

The Fall 901

Chapter 901: Catching Up

Zac could still barely believe his eyes, and if not for his senses and his recent inroads into Heart Cultivation, he would still wonder if he had been caught in an illusion array. But his instincts told him in no uncertain terms he wasn't caught in a mirage, and his heart told him this was all true.

"Sorry about that," Zac wryly smiled as he walked over. "I didn't know the ghost was with you. Didn't sound like it."

"Don't worry about it. Believe me, if that little wretch could be dealt with so easily, I would have done so years ago. I seem destined to pick up annoying hitchhikers," Ogras sighed as he looked at Zac, his otherwise ashy complexion accented by red-rimmed eyes. "You're as ugly as ever, but damn is it good to see you."

Zac smiled and dragged the demon into a bear hug as a confusing mix of emotions washed over him.

One by one, his closest people had been lost over the past years. And while he had gained some new allies and friends, they couldn't replace those who were gone. But finally, Ogras had come back. It wasn't just a huge victory on its own, but it somehow bolstered Zac's conviction that he could do the same with the others. He would get Kenzie back, and he would return Alea to her proper form.

It was all possible.

"Alright, enough of that," Ogras said as he dissipated into a mist and reformed a few steps away. "That little lass, she's with you?"

"How'd you do that? No, wait, Vai!" Zac exclaimed. "She's my guide. You didn't hurt her, right?"

"Well, she's fine except for a bump on the back of her head and a belly full of grievances," Ogras snickered. "She's around ten minutes from here."

"Let's go," Zac urged, and Ogras nodded in acquiescence as a shroud spread around the two.

"Most of those annoying mongrels have fled already after what I can only assume was your doing?" Ogras said as he nodded at the still-beaming pillar.

Zac helplessly shrugged in response, prompting the demon to scoff. "Figures. If anything, I should have realized it was you who had descended on this place the moment I saw that thing. Anyway, if we run into some stragglers, these clouds will make them ignore us. It will also allow us to talk in peace."

Zac nodded in understanding as he curiously looked at the churning clouds around him and the energies they contained.

"Two branches?" Zac whistled.

"Not bad, huh?" Ogras said with a smug grin, which drastically soured when Zac released three Dao Fields with a smile. "What? A brute like you have somehow managed to form three of them? Whatever. Comparing oneself with a Heavenkissed scoundrel is bound to cause one's teeth to itch."

"If it's any consolation, I generally only use two branches per form," Zac laughed.

"I guess that's better," Ogras muttered before looking at Zac with perplexity. "In any case, how in the Heavens did you find me? I figured I would have to make my way back myself."

"Find you?" Zac said with a blank look. "Isn't that my cue? How the hell did you appear here? Did you enter the Stellar Ladder?"

"The stellar what-now?" Ogras blurted before he stopped and looked at Zac with suspicion. "Wait, you didn't come here because you were looking for me? We just stumbled upon each other in this godforsaken place by accident?"

"Well," Zac coughed.

"I see your Luck is as strong as ever. Well, I shouldn't complain as long as I'm benefiting," Ogras said with a roll of his eyes. "Let me guess, you were out adventuring and just so happened to fall into the Dimensional Seed as well? Right into the opportunity in the temple?"

"This is actually the Mystic Realm of the Dimensional Seed!" Zac exclaimed, things finally clicking into place. He should have realized the moment he saw Ogras, but he had been too preoccupied to make the connection. "No wonder this place felt so familiar."

"Where else would we be?" Ogras said as he looked at Zac like he was a fool. "And you bastard, you didn't actually look for me after I saved the day so heroically back then?"

"I did," Zac sighed. "We had a supreme powerhouse divine your fate seven years ago. She said this Mystic Realm would pop up inside the Million Gates Territory around now, so I've been collecting the items needed for the Creators to build me a Cosmic Vessel. I came to a weird place called the Void Star to get the final item of the quest, and it turns out this realm had entered it."

"Void Star? Sounds vaguely familiar," Ogras hummed. "What's going on?"

Zac quickly recounted the situation of the Void Star and its interlayered realms, and the Stellar Ladder that had formed leading into the Mystic Realm.

"No wonder the lass kept calling me an infiltrator even if she was the one who infringed on my Mystic Realm. So that little bastard got caught inside," Ogras said to himself before looking at Zac expectantly. "More importantly, a supreme powerhouse? We have a proper backing now?"

"Not quite," Zac said with a grimace. "That powerhouse happened to be my mother."

"She returned?" Ogras frowned. "Is that good news or bad news? How powerful is she?"

"It's bad," Zac sighed. "Leandra is crazy powerful, way more than anyone in Zecia even when she's wounded. She appeared on Earth, killed Thea, and took Kenzie away. I've essentially been disowned. Kenzie was the one who had Leandra investigate your situation in return for leaving willingly."

"That lass," Ogras sighed. "And I'm sorry about your woman. I guess you were right to be wary of that side of the family. So, how do we get your sister back?"

"We?" Zac said with a raised brow.

