

## The Fall 744

### Chapter 744: Uninvited Guest

Zac looked back and forth for the source of the voice, but no matter what method he used, he couldn't pinpoint the source. The voice belonged to a man, but Zac couldn't place him at all. The stranger's ability to analyze his situation so easily was extremely disconcerting though, but Zac had thankfully activated the array hiding his Duplicity Core the second he sensed something amiss.

His mind went through all kinds of possibilities. Was it perhaps Ykrodas who had finally managed to track him down? Zac wouldn't be surprised if the Havarok Princeling had set his sights on him, considering that Ykrodas still hadn't managed to pass him on the ladder to this day.

But his instincts told him it was someone else. Ykrodas belonged to a proper B-grade force that no doubt possessed all kinds of methods, but it still felt extremely unlikely another E-grade cultivator would be able to track him down to this extremely secluded spot. And even if they knew where he was, could they even reach him? He was in the middle of a Twilight Crystal Mine, and they'd explode from the energy density before getting close.

There was someone else who might possess that ability though. Someone far more dangerous than some E-grade scion.

"It wasn't easy to track you down," the voice continued. "But I guess it is time to discuss reparations."

It was him.

There was no hesitation any longer, and Zac immediately took out his most powerful escape talisman and infused it with Miasma. However, it just turned to dust as the surrounding cave shuddered for a bit. The talisman had completely failed, and worry turned to fear upon realizing that the energy in the area had turned extremely turbid and lifeless. He was already infusing energy into [Abyssal Phase], but nothing happened.

Without that skill, Zac couldn't even leave the room. He was stuck.

"Who's there?!" Zac shouted, though he already knew the answer.

"You know," the man continued as though he hadn't noticed anything. "If you had been smart you wouldn't have answered me when I spoke to you earlier. That way I might not have actually found you."

"What?" Zac blurted with wide eyes, which prompted the man to boisterously laugh again.

"I'm just kidding. The Twilight Chasm is my domain. It's not so easy to elude me. To answer your question, I've gone by many identities. My current one is the Twilight Lord," the voice answered. "It's quite impressive. Millennia of preparations, thwarted by a Draugr not yet of age. You have no idea the cost of your actions."

"I think there has been a misunderstanding," Zac slowly said as he grasped for a way out of the situation. "I have no interest in working against you or the Twilight Harbor. I am just looking for opportunities as I pass through this sector."

Should he try to fight his way out? Zac discarded the idea as soon as it appeared. The walls around him were hundreds of meters thick, and he didn't even have any target to attack. Besides, he had already been discovered once in a forgotten corner of the Mystic Realm, proving that the Twilight Lord had far greater control over this place than Zac previously thought possible.

Not only was the Twilight Lord able to nurture that monstrous snake that had surpassed the limit of what should be permissible in this trial, but he was even able to send his consciousness into the Twilight Chasm. This went against everything he knew about Mystic Realms controlled by the System, and there was only one possibility that he could come up with.

The Twilight Lord was inside the Twilight Ocean.

Nala had already said that the Twilight Lord hadn't been seen for tens of thousands of years, and he knew that the last C-grade trial took place 20,000 years ago. Had he somehow found a way to stay inside the Mystic Realm after it closed at that point? But for what purpose? And more importantly, just how far did the Twilight Lord's grasp extend?

Even if he was inside the trial somehow, there was no way that the System would let him run amok in a sanctioned E-grade trial. And the Twilight Lord should definitely know what had transpired eight months ago, which hopefully meant he would tread more carefully going forward. After all, only a fool would risk drawing the ire of the Heavens after already having been given a warning.

That was his way to survive this encounter, so he slowly relaxed and stowed away his axe.

"Misunderstanding? Just passing through?" The Twilight Lord snorted. "Sometimes you can get swept up in grand events even without intending so, a victim to the torrents of fate. I know that feeling all-too-well."

Zac suddenly sensed a small surge of energy, and he swirled around as an illusory shape took form at the edge of the cave. The man looked like a human, except his skin had an odd greenish-golden hue. He was almost completely covered in scars as well, and he both had the aura and disposition of a warrior of a thousand battles. He exuded an air of confidence and drive, his eyes seemingly piercing straight through Zac's soul.

The appearance of the Twilight Lord's avatar was startling, but Zac was even more shocked that he actually recognized the man. And it wasn't that he had seen images of the Twilight Lord since arriving to the harbor, but rather from a missive he had bought back in the Zecia sector. The man in front of him looked a bit older and his skin tone was completely different, but the main features were the same.

It was the Eveningtide Asura.

The true appearance of the man behind cataclysmic events back in the Zecia sector wasn't widely circulated. In fact, none of the information houses in Zecia dared carry much information about him out of fear he'd one day return. The intelligence read more like tales of heroics and bravery rather than proper information missives, and any factual information such as appearance, class, skills, and strength was notably missing.

