

The Fall 792

Chapter 792: Orom

The group of bubbles that had avoided the fate of becoming a part of the Leviathan's feast was soon divided even further, where ninety percent moved together toward the tails. Next was roughly six or seven percent that shot away together, moving toward a large ridge on the beast's back. Zac was in the third group, the second smallest one with just over a hundred of the 'earmarked' cultivators.

The final group was just one solitary sphere, covered in layers and layers of engravings. It looked completely different from the others, and it suddenly just disappeared in a puff of spatial energy. As for his own cohort, it shot toward a spot just ahead of the enormous sail-like fin on its back.

Zac instinctively knew that he had survived some sort of culling, but he was still filled with unease as his cage got closer and closer to the space fish. The gargantuan Leviathan took up most of his vision by this point, stretching across the horizon. It was filled with such tremendous power that Zac couldn't stop his body from shaking.

Suddenly, a large portal opened up in front of him. It looked a bit like the ones the smaller Leviathans had created to pass through dimensions, but this one was far more stable. It was lined with patterns that looked a lot like the brands that covered the whole body of the beast, natural expressions of the Dao.

The small group of spheres shot straight into the portal, and Zac felt an odd spatial ripple pass through him before he was shrouded in absolute darkness. A searing pain suddenly erupted on his left arm, followed by a wave of weakness that spread through his body. Zac had no time to figure out what had been done to him before the darkness lifted and Zac found himself lying with his face down in the dirt.

He hurriedly scrambled to his feet only to find himself in the middle of a forest glade, surrounded by the captives from the other bubbles who had been sent through the final portal. His mind blanked out for a moment, and as he looked up at the purple sky, he wondered if they had been teleported to some world.

The warriors around him all gave Zac the impression of powerful elites, and he immediately tried to flash away to create some space for himself. However, he found that the energy in his body was extremely sluggish, and another type of seal prevented him from activating [Earthstrider]. Not only that, he felt so helplessly weak since passing through that portal.

The other cultivators were as clueless as he was on what was going on. A few tried to escape from the group, only to find the glade sealed with some sort of array. The moment they got close, an ominous rune appeared out of nowhere.

The bubbles were gone, but they were clearly still trapped, and Zac took the chance to check his situation. The result wasn't great. First of all, there was a new brand on top of his left hand, at the spot where he had felt the pain before. It was extremely complex and reached halfway up his elbow, far surpassing the one that Catheya's master had once placed there.

It was clear that this brand had replaced the restrictions covering the bubbles, sealing his power and limiting energy circulation to a slow crawl. In other words, it was a prisoner brand, similar in function to

the arrays that usually covered dungeons and prisons in the Multiverse. After all, you needed something to make sure a powerful captive didn't suddenly lash out and kill their captors.

A glance at his status screen confirmed his suspicions. His real attributes were still there, but they were struck over, replaced by a line that simply said 1,000.

One thousand attribute points? That was something you'd see on an F-grade elite. No wonder he felt so weak. He was lucky he had already placed [Verun's Bite] into a spatial ring. Just carrying the axe when restricted like this would be a bit of a struggle since its most recent upgrade.

In fact, a few captives were in that exact predicament. Shimmering weapons were lying in the grass next to them, and they were desperately trying to lift them, only to barely be able to budge them. Others were luckier, wielding tools without such forbidding weight. However, the brand on Zac's arm seemed to prevent him from communicating with [Love's Bond], essentially turning it into a useless necklace.

Zac felt extremely exposed after having his attributes restricted to just 1,000 points, but at least it looked like everyone had been dragged down to the same level, even the Hegemons. Everyone's aura was extremely uniform, except for the unique flavor granted by everyone's Daos.

In other words, the 1,000 referred to Effective Attributes, though Zac had already guessed as much after sensing his current strength. After all, his current power was well below the state when he finally passed 1,000 raw Strength by the end of the Tower of Eternity. He didn't get much time to think about the implications, as a new face suddenly appeared on top of a stone just outside the glade.

"Congratulations, you lucky bastards. You get to live another day," a gruff voice echoed out, prompting everyone to look over with apprehension.

The first words out of the new arrival were a bit crude, but they were still a relief to Zac. It looked like his life wasn't in immediate peril, which would give him a chance to figure some way out of this place. After all, his Void Energy had already proven to work against the restrictions of the Space Fish.

