

## The Fall 875

### Chapter 875: The Will of the Ancients

[Seal of the Left Imperial Palace (Unique, Inheritance): Form a seal of the Left Imperial Palace. Reward: Become a Flamebearer of Ultom. (1/4)]

Zac didn't know what to believe as he read the mission. More than anything he felt it a bit ironic. He had just devised a change for his Body Tempering Manual that would shield his heart from the System, yet it looked like he needed to participate in some System-controlled inheritance to figure out the specifics.

At least that was his first takeaway. The quest was at 1/4, which hopefully meant there were three more pieces of rubble strewn throughout the Void Star. Three more bursts of that sea of knowledge should be enough to figure out all his roadblocks for Hegemony, paving the way for him to visit the Perennial Vastness Realm much earlier than he'd anticipated. And that was just from progressing the quest itself.

Not only that, but the quest had also given a name to that massive castle in his vision – The Left Imperial Palace. By this point, it almost seemed like a forgone conclusion that it really was part of the Limitless Empire. Anything else seemed like a hopeless longshot by this point. But just what was a Flamebearer of Ultom? A representative?

Seeing as the quest type was listed as (Unique, Inheritance), it might act as the qualification to enter the palace? Or to at least gain access to some minor inheritance left behind by the Limitless Empire? Just the thought of an Inheritance of that magnitude almost made Zac drool with excitement. What if it was like Brazla's Dao Repository? A repeating opportunity that might last him all the way to Supremacy?

No matter which was the case, one thing was for sure – he needed to find the rest of that rune. The nature of the actual reward didn't even matter.

Having just gained such a massive windfall, Zac only wanted to seclude himself for a couple of weeks. He needed to digest what he'd just learned and prepare in case he stumbled onto another piece of the seal. But first things first. Slumbering motes of Creation were dragged from his cells, and Zac felt the sweet nectar of unbridled possibility course through his body.

But the energy was soon reluctantly pushed back into his body as Zac looked at his perfectly intact hand with confusion. He had been so occupied with the wealth of knowledge that he had completely failed to realize he was in perfect condition, with no hints that part of his body was previously missing.

How was this possible? Had the runes turned back time after realizing it had made a mistake? Or had it replaced his left hand with something else? No, it seemed unlikely. No matter how many times he scanned it, he couldn't find anything different from before. It was pretty unsettling, but he ultimately put the matter aside.

He was too stupid to figure out that mystery, and he only had another hour or two before he needed to get back to the barge. Possibly even earlier, considering how Kuru had just been turned into dust right in front of his eyes. He knew he might face some questioning when he returned, but he could only take things as they came. Hopefully, the runes had so utterly destroyed the token that there were no clues to glean.

Zac eventually closed his eyes again, slowly going over his insights. However, only five minutes passed until his eyes shot open as his mind suddenly screamed of danger. Extreme, mortal danger. The source wasn't some angry templar bearing down on him, but that didn't make the situation better.

Something was happening in the center of the cave. A small ball containing terrifying waves of Spatial Energy had appeared out of nowhere. It phased in and out of being as it flickered ominously, like it was trying to break into this dimension. Zac didn't know what it was, and if his absorbing of the rune was the cause of its appearance. It didn't matter.

What he did know was that he needed to get away – and quick. With one step, he squeezed into the crevasse, and with another activation of [Earthstrider], he was out in the chasm. But adding some distance to the anomaly did nothing to quell the terror in his heart – his Danger Sense was still screaming at him to get away.

For the first time since taking the appearance of Gaun Sorom, Zac released the floodgates to the divine tree in his Soul Aperture, filling his movement skill with his Branch of the Kalpataru as he escaped as quickly as his legs would take him. By now, the whole lakebed was rumbling, and it wasn't the time to be picky.

Each step took him hundreds of meters away, leaving churning whirlwinds in his wake. Even then, his horror was only mounting as the frantic energies beneath him grew stronger. He shot out from the fissure like a rocket, heading straight for the surface with all the speed he could muster.