But Zac had been extremely curious about the Eveningtide Asura since he was almost considered the second coming of him, and their backgrounds were pretty similar. The fact that no one dared to sell

intelligence on him through the Mercantile System couldn't stop Zac with his nigh-unlimited access to every corner of the sector.

One of his followers had managed to procure a proper missive from a declining information house that had lost its Mercantile Licence. The way it described the events 980,000 years ago was completely different from the public information.

Rather than a heroic lone wolf, the Eveningtide Asura had been described as a ruthless opportunist who skirted the edge of unorthodoxy without ever completely leaving the embrace of the System. He never cared about right and wrong in his pursuit of power, and his hands were already drenched in blood long before the more well-known events where he slaughtered dozens of peak clans upon his return took place.

Both Zac and the man in front of him had come up in the same way, being progenitors of planets integrated into the Zecia sector. However, while Zac had somewhat stumbled onto the path of supremacy, Alvod Jondir had firmly embarked on it through murder. Every threat to his supremacy on his home planet, foreign or native, had been butchered, after which he essentially turned his home planet into a furnace for his own cultivation.

By the time the planet had been assimilated, only a broken F-grade planet remained, with Alvod having extracted the essence of the World Core itself. It was this very ability to absorb the power of the planets themselves that had eventually sparked a manhunt, because not only was it an extremely powerful method to cultivate, but it was also a huge threat to most clans.

What if the Eveningtide Asura appeared on their planet one day, slowly siphoning off the power of the World Core?

So while the man standing in front of Zac appeared like a straightforward warrior with the aura of a hero, he knew that it was just an image hiding a ruthless cultivator that made the Great Redeemer seem as harmless as a baby chick. A cultivator who was also famous for being extremely thorough in his acts of revenge.

Zac felt beads of sweat rolling down his back, but he controlled his aura and facial expression to not give away the fact that he knew the true identity of the man in front of him. Meanwhile, his thoughts were a confused jumble as he simply couldn't understand what was going on. Most people thought that the Eveningtide Asura was long dead for hundreds of thousands of years after having angered some powerful force, yet he stood right in front of him, seemingly doing just fine.

Was the Eveningtide Asura actually the Twilight Lord, or was he simply pretending? When had the change taken place? Because one thing was for certain; the current Twilight Lord had reigned for over six hundred thousand years, which made it impossible that Alvod had been him from the start.

"Lord Twilight, it's an honor," Zac said with a bow, working hard to keep his face impassive. "I apologize if my actions inadvertently caused any problems to the trial. My masters will provide recompense for any damage."

"I am pretty certain there is no clan called 'Black', they have better taste than that. Who are you? Who are your masters, and what interests do they have for this trial?" the man snorted.

Zac hesitated for a moment before he made a decision. He had never managed to trick anyone when lying through his teeth, and he wasn't so arrogant as to think he could suddenly outsmart an old monster who had lived over a million years. He would need to expose some of his secrets, but leave some things vague.

"None whatsoever," Zac eventually said he displayed his Fragment of the Coffin, complementing the earlier display of the Fragment of the Bodhi. "They are both Autarchs with no interest to this place of the Twilight Harbor. One of them is walking the path of Oblivion, the other the path of Creation. I was sent here to temper myself and..."

"Life is not Life... Death is not Death... Oblivion and Creation," Alvod slowly mused, his eyes gleaming. "You are here for the two shards that were absorbed a few eons ago."

"I am supposed to fetch them for my masters. But if they are part of Lord Twilight's plans, I will stand down," Zac quickly said.

Alvod looked at Zac in silence for a full minute, though it might as well have been a year as far as Zac was concerned.

"You are really an interesting one, and our paths are surprisingly similar. It's almost a shame our conclusions diverged, leading us toward different peaks," the Eveningtide Asura sighed. "The path you're on... is without return."

Zac was extremely to find out what he meant, but he didn't dare disrupt the man since it actually seemed like he was changing his mind about something. Seeing as he probably came with vengeance on his mind, that could only be good news.

"You caused me a great deal of trouble, but perhaps this can become an opportunity to wipe the slate of Karma clean. Those two items are like tumors in this realm, causing a constant disturbance in the composition of Twilight," Alvod said. "They are empowered by the Twilight Energy as well, and have formed powerful natural formations around them."

Zac frowned when he heard about them being powered by the Twilight Energy as this was outside his expectations. Then again, he couldn't be too surprised since they were still here even though they were placed in the middle of the Mystic Realm. If they were easy to get, they would have been snatched up long ago by some greedy trial-taker.

"I have come prepared," Zac lied. "And if there's anything else I can do to help out..."

