

## The Fall 889

### Chapter 889: Sublimation

It didn't look like there were any dangers, but Zac still had Vai perform a second, more thorough scan of the hidden chambers while he used his various senses. Only when they had confirmed there really weren't any hidden traps did Zac relax, though he still installed a couple of defensive and restrictive arrays at the only entrance.

After that was dealt with, Zac sat down and went over the items in the infiltrators' spatial rings while Vai headed into the laboratories. It didn't take him long to find similar parchments with the Left Imperial Seal printed onto them. Zac sighed as he looked down at the nigh-identical copies. These invaders were looking for the same remnants as he.

But how did they find out about it? Did they simply stumble onto it by chance after passing through the Space Gate, or was there something bigger at play here? These people unfortunately didn't have an answer to shed the light on the situation, even if some of them were actual invaders rather than Zecia traitors.

He did, however, manage to piece together what was going on with these invaders, mostly thanks to a journal the Templar Hegemon had left behind.

"I found it!" Vai exclaimed as she emerged from the laboratory, holding a dusty Information Crystal. "It's all explained here. We are inside the Undrusian Sea, and the event outside is indeed normal, as far as all-consuming clouds of death go. They call it the Undrusian Spring, and it's created by an annual tidal wave that passes through the whole realm and extracts enormous amounts of toxins from the plant life. Not even Hegemons will be able to survive it without ample preparation."

"I guess that counts as good news," Zac grunted. "Does it say how long it would last?"

"Usually, around a month," Vai said. "By how quickly it moved, it should have encompassed the whole realm by now."

"One month?" Zac nodded. "It's not too bad, as long as those beasts outside don't keep us trapped in here after the clouds have parted. I doubt anyone will be able to make it to this place."

"I think you're right. There are eight more similar volcanoes throughout the realm according to this, including ones closer to the waystations," Vai added. "No one should come here even if they knew about these safe havens."

"Well, at least that's a relief," Zac nodded as he looked around. "It's weird how vibrant the energy is here compared to the energy-starved environment outside. Is this a secret research station or something?"

"I- It might be?" Vai said. "I found some research notes, but I haven't gone over them yet. Perhaps they studied the poisons in this realm to invent antidotes."

"Or just invent poisons," Zac countered.

"They wouldn't!" Vai insisted. "The Void Gate doesn't use such sinister methods to battle. I'm sure they're doing it to protect lives."

Zac only nodded with a small smile. He personally leaned toward a theory where even the most orthodox forces had some clandestine operations that the general population would frown upon. The Tsarun were pretty extreme in this regard, but Zac doubted any force kept everything aboveboard.

Vai clearly understood the implication of Zac's smile and huffed in annoyance. "You know, a lot of powerful medicines have toxic components added – panaceas and toxins are just two sides of the same coin. The Thousand Mile Death embodies this truth."

"The what?" Zac asked with confusion.

"The Matriarch of the Zethaya Clan. She is both the most powerful alchemist and poison mistress of the Zecia Sector."

"Oh," Zac hummed. "Sounds pretty scary. Well, I guess it doesn't matter what this place was used for as long as we're safe here."

"I guess you're right," Vai sighed as she glanced at the items strewn around Zac. "Those people... Were they real templars?"

"They were," Zac nodded. "Only the sword-wielding Hegemon was an actual invader, while the others were natives. The Hegemon Templar was named Unsur Kalca. He was approached almost two years ago, and he accepted the blood curse for a chance to restart his stalled cultivation."

"A templar of that level betrayed the Void Gate?" Vai asked with sorrow in her eyes.

"Well, he regretted it almost immediately," Zac said as he handed a densely scribbled notebook to Vai. "But he didn't find a way to get rid of the compulsions. He tried to find out as much as possible about the blood curse and the invaders as a form of repentance, it's all stored here."

There was a lot of information in the journal, from all agents he'd uncovered to how they moved between realms in the Mystic Realm. The invaders had long since invented array breakers that could forcibly activate the gates without any command tokens, and there was even one of them in the invader Hegemon's spatial ring.

Unfortunately, it turned out that a lot of the arrays and tools the invaders used needed the curse's unique energy signature to activate.

There was also a lot of information about the blood curses themselves. For example, Hegemons needed to willingly accept the blood curses, at least the common ones that you saw among these infiltrators. However, Unsur had heard the other Hegemon mention in passing that there were 'Chosen' among the Tan'Kanu with far more powerful curses, which might have the ability to forcibly possess Hegemons.