Having access to that hidden force had to be a tremendous advantage in this place. Not only did it allow him to unleash skills while the others were helpless, but the skills might even contain their original strength if they could properly circumvent the prison seal. Skills like [Abyssal Phase] might prove to be the key to getting out of this place unseen and unnoticed.

But for now, Zac would bide his time. He needed to understand what was going on, and he once more glanced at the captives around him. This time, he noticed something odd. They were all roughly the same size. If it was just a bunch of humans, Zac wouldn't have thought much of it, but there were all kinds of races here.

He had long become accustomed to seeing cultivators the size of buildings walking the streets, but he was now standing shoulder to shoulder with a beastkin that should at least have a meter on him. There was also a proper Ogre shaman in the mix, whose race often reached five meters or so. That scene confirmed something else he had already suspected; these people weren't all from the Twilight Harbor.

In this small group alone, 11 races weren't native to the harbor, three of which he didn't even recognize. At the same time, he recognized a couple of insignias on the captives and the style of clothes a few others wore. It was clear that the Leviathan had sent out its feelers in multiple directions, but roughly

half of these people came from the same place as he did. Moreover, he recognized a few people who should be from the Havarok Empire judging by the tattoos that covered their faces.

As for the one who spoke just now, it was an unknown humanoid race that almost looked a bit metallic. He had just one large eye on his forehead like a cyclops, but that eye had three different pupils. He wore a gold-lined white robe, held together by a golden brooch that seemed to be an insignia of some force that Zac didn't recognize.

He didn't wear any weapons, but Zac's instincts told him that the man was some sort of fighter leaning toward Strength just like himself. There was an innate sense of pressure emanating from his body, one that made Zac think of Greatest. No one made a move upon seeing this unknown man, but Zac could sense how many tensed up and prepared for battle.

"May I ask why you have captured and sealed us all?" a middle-aged man in a flowing robe eventually said.

"Do I look like a jailer to you?" the metallic man snorted. "I'm in the boat as you. I just got here a few millennia before you all."

Zac's heart lurched upon hearing millennia, and a few others blanched as well.

"You were all conscious for the capture? You saw that big bastard eating your companions?" the man continued. "Well, that's the Orom. Your new home for the foreseeable future. This whole place is inside its body. It's a true realm rather than an inner world, so don't bother looking for the big guy's soul."

"Your strength is greater than ours, why?" the man continued, and Zac only realized the discrepancy now. The man in front of them was indeed a bit powerful than the group of warriors around him.

"See this badge?" the metallic man said as he pointed at the brooch. "This is the insignia of the Orom Attendants. We complete some tasks for the Orom, and it provides us with some unique benefits in this place. A gold badge attendant such as myself has twice the attributes as normal citizens, though that doesn't matter much in this place. The access to unique training grounds that this brooch provides is far more important."

Zac raptly listened to the metallic man, but he simultaneously kept trying to figure out the rules of this place. A muffled curse from the woman next to him drew his attention to something, and he hurriedly focused on the Spatial Ring on his finger. There didn't seem to be a spatial lock sealing them any longer, but the prison brand prevented him from using this thing as well.

"A golden badge is the equivalent of a Hall Master of a sect, I suppose," the metallic man continued, ignoring the actions of his captive audience. "There are both higher and lower ranks. You better be careful if you run into someone with an Emerald Badge. Their attributes are capped at 10,000, and they are the only ones allowed to kill others in this world."

Next, over a hundred crude plaques appeared in his hands, and they flew over to each captive. "For now, you're just citizens. You don't need to wear these like I do if you don't want to. But don't lose it since you need it for various things in this place. You don't want to be forced to replace one, trust me."

"How do we become attendants?" a beastkin asked as he snatched his token.

"You don't," the metallic man shrugged. "At least not right now. You will find out more when we reach the town. But suffice to say, while this place is a bit weird, some things will be quite similar to a sect. You can slowly work your way up the ladder and gain contribution points. These points can then be turned in for all kinds of convenient things."

"Can they be used to buy back our freedom?" the original man asked, and the group perked up at that.

"No, you can't. But there is a straightforward method to get out of here," the man smiled. "You simply need to confirm your Dao."

"What?!" a man roared. "Become a Divine Monarch? Why not ask us to defend our Dao while we're at it!?"

"Hey, I don't make the rules. I just relay them, just like how I was told when I was dragged to this place," the attendant grinned.