Eventually, reality shattered, and a shockwave pushed Zac to the surface and hundreds of meters into the air. Zac coughed out a mouthful of blood as the bones in his body groaned, but at least he was out of the waters. Becoming airborne gave him a good vantage as well, and he spotted the barges far in the distance.

Zac slammed into the waters a few seconds later, but he immediately got back up again. He couldn't fly, but he could still run on top of the waters, and a minute later he jumped onto the barge. Vai hurried over when she saw him, and he waved at her to show he was okay before he ate a healing pill. Two more had already surfaced before him, and three more followed within the next minute.

Looking around, Zac inwardly breathed out in relief. Those who had just returned to the barges were worse for the wear, but it looked like Kuru was the only casualty. And with this big a calamity, he had the perfect scapegoat.

"What is going on?!" Teo asked as his gaze alternated between the still-wet wandering cultivators and the roiling waters.

"A breach," one of the warriors said breathlessly. "A breach is opening up at the bottom of the lake."

"He's right," another one added. "I couldn't see it, but the spatial fluctuations were terrible."

"I think two oceans have merged," one of the two remaining scouts said as he peered down into the depths, his eyes gleaming from some skill. "I can't say for sure, but it looks like tendrils of purple mud or thick water is rising from the depths?"

"Purple waters?" Tyla said thoughtfully. "Aphosis Eight? Or perhaps the Taosi Ocean in Kosdo Nine?"

"Let's hope it's Aphosis," Teo frowned. "Did anyone see any invaders?"

"Invaders?" someone muttered with confusion.

"Beasts that don't belong," Havasa explained.

Everyone shook their heads, but that did little to allay anyone's worries.

"Tyla," Teo said.

"I'm on it," the vice-captain nodded and jumped into the waters.

"Speed up, everyone stay alert!" Teo said.

Some arrays on the barges hummed to life as the Hegemons inserted more crystals into the arrays, and they sped toward the other shore. For a minute, nothing happened, until a frazzled Tyla breached the surface and jumped back onto deck.

"Not water! Insects!" the vice-captain shouted, but her voice was almost drowned out by a deafening roar as a black tidal wave exploded out from the waters, reaching over a hundred meters into the air in an instant.

Zac looked at the seething wave with incomprehension for a moment, until it clicked what the vice-captain had just said.

Insects?

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Outside a lonely cottage in a shrouded forest, Kouzo wordlessly observed the kettle as its contents simmered over the fire. The bones formed an intricate dance as they swirled around in the broth, their movements mirroring the eight primordial truths. Suddenly, one of the bones snapped, prompting Kouzo to exclaim in surprise.

He immediately threw out a handful of bones on the ground next to him to confirm, grunting upon seeing their placement.

"The first candle is lit," the old man muttered as his murky eyes turned toward the sky. "Ultom has found a candidate."

"Already?" a rumbling voice echoed out as a middle-aged man stepped out from the stars.

The air could not withstand his presence, and cracks spread in his wake as he walked forward, like a cape stretching toward the heavens. The old man sighed as he felt the primal aura being emitted from his body – the mark of a true Primordial Dragon. It looked like the Patriarch was rousing from his slumber after millions of years if one of his generals stepped forward to take charge of this matter.

Kouzo had long since retreated from the arena of power, but he could still recognize it was Realmbane who stood in front of him. The solitary golden scale covering his glabella was proof enough that he belonged to one of the two dragon heritages that were held in the highest esteem even though they were not purebloods.

After all, Realmbane and the Patriarch had a hint of the Beast Progenitor coursing through their veins.

Kouzo didn't understand. The Starbeast Alliance didn't even contend for the first pillar, and only individual Ancestors contended for the three that followed. What was so special about the fifth pillar that it elicited this kind of response? Did his master know something? Was that why he exhausted his longevity? But if so, why didn't he impart what he knew before moving on?

"We just got the report from the Worldwing Autarch, and someone has already been accepted?" Realmbane frowned. "How is this possible? Even if our activities were exposed to the Undead Empire, they still lack critical information. And while the Sangha's means are unfathomable, there shouldn't be more than one or two chapters who bother with this matter."