As for the E-grade cultivators, Unsur was unclear. He had noted that the agents tried to convert people if possible, proving there most likely was a chance of failure even with E-grade cultivators. In exchange, if a curse failed to properly fuse with a warrior, it would become a hostile parasite that did all in its power to torture and kill its host.

This was true for the host-jumping they'd seen in battle as well. Either the curses would attack the enemy, or it would strengthen an ally in pursuit of mutual destruction. In either case, it would make

large-scale battles extremely dangerous. It was a bit like fighting with the Undead Empire, where every time an ally fell, you'd soon be fighting against them as an enemy.

Zac had his hidden nodes so he didn't need to worry about either possession or the torture mentioned, but most warriors didn't have any method to deal with those curses. If the peak factions didn't find a way to counter the threat of the blood curses, then Zecia was in deep trouble.

There was a lot more information as well, covering everything from Kan'Tanu society, popular heritages, Unsur's analysis of their plans, and so on. The most terrifying part was how the blood curses forced the users to comply. It was like a mix of carrot and stick. The moment the curse fused with you, it started to produce some odd energies that strengthened your body.

The moment you acted against the will of the Kan'Tanu, it stopped, and you were almost instantly assaulted by terrifying withdrawal. One's body would feel like it was on fire while one's soul was being cut into a million pieces. But the moment you stopped resisting, the pain instantly went away. Most people stopped resisting altogether after a few such bouts of torture.

Reading the vivid explanations Zac could only imagine how much suffering Unsur had endured to compile and hide the journal for years. No wonder there was relief in his eyes when he died.

As for why the group found themselves here, they were on the way back to what Unsur called a Stellar Ladder. It was the tunnel that had formed between the Void Star and the Million Gates territory, and it apparently wasn't very far from here. They hadn't planned on visiting this particular realm though, but a mix of shifting realms and powerful squads of templar executioners forced them to take an experimental route.

The notes had stopped when they reached this Mystic Realm, but the two could piece together the rest from there.

"Poor man," Vai sighed. "One moment of weakness leading to a lifetime of suffering. I hope he understood his notes would help fight the invaders."

"I think he did," Zac nodded.

"My soul is a bit wounded, I need to rest for a bit," Vai said with a low voice as she stood up and walked toward one of the cultivation caves.

Zac looked at the receding back of the little researcher. He could see a lot of weight that had been added to her shoulders after the recent encounter. The damage to her soul after forcibly teleporting them was probably the least of her worries right now, with the betrayals and the blood on her hands being a bigger weight on her mind. There, unfortunately, wasn't much Zac could do to help her at this stage. She would have to find answers from within to move forward from this point.

Meanwhile, Zac had his own issues to deal with. The wound that had pierced his lung was healed up a couple of hours later, mostly thanks to Zac using a chunk of the kill energy to restore his body with [Surging Vitality]. Even then, there was enough energy left over for him to break open the next node, a process that Zac had essentially perfected by now. It would still take him a week to get rid of the Hegemon's latent Dao and heal the node, but he didn't need to be in perfect condition to start working on his body tempering method.

The [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] was both extremely complex and extremely simple. It essentially consisted of three main components; Life, Body, and Heart. Life referred to absorbing life-attuned treasures and stimulating the essence of every living being to elicit an improvement. The method also came with a set of specific patterns that one needed to cover your body in for the method to work.

The first layer only required you to pick one of three foundational patterns and its derivatives depending on your direction, but the following layers needed you to make some alterations based on your Dao. That meant only the first layer could be cultivated without having either a pure or mixed-meaning Dao of Life.

Body referred to a set of movements that would stimulate the potential of one's cells, and expedite the infusion of the life-attuned treasures. The Body Tempering Manual was quite flexible when it came to what type of life-attuned treasures one used, and the same flexibility was extended to the Body section of the method.

You could use the movements in various Gravity Arrays or special environments to speed up the process, but it worked fine on its own as well. The method mentioned that training inside something called 'Golden Arhat Flames' was the most efficient, but Zac had no access to something like that.

Finally, there was Heart, which was a set of Buddhist Sutras. In total, 81 incantations would be repeated in various ways while he absorbed the life-attuned energies through his skin.

These sutras were the glue of the method, the connection between one's body and the inexhaustible life of the Boundless Heavens. It was also here the true essence of the method was hidden. After all, if you could just gain an attuned constitution by smearing your body in life-attuned treasures and then doing some yoga, then everyone would have an attuned constitution already.

It was these 81 Sutras he wanted to swap out with 81 expressions of the Void. During his epiphany, he had already somewhat understood how that should be done. The Sutras were designed to somehow temporarily realign your very essence to be in tune with the Heavens, which would in turn allow for a mysterious infusion of Life into the core of your being.

