

The Fall 790

Chapter 790: The Final Twilight

The fact that one of the two A-grade leaders of the Draugr race might have taken an interest in something like an E-grade cultivator was almost incomprehensible. People at their level didn't even care whether Monarchs lived or died, and generations of E-grade cultivators would live and die in a single cultivation session of theirs.

At the same time, Catheya knew what she could and couldn't ask about, so she instead focused on the other part Reyna had divulged.

"Edgewalkers? Something like this has happened before?" Catheya hesitantly asked.

She felt a wave of regret upon remembering how confidently she had assured Arcaz about how this plan of hers would work. But it turned out she was talking out of turn, lacking critical information. She had never heard of such a marvelous thing, which was why she was so adamant that Arcaz could become a high-value member of the empire.

But if they were common, his value would immediately plummet, which meant his safety was no longer guaranteed.

"The Multiverse is beyond ancient. What hasn't happened before?" Reyna smiled. "We could even create them if we wanted. Unfortunately, they all have a fundamental weakness no matter if they were created artificially or if they were born from some cosmic hiccup."

"A weakness?" Catheya said with worry.

"Life-Death Edgewalkers cannot form a Cultivator's Core because of their contradictory nature," Reyna sighed. "If they could, they would have become strategic resources of our empire. Agents who could walk completely unfettered in the land of the living? But now, they are simply natural oddities, dayflies with a small window of glory."

Catheya blanched when she heard of Arcaz's Fate. Was this the work of the Law of Balance? He was shining too brightly, like a candle burning from both ends. It felt extremely unfair that the path of someone so miraculous as that would be cut short at the measly E-grade. But if not even someone like Reyna knew of a solution, odds were that there wasn't one.

At least there was one piece of good news that came with this. "So no one would want to kill him for research, at least?"

"Research?" Reyna snorted. "What's there to research? If it was possible to actually nurture beings who could keep both their races and pass on that ability, we would have long figured it out. Some things are simply outside of the Heavenly Law. However, it is still of paramount importance we bring him in."

"May I ask why?" Catheya hesitantly asked.

"Do you know how long it has been since we encountered an unattached Draugr?" Reyna asked.

"I-" Catheya stuttered, not following the shift in topic.

“384 Million years ago, a small settlement in a Mystic Realm,” Ruz said, seemingly understanding something. “Long-lost tribe members of the Zul. Today, the Zul have four Ancestral Nodes instead of three.”

“Just so,” Reyna said. “The Children of Draug lost much in the Dark Ages. Whole bloodlines surrendered to the void. We managed to reclaim some of what we lost by retracing our steps after the Empire was founded, but we are still not complete. Too much time has passed by now, and the odds of finding any more of our brethren are growing bleaker every day. Yet here he is, Arcaz Black. A fresh infusion not seen in eons.

“We cannot let the other races, especially the Eidolon, learn of this. Since the sacrifice of moving the Ancestral Lake, we have been considered the weakest race. But we have slowly accumulated and recovered for so long. An addition to our bloodline can have cascading effects within a few million years, just like the branch of Zul had back then. If Arcaz Black carries one of the three missing bloodlines... It can be revolutionizing.”

“What would you have us do?” Ruz said with a serious frown. “Clan Sharva’Zi will do everything in our power to help with this mission.”

“First of all, these matters don’t leave this room. If one of the other factions learns of this matter, they might hunt him down to prevent our race from gaining this asset,” Reyna said. “Secondly. Arcaz Black’s true identity is Arcaz Umbri’Zi going forward, a lineal Heaven’s Chosen nurtured in secret by my clan.

“We will take the blame on this one, and say that he has been sent to a sealed world to reflect on his actions and recover from the backlash of using the remnant of Oblivion. Luckily, we have records of all three sides meddling with that cursed thing, so it shouldn’t be too big a problem shifting the blame. I’m sure those ancient aberrations don’t mind,” Reyna smiled.

Catheya only gaped in response. That man was simply not bound by convention. She had hoped that she would be able to secure Arcaz a decent position through his unique abilities, but he had somehow subverted her expectations and become a Scion at the absolute top of the food chain, far surpassing even her standing.

“We’ll say we sent Arcaz Umbri’Zi to hasten the collapse of the Mystic Realm and force the Dreamer Autarch to make a move, but he went too far in his zeal to accomplish his mission. Just as that young bloodling did, by all accounts. That should be enough,” Reyna said. “Any questions?”

“No complaints,” Ruz hurriedly nodded, though Catheya could see he wasn’t too happy with the turn of events.

