

## The Fall 914

### Chapter 914: Blitz

Zac looked up at the viewing deck far above. It was odd to see himself and the others up there, even though everyone was already gathered behind the gates. Their counterparts were illusions made by a few of the Gnivelings, which would hopefully give them a slight edge for the upcoming battle. The closer they could get to the invaders without notice, the greater the element of surprise.

"Everyone ready?" Leyara asked and got nods of affirmation all around.

Altogether, fifteen of them would set out: himself, Ogras, Billy, Pretty, Leyara, two Hegemons, and eight E-grade Templars trained in a defensive War Array. The remaining two Hegemons couldn't be spared since their expertise was needed on the array.

"Are you sure you can do this?" Pretty hesitated as she looked at Zac. "I'm not doubting your strength, but we've seen how sturdy those barriers are. And we don't even know if these people have used the arrays to their fullest. Keeping some strength back until a critical moment is a common strategy."

"I promise," Zac nodded. "As long as I can get next to it and know what powers it, I'll get the job done. At worst, I will severely weaken it."

"Alright then," Pretty nodded.

"Then let's go," Zac said as he cracked his neck.

There was nothing else to say, and the group immediately set out with Zac and the Hegemons in the front while the E-grade cultivators made up the rear. They didn't pass through the gate but instead entered a tunnel leading beneath it. Just 30 meters in the impenetrable barrier blocked their passage, with two Peak Gniveling scouts standing to the sides of the path.

"It's clear, no activity for half a day," the long-eared humanoid nodded.

Zac nodded in thanks, and a shroud of shadows superimposed by a soothing spatial ripple enclosed them. A small hole silently opened in the barrier, and the group shot forward like a bullet. The walls turned to a blur as they rushed out from the fort, heading straight in the direction of the siege tower in the distance.

But soon enough, a soft hum spread through the tunnel, and Zac felt like an ethereal wind had passed by him.

"We're spotted," Leyara sighed, to no one's surprise.

The Kan'Tanu Infiltrators had never stopped scanning these abandoned tunnels since the second raid, so they had never believed they would be able to reach the enemy lines unnoticed. However, they had managed to cover almost half the distance to the army before being exposed, which was more than enough according to their calculations.

One of the two Hegemons slashed out with his sword, and four beams shot upward at an angle, instantly carving a path leading to the surface. The group rushed out, and they were met with a sky

already shuddering from burgeoning power. Just as Zac managed to orient himself, reality shifted, and he was suddenly much closer to the 100-meter-tall siege tower.

It was Leyara who had shifted space around the whole group in what essentially was true teleportation. Space flickered around them like the skill had conjured thousands of purple fireflies, but it held otherwise. For better or worse, space wasn't as fragile as during their mad dash toward Billy's fort. Gemmy's outburst had drastically weakened the fabric of space, but it was a temporary effect.

Still, it was clear the whole realm was declining. Even if normal attacks didn't create large Spatial Tears, you could still feel that space was more brittle than it should be. And that was something the Kan'Tanu Invaders were making use of. Within their protective bubble, space was solidified with arrays, but the rest of the battlefield didn't enjoy those protections.

A dark sanguine light burst into life at the top of the siege tower, making it look like a lighthouse of the underworld. The pulsating glowing sphere contained enormous amounts of energy, releasing hundreds of rays in their direction. Wherever they passed, space was roasted, creating a deadly maze of corrupted energy and spatial tears.

Zac, Ogras, Pretty, and Leyara were forced to counter the Array Tower's deadly blast as they rushed forward. Leyara was actually the one most effective at dealing with those beams, being a control mage. Those crystals on her hands lit up her surroundings, and it almost looked like she was standing in the middle of a miniature galaxy as she manipulated space around them.

Meanwhile, the Hegemons infused and threw out one shimmering orb after another to their left and right, forming a 1000-meter-wide corridor. Nothing happened when the orbs landed in the grass, but they weren't supposed to do anything. At least not yet, as they were a contingency in case things got heated later.

"Going," Ogras grunted when the orbs had been thrown out, and they reached stretch free of broken space, and the shadows around them condensed.

Zac felt four rapid shifts, and they had once more moved closer to the barrier in an instant, though Ogras was forced to zig-zag between the bloody lasers. By now, they were getting close, and a thick shield rose above their heads just in time to block one of the beams. Still, they were right in the crosshairs now, with hundreds of more attacks already on their way.

A powerful fluctuation of energy had been building next to Zac for a while now, and it almost looked like a gargantuan beast swiped at the barrier as two claws tore through space and slammed into the Kan'Tanu's barrier. The strike was quick and ruthless, but Pretty's attack only created a small ripple in the shield.

Of course, no one had expected the attack to work; they just needed a fast attack powerful enough to create some energy ripples.

'Slightly left to the tower, four masked cultivators. The array core is the black pedestal between them,' Leyara's voice echoed out in Zac's head as a series of protective barriers sprung up around him, courtesy of a Hegemon and the E-grade Templars.