Together, the patterns, the movements, and the sutras formed an interlocking system that made this all possible. Zac simply needed to figure out how to use his Force of the Void to mimic the effect of the Sutras and allow for the energies to be absorbed.

The first layer of the Body Tempering Manual was possible to complete at F-grade. As such, it didn't require very expensive materials, and Zac had literal mountains of top-quality materials available in his Spatial Ring. In fact, he had brought enough materials to push the [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] to the peak of the second layer.

The process, like most Body Tempering Methods, was agonizing, yet the rewards were enough for countless people to willingly torture themselves. Each Layer would not only improve Zac's inherent ability to recover from all kinds of wounds and ward off toxins, but it would also provide actual attributes as well. With the method being a top-quality technique of the Buddhist Sangha, the gain was bound to be impressive.

In other words, while reaching a state of balance for his path was the most important reason for cultivating the method, there were many other reasons to go for it as well. So Zac was full of

anticipation as he prepared to make the first practical inroads to cultivating the method. For months, he had planned for this moment, and everything he needed was neatly arranged in front of him seconds after stepping into one of the open rooms in the hidden station.

It would have been preferable to use a Cultivation Chamber, but it felt too risky if he and Vai secluded themselves at the same time. Besides, while he had quite a few secrets on his body, the Soul Cultivation and Body Tempering couldn't be considered something he needed to keep secret at any cost.

Next, an engraved brush appeared in Zac's hand, and it flew over to a bucket of life-attuned paste. It was an inscriptionist's tool that could be controlled with one's soul, and the perfect instrument to paint the array needed for the method. His Dao Control might be atrocious, but thankfully that kind of control wasn't required here.

Furthermore, being a Mortal had one unique advantage; Zac had ample experience drawing pathways by now. And with the first layer of [Boundless Vajra Sublimation] being designed for the F-grade, the patterns weren't overly complex. Even then, he wasn't used to these particular patterns even if he'd gone over them over a hundred times by now, and it took almost an hour to draw the pattern across his body.

The result was Zac looking like a tribal warrior with intricate golden tattoos from his forehead all the way to his soles. Even his buttocks were painted, but he quickly covered himself up with a simple kilt in case Vai emerged early. Like that, the initial preparations were complete, and Zac already felt a hazy warmth spread across his body.

Not only that, but he could somewhat sense that energy was circulating through the temporary pathways on his skin, which should mean he hadn't made any mistakes. None of the life-attuned energies were actually entering his body though, and some of the efficacy in the paste had already been lost.

There was no time to waste, so Zac started performing the required movements. At this stage, Zac simply wanted to get a better understanding of the first two components. As long as he could perfect these movements, he would know these parts of the method weren't the issue when he started experimenting down the road.

It was a good thing that he did, as well. The movements were surprisingly hard to complete, even if they were meant for F-grade cultivators. First of all, they required extreme precision and control of every single muscle in his body. Both movement and tempo had to be exactly right. If he hadn't already reached the Integration Stage with his techniques, he would probably be stuck at this introductory stage for weeks.

Not only that, but the paste was creating problems as well. The moment Zac got a stance right, the warmth from the life-attuned paste went from soothing to agonizing, and Zac almost felt like he was being branded by a cattle iron. The pain in turn made him stumble, forcing him to start over from scratch.

But ultimately, Zac was greatly overqualified no matter if you talked level or pain resistance, and he slowly got accustomed to the pain as he practiced the movements over and over. Half a day and two

more paste applications later, he could complete the whole set without any issues, even though the pain only got worse the further on he got.

Of course, even if Zac used high-quality materials and completed the movements without issue, he still hadn't managed to drag any of the energy into his body. It all just evaporated after torturing him for a while, not even giving his [Void Heart] a taste.

The issue was obviously that he had skipped the Sutras, but that still left him with a sense of want. He had been tortured by a pain that almost reached the level of the [Bone-Forging Dust] for half a day, and there was not a speck of Life added to his body. Zac had planned on waiting a bit longer, but he couldn't resist the temptation.

There was still some time before the latest layer of paste lost its efficacy, so he started things up again. This time, he also released some Void Energy into his body as he tried to enter a void-like mental state, where his heart was a black hole that sucked in all life around him. Instead of fusing with all creation, he would consume all creation.

The only result was a sharp pain in his mind followed by a thud as he slammed into the ground head-first, his vision swimming from an intense bout of vertigo.

"That figures," Zac muttered as he slowly crawled to his feet.

Nothing good ever came easy.