

The Fall 934

Chapter 934: One By Nine

The meeting had gone on for over five hours, and people had started to get distracted. However, Zac's somber words and serious face were like a cold shower, waking everyone right up. For over ten seconds, no one said anything until Ilvere suddenly released a pent-up sigh.

"Risk everything? Certain death?" the demon captain said with a wry smile. "I think that's it for me then, unless you desperately need my help?"

"This is about individual fate," Zac said with a shake of his head. "Some things are happening here in Zecia, big things with terrifying ramifications. There might be a chance to fish in these troubled waters for opportunities, but one would have to be ready to die at any turn."

"Alright," Ilvere smiled as he stood up. "I've seen and heard what you've been forced to go through to reach your current level. For you to utter such words, this cannot be simple indeed. I feel it's not for me. The battlefield, shoulder to shoulder with my fellow soldiers, that's my home."

With that, the demon walked out without looking back, proof of conviction with his path. Julia shook her head while giving Zac a reproachful look, like he was a troublemaker, before following suit. Calrin gazed at Zac with ruminating eyes, clearly putting two and two together after having been shown the sigils. But he didn't comment on the situation and just left with Julia.

Eventually, only Ogras, Joanna, Vilari, and Rhuger remained. Zac was a bit surprised to see Pika bowing out, and perhaps even more shocked to hear she was engaged to one of the budding Liches of Elysium. She wasn't willing to go beyond the command of her current post, which was fair.

"Are the three of you sure?" Zac said. "My words weren't a test; the dangers are very real."

"I know my foundations are shallow, but I am not content just staying a captain," Joanna said. "No matter if it's to repay you or to open a path for myself, I am willing to take this risk. To see the true face of the Dao."

"The same goes for me," Rhuger nodded.

"Don't worry about us," Vilari smiled. "We understand the risks of power. We might die, but better die following our path than shying away from our destiny."

"The Great Brazla isn't interested in your mundane opportunities," a snort came from above. "But since you're the one encroaching on this Sage's domain, you should be the one who leaves."

"Alright," Zac slowly said as he stood up. "Then follow me."

Being thrown out was fine by Zac since he didn't plan on discussing the next part in front of the Tool Spirit. Brazla had caused spectacles before to get what he wanted, such as creating enormous plaques in the sky. There was no way Zac would take such a risk with this topic. As for what the secret was, it was obviously Ultom and the Left Imperial Palace.

The three exchanged a curious glance, but they followed Zac toward his compound, where Zac activated the teleporter. Soon enough, the five of them sat on a flying vessel taking them across the alien landscapes of the Ensolus continent.

"This direction," Joanna eventually said, breaking the pregnant silence.

"You're right," Zac nodded. "We're heading toward the Ensolus Ruins."

"This is related to why you had us seal off that area," Vilari concluded.

"You're right," Zac nodded. "Before I explain, remember the matters I bring up now cannot be shared out of this group. Both for your sake and the sake of the others. This includes when you set out in the Million Gates Territory, even if part of your mission will be related to this opportunity."

"I understand," Vilari and the others nodded.

"A terrifyingly powerful inheritance is emerging here in Zecia. It's so valuable that A-grade factions are coming over in hopes to seize it," Zac said.

"And it's related to the Ensolus Ruins?" Rhuger said with skepticism. "No offense, but I spent a month exploring that place. It's odd, but it doesn't seem like something that would interest bigshots from the outside."

"I'm still not sure how the Ensolus Ruins fit into the picture," Zac said. "But it is related to something called the Left Imperial Palace. And when I say Imperial, I'm talking about the Limitless Empire."

From there, Zac told the others what he knew about the Left Imperial Palace, Ultom, and the nine subsidiary courts. He also shared most of what he'd learned from Iz, Leyara, and Perala to give everyone a proper understanding of the situation and how the war tied into the quest for Ultom.

"I'm not surprised you're mixed up in something like this," Vilari said with a small smile.

"Life is odd," Joanna said with a helpless shake of her head. "Ten years ago, I was a part-time yoga instructor. Today, I am sitting on a flying boat talking about magical castles from a billion-year-old civilization. And I am not even on drugs."

"Takes getting some use to," Zac said with a wry smile.

"What is our role here?" Rhuger asked curiously.

"The Mystic Realm where I found Ogras had four temples, and at least two of them had pieces of seals. I am collecting seals for the Left Imperial Palace itself, while Ogras is collecting for one of the outer courts," Zac said. "As for the Ensolus Ruins, I have already confirmed it holds one piece for me."

"And you're hoping there are more pieces in the Ensolus Ruins," Vilari concluded.