The proclamation was pretty shocking, not only to Zac but to those around him. Becoming a Divine Monarch was just not a matter of time, but talent and opportunity. Even if everyone in this small group was a Heaven's Chosen, actually becoming a Divine Monarch was just a longshot that normally required a large number of lucky encounters.

The man had essentially given them all a life sentence.

"Now, don't look so glum," the metal man said. "Your fate could have been a lot worse. Didn't you see where most people were headed?"

"Did the others really get devoured?" an insectoid woman asked with a frown, and Zac shuddered upon remembering the scene outside.

It was an almost incomprehensible loss of life that had taken place. That was still taking place, by all accounts. It was a stark reminder of how Earth had essentially been a trial ground where the challenges and dangers were artificially controlled by the System. Out here in the wild, there were no safety nets, and death could lurk around any corner.

But the citizens of Twilight Harbor and the trail takers who visited such as himself were truly unlucky. First, the whole harbor got blown up by the struggle between a bunch of old monsters. But the lucky few who managed to enter the Void to avoid the fallout were snatched up by some crazy monster lurking in the shadows.

"As far as we can tell," the metal man nodded. "You survived the great filter of the Orom, which means you have potential. The others were deemed lacking and were instead turned into nourishment. This is actually an exciting period for us old citizens as well. The Orom only feeds when it finds a congregation of fate, and that means two things. Fresh faces like you people, and a deluge of new items up for grabs."

Zac guessed the deluge of new items came from the hundreds of thousands of Spatial Rings that the Orom swallowed. Just the thought of all that wealth made Zac's heart beat a bit faster, almost to the point he forgot their gristly origins. There had been a lot of Hegemons in the mix, and even some Monarchs might have fallen. His wealth was pretty terrifying compared to most E-grade cultivators.

But compared to what this space fish swallowed, it was simply nothing.

“What about the other groups who survived?” another man asked with worry in his eyes. Zac guessed he had seen someone he cared about setting off toward the tails.

“There are three groups. The largest group is sent to do miscellaneous tasks for the Orom. Indentured Servants, I guess. The second group is second-string cultivators. You’ll learn more about them later. As for you, you’re the first-string, which is what you want to be if you have to be stuck inside an enormous monster.”

“There was one more group. A single sphere,” another captive muttered.

“Oh?” the metallic man exclaimed with surprise. “That’s pretty rare. I haven’t heard of such a thing happening in over a hundred thousand years. I am not sure, but I heard those people are potential disciples, sent to an inheritance trial. Others believe the Orom accidentally swallowed someone with too big a backing and is just providing them with an opportunity or some restitution before letting them go. I’m not sure which is true. In either case, it’s not related to you guys.”

“Then what does this Orom want with us?” an old man standing next to Zac asked.

“That’s the good news; it just wants you to cultivate. To break through your shackles, no matter if it’s related to your levels, constitutions, insights, souls, or crafts. Become a Divine Monarch or the equivalent, and you have provided enough to be set free,” the man snickered. “As to why the Orom is doing this, I think most of you can understand.”

Zac had no idea what he was talking about, but looking around he saw an understanding look on most of the new captives.

“How are we supposed to cultivate with our resources sealed in our Spatial Rings?” a woman asked with a frown. “I doubt this Orom can provide all the specialized arrays and treasures we need.”

“Outside Spatial Treasures are sealed in the Orom World, apparently because of some terrifying item that was brought onboard millions of years ago. Almost killed the big bastard, according to the records,” the attendant laughed. “However, there are secured locations you can take out any items you need for cultivation, and they will be scanned for problems. You can then transfer them into locally-made Cosmos Sacks.”

“What about my weapon?” a man frowned as he looked down at a blue staff that clearly had extraordinary origins.

“Alright, in a few moments, you will have a brief window to stow away items. You will not be able to take anything out though,” the attendant said before touching his golden insignia. “I suggest you take this opportunity, or the items will be lost to you forever.”

Zac felt a shudder from the brand on his arm a moment later, and he realized the brand must have received some command. He tried infusing his will into the ring on his hand, but it was still out of reach. However, he saw the others hurriedly stow away the weapons that were lying on the ground.

“Well, let’s get out of here. We need to be gone before the next group arrives. I will lead you to the closest settlement. You’ll get a better understanding of the situation over there. But if you want my advice; simply settle down and focus on your Dao. This place isn’t all-too-bad,” the attendant grinned.

“Then again, I’m sure you’re all thinking of various ways to escape. I did as well, at first. But you will find that the Orom is not so easily tricked.”