

The Fall 910

Chapter 910: Always Something

It was Leyara Lioress who had just shouted Vai's name as she rushed toward them from across the fort, each step rippling with space as she was propelled forward. She looked just like the last time they met, apart from the revealing garments she wore in the Base Town being replaced by a dress more in line with the long white robes most of the Void Gate nuns wore.

Leyara's aura was surprisingly condensed, and Zac realized that Vai might have been generous when she placed Ogras at the same power level. Her aura even eclipsed most of the elites Zac had seen in the Twilight Ascent, including those from outside factions. Not only that, but she wore a set of glove-like Spirit Tools that had huge gemstones on the back of her hands.

Knowing who Leyara's master was, they were probably Peak Quality Spirit tools, and who knew what other items she was carrying around.

Seeing Leyara here in the depths of the Dimensional Seed was pretty shocking, but it was even more unexpected to see Pretty Peak by her side. Rather than a dress, she had opted to wear an engraved set of leather armor that emitted a powerful aura of carnage. If Zac had to guess, the leather had been tanned with high-grade beast blood to give it such a ferocious feeling, and Pretty's martial air only further amplified it.

Even then, Pretty's aura wasn't quite as condensed as Leyara's, even if it wasn't that far off. It felt a bit backward after learning about the crazy Peak family. Then again, Leyara wasn't some nobody. She was a handpicked Terminal Disciple of one of the most powerful cultivators in the sector, while Pretty Peak came from a powerful clan in the Allbright Empire.

"Ah, the slow girl is here," Billy muttered as he looked at Leyara with some trepidation. "Always asking Billy about the design, never understanding."

"Design?" Zac said as he looked at Billy curiously.

Billy's face turned excited again, but he was interrupted before he could explain.

"You! What are you doing here?" Leyara exclaimed when she saw Zac standing between Billy and Vai, her pristine face scrunching up into a scowl. "And why have you brought my aunt?! Are you crazy?"

Only then did Zac remember he'd reverted to his original face to avoid getting accidentally thwoned. For a moment, his mind froze with panic, but he soon regained his calm when he realized it didn't matter. The whole point of going undercover was to hide his identity until he could contact Leyara, which was moot now that she was standing right in front of him.

"Little Lara!" Vai cried as she ran over to her niece, tears pooling in her eyes as she threw herself into Leyara's arms. "I'm so happy to see you. The Void Star is a lot scarier than you said."

"I'm glad you're okay," Leyara smiled as she patted Vai's head, though her eyes never left Zac. "What are you doing here? Has that guy done anything to you?"

"Ah, Lara, this is, ehm, Gaun Sorom," Vai hurriedly said when she saw her niece's guarded expression. "He's... He's not a bad guy! W-Well, he is a bit greedy, but he helped me a lot! We were on the same mission to stabilize a Spatial Nexus, but things took a turn."

"Gaun Sorom?" Leyara blankly said as she looked between Zac and Vai. "Why do you call him that? That's not his name."

"Eh, you two know each other?" Vai said with confusion.

"Why wouldn't I know him?" Leyara sighed. "Aunty, I was the one who told you about him, remember? How we met in the Tower of Eternity?"

"You have been traveling with the Deviant Asura without knowing?" Pretty smiled at Vai before she looked Zac up and down. "I almost thought you had died after not hearing from you for so long, but I'm happy to be proven wrong. We need people like you for the upcoming war."

Vai looked like she had been struck by lightning, her mouth slowly opening and closing without speaking. Zac simply let her process her thoughts for the time being while he dealt with the niece.

"Nice to see the two of you again," Zac said with a wry smile as he turned to Leyara. "I'm sorry about dropping in like this. I had planned on contacting you, but I didn't know how. And with the rumors and the bounties..."

"You think too little of the Void Gate if you thought we cared for those rumors or the Tsarun Bounty," Leyara said with a cute pout. "The Space Gate has probably been brewing in the Million Gates territory for hundreds of thousands of years. Even if you somehow nudged the events, you could at most have sped things up by a few centuries."

Zac was inwardly relieved. He didn't really think he was responsible for the Space Gate opening either, but it was nice to hear the strongest Spatial Faction in the Mystic Realm backing him up on that front. Still, it was an odd coincidence that Leyara and Pretty were in this specific Mystic Realm, considering it might have been the Dimensional Seed that had triggered the Space Gate to start opening early.

Was that why they were here, to investigate the source of the turbulence? Or was it related to the Left Imperial Palace and the Lost Plane? Zac was about to ask, but Vai preempted him.

"C-Corpse Trees! Atwood... Piker," Vai stammered, her eyes wide as saucers. "P-Pervert!"

"This is why I said you need to keep up with current events, Aunty," Leyara said with a shake of her head. "You never know when you run into scary people on the outside."

"Y-You're really the Deviant Asura?" Vai hesitantly asked, her face full of confusion and loss.