Zac nodded, and space shrunk as he activated [Earthstrider], forcing his way through the turbulent domain toward the barrier. A tsunami of shadows rushed forward in his wake, shrouding the battlefield in darkness. A moment later, Zac was right at the edge of the barrier, and a frenzied barrage of attacks rapidly wore down his imparted shields. Still, Zac didn't care as he drew power from his bloodline.

An ancient aura permeated the area just as a tremendous lance of darkness slammed into the barrier right next to him. Hairline cracks spread across its surface, and there was even a tiny hole right in front of him. A small smile spread across Zac's face as an ancient forest appeared out of nowhere, instantly summoned by [Force of the Void].

Before anyone could react, Zac had already jumped into one of the trees and appeared right next to the Array Masters inside the barrier. Behind him, the cracks in the barrier rapidly closed. In fact, they had never even been there. Ogras' attack had been powerful, but not powerful enough to pierce the shield like that. The damage was just an illusion the demon had attached to his attack, giving Zac an excuse for his bloodline's ability to circumvent barriers like this.

A torrential burst of Dao-empowered fractal leaves drenched the area in blood, except for the four masked warriors. A secondary barrier had sprung up to protect them, though it was severely battered by the dozens of strikes coming from the ultimate form of [Nature's Edge]. Zac had expected as much, and before the Kan'Tanu Array Masters had a chance to bolster their defenses, the next strike had already reached them.

The hymns of Arcadia joined the pained screams around him as space split apart, and the ancient aura of the Void Emperor-bloodline became even more palpable in the surroundings. In a perfect world, Zac wouldn't use his bloodline this freely, especially not when he'd just been warned by Leyara. But they didn't have a lot of options. More than twenty Hegemons from the neighboring armies were already rushing toward them, and their window was less than ten seconds.

If they delayed any longer, they would be boxed in and overwhelmed.

The Spatial Stabilizers prevented space from completely crumbling, but it wasn't enough to block his skill. [Rapturous Divide] swept right through the Array Masters' battered barrier and then through the cultivators themselves. Zac felt four surges of energy, confirming the targets were down. But the skill wasn't exhausted with just that, and it ripped through the Array Core before carving a bloody path through the Kan'Tanu army.

The area rumbled as the shield fell apart, but the sound was soon overshadowed by a deep groan like two tectonic plates grinding against each other. The sky had darkened beyond what the wall of shadows had elicited, but it wasn't because of some storm clouds. The head of an enormous club ripped through the shadowy haze, its size almost a match to the siege tower.

"Group 1, sto-" a Hegemon roared, but she was forced to swallow her words and dodge as a fractal leaf almost beheaded her.

The same circumstance occurred for two more Hegemons as Zac unleashed a barrage of fractal leaves. Simultaneously, a golden laurel appeared on his head, as a good chunk of the Kan'Tanu army was showered in golden splendor. It was the restrictive domain of [Empyrean Aegis] pushed to its limits, which interrupted hundreds of cultivators from unleashing their skills.

Zac could sense how the intensity of his domain was weakened when used against so many enemies and that it wouldn't be able to prevent anyone from circulating their Cosmic Energy when prepared for the resistance. But the sudden interruption gave Zac's group a vital window of opportunity. Some of the Hegemons were occupied by Zac, and the rest soon had their hands full.

Shimmering waves of sword Dao carved deadly paths straight through the E-grade warriors as one of the Templars unleashed a herculean strike, while the other unleashed what looked like a falling sun right on top of a Kan'Tanu captain. Still, there were twelve Hegemons in this army, and they were quickly moving to deal with the sudden turn of events.

Three of them conjured walls to block off Billy's descending strike, but they suddenly froze in place as a celestial maiden appeared above their heads. Her hair was cosmic dust and her eyes were made from stars, and she held her arms in what looked like an open invitation. She looked like a benign deity, but even Zac felt his hair stand on end when he sensed how space around the Hegemons rapidly eroded.

The D-Grade cultivators were immediately covered in shallow cuts as space fractured, and when one of them tried to respond, it backfired spectacularly. Space completely shattered around him, and Zac's eyes widened when a black claw emerged from the darkness and simply dragged the man into nothingness.

The scene was all-too-familiar; Zac had almost encountered the same thing in the Mystic Realm, except his high Luck had saved him from getting captured. A Void Beast was lurking in the dark, one powerful enough to snatch a Hegemon like it was a toy. Had Leyara summoned it with her avatar? Or was it just a lucky coincidence that the Void on the other side of the spatial tear was occupied by a waiting monstrosity?

This was no time to worry about that, though, as the Kan'Tanu had already recovered from his interruption with [Empyrean Aegis], and he was caught right in the crosshairs between his allies and enemies. Zac narrowly avoided four bloody rakes of Pretty's that ripped through the enemy lines as they shot toward Hegemons, one of them leaving a crippling wound.

