

The Fall 782

Chapter 782: The Trove of the Ocean

The treasury wasn't too big, but what it lacked in quantity, it made up in quality. Zac had been worried that it would be just an empty room, considering how most people simply carried their most valuable possessions in their Spatial Tools. But as he looked around, there were over twenty items that emitted the powerful fluctuations of D-grade items, not including the piles of Cosmic Crystals.

It was far from his most exaggerated hopes, where boundless C- and even B-grade treasures were strewn about. But Zac knew that was impossible in a System-controlled E-grade trial. He had already realized that low- or middle D-grade was the limit of what the System would allow in this version of the Twilight Ascent.

Anything beyond that was most likely placed in the higher-grade versions of the trial. And as expected, the D-grade items were all sealed by a golden brand, proving that not even the treasure chamber of Qi'Sar was free from the System's meddling. It didn't look like he would be making hundreds of C-grade Nexus Coins today, but that didn't mean his haul was anything to scoff at.

The value of every single treasure had to be measured in D-grade Nexus Coins, including the piles of Cosmic Crystals that all exuded shocking amounts of energy. And all this paled in front of the item placed in the middle of the room on a small inscribed pedestal. On top of it, a meter-tall dodecahedron wrought from mottled metal rods stood.

The metallic cage was not the real treasure, but rather acted as some sort of containment field for the thing that Qi'Sar wanted him to bring away. It was an odd-looking crystal that looked like a thick candy cane, and it hovered in the middle of the cage. But instead of red and white, it was black and golden. It didn't emit any energy at all, but Zac quickly realized it was because of the containment field.

"This is the thing I need you to take away," Qi'Sar's voice echoed through the hall, though his projection still didn't appear. "My children."

"Your what?" Zac blurted.

"It is a Realm Spirit. A true one, rather than one forged by chance such as myself," Qi'Sar explained. "I have nurtured it for ten million years, expending innumerable treasures that have been left behind. Not only that, but it is a mutated twin-souled Realm Spirit, holding the affinities of both life and death. For an Edgewalker such as yourself, it is a unique opportunity to craft a cultivation planet perfectly suited to your path."

"So that's why you were so insistent," Zac said. "You want me to save your children from the collapse of this Mystic Realm? Is that even possible?"

"They have yet to awaken, making them technically not yet alive," Qi'Sar said. "However, they are still bound to the realm. The cage you see around it is meant to protect the crystal housing them, and to keep them stable while you bring them away. However, this can only be done at the moment when the realm collapses."

"The realm breaking down will break the connection, and I just need to take them away at that moment?" Zac confirmed. "What then?"

“You acquire a high-quality world or realm such as this, and simply implant this crystal by the World Core. As long as this world has no consciousness of its own, these two children will eventually fuse with the core and truly awaken,” Qi’Sar said. “Thus, a world perfectly suited for our needs will be born, while my children will get a chance to start anew. Simple enough.”

“It’s pretty big though, can I put it in a Spatial Ring?” Zac frowned.

“You can, but no longer than ten years. They are not alive like you, but the environment in a Spatial Treasure is void of energy, which can harm them if too much time passes,” Qi’Sar said. “But as I said, you cannot take it now. You need to start infusing the array with power, preparing it for the end. With your wild pillage, we are cutting time short.”

“What array?” Zac asked with raised brows as he walked closer.

“The cage itself is the array,” the Realm Spirit sighed.

“This thing is?” Zac muttered as he slowly walked a few circles around the dodecahedron, looking at the fine engravings on the rods. “Never seen anything like it.”

“The multiverse is full of marvels,” Qi’Sar muttered. “Now, hurry up and start powering up the array. You are running out of time.”

Zac looked at the array for a few more seconds before he shrugged and straightened his back.

“I’m sorry, but my first priority is to save my Tool Spirit,” Zac slowly said as he turned to a pile of crystals he had never seen before. “Explain what I need to do before we deal with the Realm Spirits.”

“As I said, just use the refined Temporal Crystals,” Qi’Sar urged, and Zac looked at a particular pile of crystals.

The crystals were light purple and covered in engravings, and it looked like white flickering lights were trapped inside. They appeared and disappeared, seemingly at random. With the temporal energies surrounding them, it almost felt like the sparks moved back and forth in time in an eternal cycle. Most of the crystals were sealed by the System, but some were fine.

From the looks of it, the available crystals were mostly out of energy, perhaps because they had been used up to power whatever array Qi’Sar had used. It was also possible the small runes that covered their surface had failed, prompting them to leak enough energy to get downgraded from D-grade to something equivalent to Pseudo D-grade.

“You simply need to have the young demoness absorb the energy within,” Qi’Sar sighed. “The Tool Spirit is supreme inside their inner world, she should have no problem using the extracted energy from the refined crystals to trap the rampaging ball of power she had absorbed.”

