

The Fall 928

Chapter 928: Exit

Zac was startled at the proclamation but soon realized he shouldn't be. They were a bit ahead of schedule thanks to Iz extinguishing the stubborn flames from [Flashfire Flourish], but only by half a day or so. It was no surprise Gemmy made her move soon after they'd closed the Gateway, especially now that the concentrated taint of the lake had all but been removed from the Mystic Realm.

The people back in Billy's fort might even have finished things early, considering Iz had been guided to this realm by a group of Void Gate Hegemons.

Ogras appeared in a puff of smoke a few seconds later, carrying a whole bag full of containers. "Enough in here to go insane a few times over."

"Thank you," Zac smiled.

"You look better," Ogras commented as he looked at the vial still in Zac's hand.

"Had a little help," Zac nodded as he handed the vial toward Iz, but she just shook her head.

"Keep it, in case fate strikes again," Iz smiled. "My family is friends with the one who makes these drops. We can always get more whenever we need it."

"That's... Great. Thank you," Zac said, his insides twisting from jealousy while Ogras looked positively disgusted.

"It should be another hour or two," Ogras said as he looked to the sky.

Zac nodded in agreement. The world was collapsing as Gemmy sacrificed its outer regions to save on energy, but it wouldn't all disintegrate at once. Billy wasn't sure, but he said it would take at least an hour to activate the array. Essentially, one region would be refined at a time, with their section being the last to go as a safety measure.

"I'll take another look around," the demon added after a moment. "I never visited any of those tunnels last time I was here. If a gateway to an Eternal Heritage hid beneath the tower, who knows what else those greedy Goblins stashed away there?"

"Alright," Zac nodded. "I wish I could help, but I'm not really in any state to go spelunking."

"Just focus on recovery," Ogras said. "I doubt being dragged out through multiple spatial layers will be a pleasurable experience."

Zac's face paled at that. He'd completely forgotten about the Spatial Anchor for a moment. It wasn't supposed to cause any damage like his [Flashfire Flourish], but who knew if that held in his current state. He couldn't even circulate his Cosmic Energy to reinforce his body right now.

"I hope you can find some more clues about the Lost Plane," Zac grimaced. "I'll focus on not dying."

"Sounds fair enough," Ogras grinned. "I'll see if I can squeeze something out of that little bastard. He might be more talkative now that his Heritage is about to be swallowed by the Void."

A moment later, the demon was gone, but Zac could see ghosts and shadows flit about in the chasm. Iz made no move to join him and instead seemed content to stay by his side.

The silence stretched on, but Zac eventually couldn't stop himself from asking. "You're not going?"

"I'm not interested in this Goblin Kingdom," Iz said. "I am better off incorporating the insights I gained during this battle."

"There might be clues to our inheritance," Zac hesitated. "After all, these Goblins investigated the Lost Plane for millennia."

"My fate will not be decided on whether I explore the moldy tunnels of the Ra'Lashar," Iz said with a shake of her head.

"Alright, I won't disturb you then," Zac nodded and closed his eyes.

Zac spent the next 20 minutes repairing the Skill Fractal of [Surging Vitality] until it could finally be activated. Its effect on damaged foundations wasn't worth mentioning, but it was better than nothing with all the Kill Energy coursing through his body. And since he had reached Peak E-grade already, there wasn't much else he could use it for.

Some crafting techniques used Kill Energy, where the most common was weapon crafting. For example, Zac was pretty sure the Ogre he met in the Big Axe Coliseum had crafted his axe using Kill Energy while instilling it with the Killing Intent nurtured through battle. But that was just one of all the possibilities.

For example, Beast Tamers could transfer some of their Kill Energy to their beasts, and Heda had mentioned the possibility of doing the same for plants. Unfortunately, Zac neither knew any techniques like that, nor did he have the luxury of giving away his energy to Vivi or Haro.

The nurturing surge from his recovery skill went round and round throughout his body, and each circulation worked on the foundation built by Iz's lifegiving drop. It left him a little bit better off, though part of that was simply his powerful constitution naturally recovering.

All the while, [Void Heart] and [Purity of the Void] kept swallowing or purifying the lingering corruption in his body. As Zac expected, most of the corruption from the Qriz'Ul King hadn't contained any insights. However, Zac still managed to decipher a couple of paragraphs thanks to the tainted water he'd fought his way through at the end.

Zac hesitated a bit but eventually took out one of the Void Cores he'd bought in Salosar as well. He started drawing upon its energy to recover his mostly expended Void Energy. His best solution to avoiding chaotic energies at the moment was [Void Zone], but he was running low on his hidden reserve.

Iz didn't react to the glimmering core hidden within his sleeves, but Zac didn't delude himself into thinking she hadn't noticed it. Especially not after repeatedly being forced to use his Void Energy during the battle. She simply didn't seem very interested in his hidden cards, or perhaps she was merely following proper cultivator etiquette.