Zac finished the job with a quick jab, while Ogras did the same with another Hegemon, using his shadow lance. Altogether, five Hegemons had died instantly while a few more were restrained, drastically lessening the pressure. However, the area was teeming with unfettered Heart Curses by that point, and it almost looked like a living tangle was about to be born.

The others couldn't get any closer, and Zac knew he couldn't stay on much longer either. Even if those things couldn't kill or possess him, they could still maim his body and create a diversion.

A second rumble in the sky made Zac glance up just in time to see a large golden rune appear behind Billy's club. It emitted an aura of primordial fury, and the weapon suddenly gained a huge boost in weight and momentum. The hastily made barriers that had tried to impede it broke down, and the club descended toward the siege tower like a collapsing mountain.

The ground buckled, and a chaotic explosion swallowed hundreds of Cultists as the gathered energies in the tower were unleashed on their surroundings. Zac stepped into one of the few remaining trees of [Ancestral Woods] before the wave of destruction reached him, and he appeared just at the edge of the

Kan'Tanu army, where he unleashed another series of Dao-empowered fractal leaves to take out another Hegemon.

The tower was destroyed and most of the Kan'Tanu Hegemons were dead or grievously wounded by that point, which meant they had accomplished their goal. However, they were running out of time – the neighboring armies were already moving to cut off their escape. If Leyara and the others stayed behind to deal with the rest of the army, they wouldn't be able to return.

"Go," Zac nodded upon seeing Leyara's look, and she nodded in thanks.

"Good luck," Pretty said, and they were gone the next moment, once more phased away by Leyara's skill as they desperately ran toward the fort.

"Let's go," Zac grunted as Ogras appeared next to him, sporting a few shallow cuts on his face.

The demon simply nodded, and the shadows congealed around the two. But they didn't have a chance to flash away as an opaque second barrier suddenly sprung up to trap them. Zac immediately found the source using [Cosmic Gaze]; a crippled hegemon lying in a pool of blood with a cracked black sphere in his hand.

"You two stay behind," the crippled Hegemon cackled, his voice wet from the blood pouring out of his mouth.

Those were the last words as a fractal blade cut his head clean off. However, Zac didn't feel any relief even if he got a surge of energy to confirm the kill. Not only did the barrier remain even after the Hegemon's death, but something was happening with the dying man's body. It looked like his hand had been covered in black ink, and it rapidly spread to cover the man's whole arm.

The whole decapitated corpse had been swallowed a moment later, yet that wasn't the end. Like a black hole, the pitch-black tendril absorbed the Heart Curses around them, even those that had already withered. The Survivors weren't spared either, except for a Hegemon who used a protective talisman before digging into the ground with horror on his face.

"Another sacrifice skill!" Ogras swore. "These people are lunatics!"

Zac wholeheartedly nodded in agreement as the Cosmic Energy churned in his body. This was why he had held back on using [Arcadia's Judgement] until now, even during the past six raids. There was no telling what hidden cards the enemy was carrying, so you needed a few of your own.

Space cracked as the enormous wooden hand emerged, just as a 20-meter-tall monstrosity of twisting tendrils and cursed energy had been fully formed. As far as Zac could tell, the fused Heart Curse didn't actually have a living controller, but it still seemed to understand the incoming axe was threatening.

With a piercing shriek, hundreds of slimy tendrils pierced into the descending hand, and Zac groaned in pain. The damage to his skill was transferred to his own body, and Zac felt like thousands of maggots had burrowed into his flesh. Still, the hand was filled with almost boundless life force, and the damaged sections regrew as soon as they appeared.

The tendrils didn't have enough raw strength to impede the axe's descent either, and it only had time to release a second mournful wail before being cut in two. Just a moment later, the whole area shook as

the world's punishment came surging from below. Zac still didn't know what powered the secondary barrier that kept them trapped, but it didn't matter in front of the wide-scale destruction.

It shattered like brittle glass, once more exposing them to the outside.

"Let's go," Zac smiled, but his smile froze upon seeing what was going on outside.

Over ten Hegemons were bearing down on them with furious momentum, with their armies not much further behind. Even worse, the Kan'Tanu had already figured out they would probably want to escape somehow, and they had already unleashed a hailstorm of attacks around them, utterly fraying space.

Thankfully, the others in his group hadn't stayed behind, and they were already halfway to the fort. One of the Kan'Tanu armies was trying to catch them, but the spatial mines the Templars had thrown out worked wonders to delay their advance. That was one less thing to worry about, but it didn't help with their current predicament.

There was no way to tell what would happen if he activated [Flashfire Flourish] in this situation, but things changed again before he and Ogras had a chance to run or fight back. A tremendous pressure bore down on them as though an angry god had turned their attention to this battle.

Even the Kan'Tanu stopped in their tracks and fearfully looked around as the surroundings grew almost blindingly bright.

"What now?!" Ogras groaned with exasperation, but Zac barely heard him as he mutely stared at the sky.

The clouds were on fire.