"I've done one selfless thing in my life; sacrificing myself to save your sister. But now, your sister has not only returned the favor but completely nullified my deed by getting captured. Can't have that, can we?" Ogras winked.

"Well, I could use the help," Zac smiled. "I know they were headed toward a place called the Six Profundity Empire, which is apparently a top faction closer to the center of the Multiverse. We're currently too weak to even reach that place, let alone save her."

"Your mother can just waltz into the Multiverse heartlands like that?" Ogras frowned. "Wouldn't she be discovered and hunted down? Or is this empire full of traitors?"

"I have learned a few things about my technocrat heritage since you got stuck here," Zac slowly said. "I think they possess unique technology that allows them to masquerade as cultivators perfectly. Or perhaps form separate bodies that can cultivate within the System's purview."

Zac still remembered the scene back on Earth, where a human Leandra had walked out from the portal her avatar had created. One form was unmistakably technocrat in origin, while the other was unmistakably a cultivator. It was even possible that [Quantum Gate] wasn't unique to him but rather something that all Kayar-Elu possessed.

The experiments done on him were probably the next step of that technology, where they fused their technocrat heritage with Emperor Limitless' bloodline in an attempt to gain control over the System itself. Even if it failed, they would have a half-technocrat half-Void Emperor scion who could take the best from both worlds.

"Makes sense they would look into ways to hide from the Heavens and the eyes of other Cultivators," Ogras nodded. "Otherwise, how is the situation outside? Have you stirred up any more trouble?"

"Well," Zac said with a grimace. "It's a bit complicated, but Port Atwood and Azh'Rhodum are still standing."

"Complicated? I suppose that's usually how it goes with you," Ogras snorted. "What's going on?"

"A sector-wide war is on the cusp of breaking out," Zac sighed. "No one in Zecia will be spared."

"What?!" Ogras exclaimed before he looked at Zac suspiciously. "What did you do?"

"Me? Nothing!" Zac huffed. "Some people think it's my fault because I summoned the Stele of Conflict, but how is it my fault a Space Gate appeared in the depths of the Million Gates Territory?"

"Maybe the Ruthless Heavens realized too few of the factions in Zecia would mess with you after the display of the Eveningtide Asura a million years ago. It couldn't take the tranquility, so it brought in reinforcements?" Ogras offered and got a glare in return.

"Anyway, war is coming, so it's great timing you're back. We need elites to lead our armies. What about Billy? Is he okay? Is he in these mountains as well?" Zac asked.

"He's fine," Ogras snorted. "That simpleton is essentially unkillable in this realm. He's not here, though. He should be in the heart of the Mystic Realm."

"Ungillable?" Zac exclaimed. "He's gained that much from this place?"

“Well, an empty mind leaves a lot of room for the Dao to grow, but that’s not what I was talking about,” Ogras snorted. “The Dimensional Seed has gained sapience, and it’s become attached to the brute. I saw that crazy little gem crush space across over a hundred meters, killing thousands of beasts instantly.”

“Sapience?” Zac said with surprise. It sounded very familiar to Qi’Sar, the realm spirit of the Twilight Ascent. But that spirit was formed from the consciousness of two Autarchs through a freak accident. How had a recently born spirit gained sapience in a few short years? It might simply have been unusually talented, but there was a more likely explanation.

“I think it was experimented on,” Ogras said, echoing Zac’s thoughts.

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter much,” Zac said. “Have you encountered anyone else in this place apart from Vai and me?”

“Nope, that little lass was the first. But I’ve sensed a couple of fluctuations over the past months, like people were trying to break in. None have come to these mountains, except for you,” Ogras before he pointedly looked at Zac. “I guess they didn’t sense the call from the temple.”

“You too?” Zac blurted before his brows scrunched together.

What did this mean? Had he stolen Ogras’ opportunity, or were they both competing for the Flamebearer title? He had suspected such a possibility since the sudden pulse a few weeks back, but he hadn’t worried too much about it. If some infiltrator or other outsider had seized his opportunity, he’d simply snatch it back.

But what if it was an ally of his?

“Don’t look at me like a starving Gwyllgi, you lunatic,” Ogras said with an annoyed wave of his hand. “I don’t think we are in contention. Did you know there are at least four temples in this mountain range?”

“There are?” Zac slowly said, his eyes gleaming.

“I can see the gears in your head turning, but don’t bother,” Ogras snorted. “You only felt drawn to one of the temples, right?”

Zac nodded in affirmation, realizing what Ogras was getting at.

“It was the same for me,” Ogras confirmed. “I was drawn to a smaller temple in another region of this mountain. I got the opportunity inside and made some great breakthroughs. But even months later, I’ve never felt another calling.”

“So why did you stick around?” Zac asked curiously.

“After getting a glimpse of those truths, I couldn’t just give up when I knew there were probably similar opportunities hiding in the other temples,” Ogras wryly smiled. “I’ve been trying to get inside those places for a while now without any luck. Then one day, I felt an odd ripple and rushed over, and I found your little companion by chance. You two actually used one of my old haunts, so I knew something was up when a cave entrance was suddenly a solid wall.”