After all, the kind of elites someone like Iz socialized with back in the Multiverse heartlands were bound to have a handful of secrets. If you started poking your nose in others' business, you would eventually get in trouble.

Like this, just over an hour passed until the atmosphere shifted. Space didn't really collapse like in the Twilight Ocean. It more felt like the air had gone out of the whole realm, leaving it empty. All the energy had been taken away, and even the slightest hint of spirituality from the ground had disappeared.

It meant Gemmy had reached their side of the Mystic Realm, and it was already detached from the core by now. The area might last an hour or two like this before it crumbled under the pressure of the Void. And as expected, the cracks in the sky were already growing in both number and size. A few seconds later, Ogras appeared, looking pretty satisfied with his outing.

"Anything good?" Zac asked curiously.

"Well, not much in the way of treasures, but these Goblins sure were a bunch of burrowers. I found quite a few hidden compartments, ranging from small cubbies to whole hidden laboratories," Ogras smiled.

"You found?" the spectral Goblin at his side snorted. "All the worthwhile hoards would have passed a fool like you right by if not for my discerning eye. And even if you found them, the traps would've killed you ten times over. You're lucky I felt it a pity for our Heritage to end like this."

"More like you were afraid the flag would be lost to the Void," Ogras said with a roll of his eyes before turning back to Zac. "The pills and materials have long lost their spirituality, but I found quite a few crystals and tomes. I haven't had time to scan them, but a few looked promising. We should be able to extract a lot of good things if we're careful."

"Worst case, we might be able to add some good techniques to our repository," Zac nodded. "It's still kind of lacking compared to a proper faction."

"You two ought to be careful," Iz cautioned. "You saw what happened to this society. One cannot build a stable force on such dubious foundations."

"Of course, of course," Ogras agreed, but only the demon knew whether he was sincere or not.

"Well, I guess it's time to leave," Zac grunted as he got to his feet.

The pain was still there, but at least his limbs would follow his instructions by now, as long as he didn't overdo it. And with a chunk of his Void Energy recovered, Zac felt he should be able to withstand what came next.

"Here," Zac said as he threw the escape arrays over to Ogras.

"You two ready?" Ogras asked and received affirmative nods in return.

He activated the first talisman, prompting a shimmering lasso to cut out a hole in space. It was essentially a Spatial Tear, but it was kept stable by a gleaming edge of Spatial Energy. However, the three didn't immediately step through as planned, but instead looked through the portal hesitantly.

"What's going on?" Zac frowned.

The other side was supposed to be the Void, possibly with the occasional vision of one of the neighboring realms in the Void Star. Instead, they were met with a confusing blur of a million colors constantly shifting. If there were an opposite to the emptiness of the Void, then this would be it.

"I-" Ogras hesitated as he looked down at the talisman with confusion. "Is it broken?"

Zac doubted the talisman was a dud, but he didn't know how to explain the scene either. Eventually, he could only turn to Iz, hoping she had an idea.

"It should be the Void," Iz slowly said, but her tone didn't bring a lot of confidence in the assessment.

"Really?" the demon said, clearly not convinced.

"The imagery is wrong, but the energy is not. I can feel the hollowness of the Void on the other side and no other energies," Iz explained.

Zac realized Iz was correct. There wasn't any energy leaking from the stabilized tear.

"Maybe it's just an effect of Billy's Array?" Zac ventured. "Anyway, we can't just stay here and get crushed."

"Never easy with you, is it?" Ogras sighed.

"Stay close to me just in case," Zac said before turning to Iz. "Can you handle the Void?"

"No problem," Iz nodded.

"Alright, let's go," Zac said, and the three braced themselves as they stepped through the Spatial Tear.

For a moment, Zac was blinded by a cascade of color, but the chaos ended as abruptly as it began. Their surroundings were still full of color like what they saw through the portal, but the scene had stabilized. Zac could also confirm they really were in the Void as he felt the weird drain on his body.

At the same time, the effect was muted, a far cry from what he had been forced to endure in his previous encounters with the Void. Zac didn't even need to activate his [Void Zone] to withstand it.

"You two okay?" Zac asked to make sure, even if they looked pretty unbothered.

"I feel surprisingly fine," Ogras muttered as he looked around. "I guess it's an advantage of having a shadow constitution? After all, the shadows and the Void are both hidden seams of reality."

As for Iz, she was completely unaffected by the hostile environment of the Void, just like she said. A thin film of nearly translucent flames covered her, keeping the surroundings at bay.

"So what's all this?" Ogras asked with a frown. "Will it affect the talisman?"

It was a good question. Now that the confusing mix of color and shape had stabilized, they could see that it was actually an endless number of visions. They saw everything from starry skies to incomprehensible worlds. It felt like they stood outside the universe and could pick almost anywhere to re-enter.

