

The Fall 344

Chapter 344: Heretics

"You can't take time to rescue your people? Most of our elites are in that army. My three generals are there. What the hell is going on?!" Ogras growled causing the shadows in the room to shudder.

"I can't go until I close an Incursion," Zac said as he shored up his resolve.

"The flame golems? They might be a problem, but not to the point you should abandon our army. Worse case we can simply make our surface teleporter public, allowing everyone to escape. Besides, there's not enough magma in the core for the golems to flood the entire Underworld, so they can only slowly destroy town after town," Ogras said in disbelief.

"It's not them. It's the hidden incursion. It turns out it's the Technocrats," Zac sighed. "I met one of them while grinding in that cave I found."

"What? The Technocrat heretics have joined the fight for baby planets? They usually stay clear because the Ruthless Heavens is more hands-on with places like this," Ogras muttered before he suddenly froze and looked up at Zac with thinning eyes. "Wait. Technocrats as in the guys whose insignia you just happen to walk around with? The one you 'accidentally picked up'?"

Zac didn't answer, but he knew that that the demon had figured out at least half of the story already. If he hadn't then he wouldn't be Ogras any longer.

"And the only reason you'd act this obstinate is if it was about your sister," Ogras continued, proving Zac's hunch. "Don't tell me?"

Zac scratched his neck with some helplessness. He hadn't planned on cluing in Ogras to this secret, but it looked like he had left too many breadcrumbs to the truth. But at least he could which parts to expose and which parts to keep hidden to protect Kenzie.

"I don't know the truth either. But my mom might have been one of them, and these Technocrats might be looking for her. I am afraid Kenzie, and even this whole world, will be caught up in something that has nothing to do with us. Leandra disappeared twenty years ago, probably leaving earth," Zac said. "We can't get caught up in whatever mess she created."

Ruthlessness flashed in Zac's eyes as he looked up at Ogras, who frowned then he sensed the killing intent leaking out from Zac's body. Just the thought of his sister getting caught by the Technocrats because their mother forced Jeeves into her head made Zac furious.

"So I can't go to the Dead Zone yet. I cannot let a single one of the Technocrats leave this planet alive," Zac said with finality.

Ogras silently looked at Zac for a few seconds, before sighing with a shake of his head.

"Fine, let's go kill some heretics."

Zac was surprised at the ease of which Ogras agreed, and he couldn't help but feel a bit suspicious. The demonkin army and his generals were half his claim to power in Port Atwood, and if they fell he would be almost isolated apart from his friendship with Zac.

"How about you take my disk and head to the Dead Zone while I deal with the Incursion?" Zac probed to see his response.

"No point," Ogras said with a wry smile. "As much as I hate to admit it I am not sure if I'll be enough to change anything in the face of the Undead Empire. We need the human netherbeast to mow through the zombies like you did with the silver puppets."

Zac slowly nodded his head, feeling it was a good enough reason.

"I have to go prepare something back at Port Atwood first. We'll meet back up in an hour or so at the border town I came from," Zac said before hurrying out of the office toward the teleporter, leaving a befuddled demon behind.

Zac made his way through the chain of arrays before finding himself in Port Atwood. He didn't find Kenzie in either the cultivation cave or his compound so he hurried over toward the Mystic Realm instead. However, he did change to his human form and clothing first, because he might run into some people who didn't know about his Mr. Black alias.

There was a new array in the network that led straight to the center of Mystic Island. It wasn't too long since he came here last time, but it had undergone drastic changes. The chaotic swirl of spatial tears was gone, and in the desolate space that they occupied a small encampment stood instead. The array he arrived at was placed some distance away from the small town, likely as a safety precaution.

There were less than fifty structures, but it had a wall that was even sturdier than the one he had around his own wall. Not only that, but there were also multiple arrays creating a thick layer of defense, stopping any possibility of sneaking inside. Zac was suitably impressed as he walked toward the encampment

"Lord Atwood!" someone called, making Zac turn toward a vaguely familiar woman.

On a second look, he realized it was one of the more recent additions to the Valkyries, a girl who had joined after the first round of casualties during the final beast wave.

"Kaitlin, right?" Zac asked with some hesitation.

"That's right," the girl said, some worry evident in her eyes. "I'm sorry, but have you found our people yet?"

"Not yet," Zac said, guilt welling up in his chest. "We're working on it. Is my sister in the Mystic Realm?"

The Valkyrie nodded in confirmation before Zac hurried away. He couldn't look the girl in the eyes, considering the decision he had made. Because it was an undeniable truth that he had chosen his sister over the rest of Port Atwood, even though it wasn't even sure that she was in any danger. He could make all excuses in the world, but that was the gist of it.

But keeping his sister, his sole surviving family member as he saw it, safe had been his main goal since the start, the reason why he fought so hard. She was the only reason he had erected Port Atwood. If that meant that people would die, so be it. Zac would have to live with those sacrifices. Besides, everyone knew that they risked death when they joined the fight against the Undead Empire.

He stepped through the teleporter in the center of the settlement, and the next moment he stood in a cave, peering out into the supersized garden that Ogras mentioned. As he walked out he saw the majestic trees lining the horizon and the silver borders crisscrossing the sky, but he didn't have time to marvel at this place. He would have to explore its mysteries at another time.