“But how do we make sure that the crystals slow down time, rather than speed it up?” Zac frowned. “She’s already under pressure. If we mess this up she might die.”

“These are refined Temporal Crystals,” the Realm Spirit said with impatience. “Simply extract the Temporal Energy from the correct rune, the circular one, and it will be made into a Temporal Deceleration Field. It is far less efficient compared to using the Temporal Crystal with an Array, but it is enough for your purpose.”

Zac picked up one of the Temporal Crystal with a frown, and he could feel the burning impatience of the spirit as he turned the crystal over multiple times before he attempted to extract some energy from the circular rune as the spirit said. Soon enough, he could feel how a small area in front of him was filled with temporal energy.

He took out a low-grade Nexus Crystals and threw it inside, and his eyes lit up when he saw it slow down to a fifth of its original speed as it passed through the Temporal Energy. Zac repeated the same experiment a few times, both trying things out with different crystals, and comparing the effect with the other rune, the one that sped things up.

“I guess it is good that you are careful. Careless cultivators die an early death. But you also need to be decisive, grasping opportunities that are in front of you,” Qi’Sar eventually said as he saw Zac play around. “I can feel how those on the outside have made their move. You are running out of time.”

A huge shudder suddenly rocked the whole realm, almost to confirm the Realm Spirit’s warning. Zac looked around with wide eyes, as he felt a burst of Chaos even through the thick walls. Mixed in with it was something else, something he couldn’t place. Perhaps an attack from a Monarch on the outside had managed to make its way inside?

“I can only stave off their attempts for so long,” Qi’Sar urged again.

“Alright,” Zac nodded as he put a temporal stone next to the amulet on his neck and activated the rune.

At first, there was no response, but Zac soon felt a pull from the small coffin as it started to absorb the temporal energy. Zac nodded with satisfaction as he kept providing more and more energy while stowing away the other treasures in the hall.

First, the Temporal Crystals were stowed away.

Over 90% of them were sealed by a golden brand, meaning they were proper D-grade crystals. Considering their wide array of uses and their scarcity, Zac believed that this small pile of roughly 80 crystals was worth at least as much as all the Natural Treasures he had plundered over the past three years combined. These were things that had a huge demand but no steady supply in the Frontier.

In fact, he had no idea how they formed at all.

From there, he stowed away one pile of crystals after another, ignoring both the Realm Spirit’s increasingly urgent exhortations to hurry up and the increasingly powerful shakes that rocked the whole realm.

The Temporal Crystals were probably the most valuable ones in the treasury considering there were no Spatial Crystals, but the others were all D-grade crystals with various interesting attunements. Of course, there were hundreds of normal and death-attuned Cosmic Crystals, multiplying his small stockpile more than ten times over.

Altogether, the non-attuned Cosmic Crystals alone were worth tens of thousands of D-grade Nexus Coins, almost completely recouping his expenses in Twilight Harbor. Add to that all the attuned crystals, and he might just have doubled his vast fortune, considering he could probably sell these kinds of Cosmic Crystals at a premium back home in Zecia.

Apart from the crystals, there was only one more raw material; a large block of Spiritual Metal, seemingly the same material the array cage was made from. The block was just one meter long with a diameter of 30 centimeters or so, but Zac felt his arms strain as he lifted it. It weighed almost like a mountain, shocking Zac as he exerted some pressure its the surface.

“What is this metal?” Zac exclaimed.

“Diluted Blackearth Steel,” Qi’Sar grunted. “Blackearth Steel is a proper D-grade metal known for its durability and ability to isolate energy. But with the System limiting materials, I had to turn it into a Pseudo D-grade alloy to prevent it from being sealed.”

Zac curiously tried to infuse some of his energy, and just as the Realm Spirit said, it was almost like it hit a solid wall. He nodded with understanding as he stowed the treasure away, and another rumble shook the treasure chamber.

“You have only a few minutes,” the Realm Spirit reminded.

“Alright. I am almost done,” Zac nodded as he turned his attention to Alea. She had finally finished absorbing Temporal Energy, and Zac felt the Spirit Tool had stabilized somewhat. He nodded in satisfaction and stowed away the Temporal Crystal he had used to feed Alea before sweeping the shelves bare.

The items that remained were mostly various tools, but there were also a few sets of information crystals, inscribed plaques, and even a couple of scrolls. They were all different methods of storing things like Cultivation Manuals, methods, and skills, but there was no time to go through them since the realm was really falling apart at the seams.

“So what now?” Zac asked.

“The array needs life and death along with energy to activate. Infuse your Daos, and the cage will do the rest. It’s set to fully activate the moment the connection between my children and this realm is cut,” Qi’Sar eagerly said now that Zac was finally ready to deal with his task.

Zac nodded and walked over, and without any further ado started infusing his Fragment of the Bodhi and Fragment of the Coffin into the cage. However, he only infused one at the time, alternating between the two Daos as he fed more and more into the Array.