"I'm not sure," Zac hesitated. "This isn't what I saw when the Spatial Cortex collapsed. Back then, there were only a dozen mystic realms or something. This is... more. Not even the whole Void Star has this many realms."

"Didn't you say this place was connected to the Million Gates Territory?" Ogras ventured. "I hear there are an endless number of Mystic Realms and dimensional fragments over there."

"You think this is the Stellar ladder?" Zac exclaimed as he looked at the surroundings with marvel. "You might be right."

"Maybe we should-" Ogras ventured, but he stopped in his tracks when Iz suddenly threw out a shimmering ball.

It soared through the Void until it hit one of the windows. The scene rippled a bit before the ball entered the other dimension, where it kept flying for a few hundred meters before landing on the ground. The world on the other side didn't seem like anything special. It appeared to be a vast desert with dark-green sand under a purple sky. Zac could vaguely make out some mountains in the distance, but nothing that would warrant special attention from Iz.

"What's going on?" Zac asked with confusion.

"I felt a signal from Ultom from that realm. That tracker will allow me to find that location easier," Iz said before she curiously looked at Zac. "You do not feel anything?"

Zac frowned and tried to sense anything from that particular world. But there was nothing, not even the smallest of ripples coming from that window. A moment later, it was gone, replaced by another scene.

"Nothing," Zac said, and he was actually a bit relieved. And judging by Iz's expression, she shared the sentiment.

The fact both he and Iz had the quest to become Flamebearers was a subject they had generally avoided until now. Still, you could make some assumptions based on how most inheritances worked. It was very rare for a legacy to be equally shared among many when a quest was involved. The System's creed was 'struggle for supremacy,' where the winner takes all.

So even if they were allies right now, Zac knew they were heading toward a collision down the road. But after getting no signal from that window, Zac realized they might not have to fight for the same pieces of rubble.

"Predestination," Iz hummed. "The fragments are unique to us, even when slated for the same inheritance? A test of fate, perhaps?"

"Perhaps," Zac nodded.

"Alright, let me borrow some of that disgusting Luck of yours," Ogras said as he poked Zac jokingly. "I still need two of these things."

"I'm not sure that's how it works," Zac grinned, but his smile turned crooked upon seeing the demon suddenly hone in on a window that had just appeared.

Ogras got one just like that? Had the demon really managed to benefit from his Luck?

“Miss Tayn, if you could help me out?” Ogras entreated, and Zac was surprised to see Iz calmly take out another stone and hand it over.

Zac had thought her handing out that longevity water without payment was an exception to the rule. But now, she suddenly handed out items left and right just like that? It was obviously a good thing, but it left Zac somewhat at a loss. Iz had barely exchanged a few sentences with Ogras before, and now they were buddies? Had something changed while he fought the Goblin?

Perhaps he was being paranoid, but he smelled a plot. Of course, asking about it would have to wait until later.

“Infuse your Dao and throw it,” Iz said. “You will be able to sense it from quite a distance.”

Ogras followed her instructions, and his sphere entered the portal a few seconds later. The demon looked exceptionally pleased, but he kept looking back and forth as their surroundings cycled through tens of thousands of worlds. Zac was doing the same, but he started to get a sinking feeling when fewer and fewer new realms replaced the ones that disappeared.

Five minutes later, a ripple spread through the tapestry of worlds, and the three suddenly found themselves in an endless expanse of darkness. At the same time, the corrosive drain of the Void increased manifold, prompting both Zac and Ogras to grimace with pain.

“Well, I guess it’s time to go,” Ogras said as he gave Zac an odd look. “I can’t believe you were the only one who left empty-handed for once.”

“I’ll figure something out,” Zac said with a wry smile, though he had to admit he was a bit annoyed. All these Mystic Realms, and not one held either of the two pieces he still lacked?

“Well, here’s to hoping those girls weren’t playing us,” Ogras muttered before he infused the Spatial Anchor with energy.

A protective bubble five meters across enclosed the three, but it didn’t keep its spherical shape for long. It soon stretched into a jellybean shape, but that was just the start. It kept growing longer and longer. In just a few seconds, it looked like a pillar that stretched thousands of miles through the Void.

And then came the pull.

Space pulled and twisted, and Zac groaned as he felt himself twist with it. At least he thought he groaned. It was hard to tell when all your senses were in flux. At least the pain wasn’t unbearable. Soon, the vast darkness was replaced by a series of rapid flashes before the world exploded into a cascade of stars.

Zac almost felt like he had witnessed the Big Bang, but the illusion shattered as he found himself surrounded by thousands of Cosmic Vessels. The scene almost made Zac’s heart jump out of his mouth, but he barely had the chance to take in the surroundings before space twisted again. Something had grabbed him out of empty space and teleported him away.

Or someone.