"Well, yeah, I guess. Sorry I didn't explain things properly before. I figured it was for the best when you didn't realize who I was. My identity is a bit complicated, and I have a lot of enemies," Zac said with a wry smile. "But you shouldn't believe those rumors you might have heard about me."

"So you didn't fight all the sector elites and then hung them up in your corpse tree?" Vai said, her face slightly blushing. "B-Before disappearing for hours with a Draugr lady."

"Uh, no. Well, that did happen," Zac coughed before he glared at the demon, who had been laughing for a while now. "What's so funny?"

"The Deviant Asura?" Ogras snickered, his grin almost splitting his face apart.

"I didn't pick the name," Zac sighed.

"You did when you broadcasted your desire for young women across the whole sector," Pretty Peak snorted.

"I'm impressed," Ogras whistled. "Here I thought you remained the same bore as before, but it looks you've been living it up on the outside."

"Can we just focus on the matter at hand?" Zac groaned.

"First, explain why you're here," Pretty said with a frown while Leyara thoughtfully looked at him. "It's a bit suspicious you've been missing for almost ten years, only to suddenly appear here when the place is crawling with invaders. And you've even been traveling undercover?"

"I needed some stuff inside the Void Star, so I came here to get it," Zac sighed. "Like I said earlier, I chose to sneak in because I was afraid using my real identity would get me in trouble. Things took a bit of a turn from there as a bunch of infiltrators blew up one of the Spatial Nexuses. Eventually, Vai and I wound up here."

"So, fate brought you here?" Leyara asked without much surprise on her face, which prompted both him and Ogras to look at the woman suspiciously.

"I guess you could say that," Zac nodded. "What about you two?"

"I have been fighting the infiltrators in the Million Gates Territory with the Empire," Pretty Peak said.

"But that place is chaotic and hard to traverse, and we simply can't find the Space Gate. So I came to the Void Gate in search of solutions. Then I learned these Kan'Tanu had managed to infiltrate the Void Star, and that there might even be a path to the Space Gate from here."

"You're mounting a counter-attack through the Stellar Ladder?" Zac asked curiously.

"Well, that was the plan, anyway, but things have taken a turn," Pretty grimaced as she glared at Billy.

"Some people are making things difficult."

"Billy can throw you back in the dungeon if you don't like it, Angry Girl," Billy laughed. "You are no good at drawing the array anyway."

"Is that about the Design you mentioned earlier, Billy?" Zac asked.

"You two know each other since before?" Leyara asked when she saw how familiar they were. "How is that possible?"

"Well, Billy is from the same planet as me," Zac shrugged. "We dealt with the incursions together."

"Ah, Billy misses the Ratlight," Billy sighed. "The Ratlight was simpler than this. Thwonk things, and they give you money and make you stronger."

“Why didn’t you tell us you were from the outside?” Pretty scowled at Billy. “Or that you knew Zac Atwood? We could have avoided the misunderstandings.”

“You didn’t ask Billy, so Billy didn’t say,” Billy shrugged.

“I’m sure this will all make for a good conversation later. Now, I heard there was a plan to get out of this mess alive?” Ogras interjected.

“Ah, right!” the giant exclaimed. “Gemmy is sick, so Billy is healing Gemmy. As long as Gemmy gets better, she can help us.”

Zac frowned when he heard the news. This was exactly what he’d been afraid of, that him conjuring the pillar would have harmed the Realm Spirit and this world.

“What do you know about healing Realm Spirits?” Ogras asked with a raised brow. “Did you dream up a solution?”

“Yes! Billy learned it while sleeping!” Billy laughed. “Billy always has the best ideas when asleep.”

“Uh,” Zac hesitated.

“We were also skeptical at first, but it might actually work,” Leyara offered. “Come, look.”

“Are you okay?” Zac asked Vai as he walked up next to her.

“I- It’s a lot. I knew you were not just someone from Salosar Seven, but I didn’t imagine you were, well,” Vai said as she furtively looked at Zac. However, her gaze soon steadied as she looked into Zac’s eyes. “But I still think you’re a good person, even if you are a deviant.”

“That’s not-” Zac grimaced, but the researcher was dragged off by Leyara and Pretty before he could try to explain himself again.

It was very reminiscent of how Galau had been whisked off back then, and the space around the three was soon sealed. Zac could only shake his head and head toward the edge of the crater with the others. The researcher was no doubt recapping her experiences over the past months. Hopefully, Vai wasn’t to put off by him being vague about his identity.

Still, the situation was even better than he’d expected. They had stumbled onto Leyara, the key to getting out of this place, and plans were already well underway. Of course, this all hinged on this plan that Billy had somehow dreamt up, so they weren’t entirely out of the woods just yet.

Soon, they reached the crater’s edge, and Zac could finally see what was hidden inside – a massive array. It had to be a couple of kilometers in diameter, and it almost completely covered the crater. In its center, the lone peak remained – the mountain that was once an insectoid hive.