“What are you doing?” Qi’Sar almost screamed with fear after a particularly rough shudder spread through the treasury, almost throwing Zac off his feet. “You are too slow! My children will not make it at this rate!”

“If you have followed me over the past years, you should know my energy control is pretty horrible,” Zac said with embarrassment. “Besides, my soul is wounded from before. I am infusing it as quickly as I can, but you need to hold on a bit longer.”

“All because of your greed,” Qi’Sar growled, but Zac suddenly felt the realm stabilize a bit from the increasingly incessant shudders.

Still, Zac could feel how the realm wasn't long for the world. The Twilight Energy around him was unraveling, and space had started to come apart at the seams. With his lingering connection to Chaos, he could feel they were right at the precipice.

"Are we close to done?" Zac frowned as he felt his already drained soul being sapped of more and more Mental Energy. "I am running out of energy here. I need some left if I am supposed to take it away."

"Well, it needs to be able to withstand the backlash of the connection breaking," Qi'Sar said. "And don't worry. I will send you further away with my last breath. Now, get ready, we are abou- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!"

The receiving runes had suddenly started to twist along with the Blackearth Steel. The isolation capabilities of the alloy were impressive, but they weren't a match to the small burst of Creation Zac had forced into the array. He had managed to retain a small amount of both energies for emergencies, and he had chosen to use his last Creation Energy at this moment.

The vibrant force spread like a poison through the dodecahedron, causing hairline cracks to appear. The Realm Spirit was screaming at him with horror in his voice, but Zac ignored it as [Verun's Bite] had appeared in his hand. The axe was already descending toward the array as it appeared, with the two runes of sharpness and heaviness radiating a sanguine glow.

The swing bit into the metal tubes with such force that it shocked the whole treasury. The cage held, except for some small cracks that covered its surface. But Zac wasn't deterred, and he furiously swung his axe two more times until the cage cracked altogether, unleashing a storm of contained energy.

At the same time, the whole Mystic Realm groaned as spatial tears appeared all over the place, signaling that the realm was truly falling apart. Zac was inundated in extremely condensed Life and Death, but he didn't step back. Instead, he grabbed the shimmering crystal, hurriedly ripping it out of the socket just as he felt a surge of energy entering the room.

Cracks spread across the small spiraled gem as it started leaking energy, but Zac simply stuffed it into a treasure box along with a couple of the Life-and-Death-attuned Cosmic Crystals he had found in the room, before sealing the box with a talisman and stuffing it into his Spatial Ring.

"What have you done?!" an infuriated voice roared with enough force to make the whole room shake.

Zac only snorted in response, not bothering to talk with the Realm Spirit any longer. Something had been off about the congenial Realm Spirit since the beginning, and that feeling had only become stronger after he entered the castle. Zac couldn't pinpoint the problem, but something wasn't right.

Seeing how urgently the Realm Spirit had wanted him to get to the treasury, Zac had been filled with reluctance, to the point that he had started stalling. Why else would he have spent twenty minutes looting ratty old furniture and broken-down tools when the world around him was collapsing?

The Realm Spirit kept being careful to not push him too hard even when wasting time, no doubt afraid its plans would fail if he became hostile. That way, less than fifteen minutes was remaining when Zac reached the treasury, giving the Realm Spirit less time to enact whatever plan it had concocted.

And having seen the cage, Zac mostly figured out what was going on.

A vast majority of the runes were foreign to him, but some were not. He hadn't seen them in any of Catheya's compendiums of patterns, or from any missives he had bought. Rather, they were something that had originated from Adcarkas, Void's Disciple. After Zac had managed to kill the Dominator, he hadn't dared take his Cosmos Sack back to Earth, but rather destroyed it along with his and Harbinger's corpses.

However, some things still managed to make their way back, and he had seen these particular patterns upon visiting Clan Volor. It was shortly after they set up their underwater town where the frogmen had appeared on Earth.

When the Mystic Realm started collapsing, Void's Disciple and Inevitability had been nowhere to be found. So, the Zhix traitors had decided to move toward the Memorysteel Mountain, bringing their captive gemlings with them. However, they had first collected everything in the buildings where Dominators had stayed for the last couple of months.

It was among these items Zac had found several schematics, along with some research notes and experiments. Zac couldn't make any heads or tails of it, but Kenzie and Jeeves had quickly realized that the notes were related to soul transference. Adcarkas had been researching a way to adapt a possession-type array to make use of the Spatial Energy of the Dimensional Seed.

Most of the array schematic was missing, most likely left on Void's Disciple's body, but it was certain that it was the method Adcarkas used to take over the body of his daughter. And now, Zac had seen similar patterns on the cage in front of him.

The old Realm Spirit had lived for a long time, but it was clearly not as willing to enter the cycle of reincarnation as he had tried to let on.