"Exactly," Zac nodded. "I have no idea how candidates are chosen, but fate shifts just by speaking of this inheritance. I am hoping that me explaining the situation, and two candidates traveling with you, will somehow give you a chance at seizing a slot if there is one to seize."

“Are we up to it?” Joanna hesitated. “We are pretty strong compared to normal people, but we’re far from someone like you. Compared to the A-grade factions you mention, we probably don’t amount to much. At least not yet.”

“I don’t think it’s just about strength,” Zac slowly said. “From what we’ve gathered, this inheritance is aimed at the younger generation, with an age ceiling of 100. No matter who the courts choose, they’ll just be kids who have just started on the road of cultivation. Ultimately, I believe it’s more about fate and compatibility.”

“Then, that illusionist... Janos,” Rhuger asked. “Do you think he’s-“

“I’m hoping to find that out as well,” Zac nodded. “If we’re lucky, we can find him, and he might be able to shed some light on the situation with these ruins. But we also have to be realistic... Neither Ogras nor I were stuck for years when getting our pieces. It might be unrelated, and he might even be dead.”

“That guy is a bit odd, but he’s very good at surviving,” Ogras said from the side. “Remember when he played dead beneath the ground? He might have done the same if caught in some dangerous place. Just waiting for us to break him out.”

“So, are you here to claim your piece?” Joanna asked curiously. “It might give us some insights to see it first-hand if that’s okay.”

“Not this time,” Zac said with a shake of his head. “Just claiming a seal is a huge opportunity. You gain an enormous burst of enlightenment that will allow you to improve almost anything except progress your Daos. I still need to shore up my foundations for a year or two before I take the next piece. This time, we’re just here to seal off my temple so no one gets killed, and see if you feel anything from the temples after learning the truth.”

“So, what do we do?” Joanna asked. “Just meditate on the inheritance?”

“I’ll try something when we arrive at the ruins. For now, start thinking of parts of your cultivation where you feel you have the most room for improvement, just in case the opportunity is suddenly presented to you. For example, I completely reformed a top-tier Body Tempering Manual to suit my Bloodline.”

The three asked some clarifying questions for another 20 minutes before they sat down to go over their options. Rhuger was the one that had the easiest of it. He had all of Cervantes’ old manuals, but he still hadn’t had much luck adapting them to his undead form. So, if given the opportunity, he would reform and perhaps even elevate the Lunar heritage that was still out of his reach.

Three days passed like this, where Zac mostly kept reading the Book of Duality while absorbing Divine Crystals and Nature Crystals to get a small boost to his recovery. Occasionally, he meditated on the odd energy on the Ensolus continent, hoping to glean some insights for his blueprint.

Infusing the twined Realm Spirits hadn’t changed Ensolus much, but Zac could tell the energy was stabler than before. According to the reports, the earthquakes had subsided a few weeks after he implanted the spirits, mostly confirming the transplant was successful.

However, the world had still not fully recovered from the cataclysmic upheavals that had struck the world, the Ensolus continent in particular. Huge scars ran for hundreds of kilometers across the ground,

and new forests still hadn't managed to replace those burnt down by the wildfires. Still, there was a sense of vibrancy in the air, and Zac guessed it was just a matter of time.

Finally, there was a change as Zac felt a ripple from the distance. He looked over, and he could barely spot a small settlement standing at the edge of what looked like a stationary grey sandstorm. It was only a few kilometers across, but Zac knew that small sphere held an area as large as a huge capital.

Within, the Ensolus ruins waited for them.

The settlement outside was a now-evacuated research station lacking a teleportation array, not by choice but necessity. The sandstorm was a Spatial Anomaly similar to the Void Gate encampment he and Vai visited. The strong spatial field around the folded space made it impossible to buy teleportation arrays through the System.

Perhaps it was possible to build reinforced arrays by themselves, but the Atwood Empire obviously lacked the means to build something like that.

The group soon landed at the center of the settlement, and two guards walked out from one of the nearby houses. Zac recognized one of them; Cynthia, one of the original Valkyries who had joined him at the very beginning. The other was a Revenant Zac didn't recognize, but he had to be one of the captains judging by his solid Late E-grade aura.

"Anything?" Joanna asked as the two walked over.

"Nothing to report," the Valkyrie said with a shake of her head. "We have sealed off the whole cloud after being given the order. No one has attempted to approach this region since."

"Good," Joanna nodded before turning to Zac.

"Let's go," Zac said, and the quintet walked straight into the dust cloud.

Visibility was almost zero, but there was no need to bind people together with Vivi's vines – Zac could still sense the others around him with his domain. There were no spatial fluctuations either, and they didn't have to walk for more than a minute before their surroundings changed. The hazy surroundings were replaced by a sprawling city covered in moss and vines.