There were also some remnants of structures around the peak, but most of them were being dismantled to give way to the innumerable pathways. The work was still underway, with both humans and some small gnome-like beings working hand in hand, with a few floating Hegemons directing from above.

The array was terrifyingly complex, comprised of hundreds of different sections, most of which Zac couldn't even begin to comprehend. His [Primal Polyglot] wasn't up to deciphering any clues either. Judging by Ogras' surprised and befuddled look, he wasn't expecting this scene either.

"What... is this?" Zac eventually said after looking down at the crater for a while.

"This array will let Gemmy come with Billy when we leave," Billy said with excitement. "It will make Gemmy into a Pocket Realm."

"A what?" Zac said.

"It's a high-grade technique that doesn't exist on the Frontier," a foreign voice said as a Hegemon floated over. "Hopefully, we will still have time to finish it after your little stunt."

"Bah, stupid guy," Billy glared. "Less complaining and more drawing, or Billy will throw you back into the dungeon."

The Hegemon snorted and flew away after giving Zac a second glance.

"What's going on? Is the shield failing?" Zac asked.

"Gemmy is sick," Billy said again with a sad expression. "She can't gather much energy any longer, and bad guys outside are wasting it."

"And letting us inside drained her," Zac sighed, getting an affirmative nod from Billy. "I'm sorry."

"It's not Super Brother Man's fault," Billy smiled. "Friend helps friends. Besides, Billy thinks you can help. Billy's plan is good, but it can get better."

"I'll do my best," Zac nodded. "What did you mean by throwing that guy into the dungeon?"

"One day, Gemmy said more bad guys were breaking into Gemmy's World," Billy said. "The first people were already harming Gemmy, so Billy decided to catch these ones. Gemmy did space magic and made bad guys appear inside Billy's dungeon instead of the edge of the world."

"No wonder," Zac laughed as he remembered the empty forest they appeared inside.

"What is making the world sick?" Ogras asked from the side. "How long do we have until this all goes tits up?"

"Ah, that's," Billy hesitated, looking a bit confused.

"A dangerous energy is invading the Mystic Realm," Leyara said as she walked over with Pretty and Vai.

"Vai quickly retold your experiences. I'm sorry about how I acted. I owe you a favor for keeping my aunt safe all this time."

"She helped me just as much," Zac smiled. "What dangerous energy? When did this happen?"

"Since the start," Leyara said. "It has been a bit hard to piece together the events, but it looks like the Realm Spirit swallowed up a dimensional fragment holding something dangerous. That realm immediately started releasing its energy, spreading like poison through Gemmy's world. By the time the Gemmy realized there was a problem, it had already lost control over that region of its body."

“And let me guess, it’s to the east?” Ogras sighed.

“The nasty place,” Billy said as he looked at Ogras. “It got worse after you went there, stupid guy.”

“How is that possible? I got a quest to cleanse that place. I spent a year killing the monsters; I even blew the whole thing up to kill the last of the- ah?” Ogras said before he froze as his brows furrowed together. “Now you’re telling me, bastard?”

Ogras’ behavior looked odd, but Zac quickly realized he was speaking with the Goblin Tool Spirit.

“What’s going on?” Leyara asked curiously. “By the way, what’s happened to you? You didn’t look like this in the Tower of Eternity. Have you become a ghost? Did the spirits speak with you?”

“Yes, to speaking with ghosts, but I am still very much alive,” Ogras said with a grin. “If you’re interested, you are most welcome to perform a thorough-”

“Ahem,” Zac coughed. “What did the ghost say?”

“Ah?” Ogras blanked out until he remembered what they were dealing with. “Oh yeah. Remember how the Kingdom of Ra’Lashar rose? How they gained their insights?”

“They found a weakness in-” Zac said before he stopped as his eyes widened.

Zac had read some of Ogras’ notes on the insane goblin society over the past month, and it was clear what the demon was referring to. The Ra’Lashar was once a simple species on a low E-grade world. But one day, they stumbled onto a weak spot leading to the Lost Plane. Not only did that result in their planet being flooded with enough tainted ambient energy to nurture Monarchs, but they also managed to extract all kinds of knowledge.

“The ghost figured the pathway would be gone since the whole planet has disappeared, with but a small fragment being dragged into this traveling Mystic Realm,” Ogras said. “But what if it’s still there? What if the connection remains?”

“Bad guys are at the nasty place making things worse,” Billy interjected, confirming the reports they lifted from the lipless Hegemon.

“The invaders are opening a path, looking for things they shouldn’t,” Ogras muttered.

“We’re lucky,” Leyara said. “Vai told me how you conjured a huge pillar a month ago? It drained a lot of the build-up in this world. The plan was a bit iffy before, but we actually have a shot of getting out of here alive now. There’s only one problem...”

“There always is,” Ogras sighed, and Zac could only agree.

There was always something.