She could understand why. Clan Sharva’Zi had been the sole link between Arcaz Black and the Undead Empire, and now it turned out he might carry a bloodline so valuable that the Abyssal Shores dispatched the Avatar of a five-step Autarch. Both the connection between herself and Arcaz, and his connection with her Ancestor, firmly tied their wagons together for good or bad.

But now, Reyna Umbri’Zi had snatched him, along with the potential benefits he could bring, in one fell swoop.

“Good. Now, where is this little troublemaker?” Reyna asked.

"I'm sorry, we had no idea he was an Edgewalker when the realm collapsed. We looked for Arcaz Black, but not his Dreamer counterpart," Ruz sighed. "We truly have no idea what happened to him. He might have slipped away, but I am afraid something else might have happened that might prove a problem."

"There is no way he fell here," Catheya said with conviction.

"He is alive," Reyna nodded in agreement. "He has managed to hide his tracks surprisingly well, but we would know if he had fallen."

"It is something else," Ruz sighed with a shake of his head. "Something odd took place during the ascension, but it went unnoticed due to the chaos. After things calmed down, we tried to create a tally of survivors and harvest any high-potential bodies. But we stumbled upon a problem. A huge number of Dreamers, undead warriors, and even corpses are missing. Millions, altogether."

"Missing?" Reyna frowned.

"Innumerable warriors were sucked into the Void, yet we could scarcely find a single one when forcing open a path. We've also received reports of small spatial tunnels opening, sucking in unwitting warriors. At first, we thought it was simply space crumbling from the ascension, but after seeing the Void..."

"You think they've been abducted?" Reyna frowned as she closed her eyes.

No one in the room dared interrupt whatever the ancient Autarch was doing until Reyna opened her eyes with a frown after ten minutes. "It is barely discernible, but there are some remnant spatial fluctuations in the void. I cannot place the energy signature though. It might be the work of a Spatial Autarch, or it might be some aberrant energy wave rippling through the Void."

Ruz and Va Tapek looked into each other's eyes, unable to come up with any helpful suggestions.

"I will send word back home to see if any of our archivists recognize what this is," Reyna sighed before she turned toward Catheya. "Meanwhile, we'll also follow the assumption that he made it out as he had planned. It is of paramount importance that we find him quickly. Where do you think he would go in this situation? We must ensure he stays Draugr."

"I'm sorry?" Catheya said with confusion. "I think he can change races as he wishes?"

"Not like that, child," Reyna snorted. "As I said, Life and Death cannot both be the basis of a Cultivator's Core. It would lead toward Chaos, the peak that completely refused being categorized by the Apostate of Order. The fundamental stages of cultivation in this era are simply not suited for such a thing, no matter if you're within the System's purview or not."

"Something has to be sacrificed to move forward," the Autarch continued. "Life-Death Edgewalkers do have one way to break through to Hegemony. They can discard one of their identities and become a singular whole, crippling part of themselves to continue on the road of cultivation. If Arcaz Black would discard one of his facets, which one do you think it would be?"

Catheya hesitated a bit, not immediately providing an answer even with her father wordlessly urging her on. Finally, she made a decision.

"Arcaz Black is a progenitor, the leader of a planet that will stay shrouded until he has reached Hegemony," Catheya eventually said. "He isn't beholden to any faction, and he has a seemingly endless

source of wealth to come and go as he pleases. He is suspicious to the point of paranoia, and if some random stranger tries to tell him what to do, he is almost guaranteed to throw a wrench in those plans.

“You shouldn’t underestimate his ability to cause chaos. He singlehandedly managed to change the fate of a whole sector while still in the F-grade, and you saw how he managed to influence events here.”

“That was him?!” Va Tapek exclaimed with shock, drawing confused looks from the other two.

Va Tapek quickly explained what had happened in the Zecia Sector, of the Stele of Conflict and the quarantine that had almost prevented him from leaving.

“To think he has such an impact on fate. Clearly, the System has honed in on him for some reason. Just where did this child sprout from?” Reyna frowned, but she soon relaxed again as a smile spread across her face as she looked at Catheya. “Having said so much, I guess you have a proposition for us, no? Looking at you reminds me of your little ancestor, so I might be amenable to accept as long as it is within reason.”

“I don’t know where he is right now, but I am willing to head back to Zecia and talk with him about this situation. I should be able to get a message through to him one way or another. That way, I can make sure he doesn’t make any hasty decisions, and someone like me shouldn’t raise any flags among our enemies,” Catheya said. “But I want something in return.”

She could feel it. Arcaz was like a whirlwind of fate, one that was constantly advancing. She didn’t know exactly where he was headed, but she knew that she wanted to go along. But she also knew that she wouldn’t do as things stood. Arcaz Black had been weaker than her when they entered the Twilight Ocean, but he shot right past her in two short years.