"No prophecy can account for every variable, not even my Master's," the old man smiled.

"Can you tell who it is? If it's the Undead Empire, then fine. I doubt the Primo is willing to exit his seclusion, and we should be able to deal with his clones. But if it's those undying Abbots, then it's trouble," the dragon rumbled. "The more pressure we apply, the more chapters would join hands."

Kouzo turned back toward the simmering pot, and minutes passed in silence as he made his deductions.

"It's... messy," Kouzo eventually said. "I sense the Sangha, but I also sense the Abyss. And there is a hint of the Vigil. There is even something else as well, but it is too deeply hidden. I cannot grasp it from this distance."

"The Vigil is to be expected," the general mused. "But they have never gotten directly involved in the conflict. But what's with the conflicting hints? Is there someone who is obstructing you?"

"I am far from Master's level in this regard," Kouzo sighed. "There are quite a few who can blind my eyes. But no, this seems to be something else. Only part of the tapestry is obscured, but I do not know what to make of the rest. Chaos runs rife through the threads of fate."

"Chaos?" the dragon said with a start.

"My lord?" Kouzo asked, and he was met with a rumbling laugh.

"The Sangha and the Abyss, you say? Chaos?" Realmsbane said before he released a booming laugh. "I think I know what we're dealing with."

Space flickered the next moment as a spear-wielding warrior appeared, his face almost covered in scales – proving his atavism was just an early stage.

"Ancestor," the man bowed before repeating a slightly lower bow at Kouzo. "Sage Kouzo."

"A Mutant Voidcatcher just returned from a mission on the outside," the general said. "You should be able to find him in the Sea of Salvation. Bring him to me."

The warrior bowed again before he disappeared, off to fulfill his task. Seeing the dragonling disappear, Kouzo turned back to Realmsbane curiously.

"See for yourself," Realmsbane snorted and waved his hand, prompting a series of images to flash through Kouzo's mind.

“The boy?” Kuzo exclaimed, suddenly remembering the report. “How is that possible? How could an E-grade child be qualified to get involved with these matters?”

“The Left Imperial Palace has been without a controller since the Dark Ages. That’s more than enough time for it to have become influenced by the eternal intent of those ancient masters,” the general said. “Who knows what their goals were? But this could be good news as well, allowing us to test the waters. Do we have any decent prospects among the younglings of the latest generations?”

“I’m sorry, I wouldn’t know,” Kouzo smiled. “I secluded myself millions of years ago.”

“Alright,” Realmsbane nodded. “I will have someone arrange a quick trial. I will need your assistance to find those whose fates shine the brightest and augment them even further. If there is anything you can think of to increase our chance of success, let me know. This is the highest priority of the council.”

“Of course,” Kouzo nodded, though he was still inwardly confused.

As far as he knew, only Emperor Limitless knew the true worth of the Ultom Courts, but one thing was for sure – some things were often more trouble than they were worth. Being rich was a sin if you didn’t have the strength to protect it, and the Starbeast Alliance wasn’t infallible. Judging by how fate was shifting, holding onto the Left Imperial Palace would come with a terrible price.

Was there something special about the Heritage from the Lost Era?

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It was the same today as well – the shimmering wall of gold appeared when they came too close. A searing lance of fire slammed into it with enough force to incinerate a planet, yet it only rippled a bit before space calmed down again. Iz’s eyes suspiciously turned to Kvalk again, her silence speaking volumes.

“Young miss, I wouldn’t lie to you!” the golem quickly said. “The seal is extremely powerful. Even if I sacrificed some of my cultivation, I wouldn’t be able to breach it.”

“I heard it with my own ears. That Draugr girl and her master, who is a lot weaker than you, managed to visit this sector and leave without issue,” Iz hummed.

“Something must have changed for the Heavens to directly block us out like this,” Kvalk sighed.