Beneath the small hill another walled settlement stood, looking almost identical to the one outside. Zac hurriedly looked around until a demon warrior pointed him toward one of the larger buildings, which turned out to be a study filled with books and crystals.

"You're here?" Kenzie said with surprise when she noticed Zac's appearance. "I thought you were in the Underworld."

She had been sitting on a comfortable sofa with an information crystal in her hands.

"I had to go back quickly," Zac said with a smile as he sat down next to her.

"Is it about the arrays stopping working?" Kenzie asked with worry in her eyes.

"That too," Zac sighed. "There's a lot of things to do. How are things on your end?"

"You know, I am pretty sure that this place has something to do with the Technocrats! We went to the gate Ogras talked about, and Jeeves said that the wall is definitely of Technocrat origin!" Kenzie excitedly blurted out, clearly having waited for the opportunity to share the news. "I didn't enter like you said, but I'm sure there are a lot of things Jeeves can find out. Zac, perhaps mom is here!"

"Don't touch anything yet, we aren't strong enough," Zac said with worry, reiterating the severity of the situation. "You might trigger an alarm or something, leading mom's enemies here. And I don't know about mom being here. The people in this place seems to have been isolated for thousands of years, and mom disappeared only twenty years ago."

Kenzie's face went from exuberant to downcast in a second, and Zac felt a pang in his heart as he patted her head. He knew just how much Kenzie wanted to find Leandra.

"But perhaps I'm wrong. We will find out sooner or later," Zac acquiesced. "I actually came back with some news about mom, though I am not sure about all the details."

Kenzie once again perked up, but as Zac retold his encounter with the little alien in the underworld her face started to scrunch up in a frown.

"So you think that mom is this high-ranked person from the organization Firmament's Edge," Kenzie concluded. "Which means that the thing they're looking for is Jeeves?"

"Well, it can all be a coincidence," Zac ventured, though his face betrayed what he truly thought. "But their targeting device did react to the amulet. I will leave it here for now so it won't happen again."

"What will you do?" Kenzie asked.

"Well, if they're mom's enemies I can't let them stay on earth. Ogras and I will kick them out of here before they can perform the scan. Who knows what else mom has left on earth. Things are crazy enough without a bunch of technocrats arriving," Zac said with a wink as he handed over the amulet.

"See if you can find anything about mom, please," Kenzie entreated.

"I will, though you should know that these people only seemed to be hired thugs. They didn't seem to know a lot," Zac shrugged. "Please stay inside the Mystic Realm until I've dealt with the Incursion. Who knows how strong their scanners are."

"Okay, okay I will stay in here. Perhaps a few will choose to stay behind like the Tal-Eladar. It might us help understand the Technocrats and mom better," Kenzie said.

"Perhaps," Zac smiled, though he knew that would never happen.

"I'm making some headway on my formation studies anyway. It's pretty interesting stuff," Kenzie added.

"Oh?" Zac asked with interest. "Anything on the thing we found on Salvation's body?"

"Well... Maybe?" Kenzie said with some hesitation. "Jeeves have looked at it for quite a while and made some deductions. I think I can break its lock so to speak. But I still have no idea what would actually happen when I did that. Perhaps the Origin Dao trapped inside will flood out around us, but perhaps it will simply disappear? Or perhaps the whole thing would explode?"

Zac was surprised that Kenzie had made progress so quickly with the thing. He would have thought it might take months to figure out the details of such a complicated item. It was no wonder the Technocrats wanted Jeeves back.

"Well, there's no stress. Take your time with it. Remember, stay in the Mystic Realm," Zac said as he made to leave.

"Wait," Kenzie said Zac before he could leave. "Please bring any technology you can find. Jeeves wants to eat it."

Zac stopped in his tracks and looked back with surprise.

"He needs Technological items to evolve, rather than high-grade materials?" Zac asked with confusion as it was completely different from how Spirit Tools evolved.

"Jeeves isn't sure, but probably," Kenzie said. "Jeeves is a combination of technology and magic, so I think I will need both. I have already found a few ores he liked."

Zac thoughtfully nodded. Bringing any gear to the AI might not be a bad idea even if he couldn't eat them. Perhaps Jeeves could also help them understand the equipment, allowing them to use the things for themselves. And if not he might at least be able to make sure they didn't send any signals to the Technocrats hiding in outer space

"I'll bring it over after we've closed the incursion," Zac agreed. "Take care."

"Be careful!" Kenzie said. "And look after Ogras. He isn't as sturdy as you."

"What he lacks in sturdiness he makes up for in slipperiness," Zac smiled. "We'll be fine."

He left Kenzie's study and took one last look at the artificial sky before entering the teleporter. Zac was back in the Underworld soon enough, appearing in the isolated outpost where he told Ogras to meet

him. He couldn't see the demon anywhere, but a dancing shadow in the distance told him that Ogras had already arrived.

"What's with the cloak and dagger?" Zac asked with confusion when he found the demon hiding a few kilometers outside the town.

"The demons are still around. I have probably caused enough problems for grandpa already without adding hatred from the Abyssal Demons.," Ogras shrugged. "I scoured all intelligence regarding the Technocrat incursion while you were gone, and I think I know the path. It will take us two days to get there if we push it."

"Great, let's go. The sooner we destroy the Technocrats the faster we'll be able to head to the Dead Zone."