If she wanted to travel alongside that man, to experience the true marvel of the Multiverse, she needed something beyond a simple opportunity or treasure. Her momentum needed a fundamental boost, her foundations needed to be remolded. Otherwise, she would just become an impediment to his path, an empty vase who couldn’t bring anything useful to the table.

This was her chance to catch up, to become a travel companion who had the strength to withstand the winds of fate that surrounded Arcaz Black. If she didn’t seize it, she had the feeling that he would be so far beyond her the next time they met, that he might as well be from her father’s generation.

For all she knew, he was already off somewhere creating more chaos and making progress on his cultivation.

Zac was filled with a sense of helplessness as he looked at the gargantuan creature far in the distance. Over two weeks had passed since trapped in this infernal bubble, but he still wasn’t any clearer on the situation. Why had this huge thing captured him and all the others? And where was it taking them?

He desperately wanted to escape, yet he didn’t dare make a move. The Leviathan-looking beast had shown exactly what it did with those who rebelled. Zac still remembered the scene vividly.

The appearance of a creature that would dwarf even the enormous snake in the Twilight Chasm obviously hadn’t gone unnoticed. Scale and sizes were hard to grasp in the Void, but the Leviathan had

to be at least tens of thousands of meters long. It looked a bit like an alien fish, with gills glowing in green and white, and at least ten sets of eyes that emitted extremely powerful spatial fluctuations.

There was also a fin large enough to shroud out the sky on its back as well, but its tail more resembled an octopus'. Thousands of thick fleshy tentacles stretched toward the depths of the void, each one of them emitting the same spatial fluctuations as its eyes. It was clearly a beast that leaned heavily on the Dao of Space, which explained why it had so effortlessly appeared in front of them.

At the same time, Zac was somewhat certain it wasn't a Void Beast. First of all, it looked nothing like the grotesque Void Beasts he had encountered thus far. But more importantly, its aura was completely different. It emitted the primal aura of a high-grade beast, suffused with powerful spatial fluctuations.

Furthermore, it didn't seem to have much love for Void Beasts.

Four times over the past two weeks it had stopped or made detours, with the sole purpose of ripping a couple of unlucky Void Beasts to shreds. The longest hunt took them through five dimensions and lasted a whole day, yet it didn't eat them or harvest any parts. It only unleashed terrifying waves of spatial turbulence at them, leaving mangled scraps behind before moving on.

Being the target of a mysterious mythological beast had unsurprisingly put the other caged cultivators on the edge, and some of the bubbles had started to shudder as their captives held nothing back in a desperate attempt to escape. The Leviathan's solution to quelling the rebellion was simple; it ate the spheres that emitted strong fluctuations.

Seeing the huge beast simply devouring over a hundred cultivators, many of which were emitting more powerful auras than himself, had eliminated Zac's thoughts of escape. He still had the Oblivion Energy, but even if he managed to break open the impossibly sturdy bubble, then what? He would be stuck in the Void, unable to leave and without any means to break free. The Leviathan would simply recapture him or gobble him up.

He reluctantly decided to wait for a better opportunity. Thankfully, the beast didn't seem interested in actually eating anyone else, and it soon turned around and reentered the vortex it had created. Zac had been elated for roughly five seconds until he found his prison following suit. A moment later, he had found himself part of a bobbing river of shimmering bubbles coursing through an endless series of dimensions.

The Leviathan was unhindered by space or any dimensional barriers, effortlessly opening one portal after another, scuttling through space with even greater ease than any Cosmic Vessel Zac had heard of. Sometimes, Zac found himself looking out at unfamiliar stars and galaxies, but usually, his view had been the endless darkness of the Void. All the while, the string of captives had been dragged along.

Zac's nerves had been extremely taut the first hours, but the Leviathan never attacked any more of the captives after the first warning. Even now, every single prisoner was completely unscathed, if you discounted the mental torture of not having any idea of what was going on. Of course, the draining array was still active, though it only kept him at an extremely weakened state.

An even greater torture for Zac was the fact that there was a spatial lock inside the prison, one that was so comprehensive that he couldn't even peek inside the pile of Spatial Rings he had looted. For all he knew, he might be sitting on a vast fortune, or perhaps even some odd treasure that could get him out

of this place. But the items inside the Spatial Treasures might as well be on the other side of the universe.

He was still able to open his Status Screen though, and he smiled as he once more looked at the new Limited Title.

[The Final Twilight: Place first during the final Twilight Ascent. Reward: All Attributes +10%, Strength +5%. Effect of Attributes +10%.]