"Kind of you to offer, brat," the Eveningtide Asura laughed as a large vat of liquor appeared in his hand. "Actually, there is something you can do for me. As acting Earl of Twilight Harbor, I require assistance. Receive my decree."

'I just said that to be polite!' Zac screamed in his mind, but he still nodded quickly in agreement. However, his eyes widened as he realized his mistake. A piece of information that he had almost forgotten emerged from the back of his head, and his fears were soon confirmed as a screen appeared in front of him.

Cleansing Waters (Decree): Follow the tracker and unblock the turbid energy. Reward: Reward based on performance after the end of the Twilight Ascent. (0/729).

Zac barely had time to read the quest prompt before a small vortex opened up as well. It looked harmless enough, but Zac still didn't dare step forward until it had dropped off a small box and disappeared.

"Careful enough," the projection snorted as it took a swig. "Well, the foolhardy die sooner or later. But do not worry. If I wanted you dead, you would already have entered the cycle of reincarnation. This is just a simple tracking array to lead the way."

"Lead the way to what?" Zac asked with a frown, having no idea what the quest actually wanted him to do.

"People are acting against the Twilight Harbor currently participating in the trial. Their backgrounds are too powerful, so I could only let them enter and try to minimize the damage they caused. Unfortunately, they have proven surprisingly resourceful, forcing me to intervene," Alvod sighed. "They have managed to undo a lot of good work that has been done to make this ocean flourish, messing with the energy flow of this realm."

Zac's bullshit radar was reading off the charts, but there was no way he'd expose the Eveningtide Asura's lies. There was no way that this man was doing something out of the good of his heart, and it was probably just a matter of fighting for resources between monarchs. But ultimately, it didn't matter to him. He just needed to survive this ordeal now that he had been roped in.

He had offered to help and then agreed to provide assistance. That was his mistake. It might have been an empty gesture, but it allowed Alvod to generate a quest. Most cultivators weren't able to do so, but the Twilight Lord was clearly a middle-tier noble holding the rank of Earl.

Someone like Zac who just controlled a single planet was just a Lord, but he suspected that a future quest reward would be him being elevated to a Baron, the next level of the System-run hierarchy. Higher status didn't increase his combat strength, but it allowed someone to make more use of the System's features.

This wasn't a feature that had been added by the Apostates, but rather something related to the original function of the System. It was a training system for the war of the Limitless Empire, and the leaders of the empire were supposed to be able to tap into the System to some degree.

One such ability was to generate quests like Alvod had done right now.

The problem wasn't the quest itself, but rather the danger it represented. Zac didn't have any concrete proof, but there were some indications that a connection like this was almost like a Karmic bond. For example, Abby instinctively knew all kinds of things that happened all over Port Atwood thanks to her being connected to the System.

What if the Eveningtide Asura could use this quest to keep track of him?

Zac didn't let his misgivings show on the surface though, and he reluctantly picked up the array that had appeared.

"Oh, not happy?" Alvod snorted, clearly sensing Zac's hesitation.

"It's just that I already have a target on my back..." Zac sighed.

“Well, how about this?” the man grinned as a token appeared in his hand. “As long as you destroy over half the jammers, you can exchange this item from my treasury outside. You should know my reputation already. I will not shortchange someone from the junior generation. Not that I can with a sanctioned quest in progress.”

Zac hadn't seen the token before, but there was one word written on its surface in the script of the multiverse – Vast. It didn't take long to put two and two together, and his heartbeat sped up upon realizing it was the Perennial Vastness Token.

As for the reputation, Alvod obviously meant his reputation as the Twilight Lord, a man known for taking in a lot of talented wandering cultivators and nurturing them. He did honestly have a pretty good track record in that regard, but that didn't provide much comfort for Zac who knew the man's true identity.

“I'll do my best,” Zac slowly said. “However, that item is already claimed by the Fate Plucking Ladder.”

“It's my treasury, so I do what I want with it,” Alvod guffawed as the token disappeared. “Those on the outside are growing a bit uppity since I've been in seclusion gone for too long, giving out my treasures out left and right. But I'll show them wha-”

The Twilight Lord suddenly stopped mid-sentence as another presence descended upon the cave. This one was all-too-familiar as well, carrying a sense of indifference in its boundless power.

“I guess it's time to go,” Alvod muttered. “Complete your task and we'll wipe the slate clean. One month. I want to see results within one month. Otherwise, I might be led to believe you are actually working against me.”

He was gone the next second, and the pressure of the System disappeared a moment later. It was clearly just interested in booting the interloper from the trial rather than conversing with Zac this time around. It left Zac alone in the cave once more, though it didn't feel nearly as safe and secluded this time around.

“Well, shit.”