifted. "But leave him behind."

Ykrodas' brows scrunched as he looked at Ventus Kalavan before they widened as he looked at the fallen body of Uona.

"The price that has been paid," Ykrodas sighed before snapping his fingers, which released the fetters that held the numerologist. "Fate is fickle."

The slippery elf only smiled toward him before stepping to the side, though Ykrodas noted he didn't join Arcaz' side.

"He is free, and we will make no moves on him as long as he does not act against us again," Ykrodas said. "Is that to your satisfaction?"

"That is fine," the Draugr nodded.

Ykrodas hesitated for a second, filled with burning questions. What the hell just happened? What was that thing between his hands? What other madness do you have in store? Finally, Ykrodas picked the most pertinent one. His ancestors would be able to answer the rest after seeing the recordings. "Can I ask, what is the situation at the core?"

"The Blood Effigy is destroyed, and you saw the fate of Uona yourself," the Draugr slowly said. "The Eidolon had built something similar, but I destroyed that as well, along with most of the ghosts. Aia Ouro is still alive, but I doubt they are in fighting condition after our battle."

"And the realm spirit?" Ykrodas asked.

"It's fine, as far as I know," Arcaz shrugged. "I never saw it."

"I have to go. You have helped us immensely, and the Havarok Empire will remember this favor. But others are aiming to destroy the spirit, and I must protect it," Ykrodas said.

"Well, you better hurry," the Draugr said with a grimace.

"Why? Has the Radiant Temple already made their move? Or is it the natives?" Ykrodas frowned.

"Well, neither," the Draugr coughed, and Ykrodas felt he almost looked queasy. "I'm talking about that."

Ykrodas didn't understand what the man was talking about, but he still followed with his gaze as Arcaz pointed straight toward the sky. His eyes widened with horror the next moment as he saw dozens of silvery cracks that spread with speed visible to the naked eye.

"We have an hour if we're lucky. After that, the Twilight Ocean will collapse."

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Aia stabilized their mind as best as they could before cutting off the final tainted piece of their soul. They had lost over 30% of their spirit, but at least they would survive. With time and some treasures, their spirit would regrow.

A small comfort was that no matter how bad a state they were in, Uona Noz'Valadir was in a worse one. Those scenes would be imprinted on their soul for the rest of their life. That horrifying power that Arcaz Black had unleashed before chasing that harlot into the streets of the City of Ancients.

It only took one look to confirm their suspicions; their placements had moved up one spot. A Heaven's Chosen of the Eternal Clan had fallen in the Frontier. Served her right for trying to entangle Hive Ouro with that madman. The moment they returned, they seek an audience with the ancestors and lodge a complaint against both those lunatics.

"So this is it," a sigh echoed out, terrifying Aia. "Seventy-eight million years, only to be ripped apart by greed and chaos."

"Who?!" they screamed as they roused their exhausted spirit.

Looking around, Aia saw him standing by another window of the building they had chosen to hide inside, looking up at the sky. It took a second, but they suddenly realized who it was. The man looked exactly like in the pictures, but that only served to make them more confused.

"That's impossible! You're long gone!" Aia said with a mix of confusion and fear.

How could this man be standing here? He had been killed so long ago. Was this a lingering resentment? That was the only thing Aia could think of, as the man had absolutely no aura at all, not a speck of spirituality.

"An Edgewalker has appeared and conjured a corner of the Primordial Dao, yet this is what you're confused about?" he snorted. "Well, you will make a decent offering."

"This is impossible! You can't-" Aia said, but they didn't get any further as space twisted, ripping their soul to shreds.

The sky rumbled again, but the man only snorted in derision as he walked over and picked up the Spatial Gem of the little ghost. "What can you do to me that hasn't already been done, you greedy old fellow?"

His gaze turned once more to the scene outside, to the walking contradiction who had regained his senses by now. Arcaz Black was gazing up at the sky, at the cracks that had been created by his own hands.

"Child, it has to be fate that you appear before me after all these years," he muttered as blood started to run down his nose. "It is time we met."