“Poor girl,” Zac snorted as he took out the rags he’d looted from the infiltrators. “Do you recognize anyone of these sigils?”

Ogras curiously looked them over until he tapped on one of them – a different seal from the one Zac collected, and one of the sigils that had appeared to seal the pillar of stars that still stretched toward the sky behind them.

“That one, but it’s kind of ruined,” Ogras muttered as he rolled up one of his sleeves. “This is the real one.”

Zac was surprised to see that the demon actually had a tattoo of the seal, though it was incomplete in comparison to the one he’d seen just an hour ago.

“It’s not the same as mine,” Zac nodded as he pointed at the seal he was forming. “This one is mine.”

“As I expected,” Ogras nodded. “It should mean we’re not competing for the same inheritance if it works similarly to your repository back home. But I’m a bit confused. Why did your visit create a netherblasted pillar that seem intent on burning a hole in the sky? When I took my piece, I only opened a small spatial tear and let loose a beast tide.”

“I’m not sure what happened either,” Zac helplessly said as he looked back at the pillar. “The first time, I didn’t create anything like this. It was like your encounter. It should be fine, though. It seems stable enough.”

“Dragging a piece of the Lost Plane to the surface, how can it be fine? That madness is no joke. We’ve only been back together for a few minutes, and you’re already–” Ogras said before he stopped in his tracks and looked at Zac eagerly. “Wait, this is already your second piece? Do you know where we can get more? I still need two to complete my quest.”

“Two more?” Zac said with surprise. “Do you have a quest to become a Flambearer of... that place?”

“That place?” Ogras said with confusion. “Why not just say Ult–”

He didn’t get any further as Zac urgently waved him to stop as he felt fate congregate.

“There are Karmic ramifications of uttering that name aloud,” Zac said. “We might want to be careful just in case.”

“Just the name has that kind of power?” Ogras whistled. “I can’t wait to get my hands on the real thing. What’s this about a flambearer?”

Zac didn’t answer but instead shared his quest screen.

“Flambearer indeed. There are some other differences as well,” Ogras muttered.

A moment later, another screen appeared between the two.

[Seal of the Hollow Court (Unique, Inheritance): Form a seal of the Hollow Court. Reward: Become a Skybreaker of Ultom. (1/3)]

“The Hollow Court?” Zac slowly said with a slight frown, the names foreign to him. “Never heard of it. Do you recognize it?”

"Nope," Ogras shrugged. "Think I saw a piece of it in a vision, but that's about it. I thought the thing on my arm was just a key to unlock another quest until I stepped foot into the temple. I figured it was related to the Lost Plane."

Zac slowly turned away from Ogras' quest and instead focused on the unfamiliar term. "That's the second time you mention the Lost plane. What's that? How is it related to these seals and the inheritance?"

"Well, let me tell you about a bunch of lunatics called the Ra'Lashar," Ogras laughed.

Zac listened with interest as Ogras told him about how the Dimensional Seed had swallowed a bunch of hidden Mystic Realms, including one full of corrupted goblins. How they had accidentally found some mysterious dimension they named the Lost Plane, and managed to become a Peak C-grade force in a scant few millennia by deciphering some of the lesser secrets of that place.

"Is that ghost of yours trustworthy?" Zac asked hesitantly.

"Not in the slightest," Ogras laughed. "But I think he's right on this one. I can feel their weird contracted spirits have a similar energy signature as that pillar of yours."

"And you believe those temples came from the Lost Plane," Zac concluded.

"It makes sense, doesn't it?" Ogras nodded. "If those little goblins could get even a corner of the insights contained in those temples, they were bound to make drastic improvements."

"Flamebearers, Skybreakers, Palaces and Courts, and now the Lost Plane," Zac mused, feeling a headache coming on. "How the hell does all this connect?"

"Who cares?" Ogras said lazily. "We just need to figure out where the next pieces are and empower ourselves."

"I guess you're right," Zac said as he released a pent-up sigh. "We can worry about the other stuff after we get powerful."

Zac knew that even if they spent the next week trying to figure things out, it would just be guesswork. The most important thing in the short run was that it didn't look like they were contending for opportunities since they were collecting different seals.

"That's right. I'm more curious how you caught hold of this opportunity. Did you find another connection to the Lost Plane?" Ogras asked.

"Well, I kind of just got a vision out of the blue?" Zac said as a smile spread across his face.

"That's just swell," Ogras complained, his face scrunched up like a raisin. "Some people have to fight shape-shifting nightmares and contend with crazy ghosts for a chance, while others just fall face-down into a pile of treasures. And you even get four opportunities to my three."

Zac only laughed in response. He had missed this, teasing Ogras with his monstrous Luck.

"I had forgotten how infuriating it could be traveling with you," Ogras muttered. "Let's go find your little guide before I drop dead out of envy."