“Normally, only the agreements keep the upper realms away from the frontier. Even when there is direct interference, there is just suppression of providence or perhaps a seal on our strength. But this – a direct barrier barring entry? I have never heard of such a thing. This is the work of the Boundless Heavens.”

Iz looked at the barrier with reluctance, wondering what to think and what to believe. Was it really the System that blocked her out? Or was Uncle Valderak and his descendant trying to trick her again? Was there no choice but to turn back now that she was so close? She didn’t want to, but she had been stuck here for weeks now.

Suddenly, she felt the flames in her body stir, and she looked over at Kvalk just in time to see a familiar rune appear on its forehead as towering flames were released from its body.

“Little girl, are you having fun on the outside?” Kvalk laughed.

“... Grampa?” Iz hesitated before her eyes widened. “I knew it! Have you sealed off this sector?”

“How could I possibly be so bored?” Mohzius snorted, the sound a bit unnatural coming from the possessed golem. “But I am afraid things have become a bit complicated.”

“You want me to return?” Iz frowned.

“Your grandmother wants you to come home, she is worried,” the golem nodded. “But I am willing to give you a choice.”

“What’s going on?” Iz hesitated, realizing something big had happened.

“The Left Imperial Palace of the Limitless Empire is rising from the ashes of history,” Mohzius explained. “And it looks like it will make its first appearance in this frontier sector.”

“Are the uncles or aunts coming to fight for it?” Iz asked with confusion.

“We hadn’t planned on it, but things have changed,” Mozhius sighed. “It’s up to you now.”

“Me?” Iz said with confusion. “I’m only here for Mr. Bug. What’s that got to do with me?”

“We first saw the signs a few days ago, and I convened with the Old Man River to have him look for clues across the River of Time. It seems your little friend is either responsible for its emergence, or at least connected to it all somehow.”

“Mr. Bug?” Iz exclaimed before her mouth slowly started to curve upward. “That’s so like him.”

“Yes, well,” Mozhius snorted. “He almost reminds me of a younger and less dashing version of me. In either case, it seems the first stage of this emergence will contain some sort of inheritance aimed at the younger generation.”

“I would compete with Mr. Bug?” Iz said hesitantly. “If he was the one who found it, I don’t want to take it. He’s so poor, I’d feel bad.”

“It’s impossible to tell the specifics from the outside,” Mohzius said. “You might compete for the same prize, or you might need to team up to explore the opportunities. It all depends on the will of the ancients.”

“What do you want me to do?” Iz hesitated. “This is such an important matter. I-”

“At a certain point, the young need to spread their wings and fly,” Mozhius smiled. “Your grandmother would have preferred you stayed under our protection for a while longer, but I believe you’re ready to choose for yourself. And isn’t this what you wanted? To go on adventures with your friend?”

“It’s up to you to decide if you want to compete for this opportunity. If you’re ready, I will seal this child’s cultivation to middle Monarchy, which should be enough for me to force you two inside. But as soon you enter, you two will be on your own – not even your grandmother can intercede this time.”

“What about those other factions? Will it cause trouble for the family?”

“Since when have the Tayns feared some trouble?” Mohzius snorted. “Just kill anyone who gets in your way. But if all you want out of this excursion is to meet up with your friend, I will bring you back. I

cannot let you enter if you're just here for a vacation. On the other side of the barrier, you will just be you, without the protections you have back home. You might even die."

Iz slowly turned her gaze back toward the barrier again, wordlessly weighing her options. Hearing that she might actually die, she was a bit afraid. Not that she would cease to exist, but rather that she'd waste all that her elders had sacrificed to give her a chance at life. But she could also tell that her grandfather hoped for her to take this risk.

Treasures and background could only take you so far. You needed more if you wanted to walk the road of eternity. You needed conviction, you needed purpose. Her grandfather hoped she would find that in here.

She remembered how Mr. Bug struggled every day in the mirror. In many ways, he was more of a cultivator than she was. Was this her chance? To test herself, to find purpose in her existence? If she succeeded, then great. If she failed, then she simply wasn't fated. It didn't seem like a bad deal.

"I want to give it a try."