Zac's heart shuddered, and he was filled with a sense of adventure as he looked across the ruins. It almost felt like he had found a hidden city in the depths of the Amazon or even Atlantis. But the truth was even more invigorating – Zac recognized the architecture. The buildings didn't look like the temples from the Lost Plane.

Instead, they reminded Zac of the enormous palace he had seen in his first vision – The Left Imperial Palace. Certainly, the scale or domineering aura wasn't there, but the buildings were made from the same type of black stones. Most civilizations in the Multiverse were like pyramids. If the Left Imperial Palace was the tip of the pyramid, then these buildings represented the base.

Perhaps a city where servants lived?

Vaguely familiar scripts covered walls, archways, and statues, most broken far beyond repair. However, not all runes had succumbed to the passage of time. This was both the danger and the opportunity of

this place. Just in the vicinity, Zac could spot three buildings empowered by some sort of array. They were still covered in vines and moss, but their foundations still stood tall.

And who knew, there might be a trove waiting inside if you managed to force your way through. So far, they hadn't been able to break through too many of the still-active arrays. They didn't use much energy, but they were apparently insanely sturdy, and no attempts at array-breaking had shown any hint of working.

"Impressive," Ogras whistled as he looked at the edge of the storm behind them.

Zac had to agree. The method these sprawling ruins were crammed together in this small sandstorm was extremely impressive. They hadn't sensed anything at all as they entered the folded patch of space. Apparently, the scale was almost 50:1 according to measurements, and the researchers believed the effect was generated by a statue in the heart of the city.

"What now?" Joanna asked, and Zac could see the hunger in her eyes.

Zac first looked toward the heart of the city, which unsurprisingly was where the calling came from. But he soon looked back at the other three.

"Alright, be ready. The name of the inheritance is... Ultom," Zac said, and he felt the ethereal pressure of fate bear down on him.

"What was that?" Joanna said as she vigilantly looked around while a frown appeared on Vilari's face.

"Felt like a ghost just passed through me," Rhuger nodded, but Zac barely listened.

Instead, Zac's eyes were trained on the screen that had popped up in front of him.

One by Nine (Unique, Inheritance): Form a full cycle of Sealbearers. Reward: Entry to the Left Imperial Palace (4/9) [2683 days] [NOTE: Multiple cycles can be formed.]

Zac read the new quest carefully as it divulged a few key pieces of information. Most importantly, it was a timed quest, giving him just over seven years to 'form a cycle.' If Zac was a betting man, that meant the first stage of the inheritance would start at that time. In other words, he would most likely have to find all four pieces of his seal within that timeframe as well.

The quest even hinted at the inheritance's direction, considering it was telling him to form a posse. After all, a 'full cycle' no doubt meant one sealholder from each subordinate court, such as Ogras' Hollow Court. Was personal strength not enough? Did you have to gather powerful followers if you wanted a shot at the inheritance? And the multiple cycles – would that bring special benefits, or would it just keep the competition from entering?

And more to the point, how was the quest halfway finished already?

"What's wrong?" Ogras asked, dragging Zac out of his thoughts.

Zac considered it for a second before deciding to share the screen. "See for yourself."

"A quest?" Ogras exclaimed before his eyes thinned. "Four? Just like that? Can you really make it happen by willing it into being? Are you the Son of Heaven?"

"I- No idea. I didn't expect things to progress this way," Zac said, confusion written all over his face as he turned to the others. "Did you get any quest or something like that?"

"Nothing," Vilari said with a shake of her head. "For a moment, I felt something nudge my soul. But it's gone now."

"Same here," Rhuger said, his eyes repeatedly darting toward the ruins. "Perhaps if we get closer..."

"Let's go and take a look," Zac nodded. "It can't be a random coincidence I suddenly get a half-finished quest to gather followers when I am trying to share this inheritance with you. See if you can spot any of the seals I showed you on the way."

With that, the group set out, heading toward the core of the Ensolus Ruins, following an incomplete map drawn by the explorers. After all, the Ensolus Ruins might have been long abandoned, but there were still dangers. Some of the arrays inscribed on the broken towers and buildings were Killing Arrays, and there were unstable areas as deadly as any gauntlet.

Thankfully, there were multiple safe pathways leading to the center of the ruins, which was the only reason Zac dared set out in his current state. He just needed to set down a couple of arrays and see if the others could pick up anything before they headed out. Of course, ignoring all the inviting ruins felt like an itch Zac wasn't allowed to scratch, but he could always check things out in the future.

"Walking into the depths of an ancient ruin with a trouble-magnet such as yourself," Ogras muttered as he skipped over a vine as thick as a barrel. "Surely, nothing bad will come of this. I must be mad to have joined you."